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Historical Interpretation and Luther's Role
in the Peasant Revolt

HEINZ F. MACKENSEN

Motivation in Paul's Life

M. H. GRUMM

The Lutheran Council in the United States
of America

MARTIN H. FRANZMANN and ALFRED O.
FUERBRINGER

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MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

1 PETER 2:21-25

Introduction

It can be no surprise that this letter of Peter played such a predominant role in the Easter proclamation of the early church and all Christian centuries hence. From the festival of the "Newborn Babes," Quasimodogeniti, through today's epistle and the epistle for Jubilate Sunday (1 Peter 2:11-20) to that of Exaudi, still within the "50 days of Easter" (1 Peter 4:7-11), the words of this letter provide the thoughts for the Easter Epistles and the church's liturgy.

Truly it is an "Easter preachment" which the author has composed, a letter firmly resting upon the Resurrection event and reflecting the confidence of that victory to those who experience their resurrection in Holy Baptism.

All the more significant, therefore, is the place of this pericope treating Christ's Passion and death within the 50 days of Easter. For here is the demonstration of the fact that for the early church, as for us today, the resurrection has significance only in connection with the life, Passion, and death of Jesus, with the incomprehensible enigma of history that He who would be and is our Lord is He who went the way of tears and the tree. This is the paradoxical dimension of death in the baptismal Easter victory. This is the essence of Peter's thought that suffering is the inheritance of him who would believe.

Context (remote)

1 Peter 2:21-25 betrays many similarities to two other strongly Christological sections of 1 Peter 3:18-22 and 1:18-21. All three

sections in form, style, and content show characteristics peculiar to early Christian hymns and confessional statements. The affinities of these sections to other hymns incorporated in the New Testament (for example, Phil. 2:5-11, 1 Tim. 3:16) suggest that, as preachers of the Gospel still are today, Peter might have been influenced by, or might have been quoting directly, a hymn dedicated to Jesus Christ. This possibility is given further weight by the fact that so much appears similar to another very popular hymn in the early church — the greatest of the Isaianic Servant Songs, Is. 53.

Context (immediate)

This section connects directly with the preceding section (2:13-20), supplying, in the consistent pattern of the author's presentation, the support and substantiation for that which he stated in the preceding exhortation. This is the indicative supporting the imperative (cf. further 1:14, 16; 1:17, 18-21; 1:22, 23-25; 2:2, 3). Since the following section (3:1 ff.) resumes an exhortation begun earlier (2:13 ff., 2:18) and does not relate directly to vv. 21-25, it may be assumed that vv. 21-25 formed a separate unit introduced to substantiate a point made in v. 20. This assumption receives support when the relationship between the doing of good and the suffering mentioned in v. 20 and that depicted in vv. 21-25 becomes clear.

The text

V. 21. Peter advises his hearers or readers that the experience of suffering even while they are innocently engaged in well-doing should not surprise them; for this was already God's intention when He chose His people for Himself ("called" equals a *terminus*

technicus for "to choose, elect," in the New Testament). This godly people has been elected with the intention of doing good, and even when this doing good shall lead to suffering they are to remain faithful and steadfast (cf. 3:9). Suffering and persecution appear to have occasioned the writing of this letter (cf. 1:6; 4:12; 5:10). Whether this is an official persecution of the state or an attack upon the Christian community on a more local and minor scale is uncertain. However, the positive attitude taken over against the government (2:13 ff.) and the specific types of attack (slander [2:12], litigation [3:15], scorn [3:16], attack for bearing the name "Christian" [4:14]) indicate that the latter is more probable. Peter takes various opportunities to treat the problem of Christian suffering, and always the answer is the same: suffering cannot be alien and strange to those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. As they do good, intent upon living the holy and obedient life as God's elect people, and yet suffer unjustly, they ought to remember that their Lord's experience was in no degree different but exactly the same. And yet *not* the same, for His suffering involved more. For it was He who suffered *for you*, said Peter. It was His suffering and His bearing your sins upon the tree that makes your faithful endurance of suffering even possible. The *ὅτι* in v. 21 is causal. Hence we might translate "since," or "because," Christ also suffered for you. (For the implication "suffering unto death" compare the same thought in 3:18: "for Christ also once died on behalf of sins.") Some manuscripts at both 2:21 and 3:18 have attempted to arrive at a single reading (either *ἔπαθεν* [cf. Vaticanus, koine at 3:18] or *ἀπέθανεν* [cf. Sinait., Peshitta, Ambrose at 2:21]).

ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν: possibly these words are a reminiscence of the Lord's interpretation of His Last Supper with His disciples (cf. Mark 14:24, Luke 22:19 f.). Certainly they recall His Passion in its vicarious nature (Mark

10:45, Rom. 5:6, 8; 8:32; 14:15. Cf. further BAG [Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich], pp. 846 f. sub *ὑπέρ*).

ὑπολιμπάνων: a NT *hapax legomenon*, "leaving behind."

ὑπογραμμών: also a NT *hapax legomenon*, "model, pattern." The word *ὑπογραμμός* was employed in profane Greek in the sense of a "tracing" of letters for schoolchildren to copy as well as in the sense of an architectural outline or artist's sketch which might be colored or filled in by others (cf. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, p. 179). Thus the thought: He left a pattern according to which you are to trace your lives; He left footsteps in which you are to follow (*ὑπογραμμών; ἵχνησιν*).

Verse 22

He (that is, Jesus Christ) committed no sin, nor did deceit ever issue from His lips; that is He was never anything but a doer of good (cf. the Servant of God, Is. 53:9).

Verse 23

His (that is, Christ's) was not an ethic of the *lex talionis*, the law of retribution, demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Rather He endured the injustice in the submission of His life to Him who judges with all justice.

Verse 24

Again Peter describes Jesus' Passion with words very similar to those of Is. 53:4, 5, 12. This very One, says St. Peter, who committed no sin, nevertheless was punished for sin because He took upon Himself our sin, bearing that sin upon His body upon the wood. The purpose of this vicarious death was that "we who died to our sins might live to righteousness." Note here the parallelism involved: we die to our sins that we might live to righteousness. *ἀπογενόμενοι* = "to die" in the sense of ceasing from living. In classical usage, the dead were referred to, as today, as the "departed," that is, *οἱ ἀπογενόμενοι*.

This thought is very much related to earlier imperatives by Peter: that the hearers, resp. readers, "get rid of" (ἀποθέμενοι) all kinds of evil (2:1) and that they "stay clear of" (ἀπέχεσθαι) natural lusts (2:11). Such avoidance of sin must be carried out to the extent of *dying* to sin! Only in this action is the right kind of life possible and only by the death of Jesus is the believer's death to sin possible. "By His wounding you were healed" (= Is. 53:5). Oh, marvelous paradox!

Verse 25

Finally Peter concludes with the great "now" of the outpouring of God's saving acts and abundant mercy (cf. 1:12; 2:10 [twice]; also cf. 1:3). Formerly you were really straying sheep (Is. 53:6), but now you have been returned to the Shepherd and Him who cares for your very lives. This "now" refers to their having already experienced God's redeeming activity and their continuing living in it.

Introduction Outline

Christian people, do not be deceived. The leading of a wholesome life, the doing of good as God's obedient children, is no guarantee of a life free from adversity and by no means insures a life free from suffering. To the contrary, you, who confess as Lord Him who suffered injustice to death, you dare expect nothing but the same experience as that of your Lord.

With what resistance we hear these words! How unreal and ethereal they seem in an American society enraptured in the utopistic vision of painless births, carefree lives, and shockless deaths!

And yet despite the great cultural gap between the church of the twentieth and that of the first Christian century, one characteristic of attitude marks both first and twentieth-century Christians as brothers under the skin. Few of us are willing or even emotionally capable of facing the alarming truth

that to call Jesus Christ and Lord necessarily involves tracing the painful pattern which He has laid and following in the footsteps which led Him to death.

Does this come as a shocking or alarming piece of news? This can only be the case for Christians who have divorced the Easter joy from the Good Friday sorrow, who have sweet-talked themselves into assuming that before the victorious emersion from the water of Baptism there was no plunging into the depths of death. In a word,

Your Easter Life of Obedience to God's Will Will Be Accompanied by the Experience of Suffering and Death

I. *Actually it could be no other way. For in the eyes of those outside the church the God-pleasing life is not welcomed.*

A. Nonbelievers will attempt to misconstrue your good intentions as the committing of evil. (2:12; 3:14; 4:19)

B. But this is to be expected, for your Lord experienced the same treatment (2:21, 23). He too suffered, He too was reviled unjustly.

II. *But from His example we learn that suffering is the result of faithfulness to God's will.*

A. It is because we are doers-of-the-good that we suffer (2:20; 3:14, 17; 4:19). Persecution and the maligning of God's holy ones is the mode of the nonbelievers' rebellion against God.

B. So it was also with Jesus the Christ.

1. He suffered as God's faithful Servant. (2:22; cp. Is. 53:9)

2. Though reviled as a hoax, he did not revile the true hoaxes in return. (2:23 a)

3. But He committed Himself, His will, His cause, to the just Judge. (2:23 c; cp. Mark 14:36 and parallels)

C. It is this experience of suffering for the doing of good therefore which marks our communion with Jesus Christ.

His is the pattern which we trace, His are the footsteps in which we follow. (2:21; cf. also 4:12; further 3:13; 4:4, 14)

III. *Therefore the God-pleasing life can be marked only by death.*

A. Death was the price which our Lord paid to free us from sin (2:24 a). Only by the Physician's sacrifice of His own life have we, the patients, been healed (2:24 c). Oh, marvelous paradox!

B. So we too can live the life made right before God only when we have died to our love of unrighteousness. (V. 24 b)

As we, then, are to die to the natural desires in us at war with God (the *sarx*, the "old man," cf. 2:11), suffering helps in the job.

C. Suffering and death go hand in hand.

1. Suffering helps us in the job of ceasing and desisting (dying) from those natural desires of our sinful self. (Cf. 2:11)

2. Suffering keeps us sober, free from the intoxicated-with-self illusion that man no longer is bounded by death and surrounded by decay.

3. Suffering and death are the twin signs of our Baptism. Baptism initiates into life through connection with Him who sacrificed His own life; into life it introduces suffering by identification with Him who suffered.

St. Louis, Mo. JOHN H. ELLIOTT

JUBILATE

1 PETER 2:11-20

Context

A. Remote

An epistle addressed to several churches in various regions of Asia Minor. Congregation—mixed of Jews and Gentiles. Reference to Baptism (3:20-22) and frequent apparent allusions to significance of Baptism (1:3, 22, 23; 2:2 f.) suggest that a baptismal event was in the recent past. Likewise, the relation between Baptism and ethic pic-

tured suggests that the author was explicating the shape and character of the baptismal life.

B. Immediate

1. Aside from vv. 11, 12, this section initiates a large integral segment extending from 2:13 to 3:12. This body of verses incorporates exhortation addressed to various stations of people (citizens [2:13-17], domestic servants [2:18, 19]; wives [3:1-6], husbands [3:7]; all Christians [3:8, 9 (12)]). Such categorized exhortations are not uncommon in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; Col. 3:12—4:1; Eph. 5:21—6:9; 1 Tim. 2:1-15; Titus 2:4-31) or in extrabiblical literature and are generally designated as "tables of domestic duties" (*Haustafeln*).

2. Vv. 11, 12 serve as a transition from the large preceding section (1:13—2:10) to 2:13 ff. Essence of this preceding section: an imperative to the body of the believing Christians to lead a holy life (1:13—2:2), based upon the indicative fact of this body's faithful relation to Jesus Christ, her resurrected Lord. This body is to lead a holy way of life, that is, to offer Spirit-moved and Spirit-filled sacrifice as a holy body of priests, because by virtue of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Elect and Holy One, they too are elect and holy. They are the culmination of God's elect and holy covenant folk: the elect race, the royal residence of the Holy Spirit, His body of priests and holy nation, His private property, whose task is to proclaim through their obedient lives the mighty redemptive acts of Him who called them from the darkness and alienation of castoff children to the light of sonship and mercy. (2:9, 10)

Text

Vv. 11, 12 indicate to whom this proclamation of word and deed is to be addressed: to the world, all that is nonchurch. The priestly sacrifice they offer to God is the witness which they make to the world. Important is the designation of hearers or readers as

"aliens and sojourners" (2:11; cf. 1:17). Their life is pictured as a temporary residence in this world, and therefore they are to avoid the characteristic hallmarks of the world — pursuits of egoism and self-love (σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν). Over against these aggressive vices they are to live a witnessing life of obedience and holiness (cf. 1:17); they are to lead a good, a beautiful, life among and before all the nonbelieving. As a result, even though the nonbelievers charge them with being involved in evil, these same accusers — by getting a good look at really good deeds — will be changed to confessors of the gloriousness of God when He comes finally to pardon and judge (2:12). The goal of their lives, according to Peter, is to lead others to glorify God. The method by which they are to do this involves the preaching of the mighty redeeming acts of God. And the manner in which they are to preach, according to our text, necessarily involves behavior and conduct as a preaching of the Gospel. Specifically, the "doing of good," that is, the performance of God's will through the act of subordination to authority — this is the way of preaching outlined in vv. 13-20.

Important Words and Emphases

Verse 12

καλῶν ἔργων, cf. ἀγαθοποιεῖν as a synonym. The latter looks to the results of an action and more especially to its effects on others; and this is so whether the action is one that falls within or outside the normal sphere of duty; in both cases a generous and cheerful spirit is called for. (Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, p. 178.) Therefore, "welldoing," "doing of good."

Ἀγαθοποιία, or its synonym in 2:12, καλὰ ἔργα, is one of the chief means, according to Peter, by which God's elect people proclaim His mighty saving deeds (cf. 2:9; 2:14, 15, 20; 4:19). This doing of good is a sign of the new holy life from God; it is orientated, on the other hand, to the world. That is, all

that is nonchurch is to be the object and beneficiary of this doing of good. The intention or goal of this action is that all men might glorify God. Thus Christian witness, according to 1 Peter, is carried out by the doing of good among all men; the goal of this witness is the glorification of God by all. Vv. 13ff. through 3:12 show how this witness is to be executed *in concreto*; through being subordinate to those whom God has placed over you.

Verse 13

ὑποτάγητε (cf. 2:18; 3:1, 5; 5:5; 3:22; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:2) "to subject oneself to," "to be subordinate to." This is the key word throughout the section 2:13—3:12, and it is illustrated under the subjects of civic responsibility (2:13-17), the domestic relationships of servant and master (2:18-20), and wives and husbands (3:1-6, 7), and finally the general responsibilities of all Christians (3:9, 10-12). The reason and ability for subordinating oneself is given in the phrase διὰ τὸν κύριον, "because of, on account of, the Lord."

Verse 16

ὥς: not "as though" but "since," "in that," "inasmuch." As freemen, but not corrupting liberty to license; nevertheless, at the same time, God's slaves. — Cf. "Whom to serve is perfect freedom."

Verse 17

τιμήσατε "give all due and deserved respect to"

ἀγαπάτε love the brotherhood, cf. 1:22; 4:8

φοβεῖσθε honor due God (cf. 1:17)

Verse 18

οἱ οἰκέται "domestic servants," though these servants were most probably slaves.

Verse 19

χάρις not in the frequent Biblical sense of "divine grace" but in the frequent classi-

cal sense of "pleasant," "pleasant in God's sight" (cf. Luke 6:32-34).

κλέος, "fame, glory." Therefore the implication: "what kind of claim to fame is this? What is so extraordinary in this case?" (Cf. Matt. 5:46-48 for a parallel thought.)

ὑπομενεῖτε, "hold out, endure" in trouble, persecution, or affliction. It is a frequent term of early Christian encouragement, cf. Matt. 10:22; Rom. 12:12; Heb. 10:32; James 1:12; 5:11. Also used for Christ's suffering on the cross, Heb. 12:2.

In the application of the text to the contemporary situation it should be noted that the cultural setting of Peter and his audience is different from today's. The reign of the Caesars and their governors cannot be directly equated with the democratic institutions within which and under which Americans live today. Nor can Peter's words to domestic servants serve as an analogy for labor-management relations of 1964. Nevertheless the central point which the author is underscoring is that which indeed applies to all mid-20th-century Christians. Submission and subjection is the responsibility of all people who would faithfully glorify their God and serve their fellowman.

An analysis of the structural framework of 1 Peter reveals that the author supports and substantiates every imperative or series of imperatives with the following explanatory section in the indicative mood. Hence the support for what is said in vv. 11-20 is most likely found in vv. 21-25. That this is the case is shown by the link which the author makes between the suffering which Christians undergo and that which Jesus Christ endured. The latter promises the strength basis for the endurance of the former. But this thought goes beyond the bounds of our present text. Our pericope, therefore, is to be seen as an imperative section occurring between two indicative sections which state the very essence and basis of the Christian life: the Christian body is

elect and holy (1:13—2:10) through faith in Him, the Elect and Holy One of God, who Himself suffered and died as the innocent Doer of good. Therefore the picture drawn in 2:11-20 is that of the elect and holy people of God in the action of witness to the world, proclaiming through word and deed, through well-doing and submission, the significance of life and faith in the Crucified and Resurrected One. It is in this sense that our Easter lesson from 1 Peter relates so directly to the thought of today's Gradual: "Hallelujah, Hallelujah! The Lord hath sent redemption unto His people, Hallelujah!" and to the task to which all worshipers are called in the Introit: "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands. Sing forth the honor of His name; make His praise glorious!"

Introduction

If charges of "nonrelevance," complacency, avoidance of real or embarrassing issues, comfortable seclusion, apply to our contemporary church society, then it is high time that that church be confronted once again with some rather disconcerting imperatives concerning Christian behavior and witness to all that is nonchurch. According to 1 Peter the church is not a sanctimonious haven for social recluses. The church is not an igloo where Christians curl up together to keep warm from the world's wintry blasts. The church is not a sanctuary for sacerdotal functionaries intent on reserving their "priestly" functions for committee meetings and displays of democratic liberty (cf. 2:4-10). But according to 1 Peter the church is the community with a message, the holy body of the redeemed charged with confronting the world in witness to the mighty acts of God and her redemption.

God's Elect and Holy People, by Your
Behavior Give Men Cause to Glorify God!

1. *Through your behavior proclaim the mighty deeds of Him who saved you.*

- A. God has elected you for Himself (1:13—2:10); you are pilgrims and sojourners on earth; you have been saved from the world. (V. 11)
 - B. God has made you holy (1:13—2:10); stay away from those natural inclinations and impulses which corrupt this holiness and threaten to turn your election into defeat. This God who received you through the water of a Holy Baptism would have you remain holy. (Vv. 11, 12)
- II. *But you are also responsible for your fellowman. Through your behavior show men what is faithfulness to God's will.*
- A. Be subordinate to those to whom God has subjected you. (Vv. 13-15)
 - B. Be free men in the liberty from deception, be God's slaves in the service of good. (V. 16)
- III. *Through your doing of good cause men to glorify your God.*
- A. Through a holy and beautiful life turn false accusation to true glorification. (Vv. 11, 12)
 - B. Through submissive behavior bring men to praise your God for your faithful obedience. (Vv. 11, 12)
 - C. Through suffering in innocence cause men to glorify Him who suffered as the Innocent One.

St. Louis, Mo. JOHN H. ELLIOTT

CANTATE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JAMES 1:16-21

"Let us keep the feast" — that is St. Paul's call to worship in the Epistle for Easter (1 Cor. 5:8). The Epistles for Cantate and Rogate are an unfolding and an expansion of that call to worship, "worship" being understood as that "spiritual worship" which is the new man's response to the experienced

"mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1), a response which embraces the whole life of reborn man. The Epistle for Cantate unfolds the sacramental aspect of that worship, what the Collect for Cantate calls "desiring what Thou dost promise." The Epistle for Rogate explicates the other, the sacrificial aspect of worship, which the same Collect calls "loving what Thou commandest."

Desiring What God Promises

I. *What God's promise is.*

God's "promise" is an effectual promise; His promise gives what it declares. It reveals God the Giver and thus brings His gifts into our lives. We find it hard to believe in such a promise and in such a Giver; we are tempted again and again to make God the Author of the ruinous evil in our lives (1:13-15). Therefore St. James must begin with "Do not err!" when he would set before our eyes the God of the promise, the good Giver God, whom he delights to praise (cf. 1:5; 2:5). Make no mistake about this giving God of the promise, Saint James says; do not measure Him by any measure but the measure of His own revelation. He reveals Himself as

A. The God who gives *only* good gifts. (1:16)

The God proclaimed by St. James is characteristically the God who gives good gifts: the Covenant God of the twelve tribes (1:1), the generous, ungrudging Giver of wisdom (1:5; 3:17), the Giver of the crown of life (1:12), the Planter of the saving Word (1:21), the God of the orphan and widow (1:27), the Elector and Enricher of the poor (2:5), the God who justifies the believer and makes him His friend (2:23), the God who created man in His image (3:9), who makes His Spirit dwell in man (4:5), who gives grace to the humble, who draws near to the penitent, who exalts the lowly (4:6-10), whose ear is open to the cry of the oppressed (5:4), who is merciful and com-

passionate (5:11), who forgives the sinner and heals the sick (5:16), who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (1:1; 2:1), the Lord Jesus Christ, whose return will make those who wait for Him rejoice as with the joy of the harvest. (5:7-8)

B. The God who is the sure unchanging Giver of good gifts. (1:17)

He is the "Father of light," the Creator of sun, moon, and stars. He is surer than the surest thing in His universe, surer than those lights which He created and ordained to determine times and seasons for men. They change, in sunrise and sunset, in the waxing and waning of the moon. They suffer eclipse. But God is the unchanging Creator and Lord of this changing creation. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). His gift is certain, and His promise is sure.

C. The God who is the spontaneous, resolute Giver of the supreme gift of new life.

God is the spontaneous Giver—"of His own will" He gives (1:18; cf. 1:5); there is no motive for His giving but the unplumbed mystery of His love—"God so loved the world."

The supreme gift is the gift of new life for men, which has in it the promise and the guarantee of a new life for all creation (1:18). This is the distinctive Easter note (for the Resurrection as man's rebirth, cp. 1 Peter 1:3; for the implications of this rebirth for the world's re-creation, cp. Rom. 8:18-22).

This supreme gift of God is recorded and lives and works in the Gospel, "the Word of truth" (cp. Eph. 1:13). In this inspired Word God speaks, and it is done; it is a creative Word, this promise of God. Sacramental worship is the perpetual renewing of man by this Word of truth.

II. *What desiring the promise of God means*

To desire what God promises means to hear His creative Word as it demands to be heard. "Hearing" and "obeying" are closely

related in Biblical semantics. The warning "Do not err" is repeated here. St. James bids us hear the creative, saving Word.

A. With a complete nay to ourselves:

1. No self-deception (1:19)

We need to be reminded that this is the Word of the Creator (1:17, 18) and Savior of mankind (1:18, 21), that there is no word *in us* that can create and save. "Be still, and know that I am God."

2. No self-assertion (1:21)

This Word of the Giver, Creator, and Savior pronounces a verdict on us in our selfishness, our impotence, and our lostness. If we rebel against this verdict and assert ourselves over against this Word, we are lost. The righteousness of God comes only by this Word. Unless we receive it in meekness, unless we fall silent before the condemnation and the acquittal of the Word of truth, we shall not know the saving power of the Word that can save our souls.

3. No compromise with evil (1:21)

We must, in the light given by the Father of lights, learn to recognize and call by their right names our filthiness and our wickedness, to let our evil works be exposed by the light, and to turn in the nakedness of repentance to the Giver God, present and active in His Word.

B. With a complete yea to God:

1. Know God for what He is, the Giver of the supreme Easter gift. "Know this, my beloved brethren." (1:19 RSV)

2. Hear and accept in meekness God's Word for what it is, the power of God for salvation (1:21), the revealer of the righteousness of God. (1:20)

3. Value the church for what it is, the new twelve tribes of the last days (1:1), in which the mighty saving Word of God is "engrafted," implanted, where it has a home and works the perpetual Easter miracle of new life for mankind. (1:21; cp. 1:18)

Application

This is a means-of-grace pericope and a church pericope. Put God's people in mind of their Baptism (with Luther's emphasis upon the Word!). Invite them to the Table of the Lord, into the new covenant by His blood. Hold before them the glory of the creative, saving Word (sermon, liturgy, hymnody, Bible study). Hold before them the glory of the church, the garden of the implanted Word, where the air of Easter blows fresh all year long.

MARTIN H. FRANZMANN

St. Louis, Mo.

ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY

AFTER EASTER

JAMES 1:22-27

"Let us keep the feast" (1 Cor. 5:8). Our keeping of the feast, our worship, is sacramental; we draw our life from God, the Giver, who is present among us in His Word (James 1:16-21). Our worship is also sacrificial; a life born of God's Word inevitably and naturally becomes a life lived for God, a life of action dedicated to Him. It is of this sacrificial aspect of worship that the Epistle for Rogate speaks. It speaks of

Loving What God Commands

"What God commands" — we have to do with God's Word. St. James knows what a quick and powerful Word that creative and saving Word is; he has learned from his Brother and Lord that it is a good seed, with God's creative might locked in it. He has also learned from Him how hazardously that Word is sown; birds can snatch the seed, the sun can sear the sprouting grain, and thorns can choke out the rising shoot (Matt. 13:1-7). He is therefore concerned with a high and holy pastoral concern about our hearing of the Word; he would have us receive it in good and honest hearts. He would have us *love* what God commands,

that is, do what the Father commands, and do it with the loving alacrity of sons. He therefore bids us face the Word, stay with the Word, and so *do* the Word.

I. *Face it.* (1:22-24)

God is not a lecturer. His Word to us is news, Easter news, news of the event that changed the world and reversed the deathward course of mankind's history. That is what makes it a re-creative Word (1:18), a mighty saving Word (1:21). And that is why listening to it as if it were a lecture is a tragic self-deception. Who but a contemplative idiot would treat this news of the one big event that concerns us all as if it were just another word — and so miss the power and the glory of the great event? "Face this Word for what it is," St. James urges us; "look into this mirror that reveals to you all that you lack and all that God can give you. This Word concerns you; it speaks of your inevitable death (1:14, 15) and of the sheer miracle of God's gift of life to you (1:17, 18). You dare not be an idle and forgetful looker into *this* mirror. Face it, and *act* upon what you see!"

II. *Stay with it.* (1:25)

God's Easter news is a reverberating Word; the Easter event sets in motion a history which will not end until the firstfruits have drawn after them the full harvest of all God's recreated creatures (1:18). This Word is a perpetual power for salvation (1:21) and must therefore be continually heard, and it must be continually lived. "Look into it," James says, "as intently and as eagerly as John and Mary looked into the empty grave on Easter morning." (John 20:5, 11. The same Greek verb is used.) "Look into it, and stay with it." To forget it is to lose the life which our Lord has won for us; forgetting this word means forfeiting all possibility of action and losing the blessedness that such action brings. He

who forgets this Word shall never hear his Lord's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

III. *Do it.* (1:25-27)

God's Easter Word takes charge of men; the Easter grace of God, the vision of the living Christ, made a worker of St. Paul: "His grace . . . was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor. 15:10). And St. Paul urges upon the Corinthians: "Therefore" — since God has given us the victory over death and the grave by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ — "therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). St. James can therefore call this Word a "law" (v. 25), a compelling and controlling Word. But it is "law" with a difference; it is a "law" like "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," of which St. Paul speaks (Rom. 8:2). This law can do what the old Law could not do; this law is "a law of liberty" and can make us free sons of God, willing and able to give God a son's joyous and whole adoration. This law can overcome our ingrained bent toward self-deception (1:26) and make clear-eyed penitents of us. This law can tame the tongue, which no man can tame (1:26; cf. 3:8), and give us pure and wholesome speech. This law can make us capable of a worship ("religion") that is pure and unspotted in God the Father's eyes.

With this law living and working in our hearts, we can walk cleanly through the world; the lusting, grabbing, grudging, fighting, murderously competitive miasma of this world's atmosphere (4:1-3) will leave us undefiled. Set free from the scrabble of this world by the law of liberty, we can become the vehicles for the love of Him who is "Father of the fatherless and Protector of widows . . . in His holy habitation." (Ps. 68:5; cf. Ps. 146:9; Jer. 49:11; Deut. 10:18)

Application

The obvious emphasis is on seven-day worship, on the acceptable sacrifice of a whole life lived to the glory of the Creator and Savior of man and man's world. St. James gives as examples the bridling of the tongue (1:26) and the caring for the fatherless and the widow (1:27). These are of great importance; the conversations outside the church door are often enough an *illustration* of what our Lord meant by the diabolic birds that snatch away the good seed of the Word of God (Matt. 13:4, 19). And in a day when the state has so largely taken over the care of orphans and widows, the church needs to be reminded of her obligation toward them; and needs to be reminded also that there is an ingredient in her charity which no state can give — the love of the Father of the fatherless and the Champion of the widow. But the application can go beyond these two examples without doing violence to the text; any example of mercy can be spoken of to the glory of the God who desires mercy and not sacrifice. All deeds of mercy can be irradiated by the great promise of St. James: "Mercy triumphs over judgment." (2:13 RSV)

MARTIN H. FRANZMANN

St. Louis, Mo.

ASCENSION

ACTS 1:1-11

Introduction

On Easter Eve we lit a special candle, the paschal candle, to remind us that we live in the light of our Lord's resurrection. This was the first candle to be lit in every service during that last 40 days, and it was the last candle to be extinguished in each service. Today we did not wait for the close of the service but extinguished the paschal candle after the reading of the Epistle. Why? Because the Epistle tells us of

The Ascent of Our Lord

Does this mean that we are left on our own, with whatever light we can generate for ourselves? Are we in the tragic condition of meeting the darkness of our day with an extinguished candle? worshipping a Lord whose light has gone out as far as we are concerned? Quite the contrary. Now we are His light, His body, His being to others what He is to us. The ascent of our Lord creates our being and task as the church of the ascended Lord.

I. *It clearly points back to what is the foundation of the church.* (Vv. 1-2)

A. All that we have in the Gospel (specifically mentioned by Luke with regard to his Gospel) is what Jesus began to do and to teach. (V. 1)

1. This clearly marks His total ministry as the source of all ministry.

2. This clearly indicates that what He did and taught was not something in and for itself alone.

3. This clearly designates our age as the continuation of what He began to do and to teach.

B. The beginning of what Jesus did and taught is closed with His giving the disciples their task by the Holy Ghost. (V. 2)

1. It was for this that He chose them.

2. It was for this that He sent them (apostles).

3. It was for this that He commissioned them, gave them orders.

C. The beginning of what Jesus did and taught was certified during these 40 days after His resurrection. (V. 3)

1. His great Passion was an integral part of His doing and teaching.

2. His resurrection interpreted the Passion and all that He did and taught. Hence there had to be absolute conviction that He was truly alive (by many convincing proofs).

3. It all had to do with the kingdom of God concerning which He still had to tell them.

II. *It clearly manifests what is the power of the church.* (Vv. 4, 5)

A. The church does not scatter according to its inclinations but lives as the church commanded by its Lord to await the promise of the Father which it has heard through its Lord. (V. 4)

1. The church is community because while it goes out on its task through individuals, it is not scattered, each going his own way.

2. The church is obedience, held together by the command of its Lord.

3. The church lives in listening to what its Lord says and so lives in the certainty of the promise of the Father, which it awaits.

B. The church has a distinct tie with the Old Testament but is the church of the New Testament. (V. 5)

1. It knows the Baptist as the Waypreparer, taking up the promises of the Old and binding them in their fulfilment to the Christ (his baptizing with water is the last of a long line of figures designating the reality in Christ).

2. It is what it is by its baptism with the Holy Spirit (this is its Lord's ongoing Presence with it, making it what it is, enabling it to do what He would have it do, so that it is still His doing and teaching in it and through it).

III. *It clearly marks what is the task of the church.* (Vv. 6-8)

A. It still harbors foolish notions which its Lord must continue to correct. (V. 6)

1. It is still much taken with the visible which would guarantee to it that it is on God's side—statistics, success which even the world must acknowledge, Israel gloriously and unmistakably restored.

2. It still looks for prerogatives beyond

what Jesus began to do and teach, beyond the Resurrection, beyond what He tells us of the Kingdom. (Cf. v. 3)

B. It must constantly be reminded that its knowledge is always the knowledge of faith.

1. It is not given to the church to know the times and the seasons which will usher in the final consummation.

2. It is enough for it to know that these are matters reserved to the authority, not of a vague, indefinite, vindictive God, but of the Father.

C. Its single purpose is to witness of Jesus Christ. (V. 8)

1. It receives the ability to do this as it receives the Holy Ghost.

2. It is commissioned to do this wherever it is (in Jerusalem).

3. It is authorized to do this to the ends of the earth.

4. If it fails here, it is no longer church because then it has many different powers, honors, prestige, etc., but not the power of the Holy Ghost.

IV. *It assures the final victory of the church.* (Vv. 9-11)

A. It knows whither its Lord is gone. (V. 9)

1. The fact that this was done before the very eyes of the disciples makes it one of the great things of Christ of which they were to witness.

2. This is the return to the Father to sit at the right hand of God, the leading captivity captive, and the giving of gifts to men.

3. This is the triumphal declaration of the Lordship of our Lord over all things, the victorious climax and fulfillment of all that He began to do and to teach.

B. It now sees itself as being and doing

under its victorious Lord until He comes again even as He ascended. (Vv. 10, 11)

1. It cannot help straining its eyes in longing to see its Lord.

2. But it cannot spend its time and its energy in standing and looking to heaven.

3. As truly as it believes that its Lord will come again as it saw Him go up to heaven, just so surely will it witness and work to establish the Lordship of Him who is declared Lord by His resurrection and ascension and who will be openly declared Lord by His return.

Conclusion

The church may pray, and the church will pray, "Even so come, Lord Jesus! Indeed, come quickly, Lord Jesus," because it knows that this coming will be the final consummation. But the Church is merely standing and straining its eyes toward heaven and thereby denies its Lord's Ascent, if it is not what the Lord made it, His Kingdom, and if it does not do what its Lord gave it to do and empowered it to do, be His witness to the ends of the earth.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

Minneapolis, Minn.

EXAUDI

1 Peter 4:7-11

Introduction

Does God have any purpose for me? Is there any sense in which I am called of God, occupying my time and my place for the glory of God, kept for the use of God, fulfilling a destiny which is determined by God, allotted a given span of life that it may make its contribution to the master plan of God? The final Judgment will leave no doubt on that score. The faithful are those who live in the certainty of what God's end is. Always in danger of falling asleep in this area and going along with the obvious, they welcome the shock of a text like ours which

recalls them to God and reminds them of who they are and where they are going.

Determined by the Goal of God

I. *Our basic problem is always unbelief, because we don't really believe that the end of all things is at hand, that the goal of God is attained.*

A. Was our time of the past week spent in the light of God's goal attained?

1. How relevant was the ascension of our Lord?

2. How expressive were the individual acts of God's end?

3. How much of it would we have wanted to be involved in if the end of God had broken through at a given moment as final Judgment?

B. In the final analysis all unbelief is lack of faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Our failures in the light of God's end attained mean that we do not believe that Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God.

2. It is only the mercy of God that separates our Lord's ascent from His return.

3. What is really left for us to do if we believe in Jesus Christ in all things as "for us"?

4. Faith believes that it is each moment as God declares in Christ.

II. *Only in the wisdom of faith do we realize that each moment is determined by who Christ is and what Christ has already accomplished for us.*

A. It is not unduly alarmed at the calamities of life.

B. Nor unduly delighted with the joys of life.

C. The zigs and the zags of life have their direction set by God's goal.

D. Faith's ascended Lord has already spoken the final word: "Fear not! I have overcome the world."

III. *Faith in Christ keeps us sober to prayer.*

A. Faith in Christ as God's goal attained for us gives us the proper perspective in which to view each moment.

B. This faith is acknowledged, total dependence on God.

C. This faith calls forth strenuous spiritual effort

1. involving some housecleaning to get rid of whatever gets in the way of acknowledged, total dependence on God;

2. involving a straining of all spiritual muscles "to attain the prize of our high calling of God;

3. involving dedicated effort and the consecration of real time so that prayer does not come under the control of our whims and fancies instead of being under the nearness of God's goal at hand.

IV. *Faith in Christ makes us fervent in love.*

A. This has nothing to do with the warmth of an emotion.

B. It is hard work

1. involving what we do not naturally desire;

2. involving self-denial.

C. It is not something that we can bring off by ourselves.

1. It means to know ourselves beloved of God in Christ Jesus.

2. It means to know the infinite lengths to which God's love in Christ went for us.

3. It means the recognition of God's great no to His own Son so that He might speak His constant yes to us.

D. Our love is nothing more or less than the expression of faith in the love of God.

1. Worthiness of the other is not regarded

any more than it was regarded by God when He sent His Son for us.

2. To the extent to which we know the mind of God in Christ toward us, to that extent will the mind of God in Christ express itself through us.

3. There is no excuse or escape for us from God's love in Christ toward our fellowman, because God's goal has already been accomplished for us in Christ.

V. *We are altogether determined by God's goal accomplished in Christ once and for all and therefore always near at hand.*

A. This is the grace of God which is single in that it is for all in Christ.

B. This single grace expresses itself in a variety of ways.

1. None of us is without it.

2. None of us is without the necessary gifts to give expression to it.

C. It means that we constantly see ourselves as God sees us.

1. People who trust God and therefore people entrusted by God with what other people need from God.

2. People blessed of God that He might bless others through us.

3. People who know the glory of God in Christ and therefore glorify God in Christ.

Conclusion

There really is no question left except one: To whom does the glory belong? Is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is the goal of God's glory already attained in Christ? Faith knows God's goal already accomplished and is wholly determined by it and therefore lives in terms of God's end as always already at hand.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

Minneapolis, Minn.