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Homiletical Studies

Epistle Series B

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

February 17, 1991

Romans 8:31-39

Introduction: This may not be the shortest sermon that you have ever heard, but it may have the shortest text—one little word from today's epistle—"if." For many, life revolves around that little word "if." Recently one woman told me seriously, "*If I win at the racetrack today, I'll give half to the church.*" We had a little talk about that particular "if," but it shows how our many "ifs" can go either way. Winning or losing, success or failure may hinge on it. You may win your golf game *if* you make the putt, your tennis game *if* you make the point. Students pass *if* they study. The doctor tells you that your health will be fine *if* you lose some weight, *if* you quit smoking.

How many times do we hear "if only"! You are familiar with them: "*If only I knew then what I know now.*" "*If only I had more money.*" "*If only I had listened.*" Many people continue this "iffy" reasoning in their relationships with God. They confront God with this word: "*If you get me out of this problem, I'll dedicate my life to you.*" "*If you make me rich, then I'll give to the church.*" But things do not work in this way. We cannot make deals with God. We must understand that St. Paul's statement in the text is a sure and certain fact, not conditional, when he says:

IF

- I. If God were not for us, our future would be conditional.
 - A. Many people hope to be forgiven *if* they are good enough.
 1. In verse 17 Paul reminds us that the entire creation was subjected to frustration as a result of man's sin. God told Adam that, *if* he disobeyed, he would die. He sinned and so received the death sentence. Death is still our sentence today (Romans 6:23).
 2. Death is still the enemy, no matter how many "ifs" of diet and exercise we follow. The best proven of all scientific laws, the law of increasing entropy, describes the tendency in all natural systems toward disorganization and so death. We are born in sin with a death sentence. There is no hope in seeing *if* I can be good enough.

- B. God did, to be sure, make a covenant with His people.
1. "Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then you will be My treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). This covenant had an "if-then" aspect. Therefore, with the promise came a warning: "If you ever forget, you will be destroyed" (Deuteronomy 8:19). This covenant taught both God's absolute trustworthiness and man's weakness. The death sentence remained *if* people forgot.
 2. Scripture records how time after time God's people forgot. Our history today shows how we forget. But Scripture also records how God did not forget His people, that God is for us. He is faithful to His promises.
- II. "If God is for us" (verse 31), however, assumes a certain fact.
- A. God promised a Savior.
1. Scripture shows that God keeps the promises He makes. The evidence of Scripture shows that what God has done seals what He will do. God has already done the most infinitely difficult and costly thing He could possibly do. He did not spare even His own Son (verse 32). In the blood of Jesus He made a testament in favor of "us all" (verse 32). It is based on all that God has already done; it is not conditional on what we do.
 2. He effected forgiveness while we were still enemies (Romans 5:10). It is easy to love a beautiful baby that needs care. But we were not attractive at all. Outside of His eyes of love we appear more like repulsive maggots than beautiful babies. But He gave us the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus (6:23).
- B. "What, then, shall we say in response to salvation?"
1. Now that we have a new relationship we can cry, "Abba, Father" (verse 15). There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (8:1). *If* we are in Him, all His merits are credited to us as well. There is nothing "iffy" about it.
 2. "If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above" (Colossians 3:1). Here "if" equals a fact: you are risen with Christ.

Conclusion: "If"—your salvation hinges on that little word. What God has done in Jesus Christ now seals what He will do for you. *If* God is for you, then nothing in all His creation can separate you from His love. He *is* for you.

Ronald M. Baker
Evanston, Wyoming

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

February 24, 1991

Romans 5:1-11

Introduction: "Hey boss, can I have Friday off?" "Maybe." "Mom, can I spend the night at Alisha's?" "We'll see." "Do you want to go out to dinner tonight?" "Oh, I don't know." As we all know, life is filled with uncertainties. Answers such as "Maybe" and "We'll see" and "I don't know" are as common as smog in Los Angeles. The fact of the matter is that life itself is very uncertain. How do you know your job will still be waiting for you tomorrow? How do you know your home will still be standing? How do you even know that your heart will still be pumping and your brain still functioning? The truth is that you do not know, and neither does anyone else. Life truly is uncertain. We do not know what tomorrow will bring (James 4:13-15). But in today's text the Apostle Paul speaks, not of that which is uncertain, but rather of that which is certain. In clear and certain words he reminds us:

CHRIST CREATES CERTAINTY

- I. About trials and sufferings.
 - A. Trials and sufferings tend to make the people of this world more uncertain about their standing with God.
 - 1. They view them as signs of God being angry with them.
 - 2. They consider them to be a punishment for their sin.
 - 3. They are driven further away from God and His grace.
 - B. Because of Christ we can face trials and sufferings with absolute certainty.
 - 1. The anger and wrath of God fell upon Christ.
 - 2. The punishment for our sin was borne by Him.
 - 3. Through faith in Him we know that we are at peace with God.
 - C. Trials and sufferings benefit us in our walk with God.
 - 1. They produce in us perseverance.
 - 2. They produce in us character.
 - 3. They produce in us hope.
 - D. In Christ we can even rejoice in our trials and sufferings.
- II. About what will happen when we die.
 - A. The people of this world are fearful and uncertain about death.
 - 1. They know that they have committed sin.
 - 2. They try to be good, but wonder if they have been good enough.

3. At best they “hope” to make it into heaven.
- B. Because of Christ we can face death with absolute certainty.
 1. We know that salvation is God’s doing and not our own.
 2. We know that, while we were in sin and enemies of God, Christ died in our behalf.
 3. We know that, if God was willing to reconcile us to Himself through the death of His Son, He will most certainly see us through to our eternal glory.
- C. In Christ we can even rejoice in the death of ourselves and of fellow-Christians.

Conclusion: Much of life is about as certain as receiving a check in the mail from Ed McMahon. But as believers in Jesus Christ we are unique. For in us Christ creates certainty. He creates certainty in life, promising to be there even in our trials and sufferings, producing in us perseverance, character, and hope. He creates certainty in death, for He once died, taking the sting, the power, and the fear out of death. You can go forth into a world of uncertainty, knowing that the crucified and risen Christ goes with you and that, in life and in death, Christ creates certainty.

Mark W. Demel
Carson City, Nevada

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

March 3, 1991

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Introduction: “Why should we have a crucifix on the altar? Why should we want to look at that every Sunday instead of a nice, clean cross?” While these may not be the exact words in which the question would be phrased, the thoughts are common enough among us. Why do we gaze upon the image of a dying man every time we gather for worship? For many, the thought of God becoming a real man is repulsive. The incarnation simply does not resonate with the reality that they have created for themselves. A real God who has become a real man is not so easily manipulated; His words are more than just religious theory. In the crucifix we see all the foolishness of mankind and all the wisdom of God. It is in the cross adorned with a corpus that we see the stumbling block—the trigger to the trap—that exposes the man who considers himself wiser than God. It is in the cross adorned with a corpus, however, that we see the salvation of us all.

OUR FOOLISHNESS, GOD'S WISDOM

- I. We seek to be saved by works that fail.
 - A. We try to live on the highest level of life in order to placate our consciences.
 - B. We think that if we improve our station in life—socially, intellectually, or morally (in terms of some false piety)—we are holier.
- II. Christ's simple, yet profound work is effective for us all.
 - A. Christ suffered the lowliest death in order to reconcile us all to God.
 - B. Our social, intellectual, or "spiritual" level is not important because Christ became the lowest of all in order to save all.
- III. We seek to be argued into believing.
 - A. We want to spiritualize Christ so that God becomes theoretical, not real.
 - B. We look to the philosophy of the Jew, the Greek, and the Oriental for answers to our dilemma.
- IV. God does not argue with us; He established His relationship with us historically, on the cross.
 - A. Jesus Christ is God incarnate; He is real and His work is effective.
 - B. The foolish "wisdom" of man as epitomized by the Jew and the Greek is ended by the wisdom of Christ's presence on the cross and in His catholic church.
- V. We seek a god who reveals glorious might and power.
 - A. We expect God to submit to our criteria of what is "glorious" and "miraculous."
 - B. Revelation does not belong to the world, but to God alone; we do not decide on the form of God's revelation.
- VI. In Jesus Christ crucified we see the revelation of God.
 - A. The most glorious miracle of salvation is found in the humiliation of the cross.
 - B. Jesus Christ suffering on the cross for our sins is the revelation of our loving, merciful God.

Conclusion: Man's foolish contempt of the crucifixion is not the fault of God's choosing to suffer for man. On the contrary, God revealed Himself in just that way so that the lowly fools that we are might be saved by the lowly death of Christ. As we look to the altar we see God's glorious acts of the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. When we look just below that beautiful crucifix, we see God's presence yet again. For on this day our crucified and risen Lord graces this table with His presence in the blessed sacrament. Today we feast on His holy body and precious blood which were given once

as a sacrifice for us and which are now given as a gift to us. Thanks be to our most wise God!

Douglas H. Spittel
Arnold, Pennsylvania

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 10, 1991

Ephesians 2:4-10

This beautiful and powerful passage is one of the clearest biblical helps to our understanding of God's grace freely earned and given through Jesus Christ, as verses 7-8 teach us. Major emphasis and clarity must be given to these words: "dead," "alive," "by grace," "workmanship." What a powerful contrast this passage draws between our nature under "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" and being made alive in Christ Jesus.

Introduction: The films of today tell their story in living color with all the graphic details of the "realities" of life, often portraying all that is wrong in the world as exciting and compelling, the glories of life in the "fast lane." St. Paul reveals the reality of life too—as a tragedy of hopelessness when we are outside of God's mighty plan of grace.

GOD'S MIGHTY PLAN

- I. God's plan in the beginning: We frustrated it.
 - A. We find ourselves in a world of transgressions and sins (verse 1).
 - B. The world follows its own ways, the "ruler of this world," and the spirit of disobedience (verse 2).
 - C. The personal story common to us all is the "gratifying of our cravings" (verse 3).
 - D. The result is spiritual death, an eternal and painful separation from God (verses 1, 3b).
- II. God's plan in Christ: He came to redeem us.
 - A. God made us alive in Christ. The link that ties us to this new life in Christ is faith, freely given us by God's mercy and grace (verse 4).
 - B. He saved us from eternal death, raised us up, and set us at His side (Galatians 2:20).

- C. All of His plan was for us and centered in Christ, the Savior of the world (verse 8).
 - D. All men are part of this universal plan of redemption, even as all of us are born into sin (verse 3).
- III. God's plan in us: We are His workmanship.
- A. Now we are no longer motivated (as new men) by the threatening finger of the law.
 - B. Rather we boast in our freedom in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-5; 2:8-9).
 - C. We are made complete in order to participate in the proclamation of Christ as Lord of the nations (verse 10).
 - D. We are given plans and good works which begin at home, with family and friends, and then move beyond as we live out God's mighty plan of service in us.

Conclusion: We do not need to see or believe in a world of "make-believe," a man-designed world that leads to spiritual emptiness. Rather God's plan of victory over sin and death in Jesus Christ is His plan for each of us, for we are His workmanship.

Daniel J. Vogel
Miami, Florida

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 17, 1991

Hebrews 5:7-9

The lessons are appropriate for a Sunday so near to Easter. They deal with anticipation of blessings and glory that is to come. They speak of the cross that must be borne before the crown of victory can be worn. As part of the festival half of the church year, the lessons help us to focus on different facets of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Book of Hebrews shows the superior nature of the Lord Jesus Christ and His way of salvation. The epistle of the day reflects the overall thematic thrust of the book very well.

Introduction: Today's sermon theme attempts to put into words at least one aspect of the significance of the actions of Jesus described in the text. Many people have felt disillusioned by religious leaders who fail to live according to the principles that they proclaim. Eyes that focus on these fallen preachers need to be redirected to Jesus Himself. Here they will not be disappointed because Jesus has impeccable integrity and can stand the closest scrutiny. Jesus is

worthy of our allegiance. He asks nothing of us that He has not undergone Himself, and, indeed, He asks much less. He says:

I PRACTICE WHAT I PREACH

- I. Jesus is the perfect model of obedience.
 - A. Jesus became flesh to live the perfect life that God's law demands.
 - 1. He was subjected to the temptations that we experience (Hebrews 4:15).
 - a. He does not ask us to do anything that He did not do Himself.
 - b. He knows exactly what we are experiencing (Hebrews 2:18).
 - c. He is worthy of our allegiance to Him as our Lord (Revelation 5:9).
 - 2. He never gave in to sin (1 John 3:5).
 - 3. He was obedient to God even to the point of a tortured death (Philippians 2:8).
 - B. Jesus set aside the use of His own power as God and became dependent.
 - 1. Jesus prayed fervently to God and trusted Him.
 - 2. He followed the plan of God even when it was difficult.
- II. Jesus' sacrifice has won our salvation.
 - A. He took our place.
 - 1. He lived the perfect life that we should have lived.
 - 2. His death paid the penalty for our sins that we could never have paid.
 - B. Salvation is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Jesus rendered the perfect sacrifice in an obedience that was perfect and perfecting.
 - 2. He dispenses it to those who are empowered to the obedience of faith.

Conclusion: Jesus has always done what He said He would do and will surely do what He says that He will do in the future. His creeds are all backed up by His deeds. He is deserving of our submission to His authority in our lives. He loves us more than we love ourselves, knows us better than we know ourselves, and wants better things for us than we would ask for ourselves. He likewise works in us the ability to practice what He preaches.

Robert A. Dargatz
Irvine, California

THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT PALM SUNDAY

March 24, 1991

Philippians 2:5-11

The epistle gives shape to the ancient Palm Sunday collect: "Almighty and everlasting God. . .who didst send Thy Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death on the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility. . .". There is humiliation and exaltation for the king who rides into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday joins in a perfect union both passion and praise. Thus the connections with the "Palm Sunday Procession with Palms" (see *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, pp. 35-38) are obvious. In this regard we also take note of the hymn of the day, "Ride On, Ride On, in Majesty" (*LW*, 105).

The exegetical literature on this pericope is both vast and complex. Several monographs have been written on this so-called *Carmen Christi*. For helpful treatments of the text the preacher is directed to Ralph P. Martin's *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge, 1976) and *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians* by G.F. Hawthorne (Waco, 1983). Special attention should be paid to the translation of *harpagmon* in verse 6, since an incorrect translation leads to splitting apart the two natures in Christ (as occurs in the RSV at this point). Jesus does not grab for that which He already possesses. We note the clear movement from humiliation to exaltation in the text, with the cross itself being the axis (verse 8).

Introduction: The road to Jerusalem is the royal highway; it is also the way of the cross. Palm Sunday's parade culminates in the passion of the king of Israel. Praise and passion go together, for the one who is acclaimed with palms and paeans of praise is the blessed king of whom Zechariah spoke (9:9-10), who comes to die for the world's salvation.

IN PRAISE OF THE KING

- I. He is the king who comes to us as true man.
 - A. Jesus does not grab at equality with God.
 - 1. He already possesses equality with God, as we confess in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in. . .the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God."

2. The Creed continues to confess that “for us men and our salvation” He “came down from heaven. . . and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.”
 3. The Lord Christ’s equality with God was hidden in His flesh.
- B. Jesus came as a servant.
1. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
 2. His whole life is an illustration of this servanthood.
- II. Our king humbled Himself and became obedient to death.
- A. Human beings *must* obey the call of death.
1. When death comes calling, we cannot refuse.
 2. Our sin leaves us with no other options. Die we must.
- B. Christ Jesus did not have to die.
1. One with the Father from all eternity, He was and is life.
 2. He willingly embraces death—the death we earned—for us.
 3. He takes no detours. He does not dodge death. The parade of Palm Sunday is a parade with a purpose; the destination is Calvary.
- C. Our obedient King is exalted and enthroned by God.
1. This exaltation occurred not in spite of the cross, but through the cross.
 2. In fact, the Gospel of John speaks of our blessed Lord’s suffering as the hour of His glory.
- III. The humble king is received in the humility of faith.
- A. The Lord Jesus came in utter humility.
1. He was born in the poverty of Bethlehem’s stable.
 2. He rides to His death on a donkey, the humble beast of burden.
- B. He will be acknowledged as the Lord. Finally, every knee will bow at His name.
1. For unbelief, it will be a bowing down in utter and unending shame.
 2. For faith, it will be the glad recognition that this crucified king is the source of unending joy.

Conclusion: In the Holy Scriptures palms are a symbol of victory. In the Book of Revelation we read of a great multitude that no one could count from every land and language. They are gathered with palm branches in their hands as they praise the lamb of salvation, singing: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the lamb.” We sing this song on this Palm Sunday, too. For the Lord Jesus Christ, the king of kings, came to this planet to suffer and die for us, to achieve our salvation. Risen from the dead, He gives us

the fruits of His victory with His body and blood. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

John T. Pless
Minneapolis, Minnesota

EASTER SUNDAY THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

March 31, 1991

1 Corinthians 15:19-28

Pastor: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen, indeed.

Introduction: So the people of God have greeted one another at Eastertime since the earliest centuries of the New Testament era. The words of the ancient greeting proclaim the core of the great Easter news, the radiant New Testament gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the world's Savior from sin, after His redemptive death on Calvary on the first Good Friday gloriously burst the bonds of the death that held Him and triumphed over the grave that shut in His body by rising from the dead on Easter Sunday to enter into a condition of endless life.

Now the marvel of Jesus' resurrection is not simply this, that it meant for Him the utter defeat of death in His own being. Much more—the marvel of the resurrection is that it also opened up the total conquest of death and the grave to all men of our mortal race. For this is the assurance that the risen Christ Himself offers to every human being: "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). On this Easter morning we rejoice anew in this magnificent gospel truth and glorify the risen Christ as the guarantor of our resurrection. Saint Paul treats this mighty verity in today's text:

THE RISEN CHRIST—GUARANTOR OF OUR RESURRECTION

- I. Christ rose triumphantly from the dead.
 - A. The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Christians to eternal life are pivotal companion teachings of the Scriptures. Earlier in this great resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians 15) Paul speaks of some members of the Corinthian church who, while accepting Christ's resurrec-

tion, held that there would be no resurrection from the dead for the people of God. They probably had embraced the then current Greek prejudice against the material as the seat of evil and trouble in the world and man. The idea of man's spirit, freed from the prison-house of the body at physical death, then returning in the process of resurrection to that body was repugnant to them.

- B. Paul argues (in the previous context) that, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ did not rise. He draws a series of conclusions from the latter observation, the central one being that then "you are still in your sins" (verse 17). If this is the case, then we upon death, like Christians who have died before us, shall perish, that is, be damned forever in hell.
1. Death—physical, spiritual, eternal—came into the world because of sin. All people are born into the world spiritually dead because of original sin (God regards all as having sinned in Adam [Romans 5:12] and punishes all accordingly) and therefore subject to physical mortality and to everlasting death in hell (verses 21a, 22a). So it was with you and me.
 2. God sent Christ, the second Adam, to make full atonement for the sins of humanity, that all who believe in Him might have forgiveness, life, and salvation (verses 21b, 22b). The Father's raising of Jesus from the dead was absolutely necessary to show that the latter's redemption was sufficient for the satisfaction of the divine justice and that through faith men might obtain eternal salvation. Without the resurrection of Jesus we should have no assurance that the debt of sin is fully paid; there would be no *risen* Christ, who is the only object of saving faith and who with the Father justifies us believers.
 3. In view of the preceding, the inference follows: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (verse 19). How so? Unbelievers are to be pitied, too, are they not? Those Corinthians who denied the resurrection of God's people probably thought of believers' salvation as consisting in the continuing life of the spirit after physical death. But, while there will indeed be such a continuation, there would be no life even for the believer's spirit after physical death if Christ had not risen and demonstrated the sufficiency of His redemptive sacrifice. How pitiful, then, to harbor a (deceptive) hope of everlasting life—and adjust behavior on earth accordingly—only at death to find this an illusive dream and to be damned! Unbelievers at least cherish no deceptive hope.

-
- C. But now Paul sweeps away all these negative deductions with his triumphant declaration: "But now Christ is risen from the dead!" (verse 20a). He was seen alive by many witnesses. There were five resurrection appearances on Easter Sunday alone, and additional appearances during the ensuing forty days. With Christ alive from the dead, redemption is complete. The gift of God is eternal life for us and all believers. Hallelujah!
- II. He became the firstfruits of all who die in faith.
- A. Paul says that Jesus "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (verse 20b), that is, those who have died in the faith. (The apostle is speaking of believers only in this pericope.) The reference to firstfruits calls to mind a great harvest and the Levitical requirement of Israelites that they bring the first sheaf reaped from the harvest to the priest for consecration to the Lord (Leviticus 23:10). There could be no firstfruits unless there were an entire harvest ready to be reaped. Just so, when the risen Christ is called a firstfruits of believers who have died, the certainty is that there will be a whole harvest of believers ready for resurrection at the world's end. The interval of time does not count with God; the great harvest of believers is already present to Him.
- B. At the end the dead in Christ will rise with fully restored and glorified bodies (1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:21). Following the final judgment we shall enter into the eternal joy prepared for us by God.
- C. Paul's combining the fact of Christ's resurrection with that of the believers leads him (in verses 24-28) to think of other great events pertaining to the consummation. First, he points to the exalted Christ's rule over all things, over the forces of nature and the universe and over the affairs of men and nations throughout the period of New Testament history. This rule He conducts in the interest of us His people, the church, to keep us safe from spiritual harm and bring us to heavenly glory. One may compare Ephesians 1:20-23.
- D. When the last enemy, death, is destroyed, so that with the resurrection of believers it shall no longer even exist, then Christ according to His human nature will subject Himself to the Father (verse 28), so that the Triune God may reign conjointly and supremely over us in all eternity. (Verse 28 does not teach a subordination of the Second Person, according to His divine nature, to the First Person of the Trinity.)
- E. Therefore, we are strengthened and comfort one another with these gospel assurances: Have no fear of your death (Hebrews 2:14-15; Psalm 23:4; Job 19:25-27). Praise the Triune God for

the hope of the resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:38).

Walter A. Maier

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 7, 1991

Acts 3:13-15, 17-26

Many parishes have adopted the *Lutheran Worship Lectionary*, based upon the New International Version of the Bible. The frequent criticisms of Reformed theology within the NIV are particularly valid in this pericope. Verse 21 contains the phrase *hon dei ouranon men dexasthai*, translated by the NIV as "he must remain in heaven." This translation, reflecting Reformed Christology, ought to be translated as either "who must receive heaven" (Luther, Chemnitz) or "whom heaven must receive" (KJV, RSV, NASB, GWN). Both are grammatically possible (cf. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 142-143); the former is reflected in the Formula of Concord (VII:119). The meaning is not, as indicated by the NIV, "that Christ must be so taken in or circumscribed or comprehended by or in heaven that He in no way can or wills to be with us on earth with His human nature" (FC VII). Preachers should take care in clarifying the NIV lectionary lest false christological and subsequently false sacramental conclusions be drawn.

Introduction: Holy days have a way of bringing renewal to the life of God's people. Last Sunday, the holiest day of all, Easter, reminded us of the greatest renewal of all—the renewal of life through an open and empty tomb. But that was last Sunday; today, a whole week has passed and things have gone back to normal. Children are at school, parents are at work, the world has picked up right where it left off before Easter. Is that all there is to Easter—a busy celebration for a day with a joyous message that disappears in the noise of day-to-day life? Or does Easter continue to shout over the roar of the world:

ALLELUIA! EASTER NEVER ENDS!

- I. Alleluia! Life is victorious over death!
 - A. Death appears to be undefeatable.

1. So it seemed to those who demanded the death of Jesus (verses 13-15).
 2. So it seemed to Thomas, the "doubting" disciple (John 20:19-31).
 3. So it seems to all mortals who stand at the grave and cannot see beyond to Easter.
- B. Easter defeats the undefeatable.
1. Peter, that former coward who denied his Lord, announces to a crowd the message of life in Jesus, whom they crucified but "whom God has raised from the dead" (verse 15).
 2. Where is the power of death over Jesus? It is no more. Where is the power of death over the Christian? It is no more, having been destroyed by the water of baptism (Romans 6:4).
 3. A young widower, standing over the fresh grave of his beloved wife, could confess that the grave is not the end: "She's just renting space." Because of Easter, life has defeated the undefeatable enemy, death. Alleluia! Easter never ends!
- II. Alleluia! Forgiveness has risen over condemnation!
- A. Condemnation seems irreversible.
1. We cannot avoid the consequences of sin. Not even ignorance excuses us (verse 17).
 2. Nor can we avoid the weight of our guilt; the law stands ever accusing us.
 3. What guilt have you borne? What dark spot within your heart do you keep closed to all people? Is there some part of you that seems too much even for God to love and restore?
- B. Easter reverses the irreversible.
1. God made a promise through the holy prophets of old (verse 18), the promise of the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In Jesus of Nazareth that promise was fulfilled.
 2. Now the message is proclaimed: "Repent" (verse 19). Times of refreshing have come. Hear the word of absolution. Receive the blessed sacrament, where Christ, possessing all of heaven, comes to His people on earth with His body and blood (verse 21).
 3. New life is yours. Sin's power is forever broken. Alleluia! Easter never ends!
- III. Alleluia! A new day has dawned!
- A. That new day is not seen with our eyes.
1. The prophets spoke of a new day (verses 21-25).
 2. In that day, God's salvation would go out to all people—including us (cf. introit).

3. Though hidden by the present age, that day has come and shines in the hearts of the redeemed of God, His Easter people (cf. collect, gradual).
- B. Easter reveals the reality of our new day.
 1. Easter assures us that there is more to reality than that which meets the eye. Death, the great enemy, is defeated. Forgiveness removes all condemnation.
 2. Turned to God by word and sacrament, we live His life.
 3. Turned to God by word and sacrament, we share in the power of His death and resurrection.

Conclusion: It is true that the festival of Easter is over—if we limit it to one day a year. But thanks be to God—Easter never ends! Come to His table. Here is life; here is forgiveness; here is Easter.

Daniel L. Gard

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 14, 1991

Acts 4:8-12

All three lessons assigned to this Sunday prevent us from forgetting the glorious news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is obvious that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost continued to be manifest in the days, months, and years which followed. Peter and John were on their way to the temple at an hour of worship and sacrifice when they met a crippled man in the outer court. "Silver and gold we do not have," said Peter, "but what we have, we give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, stand and walk!" He did! He even did a joyous dance of liberation with limbs that could not move before. It was late in the day; the religious elite, the Sadducees, who controlled the temple and its priesthood, had God's men thrown into jail for the night. It is the following morning when the prisoners stand before the accusers and the judges. They are asked, "What do you mean by speaking in the name of Jesus and saying that He was raised from the dead? How dare you say that a crippled man was made whole by Jesus' name?" The Sadducees had little use for a resurrection or a personal Messiah. It is at this point that Peter truly stands as a rock and addresses that august assembly of the religious left and makes a powerful confession concerning the power of Christ and His resurrection.

The Book of Acts is a natural continuation of Luke's gospel. In the first chapters of Acts those who were apostles chosen by the Lord in

His state of humiliation are in the forefront. Later on, new names appear: Paul, Silas, Philip, Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla. They carry on the triumphant procession of those bearing the gospel to the world.

At this juncture in the passing parade of saints Peter is the object of Christ's promise, in Luke 12:12, of the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. He speaks boldly before the assembly of religious authorities concerning the name of Jesus. He makes no apologies for his personal faith in Christ and challenges his audience to examine honestly and carefully what is involved in that "name which is above every name."

Introduction: It is interesting to look at the derivation of names. The meanings of some names are obvious—Smith referring to one who works as a blacksmith, Tinker referring to one who fixes things mechanical, Baker referring to one who bakes bread. [At this point one might delve into the meaning of his own personal name.] As interesting as it may be to find the meaning of names, there is one name which has much more importance and meaning than any other—the name of Jesus Christ. When we think of that name, we should ask ourselves this question:

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

- I. In the name of Jesus there is power and compassion.
 - A. Peter and John healed a cripple by the power of Jesus' name. It is for this reason that Peter makes a bold defense before the Sanhedrin (verses 8-10a).
 - B. The name of Jesus is still a name of power. We no longer perform miracles such as Peter and John performed at the temple gate; nevertheless, we should understand that "the arm of the Lord is not shortened." He is still the author of great and wonderful deeds in the lives of His people. [Here one might illustrate with events in one's ministry where God worked in the lives of people—through word and sacrament.]
- II. In the name of Jesus there is offense.
 - A. The offense to the "elders" of Israel was that the one whom they rejected was now being preached. It was stated boldly that He had risen from the dead. This teaching was particularly offensive to the Sadducees (verses 10b-11).
 - B. While statistics and polls indicate that people are aware of Jesus Christ, He still remains a rock of offense to those who stumble and fumble for a salvation effected by human achievement and not by grace.
- III. In the name of Jesus there is salvation.

- A. Christ stated in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me." Peter repeated the same principle before the high council of the Jews: "There is one name given whereby people are to be saved"—the name of Jesus. The Sadducees denied His power and compassion; they rejected the cornerstone of salvation. But Christ is still the wisdom and power of God that brings salvation.
- B. In this world salvation is promised in a great variety of ways, from gurus to gross acts of demonism, from "I'm o.k., you're o.k." philosophy through "looking out for number one" to the fraudulent claims of a "new age" religion which says we are all gods and can work out our own salvation. It is a relief to know there is still one name which means salvation—Jesus Christ!

Conclusion: In 1989 the French observed the two hundredth anniversary of their revolution. An instrument of death which was the product of this revolution was the guillotine. That clever device permitted a razor-sharp blade of steel to descend upon a victim's neck and forthwith dispatch him to eternity. The guillotine was the invention of a medical doctor by that name. Dr. Guillotine would have preferred that his name be remembered not for death, but for life. But his name is now, in fact, associated with death. In contrast, the name of Jesus Christ implies eternal life. Jesus is not a name of death, but of life and salvation. What is in a name? In the name of Jesus Christ there is power and compassion. In His name there is offense only to those who despise God's grace. In the name of Jesus Christ there is the salvation of a world alienated and separated from God. Do you know what is in a name? In the name of Jesus there is everything we need.

Edmond E. Aho
Chula Vista, California

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 21, 1991

Acts 4:23-33

The references to the servant of God in verses 27 and 30 remind us of the "Suffering Servant" passages in Isaiah. Such references show us just how aware the early church was that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. In verse 33 we see that the proclamation of the resurrection was paramount to the apostles. Do we ever preach Christ

crucified without preaching the risen Christ? A Christ-centered sermon must be centered on the *risen* Christ.

Introduction: Can you fight city hall? Does a believer in Jesus want to fight city hall? How do you react when you get hassled for proclaiming Jesus' atoning cross and empty tomb? What do you do when the law of the land sanctions the murder of four thousand unborn Americans every day? Today the Holy Spirit shows us the answer to the questions in our Christian walk:

REMEMBER WHO IS IN CHARGE

- I. The Creator was in charge when Peter and John confronted "city hall" (Acts 4:1-24).
 - A. Peter and John were up against the most authoritative people in Israel.
 - B. Equally powerful forces confront faithful disciples of Jesus today.
 - C. Remembering who made heaven and earth reminds us who is in charge of local governments.
- II. God the Father was in charge when the nations raged against His Son Jesus (Acts 4:25-28).
 - A. The authorities of the whole world raged against Jesus and killed Him.
 - B. Nations, even the United States government, still rage against Jesus' followers.
 - C. Remembering whose will and power decided the events of Holy Week long before they transpired reminds us who is in charge of all which happens everywhere in this world.
- III. The Lord is in charge when we need boldness (Acts 4:29-31).
 - A. The early church never had an attitude of "fighting city hall." Rather their sole purpose was to speak God's word with boldness in all settings.
 - B. We want to remember continually who gave us our Great Commission.
 - C. The Lord is still quite able to shake us up when we need it and to support us.
- IV. The Holy Spirit is in charge, making us one in purpose (Acts 4:32-33).
 - A. The early disciples' oneness in heart and soul showed itself in their stewardship of material possessions and in the focus of their testimony.
 - B. He who is in charge has made us one. Now we pray that He may help us show this oneness in everyday witness and living.

Conclusion: Often we cry out: "O God, why?" This really is not an appropriate question for people living in the light of the open tomb. We do better when we remember who is in charge and then pray: "And now, Lord, see how they are threatening us, and grant that Your servants may continue to speak Your Word with all boldness, as You stretch out Your hand to heal and work miraculous signs and wonderful proofs by Your holy servant Jesus" (verses 29-30; GWN).

Warren E. Messmann
Fort Wayne, Indiana

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 28, 1991

Acts 8:26-40

This is a powerful pericope in reference to evangelism since it shows the early church at work carrying out the Great Commission in a cross-cultural way by employing the means of grace under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As is typical in the Book of Acts when the gospel is about to cross an important cultural barrier, God Himself sets the process in motion (cf. Acts 2; 16:9-10) but uses men to carry out the work, in this case Philip, introduced earlier as Stephen's associate (Acts 6:5) and as God's agent in bringing the word to Samaria (Acts 8:5-13). Later (Acts 21:8 ff.) he appears again as Paul's host in Caesarea upon the latter's final journey to Jerusalem. The Ethiopian eunuch, though unnamed, has a place of major significance in the story of the church, since he is the first Gentile Christian. Although not a pagan but rather a Jewish proselyte, he does represent another culture and race, serves a pagan queen, is physically maimed, and so, to our eyes, seems an unlikely candidate for conversion—but not to the Lord, who sends Philip to tell him the gospel. Significant, too, is the means Philip uses for witnessing, the Old Testament, specifically a text from Isaiah 53. Apart from God's revelation in Christ, however, the Old Testament remains a closed book even to this faithful follower of Judaism. Many today raise the same question about this pericope as does the Ethiopian, but Philip at once gives the answer of the church: Isaiah is speaking about Jesus in whom all the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah are fulfilled (cf. Luke 24:27, 44). Moreover, Philip uses not only the word but also baptism, by which the man receives all the merits of Christ. The catechetical verse 37 is textually questionable but not impossible, seeing that confession of faith prior to baptism is indicated elsewhere (cf. Acts 16:30-33). Finally, we observe that the Ethiopian continues on his way

“rejoicing” even though Philip disappears, because his faith is not in the evangelist, but in the gospel which Philip preached.

Introduction: The United States remains an attractive homeland for people from all over the world. Asians, Latin Americans, and Arabs, as well as Europeans, continue to flock to America, seeking freedom and opportunity. Native-born Americans often feel threatened by the influx of newcomers, who not only compete economically but also bring with them unfamiliar ways and customs. The text, however, reminds Christians not to identify the church with one culture, not even home-grown American culture, but to realize that the church embraces all people:

JESUS IS THE SAVIOR OF ALL

- I. Crossing barriers in apostolic days.
 - A. Everybody is ethnocentric.
 - 1. Ethnocentricity represents a natural affinity for the familiar.
 - 2. Ethnocentricity becomes sinful when we equate our “kind” of people with the best and disdain all others.
 - 3. Ethnocentricity is especially destructive when it inhibits our willingness to share the gospel.
 - B. The first Christians were Jewish.
 - 1. They could cite biblical support of ethnocentricity: Old Testament promises and blessings, physical kinship with Christ, Levitical law, etc.
 - 2. But God made sure that the gospel of Christ crossed cultural barriers.
 - C. Philip bore witness to the Ethiopian.
 - 1. There were big barriers between them: race, language, culture, physical condition, and geography.
 - 2. All these barriers were overcome by the special intervention of the Holy Spirit.
- II. Crossing barriers today.
 - A. The study of anthropology, linguistics, history, and geography contributes to understanding other people.
 - B. More fundamental, however, are these considerations:
 - 1. All are one in the human condition—sinners before God.
 - 2. All have one Savior, Jesus Christ.
 - C. We receive power from the Spirit.
 - 1. In the Scriptures God speaks to us of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. In baptism God clothes us with Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: As Philip responded to the situation in which God placed him, so the church today must take advantage of the

opportunities which she encounters. We have the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all. We also have the task of bringing that message to all.

Cameron A. MacKenzie

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 5, 1991

Acts 11:19-30

This pericope concerns the expansion of the church to the pagan city of Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, with a population of about 500,000 people. News of Christ's resurrection changed many of the people there in such a way that they were set apart from the people at large and given the name "Christians" as a designation. The term *christianos* is a hybrid word from the Greek translation of Messiah and the Latin suffix *ianos*. This suffix can designate being a soldier or partisan of someone (as in *herodianos*, Mark 3:6), or it can designate being a slave of someone. It occurs but three times in the Bible, never with embarrassment.

It is important to note that it was ascribed to Christians by non-Christians and non-Jews. (Jews would not use the name of the Messiah to describe what they considered a cult.) This fact testifies to the christocentric character of these people, their community, and especially their teaching. There is a symbiotic relationship between any label and its bearer. The actions of the person reflect on the name, and the name affects and reflects on the person. As we bear the name "Christian" today, what we think it means determines who we are. The common misunderstanding of the label makes it a sanctimonious boast. The biblical understanding of the label makes it a reason for humble thanks and sharing.

ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

- I. If being a Christian means that we claim to act like Christ, then it is a name impossible to bear.
 - A. We cannot actually live perfect, loving lives that will make all look upon us and say, "Ah, now there is a Christian." To do so would be impossible.
 - B. We can put up a facade of righteousness by keeping people at arm's length and having one *persona* in the street and another in the bedroom. We may even reinforce our masks

- with sanctimonious criticism of others whose masks have slipped or cracked. To do so would be tragic.
- C. We can refrain from bearing the name in fear of being accused of hypocrisy or in fear of having great things demanded of us. We can “try to be Christians” or “try to be good Christians” as a more achievable goal—anything but audaciously calling ourselves Christians. To do so would be common.
- II. If being a Christian means that we claim that Christ has acted for us, then it is a name impossible not to bear.
- A. We can let the facade drop, knowing that Christ will uphold the frail person under the facade. To do so is a relief.
 - B. We can confess our unworthiness, admitting that we are no better than anyone else and deserve death, yet knowing that Christ has paid the penalty for us. To do so is telling the truth.
 - C. Like never before, we can strive to do good, to spread the gospel, to visit the lonely, to help the weak, and to fight temptation, knowing that we can survive our failures because of Christ’s success. To do so is having a purpose.

Philip T.R. Spomer
Waterloo, Iowa

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 12, 1991

Acts 1:15-26

Most Bible students can readily identify Matthias as the man who replaced Judas Iscariot as apostle. Few, however, have given careful thought to the reasons for this replacement. More than mere practical considerations were involved. Peter clearly perceived that an essential spiritual imperative existed to maintain “the twelve.” Judas had been part (verse 17) of a specific and divinely called group of witnesses whose number reflected the Savior’s claim upon the twelve tribes, the whole Israel. In order to reaffirm this commitment, which was highlighted in a predictive way even in the Psalms of David (verse 20), Peter emphasized to the brethren the urgency (“must” in verse 22) of selecting another “witness to His resurrection” (verse 22). Their confidence was that God, as always, would provide what was needed (verse 25).

The goal of the sermon outlined below is to emphasize that a certain evangelical urgency accompanies everything that God equips His people to do, as confirmed even in the selection of a new apostle to

replace Judas. The problem is that too often we fail to grasp this urgency and do not fully recognize how it colors everything that God desires for His own. The means to the goal is the grace-inspired confidence that the Lord's plans and actions are always motivated by love and that He empowers His people to be part of these plans.

Introduction: Most of us would probably not be flattered if someone said to us, "You sure have a one-track mind!" For some reason we do not consider it particularly desirable to be known as people who are totally occupied with one certain pursuit. Yet from a spiritual viewpoint preoccupation is highly desirable. In fact, our God's intense preoccupation with the proclamation of the gospel, in accordance with His gracious one-track mind, truly effects our salvation. Everything the Lord does contributes to the progress of His gospel. Even the selection of another man to replace Judas as apostle, while superficially seeming to be of no major significance, reveals a God for whom everything has an evangelical importance. In the choosing of Matthias we note this theme:

CHANGING A WITNESS AND KEEPING THE TRUTH

- I. The selection fulfilled the Scripture.
 - A. It verified the "mouth of David" (verse 16).
 1. Judas' position would be vacated (Psalm 69:25).
 2. Judas' office would be filled (Psalm 109:8).
 - B. It supported the observation of Jesus regarding Judas (Matthew 26:24).
- II. The selection continued the ministry.
 - A. It identified the nature of an apostle.
 1. The replacement was to be someone who had accompanied the other apostles during the whole ministry of Jesus (verses 21-22).
 2. The replacement was to be someone who was a "witness to His resurrection" (verse 22).
 - B. It completed the whole number of called witnesses (verse 25).
 1. The work of proclamation was just beginning.
 2. The need for qualified proclaimers was growing.
 - a. God would not be stopped by a disciple's betrayal and death.
 - b. God has work to do and will let nothing deter Him.

Transition: By bringing the number of apostles back to "full strength," the Lord was proving that His purpose and truth remained unchanged. He urgently desired that His people might understand His persistence.

III. The selection emphasized the gospel.

- A. It reaffirmed God's love for Israel.
 - 1. The twelve would offer His forgiving grace to the entire "twelve tribes."
 - 2. The twelve would represent His renewed commitment even to those who crucified Him, His own people.
- B. It proclaimed the persistence of God's unchanging compassion.

Conclusion: The replacement of Judas as apostle should never be viewed as just another story in the progress of biblical history. The changing of a witness shows with great effect how committed our Lord is to the unchanging truth that His forgiving grace "must" (verse 22) be proclaimed to all, even to the whole people of Israel. It is strengthening to know that we can never overemphasize the Savior's urgent desire to keep the ministry moving and the gospel growing in every heart, including our own.

David E. Seybold
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**WHITSUNDAY
THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST**

May 19, 1991

Acts 2:22-36

Pentecost is an exciting and extremely important occasion in our church year. The preacher, however, may approach preparation of that day's sermon with some trepidation. The charismatic movement, along with other novel ideas concerning the Holy Spirit's place and work contrary to orthodox theology, make it all the more necessary to proclaim the biblical message of Pentecost boldly and clearly. This lesson fits very nicely with the gospel of the day, in which Jesus says: "From deep within the person who believes in Me streams of living water will flow" (John 7:38). As Ylvisaker comments concerning the believer: "Not only shall his own thirst be quenched and find everlasting satisfaction in the Spirit, but he shall impart this blessed gift also to others" (*Harmony*, p. 378). This is exactly what Peter sought to do in the sermon which forms the epistle—to glorify Jesus in a message filled with christological kerygma. To testify concerning Jesus is, after all, the primary work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-14).

The goal of the sermon outlined below is that the hearer would be assured and encouraged by the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord and Christ. The malady is that the hearer can become discouraged because of a false view of who Christ really is, which tears at the base of God's message of salvation to mankind. The means is the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the word, who leads us to repentance and trust in Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

Introduction: Who is He? Who is Jesus? That question has been asked by people ever since He walked among us. Even today articles, books, and Hollywood films have been produced which address the question: Who is Jesus? Almost all agree that He is an influential and important figure in the history of the world; His presence has left an everlasting imprint on the pages of our past. But just who is He? Was He just a man, albeit a great one? Was He merely a great teacher? Was He just another charismatic religious leader among many in the world's history?

The answer is in today's epistle. On Pentecost, when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the early Christian Church, we find that the Spirit, as Jesus had promised, testified concerning Him. Pentecost gives us an opportunity to see the power and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church through Peter's bold witness. Today we see the testimony of the Spirit as Peter addresses this question:

WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH?

I. Jesus the Man.

- A. He was a man who lived among us (verse 22a) and experienced life as we do.
 - 1. He was tempted as we are.
 - 2. He felt human feelings and emotions as we do.
- B. Yet He was a man "whom God commanded" (verse 22b).
 - 1. He performed many "miracles, wonderful proofs, and miraculous signs."
 - a. They were well known by all. His fame had spread.
 - b. They were worked by God.
 - 2. The mighty works that Jesus did were signs that the awaited Messiah (Anointed One) had come.

Transition: We can see that Jesus was not an ordinary man, nor merely an extraordinary man. Jesus was *the* man, God's own Son, whom God had chosen for a special purpose.

II. Jesus—Lord and Christ.

- A. The Jews were looking for another kind of Messiah.

1. They were hoping for a mighty king who would lead them into prosperity.
2. We must be careful not to try to package Jesus and His message in order to suit ourselves.
- B. His message was rejected by the Jews (verse 23).
 1. They put Him to death.
 2. We, too, are guilty of rejecting the Messiah when we fail to look to Him for forgiveness.
- C. Yet in the resurrection God proved that Jesus is the Christ (verse 24).
 1. He freed Him from the power of death.
 2. His resurrection had been foretold by David (verse 25).
- D. God proved that Jesus is Lord (verse 33).
 1. He was raised to God's right hand to take up the rulership of the world.
 2. His exaltation had been foretold by David (verses 34-35).

Conclusion: In view of what we know of Jesus by the power of the Spirit, our reaction should be like that of many of the Jews who heard Peter's message—repentance and trust in Jesus as Lord and Christ. Then we can also rejoice in the personal implications of His joyous confession: "I saw the Lord always before Me. Because He is at My right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore My heart is glad and My tongue rejoices: My body also will live in hope. . ." (verses 25-28). We see here who Jesus really is: Jesus is more than merely an excellent teacher or a charismatic religious leader. God made Him who is also man to be both Lord and Christ (verse 36) for us. This is the message of the Holy Spirit; this is the message of Pentecost. We can confidently look to Him and His cross in all assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

D.L. Rutt
St. James, Minnesota

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST THE FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

May 26, 1991

Romans 8:14-17

In Romans 8 St. Paul characterizes the life of one who has been justified by God's grace for Christ's sake through faith (a justification clearly described in the previous chapters) as a life that is led by the Spirit. Such a life stands in stark contrast to a life in which the sinful flesh is in control (cf. verses 5-13). In the text Paul seems to be giving

us motivation to live this life in the Spirit. In a sense he is saying, "Remember, after all, who you are? You are God's own child, chosen and adopted by Him as a son. One day you will inherit all He has!"

These words are a shot in the arm to Christians who daily struggle with living a Spirit-directed life. In the face of a sinful nature that competes for control of our lives and often wins out (Romans 7:7ff.; 8:12,13), enslavement to fear as we allow the law to condemn us (verse 15), and a world where the righteous suffer (verse 17b), we take comfort in knowing that we belong to God's family by His choice and His action. As a commentary on this text Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-4:7 should be read.

Introduction: "Every child, a wanted child" is a slogan that is used (with varying points of reference) on both sides of the abortion debate today. All would agree, however, that all children should be loved and wanted. It is a need that children have and one that parents have instilled within them by God to provide. St. Paul tells us Christians that we are children of God. It is wonderful to personalize and to know the certainty of this saying:

GOD'S CHILD, A WANTED CHILD

- I. At one time we were slaves who were outside God's family.
 - A. We were bound by the sinful flesh (verses 5-13).
 - B. We were bound by the fear of God and threats of the law (verse 15).
 - C. The desire to return to this life of slavery is an urge we must fight daily.
- II. We have received the "Spirit of adoption."
 - A. Adoption is often viewed today as a "last resort" method of entering a family.
 1. Those who are adopted may feel like second-class children.
 2. The thought is sometimes this: "They just wanted a child; they did not want *me*!"
 - B. But adoption should be viewed positively.
 1. An adopted child is one whom the parent usually knows beforehand and wants in particular.
 2. An adopted child is chosen because he is already loved, not simply because he is available.
 - C. God adopted us in love (Ephesians 1:4,5).
 1. He knew and chose us from eternity (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 8:29,30).
 2. He paid the ransom price and declared us to be His (Romans 3:24).

3. He sent His Spirit into our hearts to confirm the fact that we are His (verse 16; Galatians 4:6; He called us to faith).
- III. As sons we belong in God's family.
- A. Sons are free.
 1. We are led by God's Spirit and so are no longer slaves without purpose and hope in life.
 2. We are led by God's Spirit in a life of God-pleasing service to God and others.
 3. Our spirit finds joy and purpose in such living.
 - B. Sons enjoy all the rights and privileges of sonship.
 1. God is a dear Father ("Abba") who does not grow weary of our crying (cf. Jesus' intimate use of "Abba" in Mark 14:36).
 2. At the end of our suffering for Christ's sake here on earth, we will inherit all that is God's (verse 17).

Conclusion: As Jesus, our substitute and Savior, is God's Son, so we by God's choice and redemption are privileged to be called "God's child." God wants us! Thus, we live now by the power of the Holy Spirit and willingly suffer for the sake of our Brother Jesus, and at the end of this life we shall finally arrive in the glorious home of our Father.

Paul E. Cloeter
Bessemer, Michigan

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 2, 1991

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Some key words in the text are these: "light," "shine," "darkness," "show," "face," "manifest." These words and the Genesis quotation (Genesis 1:3) are an extension of a theme that runs throughout the early chapters of 2 Corinthians—that Paul's ministry is based on the gospel of Jesus and not on himself. The reason why some did not believe was that a veil covered their minds (3:15) whenever they read the law of Moses. Some are still under the veil because the god of this world has blinded their mind (4:4). That veil is removed only by God (4:6).

Introduction: It is very often difficult to understand the blindness of human beings, sometimes even religious ones. Imagine people, religious people, taking Jesus and nailing Him to a cross! How could people who tried to keep God's law so thoroughly turn on the one who

loved them? How blind could they be? What if we had been there? Would we have done the same thing? How blind would we be? Knowing that we are sinners just as they were should lead us to an honest search for the truth about ourselves and about our God. So we pray:

LET THERE BE LIGHT

- I. Paul's concern was that the Corinthians were rejecting the gospel of Jesus.
 - A. In rejecting Paul they were rejecting the gospel he preached.
 - B. Paul did not "doctor" the gospel to make it acceptable (4:2,3).
 - C. Rejection came from the god of this world (4:4).
 - D. The gospel treasure comes in an earthly vessel for a reason (4:7-12).
- II. Concern about the acceptance of the gospel of Jesus among us is real.
 - A. Christians do believe that Jesus is the Savior or they would not be Christians.
 - B. Christians still often have something of a veil over their eyes.
 - 1. They still believe they must measure up to some standards to be acceptable to God (3:15-17).
 - 2. They still rely on the force of the law to achieve Christian behavior (3:17).
 - C. Christians often fail to see themselves in the mirror of Jesus (3:18).
- III. God says: "Let there be light!"
 - A. God has not stopped providing light.
 - 1. God created and still gives physical light (4:6).
 - 2. God also gives spiritual light to human hearts (4:6).
 - B. God provides light through the face of Jesus (4:6).
 - 1. When we see Jesus, we see God's glory.
 - 2. When we see Jesus, we see what God made us to be (3:18).
 - C. God's light in us shines on others.
 - 1. God is revealed in our weakness (4:7).
 - 2. The life of Jesus is seen in our suffering (4:10,11).

Conclusion: The children sing, "This little gospel light of mine, I will let it shine." But sometimes a veil keeps people from seeing the gospel. That veil is self-righteousness, the belief that one can measure up to God's expectations by means of one's own achievements. But when God shines in your heart (with the mercy of Jesus), you in turn will reflect that light and others will see the power of God and Jesus in you.

David Schlie
Fort Wayne, Indiana

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 9, 1991

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

The goal of the sermon outlined below is to bring Christians to view present afflictions in an eternal perspective. The malady is that we get bogged down by the “troubles” (verse 17, NIV) of this life and our “wasting away” (verse 16, NIV) toward death. The means to the goal is living in the hope of the resurrection, what Christ has done—and is doing—and will do for, in, and to us.

Introduction: Have you ever been intently engaged in listening to a joke, only to have the person telling it forget the punch-line? How disappointing! Forgetting the punch-line not only renders the entire story pointless; it deflates any chance of humor. The whole thing is a waste. Do we forget the “punch-line” of our Christian lives? In the midst of the very real “afflictions” and “decay” that we experience, do we “lose heart” because we have forgotten the eternal end-of-the-story in store for us? Does everything seem to be a waste? Affliction and decay, trouble and turmoil are all easier to bear when we look at them in proper perspective:

THE RESURRECTION PERSPECTIVE

- I. Troubles and wasting away are real and present problems in our lives as they were in Paul’s.
 - A. We can neither avoid nor deny their presence.
 - 1. The troubles of illness, family strife, job stress, unemployment, financial woes.
 - 2. The wasting away of our bodies as we approach the inevitable death that awaits us all.
 - B. But these are never excuses to lose hope, to be “down on life.”
 - 1. Sometimes we look at life through cynical, negative, downcast eyes. Do you find yourself cursing the dead ends of disorder and chaos of your existence? Do you ever dread the start of a new day? Do you fear your coming death?
 - 2. Having lost the resurrection perspective, the “punch-line” of our lives, we may even lose the divine perspective, and push God out among the peripheral concerns of life, since He apparently has nothing to offer, no visible solution to our wasting away.

- C. Paul and his fellow servants of the gospel suffered great “troubles” because of the ministry to which Christ had called them.
 - 1. They were beaten, stoned, imprisoned, pursued, left for dead, etc.
 - 2. Yet they kept up their ministry with persistence and joy. Why?
- II. With Paul we view troubles and wasting away in the resurrection perspective.
 - A. Paul considered the present good that was resulting from the troubles which he suffered (verse 15).
 - 1. Through the ministry of Paul and his fellow sufferers the gospel was reaching more and more people (verse 15).
 - 2. God is able to transform the worst that life can throw at us into great blessing. Do you believe this? As we decay outwardly, our inner nature is daily renewed. God is at work not only in our lives, but also in our very selves (verse 16).
 - 3. The affliction of Christ—specifically His cross—has brought us the greatest blessing—forgiveness and eternal life. The blessing of eternal life is ours now. The resurrection is at work in us now (Romans 6:1-11).
 - B. Paul considered the “eternal weight of glory” which was in store for him, his hearers, and for us (verse 17).
 - 1. In the resurrection perspective we see our end, not in the present decay, but in the reality of our own resurrection. He who raised Jesus will raise us as well (verse 14).
 - 2. In the resurrection perspective we endure our afflictions, knowing that our Lord has prepared for us a rest beyond all affliction, suffering, loss, grief, and loneliness. In this light troubles are momentary, and wasting away is temporary, not terminal.
 - 3. The resurrection, however, is not just a carrot on a stick to impel us to “keep on going”; it means that Christ is at work within us, leading us to eternal glory.

Conclusion: The resurrection provides us with the punch-line of our lives. Our troubles are real, painful, and at times seemingly insurmountable. But the greater reality is not these things that we cannot but see, but rather the blessings of Christ that we see only by faith—His renewing work within us and the eternal glory He has prepared for us.

Michael A. Schmid
Manchester, Iowa

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 16, 1991

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Our Lord Jesus Himself established the paradigm of the Christian life. "Whoever finds his life will lose it." Here Christ marks out for us what has ever since been the Christian's battle cry. He looks beyond the boundaries of this life to that life which is to come. Many are the examples which Jesus gives of those enraptured by the world: The rich fool, the would-be disciples who demanded first to conclude various tasks, the man who did not "hate his own life," those who "treasured to themselves treasures on earth," and many others. These Christ puts on display as those who have become so enraptured by pleasures temporal (i.e., wealth, prestige, worldly knowledge, sinful associations, etc.) that they have lost sight of things eternal.

Jesus' call allows the disciple no fleshly latitude. Business, family, pride, and self all become secondary as the Lord and His kingdom assume their rightful primacy. The Christian's life-vision is therefore myopic. He looks not toward the accomplishments and glories of this life but instead toward the glory which is to be revealed, which "neither eye has seen nor ear has heard nor has it entered into the hearts of men." In this perspective he makes his life's decisions, wary of ever growing too comfortable with the world and knowing that soon he must leave it for that life to come which is "very much better."

To those of the world, the Christian must seem to have an unhealthy perspective on life. Death is thought to consume his attention to such an extent that life is forgotten. Paul, on the other hand, shows that our approach to this life is enhanced by and inextricably connected with our understanding of that life which is to come. It is because we long to "be clothed with our heavenly tent" that we can live life here and now in this "earthly tent." It is because we look to the "swallowing up of mortality" by life that we can "walk by faith and not by sight."

For this reason, a Christian is not one who allows the end to justify the means in family, society, church, conscience, or anywhere else. The ultimate victory, his eternal victory, has been completed. As Christ through His bloody sacrifice has made the Christian's salvation one in which he sits passively, awaiting reunion with his Savior, so also the Christian does not attempt to supplant his Savior elsewhere in his life. "We walk by faith." This means that divine teachings, life situations, world events, personal conflicts, church conflicts, and whatever else on which the flesh may wish to impose its own designs are left in the hands of the one who asks us to "walk

by faith." No man except the Lord wields the influence that he thinks he does. God sits in His heaven and laughs at human machinations. The Christian walks by faith.

Introduction: St. Paul had every reason for longing to be clothed with immortality. He suffered from beatings, wild animals, shipwrecks, stonings, and the fatigue of long journeys. He speaks of this longing to the Philippians, ultimately recognizing that for the moment he must remain in this life. We too often long to be "apart from the body" and to be clothed with our heavenly tent, immortality. It is this very longing, this inward groaning, that allows us to live this life not by sight, as does the world, but by faith.

WALK BY FAITH

- I. A Christian walks by faith, understanding his mortal condition.
 - A. It is a condition which is merely temporal.
 - B. It is a condition from which he longs to depart.
 - C. It is a condition in which God's gifts support and sustain him.
- II. A Christian walks by faith trusting Christ's salvation.
 - A. Christ's salvation gives the hope of eternal bliss.
 - B. Christ's salvation frees us for a life by faith, not sight.

Conclusion: For Paul, as for us, life was often exceedingly difficult. We can feel his pangs as he speaks of "longing to be clothed with immortality." But it is just that longing and the recognition of its inevitable fulfillment that allows the Christian to live life to its very fullest as he walks by faith.

James C. Strawn
Green Meadow, Minnesota

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 23, 1991

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

In giving a rationale for his ministry, Paul magnificently throws open the gospel door. In one fell swoop, he covers both objective and subjective justification and at the same time gives the key to sanctification—the incalculably powerful motivation of the love of Christ. The "therefore all died" of verse 14 seems best understood as a clarification of "He died for all," a statement of objective justification, as in verse 19 Paul states that "God was reconciling the

world to Himself in Christ." Paul's autobiographical presentation here is a compelling testimony, a dynamic model, and a moving appeal.

The problem (the malady) we face is a "worldly view" (verse 10), putting divine concerns on a par with natural human concerns in daily life. We need a transformation of the mind (the goal of the sermon outlined below) to see and live life in God's perspective. Such a life is precisely what the Holy Spirit gives when He transforms us through the bold good news of Jesus Christ (the means). We become a new creation; we are given a new motivation, and we adopt new behavior.

Introduction: "Would you please turn down that terrible noise!"—a father yells at his son by the stereo. Father and son seem to hold different points of view on the merits of rock and roll. This difference is not surprising. Did you ever see two economists interpret the GNP in the same way or two philosophers agree on the ultimate questions of life? What is your point of view? Your viewpoint on various matters may be quite interesting, but your viewpoint on spiritual matters is crucial. Today St. Paul challenges you to examine your point of view: Is it worldly or biblical? Paul personally experienced a change of viewpoint.

WHAT IS YOUR POINT OF VIEW?

- I. What is your view of Christ?
 - A. The worldly view (verse 16b).
 - 1. Christ was a manipulated, but magnetic leader; we are not interested in Him.
 - 2. Christ was a "flakey fake."
 - a. He was accused of blasphemy at His trial.
 - b. Paul thought he was doing God a favor by persecuting this man's followers.
 - c. The modern idea is that Jesus was just another guru with no answers.
 - B. The biblical view.
 - 1. Christ is the agent of love (verse 17; John 3:16).
 - 2. Christ is the means of love—in the "great exchange" (verse 21).
 - 3. Christ is the motivation to love (verse 14).
- II. What is your view of yourself?
 - A. The worldly view.
 - 1. All of life is to serve number one—me!
 - 2. I am angry with God, and I think the feeling is mutual.
 - B. The biblical view.

1. Love was God's initiative (Romans 5:8).
 2. I have been made a new person (verses 14b, 15b, 18a).
 3. Now I live for Him (verse 15c).
- III. What is your view of others?
- A. The worldly view.
 1. Other people are valuable—as they benefit me.
 2. Therefore I use and abuse others [one can give examples].
 - B. The biblical view.
 1. Others are objects too—of God's love (verses 19, 20).
 2. I am an ambassador of Christ to others (verse 20).
 3. The same loving message applies to others—reconciliation with God (verse 20).

Conclusion: Paul is engaging in no purely academic debate between merely theoretical points of view. He is asserting that your point of view is either deadly or indicative of a powerful new life. God is appealing to you today through me, Christ's ambassador: Be reconciled to God through Christ! This appeal is the passionate plea of the powerful love of Jesus. Made new by His love, you will also say: Christ's love compels me to love!

Lloyd J. Strelow
Tustin, California

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 30, 1991

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-14

One of the unique developments of American religious life in recent decades has been the willingness of people to send millions of dollars to appeals by television evangelists of the electronic church. Much of this money has been misspent. It is important for Christians to be cautious that the monies they give are really and truly supporting the kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul was asking funds for a very legitimate cause, aiding the suffering brethren in Jerusalem.

Both the Old and New Testaments teach the moral truth that God's children should show charity to their fellowmen. In the Old Testament there are many encouragements to be kind to orphans and widows; in fact, God labels it a serious sin to take advantage of the poor and downtrodden of Israel. Even strangers in Israel's midst were to be treated in a kindly way.

The commandment in the Old Testament, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," is repeated by Jesus in the New Testament. The account of the Good Samaritan teaches the truth that even enemies are to be loved and helped. Jesus Himself by His many miracles of compassion powerfully demonstrated the virtue of helping the needy.

Introduction: The Apostle Paul, probably the greatest of the apostles, told the Galatian Christians: "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith." In his two Corinthian letters Paul expressed concern for the poor saints of the mother church of Christendom in Jerusalem and called upon the Corinthian Christians to take up an offering for the relief of the suffering Christians of Jerusalem. To give generously and willingly to this special collection was labeled by Paul as a "grace," which the Spirit of God creates in those who have become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to grow in many Spirit-given graces and one of these graces was generous giving. Today we shall consider first-century apostolic instructions to twentieth-century Christians on this very theme:

THE GRACE OF CHRISTIAN BENEFICENCE

- I. The occasion for the giving of these instructions.
 - A. While the Corinthian congregation had begun this collection, it had not completed it (2 Corinthians 8:1, 11).
 - B. Some time had elapsed since the apostle had made his request, and this was his second effort to motivate the Corinthians to finish this collection for a worthy cause (2 Corinthians 8:11).
- II. The motives for excelling in the grace of giving.
 - A. The example of the Macedonian Christians who gave beyond their means (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).
 - B. The need to give themselves wholeheartedly to Christ and God (2 Corinthians 8:5).
 - C. The realization that willingness to give is a grace bestowed on believers (2 Corinthians 8:1).
 - D. The great example of the sacrificial love of Christ, who though rich became poor to save mankind from everlasting destruction.
- III. The method of carrying out the collection and realizing the goal of helping the needy saints of Jerusalem.
 - A. Giving should be according to the believer's means (1 Corinthians 16:2).
 - B. A systematic method should be followed; on the first day of the week they should contribute to the collection.

IV. The value of following Paul's admonitions.

- A. It would show and bear out Paul's teaching that in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, but all men are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).
- B. The gifts by the Corinthians and others would be a way of showing gratitude for the spiritual blessings that had come from the missionary efforts of the church in Jerusalem. Peter had been active in Corinth.

Conclusion: God expects Christians to help needy and suffering individuals. Christians are, above all, to help people with their spiritual needs. For that purpose Christ instituted the Christian church and commanded its members to make disciples of all nations. To build the kingdom of God on earth requires funds. Although the rationale and methodology of stewardship which Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 8 applied to a special collection for the saints of Jerusalem, the same reasoning may also be applied to the financial support of the program of building the kingdom of God locally, nationally, and internationally today. We dare not forget the command and promise of Christ: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you."

Raymond F. Surburg

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 7, 1991

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Introduction: All of us have heard the phrase, "Into every life a little rain must fall." But we also know that, "When it rains, it pours." And although we are familiar with the saying, "Every rose has its thorns," we sometimes feel like the neglected tomato plant which sits in the midst of an overgrown vegetable garden, choking and turning yellow under the grip of foreign weeds and cruel thistles. Yet ask the elderly veterans of this life—the dear Christian men and women who have been through the mills of life and have graduated from the school of hard knocks—ask them what the trials of life have taught them, and you will hear them tell you that it was the thorns of life which taught them what it means to appreciate and rely totally upon the grace of their loving God. It is a truthful statement that in every life both thorns and grace are to be found:

SUFFICIENT THORNS AND SUFFICIENT GRACE

- I. Thorns serve God's purpose in our lives as Christians.
 - A. Thorns humble us and show us our inabilities.
 - 1. We like to think that we are self-reliant and we boast of our wealth, our influence, our health, and our own ability to control the circumstances of our lives.
 - 2. But problems, trials, and weaknesses beset all of us, and soon our self-reliance fails us and our boasting is turned into humiliation.
 - B. Our thorns lead us to contrition before God.
 - 1. As we face our own weaknesses, we realize that we have failed to live up to our own standards, the standards of others, and, most of all, God's standards.
 - 2. Our thorns allow us to see the consequences of sin and to admit our failures before God.
 - C. Our thorns lead us into submission to God's purpose for our lives.
 - 1. When trials and problems fill our lives, we often do not understand why they come to us and we ask God to remove them.
 - 2. Even as God did not remove the thorn of suffering from Paul or from Christ Himself (although each besought God three times to remove the thorn), but rather allowed the thorn to remain so that His purpose might be accomplished, so also God allows thorns in our lives in order that His purpose for us might be accomplished.
- II. God's sufficient grace yields fruit in our times of weakness.
 - A. As God demonstrates His power and mercy in our weakness, we no longer boast in our strength but in God's grace.
 - 1. We glory in the fact that our thorns provide God the opportunity to demonstrate His power to work through the circumstances of our lives.
 - 2. We are grateful and we boast that God is greater than all the forces and failures of our earthly existence.
 - B. Our times of weakness teach us to turn to God's mercy and rely upon His grace.
 - 1. Amidst the trials that test us and the painful thorns which afflict us we learn to lean solely upon the mercies of God, which are new to us each day.
 - 2. Our thorns teach us that His grace is all that we need.
 - C. God's grace motivates us to walk by faith and live in obedience to His divine will.
 - 1. Daily we are reminded that we are nothing without God and so we walk by faith, knowing that when we are weak He is strong.

2. We live to obey God's will for our lives, knowing that the problems that are born out of our weaknesses yield evidence of our Father's saving favor on our behalf.

Conclusion: Our modern society praises self-reliance as a virtue and through the media lures us into thinking that we can handle any circumstance or challenge that we face in this life by relying on our own strength, sedatives, and successes, until such false hopes begin to fail us. It is then that we realize the inadequacy of our sinful natures, and we see that our strength is really nothing. What our society and our own sinful natures perceive to be weakness we learn to count as strength before God. The longer we live our lives as redeemed children of God, the more we come to see the sufficiency of our thorns to lead us right where God needs us, to the place where He is able to demonstrate His power and mercy. It is then that we realize the sufficiency of His grace to work in our lives, to the glory of His name, both now and forever.

Mark Berg
Crawfordsville, Indiana

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 14, 1991

Ephesians 1:3-14

Introduction: It is very easy in this highly sophisticated age of advanced degrees, skinny bodies, space travel, and computer technology to feel very insignificant and unimportant. We may even seriously question our overall value and worth. Especially in moments of discouragement, when life lets us down and when personal faith grows thin, do we doubt our place in the whole scheme of things. It is then, and especially then, that we need to be reminded of our blessings. In a tremendous doxology of praise Paul calls on us to remember them:

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS FROM HEAVEN ABOVE

- I. God has chosen us to be His own.
 - A. We were not an afterthought. He chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

- B. We do not understand the selection process, but we rejoice in our heavenly adoption (chosen in accordance with His pleasure and His glorious grace) (Ephesians 1:5, 6).
 - C. God had plans to make us more than we could ever dream to be ourselves (chosen to be holy and blameless) (Ephesians 1:4).
- II. God has made known to us the secret plan of salvation.
- A. Our salvation came at a very high price (we have redemption through His blood) (Ephesians 1:7).
 - B. Christ our reigning Lord will bring our salvation to completion and on the last day will unite the church on earth with the church in heaven (Ephesians 1:10).
- III. He has given us His Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our final redemption.
- A. Our faith is evidence of the Spirit's presence (the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts through the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation) (Ephesians 1:13).
 - B. The Holy Spirit moves us to live for the praise of God's glory (Ephesians 1:14).

Conclusion: In our human weakness we can feel utterly inferior when we compare ourselves to others in terms of worldly accomplishment and acclaim. Yet, when we consider our spiritual blessings in Christ, we are overwhelmed by our standing in His eyes. We are mindful of those timeless spiritual blessings from above in every hour and in every circumstance of life.

Dennis S. Perryman
Acton, Massachusetts

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 21, 1991

Ephesians 2:13-22

Introduction: I can promise to everyone who remains here and listens to this sermon during the following few minutes a rich reward. God will fill your hearts with wealth. One could hardly find a richer text in all of Scripture than Ephesians 2. This must be one of the "Great Chapters" of the Bible. It gives us a portrait of the great work of Christ Jesus. But then it adds the application. No, it goes deeper even than application—it shows how the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ actually begins the "times of the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). It is a portrait of "God's new society or the new

humanity in Christ" [John R.W. Stott]. This text puts everything back together, beginning with what we were, then what Christ has done, and then how this changes us right here and now.

WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE:
A PORTRAIT OF BEFORE AND AFTER

- I. What was I before (*pote*, "at one time," verse 11)?
 - A. Once I was "outside" God's kingdom, "alienated" and "hostile" and a "stranger" to the citizenship and covenant of Israel (verses 11-12).
 - B. Then I was "hedged about" with high walls of separation, with a "middle wall of partition" dividing me vertically and horizontally, from God and from others, along both spiritual and racial lines. These nasty dividers, like the former "Berlin Wall," are depictions of the double alienation which we have all experienced (verses 14, 15). (Worthy of consultation is J.R.W. Stott, *God's New Society*; also the description of the walls of the temple in Jerusalem in Josephus, *Antiquities* XV.11.5, and *Wars* V.5.2; cf. the charges against Paul in Acts 21:27-31, that he defiled the temple by bringing in Trophimus; in the early centuries the double reconciliation accomplished by Christ was compared to the two members of the cross—vertical and horizontal.)
 - C. Our separated, fragmented lives could only yield to despair (verse 12). Everything that could destroy the fabric of society and of fellowship with God stood against us. William Hendricksen summarizes verses 11-12 in this way: we were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. This was our "wretched state" before Christ (*Lutheran Hymnal* 387, stanza 4).
- II. What did Christ do (*nuni de*, "but now," verse 13)?
 - A. "You were brought near by the blood of Christ" (verse 13). The "blood" is always the price of the propitiation of God (Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 1:19). God's wrath was appeased by the precious blood of Christ. The vertical hostility was ended.
 - B. Peace was preached: Jesus' fleshly offering on the cross made "both one" and made "one new man" (verses 14, 16, 17). We note that it was "in His flesh" and "in His body" that God's judgment was appeased and a reconciliation effected (cf. Romans 8:3; 1 Peter 2:24). Here is a golden treasure which no one should miss.
 - C. "We have direct access to the Father by one Spirit" (verse 18). The walls are broken down, the hedges of "commandments of laws of dogmas" have been made impotent by Christ's sacrifice. Nothing, but nothing, now separates us any longer

from God. As in Romans 5:1-2, we have peace through Christ and immediately we enter the heavenly throne room before God.

- D. We have hope. In the parallel passage of Colossians 1:27 reference is made to the "riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What a treasure!

III. What am I now (*ara oun*, "so then," verse 19)?

- A. I am reconciled and have a new citizenship (verse 19).
- B. I am now God's "new society" (verse 19).
- C. I am now the new temple, built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Himself being the top-stone (verses 20, 21).

Conclusion: The three stages that make up the portrait presented in Ephesians 2 are clearly distinguished: alienated humanity, the peace-making Christ, and God's new society. An analogy may be helpful; we can view our "before and after" states in this way: Before I was a fragmented wreck—arms, fingers, eyes, ears, feet, hair, all disheveled; my emotions, my desires, my wishes, my thoughts, my efforts, and my strivings were all counterproductive, even contradictory, pulling me in opposite directions. But now something wonderful has happened—by virtue of the Holy Spirit dwelling in me and by virtue of Christ Himself taking possession of my life (through word and sacrament), I am (*qua* Christian) an integrated whole, a new person. The new man in me is the beginning of the restoration of God's new society. Each day as I overcome the old powers and give the new more sway—through faith in Jesus Christ—I am seeing the "restitution of all things" on the way to the world to come.

Waldemar Degner

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 28, 1991

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Introduction: Benjamin Franklin was a man dedicated to becoming the best person he could be. He developed a list of twelve virtues. He decided that he would work on one each year until he had mastered each one in turn. One day he had a discussion with a Quaker friend:

"Ben, you need number thirteen," the friend told him.

"What's that?" asked the bewildered Franklin.

"Humility!" answered his friend.

At the age of eighty-three Franklin is reported to have said, "I think that I have come to live every one of my virtues perfectly except number thirteen. When I think about how humble I am, I become proud."

It is one thing to become the best person you can be by your own strength. But we shall do well to remember Benjamin Franklin's words and recognize our own limitations. If we are to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (verse 13), as God promises us in this text through the Apostle Paul, we shall have to learn this lesson:

HOW TO BE *MORE* THAN YOU CAN BE

- I. Even being *all* you can be is a struggle.
 - A. "Make every effort," Paul says in verse 3. In these words we are reminded that, even though we are Christians, saved by Jesus' death and given the hope of eternal life and salvation through His resurrection, we must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
 - B. There is one body and one Spirit (verse 4); this unity is a given. But how often we see the body of Christ appearing to be broken and splintered! How often is there a party spirit even in the church!
 - C. There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But how often we refuse to be under the authority of God! How difficult it is to live constantly in the light of the oneness of God! We choose for ourselves so many other "gods."
- II. God calls us to be mature, of full stature, reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.
 - A. The words here do not call for us merely to be the best we can be, but to go beyond our own limitations and inclinations.
 - B. We are to seek the fullness of Jesus Christ—a tall order indeed. We may consider all that such fullness means: We recall how Jesus obeyed the Father in everything. We remember how Jesus looked to God and trusted in Him in every situation. We recollect how Jesus loved everyone else more than Himself. Such a stature is well beyond our reach, humanly speaking.
- III. There is hope for us in God's call because of God's gifts.
 - A. He gives us gifts—things we do not deserve, nor can we manufacture them ourselves. These gifts are *graces* from God. They are testimonies of His love and evidence of His good will toward us.

- B. He gives us the gifts of His Spirit: the sacrament of baptism, the word of God, the church. The place in which these gifts are given and supported and used is the body of Christ.
 - C. He gives us leaders who guide us toward Christian unity and spiritual maturity. Pastors, teachers, apostles, prophets, and evangelists all work to bring people to Jesus Christ, to a closer relationship with God, to a more mature and full life in Christ.
- IV. There is certain hope for us through Jesus Christ.
- A. Jesus is the means of our hope through His perfect life and sacrificial death. Jesus is the root of our hope through His recreating power in our lives.
 - B. The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus Christ, and through faith in Him we have a new identity as part of the body of Christ. As such we are fitted together with other Christians into the one body, working together, building one another up in love.
- V. Therefore, we have a high calling in Christ, to be more than we could ever be by ourselves.
- A. We speak the truth in love. Sinners and saints all of us are. We do not pretend to be more. We do not allow others to be less.
 - B. We will grow up into Him who is the Head, Christ Jesus. This assertion is not just a calling; it is a promise.
 - C. From Christ Jesus every part of the body is built up and joined together and grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Conclusion: We need not be satisfied with being just what we can be—we are too weak and limited for such an existence to be sufficient. No, God calls us to become more than we ourselves can be. He calls us to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ. He provides for us the means and instruments of the Holy Spirit to do so: His word and sacraments, the church, pastors and other leaders. Through our baptism God begins that process. Through Christ's continual work in us we grow and grow and so become even more than we could ever become ourselves.

David L. Bahn
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 4, 1991

Ephesians 4:17-24

Preaching on the epistles brings us face-to-face with the question of preaching on sanctification. This pericope is no exception. Clearly these verses teach about sanctification. The question we face as preachers is this: What do these verses offer us to use in preaching?

We must recall that this pericope in particular, and this epistle in general, presents itself to us not as sermon material but as didactic material. We preach on the basis of Holy Scripture, not to take what has been written and mimic it in a verbal form, not to provide a commentary to guide the hearer in later study of the written text, but to norm a proclamation of law and gospel by the Scriptures. Preaching is always the proclamation of the voice of Christ in law and gospel. Therefore, though this pericope teaches us about the life of sanctification, the sermon based on it is not bound simply to duplicate and apply a lecture on the sanctified life.

Teaching sanctification is a matter of depicting sanctification, a matter of information, and therefore necessarily a matter of the law. *Preaching* sanctification is not a matter of *depicting* sanctification but of *evoking* sanctification. The reason why a preacher is concerned about evoking sanctification is that he perceives a need to evoke the new life in his hearers. Will information cause this to happen? No, nor is it likely that it is a level of ignorance about sanctification which brings about the perceived lack of sanctification. The law does not “stir up” sanctification, but rather it “stirs up” sin (Romans 7:5; the reaction results from a dynamic quality found within the law itself). It is to the gospel that the preacher must turn with his concerns over the sanctification of his hearers. A text filled with the teaching of sanctification, such as this present one, does not invite a sermonic depiction of sanctification (except as the preacher uses such a depiction to convict the conscience of sin), but rather it challenges the preacher to evoke sanctification through the gospel. The challenge is how to “stir up” his hearers to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24—*eis paroxusmon*, “to encouragement”—characterizing the impact of the message by reference to results). Sanctification happens in the environment of the gospel; it is the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22), not the production of the believer. The preacher must never lose sight of the fact that sanctification is not *the goal* of the gospel, but rather *the result* of the gospel. Therefore, sanctification should be not the purpose, but the result, of preaching. In this light we turn to the pericope from Ephesians 4.

Here St. Paul unpacks the problem we face with the life of sanctification. Certainly there is such a thing as the sanctified life, and it is different from the life of unbelief (verses 7-20). The root problem with the life of unbelief, however, is not the callous outward behavior which we see to be bad (verse 19). Rather, the root of the issue is the reality of darkened minds (verse 17), alienation from the life of God, and hardness of heart (verse 18), all of which belong to the "old nature" (verse 22). In this observation Paul does not simply point the finger at others; he addresses believers and notes that this is "*your old nature*" which still ties the believer to his "former manner of life" and corrupts him through "deceitful lusts" (verse 22).

The solution here is found in Paul's call to a daily activity (verses 22-24) which is patterned, not after some behavioral model, but after the gracious work of God in believers by which they have been translated from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God. Paul uses these verbs to describe this saving activity as an action already completed in our conversion (aorists in verses 22, 24), which has an ongoing, albeit passive, reality in our present struggle against sin (present passive in verse 23—"continually be renewed," which is the consequence of the gospel in our lives). Contextually, we note that this saving activity is tied to holy baptism: "In Him you also, who . . . have believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory" (1:13-14); "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30; 4:5; 5:25-27). Thus, Paul here, as elsewhere, provides clear scriptural warrant for Luther's teaching that the life of sanctification is located in holy baptism: "that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

In brief, this pericope is not an invitation to pietistic or legalistic preaching about so-called "principles for successful living" (such as "put off; renew; put on"). It provides the opportunity to direct the proclamation of law and gospel so as to have the *purpose* of taking the hearers' eyes off of themselves and their works so as to see Jesus through ~~His cross~~ and through baptism into Him. In turn, this *purpose* will have the *result* that the hearers continue to grow in the life of sanctification (that is, they will respond to life as those who see themselves as having put on the total righteousness of the new man).

In the outline below the last sub-part (II.C.) is not intended as an invitation to teach the dynamics of sanctification to the hearers, but rather, in the light of one's own knowledge of the dynamics of

sanctification, to aim the sermon toward preaching in such a way as to renew the minds of the hearers with the pure grace of the gospel, in the light of which their renewed minds “put on” the new man, thus triggering the dynamics of sanctification within them. In a short conclusion, some explanation about the dynamics of sanctification might be appropriate, so as to encourage the hearers to seek out the mind-renewing gospel all week long.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE LIFE OF GOOD WORKS

- I. In us, the life of good works is impossible.
 - A. This truth neither Christian nor unbeliever wants to admit.
 - B. But all works are corrupted at their source—the sinful nature.
 - C. This corruption leaves even believers in their converted state bereft of the life of good works.
- II. In Christ, the life of good works comes to us.
 - A. Christ is the source and fount of all righteousness, all good works.
 - B. We have been plunged into that fount of righteousness in holy baptism.
 - C. The life of good works in us is generated as the gospel renews our minds.

Robert Schaibley
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THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 11, 1991

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

Paul divides his letter to the Ephesians into two main sections. In chapters 1-3 Paul reminds his hearers of their blessed membership in the *una sancta*. This section is pure gospel. In chapters 4-6 Paul instructs his hearers in the duties of membership in the *una sancta*. This section of the letter focuses on sanctification and the third use of the law. The transition between the two sections comes in 4:1, “Therefore, walk in the manner worthy of your calling.” The sermon text, Ephesians 4:30-5:2, comes in the midst of this discourse on the Christian walk. It is crucial in the interpretation of the text to understand that Paul has already laid the gospel foundation (which both saves and empowers us) before his exhortations to Christian living. Furthermore, in 1:19 and 2:10 Paul talks about the “power” that his hearers received “in Christ.” This power is a reference to the

“new man” within us. Paul’s treatment of this theme in Romans 6 is helpful background in understanding his exhortation to the Ephesians.

BE IMITATORS OF GOD

- I. Remember who you are—God’s children.
 - A. God has made us (former enemies) into His beloved children through holy baptism (5:1).
 - B. He has sealed us in the faith by giving us the gift of His Spirit.
 - C. He exhorts us, as a father does his children, to imitate Him.
- II. Follow your role model—Christ.
 - A. He is our example in imitating God.
 - 1. He exemplifies faithfulness to the Father.
 - 2. He exemplifies service to others (4:32; 5:2).
 - B. He is our enabler in imitating God.
 - 1. Through His sacrifice we have received forgiveness for all our past failures in imitating God.
 - 2. Through His sacrifice we have been reborn as a “new man” who is able to live as God’s child (Romans 6).

Conclusion: Our Father in heaven exhorts us to imitate Him in our relationship with others. Paul has instructed us this morning how to do so. He tells us to remember who we are as God’s children and to follow our role model Christ, who is our example and enabler. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Ronald P. May
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THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 18, 1991

Ephesians 5:15-20

Introduction: We often take a careless approach to our Christian life. After all, we know we are Christians who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We understand how He desires us to live. Yet, as we go about the labor of our Christian life, as we become tired and distracted by the other concerns of life, we start thinking to ourselves, “I really don’t have to be all that careful how I live my

Christian life, for it really does not matter all that much.” We learn from the sermon text, however, that our Christian lives do make the greatest of differences—not necessarily in regards to our own salvation, but in regards to the furthering of the kingdom of God. Therefore, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to strive after the will of God and to be very careful how we live for this reason:

YOU NEVER KNOW

- I. You do know, of course, who God is and what the will of God is (verse 17).
 - A. Such passages as John 6:35-40, John 4:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:2-5, and Matthew 28:18-19 make it scripturally clear what “the will of the Lord is.”
 - B. Such passages as 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and the verses of the sermon text are to be understood in this context. Therefore, God’s will for our lives is that we should be witnesses to His gospel, not only through our words, but also through the actions (the attitude and behavior) of our lives.
- II. Others, however, may know neither who God is nor who you are.
 - A. So often in our Christian lives we act as secret agents; that is, through our attitude and behavior we make it very difficult for those around us, even to suspect our true identity as redeemed Christians.
 - B. Whenever we act in this way, the effects can be devastating, not necessarily upon us (for we have complete forgiveness in Christ), but upon those around us, since our careless behavior hides and obscures the gospel which they so desperately need for their lives (Romans 6:1).
 - C. The attitude and behavior of our Christian lives are very important, since the Holy Spirit, working through our lives, leads others toward hearing and believing the gospel (1 Timothy 2:2-5).
- III. You never know how you may affect those who need to know God.
 - A. We never know what is going on in the lives of those around us. So many people learn to be “master thespians,” hiding the burdens of their lives even though they are “dying” on the inside.
 - B. We never know how the actions of our Christian lives positively affect the lives of those around us.
 - C. Since our Christian lives can powerfully affect the lives of those around us who still need the knowledge of the Savior, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us (as He forgives us) in our lives as His witnesses (Philippians 2:13).

Conclusion: Your life as an active witness, as a “not-so-secret agent,” is of the greatest importance as the Holy Spirit labors through your life to accomplish God’s will. You may never know how powerfully the Holy Spirit is working through your life as He empowers you to lead a “careful life” at work, at school, or in your neighborhood. And as you serve your church, you may never know how powerfully the Holy Spirit is working through you as you teach a Sunday school class; serve as a youth counselor, as an usher, or in the nursery; or even as you make an effort to greet that person next to you whom you do not know.

Karl W. Haeussler
Carmel, Indiana

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 25, 1991

Ephesians 5:21-31

The primary question facing the preacher in chapter 5 of Ephesians is the relationship of verse 21 to its context. Is this verse the summary of the preceding section on the relationship of Christians to one another in the church? Lenski and Stoeckhardt affirm this position. Or, on the other hand, does verse 21 introduce the following section on the relationship of husbands and wives? *Lutheran Worship* presents the pericope in this manner. Both positions reflect, in fact, a proper understanding of the verse. Verse 21 acts as a transitional statement by which Paul moves from the section on relationships in general within a body of Christians to an example of a specific Christian relationship. Verse 21 prohibits us from seeing Paul’s words merely as a discourse on the “order of creation”; instead Paul uses the most fundamental and intimate interpersonal relationship as a paradigm for all earthly relationships (as he explains further in the remainder of the epistle; this section is, after all, dubbed “the table of duties”).

This text can elicit a two-fold negative response. First, some preachers avoid this text out of fear of offending their hearers. Secondly, some sermons use this text as an opportunity to harangue either the feminist movement or the laziness of husbands. Both of these responses miss the point of the text. Paul instructs us to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The word “reverence” (*phobos*) brings immediately to mind Luther’s explanation of the ten commandments: “We are to fear and love God. . .” This reverence is

only possible through the work of God in our lives. Paul identifies this work as Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross (verse 25, *paradoken huper autes*), the benefits of which are given us in holy baptism (verse 26, *hina auten hagiase katharisas to loutro tou hudatos en remati*). However, the submission of the wife and the husband are not essentially the same: the wife is to submit to the husband as her head, while the husband is to love the wife with a Christ-like love. In summary, Paul speaks of the relationships of believers to one another in terms of service, namely, Christ's service first, which is now carried on in our daily lives as the baptized children of God.

Introduction: Chapter 5 of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians often causes discomfort in its hearers. In it Paul tells us the manner in which we are to serve God in our interpersonal relationships: Wives are to submit to their husbands, and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. In speaking in this way Paul exposes colossal failure on the part of most of us. But the positive note in this text is dominant. Paul tells us of the means through which we are able to attain the goal:

WILLING SUBMISSION

- I. Apart from Christ we reject submission to any will but our own.
 - A. According to our natural state we cannot submit to Christ in fear and love.
 - B. Our relationships apart from God are merely self-serving, manipulative efforts. We are not content with the role in life which God has given us.
 - C. By our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds we earn for ourselves the penalty for defiance of God—death.
- II. Christ re-creates our relationship with God so we can willingly submit to Him and to one another.
 - A. Christ submitted Himself entirely to God's will. His love for us expressed itself in fulfilling the law in our place.
 - B. Christ suffered the death penalty for our willing defiance of God and thereby destroyed death forever.
 - C. God effects a re-creation of our will through baptism and ushers us into His kingdom.
- III. Still, even as Christians, we fail to live in willing submission to one another.
 - A. Wives refuse to submit.
 - B. Husbands refuse to love.
 - C. Yet Christ works continually in our lives through the word and the sacraments so we can fulfill the roles He has given to us.

- D. Our sins of defiance are covered up by the robe of Christ's righteousness. God sees us through the cross of Christ as the baptized community redeemed by His Son.

Conclusion: The fact of our status manifests itself in our interpersonal relationships, most fundamentally in marriage. Still we must realize that our status in God's eyes is not determined by our submission to His will; we have failed and continue to fail in this respect. But our situation is based on the sacrifice of Christ and our ingrafting into God's family through baptism, where God has recreated us and made us new beings in Christ. Through this wonderful work of God we are enabled to submit to Christ by submitting to one another through the roles God has established for us.

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THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 1, 1991

Ephesians 6:10-20

Some interpreters look at the "armor of God" described in this text as meaning that armor which God Himself wears. As such, to "put on the full armor of God" would then mean that the believer must also exhibit such qualities in order successfully to "take a stand against the devil's schemes." The "belt of truth," for example, would be interpreted as the integrity and honesty which a follower of Christ should show.

The context of this section points to another interpretation. The whole point of verses 10-12 is that we cannot stand against Satan in our own strength, but must depend on the strength of the Lord. Therefore, the "armor of God" is that armor which God supplies for us. The "belt of truth," then, is the truth with which God provides us in His Word.

Introduction: Some years ago at the seminary Dr. George Kraus preached a very memorable sermon. He began by telling us about some new pastors out in the field who were having a very difficult time. Some were becoming discouraged; some were getting "burned out." He told us about one man who became so despondent about himself and his work in the parish that one day he went out into his garage, attached a hose from the exhaust pipe to the inside of his car, turned on the engine, and killed himself.

A few years after I heard this sermon Dr. Kraus himself died of cancer. But what a difference! All the way to the end of his life George Kraus was filled with hope, vitality, and joy in the Lord. What made the difference between these two pastors? Did one of them love the Lord any less or desire to serve Him any less than the other? I have no reason to think so. Were the circumstances in one person's life more overwhelming or difficult than those in the other's? I have no reason to think so. Both pastors wanted to serve the Lord with all their strength, and both were faced with many challenges and struggles which required great strength to overcome. The difference between these two pastors was not in the amount of strength they needed, but in the source from which their strength was supplied.

THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN STRENGTH

- I. Satan is out to get us.
 - A. In today's text, Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul warns us that we too will need great spiritual strength to survive (Ephesians 6:12).
 - B. Satan is out to get us, to wear us down until we are finally so worn out that we shall not be able to resist him any more. He attacks from two fronts.
 1. Satan tempts us to sin. He starts with a simple temptation. We put it aside. It comes again. We resist. Again it comes, when we are not expecting it. Sometimes we give in without realizing it. Sometimes we resist a little longer, but finally our strength gives out.
 2. Satan fills us with guilt and doubts. He then attacks us on the second front with guilt and frustration. We say we are Christians, but we do not act like it. We are not doing the things we know we should be doing. What is wrong with us anyway? And the cycle continues.
- II. Jesus gives us strength to stand firm.
 - A. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross.
 1. Satan can accuse us no longer.
 2. Satan can force us to do his will no more.
 - B. Jesus gives us strength with which to repel Satan's attacks.
 1. The source of our strength is in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10-11).
 - a. Paul does not say just, "be strong," but rather, "be strong in the Lord."
 - b. Paul does not say, "put on *your* full armor," but rather, "put on the full armor of *God*."
 - c. The difference between the two pastors discussed earlier is that one tried to battle Satan's attacks with his own strength. The other realized that he would

never survive in that way and depended instead on the strength of the Lord.

2. We receive God's strength by putting on His armor.
 - a. "Put on. . .the belt of [His] truth." We dare not depend on the unsteady truth of man to hold everything together; we shall depend on the firm truth of God in His word.
 - b. "Put on. . .the breastplate of [His] righteousness." We dare not depend on our righteousness to protect us; we shall depend on the righteousness of Christ.
 - c. "Put on. . .the readiness that comes from the gospel of [His] peace." We dare not wait for our own feelings of peace to share His love; we shall depend on the peace with God which Jesus gives and so share His love with others.
 - d. "Put on. . .the shield of faith." We dare not try to work up enough faith on our own to ward off Satan's attacks; we shall thank God for the faith He gave us in baptism and remind ourselves every day of the baptismal promise God made us, and Satan will be unable to touch us.
 - e. "Put on. . .the helmet of [His] salvation." We shall cover ourselves with thoughts of trust and joy in the salvation which Jesus gives us.
 - f. "Put on. . .the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Above all, we shall use the divine word to defend ourselves and others against Satan's attacks. If the word of God fills our hearts, souls, and minds, we shall be ready for anything Satan can throw at us.

Conclusion: Satan is a powerful adversary, tempting us to sin against God and to doubt our faith. But Satan has been defeated by the cross of Christ. Our salvation is sure. And Jesus has given us God's armor to defend us from Satan's attacks. He truly is the source of Christian strength.

Steve Moser
Sandpoint, Idaho

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 8, 1991

James 1:17-27

This Sunday begins a series of four Sundays on which the second lesson is from the Letter of James. This letter, Luther's familiar quotation notwithstanding, urges a vital Christianity characterized by a faith that proves itself alive by good works. There are clear aspects of that emphasis in this text.

James says that by grace the Father chose to give us birth (verse 18, *apokueo*; a less noble use occurs in verse 15) through the word of truth, that is, the gospel. We become, therefore, a kind of firstfruits of all He created. The *aparche* was in the Hebrew Scriptures the first portion of the crop set apart for God; God has set us apart for Himself by giving us spiritual birth.

The word (*logos*) has been introduced and becomes the center of this text. Already it is clear that the word is more than just words to be rationally heard and understood. The word has power to give us life (verse 18), and, when it is planted and grows within us, it has the power to save us (verse 21). The idea of the planted word is reminiscent of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) and reminds us that the word has power to enable us to bear fruit.

Therefore, the word must be heard by us, humbly accepted and welcomed by us (*deksasthe*, verse 21). Everything that hinders such receiving of the word must be put away. Clearly this hearing is more than a mental awareness of words formed into sentences. It reminds me of the church's old collect for the word: ". . . grant that we may in such wise hear them [the Holy Scriptures], read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. . ." Only the Holy Spirit can make such hearing possible for us.

But our hearing can fall short of that goal. Hearing can merely assimilate words and ideas in the mind instead of receiving life and power in the heart. Hearing can be forgetful, failing to remember the vision we have seen of what God has made us to be. Hearing can become a pious end in itself, instead of a powerful means to the end of doing the word in our lives. With such hearing we deceive ourselves (verse 22). This text does not pit hearing and doing against each other; rather it contrasts two kinds of hearing: (1.) the deceptive hearing that leads nowhere and (2.) that hearing which looks into the perfect law that gives freedom to the spiritually newborn and so moves us beyond hearing to doing the word.

What does such doing of the word that flows only from a full, proper hearing of the word look like? James suggests some rather practical things: It keeps a tight rein on our tongues lest our unbridled speaking torpedo our religious profession. It leads us to stand with the Father in looking after the fatherless, the widows, and all who are distressed. It helps us to keep ourselves unstained by the world. Then our religion is pure and faultless and acceptable before God. Here James "rehabilitates" the word *threskeia* (basically meaning the outward expression of religion in ritual, liturgy, and ceremony) by filling it with the meaning of doing the word that is heard. Such doing carries the promise of God's blessing (verse 25).

We can easily imagine what it is that motivated James to write the words in this text. As pastors we see enough of it ourselves: People sit in church services and Bible classes Sunday after Sunday. We assume that they are hearing the word through our words. Yet there is disappointment. When we look at their lives (like our lives), they are not what we would hope them to be. Their (like our) speaking often falls short of Christ-like speech. Their (like our) concerns seem to be centered more on self than on compassion and care for the poor, the needy, the distressed. They (as we) let themselves be too easily stained by the sin of the world around them.

What is the problem? Is it the word we proclaim? Certainly not, says James, and so we say, too. The word is good seed, with all the power of life, growth, fruit, and salvation. So the problem must be with the hearing, even as in the Parable of the Sower the problem was with the soil into which the seed fell. We need in this sermon to think about our hearing. Are our spiritual ears so clogged with the sinful debris of the world that the power of the word cannot get through? Then we need the Holy Spirit to use His gifts anew to correct us and our hearing so the word of the gospel can get through.

When we hear and receive the word fully and properly, when it grows within us, then doing the word will follow. It is important to notice here that this idea is not mere moralism on the part of James. He does not divorce ethical behavior from the power of the word; the former follows from the latter. We need to hear all of this through the word which God has spoken to us in these last times, the word of Jesus Christ (John 1; Hebrews 1).

The goal of the sermon outlined below is to help our hearers hear the word in a way that moves them beyond hearing to doing the word. The malady is our spiritual hearing problem—all the disorders arising from our hearts that keep the power of the word from touching our hearts and changing our lives. The means to the goal is to remember again what our Father has made us to be through the word, to see again what we are through the forgiving, redeeming word of

Jesus Christ, and to call again upon the power of the Holy Spirit to give us ears to hear.

Introduction: We Lutherans are people of the word. We place a high priority on preaching and teaching the word, on hearing and studying the word. But precisely this fact can become a trap for us. Hearing the word can become an end in itself. We can become satisfied with hearing. We can even feel quite religious just for hearing the word. But James warns us that we can be deceiving ourselves. We can be swept into a religion which the Father counts worthless. James suggests that we need to move beyond hearing:

BEYOND HEARING TO DOING

- I. Have you heard?
 - A. Sometimes with great excitement that question is asked of us: Have you heard?
 - 1. The enthusiasm of the question peaks our interest. We want to know.
 - 2. Sometimes the answer does not touch us and our interest fades.
 - 3. At other times the answer has the power to captivate us. We become quite excited and may even want to do something about it. Here is an example: "Have you heard? The first twenty patrons at the theater tonight will be admitted free!"
 - B. Have you heard? The Father has chosen you for new life!
 - 1. Through the power of His word He has given you spiritual birth (baptism).
 - 2. By that birth He has dedicated you to Himself, like the special firstfruits of the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 3. He has planted within you His word which has the power to make you grow, to save you, to help you bear fruit.
 - 4. It is the Word, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed you for this new life, the righteous life God desires.

Transition: What a word to hear! Have you heard?

- II. We have heard all that before!
 - A. It is true. We have heard it all before.
 - 1. We have heard the words and the sentences with our minds.
 - 2. We may feel "religious" because we have heard.
 - 3. But often our hearing does not move us beyond hearing to doing the word.
 - 4. We do not exhibit the new life and power of the word in our daily conduct.

- B. We must confess: We have a spiritual hearing problem.
1. We can make hearing the word in preaching and teaching an end in itself.
 2. There is much static that interferes with our hearing: our speaking, anger, sin, pride.
 3. We can be forgetful hearers. We see in the mirror of the gospel word what God has made us to be, but we go away and promptly forget who we are.

Transition: We become hearers of the word, but not doers.

III. We need to hear again!

- A. We seek the power of the Holy Spirit to give us ears to hear.
1. We are newborn children of the Father by the power of the word.
 2. This powerful word has been planted in us.
 3. Through the Word, Jesus Christ, we have been saved, forgiven, and empowered for the righteous life God desires.
 4. We need to look again in the mirror of the gospel word and remember who we are.
- B. If we have really *heard*, we will *do* the word.
1. We will keep a tight rein on our tongues.
 2. We will look after the orphans, the widows, and all who are distressed.
 3. We will keep ourselves unstained by the world.
 4. We will live the righteous life God desires.

Conclusion: Such hearing *and* doing will make our religion the kind the Father accepts as pure and faultless. Such hearing *and* doing carries the promise of the Father's blessing. "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

Sergei S. Koberg
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THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 15, 1991

James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18

Today's text, although emphasizing good works, strikes at a much deeper issue. When we consider some individuals to be more worthy than others, we show a failure to believe a gospel that preaches the cross before glory, faith before works. This partiality, which all of us

show to some extent, bears proof of our struggle to believe that we are truly justified by faith and not by works.

Two points ought to be mentioned. The negative particle with the present imperative in verse one indicates a prohibition of an action presently in progress. Also, I follow the opinion (so Lenski; TDNT) that *diakritheti* in verse 4 possesses a middle sense ("be at odds with oneself, doubt") rather than an active sense ("make distinctions").

Introduction: All of us have preferences. Some people like the wildest flavors of ice cream and others like plain vanilla. And distinctions are important: men are not women; adults are not children; and so on. But distinctions as to worth before God have no place for Christians. For this reason James tells us:

LIVE WITHOUT PARTIALITY

- I. Because to live with partiality is to deny one's faith.
 - A. Sinful partiality considers some people more worthy.
 1. The apostle is speaking to a situation in which a rich man is being given special treatment over a poor man.
 2. We often make value judgments about other people.
 3. Such attitudes are sinful, breaking the second table of the law (verses 8-9). And when the law is broken in even one place, one becomes guilty of sin in general (verse 10).
 - B. Partiality by Christians is doing one thing and believing another.
 1. It places contradictions into our own lives (verse 4).
 2. God's entire nature and His dealings with us in law and gospel completely exclude partiality (Romans 2:11). Partiality sends a mixed message to others and causes others to stumble (Romans 2).
- II. Because the gospel proclaims the same salvation for all.
 - A. For all mankind there is only one salvation.
 1. There is only one Savior for all (John 14:6).
 2. Christ impartially took the sins of all people upon His shoulders.
 - B. God forgives us, not on the basis of our worth, but on the basis of Christ's works.
 1. The accomplished work of the cross is an objective truth existing outside of ourselves. Man can take no credit for his salvation.
 2. Together we are all beggars at the same cross. We come equally undeserving, but we leave equally forgiven.
 3. The wonderful message of the gospel invites all of us to believe: "Your sins are forgiven; go in peace." All who believe these words have the same forgiveness.

III. Because to do so is to show our faith by our works.

A. True faith produces works.

1. We are saved by faith alone, but we are not saved by a faith that is alone. In effect, faith without works is dead.
2. Beginning with our baptism, God is continually at work strengthening us for the life we are called to live as Christians.

B. Being impartial shows others our faith.

1. James invites the contentious person to show his faith without works (verse 18). He will show his faith by his works.
2. Impartiality will open doors for us to share the message of our impartial gospel.

Conclusion: In today's text the Apostle James warns us against living with partiality. Why? First, to do so is to deny our faith. Secondly, the gospel proclaims the same salvation to all. Thirdly, as we avoid partiality, our works will be seen by others and will open the doors to giving them too this wonderful message. We urgently pray, therefore, that God would enable us all to live without partiality.

Berton L. Greenway
Smyrna, Delaware

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 22, 1991

James 3:16-4:6

The NIV heading for this pericope is "Two Kinds of Wisdom," although the NIV follows Nestle's twenty-sixth edition by starting the paragraph with verse 13 rather than verse 16. James, in 3:1-12, 14-16 and 4:1-5, gives a picture of a wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil. We note that, as opposed to any ideas of perfectionism, James is confronting such wisdom within the church.

The opposite kind of wisdom, which "comes down from heaven," might well be called "holy wisdom." The Eastern Orthodox churches introduce the liturgical lessons with this cry: "Wisdom! Let us attend." The name of the magnificent Hagia Sophia Church in Constantinople affirms that, although true wisdom may well be gained from books or great teachers, wisdom is to be found first and foremost in the church.

James chooses pastoral metaphors like “seed” and “sowing,” “fruit” and “harvest.” Lest we moralize or look toward human achievement in gaining wisdom, chapter 4 of James emphasizes God’s gift of wisdom and man’s need for right relations with Him. The word structure in this lesson is worthy of attention. Verse 3:17 begins with the cadence of an epsilon alliteration (a sequence of words with the same primary letter) and then moves to a contrasting double alpha privative (alpha prefixed to an adjective, indicating the negative). Finally, Lenski provides a helpful word study contrasting *psychikos* (“worldly,” “sensual”—found in James 3:15 and illustrated throughout the pericope) and *pneumatikos* (“spiritual,” “divine”).

Introduction: It is humiliating when someone says that we have made an *unwise* choice. We like to make *wise* decisions, to do what seems smart to those who are watching us. We want to be seen as possessing, not only knowledge, but also *wisdom*. The Holy Scriptures contain many references to wisdom. However, these writings teach that there are two very different kinds of wisdom. The text, along with passages before and after it, asks the reader this question:

WHAT KIND OF WISDOM DO YOU HAVE?

- I. Do you have earthly wisdom?
 - A. It is based on falsehood because wrong motives (4:3), pride (4:6), and fleshliness (*psychikē*, 3:15) are based on the lies of the devil rather than on the truth of God’s word.
 - B. It points to the self. Bitter envy (3:16), selfish ambition (3:16), and boastfulness (3:14) alienate one from God and his neighbor because they seek to take advantage of others to satisfy one’s own desires and self-interests.
 - C. It is disorderly. Becoming the logical result of selfishness, evil desires (4:1), quarrelsomeness (4:2), and hatefulness go beyond alienation and seek to destroy the very fabric of family, society, and friendship.

Transition: It is the tragedy of man’s lost condition since the fall of Adam and Eve that the divine gift of intelligence should be perverted to evil uses as it is in *earthly wisdom*. How wonderful it is that God has given us the gift of pure wisdom, holy wisdom. The text refers to it as “wisdom that comes from heaven.”

- II. Do you have heavenly wisdom?
 - A. It is true. Heavenly wisdom working in the Christian brings purity of belief and action (3:17). This wisdom is directed toward God in His absolute purity and righteousness. It is

impartial (3:17), knowing that partiality bases itself on prejudice or self-righteousness rather than on what is right. Also heavenly wisdom is sincere (3:17). Belief is based on what is right, not what is convenient or comfortable.

- B. It points to God (heaven). It is yielding or submissive (3:17) to God's good purposes, having a holy flexibility. It is humble (3:13), wanting to give glory to God and honor to others. In a world of personal power and striving, it finds meaning in recognizing where the forgiven sinner stands in relation to his heavenly Father.
- C. It is peaceable. It not only loves (3:17) peace, but it strives and works (3:18) for peace, against all of the envy and disruption the world can foster. Also this peacemaking is expressed in mercy (3:17). As I am forgiven, I can forgive others. I can put the best construction on what my neighbor is and does. One can compare the bloody legacy of the French Revolution with the powerful force of non-violence in America's civil rights movement.

III. What kind of wisdom do you (as a Christian) have?

- A. Because of the old nature, we still harbor the earthly wisdom, which must be continually beaten back by the holy wisdom which is ours in Christ Jesus.
- B. Jesus is our wisdom. His word draws us to Himself, where we are made "wise unto salvation." As the perfect man, the New Adam, He lived according to heavenly wisdom, becoming the blameless sacrifice for our sins, doing for us what we were unable and unwilling to do.
- C. In holy baptism we receive the full benefits of Jesus' wisdom and, by faith, are given the power to become the children of God and are promised His Holy Spirit. This Spirit will lead us into all truth, not just the wisdom that leads to salvation, but also the wisdom that gives shape to a godly Christian life, a life of response—in love and gratitude—to what God has done for us.

Conclusion: The Lord has made you "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Now His holy wisdom works within you, bringing an awareness of your need for greater wisdom and leading you to greater wisdom in His service.

James H. Cavener
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THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 29, 1991

James 4:7-12 (4:13-5:6)

James' question—"Who are you to judge your neighbor?"—reflects his understanding of submission (*hupotassō*, 4:7) to God. Only the "one lawgiver and judge" (4:12; cf. Matthew 9:6; 28:18) ultimately has the authority to judge and delegate His authority to His chosen instruments. Relevant passages are Romans 13:1-2, Hebrews 13:17, and 1 Timothy 2:12. Luther comments: "No one has authority publicly to judge and reprove his neighbor, not even if he has seen him commit a sin, unless he has specifically been given the authority to judge and reprove." Luther's discussion of the Eighth Commandment (*Large Catechism*) is a superb commentary on who has the authority to judge and a good corrective to the common misuse of this passage to deny even "right judgment" (John 7:24).

Great clarity must obtain when discussing "submission" in our "non-submissive society." However, it must be made clear that lack of submission to those appointed by God is rebellion against God, unless those so appointed are themselves promoting rebellion against God (Acts 4:19-20). So too when we assume authority that has not been given to us, we are "usurping God's judgment and office" (Luther).

Introduction: James asks of us the question, "Who are you to judge your neighbor?" Every Christian must answer this question. Before it can be answered properly the Christian must consider four important scriptural truths.

WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?

- I. Every Christian is subordinate to God.
 - A. Each Christian knows that it is his duty "to serve and obey Him."
 - 1. Because He is our Creator and Preserver.
 - 2. Because He is our Redeemer (4:12).
 - 3. Because He is our Sanctifier (4:5, 10).
 - B. Each Christian knows that Christ Himself became subordinate.
 - 1. When He humbled Himself, even unto death, God lifted Him up.
 - 2. When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up (4:10).
- II. Every Christian has a role given by God.
 - A. God Himself has established these roles.

1. They are pleasing to Him (4:12).
 2. They create and maintain order.
 3. They are good for us because God is good (4:11).
 - B. God has not given everyone the same role.
 1. Every Christian is being renewed in the image of God, but in the relationship of male and female women are to be subordinate (1 Timothy 2:11).
 2. Every Christian is a holy priest, but not everyone is a pastor (1 Timothy 3:1ff.).
 3. Every Christian is confronted with sin, but not everyone has been given authority to judge his neighbor.
- III. Every Christian is a sinner before God.
- A. We sin against God when we try to usurp God-given authority.
 1. We judge the law that protects our neighbor (4:11).
 2. We judge the lawgiver who gave the law (4:12).
 3. We consider ourselves gods, for we are "usurping [the one true] God's judgment and office."
 - B. We sin against God when we do not accept our God-given responsibility.
 1. We judge the law that requires that order be maintained.
 2. We judge the lawgiver who placed us in a position of authority.
 3. We consider ourselves gods, for we overrule His rules.
- IV. Every Christian has passed from judgment to life (John 3:18).
- A. God Himself demands repentance.
 1. He calls us to such repentance (4:8-9).
 2. He creates this very repentance (4:5).
 - B. God no longer holds our sins against us (4:6-12).
 1. He speaks well of us through the office of the gospel.
 2. He desires that we speak well of others through the power of the gospel.

Conclusion: Unless our God-given role demands otherwise, when talking of our neighbor we should "defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything," for we have not been called by God to judge. Unfortunately, because of our rebellious sinful nature, we often usurp God's authority. The good news is that Christ's perfect submission has won us forgiveness for this usurpation and for every other form of rebellion. That news is good news indeed!

Eric Lange
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THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 6, 1991

Hebrews 2:9-11 (12-18)

This epistle reading has little in common with the other readings for this Sunday. The Old Testament and gospel readings speak about marriage. This is the first in a set of readings from the Epistle to the Hebrews which will continue until the Sunday before the end of the church year. Because of this scheme the remaining epistle readings are often unconnected with the other readings. To avoid repetition the preacher is encouraged to study all of these epistle readings and plan the sermon themes for the remaining Sundays in the church year at one time.

This section of Hebrews speaks about the incarnation of Christ our Savior. Hebrews 1:1-8 shows Christ as God's Son and so superior to the angels. Hebrews 2:6-8 is a paraphrase of Psalm 8:4-6. These verses contain some verbal similarities to Genesis 1:26 (the Old Testament reading). In Genesis 1:26 the Creator gives humanity dominion over the world. The Son of Man, however, exercises dominion over the whole universe by virtue of His deity (Daniel 7:13). Yet Hebrews 2:9-18 shows Christ in His state of humiliation as lower than the angels. The incarnate Christ had to become lower than the angels that by His death He might exercise dominion over the universe on behalf of His brethren. Hebrews 3 states that Jesus is greater than Moses. This is the pericope's context.

Christ came as the mediator of the New Testament (*kaine diatheke*—Hebrews 9:15-17). This testament was promised by God in Genesis 15. There God alone, in the form of a smoking firepot, passed through the sundered parts of the animals. God thus brought upon Himself the curse of death. God promised that He would humble Himself and die for sin. If God is to die, He must become human. In the Old Testament the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ was already prophesied. (Relevant statements of Luther can be found in *LW*, 36, p. 38; *LW*, 29, p. 213; *LW*, 27, pp. 264-268; *LW*, 35, p. 84; *LW*, 36, p. 179.) Jesus' death and resurrection are His glory and ours.

Introduction: We are often told today that less is more. Eat lightly—less calories, less cholesterol, and less weight contribute to a more healthy lifestyle. Less is more! The text shows that Jesus' humiliation results in exaltation. So with Jesus—less (humiliation) is more (exaltation)!

LESS IS MORE!

I. Less is more!

A. Less: Jesus was lower than the angels (verse 9).

1. As the incarnate Son of God, He is not ashamed to call sinful and imperfect human beings His brethren (verse 11).
2. He took on Himself human flesh (the seed of Abraham), that He might be like His brethren (verses 16, 17).
3. He came to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

B. More: Jesus is true God (chapter 1).

1. The name "Jesus" identifies Him as the virgin-born Savior from sin (Matthew 1:21).
2. He is the only person to have spent His entire life on earth without committing a sin in thought, word, or deed (Hebrews 4:15).
3. As our sinless high priest, He made reconciliation for the sins of all people (verse 17; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). (Because of the emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness in this text, it might be best to use the introit appointed to this Sunday in the one-year series, which comes from Psalm 32:1-5.)

II. Less is more!

A. Less: Jesus suffered in His state of humiliation (verse 10).

1. Jesus was tempted to sin (verse 18; Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 4:1-11).
2. Human beings succumb to the temptations of Satan and sin by hardening their hearts, by getting unscriptural divorces, by committing adultery, and by tempting others to sin (verse 18; Mark 10:2, 5, 11, 12—the gospel reading).

B. More: Jesus' suffering has brought exaltation to Himself and help to His sinful and suffering brethren (verse 18).

1. He helps by making His brethren perfect through the forgiveness of sins which comes to them in word and sacrament (verse 10).
2. He helps His sanctified brethren say no to sin (verse 11).
3. He is able to bring His brethren to heavenly glory through His saving grace (verses 9-10; Hebrews 2:7-8).

III. Less is more!

A. Less: Jesus died!

1. This is why He was made lower than the angels (verse 9).
2. Jesus died after suffering hell's full penalty for every sin of each sinful human being (verse 9). He is the propitiation for the sins of all (verse 17).

3. This death is why God had to become incarnate in Christ as He promised in the Old Testament.
 4. Jesus' state of humiliation makes Him appear to be less than what He is, true God. Can God be lower than the angels? Can God suffer like a human being? Can God die? Human reason calls such things impossible, for they are seen as lessening God. But such "rational" thoughts must be rejected. Rather, we must firmly believe that Jesus—the incarnate God—did these things in His state of humiliation.
- B. More: In Jesus, God has gained the victory for us!
1. Jesus is our perfect and sinless substitute. He did not deserve death (verse 9).
 2. He died that He might destroy sin, death, and the devil for us (verses 14, 15).
 3. With His death Jesus put His last will and testament into effect. By faith we receive the promised testamentary inheritance of the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, and the glory of heaven (verses 9-11; Matthew 26:26-28; Hebrews 9:15-17). These blessings are emphasized in the collect of the day and in the gradual.
 4. Jesus' death is basic to His glorification and ours (verse 9; 2:7-8, John 12:23-33; 13:31-32; 17:1-5; Philippians 2:5-12).

Conclusion: Jesus is the author (*archēgos*) of our salvation. By His death He authors our resurrection. By His cross He authors our heavenly glory. Because Jesus appeared to be less than the incarnate God in His humiliation, suffering, and death, He is able to give us more than we could otherwise ever hope—the forgiveness of sins and the glory of eternal life as God's righteous sons and daughters. Truly, with Jesus, less is more!

Armand J. Boehme
Waseca, Minnesota

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 13, 1991

Hebrews 3:1-6

What is it that gives Christians the tenacity to persevere in the faith through all trials and tribulations? The answer is Jesus Christ and His trustworthiness as Savior. When we lose confidence in Him, we

also lose sight of our heavenly destination. The absence of faith shifts both attention and confidence to the self, which turns hope, once rooted in God's power and promise, into despondence. The objective of repentance is to return the heart and mind to confidence in the one sent from God to save (the apostle) and intercede (the high priest), Jesus Christ. Confidence built upon His abilities is unshakable.

In the text the writer is addressing Jews tempted to return to the old cultus. The persecution of the Christian faith had made their old covenant look superior to the new testament. As with their fathers, tribulation had confused their memories and made the old days appear better than the new. In actuality, a return to the old cultus would not have been a real return to Moses, for Moses had been a servant in the same household over which Jesus now ruled as Son. This unity between Moses and Jesus meant that a rejection of Jesus would be simultaneously a rejection of Moses. The temptation of the fathers to reject Moses was much like, indeed, the temptation of these Jews to reject Jesus. It was imperative that the believers look to Jesus with even more confidence than the Israelites had put in Moses. Moses had been reliable, but Jesus was even more so, as God incarnate. He transcended Moses in glory—as God's spokesman to the people (apostle) and as an intercessor for the people before God (high priest). To promote our own repentance, therefore, we are encouraged to look at our level of excitement in anticipating the heavenly promised land, in order that we may direct our hearts to confidence in Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Travel is a joy. There is nothing that makes us hum and whistle more than the anticipation of some exciting vacation. Sometimes the thoughts can be as pleasant as the vacation itself. Whatever the tedium of our chores or the hardships we face, the opportunity to "get away from it all" on a wonderful vacation can make such a difference in our capacity to endure. This is the secret of Christian endurance: We are going to take a journey to a place that exceeds any earthly vacation. We are bound for heaven. The very thought of our heavenly future brings joy to our daily lives, enabling us to endure life's threats and trials.

FIX THOSE THOUGHTS ON JESUS

- I. How blessed we are when we think much of heaven!
 - A. We have every right to relish thoughts of heaven and anxiously anticipate arrival there. The text says Christians even "boast" in such thoughts (3:6).
 - B. Our delight stems from the certainty of attaining heaven, and such certainty comes from the reliability of our guide and

leader, Jesus Christ. It is not founded upon our own capacities, but upon the one sent by God.

II. How sad we are when we think little of heaven!

A. God has, indeed, set before our eyes the evidence of His power and presence.

1. Delivering us from the kingdom of Satan.
2. Delivering us in the waters of baptism from the deadly force of sin.
3. Effecting His testament in favor of us all.

B. We still wonder if heaven can really be true—this paradise of freedom and eternal rest.

1. We question if it is worth struggling now for the “possibility” of something greater tomorrow. We look at others and we wonder if our life is truly better.
2. Doubt stems from thinking that heaven is going to depend upon us, our efforts, and our accomplishments. It is no wonder we lose our enthusiasm for heaven! It is not our doing. God is the one who effects salvation.

III. How sure we are when we think always of Jesus!

A. We fix those thoughts on Jesus the apostle, who in a way infinitely above Moses of old has been commissioned to deliver His people.

1. Have we not seen Him open up the pathway to eternal life?
2. Have we not seen His power, not only in changing water into wine, but also in raising the dead and even rising from the dead Himself?

B. We fix those thoughts on Jesus the high priest, who in a way infinitely above Moses of old now intercedes for us before God the Father.

1. Did He not share our burdens, suffer with and for us, and lay down His life in our behalf?
2. Did He not pray for His weak and weary disciples to keep them from falling?
3. Did He not pray even for His enemies? Moses prayed for the people and only stayed the wrath of God temporarily. Jesus, as the Son of God, has gained forgiveness for all our sins and has obtained the right to lead us into the heavenly promised land.

John Fiene
Norwalk, Connecticut

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 20, 1991

Hebrews 4:9-16

This pericope encompasses an intriguing transition between the writer's discussion of rest (3:7-4:11) and the high priesthood (4:14-8:6), joined together by the well-known and lofty comparison of God's word to a two-edged sword (verses 12, 13). While any of its three divisions would provide ample material for sermonizing, the challenge here is to deal with these verses as the related whole which they are.

While "sabbath rest" is best understood as the eternal rest prepared by God for His people, it is important that sufficient emphasis be given to the present peace and rest which results from the believer's confidence of salvation. Of the many interpretations which have been given to verses 12 and 13, Luther's understanding (*LW*, 29) of these verses as a portrait of the terrifying and condemning law of God is the most reasonable. Then, as Luther says, "no other refuge is left than that one sanctuary which is Christ, our Priest."

Introduction: People today are searching as they have for centuries—searching for tranquility in a world that seldom affords it. While we are encouraged to look for rest in many different directions, there is only one place where true rest is found. In the gospel of Jesus Christ we find rest, both temporal and eternal. There alone we find rest:

REST FOR THE WEARY

- I. All people long for rest.
 - A. The anguish of our mortal life drives us to this longing and searching.
 - 1. Our labors are difficult (verse 9).
 - 2. Our weaknesses are many (verse 15).
 - 3. Our sorrows are frequent (verse 16).
 - B. We tend to trust in people and things that fail to give us lasting rest.
- II. No one deserves rest.
 - A. The living word of God exposes sin (verses 12, 13).
 - 1. No one is exempt from or can hide from the law.
 - 2. The law judges with absolute equity and power.
 - B. Sin deprives of rest (verse 11).
 - 1. It deprives of both temporal and eternal rest.
 - 2. It deprives because it is rebellion against God's holy will for our lives.

- a. Hardened unbelief and its consequent disobedience deprived the Israelites of rest, both in Canaan and in heaven (3:19; 4:11).
- b. This rebellious and unbelieving sinful nature is still a part of each of us.

III. God gives true rest.

- A. He gives true rest for the sake of His Son, our high priest (verses 14, 15).
 - 1. On the cross Jesus was offered as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.
 - 2. Through Jesus' sacrifice we are declared the people of God (verse 9) and guaranteed an eternal rest.
- B. He gives true rest through the means of grace (verse 16).
 - 1. Through these means the Spirit creates faith, which appropriates Christ's sacrifice and the consequent blessings of rest.
 - 2. When we are nourished regularly by these means in the context of worship, our promised eternal rest fosters within us a peaceful present rest.

Conclusion: By faith in Jesus Christ, our great high priest, we rest each day in the confidence of our eternal rest with Him in heaven.

Peter K. Lange
Concordia, Missouri

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 27, 1991

Hebrews 5:1-10

Introduction: All people of all times feel they have problems that are unique. They feel that their problems can best be understood and helped by "one of their own," a person who has lived the same problems, experienced the same difficulties first-hand. We see this feeling manifested, not only in Alcoholics Anonymous, but also in a seemingly endless and ever growing multitude of self-help groups and religious sects. But in all these groups the quest is the same as it is for all of us. We are all asking the same question:

WHO UNDERSTANDS ME?

- I. Can someone really understand us if he does not really know us?

- A. Can someone understand us if he does not know our problems?
 - 1. We know that in the workplace the person who ordinarily does a certain task is the one who is best equipped to locate the problem when something is going wrong and make corrections—as opposed to a manager who has never seen the factory.
 - 2. The listeners in the text understand that the best one to represent them before God is a person who is subject to the same weakness as they are, a man from amongst themselves.
- B. Can someone understand us if he does not know our needs?
 - 1. The person with the problem is usually not the person with the solution.
 - 2. When we look to ourselves or we appoint someone to find solutions to our problems, we only end up with more problems.

Transition: Jesus understands us because in His state of humiliation He experienced the temptations and the problems we face. Moreover, He understands us as no one else could since in His state of exaltation He is our great high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

II. Jesus understands us.

- A. He knows our problems better than we know them ourselves.
 - 1. He has endured the trials and temptations of this life, where we have failed.
 - 2. He understands the full consequences of sin. (He was forsaken on the cross for us.)
 - 3. He understands our need to repent.
- B. As the source of our eternal salvation Jesus understands our needs.
 - 1. He understands our need to be forgiven.
 - 2. He understands our need to be comforted and strengthened in the faith.
 - 3. He understands our need to be loving.

Conclusion: It is a lonely feeling when we sense that no one around us understands us. The temptation is great to follow anyone or any group that claims to understand us. But the only one who can really understand us is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Micheal Kroll
Winamac, Indiana

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

November 3, 1991

Hebrews 7:23-28

The mortality (verse 23) and sinfulness (verse 27) of the Levitical priests required consecutive priests and continuing sacrifices. The supremacy of the priesthood of Christ stands out as unique. The Levitical priests died; Christ lives! The Levitical sacrifice was temporary at best; Christ is permanent! "Once for all" (verse 27) is the significant thought in this pericope—one time by one priest, for all mankind for all time. There is nothing else to do. His sacrifice was the final sacrifice.

Christ "meets our need" (verse 28). He meets our need in that He is not only the high priest but also the perfect sacrifice. It is this combination that made His sacrifice sufficient to "save completely" (verse 25). Here "completely" may be understood as fully and hence eternally. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save eternally since Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save fully. Nothing else need be added to it now or ever.

Introduction: What have you done to earn your salvation? Have you done enough? Is there more that you could do? Is there more that you should do? On whom do you depend for your salvation? Do you depend upon your pastor? Do you depend upon your parents? Do you depend upon mankind's self-fulfillment or upon mankind's "coming of age"? These and other questions like them are answered in many different ways by the many different religions that we find around us today. The text this morning points us to the answer to these questions with this assertion: "He sacrificed for their sins once for all, when He offered Himself."

A SACRIFICE SUFFICIENT FOR ALL

- I. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves.
 - A. The first question asked by sinful man is this: "Can I be saved?"
 - 1. I have rejected God.
 - 2. I have sinned against God and man.
 - B. The second question asked by sinful man is this: "What can I do to save myself?"
 - 1. Can I earn my own salvation?
 - 2. Can others (pastors, priests) intercede for me?

Transition: Man's knowledge of his sinful condition brings him to this question: "Can I be saved?" The world offers man many ways to save himself, such as works-righteousness, self-transformation, and general human cooperation. But these efforts all fail. They do not bring comfort. Where does man find comfort?

- II. Christ's sacrifice is able to save completely.
 - A. Christ meets our needs.
 - 1. He was the perfect sacrifice.
 - 2. He did that which we are unable to do.
 - B. Christ lives forever.
 - 1. He is there to intercede for sinners now.
 - 2. He is there to intercede for sinners always.

Transition: We can find our comfort in the knowledge that Christ was the perfect sacrifice and is able to save completely. However, one question remains: Whom is He able to save?

- III. Christ's sacrifice is sufficient "for all."
 - A. Whom does Christ save?
 - 1. Those who come to God through Him.
 - 2. All who come to God through Him.
 - B. How does He save? His own blood is a ransom for all.

Conclusion: The law and so too all worldly remedies for salvation are unable to clear the conscience of the worshipper. But "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." Christ gave Himself up for us, thereby freeing us from the guilt of sin and allowing us to give ourselves up to Him.

Myles R. Schultz
Okmulgee, Oklahoma

THE THIRD-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

November 10, 1991

Hebrews 10:11-18

This text is the third in a row concerning Christ as priest. To avoid repetition Pentecost 23 could focus on God's choice of Jesus as priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," Pentecost 24 could focus on Jesus' priestly work of intercession, and this week could focus on the

completed task of Jesus' priesthood, namely, His once-and-for-all sacrifice for sins. This text concentrates on the results of Christ's completed sacrifice.

Many concepts in the text provide unusual ways to proclaim the gospel. The phrase "sacrifice for sins" (verse 12) is a more concrete picture than "atonement" or "redemption." The word "perfected" (verse 14) is not meant as a moral statement, but rather expresses the idea that Christ's sacrifice "brought us to completion," adding to us the imputed righteousness which we lack by nature. Likewise, "those who are sanctified" (verse 14) are not those who lead a holy life but those whom Christ's sacrifice makes holy in God's sight. (We note the passive voice of "sanctified.") The *diatheke* of verse 16 is not a "covenant," but rather a last will and "testament" (cf. Appendix 2 to *God's Word to the Nations*). This translation allows us to emphasize the monergistic grace of God in His promise to forgive. God's promise to "not remember" our sins (verse 17) provides an explanation of "forgiveness" (verse 18). All these terms allow us to preach a justification sermon on Luther's birthday without even using the term "justification."

The malady addressed in the outline below consists in doubts about our forgiveness and attempts to make up for our lawless deeds with something other than the sacrifice of Christ. Satan always tempts us to believe that we must somehow add something to the salvation Jesus purchased for us. The goal is to assure ourselves of forgiveness on the basis of the completed sacrifice of Christ.

Introduction: Lutheran Bible Translator David Drevlow reports that the Vai people of Liberia, Africa, still offer animal sacrifices, even though their Islamic religion does not. Americans usually consider such practices uncivilized. A couple of years ago we heard reports of a drug ring in Mexico that offered human sacrifices to insure the "success" of its members. Most Americans considered them crazy. Yet Jesus' own parents sacrificed two small birds after His birth, and the Book of Hebrews tells of how Jesus Himself offered a human sacrifice. What is it that leads people to make sacrifices? And why do we *not* offer sacrifices any more? The epistle today tells us:

**WHERE THERE IS FORGIVENESS,
THERE IS NO LONGER AN OFFERING FOR SIN**

- I. We needed an offering for sin.
 - A. God demanded an offering for sins (e.g., Leviticus 4:3, 13-15; Hebrews 9:22b).
 - B. Animal offerings could not in themselves make amends (verse 11).

- C. Animal offerings reminded people of the need for amends to be made (Hebrews 10:3-4).
- II. Jesus made our offering for sin.
 - A. He offered one sacrifice for sin (verse 12a).
 - B. His session at God's right hand shows that God accepted this sacrifice (verses 12b-13).
 - C. His offering perfected us forever (verse 14a).
- III. We no longer need an offering for sin.
 - A. Through faith in Jesus we are sanctified (verse 14b).
 - B. We have forgiveness.
 - 1. The Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth in Scripture (verse 15).
 - 2. God's testament assures us of this truth (verse 16).
 - 3. He promises not to remember our sins (verse 17).
 - C. Therefore we simply remember Jesus' one offering for sin (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
 - D. And there is no longer an offering for sin (verse 18).

Conclusion: Do not waste your time looking for ways to make amends for your sins. Jesus completed the necessary sacrifice for sins, and God says you are forgiven. You are free to use your time usefully, doing good works. You have forgiveness from Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross.

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THE SECOND-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

November 17, 1991

Hebrews 12:1-2

Introduction: Whenever I contemplate the divine message in chapters eleven and twelve of the Letter to the Hebrews, I must admit that I am somewhat taken aback at the analogy drawn for the Christian there. In chapter eleven many of the Old Testament's mighty champions of faith are set out as examples for us to follow. They are a rather exclusive group, to say the least, and yet God would have us imitate their faith in the living out of our own lives. Chapter twelve follows with the advice, "Let us also rid ourselves of every burden and the sin into which we easily fall" (GWN). Our struggle is to try to answer God's call despite the continued presence within us of the "old Adam," whose every inclination is to sin. The answer to our dilemma coincides nicely with the liturgical position of the text.

Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith helps us in the race toward our eternal home by this means:

REMOVING THE STUMBLING BLOCKS TO FAITH

- I. A faithful race is one begun in Christ.
 - A. Trying to run a race without keeping one's eyes on the finish line would be foolish. In the Christian's life sinful pride causes him to look everywhere for shortcuts to the finish instead of faithfully running the course laid before him.
 - B. In baptism Christ has planted the seeds of faith and focused our eyes on His kingdom. He is the one that enables us to begin the race in faith that is straight and true. He removes the stumbling block of pride which seeks to direct our attention to the "shortcuts" which our sin would have us follow.
- II. A faithful race is one already run by Christ.
 - A. Jesus ran the race of faith for us knowing full well the great obstacles which lay before Him. He willingly faced the world's rejection of Him and His own death on the cross in our place in order that we might partake in His victory.
 - B. Jesus ran the race for us, so He is aware of the obstacles which we need to avoid. When we stumble and fall, He is the one who refreshes us with His word and His precious body and blood so that we may continue the race.
- III. A faithful race is one completed in Christ.
 - A. A race begun in faith is only completed through patient endurance. Our eyes must always be focused on the finish line, eternal life with our Lord. It is the joy which is set before us.
 - B. A faithful runner will overcome much in order to win the prize. Because Christ dwells in us, we too are equipped to overcome the stumbling blocks of pride, self-reliance, and weakness of the flesh in order to obtain the victory won for us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He gives us the tools of word and sacrament, which give us the strength to run the race successfully.
 - C. There is the witness of the Old Testament saints to whom the text refers. They had a great faith, not because of the quantity of faith they possessed, but because of the object of their faith. Their faith was great because it trusted in a great God. They completed their race in faith and received their reward. This is the example God would have us follow.

Conclusion: Are you facing a particular stumbling block in your life that is hindering your faith? Is the race which you have been running

making you weary? Are you using the tools which God has given you to keep your faith on track? Be assured that your Lord knows your every need and stands ready to rescue you from your weariness, refresh you with His word and sacrament, and bring you home to the finish. He gives you the victory so that like the Apostle Paul you may say, "I have fought the good fight; I have completed the race; I have kept the faith. Now there is waiting for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who are longing to see Him come again" (1 Timothy 4:7, 8).

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THE LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR THE SUNDAY OF THE FULFILLMENT

November 24, 1991

Revelation 1:4b-8

The text is reproduced here from *The New Testament: God's Word to the Nations* (GWN; Biblion Publishers, Cleveland, 1988) by reason of its informative format as well as diction:

- 4b. Grace and peace to you from
 the One-Who-Is and
 the One-Who-Was and
 the One-Who-Will-Be,
 and from the Seven Spirits who are before His throne,
5. and from Jesus Christ—
 He is the faithful witness,
 the first of the dead to live again,
 and the ruler over the kings of the earth.
 To Him who loves us
 and by His blood has freed us from our sins
6. and has made us a kingdom, priests to God and His
 Father—
 to Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen
7. Look, He is coming in the clouds,
 and every eye will see Him,
 even the men who pierced Him,
 and all the groups of people on earth will mourn because of
 Him.
 So it will be. Amen.

8. "I am the Alpha and the Omega [the A and Z]," says
 God
 the Lord,
 the One-Who-Is and
 the One-Who-Was and
 the One-Who-Will-Be,
 the Almighty.

While the text spoke in the first instance to the seven churches of Asia (4a), the Holy Spirit speaks also to us in this concise salutation, announcement of theme, and certification of the Book of Revelation. The three-part division is highlighted by the format of GWN, which also stresses the Trinity in verses 4 and 5. The occurrences of *kai* connect the three persons; the Father and the Son each receive three special epithets with the Spirit as the cohesive one joining them together. That the "Seven Spirits" represent the Third Person appears from Isaiah 11:2 and Zechariah 3:9; 4:2; and 4:10b. The differences in the phraseology in the KJV and NIV are noteworthy.

In verse 5 "freed" represents a better reading than "washed" in the KJV. The word translated as "sins" means literally "instances of missing the mark." The "kings of the earth" receive whatever authority they have from Jesus Christ, the king of kings.

In verse 6 "kingdom" involves, not geography, but rather God's active reign in the lives of His people. As priests we have access to the presence of God to bring sacrifices of praise and confession of faith. The Greek phrase translated here as "forever and ever" is literally "the ages of the ages" and is much stronger than the Old Testament Hebrew phrase which the KJV usually renders "forever and ever."

Verse 7 states the theme of the whole Book of Revelation. The phrase "all the groups of people on earth" represents exactly the same Greek words which appear in Matthew 24:30 and means literally "all the tribes of the land." Here the phrase refers to the whole unbelieving element of humanity. In verse 8 Jesus certifies Himself as the center of all things.

Introduction: We call a wheel eccentric when the axle is off center. People living "near the edge" have lives that are off center. When our lives seem most off center, we rejoice in John's call in the Book of Revelation:

KEEP JESUS CENTRAL

- I. Jesus is the center of God's language.
 - A. Jesus is the center of all the revelation of God.
 - 1. "My word will accomplish My purposes" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

2. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14).
3. "I came to fulfill the law" (Matthew 5:17-18).
- B. Jesus is "the Alpha and the Omega," the A and Z.
 1. Jesus is "the faithful witness."
 2. Jesus is the beginning and end of the Book of Revelation (21:6; 22:13).
 3. Jesus is the beginning and end of Scripture.
 4. Jesus is the beginning and end of revelation in general.
- II. Jesus is the center of human history.
 - A. Jesus is the speaker in verse 8:

"the One-Who-Is and
the One-Who-Was and
the One-Who-Will-Be."

 1. He is the eternal God (Exodus 3:14-15).
 2. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
 3. As the "Gloria Patri" says, He "was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."
 - B. The cross is the central tree of history.
 1. There was once a tree of knowledge of good and evil.
 2. There will one day be again a tree of life.
 3. There is in between the tree of most importance.
 - a. It is the tree on which hung the one "pierced" by human sin (verse 7; Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34,37).
 - b. It is the tree on which hung the one cursed with all the punishments which we deserved (Galatians 3:13).
 - C. Jesus is "the ruler over the kings of the earth."
 1. He is above all rulers and authorities (Ephesians 1:20-21).
 2. He is the king of kings (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14).
 - D. Jesus is coming again to bring an end to this world, "and every eye will see Him" in glory (verse 7).
 1. The unbelievers will "mourn."
 2. The believers will rejoice.
- III. Jesus is the center of God's work.
 - A. Jesus "by His blood has freed us from our sins."
 1. We have missed the mark and moved off center.
 2. Jesus has freed us to be on center in our lives once again.
 - B. Jesus is "the first of the dead to live again."
 1. We already live as a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).
 2. We already live as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9).
 3. We live to love (in action) (1 John 3:16-18).

Conclusion: Keep Jesus central. He is the center of the revelation of God. He is the center of all history. He is the center of God's work

for you and through you. As one church year ends and another begins, keep Jesus central.

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APPENDIX

The editors of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* have decided to draw to a close with this issue the publication of complete annual series of homiletical studies. When the *CTQ* began the production of complete series in 1975, the aim was to render the pastors (and so the congregations) of this synod a service which no one else was then providing. The editors hope that the sixteen full years of homiletical studies which have now reached completion have, indeed, been of some assistance to the readers. It is, however, no longer necessary to allocate the same number of pages to sermonic material as during the past decade and a half. Concordia Publishing House has now begun publication of a periodical called *Concordia Pulpit Resources* which the editors here have seen and can highly recommend as dedicated to the same goals as we have had. Indeed, since many of the contributors to this new periodical have been ours for many years, we have no difficulty in extending them fraternal wishes of success in this promising enterprise.

The homiletical program of the last sixteen volumes of the *CTQ* was a joint project, not only of the members of the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, but also of pastors serving in parishes spread throughout this synod. There were even contributions from pastors overseas. We especially remember the late Professor Gerhard Aho, the first homiletical editor of the *CTQ*, who supervised the initiation of the program now reaching completion. He was succeeded by Dr. Donald Deffner, visiting professor in pastoral ministry. During all these years the bulk of the editorial work fell into the capable hands of Professor Douglas Judisch, whose arduous labor and concern for precision are deeply appreciated. None of the contributors or editors received any compensation for their services; this notice will have to serve as the only—and a wholly inadequate—expression of the thanks which is due them. The homiletical studies of the past sixteen years constitute a vast pool of theological wisdom and homiletical experience. Some readers have suggested gathering together some or all of these studies into a special volume. Until such a collection emerges, pastors are, of course, welcome to make photocopies of past issues wherever they may find them available.

David P. Scaer