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# Homiletical Studies

## Series B Old Testament Lessons

### FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1-8

November 29, 1987

Isaiah has recalled Israel's deliverance from Egypt. God's intervention at that point in time brought the Israelites safely through Sinai into Canaan. But their later rebellion necessitated God's opposition to them. Against this background Isaiah petitions the Lord. Israel's sinfulness has been the breeding ground for more sin. Isaiah begs God to deliver His forsaken people from their sin and to restore them. He prays for divine intervention, that God may reveal Himself in power as in the days of old. The prophet, on behalf of Israel, confesses her sin. Apart from the Lord's fathering hand, there can only be a pattern of mounting anxieties.

*Introduction:* A new church year affords opportunity for new resolves and new beginnings. The first Sunday in Advent sets the stage for a return to the festival seasons of worship. The cycle is repeated. The person and work of Christ are the focus. The incarnational celebration is at hand. The zest of Emmanuel's name and the refreshing breezes of our redemption are drawing near! But penitential purple drapes the altar and the pulpit. All is not well. Our sinful nature trails along with us. The uncleanness of our flesh did not get left behind in the old church year. The spoiling reality of our corrupted nature swirls around us as new resolves begin to resemble old rubbish. Where there is sin there will be anxieties. Advent is no exception.

### A PROPHETIC PRAYER IN THE ANXIETIES OF ADVENT

- I. The cause for our anxieties.
  - A. The long-time sin condition (vv. 5-6)
    1. Breeds within us spiritual uncleanness which becomes evident in a world of double standards (specific hidden anxieties could be considered).
    2. Makes of us a polluted garment as we pretend to be what we are not (the anxieties of an exposed self-righteousness or living a life of deception could be considered).
    3. Results of our leaf-like decay as our iniquity blows upon us the winds of death (the many anxieties that append themselves to a frail, human existence could surface here).
  - B. "There is no one who calls upon Thy name" (v. 7)
    1. Anxiety is inevitable if we cut ourselves off from that name which is above every name.
    2. Anxiety is inevitable if we are not using with regularity the means of grace.

3. Anxiety is inevitable if we are not modeling Isaiah with a devotional prayer life that cries for restoration.
- II. The prophetic prayer has been answered.
- A. God does "return for the sake of His servants" (v.17).
    1. Our redeeming Father has come down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ (63:16; 64:3).
    2. He has worked His full salvation "for those [the anxious ones] who wait for Him" (v.4).
    3. His justified anger has become justifying grace (v.5).
  - B. He continues to be "our potter" (v.8).
    1. He remolds those deformed by their anxieties.
    2. The clay which He fashions will display the Father's goodness through deeds that He declares to be righteous.
    3. The work of the Father's hand endures forever.

*Conclusion:* Learn to pray Isaiah's prophetic prayer in the midst of your Advent anxieties. Anxious moments will linger on, but not forever. The gentle, restoring hand of the potter will continue to fashion you as His servant who needs not be anxious and who prays without ceasing. The advent of God's Son has accomplished your restoration!

Randall W. Shields  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Isaiah 40: 1-8

December 6, 1987

Isaiah was writing to people whom the Lord would soon punish because of their sin. Babylonian captivity would uproot them from their homeland. When that predicted punishment fell upon Judah, it would mark the departure of God's glory from among them. And yet the severity of God's rebuke did not mean that He would forget His people. He had promised them a Savior and God never breaks a promise. Far in advance of their captivity Isaiah alerts God's people "to prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for your God."

This text may well be considered an "Old Testament classic." The young preacher has heard others expound upon it while many a pulpit-veteran has numbered this pericope among his favorites. Rich indeed are the prophet's words to the people of Judah and to the church of today.

Some eight hundred years before the heralding angels astonished the shepherds of Bethlehem with the birth announcement of Jesus, Isaiah heralded the Gospel of the coming Messiah. And now some two thousand years after His birth the message has not changed—the Lord is still coming. The sounds of this ancient Advent message cannot fade away in a dusty corner of the distant past. The sounds of Advent are to be heard still today.

*Introduction:* We live in a world of sounds. Recording artists Simon and Garfunkle put together a hit song in the 1960's called "Sounds of Silence." Julie Andrews is still remembered for her leading role in "The Sound of Music." And big names in the field of electronics compete to sell us the best sound system.

There are the quiet sounds of the countryside that contrast with the accelerated sounds of fast-paced living in the city. There are the happy sounds of children at play and the disturbing sounds of their parents in conflict. There are sounds that we want to hear again and again, and there are sounds that need to be heard but are often silenced.

This morning, for your listening enjoyment, you are invited to consider the sounds of Advent. Perhaps these sounds will be familiar music to your ear, and if so, then let the sound become even more pronounced in your life. If these sounds are unfamiliar for you, let the Advent sound system of the prophet Isaiah echo around you in a new kind of listening and living experience. Give ear to the message recorded in Isaiah 40:1-8. These are

### THE SOUNDS OF ADVENT

- I. The sound of comfort (vv. 1-2).
  - A. God speaks tenderly to Jerusalem (you and me).
    1. Warfare is ended.
    2. Iniquity is pardoned.
  - B. The "comfort" of the Gospel is applied.
- II. The sound of anticipation (vv. 3-5; see also Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3, Lk 3:4-6, Jn 1:23).
  - A. "A voice cries . . . Prepare the way."
    1. "Our God," the Messiah, Jesus comes (and there should be an air of excitement).
    2. The sound of spiritual road-building bespeaks a life of repentance.
  - B. Glory is revealed for all to see.
    1. How do we see Him?
    2. Does this sound stir up a present-day anticipation that we live out?
- III. The sound of the Eternal Word (vv. 6-8; see also 1 Pe 1:24-25).
  - A. The sounds of the world around us fade away.
    1. Decay dominates in the physical world.
    2. "Surely the people is grass."
  - B. "The Word of our God will stand."
    1. The spoken Word has been revealed in Christ—the Advent sound made flesh for us.
    2. This eternal sound will silence all others.

*Conclusion:* There are so many sounds that intrude upon us and beckon to us. There are so many sounds that disturb us and delight us. But in the midst of them all tune in carefully to the sounds of Advent. The voice of our God has spoken tender words of comfort, words of anticipation, and words of everlasting life. Absorb the sounds of Advent and live them out!

Randall W. Shields  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

### THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11

December 13, 1987

Isaiah's prophetic perspective sweeps forth from the present failures of Israel to the fulfilment of a gracious God's present promises. Isaiah 61, strategically placed in the third triad (chapters 58-66) of Isaiah's "Book of Comfort" (chapters 40-66), builds on the confident hope for deliverance from sin (chapters 40-48) and the Servant's atonement for sin (chapters 49-57). Here the benefits of the Servant's vicarious satisfaction are not only anticipated, but also truly present for those who believe the promise.

The trajectory of this promise moves from the servant passages to Isaiah 61. F.F. Bruce (*This is That*, Exeter, 1969, p. 90) suggests that Isaiah 61 "may have been interpreted in terms of the Servant of Yahweh." This quotation from Isaiah 61 is used at Qumran with reference to the Teacher of Righteousness (1QH 18:14). The true target, however, toward which these words were launched was the eschatological prophet who was also the Servant (Luke 4:16-21) and the Son of David (Is 11:1-9). The fact that Jesus inaugurates his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth by first locating this passage in the prophetic scroll (Lk 4:17) and then declaring to a rapt assembly, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," underscores what rich Christological contours mark this text.

*Introduction:* Most of us have never been in jail. Imagine the incarceration of a whole nation, even the whole human race. Israel's captivity was a part of humanity's captivity. Her pain is one with our suffering.

#### THE PRESENCE OF THE FUTURE

- I. The good news is meant for a bad situation (61:1).
  - A. Our rebellion, like Israel's, closed all options.
    1. We were bound by our sin and hence brokenhearted (61:1).
    2. We were captive to a fallen order (61:1).
    3. We were in the darkness of captivity (61:2).
  - B. Our rebellion, like Israel's, brings the same old smart.
    1. We grieve without God's gracious presence (61:3).
    2. We mourn, even despair, without His righteousness (61:3).
- II. The good news effects a great reversal.
  - A. God frees us from captivity for freedom, from darkness for light (61:1).
    1. The Lord's salvation replaces our confinement (61:10).
    2. The Lord's righteousness breaks our wickedness (61:11).
    3. The Lord's proclamation brings about its context (61:2).
  - B. God's liberation of Israel, and humanity, brings gladness (61:10).
    1. We rejoice instead of grieve (61:3).

2. We delight instead of despair (61:10).
- III. The good news is Jesus Christ, the prophet, priest, king, servant, son of David for us.
  - A. Jesus Christ is present for us in baptism.
  - B. Jesus Christ is present for us in the Eucharist.
  - C. Jesus Christ is present for us in the Gospel.

Dean Wenthe

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

December 20, 1987

The pivotal place of David in the messianic hope of Israel is the focus of this text. His role as the father of the Messiah not only leads the prophets to portray the latter in terms of the former (Jr 23:5; 30:9; 37:24), but also leads Matthew to begin his gospel with "a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1). As Walter Roehrs has succinctly stated: "David was not only the inspired mouthpiece of divine words; he himself was a prophetic figure. As God carried out His eternal plan of salvation, He made him a type of the one who was to come and his kingdom a shadow of what is to come" (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (1979), p. 339). A thorough description of the various facets of that kingdom which was a shadow is John Bright's *Covenant and Promise* (1976), particularly pages 49-77.

In the Advent cycle, of course, the accent will fall on the promissory aspects of the text (v.9, "I will make your name great..."; v.10, "I will provide a place..."; v. 11, "I will also give you rest..."; v. 16, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever..."). With David a new departure towards God's future and final deliverance has occurred. The seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, will now also be, without doubt, the seed of David.

*Introduction:* My father once told me: "Son, if you want to know what your girlfriend will be like in years to come, look at her mother." A parallel to this advice is the common expression "like father, like son." *Sometimes* there is truth in folk wisdom; but God leaves no doubt in David's mind that the future Messiah will be *like him*; that fact is established by the sure word of the prophet Nathan.

#### DAVID: THE GREAT DIVIDE

- I. The history of Israel was a spiral downward.
  - A. After the Exodus the people rebelled.
    1. The golden calf episode is an epitome of Israel's character (Ex).

- 2. The new generation was warned by Moses (Dt).
- B. After the conquest the people commit apostasy.
  - 1. The repeated pattern of forsaking Yahweh for Canaanite deities is clear (Jdg).
  - 2. The rejection of Yahweh as king for a secular paradigm is transparent (1 Sm).
- C. Our lives, in Adam, too often mirror the activities of Israel.
- II. Second Samuel 7 is a great turning point in Israel's history.
  - A. God will build David a "house" (2 Sm 7:9).
  - B. God will provide a place for his people (2 Sm 7:10).
  - C. God will establish David's house forever (2 Sm 7:16).
- III. The promise is certain.
  - A. Those who are "in David", i.e., who trust this promise, are also "in Christ," for it is Christ's kingdom that David's foreshadowed.
  - B. Unlike Israel's record of defeats and defections from God (or ours), the promise to David was fulfilled to the letter.
  - C. Christ, David's Son, rewrote David's history and rewrites ours by means of his perfect obedience and vicarious satisfaction.

Dean Wenthe

## CHRISTMAS DAY

Isaiah 62: 10-12

December 25, 1987

The prophet Isaiah lived seven centuries before the time of Christ. Little is known of his antecedents except that he was the son of Amoz. But more than any other person who lived in the centuries before Christ, Isaiah saw the glory of His coming and wrote of Him—more than Moses who called Him a prophet, more than Abraham who knew He would come from his seed, more than David who sang of Him, more than all the other prophets who predicted His coming. Isaiah saw the glory of the coming of Christ and he spoke of Him. His name "Isaiah" ("the Lord saves") somehow epitomizes the long tenure of this prophet's ministry among God's people in Judah before the judgement of the Lord brought them to their knees in repentance for their careless disregard of His holiness and their lack of serious attention to fulfilling the "law of love" in terms of service to their fellows.

In Isaiah 62 God's man speaks of a return of the exiles from their Babylonian bondage and then projects himself into the future reign of God's Messiah. Worldly scholars of Scripture would argue that these words came from a period at least two hundred years after Isaiah, ascribing them to a Deutero-Isaiah. But neither Christ nor the New Testament allow for such a critical creation. Isaiah 62 and particularly

our text assures us that, as the captured people of Judah finally saw the Lord's deliverance, so people everywhere would see the deliverance that comes from Zion in the person of God's Messiah.

*Introduction:* A devoutly religious couple who loved all their children with self-giving sacrifice had one son who was the proverbial "black sheep." He had flitted from one job to another. He had begged, borrowed, and stolen from all his friends and relatives until he had become an unwelcome guest at almost every door. Still the parents loved their wastrel son and prayed daily that their prodigal might shape up. On a Christmas morning, after this boy had not been heard from in months, he appeared at his parents' home. He was neat, clean, and well-shaven. When his father opened the door, the young man fell on his shoulders and cried like a child. He admitted his failures but assured his parents that his life had changed. At the brink of despair and suicide, a jail chaplain spoke to him firmly but lovingly of a better way in Jesus Christ. The young man's life, through help in a half-way house, took on new meaning. Not only was there rejoicing in heaven, there was joy in his parents' home. It had finally happened!

There were centuries of watching and waiting in the Old Testament before God's promises of deliverance in a coming Savior would be fulfilled, but it finally happened. We all, particularly the children, have waited for the coming of another Christmas, and it has finally happened. It bursts upon our world and our lives with wonderful good news.

### IT HAS FINALLY HAPPENED

- I. It has happened by God's plan.
  - A. It was God's plan that His exiled people should return to their homeland. "Pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people" (v. 10).
  - B. It was God's plan that all mankind, exiled by sin, should be restored to His love. "Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones (the impediments to God's plan being fulfilled). Raise the banner for the nations" (v. 10).
- II. It has happened in the coming of God's Messiah.
  - A. "Say to the Daughter of Zion, see your Savior comes!" (v. 11); announce to the returned exiles that there is salvation in the Savior whom God will send.
  - B. Say to people everywhere that the Savior has come. Such is the message of the angels, of the prophets, of the evangelists of God. He has come to Bethlehem in the birth of Christ. He brings His own reward, the gift of God's grace and forgiveness, to all people everywhere.
- III. It has happened that lives may be changed.
  - A. The people of Judah were not to return to the same evils which brought their destruction. They were to be a "holy people, the redeemed of the Lord" (v. 12). People would "seek them out" because they would be the saints of God.
  - B. Let us not return to the things that profane Christmas among us. Let us



live as the people of God, whose lives the coming of Christ, the Messiah, has changed that we may testify to what has happened to us in Him.

*Conclusion:* I remember as a child the joyful anticipation of Christmas. Then it happened; it really did. Somehow, mysteriously, there were gifts under the tree and the gleeful excitement of tearing them apart to see what we had received. This day reminds us again that it finally happened. It happened when God's Messiah came, and it happened that our lives might never be the same.

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### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 45:22-25

December 27, 1987

The Scriptures of the Old Testament repeat the refrain: "Thus saith the Lord." In Isaiah 46:11 we read, "What I have said, that will I bring about." God was speaking of His promise that in the Seed of the Woman would all people be blessed. A covenant is an agreement. God says, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people." God fulfilled this covenant by keeping His promise to send the Savior to the world. Isaiah repeatedly alludes to God's promise to send the Savior, the Lord and King of all. This is the theme of chapter 45 from which our text is taken. The Word admonishes us to "look to the Lord!" So were the people of Judah urged to "look to the Lord" from the bitterness of their bondage in Babylon. God would deliver them. But God's everlasting King and David's greater Son would come and establish God's covenant of grace with a far greater and all-inclusive "Israel" than that remnant which would return from the Babylonian episode.

*Introduction:* The Sunday after Christmas can be a "downer" for most pastors and a lot of congregations. One pastoral journal urged congregations to give their pastors the week off after Christmas and Easter so that they might recoup their strength. But is Christmas to be rapidly tucked away for another year when it is over? Should it be quickly forgotten as businesses plan for the "End of the Year Sale"? Our text encourages us to continue the celebration by honoring Him whose word cannot be shaken and who came to establish a covenant of grace with us? How fitting it is for us in this yet fresh Christmas to worship the King!

### O WORSHIP THE KING!

#### I. Who is this King?

A. He is the Lord God of heaven and earth (vv. 22, 24).

- B. He has revealed Himself as Lord and King in His Son.
- II. How are we to honor this King?
  - A. By turning to Him in worship and adoration (vv. 22-23).
  - B. By acknowledging Him as God alone.
- III. What will this King do for His subjects?
  - A. He will save them (vv. 24-25).
  - B. In this King they will triumph and glory.
- IV. What will this King do to those who reject Him?
  - A. He will put them to shame (v. 24).
  - B. They will regret eternally their rejection of His righteousness.

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## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

January 3, 1988

In verse 10 Isaiah uses the infinitive absolute with the finite verb, which is translated with the adverb "greatly". Isaiah as spokesman for both old and new Zion expresses emphatic joy in salvation. He says his *soul* rejoices; this is an intense joy of faith not dependent on outward circumstances. Verse 3 features an aspect of our faith too rarely treated. Where our Reformed friends celebrate the Sovereign Lord who "holds the whole world in His hand," Isaiah tells us the redeeming Lord finds His greatest joy in the salvation of sinners as the most glorious of His mighty works.

*Introduction:* The radio stations shelved Christmas carols a week ago. Television specials have shifted to the year-in-review. But on this tenth day of Christmas the Holy Spirit is still singing, through Isaiah,

### JOY TO THE WORLD

- I. Christmas is God's joy (v. 3).
  - A. The most joyful celebrant at Christmas is God Himself. When party time came (Ga 4:4), the Lord crowned all His mighty works with a crown of thorns that gives His elect the crown of life.
  - B. The people for whom Jesus was born, lived, died, rose, ascended, and rules are the diadem with which He proclaims victory over sin, over death, over the devil — yes, even over the sorrowful events of the year-in-review.
- II. Christmas is the church's joy (vv. 10-11).
  - A. In Jesus we are newly dressed (v. 10).
    - 1. We sinners are clothed in garments of salvation.

2. We baptized ones wear robes of righteousness.
  - a. This is no inherent righteousness.
  - b. Ours is a righteousness imparted to us (Ro 3:21-22).
3. Now we are clothed for the wedding banquet (Mt 22).
- B. In Jesus we grow in the joyous fruits of faith (v. 11).
  1. Isaiah used the same picture in Isaiah 55:9-11.
  2. Jesus used the same picture in Mark 4:1-20.
  3. Isaiah, like Abraham (Jn 8:56), rejoiced to look ahead to the day of Jesus Christ.
  4. Paul in today's epistle rejoiced in his own salvation, the salvation of the Ephesians, and the salvation of the Bride of Christ.
- III. Christmas is the world's joy (vv. 1-2).
  - A. The glory of the church, hidden in Isaiah's day, lights the world like the dawn, like the rising sun (Mal. 4:2).
  - B. The Bride of the Light of the World cannot hide her light under a bushel.
  - C. The world must be shown that we who were once forsaken sinners have new names: the Lord's righteous, the Lord's glory.

*Conclusion:* Christmas joy is, first of all, God's joy. He imparts His joy to us. Now we, anticipating Epiphany, *must* proclaim His joy to the world.

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

### THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Isaiah 42:1-7

January 10, 1988

The same Old Testament and epistle readings are used for this Sunday in all three years of the lectionary. The epistle is but one of fifteen references to Isaiah 42 in the New Testament. Jesus' baptism is one of the few events in His life treated in all four Gospels. The preacher will want especially to research the concept of "justice" in verse 1 and the word *tsedheq* in verse 6. This passage clearly speaks, already in the Old Testament, of the Trinity. We can use it to help our people remember that Jesus' baptism is not just an event in His life. In view of widespread confusion regarding John's baptism, Jesus' baptism, and our baptism, it is good to study baptism in the context of Epiphany. In Isaiah we have an Epiphany theme — the promise of the Servant of the Lord, anointed by the Holy Spirit, who brings hope impartially to all.

*Introduction:* Sometimes we baptize babies, children, and adults almost too mechanically at this font. The Gospel (Mk 1:4-11) and Isaiah remind us that at each baptism we

### CELEBRATE THE BAPTISM OF SPEAKER, SERVANT, AND SPIRIT

#### I. God the Father speaks in baptism (vv 1a,5-7).

- A. The Creator of heaven and earth took the initiative in declaring Jesus to be righteous (Is 53:11).
- B. God the Father took the initiative in taking the hand of Jesus during His earthly life (Mt 2:13-14; Lk 4:30; Jn 18:6; and others). Jesus in turn took the hand of Peter and of each of us of "little faith."
- C. The Father took the initiative in declaring Jesus to be His covenant with His people.
- D. The Speaker took the initiative in making Jesus the Light of the World (Jn 8:12) in order to
  - 1. Give sight to the blind.
  - 2. Free us from all forms of captivity.
  - 3. Lift us from dark dungeons of despair.

*Transition:* Baptism is God the Father in action, and

#### II. Jesus serves in baptism (vv. 2-4).

- A. Men who have claimed to serve the people usually have a fearful aspect. Ghandi, Hitler, Martin Luther King, Jr., Karl Marx, and a full range of Republicans and Democrats have each scared as many as they have served.
- B. Jesus came with no ballyhoo. To allay our well-justified fears we are told more of what the Servant Jesus does not do. For all the bruised reeds, the smoldering wicks, the poor in spirit, the brokenhearted, those in mourning, the Peters and Thomases, here is a Servant who does not destroy in order to save.
- C. Here is justice different from what the best-intentioned among us offer. Jesus never tried to effect improvements by altering social structures instead of hearts. Jesus serves by delivering justice faithfully. Here is the baptism needed by both Philemon and Simon Legree, by both Zacchaeus and Nicodemus.
- D. The Servant Jesus is not only low-key, gentle, and successful, but also persistent and persevering. Surely He had ample reason to be discouraged. Yet He never faltered. He not merely went "all the way to Timbukto," but set His face for Jerusalem (Lk 9:51).

*Transition:* Baptism is Jesus as Servant in action, and

#### III. The Holy Spirit anoints in baptism (v. 1).

- A. Isaiah calls Israel the Lord's servant (Is 4:18). Paul knew he was the Lord's servant (Ac 13:47). Many Christians are rightly called servants of the Lord. Yet the text is speaking of one special (anointed) Servant.
- B. Jesus was anointed with the Spirit in a visible way on the banks of the Jordan. And this action was more than the anointing of prophets and kings

in the Old Testament (1 Sm 10:1-10; 16:1). Here is baptism with the Holy Spirit and power (Ac 10:38).

- C. Words can be stronger than swords. You are empowered by baptism into Christ to proclaim justice to nations. You can declare justice between the sinner standing before you and the Father in heaven. Such is the power of being baptized into the name of the Triune God.

*Conclusion:* The word "baptism" does not appear in our text. Yet Isaiah's message from 750 years before Christ is full of the promises of baptism. "Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life" (Ro 6:3-4).

Warren E. Messmann  
Plain City, Ohio

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Samuel 3:1-10

January 17, 1988

The central thought of the text is that Samuel heard the Lord and responded obediently. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers respond to God's Word in obedience. The problem is that we treat God's Word as a mere human word. The means to the goal is that God patiently speaks His powerful Word of love to us.

*Introduction:* Among children two words suffice to lend gravity to any admonition, add authority to any device, or infuse comfort into any consolation: "Dad (or Mom) said." Similarly, we need to be aware that *God* is behind His words to us. (This is the lesson Samuel learned.) Then we can say

### SPEAK LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS *NOT* LISTENING

- I. Not listening to a mere man.
  - A. Until chapter 3 Samuel has served God *under* Eli. Now he served God, period.
  - B. We should take care to hear *God* through His spokesmen today.
    1. If we do not, our attention can easily be dominated by the spokesmen.
      - a. A pastor may be an object of hero worship or personal dislike. Either way, we can have trouble hearing the Word through him.
      - b. When God comes behind "masks" (Luther), the potential for offense always exists. But woe to us if He comes any other way.

2. God still speaks to us personally, though not quite as with Samuel.
  - a. Scripture is like a letter God has written to all men. But it never leaves the Author; actually, the Author comes with it.
  - b. His good Word in Christ acts. It reaches out to us (1 Th 2:13).

*Transition:* The kingdom of God consists of power, not just talk (1 Co 4:20).

II. Not listening for mere conversation.

- A. God's Word to Samuel was so important that the Lord spoke it repeatedly.
- B. We too can be stupid about God's Word, not appreciating its blessings.
  1. Like Samuel, people today are not accustomed to hearing the Word.
  2. Even we Christians forget what God wants to give us in His Word.
- C. God's Word transcends conversation. It is transportation. It brings us
  1. Christ's finished redeeming work and all His benefits.
  2. Doctrinal certainty. Luther said: "If we lose sight of the Word, we have no aid or counsel left ... I have suffered many trials ... as soon as I took hold of some statement of Scripture as my holy anchor, I found security" (LW 27, 78-79).

*Transition:* A little girl on the second floor of a burning house would not listen to the voices of firemen telling her to jump through the smoke into a net. Only her father's voice would do.

III. Not listening so I can merely forget.

- A. Obedient Samuel would replace Eli, who had heard God but failed to take a *decisive* step against his sons (3:13; see 2:12-17, 22-25).
- B. We treat God's Word as a human word when we pay heed more to what the world says than to what God says. We must
  1. Confess our guilt.
    - a. Our conduct is often conformed to this world.
    - b. Our witness is often blunted by its derision (see Jn 1:46).
  2. Recall that God's authority is on our side in Christ (Ps 85:8).
    - a. When God declares us righteous on account of Christ, we *are*.
    - b. We disregard everything the world says to the contrary.
    - c. Thus, we give God "the honor of truthfulness."

*Conclusion:* There was good reason for Luther to say ears are the "proper organ" of a Christian. "Speak Lord, Your servant is listening!"

Ken Schurb  
Columbus, Ohio

### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

January 24, 1988

The goal of the sermon is that the hearers take the initiative in speaking with people about Christ. The problem is that, under pressure from the world, we start wondering what good our words can do. The means to the goal is that God's Word has power to produce great results, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

*Introduction:* Speaking of Christ takes guts, often more than we can muster. We rationalize: "What good can my puny words do?" But the message remains God's, not ours. He does great things through it. The text is a case study in which

#### THE GREAT CAPITULATE TO GOD'S STRONG WORD

- I. In an unlikely situation. Nineveh was a "great city," that is, it was
  - A. Great in size.
    1. Jonah was outnumbered—against 120,000 he was one man in a city "three days' journey" large (probably not travelling straight through, but stopping to preach at various points).
    2. We too are "outnumbered" as we speak God's Word—if not by people, then by the devil, the world, and our flesh.
  - B. Great in sin.
    1. "Jonah did the Almighty's bidding ... to preach the truth in the face of falsehood" (Father Mapple in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*).
      - a. Nineveh was violent (see reference works on Assyrian cruelty).
      - b. Nineveh was proud (see later texts, Is 10:12-14 and 2 Ki 18:28).
      - c. Nineveh was ripe for destruction, like Sodom and Gomorrah.
    2. At times we Christians are dumbfounded at the evil around and among us.
  - C. Great also as an object of mercy, however unlikely.
    1. In this way Nineveh was a great city to God (v. 3, Hebrew: cf. 4:11).
    2. God's "almight power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity."
      - a. Mercy prompted God to send the Saviour, also to us.
      - b. The message of repentance and forgiveness is rooted securely in His completed work. It is for all (Lk 24:47).

*Transition:* We take care to proclaim God's message and no other (false doctrine; see v. 2) on account, in part, of an evangelistic motive. Only God's Word can do His work.

- II. With a great result.
  - A. Repentance

1. In Nineveh God's Word caused an impressive repentance which was
  - a. Immediate—Jonah was not even halfway through town (v. 4).
  - b. Sincere—the Ninevites reacted as one would expect God's people to react, believing God (v. 5a; see Gn 15:6 and Mk 1:15) and bemoaning their sin (v. 5b; see J1 1:13 and Dn 9:3).
  - c. Inclusive—everyone in the city was involved (v. 5c).
  - d. Indicative—God's mercy and power are significant. Note that Jonah was not surprised at the result, though he did not like it (4:2).
2. God's Word has great power when we proclaim it, too.
  - a. Creative power (2 Co 4:6).
  - b. Resurrection power (Eph 1:13, 19-20).
  - c. Vivifying power (1 Pe 1:3, 23).
- B. Deliverance.
  1. God, in His power and mercy, spared Nineveh (v. 10).
  2. God works in power and mercy through the Gospel today. We proclaim; He converts and delivers.

*Conclusion:* The late football coach Vince Lombardi trained players to beat an opponent at his strongest point. Then the player had the advantage. He had shown superiority. God sent Jonah with only the Word to a bastion of godlessness. Result—the great capitulate! Why should we hesitate to speak the Word?

Ken Schurb  
Columbus, Ohio

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

January 31, 1988

A "prophet" (v 15) is one who announces something in the place of God, God's Word to men. Thus, he is an interpreter of God to men. In the same way, "like me" suggests that the prophet would act like Moses by serving as a mediator between God and the people. In verse 16 Moses reminds the Israelites of how terrified they were when God gave His law and of how they asked Moses to be their mediator with God. God was pleased to have Moses serve as His spokesman to the people (v 17). But, according to verse 18, God would in the future raise up a prophet who would convey far more of God's truth than Moses had conveyed. The Messiah is here clearly predicted, and the Jews indeed expected the Messiah to appear as the greatest of the prophets, whose words would have to be heeded. Christ applied this passage to Himself in John 5:45-46; 11:48-50. While there would be a succession of prophets from Moses until Christ, Christ is the greatest revealer of God, whose words about God are utterly true and reliable. Such is not the case with those prophets



who purport to speak to the people for God, but whom God has not commanded to speak (v 20). In the verses following the text the test by which true prophets were to be distinguished from false was the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of what they were predicting. The events predicted were those which were supposed to happen within a limited period. If a prophet's words did not come true, he was to be regarded as a blasphemer and put to death.

*Introduction:* In the United States there are more than four hundred religious denominations and sects, all claiming to have the truth. In this welter of religions where can we find truth that leads to God and heaven? Where can we find religion so utterly reliable that we can stake our bodies and souls on it for time and for eternity? According to our text such religion is embodied in Jesus Christ.

### JESUS CHRIST BRINGS RELIABLE RELIGION

#### I. Because of who He is.

- A. Christ is the prophet foretold by Moses (v. 15a).
  - 1. Christ so identified Himself (Jn 5:56).
  - 2. Peter (Ac 3:22) and Stephen (Ac 7:37) so identified Christ.
  - 3. The Jewish people expected a prophet greater than Moses (Jn 1:21).
- B. Christ is a prophet from among His people (v. 15b).
  - 1. He is a human being, tempted as we are (Heb 4:15).
  - 2. We can rely on Him to understand and to empathize with us in our predicaments.
- C. Christ is a prophet who is our intermediary with God, as Moses was God's intermediary with Israel ("like me").
  - 1. We need an intermediary because our sins condemn us and therefore we have reason to be afraid of falling into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31).
  - 2. By His perfect life and bloody death Christ became our mediator, through whom we have found favor with God. We can rely on Jesus as the one who has made us acceptable to God.

*Transition:* How can we be sure Jesus has done all this for us? Because He has told us. Jesus brings reliable religion also

#### II. Because of what He says.

- A. Jesus, like Moses, said only what God commanded Him to say (v. 18b).
  - 1. Jesus has a direct line with God (Jn 14:24;17:8,13).
  - 2. Thus Jesus spoke with authority (Mk 1:22).
- B. Jesus always speaks the truth.
  - 1. About our sin (Matt 15:19).
  - 2. About God's forgiveness (Matt 9:2).
  - 3. About His presence (Matt 28:20).
  - 4. About eternal life (Jn 3:16).

C. Jesus' words are to be heeded (v. 19; Matt 17:15).

1. On this account we must take every opportunity to read and hear God's Word.
2. If we neglect the Word or listen to prophets who do not speak God's word, we will suffer the consequences (Jn 14:48).
3. But who would want to turn away from the words of eternal life (Jn 6:67)? We can rely on such words in life and in death.

*Conclusion:* In a world filled with all kinds of religions, we do not have to grope in the dark or flounder in fantasies. Jesus Christ brings reliable religion because of who He is and what He says.

Gerhard Aho

### FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Job 7:1-7

February 7, 1988

Job is usually described as a patient man; yet between the beginning and the end of the book he vehemently protests what has been done to him. At first he does appear patient as he resigns himself to God and scolds his wife when she urges him to curse God and die. But when his three friends arrive to console him, he breaks the initial silence with a bitter complaint in which he curses his birth and desires to die (3). Eliphaz, the first friend to speak, essentially generalizes that all people are sinners and that Job's hope rests in confessing his sins and seeking God's mercy (4-5). Job rejects the advice as being insipid, charges his friends with disloyalty, and challenges them to prove any guilt on his part (6). He then laments that life is troubled and short (7:1-7). The speeches that follow lead up to the magnificent theophany in which God asserts His omnipotence and justice. Job repents and his fortunes are reestablished.

The pericope by itself is very discouraging. It appears to have been selected (instead of Zph 3:14-20 when the three-year lectionary was first introduced) as a counterpoint to the Gospel (Mk 1:29-39), which recounts Jesus' healing of the sick and demon-possessed. Job is an example of how we can consider life to be without meaning and purpose. But it is God's epiphany in Jesus that delivers us from our self-defeat and raises us from the despair that is caused by sin and its consequences.

*Introduction:* We have those times when we feel devastated by the sin and troubles in our own lives and about us. Relatives and friends may counsel us to be patient ("as patient as Job" perhaps) when what we want to do is cry out against all the injustices of life, real or imagined. Job felt that way. Job cried out. But with Job we also should believe that

### GOD IS IN CONTROL

- I. Life can appear to be out of control.
  - A. Satan and sin create havoc.
    - 1. Job was caught up in the power of evil (Job 1:6-2:10).
    - 2. Sin and sickness and weakness beset us.
    - 3. Even when we strive to be obedient (Job 6:28-30).
  - B. We can feel as Job did.
    - 1. Life is burdensome (vv. 1,3,5).
    - 2. It is without hope, like a shuttle that runs out of thread (v. 6).
    - 3. It has no substance and so is unhappy (v. 7).
    - 4. We long for relief (v. 2).
- II. God is in control.
  - A. God asserts His authority and power.
    - 1. He confronted Job with His power, wisdom, and justice (Job 38,40).
    - 2. Jesus overpowered evil (Mk 1:29-39).
    - 3. His death and resurrection win the victory (I Cor 15:20-24).
  - B. The Good News is that His kingdom is at hand. In repentance and faith we experience His power in our lives (Mk 1:15).
  - C. Yet we are still in a world of sin and sickness. We do not always understand why the righteous suffer. But we trust that God is in control and His will is best (Job 42:1-5).
  - D. We put our hope in His unfailing love (Ps 147:11) and receive power to endure sin and the trials of life.

*Conclusion:* We do not know why God allowed Satan to bring sin into the world. But we do know and believe that He does control evil and He will give us the final victory in Christ.

Luther G. Strasen  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

### LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

2 Kings 2:1-12c

February 14, 1988

The Feast of the Transfiguration celebrates the most glorious epiphany of our Lord when He was among us visibly. Yet as we observe it, we struggle with the realities of the transcendent. We are so tied to the here and now, while the transfiguration projects us forward to what will be. Our theology strongly proclaims the hope of the glory which shall be revealed in us (2 Cor 3:12-4:2), yet the events and struggles of this life seem more important.

While the Gospel describes the glory of Jesus Himself as He was transfigured before the three disciples, the glory of God is left more to the imagination in the assumption of Elijah as a fiery chariot and horses take him to heaven in a whirlwind. However, the conduct of those who witnessed the two events has similarities as they desire to participate in the glories and are not too sure how to react when each is complete. Today is a day of worship when we, too, can reflect and act on God's plan for us to share in His glory now and fully forever.

*Introduction:* We deal with a contradiction. We might look for better circumstances in our life and thus long for the future—as long as that future is in this life. And so we speak about the wondrous glory of God we shall experience in heaven, but we are not that eager to experience it right now. The Feast of the Transfiguration enables us to worship God and praise Him for the glory that is here for us now, the glory that sustains us on this life's journey, the glory that will be fully ours in heaven. It is

### THE ETERNAL GLORY NOW

- I. We seek God's glory.
  - A. We live in a world where sin attempts to suppress God's glory. Elijah and his successor-to-be Elisha lived in the midst of evil times (1 Ki 17). Our times can lead us into temptation and sin.
  - B. But our goal as the redeemed of God is to come into the fullness of God's glorious presence forever (Ps 16:11).
  - C. We want nothing to deter us. Elisha insisted on accompanying Elijah and told the company of the prophets to be still (vv. 1-6). The disciples wanted to bask in transfiguration glory (Mk 9:5).
- II. For we already see God's glory.
  - A. Elijah saw the glorious power of God on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki 18:36-38) and felt His presence on Horeb (1 Ki 19:11-13).
  - B. Elisha and the company of prophets witnessed a display of glory as Elijah was assumed into heaven (vv. 7-12).
  - C. We now see the glory of God in Jesus, full of grace and truth, and by faith belong to God's family (Jn 1:12-14). We worship Him who displays His glory as God (Mk 9:2-8).
  - D. Our lives are being transformed to participate in ever greater glory in Him (2 Cor 3:17-18).
- III. Yet we await the fullness of glory.
  - A. We still must make the journey through this life of sin. Elisha went from a glimpse of glory to juveniles' jeers (2 Ki 2:23-25).
  - B. We are faced with disbelief from others. The company of prophets did not want to believe God's glorious power (vv. 15-18). We could lose heart because of sin and unbelief. We could join others in focusing our loyalty and interest on this life only.

C. Yet we are sustained with God's promise that we will be with Him in final glory (Jn 14:1-4).

D. The gift of the Holy Spirit is ours, as Elisha also received God's power (vv. 13-14), to keep us faithful and fearless on our journey to eternal glory (Jn 14:26-27).

*Conclusion:* On the Mount of Transfiguration the very Elijah of our text stood with Jesus in His glorious magnificence. The glory of Jesus that we already see and believe certifies that we, too, will be in that glorious company of the apostles and prophets to worship God eternally.

Luther G. Strasen  
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### FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 22:1-14

February 21, 1988

*Introduction:* Have you ever become deeply attached to a person whose good qualities you admired and desired to imitate? You have spoken favorably about this person to others and placed him on a pedestal to be imitated by yourself and by others. But as time went on you noticed traits and acts of that individual not in harmony with your expectations. It became apparent that your confidence had been greatly misplaced. Oh, how you were hurt! When certain persons have such an experience, they have become totally skeptical of all humanity.

When a person has totally relied upon God and when a terrible tragedy occurs in that person's life which God permitted to happen, then such an individual is in danger of rejecting God. In situations like that some people have become victims of utter infidelity. To acknowledge God as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and then to have something happen that God could have prevented can cause a person to lose his confidence in the goodness and power of God. In the life of every believer there come times when one is disappointed in God. Superficial souls escape such disappointments. But the soul that lives in close fellowship with God will almost inevitably experience times that test the mettle of faith. How can a person feel right about God when he believes that God contradicts Himself? During the Lenten season, as we endeavor to draw near to our Savior, let us bravely ask the question:

### DOES GOD EVER CONTRADICT HIMSELF?

- I. It seemed so in Abraham's experience (set forth briefly the course of Abraham's life from the time of his call in Ur of the Chaldees up to the command of

the Lord to offer up his son Isaac, Gn 11:31-22:12; Ac 7:3-7.)

A. God had given Abraham a three-fold promise:

1. Abraham was to have a son, even though Sarah could no longer bear children because of her advanced age (Gn 12:2).
2. Abraham's descendants were to inherit the land of Canaan (Gn 12:7; 22:11).
3. Through one of Abraham's descendants ("Seed" in KJV) all the nations of the earth were to be blessed (Gn 12:3). (The RSV translation "shall bless themselves" does not correctly reproduce the niphal in the Hebrew text as a passive; for proof consult Ga 3:16.)

B. The command of the Lord to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac appeared

1. To go against the natural law which God placed in the heart of men.
2. To run contrary to God's own law (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17).
3. To condone the human sacrifice which God condemned as heinous on the part of the Canaanites.
4. To make impossible all the promises made to Abraham.

C. Abraham's faith, however, was so strong that he believed that, if necessary, the Lord could raise up children from the very stones to fulfill His promises (He 11:19).

D. The seeming contradiction was resolved when God appeared to Abraham and commanded him not to kill his son but to offer a ram (Gn 22:12-13).

II. It seemed so in Jesus' experience.

A. What a disappointment was the whole life of Jesus to the Jews! (The Old Testament had predicted the glories of the coming Messiah, Gn 49:10; Ps 2:10-12; 110:6; the Messiah's kingdom was to stretch to the uttermost parts of the earth, Ps 72:8.)

B. What a seeming self-contradiction was life of Christ!

1. Although He was the Creator of the universe (Jn 1:1-3), He lay as a helpless babe in Mary's arms (Lk 2:7).
2. Although He helped people both spiritually and physically, He had many enemies during His public ministry (Mk 2:7; Lk 4:28-29).
3. Although He was completely innocent, He was condemned to death and died as a criminal (Lk 23:33).

C. The seeming contradiction was resolved on Easter morning when Christ, who died on Good Friday for the sins of the world, was raised for our justification (Ro 4:25; 2 Cor 5:18-20).

III. It seems so in our experience.

A. God has given Christians numerous promises that He will help and sustain them (Ps 1:3; 4:3; 50:15; Mt 28:20; He 13:5).

B. How often, however, in our experience do these promises seem to go unfulfilled!

C. Eternity, however, will reveal that in some way God has kept His promises. When we are safe in heaven, we will see that God does not contradict Himself!

*Conclusion:* In this Lenten season none of us need have a rebellious spirit. The suffering and death of Jesus assure us that God will with Jesus freely give us all good things (Ro 8:31). Ultimately all things must work for good for those who love God (Ro 8:28). God works for us in His own time and way. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are God's ways our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways (Is 55:8-9).

Raymond F. Surburg

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 28:10-17 (18-22)

February 28, 1988

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps 19:1). This kind of revelation is called general revelation and is available to everyone in the world. In the Old Testament there were a number of other ways in which the Lord gave revelation to men. Besides the simple words of God, these ways include theophany (manifestation), dream, vision, ecstasy, and certain acts of God in history. The various names of God used in the Old Testament likewise stated what the Lord was like or what He did.

*Introduction:* The three patriarchs of the Hebrew people received at different times divergent kinds of divine revelation. One such revelation was vouchsafed to Jacob, and on this occasion the Lord used a dream. Let us consider, then,

### JACOB'S DREAM AT BETHEL

- I. The events which led up to Jacob's dream.
  - A. Rebekah, Jacob's mother, was told of twins in her womb (Gn 25:23).
    1. The Lord specified that, contrary to law and custom, the younger was to receive the paternal blessing (Gn 25:23).
    2. This decision was cherished by Rebekah, but Isaac either forgot it or ignored it (Gn 27:1-3; 27:5-7).
  - B. Esau did not hold his birthright in high esteem but on one occasion sold it for a pot of lentil soup (Gn 25:29-34).
  - C. Rebekah helped her son Jacob by stealth to obtain the paternal blessing which Isaac had planned to bestow on Esau (Ge 27:13-25).
  - D. Isaac bestowed on Jacob the great Messianic blessing (Gn 27:29).
  - E. Esau, feeling cheated out of his birthright, threatened to kill Jacob (Gn 27:41).
  - F. Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob to their relatives in Haran.

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*Application:* With the completion of the New Testament God no longer uses dreams or any other means to give new revelation. Divine revelation has ceased. Charismatics and modern religionists who claim to receive new revelations (even those confirming Scriptural truths) are being deceived or are deliberately deceiving others.

II. The extraordinary contents of Jacob's dream.

- A. In his dream Yahweh is the speaker, the everliving God, unchanging and sufficient, able to keep His promises.
  - 1. As when Christ showed Himself to the disciples at the Transfiguration, so Jacob received strength from this appearance at Bethel.
  - 2. Today Christians likewise receive help from studying the inscripturated revelation of God in the Bible.
- B. Jacob was promised great gifts by the Lord.
  - 1. His descendants would inherit the land of Canaan and become a great nation (Gn 28:14-15).
  - 2. Through one particular Descendant ("Seed," used in the individual sense) the salvation of mankind would come (Gn 22:18). All the nations of the earth would be blessed through this Descendant (Gn 22:18; Ga 3:16). (Christ is the unifying theme of Holy Writ.)

III. The fulfilment of Jacob's dream.

- A. Under Joshua's leadership Canaan was conquered. By David's time the land of Israel extended from "the river of Egypt to the Euphrates."
- B. Christ, the Lamb of God, took away the sins of the world (Jn 1:19). Now heaven is open to all (Jn 1:51; He 9:15).
- C. Christ is like a ladder uniting heaven and earth, a ladder by means of which all men may reach heaven.

IV. The effects of Jacob's dream at Bethel.

- A. Jacob felt the nearness of God's presence (Gn 28:16).
- B. Jacob glorified God by erecting a monument (Gn 28:18).
- C. Jacob made a vow of faithfulness to God (Gn 28:20).

*Application:* The plan of salvation revealed in the Bible, God's final revelation to mankind, is reason for us to thank and glorify God.

*Conclusion:* Many have claimed to be recipients of new revelation. Mormonism, Christian Science, Mohammedanism, and cults in our time make such Bible-denying claims. Some "evangelists" of the "electronic church" also claim to receive new revelations and ask people to support projects based on such alleged revelations. We Christians, however, have God's complete and final revelation in the Holy Scriptures. To this Word let us attend.

Raymond F. Surburg



**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

Exodus 20:1-17

March 6, 1988

Preaching on the Ten Commandments can easily become legalistic or moralistic if the preacher forgets to place this Law into God's covenant of grace with His people. Verse 2 is vital for a proper application of this text to the Christian congregation that today is living under the new covenant. It is because God delivered His people that He now can demand such obedience. And it is only in our remembering this salvation through faith that a proper motivation for obedience can result. Truly, love pervades any presentation of God's law to Christian ears (Ro 13:10). The love implicit in God's giving of the Law is the controlling theme behind the sermon outlined below. If the preacher wishes to devote more time to specifics in each commandment, an appropriate place might be under IB.

*Introduction:* As individuals and generally as a society, we have developed a dislike for authority with its dictates and commands. We have learned to hate the law, to see it as what has to be done, not what I want or love to do. The law is harsh and insensitive, and we see it more as benefiting institutions, ideals, and programs than people. Fear becomes our only motivation in keeping it. The Law that comes from the highest authority, however, is not to be feared or hated. In His giving of the Ten Commandments, God demonstrates

**THE LAW AS LOVE**

- I. The Law is God's expression of love to us.
  - A. God's Ten Commandments outline provisions for our covenant relationship with Him.
    1. God initiated the covenant by delivering us.
      - a. Israel became God's own people by His choosing and bringing them out of Egypt (v. 2).
      - b. We have entered the new covenant through the death of Christ and our baptism (He 9:11-18; Ro 6:3-7).
    2. We affirm our inclusion in that covenant by using the Law to show us our sin and our dependence on His grace.
  - B. God's Ten Commandments are designed to bring harmony and happiness to our living. The wise Creator knows best how His creation functions smoothly.
    1. The law enables us to relate with God as He intended (vv. 3-11).
    2. The Law enables us to live a fulfilling life in our relationships with others (vv. 12-17). (Example: Faithfulness in marriage does provide the greatest happiness.)

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- II. The Law is our expression of love to God.
- A. Keeping and even loving the Law is a natural response for one who has experienced God's covenant of grace.
    - 1. Obeying the Law is not a way of keeping "our end of the bargain" or earning the right to be God's chosen people.
    - 2. The obedience of faith, rather, is a total surrender of self as a sacrificial thankoffering to God.
  - B. The Ten Commandments give us direction in our Christian walk and dispel any Satan-inspired doubts that we allow to surface through our guesses and feeling.
    - 1. They teach us how to love God (Mt 22:37).
    - 2. They teach us how to love our neighbor (Lk 10:25-37).

*Conclusion:* The Ten Commandments were initially given to a small, struggling nation in a remote wilderness halfway around the world 3,500 years ago. Yet they are as relevant and applicable in our lawless world today as they were to Israel back then (Mt 5:17-20). Underneath their perfect demands and harsh threats is a strong statement of love from God to us. By the grace of God through His new covenant in Christ, there is a strong desire in our hearts to return that love.

Paul E. Cloeter  
Kimball, Minnesota

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Numbers 21:4-9

March 13, 1988

This account gets both bad press (1 Cor 10:9-10) and good press (Jn 3:14-15) in the New Testament. It pictures human nature rather disgustingly, but God's grace and promise at their best. Israel had nearly completed its wilderness wandering, but now were heading in the wrong direction from the promised land (v 4). We Americans might sympathize with the Israelites in their complaining (v 5), but God's repeated demonstrations of protection, deliverance, and providence would all have to be forgotten in the process. We, no less than Israel, are a nation of complainers. We tend to forget or despise our history of divine care, together with future promises of grace and every blessing. But God in His love would seek to restore us also through our looking to the cross of Christ in repentance and faith.

*Introduction:* Now and then, who has not had the urge to play God? We see evil and unfairness and we think, "If I were God, I'd get those guys for that. I'd make them eat crow. I'd make things right." It is predictable that we should act that way. Thank God He is not like us in this respect. In our text we hear of

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**GOD'S UNPREDICTABLE RESPONSE TO OUR PREDICTABLE BEHAVIOR**

- I. In the face of hardship and suffering, human nature predictably will complain.
  - A. Israel grumbled throughout its wilderness wandering (vv. 4-5; cf. Ex 14:11-12; Nu 11:4-6; 14:2-3; 1 Cor 10:9-10).
  - B. We grumble about matters in our own life, from a slow driver in front of us to the discovery of a terminal illness in us.
  - C. The sin of complaining denies God's loving providence in our lives.
    1. It forgets God's merciful acts of deliverance and blessing in the past and even condemns God and His messengers for heartless and unfair treatment.
    2. It says we know better than God what is best for us.
- II. In the face of our complaining, God surprisingly acts out of love.
  - A. He may have to go through the severity of "killing" us in order to make us alive.
    1. The "fiery serpents" were sent by God to work repentance.
    2. It is through our repentance that the desire for sin and our soul-destroying pride and self-centered trust are cut away.
  - B. His ultimate salvation is most unexpected.
    1. The bronze serpent, the type.
      - a. A sign and reminder of the very thing that was killing them would give them life.
      - b. It was through faith (looking to the bronze serpent) in the otherwise hard-to-believe promise of God that saved the people.
    2. Jesus Christ, the Anti-type (Jn 3:14-15).
      - a. He became sin for us that through His hanging on a tree we might have life (2 Cor 5:21)
      - b. Faith trusts in the promise of God that this payment for sin saves us from death. Through our believing, we are saved.

*Conclusion:* God acts out of love for His people, no matter how faithless we become. That love at times may bring severe affliction, but its ultimate goal is a gracious salvation. God's action is better than anything we expected.

Paul E. Cloeter  
Kimball, Minnesota

**FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

Jeremiah 31:31-37

March 20, 1988

Jeremiah 31 is purest Old Testament Gospel, cast in the form of a promise to restore the children of Israel as Yahweh's covenant people. Verse 1 announces

salvation for all the families of Israel while verses 2-22 specify the ten tribes of Israel and verses 23-26 the kingdom of Judah. Verses 27-30 indicate Yahweh's providential concern for His restored people as well as the clarity of His righteous judgment in the new era, but verses 31-34 contrast the gracious nature of the new covenant with the legal (and broken) nature of the old covenant while verses 35-40 assure us of the holiness and longevity of the restoration. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17 and alluded to in the words of institution, the New Testament thereby indicating that this Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in the gracious, saving work of Christ and that believers in Christ are the new Israel.

*Introduction:* Contracts are agreements enforceable at law; and in a litigious society such as ours those who perceive that a contract has been broken are quick to take those who have broken it to court. How striking, therefore, is the conduct of God in our text who instead of enforcing the old covenant creates the new.

### A COVENANT OF GRACE, NOT OF LAW

- I. The old covenant, a two-sided agreement (v. 32).
  - A. In a typical contract, each side promises to do something, conditioned upon the performance of the other.
  - B. Such was the case with the old covenant established by God with Israel at the time of the Exodus.
    1. Though God took the initiative in rescuing His people from bondage, He conditioned His continued favor to them upon their obedience to His ordinances—an agreement that Israel assumed at Sinai but broke almost immediately and continually throughout her history (cf. in Jeremiah's own time Judah's stubborn resistance to his message).
    2. By this covenant of the Law, Israel earned not God's favor but His wrath.
  - C. Similarly, any time man seeks to maintain a contractual or legal relationship with God—a two-sided agreement—the result is always failure.
    1. Man either reduces the Law to formalism and so satisfies it hypocritically (cf. 1 Sm 15:22; Is 1:11; and Ho 6:6).
    2. Or else he falls into despair at his sinfulness when measured against God's righteousness.
    3. In either case, he earns God's condemnation and wrath.
- II. The new covenant, all God's grace (vv. 33-34).
  - A. Since God is love, He forgoes His contractual rights under the Law to establish a one-sided agreement, completely independent of man's performance.

1. It is actually a testament or promise effected by the death of the testator, in this case, Jesus Christ, God's Son (cf. He 9:15-16).
  2. Since this covenant rests entirely upon God's gracious initiative and Christ's perfect salvific work, it is solid and sure; we are forgiven, we are God's people, we are one with Him forever.
- B. Therefore, too, God sends forth His Spirit into our hearts so that we might recognize and accept the testament and live lives appropriate to recipients of grace.

*Conclusion:* In Jeremiah's day the new covenant was only a promise, but now it is a promise fulfilled and renewed to each of us personally whenever we partake of the "new testament" of Christ's blood.

Cameron MacKenzie

### PALM SUNDAY

Zechariah 9:9-10

March 27, 1988

The evangelists Matthew and John both tell us that this Old Testament word was fulfilled by Christ's entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Mt 21:5 and Jn 12:15). Accordingly, the vision of Zechariah helps us to understand more fully the significance of what Christ was accomplishing in the events of holy week. The last six chapters of the book of Zechariah consist of two oracles—(1) the "burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach and Damascus" (9-11) and (2) the "burden of the word of the Lord for Israel" (12-19)—in which the prophet depicts the warfare between the heathen world and Israel. In chapter 9, particularly, the image of warfare pervades the text as the prophet foresees God doing battle on behalf of Israel against her heathen neighbors. In the midst of such conflict the prophet envisions the triumphant entry of Judah's king into this capital city from which His kingdom of peace will spread to the ends of the earth.

*Introduction:* Every day, it seems, we read stories about the search for peace in the Middle East; but the warfare continues. Zechariah, however, foreseeing Palm Sunday, summons the people of God to rejoice at

### THE HUMBLE KING AND HIS KINGDOM OF PEACE

- I. The King (v. 9)
  - A. The greatest honor for a victorious Roman general was to enter a city in triumph—i.e., a parade of his men and their chariots, his defeated enemies enslaved, and himself upon a stallion or in a chariot—through the streets of the city to the acclaim of the people.

1. Since Jesus is a different kind of king who carries on a different sort of warfare, He entered Jerusalem in a strikingly different way—lowly and riding upon a lowly beast of burden.
  2. But lowliness is the weapon of His warfare since, by humbling Himself under the Law even to the point of death on the cross, He effected the greatest triumph, man's redemption (cf. Php 2:5-8)
  3. Therefore, Zechariah foresaw Him as "just and having salvation"; His victory was won on behalf of His people.
- B. For many then and now the lowliness of this King is disconcerting.
1. First the Pharisees, but by the end of the week even His disciples, had had enough of a Messiah who would not fight, or a King whose throne was a cross.
  2. So today the church is tempted to deny the humility of her King by seeking temporal pomp and power.
    - a. Churchmen think "bigger is better" or use the prestige of the church to endorse political causes.
    - b. Individuals forego regular use of the means of grace, preferring instead to devote time and energy to the world's status symbols.
- II. But the lowly King wins the greatest victory—eternal peace (v. 10).
- A. However futile the quest, men persist in the search for temporal peace, for they understand its value for themselves and posterity.
1. How much more wonderful is the peace which Christ has won that establishes a right relationship between God and sinful men forever!
  2. All man's efforts are in vain to effect it, but because of what Christ has done, He proclaims it—complete and perfected—to all who will believe it, including the heathen who had previously rejected Him.
- B. Therefore, the church continues Christ's work today, not by seeking glory but by seeking souls through the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of peace.

*Conclusion:* It is not clear from the gospels if the people who hailed Jesus on Palm Sunday had an accurate understanding of what kind of Messiah He was. But today certainly, with the eyes of faith, we can see that the humble King is also our triumphant Savior, who has established true peace between God and man. Therefore, we give heed to the prophet; we rejoice and shout for our King has come unto us.

Cameron MacKenzie

## EASTER SUNDAY

Isaiah 25:6-9

April 3, 1988

Unquestionably Easter is the highpoint of the Christian church year. It is the celebration of the greatest event in history. Accordingly, the message offered on

this day will be positive, vigorous, and triumphant and emphasize the love and power of God the Victor. The text before us does all these things. The inspired words of Isaiah capture the glorious blessings that God has planned for His people. Each of the sentences in verses 6-8 has God as its subject. He has planned and authored all the blessings and triumphs. In revealing what God does for people, the text is truly Gospel-centered. The goal of the sermon is to highlight the triumphant love of God in bringing relief to people by "swallowing up death" (v.8) and offering eternal joy and salvation. Indeed, God's people have been waiting for this refreshment and rejoice in the blessing of receiving it (v.9).

*Introduction:* One of the most lovely images in this life is that of a mother preparing a special dinner for a son or daughter who has been away for a long time and is finally coming home. She wants everything to be perfect and works tirelessly to achieve it. Even when dinner is finished, she would not think of letting her beloved help with the clean-up. The dinner is her gift, one cherished by both the giver and receiver. Life, eternal life, is God's gift to us, made possible by the victory of Christ Jesus over sin and death. Our Lord has done it all. We are the honored recipients, and in gratitude and relief we rejoice in the eternal blessing prepared especially for us. Easter is the day for remembering all these things, a new era of triumph over "the former things." Truly this is

### THE DAY OF "NO MORES"

- I. No more death.
  - A. God will remove the dark pall covering all people (v.7).
    - 1. They will no longer live in the blackness of fear.
    - 2. They will no longer wonder what life really means.
  - B. God will swallow up death forever (v.8).
    - 1. He will accept the sacrifice of Jesus.
    - 2. He will empty the grave to show His eternal victory.
- II. No more tears.
  - A. God cares about the hopes and fears of people.
    - 1. He knows life's uncertainties frighten people.
    - 2. He understands their emotions and temptations.
  - B. God takes a personal interest in comforting them with a triumph that turns tears to shouts of joy.
- III. No more waiting.
  - A. God knows that it has been difficult for His people to wait for His relief.
    - 1. They have suffered reproach (v.8).
    - 2. They have struggled with their own doubt.
  - B. God rewards their patience by keeping His promises.
    - 1. He comes.
    - 2. He comes so that His people know Him.
    - 3. He comes so that His people know Him and can rejoice in the triumph which has finally arrived.

*Conclusion:* Nowhere is the power and love of God more evident than in the triumph of the resurrection. Simply stated, God wins. In this victory He lays aside eternal death, tears of fear, and years of waiting for His people. It is likened to a glorious banquet which God prepares and offers (v.6), a new era of spiritual refreshment. Best of all, it belongs to us, a gift from a Lord who is simply magnificent.

David E. Seybold  
Fredonia, Wisconsin

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 3:13-15, 17-26

April 10, 1988

One of the notable features of the post-Ascension mission of the apostles is the gentle yet persistent way in which they carried forth the Gospel message. Their style was not purposely confrontational. Their purpose was not to annoy the authorities. They simply had something important to say in a way that showed they were messengers of a great and wonderful God. Not surprisingly, Peter is the spokesman. He does not attack his hearers, but in a firm and kind manner (cf. v.17) he reminds them that God was working through His long-intended plan right on schedule. What recently happened to Jesus, from His life to His death to His new life, was all part of this plan (v.21). All that remained was for people, including Peter's audience, by grace to turn from sin (v.19) to Jesus (v.26). The goal of the sermon is to emphasize the persistence of God in authoring and offering salvation and to invite the hearers to live by grace in repentance and hope of His promises.

*Introduction:* The familiar phrase, "Three strikes and you're out," reminds us that we usually have only limited chances to achieve something in life before the opportunity runs out. Fortunately God does not subscribe to this kind of thinking. Persistently, firmly, yet lovingly He continues to offer His salvation, even to those who oppose Him strongly, through the Good News carried by His faithful messengers. In so doing, He is showing that He wants everyone to be

### PART OF HIS PERSISTENT PLAN

- I. It is a plan promised.
  - A. The prophets of the Old Testament saw the Savior and spoke of His coming.
    - 1. Moses knew He would come through Israel (v.23).
    - 2. Samuel and others also saw this day (v.24).
  - B. The prediction to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his Seed pointed to Jesus.
- II. It is a plan opposed.



- A. God's own chosen people led the attack against Jesus.
    - 1. They denied Him (v.13).
    - 2. They preferred the release of a murderer (v.14).
    - 3. They killed Him (v.15).
  - B. God's own people acted vengefully but ignorantly (v.13), unable to recognize the Author of Life.
- III. It is a plan fulfilled.
- A. The Lord knew that Jesus would suffer just as He did (v.18).
  - B. The Lord received Jesus into heaven in His ascension as He had planned.
  - C. The Lord turned the evil of man to eternal good by glorifying Jesus (v.13).
- IV. It is a plan proclaimed.
- A. The disciples were witnesses of God's plan and eager to tell it.
  - B. The disciples knew that the preaching of repentance prepared the way for the refreshment of the Good News (v.19).
  - C. The disciples were eager to announce fearlessly and persistently that there was hope for all who by grace would turn from wickedness to Jesus (v.22).

*Conclusion:* The people of Israel, from the days of Abraham to the time of Jesus, had repeatedly tried God's patience and turned from His promises. This history of rejection culminated in the killing of the Messiah. But God did not give up. He still desired their salvation and through His messengers persistently and mercifully offered to turn them from sin to Him. The same persistence, kindness, and love are also our salvation!

David E. Seybold  
Fredonia, Wisconsin

### THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:8-12

April 17, 1988

Acts 3:1 - 4:31 forms a marvelous illustration of the general statement made in 2:43-47. The healing of the lame man was but one of the "many wonders and signs done through the apostles" (2:43). It happened one day as Peter and John were "attending the temple together" (2:46). Moreover, it recounts one of the instances by which "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (2:47). Throughout the account Luke keeps referring to the *name* of Jesus as the powerful, compelling instrument by which God worked in the early church. That wonderful name is the dominant subject in this entire section. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer trust and share the powerful name of Jesus. The problem is that we tend to be timid and expect failure in our witnessing. The means is the Gospel promise that the same name that alone can save us from sin and death also empowers us for bold Christian witnessing.

*Introduction:* The mere mention of a person's name can be a powerful motivator. Names can motivate people to anger, joy, love, and sacrifice. In the late 1860's the name "Mudd" made people angry. Dr. Samuel Mudd had set the broken leg of John Wilkes Booth after the latter had shot President Lincoln. Though innocent, Mudd was charged with conspiracy in the assassination and was imprisoned for years. "Your name will be Mudd" was used to discourage someone from doing something wrong. "Mudd" was a powerful name to evoke anger and disdain! Our text shows us

### THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME

- I. Seen in the miraculous healing of the lame man.
  - A. The events of that day in Jerusalem were simply amazing.
    1. Every Jew who went to the temple, resident or tourist, had known the cripple.
    2. But on that day his whole life quickly changed.
    3. Peter and John's healing of the man caused quite a stir.
  - B. These events were totally undeniable.
    1. The same leaders who had Jesus killed a few months before were angry over what transpired, but they could not refute it.
    2. All they could do was threaten the apostles not to speak in Jesus' name.
- II. Seen in the miracle that occurred in Jesus' disciples.
  - A. They had changed.
    1. Peter, the impetuous know-it-all who had denied Jesus in the courtyard, now rose to declare Jesus before the Sanhedrin.
    2. There were two reasons for the change—namely, Easter (they had seen Jesus alive) and Pentecost (they were Spirit-powered).
  - B. Their miraculous change is seen in their powerful witness to Jesus.
    1. When most would have shrunk back, they rose in boldness.
    2. These men were not learned scholars; it is no wonder the Sanhedrin sat speechless and shocked.

*Transition:* The same Spirit that inspired Luke to write Acts wants you and me to know that this same powerful name of Jesus is to be

- III. Seen in our lives too.
  - A. Jesus gave us one supreme commission: Be My witnesses.
    1. He gave that order because mankind is utterly lost without Him.
    2. Only Jesus can remove the barrier of sin. "There is no other name under heaven. . . by which we must be saved."

*Summary:* Jesus is mankind's only chance. To some that statement may sound pretentious, haughty, or mere opinion, but we know it to be pure truth.

- B. We too can share Jesus' name because God empowers us to do so.

1. By the power of our baptism that first tied us to His powerful name.
  2. By the power of Holy Communion that strengthens that tie with Jesus as well as with one another as fellow witnesses.
- C. Today the Spirit challenges us anew: Trust Jesus and declare His powerful name in word and deed.

*Conclusion:* Through the word of witness we speak God will change others too in a miraculous way.

Ron Weidler  
Tampa, Florida

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:23-33

April 24, 1988

The key word is *pareesia*, "boldness" or "confidence." The central thought is that Christians are to live confidently, knowing that in Christ we have complete, lasting victory over all enemies. Lenski takes *tous idious* (v. 23) to refer only to the apostles. So also he takes the "all" in verse 31 who spoke the Word with confidence to mean just the twelve, but such an interpretation seems too restrictive. Surely 8:4 proves that preaching the Word is a task for every Christian. Chapter 4:29-31 provides an insightful explanation of the purpose, not only of Pentecost, but also of all the subsequent gifts of miracles and tongues. These were never ends in themselves. Together they were a special outpouring on the new church to bolster her speaking of the Word and name of Jesus with all boldness and confidence. The healing of the lame man immediately preceding this text is a classic illustration of this point.

*Introduction:* Quite often, Christians fall into the habit of wishing each other "good luck" as part of their goodbyes. Over the course of time we can slowly come to believe that chance or fate does indeed play a part in what "befalls" us. Things happen because of a "bad break" or "tough luck." Our text shows a totally different orientation to life. Rather than having us fear if another "bad break" is waiting for us around the next corner, God calls out to us today and every day of our earthly sojourn and says,

#### CHRISTIAN, LIVE WITH A BOLD CONFIDENCE

- I. Realize that the enemies of Christ will fail.
  - A. The Sanhedrin failed.
    1. They thought the cross would finish Him, but Easter said "no!"
    2. They thought they could intimidate Peter and John but failed.

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- B. Herod and Pilate failed (they are representatives of "the kings of the earth" and "the rulers" in Ps 2:1).
    - 1. They meant evil against God and His Christ.
    - 2. Yet God "meant it for good" (cf. v. 28 with Gn 50:20).
  - C. All other world rulers have failed to crush the church (cf. *LW* 340, stanza 2.)
  - D. And all others will fail.
    - 1. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against the church (Mt 16:18).
    - 2. The future of God's people, including you and me, is bright (cf. *LW* 518, stanza 3).
- II. Remember from where our victory comes.
- A. The sovereign Lord who is over all (v. 24).
    - 1. The One who is the Creator of all (v. 24b).
    - 2. The One who can do all things (v. 30, "signs and wonders").
  - B. The Messiah who is one with God the Father (Ps 2:2c, 7).
    - 1. Prophesied by and descended from David (Lk 20:41-44, both David's Son and David's Lord).
    - 2. Anointed by God to be mankind's Savior (v. 27) from sin, Satan, and death.
  - C. The Spirit who empowers all who are in Christ.
    - 1. Since He alone can give faith in Christ, He is the Lord of life.
    - 2. He is the One who equips and empowers us to live in confidence (cf. Ro 8:14-17; 2 Tm 1:7).

*Transition:* When we realize (I) and remember (II), then we can

- III. Radiate our victory to all with whom we live.
- A. Let us do "good to all, especially those of the household of faith" (Ga 6:10).
    - 1. The early Christians were known for their charity to all.
    - 2. Their love for one another was demonstrated by their mutual support (v. 32).
  - B. Let us, therefore, preach the Word with confidence.
    - 1. The apostles were eye-witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (v. 33).
    - 2. But we too witness and "cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

*Conclusion:* In Christ God has proven that He can be trusted! He will keep His promises. He will give us eternal life. Indeed, we already *have* it! Let us, then, confidently give ourselves to serving our neighbor, regardless of the cost, and in witnessing to Christ in word and deed. Our future lies not in luck or "breaks" but in Christ!

Ron Weidler  
Tampa, Florida

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

Acts 8:26-40

May 1, 1988

The power of the Word of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, is witnessed in story after story in the book of Acts. There may be no stronger witness to its power than in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. After having recorded the Gospel's power to incorporate Samaritan outcasts into the fellowship of the church (Ac 8:14-17), Luke adds another account to reveal the Gospel's power to overcome the exclusion of even a eunuch (Dt 23:1). The power of this glorious Gospel fulfills the seemingly impossible promise of Isaiah 56:3-5. The good news of Jesus who endured humiliation and death (Is 53:7,8) before exaltation and life brings joy and life to a eunuch whose own lot was that of humiliation with only the prospect of death. This is a powerful story of life for all who are like "a dry tree" (Is 56:3).

*Introduction:* Has the Easter cycle run its course? Is it possible that we have heard the good news of Jesus and slumped back to a life that bears no fruit, that knows no future, that experiences no joy? Perhaps you have never heard the good news of Jesus for you. Is it possible that the good news has passed you by? Maybe you cannot quite believe that it is for *you*. The good news of Jesus has power—for you. Come with me and take a chariot ride with a eunuch, and see how good the news really is.

**LET'S GO FOR A CHARIOT RIDE**

- I. Take a ride and hear an unusual story (about the Servant of the Lord).
  - A. The story is that of humiliation (Is 53).
    1. It is a story of rejection (v. 3).
    2. It is a story of shame (v. 3).
    3. It is a story of unjust suffering (v. 4).
  - B. The story is that of losing one's future (Is 53).
    1. It is a story of being cut off from life (v. 8).
    2. It is a story of identification with the wicked in death (v. 9).
  - C. The story is that of ultimate victory (Is 53).
    1. It is a story of life (v. 10b).
    2. It is a story of fulfilment and fruit-bearing (v. 11).
    3. It is a story of honor (v. 12).

*Summary:* This is the story of Jesus, the Suffering Servant. Think how unique, how refreshing, how loving, how filled with hope this story was to the eunuch.

- II. Take a ride and see the powerful results of this story.
  - A. Phillip had used a version of the story before with Samaritans (Ac 8:4-8).
    1. The Samaritans were outcasts also.
    2. The Samaritans were enemies.

3. The Samaritans believed and were baptized.
- B. Phillip used this story with a eunuch (Ac 8:26-40).
  1. The eunuch was an outcast from Israel (Dt 23:1).
  2. The eunuch was a man without a future (Is 56:3-5).
  3. The eunuch believed and was baptized.
- C. Others used this story later when reaching out to Greeks (Ac 11:19-20).
  1. The Greeks were Gentile outcasts.
  2. The Gentiles were unclean.
  3. The Greek Gentiles were the first to be called Christians.

*Summary:* This was a long ride, but think how powerful this story is.

- III. Take a ride and listen to the story for yourself.
  - A. The eunuch was able to identify with Jesus.
    1. He had suffered humiliation, as Jesus had done infinitely more.
    2. He wanted the hope Jesus gave.
    3. He was joined to Jesus in baptism.
  - B. You can identify with Jesus, too.
    1. Be honest about your sin and your sinful status.
    2. Acknowledge your own exclusion from God as a sinner.
    3. Believe that Jesus is for you.
  - C. You can experience the joyful Gospel.
    1. You can through faith and baptism feel its power in your acceptance.
    2. You can rejoice in your new status with the people of God.
    3. You can live in triumph because of your hope.

*Conclusion:* Every once in the while we need to go on a chariot ride. We need to hear the story of "Jesus for me." We need to stop at the water and take a plunge into our baptismal experience, our union with Jesus. Then the joy of the Gospel will be felt in our lives.

David Schlie  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 11:19-30

May 8, 1988

The power of the Word, the good news of Jesus, brought Samaritans into the family of God (Ac 8:14-17), gave hope and acceptance to a eunuch (Ac 8:34-38), and now goes so far as to extend God's grace to Greeks (Gentiles, pagans) and bring them into the family as well (Ac 11:19-26). As was the case previously (Ac

8:14; 9:32; 11:1), the church in Jerusalem had something to say. It dispatched Barnabas to Antioch to look into this new development. What he saw was the grace of God (Ac 11:23).

Luke, wanting to reveal the significance in this event, first calls this group of believers "church" (Ac 11:26). This group of people, pagan in origin, Greek by nationality, uncircumcised and unclean according to Jewish law, was part of the church. They were members of the church just like God's people in Jerusalem. While they did not have the privilege of being associated with the founding of the church, yet they were the first to be called "Christians." They were recognized as being devoted to the worship of Christ.

This was a movement affecting a world. This movement, however, was not marked by division and internal struggles for leadership. It was united and supportive. Immediately after recording the events brought about by the grace of God among the Greeks, Luke relates a remarkable turn of events. These new Christians demonstrated the effect of that grace by generously breaking bread with their benefactors in Jerusalem.

*Introduction:* In the life of God's people breaking bread is significant evidence of the presence and power of God's grace. In a world of independence the church has all too often suffered from a lack of bread-breaking and the resultant lack of strong bonds among brethren. Today we can learn much from those new Christians of Luke's day by considering

### BONDS BY BREAD

- I. The breaking of bread is a major emphasis in Scripture.
  - A. Two prophets were remembered for their "breaking of bread."
    1. Moses with regard to the manna in the wilderness.
    2. Elijah with regard to the widow's flour.
  - B. Jesus is remembered for "breaking bread."
    1. Jesus miraculously fed five thousand and four thousand people on different occasions.
    2. Jesus ate and drank with sinners.
    3. Jesus made Himself recognizable to the Emmaus disciples while breaking bread.
  - C. The early church "broke bread."
    1. The Christians broke bread daily in their homes.
    2. The Greeks "broke bread" at a distance with the believers in Jerusalem.
    3. Paul appealed to Corinthian and Macedonian Christians to "break bread" with those in Jerusalem.
  - D. In Jesus and what He did "breaking bread" takes on spiritual meaning.
    1. Jesus is the Bread of Life who gave His life to heal our separation and bind us to God.
    2. Jesus used bread to share His body in the Lord's Supper.
    3. We Christians who eat that one bread in the Lord's Supper are one body.

- 
4. From Jesus' act of "breaking bread" with us on the cross and in the Eucharist flow all our acts of "breaking bread" with our fellow human beings.
    - a. When we let Jesus feed us through Word and Sacrament we will be strengthened to help ("break bread") with others.
    - b. When we feed on Jesus by faith we will be moved to help ("break bread") with others.
  - II. Christians who do not "break bread" easily break bonds.
    - A. Christians sometimes break bonds with each other in the church.
      1. Denominations often compete against each other rather than work against evil.
      2. Congregations often have factions and strife.
    - B. Christians break bonds in their personal lives.
      1. Christian homes are often places of disunity rather than harmony.
      2. Christians bear resentment toward each other.
  - III. Christians who "break bread" build bonds.
    - A. We build bonds by sharing the Bread of Life.
      1. In homes—devotions.
      2. In Bible studies.
      3. In open discussions.
    - B. We build bonds by sharing "bread" with others.
      1. The poor need actual bread.
      2. The unlearned need our resources.
      3. The sick need our care.
      4. The lonely need our presence.
      5. The troubled need our support.
    - C. By this "breaking of bread" we strengthen the bonds of love and concern between ourselves and others.

*Conclusion:* Just as the Gentiles who received the "Bread of Life" from Jewish believers shared their daily bread with their newfound brothers and sisters who were in physical need, so we can build bonds by "breaking bread."

David Schlie  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

### SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 1:15-26

May 15, 1988

*Introduction:* This text underscores a concern of many Christians—the failure of some to function effectively as workers in the church. The text deals with the



original disciples, and so all the details are not applicable to the ministry today. But there are lessons to be learned from Judas, Matthias, and Barsabbas which are applicable to the church of today and its ministry. Can the church excuse or ignore failures in the ministry? But an even more serious question is raised: Does God know what He is doing when He calls men to be His servants?

### DOES GOD KNOW WHAT HE IS DOING?

- I. Man can fail in faith and mission.
  - A. The betrayal of Judas demonstrates the weakness of men as Christ's servants (vv. 17-19).
    1. God calls and chooses flesh-and-blood men to serve Him. They are saints-and-sinners, not supermen (vv. 15-16).
    2. They can fail in their mission and even lose faith (v. 20).
    3. But God does not change the plan or lower the goals (v. 20).
  - B. God holds His people responsible for faith and action.
    1. The tragedy is not simply failure in mission but the loss of faith in Jesus (King Saul and Hymenaeus).
    2. God judges each one by his faith or works (v. 18).
    3. The life of Judas is a warning to all believers (Jd 7).
- II. God's chosen men depend on God's sure word.
  - A. Christ died on the cross to forgive all sin of all men (Jn 3:16).
    1. This message is the central task of the church (2 Cor 5:20).
    2. Christ chose believers to deliver that message (v. 21).
    3. This is God's proclaimed plan to save mankind (v. 20).
  - B. Called servants (clergy and lay) follow God's plan.
    1. Personal faith and knowledge of Christ are required (v. 21).
    2. God's goals and standards never change (v. 22).
- III. The church calls, trains, and commits men to God's mission.
  - A. A group of the disciples (120) was involved in this call and commissioning. The whole church was responsible (v. 23).
  - B. Structure and requirements are evident in this calling (vv. 24-25).
  - C. Prayer and commendation to God are part of this commission (vv. 23-24). Approval comes from both God and men.
  - D. The office is served and the Gospel is to be proclaimed (v. 26).

George Kraus

### PENTECOST SUNDAY

Ezekiel 37:1-14

May 22, 1988

The vision described in the text was God's way of reviving the hopes of the people of Israel, who in their Babylonian exile thought the prospects of national revival

were as unlikely as skeletons coming alive. The resuscitation of Israel would take place through the power of the same God who called into existence everything that is and who formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The expression "son of man" was a continual reminder to Ezekiel of his humanness and weakness. Yet he who was troubled by his impotence and failure would be instrumental in God's great work, for he (Ezekiel) would speak the word through which the miracle would be performed. Through that Word of the Lord spoken by the prophet, the Holy Spirit would reawaken Israel to spiritual and national life. Finally, on the last day Christ will call all the physically dead from their graves, some to life everlasting and some to eternal shame and contempt. The vision emphasizes the mighty work of resuscitation effected by God's Holy Spirit through the Word.

*Introduction:* We sometimes speak of self-made persons who, by hard work and total dedication to the tasks at hand, have gained prominent positions in which they have benefited others. We all like to attribute our accomplishments, whatever they may be, to conscientious performance of duty. But as Christians we are not self-made persons. Today when we focus on the work of God and Holy Spirit we have an opportunity to reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit in making and keeping us Christians. The vision God granted Ezekiel dramatizes

### THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I. The Spirit's power is seen in the kind of people He works with.
  - A. These people are like dry bones.
    1. In their captivity the Israelites felt like dry bones (v. 11).
    2. Many people today feel like dry bones. They are confused, their lives in disarray, no reason for living and no hope in dying.
    3. Other people, though they too are like dry bones, may not feel that way because they are outwardly successful, believe in God, and try to do God's will.
  - B. We are like dry bones.
    1. Through our natural birth we were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) with no more power to come alive than scattered bones in a valley.
    2. Even though we are Christians we may sometimes feel more dead than alive. We so easily get wrapped up in ourselves and forget others in their need. We so often fail to read God's Word and to pray. The world so subtly lures us from God. We see the power of the Holy Spirit when we consider what the Spirit has to work with—dry bones, people who are or who sometimes feel like dry bones. That is not much to work with.
- II. The Spirit's power is seen in making people alive.
  - A. The Holy Spirit makes people alive through the Word.
    1. Ezekiel was asked to speak God's Word to the dry bones (v. 4).
    2. Also today the Spirit works through God's Word, the Holy Scriptures (Jn 6:63).

- B. Only by the power of the Spirit in the Word are we made alive (v. 9).
1. Wherever the Word is spoken, in north, south, east, or west, there the wind of the Spirit blows to vivify and resuscitate (v. 10).
  2. It is a mystery how the Spirit can make alive (Jn 3:8), but He does it. In the Word connected with baptism the Spirit raised us up with Christ into a new existence.
- C. Only by the power of the Spirit in the Word are we kept alive (v. 14).
1. When we feel more dead than alive because we fall short in our zeal and witness and service, the Spirit leads us to repentance and renews our faith in God's forgiveness.
  2. When we are burdened by difficulties that cause us to wonder if we can stay alive, the Spirit points us to our source of strength in God (Is 49:5).

*Conclusion:* The power of the Holy Spirit is very great. Look at the kind of people He has to work with. Look at what He does to them. As the Jewish exiles lived again, so the Spirit of God has made us alive. Finally, on the last day, Christ's Spirit-filled Word will raise us from our graves and place us in the heavenly land where we shall enjoy life in all its fullness and everlastingness.

Gerhard Aho

## TRINITY SUNDAY

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

May 29, 1988

*Introduction:* There are three uses for the word "one." It is used as an exclusive: "There is only one God and no other." It is used numerically: "This class is one of many." It is used to describe wholeness, completeness. In our text we stress the third use, though the first is also involved. The text deals with the Blessed Trinity, God's grace, His will for His people, and our response as forgiven, renewed people of God.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE

- I. We live in a fragmented world.
  - A. Sin has isolated us from God, the world, and ourselves.
    1. We are born in sin and alienated from God. We cannot by ourselves obey God's will (v. 5).
    2. We are alienated from others (examples: war, divorce, strife, etc.).
    3. We are alienated from ourselves. Psychiatry demonstrates that man is working against himself (e.g., King Saul).
  - B. This alienation brings God's judgment.

1. God's verdict is that the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23).
2. We are without hope or help by ourselves (Ro 3:20).
- II. Christ has restored wholeness to the world.
  - A. Jesus came to heal fragmented man. This was His chief purpose in entering our world as man (Ga 4:4).
  - B. Jesus carried all humankind's sin, death, judgment, and alienation in His own body. By His perfect life and death He cancelled the world's guilt (1 Jn 1:7).
  - C. Now God is at peace with His world—at-one-ment (Ro 5:1).
- III. As God's renewed people we respond to God's word and will.
  - A. The text speaks to God's new people, whole people.
    1. God reminds them that there is only one God, the Trinity. This point is made not merely to provide information but to produce spiritual growth (v. 4).
    2. Obedience to the Great Commandment is the response God expects from His forgiven people (v. 5).
    3. His words are to be in our hearts, not just our heads. They are life to us (v. 6).
  - B. God's whole people are shaped and directed by His Word.
    1. His Word forms our life-style and defines our goals in life (v. 8).
    2. His word instructs our families, adults and children (v. 7).
    3. His Word reaches out to each culture with the good news of God's grace and healing (v. 9).

George Kraus

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

June 5, 1988

This Old Testament lesson focuses on the Sabbath and relates to the gospel (Mk 2:23-38), in which Jesus overcomes the Pharisee's objection to the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath by declaring, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Set in the context of the second giving of the law, with Israel poised to enter the promised land, this commandment gives as the reason for observing the Sabbath God's mighty deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Dt 5:15) rather than God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Ex 20:11).

*Introduction:* Worship and rest grace the Christian life and pulsate through the Christian community gathered around Word and Sacrament. The Old Testament Sabbath stands as a monument to the ongoing need for worship and rest among New Testament Christians, liberated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Lord of the Sabbath. Today's Old Testament lesson from the giving of the law in Deuteronomy 5 helps us to view

### THE SABBATH AS A RESPONSE TO GOD'S DELIVERANCE

- I. Desecrating the Sabbath ignores God's deliverance (vv. 13-14).
  - A. Moses repeats God's Sabbath commandment because of disobedience in the wilderness and future temptation in the Promised Land.
    1. People tried to gather manna on the Sabbath (Ex 16:27, 28).
    2. A man gathered wood on the Sabbath and was punished (Nu 15:32, 35).
    3. Many desecrated the Sabbath in Israel by working (Ne 13:15; Jr 17:27; Eze 22:8).
    4. God condemns such desecration (Ez 20:13).
    5. God continued to deliver Israel and remained faithful to His covenant.
  - B. The Sabbath commandment exposes our rejection of regular worship and rest as ignoring God's gracious deliverance in Christ.
    1. We often despise worship by giving it low priority in our lives.
    2. We often refuse rest because we seek to control our own destiny by unrelenting work.
    3. God condemns such rejection of worship and rest by pointing to our disobedience and selfishness.
    4. God continues to deliver us through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- II. Formalizing the Sabbath replaces God's deliverance.
  - A. The Pharisees, following post-exilic Sabbath abuse, reduced the Sabbath to man-made rules which replaced God's gracious acts of deliverance (Mk 2:24, 27).
  - B. Despite Jesus' death and resurrection, we sometimes turn our day of worship into a series of man-made rules (Col 2:16-17). We confess our sin of self-righteousness.
- III. Observing the Sabbath celebrates God's deliverance (vv. 12, 15).
  - A. Moses describes the joy of remembering God's mighty deliverance from Egypt by observing the Sabbath (see also Is 58:13-14).
  - B. Because the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, we joyfully worship regularly and rest in His love (see also Col 3:16).

*Conclusion:* Confessing our desecrating and formalizing of worship, we receive God's deliverance in Christ and respond with joyful worship.

Stephen J. Carter

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**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Genesis 3:9-15

June 12, 1988

Part of the fall account in Genesis 3, this Old Testament lesson sets the stage for the gospel (Mk 3:20-35), which counters the charge that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, by asserting that Satan cannot drive out Satan. The lesson describes the ongoing opposition between Satan and the Offspring of the Woman; Jesus Christ, while mortally wounded, crushes the serpent and wins the victory. Indeed, Satan cannot drive out Satan.

*Introduction:* In today's gospel a battle rages between Jesus and Satan. The Pharisees join Satan by accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub. In order to find our place in this age-old battle, we turn back to the third chapter of Genesis, where our Old Testament lesson describes

**JOINING THE BATTLE**

- I. We join the battle on Satan's side against God.
  - A. Adam and Eve joined Satan in rebellion against God.
    - 1. They ate the forbidden fruit (v. 6).
    - 2. They tried to cover up and hide from God (vv. 7-8).
    - 3. They tried to blame each other and Satan (vv. 10-13).
    - 4. They stood with Satan under God's judgment (vv. 14-19).
  - B. We join Satan in rebellion against God.
    - 1. We bear the sin of Adam and Eve from birth.
    - 2. We try to cover up and hide from God.
    - 3. We try to blame each other and Satan. ("The devil made me do it.")
    - 4. Like the Pharisees in the gospel, we stand with Satan under God's judgment of our sin.
- II. God joins the battle on our side against Satan.
  - A. God promised a Savior to crush the head of Satan on our behalf.
    - 1. He curses the serpent, Satan, to crawl on his belly in the dust (v. 14).
    - 2. He predicts an age-long enmity between humanity and Satan.
    - 3. He promises victory for God and humanity through a final life-and-death struggle between Satan and the Woman's Offspring, Jesus Christ.
  - B. God fulfilled His promise of a Savior for us and continues to join us in the daily battle with Satan.

1. He sent Jesus to crush the serpent's head on Calvary in a victorious battle.
2. He joins our battle with Satan through baptism.
3. He sustains us through Word and Sacrament for the daily battle until we join Him eternally in heaven.

*Conclusion (The Lutheran Hymnal, 262, stanza 3):*

Tho' devils all the world should fill,  
 All eager to devour us,  
 We tremble not, we fear no ill,  
 They shall not overpow'r us.  
 This world's prince may still  
 Scowl fierce as he will,  
 He can harm us none,  
 He's judged, the deed is done;  
 One little word can fell him.

Stephen J. Carter

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ezekiel 17:22-23

June 19, 1988

In the verses prior to the text Ezekiel uses an allegory and its interpretation to speak of Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of King Jehoiachin and others of the royal family to Babylon in 597 B.C. (vv. 3-4, 12), Nebuchadnezzar's installation of Zedekiah (Jehoiachin's uncle) as his vassal (vv. 5-6, 13-14), Zedekiah's sinful rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in league with Egypt (vv. 7-8, 15), and, therefore, the imminent deportation of Zedekiah and the destruction of his nation by Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 9, 16-21).

The Messianic prophecy, then, which follows takes its form from the preceding allegory. Thus, "the cedar" (v. 22) is the family of David. Its regrowth to lofty proportions, despite its decapitation by Nebuchadnezzar, places the events predicted in the distant future, as well as implying the Messiah's descent from another division of the Davidic family than Jehoiachin's (cf. Jr 22:30; Lk 3:31). The sprout plucked by God is the Messiah. The designation of Him as a shoot or branch, regarding either His Davidic ancestry (Is 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15) or His divine generation (Is 4:2), was so common in the Old Testament church that "Branch" became a Messianic title (Zch 3:8; 6:12). The specific word used here, *yonek*, as well as the description of the shoot as "tender" (*raq*), indicates, as in Isaiah 53:2, the lowly circumstances of His human origin—that is, His state of humiliation. God's implantation of the shoot evidently signifies His inauguration of the Messiah's kingship (cf. v. 5)—here

His office as King of the church, the kingdom of grace. The mountains mentioned in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament ordinarily refer to the New Testament church (e.g., 20:40; 37:20; 40:2; 43:12; Is 11:9; 65:25). Here the construct clause "mountain of Israel" identifies the mountain as the New Testament Israel (v. 23). The Messiah's state of exaltation, in which He would take up the full and continual exercise of His kingship, is symbolized here by the transformation of the tender shoot into a "splendid cedar" (cf. Is 53). The "birds of every plumage" who "dwell under" the tree and "in the shade of its branches" signify people of every nation in the world who will find peace with God in the kingdom of grace through reliance upon the Messiah. The "fruit" which the tree bears to attract the birds and retain them in its branches is, then, the sustenance provided by the Messiah in His kingdom of grace, His Word and sacraments. (Longer studies of this pericope and the one following are available from the author.)

*Introduction:* Although few would rank Joyce Kilmer among the greatest poets of the English language, "Trees" contains several of the best known lines of American poetry:

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree ...  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

The prophet Ezekiel compares the Messiah to a majestic cedar. The grandeur of this cedar is, indeed, so sublime that we cannot help but marvel:

### ONLY GOD COULD MAKE THIS TREE!

- I. Its origin.
  - A. Its parentage.
    1. Davidic: the Messiah was to be the descendant of David (v. 22).
      - a. Through His virgin mother (Is 7:14).
      - b. In the distant future (v. 22).
    2. Divine: the Messiah was to be the Son of God.
  - B. Its humility.
    1. The fact (v. 22).
    2. The reason:
      - a. The sinfulness of man bringing God's wrath upon us.
      - b. The love of God issuing in the substitutionary atonement.
- II. Its growth.
  - A. First among the Jews (vv. 22-23).
    1. Through the preaching of Christ Himself.
    2. Through the preaching of the apostles.
  - B. Then among all the peoples of the world (v. 23).



1. Through the preaching of the apostolic word (now enshrined in the New Testament).
    - a. The Law, which convicts us of sin.
    - b. The Gospel, which relieves us of sin.
  2. Through the administration of the sacraments.
- III. Its role.
- A. With respect to men: the provision of spiritual rest (v. 23).
    1. A rest which we could find nowhere else.
    2. A rest which we can find in Christ.
  - B. With respect to God: the confirmation of His omnipotence.
    1. Who is able to do whatever He wills (v. 24a).
    2. Who told us beforehand what He would do (v. 24b).

Douglas McC.L. Judisch

### FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Job 38:1-11

June 26, 1988

In 31:35-37 Job has gone so far as to rank his righteousness above God's, calling the Almighty to account! In chapters 38-41 God takes up the gauntlet thrown down by Job. Intervening directly in the discussion of His conduct, God underscores the basic theme of the book—that the sufferings of the godly ultimately redound to their eternal good according to a divine design which we cannot necessarily discern in this life. God's appearance in a storm (38:1; 40:6) confronts the eyes of Job with the same "awesome majesty" as His words do his ears. The first divine discourse (38:1-40:2) demonstrates the omniscience of God and the ignorance of man. For God's omniscience eventuates in His wisdom, the sound use of knowledge (which, in turn, implies justice). Likewise, this omniscience is intertwined here with the eternity and the omnipotence of God; His knowledge of everything comes in part from His creation of everything in the first place and His governance of everything throughout history. Specifically, 38:4-7 connect God's omniscience with the basic creation of the earth on the first day (Gn 1:1); and verses 8-11 relate to the creation of specific bodies of water on the third day (Gn 1:9-10) by elevating specific areas of land above the surface of the primeval world-ocean (8b-9; Gn 1:2). The "sons of God" (v. 7b) is a figurative title which the Book of Job gives to the angels (1:6; 2:1) by virtue of their comparative similarity, as incorporeal spirits, to the divine essence. Evidently, the parallel phrase, "the morning stars," is likewise a metaphorical designation of the angels—drawn from their celestial glory—since God did not form

the various heavenly bodies until the fourth day (Gen 1:14-19). Genesis 1 says nothing about the creation of the angels, but Exodus 20:11 necessarily implies its occurrence sometime within the hexaemeron, while we infer from Job 38:7 that God created the angels simultaneously with the basic substructure of the universe (Gen 1:1) so as to sing from the beginning the praises of the Creator of all.

All this emphasis upon the omniscience of God throws into relief all the higher the ignorance of man. The answer to the rhetorical question of verse 4 is, of course, "nowhere"; and, in response to verse 1, Job or any other man "darkens counsel" when he speaks such "words" as those quoted in 31:35-37. The basic point is that man speaks "without knowledge" whenever he says things about God which God has not said, a point which Job himself admits in his penitent response to the Lord's double discourse (42:1-6). Man can only know those things of God which He has chosen to reveal. God manifests His omnipotence, His wisdom, and even His goodness in nature (38-41 *passim*); but He reveals His grace only through His inspired spokesmen—the prophets of the Old Testament (33:13-18) and the apostles of the New—and, most fully, in the Messiah (e.g., 19:23-27).

*Introduction:* One of the popular television programs of the fifties, constantly rerun down to the present, was "Father Knows Best." In a typical episode Bud or Betty or Kathy finds himself or herself in a problematic situation in which the sage advice of their father proves invaluable. By virtue of his experience a father does usually know better than his children themselves what is best for them; but even the wisest human father is sometimes wrong. The text, however, reminds us that God knows no limitations. Those who are the children of God can always say with certitude:

### THE FATHER KNOWS BEST

- I. Man's ignorance.
  - A. We are only creatures (not the Creator) with finite intellects (38-41).
  - B. We are also sinners with corrupt intellects (38:2; 40:2, 7-8).
    1. As we come into the world.
    2. Even as Christians, e.g., Job (38:2; 40:2, 7-8).
- II. God's knowledge.
  - A. Its infinitude (38-41 *passim*; e.g., 38:16-20, 33).
  - B. Its connection with
    1. His eternity (especially 38:4-10, 21).
    2. His omnipotence (38-41 *passim*, e.g., 41:10-11).
    3. His wisdom (38-41 *passim*; e.g., 39:26).
  - C. Its significance in the Christian life.
    1. His preservation of the world on behalf of His people.
    2. His salvation of the world.
      - a. God knew the only possible way to the salvation of men.
      - b. God accomplished the salvation of men through the work of Jesus Christ in accord with His eternal plan.

- c. God has made known His salvation to all nations.
- 3. His sanctification of His people.
  - a. Including the use of suffering.
  - b. According to His special plan for each individual Christian.

Douglas McC.L. Judisch

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lamentations 3:22-23

July 3, 1988

The boundaries of this pericope have been established along thematic lines; the whole of chapter three forms an alphabetic poem (an acrostic), in which each letter of the Hebrew alphabet stands at the beginning of three verses (a-a-a, b-b-b, etc.). It is an island of hope in the midst of Jeremiah's mourning over the ruins of Jerusalem and the house of God. These verses steadfastly refuse to permit us any mingling of Law and Gospel. The true nature of confession is seen in the troublesome statement (v. 29), "There *may* yet be hope." (See similar statements in Amos 5:15 and Jonah 3:9.) Confession must not be construed as our own prearranged deal with God; rather, we "resign ourselves to hell," being fully aware that forgiveness can be initiated only through a love which resides in God. Lamentations contains few specific requests for deliverance. Nor are there many references to the actual sins of Judah. A mere bemoaning of the current devastation is carefully distinguished from admitting the people's sin, the *cause* of the devastation. Jeremiah simply asks God to see Judah's affliction, and then he waits in hope for the true colors of God's grace to shine through (3:25, 26). One might here review the "alien" and "proper" work of God, so clearly evidenced in 3:31-33.

The grace of God is spoken of in terms that are reminiscent of Exodus 34:6-7, where God revealed His true nature to Moses. In verse 22 the twin terms of God's grace are both in the plural; thus one can rightly speak of God's merciful *acts* and refrain from conceiving of only an inert disposition. God in His faithfulness finds fresh ways of working out His love each and every morning (cf. Jer 33:19-21). Rather than revel in a territorial inheritance (see "portion" in v. 24), the Lord Himself is the only real cause for rejoicing. From our Christocentric point of view Lamentations contains many allusions to Christ; He bore the very punishment man had to face because of his sin. As in the Psalms, the Christian can sense that Christ Himself was speaking in this book about the sufferings He bore for the sin of the world.

## THE TRUE COLORS OF GOD

- I. The sin of Jerusalem aroused the righteous anger of God.
  - A. The people's unbelief manifested itself in active rebellion against God.

- B. The people's unbelief prohibited them from truly confessing their sin.
  - 1. They bemoaned the physical results of their sin.
  - 2. They did not bemoan the very cause of their plight, their sin.
- II. The Spirit leads us through the Law to see the true colors of our sin.
  - A. As sinners we are in no position to bargain with God.
  - B. Resigning one's self to hell is beyond human capability.
  - C. With nowhere to turn, we throw ourselves upon God's mercy, our only hope.
- III. The true colors of God shine through in His Son Jesus Christ.
  - A. Grace resides in the very nature of God.
    - 1. He quickly moves from His "alien" work to His "proper" work.
    - 2. The person who waits in hope will never be disappointed.
  - B. The true colors of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ.
    - 1. He bore the physical and mental pain that we deserved.
    - 2. Through His one sacrifice fresh mercy is ours every single morning.

*Conclusion:* Man's business is to repent, confessing his sins from "A to Z"; forgiveness is God's business, a miracle of His own gracious choosing.

James Bollhagen

## SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ezekiel 2:1-5

July 10, 1988

This pericope, which could be extended through verse 7, is part of the call of Ezekiel (chapters 1-3). Ezekiel experienced a second "call" or reconsecration in chapter 33, but to state that his first call was a summons to preach the Law, while his second was a Gospel call, would be an inaccurate oversimplification. The designation "son of man," which is used repeatedly for Ezekiel, should not be loaded with messianic freight; the term simply accentuates Ezekiel's human weakness in vivid contrast to the glory of God he had just seen. But neither should we be too harsh in our psychoanalysis of Ezekiel's personality. We might ask ourselves what we would do if we had an urgent message to deliver from God Himself and at the same time were prohibited from speaking. Christological cues for a sermon can be derived from a comparison of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse. Note the similarities in style, content, and the activity of the Spirit (cf. Eze 3:12 and Re 1:10, 4:2).

As a man already in captivity (1:3) Ezekiel explores the meaning of this and other imminent calamities. The root cause of these is the hard-hearted sins of the people. As in the New Testament, it was not individual transgressions that spelled the people's doom (if that were true, we would all be lost); it was their idolatrous unbelief and lack of repentance. The terms used in these verses for Judah's sins depict open and

deliberate rebellion against God, and the people are urged to accept personal responsibility for their sins. Repentance here does not include merely complaining about environmental factors, such as the circumstances which originally "forced" them into sin or the circumstances of the judgment at hand.

In the theological forefront of this pericope is the "second use of the Law." This doctrine is immediately discernible when one asks of this text: In the midst of judgment why did God even bother to give the people this one last warning about their sins? The answer is found in the Gospel, that God does not desire the death of any man; in His grace He wants him to live (Eze 33:11). Thus, repentance continues to be a crucial aspect of the message spoken by heralds of the New Covenant (Lk 24:47).

### THE DETERMINATION OF GOD

- I. Sinful man remains stubborn in his rebellion against God.
  - A. Each generation repeats the sins of its ancestors (v. 3).
  - B. He stubbornly refuses to repent.
    1. He throws the blame for his sin upon his environment. ("I wasn't raised right." "I was born on the wrong side of the tracks.")
    2. His complaints about God's discipline only lead him to harden his heart all the more.
- II. God remains stubborn in the enforcing of His will upon man.
  - A. Like Ezekiel we refuse to compromise the will of God (3:9).
  - B. We deserve not only the temporal but the eternal punishment of God.
  - C. We have no one but ourselves to blame.
- III. God remains stubborn in the promises of His grace.
  - A. God's determined grace has persisted right up to this very hour.
  - B. His Son Jesus Christ walked with all gracious determination the way to the cross (Lk 9:51; Is 50:7).
  - C. "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ."

James Bollhagen

### EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Amos 7:10-15

July 17, 1988

Prophets at the time of Amos were very "professional." They were trained in saying those things that pleased the ears of the people (1 Kgs 22:6-8). Amos was not that kind of prophet. He was a simple man used by God to bring His Word to bear on Israel (Am 1:1). Amos was not concerned about pleasing those to whom

he spoke. He was not in their pay. When Amaziah urged him to return to his native land of Judah and earn a prophet's salary there, Amos replied that he did not work for the money (vv. 14, 15).

Amos prophesied to a people who were very comfortable (Am 6:1-6). They were untroubled by sin and had no desire to repent (Am 4:6b, 8b, 9b, 10b, 11b). In some ways our world today is very much like the world of Amos. We may not like what he has to say, but his call to repent cannot be ignored without tragic consequences (Am 6:4, 6). The central thought of the text is that, although the word of God may sting, it cannot be ignored. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will respond to God's call to repent.

*Introduction:* Although we may have an appreciation for comfortable living, we are not the only people who ever have. Life in the eighth century B.C. in Israel was quite comfortable.

#### A PROPHET WHO COULD NOT BE BOUGHT

- I. Amos lived in a comfortable world.
  - A. Israel was prospering.
    1. The culture and economy were strong (Am 6:1, 4-6).
    2. Religion was popular (Am 4:4b, 5).
      - a. Sacrifices and rituals were observed in detail (Am 5:21-23).
      - b. Prophets were professional.
  - B. Israel's moral fiber was falling apart.
    1. She cared nothing about those in need (Am 2:6, 7).
    2. She lived for herself (Am 6:6b).
    3. Her prophets did not serve God (vv. 10, 11).
- II. The message of Amos was not comfortable.
  - A. His message stung the Israelites.
    1. He did not say what other prophets said and the people wanted to hear (vv. 12, 13).
    2. He spoke the Word of God.
      - a. This Word condemned (2:6-8).
      - b. This Word called to repent (5:4).
  - B. His message stings us.
    1. Our world is like that of Amos.
      - a. People are little troubled by sin.
      - b. People are little concerned for others.
    2. His words are unsettling.
      - a. He speaks judgment.

b. He calls to repent.

III. What is the response to this prophet?

A. Israel rejected him.

1. Amos was ignored (v. 12).
2. Judgment came to the nation (2 Kgs 17).

B. How do we react?

1. God wants us to repent (Mk 1:4, 15).
2. God is serious about forgiving sin.
  - a. He does not want us to feel guilty and ashamed (Is 1:18).
  - b. He sent Jesus to save us from our sin (Mt 1:21).
    - (1) Jesus lived the life we are afraid to live because it might cost us our comfort (Jn 13:3-5).
    - (2) His death atones for our wrong (1 Pe 2:24).
3. God is serious about empowering us for the life Amos calls us to live (Am 5:24; Php 1:6).

*Conclusion:* The truth of God's Word may hurt for a moment, but God is eager to bless where there is repentance and faith.

Lawrence Mitchell  
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## NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 23:1-6

July 24, 1988

Jeremiah is writing in the last days of Judah. As the history of the nation is about to reach its conclusion, the land is in a sorry condition (2 Kgs 24:1-7). Although much of the countryside was in ruins a far worse tragedy was the spiritual ruin of the people. The shepherds (a term used especially of kings but also inclusive of religious leaders) had failed miserably in their task (Jr 22). They were actually responsible for scattering and driving away the sheep of God's fold. Where they should have attended to the needs of the flock, they were unconcerned (v. 2). How the faithful of the Lord must have felt forsaken (Hab 1:1-4)! But through Jeremiah God declares that He is aware of the situation (v. 1). He will hold the false shepherds accountable. He will restore His people. He will provide them with true shepherds. He will provide a righteous Shepherd-King — a righteous Branch — who will make security possible for the people of God (vv. 5-6). The central thought of the text

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is that God knows what is happening to His people, and He is committed to blessing them. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will be comforted by the assurance that God knows our plight and in His Son He shepherds us.

*Introduction:* When things go well in life, it is easy to feel that God loves and cares for His people. When things do not go well, we are tempted to feel as if God has forgotten His own.

### A PEOPLE NOT FORGOTTEN

- I. God knows the plight of His own.
  - A. The people of Judah must have felt forgotten (Hab 1:1-4).
    1. They were scattered sheep (v. 2).
      - a. They were led by shepherds who drove the sheep away.
      - b. They were led by shepherds who failed to attend them in their need.
    2. Through Jeremiah God shows that He remembers His own.
      - a. He will hold the erring shepherds accountable (v. 2b).
      - b. He gives a promise of restoration (v. 3).
  - B. Sometimes we may feel forgotten.
    1. It is easy for problems to so overwhelm us that God seems far away.
    2. God does remember us.
      - a. He is just as aware of our plight as He was of the plight of the people of Judah (Mt 10:29-31).
      - b. He has a good plan for us although it may not always be clear to us (Jr 29:11).
- II. He has raised up Jesus to shepherd us (v. 5a).
  - A. He remembers how frail we are.
    1. Jesus does not deceive or provide false counsel like the shepherds of Judah (v. 5b; Jn 6:68).
    2. Jesus is not unwilling to care for us in our need (Mt 11:28; Jn 10:11-15).
  - B. He is the Good Shepherd.
    1. He gave His life for us (Jn 10:11).
    2. He declares us precious and remembered (v. 6; Jn 10:27, 28).
- III. He provides shepherds today (v. 4).
  - A. They are gifts from God (Eph 4:11).
  - B. They are not perfect.
  - C. They caringly apply the Gospel to the sheep of God (1 Pe 5:2, 3).



*Conclusion:* Friends and acquaintances may forget us over the years. They may be unaware of our problems and unconcerned about our needs. But our God knows and cares in His Son Jesus Christ.

Lawrence Mitchell  
Bloomington, Indiana

### TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Exodus 24:3-11

July 31, 1988

*Introduction:* At Mount Sinai the Lord gave Moses the Law in written form. The children of Israel signified their willingness to obey. The God of Sinai is the God that continues to call to each of us today. While we must recognize our failures, may we also stand with our forefathers in the faith and pledge:

#### "WE WILL OBEY"

- I. God reveals His will.
  - A. The Law of God is part of the Lord's revelation.
    1. The Law describes God's just expectations of us.
    2. The Law serves as a guide for us who desire to walk in the Lord's way.
  - B. The Law of God is given for our good.
    1. The Law is an aid to us in leading our earthly life.
    2. The Law allows us to distinguish better between that which is contrary to God's will and that which is in keeping with His will and purpose.
- II. The fellowship of believers is an aid to our obedience.
  - A. We have a "cloud of witnesses" (He 12) who have demonstrated for us the value of keeping of God's Law.
    1. The altar erected by Moses was built on twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel.
    2. We today build on the heritage that is ours in the Word delivered to us by the apostles and prophets.
    3. Our unity as believers within our congregations is an encouragement as we strive to keep the Law.

- B. The God who spoke to Moses is the same God who continues to speak to us today in Holy Scripture.
- III. We "obey" through the power of the God who has revealed Himself to us.
  - A. The "blood of the covenant" is the seal of our relationship with God.
    - 1. By the blood of the New Covenant, the blood of Christ, we are called into a relationship with Him today.
    - 2. By the blood-bought union of each person and God we are empowered to shun the world and live for God.
    - 3. By the blood of the cross, the symbol of our covenant with God through Jesus Christ, we are assured that our life is not in jeopardy because of our failure to obey as we should.
  - B. The "blood of the covenant" is our call to obedience.
    - 1. We obey not because of our fear that God will destroy us if we fail.
    - 2. We obey because of our "blood" relationship with our God.

*Conclusion:* The children of Israel responded well. May we likewise, in response to the promises our Lord has made to us and sealed in His Son our Saviour, say, "We will obey."

William G. Thompson  
Utica, Michigan

### ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Exodus 16:2-15

August 7, 1988

The children of Israel lived in Egypt for 430 years. Their arrival in the country of the Pharaoh was pleasant. Joseph was an important leader, the right-hand man of the Egyptian ruler. However, the biblical account tells us that in time a new king came to power "who did not know about Joseph" (Ex 1:8). He was afraid of the Israelites. Therefore, he worked the people "ruthlessly," they were "oppressed," "their lives were made bitter."

*Introduction:* Such was the plight of the children of Israel until God freed them from their imprisonment in Egypt. Under the leadership of Moses, by the miracles of God, by virtue of the mercy of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the children of Israel were set free. The words that compose the Old Testament lesson today offer an account of these newly freed people only thirty days following their

miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Plainly and simply the writer says:

**“IN THE DESERT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY GRUMBLED”**

- I. Grumbling often comes when our memories are too short.
  - A. The children of Israel had very short memories.
    - 1. Too quickly they forgot how oppressed they had been.
    - 2. Too easily they forgot the miracles God had worked on their behalf.
  - B. We, like the children of Israel, too often have short memories.
    - 1. We forget what conditions we have made for ourselves and what punishment we deserve because of our sin.
    - 2. We too frequently in the face of trial fail to recall all that our Lord in His grace has done for us and all that is promised to us through His Son.
    - 3. Grumbling robs us of the joy of appreciating what we have received and anticipating what is in store for us.
- II. The grumbler too often overlooks the blessing of the moment.
  - A. The children of Israel had grumbled so much that many of them doubted the gift that was given them in the manna.
    - 1. They doubted the worth of their freedom.
    - 2. They could not understand what the manna was.
    - 3. They did not believe that enough manna would be provided each day.
  - B. We resemble our Israelite forefathers in many ways. When we grumble so much, we rob ourselves of the ability to recognize blessings as blessings.
    - 1. One who grumbles is usually suspicious of the gifts that are received and therefore often robbed of the joy of receiving.
    - 2. Those who grumble too frequently are so absorbed in self-pity that they fail to see the potential that exists even in their troubles. (The children of Israel were in the wilderness in preparation for entering the promised land.)
    - 3. Those who grumble too regularly seldom find comfort or security, for they normally assume things can only get worse.
- III. The God of our deliverance gives us every reason to rejoice and stop grumbling.
  - A. In spite of their grumbling, God in His mercy provided for the needs of the children of Israel. If they had trusted in the Lord, they would have saved themselves a lot of grief.
  - B. The same God still speaks in His mercy to our need. We have the added advantage of the seal of His promise given in Jesus Christ. “He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?” (Ro 8:32).

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*Conclusion:* Grumbling—what is its purpose? May we grow in faith to grumble less and trust more.

William G. Thompson  
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## TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 19:4-8

August 14, 1988

This text begins rather abruptly with the statement that Elijah came to a broom tree, sat down under it, and said that he wanted to die. When the time comes to read the text, it would be very helpful to read 19:1-8 and to recap the career of Elijah for the hearers' better understanding of just what Elijah was facing. After Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal, Jezebel sent word to him that she would kill him. Elijah's reaction was to flee to the desert and call on God to let him die. Even in light of his experience with the prophets of Baal, the end of the drought, and his running ahead of Ahab to Jezreel, the reality of his own limitations was all too apparent to Elijah. He would not be able to set things totally right in Israel. Jezebel is too strong for him. Sin still abounds and the righteous will continue to suffer.

The resolution of this problem is not ultimately that of the angelic ministrations recorded in the text. The solution to Elijah's despair at the apparent result of his work was to be told that the Lord works, that he was not the only one left, and that he would be provided a colleague to carry on the prophetic work. The malady addressed in this text is that of discouragement and loss of zeal in the Lord's work, something caused by our dependence on ourselves rather than God. The goal is that the hearer will take advantage of the provisions God makes for carrying out His will and living as His children. The means is that God has provided for our ultimate needs in the Bread of Life—Jesus Christ (cf. the gospel of the day).

*Introduction:* What do you do when you finally have to face your own powerlessness? Many of us each day find out that we cannot change the world, and that we have done no more—if even as much as—our ancestors in righting the wrongs of society. When we are tired of trying, when we get discouraged, when we lose heart and our zeal flags, we can thank God that

### WHEN MAN'S STRENGTH FALTERS, GOD'S SUFFICIENCY FLOURISHES

I. Our strength and zeal do at times grow weak.

- A. Big dreams are dashed against the hard rocks of reality.
    - 1. Such events are common experience (farm foreclosures, bankruptcies, divorces, business failures, forgotten diets and the like might be shared).
    - 2. Elijah's experience was the same (read the text and recap the events of Elijah's ministry).
  - B. When such things happen, we are often truly discouraged, even despairing.
    - 1. We think that perhaps we are the only ones who really care.
    - 2. We are ready to give up and try no more—no matter the cause or the value of the goal for which we strive (even in the church in evangelism, education, and stewardship endeavors).
    - 3. Elijah knew this feeling as well. He was ready to die. He recognized that he had accomplished no more than his ancestors. He was ready to give up everything. "Let me die," he said.
  - C. The real problem we are facing in these times is that of our own insufficiency and perhaps even sinful self-dependence.
    - 1. We will each have to come to grips with his own insufficiency and impotence sooner or later. Even if we never pray to die, we will each one day face death for himself.
    - 2. We cannot save the world. We cannot even save ourselves.
    - 3. Elijah faced his own limitations in this same way. And in the same way that he received help and hope from God, we too can be thankful that, "When man's strength falters, God's sufficiency flourishes!"
- II. God provides strength and encouragement to finish our course with Him.
- A. He provides for our needs in this world.
    - 1. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (Jas 1:17). Luther's Small Catechism in its explanation of the First Article is an excellent summary of God's daily provision for all our needs.
    - 2. Sometimes He works in wondrous and miraculous ways, at other times in more common ways. The disaster relief work of Lutheran World Relief is but one example of God at work—this time through people. The angel's miraculous provision for Elijah is another example. But God did not stop there; He soon provided a co-worker for Elijah. God provides whatever we need on earth to do His will.
  - B. He provides for our eternal needs as well.
    - 1. He provides life, hope, and eternal power that go beyond the length of our days on earth. Our days may end, but God's mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, and life will never end.
    - 2. He has saved the world through Jesus Christ. What neither Elijah, nor Paul, nor Luther nor anyone else could do, He has done in Jesus. Our sins are forgiven, justice has been established, evil has been conquered, death and the grave are no longer victorious—all because *God* has acted in Jesus Christ.

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*Conclusion:* Our strength, zeal, and hope may, indeed, grow dim. But we can take courage; "When man's strength falters, God's sufficiency flourishes!" Amen.

David L. Bahn  
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

### THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 9:1-6

August 21, 1988

In Proverbs 8 and 9 both "Wisdom" and "Folly" extend invitations to the simple. Both call out and encourage passers-by to come near, follow their ways, and reap their benefits. Folly mocks wisdom (9:13-17), but the end of wisdom is life. The end of folly is in "the depths of the grave" (9:18). If Christ is God's wisdom from on high—higher than the heights of the city (even His folly is wiser than man's wisdom)—then this text is rightly understood as referring to Jesus and His call to discipleship together with the promises of the Gospel (the essence of that call).

Without Christ we are lacking spiritual vitality and judgment; we are "simple" (note the parallelism in verses 4 and 5). The promise of life is found only in Christ. By the Spirit's work in our hearts, we are enabled to turn to Him and live. Such is the invitation. How will we respond? The malady addressed in this text is that, unless we are guided by Christ (God's wisdom), we will surely follow folly and die. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer will respond to God's call to repentance and receive the life He offers. The means to this goal is the spiritual food and drink we have in the Gospel and sacraments.

*Introduction:* We have all probably received a great number of invitations in the mail that we have tossed aside without a second thought. Whether it be the premier showing of a collection of jewelry or the grand-opening of the newest grocery store in town, we can easily ignore such "wonderful, one-time only" offers. God, too, is constantly inviting us to enjoy life and the riches of His gifts through Jesus Christ. His, however, is

#### AN INVITATION WE MUST NOT IGNORE

- I. The invitations are being sent to you.
  - A. God wants us to know His love and receive His blessings.
    1. He announced His love by sending His Son to the world.
    2. He tells us today that through Jesus we are invited to a great feast of love and life at His house (v. 1).

B. He sends invitations to everyone.

1. He sends missionaries, pastors, Sunday school teachers, speakers on radio and television, Christian parents and friends to tell us that we are invited to come to Him.
2. Whoever we are, this invitation is for us. No one is beyond the saving reach of the Gospel. There is hope and a place for you too.
3. Wherever we go, we can share the invitation, too. Whose life can you touch? Whom can you invite? Anyone!

II. How will you respond?

A. Turn away from the simple way of self-service and live.

1. Self-service kills. We, too easily, care only for ourselves and will thus "lose life" (Mt 16:25, 26). We cannot save ourselves.
2. God saves us by Christ's death and resurrection. He forgives. He gives life (v. 6). The invitation is going out today through Word and Sacrament (9:5). It is for you. Respond in repentance and faith. A great blessing awaits you in Christ.

B. Recognize the beauty of God's "house."

1. Heaven is a glorious place, "many mansions."
2. Really, anything else that would compare itself to God's heaven only mocks and proves to be a cheap imitation of His true glory.

*Conclusion:* Recently I was introduced to the fantastic sound available to audio enthusiasts in compact discs. These small circles of plastic and aluminum are read by lasers and produce an incredibly clean, clear sound. I was amazed. When I commented on the clarity of these audio wonders, the reply of the technician was simple. "Everytime I hear one of these," he said, "I remember that they are just a substitute for the real thing." What God invites us to enjoy through Jesus Christ is the real thing. This *is* an invitation we must not ignore!

David L. Bahn  
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

## FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

August 28, 1988

In preaching on this text two points must be emphasized—first, no "choice" can be made for God unless God Himself gives such faith, as Jesus reminds us in the appointed gospel, "No one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him"; secondly, the Father calls us to such uncompromising faith through the means of

grace, as Luther has taught our church so clearly for over four hundred years: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel..." The apostle reminds us of this fact in the appointed epistle, where he points us to our baptism as the means through which Christ made us His people, making us holy "by the washing with water through the word" (Eph 6). The first word in verse 14, "and now" (*weatah*), shows that while 3-13 are not included in this pericope, they certainly are an integral part of our text and provide the background for Joshua's call to faith; for in these verses Joshua proclaims the "good news" to Israel of God's saving acts which made her His people.

The phrase, "fear the Lord" (v. 14), is not a call to be afraid of the Lord or to tremble before Him (as the English translation "fear" probably suggests to most people today) but is a call to faith and trust, similar (but with far greater depth of meaning) to the New Testament's invitation, "Believe in the Lord Jesus." New Testament faith was expressed in the Old Testament with the phrase, "fear Yahweh"; see, for example, Deuteronomy 6:13 (and parallel references) where, having heard of her Lord's grace (5:10-12), Israel is invited to "fear the Lord..." Note that the "fear of the Lord" is called the "beginning of wisdom" throughout the wisdom corpus. "Fear of Yahweh," like "faith in Jesus," is the beginning of one's relationship with God.

In verse 17 the people rightly confess that Yahweh is "our God" (*elohenu*), not because they have "served Him" or chosen Him but because of His grace alone; "He is the one bringing us up" (a hiphil participle). Note the word "us" (*otanu*); the Egyptian deliverance was not merely history but a story with personal involvement. The rabbis later taught the people, "In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt..." (Mishnah, Pesahim, 10:5).

*Introduction:* We make many decisions in life every day. Some matter little, others can spell the difference between success and failure, even life and death. But no decision we can ever make matters more than one Joshua asked Israel to make several thousand years ago at Shechem: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." May the Holy Spirit move us always to respond with ancient Israel:

### WE WILL SERVE THE LORD

- I. We will serve Him by throwing away all the false gods around us.
  - A. Many false gods constantly try to draw us away from our Lord (see v. 16).
    1. Israel was tempted by many gods, the gods of their forefathers (see 24:2) and the gods of the peoples whose land God was giving them (v. 15).
    2. The people in Jesus' day were tempted to fall away from the Lord Jesus and follow the "gods" of their own imaginations (Jn 6:66).
    3. There are many false gods tempting us today, trying to pull us away from our Lord and His life-giving Word.
  - B. These false gods can never help us nor give us salvation.



1. Isaiah the prophet ridiculed the impotent false gods of his day (Is 44:6-20).
  2. Peter realized that only Jesus could give eternal life: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (Jn 6:68).
  3. All the money, all the education, all the political and military power in the world can never give us peace of mind before God nor help us through death into eternal life. Joshua encouraged Israel (and God is encouraging us likewise today), "Throw away these impotent, false gods and fear the Lord and serve him alone."
- II. We will serve Him by placing our confidence in the Lord alone.
- A. He is the one who saved us and has made us what we are.
1. It was God who had made Israel a nation with hopes and dreams (see vv. 3-13).
  2. This same Lord in the person of His Son Jesus Christ has given us an eternal hope by conquering our spiritual enemies and opening for us the way into eternal life (Eph 5:25).
  3. He made our Lord's victory ours individually when we were baptized (Eph 5:26), so that we can say, "I died with Christ and rose with Him."
- B. Trusting in Him we will never be disappointed or ashamed.
1. Joshua pointed the people to their Lord's great power (vv. 17-28).
  2. The mighty Lord who fought for Israel and fulfilled His promises to them by giving them the land He had promised (v. 28) is the same Lord who will give us our inheritance as He has promised: "I go to prepare a place for you"; "Because I live, you too will live!"
  3. We have assurance of our heavenly victory in the Holy Supper our Lord has given us.

*Conclusion:* Considering the mighty salvation accomplished by our Lord, can there really be any "choice" but to respond with ancient Israel, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods!" For, as Peter centuries later exclaimed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

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## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

September 4, 1988

This text might seem at first glance to teach that one can earn "life" by obedience to God's laws and commands (see especially v. 1, "follow them so that you may live..."). This is certainly the way in which many Jews understood it later. However, such an understanding ignores the entire context. In the previous three chapters Moses

has just rehearsed for the Israelites the work which their Lord had done for them, work which was done by God's grace alone. Furthermore, one must not overlook the significance of the pronominal suffixes attached to God's name (v. 2, "*your* God"; v. 7, "*our* God"), which clearly show that Yahweh was the God of the Israelites before they had even begun to live out the requirements of His Sinaitic covenant with them. Indeed, the participle in verse 1 in the phrase, "...which I am teaching you," clearly indicates this fact too, for even though Moses has not yet finished teaching the Israelites God's commands, God calls Himself "their God" and "your God."

While in verse 1 God addresses Israel initially as a boy (*Shema*, in the singular), He then shifts to the second person *plural*, reminding Israel that each individual person is responsible for his obedience. The phraseology in verse 2, "Do not add ...do not subtract," represents *lo* with the imperfect in the Hebrew, indicating permanent or objective prohibition. God will not have His Word twisted to fit human opinion (cf. Re 22:18-19).

Unfortunately the New International Version translates the Hebrew *torah* (v. 8) as "body of laws." Such a translation continues to perpetuate the mistaken popular idea that the Old Testament is Law while the New Testament is Gospel. Each occurrence of *Torah* should properly be translated as best fits the context, here perhaps as "Word."

*Introduction:* A wasted life is such a tragedy. God especially does not want any Christian to waste his life; God has saved us for a purpose as St. Paul writes, "Christ died for all that they which live should not live for themselves any longer but for Him who died for them and rose again." God wants to know from each of us today the answer to this question:

#### WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR LIFE?

- I. In His loving grace God has made you His child so that, living according to His Word, you can enjoy the blessings of that Word.
  - A. We certainly cannot earn the status of being God's people by obeying His Law. We are God's people because He freely chose us and made us His people apart from anything we have done.
    1. The Israelites were God's people, not because they obeyed His Law, but because He had freely chosen them and brought them out of Egypt (see Dt 1-3); God was *their* God before and without their works.
    2. In our baptism God called us into His family, the church, by grace alone (see Tt 3:5).
    3. We live according to His Word, not in order to become God's children, but because we already are, by grace alone, His redeemed children.
  - B. God desires that, as His people, we live according to His revealed Word and not according to our own desires.
    1. God very carefully commanded Israel to follow His laws and observe them carefully, neither adding nor subtracting from them (v. 2).

2. Our risen Lord desires the same from us today (see Jn 14:23 and similar texts).
  3. He warns in the gospel today that a life lived apart from God's Word cannot please Him (Mk 7:6-8).
- C. By His grace He has promised us rich blessings through His Word.
1. Through His Word God promised the people a full and happy life and possession of the land promised to Abraham and their fathers (v. 1).
  2. Through His Word God today wants to bless us with many gifts of His love.
- II. But God wants us to live according to His Word, not just to enjoy His blessings, but also to attract others to Him.
- A. God's Word is the "magnet" which God uses to attract people to Himself.
1. Through Moses God told Israel how the nations would be attracted to the Lord when they saw and heard about His "righteous decrees and laws" (v. 8).
  2. Today, too, people are attracted to God through us as they notice how His Word comforts in distress and guides us in living contented and happy lives.
- B. We should pray that the Holy Spirit may keep us faithful to our Lord's Word.
1. Jesus warns us today how easily we can fall from God's Word and live lives according to our own sinful passions (see Mk 7: 20-23).
  2. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him that he might declare God's Word "fearlessly, as I should" (Eph 6:20).
  3. In these days when many compromise God's Word, we should pray that the Holy Spirit may keep us and our church faithful to God's Word so that we also may continue to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jd 3; v. 2 in Hebrew, "guard the commandments").
  4. But we should also pray that the Spirit may help us to live lives which reflect His Word (v. 6 literally, "you shall guard and you shall *do*...").

*Conclusion:* Living a life according to God's Word will never be a wasted life. For not only will God bless us individually in countless ways, but He will use us to draw more precious people to Himself for life and salvation. We pray with Luther, "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word!"

Steven C. Briel  
Osseo, Minnesota

## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 35:4-7a

September 11, 1988

In the gospel of the day Jesus is confessed as He who “does all things well, making the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.” In this way Jesus is identified with the God of whom Isaiah speaks, as the one who would come and save, whose coming would be signaled by the blind being made to see, the deaf made to hear, the lame made to leap, and the tongue of the dumb made to shout. Isaiah speaks words of promise for the future in the face of God’s visitation of judgment upon a world typified by Edom (chapter 34) and upon Jerusalem for her apostasy. As the people of God are affected by this punishment—lest they become weak in faith, lose hope, and despair—Yahweh calls upon them to cheer up, for He is coming and will save them. The infliction of punishment is the immediate object of His coming, but the ultimate object is the salvation of His people.

Isaiah points forward to the day of salvation with signs signaling God’s time of deliverance. These healing signs are to be taken literally. Accomplished by Christ in fulfillment of prophecy, they authenticate Jesus’ messianic claim—a claim further validated by His suffering, death, and resurrection, through which Yahweh saves and thus is the source of comfort and hope.

### GOD WILL COME

- I. The immediate object of His coming is to inflict punishment.
  - A. He comes with divine retribution (v. 4).
    1. Upon Edom as typical of the pagan neighbors of Jerusalem.
    2. Upon Jerusalem for her apostasy.
  - B. God’s people are affected by God’s infliction of punishment.
    1. The innocent often suffer with the guilty.
    2. The people of God are tempted to become weak in faith, lose hope, and despair (v. 4).
    3. God calls upon His people to “take courage” and to “fear not” (v. 4).
- II. The ultimate object of His coming is the salvation of His people.
  - A. He comforts the afflicted church.
    1. Not only in the just punishment of the wicked.
    2. But also in the word of comfort God speaks: “But He will save you” (v. 4).
  - B. He promises salvation.
    1. Yahweh gives signs of the day of salvation (vv. 5-7).
    2. Yahweh points directly to the time of the Messiah.
  - C. He fulfills His promises.
    1. Climaxing in the death and resurrection of the promised Messiah, Jesus.

2. Proclaimed in the Word of God, which produces spiritual abundance (v. 7).

Norbert H. Mueller

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 50:4-10

September 18, 1988

The Introit sounds the dominant note of the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: "The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." The Servant of the Lord, whom Isaiah introduces in the text and whom Peter identifies as Jesus the Christ in the gospel of the day, follows the instructions of Yahweh (vv. 4,5); in willing obedience fulfils Yahweh's saving purpose for mankind (vv. 6-9); speaks the sure word to "sustain the weary" (v. 5); offers deliverance from tribulation ("darkness") to those who "trust in the name of the Lord" and "rely on His God" (v. 10). The way of the Servant's calling leads through a shameful condition of humiliation (v. 5). As Delitzsch indicates, what was predicted typically and prophetically finds in the Servant, i.e., Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 27:67; 27:30; Jn 18:22), its perfect fulfilment. In the light of these facts we flee for refuge to the "strongest tower, the name of the Lord [cf. Pr 18:10], and there every righteous man will be made to rejoice, and even the dead will be made alive" (Luther).

### THE SERVANT IN WHOSE NAME WE TRUST AND UPON WHOSE GOD WE RELY

- I. The Servant is instructed by Yahweh.
  - A. He listens to Yahweh (vv. 4, 5).
  - B. He is obedient to Yahweh (v. 5).
- II. The Servant suffers.
  - A. He sets His face like flint (v. 7).
    1. Willingly endures suffering (v. 6) (cf. Ph 2:6-8; He 12:2).
    2. Willingly suffers rebuke and contempt (v. 6).
  - B. He is innocent and sinless (v. 8).
  - C. His accusers shall wear out and fail (v. 9).
  - D. He is vindicated by Yahweh (vv. 8, 9) (cf. Php 2:9-11).
- III. The Servant comforts and strengthens the weary and those in "darkness", i.e., in tribulation.
  - A. His "tongue ... sustains the weary one with a word" (v. 4).
  - B. He summons all to "trust in the name of the Lord," to "rely on His God" (v. 10).

1. "Darkness, clouds, trials, invitations on the part of demons and of men will come our way" (Luther).
2. We cannot defend ourselves with human resources.
3. We flee for refuge to the Servant, Jesus Christ.
  - a. In whose name we trust.
  - b. Upon whose God we rely.
4. We pray: "O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee. O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded."

Norbert H. Mueller

### **EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Jeremiah 11:18-20

September 25, 1988

The gospel reiterates last week's lesson with Mark's second passion prediction, but it adds another twist—the greatest in the kingdom of heaven must be last and a servant of all. The Old Testament lesson from Jeremiah 11 perfectly complements Mark 9, since a type of the suffering of Jesus can be seen in the life of the persecuted prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 11:18-20 occurs in the midst of plots against the prophet's life, plots that are even instigated by his family and friends. The focus of the lesson is verse 19, clearly reminiscent of Isaiah 53 where the silent suffering of the Servant is emphasized. Jeremiah is a persecuted prophet because of the message he brings to Israel, a fact that may be indicated by the statement of his enemies that they must "destroy the tree with its fruit...that his name be remembered no more" (Jr 11:19). A sermon on Jeremiah 11 could focus on the prophet's persecution, tying it to the gospel by seeing Jeremiah as a type of the Messiah. The message and the person of the one suffering for the kingdom could be observed in the lives of Jeremiah, Jesus and all those who bear the mark of the crucified and risen one.

### **THE PERSECUTED PROPHET**

- I. Tells the truth about the covenant with Yahweh (Jr 11:1-8).
  - A. The covenant made at Sinai.
  - B. The covenant to restore people to the land.
    1. By passing through the Red Sea.
    2. By receiving manna in the wilderness.
    3. By the trek through the wilderness.
    4. By the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land.
  - C. The new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34.
    1. "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (cf. Jr 11:4).
    2. "I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more."

- 
- II. Tells the truth about the sins of the people (Jr 11:9-10, 18-20).
    - A. The breaking of the covenant by Judah (v. 10).
      - 1. By returning to the iniquities of the fathers (v. 10).
      - 2. By refusing to hear the words of the Lord (v. 9).
      - 3. By serving other gods (v. 9).
    - B. The plots on the life of the prophet (Jr 11:18-12:6).
      - 1. The Lord reveals the evil deeds of the people to Jeremiah (v. 18).
      - 2. The people desire the death of God's prophet (v. 19).
      - 3. The prophet remains faithful in the midst of persecution (v. 20).
  - III. Tells the truth about the repentance of the people (Jr 11:11-13, 21-23).
    - A. They do not cry out to the Lord but to false gods (vv. 11-13).
    - B. The judgment of the Lord is upon them (vv. 14-17) for persecuting the Lord's prophet (vv. 21-23).
  - IV. Tells the truth about the suffering of the Lord's Anointed One.
    - A. Jeremiah knows that the new covenant is one of righteousness.
      - 1. The Lord will raise up for David a righteous Branch (Jr 23:5).
      - 2. The Lord will execute justice and righteousness in the land (Jr 11:20; 23:5).
        - a. By the suffering and death of God's Anointed One (Is 53).
        - b. By the vindication of God's plan through the resurrection (cf. Mk 9:31).
    - B. Jeremiah-Jesus is like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter (Jr 11:19).
      - 1. To bear the name of the Messiah is to suffer like Him (cf. Mk 9:35: "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all").
      - 2. To suffer like Him is to confess Him as the righteous judge.
      - 3. To confess Him as the righteous judge is to trust Him.
      - 4. To trust Him is to receive the forgiveness of sins.

Arthur Just, Jr.

### NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

October 2, 1988

Although Israel spends forty years in the wilderness, Numbers handles them in eleven chapters (Nu 10:11-21:9). In those eleven chapters Israel conceives one rebellion after another, culminating in Moses' rebellion at Meribah (20:7-13) that keeps him from entering the promised land. Thus, the wilderness becomes paradigmatic of Israel's spiritual condition (and ours), for the more Yahweh provides for them, the more they grumble. This phenomenon may seem incredible to us since the ark was always with them, until we ponder our own situation today. Since Numbers 11 includes three examples of grumbling, the sermon may want to focus on the

relationship between God's gracious presence in the wilderness and the people's unbelieving response. We are still a people who depend on God's grace to guide us on our pilgrimage in the wilderness.

With this approach, one must be careful that the sermon does not turn into a moralizing lecture on our ungratefulness in the face of God's graciousness. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 gives us an example of how to handle the comparison between the Old and New Israel: "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come...God is *faithful*, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Instead of dwelling on the grumbings of Israel, the sermon will want to concentrate on God's faithfulness to the world in providing the way of escape in His Son Jesus Christ, even in the face of all our grumbings. This idea continues the theme of the last two weeks, although today the focus is on the response of God's people when the theology of the cross enters their lives. Do our sufferings draw us closer to God or cause us to reject Him? Israel's example calls us to remember that it is only by God's grace that we remain His children. Many have observed the close relationship between the gospel from Mark 9 and Numbers 11. The Spirit's presence in the midst of the people is another example of God's faithfulness.

### GRUMBLINGS IN THE WILDERNESS

- I. The grumbings of the Israelites over the lack of meat (vv. 4-6).
  - A. Despite God's deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt.
    1. A deliverance that is *the* redemptive act of God.
    2. A deliverance that is remembered every year in the Passover.
  - B. Despite God's faithfulness in providing for Israel in the wilderness.
    1. They "all ate the same supernatural food" (1 Cor 10:4).
    2. They "all drank the same supernatural drink" (1 Cor 10:4).
    3. "For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them" (1 Cor 10:4).
    4. "And the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).
- II. The grumbings of Moses who cannot deal with the complaining Israelites (vv. 10-16).
  - A. Despite God's faithfulness in providing him with the means to lead the Israelites.
    1. God promises to be with Moses (Ex 3:12).
    2. God reveals His name to Moses (Ex 3:13-15).
    3. God gives Moses signs to show His faithfulness (Ex 4:1-9).
    4. God gives Moses a spokesman (Ex 4:10-17).
  - B. Despite God's constant presence in the midst of the Israelites.
    1. God is present in the burning bush (Ex 3).
    2. God is present on Mt. Sinai (Ex 19).



3. God is present in a vision and a meal (Ex 24).
  4. God is present in the tabernacle (Ex 25).
  5. God is present in the cloud (Nu 9:15-23; Ex 13 and 14).
- III. The grumbings of Joshua over the prophecy of Eldad and Medad (vv. 24-29).
- A. Despite the presence of God's Spirit with Moses (Nu 11:24).
    1. The Lord comes down in the cloud and speaks to Moses (v. 25).
    2. The Lord shared the Spirit upon Moses with the seventy elders (v. 26).
  - B. Despite the Spirit-inspired nature of the prophecy (v. 26; cf. Mk 9).
    1. Moses said: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (v. 29).
    2. Joel prophesied the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh.
    3. At Pentecost the church was empowered by the Spirit.
      - a. A church now empowered to preach Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead (Lk 24:46).
      - b. A church now empowered to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations (Lk 24:48).
      - c. A church that is continually in the temple praising God (Lk 24:52).

Arthur Just, Jr.

## TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 2:18-24

October 9, 1988

Genesis 2:4-25 is essentially topical. It tells us how the Lord God lavished His love upon His foremost creature, man. This fact is especially evident in this text, the last eight verses of chapter 2, which treats of the creation of woman and of the institution of marriage. It is introduced by God's own assertion, "It is not good for the man to be alone." These verses are extremely important to all order in human life. At creation God established two classes of humankind and assigned distinctive roles to man and to woman for this earthly life. The view that the first man was bisexual until God divided him into male and female finds support neither in Genesis 2 nor in the seven times these verses are cited in the New Testament (1 Cor 11:8-9; 1 Tm 2:13; Mt 19:5; Mk 10:6; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31). It should be noted too that the creation took place just as reported in the first two chapters of Genesis. God acted just as the account says. What He said about Adam and Eve and their union in marriage is definitive for people of all succeeding times. His words here have a direct bearing on us yet today.

Something which is quite difficult for us to understand and explain today is the teaching of the "orders of creation." These orders involve God's design for man and woman in the world. Moved by His deep love, God arranged for man to live as a social being, with the woman as "a helper" for man, yet "one like man" in

that she corresponded to man physically, mentally and spiritually. This institution of the union between man and woman is the foundation for all other orders of society—family, state, government, church and every other social structure.

In addition, there is a moral structure initiated here. There is a role of subordination of man to God and of woman to man. This subordination, however, is not an oppressive subordination, but a “unity-subordination.” The latter occurs in a relationship that is “carried on for the sake of a unity or a higher cause” (S.B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* [Servant Books, Ann Arbor, 1980], p. 41). This is the order to which Paul refers in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 when he states that woman is “not to exercise authority over a man” because “God formed Adam first, then Eve” (cf. 1 Cor 11:3-16; 14:33b-36). The Augsburg Confession (Articles 27 and 28) teaches that marriage is a function of the state and that it is a lawful and God-pleasing contract for all who “are not fitted for single life.” It should also be noted that the “orders of creation” are being discussed not merely by conservative Christians, but also on rarified intellectual levels by secular scholars. An example is *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, edited by Robin Lovin and Frank Reynolds (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985). The contributors to this volume see a moral structure implanted in people of all times and in every civilization thus far studied. These “orders” belong to the natural law; they ought to be developed in detail on the basis of God’s special revelation in Scripture.

*Introduction:* So few today model their marriage on God’s precepts. So many who are married want to escape this relationship because they find no happiness in it. In reality, however, all Christians—those already married, those contemplating marriage and those who have the gift not to marry—should thank God for the gift of marriage by saying:

## I LOVE MARRIAGE

- I. Because through marriage God establishes order.
  - A. It fills the needs of man.
    1. The psychological need: companionship (“not good for man to be alone,” Gn 2:18).
    2. The physical need: procreation (“be fruitful and multiply” Gn 1:28).
    3. The moral need: decency (“better to marry than to burn” 1 Cor 7:9).
  - B. It involves sexual distinctions.
    1. God created the female as a separate class and counterpart to the male.
    2. God established the roles of male and female (cf. 1 Tm 2; 1 Cor 11; 14).
  - C. It is the foundation of human society.
    1. The family is the basic unit of society.
    2. The community, the state and every other social structure rest, in turn, on the family.
- II. Because through marriage God provides for the happiness and holiness of mankind.

- A. The family is connected with happiness.
  - 1. In the Christian family love is planted, nurtured and expressed.
  - 2. In the Christian family happiness predominates.
- B. The family is connected with holiness.
  - 1. God blesses all the families of the earth through the Seed of the Woman (Gn 12:1-3; cf. Ps 68:5; Jr 31:1; Eph 3:15).
  - 2. Paul uses the marriage relationship to picture the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-33).

*Conclusion:* The church must keep its respect for marriage high. Every other unit of society rests on the foundation of marriage. Many regard it as obsolete, but marriage is like the blacksmith's anvil: The more people hammer against it, the better and truer and tougher it becomes.

Waldemar Degner

### TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

October 16, 1988

Amos, the shepherd-turned-prophet from Tekoa (ten miles south of Jerusalem), bids Israel heed the verdict of the Judge of the nations. From the south (Judah), Amos approaches the ruler of the Northern Kingdom in Bethel, the prosperous King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). Yet little more than thirty years after Jeroboam's death, his capital fell to the Assyrians and the Israelites were carried away into captivity (9:8-10). Jonah and Hosea were contemporaries of Amos. Amos reeks of judgment. The sins for which Israel is judged (2:6-8) are primarily the social sins: oppression of the poor, uncontrolled lust, adultery, covenant breaking, ingratitude and idolatry. In the end all of these sins are due to Israel's rejection of the Lord God and His Word. Anybody who in disbelief rejects God's Word also hardens his heart against the grace of God (1 Pe 2:8). Worse, when people reject the Word of Grace, God withdraws the Word from them. He will "send a famine on the land...of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11-12).

Amos 5 begins with a dirge over obdurate Israel. Her doom is so certain that the prophet can speak of Israel's doom as though it were already past (5:2). The "virgin" Israel's death is untimely; she dies before she has attained motherhood. God's judgment includes a call to repentance and a promise of forgiveness.

*Introduction:* Belonging to a Christian congregation very often becomes something like belonging to a club. People become comfortable; they pay their dues; they attend meetings. Yes, many even attend to the formalities of worship. It is all part of the

routine. But the "fire" has gone out. There is no sense of urgency, no cross, no daring to heed the call of Christ. Thus, when comforts come first, when conformity to the world is normal, when faith grows dumb, then we need to hear Amos. He tells us:

### SEEK GOD AND LIVE!

- I. Amos asks, "But what do you, in fact, seek?"
  - A. Amos' question is relevant because there is a judgment of sinners (v. 6).
    1. God condemned the Israelites for grievous sins against fellow men—turning "justice into wormwood" (i.e., a bitter draught serving as a figure of injustice).
    2. The "righteousness" of God is "laid to rest in the earth" unless the consciences of men are aroused by the evil treatment of their fellow men.
  - B. God's Law measures us; God is the one whom we fear, love and trust above all else.
    1. Do we turn from what is right?
    2. Do we reject God's judgment of our actions (v. 10)?
    3. Do we treat our neighbor unfairly (v. 11a)?
    4. Do we adapt ourselves to the standards of the world (v. 12)?
    5. Do we divorce faith from life?
  - C. Each of us must echo the words of earlier believers.
    1. Luther said: "We daily sin much!"
    2. David, who did not see his sin for a time, said: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sm 12:13a).
- II. Amos says, "Seek the Lord and live!"
  - A. Nathan the prophet told David that he was forgiven: "The Lord hath put away thy sin" (2 Sm 12:13b).
  - B. Amos proclaims the Lord as the source of life.
    1. Amos was a messenger of grace in troubled times.
    2. God's grace in Word and Sacrament raises us up when we are laid low by the judgments of God.
    3. The penitent are the "remnant of Joseph" to whom the Lord God will be gracious (v. 15).
  - C. Each of us must heed the call of Amos.
    1. Do I confess my sin, including such sins as Amos enumerates?
    2. Do I look with faith to Christ Jesus of whom Amos prophesied (cf. 9:11)?

*Conclusion:* In the end, it is not we who seek, but it is God who seeks us. He has found us. Therefore, we sing to Jesus (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 350, stanza 3):

O Hope of every contrite heart,  
O Joy of all the meek!

To those who fall, how kind Thou art,  
How good to those who seek.

Waldemar Degner

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 53:10-12

October 23, 1988

These verses, along with Isaiah 52:13-53:9, present perhaps the strongest biblical statement of the substitutionary atonement offered by Christ to God. In examining this powerful text, we may note the following:

In verse 10 the KJV and NASB correctly translate *chaphetz* as "pleasure," reflecting the original's emphasis. The RSV and NIV are weak when they translate "will of the Lord," suggesting that the *satisfactio vicaria* was an arbitrary movement of God's "sovereign will."

Verse 10a says the Lord Himself "crushed" the Suffering Servant, His Christ. He "put Him to grief," i.e., caused Him to be sick or suffer (the *hiphil* perfect). This suffering was accomplished when the Christ offered Himself as the "guilt offering" (literally, "His soul will place a guilt offering"). In offering up His soul once and for all, the crucified Christ was both the full compensation for our offenses and the atoning sacrifice for our guilt.

In verse 10b the grammatical subject is the Suffering Servant. As a consequence of having made a guilt offering with His soul, He will have offspring (literally, "see seed") and live long (literally, "prolong His days"). In this way, the Lord's pleasure will continue. Here "seed" (*zera'*) designates human offspring in the sense of those who derive their life from another in a spiritual manner.

In verses 11-12 the Lord becomes the speaker and He refers to the Servant in every personal use of the third person singular. In verse 11, following His suffering, the Christ will enjoy a satisfying sight (literally, "He will see and be satisfied"). He will be pleased to consider His own sacrifice, for thereby the Righteous One "will justify the many" (emphasizing the greatness of, not any limitation in, the number of those declared righteous because of Christ). This justification is objective; the Servant has accomplished it Himself. He suffers, He bears iniquities, thus He justifies and this justification occurs "by His knowledge" (subjective genitive). This knowledge (*da'ath*) of Christ includes not only His understanding of us, but also His obedience to God for us (cf. BDB, p. 395).

In verse 12 we see the height of Christ's exaltation as the result of His humiliation for us sinners. The Lord "will give Him a portion with the great." Even "the great," the most powerful people of earth, are under His rule and will have to pay Him homage one day. Furthermore, "He will divide the spoils with the strong." As the

glorious Victor, Christ alone is rightly exalted; nonetheless, He will share His glory with "the strong," i.e., with His spiritual seed.

*Introduction:* You can tell how much someone loves you by how much he is willing to endure for you. And you show others how much you love them by how much you are willing to endure for their sake. In our text, God shows us just how much He loves us by showing how much He has endured for our sakes. He loved us so much that when He looked at His only Son, Jesus Christ, suffering and dying on the cross, He was actually pleased. It is amazing to consider

### THE LORD'S PLEASURE IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST

- I. The Lord was pleased with the cross of Christ.
  - A. Not because of some evil within God.
    1. True, the Lord was actually pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief, making Him sick, causing Him to suffer (v. 10a).
    2. But God so acted, not because He by nature had a wrath which He had to vent (Ps 5:7); He is righteous and just (Dt 32:4).
    3. Neither did God so act because Christ Himself deserved punishment; the Father was well pleased with His perfect Son (Mt 3:17; 17:5).
  - B. But because Christ thereby made Himself a guilt offering for us.
    1. God's Law reckons us as guilty because of offenses against God and others (Lv 5:17).
    2. We sinners cannot truly make amends for our offenses, to God or others (Mt 18:25). We deserve to be thrown into the prison of hell until every last cent is paid (Mt 18:34, 5:26).
    3. But the Lord loves us so much that He put Christ on the cross to pay our debt for us. As the antitype of the Old Testament "guilt offering" (v. 10), the crucified Christ made full compensation for our offenses and offered the sacrifice which has freed us from the verdict of "guilty."
- II. The Lord continues to be pleased with the cross of Christ.
  - A. As a result of His cross, Christ now has "offspring" (v. 10).
    1. Christ's "offspring" are those like Him in righteousness. He has caused them to be reckoned as righteous by bearing their iniquities (v. 11).
    2. Christ's "offspring" are also to be like Him in carrying a cross (Mt 16:24). As Christ served us though we did not deserve it, so we serve others even if they do not deserve it.
  - B. As a result of His cross, Christ has now received all glory.
    1. He has exchanged His cross for a crown. He "lives long" (v. 10); He has been raised. He has His due "portion" (v. 12); He is exalted above all, even above "the great" on earth. One day even they will bend the knee.
    2. His glory is His to share. He will divide it with the "strong" (v. 12), His offspring who firmly trust in His righteousness and are willing to carry His cross.

*Conclusion:* Because the Lord has taken pleasure in His cross, we too can find pleasure in the cross of Christ until He exchanges our crosses for crowns.

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### THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 31:7-9

October 30, 1988

This text almost seems "out of character" for the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. After promising restoration to His people in the first part of the chapter, the Lord through the prophet here urges them to seek that restoration and to rejoice in His deliverance. The problem is that in difficult times we often see nothing but the darkness of our circumstances. The answer is to look in confidence to our God Who is right there with His forgiving, sustaining love all the time. The theme of separation and restoration ought to be enriched with illustrations and applications relating to the Reformation.

*Introduction:* Many of you will recall a popular entertainer who loved to use the phrase: "How sweet it is!" In speaking to His people of old—and to us—through the prophet Jeremiah, God urges us in the opening verse of the text to exclaim:

#### HOW SWEET LOVE IS!

- I. Love is sweet when life is bleak.
  - A. There is the bleakness of separation in an earthly-physical sense.
    1. Israel was separated from its homeland through captivity.
    2. People are separated from each other today on account of college, military service, employment, disasters, illness, etc.
  - B. There is the bleakness of separation from God on account of sin.
    1. Jeremiah exposed the national sins of Israel (Jr 3:20-21).
    2. Luther felt acutely the burden of his sinfulness.
    3. The sins that so easily beset us also upset us.

*Transition:* To be alone, to feel alone, to know that you deserve aloneness is a bitter pill to swallow. How sweet it then is to receive love anyway!

- II. Love is sweet when the love is from God (v. 3).
  - A. There are many counterfeit love offers—all cheap, illusory, fleeting.

- B. God's love is inclusive (v. 8).
  - 1. He gathers the separated (Jr 3:18; 16:15; 6:22).
  - 2. He is concerned with the vulnerable (v. 8).
  - 3. He still reaches out with an open invitation (Mt 11:28; 22:9).
- C. God's love restores.
  - 1. We come repenting of our sin (v. 9a).
  - 2. His is a Father's love.
    - a. Forgiving, like the love of the prodigal son's father's (Lk 63:16).
    - b. Guiding and sustaining (v. 9b; Is 48:21; Ps 23:23).

*Conclusion:* Love is sweet if it meets the real needs of people. God's love is sweet! Directed to our hearts and lives through Jesus Christ, God's love brings us back to call Him our Father and to live confidently as His children.

Lloyd Strelow  
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### THIRD LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Daniel 12:1-13

November 6, 1988

While some expositors take these words to refer to the persecution of Antiochus, before the first advent of Christ, or the Romans at the time of the fall of Jerusalem, they are best taken to refer to the period of tribulation before the second advent of Christ.

*Introduction:* As we near the year 2000 speculation abounds about the end of the world. Many focus on the great and awesome day in itself, claiming the imminence of doomsday. "We're on the eve of destruction," runs the headline of a national Roman Catholic weekly. Television evangelist Jerry Falwell does not expect his children "to live out their full lives." Others find a fascination in assigning modern-day events to all the details of prophecies concerning the last times—consider Hal Lindsey in "The Late Great Planet Earth." Certainly such sensationalistic speculation is not what the Holy Spirit had in mind in revealing truths about the days before the end. These truths were given to lead us to sober steadfastness as we patiently await the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. This concern is clearly the emphasis in Daniel's words today as he encourages us:

#### HANG ON, PEOPLE OF GOD

- I. Hang on, people of God, inasmuch as the last days are days of great trial and tribulation (v. 1).



- A. This tribulation is unlike anything ever experienced (v. 1).
  - 1. Consider a greater tribulation than that which occurred to the people at the time of the flood or the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
  - 2. Consider God's grace in alerting us (making us wise, v. 10).
- B. This tribulation serves to purify our faith (v. 10).
  - 1. Persecution is God's polishing stone to brighten His church.
  - 2. In this purpose we see God's love (He 12:6; Re 13:19).
- II. Hang on, people of God, by going your way and doing the work God has given you.
  - A. Instead of working there is always that human tendency to get caught up in empty speculation about the details of the final events of history (v. 8).
    - 1. Such speculation is a waste of time since it is not for us to know all things (v. 8).
    - 2. Speculation sidetracks us from our work.
  - B. The greatest work we have been given to do is to "lead many to righteousness" (v. 3).
    - 1. It is Jesus who makes many righteous (Ro 5).
    - 2. We bear witness of His work and so are His instruments in leading others to righteousness (Ro 10:14).
- III. Hang on, people of God, being confident of God's ultimate victory.
  - A. Everyone whose name is found written in "the book" will be delivered (v. 1).
    - 1. This book is "the book of life" and includes all those whom God has destined to eternal life (Ph 4:3; Re 3:5; 8:8; Lk 10:25).
    - 2. There will be deliverance for the faithful who are living at the end (v. 1).
    - 3. There will be deliverance too for those who are asleep in Christ; they shall awaken to everlasting life (v. 2; John 5:28, 29).
  - B. Special honor will be given those who have led many to righteousness.
    - 1. All who believe in Christ shall receive eternal life and will be perfectly happy.
    - 2. Yet there will be a distinction in the honor given to each of the faithful (1 Cor 15:41, 42).

*Conclusion:* Reminders of the last day should not make us come unglued, but cause us to hang on more tightly and move us to greater earnestness in our faith. May the Holy Spirit accomplish this goal in us through the words of Daniel which we have heard today.

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**SECOND LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR**

Daniel 7:9-10

November 13, 1988

The context of this pericope is Daniel's vision of four great beasts coming from the sea. The beasts correspond to four earthly kingdoms. While there has been some debate over the exact identity of these four kingdoms, the main point of Daniel 7 and the text is that God is the ultimate judge of all earthly rulers. He has ultimate control over all political forces. This point should be applied to God's people today in two ways. Christians need to know that God is in control of their lives and that He is in control of all world events, so that His kingdom does not depend on earthly efforts, either individual or national.

*Introduction:* The best known and most competent judges of our judicial system are not perfect. They do not always judge fairly. Often they do not have all the facts. They have a tremendous backlog. They give verdicts which, even if fair, never really change people very much. Thankfully we have a Judge who rises above all the shortcomings of earthly judges.

**GOD IS THE ULTIMATE JUDGE**

- I. God is the ultimate judge because He judges all.
  - A. He is the "Ancient of Days."
    - 1. He has always existed.
    - 2. So he knows all things and all people.
  - B. All people will stand before Him on the last day (v. 10).
  - C. No one is free from God's observation and control.
    - 1. Whether these be great world leaders.
      - a. In the past, the leaders of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.
      - b. In the present, the leaders of Libya, Central America, Russia and America.
    - 2. Or the smallest child.

*Transition:* God not only judges all people but He judges them fairly.

- II. God is the ultimate judge because He judges fairly.
  - A. His appearance in Daniel's vision symbolizes His perfect purity.
    - 1. His snow white garments.
    - 2. His pure wool hair.
    - 3. Flames and burning fire.
  - B. The books reveal everything.

1. No circumstance is hidden.
  2. No excuse is allowed.
  3. No grievance goes unanswered.
- C. So all His verdicts are based on all the facts.

*Transition:* Such universal righteous judgment would mean condemnation except that God judges graciously.

### III. God is the ultimate judge because He judges graciously.

- A. He looks at us through Christ (vv. 13-14).
  1. Who has conquered all the forces of evil.
  2. Who has redeemed all people.
  3. Who forgives all that "the books" reveal.
- B. His judgment makes us His.
  1. In His Son.
  2. Through His Word.
  3. To all eternity.

*Conclusion:* Probably the best known judge in America today is Judge Wapner. He is fair-minded, seems to judge an endless array of cases and is compassionate. But even this useful man is nothing compared to God, our ultimate Judge. He judges all, He judges fairly, He judges graciously.

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## LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Isaiah 51:4-6

November 20, 1988

This pericope is a prophecy of the new testament and the gracious rule of God's Servant, the Messiah, in all who believe. The key idea is expressed in the words "justice," "righteousness" and "salvation." The *mishpat* ("justice") of verse 4 is "a judicial pronouncement, a judge's verdict" and here refers to the conferral of forgiveness; *tsedeq* ("righteousness") and *yeshu'a* ("salvation") connote the forensic pardon of God and its renewing strength. The *torah* of verse 4 is not Law as opposed to Gospel, but rather instruction. The idea is that God has a new proclamation of justice, righteousness and salvation. God's people of old anticipated with faith the establishment of Christ's gracious rule. They are cautioned against

any attachment to this world as they wait for the coming of justice, righteousness and salvation. God's people today believe that Jesus is the fulfilment of past hopes and the source of our confidence in God's gracious rule today. For homiletical purposes "grace" is probably the best word to capture the meanings of all three words to which we have made special reference.

*Introduction:* Whenever things no longer seem to be going right, we tend to wish that something would happen to change it all. The favorite team is losing in the final seconds and we say, "Oh, if only we could have ten more minutes on the clock." We try to figure the budget and conclude with, "If only we had two hundred more dollars or another paycheck." The marriage is floundering, or we have lost a job, or the children fail to honor us and we say, "If only someone would change it all." God seems far away and distant and we pray, "If only..." Isaiah brings us the great news that our "if only's" have been answered by our God, who comes to us with grace.

### GOD COMES TO US WITH GRACE

- I. Grace is needed.
  - A. Because we are sinful mortals (v. 6).
    1. Who have offended God (50:1).
    2. Who deserve His punishment (50:11).
  - B. Because no other help is apparent (v. 6).
    1. Neither other gods.
    2. Nor humanity.
- II. Grace is attractive.
  - A. Only to those who see their need (v. 6).
  - B. To people from all nations (vv. 4, 5).
  - C. Because God comes down to us (v. 4).
    1. As a lowly man.
    2. Living among us.
    3. Never repelling us.
  - D. Because grace requires no work on our part (vv. 4-6).
    1. God takes the initiative.
    2. God assumes all the responsibility.
      - a. No one can say, "He does His part if I do mine."
      - b. No one can say, "He saves me when I'm ready."
- III. Grace is effective (it works).
  - A. Its source is God.
    1. In Christ He is no longer angry.
      - a. Darkness is a figure of anger.
      - b. God provides light.
    2. He loves us.
    3. He pronounces us forgiven for Christ's sake.

- a. Justice.
- b. Righteousness.
- B. It changes us.
  - 1. We are renewed in Christ (salvation).
  - 2. We no longer want to live for ourselves.

*Conclusion:* Grace is a wonderful gift of God. Through it He intervenes in our lives. Grace in Christ is needed, attractive and effective. Because of Christ and His grace, "if only" is never something we need to say as far as our relationship with God and eternal life are concerned.

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