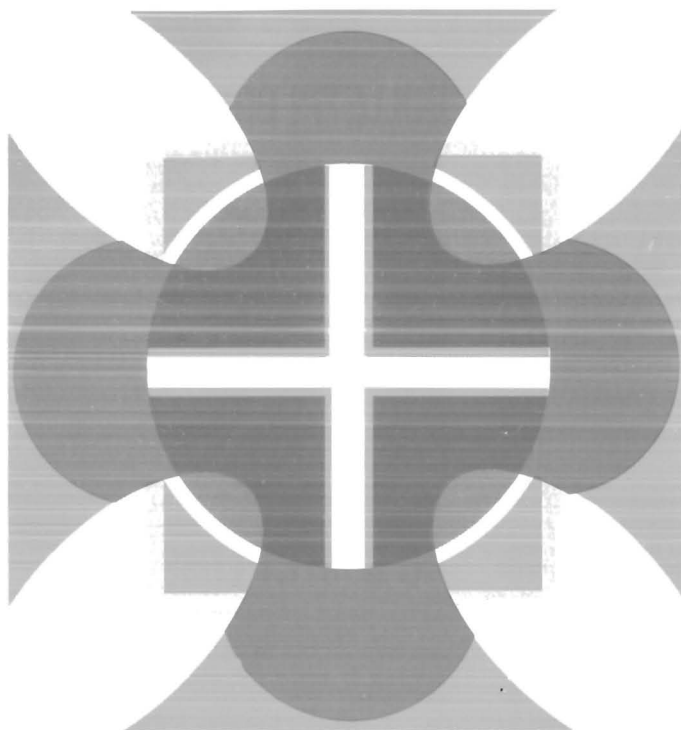


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HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION

Historians, systematicians, exegetes, members of the department of practical theology — they are all here in this issue's collection of sermon suggestions. Even those preachers who are not following the revised lectionary of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship might be interested in covering the author's names and trying to identify their department. Those who are seeking sermon starters should be forewarned (if the Christmas materials have not already warned them of that fact) that not all Sundays and significant days in the church year are being covered in this series. But in the space provided, consider a preaching sequence that takes us into the midst of Lent.

George W. Hoyer

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Jer. 24:1-7(8-10)

Rom. 8:31b-39 (begin "If God is for us...")

Luke 13:6-9

This date is traditionally the day of St. Sylvester, bishop of Rome at the time Constantine "liberated" the church. The revisers have seen fit to legitimize the widespread practice of celebrating New Year's Eve in church by assigning lessons proper to that celebration. (By way of comparison, the German Lutheran *Agende* of the last decade provides a full set of propers for "Altjahrsabend [Sylvester]" (*Agende für evangelisch-lutherische Kirchen und Gemeinden*. Berlin, Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1964.) We are not concerned here with any propers other than the three lessons.

The theme of these lessons is judgment: verdict and sentence. Under various guises, and openly, evaluation is a common topic at this season. Transience is also in many people's thoughts; its manifestation in death has never been far from Christian talk of judgment. In a way, then, the end of the civil year borrows its theme from the end of the church year.

Jer. 24:1-10. (the whole prophecy should be read) is dated between the two deportations into exile from Judah. The prophecy holds out promise of restoration to those in exile already, and threat of destruction to those left behind, who are stirring up trouble. The promise is not a legal pronouncement in spite of its parallelism with the judgment. It is neither an acquittal nor a reward but an act of mercy, of covenant-love which goes far beyond what is deserved — no, contrary to what is deserved. A close parallel to this may be found at 31:31-34, a more famous passage.

The Luke pericope employs a common Biblical metaphor for man and for judgment: a tree and its fruit. "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43 f.). Jesus uses this image here in telling some who were self-righteous and complacent that present good fortune (for example, not having towers fall on one, 13:1-5) should not be taken as a sign of God's favorable judgment. As St. Paul puts it, "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). Judgment is on its way; John the Baptist warns, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees." (Luke 3:9a)

The lesson from Romans affirms that God's being for us in judgment is grounds for courage for the Christian, in the face of the trouble there is in the world. If God is for us, St. Paul asserts, we are invincible. The evidence is overwhelming that He *is* for us: He gave up His Son for us (8:32, cf. 5:8). Vv. 33 f. then clarify what it means for God to be "for us," namely, that He has chosen us and justifies us, that His activity in Christ Jesus was on our behalf. In the next few verses, the application is made to the life of the Roman Christians. St. Paul admits that they have it rough (8:36), and perhaps also hints with this quotation that there is grumbling (note the content of the quote in Ps. 44). But, he asks (8:35), how can even death itself defeat us, when our champion is one who, though he died, was raised from the dead and is acting on our behalf right now (8:34)? It cannot. Nor can anything else separate us from this love of God (8:38 f.). It is unclear how some of the elements of this list could be

thought to "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:39), but the basic thrust is that nothing in creation, nothing less than God, could separate us from his love.

We would do well to look at the opposite condition of man, as St. Paul describes it. There was a time when God was not "for us," when He was our enemy (5:10). *That* is when we were "helpless" (5:6). We were all involved in sin, and faced death as a consequence (5:12). Sin "reigned in death" (5:21), and we were "enslaved to sin." (6:6)

No longer. Now that Christ's death has reconciled us to God, we may surely expect that he will be by our side upon the plain. His victory over death (8:34) is our victory, too (6:4); sin and death will have no more dominion over us.

God Is Surely for Us in All Our Battles

- I. Our lives are full of battles.
 - A. Human life is typically shot through with struggle and conflict—with nature or with other people. Review of the year past should show this; also the catalog in v. 35. Struggle for survival.
 - B. The war behind the battles, St. Paul says, is a war with God! We are sinful rebels, justly doomed to die. Fear! (Cf. 8:15)
- II. God has chosen to fight on *our* side.
 - A. But God's will for us is life, and in spite of our still being sinners He chose to fight *for us*. He even gave up His Son to death, *for us*.
 - B. He will be faithful. What *wouldn't* He do for us, if He would give up His Son for us? (V. 32)
- III. With a friend like Him, who has enemies? Or, wonder where the enemy went?
 - A. Death is vanquished (v. 34), "sin will have no dominion" (6:14) over us. God's justifying act (v. 33) has settled all claims of the Law.
 - B. Those daily struggles and conflicts? In those that remain "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (8:37)

Is. 55:1-13	Num. 6:22-27
Gal. 3:23-29	Gal. 4:(1-3)4-7
Luke 2:21	Luke 2:21

The name of this day has been changed (from The Circumcision and The Name of Jesus) to reflect the major emphasis of both the Reformer and of St. Luke in the Gospel appointed. While either introit included in *TLH* is still appropriate, only the third of the collects fits this theme. The first introit uses Old Testament verses to marvel that a God so great reveals Himself as a Redeemer, as one who is mindful of mere man. (The RSV has an even more telling rendering of Is. 63:16b.) The second introit finds the same theme in Phil. 2:10 f.; that the name "Jesus" should evoke worship is not blasphemous but the highest praise of that which God counts His "glory." This second introit ties in to the collect with its mention of the worship of Jesus' name. In chiasmic form the collect deals with two motifs: Jesus' being made Savior, and our receiving this salvation; His being named Jesus, and our worship of this name.

The text governing this set of propers is, of course, Luke 2:21, which is the occasion for this celebration on the octave of Christmas. Recent commentators agree that the emphasis of this verse is on the naming, and some even go so far as to suggest that the circumcision might be incidental to the telling of the story. Those who do see great significance in the circumcision itself almost unanimously refer the reader to the phrase in the appointed Epistle, "born under the law" (Gal. 4:4), in explanation of its importance in the case of Jesus. The name, in its Hebrew root form, means "Yahweh is salvation," and it is this simple declaration which ties all of the propers together. While the Epistle does not speak specifically about the name of Jesus, it does tell how this saving God has come to the rescue of *us* who were "under the law" (and therefore "under a curse"), in His Son, who was "born of woman." The Old Testament lesson gives a concrete (and frequently rehearsed) instance of God's putting His name on His people in blessing. If there is one way God wants to be known, it is in blessing, not cursing; He has made a name for Himself as Savior, and this day is a celebration of that fact.

THE NAME OF JESUS—January 1

Standard Lessons Historic Pericope
Series Revision, 1971

The pertinence of God's saving activity in Jesus, described in the Epistle, depends largely on the predicament briefly represented as being "under the law." "Under" here means "under the power of," or "under the sovereignty of." That the Law is anything but a benign sovereign has been indicated in earlier parts of this Epistle, most dramatically in 3:10: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse." The Law cannot justify (3:11), and does not supply the Spirit (3:5). Instead, the Law makes sure that each of *us* who is born of woman, born under the Law, is under a curse—that is, a threat of judgment and death which starts taking its toll now. Death is the word that comes to us from the Law; "for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law." (3:21*b*)

What is it then for Christ to "redeem" those "under the law"? This word for redeem is only used in this sense one other place in the New Testament, in Gal. 3:13. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us . . ." The Law holds before us the alternatives of righteousness and life or sin and death. Since "it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law" (3:11, cf. 2:16), we all are enmeshed in sin and face the death penalty. But if we are "baptized into Christ," if we have "put on Christ," if we are "Christ's" (3:26-29), then Christ's death has paid that penalty *for us*, and we are forever free of the curse; we are no longer the slaves of the Law.

We do not, however, exchange one slavery for another. The text artfully mixes the metaphors of family and state by comparing a son under guardians (not necessarily implying the death of the father in Greek law) to a slave—he has that little freedom. But when this "date set by the father" had come, we became free sons of a most gracious God, who filled us with his Spirit, and made us heirs to all his promises.

Not Slaves, But Sons

"Slave" or "son" says something important not only about the person who bears that title but also about the person on the other end of that relationship. God is telling us in Jesus that He is not an enslaving God, but a saving God; not a

slavemaster, but a Father.

I. "No better than a slave." (4:1)

A. We are no better (that is, in effect no freer) than slaves, if we justify our lives by reference to a Law, whether one of conformity or non-conformity, of hedonism or activism, or even by reference (textually) to God's law.

B. And we make of God nothing but a slavemaster if we think His will for us is summed up in commands; an especially vicious slavemaster, considering that his will is past our fulfillment.

II. "No longer a slave but a son." (4:7)

A. But God has said, "Know me as Jesus," and has hidden His glory behind the saving work of Jesus on the cross, in order that even those of us outside of Israel might know what the true God is like.

B. The will of this saving God (revealed in Jesus) is, then, that we be His sons. His fatherly gifts to us begin with freedom, adoption as sons, and the Spirit of His Son.

Edward H. Schroeder

EPIPHANY, FIRST AFTER

Old Standard	ILCW Lectionary
Is. 61:1-3	Is. 42:1(2-4)5-7
Rom. 12:1-5	1 Cor. 1:26-31
Luke 2:41-52	Mark 1:9-11 or Matt. 3:13-17

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist—the public "inauguration" of God's Son as Savior-Prophet; the perfect willingness of the 30-year-old Jesus to submit to this rite "to fulfill all righteousness"; the manifestation of sinlessness and godhead of this "servant" to John and other witnesses both then and now; and the great delight of the Father and the outpouring of the Spirit—these are the central thoughts of the ILCW Gospel. This Epiphany message parallels the Old Standard Gospel of the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple, "who needed to be about His Father's business" and showed His godhead to the learned ones in the temple, as well as to Mary and Joseph.

Both Old Testament pericopes (Is. 61 and 41) are beautifully Messianic, tying in well with the Gospel and pointing to

the healing, delivering, prophetic-saving office of "God's Servant," the Father's great delight over Him, and the pouring out of the Spirit upon Him.

While the Epiphany Gospel reveals Jesus to us as the Christ, the Spirit-anointed Son of God, the Epistle stresses that the foolishness of the preaching of the cross, to bring us into connection and salvation with this Christ, is the "manifestation" which ultimately counts subjectively for righteousness, redemption, and sanctification.

P. Z. Strodach (*The Church Year*, p. 69) calls this day "The Epiphany of Loving Duty." As we are "in Christ" who is manifested to us, we grow in the manifestation of knowing and doing the Father's will and living to the glory of God.

We are using one of the ILCW Gospels, Matt. 3:13-17. (Mark 1:9-11 is a short report in which the voice from heaven addresses Jesus directly; in Matthew the voice speaks to John and other witnesses.) Luke 3:21-22 should be consulted, where the emphasis is on what happened after the baptism and the descent *bodily* of the Spirit as a dove; also John 1:31-34, the Baptist's witness and interpretation of the person he baptized as the Son of God "who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." So,

Let's Celebrate the Inauguration

This month Richard M. Nixon will be inaugurated for another term as President of the United States. Solemnly and officially he will take the public oath of office. His inauguration is not the cause of his presidency but the result of his election. The baptism of Jesus, a kind of inauguration for His public ministry, is likewise not the cause of His prophetic office, but the result of His willingness to be our Savior. That's cause for celebration, even as our own baptism, our inauguration as it were, as sons and daughters of God, is constantly cause for our more personal celebration of God's grace. Let's celebrate inauguration! "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness," the psalmist urges in both the introit and gradual for today. (Ps. 100:1-2)

I. Let's celebrate His baptism-inauguration to be our perfect Prophet-Priest-Savior.

A. Consecration of self "to do His Father's business"—for us (as al-

ready demonstrated by 12-year-old Jesus in the temple).

1. Willingly, anxiously allowing, even seeking, "repentance baptism" He did not need for Himself—for us

2. Identification with all sinners—for us

3. "Fulfilling all righteousness (*dikaioisunee*—"right conduct before God") for us

B. Proclamation of His sinless Self and Savior intent (and the Baptist recognized it!) for us.

C. Manifestation

1. Of Jesus' godhead

2. Of God's affirmation

a. The open heavens

b. The voice of the Father's approving delight (cf. Old Testament, Is. 42)

c. The Spirit as a dove

d. Trinitarian participation and revelation

D. "Inspiration"—"baptized with the Holy Ghost and with power."

E. Celebration.

1. In heaven: see introit, "I heard the voice of a great multitude saying, 'Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,'" Rev. 19:6

2. For us on earth: see introit and gradual, Ps. 100:1-2

II. Let's celebrate our baptism-inauguration and continuation as sons and daughters of God.

A. We have become connected with Jesus in our baptism and in the Gospel.

1. Unlike Him, we needed it.

2. By it the benefits of His perfect life and death are ours.

3. The Holy Spirit came and still comes to us in the Gospel.

4. God continues to say about us, "In Jesus, this is My beloved son, daughter."

5. Thus life in Christ is occasion for constant celebration.

B. With such inauguration, continuation and celebration goes responsibility.

1. This Sunday has been called the "Epiphany of loving duty." (1 Cor. 1:30—Epistle for today)

2. We pray in the collect for today:

- a. "That we may perceive and know what things we are to do"; and
- b. "That we may also have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same."
3. Like Jesus, according to His example and by His enabling power, we are to grow in His grace to:
 - a. Yield to the Father's will
 - b. "Fulfill all righteousness"
 - c. "Present ourselves as living sacrifices" (Rom. 12)
4. In Word and Sacrament we receive the same power from the Holy Spirit.

Paul G. Lessmann

EPIPHANY, SECOND AFTER

Is. 61:1-3

James 1:17-18

John 2:1-11

Epiphany helps us to see that Jesus manifested the Father's glory in meeting all the daily needs of His people. John tells us that the first sign of His glory happened at a wedding which ran out of wine! In the collect we pray for God's peace—not just the cessation of war, but the provision of everything we need—physically, mentally, spiritually. No wonder, then, that the introit announces that the whole world praises God for His goodness. The Epistle of James reminds us that we should be first-fruits of God's creatures. What God does, we also should want to do.

Since my specialty is Old Testament studies, I will give attention to these themes as they are present in the Old Testament lesson. Scholars are undecided whether the "me" in Is. 61:1 refers to the prophet himself or to the so-called Servant (see especially 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13—53:12). In any case the author feels that he is empowered and commissioned in very special ways. The "spirit of Yahweh" which had rushed on Judges like Samson and on the servant (Is. 42:1), and who would rest on the Messiah (Is. 11:2), now comes with all His power on the speaker of this poem as well. Just as David had experienced the Spirit in close connection with anointing (1 Sam. 16:14-23), so now the Lord has anointed our poet to a special office with special functions. A third mark of God's commission comes

with the word "sent." With the power and protection of the Sender, the writer, like many a prophet before him, goes forth to his assigned tasks.

The Hebrew poetry helps us in interpreting these tasks. God's good news for the poor means a binding up of shattered and discouraged hearts. God also sends the speaker with an emancipation proclamation. The words in v. 1, in fact, are reminiscent of the release proclaimed to all slaves in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:40-41). Prisoners too are to be released although some scholars have suggested emending the last line of Is. 61:1 to read: "the opening of eyes to the blind (cf. Luke 4:18)." But one thing above all else must be proclaimed: Now is God's time for showing favor to His people. The translation "day of vengeance" in v. 2 is misleading. Both the poetry and lexical studies suggest a reading "the day of rescue by our God."

The writer pays special attention to God's concern for those who mourn. Instead of sackcloth and ashes, they will put on garlands, party clothes. Instead of tears, they will celebrate with aromatic oil like that used at festivals. Instead of feeling despondency, they will join in praise. When God takes care of the needs of His people there is total transformation. The writer has a rich palette. In the future all the broken, the captives, and the mourners will abound in strength. They will not be objects of pity but reasons for people to praise God.

These exegetical reflections can issue in the following sermon outline, the title of which recalls the words of the gradual: "Oh, that men would praise the Lord . . . for His wonderful works to the children of men."

Epiphany: A Time for Wonderful Works

I. The way it was for Isaiah.

- A. This believer felt himself commissioned in many ways to announce and implement God's wonderful works. Through the Spirit, God's anointing, and His sending, he received the power for his service.
- B. His message was good news for everyone in his time who was deprived of full joy. Poor and brokenhearted, captives and prisoners, and especially those who mourned would experience

through God a complete reversal of condition.

- C. The goal of God's wonderful works was that others would see and glorify God.

II. The way it was in Jesus Christ.

- A. Jesus found the words of Isaiah fulfilled in Him. In His first sermon at Nazareth, Luke 4:18-20, He outlined His ministry to the total needs of men. When the disciples of John came asking whether He was the Messiah, He said, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Matt. 11:4-6)

- B. At Cana in Galilee (today's Gospel) Jesus manifested His glory in the first of His great signs. While in John's Gospel the ultimate manifestation of Jesus' glory came on the cross, the concern of Jesus for the everyday needs of His people at a wedding is already a token of God's great love.

III. The way it is to be in us.

- A. St. James reminds us in the Epistle that we are to be the firstfruits of God's creatures. These wonderful works that we do are "from above" —without God's power we could never do them. But with His power we become "little Christs" to all who are in need. That's the way we manifest God's glory and lead people to praise Him.

- B. We are on mission to the whole man and to the whole society. The joyful message of Isaiah and the wonderful works that Jesus did during His ministry must be modified for the individual hardships and hurts of our several communities. When we pray in the collect for God to grant us peace, we are asking that God's wonderful works be done *to* us, and *through* us to all men.

Epiphany is a great time to equip God's people for their mission to the whole world. The introit and gradual for this day celebrate God's worldwide kingship and proclaim that all the distant islands find joy in His reign. The Epistle announces that the Gospel is the power that saves for both Jew and Greek. The holy Gospel tells of two miracles in which Jesus manifested God's kingship: a) the cure of a paralyzed centurion's son; b) the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. St. Matthew reminds us that such service by Jesus meant that He was living up to His advance billing. (Is. 53:4)

The Old Testament lesson is another of those poems which speak of a Servant who embodies what Israel should be. This Servant calls the islands and distant peoples to hear (v. 1) since they are finally the goal of all His service (v. 6). His call antedates His birth; ever since the first moment of His existence God has been calling Him by name (v. 1). Thus the Servant cannot point to His life or character as meriting God's attention, the favor of God is rooted in His mercy and grace. In addition, the Servant has seen God's fidelity over a long period of time; His whole life provides evidence for God's goodness.

God turned the Servant's mouth into a weapon through which His glory could be proclaimed and acclaimed. The Servant's mouth is compared with a sword and an arrow, symbols of sharpness and accuracy, but also items given special protection by the warrior, that is, by God Himself. (V. 2)

Adopted by God ("you are my servant"), the Servant embodies what Israel is and what it should do. But like historical Israel experiencing the frustrations of exile, national defeat, and doubts about God's power to save, the Servant feels that His best efforts have resulted in nothing but frustration and failure. In despair He pleads for God to defend His rights and to restore His blessing. (V. 4)

"And now." With these words we expect an announcement of God's forgiveness, even words of encouragement. First, however, the Servant recalls how God created Him to be Servant, how that servitude had as its goal the restoration of Israel, and how His position as God's Slave is one of honor and strength (v. 5). Even then

EPIPHANY, THIRD AFTER

Is. 49:1-6

Rom. 1:16-17

Matt. 8:15-17

there come no words of comfort and consolation. Instead God tells Him that His previous, frustrating assignments have been too easy. When God forgives and renews His call, He increases the responsibility. Once only a Servant for Israel, the Servant is now to be a light also for the nations so that the news of God's victory (salvation) may reach to the ends of the earth (v. 6). Likewise Jeremiah was tired with racing with men but was invited by God to race with horses (Jer. 12:5). He screamed with pain and frustration, with the charge that God was deceitful. Yahweh urged him to repent and promised to restore him so that he could serve more. (Jer. 15:19)

The following sermon thoughts are based on this Old Testament lesson (and the other propers):

"Bringing Christ to the Nations"

I. Our Calling

- A. Why are we called? To ask "why" is not to ask about the causes of our election but about its goal. With Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) we see our assignment in bringing blessing to the nations. At the beginning of a calendar year a sermon could well focus on the congregation's mission priorities.
- B. Who else has been called? We are called as part of God's people of all times. Abraham and, through him, Israel were called for a great mission. Jeremiah and Paul are classic examples of prophets to the nations. Above all, the Servant in Isaiah who embodies the ideal role of Israel and the church, helps us to see corporate perspectives in our mission endeavors.
- C. What benefit is there in being called? Jeremiah, Paul, and the Servant were called before their birth. To talk of calling, therefore, is to talk of *God's* gracious decision and *His* power. With these saints of the past we too are literally "made" (created) to serve.

II. Our Resources

- A. The Gospel that we share is the same power that enables us to share. Here the Epistle provides an abundance of "means" material. We believe the Gospel, but *it* is

also the power of God for salvation.

- B. We who would be servants find strength in the greatest Servant of God, Jesus Christ. In bearing our infirmities and healing our diseases, He demonstrated that He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. Thus today's Gospel announces that Jesus actually did everything Isaiah's Servant was supposed to do, but never could do. In Him we find not only forgiveness, but also the call to greater responsibility. (Cf. Is. 49:6)

III. Our Strategy

- A. Bringing light to the nations. In Epiphany we can heed the imperative, "Arise, shine (Is. 60:1), because our light, *the* Light,' has come." Those who are blind or sitting in dark dungeons (Is. 42:7) are apt symbols for spiritual darkness which is to be banished by the Light of the World. The Nunc Dimittis in the Communion liturgy reminds us that the joy and deliverance of this Light is for all Gentile nations as well as for His people Israel.
- B. Bringing healing and care to the nations. Today's Gospel shows Jesus carrying out this part of the Father's will and the collect asks for help in our infirmities, dangers, and necessities. Those who are blind or sitting in dark dungeons (Is. 42:7) are also apt symbols for physical needs of every kind throughout the world. The Old Testament lesson reminds us that while Jesus is *the* Servant, we too are servants and lights like Him.

Ralph W. Klein

EPIPHANY, SIXTH AFTER

Jer. 9:23-24

1 Cor. 9:19-27

Matt. 20:1-16

Twenty times, at least, in this section from the book of the prophet Jeremiah (chs. 7-10) the prophet says, "These are the words of the Lord," or "says the Lord" or their equivalent. There is no question in the framework of this section that we have here an oracle of God.

This section, like the parable of the laborers and Paul's testimony about himself, touches profound questions of our relations with God and with one another, the very basic questions of human existence.

We learn that we haven't got much to go on. Even if we are wise, our wisdom is limited; if we are full of courage, the time comes when courage will fail; if we are rich—well, we know "we can't take it with us." We can work all day and get our day's pay and yet we grumble. God's law is there and we are fearful that we might become rejected by a just God.

God bids us remember that He is the Lord. Luther has much to say about letting "God be God." See, for example, *Luther's Works*. VI, 226–30. In another place (*Luther's Works*. IV, 119) he points out: "Furthermore, to be God means to deliver from all evils that burden us, such as sin, hell, death, etc.; for in this manner the prophets regarded and interpreted these words. The heathen know God solely as the Creator; in the First Commandment you will find Christ, life, victory over death, and the resurrection of the dead into eternal life, and finally in the entire Old Testament. But only those who have the Holy Spirit and pay attention to what God says and does see this."

The landowner tells the griping laborers of the parable: "Surely I am free to do what I like with my own money." Does God say this, too? Read Romans 9 and parallel passages. The context of the pericope from Jeremiah, especially ch. 7, reinforces the sovereignty of God.

In glorying, the wise man, the strong man, the rich man should not praise himself in wisdom, valor or might, or riches, but he who praises should praise himself in the Lord.

This God is not like the gods which men fashion for themselves. See Jeremiah 10. The wise and the mighty and the rich go astray when they make might or riches or wisdom gods. The taunt of Jeremiah regarding the idols holds good of all that man values if it is his god: "They can no more speak than a scarecrow in a plot of cucumbers" (Jer. 10:5). The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10; Ps. 111:10). For the consequence of not knowing God, see Hos. 4:1, 6; Jer. 4:22. For what it means to know God, see Jer.

24:7; 31:34.

Our God is a God of unfailing love. Luther has a most appealing exposition on this thought in the *Magnificat*, in which he cites our pericope from Jeremiah and elaborates on it. See *Luther's Works*. XXI, 330–39. Luther will help you to see the dimensions of God's love which your pastoral experience will apply to the anxieties that even believers have.

These anxieties might be about the treatment people suppose that they are getting from God, a treatment that they think is not entirely fair, as if God were letting them down. Others receive the same reward of grace; they have sweated all day in the blazing sun, but God's love is unfailing towards those who have long disregarded it. The anxious must be reminded of the greatness of God's love to them, without any comparison with others.

God does justice and right on the earth. We do not look on what we have done. We receive His love, and those who want God to apply absolute rules of justice without love and mercy will receive their due. Emphasize the unfailing love of God.

That love compels us, as it did St. Paul, to give ourselves completely to God. We don't mind the sweat and the hot sun beating down on us hour after hour. We don't mind even that others come in and work only an hour, in the evening when it is cooler, and get a full day's wages. We know that we are free, but as Luther reminds us in his tract on "The Freedom of a Christian" (*Luther's Works*. XXXI, 344): "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, but subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." That is why Paul could subject himself to the Law, be a Jew to the Jew, why he could "become everything in turn to men of every sort." He sacrificed himself with one goal in mind, that he would preach the Gospel, serve others by bringing them the message of God's unfailing love.

The thoughts expressed can readily be applied to the functions of Christian education.

In all of this we want to remember that God has a message for us. "These are the words of the Lord." God tells us that we aren't much when we look at ourselves, no matter who we may be. We must look to Him. Looking to Him, we will know Him, turn to Him, and in Him have com-

fort and eternal salvation.

EPIPHANY, SEVENTH AFTER

Amos 8:11-12

Heb. 4:12-13

Luke 8:4-15

The Word of God, in one aspect or another, is the likely theme for this Sunday, given the Epistle and the Gospel. The Old Testament lesson from Amos seems to fit in most helpfully if we emphasize the last part of v. 12: "This is the very word of the Lord, who will do this." That is our cue. God's Word does it.

God's Word is the promise of restoration, as the promise in Amos reminds us. Alienated men, that is, people who were foreigners and estranged, will be restored. How God will restore, repair, rebuild the ruins of His people of old we are not told, except that we are assured of this promise. The promise is fulfilled in His Word. Restoration can be posited only in Him.

God's Word is alive and active. Luther goes into detail in his explanation of this pericope (see *Luther's Works*, XXIX, 163-66). The two-edged sword that cuts both ways is the Law. It lays bare the inmost thoughts of men and their hidden purposes. It exposes the individual before the wrath and judgment of God. There is only Law, no Gospel, in this text from Amos. The Gospel follows in the next verses (vv. 14-16). In speaking of God's Word in connection with vv. 12-13, the "mirror" aspect of the Law and its condemnation is illustrated. The words of Christ to Peter, of which he was reminded by a look, achieve a similar result.

Since that Law exposes us "to the eyes of the One with whom we have to reckon," the text speaks of the appearing of each one before God's judgment seat. The preacher can determine how far he wants to develop this thought. Nevertheless, we must not fall into the wrong supposition that it is unwise to preach Law and judgment because some people would rather hear sentimental moralizing. God's judgment is real and it is well to remind the hearers of that in the pre-Lenten season.

God's law will have its effects. It will terrorize sinners and make sinners painfully aware of the judgment to come. Like Felix they may postpone hearing about it further until some later day, but its effects will then be realized.

There are many circumstances that men permit to block the way of God's Word. The parable of the seed sown in the different kinds of ground illustrates that. The devil is active to rob men of God's Word. He and his forces of evil try to nullify the Word of God. Men allow the anxieties of the minute and momentary sorrows to deprive them of God's Word. When tested they desert. The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer is one that Christians constantly need to pray. Others hear God's Word, but there are too many distractions, the cares and wealth and pleasures of life. The forces opposing God's Word should not cause us to belittle it.

After all, it is a living, active Word. When God speaks, things happen. When His Word is sown "in good soil," soil which He has made receptive, it causes men to hear, to believe, and to persevere.

God's Word is not sown in vain. It comes down like the gentle rain from heaven and accomplishes the purposes to which it is sent. That is the assurance we have, too, from 2 Tim. 3:15-17. The Sacred Writings "have power to make you wise and lead you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Perhaps a rereading of Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession will be helpful to the preacher to reassure him of this basic task of the Word of God. Browsing in one volume of *Luther's Works*, for example, vol. VIII, will give the preacher ample material for the elaboration of this point and the following.

2 Tim. 3:16, 17 tells us that the inspired Scriptures have the functions of teaching truth and refuting error, of reforming manners, and of training in right living, "so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind."

The parable of the sower is placed in the total context of Christ's teaching and activities. The text from Hebrews 4 is followed by an exhortation to "hold fast to the religion we profess." Amos reminds us of the remnant that is spared and restored, belonging to God.

To persevere in God's Word we must use it, hear it, meditate on it, make it our own. "The very word of the Lord" which condemns and judges is also the Word which restores and pronounces guiltless. It is a Word that has power to create faith in us and keep us in faith. It is a Word that

yields a harvest.

It is God's Word that does this.

Carl S. Meyer †

EPIPHANY, NEXT TO LAST AFTER

Is. 50:4-7 (8-9)

1 Cor. 13:1-13

Mark 8:31-38

The introit, collect and gradual for this Sunday (Quinquagesima) emphasize trust. This trust is eschatological; it fixes on that which has come, is coming, and will come. "Rock" is the symbol for the object of that trust. The Rock is an impregnable defense, a fortress, a sanctuary. This strong Rock is the Lord in action performing his work of redemption.

The action moves from *pro nobis* in the propers to *in nobis*. The fact that we are involved in this redemption finds expression in our action of service and praise. The texts are all so appropriate that the preacher will probably make his choice on the basis of current need for emphasis. Do the people in his congregation primarily need assurance? Or do they need encouragement to become involved? The Old Testament lesson emphasizes the dynamic of the Gospel. As a beautiful work of art it involves us with Christ's unwavering determination in the ordeal of redemption. The Gospel states this more explicitly: first Christ for us, then our involvement by faith in Him.

The Epistle (1 Cor. 13) lays almost total stress on participation. It continues the discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and brings them into proper focus. There are many kinds of activity, Paul says, but the most important thing is that such activity have proper motivation and goal. The triad at the end (faith, hope, love) shows the close connection between God, our house of defense, and us as living stones of that house, thereby bringing justification and sanctification together. Sanctification is justification in action. Activity is faith perceptible. The Apology, therefore, properly regards the three words as virtues: "Paul is not discussing the mode of justification. He is writing to people who upon being justified needed urging to bear good fruits lest they lose the Holy Spirit" (Apology IV: 220). "In this passage, however, Paul speaks specifically about love to our neighbor, and he indicates that love is the greatest because it

has the most fruits. Faith and hope deal only with God, while love has infinite external duties to man." (Apology IV: 226)

The faith, hope, love created in the heart by the Holy Spirit makes us faithful, hopeful, loving. We become faithful to God and man (faith), we become optimistic in all our actions, realizing that life moves toward ever greater things (hope), we become creatively involved in God's act of creation and redemption (love). The last is the greatest. Man's actions can be destructive; he can exploit his fellowmen and God's entire creation for egocentric purposes. Love is not simply an emotion but a way of life. Love is from above, God's way to man; it is God's salvation in creation and redemption; it is identified with God; it is not acquisitive; it is not determined by quality, beauty or worth of object; it is sovereign in relation to its object both "evil and good", it is spontaneous having its source in the subject; it creates value in its object. Thus love is a co-working with God in creation and redemption.

Some notes on 1 Cor. 13

Vv. 1-3. Love is contrasted with other religious actions and attitudes. According to rabbinic tradition, speech of angels was not ordinarily understood by men. Paul was acquainted with heavenly language (2 Cor. 12:4; cf. Rev. 14:2, 3). To speak in tongues without love is like tones which a lifeless instrument can make. Glossolalia without love is as meaningless as clanging of cymbals in heathen cults (in which they may have been used to attract the god's attention or drive demons away). Also prophecy, one of the highest Christian activities, is nothing without love. Prophecy is associated with understanding mysteries. By mysteries Paul is probably referring to the relation of the divine to the human in the church and the eschatological implications (2:7; Rom. 11:25). Miracle-working faith distinguished from justifying faith likewise is nothing without love.

Apart from love even deeds for others are nothing. Examples of this are doling out food and suffering martyrdom. *φωμίσω* may mean "feed in small morsels" or "divide property into small portions." The reading "though I give my body to be burned" (*καυθήσομαι*) is to be preferred

to "though I give my body to have glory" (καυχῆσμαι). Paul was acquainted with martyrdom in Acts 7:59 though the reference in "burning" is uncertain.

Verses 4-7 describe love chiefly in negative terms. "Long-suffering" shows patience with those who do wrong; "kind" points to doing good in return for evil; "to behave unseemly" (ἀσχημονεῖν) has been referred to 1 Cor. 11:2-16 or 1 Cor. 14 by scholars. *περπερεύεται* was a word used by Stoic philosophers, has connotations of a windbag braggart, and carries over into the *φυσιοῦται*, "over-inflated." Love is not touchy (*παροξύνεται*). Love never ceases to endure, that is, it remains love through all tests.

In vv. 8-13 the contrasts are resumed. Love remains through all tests, a statement that can be made only about divine love which is kindled in man's heart by the Spirit.

Prophecy, whether prediction or declaration, vanishes when Christ appears. Mysterious utterances will stop. When God is seen face to face, knowledge as information about Him vanishes. Such gifts are fragmentary and imperfect. The images of child and looking glass develop the relationship of the partial to the complete (Philo already used this metaphor of mirror to describe partial knowledge of God). In a mirror God is seen in a riddle. (Cf. Num. 12:8)

Paul frequently associates love with faith (Rom. 4:21; 1 Cor. 16:13, 14; 1 Thess. 3:6). He shows the inner connection in Gal. 3:6 (faith working through love). Paul speaks of love of neighbor (Rom. 13:8-10; 14:15), of God (Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 2:9); or love of God (or Christ) for man (Rom. 5:5, 8; 8:35, 37; 2 Cor. 5:14). "The love of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given us" (Rom. 5:5) means that we are certain that God loves us, but also that love becomes a power in us.

Faith, hope, and love, as the confessions point out, designate virtues, but virtues which are the response of God's work in us. Faith becomes active as faithfulness, the thankful and loyal recognition of the gracious God. Hope, manifested as constant and firm dependence on God, continues forever because God is always the source of all. Love penetrates to the reality of, and reaches its climax in "seeing him

as he is" whereby we become like Him. It is the beatific vision which Dante attempts to describe. This is the greatest because it is of one piece with the nature and being of God Himself.

A possible goal of a sermon might be to urge hearers to seek now to be that which they hope to be in the future. It is the answer to modern concerns about meaning and value. The following factors may be put into the outline:

Love is the Greatest Gift of All

- I. It gives meaning and value to actions.
- II. Its qualities are supreme from all points of view.
- III. It is the greatest of the eternal virtues.
 - A. Faith, hope, love abide.
 - B. Love is the apex and the ultimate.

EPIPHANY, LAST AFTER— TRANSFIGURATION

Ex. 24:4b-18

2 Peter 1:16-21 or 2 Cor. 4:6-10

Luke 9:28-36

The propers for Transfiguration deal with a number of themes: crossing of the Red Sea; manifestations of God's glory in His Son and nature; blissful dwelling with God; God's revelation from clouds; God's victory and salvation; mysteries of the faith; expectation of deliverance. Is the mood of Transfiguration, then, many colors splashed haphazardly on one canvas? or like a spectrum, different colors of one white light? The latter is correct.

The Scripture lessons present a vision of the divine in mystery. The Old Testament lesson (Ex. 24:4b-18) presents the glory of the God who led Israel out of Egypt. The fiery, cloudy pillar is shown in all splendor. Israel learns that not mere earthly events arranged by the magic of some supernatural power shaped her destiny but the ineffable God seen in visions of inexpressible glory. This is the mystery of the faith of Israel. It is the mystery which made the Exodus central in the creed of Israel (Ex. 20:2). Only the human side of the mystery can be reduced to words. Hence the most important creed in the history of Israel is not a statement regarding the attributes of God but a statement regarding His salvation acts (Deut. 26:5-9). All Israel participates in this Exodus by faith. The Psalms show how deliverance is identified with the Exodus

and is symbolized by the crossing of the sea (for example, Ps. 136). That Christians still use the Exodus as a symbol of deliverance is shown by hymn 54. (TLH)

The Gospel (Luke 9:28-36) gives a vision of the mystery of the Christ event. The death and resurrection of Christ is not simply an event on the human level of history. But like the first Exodus it involves the activity of the ineffable God revealed in glory on the holy mountain. Moses and Elijah call the Calvary event "exodus" (a term which translators should keep). They indicate the centrality of the new Exodus to which all prophets witness.

The Epistle (2 Peter 1:16-21) points to the divine in the mystery of the new Exodus. It was not a fabrication when they pointed to something beyond the blood, cries, anguish of Golgotha; the sadness, gloom, finality of the garden; and the thrill, joy, vivification of Easter. For on the holy mountain Moses and Elijah formally acknowledged the Exodus of Jesus, and God declared Him His beloved Son whom all should hear.

Luke 9:28-36 may be used to show the centrality of the Gospel. To it the Old Testament, with the Exodus at its center, points. Its ceremonies (for example, Pass-over) give way to ceremonies centering in Christ's death and resurrection. It is the coordinating center of Scripture, of Christian lives, of the world (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 1:18-20). Both the old and new Exodus are wrought by God. Both involve leaving the old and entering into the new. Israel left Egypt for the land of promise. Christians died to the world and are born in the Kingdom. Participation in both is by faith. (Heb. 11:26-29; Gal. 2:19-21)

Some Comments on Luke 9:28-36:

V. 28. Luke connects the account more explicitly than Mark with the preceding discussion. Luke's phrase "about eight days" may point to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-36). Peter's suggestion to build tabernacles (v. 33) shows the same connection. The mountain is unnamed; it suggests special revelation.

Vv. 29-31. Moses was prototype (Deut. 18:15) and Elijah the forerunner (Mal. 4:5) of the Messiah. Both had been translated into heaven (Deut. 34:6; 2 Kings 2:11). Both are also associated with Messiahship in apocryphal literature (2 Esd. 6:26).

Allegorists have equated them with the Law and Prophets.

Luke is very interested in identifying Christianity as the true Israel. But the Christ does not continue the function of Moses; He replaces Moses.

Elijah was not primarily considered a prophet by the Jews. He would come to restore all things (Mark 9:12). Jesus, rather than John the Baptist, takes on the functions of Elijah. He, however, becomes much more. Elijah was to come to help the sufferers (Mark 15:36). Jesus is the Sufferer. There will be a new Exodus which will become central and of which the Moses and Elijah events are clusters. The Old Testament figures are transfigured in Christ.

Vv. 32-33. As Daniel was burdened with sleep during profound revelation (8:18; 10:9), so also the disciples. The mountain event causes Peter to think of the Exodus and the dwelling in tents. Ignorantly he suggests a return to the old. There is, however, no return. The face must now be set like flint for the ordeal of the new Exodus.

Vv. 34-35. The climax comes in the formal endorsement. The cloud played a prominent role in the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 14:19). It appears on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:15-18). It filled the temple at dedication (1 Kings 8:10). The cloud (*Shekina*) symbolized the presence of God. In 2 Macc. 2:8 it is described as reappearing in messianic times. The words from the clouds, of course, recall the words of Deut. 18:15.

Luke's account of the Transfiguration give the pastor an opportunity to stress themes emphasized by Luther, Walther, and of course Paul: the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus (justification); Law (leaving the old) and Gospel (rising to the new); the centrality of the new Exodus (Christ's death and resurrection) in Scripture, in the means of grace and their symbols, in all human lives, in the world.

The world needs that message too. The sermon outline, of course, depends on the preacher's goal but will probably have these basic ingredients:

The Cross of Christ— The World's New Exodus

I. It is the ultimate answer to man's

basic needs.

- II. It repeats the pattern of the old Exodus (departure from Egypt—entrance into Canaan; death to the world—rising in Kingdom).
- III. It is endorsed by God. (Acts 4:12)
Erwin L. Lueker

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: REMINISCERE

Is. 5:1-7

Rom. 5:6-11

Mark 12:1-12

The gradual for Reminiscere views the troubles of the believer from the perspective of God's mighty acts, thus reinforcing the thought of the introit. God is most consistently himself when he displays compassion for His people and rescues them in the face of disaster. However, some tribulation is homegrown. Therefore the gradual reminds the congregation that they are under obligation to "keep judgment" for "he that doeth righteousness at all times" is "blessed." The intimate cause-and-effect relation of moral performance and the fortunes of history is especially apparent in group experience. The rise and fall of nations is, according to much prophetic testimony, in direct ratio to collective sensitivity or insensitivity to elementary justice.

The Old Testament lesson for this day, Is. 5:1-7, climaxes a divine lament over Israel's unresponsiveness with a description of her terrible fate. The cause? Yahweh "looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." Her collective guilt precluded any future along her own desired lines. The Gospel, Mark 12:1-12, reveals that history may for some be merely a hiatus. God did not give up His vineyard holdings, even after the disaster with Israel in the sixth century B. C. His mercy displayed in the words of the introit and in the gradual reached the acme of expression in the sending of His own Son to His latter-day vineyard in Israel. But the institutional religious establishment, firmly committed to business as usual, signed the warrant for the entire nation's destruction. Yet the main thread of Israel's history was intact, for the stone rejected by the builders became the head of the corner, the climax of the "mighty acts" described in the gradual.

The Epistle, Rom. 5:6-11, is the her-

meneutical key that unlocks the mystery of God's continuing mercy as it intertwines with disastrous human experience. In the new age cause and effect as they were once viewed require fresh examination. The fortunes of Jesus had broken going scales of evaluation. Individual suffering could not be put on the same tray with collective disaster. Protests had indeed been made, as in the poem of Job, but once and for all it had now been determined that a righteous man could suffer without prejudice to either his or God's moral qualifications. Rom. 5:6-8 admits of no doubt about the matter. Jesus the innocent one dies in behalf of the guilty. At the cross of Jesus Christ justice was upended and a fresh "reading" of history became necessary. In a manner of speaking, God committed suicide at Golgotha, for in permitting Jesus the innocent one to be destroyed, he appeared to be favoring the guilty. For his own law declares: "I will not justify the wicked" (Ex. 23:7). But this is the Good News: At Golgotha God challenged his own verdict at Sinai. Yet the contradiction is not destructive of divine claim, for to say that God is just is not to say the whole truth about God. The truth is that God transcends human standards and calculation. God goes beyond the point at which man stops. He guarantees (συνίστησεν) his own unique (ἑαυτοῦ) love for us, as is evident from the fact that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Thus the justice and the love of God are in tension, and God bears the sole responsibility and huge cost of that tension.

From the foregoing perspective the problems of the sufferings of this present time can be freshly evaluated. Personal tribulations (as described in v. 3) are not a sign of God's displeasure nor a fragmented display of his end-time wrath (v. 9). We are "in the right" (justified) as far as God is concerned, and this righteousness is a present reality (νῦν). If God does that for us *now*, we shall certainly be saved from his wrath. This argument is supported by another line of reasoning that goes back farther than the *now* of v. 9. While we were hostile to God (that is, long before our justification through faith), God declared His willingness to enter into a fresh relationship with humanity, free of hostilities (reconciliation). That reconciliation or

amnesty is an objective reality, a divine commitment made in the death of His Son. God scrapped Sinai; He cannot scrap the Cross. Well, then, argues the apostle, if Jesus Christ's death made reconciliation a reality, how much more will His life spell salvation. But that salvation is not an idle hope. We believers, he says, have *now* received the reconciliation.

He emphasizes the *now* in order to underline the fact that the powers of the new age are operative in the present. This text in fact anticipates the subsequent argumentation concerning the power of righteousness as a reigning influence in the Christian's life. As reconciled people we need not work to effect a new relationship with God. At the cross God drew the circle within which He wanted to enclose us with Himself. Through faith we accept the offer of that reconciliation or amnesty and are declared in the right with God. Thereby the way is open for experience of real *life*, subsequently defined by the apostle as the penetration of the Holy Spirit, with resulting production of the fruit that is his specialty (see Rom. 5:20-21; 6:19-23; 8:9-11; Gal. 5:22-23). Also the gradual comes to beautiful expression in the pronouncements of Rom. 5:10 concerning life: "Blessed are they that keep his judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times." We have been made righteous in order to be committed to lives of righteousness. To such the tribulations of this present time are no signs of God's displeasure but opportunities for special boasting over God's transcendent love. Well does the collect express the thought of this text: Defense from all adversity, inward as well as outward.

Our Unpredictable God

Introduction: Discussion of the problem of suffering, especially as this relates to the fact of being a Christian.

I. God risks his reputation.

- A. On the one hand He is bound to His legal pronouncements.
- B. On the other hand, He is bound to concern for us and gives Jesus Christ over into death in our behalf.

II. He overcomes wrath with amnesty.

- A. Reconciliation—the fact of the Gospel.
- B. Justification through faith—the aim of the Gospel.

1. Acceptance of amnesty and the present assurance
2. Experience of life and a future filled with hope

Conclusion: Sufferings are no sign of God's disfavor, for we *now* have amnesty, forgiveness, and life.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: OCULI

Jer. 20:7-12

Rom. 12:1-2 or Eph. 5:1-2, 6-9

Luke 9:51-62

The reputation of God appears to be called into question by the disastrous events that befall His people. What makes matters worse, they fall victim to the ridicule of those who share no interest in God. Therefore voices in both introit and gradual for Oculi are raised in lamentful plea that God give the enemy a sample of divine power. How can God fail to hear, knowing that the eyes (*oculi*) of the plaintiff refuse to look in any other direction? God cannot avoid the stare, and His own eye answers the eye of man so that at last He looks "upon the hearty desires" of His "humble servants."

Jeremiah, as have few other men, experienced the agony of being under the necessity of speaking words of truth that could only promise disaster. According to the lesson to be read from his book (Jer. 20:7-12), even his closest associates could not endure what seemed to be sheer madness. But God was stronger, and Jeremiah kept hurling his fusillades of doom, even though his heart was cut to ribbons as he heard himself on all sides condemned as a traitor. In the year 626 B. C. he received the prophet's call and from that point on his days and nights were spent rehearsing future marches and battles that were to leave Judah crushed and battered. There were those who sought to make the temple a place of refuge, but security is to be found not merely in a place. Without a moral about-face, even the temple could prove a liability.

Words like these were heresy and treason to people unaccustomed to subject themselves to the scrutiny of Yahweh. The nations about them were evil, but Israel had the truth, and who was Jeremiah to speak such words of blasphemy, that Yahweh would not protect them in His own temple? Such was the frontal assault of the established priestly and prophetic rep-

representatives. But saner heads prevailed, and Jeremiah's life was spared. Yet Jeremiah was destined to become more unpopular. Soon he committed the unpardonable sin of suggesting to the people that there was more to worshipping Yahweh than merely mouthing correct formulae and going through approved ritual acts. Jeremiah had the nerve to question their daily business tactics. He meddled into social issues and did not stick to cultic prescription and preaching the Gospel. Not only that, he brought politics into the religious arena and without batting an eye promised the king that "he would be interred with all the ceremony appropriate to an ass." (Jer. 22:18-19)

Not satisfied with oral utterance, Yahweh insisted that Jeremiah go to press. Jehoiakim didn't like the look of the words before his eyes and went down into history not only with long ears but as a book burner. However, Jeremiah's source of rhetoric never dried up, and Jehoiakim got a second amplified edition that left no doubt as to where Jehoiakim's royal and military brains were located. Jeremiah kept on with his refrain: "Jerusalem is a loser." Hostility intensified, and only in the eyes of God could Jeremiah find refuge, for God alone could penetrate to the depth of Jeremiah's ardor for Jerusalem. (Cf. Jer. 20:12)

In the face of the hostility of God's enemies, it is tempting for God's people to hoist the white flag and call for a cease-fire. To stop making waves, no longer to rock boats, to endorse the going rate of morality and ethics—that is the easier way to success. But the Epistle reminds us that we are not to be "conformed to this world" but "transformed by the renewing" of our minds. Like Jeremiah we have no choice. To God's enemies it will be considered madness, but the pressure of God's interests corrects and modifies every instinct to play it safe. Such uncompromising quality of life marked the ministry of Jesus, and the Gospel for Oculi echoes the standard of magnificent madness described in the Old Testament lesson and in the Epistle.

Luke 9:51-62

With v. 51 St. Luke begins what is popularly known as his travel account, for at this point Luke lays special emphasis on the direction Jesus took toward Jerusalem (see

also v. 53; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). Jerusalem is the key geographical locale in St. Luke's twin work. His gospel opens with scenes in Jerusalem. At Jerusalem Jesus, as a 12-year-old child, announces his decision to carry out his Father's purpose (2:49). On the temple in Jerusalem he opts for God in the face of apparent disaster (4:9-12). And after accomplishing his mission in Jerusalem (see 24:26), he ordered his disciples to sit tight in Jerusalem and await their marching orders (24:48-49). Acts repeats the cycle, beginning with mention of Jerusalem and with frequent references thereafter to that city, but ends with a significant alteration. Instead of being in Jerusalem, Paul is in Rome and pronounces words of stern warning to the religious leadership that echoes the policy of Jerusalem.

The word ἀνάληψις (9:51) anticipates the successful outcome of Jesus' mission (cf. 24:26, 51; Acts 1:2). The road to that success or glorification runs directly through Jerusalem. Unlike John the Baptist who was to go before Israel and prepare the people for God's revelation (Luke 7:27; see F. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age According to St. Luke: A Commentary on the Third Gospel*, p. 97), Jesus sends messengers ahead of himself. His messianic credentials are not dependent on the presence of John the Baptist as a second Elijah. Jesus himself performs in the manner of Elijah-Elisha (see, for example, 9:10-17 [cf. 2 Kings 4:42-44]; Luke 7:11-17 [cf. 2 Kings 4:32-37]), yet, as the sequel shows, with a significant difference. A village of Samaritans, of the Heinz-variety race as they were viewed by the bluebloods of Jerusalem (see *Jesus and the New Age*, p. 124) refused to lay out the welcome mat, for Jesus was evidently headed for the rival religious center. In the spirit of 2 Kings 6:21, the disciples wanted to perpetrate celestial arson. Elijah and fire were practically synonymous (see 2 Kings 1:10-12), and the disciples could think of no better way to teach the Samaritans a lesson and at the same time clear up the question of Jesus' credentials as the end-time deliverer. Learned copyists even reinforced the point by adding to v. 54, "as Elijah did." Luke, in anticipation of the eventual outreach to Samaria (cf. Acts 1:8; 8:25; 9:31), records Jesus' rebuke. Thus Jesus renounces opportunity for spectacular Messianic display.

It is a pattern that finds reinforcement in the succeeding series of dialogs, Luke 9:57-62.

One might expect a campaigner for the highest office in Israel to take advantage of the enthusiasm displayed at his whistle stops. But not Jesus. To one who assures him that he will follow Jesus wherever he might go, the Savior responds that association with Him is extremely hazardous, for "the Son of man has no place to lay his head." Here is a strange juxtaposition. The term "Son of man" may suggest the familiar strong apocalyptic figure who is to spell the windup of Israel's glorious destiny, yet He is in the person of Jesus one who cannot be trusted, for He has no roots (cf. Sirach 36:26). Shades of another day, when He first arrived at Bethlehem (Luke 2:7)! Thus did Jesus dismiss the rash volunteer. The second man does not volunteer, but receives a personal directive, "Follow me." Mindful of the counsel that finds expression also in Sirach 38:16-17, he pleads a few days' delay to bury his father. Jesus' reply catapults the man into a crisis— "let the dead bury their dead." One misses the radicalness of Jesus' revolutionary call if the text is here shaved off into a dialog about geriatrics. Jesus was not crucified for indulging inherited custom. Jesus uttered many a word that sounds harsh to our ears. But in His person the end of the ages has dawned, and there can be no delay. There are others who can discharge the customary amenities, but this man must take the field *now*. The text does not tell us how the man voted that day, but he may have cast his ballot for the future and been among those of whom Peter spoke on another occasion. (Luke 18:28-30)

Another man volunteered and combined with his offer a request similar to that

of the second man. He would just like to say farewell to his family. Elijah once indulged Elisha who made a similar request (1 Kings 19:19-21). But Jesus moves with even greater urgency than did Elijah, and He warns the man about the backward look. The embarrassment of the unexpected, the claims of counterrevolution and of approved time-honored ways, the call for equal time with decisive allegiance to the authority of Jesus Christ—all these come under the rubric of conformity with the world and conflict with that transformed mind that spells victory with Christ.

In Samaria Jesus rejected a display of power. On the road He made things difficult for would-be or potential followers. He is indeed a strange campaigner.

The great temptation for the preacher: to orate on discipleship along institutionalized lines rather than in terms of total commitment in the round of routine decisions in which custom and the going rate of moral exchange ordinarily determine the choices one makes.

The Successful Church

- I. Rooted in the resolute purpose of Jesus Christ.
- II. Demanding in allegiance to Jesus Christ.
 - A. Hence the reminder to the shallow would-be follower that we are not engaged in a standard-success operation.
 - B. Hence the reminder to the other-things-first-disciple.
 - C. Hence the reminder to the I'll-talk-it-over-disciple.
- III. Willing to accept critique.

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