

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

January 1977
Volume 41, Number 1

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Homiletical Studies

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT: LUKE 21:25-36

Advent is thought of by most Christians as a part of the Christmas cycle, leading to the Christmas celebration. Actually it alerts Christians to be prepared far more for Christ's second coming than for a celebration of His first coming. Only those fully prepared for His second coming can fully enjoy the celebration of Christmas. This text is, therefore, very appropriate for the First Sunday in Advent. It points out the need of another year of grace, the need of Christ's constant Advent into our hearts and lives.

Luke tells us that when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled there will be signs, terrible signs. These signs will usher in the last day and the Advent of Christ our Savior King. When he comes he will carry out the judgment of the world and receive his saints, the living and those raised from the dead, into heaven. This will be the completion of our redemption. The price was paid long ago. The enjoyment is still to be realized.

Christ is coming soon. This is the greatest Advent theme. To make it possible there had to be other Advents of our Lord: His coming in the flesh to die for the sins of the world and His coming through Word and Sacrament to impart the fruits of His redemption to all whom the Spirit brings to saving faith. Luke tells us, quoting Christ Himself, that it will be a terrible day for all who do not know Christ as Savior. It must be so. God will not be mocked. But lift up your heads, you saints of the Lord. The fire of judgment will leave us untouched. The cords that bind us now will fall from our hands and feet and we will walk all over God's heaven.

Only the saints will be there. Only those in Christ will be his saints. So take heed to yourselves. That is Christ's warning to each of us. We would never choose to leave Christ. No Christian can or will. But the devil, the world, and the evil flesh will lead many away from the saving faith as they have in the past. It could happen to any of us. But it will not happen if we keep on praying to God to keep us watchful. So stay sober in this happy season, stay close to Him who loves you most. Get the full joy of Christmas, known only to God's children. He came for us. He is coming again for each of us.

The Final Coming of Christ Our Savior

- I. No longer to seek and to save the lost.
 - A. He did that long ago.
 - B. Those lost when He comes again will taste His wrath forever.

- II. He will come to give us the full fruits of His redemption.
 - A. They are waiting for us now.
 - B. It is imperative that we also wait for them and for Him who will lead us to enjoy them.

The Signs of the Last Day Have A Message For Us

- I. They tell us that the days of grace will not go on forever.
 - A. We need this warning to put down the flesh within us.
 - B. We need this warning to make us true messengers to those who are in danger of the judgment.
- II. They tell us that Christ's promises will all be fulfilled.
 - A. His promise to free us from this evil world.
 - B. His promise to give us the full fruits of His redemption.

MJS

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT: LUKE 3:1-6

Lenski "credits" Luke with piling up the items in the first two verses of chapter 3 of his gospel solely for the purpose of dating, not, as some think, for the purpose of describing the political and the ecclesiastical situation that prevailed at this time. This, however, seems unreasonable. If dating had been his only concern, the reference to Tiberius Caesar would have been sufficient. Would a historian as great as Luke, the well-versed Gentile of the apostolic age, be satisfied with a mere dating of the beginning of Christ's ministry? Historians are among the greatest proponents of the thought that there are messages for us in the lives of those who have gone before us. Certainly you will then have something to say to your hearers about John the Baptist ministering to and preaching to people in the days of such persons as Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch and Annas and Caiaphas. We need only think of the effect of government on the lives of people today and the effect church leaders are having on people today. I would therefore consider it worthwhile to spend time studying what it was like to preach in the days of Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas, to mention only two. The message of John the Baptist is so clearly stated both by the prophets who foretold his coming and by the evangelists, that they require no comment here.

The Message of the Baptist Is Important For Our Day

- I. When, if ever, were there more roads leading away from God?
- II. When, if ever, did the church have a greater task to tear up the false roads and to build safe ones?

- III. When, if ever, will the message of salvation mean more to the people of our day than now?

All Flesh Shall See The Salvation of God

- I. It is not just the will of God that it should be so.
- II. God is still carrying out His plans to make it so.

It Is God's Voice You Are Hearing Today

- I. He is still calling us away from the sins of our times.
- II. He is still assuring us of His loving concern.
 - A. Concern for our faith in His Son.
 - B. Concern for a life that is "straight" and "smooth."

Are You Ready for the Word of Christ Your Lord?

- I. He wants to come to you with assurance of forgiveness and salvation. Are you always ready to listen?
- II. Do you not first need the Baptist's cry to make it important for you?

Note that in this last outline the gospel seems to precede the law. Actually, however, the *truth* of the gospel would be presented in Part I and the *application* of both law and gospel to the individual would follow in II, where the gospel would become more meaningful to us in the light of our need of it. That is the way Luther put it: "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature."

MJS

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT: LUKE 3:7-18

The days of fire and brimstone preaching are past. Is that true? Do you ever think of yourself as a fire and brimstone preacher? Do you ever wish you could lay the sins of people on their conscience as did John the Baptist? It is important, of course, to ask ourselves how our congregations today compare with John's audience. In the days of Annas and Caiaphas you would not expect too many to have had the true knowledge of salvation. For the most part, they were a generation of vipers, as John described them. His preaching had an effect on thousands, but it left tens of thousands untouched. Christ later came unto His own and they did not receive Him.

It is quite different for most Lutheran pastors. Our congregations are composed of those who have received Christ. They have been warned to flee from the wrath to come. They have been invited by Christ to come to Him. Outwardly, at least, they have all come. As we address them, we certainly will not call them a generation of vipers. Yet we must urge them to search their hearts and minds and lives for any evidence of hypocrisy or lukewarmness. Many will boast of having been Lutherans all their

lives. Just as many will not be clear about the need to show in their lives that they have the true saving faith. Many are not sure whether Christ will call them wheat or chaff when He purges His threshing floor. There is need then for an honest appraisal of those who "come forth" today when the Word is preached. The call to repentance should not be neglected. Clear direction must still be given regarding the life that is pleasing to God. Here it is important for the preacher to remember that he has been baptized with the Holy Ghost, who enables him to speak for Christ, not with fleshly anger against people, but with loving concern for all, and that means for each one.

Are You Convinced?

- I. Convinced of your sins?
- II. Convinced that you need to be reminded of your sins?
- III. Convinced that your life is being judged by God?
- IV. Convinced that Christ alone can save you?
- V. Convinced that you will be gathered with the saints on Christ's great harvest day?

Note to the preacher: As you develop each question in turn, be sure to direct your hearers to the Holy Spirit who will enable them to give an honest answer.

TRUE Repentance WILL Show Up In Our Lives

- I. In our willingness to admit that we are sinners.
- II. In our unflinching stand with Christ.
- III. In works that will give evidence that we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

MJS

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT: LUKE 1:39-45

On this Sunday before Christmas, our people have the right to expect us to leave the Advent themes dealing with Christ's second coming and to speak a clear word about His first coming to earth. We all need help with our Christmas preparations. As Christians we want to celebrate the birthday of our Savior as His birthday ought to be celebrated. For this purpose our text takes us to the hill country of southern Palestine, where Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, broke forth in a pre-Christmas hymn of praise that was exactly what Mary, the mother of Jesus, needed and may be exactly what we need today—the assurance of God the Holy Spirit that all that had happened and was to happen to Mary was planned by God Himself.

Mary needed this assurance. At this point in time, Joseph had not yet become aware of Mary's pregnancy. She could not talk to

him about it. He had not yet been instructed by the angel to take her to his home to be his wife. She, of course, trusted the word of the angel. She also knew from the first - a not uncommon thing even for a normal conception - that she was pregnant. But what about other people? How would they find out? She just had to talk to someone. And the Lord directed her to the right person.

The angel who had announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of the Christ also told her about her cousin Elizabeth, already six months pregnant, with the son that would become the forerunner of Christ. Mary, taking the hint that the angel seemed to have given her, proceeded at once to the hill country where Elizabeth lived, and there her need of the moment was fully supplied, and that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is the point I would stress in preaching on this text. The Holy Spirit is our guide and counselor who has the answer to our every question, the solution to our every problem.

If you or your people have problems with anything in connection with the first Christmas, or with your preparation for a God-pleasing celebration of Christ's birth, with the virgin birth, with the honor bestowed on Mary - so often lacking among Lutherans because of an over-reaction to Roman theology - the Holy Spirit will hear and answer your prayer. He will do that also for your hearers if you direct them to Him for guidance and help.

Even The Most Faithful Children of God Need the Guidance of His Spirit

- I. Mary, honored to be the mother of Christ, received His guidance and help, as did Elizabeth, the mother of Christ's forerunner.
- II. Learn, then, that in Him there is an answer to your questions, a solution for your problems.
- III. Listen especially as He speaks to you of Christ your Savior.

Christmas Joys Are For Sharing

- I. What a privilege it was for Mary to seek out her cousin Elizabeth in her joy at the coming of the birth of Christ.
- II. God is showing us through such narratives that we also have joys to share.
 - A. The joy that we have in knowing Christ as our Savior.
 - B. The joy that we have when celebrating His birthday as only Christians can.
 - C. The joy we have that God uses people like ourselves to carry out His wonderful works.

MJS

CHRISTMAS DAY: John 1: 1-18

Vs 1-5 a profound statement regarding the Person of Christ. "The Word" (v 1): Jesus is one with the very being and mind of God and also the expression of the intelligence, will, and power of God. His person is identified with God. His office is to reveal God. Eternity, personality, and deity of Christ affirmed. "Darkness" (v 4): men unable by their own reason or strength to understand Christ. John called "a man" (v 6) to contrast him to Christ who is God. "Children" (v 12) is distinct from term "sons" more commonly used by Paul. Latter suggests position and legal rights secured by adoption; former indicates likeness, nature, life, resulting from birth. Believers "born" (v 13) by the supernatural exercise of divine power. Christian life imparted by Spirit of God. "Only begotten" (v 18) is absolutely distinct from those who are called the "children of God" by faith in Him.

The text stresses the reality of the incarnation. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would grasp more fully the implications of God becoming a man. Introductory thought: Celebrating a unique birthday today. Without Jesus' birth, no birthday could give promise of future good. Text gives the reason for the joy to all men of which the angels sang.

THE WORD BECAME FLESH**I. What a profound mystery!****A. Jesus is God (vs 1-2).**

1. Not merely in God or an emanation from God.
2. One who reveals God so that no one can know God except through Jesus (v 18).

B. Jesus is the Creator (v 3).

1. His wisdom and might displayed: in the depths of the seas, in the heights of outer space, in the way in which we hear and see and think.
2. He is Lord of the universe.

C. Yet Jesus is also a man (v 14).

1. A helpless infant who developed and grew up in human fashion.
2. A friend of sinners who was numbered with the transgressors. Confronted with temptations, acquainted with sorrow. He suffered and died. He became like us, except that he was without sin. Partook of our humanity in the fullest sense. A mystery indeed: The Word became flesh.

Through this Word become flesh God has

something of eternal import to say to us. Here in the incarnation is God's own testimony.

II. What a unique testimony!

A. God uses men to bring His testimony to the world.

1. He used John the Baptist (vs 6-8).
 - a. John was a fine witness.
 - b. But many nevertheless rejected his testimony (vs 9-11).
2. Today God uses pastors as well as lay Christians.
3. Are our ears open to God's testimony?

B. The testimony is that Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth.

1. Full of grace toward you—you can leave with Him your sins and burdens.
2. Full of truth toward you—in a deceitful world you can still rely on Him.

C. God enables us to receive the testimony.

1. No man can receive it by his own powers (vs 5a,10).
2. The Spirit creates faith through the testimony concerning Jesus (vs 9,13).
3. To believe in Jesus is to be born of God.

Concluding thought: Nothing more unique than the Word becoming flesh, for in the assuming of our humanity by the Son of God we see a mighty wonder and receive a saving testimony. Our birthday was the prelude to our rebirth in baptism through which we have the joy of salvation. That joy is a reality because the Word became flesh.

GA

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: LUKE 2:25-38

When dealing with a lengthy text like this one, try looking at the whole text from a distance, as you would do if you tried to get a picture of a towering mountain or a castle by the sea. With such an approach you could not do justice to each verse of the text in turn. The sermon would become a rambling homily if you were to speak in turn of the baby Jesus, His mother Mary, the aged (?) Simeon, and the aged (!) Anna. On the other hand, to break up the text, dealing only with verses 25-32 or 29-32, would result in a loss of important truths: the blessing of Joseph and Mary, the message of Simeon, the service of love of Anna.

Imagine yourself in the temple that day, inspired by the common faith of all that are mentioned in the text. We share that faith today. Note the different ways in which these people served the Lord according to the grace given to them by the Lord. He still imparts His grace to us today to serve Him in one or many ways. The text clearly demonstrates that Christ was born under

the Law to redeem us who were under the Law; that His redemption which is for all will not save all; but that He is set for the rising of many (the text shows at least a few) who will enjoy abiding peace through Him. On this Sunday after Christmas you will want to show your people what Christmas can mean to them for their daily lives — what it certainly does mean to most of them, though they may not be aware of it.

**THANK GOD, OUR EYES HAVE SEEN
HIS SALVATION**

- I. We were enlightened by the Spirit to see it.
- II. We have pressed the Savior to our hearts.
- III. We can pass on to others what we have experienced ourselves.
- IV. We can look for a peaceful departure from this life to join the saints who have gone before us.

MJS

**THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS:
JOHN 1:1-18**

Here at the beginning of his gospel John tells us what Jesus meant to him and what he can mean to us. He uses comparisons. John points to the best, the greatest of mere men, among whom he also has a rightful place, and gives full recognition to what they accomplished with power from on high. Then he puts Christ alongside of them and shows Him towering over them as the Himalayas would tower over the Mount of Olives. Note how ably John introduces each of these men. First there was a man sent from God whose name was John. He was the forerunner of the Christ. Secondly he alludes to himself, who, in the company of others, beheld Christ's glory, as he did especially on the Mount of Transfiguration. Then John the Baptist comes in again. Finally, Moses, the great lawgiver. These were great men. Jesus Himself said of the Baptist that he was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. John, the Evangelist, speaks of himself as the one whom Jesus loved. Moses, long ago, had said that the Lord would raise up a prophet like unto him.

Yet great as these men were, the Lord was far greater than any. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, but said of Christ, "I am not worthy to untie his sandals." The evangelist John gives us the reason. Christ *was* in the beginning. He created the world. As Creator, he also made

Moses and John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, the writer of our text. Moreover, in Him was life and the life was the light of men. Whoever heard Moses was actually hearing the Word, the Son of God. He also enlightened John the Baptist for his work through His Holy Spirit. He prepared John the Evangelist for his important work. He is truly the greatest. That is why even unbelievers, in a measure at least, observe His birthday. That is why Christians teach their children to think of Christmas as Jesus' birthday. He is the greatest.

**OF CHRIST'S FULLNESS WE HAVE RECEIVED
AND MUST EVER RECEIVE**

- I. He gives us His truth.
 - A. Which He was able to give because He was with the Father from the beginning
 - B. Which our human powers, without His help, would never be able to grasp
 - C. Which clearly portrays the life we can live in Him
- II. He gives us His grace.
 - A. Moses helps us to see our need of it.
 - B. John the Baptist preached repentance that we might see the greatness of Christ.
 - C. That will be our message until the end of time.

**DO NOT BLAME OTHERS IF YOU CANNOT CLEARLY
SEE YOUR LOVING GOD**

- I. The enemies of the truth are there to try to hide him from your view.
 - A. Darkness is all about us in the world.
 - B. Most men have not yet come to Christ.
 - C. The devil will do his best to try to draw you away.
- II. But Christ is greater than any power of darkness.
 - A. He is Himself the light.
 - B. He has revealed God from the beginning of time, having been with God.
 - C. His message shines bright and clear.
 - D. Keep your eyes on Christ the light and no one can lead you into darkness again.

**THE TRUE GLORY OF THE SAVIOR WHOSE BIRTH
WE CELEBRATE**

- I. He is the only begotten Son of God.
 - A. Moses pointed to His glory long ago.
 - B. John the Baptist showed his greatness in comparison with Himself.

C. John, the one whom Jesus loved, is a eye-witness of His glory.

II. He is the everlasting fountain of the love of God.

A. He has brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

B. In that marvelous light we see God.

1. Not full of wrath toward us, as we would deserve.

2. But full of forgiving love in His Son.

3. Giving us all of the blessings which He has created for us.

MJS

EPIPHANY—MATTHEW 2:1-11

The story of the coming of the magi is both fulfillment of prophecy and itself a prophecy. Both Matthew here and Paul (Ro. 15:9-13) cite prophecies touching the coming of the Gentile nations to the Christ. There was a widespread consciousness throughout the then known world that some day in Israel there would appear a great leader called the Messiah. The magi undoubtedly drew on this knowledge when, through the agency of a star which God had caused to shine, they came seeking Him who was born King of the Jews. The faulty messianic expectations of the Jewish people is nowhere better illustrated than in the indifference indicated at his birth and the hostility generated both in Herod and in the whole of Jerusalem at its revelation. Israel remains indifferent to her King and rejects him. The good news of his reign goes to the Gentiles. In this latter point the magi's coming becomes itself a prophecy. For in this coming there is sign and symbol of the world conquest of the Christ (Is. 60:3).

It is apparent that the nature of the Messiah's kingdom and reign was at variance with commonly held opinion, even though the prophecy describing the nature of Christ's reign was described by Micah. He is described by the use of the words "govern" and "ruler." The term "govern" is literally "to be shepherd." The word involves the whole office of the shepherd - guiding, guarding, folding, as well as feeding. It was often applied to the guides and guardians of others. It was applied to himself by Jesus (Jo. 10:11) and to the Christ by others (1 Pet. 2:4-5; 1 Pet. 5:4; He. 13:20; Re. 7:17). So also the term "ruler" is in harmony with the idea of shepherding, since it originally meant one who "goes before" or "leads the way" and suggests Christ's word about the Good Shepherd in John 10:3, 4. This he does for God's people (genitive of possession), the people whom God has chosen for himself, selected and made peculiarly his own.

The gifts, three in number, have no bearing on the number of magi. Their number remains unknown to us. The nature of the gifts does, however, point to the office and ministry of Jesus: "gold" for a king; "frankincense" for a priest; "myrrh" for one who is about to die. It is foretold that he is to be the true king, the perfect high priest, and in the end the Saviour of men. It is implied, if nowhere expressed, that it was in this wise that the magi accepted Jesus the Christ. The king to whom they were led was indeed their "Saviour-King." This relationship with God is indicated also in the use of the word translated "being warned." In the active it means "to give response to one who asks or consults"—hence in the passive, as here, "to receive an answer." The word therefore implies that the magi had sought counsel of God. Responsive to His will, they returned home another way.

GOD LEADS THE GENTILES TO THE SHEPHERD-KING

In the leading of the magi God demonstrates the sincerity of his promise that he would have all men to be saved. We rejoice in the visit of the magi to Christ, for by it God enables all mankind to be included as "the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand."

I. God Leads the Gentiles

A. He led the magi.

1. They shared a common expectancy.
2. In faith they "knew" when they saw the star.
3. They came seeking Christ to pay homage.

B. In them God keeps his promises to us.

1. All nations shall come to God's light (Is. 60:3).
2. In Him shall all the Gentiles hope (Ro. 15:12).
3. He is a light to lighten the Gentiles (Lk. 2:32).

II. To their Shepherd-King

A. He who rules and governs

1. As shepherd - guiding, guarding, folding, feeding (v. 6)
2. As ruler, one who "leads the way" (v. 6)
3. To a people God has chosen for Himself (v. 6)

B. He who lays down His life

1. As the true King
2. As the perfect high priest
3. As the Saviour of men

C. He who enables a response of faith and obedience

1. By the magi
2. By us in the totality of life

NHM

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY:

LUKE 3:15-17 and 21-22

The approximately eighteen years of silence had left Jesus shrouded in anonymity. The people's Messianic expectancy as it began to take focus on John had to be directed away from himself and toward Christ. John confesses, "He is even now engaged in coming" (v 16). Although still unknown to him, John proclaimed the Messiah's presence in Palestine at the very time of his preaching. Declaring himself unworthy in contrast with the Messiah's surpassing dignity to render him the humblest service, John pictures the Messiah both as bestower of the greatest blessings and as the great judge (v 16,17). The Christ will baptize with "the Holy Spirit and with fire" (v 16). Some see in this verse a reference to the Pentecost miracle. Others interpret these words as saying that the Messiah will bestow the Holy Spirit in baptism and otherwise on all those who receive His message, but to those who refuse to accept it He will come with the fire of judgement, punishing them in hell. In view of v. 17 preference is here given to the latter view. The *en* is construed as an "instrumental dative"; thus, baptism is spoken of as a means of grace inasmuch as in it the Holy Spirit is bestowed. Reference to Christ's role of judge is expressed by John (v 17). He will on the last day separate the believers from the unbelievers. The latter are cast into the place of judgement. The "unquenchable" has the force of "everlasting."

Jesus underwent baptism not out of personal need, for He was the sinless son of God, but rather as the fulfillment of all righteousness, and as our substitute to fulfill the law for us. "You are my beloved son," a reference drawn from Psalm 2:7, has always been accepted as a description of the Messianic King. "In whom I am well pleased" is part of Isaiah 42:1 and part of the description of the Servant of the Lord whose portrait culminates in the sufferings of Isaiah 53. Therefore, in His baptism Jesus is proclaimed the Messiah, God's anointed King, and secondly sets His feet firmly on the path of suffering that leads to the cross. By the visible appearance of the Holy Spirit it was made evident that Jesus was being anointed and thus made ready for the beginning of his holy ministry. He is the one upon whom the Spirit would rest. With the descent of the Holy Spirit Jesus was singled out as that promised Messiah upon whom the fullness of God's Spirit would be poured (Isa. 61:1).

A REMARKABLE CONFESSION RECEIVES
DIVINE ATTESTATION

Introduction: We are urged to make a good confession of Jesus Christ. What does this involve and how do we best express it?

- I. John's Confession of Christ
 - A. Indicates true understanding
 - 1. Of self
 - 2. Of the human condition
 - B. Acknowledges Jesus
 - 1. As Messiah-King
 - 2. As judge
 - C. Directs people away from self to Jesus
- II. Receives Divine Attestation
 - A. From the Father
 - 1. "My beloved son" (Ps. 2:7)
 - 2. "In whom I am well pleased" (Is. 42:1).
 - 3. God's anointed King sets His feet firmly on the path to the cross
 - B. From the Holy Spirit
 - 1. The visible manifestation
 - 2. The fulfillment of promise (Is. 61:1).
- III. Reminds Us That God Awaits our Confession in Word and Life

NHM

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: JOHN 2:1-22

There is speculation and even tradition which suggests that the wedding to which Mary, Jesus, and his disciples were invited was that of John the apostle whose mother Salome was Mary's sister. This may account, at least in part, for her authority over the servants. We can picture the great source of embarrassment it would be to the young couple to have provisions run out. Given the importance of wine to a wedding feast—the rabbis said, "Without wine there is no joy" — a potential heartache was in the making when the wine failed. Mary came to Jesus and reported that "they had no wine." Something more than an appeal by Mary to Christ's resourcefulness is indicated here; since Jesus for the first time had gathered disciples around him, Mary may well have thought that the time had come for Him to show Himself for what she knew Him to be (cf. Lk. 2:19). In the ensuing dialogue our Lord may appear as a somewhat less than a loving, respectful son. But His word of address, "woman," implies no severity or disrespect (cf. Jo. 20:13, 15). It was a highly respectful and affectionate word of address for which there is no adequate equivalent in English. Yet, at the same time, that Jesus addressed Mary as "woman" rather than "mother," as would be normal, indicates that the time had passed for the exercise of any maternal authority on her part. Then, though in a gentle and affectionate manner, Jesus rejected Mary's interference: "what is

there to me and to you." Yet this commonly used phrase is always suggestive of diversity in opinion or in interest. It does not always imply reproach, but it may suggest it, depending on the tone or mode of expression. Here it seems to be a gentle suggestion of misunderstanding; Jesus implied, "I shall see to that; it would be better that you should leave it to me." As to the phrase, "Mine hour has not yet come," in every case the coming of the hour indicates some crisis in the personal life of our Lord. Although more commonly it is His passion, here it is the hour of His Messianic manifestation. Mary's instruction to the servants indicated her certainty that Jesus would intervene. "When men have drunk freely" is a weak translation; the word in the original means "to be drunk." In every instance of its use in the New Testament the word refers to "intoxication." The ruler of the feast, one of the guests elected to preside at the banquet, means that when the palates of the guests have become less sensitive through indulgence, an inferior quality of wine is generally offered.

The changing the water into wine was essentially a sign, a mark of the doer's power, grace, and divine character. Thus, it corresponds perfectly to the words "manifested His glory"; it was an epiphany of our Lord in the truest sense.

LORD TEACH US TO PRAY

Introduction: In Christ God is our Father and we His children. Because He has answered our most basic needs, we instinctively turn to Him in time of need. Yet we often need to pray, "Lord teach us to pray."

- I. For We Often Pray in Ignorance
 - A. We do not know what to pray for.
 1. Mary did not understand (v 4).
 2. We do not know what our true needs are.
 3. God helps us in our weakness (Ro. 8:26ff).
 - B. We do not realize the implications of our prayers.
 1. "Thy will be done" is a most difficult prayer.
 2. We are often unwilling to make the changes necessary required by what we request.
- II. So That We Can Cope With God's Seeming Rejection and Silence
 - A. Jesus seeming rejection
 1. Of Mary's request (v 3), a simple statement of need
 2. Of our petitions—"I've prayed and prayed and don't seem to get an answer."
 - B. The Silence of God when He seems so remote
 - C. The Fallacy of our prayers — we insist on prescribing the answer.

- III. So That We May Realize That Our Prayers Will Be Answered and Our Faith Vindicated
- A. Mary left it in the hands of Jesus (v 5).
 - B. God in His own time and in His own good way will answer our prayers.
 - 1. He knows our needs.
 - 2. He will not withhold from us any good things.
 - C. All this finds focus in the cross (Ro. 8:3,2).

NHM

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: LUKE 4:14-21

In the power of the Holy Spirit poured out upon Him at His baptism Jesus begins his ministry. By word and act Jesus demonstrates that God indeed has intervened in our world, wresting control of man and his destiny from the grip of Satan. It was on the Sabbath that Jesus arrived in Nazareth. In accord with His regular practice He went to the synagogue. This was the first of two visits that Jesus made to Nazareth (*cf.* Mt. 13:55 and Mk. 6:1). Customarily the synagogue worship was divided into three main parts: In the worship part prayers were offered. The reading of the Scriptures consisted in lessons from the Law, usually read verse by verse by seven persons and lessons from the prophets read three verses at a time. The teaching part was the third part of the service. On this occasion Jesus was both reader and preacher. We do not know whether or not the selection that Jesus read and which formed the basis of His sermon was the pericope for that day. In any event, the quotation from Isaiah is a beautiful Messianic prophecy. Jesus speaks of His endowment and of the purpose for which He came. "Because" He was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, He is filled with the Spirit and thus set apart for His holy office. Indeed, the ancient synagogue regarded Isaiah 61:1, 2 as one of three passages in which the mention of the Holy Spirit was connected with the promised Messiah. "To the pure" (those in utter spiritual destitution, that consciousness which precedes the entrance into the kingdom of God and which cannot be relieved by one's own efforts, but only by the free mercy of God) He preaches the good news of that free mercy. "To the prisoner" (properly, to the prisoners of war [*cf.* Is. 42:7], to Israel both as captive and as exile, as prisoners of Satan's spiritual bondage) He proclaims release. "To the oppressed" (literally to those "broken in pieces" [*cf.* Is. 42:3]) He proclaims freedom. To one and all in spiritual bondage, blindness, poverty, oppression He announces the advent of that era in human history which God looks upon with favor and in which He grants His blessings in

abundance, when salvation and the free favor of God abound. It is the first day of the "year" of Jubilee, a fixed period of time wherein throughout the whole land liberty is proclaimed.

GOD'S NEW YEAR OF JUBILEE

- I. In the Person of His Son Jesus Christ
 - A. Upon whom the Spirit of the Lord was (v 18)
 - B. Who at His baptism was set apart and endowed for His work in ministry (Lk. 3:21-22)
 - C. Who was sent by God in fulfillment of promise (Is. 61:1 ff)
 - D. Who came with power and compassion
 1. The power and compassion of His healing signs (v 23)
 2. The power and compassion of His atoning death and resurrection
- II. God Heralds the Dawn of the New Year of Jubilee (Lv. 25:8-17).
 - A. It is the acceptable time of the Lord (v 19).
 1. The year of Jubilee (Lv. 25:8-17)
 2. A fixed time — Incarnation to the Second Coming
 - B. In it God's grace and love abound (v 18).
 1. To the poor He proclaims the good news, God's free mercy.
 2. To the "prisoner of war" He proclaims release.
 3. To the oppressed He proclaims freedom.
 - C. It is fulfilled today in your hearing (v 21).
 1. All finds focus in Jesus Christ.
 2. It is the day of opportunity for us.
 3. Rejoice in our "year of Jubilee."

NHM

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: LUKE 4:21-30

The visit to Nazareth was in many respects decisive. It foreshadowed the ultimate rejection of the Christ by His own people: "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Jesus' fellow-townsmen had received word that Jesus was truly a remarkable preacher. When they "marveled at the words of grace," they bore witness to the fact that this report was true. These words of grace possessed that property which caused them to give joy to the hearers. The enthusiasm of the crowd, however, waned quickly. Rather than hearing the word, they became more concerned with the pedigree of the preacher. Instead of believing that He was the Messiah and that now He was fully fulfilling the promises touching the Messiah which God had given His people, they manifested an attitude of skepticism. They demanded that

Jesus furnish proof. Anybody who makes claims must be able to back up those claims. They demanded a performance of the same great deeds of which they gained report from other places (v. 22, 23).

The antagonism of the Nazarenes was aroused when Jesus, through the relating of two incidents from the Old Testament, indicated to them that belonging to Israel is no sure sign of divine favor. In spite of a person's physical connection with Israel, he may be lost. Not those who were "their own," but those who were most receptive in faith, not Israel, but Gentiles—were those favored by the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. If the people of Nazareth did not accept Christ, they would likewise be rejected. This point stung them so severely that they tried to take his life. His passing unharmed through their midst was a manifestation of His diety. Their attempt does, however, point to His ultimate rejection, persecution, and death.

NAZARENES OLD AND NEW

Modern man considers himself different. He is more sophisticated. Yet the reaction of the Nazarenes to Jesus is typical of how modern man also receives the witness of Jesus Christ. All of us, to one degree or another, fall under the same indictment.

I. They show Shallow Enthusiasm.

A. Jesus' coming is met with enthusiasm (v. 22).

B. The enthusiasm shifts to skepticism (v. 22).

II. They Demand Proof.

A. People then and now demand signs and wonders (v. 23).

B. They place more reliance on their own senses than on the Word of God.

III. Receive Ultimate Rejection.

A. They reject Christ (v. 28).

1. Become angry.

2. Try to do away with him.

B. They forfeit the chance for life.

1. As their ancestors before them (v. 25).

2. As all those who shift their reliance to any but the Christ of God.

NHM

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: LUKE 5:1-11

The call of Peter and the others came after the open break with and the initial persecution by the Jewish authorities. In spite of the reaction by their leaders to the ministry of Jesus, the people in ever increasing numbers went out to hear Him. The press of the

crowd was such that Jesus stepped into a fishing boat and had Peter launch out from the shore and from the boat continued His teaching. Even though it was contrary to all that he knew, drawn from a lifetime of fishing experience, Peter followed the instructions of Jesus to go out to the deep water in the heat of the day and drop down his nets. The miraculous draught of fish ensued. The nets began to break. Help was summoned and both vessels began to sink. Amazement encompassed Peter. In response to his request that Christ depart from him because of his sinfulness, Jesus spoke the great "Fear not" and summoned Peter to follow Him to become one who was to "catch men" or "take men alive." The disciple of Jesus Christ is characterized as one who takes men alive, out of the power of Satan, to be preserved for doing the will of God. The call required abandonment of former occupations and, indeed, of all earthly ties. Nevertheless, Peter and the other forsook all and followed Him.

PETER'S "YES" TO JESUS' SUMMONS TO DISCIPLESHIP

The summons to discipleship is ever and always a summons to faith and to labor in the Lord. Faith establishes that new relationship that exhibits itself in our willingness to commit all that we are and have to the service of our Lord. The highest service is the catching of men alive for the kingdom.

I. Peter's "Yes" to the Summons to Faith

A. In his obedience to Christ's directives (v. 5)

1. The seemingly inappropriate time
2. The seemingly inappropriate place
3. Peter's "nevertheless"

B. In his realization that Jesus was the Divine Messiah (v. 8)

1. Peter was confident that a great work had been performed.
2. Peter acknowledged his own sinfulness and unworthiness.
3. Peter saw Jesus as the Messiah sent from God (Jo. 1:41).

II. Peter's "Yes" to the Summons to Labor

A. In his forsaking all (v. 11)

1. The abandonment of all that he had
2. The severing of earthly ties

B. To Follow Jesus (v. 11)

1. What had been temporary now was to become constant.
2. He acted in the face of the mounting opposition and persecution of Jesus.

C. To Catch Men Alive (v. 10)

1. He was still to be a fisherman,
2. But with a difference—He was to catch men alive (2 Tim. 2:26).

III. The Lord Awaits our Response to the Same Summons to Discipleship.

NHM

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: LUKE 6:17-26

Vv. 17-19: The popularity of Jesus had reached its height. Throngs came from Jordan and Tyre and Sidon. Mt. 4:25 adds Galilee, Decapolis, and the region beyond Jordan. Christ performed many miracles and power kept going out of Him. The Sermon on the Mount was spoken from a plateau in the mountains between the horns of Hattin in Galilee. V.20: The theme of the sermon is the blessedness of the children of the kingdom. "Blessed" reflects Psalm 1. "Oh, the blessedness of the man who is poor." Mt. adds "in spirit." "The poor," "the hungry," and "the weeping" all describe the penitent sinner. "The kingdom of God" is the gracious rule of God in the heart, bringing the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. V.21 (Mt. 5:6): The hungry are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Note the durative present: "are hungering." The hungry shall be filled with the righteousness of Christ. The weeping shall laugh for joy in the Redeemer. V.22: Because of their allegiance to Christ, they would be separated from the Jewish synagogues, reviled, and rejected for bearing the name of Christian (cf. Ac. 11:26; 24:15). V.23: The reward is always one of grace, Mt. 19:29. Prophets were persecuted, 1 Kgs. 19:14; Mt. 19:29. V. 24: The rich, the full, and the laughing ones are impenitent sinners who feel no need for God's grace. The rich have now the only consolation they shall have. V.25: The full shall experience hunger and the laughing ones shall weep in the judgment of God. V.26: The world loves its own. Cf. 1 Kgs. 18:19; Jer. 5:31.

Introduction: Happiness eludes so many people. Many look for it in the wrong places. Some despair of finding it.

GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR HAPPINESS

I. Know Yourself.

A. Children of the world described

1. Rich: they feel they lack nothing. The Pharisee, Lk. 5:31; the rich young ruler, Mt. 19:20.
2. Full of their own imagined righteousness, Lk. 5:31; Mt. 9:13.
3. Laughing, Ps. 73.
4. Spoken well of by all men—the world loves its own.

B. Children of Christ's kingdom described

1. Poor in spirit: Ps. 32:51
2. Hungry after a righteousness which they do not have: Luther; the dying thief; the prodigal son.
3. Weeping: Peter, Mt. 26:75.
4. Bearing cross, Mt. 23:34. 37; Ac. 4; 7; 12:1-2

The road to happiness begins with unhappiness over ourselves and our waywardness. The Law condemns us all. In its mirror we

are daily to see our sin and to turn to God in repentance. God responds in grace, Is. 66:2; Ps. 51:17; 1 Jn. 1:9.

II. Know God's Grace

A. Unbelievers do not find it.

1. The rich become paupers: Dives, Lk. 16:23.
2. The full end hungry, Mt. 19:20.
3. Those who laugh now weep and mourn. Mt. 8:12.
4. Those who deny Christ are denied, Mt. 10:34.

B. Children of the kingdom know God's grace.

1. The poor have the riches of the kingdom, Lk. 12:32
2. The hungry are filled with the righteousness of Christ.
 - a. Christ won righteousness for all, Is. 53.
 - b. God gives righteousness to all who believe, Ro. 4:5; 3:21-22; 4:16; Gal 2:16.
3. Those who weep shall laugh, Ps. 126:5; Mt. 25:21; Is. 61:2-3; Jn 15:11; 1 Jn. 1:4.
4. Those who bear the cross shall be glorified, Ps. 17:15; Mt. 10:32; 1 Cor. 15:49; 1 Pt. 1:3-5.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." God's grace turns your poverty into riches, your hunger into satisfaction, your weeping into laughter, your suffering into a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

HJE

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY:

LUKE 6:27-38

This text accents the idea that the lives of the children of the Kingdom should shine with distinctive love. Vv. 27-28: The imperatives here are all in the durative present tense: "Keep on loving," etc. The demands overturn all popular notions. V. 29: Behind this verse is the law of criminal justice: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19ff.). The Pharisees concluded that this principle could be applied also in private morality. Jesus enunciates the principle: Rather suffer injustice than to take justice into your own hands. If applied carelessly, these words would only encourage the ruffian and the thief. The cloak is the outer garment; the coat, the inner. V. 30: Indiscriminate giving would foster shiftlessness. However, it is better to suffer in body and goods than to let passions rule. V. 31 is the Golden Rule. Vv. 32-34: These verses inveigh against popular selfish morality. V. 35: Love does not make us children of the Highest, but it does demonstrate that we are such. V. 36: Here is the principle found already in the covenant of the Old Testament V. 37: Jesus says: "Do not pass judgement without sufficient evidence. Do not condemn by voicing your judgment to others. Rather, forgive." V. 38: "Your bosom": the loose part of the Oriental garment just above the belt. "It shall be measured to

you again”: This is both judgment and mercy — judgment against the niggardly, grace to the generous.

Introduction: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.” It is impossible for us to attain to God’s perfection, but we should strive to be imitators of God, Eph. 5:1. Furthermore, the mercy of God we experience ought to motivate us to practice mercy.

BE MERCIFUL AS OUR FATHER IS MERCIFUL

I. Love Your Enemies

A. That is what God does.

1. Mankind is at enmity with God because of sin, Ro. 8:7.
2. This world God loved in Christ, Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:19.

B. Like God, we are to love our enemies.

1. Popular attitudes
 - a. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, Ro. 12:19.
 - b. Love those who love you, V. 32.
2. Jesus’ ethic: Love as God loves.
 - a. Do good to those who hate you, Lk 10:30ff; Pr. 25:21-22; Rom 12: 20-21.
 - b. Bless them that curse you, 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Pt. 2:23.
 - c. Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, Ac. 7:60; Lk. 23:34.
 - d. Rather suffer wrong than do wrong, v.29; Is. 53:7.
3. Then you will show yourselves to be children of the Highest, v. 35; Eph. 5:1; Jn. 15:9.

II. Give

A. God gives liberally to all, Ja. 1:17; Ps 103; 65:11; Mt 5:4-5; Explanation to First Article.

B. Be like God in your giving.

1. Do not give selfishly, V. 34; Mt. 19:27
2. Give generously, V. 30, 35.
3. God’s promise to the cheerful giver, V. 38; Heb. 13:16; Mal 3:10; 2 Cor. 9:7.

III. Forgive

A. God forgives.

1. He does this for Jesus’ sake, 2 Cor. 5:21; Is 53:6.
2. He forgives all penitent sinners, Lk 7:47; Ro 8:33; Mt 9:2; Ps 130:4; Lk. 15:21-24; Ps. 51:17.

B. We are to forgive.

1. Guard against judging and condemning, Lk 15:25-32; Jn 8:7.
2. Forgive, Mt 18:21-35; Eph 4:32.

Motivated by the great mercy of our Heavenly Father, let us show mercy by loving our enemies, by giving, and by forgiving.

HJE

ASH WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18, 19-21

V. 1: Chapter 6 deals with false piety. Three cases of hypocrisy are cited. The fourth is similar, pretending to trust God while trusting in riches. The word "Father" runs throughout this chapter. Christians are to have the Father in their hearts. "Take heed" and that constantly. "Your righteousness" refers to the whole range of good works. "Reward": one must choose between two rewards; the empty praise of men and the reward laid up at the Father's side. V. 2: "Hypocrite": an actor who wears a mask. Hypocrisy deceives others, but oneself most of all. "They have their reward in full." V. 3: If hands could see, the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing as it gives alms. God will reward even a cup of water given in His name. God gives rewards to those who seek no reward. The emphasis is not on the standing because the Jews regularly stood for prayer; the emphasis is on the places. Pharisees liked to pray on corners of wide streets at the appointed hours of prayer. V. 6: Not to pray is to reject both the command and promise of God. V. 16: Fasting often accompanied prayer. Pharisees fasted on Thursday (when Moses went up into the mountain) and on Monday (when he came down), also on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:37). "Disfigure their faces" with ashes. V. 17: "Oil your head and wash": ordinary forms of cleanliness. V. 19: Jesus turns to the subject of self-deception. The word rendered "rust" in the KJV means "eating." "Doth corrupt" means to cause to disappear. Eating and moths cause food and clothes to disappear. All earthly treasures are transient. V. 20: "Treasures in heaven": the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, Mt. 6:33. V. 21: Heaven alone abides forever. The heart whose treasures are there will never lose them.

Introduction: Lent calls upon us to examine the sincerity of our faith. There is nothing quite as bad as doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Everything depends upon our motives in our Christian living.

GUARD AGAINST HYPOCRISY

I. In Giving

- A. Giving is a good work, Mt. 5:42.
- B. Those who give to be praised by men have the only reward they will get.
- C. Give in a God-pleasing way.
 - 1. Give because God gives you so much, 2 Cor. 8:9.
 - 2. Give unostentatiously, Mk. 12:44.
 - 3. Your Father will reward you openly, Lk. 6:38; Mt. 3:40.

II. In Prayer

- A. Prayer has both God's command and promise, Mt. 7:7-11.
- B. Those who pray to be seen of men have their reward.

C. Pray as God encourages you.

1. Pray privately, Lk. 6:12; Mt. 26:38.
2. Your Father sees in secret and will reward you, Ps. 139:7-8.

III. In Fasting

A. Luther calls fasting a fine outward training.

1. The Jews fasted on the Day of Atonement, days of national calamity, and seasons of drought.
2. Today some people fast or otherwise deny themselves during Lent.

B. The Pharisees fasted to be seen of men and received the reward.

C. If we fast, let us do it in the right manner.

1. Unostentatiously.
2. To the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31.

IV. In Our Attitude Toward Our Possessions

A. We pray for them and God gives them.

B. To set one's heart on possessions is self-deception.

1. Money-mad people have dollar signs in their eyes. Their heart is where their money is, Mt. 19:22.
2. To trust in riches is self-deceiving.
 - a. Eating and moth consume and thieves steal.
 - b. Example: the rich fool, Lk. 12:16-21.

C. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

1. God has prepared these treasures in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Jn. 3:16.
2. We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, Mt. 6:33.
3. Then all these things will be added unto us.

HJE

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 4:1-13

V. 1: Cf. Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-12. V.3: This was Christ's first attack on the devil and his kingdom. The complete victory came on the cross. Christ is the second Adam doing battle with the foe who conquered the first Adam. The Prince of life meets the prince of darkness. The first temptation is a temptation to doubt and to a misuse of His divine power. Had Christ yielded, He would have faltered in His obedience to the will of His Father. V. 4: Jesus counters the first temptation by clinging to the Word of God, "Thou art my beloved Son." Cf. Duet 9:3. The power to sustain life does not lie in bread, but in the Word and promises of God. Vv.5-7: Mt has this as the third temptation. This is a temptation to win the world without suffering and dying. V.8: "It is written"; cf. Dt. 6:13; 10:20. V.9: The final temptation is a temptation to

tempt God. The devil implies that if Christ would cast Himself down, He would be sustained by angels. and would win instant acclaim among the people. Vv. 10-11: The devil quotes a garbled version of Ps 91:11-12. V.12: Dt 6:16 is the passage which Jesus quotes against the devil. V. 13: "for a season": Jesus' whole life was beset by temptation. Cf. Heb 4:15. For us and for our salvation, Christ kept God's Law perfectly.

Introduction: Today we want to talk about every man's problem, the problem of temptation. This is both a perplexing and a serious problem. Jesus deals with it both as Victor for us and as our example.

CHRIST CONQUERS TEMPTATION

I. As Conqueror For Us

A. Each temptation of the devil was designed to thwart Jesus' mission as the Savior of the world.

1. The temptation to turn stones into bread was temptation to doubt the Father's care and Christ's relationship to the Father as His beloved Son.
2. The second was a temptation to gain the world without the cross.
3. The third temptation was designed to get Jesus to think that He could win instant acclaim and so avoid the cross.

B. Jesus emerges the Victor

1. He turns aside the first temptation by reminding the devil that we live by the Word and promises of God.
2. He parries the second temptation by reminding the devil that God alone is to be worshipped.
3. He thwarts the third temptation by telling the devil that we are not to tempt the Lord.
4. How important for us that Christ emerged the Victor.
 - a. Had Christ failed, He would have been a sinner like us, not our Savior.
 - b. But Christ kept the Law of God perfectly for us as our Savior, Heb. 4:15.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. As Our Example.

A. As the devil attempted to foil Christ in His saving work, so he attempts to win us again as his own.

1. By faith we are all the children of God, Ro 8:16-17.
2. However, we are daily subject to the temptations of the devil, 1 Pt. 5:8; Eph 6:12.

B. The devil uses the same tactics against us as he did against Christ.

1. He tempts us to doubt God's promises.

2. The devil tempts us to worship him.
3. He tempts us to presume on God's grace.
- C. To overcome Satan we must use the tactics Jesus used.
 1. To overcome the temptation to doubt, we need to quote promises of God, Mt 28:20; Heb 13:5; Ro 8:32.
 2. To overcome the temptation to worship Satan, we are to remember who we are by God's grace, children of God and heirs of heaven, Phil 1:21; Gal 2:20; Ro 14:8.
 3. To overcome the temptation to presumption we are to follow God's clear directions for Christian living, Eph 4:1; Gal 5:16; Eph 5:8; Ro 6:1ff.

By looking to God's grace in Christ, we can be more than conquerors.

HJE

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 13:31-35

V.31: The Pharisees want to scare Jesus out of Herod's territory, Galilee and Perea, to get Him to Jerusalem. V.32: He who is Master of demons and diseases is not afraid of Herod's bark. "I shall be perfected": Jesus refers to His life's goal, namely, His death in Jerusalem. Reference to the three days indicates a short time. V.33: Let Herod threaten, says Jesus, I must continue my work. "It cannot be," etc.: This is irony. At no other place were so many prophets put to death as at Jerusalem. V. 34: Cf. Mt 23:27-39. Jesus uttered these words both in Perea and on the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem's guilt was that of stoning the prophets. How often Jesus tried to save the nation, as a bird seeks to gather her brood. V.35: Besser: "Jerusalem scorned the wings of the hen and fell into the talons of the eagle," Mt 24:28. Jerusalem shall be a city of desolation, Lk 19:43-44. Titus leveled Jerusalem in 70 A.D. "Ye shall not see Me," etc.: They will not see Christ again until the day when He returns in His glory, and when even His enemies will have to confess that Jesus is Lord.

Introduction: An opportunity missed is often followed by disappointment and tragedy. (Example: waiting too long to see a doctor.) In the spiritual realm there is a day of grace and a day of retribution. If one spurns the first, he will surely meet the second.

LET NO ONE MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE SAVED

I. Today Christ Comes In Mercy.

- A. Christ came in mercy in His earthly life.
 1. The Pharisees try to lure Jesus to Jerusalem to condemn Him to death. Herod is their foil.
 2. Jesus replies:
 - a. "I cast out devils; I do cures"—manifestations of His mercy.

- b. "The third day I will reach My goal of suffering and dying for the sins of the world"—the greatest evidence of His mercy.
- B. Christ still comes in mercy.
 - 1. He invites all to pray to Him in need and promises to hear, Mt 7:7.
 - 2. He Proclaims Himself the Savior in the Gospel.
 - a. Every man needs this Savior, Ps 51:3; Ro 5:12.
 - b. Christ is the perfect Savior, Mt 1:21; Mt 18:11.
 - a. He kept God's Law.
 - b. He suffered and died for all, Is 53; 1 Pet 3:18.
 - c. He gives life to all who believe, Mt 11:28; 1 Jn 1:9; Jn 11:25; Rev 22:17.

What an opportunity for all! You would think that all men would accept it.

II. The Day of Mercy Is Followed By a Day of Judgment.

- A. Jerusalem represents love's labor lost.
 - 1. They killed the prophets, Is 5:1-7.
 - 2. Jesus tried to gather them together, but they would not, Jn 1:10-11; 5:18; 7:19.
- B. Jerusalem's doom
 - 1. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.
 - 2. It will not see Him again until He returns as judge.
- C. The world is older but not much better.
 - 1. People still refuse God's grace.
 - a. The unbelieving world, 1 Jn 2:15.
 - b. One-time Christians who have fallen away, Rev. 2:14; Heb. 4:11
 - 2. How great is their loss, Mk 16:16; Mt 25:41.
 - 3. This is the reason for the repeated encouragement to steadfastness in God's Word, Heb 2:3; 3:13; 1 Tim 6:12; Mt 25:13.

HJE

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 13:1-9

Pilate's massacre of the Galileans was brought to Jesus' attention presumably in the hope that he would be incensed at this outrage and take sides with the nationalists against the hated Romans. Refusing to choose sides, Jesus talks instead about the necessity of repentance. His reference to another calamity in Jerusalem emphasizes that, while certain punishments may result from particular sins, every untoward incident should not occasion a why on our part. We do not always know God's purposes. All misery is the result of sin, but the circumstance that one individual has a heavier load than another is a part of God's unfathomable ways. The

question we ought to be asking is: What does a particular tragic occurrence impel us to do? The necessity of repentance is firmly established by the parable. Vineyard: God's order of salvation. Fig tree: Israel. Owner: God. Vine dresser: Jesus. Three years: era of grace granted Israel then and us now.

The central thought of the text is the urgency of repentance. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would make their lives a daily repentance. The problem is that Christians become careless about producing the fruits of repentance—confessing their sins, relying on mercy, and doing good deeds. Yet the Lord in his grace gives us time to repent.

Introductory thought: God gives us time for living. How we utilize it is of crucial importance for the present and the future. That is why we need to take to heart Christ's words: "LET IT ALONE THIS YEAR ALSO."

I. These words tell us that God's patience will end.

A. God's patience ended for Israel.

1. The vine dresser does not ask that the tree would never be cut down.

a. The request is only for an extension of time.

b. Despite the extension of time, Israel repudiated God's love—resembled the tree by the roadside (Mt. 21:9).

2. Unrepentant Jerusalem was destroyed and the people dispersed (vs 3, 5, 7b, 9b; Lk 19:41-44).

B. God's patience with the unrepentant ends also today.

1. Cannot sin with impunity, excusing our failures.

2. Are we playing with Christianity? Saying, "Lord," but our hearts are far from Him? Substituting ritual for repentance?

"Let it alone this year also." A warning for us. We are in a probationary period. God's patience has an end. "Cut it down."

II. These words also tell us that God deeply desires our repentance.

A. God gives opportunities to repent.

1. He gave Israel opportunities not only throughout the Old Testament period (vs 6, 7a), but especially during the ministry of Jesus and the apostles (v8a).

2. He gives us opportunities.

a. He has planted us in His church.

b. We have unrestricted access to His Word in printed form and through the media, also in the Sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and through fellowship with other Christians.

B. God himself makes repentance possible (v 8b).

1. With the Law He "digs"—laying bare our sin.

2. With the Gospel He "fertilizes"—strengthening our grasp on Jesus and producing the fruit of good deeds.
3. Our life becomes a daily repentance in which we confess our sin, trust in His mercy, and bear the fruit of good works.

"Let it alone this year also." What a comfort! God grants us time, for He deeply desires our repentance.

Concluding Thought: Now is the accepted time (Hb 3:7-8). Bring forth fruit (Mt 3:8). God will make you like a tree (Ps 1:3).

GA

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

The self-righteous complaint of the Pharisees and the scribes occasioned the parable of the text as well as the two immediately preceding parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

The younger son (v12) demanded property that normally would not have come into his possession until the death of his father. But he wanted to cast off restraints, assert himself, do his own thing, and do it now. He could not keep on doing it forever (v16); everything went stale. His attitude toward sin and toward his father changed (vs17-19). The impelling motive in the return was the remembrance of a benevolent father. If there had been any thought of redeeming himself in the father's eyes by offering to be a hired servant, the unexpected outpouring of love by the father so overwhelmed him that he offered no solution to the estrangement. He could only put himself completely at the father's mercy (vs 20-21).

The elder son is a picture of the Pharisees who refused to rejoice over a sinner's return to God and who expected rewards for their labor. Yet the father loved both sons indiscriminately (v28). He does not reject the elder son (v31) but takes the trouble to defend the joy that accompanies love (v32).

The central thought of the text is that God loves every sinner, no matter who he is or what his sin. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be certain of God's love for them. The problem is that we often set up conditions for the love of God toward us and toward others.

Introductory thought: Human love tends to be conditional. Do this and I will love you. Be like that, and you can count on my love. I can see why God might find it

easier to love certain others but not me, or me but not certain others. The text emphasizes that God's love is unconditional. It points up **THE INCREDIBLE LOVE OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.**

I. He receives us as sons.

A. Even though we have rebelled against him (v 12a).

1. We have not always appreciated being His son or daughter and have wanted to be independent from Him.
2. We have pandered to our sinful nature by using money and other gifts God has given us solely for personal pleasure (v 17).

B. God takes the initiative in taking us back.

1. In Christ, God came down to meet us and humiliated Himself to reconcile us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).
2. God's action moves us to confess our sins and to cast ourselves on His mercy (v 21). Not disgust with ourselves but remembrance of the Father's love moves to repentance.

II. He treats us as sons.

A. Even when we act self-righteously.

1. When we insist on a penalty before the restoration of a relationship (v 28).
2. When we regard God as a master whom we are to obey for a reward (v 29).
3. When we refuse to share in the salvation joy of another (v 30).

B. God continues to pour out love.

1. Addresses us affectionately ("Son," v 31a).
2. Regards us as possessors of all His treasures (v 31b).
3. Shows us how unnatural is the complaint of the self-righteous (vs 32, 1).

Concluding thought: What is incredible love! The Father alone is able to restore us, and that through grace alone. He not only accepts us but welcomes us with open arms. And He never stops pouring out love upon us as sons.

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FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: LUKE 20:9-19

This parable is a graphic portrayal of the rising wave of enmity on the part of Israel, especially of its leaders. God had done everything possible—planted Israel as His vineyard and cared for it. Israel's leaders acted as if they owed God nothing. They treated the prophets shamefully and finally

killed even God's own Son. Yet their wicked action gave Christ the significance God had ordained, for He became the head of the corner in the temple of the new covenant (Ac 4:11). Those who continued to reject God's grace would be destroyed. Christ speaks of Himself metaphorically as a stone on whom men are broken and by whom they will eventually be crushed.

The central thought of the text is that Christ is both a rock of offense and of salvation. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would renew their grasp on Christ as their rock of salvation. The problem is that Christians sometimes become indifferent to God's overtures of grace.

Introductory thought: A large insurance company whose symbol is the rock of Gibraltar advertises its benefits by pushing the slogan: "I own a piece of the rock." In the text Jesus quotes Ps. 118 and Is. 8 to remind us that He is a spiritual rock. The parable reveals that the leaders of Israel did not possess Christ as their spiritual rock. Their negative response to God's seeking love leads us to ask the question:

DO I OWN A PIECE OF THE ROCK THAT IS CHRIST?

- I. The tragic results of denying one's self a piece of the rock.
 - A. The denier will be broken into pieces (v 18a). Picture of a stone lying on the road upon which a person falls and is badly hurt.
 1. The leaders of Israel had their vineyard taken away (v. 16b; Mt. 21:43) and given to a spiritual Israel gathered from all peoples.
 2. Everyone today who rejects Christ will be broken (1 Pe. 2:8a).
 - a. With respect to his relationships with others—seeking to destroy anyone who gets in his way (v 14).
 - b. With respect to life's purpose—deepest needs unfulfilled, meaning gone.
 - B. The denier will finally be crushed (v 18b). Picture of a stone falling from a building or a mountain and utterly destroying all in its path.
 1. Jewish leaders destroyed together with the people (v 16a). Allusion here also to final destruction on Judgment Day.
 2. Eternal destruction in hell the lot of those who are hostile to Christ.
 - C. These results are just in view of the continuing rejection of God's grace.
 1. God not only planted the vineyard, making Israel His own, but sent prophets in waves (1st, 2nd,

3rd servant) from Moses to John the Baptist, and finally His own Son.

2. We have the ongoing testimony of the prophets and of Jesus in the Scriptures. What more can God do?
 - a. Do we recognize that God is lovingly seeking our trust and dedication?
 - b. Do we tend to become indifferent to His approaches?

It is not only wicked but eternally tragic to be careless in our attitude toward the rock that is Christ.

II. The blessed results of owning a piece of the rock.

A. Christ is our cornerstone.

1. God used men's rejection to make Christ the cornerstone (v 17; 1 Pe. 2:6).
 - a. Engraved on Christ, the living stone (Zph. 3:9), important words (Jn. 1:29).
 - b. Turned blackest evil to inestimable good for all men.
2. Christ the cornerstone of the spiritual building, the church (Eph. 2:20), governing every angle in the whole building.

B. We are lively stones.

1. Stones that revel in His continuing overtures of grace toward us (1 Pe. 2:5).
2. Stones that reflect His rich grace to others (Eph. 2:21-22).

We have security now and forever when we own a piece of the rock.

Concluding thought: How tragic that men then and now reject God's loving offer! Christ a rock of offense for many. But He is also a rock of salvation. Thank God, we own a piece of that rock!

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