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ARCHIVES

HOMILETICS

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

December 28

*Worship Supplement: The Form
of Intercession for Christmastide (p. 34)*

The season and the day stress our recognition of the good God and the beloved Son given for us. "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength. . . ." "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips." But a *Point* for the sermon underlining this form of intercession might stress our proper view of all our fellowmen. It could pick up the Epistle's (Gal. 4:1-7) accent that the action of God through His Son was "to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." We are to see all men as God's sons, all people as God's children; because the Word became flesh "in order that all men might be revealed as God's sons." The prayer picks out categories for our proper seeing—churchmen, statesmen, servicemen, parishioners, artisans, orphans, and the lonely dying. Surely this view would delight our Lord who is "the salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [His] people Israel" (The Gospel: Luke 2:33-40).

Our *Problem* is that we see men as men, as problems or as annoyances, in the spirit that rules mankind, "the ruling spirit of the universe" (v. 3 TEV). We treat people in our fellowship coolly—congregations often are more like a bag of marbles coolly touching one another than they are living, loving, warm, and caring fellow members of the body. And our relationship with those who are not part of our bag is often that of

the shooter, the agate that tries its best to knock others out of the circle. The bonds of slavery still bind (v. 3). The sons are not seen even as potential. Slaves die as slaves. We look all too humanly at everyone (2 Cor. 5:16).

But God would not have it so. Seeing the bonds that bind men, He bound Himself in them, bore them through His time of living with men, to free those who were enslaved by them. He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Slaves die as slaves—and so He died for all the enslaved under the Law. Sons inherit life—and that inheritance has been prepared for all men . . . "to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son . . ."

With that Spirit our view of all our fellowmen changes. "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died." The slaves have died. The sons live. Our old dominating spirit sees men and cries, "Slaves"; but God calls out, "Sons!" It was the Spirit of God who inspired Simeon, led him to the temple, and opened his eyes as he opened his arms to recognize the Child he received as God's salvation for the Gentiles and the people of Israel. That same Spirit opens our eyes to recognize all men as sons of God and moves us to open our arms to welcome them as brothers.

Material supplied by
JAMES L. MUELLER
Madison, S. Dak.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

December 31

*Worship Supplement: An Order
of Corporate Confession and Absolution*
(pp. 56—58)

Christians need always to reaffirm their faith in Christ and their determination to serve Him. The Christians' need in order to achieve this determination and to make this reaffirmation is God's absolution, God's gift of forgiveness—"for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

Point:

"A new spirit for a new year." Ps. 51:10

New Year's Eve has the tradition of being a time for turning over a new leaf. Each day should be such a day for the Christian, a turning away from the old by an admission of its inadequacy, and a turning to the new, the new life in Christ. The use of the Corporate Confession gives opportunity for each to sever himself from an old spirit of self-satisfaction or pride and to choose the spirit of humble dedication and service to God.

The rubric which indicates, "The minister shall preferably absolve the penitents individually at the altar, laying his hands on each and saying the following absolution over the first penitent and beginning with the words, 'I forgive you' over the succeeding penitents . . .," will help to make that personal severance and personal choice emphatic. The specific absolution and the laying on of hands, which make dramatically clear the "for you" nature of the forgiveness our Lord has secured for us and empowered the church and her ministers to pronounce in His name, is the Gospel power specifically supplied for *repentance* (which is such severance and such choice). "As you believe,

so let it be. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I, a called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Problem:

We are too often satisfied with confession without repentance. We spend our time looking back over life justifying ourselves rather than looking to Him who alone justifies. Our prayer at the end of a year may be, "More of the same, please," rather than, "Make more of me, please. Make of me more of a servant of Yours." This old spirit is content with things as they are, the status quo, a steady confession that things aren't as they ought to be but with no conclusion therefore to make a change.

The first rubric of the Order states that "it envisions only those penitents being present who have specifically come to make confession and who are desirous of receiving the absolution." If the service has been arranged for these parishioners, the preaching of the Law may be that which the Order itself supplies—"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." "If we thus examine ourselves, we shall find nothing in us but sin and death, from which we can in no way set ourselves free." If the attendance is representative of New Year's Eve, the "diligent examination" requires diligent delineation of the *Problem*. Our discontent with the status quo in so many other areas of our lives might be compared with our relaxed contentment with the way things are in our life in Christ, and God's opinion of that voiced.

Power:

God is always new. He makes old things new. His good news is that all things are new in Christ Jesus. He has a new operation, a heart transplant, to make new people. He installs the new and right spirit within. "And

to the end that we should the more confidently believe this and be strengthened by our faith in cheerful obedience to his holy will, he has instituted the Holy Sacrament of his Supper, in which he feeds us with his body and gives us to drink of his blood."

His New Man, Christ Jesus, creates new men. And He gives the time to act as new men in the new year.

JAMES L. MUELLER
Madison, S. Dak.

THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE NAME OF JESUS

January 1

Worship Supplement: Hymn 717:
"This Little Babe So Few Days Old"

The humanity of Jesus Christ is described and proclaimed by this hymn. Christ's circumcision demonstrates the same humanity. That circumcision shows that He is a *man* under the Law.

The majestic divinity of Jesus Christ is asserted and praised by this hymn. He is given the name of Jesus, the Christ. He has all power and authority and these are known to us by His name.

The circumcision and the name of Jesus, when viewed together, provide the link between the helpless little baby and the conquering warrior. God and man are now one Word. That Word is Jesus. In the Semitic world a name is synonymous with the person who bears that name. This Jesus-person saves people from their sins.

What He does with that humanity and that divinity—that He saves us from our sins—is the importance of all this for us.

Born into time, but a few days old—He rifles Satan's fold.

Shivering from the cold—He makes all hell shake.

Weak and unarmed—He surprises the gates of hell.

The contrast continues through each

stanza, and the combination means that He saves us. With His circumcising He begins the work of obedience to the Law and the self-sacrificing that means our salvation.

This is *Power*—that Name is this Person who saves us; that saving action, proclaimed, brings us the Word that empowers us; and all of this is summed up in the name Jesus.

This could be a sermon *Point*—that we call Him by name—*Jesus*—and that we name Him our Savior by calling Him *Lord!*

But the *Point* of this hymn carries us further. Each one of us is to speak directly to himself, "My soul, with Christ join thou in fight." "Foil thy foes with joy." This Name and the power connected with the Name, this saving obedience and sacrifice and the Word that conveys its strength to us, is to be used by each one of us to defeat Satan and advance the cause of the Kingdom.

Common sense tells us not to follow one so small and ill-armed as this Baby. How can a weak mortal possess the potential to defeat the forces of hell and give protection and victory to all who follow Him? That is the *Problem* to the *Point* of calling Him Savior and Lord. But our *Problem* over against the *Point* of "join in the fight" and "foil thy foes with joy" is our reluctance to name the Name. We are reluctant to foil, averse to fighting. We want to pitch our tent toward Sodom and not stick to His tents. We flit from the Boy. How corrupt, how degraded the parents who abandon their child, who abuse their children. How sick the parents who hate their own flesh and blood. But what of us, created sons of God, who have within us still the dislike of God's own Son, our Baby Brother, who abuse Him, who abandon Him? How sick we!

The preacher strives so to speak the Word, so to name the Name, so to proclaim the saving work, that even as he preaches the hearers will call on that Name with him. He strives so to share the Power that his

fellow Christians, even while they are apparently sitting still in the pews, will be confidently lining up in ranks behind this heavenly Boy to join in the fight, with joy to foil the foes.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

January 4

Worship Supplement: The Rubrics
for the Minister—Specifically
the Greeting of Peace (p. 52)

If a man accidentally gets into a reception line and shakes hands with someone he cannot even identify, the whole gesture has very little significance. But if he knows ahead of time that the President is there or that some great man has returned from space, there is a thrill in a handshake, and by that handshake he attempts to express feelings which he has neither the words nor the time to formulate in any other way.

By itself the simple sharing of the *Pax* with a handshake will not change a widely assorted congregation into the "people of God." The Greeting of Peace in the eucharistic liturgy will become a blessing to each fellow Christian who shakes hands in a somewhat direct proportion to his realization of what a greatness there is in being Christian and being fellows. The introduction of a gesture designed to express a great truth must be accompanied with great teaching of that truth. Each of us is living evidence of the fact that our Lord did come again and dwells in us. Each one of us is a king and a priest by God's gracious election. Together we are members of the same body. And as we shake hands—these marvelously contrived members of a body which has become temple to the Holy Spirit—we share the greeting of our risen Lord, "Peace be with you," and call one another by the name given us in Baptism.

It is very strange that although both the

Epistle and the Gospel for this day (1 Peter 4:12-19 and Matt. 2:13-23) reflect violence we talk of peace. We share peace in a world and a day which neither knows peace nor gives peace nor leaves us at peace. What kind of peace are we describing and sharing when we say "the peace of God"? Not freedom from toil and want; not an absence of war and famine; not an abundance of leisure time and money to be used in the promotion of security and stability. Our Lord made it distinctly clear to the disciples that they should not anticipate those things if they followed Him. St. Peter reminded the Christians not to be surprised at the fiery ordeals which would come to them. God has not promised us any of those things nor does He owe them to us.

God's peace is that stability, that security, that calmness of heart which He gives to us through the suffering of Jesus Christ. God's peace is the assurance of our salvation. It is the awareness that we are loved by the great and faithful creator God Himself. It is the certainty of God's fatherly wisdom and saving concern that enables us to see even sufferings as something to rejoice over, aware that we share in them with Christ, and certain that they will prove us and bring us out of the fire more pure. It is the comfort of being in the household of God, even though that is where judgment begins, for the peace we share with one another multiplies.

The *Point* of the sermon then might be as simple as bringing each Christian to accept the peace of God shared with him by a fellow Christian.

The *Problem* will not be that some will find shaking hands—even with one's own wife or children!—a strange thing to do suddenly in the middle of the liturgy; no, the *Problem* will be that we do not want to receive peace at the Lord's hands, not His kind of peace.

The *Power* will be shared as the sermon

tells again how God spared not His only Son but delivered Him up into suffering and death for us. But all are dead who sought His life; and He who died, lives.

Material supplied by
JACK D. FERGUSON
St. Louis, Mo.

EPIPHANY

January 6

Worship Supplement: The Offertory
for Epiphanytide (p. 30—31)

There is a pleasing little story that the wise men included among the precious gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh they brought to Bethlehem a tiny, tumbling toy to make glad the heart of the child Jesus. What is it that can make God happy? We believe we can be happy if we receive. God is happy when He can give. He is happy about us when we learn to be happy by giving, for that is evidence that we have become His kind of people. God gave His only Son because He loved the whole world. If we, therefore, could but give to God the whole world, He would be made happy, happy because we are giving, and happy because the world for whom He gave Himself would be receiving Him.

In the series of children's booklets called *Little People's Paperbacks* the author, Gerard A. Pottebaum, and the illustrator, Robert Strobridge, have combined their skills to tell of "The Three Wise Men." The faces of the characters in the story are shaped by torn paper. The face of each of the wise men is torn out of a map of a different country of the world. "One wise man was from a land where people had very light skin"—and the face reflects the land of China and the Gobi desert. "The second wise man was from another land, where people had very dark skin"—and Indonesia and New Guinea are the wrinkles of his forehead. "And the third wise man was from a land where people had skin that

was neither dark nor light, but in between"—and all of South America covers the side of his head. When wise men found the child Jesus, "they fell to their knees and adored Him. They gave Him precious king gifts. For He had come to rule all lands. And in their gifts they offered Him the whole world."

The *Point* is: Make God happy by giving, by giving to Him the whole world.

Our *Problem* is: We remake our Christian faith into something that we receive for ourselves. We want to be Christians on our own terms, on the receiving end. We forget that the righteous God has made us righteous—that is, to be like Him. We so easily forget that we have received what we are by the sheer love, the pure grace, the unmerited mercy of God, who made us alive to share His life with all the world for which His love and grace were also given. The appreciation of what God has done grows dim. It is no longer the great good news that has to be told. Forgetting grace, forgetting mercy, we fail to be gracious and merciful. We tend to despise the poor, the person of another color, the great sinner. We hold them at arm's length because they are not good enough for our fellowship, instead of reaching out to all with the love so amazing that loves "not only me, but all." We do not go ourselves into all the world, and we are so slow to send those who cry, "Send me!" This receiving but not giving attitude stirs God's righteous anger. And yet beneath it all is the deepest sorrow. His life comes to us, but comes to a halt in us, and He must judge. He weeps, for He does not have pleasure in the death of the wicked.

God's *Power* is: This Jesus Christ, small and weak, is yet the greatest Giver ever. He gave up the kingdom and the power and the glory for this stable, this house, for poverty, for persecution. He became a part of what He had made so that what He had made might share His life forever. This Giver

Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, went through the spit, the pain, the mockery, the death. Because of the joy of giving us life, He laid down His life and took it up again, that through us all He might give it to all.

Give! Empty your hands and offer your hearts. Be the living sacrifices through whom the boundless goodness of God spills over into the lives of others. Open your hands so that the gold of your offerings may bring the glory of God's mercy to others. Open your mouths so that God's good news may spread by your words to others. God lives in you. Give yourself away so that God may live forever in others too. If we will make that first offering of self, then we can urge all nations to praise Him, all people to call Him blessed. Give Him the world!

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

January 11

Worship Supplement: The Intercession
for Use Throughout the Year, I
(pp. 38—39)

Point:

Take hold of God's power in Christ, to become well-rounded Christians in all areas of Christian life and duty.

Introduction:

What does a Christian look like? What comes up in your mind as I ask the question? The fact that Christians are people, and that people are short or tall, fat or thin? I suggest to you that Christians ought to be round, not in their person but in their posture. Standing on Christ, as on the hub of a wheel, they are to look out on life in all directions, as the spokes of a wheel go out in all directions from the hub. A Christian is to be well-rounded, leaving no area of life un-

touched or unaffected by the Christ on whom he stands.

Problem:

Look for a moment in the various directions of life. Here is the church. There is your home. Over here is where you work. There is your social life. Here is your role as a citizen. Do you look with the eyes of Christ and walk as He would walk—in all directions? Perhaps we're with Him all the way in our church life, but leave him outside the door when we enter our homes, as we criticize our wife or don't want to be bothered with the children. Perhaps we are model, law-abiding citizens and make constructive contributions to the life and government of the community, but at work we're not above a little dishonesty, nor averse to stepping on the other guy to inch a little further up the ladder of success.

You'll have to admit, won't you, that this is not well-rounded Christianity? If your life in Christ were a wheel, would it have only one or two spokes going out from Christ to areas of life?

You're in a bad way—Christ will not consent to be shut out of any area of life. Christ once wrote some letters through the pen of St. John to the churches in Asia Minor. He commended these people for keeping His Word, remaining strong under persecution, and opposing false teachers; but then He said: "I have some thing against you. You have lost your first love. You are tolerating certain sins." He was saying in effect: "Your Christianity is not well-rounded. Repent!" That was His message, and is today. "Repent, or I will come in judgment."

Power:

Christ rounded out His ministry—a full 360 degrees—that we might become, more and more, well-rounded Christians. There was no time in His life that He was not

about the Father's business. There was no area of life He did not touch. He lived it, as we have to live it, in the church, the home, at work, and as a citizen. He lived it perfectly for you and me. The square corners and sharp edges of our sin bruised and hurt him and finally crucified Him. But look, the Crucified lives! Our failures and sins did their worst — on Him. And yet He lives — in victory and power! We stand on Christ as the hub and source of our life, and now we know that sin can't do its worst in us anymore. In Christ we have power to meet the opposition head on, in all directions, in every area of life.

Do it more and more. In our prayer today we are going to pray for our fellow Christians, for ourselves, and for the world, in various areas of living and responsibility. (Expand on subjects in the prayer.) Pray with a confident heart. Look whom you're asking, the One who has overcome all that holds you back. Pray with the firm decision to work for the things for which you pray. Look who makes it possible — He who rounded out His ministry, taking on all opposition from every direction, that you and I might be well-rounded Christians.

What do Christians look like? They are round. Let Christ round you out a little more today.

GEORGE H. RATTELMULLER
Carrollton, Mo.

TRANSFIGURATION — EPIPHANY II January 18

Worship Supplement: Hymn 723:
"O Wondrous Type! O Vision Fair"

Introduction:

Time of the year when we have little glory. After Christmas doldrums; tax time coming up fast. Short days. Epiphany the time of Christ showing Himself as God — we could certainly use a little showing of Christ right now. Three disciples had a rather nice deal up there on the mountain.

How about us? A little glory would be just fine. New hymn this morning sounds like writer was up there on mountain. Don't know about the writer in 15th century, but translator, Dr. John Neale (died on Transfiguration 1866), never saw any celestial fireworks in his life. Almost in poorhouse most of his life, ill health, died operating home for wayward girls. Doubt if he ever saw any "vision fair" — neither do any of us. So these three disciples get a sort of unfair "vision fair." Where is the glory of Lord? How can we see it — even a little?

I. The Disciples' Glorious "Vision Fair"

As Jesus instructs disciples that He has to go up to Jerusalem they get a bit down in the mouth (Matt. 16:21-28). After 6 days of wondering what would be happening — Jesus takes the three up the mountain. There they get wide-screen full-color treatment! Complete with God's personal stereo sound! What a wild experience it must have been! No doubts for the disciples now. Peter's understatement of his life (v. 4), "Lord, it is well that we are here!" Author caught in hymn: "Of glory that the Church may share, Which Christ upon the mountain shows," or verse 2 of hymn.

II. Where Is Our Glorious "Vision Fair" Now?

The disciples wanted to stay up there on the mountain and bottle up all that glory for awhile. We haven't even been up the mountain!

1. Our life in this world doesn't have much glory.

Income tax and Christmas bills are the least of our worries. If only someone could come up with a good substitute for hospitals and cemeteries. But that isn't the real problem either — just a sign of the deeper problem of sin. Of manufacturing our own glory at the expense of God and others.

2. We have a false idea of glory to begin with.

We have rather "kindergarten" ideas about glory. We think if we color everything gold (or green) we've captured God's glory. Christ's incarnation in Bethlehem was done quite nicely; we don't have to improve on it; yet we insist on inventing our own way of getting God down here with us in our cozy little tents of life, our little schemes of "Celestial Camp-out." Play at the idea of being God's people—set up the tent, furnish it, ask God in, and if He doesn't show, we make our own incarnations of God.

3. Then we wonder where the "vision fair" is.

With no apparent thunder from heaven to tell us to quit, we build the tents, and then wonder what went wrong—no glory to be seen. In the midst of all our *other* troubles He could at least give us something! Our hymn for today just seems to rub it in with verses 3 and 4. It *does* say, "Christ deigns to manifest today What glory shall be theirs above." But we don't see a thing.

III. Christ in Us Gives Us Glory Now.

We don't have to punch a hole in heaven or build a tower to see the glory of Christ. The "secret" is to be Christ's. Look at the text—the three were disciples of *His!* As Christ's own they got the "vision fair." Look at what Christ makes of you and gives you now. Instead of being stuck in the dead ends of our manufactured incarnations, there is a cross for us right now. You are washed clean, regardless of what tents you pitched this morning. Only weeks back we got stiff backs looking into that manger—look again: that's the One who climbed into our life, and by faith climbs into your life right now. Incarnation—He's showing it to you right now—and He's showing you glory right now—you are His. Verse 3 of hymn.

IV. We Have the Witness of the Holy Spirit that This IS the "Vision Fair."

We always look for insurance though. The disciples heard the voice from the cloud. We have God's new voice—here it is—you're hearing it right now. Better yet, the Incarnation is here for us now as Christ comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament. There is the "Epiphany" of his "shining face and bright array." What better array than when He forgives and gives? When he assures you that you are His, now? What glory! Now the whole fireworks of light and sound that is life in Christ and His glory is churning up inside of us—so let's let it out as the hymn does in verse 4.

V. We Go Back to the World with This "Vision Fair."

Of course we'd look a bit silly if we went out the front door singing "O Wondrous Type" in our cars, waiting for the bus, or waiting for the green light! The world has a bad way of shutting our mouths. But when Christ came down that mountain, the first person he confronted was an epileptic boy. That didn't turn Christ off, but on. He gives us the same power and glory also to keep singing and working for Him. We've got work to do for Him to let some others join us in the glory. We might be humming on occasion when the going's rough, but the song has to burst out—verse 5.

CONCLUSION

"To see thy glory face to face." On occasion its sort of hard to wait. We'd like that fantastic "vision fair" of heaven itself. But really we don't need it right away—like the disciples, we've had our own little "unfair vision fair." We've seen Christ—we see Him now, hear and taste. That glorious churning inside of us—let's let it go—and by the way, let some others in on the vision.

SEPTUAGESIMA

January 25

Worship Supplement:

The Holy Eucharist, II (pp. 59—62)

Introduction:

Changed to a new car and sold old one. Former car had emergency brake between the seats. For weeks kept reaching for brake that wasn't there. Have to be conscious of location of new one. Familiarity takes awhile. Still reach for lights and get windshield wiper instead. New liturgy at first can be a panic. Takes effort. Perhaps will be getting wipers instead of light for a bit. No fear—the power is here—this really goes. But let's learn it well, so work well with it. Unfair compare Sacrament to machine—cold—but as we go through, catch the love in God's grace that's here for us today. Work with that.

I. The Kingdom Is Labor.

Matt. 20:1-16—The laborers waiting for work. The hiring and different times of day. All work—together. The rewards identical—but given out of "grace," out of goodness of Lord. Work in Kingdom is the labor of being Christ's all the time. Has its own reward—being His, being in His grace, love. Reward of godliness is being God's.

II. We Are Not Ready for Labor

(The Preparation).

We are standing in marketplace. Apart from God's grace, no one goes charging in to work for Him. Not ready for work. "We are here"—not much more. Admit unreadiness in, "We are stubborn fools. . . ." Want work—but only for selves, not Him. "Sick from it" and need healing, strengthening of muscles of heart, first.

III. The Lord Instructs Us in Labor

(Service of the Word).

Lessons instruct us as to type, extent of labor. Epistle especially on this day. What He expects of us He also furnishes. Mercy and grace in Gospel. Proper equipment for work. The necessary instructions and power is all here. Tasks not always equal, nor abilities, thus the variation from Sunday to Sunday; but in it always is the glory of Christ here now—speaking as the Giver of grace. He still always picks you as His.

IV. We Offer Ourselves for Labor

(First Action).

First making peace with fellow laborers—unlike the hostility shown in text between laborers. Offer gifts—but as "First Action" states—it is ourselves we give. This only reasonable—that's what we're here for, to labor.

V. Christ Inspires Our Labor

(Second Action).

We affirm His presence. Most taskmasters we can do without. Christ is present only in grace—we welcome His presence. Greet in joy that grows out of remembrance of His sacrifice for us. Wait "the gift of Himself"—so we say, "Come." Pretty odd—thank you and praise for One who sends us to work—but now we're grabbed by His love. There is no merit in this work—it's all joy.

VI. Christ Equips Us for Labor

(Third Action).

A memorial of His sacrifice for us. Because we broke off with fellow workers—Christ needed to be broken for us on cross. Here remember in action, for our brokenness of sin, Christ broken. Heal the breaks we make. He heals now. He's not broken now, but results come to us now.

VII. We Share Christ and Labor in Love
(Fourth Action).

We share *Christ*. We *share* Christ. We share *in* Christ. The forgiveness comes to us broken ones. To the ones unwilling to work. Share the healing and the power to accept grace. Share power to work. Share love of Christ the better to love. We can't wait to get into the vineyard and work!

CONCLUSION

That's the new *working* model. Made for laborers. Trustworthy. It's got all the power. Here is God's grace for us. We're equipped and ready for work. Reward? This is it! His! It's payday — right now.

MARTIN W. BANGERT
Milwaukee, Wis.