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Homiletical Studies

TRINITY SUNDAY

John 3:1-17

June 2, 1985

John alone of the Scripture authors mentions Nicodemus, and then three times: our text, 7:50-51, and 19:39. Out of the "many other signs . . . these have been written that you may believe" (20:30-31). The question before us then is: How do the Nicodemus accounts point us to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and, through Him, to life? The "eternal life" of 3:16 does not mean "everlasting 'this life,'" but rather "a new quality of life." Note that the three "How can this be?" questions of Nicodemus have much the same sense as Luther's "What does this mean?" After all the commentary on 3:3, two points stand out. First, both translations, "born again" and "born from above," should be acknowledged. Perhaps "born anew" comes close. Compare the Greek of 3:3 with 3:31, 19:11, 2 Cor. 5:17; Ga. 4:9; Tt. 3:5; 1 Pe. 1:23. Second, there is room to read this rebirth as God's one-time activity in Christ repeatedly brought to the individual Christian life. Note the *pneuma-pneumatos* in verse 8, and consider Gn 2:7; Eze. 37:9-10; Jn 20:22; 2 Tm 3:16. John picks up *Martevia* (vll) in 3:31-36; 5:31-47; 8:12-20. The judgment—redemption theme of this text is also treated in 5:22; 8:15; 9:39; 12:47. Jesus could assume (3:14) that Nicodemus was familiar with Nu 21:5-9. Today's preacher cannot make the same assumption of his congregation.

Introduction: The odds in this life are long. There is little chance the boy starting in flag football will ever play in the NFL. The man starting a small business is glad to survive without much hope of becoming another IBM. The mortician expects our business sooner or later. The odds against man by himself in his spiritual life are even worse. It is very good news, then, that

GOD CHANGES THE ODDS IN OUR FAVOR

- I. Natural man is doomed (v 6a, 13a).
 - A. Nicodemus perfectly represents the aristocratic, well-intentioned but unenlightened Judaism of his day, and the best of men in our time. The best Nicodemus could do was to move
 1. From the darkness of night (v 2),
 2. Through the intrigue of politics (7:50-51)
 3. To the gloom (half-light, mostly-dark) of the grave (19:39).
 - B. Our best efforts also are doomed (Is 64:6).
 1. We neither understand nor can control earthly things (v 8).
 2. Even less do we, on our own, believe heavenly things (vv 9-12, Is 64:6b).
- II. Jesus came to change the odds for us (v 13).
 - A. God the Father did not want us to perish (v 16).
 - B. Jesus did not come to condemn us (v 17a).
 - C. Jesus came to bring eternal life (vv 15-17).
 1. "Eternal life" is not just everlasting "this life".
 2. Those "born anew" in Christ have a new quality of life (v 3b, 5b, 6b).
- III. Jesus' method was to absorb the consequences of our former odds.
 - A. Jesus did His work in the light (Jn 18:20).
 - B. He came into our darkness (v 2a, Jn 13:30b).
 - C. He even went to the darkness of the cross (v 14).

1. Where snakebite would have killed us (Nu 21:5-9).

2. Jesus absorbed the venom, even died of it for us (Gn 3:15b and 2 Cor 5:21).

Conclusion: When all odds were against us, Jesus came from the life of heaven into our darkness that we might be born anew into His light.

Warren E. Messman
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SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 2:23-28

June 9, 1985

In nine instances in Mk 1:21 through 3:12, Jesus not only claims deity, but shows the power of deity. He demonstrates His power as Servant over a demon, disease, leprosy, paralysis, a publican, the old religion, the Sabbath (our text), deformity, and demons. Jesus accepts implicit responsibility for His disciples' behavior. Our behavior when we claim discipleship still reflects on Jesus. But more, Jesus takes this opportunity to teach what had been forgotten about God's rest. Meditate on Gn 2:2-3; Ho 6:6; Mt 12:11-12; and Dt 5:12-15. The Sabbath is intended for physical and spiritual blessing. See Ps 95:11, Mt. 11:28; Ga 4:9-10; He 4:1-13. Jesus cites David not as mere precedent, but to reestablish two principles: first, the Sabbath is for man, not vice versa; and second, certain work is permissible even on the Sabbath, i.e., works of mercy and necessity, Dt 23:25. Review Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment. If we, like the Pharisees, pervert the Word of God, we deny Christ who both authored and used the O.T. throughout His ministry. It is easier to follow the letter of the Law (though we do not!) than it is to exercise the thought required by love. The priest fed David and his men because he recognized that his moral obligation superceded the ceremonial regulation. Jesus put every institution on notice that it was made for people, not people for the institution. See Lenski for help with the Abiathar-Ahimelech "controversy."

Introduction: What are we doing here this morning?

DO WE KEEP THE SABBATH OR DOES THE SABBATH KEEP US?

- I. We enslave ourselves to the Sabbath when we regard the letter of the Law as inviolable at the expense of God's intention.
 - A. The Pharisees tried to hold Jesus' disciples to an interpretation of the Law that went beyond God's intent, v 24.
 - B. Sometimes we concern ourselves more with "right" doctrine or "right" liturgy than with true worship, Ho 6:6.
 - C. We can misuse the Sabbath on weekdays too.
 1. A people more concerned with its own congregation than the community or the hurting in our world denies Christ.
 2. When we insist on our rights but neglect our responsibilities, we deny Christ.
 3. When we are more interested in being loved than in loving, we deny Christ.
- II. God intends the Sabbath to keep us.
 - A. Jesus reaffirmed that the Sabbath was made for man, v 27a.
 1. Jesus served His disciples by defending them.

2. Jesus used David (vv 25-26) to demonstrate two points:
 - a. The Sabbath is made to serve man.
 - b. Certain work is more important than regualtion.
 - B. The Sabbath is intended for our physical and spiritual blessing.
 1. Our bodies need a period of daily and weekly rest, Gn 2:2-3.
 2. Weary souls need rest too, Mt 11:28.
 3. We also remember the Sabbath day when we do necessary work on the Sabbath (such as police, fire, or medical work) in a manner that glorifies God, Mt 12:11.
 4. We also remember the Sabbath when we do works motivated by love, even on the Sabbath itself, Mt 12:12.
 - C. The Sabbath serves us when we celebrate sins forgiven. We "rest" in forgiveness, ours for the sake of the Son of Man who served us.
- Conclusion:* Which will be discussed more around the dinner table today: how the pastor preached, or how the people celebrated?

Warren E. Messmann

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 3:20-35

June 16, 1985

When Jesus' friends ("his own people," NASB) saw Him working so zealously that He was not able to attend to His bodily needs, they considered Him "beside himself" (v 21), bereft of His reason. "Even his brothers did not believe in him" (Jn 7:5), but they were concerned about Him and wanted to rescue Him from the importuning crowd.

The scribes' authoritative judgement (v 22) was absurd. If Jesus were casting out demons by Satan's power, Satan's kingdom would be divided against itself, which would be suicidal for Satan. Jesus compares Satan to a strong man who must first be bound if his house is to be plundered. Jesus is the one who binds Satan, spoils his kingdom, and leads sinners who have been under Satan's power to repentance and salvation. Satan is Christ's enemy and is not in league with Him. Therefore, the scribes must understand that Jesus is casting out devils by the power of God and that in Him the kingdom of God has come among them.

Having reasoned with the scribes, He warns them (vv 28-30) that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven (v 29). In attributing to the chief of evil spirits works of Jesus that were obviously being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the scribes were close to, if they were not already, calling the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit. The Holy Spirit alone works repentance, but if He is called a demon repentance is not possible. When the Holy Spirit working through the Word is recognized as God's Spirit and a person deliberately blasphemes Him, the Spirit's power to change that person has been nullified. Such a person's eternal damnation is sealed.

In verse 31 Mark resumes the story about Christ's relatives from verse 21. To what extent the charge of the scribes against Jesus influenced His relatives to restrain Him is difficult to say. In any case, when Jesus is informed of His relatives' desire to speak to Him, He utilizes the untimely interruption to teach an important truth. Jesus is not ashamed of His earthly relationships, but He emphasizes that there is a higher relationship which hinges on doing God's will, that is, God's gracious will,

which is that we repent and believe the Gospel.

The central thought of the text is that we do God's will when, by the working of the Holy Spirit, we believe in Jesus as the conqueror of Satan for us.

Introduction: Ties of flesh and blood bind family members. Love and companionship bind husbands and wives. Common interests and like-mindedness bind friends. In every relationship there are bonds that hold people together. It is so also in our relationship with Christ.

FAITH IS THE TIE THAT BINDS US TO CHRIST

- I. Faith in Christ as the conqueror of Satan.
 - A. Jesus demonstrated His power over Satan.
 - 1. He drove out evil spirits (Mk 3:11).
 - 2. When He died and rose from the grave (v 27; Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8), Jesus delivered us from Satan's power and opened the way to a faith relationship with Himself as the conqueror of Satan.
 - B. Satan still tries to bind us.
 - 1. By leading us to think, along with Christ's relatives, that too much zeal in religion may be an indication of mental instability.
 - 2. By leading us to misjudge, along with the scribes, the cunning and strength of Satan.
 - C. Yet because Christ plundered Satan's house, we can now be brothers and sisters of Jesus.
 - 1. Jesus leads us who were bound by Satan to repentance and faith.
 - 2. Satan is marking time until his final judgment on the Last Day. He cannot take from us our faith in Christ.
- II. Faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit.
 - A. By the power of the Spirit we daily do God's will (v 35).
 - 1. The will of God is that we believe in Jesus as our brother and the conqueror of Satan (v 34; 1 Tm 2:4).
 - 2. We do God's will when we let our faith be nurtured by the Spirit through God's Word and the Sacraments.
 - B. We guard against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (vv 28-30).
 - 1. Blasphemy of the Spirit takes place if we reject what we know to be true, namely, the Spirit's testimony to Christ in the Scriptures.
 - 2. It is the unforgivable sin to reject against our better knowledge the Spirit who alone can work faith.

Conclusion: By Spirit-wrought faith we have come into a relationship that is higher and nobler than any earthly relationship. We are brothers and sisters, not of Satan (God forbid!), but of Jesus Christ, the Lord!

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Mark 4:26-34****June 23, 1985**

The parable in verse 26-29 emphasizes that the seed (God's Word) produces fruit by its own power and in its own time. We can trust the seed to work and not worry about it. We cannot make the Word more effective than it is. Luther says, "The Kingdom of God comes indeed of itself without our prayer." Where the Word has been sown, there will be a harvest. The harvest is at our death or at Christ's final coming, whichever occurs first. We can patiently trust the seed to do its work and bide God's time for the harvest.

The second parable (vv30-32) stresses the contrast between the insignificant beginning of the kingdom of God and its surprising ending. Rome was oblivious to the kingdom Christ brought, and the Jewish leaders were blind to it. The religious leaders could not conceive of God's kingdom in the person of a child born in a stable who later as a man associated with public sinners. Furthermore, Jesus' followers were uneducated fishermen. Yet from these insignificant beginnings the kingdom grew to encompass not only Jews but Gentiles in many parts of the world. The contrast is between the small seed and the great bush.

Taking the two parables together, as the text does, the central thought is the growth of the Word of the kingdom.

Introduction: Where there is life there is growth. Even after physical growth stops human beings need to keep on growing intellectually and in other ways. Growth is necessary to experience life at its fullest. Growth is a feature also of God's kingdom and specifically of the Word of that kingdom. The parables in the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel, beginning with the parable of the sower, focus on God's Word. The text points out that

THE WORD OF GOD GROWS**I. The Word grows gradually.****A. As the seed is sown (v 26).**

1. Pastors and also lay-Christians sow the seed of the Word.
2. The sowing goes on whatever God's Word is proclaimed and taught. Gradual sowing is necessary for gradual growth.

B. As the plant develops.

1. We can prepare the ground and nurture the plant, but the seed grows of itself, mysteriously (v 27b).
2. We may sometimes get discouraged because the growth is so gradual, but growth there will be (Is 55:11). Therefore, we can relax (v 27a) and let the Word work according to its own schedule.

While learning to be patient with growth that is gradual, we must also face up to the fact that

II. The Word grows inconspicuously.**A. The Word is as inconspicuous as a mustard seed in the beginning stages of its growth (v 31).**

1. The great and the powerful in Christ's day gave little notice to the Word growing in their midst.
2. Those who wield power and influence in the world today are indifferent for the most part to the growth of the Word.

B. So inconspicuous is the Word's growth that we are often not aware of anything taking place.

1. The sinners with whom Christ associated and the disciples whom He called often gave little evidence of spiritual growth.
2. We cannot see faith, nor do we always see the various stages of growth (v 28). Conversions are not necessarily spectacular, nor do we always perceive growth in love and patience in ourselves and in others.

At the same time, there is evidence of rather impressive growth.

III. The Word grows impressively.

A. The Word that was sown in a little corner of the world has spread to many nations.

1. The Word has produced a great bush with large branches in which all sorts of people find refuge and rest (v 32).
2. The worldwide church attests to the growth power of the Word.
- B. The Word will continue to grow until it produces a harvest (v 29).
 1. We shall see this harvest on the Last Day.
 2. Then there will be a great gathering of ripened grain, of redeemed souls, for the heavenly gardener.

Conclusion: We need never discount the power of God's Word. The Word of God grows gradually, inconspicuously, but also impressively.

Gerhard Aho

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 4:35-41

June 30, 1985

This well-known pericope, contained also in Matthew and Luke, leads us directly to the purpose of Mark's Gospel: to confess that Jesus is Lord. The three miracles recorded in Mk 4:35-5:43, the stilling of the sea, the vanquishing of the Gerasene demoniac, and the raising of Jairus' daughter show that Jesus is Lord over nature, demons, and death.

Two pitfalls must be avoided: The interpreter can get caught up in trying to explain the cause of the "fierce gust of wind" on the sea, as though purely natural causes could explain this phenomenon in the basin-like topography of the Sea of Galilee. The other danger is that this whole text is viewed merely as an allegory of Christ and the Church — attractive as that may be. Of course, Mark uses symbolic objects to teach, but he uses them to teach faith (justification) rather than to model life in the Church (sanctification).

Introduction: We all confess that "Jesus is my Lord." Yet our lives display inadequate evidence of such a faith. This is due to our flesh always warring against our spirit, as well as to the fact that Jesus' lordship is largely veiled. That veiledness is uncovered in today's text. With the world of nature howling against the disciples, and us, Jesus discloses His lordship. As a result, we, like the disciples, exclaim:

WHO THEN IS THIS?

- I. He is the Lord of nature.
 - A. He created nature.
 - 1. His Word and Spirit were the agent (Jn 1:1-3; Gn 1:1ff; Pr 8:22ff).
 - 2. He is the firstborn and head of creation (Col 1:15ff).
 - B. He redeemed nature.
 - 1. He tasted death for every man (Ps 8:4-5; cf. He 2:6-8).
 - 2. His blood was sprinkled on earth for an atonement to free nature from captivity to sin and mortality (Ro 8:19-23).
 - C. He is the provider for all.
 - 1. Sunshine and rain in due season to all (Mt 5:45).
 - 2. Everything depends upon Him for sustenance (Mt 6:25ff).
 - 3. He intervenes to muzzle storms and still the seas (v 39).
- II. He is the Lord of Scripture.
 - A. He discloses Himself in grace to believers.
 - 1. Though seemingly asleep He can be wakened (vv 38-39).
 - 2. His hiddenness instills fear (v 39).
 - 3. He rescues by rebuking faithlessness and revealing Himself the Master of the elements (i.e.f. "silenced" and "muzzled" with Mk 1:25, "demon muzzling").
 - B. He is the fulfiller of Scripture.
 - 1. He is the prophetic end and the shaper of all Scripture and history (Re 1:4,8).
 - 2. All scripture is witness to His suffering and glory (Jn 5:39; 1Pe 1:11).
 - 3. He unveils His real glory in the Scriptures; nature is but His mask.
- III. He is my Lord.
 - A. He unveils His power daily, especially in the midst of peril. (The early Christians remembered this account in their persecutions.)
 - B. He releases His grace in daily forgiveness (1 Jn 1:7).
 - C. He disciplines me, often with affliction, to keep me His own (He 12:5ff).
 - D. I confess His Lordship through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

Conclusion: The goal of this sermon is to elicit the confession, "Lord Jesus!" I can confess this only with a Spirit-wrought faith. Hence, "Lord, increase my faith!"

G. Waldemar Degner

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-41

July 7, 1985

The last verse of this text (Mk 5:43) poses two problems. The first portion states: "And He charged them much that no one should know this." This is the so-called "Messianic Secret," which confronts us throughout this Gospel beginning with 1:44. For a detailed review of alternative answers to this problem see Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). In summary, Jesus did not want the "pearls" of the Gospel to be cast to the swine (Mt 7:6); He wanted the Good News proclaimed only to those readied by repentance. The "key" to the secret is in Mk 8:31ff, where first the sufferings and death of Christ are mentioned, and then the individual cross-bearing of the follower is stressed. To

those who live in impenitence and without faith the Gospel is hidden; at best, it is spoken in parables so that hearing, they do not understand (see Mk 8:17f). To the "hardened heart" there is no reception (Mk 6:52).

The second part of v 43 states: "and He commanded that something should be given her to eat." People have viewed this as a kind of anti-gnostic appeal or as an editorial addition. It is far better to take the command as genuine. It is a loving touch of which only the Master Healer would think amidst the excitement and confusion of events. Together with healing and life He also sustains the body with food. The Lord of life performs a deed of compassion and a deed which provides a pledge of His conquering power over the combined forces of death and unbelief.

Introduction: We think of death as an event at the end of our life. Seldom do we consider it a process that is going on continuously. St. Mark aligns the powers that are hostile to God to show their inter-relationship—the storm at sea (Mk 4:35ff), the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), the woman with the issue of blood (5:25-34), and finally the raising of Jairus' daughter—as a climactic progression of distortions of God's purpose. In the midst of these hostile powers the lordship of Christ stands forth. In this text Jesus is

THE LORD OF LIFE WHO RESTORES LIFE

I. The lost life is described.

A. The image of God has been destroyed.

1. In the Gerasene demoniac the very ego of man is warped; it is bent on self-destruction. The divine likeness of creation is destroyed so that alien powers are now at work (Mk 5:1-20).
2. God gives all of the sons of Adam over to death (Ro 5:12ff), even those raised in a godly environment such as Jairus' daughter.

B. Sin's power is evident.

1. Sin's power is seen in every form of rebelliousness, disease, and every perversion of God's order. The wages of sin end in death (Ro 6:23). Note the noise makers and weepers in the text as they illustrate the desire of man to cover up what is wrong.
2. The power of sin rules the unconverted man (Ro 6:12ff). This is personalized in James 1:14f: lust in man becomes pregnant and gives birth to sin; sin grows up only to become death.

II. The Lord of Life makes alive.

A. He gives the life of faith that seeks wholeness.

1. As in Jairus, the life of faith is manifest in coming to and in praying for wholeness; in seeking only a touch of the hand of Jesus (v 23).
2. Where there is a life of faith there is acknowledgement of human need and confession of unworthiness to "bother the Teacher" (v 35).
3. In the midst of the tumult of the noise-makers and professional weepers faith latches on to the Word of life (vv 38-40).
4. Faith reasons this way: Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more; where condemnation convicts, God's righteousness acquits; where death reigns, life superabounds (Ro 5:15-17; Is 40:2).

B. Faith-life attains the restoration that Christ came to bring.

1. Jairus' daughter is raised by the divine command (v 41).
2. Real life now begins.

Conclusion: God give us such a radical faith!

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:1-8

July 14, 1985

Introduction: Sometimes we envision the ministry of Jesus in terms of strong responses of faith and crowds of people following Him. Indeed, at times He took special note of a strong faith. Not long before the events mentioned in our text Jesus spoke to the woman healed of an issue of blood saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mk 5:34; see also Mt 8:10). In contrast to such beautiful responses we need to be aware also of the negative responses to Jesus' ministry. The text relates such a response in Christ's home town of Nazareth.

UNBELIEF STANDS IN THE WAY OF JESUS' BLESSING

- I. Unbelief has its roots in envy and pride (vv 1-3).
 - A. The question, "Where did this man get all this?" betrays an envy which will not admit that Jesus had a greater depth of knowledge than they who had the same education and environment.
 - B. The pride of many would not allow them to believe that one who had grown up among them could be more important than they.
 1. Because we are instructed and confirmed in the Lutheran Church are we sometimes offended because someone implies that we should grow in knowledge and in faith and in ability to serve?
 2. Are we jealous or envious of those in teaching and leadership positions? Do we forget that God speaks to us through sinful people?
 - C. In their unbelief many could not accept Jesus as the embodiment of the true God (v 3). How could Mary's son be the Son of God? (cf. Luther's explanation of the Third Article).

Transition: These thoughts and attitudes caused many to "take offense at Him" and robbed them of the blessings Jesus meant to bestow.

- II. Unbelief has sad results (v 5).
 - A. Among the many who were offended a few did believe and were healed. However, the general unbelief of His hometown people prevented Him from bestowing more such blessings.
 - B. The even greater work Jesus wished to do among them was to draw them into His kingdom. For them He was living. For them He would die. For them He would empty the tomb on Easter morning. The saddest result of their rejection of Him was not their lack of physical healing, but their lack of spiritual healing in their relationship to their God. Their sins separated them. Jesus wanted to heal them of this separation, but was prevented by their unbelief.
 - C. So He went to other towns and villages and later sent His disciples to these towns.

Conclusion: As we take our place in the ministry of our Lord under His chosen ministers, we are warned against pride and envy and the awful consequences of unbelief. Yet rejection is not a signal for us to stop our ministry but an inducement to bring the Gospel to others.

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EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:7-13

July 21, 1985

Introduction: Every Christian who has said "yes" to the Lord Jesus before God and his fellow Christians on the occasion of his confirmation has also said "yes" to the great commission—to "make disciples" of all nations. The text give a clear vision of the task and invites

OUR INVOLVEMENT IN MINISTRY

- I. Travel light (vv 8-9).
 - A. It is well to have a minimum of physical encumbrances when carrying out the Lord's mission. Thereby we avoid preoccupation with ourselves and can devote our energies to the task of ministry.
 - B. Traveling light indicates trust in the Lord's provision.
 - C. It provides an opportunity for a ministry of sharing among those to whom we are sent.
- II. Be concerned with relationships to people and their relationship to the Lord (vv 10-11).
 - A. Do not go shopping for the best place to stay. Be gracious and thankful for a sincere and cordial reception. Since you are God's representative a warm reception is already an attitudinal expression toward God.
 - B. Do not force yourself or your message upon people (v 11). God does not force His love and grace upon people. It is the "Gospel" that we proclaim.
- III. Our ministry is to the whole person (vv 7, 12, 13).
 - A. Preach repentance. Dare to identify sin as sin and help people to renounce it. Point them to Jesus—to His life to remove guilt and provide righteousness; to His death to take away the fear of punishment for sin; to His resurrection to give us victory over sin!
Cast out the evil spirit. No person can do this on his own. But Jesus has given us authority over them (v 7). With authority and vigor, in the name of Jesus, cast out the spirit of selfishness, of lust, of greed, of jealousy, of hate.
 - C. Minister to the physically sick in the way the Lord directs you. Pray for and with the sick and dying.

Conclusion: Again today the Lord seeks our involvement in ministry. We have already said "yes" by virtue of our membership in His church. What will we say to Him today? What will be our involvement? Will it be daily prayer for people by name? Will it be increased financial support? Will I talk to my son or daughter and encourage?

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NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 6:30-34

July 28, 1985

"Compassion" (*splanchnizomai*, v 34) is one of those words on which an entire sermon could be preached and still not have its full meaning exhausted. This verb occurs 12 times in the N.T., all in the Synoptics and all having Christ as the subject. The word comes from the noun *splanchnon* which originally meant "the inward parts, or entrails, especially the heart, lungs and liver," considered the site of man's deepest passions. The metaphorical meaning of "compassion, mercy, feel pity" is found only in the writings of Judaism and the N.T. (DNTT).

The compassion of Christ exerts itself as the controlling theme of this text. The twelve disciples had come back from their mission (vv 7-13) exhausted, yet excited. Using good psychology, Jesus hears them out. He senses their need for the rest and He takes them away to a quiet place. But a greater need soon presents itself to which Jesus responds with compassion. The crowds that hounded Him were spiritually destitute, "like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus selflessly gives Himself to the needs of His disciples on the one hand and to the needs of the crowd on the other. People often picture Jesus the way many see a pastor, as someone too busy to be bothered. "He's got so many other things to do, so many other people to help, He certainly couldn't be concerned about my problem." But Jesus is concerned. We have a compassionate Lord who knows our needs, feels for us, and does something to help.

Introduction: It has been quipped that one of life's major mistakes is being the last member of the family to get the flu—after all the compassion has run out. It is often true of us that a lot of our compassion is wasted on ourselves, or we are compassionate as long as it costs us nothing. From our text, we learn of someone who is not like us. We see that

CHRIST HAS A PASSION FOR COMPASSION

- I. His heart goes out to us.
 - A. Jesus is compassionate because He knows our needs.
 1. Physical needs (vv 31, 35-44).
 2. Spiritual needs (v 34).
 - B. Jesus is compassionate, regardless of our motives.
 1. The disciples were only concerned about their reporting and resting.
 2. The crowds were unaware of their spiritual poverty. They wanted a miracle-worker and a king (Ez 34; Lk 15:4-7).
 3. What about our selfish motives for wanting Jesus and our casual attachments to Him?
 - C. Jesus is compassionate, not wanting any to be lost.
 1. These were His sheep (Ez 34; Lk 15:4-7).
 2. His attachment to us is one of loving ownership (Jn 10:14, 15).
- II. His compassion moves Him to Action.
 - A. He shepherds.
 1. By going out of His way and even interrupting His plans.
 2. By leading with His Word. "He began to teach them many things" (v 34).
 - B. He saves.
 1. Redemption by crucifixion—the supreme act of compassion.

2. Forgiveness—the result of compassion (cf. the Forgiving King in Mt 18:27 and the Waiting Father in Lk 15:20, both of whom had “compassion”).

Conclusion: Compassion is a beautiful description of God's attitude toward us. To sheep who are prone to wander and often find themselves lost and hurt, it is good news that we have a shepherd who pours out his heart to us and who poured out His blood for us.

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TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:1-15

August 4, 1985

The Feeding of the 5,000 is such an astounding miracle and, apparently of such value for the church, that we find it recorded in all four Gospels. Only John's account, however, has the question of Jesus to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?” (v 5) and the parenthetical remark of v 6 that this question was posed as a test. Rather than make a shallow application of the miracle itself (e.g., “as Jesus fed the 5,000, so He feeds and cares for us”), we choose to apply the purpose of Jesus in doing the miracle. The disciples had been in school with their Master for some time, and now Jesus tests them to see what they have learned. Do they trust Him to provide in the face of an insurmountable problem? Or do they limit themselves to their own resources and admit failure. The Synoptics include Jesus' remark, “You give them something to eat,” a challenge which all the more increases the tension of the testing process.

Like the disciples, we often feel that circumstances of life are more than we can handle. But rather than take them to a Savior who has already proven to us His ability to help, we would rather “send them away.” And when that does not work, we despair, we give up. The goal of this sermon is to apply the testing process to our life so that we can see how we try to carry and solve our burdens alone, and then to be aware of the kind of Lord we have in Christ, who desires and is able to help.

Introduction: Testing is a procedure with which we are all familiar. Generally speaking, our ability to pass a test depends on us—our knowledge, study, and work. Jesus in our text administers a test to us which is just the opposite of what we are used to. When we work hard at trying to ace it, we are sure to fail. But when we “cheat” and use the answer sheet Christ provides, we pass. The question is,

DO YOU PASS THE TEST?

- I. Do we try to take the test alone?
 - A. We often limit ourselves to human possibilities and solutions.
 1. Philip and the disciples thought only of their inability to feed 5,000.
 2. In our independence, we take credit when things go well, and we complain, worry, and despair when things get out of hand.
 - B. Consequently, we fail to “cast our cares on Him.”
 1. Even though we have been schooled by Jesus in the past and have learned of His desire and ability to help, we forget Him or doubt that He will bring help.

Transition: Jesus tests us so that we can see how miserably we fail. He wants us to look away from ourselves for assistance during the testing process. And so we ask:

II. Do we get help by using the answer sheet Christ provides?

A. He gives us "signs" to point us to Him.

1. "Signs," according to John, are miracles intended to instill faith in the miracle worker, not fascination in the miracle (Jn 20:30, 31).
2. Jesus wants us to see Him, not as a "Bread King" (v 15), but as the "Bread of Life" (v 48-51).

B. He gives "signs" to deliver us "in the day of trouble."

1. Jesus took care of the immediate need of feeding 5,000.
2. He knows already what He is going to do in our life, and it is always to bring about good.
3. Through His greatest sign, death and resurrection, He gives us His passing grade.

Conclusion:

He who hitherto hath fed me
And to many joys hath led me
Is and ever shall be mine.

He who did so gently school me,
He who still doth guide and rule me,
Will remain my help divine.

Paul E. Cloeter

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:24-35

August 11, 1985

With the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 still a recent and dramatic memory, Jesus had a fitting illustration on which to build when the crowds came to him the following day. As He observes, they came back to Him mostly because they had received a physical satisfaction from Him (v 26). But He was about to teach them that there was something far more important than food. After the usual verbal jousting that seems to typify the encounters between the Savior and His countrymen, with the predictable Jewish insistence on a definitive "sign" from Jesus to prove that He truly deserved their faith (even after they had a dramatic sign still digesting in their stomachs!), the conversation came to the real point. Jesus reveals Himself as the Bread of life. His "food" satisfies hunger permanently. Like the woman at the well (Jn 4:15), the Savior's hearers desired this kind of provision (v 33). Yet their desire was physical and not spiritual. This attitude remains today a basic human flaw and the challenge of the church.

The central theme of the text is that Jesus is finally all anyone ever needs as He satisfies permanently the spiritual hunger and malnutrition of man by His saving Word and gracious presence. The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearers to under-

stand the emptiness of worldly thinking and the eternal satisfaction which comes from fully knowing the Bread of Life. The problem rests with our inclination to view life in purely physical terms and to take too many short-term perspectives. The means to the goal is Jesus' willingness to give us exactly what we need (not always what we want) to live forever.

Introduction: Few in our nation are concerned about where their next meal is coming from. They simply expect to get their fill several times each day. Yet it is troubling to note how easily people expect temporary physical nourishment and how readily they neglect permanent spiritual nourishment. In reality we usually have the food we desire. The tragedy is that, spiritually speaking, we often skip

THE FOOD WE NEED

- I. It is a food from heaven.
 - A. The manna from on high in the Old Testament was God's gift.
 1. He, not Moses, was the giver of this gift (v 32).
 2. He provided the signs of His care.
 - B. The manna from heaven was a temporary physical provision.
 - C. The food from heaven that endures must also come from God alone.
- II. It is a bread for life.
 - A. The bread that Jesus had given the crowd could sustain only their physical life.
 1. Since most people are short-term and this-world oriented, this physical filling satisfies only for a time.
 2. But people want more because physical hunger cannot be long removed.
 - B. The bread that Jesus offers all people sustains "real" life.
 1. It is always present.
 2. It has substance and meaning.
- III. It is a nourishment for eternity.
 - A. Whatever is physical has a limited existence.
 1. The multitudes knew they would get hungry again, and for this reason they even tried to make Jesus their "Bread King." (v 15)
 2. People perceive the fleeting nature of earthly life in general and earthly possessions in particular.
 - a. Their desires are constant to keep their life "full."
 - b. They want much because "you can never have too much."
 - B. Whatever is spiritual has an eternal existence.
 1. Jesus provides the kind of lasting "food" we cannot get by ourselves.
 2. The Savior deals in eternals because that is exactly what we need.

Conclusion: Jesus certainly understood physical hunger and the physical desires of people. He did, after all, feed the multitude of 5,000. Yet He also know exactly what we need to satisfy spiritual malnutrition permanently. He is the Bread of Life and the Food we need.

David E. Seybold
Fredonia, Wisconsin

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:41-51

August 18, 1985

The Jews who pursued Jesus following the feeding of the 5000 were not about to let the issue of Jesus' identity die. Perhaps they could not stop Him from doing unexplainable feats with food, but they were unwilling to let Him claim to be "the bread which came down from heaven" (v 41). That description of Himself was absurd, they thought, because they knew His parents. But Jesus was undeterred. Whether or not His audience believed it, He continued to expand on the theme of heavenly bread as a self-characterization. He provided the kind of life that even the heavenly bread of the Old Testament days of wilderness wandering could not provide. The people who ate the manna had long since died. But those who "eat" of the Bread of Life have a permanent life, an eternal life (v 50), which begins the moment that God brings them to faith.

Clearly in this text Jesus is making the very most of the bread image suggested by the feeding of the 5000. The main point of the text is that Jesus is the Source of all life and provides by grace through faith an everlasting life which begins right now. The goal of the sermon is to emphasize that those who cling to Jesus can have the absolute confidence that their eternal life has already begun. The problem is that there are many who think they can find their own way to life and that even true Christians can forget that their life in Christ never has to end, from this moment on to eternity. The means to the goal is the Savior's gracious gift of His own life (the "bread") which He makes available for the eternal life of everyone.

Introduction: Life after life always has been an attractive concept for man. From the ancient Egyptians who outfitted the pyramids with lavish treasures for the use of their rulers in the presumed after-life to the recent fascination with "after-death" experiences of people declared clinically dead, man has wanted to believe that he could live in happiness even after physical death. The message of Jesus is that he can, but only through a relationship of faith with the true "Bread of Life." What is more, this life can begin right now, continuing into eternity even as physical life ceases. It is a thoroughly Christian and completely heartening truth to announce that

ETERNAL LIFE IS A PRESENT TENSE

- I. Jesus provides more than physical life.
 - A. Bread for the body is necessary.
 1. Jesus did not turn the multitude away when it was time to eat.
 2. Jesus does provide everything we need and more to sustain our physical existence.
 - B. Bread for the body is temporary.
 1. The wandering nation of Israel ate the provided manna but still died (v 49).
 2. The multitude of 5000 ate the bread given but were not permanently satisfied.
 3. The world today also cannot endure by "bread alone."
- II. Jesus offers more than future hope.
 - A. Eternal life is not simply a future hope.
 1. The Savior promises that those who trust in Him have it (not will have it) (v 47).

2. The Savior assures that those who share in His body live forever (v 55).
- B. Eternal life begins right now.

III. Jesus gives more and permanent life.

- A. His way to life cannot compare with any other human way to salvation.
- B. His way to life is the only way and more abundant way (Jn 10:10).
- C. His way to life does not diminish, deteriorate, or fade away.
- D. His way to life depends on His all-atoning and once-for-all death (v 51).

Conclusion: The "world" may carry a vague hope that life does not end with death. We have the sure conviction that not only do we have in Christ an everlasting life but also we have it right now. Nourished spiritually by the eternal Bread of Jesus, we are filled now in this life and forever in the life to come.

David E. Seybold

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:51-58

August 25, 1985

Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John contains many references to the manna God provided for Israel during wilderness wanderings (vv 4; 30-34; 49; 58). As this bread nourished Israel during those years, Jesus reveals that He is God's Living Bread who nourishes us for eternal life (v 51).

In Jesus, our Heavenly Father gives us what we need for life (vv 51a, 57). However, some people are more interested in consuming health foods that add years to life than in consuming the Bread of Life who grants life beyond years. For anyone to despise the Bread of Life is to invite tragic consequences upon themselves (v 53b). But when men and women feed on Jesus in faith, they are blessed. The result is life that cannot be destroyed by death (v 58). This is not wishful thinking! This is the promise of the Christ who lived and died and rose again. All who partake of Him by faith have His life.

The central thought of this text is that Jesus is the God-appointed Bread that nourishes us for eternal life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer would not despise the Bread of Life, but would always partake of Him in faith.

Introduction: It is the work of God to feed His creation (Ps 145:15, 16). In His mercy He not only provides bread for our tables, but He also provides the Living Bread from heaven.

LIVING BREAD FROM HEAVEN

- I. Jesus is the Bread sent by God.
 - A. God knows what Bread His people need.
 1. He provided manna in the wilderness.
 - a. It was God's gift (Ex 16:4-16).
 - b. It nourished Israel for forty years (Ex 16:35).
 2. He sent Jesus for us (vv 51, 57, 58).
 - a. Our greatest need is not for food and drink to fill our stomachs (Mt 6:31-33, Lk 12:23a).

- b. Our need is for Bread to nourish our souls (Jn 6:26,27). Jesus alone is this Bread (v 51). We are nourished by the sacrifice of His flesh and the shedding of His blood (vv 51b, 53; He 9:12).
 - B. Some challenge God's choice of Bread.
 - 1. The Israelites did in the wilderness.
 - a. There were those who despised God's manna (Nu 11:4-6).
 - b. They were condemned (Nu 11:33).
 - 2. Certain people reject Jesus.
 - a. They scoff at His claim (v 52).
 - b. They are without life (v 53).
- II. God binds His promise of life to His Bread.
 - A. God's promise is of eternal life.
 - 1. Although God's manna fed the Israelites, they all died (v 58b).
 - 2. In Jesus there is life that death does not destroy (vv 51, 54, 57, 58; Re 1:17b, 18).
 - B. God's promise is for those who partake.
 - 1. This Bread is not to be admired as a centerpiece on a table.
 - 2. This Bread is to be eaten.
 - a. By faith (Jn 6:29, 47, 48).
 - b. In the Sacraments (Mt 26:26-28).
 - C. God's promise is for all.
 - 1. No one is denied this Bread (Jn 6:37b, 51).
 - 2. God's grace is all-inclusive (Is 55:1, 2).

Conclusion: May God grant that we partake of His Living Bread from Heaven with the same eagerness that we feed on the bread He provides from the fields.

Lawrence W. Mitchell
Bloomington, Indiana

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

John 6:60-69

September 1, 1985

Some of the 5000 Jesus fed expected to hear how Jesus would keep them in bread (Jn 6:14,15,33,34). It is a common misconception that Jesus speaks words that make us "happy" and that guarantee material success to every "true" believer. But Jesus says no such thing. The disappointed hearers responded: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" The problem is that people do understand and do not like what they hear (vv 61,66).

His words are unique. They bring eternal life to all who share the confession of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (vv 68,69). The central thought is that only Jesus has words of eternal life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer not try to force his own words into the mouth of Jesus, but rather accept and believe the words of Jesus Himself.

Introduction: The story of Mary and Martha is familiar to most of us (Lk 10:38-42). While Martha was "distracted with much serving," Mary "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." Why? Mary knew that there were no other words like His.

NO OTHER WORDS LIKE HIS

- I. Some are frustrated by the words of Jesus.
 - A. Jesus had many followers early in His ministry (Jn 6:2).
 1. They had hopes for Him (Jn 6:14,15,33,34).
 2. Their hopes did not agree with His words.
 - a. His words spoke of spiritual concerns (v63b; Lk 5:32; Jn 12:25,26).
 - b. His words included overwhelming claims about Himself (Jn 6:38,40,51).
 3. They objected that His words were hard (vv 60,66).
 - B. Today, some are initially eager to follow Jesus.
 1. They expect to hear words that will make life easy.
 2. The words of Jesus offer no formula for easy living (Mt 5:1-12).
 3. Some are offended and reject His words (Lk 18:18-23).
- II. Others are blessed by the words of Jesus.
 - A. His words are unique.
 1. They are unique because of who He is (v 69).
 2. They are unique because of the life they bring (vv 63,68).
 - a. Life now (Lk 7:47-50).
 - b. Life forever (Jn 11:25, 26).
 - B. His words are for believing.
 1. Jesus does not expect us to understand fully all that He says.
 2. He does expect us to believe (Jn 6:40).
 - a. Faith is a precious gift from God (Jn 6:44).
 - b. Faith is not offended at the words of Jesus (Lk 7:23).

Conclusion: What is our response to the words of Jesus? The question Jesus asked of the twelve is for us as well: "Do you also wish to go away?" May we say with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Lawrence W. Mitchell

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 7:1-8

September 8, 1985

A banner that received a great deal of attention at a past convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod contained the inscription: "The Seven Last Words of the Church: We Never Did It That Way Before." This statement is a timely reminder of the dominant role tradition can play in the spiritual life of people and the reluctance of many to give up. In and of themselves traditions are not wrong, providing they are not allowed to take precedence over the clear commands of Scripture. This is the situation that confronts Jesus and His disciples in the text.

The Lord and His followers were being accused by certain Pharisees and scribes of failing to "live according to the tradition of the elders" (v 5), a body of practical rules which they regarded as more important than the inspired Scripture (see Lenski, pp. 283-284).

The superior attitude of the scribes and Pharisees compelled Jesus to denounce

their traditionalism and label their behavior as hypocrisy in the religious sense. "The worst form of hypocrisy is that which carries its self-deception to the point where it thinks that it really is what it actually only pretends to be . . . The two great marks of fully developed hypocrites are presented in Jehovah's characterization: honor that is mere pretense (with the lips, not with heart); teachings that are likewise empty pretense (presented as divine when they are put forward only by men). The two always go together, for the moment the heart keeps far from God it leaves also his Word. The very first requirement of his Word which is fundamental for all true worship of God is genuine sincerity toward him and his Word" (Lenski, p. 287).

Introduction: "Did you wash your hands?" is a question most parents ask their children before they sit down to eat. The Pharisees and scribes in our text were also concerned about clean hands. Their concern, however, was not primarily hygienic but religious. They were upset because the Lord's disciples were not living according to "the tradition of the elders." In no uncertain terms Jesus stood up to their criticisms with the admonition,

LET GO OF MEN'S TRADITIONS! HOLD ON TO GOD'S COMMANDS!

- I. False religion holds on to the traditions of men and lets go of the commands of God.
 - A. Traditionalism substitutes man-made rules for genuine love and concern.
 - 1. It is more interested in the impurities of the body than in purity of heart.
 - 2. It is more interested in following rules than helping someone in need.
 - B. Traditionalism results in hypocrisy.
 - 1. It fosters an attitude of self-glory.
 - 2. It leads to vain worship.
- II. True Christianity lets go of the traditions of men and holds on to the commands of God.
 - A. True Christianity is anchored in the sure Word of God.
 - 1. It recognizes Scripture alone as the only source and norm of Christian doctrine.
 - 2. It denounces those who would elevate the opinions of men above the clear teachings of the Bible.
 - B. True Christianity expresses itself in worship that is controlled by that Word.
 - 1. It is worship of the heart and not mere worship of the lips.
 - 2. It is worship that is guided by God's will and Word and leads to true Christian service.

Conclusion: Traditions play an important role in our lives. It is never easy to give up things with which we have grown comfortable. Yet Christ would remind us that we must be willing to let go of the external and formal for what God requires—the faith, love, and loyalty of the heart.

Ronald W. Irsch
Rochester, Michigan

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 7:31-37

September 15, 1985

Some general observations on Mark 7:31-37 follow: (A.) While the man brought to Jesus was completely deaf, *mogilalon* (as opposed to *alalos*) would imply an impediment in his speech rather than absolute dumbness or inability to speak. (B.) Taking the man aside was done, no doubt, to fix the attention of the afflicted man upon himself, and upon the fact that the Lord was about to act upon his ears and his tongue (*Pulpit Commentary*, "The Gospel of Mark," Volume 1, p. 296). (C.) After taking the afflicted man aside, Jesus carried out three actions to help him understand what was about to happen: (1.) The first action was to convey the idea that Jesus was about to do something about the man's deafness. (2.) The second actions (spitting and touching the man's tongue) indicate that Jesus now wants the afflicted man to center his attention on his mouth and tongue; Jesus intends to do something about his speech impediment. (3.) "Jesus looks up to heaven. The man watches Jesus do this. He grasps the idea that the help that Jesus brings him is from heaven, is divine, almighty help that is far different than anything merely human. With this upward look Jesus sighs. The man is to see the sigh; it is part of the sign language which Jesus is using" (Lenaki, pp. 310-311). (D.) Why did Jesus charge those who had witnessed this miracle to tell no one? "He has only a few months left, and he does not want the excitement to spread far and wide about his being the Messiah. The people generally connected earthly, political ideas with that title, the very ideas which Jesus combated." (Lenaki, p. 312).

Introduction: Being a deaf-mute would be a difficult handicap to live with. What is worse, however, are ears and tongues that are spiritually inoperable. Thanks to God's love there is a sure remedy for the latter. Through the power of His Word we can know the blessing of

OPENED EARS AND UNLOOSED TONGUES

- I. By the power of God, ears that are deaf can be opened.
 - A. Through Jesus' command the ears of a deaf-mute were opened.
 1. In love Jesus drew him aside in order to minister to his needs (v 33a).
 2. As a sign of what He was about to do, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears (v 33b).
 - B. Through God's abiding Word the ears of the spiritually deaf are opened.
 1. The world is filled with people who are spiritually deaf (Ez 12:2; Mt. 13:15).
 2. Apart from God, their ears will never be opened.
 3. The Word of God is a power that opens ears that are spiritually deaf (Is 35:4-5, Re 10:14-17).
- II. By the power of God, tongues that are silent can be unloosed.
 - A. Through Jesus' command the tongue of a deaf-mute was loosened (v 35).
 1. Jesus also provided a sign for this miracle when he spit and touched the man's tongue (v33c).
 2. The same word that opened the man's ears, "Ephphatha," also unloosed his tongue (vv 34-35).
 - B. Despite Jesus' command the tongues of those who witnessed the miracle were loosened (v 36).

1. They "were overwhelmed with amazement" (v 37a).
2. They proclaimed the Lord's greatness (v 37b).
- C. Because of Jesus' command our tongues are loosened.
 1. We have been commissioned to use our tongues to speak God's message of reconciliation (Mt 28:19-20; Ac 1:8; 2 Cor 5:18-20).
 2. It is through this message that the Spirit works to unloose the tongues of the spiritually mute (1 Cor 12:3; Luther's explanation to the Third Article).

Conclusion: May we who have ears to hear and tongues to speak spread forth the Good News of God's saving love so that Isaiah's prophecy will continue to be fulfilled: "The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Is 35:5).

Ronald W. Irsch

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 8:27-35

September 22, 1985

The rendezvous with Calvary's cross would soon be kept, but still there was much important instruction to be given by our Lord. In a brief hiatus from Galilee, the Master took His "seminary class" to the northern reaches of the land of the Jews. This area was known as Caesarea Philippi and was in the tetrarchy of Philip. This is to distinguish it from the more prominent Roman capital of Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean. It is here that our Lord conducts a theological class and gives His students a test. This test comes under an umbrella which reveals that there are many and varied answers given concerning the person of Christ. Even the disciples of the Lord can be confused about the role of the Messiah. Giving the right answer verbally to the test as to Jesus' person can present a real challenge.

Introduction: We face many forms of tests and testings in our world and society. What student has not "burned the midnight oil" over midterm and final examinations? What man or woman seeking a promotion or advancement has not been concerned about passing some technical quiz concerning his or her field of endeavor? What teenager, eager to get his driver's license, has not worried about the state driving examinations? We face many situations in life in which we are called to answer questions on a test. No test, however, is more important than the one which the Lord gave to His disciples in our text when He posed the questions: "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" The test is before us; we are called to answer.

CAN YOU PASS THE TEST?

- I. People give various answers to the test.
 - A. Some answers fail.
 1. "He is John the Baptist" who has come back from the dead to haunt Herod who had beheaded him. "He is Elijah" whom the Jews believed would be a prelude to God's Messiah. "He is one of the prophets" or just a great man of God.

2. The world today has a mixed bag of answers when it comes to recognizing Christ: teacher, guide, exemplar of morals, inspiration, etc.
- B. One answer suffices.
 1. He is "the Christ." This is Peter's response—that Christ is the promised Messiah and Savior.
- II. The test can be confusing.
 - A. It is confusing when Christ announces that the Messiah must suffer and die. When Peter rebukes Christ for speaking of death by crucifixion, he no longer speaks from God but from Satan. He and the others do not yet understand. "No cross, no crown." They were still wrapped up in an earthly kingdom for the Messiah.
 - B. This confusion is part of the devil's smokescreen to confuse the church and the world concerning God's Messiah and His plan of redemption.
 - C. Our world and many in the church continue to be confused as to why Christ had to suffer and die.
- III. Passing the test can be a challenge.
 - A. It means denying the self for Jesus' sake.
 - B. It means taking up the cross of discipleship for Jesus' sake.
 - C. It means following Christ, no matter where He may choose to lead. The disciples would find all these things to be true soon enough. So shall we if we pass the test.

Conclusion: When one of my sons was ready to take his driver's license test, he seemed very confident. I cautioned him to study, to be prepared, and not be over-confident. I asked him, "Can you pass the test?" Our Lord confronts us with a much more important test. The answer to His test will not tell us whether or not we can drive a car, but whether we can be sure and confident about our position as a child of God. Can you pass the test when it comes to truly knowing Christ? There may be many answers that are false; however, there is only one true answer. This, in itself, can be confusing, but this is part of the devil's scheme to confuse the world concerning the Christ. Having given our answer, let us be willing to live that answer in true and devoted discipleship.

Edmond E. Aho
Yuma, Arizona

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 9:30-37

September 29, 1985

Last week we left our Lord and His disciples in the tetrarchy of Philip, Caesarea Philippi. Now we find Him and His group on their final trip through Galilee, which was the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. It is probably the spring of 29 A.D. and the Master knows there is an appointment to be kept very soon in Jerusalem.

The Lord does not want to be bothered with eager people pressing upon Him for some miracle or cryptic statement about the mysteries of the kingdom. He only wants to impress upon His disciples that in order to fulfill God's plan, He must go the way of the cross. Typically, they do not understand and, consequently, lose themselves in vain arguments as to who of them would be considered greatest when Christ

assumed power in His earthly kingdom. Just when it appears that the Lord's men have a grasp of His kingdom's plan, they prove again that they are earthen vessels with feet of clay. Ever so patiently the Lord impresses upon the disciples that real respect and greatness come through service and sacrifice such as He would give and they also would be called upon to give. The Lord uses a simple object lesson. He bids His men to be great and gain respect by being humble as children and by serving rather than being served.

Introduction: The comedian Rodney Dangerfield always laments, "I get no respect." Often we, too, may feel that we get no respect—no respect from our peers, from our parents, from our teammates, from our boss, and from others around us. People often resort to bizarre means to get respect from others, but so often they end up as fools, still crying for respect. We are so concerned about getting respect from other people. What about respect from God? God respects all people in the sense that we all are important to Him. After all, He created us and still preserves us. But are we respectable enough to be in heaven one day with God? How do we get from God the respect that makes us worthy of eternal life? So the question before us is,

HOW TO GET RESPECT—IN GOD'S SIGHT

- I. God's respect is not earned.
 - A. Our humility and service do not measure up to God's perfect standard.
 1. Like the disciples, we would rather be served than serve.
 2. Even when we serve, our motive is often one of self-serving.
 3. We make comparisons: "I have served more than you have." Pride creeps in to stain our service.
 - B. We labor under a false pretense if we think we can earn God's respect by our humble serving.
 1. Jesus refused to seek people's respect under a false pretense (v 30).
 2. The way to God's respect is opened by honest admittance that in ourselves we are not respectable people.
- II. God's respect is a gift.
 - A. Christ earned it for us.
 1. His humbling Himself all the way to death on a cross (v 31a) atoned for our pride.
 2. His rising from the dead (v 31b) guaranteed our respectability before God.
 - B. When we believe that Christ died and rose for us we can be sure God respects us as heaven-worthy people.
 1. Christ has given us His humility in exchange for our pride.
 2. Christ has bestowed on us His greatness in exchange for our smallness.
- III. God's respect is demonstrated by us.
 - A. When we serve people who do not deserve our respect.
 1. Willing to place ourselves last (v 35).
 2. Willing to serve without recognition or praise and thereby foregoing greatness as the world sees it (v 34b).
 - B. When we serve people who are not in a position to reward us for our service.
 1. Little children are not in a position to reciprocate our service to them (v 36), any more than we are able to pay God back for having served us in His Son.
 2. Yet when we serve even the least of God's children, God respects our service for Jesus' sake and graciously rewards us (v 17).

Conclusion: Herman Gockel in his book *Give Your Life a Lift* tells the story of a very wealthy woman who had given great sums of money to benevolences and missions in her church. One day she decided to take a trip to visit some of the mission projects her money had so generously endowed. She visited a hospital where wonderful help was afforded to needy natives. She stopped at an orphanage where little children of the street were cared for. She went to a leper colony where a loving nurse was treating those who were suffering from the putrifying disease. She commented, more to herself than to the host, "My, I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nurse who was treating a patient answered, "Neither would I." In the service of Christ to us, exemplified in the nurse's service, we find the secret of greatness and the way to get respect in God's sight.

Edmond E. Aho

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 9:38-50

October 6, 1985

This text is part of Jesus' final teaching as He was leaving Galilee, heading for Jerusalem and for suffering and death. Ever since Jesus had left the regions of Tyre and Sidon, He had been in retirement with His disciples. Despite His withdrawal Jesus found it difficult to escape notice; the crowds repeatedly found Him and throngs assembled about the Master. It was not that Jesus feared His enemies, but He desired opportunity for meditation and prayer.

At Capernaum the disciples disputed among themselves as to who among them was to be greatest in the kingdom Christ was going to establish. Jesus taught them the nature of true greatness by placing a child in their midst and by stating: "Who-soever shall receive such a little child in my name, receiveth me, and whosoever receives me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent Me." This instruction concerning true greatness was then followed by instruction about the character of true religion.

Introduction: The history of mankind has been characterized by intolerance in religion. In pre-Christian times conquering nations would often insist on the conquered accepting the gods and religion of the victors. Until A.D. 313, Christians periodically were persecuted for their refusal to participate in the emperor worship of Rome. After Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, pagans were discriminated against. During the days of the Holy Roman Empire heretics and Jews were persecuted because of their non-conformity to Christianity. When the Mohammedans conquered many Christian countries, the latter were persecuted and discriminated against if they did not accept the religion of Mohammed. The Roman inquisition established a terrible record of persecution and intolerance against Jews and heretics. Protestants in the Reformation and post-Reformation period were also often guilty of intolerance toward those who believed otherwise. It has happened that because of the emphasis on purity of doctrine Christians in the past, as well as at present, have acted intolerantly toward other Christians. Religious prejudice and intolerance are sins against which all Christians need to be on their guard. In the text Jesus discusses religious intolerance from two different perspectives. Hear what Jesus' answer is to the question,

WHEN IS RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE WRONG AND WHEN IS IT NECESSARY?

- I. Religious intolerance is sometimes wrong.
 - A. John, the son of Zebedee was wrong when he would have opposed a man, not of their company, who cast out demons in Christ's name (v 38).
 - B. Intolerance is wrong when it is motivated by a great deal of presumption and prejudice (v 39).
 - C. Religious intolerance is wrong when a spirit of legalism underlies opposition to other Christians (v 39).
 - D. Religious intolerance is wrong when others are expected to serve the Lord in the same way with the same gifts, since gifts are diverse.
- II. Religious intolerance is sometimes necessary.
 - A. A Christian must be intolerant of all who would cause a believer to fall away (v 42).
 - B. The Christian must be intolerant of his sinful self (v 43).
 - C. The Christian must be intolerant of false teachers and false doctrine (Mt 7:15, Tt 1:13-14, I Tm 2:12; Ro 16:17).
 - D. Christian intolerance does not advocate or use physical force in opposing false teachers.
 - E. Failure to be intolerant of one's sinful self and the forces of evil will have serious consequences.
 1. The thoughts, words, and deeds of men will be subject to burning and judgment (vv 47,48).
 2. Intolerance of all evil will ultimately prevent the believer from losing his faith and spending an eternity in hell (v 48).

Conclusion: Christ has commanded His followers to be a light and a salt (Mt 5:13-14). By avoiding the wrong kind of intolerance and by exhibiting the right kind of intolerance Christians will have "salt in themselves and peace with one another."

Raymond F. Surburg

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:2-16

October 13, 1985

In chapter 10 Mark gives an account of what is known as the Perean-Judean ministry of Christ. The other Synoptic Gospels give many incidents which occurred during it, but Mark selects but a few happenings of the Perean ministry. Chapter 10 is the dividing line of the whole life of Christ as presented by the second evangelist. The nine chapters which precede outline the years of Christ's public ministry; the last seven chapters (10-16) record the events of the passion week and of the resurrection day. Mark usually emphasizes the mighty deeds of the Messiah, but it stands out as a characteristic of Mark's account of the last journey to Jerusalem that only one miracle is mentioned. Otherwise, Mark confines his narrative to the teachings of Jesus; those selected by Mark under the Holy Spirit's guidance are of the greatest significance. The first teaching deals with the subject of marriage and divorce.

The theme of Christ's discourse was prompted by the Pharisees who wished to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. At our Lord's time, the Jews held two different

views about divorce. It was the hope of the enemies that no matter which answer Jesus gave, He would be discredited in the eyes of his countrymen. Instead, siding with one of the two current schools, he settled the matter by taking his questioners to the beginning of the institution of marriage and restating the instruction Jehovah had given Adam and Eve relative to the permanence of marriage and its non-dissolution.

Introduction: God has established three pillars of society, namely, the home, the church, and the state. They were established for the stability and welfare of mankind. All three have been attacked by humanism and Marxism. The home is the foundational institution of society. In the twentieth century in Western civilization the home's stability has been greatly shaken by the loose morality that advocates free sex and encourages people to live together although not married. Divorce has become commonplace, with nearly as many marriages ending in divorce as those enduring. Unfortunately, many of those calling themselves Christians have succumbed to this new morality and have contributed to the moral breakdown of our times.

Christians especially, as the salt of the earth, are to take the teachings of the Bible seriously as God's instructions, if they wish to inherit eternal life. It is also a part of God's plan that under normal circumstances Christian married people should have children. Today let us follow

CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF CHILDREN

- A. Christ's instruction about marriage.
 1. Marriage is not merely a human arrangement as held by Jewish schools in Christ's time.
 2. Jesus restated the divine regulation given mankind in the garden of Eden (v 7).
- B. Christ's teaching about divorce.
 1. Hardness of heart was the major reason God had allowed divorce, a violation of the Edenic marriage guideline (Gn 2:24).
 2. Christ's definitive regulation was that marriage is indissoluble; divorce in principle is not permitted (v 12).
 3. According to Matthew 19:9, Jesus allowed divorce on account of adultery.
 4. Through His apostle Paul Jesus also permitted divorce on account of desertion (1 Cor 7:15).
 5. A person of securing an unlawful divorce was not to marry again.
 6. A Christian was not free to marry an unlawfully divorced person (v 12; Mt 19:9).
- C. Christ's teaching about the blessedness of children.
 1. Christ desires to bless children; He wants them brought to Him (v 14).
 2. Children can be a part of the kingdom of God (v 15).

Conclusion: In this atomic age, where divinely instituted morality is flouted, Christians have a great opportunity to reverse the corruption of modern civilization and prevent the punishment which will surely come if men and women do not abide by the Creator's rules for living.

Raymond F. Surburg

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:17-27

October 20, 1965

There is no need to doubt the sincerity of the young ruler's question to Jesus. While he seemed to have everything something was missing. Notice how Mark mentions that Jesus "loved him." How contemporary is Jesus' warning about the dangers of riches! Whether the "eye of the needle" refers to a sewing needle or a narrow gap in a rock, the point is the virtual impossibility of the camel going through. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will rely wholly on Jesus for eternal life. The problem is our reluctance to accept God's life as a free gift. We are naturally inclined and conditioned by our society to earn our "benefits." The means to the goal is our wonderful God, who can do anything.

Introduction: While "all roads may lead to Rome," all roads do not lead to heaven. It is heaven where we as Christians desire to go. Yet sometimes doubts arise as we see so many apparent options offered, so many "paths to life." Our text gives us God's answer to the question,

WHICH HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN?

- I. Is it the toll road?
 - A. The toll road principle is well known.
 1. You pay the price—a fee of some sort to use the highway.
 2. You get benefits—even special ones: gas stops, restaurants, maintenance.
 - B. The rich young ruler took the toll road.
 1. He paid the price.
 - a. His question assumes he had to do something to get to heaven (v 17).
 - b. He presented his credentials—an impeccable young man (v 20).
 2. He wanted special benefits.
 - a. He looked for eternal life (v 17).
 - b. Yet he was unsure that he was on the right highway; therefore he asked Jesus.
 - C. There was a roadblock in the way.
 1. The roadblock seemed to be money (vv 21-22).
 2. The real roadblock was an unwillingness to surrender heart and life to Christ, while outwardly obeying God's will.
 3. It is not always the "gross" sins that destroy people, but more often the things to which they become attached.
 - D. A toll road to heaven is impossible.
 1. Money has the power to corrupt the heart (v 23) (cf. the "almighty dollar").
 2. Men cannot save men (vv 26-27; Eph 2:8-9). Defeat and disappointment are the experience of all who try to save themselves.

The toll road takes its toll. It is the highway to hell. Thank God there is another highway.

- II. It is the freeway.
 - A. The freeway principle is well known.

1. You travel without cost. Our government a few years ago erected a nationwide system of freeways.
- B. The freeway is very expensive—for God.
 1. Planned by the Father from eternity (Eph 1:3-4).
 2. Built and paved with the blood of Jesus (Jn 14:6; 1 Pe 1:18-19).
 3. Maintained by the Holy Spirit (Ro 8:16-17).
- C. The freeway ends with eternal life with God (Jn 17:3,24; 3:36; Php 1:6).

This is the amazing grace of our God, who does the "impossible" in love for us!

Conclusion: Isn't God's love fantastic? He tackles a job no man could handle. He does the impossible. He plans a freeway to heaven. His Son both builds it and pays the cost. His Spirit invites us to travel without cost or price, to believe in Jesus as our Savior and to live in His love until the freeway ends—safe in the arms of Jesus in heaven.

Lloyd Strelow
Covina, California

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:35-45

October 27, 1985

James and John are excellent examples of how narrow and self-centered people become. Here Jesus had just explained His coming suffering, but they were so wrapped up in themselves they could only think of their coming "glory." Matthew tells us Salome, their mother, was right there with them. In a royal court, both the left and right sides would be positions of honor. The goal of the sermon is to get beyond the "proper actions" to God-pleasing motivation for effective Christian service. The obstacles are that we naturally want to master and be glory-hounds because we so easily misunderstand the nature of the kingdom of God. The means to the goal is our Lord Jesus Christ and the loving service He rendered for us.

Introduction: Actions speak louder than words. But actions are determined by attitudes. How we feel, think, or perceive others or ourselves is crucial in determining how we act toward them. Our text calls us to engage in self-examination. Is our own

MOTIVATION FOR MASTERY OF MINISTRY?

- I. In relation to God.
 - A. Beware of an over-inflated ego.
 1. Salome and sons (vv 35-37; cf. Mt 20:20)
 2. Our feelings of pride, spirituality, goodness.
 - B. Beware of under-estimating the suffering in His kingdom.
 1. Example: we see Hollywood stars, highly paid athletes, successful leaders, but have little idea of their struggles to get and stay where they are.
 2. James and John were oblivious to Jesus' cup of suffering (vv 38,32-34; Mk 14:36).
 3. Christians must be prepared to suffer for Christ's sake.
 - a. Not glibly (v 39).
 - b. But in daily life and witness (v 39; 1 Pe 4:13; 2 Cor 4:10; Jn 15:20).

- C. Beware of misunderstanding God's ways.
 - 1. He "awards" by grace rather than "rewards" by merit.
 - 2. Awards are the Father's decisions (v 40; Mt 20:23).
- II. In relation to others.
 - A. When self is at the center.
 - 1. We become glory and power oriented.
 - a. That is how worldly rulers operate (v 42).
 - b. That was the mistaken idea James and John had of God's kingdom.
 - B. When service is at the center.
 - 1. The natural order is reversed: ministry replaces mastery (vv 43-44).
 - 2. The opportunities in this congregation and community for such ministry abound. (Enumerate them specifically.)
 - 3. Jesus Christ shows the way.
 - a. Although He is Lord of heaven and earth, He came to live among men and serve them.
 - b. The proof is His life, miracles, and message.
 - c. His death (v 45) and resurrection provide forgiveness for our efforts at mastery and make it possible for us to minister to others.

Conclusion: Christian people have a great deal of energy. They do many things in God's kingdom. The question is, Why? What is your motivation? It cannot be mastery, power, or glory. See how Jesus worked—always in loving ministry. May His love ever motivate your service.

Lloyd Strelow

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 10:46-52

November 3, 1985

Jesus comes into the lives of people from a distance. As He confronts a person individually, there is a charged atmosphere of expectation, a feeling that life can be different following the meeting. The miracle happens? It is everything we expected and more. But the troop of followers moves on to bring the message of new life and changed living to others along the road. So at any one moment in time, there are countless thousands who see Jesus from different perspectives: some see Him coming, some passing, some revealing strength and hope for new life. It is a privilege to walk with Christ and see Him come into the lives of people, change their lives in a miraculous way, and give them new direction and purpose in living.

Introduction: Followers of Christ (and also unbelievers) are convinced of the value of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). It saves lives and creates a special bond between the saved and the savor. On the road to Jericho, there was a CPR event with a different, but very significant result.

CPR ON THE ROADSIDE

- I. "C" - Jesus comes (v 46).
 - A. His reputation precedes Him.

- B. Advance workers want a peaceful approach (v 48).
- II. "P" - Jesus passes, and the air is electrified (v 50).
 - A. Jesus extends an invitation to the individual (v 49).
 - B. Jesus accepts honest words of praise.
 - C. Jesus performs a miracle of few words, but with long-lasting effects (v 52).
- III. "R" - Jesus reveals grace to others, as the entourage continues.
 - A. Bartimaeus lends his support to Jesus' message.
 - B. Jesus receives him as a part of His following (v 52).
 - C. Bartimaeus both receives Christ's continuing revelation of grace and testifies to the special grace once revealed to him.

Conclusion: As Jesus comes, passes, and continues to reveal Himself to people, a bond develops which strengthens and matures for future usefulness among followers and potential followers.

Philip C. Tesch
Houston, Texas

THIRD LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Mark 13:1-13

November 10, 1985

There are scores of preachers who feed their hearers a steady diet of calculations. They read current events, terrestrial movements, and even stop-and-go lights as keys to unlock the timing of the parousia. This type of calculation falls upon itching ears which are anxious for any knowledge of the future. But it is the proclamation of the Gospel which must dominate the activity of the church, or it will suffer the same fate as the second temple. No one can accuse Christ of sugar-coating the fate of those who fail to take His proclamation seriously. But the free gift of heaven awaits those who embrace Christ Jesus by faith.

Introduction: Specialized calculators are available to count calories, convert English to metric, chart biorhythms and mathematical functions. Many are turning the Scriptures into a specialized calculator to fix the second coming of Christ. But the function of the church is

NOT CALCULATION BUT PROCLAMATION

- I. There is urgency in Gospel proclamation.
 - A. Signs are wrongly interpreted by deceiving calculators (v 5).
 - B. The Holy Spirit provides the spontaneous witness to the truth (v 11).
- II. There is risk in Gospel proclamation.
 - A. Jesus promises resistance from authorities (v 9).
 - B. Jesus polarizes family members against each other (v 12).
- III. There is reward for Gospel proclamation.
 - A. The "reward" of persecution is directed at Jesus, though received by us (vv 9,13).
 - B. Salvation comes only through Jesus (v 13).

Conclusion: If we are convinced that Christ will come soon, we ought to be making a concerted effort to proclaim, not what might be interesting to the curious, but what is essential for salvation.

Philip C. Tesch

SECOND LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Mark 13:24-31

November 17, 1985

Lenski, Alford, Lang, and others understand Mk 13 to speak of both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Parousia, alternating between the two in the course of the chapter, with vv 24-31 applying to the Parousia. R. T. France, on the other hand, in his *Jesus and the Old Testament* sees Mk 13:1-31 as dealing exclusively with the destruction of Jerusalem. In this writer's opinion, France's view is the correct one for the following reasons. The figurative language of Is 13 and 34 (used by Jesus in vv 24-25) referred to the fall of Babylon and God's judgment against the nations, thus signifying, on Jesus' lips, God's judgment against the Jewish nation. In v 26 the Son of Man comes. But in Daniel the Son of Man comes not to earth but to the Ancient of Days and receives "authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him" (Dn 7:13-14). (Note the striking parallel with the great commission.) Jesus also says that this generation will not pass away until all these things take place (v 30). These words easily apply to the destruction of Jerusalem. The sending of the angels to gather the elect is reminiscent of the great commission. Not until v 32 does Jesus mention "that day" in the singular. Until that verse he uses the plural, "days" (vv 17,20).

The NASB begins a new paragraph at v 33 and has "He" in v 29, though there is no pronoun in the text. The NIV, KJV, and RSV all end the paragraph at v 31, and the NIV and KJV both have "it" in v 29, referring to the nearness of the time rather than to Christ himself—the former being in keeping with the suggested understanding of these verses. The central thought in this text is that Jesus will receive honor and glory and Jerusalem will be destroyed, and all this will certainly happen soon for the purpose of gathering God's elect together into the New Testament Church. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will respond with repentant joy to God's call and His desire to gather His people. The malady is that we too often respond to God only because we fear the consequences of not responding.

Introduction: Some preachers try to scare people into the Kingdom of God by recounting the terror of the tribulation or the second coming of Christ. The words of our text may seem to be words that do the same, unless we put ourselves into the context of Jesus and His disciples. The disciples heard these words and recognized the very strong Old Testament figurative language. When we hear these words in the light of the Old Testament we will not recall accounts of the horror and dread of the end of the world, but rather we will hear a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in 70 A.D. But more important, we will note that

GOD WANTS TO GATHER HIS PEOPLE

- I. To gather His people, God established His Son as the final authority on earth and in heaven.
 - A. Jesus has received all power and authority.
 1. The powers of heaven have been shaken. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.
 2. The Son of Man has come to the Ancient of Days and received authority, glory, and sovereign power (Dn 7:13-14; Mt 28:18).
 - B. His word will stand forever.
 1. Herod's magnificent temple no longer stands. Even the finest things of earth rot and decay—one day heaven and earth itself will pass away.
 2. But Jesus' words of forgiveness and life will never change. His salvation will remain.

Transition: To gather His people, God established Jesus our Savior and His word forever. This message of the church must be spread.

- II. To gather His people God has sent His messengers to the far reaches of the earth.
 - A. God "sends his angels."
 1. God's angels are His messengers, those who tell the Good News.
 2. God continually sends messengers with the Good News: The Twelve, Paul, Timothy, missionaries, pastors, and people like you who are willing to share the message of God's love in Christ.
 - B. God's messengers range far and wide seeking His people.
 1. "From the ends of the earth to the ends of heavens," says the text.
 2. This is a great comfort for us. God has sought us out—wherever He has had to go to find us.
 3. This is also a great responsibility for God's messengers. They must be willing to go wherever necessary to share the Good News.

Conclusion: God does not want to frighten people into His Kingdom. He wants to gather people with the Good News of His love and mercy in Christ. For those He has gathered, this Good News is also a great motivator to range far and wide with the message of salvation.

David L. Bahn
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

John 18:33-37

November 24, 1985

The immediate challenge of this text is to connect the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate. Is this a verbal jousting match with these two men trying to thrust and dodge? Or is there meaningful dialogue taking place here? The answer lies in finding a common thread of thought running through their conversation. That thread of thought centers in more than the kingship of Jesus. It is rather the kind of kingship Jesus claims and exercises. According to v 37, Jesus is the King of Truth. The central thought of this text is that Jesus' kingship transcends and even uses the ways of the world for the purposes of truth. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer will listen to Jesus, the King of Truth. The malady is that we fail to recognize Jesus' voice because we look for it in the wrong realm.

Introduction: How often do you hear people tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? From the "fine print" of contracts we sign to "truth in lending" laws we may be frustrated or sometimes satisfied in our desire for the truth. At times we would rather ignore the truth, but that is not a wise action. The truth always catches up with us. Jesus put a high value on truth. He was, in fact, the truth (cf. Jn 14:6). Our text makes clear that

JESUS IS THE KING OF THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH

- I. He implores us to come to grips with the truth in our lives.
 - A. Jesus confronted Pilate with the truth of his motives.
 1. Pilate wanted to find any excuse to charge and condemn Jesus. He was not so much concerned about the truth as he was concerned about disposing of Jesus' case now before him.
 2. Jesus wanted Pilate to face the truth. He asked why Pilate questioned Him about his kingship. Behind this question lay Jesus' concern for the truth, and His desire for Pilate to face that truth as well.
 - B. We are confronted by the King of the kingdom of truth.
 1. Too often we would hide behind the half-truth of our outward piety. Too easily we ignore Jesus' call to repentance and faith in Him as the true King of God's kingdom.
 2. Jesus wants us to repent of hiding behind half-truths in dealing with God or our neighbor. He wants us to bring forth the fruit of true repentance.
- II. He desires that we be part of God's kingdom of truth.
 - A. False kingdoms seek our attention and devotion.
 1. Pilate saw in Jesus a man with no apparent power and a king with no obvious subjects. Jesus was not a king in any sense of the word Pilate knew.
 2. Kingdoms that seek our devotion are obviously powerful, visible, and with great throngs of followers. False Christ-denying cults attract many followers. Powerful special interest groups seek our support. Highly visible empires want our investments of time and money to aid their building.
 3. But whether in the name of religion, special interest, or financial security, all such kingdoms are doomed to ultimate failure. These are not of the essence of Jesus' true kingdom.
 - B. Jesus' kingdom of truth is founded on the foundation of God's truth in heaven.
 1. Jesus says, "If mine were an earthly kingdom the visible trappings would be present." Servants would fight, power would be obvious to all.
 2. But, Jesus has a greater power-truth. He has greater loyalty—the lovers of truth are His subjects.
 - C. Jesus wants us to be part of His kingdom of truth.
 1. This means more than allowing Jesus to be true. It means recognizing the truth of His mission: to testify of the truth of God's love for all. The greatest testimony of that truth is found in the cross of Calvary.
 2. This also calls for us to lay aside worldly definitions of glory and power. True power, lasting and beneficial power, is founded in Jesus' kingdom of truth alone.

Conclusion: Jesus confronts us with truth's claim on us—the truth concerning our need of repentance, and the truth of Christ's cross-earned forgiveness. May we rejoice as subjects of the King of the kingdom of truth, ever listening to the King Himself.