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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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Homiletical Studies

TRINITY SUNDAY

Romans 8:14-17

June 14, 1981

"Sons of God" (v14) suggests rank and privilege while "children of God" (v16) refers to kinship with God. The aorist (*elabete*, v15) points back to baptism. The Spirit received then does not lead us to shrink from God in slavish fear, but it is a *pneuma huiothesias*, proper to a filial relation to God. "Sonship" distinguishes those made sons by grace from the only-begotten Son of God. By God's grace not only is our position before God different, but the Spirit has created in us a new nature. Our crying "Abba, Father" shows we have not only the status but also the heart of sons.

Our kinship with God is the earnest of an inheritance (v17; 2 Cor 1:22, 5; Eph 1:14). Being in the body will not prevent us from receiving the inheritance of heaven, even though we must suffer now. As Christ suffered and then received glory, so it is with us. Suffering unites us more to Christ and insures our final inheritance with Him (2 Cor 1:5, 7; Php 3:10).

The central thought of the text is that we are the children of God. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be confident that they are God's children. Suffering sometimes causes us to doubt this. The Holy Spirit assures us that God is our Father and that we are heirs with Christ.

Introduction: Trinity Sunday reminds us that God is infinitely greater than we (Ro 11:33-36). Since God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (Is 55:8-9), we might conclude that we cannot be intimately involved with God nor He with us. Our text, however, emphasizes that

We Are Children of the Triune God

- I. We can call God our Father.
 - A. We do not have to fear him (v15a).
 1. Because of what Jesus did, God no longer condemns us (Ro 8:1-3).
 2. God will not punish us for our sins, here or hereafter (He 2:15).
 - B. He made us His children.
 1. By giving us Christ's benefits in our baptism (Ga 3:27; Jo 1:12).
 2. By giving us faith which moves us to cry, "Abba, Father." That cry is the Holy Spirit's testimony within us that we are children of God (Ga 3:26). Being children signifies not only a new relationship but a new existence.
- II. We are led by the Spirit (v14).
 - A. The Holy Spirit leads us to spiritual life.
 1. He makes us new creatures (2 Cor 5:17).
 2. In our inmost self we love God and delight in His law (Ro 7:21).
 - B. The Holy Spirit leads us to live as God's children.
 1. Avoiding the deeds of the flesh (Ro 8:5; Ga 5:16-21).
 2. Growing in the fruits of the Spirit (Ga 5:22-24). Living as God's children points to endless life.
- III. We are heirs with Christ.
 - A. First we suffer with Christ (v17b).
 1. We suffer from the assaults of sin in the world, experiencing discouragement, sorrow, and pain.
 2. This suffering is not worth comparing with our future glory (Ro 8:18).

3. This suffering is a prelude to glory (2 Tm 2:12).
- B. Then we will be like Christ (1 Jo 3:2).
 1. In an incorruptible inheritance (1 Pe 1:4).
 2. Experiencing complete victory over sin.

Conclusion: Incredible as it may seem, the great God is our Father who makes us alive by His Spirit and glorifies us with Christ. We are children of the Triune God.

GA

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28

June 21, 1981

In Ro 3:1-20 Paul explains the function of the law and shows the universal need for the Gospel. In the text he sets forth the Gospel itself. He shows that the righteousness of God which all people need has been made accessible to all. The law contributes nothing to this righteousness, for it is a righteousness which is all of grace. The righteousness held out in the Gospel would never have come about except for the propitiatory virtue of the blood of Christ. God for a time seemed to pass over sin, but when the time had fully come He demonstrated His righteousness in the death of Jesus. The cross is at once the vindication of God and the salvation of man. The sharp distinction between faith and works of the law in v28 shows that faith cannot be interpreted as a work of law but is a renunciation of all such confidence as legal obedience inspires.

The central thought of the text is that justification on God's part is a gift. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be more certain of their acceptance by God. The problem is our tendency to think that acceptance with God depends on something we do. The means to the goal is God's justification of us by His grace as a gift.

Introduction: There are many distinctions or differences among people — physically, economically, socially, temperamentally, educationally. Yet God says,

There Is No Distinction

1. With regard to sin.
 - A. "All have sinned" (v23a).
 1. We readily admit that thieves, adulterers, and murderers are sinners who are under God's judgment. We are not so ready to admit that decent people like us are under the same judgment.
 2. The law reveals our sin (20b).
 - a. God has not always been first in our life — work, pleasure, family have come between us and God.
 - b. We have not always loved our neighbor as ourselves — indifferent to his needs, unwilling to become involved.
 - B. All are under God's wrath.
 1. God is righteous (v26). He must punish disobedience, His justice must be carried out.
 2. Since we have all fallen short of God's glory (v23b), making excuses, comparing ourselves favorably with others, trying to make up for our sins by doing good will not change our situation before God. There is no distinction with regard to sin. But since that is the case, there is no distinction either —

II. With regard to righteousness.

A. All are justified (v24).

1. God set forth Jesus as an expiation for sin (v25a).
 - a. Only Christ's blood could expiate sin.
 - b. Only Christ's death could satisfy God's just demands.
2. God declared the whole world righteous for Jesus' sake (Ro 5:8-10).
3. No matter how evil the world becomes, a redeemed world it will remain. The redemption by Christ took in everybody. Anyone who thinks he has been excluded is thinking too highly of himself. God has justified you — declared you righteous for Jesus' sake.

B. All may believe.

1. God's justification is "to be received by faith" (25b).
2. Faith too is a gift of God and not a work by us (Eph 1:8).
3. Faith is created and sustained by the good news that in Christ God regards us as righteous people, no matter who we are or what we have been.

Conclusion: Let us never say, "I'm right with God, so what's a little more or less dirt on my conscience?" Rather let us take our sin seriously and admit that there is no distinction with regard to sin. On the other hand, let us not think we can make ourselves worthy before God. The righteousness of Christ is available as a gift to all people. How thankful we can be that there is no distinction with regard to righteousness!

GA

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 4:18-25

June 28, 1981

Since the "fall" our world functions abnormally, and humanity as a whole has run off the track on which God initially set it. At various times we all have to face this reality, which may challenge our hope, security, or joy. Sin takes its toll (health, relationships, world events, etc.). For the believer, there is only one answer to the reality of a fallen world and that is to trust in the promises of God which are ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. There is hope and power for living when the believer trusts moment by moment in the promises of God which are ours through Christ. Trusting in the promises of God is the only answer to the reality of life in a fallen world.

Introduction: It has been observed that when faced with unpleasant realities, some people dream of castles in the sky and some people live in them and others comfort themselves by collecting the rent. The question before us this morning is how do we as God's people deal with the sometimes stark and unpleasant realities of the world in which we find ourselves.

A Faith for the Real World

I. The realities of life may not look hopeful.

A. The realities of life did not look hopeful for Abraham.

1. Abraham had to face the reality of no seed (Gn 15:1-3).
2. Abraham had to face the reality of both his and Sarah's age (v19).

B. The realities of life have not looked hopeful for many others of God's people.

1. Examples abound in the Scriptures of believers facing situations that

did not look hopeful (Israel at the Red Sea; David as he faced Goliath; the disciples in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee; etc.).

2. Also contemporary examples of the realities of life which seem crushing abound. (Here personal examples from one's own life experiences would be appropriate.)

- C. The realities of life may not look too hopeful to you at times, maybe at this very moment. (At this point the preacher should paint with as much vividness as possible the realities that people in the congregation might be facing such as unemployment, marital or family problems, fears about the economy or world events, guilt, issues concerning old age or loneliness, etc. It is important at this point to be as concrete as possible.)

Transition: The realities of life in our fallen world can be stark and sometimes frightening. However, we must never forget that our gracious Father equips us to deal with the realities of life victoriously.

- II. Faith in the promises of God equips God's people to face the realities of life in a fallen world.

- A. Faith in God's promises equipped Abraham to live in the real world

1. Abraham, through faith, maintained his hope even in the face of a seemingly hopeless situation (v19).
2. Abraham, through faith, staggered not at the promise of God (v20).

- B. Faith in God's promises will equip you to face the realities of your world.

1. God, our Father, has made many personal promises to you that become real in your life through Jesus (forgiveness, help in time of trouble, strength to endure, the perspective of a new world coming, the promise to work all things together for good, etc.).
2. Let us therefore be persuaded as Abraham was that God can and will deliver what He has promised.
 - a. Let our hope be unquenchable.
 - b. Let us not stagger at the promises of God; we shall stand strong in Christ.

Transition: Trusting the promises of God in Christ will give us the victory in the face of the realities of living in the twentieth century and will, in addition, bring into our lives certain other benefits (blessings).

- III. Faith in the promises of God in Christ brings wonderful blessings into our lives.

- A. Abraham's faith proved to be a blessing.

1. Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness (v22).
2. Abraham's faith was confirmed and strengthened (God kept His promises and Abraham witnessed their fulfillment.)

- B. Your faith will prove to be a blessing.

1. Your faith in Christ is the foundation of your relationship with God the Father (Ro 5).
2. Your faith will be confirmed and strengthened. God's promises are real and certain and will come to pass. You will witness their fulfillment (II Tm 1:12, He 10:22,23).

Conclusion: In Christ Jesus, our Lord, God the Father has given us marvelous promises to cope with the realities of life we all face. Let us be persuaded beyond any doubt that even when situations do not look hopeful or are discouraging, faith in God's promises will full equip us to live victoriously and will bring wonderful blessings into our lives. Truly we can say that trusting in the promises of God is the only answer to the reality of life in a fallen world.

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 5:6-11

July 5, 1981

When God's Law has done its work, we experience the depth of our sinfulness. Facing the fact of who we are according to our human nature and of who God is according to His perfect and holy nature, we can sometimes get troubled and wonder, does God really love me? Am I really one of His beloved children or am I just fooling myself? There are many possibilities the preacher could pursue with this text. One would be to focus on the depth of our Father's love for us. The love of God in Christ Jesus has broken through into our lives "in spite of" the fact that we were helpless to effect our own righteousness, "in spite of" the fact that we were sinners who separated ourselves from God and fell in love with the world, and "in spite of" the fact that we were rebels, convinced of the sanctity of our revolution against the true and the living God.

How then can God love us? More specifically, how can God love me when I find myself a sinner, rebelling against the will of God for my life? The love of God in Christ breaks through it all! The penetrating power of the Gospel is the ground of our unshakable confidence in God's undying love for us. The love of God in Christ breaks through every obstacle.

Introduction: The great Houdini was a master of breaking out (A little research on the life of this great escape-artist will provide ample material for an attention-getting and interesting introduction.) This morning we want to focus on One who was and is the greatest master at breaking "in."

Love Conquers All

- I. The love of God in Christ broke into our lives when we were helpless (v6).
 - A. We were helpless to seek the true God, without strength and without desire.
 1. We had totally lost our sense of direction.
 2. We had zero capacity to retrace our steps back into fellowship with the true and living God.
 - B. However, while we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly (v6).
 1. We were lost, but Christ sought us out. (The parable of the lost sheep would be appropriate at this point or possible Ez 34:1-16).
 2. The love of God in Christ continues to break into our lives when we fell helpless and have lost our sense of direction.

Transition: Not only did the love of God in Christ break into our lives when we were helpless, but Christ broke through when we were still trapped in our sin.

- II. The love of God in Christ broke into our lives when we were yet sinners (v8).
 - A. God did not wait until we showed some glimmer of worthiness.
 1. He would have waited forever.
 2. We had long passed the point of no return.
 - B. God did not give us a little grace and then sit back to see what we would do with it.
 1. God's grace does not come in installments.
 2. We were not in a position to accept anything from God. (The cup of reception was tipped upside down.)
 - C. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. God acted decisively on our behalf on the cross of Calvary and broke through the wall of separation that our sin had built.
 - D. The love of God is still based upon that decisive act in history when Christ died not for the righteous, but for sinners like you and me.

1. It is the same power of the cross that convinces us that "in spite of" our sin we are forgiven and loved.
2. It is the same power of the cross that produces discontent with sin.
 - a. We are moved to repentance by the power of the cross.
 - b. We are motivated to change by the power of the cross.

Transition: As if it were not bad enough that we were helpless and trapped in sin, God had one more obstacle to overcome in His passion to convince us of His love.

III. The love of God in Christ broke into our lives while we were enemies of God (v10).

- A. We were enemies of God because our human nature, devoid of the Holy Spirit, was at war against God.
 1. The natural man feels guilty, but believes there is no remedy,
 2. The natural man consequently fears God.
 3. Therefore, the natural man sees God as the enemy and fights (actively resists) the entrance of God into his life.
- B. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son (v10).
 1. In spite of our resistance to peace with God, the war is declared over on the basis of Christ's reconciling death on the cross.
 2. We are children of God by faith in Christ. We are no longer God's enemies, for we have peace with God.

Conclusion: The love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord broke into our lives when we were helpless, sinners, and enemies of God. Can there be any question, any doubt, that the love of God in Christ has broken through every obstacle? Be assured that nothing — nothing will keep the love of God in Christ out of your life. After all, He is the master of all time at "breaking in."

MRO

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 5:12-15

July 12, 1981

In v12 *dia touto* refers to Christ's relation to humanity as expounded in 3:21-5:11, although the grammatical reference may be only to 5:1-11. Sin as a power antagonistic to God entered the world through Adam (Ge 3) who succumbed to the temptation of Satan. Sin and death were inseparably connected and consequently death extended over all people. The universality of death rests upon the universality of sin — "all men sinned" (v12). All have been implicated in the sin of Adam ("in Adam all die", 1 Cor 15:22). Sin as an infection of human nature has continued since Adam, though not everyone has sinned the same way Adam die (v14), consciously going against a known command. Yet even before the Mosaic law, all were sinning and were doomed to die.

Adam was a type (*typos*) of Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), in that both represented humanity, the one fallen, the other restored humanity. The transgression of the one and the obedience of the other alike affected all (vv18-19). But there is a difference (v15). If one man's trespass had such far-reaching effects, much more must the grace of God displayed in One have far-reaching effects. A contrast is thus drawn between trespass and grace, the free gift in Christ annulling the effect not only of that one trespass but of all subsequent trespasses. If the race suffered through the first Adam, much more will that done by the second Adam benefit the race.

The central thought of the text is that the Second Adam achieves greater things than the first Adam. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will experience God's abounding grace in their own lives. The problem is that sin and death often seem more significant than grace. The means to the goal is the grace of God in Christ which annuls the effects of sin.

Introduction: *A Tale Of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens shows the author's genius for revealing the very pulse of life. It is an engrossing story. Paul in our text writes a still more gripping story, for it is one in which we all are involved. It is

A Tale of Two Men

- I. Misery came through the first man.
 - A. Sin came into the world by the first man, Adam (v12a).
 1. Not all the descendants of Adam sinned in the same way he did (consciously violating God's clear command (v14b; Ge 2:17; 3:6). Yet even before God gave his law in written form, all who lived from Adam to Moses were accounted sinful (v12c).
 2. We are involved in that one man's sin, for our nature is corrupt (Ro 5:19; Ps 51:5; Jr 17:9). We do bad things because of this inner corruption which is the essence of sin (Mt 15:18-19).
 3. Because of that one man the whole world lies in sin and remains an evil world.
 - B. Death came into the world by the first Adam.
 1. Death is the inevitable consequence of sin (v12b; Ge 2:17; 3:6).
 - a. Physical death is proof of the universality of sin.
 - b. Eternal death or hell is proof of divine retribution for sin.
 2. What grief and anguish we experience because of death! The tale of the first man ends in unmitigated disaster. Not so the tale of the second man, though it is all one tale.
- II. Blessing came through the second man.
 - A. Grace came to the world by the second Adam, Christ (vv15, 14b; 1 Cor 15:45).
 1. Grace signifies a free gift, not at all like the "tit for tat" matter of "we sin — we must die."
 2. Grace signifies unconditional generosity.
 - a. Demonstrated in the willingness of that one man Jesus Christ to become sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
 - b. Demonstrated in his readiness to endure death for all.
 - B. The grace of the second Adam has abounded to us, a grace infinitely better than the misery caused by the first Adam (v15).
 1. This second man's righteous act led to our acquittal before God so that we are freed from guilt and condemnation (Ro 5:18).
 2. This second man's victory over death led to life for us.
 3. No need exists for anyone to live under sin's condemnation and to die eternally. The free gift of the second Adam is being offered to the world.

The tale of the second Adam, Christ, ends in incomparable blessing.

Conclusion: Dickens' *A Tale Of Two Cities* is entertaining reading. The tale of the first and the second Adam is far more than entertainment; it tells of misery and of blessing that touches us all.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Romans 6:2b-11****July 19, 1981**

For us who have “died to sin” (v2b) to be still living in it is as ridiculous as a physically dead person reacting to stimuli. The dying to sin occurred in our baptism (v3), which brought us into union with Christ so as to identify us with Him. To be buried (v4) one must have died, which is Paul’s way of emphasizing that baptism so connected us with Christ’s death that we died to sin. Then baptism also has power to effect a new life (v4b). Walking in newness of life presupposes a resurrection analogous to Christ’s. As Christ died and rose again, so we died to sin in order to rise to a new life (v5). Because our sinful self was crucified (v6), ours is no longer a body enslaved by the power of sin (v7). Christ by His death broke the power of sin and is done with both sin and death (v9). So it is with us. Not only have we been delivered from eternal death, but the new man in us has taken over now. We are to live in such a way that sin dominates no longer in our life (v11).

The central thought of the text is that in Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would live as the new people they are. The problem is that we often let sin assert its power in our lives. The means to the goal is our baptism by which we became partakers of Christ’s victory over sin.

Introduction: Who of us does not want to live right and do what is good? A source of power for such living is our baptism. Paul makes clear that

Our Baptism Gives Power for Right Living

- I. Our baptism made us dead to sin.
 - A. In our baptism our old self was crucified with Christ (v6).
 1. Nothing less than crucifixion could destroy sin’s power to control us.
 2. Now we do not have to be enslaved by sin.
 - B. It makes no sense to live in sin.
 1. To respond to evil desires when our old self has been “killed.”
 2. To play with sin when we are done with it, as surely as Christ is once and for all (v10a).
 - C. While the decisive victory has been won, the battle with sin is not over.
 1. We must live in such a way that sin does not get control of us.
 2. When sin tempts, remember that your baptism has made you dead to sin (Col 3:9; Ga 5:24).

But there is a positive as well as a negative side to our living.
- II. Our baptism made us alive to God.
 - A. In our baptism we were raised with Christ from death to life (v8).
 1. Only God who raised Christ could raise us also.
 2. The evidence of this life is the newness of our walk (v4b).
 - a. We bear fruit to God (Ro 7:4).
 - b. We no longer live for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15).
 - c. We set our minds on things above (Col 3:3).
 - B. It is natural to live as the new people we are.
 1. Good thought, attitudes, and actions are an integral part of our new self.
 2. No wonder Christians on the last day will not even be aware of their good deeds (Mt 25:37).
 - C. Yet it will take effort to live as the new people we are.
 1. The resurrection power of Christ given us in our baptism will impel us.
 2. Our aliveness through our baptism will spur us.

Conclusion: Our baptism happened once but has ongoing significance. It is a continual source of power for right living.

GA

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 7:15-25a

July 26, 1981

No more realistic and dramatic articulation of the inward struggle between good and evil exists than that found in Romans 7:15-25a. St. Paul's testimony fits all of us. As the famous German preacher, Helmut Thielicke, said, "The wolves howl in our basements too."

Acknowledgement of the problem opens us to the therapy in which

Christ Helps Us Win Our Inward Battle

- I. He understands our failure to cope at times with evil.
 - A. Since Christ was tempted, He knows how strongly sin asserts itself also in our lives.
 - B. If even Christ had to fight evil that threatened to overcome Him, we who still have the sinful flesh must never think that our being Christians frees us from struggling against the evil within us.
- II. He enables us to desire the good.
 - A. He died to take away the sin to which we yield.
 - B. He sends the Holy Spirit to cleanse our conscience and to strengthen the new life within us.
- III. He delivers us from the body of death.
 - A. He frees us from captivity to sin and death.
 - B. He moves us to delight in the law of God.
 1. So that we will to do the good.
 2. So that we daily work at doing what God would have us do.

HHZ

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:18-23

August 2, 1981

Everyone has to find some kind of explanation of tragic suffering. People ask us, "Why?" when suffering comes. The best explanation we can find appears in Romans 8:18-23. These words of Paul enable us to adjust to issues and feelings of tragic suffering because they assure us that

God Guarantees Us a Glorious Future

- I. God directs our destinies toward a hopeful outcome.
 - A. Of itself creation is subjected to futility.
 1. Compare the philosophy of nihilism.
 2. Note the myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned continually to roll a stone up a hill only to have it roll down again.
 - B. By the will of God we are subjected to suffering in hope.
 1. The divine will has the power and eternal scope to bring the total creative process to a meaningful fulfillment.
 2. That hope which we now have in God brings motivation to our lives.
- II. God will glorify His suffering children.
 - A. The sufferings of this present time can be tolerated when we know what

the future has in store for us.

- B. The glory that is to be revealed is so majestic and worthwhile that it encourages us to bear the pain of our present suffering.
- III. God will reveal a marvelous fulfillment of His plan for His waiting sons.
 - A. Creation waits with eager longing for the end which lies in store for it.
 - B. God will reveal a dramatic climax of His plan for His sons.
- IV. God will free us from the decay of death.
 - A. Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay.
 - B. We shall all obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- V. God will deliver us from travail.
 - A. Creation has been groaning in travail until now.
 - B. God will redeem our bodies along with the material creation in the new heaven and new earth.

HHZ

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:26, 27

August 9, 1981

Here we are told that we really do not know how to pray. But the Spirit does not forsake us in our weakness or frustration. The Lord knows the mind of man and the mind of the Spirit. The intercession of the Spirit will be attuned to the will of God.

The central thought of the text is that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would keep right on praying. The problem is that we do not pray as we ought. Yet we are not alone when we pray, we have a partner. The Spirit helps us.

Introduction: Gertrude Behanah, the former aristocrat, alcoholic, and non-Christian, was stunned when Christian friends visiting her in New York said that when they returned to Chicago they would pray for her each morning at 9:00 a.m. Gertrude said she was floored — “nobody ever told me they would pray for me.” Our text tells us that the Holy Spirit has promised to pray with us and for us. Therefore, we are

Partners in Prayer

- I. We need the partnership of the Spirit because we are often discouraged from praying.
 - A. Not knowing God's will fully can keep us from praying. We find it hard to trust God to do what is best. Or we feel that our analytical minds must have everything figured out and that we must know that outcome before we can make a commitment.
 - 1. We may give other reasons for not praying, such as our prayers not being answered, being too busy or too tired.
 - 2. The basic reason for not praying, or for praying very little, is that we try to probe into what we cannot know. We fail to remember that God's ways are not our ways (Is 55:8-9; Ps 33:10).
- B. The Holy Spirit knows God's will.
 - 1. The Spirit has an inside track on what is best for us. He has the perspective of the past and of the future.
 - 2. The Spirit prays in accordance with God's will. We have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Counselor, as our prayer partner, praying the right prayers for us in accordance with God's will. God's will may sometimes be hidden from us; that should not keep us from praying.

II. We need the partnership of the Spirit because our prayers often seem so weak.

A. We do not know how to pray as we ought.

1. "The Apostle is not trying to say that holy and good people are asking for things which are contrary or harmful, but rather that they are asking for too little — things that are too lowly or insignificant in comparison with what God wants to give them" (Luther).
2. The Spirit helps us by reminding us that, since God did not spare His own Son, He will also give us everything else we need.

B. The Spirit intercedes for us.

1. As Jesus did for His disciples and for others. Jesus reminded Peter that He had prayed for him for he would be tested by Satan. From the cross He prayed for those who had crucified Him.
2. With signs too deep for words. When we cannot find the words, the Spirit finds ways to make our anguish or elation known to God.

Conclusion: How encouraging to know that someone no less than the Holy Spirit is interceding for me. I have a partner in prayer.

Jerrold L. Nichols
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TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:28-30

August 16, 1981

The central thought of the text is that the Lord has established a process for our growth until we reach the image of His Son in glory. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would grow spiritually. The problem is that our growth is stunted when we become discouraged and depressed by the events of life and we lose confidence in God's providential care for the growth of His elect. The power of the Gospel is found in the knowledge that God, who has provided for our salvation through the gift in His Son, can be counted on to provide all we need for spiritual growth.

Introduction: The biennial theme of our Synod from 1977 to 1979 was "That We May Grow!" That is also a fitting theme for a study of our text.

That We May Grow

I. Our growth is stunted.

A. When we become discouraged.

1. We do not know why certain things happen. Paul wanted the thorn in his flesh removed. We want to be able to understand trying events.
2. We resent the events of life which seem to say that God does not love us. How can we love Him when we cannot accept what He sends us?

B. When we become depressed.

1. Discouragement can lead to depression if it is not handled properly. The more discouraged a person becomes the more depressed he becomes. The more we see the negative side of life the more we are siphoned downward into despair. "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (Ps 42:5).
2. Depression causes us to forget who we are. The circumstances surrounding us become a stronger force than the certainty of the promises of God. The prodigal son at last remembered who he was.

C. When we lose confidence.

1. That everything works for our good. We are often convinced that an event is no good, that God is unable to bring good out of it. We see only the loss. God used Joseph's struggles to bring blessing to many.
 2. In God's love for us. If we have not experienced love in the family unit it may be difficult to accept the fact of God's love. The Word of the Lord must win out over our human experiences. We may feel unworthy of God's love.
 3. In God's providential care. It sometimes appears that we are left to ourselves to provide for our daily needs. ("Guide Me, Oh Thou Great Jehovah," *TLH* hymn 54).
- II. Our growth is assured.
- A. When we remember that we were predestined (vv 29-30).
 1. God chose us already before we were born to be His own.
 2. God chose purely out of His grace, not on the basis of our faith or any other condition or behavior of ours (Eph 1:12; 3:11; I Pe 1:2).
 - B. When we remember that we were called (vv 28-30).
 1. The call to receive God's grace came to us in baptism.
 2. The Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament calls us daily to renew our grasp on grace.
 - C. When we remember that we were justified.
 1. God declared our sins forgiven when Christ died and rose.
 2. Through faith we appropriate God's declaration that He has been reconciled to us.
 - D. When we remember that we were glorified.
 1. We are conformed to the image of Christ in that we have all of His righteousness. We are thus brothers and sisters of Christ, who is the firstborn of many brethren.
 2. One day we shall be conformed to Christ's image also in that our bodies and behavior will be perfect (Php 3:21; 1 Jo 3:2). By remembering this fact, our growth is assured in faith and hope and love.

Conclusion: An insurance company assures its clients that they "are in good hands." We can say no less when we view the providential care of God for His elect until they arrive in glory. He has chosen and called us, justified and glorified us. We are in the good hands of our God who makes it possible for us to grow.

JLN

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:35-39

August 23, 1981

V35: "The love of Christ" is Christ's love for His people, not their love to Him. (Cf. v37, "through Him who loved us," and v39, "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.") V36: Contains a verbatim quotation of Ps. 44:22 (He 44:23). Adversity is the lot of God's people in all generations (Ac 14:22; He 11:35-38). Vv38,39: Paul develops an antithetical pattern to demonstrate the strength of the love of God. Death — life, things present — things to come, height — depth, angels (good) — principalities (evil) all show the boundlessness of the power of God to overcome everything.

Introduction: Many counselors today are emphasizing the values of a "trial separation." The hope is that the couple will have the opportunity to stand back and assess the situation from a distance.

In the text, Paul is encouraging us to step back and evaluate "trials" that come into every Christian life. Trials usually separate — husband and wife, man from job, even parent from child. The emphasis is that no trial, no matter how severe, has the power to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Trials Cannot Separate Us from the Love of God

- I. Trials are one of the "givens" of the Christian life.
 - A. Physical trials for Christians have persisted throughout history (vv35,-36).
 1. Tribulations are the marks of a Christian's struggle (Ro 2:9; 2 Cor 4:8).
 2. Persecutions, famine and nakedness were experienced by many (1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:26f.).
 - B. Spiritual trials befall every Christian (v38).
 - C. Death is the final trial through which we all must pass (v38).
- II. Trials were experienced by Jesus throughout His state of humiliation.
 - A. He was rejected (Mt 21:42).
 - B. He had no place to lay His head (Mt 8:20).
 - C. He suffered (Lk 24:46).
 - D. He felt separated from His Father (Mt 27:46).
 - E. He died (Mt 27:50).
- III. Trials are "overwhelmingly conquered" through Jesus (v37).
 - A. Our ability to overcome is based on His promises.
 1. He will not leave us nor forsake us (Jn 14:18).
 2. He will not give us more than we can bear.
 - B. Our future is secure.
 1. Jesus rose and so shall we.
 2. Jesus has prepared a place for us.

Conclusion: History has proven that individuals and the church have always been strongest when persecution was most severe. So, lift up your head, disheartened father. Keep smiling, pain-racked mother. Do not lose heart, grief-stricken spouse. Be strong, grandfather who is facing death. You are winners! You are conquerors through Jesus Christ, your Lord.

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TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 9:1-5

August 30, 1981

"I do not lie" — Paul was aware of his responsibility for his statements, since He calls on Christ as a witness. "My conscience" — Paul has proved his feelings with regard to the Jewish people through his conscience and the Spirit of God. V3: "I could wish" — Luther translates "I have wished," referring to Paul's former state as a persecutor of Christians. V4: "Who are Israelites" — the glory of the Jews is that they are bearing the honorable name of Israel (See v6). "The adoption" signifies the close relationship between God and men through the regeneration of the Holy Ghost. V5: "God blessed forever. Amen." A quotation from the synagogical liturgy, well known by Jews and Gentiles alike.

Introduction: The score is 62-61. There is a shot at the buzzer. It bounces around the rim and falls out. The game is over — so close and yet so far. It is the bottom of the ninth; the bases are loaded; the fans are cheering; Mighty Casey

strikes out — so close and yet so far. It is disappointing to come that close and yet not to win. However, in the spiritual realm it is devastating to be at the threshold of the Kingdom of God and fall back. That is a fatal error.

So Close and Yet So Far

- I. So close.
 - A. The Jews were so close to God.
 1. They were adopted as His sons (v4).
 - a. They were first-born sons (Ex. 4:22; Dt. 14:1; 23:6).
 - b. Circumcision was the symbol of that relationship.
 2. They had a covenant relationship (v4).
 - a. A covenant was made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.
 - b. The New Covenant was conveyed to these people (Jr 31:31-34).
 3. They worshiped in the Sanctuary (v4).
 - a. Temple and synagogue worship was a part of their lives.
 - b. The reading of the law (Torah) was a part of the worship.
 4. They received God's promises (v4).
 - a. Many prophecies were made concerning their physical life.
 - b. The Messianic prophecies foretold the Savior.
 5. They descended from good stock (v5).
 - a. Their "fathers" were men of God (11:17).
 - b. The Chosen One came from that race (v5).
 - B. Many today were so close to God.
 1. They received the adoption of baptism.
 2. They worshiped and were trained as children.
 3. They confirmed their faith before God's altar.
 4. They received the sacrament of the Body and the Blood.
 5. They descended from good stock (godly parents).
- II. And yet so far.
 - A. The Jews walked away from the Kingdom of God.
 1. They were separated from Christ (v3).
 - a. They denied His Messiahship.
 - b. They nailed Him to the cross.
 2. They sought their own righteousness, not Jesus'.
 - B. Many today walk away from the Kingdom of God.
 1. They remove themselves from the Means of Grace.
 2. They cease attending the worship services needed for mutual strengthening.
 3. They become self-righteous and have no need for Jesus.

Conclusion: Paul's heart was heavy. He could not keep silent. It was not condescension but concern. It was not speaking down. It was speaking as a brother. We cannot keep silent either. As individuals we must share with relatives and friends who are so close and yet so far. As a congregation we must develop active and faithful programs for reaching delinquent members and returning them to the family of God. Their future depends on it!

WAP

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

September 6, 1981

Paul will add glory to his apostleship if through it the Jews also are converted (vv13-14). The more successful he is with the Gentiles, the greater the prospect

that some of the Jews may be provoked to jealousy and saved.

God reconciled the world to Himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:19), but this began to be made known only after Jewish unbelief diverted the Gospel to the Gentiles (v15a). Yet God is not sorry for His gifts to and calling of the Jews (v29). The misuse of the gifts contributes to the working out of God's universal plan of redemption (v30). Both Gentiles, who had formerly been disobedient, and Jews are objects of God's mercy (vv31-32). All are under sin and are saved only by mercy.

The central thought of the text is that God is earnest about offering mercy. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would more fully appreciate God's mercy. The problem is that we sometimes focus more attention on our position and gifts than on divine mercy. The means to the goal is God's desire to show mercy to all.

Introduction: In the non-Christian world mercy is neither greatly admired nor widely practiced. We too are sometimes more concerned about getting our rights than showing mercy and are ready to withdraw mercy at the slightest provocation. How different is God. The text shows that

God Does Not Withdraw His Mercy

- I. Even though some rejected it.
 - A. Israel as a whole rejected God's mercy in Christ.
 1. God chose the people of Israel to be the first recipients of His mercy.
 2. Christ Himself was a Jew and worked among the Jewish people. Yet His own people rejected Him.
 - B. God did not reject His chosen people (vv29, 28, 1).
 1. He did not shut them out from the mercy now being shown to the Gentiles (vv31b; 15b).
 2. God was ready to use even jealousy on the part of the Jews to arouse their interest in His offer (v14).
 - C. God uses the rejection by some to extend mercy to others (v15a; 30a).
 1. Most of us are among the Gentiles who have received God's mercy.
 2. God uses us to extend mercy to those who have rejected it.
 - a. Our church's work is magnified when rejectors of mercy receive it by faith (v15b).
 - b. How thrilling it is when a person we thought would never become a Christian rejoices in God's mercy!

We might think that our not rejecting God's offer makes us more worthy than those who have rejected it. Not so. None of us is worthy. Yet God does not withdraw his mercy —
- II. Even though no one is worthy of it.
 - A. We all, both Jews and Gentiles, are consigned under sin (v32a).
 1. We all are naturally disobedient to God.
 2. We all naturally rebel against God's offer. That is why we so desperately need mercy.
 3. We are Christians today only because God in His mercy brought us to repentance and faith.
 - B. We have no reason to be proud.
 1. We are God's people, not through heredity or gifts or position, but only through divine mercy (v32a).
 2. We continue as His people because God in his mercy enables us to stand fast in our faith (v20).
 3. Must we not stand in awe of a mercy which is extended to all, even to us, in all our unworthiness!

- a. It is the nature of divine mercy that it is for sinners only.
- b. God wants more than anything else to show mercy to all (1 Tm 2:4).

Conclusion: What a contrast God's mercy is to human exclusiveness, meanness, and revenge! God is utterly in earnest — He does not withdraw His mercy even though some have rejected it and even though no one is worthy of it.

GA

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 11:33-36

September 13, 1981

Paul, contemplating the mercy and love of God revealed in His dealings with Jews and Gentiles, adores the divine wisdom and knowledge which can never be fully known by human beings (v33). In v34 he quotes from Is 40:13 to prove the unsearchableness of God's ways and that no one can be His confidant. In v35 quotes from Job 41:11 to show that the initiative always belongs to God and that we have nothing which we did not receive. In v36 he emphasizes man's absolute dependence on God — "from him" as the source, "through him," as the power by whose energy the whole world is sustained and ruled, "to him" as the goal for whose glory the world and all that is in it exists. Creation, redemption, providence and all the phenomena connected with them are to the glory of God.

The central thought of the text is that God is supreme. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will acknowledge God's supremacy. The problem is that we sometimes honor persons and things more than God. The means to the goal is God's ordering and controlling of the world to serve His love in Jesus Christ.

Introduction: When we look at what human beings have accomplished, especially in medicine and computers, it is easy to give glory to man. The test shows that it is more appropriate to give the glory to God.

To God Be the Glory

- I. He is the source ("from him," v36).
 - A. He created the world and all that is in it (1 Cor 8:6; 11:12).
 1. Researchers discover what was there all along.
 2. God's wisdom and knowledge are apparent in His creation of the human eye and ear, for example.
 - B. He initiated the world's redemption.
 1. The riches of His love moved Him to plan the redemption as a gift (v35).
 2. His wisdom found a way to meet the demands both of His justice and His love. No one offered Him any suggestion as to how to do this (v34).
- II. He is the power ("through him," v36).
 - A. His energy sustains the world and the universe.
 1. He holds it all together (Col 1:17; He 2:10a).
 2. He keeps us alive (Ac 17:28).
 - B. He is the agent of salvation.
 1. In Christ He saw it through to the resurrection and the ascension.
 2. He brought us to Christ and keeps us with Him.
- III. He is the goal ("to him," v36).
 - A. The world and the universe exist for God's praise.
 1. All created things (Ps 19:1; 148:9-10).
 2. Our physical body (Ps 139:14).
 - B. We have reason to praise Him for who He is and for what He has done (our creation, redemption, and preservation).

C. We praise Him with words and songs of adoration and with lives that honor Him.

Conclusion: It is exhilarating to focus on God rather than on ourselves. We become truly human when we give God the glory.

GA

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 12:1-8

September 20, 1981

The mercies (v1) are those God has shown in the redemption through Christ. Our body is the instrument by which we serve God. The reasonableness of the service (KJV) lies in the presenting rather than in the sacrificing of the body, the act of offering and not the thing offered constituting the service. It is reasonable service also because it is rational and not merely outward and mechanical. Christian renewal imparts not only the will and power to do God's will, but also the intelligence to discern it (v2). The will of God here is that which is good in a moral sense. The present tenses suggest ongoing renewal by the Holy Spirit. Although various degrees of self-estimation are proper since God gives one person more and another less (v3), all are regulated by humility, for none of us has anything we have not received. Each of us has received a gift or gifts. Yet we are no more than members in the whole body (v4). We are mutually dependent on each other (v5). We are to exercise whatever gift we have as well as we can (vv6-8). In v9 the stress is on using the gifts on the basis of love which never condones evil but clings to the good. Love is to be directed to the whole family of God (v10). Love moves us to zealous performance of our duties as service to the Lord (v11).

The central thought of the text is that the mercy of God moves us to worship with our body, mind, and gifts. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would worship God with their whole being. The problem is that fleshly rather than spiritual considerations often motivate and direct our worship. The means to the goal is the mercy of God in Christ which impels and empowers our worship.

Introduction: In the chapters preceding the text Paul describes the mercies of God demonstrated in the redemptive work of Christ. He reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Ro 8:1), and that nothing in heaven, on earth, or beneath it can separate us from God's love in Christ (Ro 8:38-39). Such mercy calls for a response. However, Paul does not say, "I command you," but rather, "I appeal to you... by the mercies of God..." To do what? To perform our "reasonable service" (KJV). He goes on to explain

Our Reasonable Service

- I. We present our bodies.
 - A. As a living sacrifice.
 1. Not as slaughtered animals or perfunctory performances.
 2. Rather as instruments for rational, moral behavior (v1c; 1 Pe 2:5; Ro 6:13, 16, 19).
 - B. Acceptable to God.
 1. God's mercy motivates our behavior.
 2. God's mercy covers our shortcomings.
 3. God's mercy hallows our efforts.

Such presenting of our bodies is a reasonable service (1 Cor 6:20). But this service involves the mind as well as the body.

II. We are renewed in our minds.

- A. The Holy Spirit enables us to discern God's will (v2b).
 - 1. We become more sensitive to what is good.
 - 2. We become more watchful that the world does not squeeze us into its mold (Phillips).
- B. The Holy Spirit enables us to assess ourselves honestly.
 - 1. We neither denigrate ourselves nor think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (v3).
 - 2. The awareness that all we have is from God makes us humble (v3b, 6a).

So to be renewed in our minds is a reasonable service. With bodies and minds activated by mercy —

III. We use our gifts.

- A. We use whatever gifts we have as well as we can (vv7-8).
 - 1. Each of us has different gifts from God (v6).
 - 2. We are most ourselves when we use our gifts as fully as possible.
- B. We strive to use our gifts for the good of others (v5).
 - 1. We are dependent on each other.
 - 2. We each can contribute to the functioning of the whole body.

Conclusion: What a challenge to present our bodies as living sacrifices, to be renewed in mind in holiness and humility, and then, with body and mind, to use our gifts more fully! This is but our reasonable service in view of the magnificent mercies of God.

GA

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 13:1-10

September 27, 1981

Paul is not referring to cases where it might become necessary to obey God rather than man, nor does he touch on whether it may be right at times to resist tyranny. He simply states that the government and its representatives are of God and are, therefore, entitled to honor and obedience from Christians.

Imperfect as governments are, they exist by divine right for the purpose of security and order in the world (v1). Judgment against evil-doing is carried out by magistrates as God's instruments (v2). To escape the fear of punishment one must do what is legally and morally good. Paul assumes that the state will approve this kind of good (v3). In v4 Paul is not speaking merely of capital punishment but of the punitive right of the government generally. Yet one should submit not only because of the consequences of disobedience but because the conscience recognizes the state as an agent of God (v5). For this reason, too, taxes are to be paid (v6). Beginning with v7 Paul introduces the duties all individuals have toward each other in society. In vv8-10 he moves on to the principle which should inspire all our dealings with our fellow human beings in the government and also other spheres. Love moves us to do good to our neighbor and thus to be law-abiding citizens.

The central thought of the text is that love moves us to be good citizens. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will obey laws of the state and of God out of love for their fellowman. The problem is that failure to love our fellowman often leads us to break the law to secure our own advantage. The means to the goal is that Christ whom we have put on by faith enables us by His love to love others.

Introduction: "Owe no one anything." Many people would be happy to go along with this because they do not feel indebted to anyone or anything. Their

attitude is reflected in expressions like, "Count me out," "Let George do it," "I couldn't care less." They speak much of rights but little of responsibilities. But there are no rights without corresponding duties. We cannot claim the rights of free citizens unless we fulfill our duties of voting and paying taxes. The fact is we are debtors. The debt we owe is love. Paul says it well:

"Owe No One Anything, Except to Love One Another"

- I. Love inspires obedience to civil laws.
 - A. God reveals His love through civil governments.
 1. Governments exist by divine right (v1).
 2. Through national, state, and local governments God maintains order and security in society (vv3-4). Governmental authorities are God's instruments for punishing evil-doers and for protecting those who obey the laws.
 - a. Fear of punishment should spur us to avoid wrong-doing.
 - b. We should avoid wrong-doing also for the sake of conscience, recognizing that, when we disobey the laws of the state, we disobey God.
 - c. A still stronger inducement to avoid evil and to do good is the love God showed in making government His agent for our welfare.
 - B. God reveals His love most fully in Jesus Christ.
 1. As we daily put on Christ by faith (Ro 13:14), we put on the forgiving, accepting love of God in Christ.
 2. We reflect God's love by loving people in tangible ways — respecting property rights, obeying traffic laws, paying taxes.

Obedience to civil laws flows from God's love for us.

- II. Love makes obedience a delights.
 - A. Because "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (10a).
 1. In the name of love for the fatherland people have sometimes trampled under foot their fellow man.
 2. Torturers often are sustained by an ideal that blinds them to the ugliness of their deeds.
 3. The second table of the Law is a way of expressing love that does not squeeze people into the shape we like but that respects their personhood, accepts them as they are, and does good to them.
 - B. Because "love is the fulfilling of the Law" (v10b).
 1. We are freed from the burden of keeping the Law in order to earn God's favor. Love does not say, "Must I do this or that?" It is already busy doing it.
 2. We can be free from pride, knowing we have but done our duty, simply paying our debt of love.

Conclusion: We owe everything to God, all the blessings we have in this country and with family and friends. To human beings we owe nothing at all — except to love one another.

GA

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 14:7-9

October 4, 1981

The text must be seen in its immediate context. It appears to have been "sandwiched" in between a portion of the letter in which Paul is admonishing his

readers not to judge the weaker brethren because of their misunderstanding about a practical matter very similar to the problem addressed by Paul in 1 Cor 8. Rather than judge or condemn the weaker brethren, they are to welcome them.

Introduction: We know of a young man whose mother, though a devout Christian was an invalid with a terminal illness and whose father was a very weak Christian. Shortly after this young man was confirmed, he quit attending the worship services of his congregation altogether. A member of his class questioned him about this conduct, and he replied that he was going to drop out of the church for now but rejoin when he was old and about to die.

To be sure, few people would be so honest and blunt as this young man; however, his reply seems to reflect the unspoken attitude of many in the church today. Therefore, we see that our text is a timely reminder that

We Are the Lord's

I. Whether we live

A. What this meant for Paul then.

1. I do not judge my fellow Christians in things neither commanded nor forbidden (vv2-6, 10).
2. I will welcome the weak brethren into my fellowship (v1).
3. I will strive to live my life in a way that is pleasing to the Lord (v8).

B. What this means for us today.

1. We, too, will refrain from judging our fellow Christians in matters neither commanded nor forbidden.
 - a. Such as playing harmless card games.
 - b. Such as the moderate use of alcohol.
2. We, too, will welcome weak brethren into our fellowship.
 - a. In order to have opportunity to nurture him in the faith.
 - b. In order that we might rejoice in the Lord together.
3. We, too, will strive to live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord.
 - a. Therefore, we need to grow in our understanding of God's will for us.
 - b. Therefore, we need to grow in our ability to express our faith.

II. Or whether we die.

A. What this meant for Paul then.

1. He was confident that he would spend eternity with His Lord (v8).
2. Because he believed that Christ lived, died, and rose again for him (v9).

B. What this means for us today.

1. We have the same hope for eternity that Paul had.
 - a. Being in the presence of the Lord (Ps 16:11).
 - b. Experiencing eternal bliss (Re 21:3-4).
2. Because Christ has earned it also for us.
 - a. By His active obedience to the Law.
 - b. By His passive suffering and death in our place.
3. We appropriate this blessing unto ourselves through our personal faith.
 - a. Which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. The Spirit creates and sustains this faith by the Means of Grace.

Conclusion: May this text serve as a reminder to us that we are the Lord's now, and may that be obvious to all by the way we conduct our lives now. May this text also remind us that we are the Lord's even in death and that we shall spend

an eternal bliss with Him. May this thought strengthen and comfort us when we face our last enemy, be that soon or in the distant future.

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EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 1:3-5, 19-27

October 11, 1981

Paul's words in v24 might make it appear that he is boasting of himself. From the context, however, it is clear that he is expressing his confidence in being God's man for a particular time and task.

Introduction: A popular song a few years ago had the refrain: "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world!" These words point up the fact that each human being has a basic need to love and be loved.

Paul recognized this truth. He is telling us:

We Are in This Together

- I. We need each other's support.
 - A. Paul was thrilled to receive support from the Philippian Christians.
 1. They had joined him in furthering the Gospel (v5).
 2. He knew that they were still praying for him (v19).
 3. He urged them to continue to manifest their faith (v27).
 - B. We, too, need spiritual encouragement.
 1. We sometimes feel so alone in our attempt to live as Christians.
 2. The Christian lives of others can encourage us.
 3. We are encouraged when we know others are praying for us.
- II. We can help each other.
 - A. Paul was sure that he could assist the Philippians in their faith.
 1. Going to the Lord would be great gain for him (v23).
 - a. He could leave the cares of this world behind.
 - b. He would begin to enjoy the complete joys of eternal life.
 2. Yet he also recognized he could be God's agent to benefit the Philippian Christians to facilitate their progress and joy in the faith (v25).
 - B. We can help our fellow Christians to grow in the faith.
 1. By reminding them of the kind of Lord they have, a Lord who has helped us through the Gospel in our greatest need.
 2. By reminding them of how Christ desires to use all Christians in His work of spreading the Gospel.
 - a. Each of us has different abilities.
 - b. We are to use them for the common good.

Conclusion: We are all member of one big family in the Church. We are in this task together. We need each other's support. We can help each other. We can be so thankful for our partnership in the Gospel.

DOW

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 2:1-11

October 18, 1981

This text is more than an exposition of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. It teaches us to serve as He did. It was pure love that caused the Son of

God (v6) to volunteer His service to become one of us — to save us.

The central thought is that in His humiliation Jesus not only fulfilled the Law for us but showed us how to glorify God in our lives. The goal is to have Christians use Jesus as both their guide and strength to serve each other. The problem is that we so easily fail to follow Jesus with the excuse that "He is God; He can do it. I can't." The means to achieve the goal is our union with Christ and our fellowship with the Spirit.

Introduction: Imitation is not only a form of flattery but one of the best ways to praise. Our text calls us to take a close look at Jesus.

Think Like Jesus

I. Think like Jesus *about yourself*.

A. See Jesus' self-view according to His human nature.

1. He was fully God and able to do whatever He willed (v6).
2. He was not pre-occupied with merely displaying His divinity; otherwise there would not have been an incarnation.

B. Examine your own self-appraisal.

1. It is not wrong to be self-concerned. V4 (NIV) implies that it is right to look to one's own interests. "Love your neighbor as yourself" means it is right to love yourself.
2. Never let self dominate (v3). We fool ourselves by the titles we cling to. Everyone can find someone "lower" whom he can dominate, subjugate, humiliate.

Transition: Jesus' attitude toward Himself in His human nature is inseparable connected with His attitude toward others.

II. Think like Jesus *about others*.

A. Jesus became a servant (v7).

1. That is what His incarnation was all about.
2. His ministry was filled with continual serving of people's spiritual and temporal needs.
3. His greatest service was to do for all people what no person could do for himself or for another; Jesus redeemed us with His blood (v8; Is 53; Mt 20:28).

B. How do we serve others in His name?

1. We need not and cannot duplicate Jesus' service and redeem the world.
2. We are challenged to consider other people and their needs as more important than ourselves (v3b). We are not to disturb and destroy others, but reach out to them in love.
3. Service (v4) comes in many and varied opportunities: listening to someone's problems, mowing his lawn when he is sick, babysitting, and, best of all, sharing with him the love of God in Christ.

III. Think like Jesus *about God*.

A. This is the relation in which Jesus, according to His human nature, stood to God.

1. He wanted to glorify God (Jn. 17).
2. He was obedient (v8).
3. He was strengthened by His Father for the task (Jn 17:2ff.).
4. At the right time, God exalted Him (vv9-11).

B. We also need to look up to God.

1. He equipped us for the servant-role (v1).
 - a. Christ is our strength as well as example for the task.
 - b. Through God's love, we have His pardon and presence.

- c. The fellowship of the Spirit daily nourishes us through the Word.
- 2. He blesses us abundantly (v2).
Christians are united by His love; they have a common bond.
Christians are enabled to serve with united purpose and harmonious effort.

Conclusion: Our text presents no dazzling display of divine power. Rather we see the possessor of all power joining the human race as servant-Savior. How we need to think like Jesus! God pays no attention to the titles we hold, but rather to the role we play. A servant role would fit us just fine! With the opening of the church door come many opportunities this week to think, and act, like Jesus.

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TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 4:4-8

October 25, 1981

"Always" (v1) has staggering implications. As Law, it reminds us that we want to rejoice only when God does things our way. As Gospel, it reminds us of the constancy of our Lord's love. In view of the nearness of the Lord's return (v5) and the spiritual emptiness of many people, our joyfulness in the Lord needs to be expressed. The six "whatevers" (v8) open doors for expression of our joy. How can the content and delivery of the sermon, the selection and singing of the hymns, the doing of the liturgy, exhibit joy in the Lord and stimulate God's people to show it?

The central thought is that joy is a gift from God through Christ. The goal of the sermon is that Christians would express their joy in the Lord. The problem is that we too often see Christianity providing eternal joy but stifling happiness on earth. The means to joy is the peace of God in Jesus Christ.

Introduction: An unhappy Christian is a contradiction. Yet the conversation and conduct of many Christians indicates that joy is not a primary factor in their lives. They apparently are of the opinion that sadness is more fitting than joy. Our text is saying we do not have to wait for the joy of heaven. It calls us to rejoice now.

Yes, You — Rejoice!

- I. You have the right reason.
 - A. Your joy is not superficial.
 - 1. The world's joy does not last (the "now generation," "have a blast"; wild parties).
 - 2. The painted smiles of the model, actress, clerk, politician quickly fade.
Example: The television announcer for a Saturday children's program, thinking he was off the air, said: "I guess that'll hold the little stinkers for awhile."
 - 3. Even the emotional ecstasy of a church service may not last.
 - B. You are a Christian (v4).
 - 1. Your Heavenly Father loves you; He made you and cares for you (Ps 103).
 - 2. Your Savior redeemed you (1 Jn 4), He is coming soon (v5b).
 - 3. The Spirit nourishes your faith (Jn 15:26; Jn 14:26).
 - C. You have a reason to rejoice even in hardship.
 - 1. Paul knew this from personal experience, writing this text and letter from prison.

2. In the midst of pain, family crises, financial concerns, ridicule, temptation, we too can rejoice, for our Lord strengthens us (vv6a, 7, 13, 19).

Transition: God does not give you the right reason to rejoice without also giving you a way to express that joy.

II. You have ample opportunity to rejoice.

A. Rejoice before God.

1. Rejoice as you come to Him in prayer and petition (v6) whether about a problem at work, your spouse's health, a math problem, dating, or whatever.
2. Rejoice in your thanksgiving and praise to Him (v6). Let it be both spontaneous and conscious. Remember His strength to fight temptation, a blessing you received through a family member, the Sacrament of the Altar.

B. Rejoice before people.

1. Display an attitude of joyful trust in God (vv6,7).
2. Select activities that honor God and help people (v8). Christianity is not a narrowing of options for joy. As Christians we do not view God's will as "boxing us in."
3. Such rejoicing is not bragging but witnessing (v5).

Conclusion: Rejoice in the Lord always? This "impossible" assignment becomes a delightful opportunity for God's people. God is asking us to remember whose we are. In the Hawaiian sunset the sun sets rapidly, but there is a long, beautiful afterglow that paints the skyline. Jesus' visible ministry on earth was brief. But the love He brought glows in and through us. Rejoice! Again, I say, "Rejoice!"

LS

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 4:10-13, 19-20

November 1, 1981

This text is best known for the affirmation, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Many today feel stampeded into helplessness to cope with one crisis after another. They lose their will to live with graciousness toward God, others, and themselves. This text puts them into touch with Christ's strength to restore their self-esteem, their confidence in God, and their newly oriented concern for others.

I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me

- I. I can deal with my personal relationships responsibly through Christ who strengthens me.
 - A. I can rejoice in the Lord when people show *concern for me*.
 - B. I can show *concern for others* by asking God to supply their every need.
 - C. I can find strength in Christ in times of abasement when others do not show concern for me.
 1. I understand their limitations when they have no opportunity to show concern.
 2. I know that Christ will move some to concern in the future.
- II. I can deal with my worldly needs through Christ who strengthens me.
 - A. I have learned the secret of facing prosperity.
 1. I thank God who provides the plentiful resources.
 2. I seek means of sharing my abundance responsibly.

- B. I have learned the secret of facing poverty.
 - 1. Christ gives me strength to endure hunger.
 - 2. I know that God will supply my wants according to His providential plan.
- C. Christ gives me the mind to glorify God in whatever worldly status I am placed.

HHZ

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Thessalonians 1:1-5a

November 8, 1981

In v1 Paul states the characteristic peculiarity of the church: Christians are in God and in Christ. Their hope and help is their *kurios*. Paul goes on in v3 to give thanks for the Thessalonian Christians' faith which was productive of good works and for their love which was manifesting itself in acts of kindness. These evidences of the Spirit's work were proof that they were God's chosen people (v4). Paul is confident of their being God's chosen ones also because the Thessalonians received the Gospel joyfully, being convinced of the Gospel's reality by the power of the Holy Spirit (v5a).

The central thought of the text is that our attitude toward the Gospel and our life of faith give evidence that we are the chosen of God. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be confident that they are God's chosen ones.

Introduction: What a thrill to be chosen for a coveted position or award! Maybe you have never been chosen for anything. Yet we Christians, all of us, are the objects of a unique choice. God has chosen us to be His people (Jn 15:16). How can we be sure? According to Paul in the text

We Know We Are God's Chosen Ones

- I. Because of how the Gospel is working in us.
 - A. The Gospel consists of words with power (v5a).
 - 1. By the operation of the Spirit in the Gospel at our Baptism we were transferred from Satan's kingdom to God's kingdom.
 - 2. Through the Gospel in the absolution, in Holy Communion, in sermons and devotions, the Spirit continues to work in us the full conviction that God loves us for Jesus' sake and regards us as His own.
 - B. The Gospel supplies the power to live under grace.
 - 1. Does the Gospel sometimes strike us as the "same old thing?" It is not the "same old thing" at all; it has many facets, and it can speak pertinently to our need.
 - 2. Do we sometimes feel that God is a wrathful deity? The Gospel assures us that God loves us in spite of what we have done and what we are.

The working of the Gospel in us is evidence that we are God's chosen ones. The Gospel-worked conviction that God accepts us in Christ is faith. Faith expresses itself. We know we are God's chosen ones —

- II. Because of how our faith is showing through us.
 - A. Faith shows itself in labors of love.
 - 1. To love takes will and effort.
 - 2. It may be a labor at times to help a child with homework, to listen to one's spouse, to visit a lonely person.
 - B. Faith shows itself in the steadfastness of hope.

1. Hope that God will see us through our troubles.
2. Hope that we will one day be with our Lord in heaven.

Although our faith could be showing itself much more, it is nevertheless showing itself in love and in hope. This activity of faith is evidence that we are God's chosen ones.

Conclusion: In us, as in the Thessalonians, the Gospel is working and faith is showing. Therefore, we know we are God's chosen ones. To be chosen by someone for a responsible task or a coveted award may seem to be a great thing. Yet there is nothing greater than to be the chosen of God.

GA

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Thessalonians 1:5b-10

November 15, 1981

The Thessalonians' reception of the Word was accompanied with "much affliction" (v6), for unbelieving Jews stirred up the heathen rabble and raised a persecution against Paul and his associates. After Paul left Thessalonica the persecution increased against the Christians. Yet the Thessalonian Christians gave evidence of a Spirit-inspired joy. Their witness to the Lord excited the attention of people both to the north and to the south of them. Their faith sounded out (v8) like a trumpet; many heard of how they had made a radical turn-about from dead idols to serve the living God. God had manifested Himself in the raising of Jesus from the dead (v10). The Thessalonians could commit their life into the hands of God who at the parousia will judge His opposers and eternally deliver His own.

The central thought of the text is that Christians by their attitudes and actions sound forth for the Lord. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers' sounding forth for the Lord will be clear and certain. The problem is that our attitudes and actions often send out uncertain sounds. The means to the goal is that God who raised Jesus from the dead transforms us with His power to send forth certain sounds.

Introduction: A baby grand piano I once owned began emitting a rattling sound whenever I played the ten keys below middle C. After much investigation by the company representatives it was discovered that the sounding-board had a crack in it. A piano's sounding-board is crucial for the clarity and sonority of the tone. Paul says of the Thessalonian Christians that "the word of the Lord sounded forth from you." Evidently they were good sounding-boards. We too are

Sounding-Boards for the Lord

The question is, how clear and pure is the tone that sounds forth from us? According to the text, one way to be good sounding-boards is by

- I. Rejoicing in affliction.
 - A. The Thessalonians actually rejoiced in the afflictions that came to them as a result of their believing the Gospel.
 1. What a peculiar reaction to affliction! No wonder the news of their behavior spread throughout Greece.
 2. Their joy was not something they worked up themselves — sort of gritting their teeth and saying, "Affliction is fun." It was "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit."
 - B. We too can rejoice in affliction.
 1. Affliction should not surprise us; it is the lot of all Christians (TLH

413, st. 2).

2. God, who raised Jesus from the dead, will support us with His power. We can trust God no matter how joyless we feel.
 - a. Joy does not depend on joyous feelings. Sometimes we feel like the book title, "Been Down So Long, It Looks Like Up to Me." Life is up and down — testing, stretching, then peace again.
 - b. Joy does not depend on our comprehending all the tragedies of life.
3. Rejoicing is possible because we do not have to pretend affliction does not hurt, or display a foolish bravado. Yet we know that affliction can be used by God to enrich our life and enlarge our faith.

We are sounding-boards for the Lord not only by the attitude we display but also by the action we take.

II. Serving the living God.

- A. The Thessalonians turned from idols to God.
 1. They gave their allegiance to God.
 2. They served God by imitating the apostles in struggling against the flesh, in speaking the truth, in demonstrating love.
 3. They relied on Christ's resurrection power to serve God.
- B. We too can serve the living God.
 1. Many things hinder our service — judgmental attitudes, lustful desires, selfish motives. We need help from God.
 2. Through Word and Sacrament God renews us daily in Christ's image as we wait for the day when Christ will deliver us from all evil and bring us to His heavenly kingdom.

Conclusion: The sounding-board of even a very good piano can develop a crack. The Word which sounds forth from us is Christ's own Word through which the Spirit works. That Word is able to mend the cracks in our lives and make us better sounding-boards. It is such a privilege to sound forth for the Lord.

GA

LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Corinthians 15:20-28

November 22, 1981

Too many sectarian religious leaders confuse innocent believers with the chronology of the end times instead of following the simple order of the resurrection events which have as their purpose the consummation of the kingdom and those who belong to Christ. Too many free-lance speculative religious spokesmen have subordinated Christ and attacked the Trinity. St. Paul's statement of the order of events of the last things affirms the resurrection of Christ, the glory of Christ in His kingly work, and the consummation of God's saving work through Christ in relationship to the world and us.

The Sequence of the Resurrection Events

- I. Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection.
 - A. In Adam all die.
 - B. In Christ all shall be made alive.
- II. Those who belong to Christ will be raised next.
 - A. The *assurance* of their resurrection is their belonging to Christ.
 - B. The *time* of their resurrection will be at His coming (Parousia).
- III. Then Christ will deliver the Kingdom of God.

- A. Christ will deliver the Kingdom to God *when the end* comes.
- B. Christ will *destroy* all *opposition* to God.
 - 1. Every rule.
 - 2. Every authority.
 - 3. Every power.
- IV. Death will be the last enemy to be destroyed.
 - A. God puts all things in subjection under Christ's feet, including death.
 - B. The children of God will be freed of the fear of death and its grievous consequences.
- V. God will be everything to everyone.
 - A. God will consummate the divine destiny for everything in His creation.
 - B. Through everything in the restored creation God will fulfill our lives.
 - 1. He will consummate the abundant life for us.
 - 2. He will give us eternal life.

HHZ