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Homiletical Studies

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY: LUKE 2:41-52 (JANUARY 7, 1979)

In this unique glimpse into the family life of Jesus as a child we see His parents observing a continual pattern of travel to the temple in Jerusalem (v. 41). Reaching puberty (v. 42), Jesus was to become a "son of the Law," thereby obliged to learn and observe its provisions. Luke's reference to Jesus changes with v. 43 from child (*paidion*) to boy (*pais*). Note, in v. 46, Jesus is not teaching but listening and asking questions; although, in v. 47 He also gives answers of such depth the hearers were literally "beside themselves." The parent's shock (v. 48) is two-fold: first, at His length of unexplained absence; and second, at His location when found. Verse 49 emphasizes "My Father's matters"; it is not a reference to the place where Mary and Joseph ought to have looked, but rather explains His behavior. Therefore, we translate *en tois tou patros* "in the matters of My Father," rather than with reference to place. Also, *dei* indicates Jesus' drive toward his ministry (cf. Luke 4:43; 9:22; 13:14,33; 17:25; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7,26,44 - emphasis indicates redemptive references). Note that in v. 51 we see that Mary keeps in her heart even things which she does not understand (v. 50). Many see this verse as an indication that she was Luke's source for this incident. Luke makes no further reference in his Gospel to Joseph.

The central thought of the text focuses on the growing awareness of the ministry of Jesus; an awareness touching His parents and family, the people, Luke's readers, and Jesus Himself. The problem in the text is the need to gain this awareness. The goal of the sermon is to introduce this pre-public-ministry appearance of our Lord so that, even at 12, we may truly see Jesus as our Savior.

Introduction: These days we find ourselves, as a society, immersed in a flood of contemporary fountains of youth, all designed to help us in our futile attempt to regain an age that is lost. However, not every longing glimpse at the life of youth is futile! Today, in our text, we see a young life that truly can change ours. We see:

Jesus at Twelve

- I. Jesus at 12: A Son of Mary and Joseph
 - A. We see our Lord at the point of adolescence.
 1. Still under His parent's care.
 2. Growing and increasing in stature.
 - B. We see Jesus as a "son of the Law."
 1. Continuing to live "under the Law" for us.
 2. Demonstrating a love of God's house.
 3. Giving us a picture of young manhood.
- II. Jesus at 12: The Son of God
 - A. Demonstrating God's Wisdom.
 1. The priority of God's Word in Jesus' life.
 2. The expression of God's Word in Jesus' answers.
 - B. Continuing God's "Business."
 1. The desire to make us wise unto salvation.
 2. The desire to save us from our sins.

Youth seems a fleeting experience, wasted, as one has said, on the young.

However, Jesus redeems also our youth, and through the knowledge and salvation which He brings our lives are renewed.

Robert W. Schaibley
Concordia Teachers College
River Forest, Illinois

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY: JOHN 2:1-11
(JANUARY 14, 1979)

It is probable that John is completing his description of the first week of Jesus' public ministry with the words "on the third day" (v. 1), followed by the first Passover of Jesus' ministry. Note that John goes into similar detail before the last Passover (John 12:1ff). Lenski draws a distinction between Mary's presence at the wedding as a part of the official party and Jesus' presence as an "invited" guest (v. 2); the RSV translation of *kai* as "also" suggests that both were guests, with the disciples appearing as "tag-a-longs." The manner in which Jesus addresses Mary does not carry the harshness of the English translation "woman" (v. 4). The "hour" for which our Lord has come, at which time all mankind "has to do" with him, is the hour of the atonement (cf: 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1). The servants (v. 5) were volunteer helpers (*diakono*i) at the wedding, not slaves. The stone jars were for the purpose of purification; Jesus uses them as a sign of His identity as the One who will truly purify men. The water-now-turned-into-wine was "drawn" from the stone jars, suggesting the large volume of wine now available (approximately 120 gallons in all). Verse 10 does not entail that drunkenness must necessarily ensue, either at this or any other wedding of the day; rather, it simply points to a "best-first" policy, one which Jesus reverses not only on this occasion but in the economy of salvation as well—the new covenant is better than the old. In verse 11 John introduces two devices which will assume predominant places in his Gospel: first, the concept of miracles as "signs" or evidence of the identity of Christ; and second, the response of people (here, the disciples) to see and believe!

The central thought of the pericope is that our Lord brings great blessings with His presence. The problem addressed in the text is the discovery of men that their earthly blessings are not sufficient to bring continual happiness and meaning to life. The goal of the sermon is to bring the vision of Christ's spiritual blessings to bear upon the life-situations of the hearers.

Introduction: Weddings are part of the normal affairs of everyday living, despite the great interest which we have in them. Jesus, too, shows an interest in our daily lives by His presence at the Cana wedding. In fact, as we see Him through the "sign" of changing water into wine, we discover a wonderful truth:

Jesus Christ Blesses Our Daily Lives

I. He Blesses Us With His Presence.

A. He came to Cana as an invited guest.

1. Clearly a human being - true man.
2. Also, a personal friend.

B. The Presence of Christ today is where His Word is received.

1. As the Cana wedding was the stage for Jesus' activity,
2. So Christian worship, Christian meditation, Christian homes become that stage.

II. He Blesses Us with His Power.

A. At Cana, the wine failed.

1. Man's efforts to bring joy to himself ran out.

2. Our use of the creative gifts of God also will fail before we are satisfied.
- B. Jesus gives new wine.
 1. He shows the creative power of the Father.
 2. He shows a love and concern for man's happiness.
 - a. First, for those at the feast.
 - b. But chiefly, for all mankind, through the continuing creation.
- C. Christ has the power to bring life's best.
 1. To give us good things from His hands.
 2. And to give us the relationship with God so necessary for true happiness in this world.
- III. He Blesses Us with His Purpose.
 - A. His purpose was not fully seen at Cana.
 1. His "hour" had not yet come.
 2. His hour arrived on Calvary.
 - B. His purpose is to perfect purification.
 1. From the old rites of Jewish purification.
 2. To the "new wine" of the Atonement.
 - C. His purpose is to reveal His identity.
 1. Seen in a sign of His glory;
 2. But pointing forward to His greater glory on Calvary.

As the war is fought in the trenches, so our lives are lived in the "everyday grind." Into this grind our Lord has come, to be with us, to act for us, and to cause us to see His glory. May the brightness of His light be our cause for joy this day!

RWS

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY: MATTHEW 8:1-13 (JANUARY 21, 1979)

Here our Lord is faced with two critical illnesses, both of which were "hopeless" by prevailing medical standards. Leprosy was regarded both as an illness and as uncleanness, thus having special significance as a figure of sin. In v. 2, the leper expresses his request as a matter of Jesus' will, not His power. Opinion is divided as to whether Jesus instructs the cleansed man to present himself to the priests as a proof to the people that he is healed or to the priests as a testimony to Christ; given the special character of leprosy, both applications seem sound. The centurion approaches our Lord by means of intermediaries, according to Luke, to appeal on behalf of his servant, a young boy who suffers from painful paralysis. Note Jesus willingness to both *treat* and *heal* the boy (*therapeuso*). But the centurion believes that the mere word of Christ will heal (*iathesetai*), without the mediation of treatment. See Luke 9:11, where Jesus healed (*iato*) those who needed treatment (*therapeias*). Jesus' commendation of "great faith" is reserved for the centurion, along with the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:28) and the unknown child (Mt. 18:4); these are among the "sons of the kingdom"! As an idiom of the day, that phrase referred to "Jews"; in point of fact, Jesus reminds us, it ought to refer to believers.

The central thought behind these two miracles is the fact that Jesus, as God's Son, reveals the great love and power which God brings into the lives of man, especially of His "sons of the kingdom" by faith.

Introduction: "I am the greatest", some are known to boast concerning themselves. But are they? What makes for greatness? Is it mere power? Is it cunning or well-developed skill? In our text for this Sunday, Jesus focuses our attention on greatness, as we learn

The Measure of Greatness

I. The Measure of Greatness Is to Face Great Need.

- A. The great needs in our text become the background for greatness
 - 1. The man with leprosy. vs 1-4.
 - 2. The boy (slave, Lk. 7:2) with painful paralysis.
- B. The great needs of our world and lives provides opportunities for greatness.
 - 1. We have an existence infected with spiritual leprosy; real leprosy was a symbol of sin in the Old Testament.
 - 2. We have a need to be freed of the enslaving and paralyzing power of sin.

Great needs alone mean defeat—for greatness to come from great needs, there must be a “Valiant One” to fight for us. This means that

II. The Measure of Greatness Is to Have a Great God.

- A. God’s greatness is shown in His purposes for men.
 - 1. The issue in our text is not God’s power! That is assumed (v. 2,8).
 - 2. Rather, it is God’s willingness and desire.
 - 3. We see God’s greatness in Baptism, in His Word, in the Lord’s Supper, where God’s will is shown to us!
- B. God’s greatness is shown in Christ.
 - 1. Jesus: the One who is God.
 - a. He is recognized by the leper and the centurion.
 - b. He is recognized by His people.
 - 2. Jesus: the One who saves.
 - a. Not by ancestry, membership, or tradition (vs. 11,12).
 - b. But by “faith” (v. 13).

But can this greatness avail for us? How does my believing in Christ bring greatness to my living? We see the answer in the discovery that

III. The Measure of Greatness Is to Express a Great Faith.

- A. Our faith is “great” because its object is great!
- B. Our faith is “great” because it *goes* to our Great God.
 - 1. The introduction to both miracles is the petitions of faithful people.
 - 2. Faith exercises itself in prayer—going to God.
- C. Our faith is “great” because by it we are equipped by God to serve others.
 - 1. The leper served as a testimony of Jewish leaders.
 - 2. The centurion served both his servant and Jesus’ disciples (as an object lesson).
 - 3. Great faith expresses itself in our obedient responses to God’s grace in Christ.

True greatness is not measured by strength or cunning or finely tuned skills, for all of these things deteriorate and die. True greatness is measured by the responses of God’s forgiven people, trusting their Great and Good God, as they face the great challenges of daily living. And as Jesus reminds the disciples, the final expression of true greatness is the “victory banquet” to which many from the east and the west will be invited to celebrate eternally the greatness of God.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: MATTHEW 8:23-27
(JANUARY 28, 1979)

Matthew records this pericope in the midst of Jesus' early ministry. Here we find Him beginning a round-trip across the Sea of Galilee (v. 23). The return portion of the trip is described in 9:1. The great storm (v.24) is of earthquake proportions (*seismos megas*); cf. Luke 8:23—"furious gusts." Meanwhile, Jesus "was sleeping" (*ekatheuden*), the imperfect indicating that He was "not disturbed" in sleep. The disciples' petition is brief and to the point: Save! (*soson* - at once); we are perishing (*apollumetha* - the present tense indicating an immediate tragedy). In v. 26, *ti* may well be translated "how" rather than "why," giving Jesus' observation an exclamatory character: "How fearful you are!" Note, following the word of the Lord, the great storm instantly becomes a great calm (*galênē megaîē*). Here we see Jesus working a miracle of nature, since the winds and the waves came to this abrupt stop; such an occurrence brings the puzzled response from the disciples, "What manner of man is this?" The central thought of the text is that Jesus is revealed as the Lord of creation, in whom those of faith are encouraged to hope. The problem being addressed is the fearful response of Jesus' disciples in the face of danger. The goal of the sermon is to apply our vision of Christ to the realm of our daily anxieties.

Introduction: How easy it is for initial impressions to be mistakes! Almost every victim of unscrupulous salesmen has discovered the fatal flaw lurking in the inadequate investigation of a proposed purchase. It is in a thorough "test-ride" that people may come to a more realistic evaluation of a product. Likewise, the realistic character of our faith exhibits itself, not in the isolation of special "religious" occasions, but rather in the grind of daily living. Here, where all the world faces the struggles of life, the Christian matches these same struggles against his growing life in Christ. In our text, we take the pulse of the disciples' faith, as they face such a life-struggle. Let us ask the question which they raised:

"What Manner of Man Is This?"

I. What manner of men are the disciples?

- A. They were capable men of the sea.
 - 1. Trained as fishermen.
 - 2. Experienced in handling the Sea of Galilee.
 - 3. Cognizant of the threats which the sea holds.
- B. They were close followers of Jesus (men of faith).
 - 1. They had a growing awareness of His mission and power.
 - 2. They saw Him as a source of help in time of need.
 - 3. Yet, they are astonished at this miracle (men of little faith).
- C. What manner of men are we as disciples of Christ?
 - 1. We too must take on a world with skill.
 - 2. Yet, we too, know its perils.
 - 3. How is Christ our source of help in the face of peril?

II. What manner of man is Jesus?

- A. He is above the perils of life.
 - 1. He can sleep in the boat: the quiet Lord who sleeps.
 - 2. He can cause the storm to cease: the active Lord who speaks.
 - 3. He is ready to meet our temptations to fear (Heb. 4:15).
- B. He is active in conquering the effects of sin.
 - 1. The destructiveness of weather is an effect of sin (Romans 8:20).
 - 2. The destructiveness of doubt is an effect of sin; He rebukes the disciples.

3. The destructiveness of sin itself is conquered for us:
 - a. The disciples' cry "Lord, save!" is ours, too.
 - b. It speaks also our confession of sin.

Both the words and the actions of our Lord in this text are designed to bring peace to fearful hearts, to encourage us to see that God does act for us, His children by grace through faith. Indeed, the encouragement of our standing with Christ builds a love within us for our heavenly Father, together with a trust of Him, that casts out all fear. Thus, it is in Christ that we measure ourselves as the remedy to fear.

RWS

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD: MATTHEW 17:1-9 (FEBRUARY 4, 1979)

"After six days" (v. 1) calls our attention to the behavior of Peter during the previous week: first, "You are the Christ" (16:16); then, "This shall never happen to you" (16:22). Jesus was "transfigured" before them: *metemorphōthē* - from which we receive, metamorphosis, "change of form of being." Moses and Elijah (v. 3) speak with Jesus; Luke states that they were conversing about the death of Jesus in Jerusalem. "Shelters" (v. 4) harken back to the Old Testament practice of erecting an altar to God in the midst of a journey. The voice (v. 5) conveys the same message as at Jesus' baptism, the beginning of his ministry which is to be completed at Jerusalem. The vivid comment, "they saw no one except Jesus," testifies to the truth that Jesus' mission is to be the solely sufficient answer to man's need. That Jesus wants the disciples to remain silent about their experience until the resurrection is further testimony to the fact that this experience points from itself to the work of redemption on Calvary. The central thought in the text is that Jesus is the long-awaited Redeemer of mankind. The problem which is addressed in the text is the difficulty which men have in understanding the person and work of Christ for them. The goal of the sermon is to highlight Jesus' person and work as the lesson to be learned on the mountain.

Introduction: All life seems to be divided into two parts: the ordinary days and the important days. There are many important days for us which spice up our daily diet of life: anniversaries, graduations, birthdays, etc. Transfiguration Day is an important day for us. It marks the last Sunday of the Epiphany season, the season in which we are reminded of the true glory of our Lord. So, in this last week of Epiphany, we see with special clearness, the true glory of the Lord Jesus, as we learn

The Lesson of the Mountaintop

- I. It Is a Lesson in Understanding Jesus.
 - A. The disciples still did not understand Jesus.
 1. Peter (Mt. 16:16) - "You are the Christ."
 2. Peter (Mt. 16:23) - "You are not going to die."
 - B. They learn of Jesus in this vision.
 1. Jesus was "transfigured" before them.
 2. Moses and Elijah appeared before them.
 - a. A witness to the message of the Law and the Prophets.
 - b. Luke adds: "They were speaking of His death at Jerusalem."
 3. The voice of the Father was heard by them.
 - C. Thus, we with the disciples see a complete picture of God.
 1. Here is the Messiah, the Savior—true Man

2. Here is our Lord—true God.

3. Here is the meaning of Jesus ministry: God's gift, to which we listen.

II. It Is a Lesson in Understanding Ourselves.

A. People are in need of God's touch.

1. For life is confusing.

a. Peter said: "Let's stay; let's build."

b. God says: "Let's listen; let's go."

2. For life is full of fear.

a. Peter, James, and John were felled by it.

b. The touch of God in the presence of Jesus quells fear.

c. Jesus is Emmanuel: "God with us."

B. People are in need of the right mountain.

1. Not Mt. Sinai.

a. It is Moses' mountain.

b. It means the Law which men cannot fulfill.

2. Not Mr. Carmel.

a. It is Elijah's mountain.

b. It means the Prophets which men cannot heed.

3. Not even the Mount of Transfiguration.

a. Its location is unknown.

b. It means an "experience" which men cannot keep.

4. But Mt. Calvary.

a. It is Golgatha - the place of the skull.

b. Toward it Jesus heads as He leaves the Mount of Transfiguration.

c. It means the redemption to which men cannot add.

The lesson on the mountaintop is not only that we are to see Jesus as He is, and that we are to see Jesus only, but also that we see Him on the cross, where His true glory as God can best be seen.

RWS

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY: MATTHEW 20:1-16 (FEBRUARY 11, 1979)

Here we find yet another of our Lord's parables of the kingdom. As a parable we expect to find some point at which the abstract reality of the kingdom of God is concretely illustrated. In this parable, the act by which people are brought into the kingdom is the recruiting activity of the landowner (vs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7). The function of those who are brought into the kingdom is service ("to work in his vineyard"). There is a blessing which falls to those in service in the kingdom (the denarius), yet this blessing is credited to the generosity (v. 15) of the landowner. The central point of the text is that it is the landowner whose actions make the kingdom of heaven available to men. The problem in the text is that men are tempted to regard their service, rather than the landowner's gracious activity, as the basis for their standing in God's kingdom. The goal of the sermon is to redirect our thinking from self to Christ as we consider our place in God's kingdom.

Introduction: Today our economic well-being is significantly influenced by the modern labor union. Hardly a day goes by without news of some contract negotiation reaching our ears which threatens to effect seriously our living standards. Undoubtedly many good benefits have come to workers through the union movement; however, one can sense an underlying belief within almost every union contract, a belief that one's value is best measured and rewarded by the paycheck. Actually this belief is part of the very nature of man; and it

is this thought which motivates some grumblers in the kingdom of God. We hear the grumbling in our text, and we hear it in our churches; perhaps, in an honest and perceptive moment, we hear the grumbling in our hearts. Today we need to learn

The Market Value of the Kingdom of God

- I. We Learn How It Is Measured.
 - A. Not with reference to one's self.
 1. The workers in the text measured by their labors.
 2. Workers in the congregation often measure by their contributions.
 3. The Christian in his heart often measures by his works.
 - B. But with reference to God's gifts.
 1. In the text it is the graciousness of the landowner that is praised.
 2. In the church it is the Gospel that both calls and rewards us.
 3. Thus, we are pointed to the true nature of the value of God's kingdom.
- II. We Learn How It Is Given or Created
 - A. It is created by the free act of God.
 1. In our text the landowner continually offers the privilege of kingdom-service.
 2. In our lives God has "called me by the Gospel . . ."
 - B. It is given freely to all who will believe.
 1. In our text those who trusted the landowner received the privilege of kingdom service.
 - a. Other than the earliest workers, all had only the promise, "I'll pay you what is right."
 - b. Even those called at the eleventh hour trusted the owner's offer.
 2. In God's kingdom the blessing of eternal life is given to all who believe.
- III. We Learn How It Pays Dividends of Blessings
 - A. The service itself is a blessing.
 1. In the text men designed to work and desirous of work found the opportunity in the offer of the landowner.
 2. We, too, are designed as men and women to seek work, creative service to God.
 - B. The results of our service is a blessing.
 1. For the workers in the text, a denarius, equally given, to those who were faithful as workers.
 2. For Christians, a crown of glory, equally given, to all who have been called into the kingdom of God.

There is only one effective way to prevent the cancer of self-centered thinking from eating its way into our soul as we serve in God's kingdom, and that is to remember daily how it is that we are servants and sons of God—by Christ's saving act, which God extends to us through the means of grace. This focus on Jesus as our Master and our reward will keep us in grace and peace as we serve in His kingdom.

RWS

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY: LUKE 8:4-15
(FEBRUARY 18, 1979)

It is clear that Jesus tells this parable to a large crowd (v. 4), although its meaning will be clear only to those who are "given the secrets of the kingdom

of God" (v. 10). Thus, this is another parable of the nature of the kingdom of God. It is important to note that the point of comparison centers around the various soils, and therefore it is more appropriate to speak of the "parable of the soils" than the "parable of the sower." Our Lord gives us clear indications of the realities which lie behind the images in the parable. Note that, whereas Matthew reports results of the seed in the good soil in terms of 30-, 60-, and 100-fold increases, Luke simply says that the seed "yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." (v. 8). The central point of this parable and its explanation by our Lord is that our reception of and life in God's kingdom is affected by the way in which we receive the Word of God in our lives. The problem is that productive spiritual growth cannot occur in hearts which resist the power of the Word. The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearers to that repentance of heart which gives good ground for God's Word and its life-giving work.

Introduction: Are you spiritually healthy? If so, how do you know? If not, how do you know this to be the case? If you don't know whether or not you are spiritually healthy, shouldn't you? Just as we recognize the need for physical health, so too we should see the need to ascertain and possess spiritual health. In our text for today, God invites us to

Take Time for a Spiritual Check-up

I. Diseases Which Rob You of Spiritual Health.

A. The disease of a stubborn heart.

1. The picture: the soil that rejected the seed.
2. The application: the pride-filled heart that simply says to God: "I will not." Note that this heart "hears the Word." Yet, there can be no life without change.
3. The remedy: since this disease can touch us all, we need to humbly repent—"O God, come and change my heart."

B. The disease of a shallow heart.

1. The picture: the soil that allowed for no roots.
2. The application: the faith that receives the Word on an emotional level. Yet there can be no life without depth, in the face of tribulations.
3. The remedy: We need to ask our God to break away the undercrust from our hearts, that we may see the great value of having roots.

C. The disease of an ungrateful heart.

1. The picture: the soil which also grows thorns.
2. The application: the divided heart that needs Christ and salvation, but also wants what the world offers. Yet, two masters mean a strangulation of the spirit.
3. The remedy: We need to remember from whence we came and what we would be without God, and to confess our forgetfulness of all our blessings in Christ.

II. The Picture of Spiritual Health

A. The nature of spiritual health.

1. The textual picture: the good soil which receives the seed.
2. Application: where by repentance one has broken down the objects of resistance and pride, the seed of the Word can accomplish its task.

B. The way to spiritual health.

1. Let us repent of all that robs God's Word of its place in our lives.
2. Let us receive today what that Word of God offers our hearts:
 - a. The Word of reconciliation—"You are forgiven, redeemed, blessed."

- b. The Word of power—capable of bringing spiritual growth a 100-fold.

RWS

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY: LUKE 18:31-43
(FEBRUARY 25, 1979)

Note that this pericope does have an unifying theme—the need for perception. With the disciples the perception which is lacking (and remains so after our Lord's instruction) is spiritual; they failed to see that the Messiah was fulfilling all that had been written about him in the prophets. With the beggar, the perception which is lacking is physical, yet through his faith (spiritual perception of Christ) he receives his sight. Note Jesus' positive understanding and use of "Messianic prophecy" (cf. vs. 31-33). Note also the title which the beggar uses to address our Lord: "Son of David" (v. 38,39). Apparently this blind one also understood something of Messianic prophecy. From these two incidents we learn by way of the physician Luke which is the greater problem in perception. Thus, the central thought of this pericope is that Jesus offers to men the vision to see Him as He really is: God and Savior. The problem addressed in the text is that men are by nature spiritually blind. The goal of the sermon is to enlighten the hearer as to the person and work of Christ.

Introduction: On Wednesday we enter again into the season of Lent. Just what does this season hold for you? How well do you understand this season and its message as it applies to you? Our opportunity to receive spiritual benefits from Lent depends on how clearly we see Jesus and His work in the message of Lent. So today, in our Gospel, the Lord is operating on our spiritual eyes so that we might

See the Blessings of Lent

- I. We Need to Be Given the Gift of Sight.
 - A. In the text blindness was the problem.
 1. The beggar needed physical sight.
 2. More seriously, the disciples needed spiritual sight.
 - B. As we approach Lent, blindness can be the problem.
 1. As to the purpose of this season.
 - a. Not that we see a sacrifice in us.
 - b. But that we see a sacrifice for us.
 2. As to the results of this season.
 - a. With reference to Easter.
 - b. With reference to daily living.
- II. Lent Holds Out Blessings for Us to See and Possess.
 - A. We see Jesus as God incarnate.
 1. The beggar saw this, though blind.
 2. The disciples were shown this by their Lord.
 3. In Lent, through the glory of the cross, we see God incarnate.
 - B. We see Jesus as God's gift of Salvation.
 1. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
 2. His life and death give us life and salvation.
 3. His gift of revelation gives us light and knowledge.

RWS

ASH WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 6:16-21

(FEBRUARY 28, 1979)

Verse 16: Fasting was a part of the religious rites of the Jews. The Mosaic Law prescribed fasting only for the annual festival of the atonement (Lv 16:29; 23:27; Ac 27:9). The Jews fasted also after an appalling disaster (2 Kings 25:25; Jr 41:1ff.). The Pharisees fasted Monday and Thursday each week (Lv 18:12). "The hypocrites": Jesus has the Pharisees in view. They made their fasting another means of self-glorification. "Disfigure their faces": They put on a sad, gloomy, look. Tearing and marking the flesh was forbidden (Lv 19:28; Dt 14:1). The Pharisees disfigured their faces by covering them with ashes, by not washing, or by covering a part of the face or head. "Their reward": They received the praise of men. They could expect nothing from the Lord. Verse 17: Anointing was a sign of joy. Anointing and washing were everyday forms of cleanliness. A mere outward show of repentance without change of heart does not befit the followers of Christ. It is the heart which should feel sorrow and humility, not the face. Verse 18: Unseen by human eye, our God sees in secret; His eyes pass by nothing (Ps 139:1). "Reward them openly": Perhaps this refers to judgement day (Mt 5:12); but certainly the expression is not restricted to that day. God rewards with the gifts He alone can give, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Verse 19: Jesus turns to the subject of hoarding. The Pharisees devoured widows' houses (Mt 23:14). "Moth and rust": Any power that eats or corrodes. "Thieves break through," literally, "dig through": It was comparatively easy where houses were made of mud and semi-dried brick. Verse 20: The treasures are to be of the right kind. The treasures of the Christian are even now safely included in God's Word, and their fulness will be realized in heaven (1 Pe 1:4; 2 Tm 1:12,14). The treasures are the kingdom and all its blessings: righteousness, peace, joy, sonship, heaven.

A God-Pleasing Preparation for Lent

I. Manifest genuine penitence.

A. False penitence.

1. The Pharisees fasted to be seen of men.
2. They had their reward.
 - a. They won the praise of men.
 - b. They lost the praise of God.

B. True penitence

1. Recognizes one's sinfulness before God.
2. Confesses one's sinfulness to God (Ps 32; 51).
3. Pleads for God's mercy (Lk 18:13; Cf. Introit).
4. Receives the gracious forgiveness of God (Is 1:18; Jn 8:11; 1 Jn 1:9).

Application: The collect for Ash Wednesday.

II. Concentrate on the true riches.

A. Not on the perishable riches of the world.

1. Money is good, unless we make it a god.
2. It is folly to make money a god.
 - a. It can be taken from us.
 - b. A heart set on money is not set on God (e.g., Solomon, the rich and foolish, Mt. 6:24).

B. On the imperishable riches of heaven.

1. Christ won the treasures of heaven for us.
 - a. He kept God's Law in our stead (Ga 4:14).
 - b. He paid the debt for our sin (Is 53; Jn 3:17; 2 Cor 5:19; He 9:12).
2. Christ gives the treasures of heaven to us.
 - a. Peace with God (Ro 5:1).
 - b. Sonship (Eph 2:19; 1 Jn 3:1).

- c. Eternal life (Jn 3:16; I Pe 1:3-4).
 3. These treasures are ours by faith (Ro 4:5; Jn 11:25).

For a God-pleasing observance of Lent, let us keep one eye on ourselves to recognize our sinfulness; the other on Christ, to thank Him for winning for us the treasures of heaven.

HJE

INVOCAVIT, THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: MATTHEW 4:1-11
 (MARCH 4, 1979)

Verse 1: At His baptism, Jesus entered formally upon His work as our Prophet, Priest, and King. In His temptation he demonstrates that He is a faithful servant. At His baptism He was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit; in His temptation He used that power. He, the second Adam, was tempted of the devil, but emerged as the Victor. The victory was a part of His mediatorial work, for He kept God's Law perfectly for us and in our stead. "Into the wilderness": He was to struggle alone. The temptation continued through the forty days; the three temptations specifically cited were the culmination (Mk 1:12-13). Verse 3: This was a cosmic struggle between the Prince of Light and the prince of darkness (He 5:8) for the souls of men. Verses 3-4: The first temptation was to doubt God's provident care. Jesus went to a clear word of Scripture for His reply, (Dt 8:3). He trusted the Word and promises of God. Verses 5-7: The second temptation was one to instant acclaim—without the cross. The devil garbled Ps 91:11-12, omitting "in all thy ways." Luke places this temptation last (Lk 4:1-13). Jesus' response indicates that the proposition was to tempt God (Dt 6:16). Verses 8-10: The third temptation was the offer of the world—without the cross. The devil was bargaining with stolen goods, for the earth is the Lord's (Ps 24:1; 50:12). The temptation was on to blatant apostasy. Jesus responded again with a clear Word of Scripture (Dt 6:13). Verse 11: The devil left Jesus, only to return again and again, for Christ was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (He 4:15). He kept God's Law perfectly for us and our salvation. The devil tempts us, too, to doubt God's care, rashly to presume on God's providence, and to gain the world at the price of apostasy. Our only but sure defense is the clear Word of God.

Introduction: Temptation is as old as man and as new as this very hour. Through the fall of man in the first temptation, the devil gained control over mankind. To break that death grip, God promised to send His Son to crush the serpent's head (Gn 3:15; Ga 4:4).

Christ's Victory over Temptation

- I. He conquered the devil for us.
 - A. The devil approached Jesus.
 1. Immediately after Christ formally entered upon His redemptive work.
 2. The purpose of the devil was to thwart Christ's Messianic work.
 - B. There were three temptations.
 1. To distrust God.
 2. To presume on God and thus to tempt Him.
 3. To gain the world without the cross.
 - C. Jesus responded with the weapon of the Word.
 1. He would trust the promises of God even though hungry.
 2. He would not tempt God by needlessly exposing Himself to danger.

3. He would worship only God and do His will.
- D. Christ emerges the Victor over Satan.
 1. Satan leaves defeated.
 2. Christ's victory is His victory for us.
 - a. He remains sinless (He 7:26).
 - b. This is part of His redemptive work (Ga 4:4; He 4:15). Christ's victory is great comfort for us. When tempted to despair, we can point to Christ who has kept the Law for us.
11. Christ is our example.
 - A. We face the tempter every day (1 Pe 5:8; Eph 6:12).
 - B. The devil employs the same tactics.
 1. He tempts us to distrust God (cf. the Children of Israel).
 2. He tempts us to tempt God by toying with God's commands.
 3. He tempts us to worship him (cf. Judas, Demas).
 - C. The Word, the weapon of our warfare.
 1. To hurl the Word at Satan is our best defense (Eph 6:13-17).
 2. The Word is also the source of spiritual strength (Jn 8:31-32; 1 Pe 2:2).

Let us take comfort in Christ's victory over the devil and follow His example in the temptations that beset us. (The collect may be used as a concluding prayer.)

HJE

REMINISCERE, THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT:
MATTHEW 15:21-28
(MARCH 11, 1979)

Verse 21: Jesus leaves Capernaum for the borders of Tyre and Sidon. These cities were the capitals of Phoenicia. There the people worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth. Verse 22: It is significant that the woman should address Jesus in the way she does. "Lord" is a divine name; "Son of David" refers to the Messiah. "Have mercy on me": This woman identified with her daughter's illness. She did not dictate how Jesus should help. She asked only for mercy.

Verse 23: The first rebuff was the silence of Jesus. The second was the request of the disciples, "Send her away." They asked Jesus to dismiss her by granting her petition. Verse 24: "The lost sheep of the house of Israel" were the people to whom Jesus confined His earthly ministry (Mt 10:5-6). Through the apostles the kingdom was to come also to the Gentiles. Luther says that Christ is nowhere painted as harsh as here. Verse 25: She grew bolder as a suppliant. She fell at His feet. Verse 26: The children to whom Jesus referred are the children of the kingdom (Mt 8:12). "Dogs": In the East dogs have access to the rooms and eat what drops or is thrown to them. The third rebuff was to compare this woman to a dog. Verse 27: The woman turns Christ's words against Him. She says: "Give the children the bread; I'll be content with the crumbs." Verse 28: At no one's faith did Jesus ever express surprise except at that of this woman and that of the centurion (Mt 8:10), both Gentiles. Luther: "When we firmly cling to the *yes*, then it must finally be *yes* and not *no*."

Introduction: Faith is not only a knowledge of God and His promises; it is also the firm confidence that prompts us to act on the promises of God.

The Marks of a Great Faith

- I. Faith goes to Christ in time of need.
 - A. This woman had a great need.

- B. She went to Jesus in faith, acknowledging Him to be the Lord and the Son of David, the promised Messiah.
- C. She pleaded for mercy (cf. the introit).
- D. How much more reason we have to go to Christ in time of need.
 - 1. We have needs, temporal and spiritual, our own and the needs of others.
 - 2. We know so much about God.
 - a. His love for us, manifested in the cross of Christ, Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9.
 - b. His power, manifested in creation and in the miracles of Christ. Mt 28:18; Lk 1:37 (cf. the gradual).
 - c. His wisdom, Ps 139:1.
 - 3. He invites us to come to Him and promises to hear us, Mt 15:7; Jn 16:24.

What wings all this knowledge of God ought to give to our faith. Let us join the woman in her plea, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David" (cf. introit).

II. Faith persists in spite of rebuffs.

- A. This woman persisted.
 - 1. The rebuffs.
 - a. Jesus' silence.
 - b. "Send her away."
 - c. "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
 - d. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs."
 - 2. Her undaunted persistence.
 - a. She continued to plead for help.
 - b. She was content with the crumbs of His mercy.
 - c. Having tested her faith, Jesus granted her request.
- B. How much we need a faith which manifests itself in persistent prayer.
 - 1. God tests our faith, too, by His apparent silence, 1 Pe 4:12.
 - 2. At such times, we need to learn the lesson of persistence, Mt 4:7; 2 Cor 12:7-8; Lk 18:1-8.
 - 3. God answers every proper prayer either by giving us what we ask or something better, Mt 7:7-11; Eph 3:20.

Therefore, let us always pray and not faint (cf. the collect).

HJE

OCULI, THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 11:14-28 (MARCH 18, 1979)

Verses 14-15: There were three reactions to the miracle: some wondered; others sought a sign, as though the miracle was not sign enough. Verse 17: Reading the hearts of the Pharisees, Jesus answered. If Jesus were in league with the devil and yet cast out our devils' he would be dividing the devil's kingdom. Verse 19: By condemning Jesus, the Pharisees were condemning their own sons. Cf. Acts 19:13-14. Verse 20: If Christ by the power of God cast out demons, Christ has come as Messiah to bring to people the grace of the Kingdom. Verse 21: The devil was secure until Christ came to destroy his power, Col. 2:15. Verse 23: Men are either for Christ or against Him. One cannot be neutral. Verses 24-26: These words were spoken against the Pharisees with their outward piety but inner wickedness. If a man resolves to rid himself of a bad habit but does not put Christ in his heart by faith, the bad habit soon returns with seven others. The devil loves a vacuum. Christianity calls for repentance and faith of the heart, not simply outward reformation.

Verse 21: Said one, "How blessed a mother to have such a Son." Jesus replies, "Blessed is he who hears the Word of God and keeps it in faith, bringing forth the fruit of good works." Luther says: "Therefore let us thank God for such grace that to aid us He sent His Son against the devil to cast him out, and left His Word with us, through which to this day the kingdom of the devil is destroyed and the kingdom of God is established and increased."

Introduction: When Christ died, He appeared to be the victim; but in reality he was the victor.

A Greater than Satan is Here

I. He comes to destroy the power of Satan.

A. He is not in league with the devil.

1. If He were, Satan's kingdom would be divided.
2. Condemning Jesus, the Pharisees condemned their sons.

B. Christ came to destroy the power of Satan.

1. Satan gained control of mankind because of sin, Rm 5:12.
2. Christ destroyed the power of Satan, Gn 3:15; He 2:14-15; Jn 12:3.
 - a. He kept God's Law for all men, Ga 4:4.
 - b. He paid the debt of man's sin, Rm 5:17-19.
 - c. Now we can exalt with Paul, Rm 8:33-34; 1 Cor 15:55-57 (cf. the collect).

II. He invites man to share in His victory.

A. Neutrality is not good enough, v. 23, Ac 17:32.

B. Reformation of life is not good enough, vs. 24-26, Rm 3:20.

C. Saying nice things about Christ is not good enough, v. 27, Mt 7:21.

D. We need to hear and keep the Word of God.

1. Hear it in church.
2. Hear it in our homes.
3. Keep it in our hearts by faith, Rm 4:5; Rm 5:1-5; Php 1:21; Rm 1:17; Ga 2:20.
4. Keep it in works of love as the fruit of faith, Jas 1:27; 2:14-17 (cf. Eph 5:1-9).

A greater than Satan is here. Thank God for His victory for us. Live in that victory by faith.

HJE

LAETARE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 6:1-15 (March 25, 1978)

Verses 1-4: In the ancient church the Lenten season, with its fasting, began on the day after this Sunday. This Sunday, therefore, was generally a day of feasting; hence this Gospel. Thousands went around the coast of the Sea of Galilee, curious to see more miracles. Luke tells us that Jesus spoke to them of the kingdom of God and healed the sick. Verses 5-9: Jesus put the faith of the disciples to the test, although He knew what He would do. As Philip estimated that 200 denarii, about \$34, would not be enough; so anxious people calculate how they will meet their physical needs. Philip forgot the wedding at Cana; Christians sometimes forget the power of God and become anxious. The lad gives up his lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish. Verses 10:14: There were 5,000 men, without counting women and children (Mt 14:21). The loaves multiplied under the almighty touch of Jesus. Christ still blesses the loaves we eat (Ps 145:15). Jesus taught proper conservation of food. Infinite resources do not justify wast. "That prophet" was a reference to Deuteronomy

18:15. This prophet was also to be a king (Ps 2:6; Is 9:6 ff; Zch 9:9). The masses saw Jesus only as a bread king.

Introduction: In Lent we concentrate our attention on the passion of our Lord and the spiritual blessings we receive as a result. And so we should. However, a text like ours reminds us that God provides also for our physical needs.

God Gives us Our Daily Bread

- I. Therefore, we ought to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.
 - A. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.
 1. He saw and met the need.
 2. The people had reason to give thanks.
 - B. He still provides our bread.
 1. He makes the soil productive.
 2. He gives us health so that we can work.
 3. Therefore we ought to receive our bread with thanksgiving, Ps 103:1.
 - C. Cultivating a spirit of thanksgiving keeps us from three deadly sins.
 1. Complaining (cf. the children of Israel).
 2. Pride (cf. the rich fool).
 3. Worry.
 - a. Philip faced a real problem.
 - b. We do, too, and too often worry.
 - c. We should rather remember that God provides, Ps 145:15; Mt 6:34.
- II. Therefore we ought to be willing to share our bread.
 - A. There are examples of sharing in the text.
 1. The little boy shared his lunch.
 2. Jesus shared with the multitudes.
 - B. So also we should share.
 1. Two-thirds of the world goes to bed hungry.
 2. Christians are to share their bread with others, Pr 25:21; Mt 5:42.
 3. We are to support even more freely the extension of Christ's kingdom, Mal 3:10.
 - C. To have bread to share, we must gather up the fragments.
 1. Jesus did.
 2. So should we.
 - a. How easy it is to waste food and natural resources.
 - b. Let us cultivate the habit of conserving.

HJE

JUDICA, THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 8:46-59 (Apr. 1, 1978)

The text is a bitter debate between Jesus and "those Jews who believed in Him" (v. 31). These Jews accepted Christ as the Messiah in a crassly political sense. Their stolid unbelief and the great affirmations of Jesus stand out in bold relief in this text. Verse 46: None could successfully convict Jesus of sin. "The truth": Jesus claimed to be the truth, Jn 14:6. Verse 47: To hear God's words here implies acceptance in faith. He who is "Not of God" is of the devil (v. 44). Verse 48: The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch. They were the most hated neighbors of the Jews. Concerning "hast a devil," cf. v. 44. Verse 49: Jesus' whole mission was to honor His Father (cf. Jn 17:4). Verse 50: cf. vs. 28,42; 7:8. Verse 51: "Verily, verily" introduces a new thought. "Keep" means to heed, or to guard. "Not" is very emphatic. "Not see death": cf. Jn 11:25. Verse 52: The rabbis talked about "drinking the cup of death." Verse

55: They did not know the true God. Verse 56: Abraham rejoiced in the promises of the coming Messiah, Gn 15:4; 17:17; 18:10; 22:18; cf. He 11:13. Verse 58: Jesus is the eternal "I am," Ex 3:15; He 1:1-2; Col 1:17; Rm 1:18. Verse 59: How often Jesus would have gathered the Jews, but they would not.

Jesus' Self-Testimony

- I. "I say the truth."
 - A. Jesus lived according to the truth.
 1. None could accuse Him of sin, v. 46.
 2. He kept the Law for us, Ga 4:4.
 - B. He spoke the truth.
 1. He pointed men to Himself as the only Savior, Jn 10:11; Jn 14:6; 7:37; 15:1.
 2. The Jews rejected His words in unbelief, v. 47; Mt 23:37.
 3. Faith takes comfort in the truth, He 1:1-2.
- II. "I honor my Father."
 - A. "I know Him," v. 55.
 1. "Before Abraham was, I am," v. 58. Christ is eternal.
 2. Christ is one in essence with the Father, v. 55; Jn 10:30; Col 1:19.
 - B. He came to honor the Father, v. 49.
 1. The Father willed the world's salvation, Gn 3:15.
 2. Jesus came to carry out the Father's will.
 - a. He did not seek His own honor, vs. 50,54; Mt 20:28; Php 2:5-8.
 - b. He honored His Father by His sacrificial death, Jn 17:4; 4:34.
 - c. Faith rejoices and takes comfort, Rm 8:32-37.
- III. "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death."
 - A. Death came by sin, Ge 2:17; Rm 5:21.
 - B. Jesus won life by means of His death, Rm 5:17-21; 1 Jn 5:11.
 - C. Life is ours by faith, Jn 17:3; 11:25.
 1. To reject Christ is to remain in death, Jn 3:36.
 2. To accept Christ by faith is to have life, 1 Jn 5:12.
 - a. Now, Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 3:14.
 - b. Eternally, Jn 14:1-6.

HJE

MAUNDY THURSDAY: JOHN 13:1-15 (APRIL 12, 1979)

Verse 1: This is a most solemn moment in Christ's life. Note the intensity of the language in vs. 1-3. Verse 3: The responsibility for the redemption of the world rested on Christ alone. Note the divine self-consciousness of Jesus. Verse 4: "His garments" refers to His outer garments. Verse 6: Peter sees the incongruity of the situation. Verse 7: "Hereafter" means after the resurrection. Verse 8: The washing is symbolical of the washing from sin which Christ alone can give. Verse 9: Peter is quick to catch the symbolical significance of the washing. Verse 10: Here Jesus talks about the daily cleansing necessary for the Christian who daily sins. Verse 11: Judas has spurned the cleansing of Jesus. Verse 15: The disciples are to apply Christ's example of humble service to their own lives.

Introduction: There were feet to be washed that memorable night when Jesus ate the Passover for the last time with His disciples. There are still feet to be washed.

There Are Feet to Be Washed

- I. Your feet.
 - A. Jesus cleansed Peter.

1. Peter's objection, v. 8.
2. Jesus' reply, v. 8.
3. Peter understands, v. 9.
4. Jesus points to a need for daily cleansing from sin, v. 10.
- B. Like Peter we have been cleansed.
 1. Christ won cleansing from sin for all the world, v. 1, 1 Jn 1:7; Is 53:5-6; 2 Cor 5:19.
 2. The Holy Spirit gives this cleansing to us.
 - a. In holy baptism, Tt 3:5-7; Ac 2:38; Jn 3:5.
 - b. In the Word, Rm 1:16; 2 Tm 3:15-17.
- C. Yet we need daily cleansing.
 1. For we daily sin, Rm 7:18-19.
 2. We receive this cleansing by repentance and faith, Rm 4:5; Ps 51.
- II. Other people's feet.
 - A. Jesus gave the disciples an example of humble service.
 1. In pride they quarreled about who should be greatest. None was humble enough to assume the servant's role and to wash the other's feet, Lk 22:23-27.
 2. Though Christ knew that He was true God, He washed the disciple's feet to give an example of humble service.
 - B. We, too, need this example of humble service.
 1. Our old Adam is proud, wanting to be served, Jas 4:6.
 2. But greatness in the Kingdom comes from humble service, Mt 20:26-28; Mt 25:14.
 3. Opportunities abound for selfless service.
 - a. In the home, Eph 5:25-6:4.
 - b. In the church, Mt 28:18-20.
 - c. In our city and nation, Jr 29:7.

Thank God that He washes your feet. Take up your basin and towel and wash another's feet. For there are feet to be washed.

HJE

PALM SUNDAY: MATTHEW 21:1-9 (APRIL 8, 1979)

Verse 1: Jesus had probably gone straight from Jericho to Bethany and spent the Sabbath with His friends. Palm Sunday was the day the paschal lamb was selected (Ex 12:3). Matthew mentions only the mother of the foal. Note the omniscience of Jesus; He knows the ass and the colt will be there. Verse 3: Note Jesus' omnipotence: "he will send them." "The Lord" is a divine title. Verse 4: The phrase "through the prophet" refers to Zechariah 9:9 and Isaiah 62:11. Verse 5: The daughter of Zion is the church. "Thy King" means the King of thine own race foretold of the prophets, Is. 9:6. Cf. Mt. 11:29. Coming as King, Christ must ride upon an animal which had never been used, Nu. 19:2; Dt. 21:3. The ass was used by the judges on peaceful errands, Jdg. 5:10; 10:4. Jesus rode upon the foal. Verse 7: "Their clothes" refers to their outer garments. Verse 9: The Passover brought multitudes, as did also the raising of Lazarus, Jn. 12:18. "Hosanna" means "save now." "Son of David" is a Messianic title. "Help the Son of David. May He succeed": The song is taken largely from Psalm 118:25-26, a part of the Hallel (Ps. 113-118), sung at the Passover Festival and the Feast of Tabernacles. "Blessed is he etc.": Blessed be he that cometh with divine mission, sent with the authority of Jehovah.

Hail to the King

I. Hail Him as your King of grace.

A. He came as the very Son of God.

1. He is an omniscient King v. 2; Ps 139:1.
2. He is an omnipotent King, v. 3; Mt 28:18.

B. He came not to destroy, but to save.

1. He could well have come to destroy Jerusalem, Jn 3:17; Mt 23:37.
2. But He came to save, Phil 2:5-8; Jn 10:11; Lk 19:10.
 - a. He assumed the world's guilt, Is. 53:5.
 - b. He assumed the world's punishment, Is. 53:5.
3. We are heirs of the blessings He won: peace with God, reconciliation with God, everlasting life, Ro 5:1-5; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14.

And so we sing: "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be Dearest Jesus, unto Thee."

II. Hail Him with praise.

A. Jerusalem's reception of the King.

1. The chief priests and scribes were openly hostile.
2. The masses were indifferent.
3. How good that some were there to sing His praises and to garland His path.

B. Christ comes to us today.

1. Many are hostile or indifferent, Is. 53:1; Jn. 1:5,10-11.
2. How shall we respond?
 - a. Acknowledge Christ as King, Gal. 2:20.
 - b. Sing His praises.
 - a. In faithful worship, Ps. 100.
 - b. In eager mission activity, Mt. 28:18-20; Ac. 1:8.
 - c. Give Him your gifts, Mal. 3:10.

HJE

GOOD FRIDAY: JOHN 18-19

(APRIL 13, 1979)

John 18:1-3: Luther remarks the Jesus neither sought the cross, nor did He flee from it; He entered into His passion willingly, but he did not challenge martyrdom. 18:4-9: Jesus voluntarily delivered Himself. 18:14: Caiaphas is an unconscious prophet. John describes the preliminary trial before Annas. The mock trial before Caiaphas is described in Mt. 26:57-68. 18:28-40: Before Pilate, the Jews charged Jesus with being a rebel, dangerous to the Roman government. In their own courts, the charge against Jesus was blasphemy. 18:37: Jesus, the King of truth, establishes and expands His kingdom by means of the Word of truth; He reigns through His Word. 19:1-6: Pilate hoped in vain that the scourging would satisfy the Jews. Cf. Is. 50:6. 19:7-12: Luther states: "Mark here that the innocence of Christ, our Lord, stands for our guilt. For though He was condemned to death being innocent, He yet is guilty before God according to the Law; not for His person, but for our persons." 19:12-16: Pilate is an unjust, unwise, weak judge, who plays havoc with justice and attempts to please men. 19:16-22: Luther states: "Thus Christ was crucified and hanged on the cross as the greatest thief . . . The innocent Lamb, Christ, must bear and pay strange debts . . . Our sins they are that lie upon His neck." The superscription was in

Hebrew-Aramaic, spoken by the common people; in Greek, the language of commerce; in Latin the language of court and camp. 19:25-27: The small band under the cross is a picture of the Christian church. 19:28-30: Cf. Ps 69:21, 19:31-37: Luther remarks: "That same blood of Christ is our advocate with God . . . and thus earns for us God's grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, salvation." 19:38-42: Jesus Christ by His burial has sanctified the graves of all His saints.

Introduction: On Good Friday we stand on holy ground to hear the final words of the suffering Savior. Without a word of complaint, Jesus in His final hours speaks words which we Christians hold dear.

A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth

- I. In His willing surrender.
 - A. Betrayed by Judas, Jesus is sought out by the chief priests and scribes, 18:1-7.
 - B. Christ willingly surrenders, 18:8.
 1. At other times He escaped from violence.
 2. Now His hour has come to drink the cup of suffering.
- II. In His testimony to His innocence.
 - A. The mock trial.
 1. The verdict is determined in advance, 18:14.
 2. The charge is blasphemy, Mt. 9:3.
 - B. Jesus meekly testifies to His innocence, 18:20,23.
 1. He spoke no evil, 18:23.
 2. The comfort for us in Jesus' innocence.
- III. In His claim to be the King of truth.
 - A. He was no earthly king, 18:36.
 1. He had no army.
 2. Even Pilate conceded Jesus' innocence of that charge, 18:38; 19:4; 19:6.
 - B. But a King of truth He was.
 1. He spoke the truth of the Gospel, pointing men to Himself as the Savior, Jn. 14:6; 11:28.
 2. Everyone that is of the truth hears His voice.
- IV. In His final victory.
 - A. Rejected by the Jews, given over by Pilate, Jesus bears His cross, 19:17.
 - B. From the tree of the cross He speaks.
 1. "Woman, behold thy son," 19:26.
 - a. He provides for His mother.
 - b. As if to remind us of our responsibility to our parents.
 2. "I thirst," 19:28.
 - a. The intensity of Christ's physical suffering.
 - b. The intensity of His soul suffering, burdened with the sins of the world.
 3. "It is finished," 19:30.
 - a. The physical suffering was over and friends laid His body to rest.
 - b. The enemies were conquered: sin, death, and the devil, I Cor. 15:55-57.
 - c. The world was redeemed. I Jn. 1:7; II Cor. 5:19; Jn. 3:16.

EASTER, THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION: MARK 16:1-8
(APRIL 15, 1979)

The anointing of Jesus' body had probably been done hurriedly on Friday evening. The women purchased spices Saturday evening, after the sabbath was passed, to anoint Christ's body more carefully. Setting out early Sunday morning, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. On the way they kept on saying to each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" (v 3). They no doubt walked with heavy hearts and downcast eyes. Approaching the tomb and "looking up" (v 4), they saw that the stone had been removed. Entering the ante-chamber of the tomb, they saw an angel. His form (a young man) indicated vigor and strength, and his clothing (a white robe) indicated a heavenly spiritual being. The women were taken completely by surprise. The angel's words (v 6) imply that the women actually entered the inner chamber and saw the place where the Lord had lain. But they were not to keep staring at the empty grave. There was work to be done: they were to go and tell the disciples and especially Peter (perhaps to comfort Peter lest he despair on account of his denial of Christ). The reference to Galilee recalls the words of Jesus before His death (14:28) pointing to Galilee as the main scene of His reappearing to the disciples. The angel's words failed to calm the women. The events had been altogether too much for them. They fled the scene of such surprises, trembling with fear and stupor. They were probably afraid to say anything to anyone lest they would be accused by the Jews of having stolen Christ's body.

The central thought of the text is that the stone was rolled away as proof of the stupendous fact of Christ's resurrection. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would live victoriously by means of Christ's resurrection.

Introduction: As the women journeyed to the tomb on the first Easter morning their overwhelming concern was the stone at the entrance. Would that stone, symbolic of their harrowing loss, also prevent them from their last labor of love? The stone which reminded the women of all that had happened is meaningful also to us. It is this stone that catches our attention as we hear Mark's account of Christ's resurrection. Let us consider

The Great Stone as Our Easter Symbol

- I. The stone was a symbol of total defeat.
 - A. It shouted that Jesus had made a great effort and failed.
 1. He did not resist His enemies but met them with love and sacrifice.
 2. Yet He failed, for now He was dead and buried.
 - B. It cried out the power of sin.
 1. The sin of the world had been cast upon Christ.
 2. But see what sin had done!
 - C. It cried out the power of death.
 1. See how death wracked its victim with shame and pain.
 2. See how death destroyed Him.
 - D. It cried out the power of Satan and hell.
 1. They had heaped indignity and horror upon Him.
 2. Now He was dead in failure and defeat.
- II. The stone is a symbol of everlasting victory.
 - A. The stone was rolled away to show that death could not hold Christ.
 1. The grave is empty.
 2. A heavenly messenger announces the fact.
 3. All that Jesus said is true.
 - B. The stone is rolled away as a symbol that sin can no longer condemn us.
 1. Our sin has been wiped away.

2. The powers aligned with sin - Satan and hell - have been defeated once and for all.
- C. The stone was rolled away as a symbol that sin need no longer control our lives.
 1. We do not need to be afraid.
 2. We have a mission in life—"Go, tell"—for we too have seen Him and continue to see Him in the means of grace.

The stone was rolled away to show that Christ had risen. It reminds us that the powers which threatened to destroy us have been totally defeated and that we can live as conquerors now and forever.

GA

QUASIMODOGENITI, THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER:

JOHN 20:19-31

(APRIL 22, 1979)

The first appearance of Jesus to His disciples (vs 19-23) occurred on the evening of the first Easter Sunday when they had fearfully withdrawn to the safety of an upper room. Not the reports by creditable witnesses but a physical demonstration convinced the disciples of Christ's resurrection. They now put their trust in one who is unquestionably divine, who could give peace and impart the Holy Spirit because He is the Son of God. Now they were also to enter a mission issuing from the mission of the Son. "As the Father has sent me" (perfect tense), "even so I send you" (present tense). And He gave them power for it. "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v 22). This gift, imparting to them a fuller knowledge of the truth, would be completed at Pentecost. Christ would continue to pardon believers and condemn unbelievers through His human messengers.

The importance of faith is brought out in Jesus' second appearance to the disciples one week later (vs 24-29). Probably Thomas was no more skeptical than the others had been before seeing the risen Christ. He demanded practically the same proof that had been given them. But he should have accepted their testimony. He refused to believe on sufficient grounds and demanded a specific kind of proof. Conviction came to Thomas when the Lord appeared and offered him the evidence desired. He cried out in adoring wonder: "My Lord and my God!" This confession is both a culmination of belief and the climax of John's gospel. John at once adds that his purpose in writing has been to bring his readers to just such faith in Christ. John's purpose was not to compose a life of Jesus but to select from a vast array of facts a sufficient number to convince the readers that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God." The term "Christ" designates the office of the Messiah, and "Son of God" denotes His divine person. John is evidently addressing not chiefly those who are unbelieving but those who already have faith in Christ. Among the miracles related in his Gospel, the resurrection of Jesus is supreme. The signs wrought by Christ, especially His resurrection appearances, enlarge belief if they are carefully studied.

The central thought of the text is that we have no reason to doubt that Jesus is a living and merciful Lord. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would daily move from faithlessness to faith in Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Introduction: In the text we see stubborn unbelief. We would expect that in Christ's enemies. But in an apostle? While Jesus had been with the disciples He had often rebuked their faithlessness. Now He does so again. But we also see bold faith and its accompanying joyful confession. Let us look at what is central in this text, Christ's words,

"Do Not Be Faithless, but Believing"

I. Why Jesus rebukes unbelief.

A. Unbelief is unreasonable.

1. Some may think it wise, but to disbelieve facts is foolish.
2. Thomas had Christ's own word as well as the word of the women and the disciples. So do we.

B. Unbelief causes grief for others.

1. The disciples were concerned about Thomas. Christian parents and pastors are concerned about those in unbelief.
2. Apparently the disciples stayed in Jerusalem on account of Thomas (v 26), not going to Galilee as Jesus had commanded. The Lord's work is still retarded by unbelief.

C. Unbelief brings loss to the unbeliever himself.

1. It keeps him from Christian fellowship (v 24).
2. It deprives him of peace (v 24).
3. It prevents him from receiving the Holy Spirit (v 22).
4. It results in eternal damnation.

II. Why Jesus pleads for faith.

A. The object of faith is firm and true.

1. Christ, His death, and His resurrection are historical facts.
2. Christ gave physical proof of His resurrection (vs 20-27).
3. Christ is witnessed to by the apostles in the word of Scripture.

B. The means to faith are effective.

1. Christ comes to us in Word and Sacraments.
2. The Holy Spirit creates faith and sustains it through the means of grace.
3. The means of grace, including the Office of the Keys, have been given by Christ to the church on earth.

C. By faith we claim Christ as our God and Lord.

1. In Him we have the peace of forgiveness.
2. In His stead we Christians forgive and retain sins.

There is no excuse for unbelief, no reason for skepticism with regard to Jesus Christ. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

GA

**MISERICORDIAS DOMINI,
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER:
JOHN 10:11-16
(APRIL 29, 1979)**

The distinguishing characteristic of the Good Shepherd is that He seeks, not His own, but His sheep's welfare. The characteristic of the hireling is that he looks out for himself, abandoning the sheep (Eze 34:1ff; 2 Cor 11:20). In verse 11 (in the original) the word is doubly definite. Jesus is not merely one shepherd among many but *the* shepherd. He is not simply a good shepherd as opposed to others that are less good, but He is *the* Good Shepherd. There is no equal to Him. If the shepherd's love led Him to sacrifice Himself as a ransom (Mt 20:28; 1 Tm 2:6), the attitude of the sheep toward the shepherd is also one of self-surrender.

The relationship between the Good Shepherd and His sheep is analogous to the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is a matter of knowing and being known in love. This relationship has its origin not in the sheep but in the shepherd. He knows them first.

Jesus adds (v 16) that as the Good Shepherd He has other sheep "that are not of this fold." Jesus is looking beyond Israel to the Gentile world. All civic and national barriers are broken down in Christ. Jesus says He has these sheep. In His prophetic vision they are even now His sheep (those in all nations who will come to faith in Him).

The central thought of the text is that Jesus is truly the Good Shepherd. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be convinced of their importance to Christ.

Introduction: A man with a broken leg lay in a convalescent center. Although the leg was healing slowly, he thought it would never heal and that he would not walk again. He felt nobody cared about him. He wished he could die. We may feel sometimes, for any number of reasons, that we are of no importance to anyone. The text helps us deal with feelings of worthlessness. It tells us that

We Are Very Important to Jesus Christ

I. The first proof of this is that Jesus died for us.

- A. The picture of sheep and of shepherds was a familiar one to Christ's hearers.
 - 1. There is quite a difference between a good shepherd and a hireling (vs 11-13).
 - 2. The Jewish religious leaders were the hirelings who did not care about the people's spiritual welfare.
- B. Jesus, unlike the hireling, sacrificed Himself for us.
 - 1. He would not have had to; He could have overcome His enemies (Mt 26:53).
 - 2. He went all the way to the cross because He wanted to rescue us.
- C. Only by dying for us could He deliver us from the ravening wolf, Satan.
 - 1. We could never have made recompense for our sins.
 - 2. We could never have escaped hell.

Obviously, we are very important to Jesus Christ.

II. The second proof of this is that Jesus cares for us.

- A. He knows us intimately, just as a shepherd can identify each of his sheep (v 14).
 - 1. We may feel that others cannot know what we are going through in loneliness, grief, or nervous tension.
 - 2. But Jesus does. "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus."
 - 3. We do not even know ourselves, although we may think we do. We are not so much in control, so strong, so loving as we think we are. It is not easy to know ourselves as we really are. Remember Willy Loman's epitaph in *Death of a Salesman*. "He never knew who he was."
 - 4. But Jesus does. That is why He is able to care for us.
- B. He is able to keep all of His sheep (v 16).
 - 1. Jesus has other sheep besides us. All those who know Him as their shepherd comprise one fold. We cannot see this entire fold now, but on the last day it will be visible to us.
 - 2. Until that day Jesus empowers us through His Word and Sacraments to hear His voice and to obey Him, to resist the evil within and

without, and to remain in His fold. He will let nothing snatch us out of His hand (v 28).

You may feel at times that you are not important to yourself or to anyone else. Yet you are very important to Jesus Christ. He proved it by dying for you and by caring for you.

GA

JUBILATE, THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 16:16-23
(MAY 6, 1979)

Jesus promises His disciples that they will meet again after a brief period of tribulation in a joy that no one will take away. This promise is an expansion of the words of comfort spoken in chapter 14. Not only does Jesus promise them a Comforter to assist them and to continue His work, but He says that He will see them again after a brief interval. This promise was fulfilled during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. But it was fulfilled in even greater measure in the joyful contemplation of Him through the work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. The perfect fulfillment will come in eternity. But the disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying and cannot reconcile His promise with the words in verse 10. When Jesus observes their questioning and realizes that they want more information, He repeats what He has said about the "little while" and adds that the sorrow which they will experience at His departure will be increased when they see the world rejoice. Yet, in the midst of this sorrow eternal joy will be born within them. Their distress may be compared with the pains of childbirth. The birth of a child is the cause of the mother's anguish, but that birth is also the source of a joy in which the sorrows are forgotten. So Christ's words awaken in the disciples a stronger faith and assurance of future glory. As the Spirit enlightens them, doubts and misgivings will be removed as they turn to the Father in Jesus' name. While Jesus was with them, prayer in His name was unnecessary because they could address Him personally. Only after He had accomplished His redemptive work was the full significance of His name revealed.

The central thought of the text is that the Christian's life is a mixture of sorrow and joy. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers experience more real joy in their lives.

Introduction: Joy can be so fleeting. The criticism of others, illness, loneliness, a financial squeeze can squash our joy. That is how it is because we are part of humanity, and what is common to one is common to another. Yet there is a joy which only Christians experience. It is a lasting joy that Jesus describes in our text as

A Joy That No One Will Take Away

I. This joy is preceded by sorrow.

A. The sorrow is real.

1. The sorrow of the disciples was the more intense because they did not understand why Christ had to die, because they had forgotten the promise of His resurrection, and because the world rejoiced at His death (v 20).
2. We experience sorrow when we think of what our sins did to Christ and when we see God's cause seemingly failing in the world.

B. But the sorrow lasts only a "little while."

1. For the disciples, it lasted only until they saw Christ again after His resurrection (vs 16-22a).
2. For us, the sorrow lasts that little while until we see Jesus again with eyes of faith.

3. Our sorrow on earth lasts a little while compared to the eternity of heaven.

C. Like a woman who has delivered a child (v 21), our joy is that much greater when we have first known the sorrow. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (Lk 6:21).

This joy, preceded by sorrow over our sin and our failures, no one will take from us because

II. This joy has its source in Christ.

A. In Christ we have salvation.

1. Christ left His disciples for a little while that He might return to them as the completer of salvation.
2. His death and resurrection guarantee our forgiveness.
3. He has assured the triumph of His cause (Jn 16:33).

No one can take from us the joy we have as redeemed people.

B. In Christ we have a new relationship with God.

1. God as our Father hears and answers our prayers (vs 23-26).
2. As our Father He cares about us.

No one can take from us the joy we have as children of the heavenly Father.

C. In Christ we have joy forever.

1. When we see Him on the last great day, nothing—Satan, sin, death, the world—will ever again dampen our joy.
2. Then our joy will be perfect.

Although in the Christian life there is more to be glad about than sad about, there is never joy without sorrow. Yet they are holy tears we Christians shed, for they prepare the way for the joy that is in Christ. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps 30:5). Our joy no one will take away.

GA

CANTATE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 16:5-15 (MAY 13, 1979)

"These things" (v 5) refer to the persecutions the disciples will experience after Jesus' departure (vs 2-3). Jesus had not spoken so openly before to them about these persecutions because, while He had been with them, the world's enmity had been directed against Him rather than against the disciples. From now on it would be different. He will return to God, but they must remain in an evil world. However, Christ's departure will bring gain to them, not loss. As the Savior who would suffer, die, rise, and ascend, He would send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to comfort them. Jesus goes on to describe the two-fold task of the Holy Spirit, with the world (vs 8-11) and with believers (vs 12-15).

With the world, the task of the Holy Spirit will be to convince people of the sin of unbelief. Since Christ has redeemed the whole world, unbelief is the only sin that excludes sinners from God's kingdom. The Spirit will also convince the world of its need of the righteousness which Jesus demonstrated that He had earned by departing to the Father. This is the only righteousness that counts before God. Finally, the Spirit will convince the world that Satan, to whom the world has been subjected since the fall of Adam, has been utterly defeated through Christ's death and resurrection and deprived of his power to destroy. Through the Word of

Christ the Spirit will make these truths obvious, even though many in the world will refuse to listen.

With the believers, the Spirit will impart a greater understanding of the truths of God through the writings of the apostles whom the Spirit of Truth guided into all the truth, so that in their writings we have God's infallible Word. The Spirit will not act in isolation from God, nor as an emanation from God, nor as a power from God, but as a person sent by the Father and the Son who speaks what he hears within the Godhead as part of the divine counsel and as searcher of the "deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10). In so doing the Spirit will "glorify" Jesus, enabling Christians to see ever more clearly the centrality of His person and redeeming work.

The central thought of the text is that the Holy Spirit's work is absolutely necessary if people are to become and remain Christians. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would more fully experience the enlightenment of God's Holy Spirit with respect to sin and grace.

Introduction: We confess in the creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Without the Holy Ghost there would be no Christians. Only the Holy Ghost makes Christians and preserves them. If we want to remain Christians, we need to ask God to keep sending us the Holy Spirit. In our text Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to His disciples. The Holy Spirit came to them, and He has come to us. But He needs to keep on coming. And so we ask (TLH 225):

"Come, Holy Spirit, Come!"

- I. "Convince us of our sin."
 - A. It is not easy to be convinced of our sin. We are prone to excuse and to defend it.
 - B. It is even harder to be convinced that unbelief is the greatest sin (v 9). We tend to equate knowledge of Christ with faith in Christ.
 - C. The Holy Spirit by means of the Law warns us not to take sin lightly.
- II. "Then lead to Jesus' blood."
 - A. The Holy Spirit by means of the Gospel shows us the righteousness Jesus earned for us by His suffering and death (v 10).
 - B. Jesus' blood-bought righteousness makes us acceptable to God. Our own righteousness will not do.
- III. "Then to our wondering view reveal the mercies of our God."
 - A. What mercy God has shown in breaking Satan's tyranny (v 11)! Satan has been judged, his power destroyed. He cannot harm us.
 - B. What mercy to know more fully through the apostolic word the deep things of God (v 13)!
 - C. What mercy to have the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus so that the realities of His person and work are clear and vital! What matters is that by the power of the Holy Spirit we have Jesus and with Him, the Father.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Keep coming through Word and Sacraments. We need you.

GA

**ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 16:23-30
(MAY 20, 1979)**

"In that day" (v 23), in the period beginning at Christ's resurrection, the disciples would no longer put questions to Christ in the same way they had before because the illumination of the Spirit would make such questioning unnecessary. Furthermore, the disciples would comprehend more fully what it means to pray to

the Father in the name of Jesus. "Hitherto" (v 24), up to the present time, the disciples had not comprehended the fullness of the name of Jesus as an inducement and guarantee of proper prayer. Ask, continuously and habitually (present tense), and you will receive, with the result that your joy will be full. After Christ's resurrection the disciples would not only pray more confidently but understand Christ's words more clearly. While He was with them, Christ often spoke to them "in figures" (v 25). (See chapters 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 where there are numerous condensed utterances in which the words refer to higher things than their ordinary usage did.) Thereby Jesus intended to draw the disciples from their ordinary ideas to the heights of His thought and the mystery of His person. But the hour was coming, the climactic period following His revelation on Pentecost, when the Spirit would convey the meaning also of the parabolic sayings. "In that day" (v 26) the disciples will make petitions, not demands, of Christ, for now they will appreciate Christ's name as the divine equivalent of the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. In His name they have access to a heavenly Father. The purpose of Christ's ministry is to bring people by the power of the Spirit's revelation to the Father. There is no need for Christ to make a special prayer to the Father; from the beginning the Father had acted in love in planning salvation through His Son. Jesus' leaving the Father, coming into the world, and the returning to the Father prove the completeness of His sacrifice. Christ is the pledge of the Father's love for Him and for the disciples (v 27). There is no need for Jesus to ask something of the Father because His position as mediator establishes a continual appeal, a continual guarantee of our fellowship with the Father. What Christ says in verse 28 had been said by Him before, but the disciples had never seen it as a whole. The promise made in verse 25 seems already to be fulfilled (v 29). They sensed that Jesus again had known what was in their hearts and had answered their yearnings (v 30). When they had been afraid to ask Him concerning "the little while," He had discerned their yearning and responded to it. In a gush of faith the disciples were sure that Christ's whole ministry and revelation were of God. They had reason to believe in Him and to approach the Father in His name.

The central thought of the text is that we can approach the Father confidently in Jesus' name. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would pray more confidently.

Introduction: Some think prayer is a waste of time. If God does what He intends to do, why pray! Others regard prayer as a form of positive thinking, a psychologically helpful exercise. Many neglect prayer, even though they know God commands it and invites them to pray. They behave like the child who seldom speaks to his father, or is ashamed of him. In the text Jesus encourages us to pray. He tells us

We Can Confidently Approach the Heavenly Father

I. Because the Father loves us.

A. The proof of His love is in Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus came from the Father according to an eternal plan (v 28a).
2. He carried out the redemptive work the Father had stipulated and ascended to the Father again (v 28b).
3. Jesus' presence before God is a pledge of the love God had for us (v 26).

B. The Father's love for us is unique.

1. While God loves the world, he lavishes a special Fatherly love on those who believe in Jesus and love Him (v 27).
2. When we neglect to pray we despise the Father's love.
3. It makes no sense not to talk to a God who loves us despite our many failings, also in prayer.

His love is an inducement to pray. We can confidently approach the heavenly Father also because we know He hears us.

11. Because the Father hears us.

A. He always hears us when we come to Him in Jesus' name.

1. To pray in Jesus' name means to approach God directly in the confidence that He is our Father on account of Jesus.
2. The Holy Spirit makes known to us the fullness of that name by which we have the revelation of God (vs 25-26). It is prayer in Jesus' name that marks distinctly Christian prayer.
3. When we pray in Jesus' name we bring God greetings from His Son. We are so close to Jesus that God hears us just as He hears His own Son.

B. As He hears, He gives us what we ask (vs 23-24).

1. Before God, it is Jesus' name that counts.
 - a. Our sin often corrupts our prayers so that we ask selfishly and not in Jesus' name.
 - b. The Holy Spirit guides us to ask in Jesus' name, that is, according to what Jesus desires (Ro 8:26-27).
2. We do not receive everything we ask for at once, but we keep on receiving more understanding, patience, strength, and joy.

What an inducement to pray when we know that the Father hears us!

Let us never stop coming confidently to the heavenly Father. We can be sure that He loves us and that He hears us.

GA

EXAUDI, THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION:

JOHN 15:26-16:4

(MAY 27, 1979)

In the preceding verses (18-25), Jesus speaks of the hatred His own will experience from the world. Now (v 26) He promises the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, as a mighty aid in their conflict against the world's hatred. The Spirit whom Jesus will send from the side of the Father and who proceeds from the Father will bear witness of Jesus and thereby strengthen the disciples to be witnesses for Him.

This verse both the Western and Eastern Church have relied on for their doctrine concerning the procession of the Spirit. The Western Church thought that the whole truth concerning the divinity of the Son was concealed if the *filioque* phrase, "and the Son," were not added to the creed, thereby taking into account also Jn 14:26, "whom the Father will send in my name." Although the Greeks never limited their statement to "proceeding from the Father only," the denial of the *filioque* tends to make Spirit and Son coordinate and subordinate emanations of the Father and thus leads to monarchianism.

The power of the Holy Spirit will counteract the hatred in the world through the witness of the disciples. The disciples will witness to the great deeds of Christ and thereby make an impression on the world. Their experience with Christ from the beginning of His ministry will enable them to give a unique testimony. Jesus indicates in chapter 16:1 that what He had been saying to them about the hatred of the world and the comfort of the Paraclete was intended to prepare them for the bitter persecutions they would experience. As faithful Jews, the disciples at this time would not have expected to be ex-

communicated from the synagogue (v 2). Yet the fanaticism of the world's hatred was shown clearly in the persecution of Stephen. This kind of persecution could easily have destroyed their faith.

Jesus gives the reason (v 3) for the persecution, namely, that the world does not know the Father or Jesus. Jesus had not spoken to them so specifically before about persecution, because He Himself had been with them. It would have been premature to speak of the special help which would be given them by the Holy Spirit to endure.

The central thought of the text is that the Holy Spirit strengthens Christians to witness in a world that hates Christ's cause. The goal of the sermon is the hearers witness to Christ in all they do and say.

Introduction: One cannot be a believer in Christ without being a witness for Christ. If our witness lags, our faith is weak and love is cold. When witnessing ceases our Christianity is dead. Before leaving this world and ascending to heaven Jesus impressed upon His followers that they were to be witnesses. His words apply also to us.

You Also Are Witnesses

I. Witnessing is our calling.

- A. We have been called to bear witness to Christ ("He will bear witness of me, and you also are witnesses").
 1. Who He is and what He did.
 2. On the basis of our knowledge and experience of Christ.
 3. Always according to His Word.
- B. We can witness by the power of the Holy Spirit (v 26).
 1. We sometimes think we cannot witness because we experience in ourselves so much weakness, timidity, tiredness, and indifference.
 2. The Spirit of truth, proceeding from Father and Son, witnesses to us through the infallible writings of the prophets and apostles whose words He provided.
 3. When we use the Word and the Sacraments the Spirit draws us to Christ, establishes us in the truth, and renews us in God's image.

We can witness because the Spirit-filled Word is near us, in our heart and mouth (Ro 10:8).

C. We will witness.

1. Individually by confessing Christ with our mouth and testifying of Him with our actions.
2. Collectively as members of His Church.

II. Witnessing brings persecution.

- A. Persecution comes because the world does not know Christ (v 3).
 1. It is the proclamation of Christ in contrast to worldly perspectives, goals, and salvation schemes that causes the offense.
 2. Faithfulness to Christ's Word, the Scriptures, is not looked upon favorably by the world but is regarded as narrow dogmatism.
- B. Persecution takes different forms (v 2).
 1. It is almost unbelievable how Christians have been regarded as the scum of the earth (by the Jewish leaders in Christ's day and by Communist leaders in our day). That should not surprise us, for there is no foolishness people have not believed and no sin they have not regarded as a good work.
 2. Some of the bitterest persecution has been visited by one Christian group (at least in name) upon another.
 3. Even if persecution does not always take severe forms, the world has not changed. If you have sought to be an honest Christian

and have not suffered much, then thank God. He gives each Christian the cross that fits him.

C. Persecution grows or wanes in God's good time.

1. He controls things in ways that are best for us (vs 1-4).
2. He knows our weakness and strengthens us.
3. His help may not always come when we expect, but afterwards we see that He did more than we could ask or think.

There is no more satisfying life than that of a witness for Jesus Christ.

GA

WHITSUNDAY, THE FEAST OF PENTECOST: JOHN 14:23-31 (June 3, 1979)

The question asked by Judas (the Thaddaeus of Mk 3:18 and Mt 10:3) suggests a desire for a great display of power or glory to the world, a display dear to the Jewish heart (v 22). Jesus makes clear (v 23) that the Holy Spirit will manifest Christ only to those whose love is unfeigned. A necessary fruit of love for Jesus is the observance of His Word, which is also the word of the Father. This Word in its entirety, both Law and Gospel, must be kept inwardly in willing obedience of the heart and outwardly in fearless confession. Whoever is not willing to yield such obedience does not love Jesus.

Jesus will be manifested as one in essence with the Father. The Father and the Son will come together in the power of the Spirit and dwell within the believer. The hearts of the believers will become the temple in which the triune God dwells, as the temple in the Old Covenant was the house of God. Here Jesus speaks both of the union of the three persons of God and of the mystical union of God with those who have entered into a relationship of love and obedience to Him.

The Holy Spirit will clarify (v 26) past events and acts of Jesus' life which had been obscure. The disciples would be able to recall what Jesus did and said and would be able to state these truths clearly and objectively to the church. Thus the church for all time would be insured the necessary information and true discernment of matters pertaining to faith. The church has in the apostolic writings a reliable and adequate source of religious information. As the disciples waited for the gift of the Comforter, they would not, however, be without spiritual gifts. Jesus gives them peace (v 27), the peace God had made with mankind in Christ. This objective peace becomes a subjective peace when the Holy Spirit convinces us that God has been reconciled to us through the death and resurrection of Christ. Those who have this peace need not be troubled or afraid. The disciples should not be sorrowful but they should rejoice because Jesus is returning to the Father who is greater than He, insofar as Jesus is a human being. Yet Jesus is returning to the Father in order to receive, according to His human nature, the authority to govern the universe with divine power and majesty. Jesus has informed the disciples of all these truths in advance so that they would not lose courage when He would have to leave them. His departure would soon take place, for Satan, the prince of this world, was approaching with his underlings. Yet these enemies do not exercise power over Him. He went into death of His own free will, conscious of His innocence and in obedience to the Father whom He loved.

The central thought of the text is that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts upon believers. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would more fully appreciate the Spirit's gifts.

Introduction: The gift of tongues, being able to speak different languages,

which the apostles received on the first Pentecost was unusual. There were other unusual gifts which the Spirit bestowed on the apostles, such as the power to heal by command and to raise people from the dead. These gifts are not being given today. This does not mean, however, that the Spirit has ceased giving gifts. The text makes clear that the

The Spirit Gives Gifts to Believers

- I. He bestows peace.
 - A. A peace the world cannot give (v 27b).
 1. The world's peace is not based on anything permanent.
 2. The world's peace is often a feeling that passes.
 - B. A peace based on Christ's atonement.
 1. He conquered Satan, the disturber of our peace (v 30b).
 2. Now our relationship with God is right.
 3. Peace is a state of being rather than a feeling.
 - C. A peace which the Holy Spirit brings to our hearts when we believe the Gospel Word.
- II. He teaches truth.
 - A. By leading us into the Scriptures
 1. He enables us to distinguish true from false doctrine.
 2. He imparts no thought that disagrees with the Word. The prophetic and apostolic Word "comprises the whole truth which the Spirit makes known to us.
 - B. By bringing to our remembrance what Jesus has said.
 1. He wants most of all to have us center our existence in Christ.
 2. He comforts us and strengthens with the words of grace that Jesus spoke so that we will not be afraid (v 27a). What a teacher the Spirit is!
- III. He instills love.
 - A. Love for Jesus is shown by keeping His Word (v 23a).
 1. Confessing and teaching all of the inscripturated Word.
 2. Living in accordance with the Word.
 - B. When we love Jesus, God Himself lives in us (v 23b).
 1. It is an awesome truth that the great God Himself should be so united with us in love.
 2. There is security in knowing that God's love does not change. Now we can love God because He first loved us.

The Spirit is still giving gifts to Christians. Let us not despise these gifts or quench the Spirit. Let Him give them to us more fully.