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# Homiletical Studies

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY: MATTHEW 3:13-17  
(JAN. 8, 1978)

When we hear the word "Epiphany" what comes most readily to mind? The star; the magi. But originally when worshippers heard of the Epiphany they thought at once of the Baptism of Jesus. This was the great event originally chosen to celebrate the fact that the Child born in Bethlehem was made manifest as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Textual Notes: 1) John's baptism. At John's time there was a baptism in Judaism for proselytes, those who came into Judaism from some other faith. But it was for "sinners," and no Jew ever thought that he, a descendant of Abraham, could ever need such a baptism. John makes no distinction; he calls also Jews to repentance. And they come. Jesus later tells us that John's baptism was "from heaven." Here was God acting in giving repentance and grace to all people who stand under His judgment. 2) "Fulfill all righteousness": In His baptism Jesus identified Himself with the people He came to save. He came to live and die vicariously for sinners in need of repentance. That is why He insisted on being in the water. 3) The descending Dove and heavenly Voice are the supreme verification and stamp of approval on all that Jesus is and all He came to do. 4) "This is My beloved Son" - a quotation from Ps. 2, which is a description of the Messiah, the mighty King of God who was to come. 5) "In whom I am well pleased" - another OT quotation, this time from Is. 42, which is a description of the Suffering Servant.

Introductory thought: When we see Jesus standing in the river with John the Baptizer, there is one question that must come to mind:

## What Is Jesus Doing In The Water?

- I. Jesus did not belong in the water (at least John the Baptizer did not think He belonged there).
  - A. John's baptism stands as a stark reminder that all people are sinners under the judgment of God.
  - B. In John's baptism God was acting in giving repentance and channeling His grace to people.
  - C. But Jesus needed no repentance or forgiveness; why did He insist on being in the water?
- II. Jesus is in the water because that is where we belong.
  - A. We are sinners under God's judgment.
  - B. By His being baptized Jesus identified Himself with the people He came to save.
  - C. The innocent Son of God assumed our guilt and bore the penalty of our sin.
  - D. Jesus' finished work makes the water of our baptism a place of righteousness and rebirth, it is where we belong.
- III. The Dove and Voice tell us God is glad that Jesus is in the water for us.
  - A. Jesus is the bearer of the Holy Spirit who has the power to renew us.
  - B. Jesus is the Anointed King who goes His royal way, the way of the cross.
  - C. Jesus is God's Suffering Servant who comes to enthrone Himself in our hearts and lives.

So now we know what Jesus was doing in the water. He was there because of us. He was there to save us. What an Epiphany that is!

RH

**THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD: MATTHEW 17:1-9**  
(JAN. 15, 1978)

We sing in one of our hymns, "Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus" (TLH 348). That is putting all our eggs in one basket. It eliminates other options and leaves us with the question: In a world gone to the devil, is Jesus all we need for our spiritual life and well-being? Are the resources we have in "Jesus only" enough for the problems and challenges we face? It is to this question that our periscope speaks with convincing clarity. In particular we focus on verse 8: "And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only."

**Textual Notes:** The Transfiguration follows Peter's great confession (it is like God's "Amen" to Peter's affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God) and Jesus' prediction of His passion (16:13ff.). The conversation on the way down from the mountain discussed the martyrdom of John the Baptist and the impending death of Jesus. At the foot of the mountain we find the remaining nine apostles unable to cope with a demonic aspect of life because of the littleness of their faith (17:10ff.).

"Moses"—the law-giver of Mt. Sinai. "Elijah"—the fiery prophet of Mt. Carmel who insisted on undivided loyalty to the Lord. Perhaps the two together symbolize the fullness of God's revelation (law and prophets) to Israel. "Booths"—reminiscent of the sojourn of Israel when they received the revelation of the Law through Moses. "Bright cloud"—indicative of God's presence. "My beloved Son"—a revelation of the divine Sonship of Jesus as the victorious Messianic King spoken of in Ps. 2. "In whom I am well-pleased"—an echo of the Messianic Servant passage in Is. 42:1; Jesus is doing His Father's will when He suffers and dies for the sins of the world; He is our Saviour. "Listen to Him"—the glory of this moment will soon pass away, but this same Jesus will continue to address His Word to you.

**Introductory thought:** Is not having Moses and Elijah and the bright cloud and the heavenly voice and a transfigured Jesus—gleaming and glowing—better than simply having "Jesus only"?

### Jesus Only

- I. When the apostles saw "Jesus only" it meant the end of the mountain-top experience.
  - A. Jesus had granted them a moment of spiritual exhilaration.
    1. What an experience! Jesus transfigured, Moses and Elijah, the voice from the cloud.
    2. Like Peter, we often crave to bask in the vicinity of such heavenly splendor, far removed from the sordid realities of daily life. But—
  - B. Jesus brings His apostles back down into the "real world."
    1. Here is where God's spokesmen are under attack and the devil appears invincible.
    2. Here is where our feeble faith frequently falters and fails.
- II. "Jesus only" is more than sufficient to meet our needs as we face life at the base of the mountain.
  - A. The same Jesus who was transfigured is with us day by day.
    1. He is God's own Son who has conquered the forces of the devil. Faith in Him lays hold of the power needed to confront life's problems.
    2. He is the One who pleased God when He came to be our Saviour. Faith in Him lays hold of heaven's glory prefigured in the Transfiguration.
  - B. Amid life's many clamoring voices, we are still to listen to this transfigured Jesus.
    1. As God's Son He speaks a true and powerful Word that strengthens our faltering faith in the face of life's problems.

2. As our Saviour He speaks a forgiving Word that opens to us heaven's glory. Jesus only: He is enough!

RH

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY: MATTHEW 5:27-37  
(JAN. 22, 1978)

A house eaten by termites and beginning to sag may appear better with a fresh coat of paint, but it is still a rotting house. The problem lies on the inside and must be dealt with there. In like manner, Christian morality is not simply doing things which appear good to other people; it has to do with God. Sin is, first of all, an "inside job." The heart of the matter is a holy heart and that is what this pericope is all about.

Textual Notes. Four preliminary observations: 1) Jesus speaks the words of this pericope to His *disciples* (Matt. 5:1-2). 2) Three times He declares, "But I say to you." We note the divine *authority* with which He addresses men, and also that it is *Jesus* who speaks, the One who came to live for us a life dedicated to His Father's will and to die in payment for our sins. 3) Jesus was speaking in the context of that rabbinic legalism which, through casuistry and compromise, had externalized God's Law, thereby evading its full intent and excluding God's claim over every aspect of life. 4) This pericope is primarily a law text directed to a disciple's old Adam and setting forth a pattern for his life.

Vv. 27-30. By giving prominence to the outward act the scribes tended to externalize the command forbidding adultery. Jesus directs the Law to the root of the sinful impulse, the heart. The 6th Commandment calls for a pure heart which keeps even the eyes pure. The strong words point to the strenuous effort necessary to master sexual passion; Jesus is not recommending successive amputations.

Vv. 31-32. The scribes had so re-interpreted the prescription of Moses as to permit all manner of divorce and thereby evade the intent and will of God. One rabbinical tradition at the time of Jesus permitted divorce for the love of another woman or for causes as trivial as inferior cooking. We cannot substitute human regulations for the divine requirement. Every severance of marriage, apart from death, violates God's commandment.

Vv. 33-37. Again, the scribes had a great deal to say about which oaths were binding and which were not, concluding that any oath which avoided using God's name was not (i.e., swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or one's own head). The logic was that if God's name was not used, He had nothing to do with the transaction. Jesus declares that no man can keep God out of any segment of life; you cannot exclude His demand for truth by substituting something less sacred for the divine name. For the disciple, whose heart is pure and who always speaks the truth, there is no need for oaths. In civic life, however, because of the untruth in the world, the state, which has to deal with all men, must often require oaths.

In the area of Christian morality

**The Heart of the Matter**

is a holy heart wholly intent on doing God's will in every aspect of living.

I. The heart of the matter

(Jesus had made us His disciples)

A. Jesus came to seek and claim disciples.

1. Discipleship is a gift of His grace.

2. Discipleship places His claim of grace upon us.

B. To this end:

1. He lived a life of whole-hearted commitment to God's will for us.

2. He gave His perfect life in payment for our sins.
3. Through His Spirit He gives us new hearts intent on doing God's will.

## II. Is a holy heart

(Jesus calls for a holy heart as the source of a life in keeping with our discipleship.)

- A. Jesus condemns the scribes who externalized God's Law (example: 6th Commandment a matter only of the outward act and not of the heart).
- B. Outward piety is not enough, our hearts must be pure. No matter how pious we appear to others, God sees and judges our hearts.
- C. We continually need to have the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts.

## III. Wholly intent on doing God's will

(Jesus calls for a heart wholly intent on doing God's will.)

- A. Jesus condemns the scribes who interpreted the Law so as to evade its full intent (example: their casuistry with regard with divorce).
- B. We cannot substitute human rationalizing for the divine requirement. (examples: situation ethics where "love" determines "right and wrong." Or again, "Do your best" is not good enough, no matter how acceptable it may be to the world around us.)
- C. After all, it is because Jesus was "wholly intent on doing God's will" that we are His disciples today.

## IV. In every aspect of living.

(Jesus calls for a heart that does God's will in every aspect of living.)

- A. Jesus condemns the scribes who sought to exclude God's claim over every aspect of their lives (example: their casuistry with regard to oaths).
- B. We cannot compartmentalize our lives and exclude God from any area our speaking and doing. What we say and do on Saturday night (or Monday morning) is as much under the claim and judgment of God as what we say and do on Sunday morning.
- C. He died for us that we might live for Him (2 Cor. 5:15). "So, whether you or drink or *whatever you do*, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). We have that exceeding righteousness in Jesus Christ. Let's live it!

RH

## SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY: MATTHEW 5:38-48

(JAN. 29, 1978)

When the lawyer asked Jesus "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29), he was trying to find out who were the guys he did not have to love. In a sense we can understand that. There are some people we don't even like; how can we love them? Others have treated us so badly they don't deserve our love. Where can we draw the line? What are the limits on love? In this pericope we hear Jesus tell His disciples that for the children of the heavenly Father there is no limit to love.

Textual Notes: Vv. 38-42. "An eye for an eye"—this is a sound principle of civil law; its original aim was the limitation of vengeance, indicating how a judge in the court must assess punishment and penalty. In the Mishna a money payment in lieu of eye, tooth, etc., is taken for granted. Jesus does not condemn the principle that legal justice is a set of limited revenges. Rather, He removes every impulse for retaliation and desire for vengeance from the heart of His disciples.

The examples he gives are arranged in the form of an anticlimax: acts of violence, legal proceedings, official demands, simple requests. "Strikes you on the right cheek"—perhaps a backhanded blow which would be a deliberate and contemptuous insult. "Coat/cloak"—the tunic, or undergarment, and the blanket-like outer garment which doubled as a blanket at night. Jewish law permitted a man's tunic to be taken as security, but not his cloak; see Ex. 22:26-27. "Forces you to go"—a Persian word which came to mean enforced service by an occupying power; example: Simon of Cyrene, Luke 23:26. "Beggars/would borrow"—nuisance requests.

Vv. 43-48. The Law did not include the words "and hate your enemy," but this was the result when the scribe sought to find areas where a person was not explicitly required to show love. "Love your enemies"—Jesus removes every limitation from love. Such love (*agape*), which actively seeks the highest good ("pray for them") for those who treat us the very worst, involves something of the will as well as the heart. It is like the action of God's love in the world which is unwearied in its benevolence toward all people. It is love which has its source in the adoptive love of the Father. "Father," as a name for God, occurs first in the Sermon on the Mount where we find it 17 times.

"Perfect" (*teleios*) often means "totality"; the disciples of Jesus should be "total" in their love, including their enemies within its compass. Such perfection is also functional, i.e., a disciple is "perfect" to the extent that he reproduces in his life the forgiving, sacrificial love of God which made him a son. The pattern and power of this lived sonship is Jesus Himself. It is the Gospel which makes people the children of God and which enables them so to live.

### No Limit To Love

- I. Jesus won't let us limit our love.
  - A. We want to limit it.
    1. By nature we have an inclination for vengeance.
    2. God restrains and regulates this impulse through civil courts.
  - B. Jesus' words remove every limitation from love.
    1. "Love your enemies" removes every limit.
    2. Rather than vengeance, we are to seek their highest good ("Pray" for them).
- II. This is because God's Love, which made us His children, knows no limit.
  - A. God's love knows no limit
    1. We can observe it in His unwearied benevolence in the world.
    2. We see it in the sending of His Son. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).
  - B. This love has made us God's children.
    1. He has adopted us.
    2. He wants us to be "perfect" children by demonstrating His kind of love in our lives.
- III. Therefore, as our heavenly Father's "perfect" children we show love without limit when we—
  - A. Bear insults and personal abuse without resentment and retaliation ("turn to him the other also").
  - B. Do not insist upon our rights ("let him have your cloak as well").
  - C. Put ourselves out for the other person ("go with him two miles").
  - D. Are willing to be put upon ("do not refuse him").

RH

QUINQUAGESIMA: MATTHEW 6:24-34  
(FEBRUARY 5, 1978)

"You can't work for me and him too!" explodes an employer when he learns that one of his employees is also attempting to hold a full-time job with his arch-competitor. It is ludicrous; it cannot be. That sort of things is what our Lord has in mind when He states that a disciple of His cannot "be a slave to two owners." He points out that worry is a test of our allegiance. If God comes first, we will trust Him completely (as we confess in to day's introit: "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust."). Worry indicates that someone or something else is in the top spot, namely, Mammon.

Verse 24: "No person can be a slave to two owners." The disciple cannot have a divided loyalty; there is no room for competing masters. The alternative to God, who has come to us in Jesus Christ and claimed us as His disciples, is "Mammon." Mammon is wealth, material possessions, personified. It is a false god that demands exclusive loyalty as God demands it. The meaning is not, "You cannot serve God and have riches"; rather, "You cannot be faithful to God and make an idol of wealth."

Verse 25: "Therefore"—the extent to which we "fear, love, and trust in God above all things" is evident by the amount of worrying that we do. Anxiety with respect to earthly goods is evidence that we are serving Mammon. Food and clothing represent basic earthly needs. Can we not trust Him who gave us the greater (body and life) also to give us the less (food and clothing)? Verse 26: The birds work, but they do not worry. Verse 27: No amount of worry can add the shortest span to life. Verses 28-30: God, who is so lavish with the short-lived flowers, will not be forgetful of His disciples. Worry is evidence that we do not trust God above all things; it points to the littleness of our faith.

Verses 31-32: To make the provision of food and clothing an object of anxiety, is to live like the pagans whose primary allegiance is to the accumulation of earthly goods—Mammon. Verse 33: If, however, our primary allegiance is to God, our primary concern will be for His rule in our lives. The assurance ("shall be yours as well") of the needed material goods implies that the main quest—God's kingdom and righteousness—will be secured. Verse 34: Trust lives one day at a time.

### Worry Or Trust: A Test Of Our Allegiance

#### I. God demands our complete allegiance (v. 24).

##### A. God is the Owner who—

1. Claims us, not to benefit Himself, but us. (He became a slave to serve us; cp. Phil. 2:6-8).
2. Demands our complete allegiance. (We should fear, love, and *trust* in God above all things.)

##### B. Mammon is a false god that also demands our exclusive loyalty.

1. "Mammon" is wealth personified. The goods entrusted to us by God become the god in whom we trust.
2. When Mammon holds sway, our primary concern becomes the accumulation of earthly possessions.

##### C. Divided allegiance is impossible: "No person can be slave to two owners."

#### II. Worry gives evidence of Mammon's sway (vv. 25-30).

##### A. Mammon says, "Get more!"

1. We worry that we will not have enough.
2. How unlike the birds; they work but never worry about accumulating for the future.
3. How pointless; worry cannot prolong our lives a moment.

##### B. Mammon replaces the God who has already given us "more."

1. He has given us life and body which is "more than" food and clothing.
  2. He has given us His Son that we might live with Him forever, body and soul.
  3. Should we not trust Him for the food we need (we are of more value than the birds) and clothing (we are more important than flowers)?
- C. Worry, therefore, is evidence, that we do not trust God above all things; points to the littleness of our faith.
- III. When God holds sway in our lives (vv. 31-34)—
- A. We live as children of a heavenly Father.
    1. The primary concern with material goods is a pagan trait.
    2. We trust a heavenly Father who provides for all our needs.
  - B. We seek God's rule and righteousness.
    1. Our primary concern is for these spiritual needs.
    2. We trust God to provide them.
  - C. We live one day at a time.
    1. We experience God's help to meet today's problems.
    2. We trust Him for tomorrow's needs.

RH

ASH WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18  
(FEB. 8, 1978)

"Piety" (v. 6) refers to good works in the life of a believer. Not men but God should be uppermost in our minds when we practice our righteousness or piety. In chapter 5:21-48 Jesus deals with the doctrine of the Pharisees; in the text He deals with their practice. Alms are mentioned first because the self-righteous Jews attributed to them a special merit. "Sound no trumpet" is to be taken figuratively; hypocrites broadcast or blazon forth their works of charity (v. 2). They receive their reward in the encomium of their followmen, but nothing more remains, for from God they receive no reward. The aphorism in v. 3 means that we are not to carry good deeds aloft as banners, not to make them known to our fellowmen, not even to our nearest kin. We are to be ignorant, so to speak, of the good works we perform. On the last day the righteous will ask with unfeigned surprise, "Lord, when did we see Thee. . ." (Mt. 25:37)? No matter if others do not see our charity; God sees and rewards (v. 4). The Pharisees made public prayer a spectacular part of their worship. Also they prayed three times each day in accordance with Ps. 55:18 and Dn. 6:11) with all due ceremony wherever they happened to be (v. 5). But prayer is not a standard to be raised before human eyes, but an overture of the soul to its God (v. 6). Public prayer is not forbidden here. The stress is on a personal approach to God and the seclusion of the inner life. The Pharisees in their private fasting simulated sorrow but had no concern about their sins in their hearts—pride in the garb of humility. They made their faces inconspicuous in order to be conspicuous among men (v. 16). Fasting is not forbidden, but those who fast should come as they are. One should fast because it may be useful in his spiritual life, not to display sadness (vs. 17-18). This applies to any act of self-denial whereby sinful inclinations are subdued and pure affections cultivated.

The central thought of the text is that Christians are not to make a show of their piety. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be sincere and humble in their piety. The problem is that Christians sometimes become hypocritical and self-righteous in their piety. The means to the goal is that God knows and rewards the good we do.

Introductory thought: Orwell in his fantasy *1984* warns that "Big Brother sees." He sees, and hears, all that might be inimical to his power; so all citizens beware. Similar fear may be aroused by the realization that God sees



all, especially our sins. The text brings out that God sees, not only the evil, but also the good we do.

### God Knows About the Good We Are Doing

I. Others do not have to know about it.

II. We do not have to keep a record of it.

#### I.

##### A. Jesus warns against ostentatious religion.

1. Giving to help the needy and to support the church in order to gain a reputation for generosity (v.2).
  - a. Insisting on public acknowledgement of one's charity.
  - b. Giving less if the contribution is not made known.
2. Making sure others know about our worshipping (v. 5).
  - a. Much attention to public worship with neglect of private devotion.
  - b. Letting it be known that we pray much in private.
3. Displaying self-denial (v. 16).
  - a. Letting others know one has become a teetotaler, or that one has given up a vacation to attend a religious retreat.
  - b. Advertising one's sacrifices for children or parents.

##### B. Such religion is wicked.

1. It pretends to be something it is not.
2. It cultivates the admiration of men with little or no thought of God.
3. It brings God's judgment (v. 6b).

##### C. Such religion is unnecessary.

1. Though the good we do is concealed from the world, it is not hidden from God ("sees in secret").
  - a. It does not follow that others must not see the good we do or that only those deeds are truly good which no one has ever seen.
  - b. It does follow that this is a matter over which we have no control and that we must not advertise our wares.
2. Though no one praises us, we will have a better prize from Him who will not let even a cup of water given in His name go unrequited (vs. 4, 6, 18; Mt. 10:42).

#### II.

##### A. We are to be "ignorant" of the good works we are doing ("alms may be in secret," "shut the door," "fasting may not be seen by men;" Mt. 25:37).

1. Not constantly informing ourselves about our charity (v. 3).
2. Not using prayer as a badge of piety but as a means of communion with God in our innermost heart (v. 6).
3. No being conscious of sacrifice, denying ourselves but making no issue of it.

##### B. To keep a record of our goodness is foolish.

1. This goodness is so small—like a drop in the ocean compared to God's holiness.
2. It is so tainted by impure motives.
3. We have Jesus and heaven as our treasure by God's grace, and thus there is no need to try to earn heaven (Mt. 6:21).

##### C. It is enough that God keeps a record.

1. God's record-keeping will be revealed on the last day (Mt. 25:35-36).
2. He looks beyond the outward deed to the source from which it springs.
3. He gives to those whose piety flows from a heart transformed by grace a rich reward, though unearned and undeserved by them.

Concluding thought: Be on guard against ostentation in religion. We need not let others, not even ourselves, know about the good we are doing. God knows about it. That is good enough.

INVOCAVIT, THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: MATTHEW 4:1-11  
(FEB. 12, 1978)

"Then" (v. 1) shows that Jesus' temptation is closely connected with His baptism. In baptism He was endowed with the Holy Spirit's power to resist temptation. "Led up by the Spirit" indicates that temptation was part of the calling Jesus had accepted. He had to enter the strong man's house and bind him (Mt. 12:19). This was the first onslaught; it was not accidental, but willed by Father and Son. The temptation was real and not simply pretense or simulation. It brought Jesus suffering (He. 2:18). From v. 2 and also parallel accounts it is obvious that Jesus was tempted continually for forty days, the ordeal culminating in the three conflicts described in the text. In the first temptation the devil tried to get Jesus to doubt and to misuse His divine power. In the second, Jesus was tempted to pride in His Messianic office. He was tempted to glorify Himself before men. In the third, He was tempted to anticipate a future dominion not in accord with His calling, which was the way of suffering. The sum total of all the temptations is a carnal caricature of the work of the Messiah. Jesus does not argue with Satan but wages the battle against him with the written Word of God. Truth may be oppressed, but not suppressed. The Word is the sword of the Spirit, the weapon of offense and defense in the Christian's spiritual armament (Eph. 6). But Scripture must be used properly, not misused.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus used God's Word to overcome Satan's temptations. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would overcome Satan's temptation. The problem is that they often feel unable to do so. The means to the goal is that Jesus overcame Satan for us.

Introductory thought: During the 1960's movements arose which adopted the slogan, "We shall overcome." Christians belong to a movement which can well take the same slogan. Jesus, the Founder of this movement, said so (Mt. 16:18). So every Christian can say:

**We Shall Overcome**

I. Can we overcome?

II. How can we overcome?

I.

A. There would seem to be sufficient reason for confidence.

1. Jesus was baptized and thus empowered with the Spirit, and so are we.

2. Jesus was led all the while by the Spirit, and so are we.

B. Yet it is not easy to be confident because temptations are often severe.

1. It is hard not to set physical needs above spiritual needs.

2. It is hard not to rely presumptuously on God.

3. It is hard to stifle ambition and to avoid operating with the "end justifies means" principle.

In the face of such temptation it is no wonder we begin to ask, "Can we overcome?" But we can. How?

II.

A. Obey God.

1. Keep priorities straight.

2. Refuse to use God.

3. Worship God alone.

B. Do not argue with Satan.

1. Eve could not reason with Satan, and neither can we.

2. Our best recourse is the pertinent and specific word of God to which Satan has no comeback.

**C. Look to Jesus for help.**

1. He understands our temptations (He. 4:15).
2. He stands by us.
3. He conquered Satan once and for all (Col. 2:15).
4. He strengthens us through Word and Sacrament (He. 2:18).

Concluding thought: In Him and through Him we shall overcome.

GA

**REMINISCERE, THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 4:5-26  
(FEB. 19, 1978)**

In asking for a drink (v. 7) Jesus placed Himself on a level with the woman. His request made her willing to listen further to what He had to say. She felt His true, unselfish interest. Her interest was further aroused by the statement: "If you knew the gift of God. . ." (v. 9). She was moved to consider Christ's claims (v. 12). Next Christ gave a promise appealing to conscious need (v. 14). The woman had sought satisfaction all her life, unrestrained in her search by laws of God or man, but she thirsted still. In every heart there is a thirst, a sense of lack which Jesus promises to satisfy (vs. 13-15). Then came a command appealing to conscience (v. 16). No matter how a person may admit Christ's claims, he will never find satisfaction until the thing that is wrong in his life is made right. Jesus had touched the sore spot in her life. Her answer (v. 17) was half true. Jesus proceeded to reveal her whole life (v. 18) with such divine insight that she called Him a prophet (v. 19). Jesus had appealed also to a religious instinct which, though dormant, was not dead. But the woman thought of religion only as form and ceremony and imagined that the mistake was in the location of the worship (v. 20). Jesus informed her (vs. 21-25) that the trouble was not the place of worship but the fact; she had never worshipped at all. Since God is a Spirit, true worship is not a question of place or of form and ceremony, but of spiritual reality. Jerusalem has indeed been the divinely appointed place of worship, because of the promise of salvation through the Jews, but the time has come when there are to be no local restrictions to worship. True worshipers will not be concerned with place and symbol. The woman in her reply suggested a need for a mediator to give fuller knowledge of God. Now she was ready to hear the supreme word (v. 26). Did she believe? She made no verbal response, but her actions (v. 28) were more eloquent than speech.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus leads lost souls to know the gift of salvation. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would reaffirm Jesus as the gift of God that satisfies.

Introductory thought: Although Jews generally avoided Samaria, Jesus did not. He sat down to rest, but forgot his weariness when the opportunity presented itself to lead a lost soul to know God's gift. Jesus, who suffered weariness and thirst for us, has come to us and pleaded, "If you knew the gift of God. . ." He comes to us again today and offers the gift of God, His own self, to know and to enjoy.

**Jesus Leads Us to Know The Gift of God**

- I. He makes us aware of our need of it.
- II. He shows us where to find it.

**I.**

**A. Jesus reminds us that earthly wells cannot quench spiritual thirst (v. 13).**

1. We, like the Samaritan woman, have earthly wells of whose waters we boast (v. 12) - money, success, possessions, ambitions.

2. There are times when we yearn for something more than the water of these miserable wells (v. 15).
  - B. Jesus puts His finger on sin as the cause of our thirst (v. 16).
    1. Jesus condemns as sin actions we may have excused (vs. 17-18).
    2. We can no longer hide or equivocate (v. 19).
    3. That which is wrong in our life must be made right if we are to have satisfaction.
    4. Jesus stimulates in us a desire for the gift of God (v. 14).
- Jesus leads us to know the gift of God by first bringing us to an awareness of our need for that gift. Then He shows us where to find it.

## II.

- A. In the true church.
    1. We may be perplexed as to which church is right (v. 20).
    2. The true church is there where God's Word is taught purely and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's command. There we find the gift of God - salvation (v. 22).
  - B. Among true worshipers.
    1. Who are not bound to any particular place or ritual (v. 21).
    2. Who worship the true God in spirit and in truth (v. 23).
      - a. God is not bound to any outward group or building.
      - b. Church organizations can cease to exist, but true worshipers, who make up the church, will continue.
  - C. In the Savior Himself.
    1. Jesus reveals Himself to us (v. 26) in Word and Sacraments.
    2. We can have Him now, as we are, in our emptiness and thirst.
    3. He is the gift that satisfies (vs. 28-29).
- Concluding thought: Do you know the gift of God? Jesus says to you, "I who speak to you am He."

### OCULI, THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 9:26-41 (FEB. 26, 1978)

The healing of the blind man was a marvelous "sign" and would go far to persuade men to admit the claims of Jesus. This Christ's enemies feared and so they sought to prove that the miracle had not been wrought, but without success. The Pharisees carefully cross-examined the man who had received his sight and also his parents. They summoned him a second time and urged him to admit that the reputed miracle was only a deception (v. 24). The man's answer (v. 25) does not mean he had no opinion regarding the character of Jesus but that he was willing to leave the theological problems to their superior wisdom. He knows, however, what Jesus did for him. The Pharisees were indeed in a dilemma; there stood the man before them, his sight perfect who had been born blind. They had either to deny the facts or to admit the divine nature of Jesus which the facts proved. They tried to escape from their dilemma by asking the man to repeat his story, hoping to entangle him in his report. But the man sees their dilemma and asks, with bold irony, whether their eagerness for more information was due to a desire to become his disciples (v. 27). Now they could only revile him (vs. 28-29), abuse taking place of argument. The man heaps upon their cowardice the contempt it deserves in the form of an unanswerable argument (vs. 30-33). The Pharisees dismiss the matter by excommunicating him (v. 34). Jesus knew the difficulties the man had encountered in his faith and came to strengthen him (vs. 35-38). He who first regarded the Lord as a man called Jesus, and then as a prophet, now saw Him as the Son of God. Often the humble who have no wisdom of their own

are the first to admit the claims of Christ. But this is no excuse for the wise and learned. The Pharisees' greater privileges and knowledge of Scripture should have made them the first to believe. Their boasted insight was their very condemnation and aggravation of their guilt (v. 41).

The central thought of the text is that the coming of Jesus brings both darkness and light. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would see Jesus more clearly. The problem is that opposition sometimes blurs their vision of Christ. The means to the goal is Jesus bestowing and sharpening spiritual vision.

Introductory thought: The actions of Jesus are paradoxical: the poor filled with good things and the rich sent empty away; the righteous declared to be sinners and sinners made righteous. To those who laugh He brings weeping and laughter to those who weep. The last He puts first and the first last. The wise He shows to be foolish and to the foolish He gives wisdom. He is the world's Savior, but in our text He declares, "For judgment I came into this world" (v. 39). The text presents:

### **The Paradoxical Purpose Of The Coming Of Jesus Into The World**

I. That the seeing may become blind.

II. That the blind may see.

#### **I.**

A. The Jewish leaders thought they could see.

1. Yet they refused to believe that the man had been given his sight (Mt. 9:17-26).
2. When they could no longer deny the fact, they treated the whole matter with contempt (vs. 28, 34).
3. They would not admit their blindness. Therefore their guilt remained (v. 41).

B. Many today think they can see.

1. Skeptics who substitute for the religious formula of the Pharisees (Mt. 9:16) the axiom that the supernatural cannot exist and that miracles cannot occur.
  - a. They try to prove discrepancies in the Gospel story and to accuse Jesus of deception.
  - b. Yet they are troubled by the facts.
2. Agnostics who lack the moral courage to face the facts.
3. Those in Christendom who twist God's word, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim. 13), and refuse to be instructed by the Word.

Jesus' purpose in coming is to judge all such. They see Jesus, the light, but deny Him. Insisting that they see, they remain blind. To all such Jesus speaks as to the Pharisees (Mt. 23:16, 17, 19, 24). How paradoxical! There is another side to the paradox.

#### **II.**

A. We are by nature "those who do not see" (v. 39a).

1. Cannot discern spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).
2. Opposed to God (Ro. 8:7-8).

B. Jesus alone can open our eyes.

1. He works through the Gospel that proclaims Him as Savior (Ac. 26:18; 1 Tim. 1:15).
2. The Gospel is the eyesalve of the Spirit that opens our eyes so that we can say, "I believe" (v. 38; Re. 3:18c).

C. Jesus sharpens our vision.

1. Obstacles can blur it.
  - a. Rational and theological arguments (v. 24).
  - b. Reviling (v. 28).
  - c. Persecution (v. 34).

2. Jesus enables us to confess Him simply and boldly (vs. 25, 27, 30-33).

3. We see Jesus more clearly (vs. 35-38).

We have seen Jesus and heard Him speak. No more is needed.

Concluding thought: The blessed aspect of Jesus' paradoxical purpose is fulfilled in us who can say "Mine eyes have have seen thy salvation" (Lk. 2:30).

GA

LAETARE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: MATTHEW 20:17-28  
(MARCH 5, 1978)

Jesus took the twelve disciples "aside" from others who were also journeying toward Jerusalem (v. 17). His thoughts centered on the portentous events which lay ahead, and He sought to prepare the disciples by telling them in detail what would happen to Him (vs. 18-19). According to Luke (18:34) they "understood none of these things," for their thoughts were not yet disengaged from a kingdom of earthly glories. The request (v. 21) came from the sons of Zebedee, James and John, and although their mother was their intermediary Jesus directed His answer to them (v. 22). To be given a place at the right and at the left of the king seated upon his throne was in the Orient a token of the highest possible rank in the kingdom. As Jesus began to speak of His suffering, they recalled His words (Mt. 19:28) and supposed that in the glorious final outcome they who had followed Him and who were also His first cousins should receive a reward of highest distinction. Jesus reminds them (v. 22) that His kingdom is not a kingdom of worldly glory but a kingdom of the cross. Jesus asks them if they are able to drink His cup of suffering (Mt. 26:39) and to endure a baptism with blood, that is, a cruel death. Not fully understanding the meaning of Christ's question, or then perhaps trusting too much in themselves, they nevertheless reveal a desire to follow Jesus. Jesus does not reprimand them but predicts that their love would be put to a severe test (v. 23). Jesus' words were fulfilled (Ac. 12:2). Yet Jesus, in His lowliness, cannot arbitrarily assign to any individual a place of prominence in heaven, but must act according to the will of the Father to whom He now submits. In His humiliation He may do nothing of Himself (Jn. 5:19). The ten become incensed at the request of James and John, for they yield themselves to no one (v. 24). Jesus teaches them that greatness in His kingdom will not be obtained by persons who covet an exalted position but by those who forget themselves in their desire for the welfare of others (vs. 25-27). Not egotism but service is the prerogative. Tyranny must be wrecked upon the solid rock of subordination. The supreme example is Jesus Himself (v. 28), who came to serve, manifested especially in His giving Himself as a ransom for many. The symbolism is that of prisoners or slaves who are liberated upon the payment of a price. This ransom was paid to God, whose holiness and righteousness had been violated. "Many" are all sinners (Ro. 5:19), in whose behalf the ransom was paid.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus came to serve us that we might serve Him. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would live the life beautiful, a life of faith in and service to Jesus Christ. The problem is that Christians sometimes fail to see that service follows faith. The means to the goal is that Jesus ransomed us.

Introductory thought: Despite their best intentions, people are often unable to live well. Life is full of dissatisfaction and despair. The secret of beautiful living eludes them. That secret is found when we begin to ask not what others can do for us but what we can do for others. The text expresses it even better in the words, "Not to be served but to serve." Here we have

### The Secret Of Beautiful Living

I. Jesus served to save us.

II. We are saved to serve Jesus.

#### I.

- A. Jesus walked the way of the suffering servant (vs. 17-18).
  - 1. Even though He knew the anguish that lay ahead.
  - 2. His love for us moved Him to go unflinchingly.
- B. The result was our ransom (v. 28b).
  - 1. We could not ransom ourselves from sin (Ps. 49:7-8).
  - 2. The ransom required was nothing less than the perfect life and atoning death of Jesus Christ (1 Pe. 1:18-19; Ga. 3:15).
- C. Jesus still serves us.
  - 1. He is patient with us.
  - 2. He calls us by the Gospel.
  - 3. He keeps us in the faith.

The secret of beautiful living is to know how greatly Jesus served us by His redemption.

#### II.

- A. We are to serve after the example of Jesus (v. 28a).
  - 1. Unselfishly.
    - a. Not exploiting others (v. 21).
    - b. Not vying for a position we have not earned (v. 23b).
  - 2. Sacrificially.
    - a. Denying self.
    - b. Suffering with Jesus if need be (vs. 22-23a).
  - 3. Humbly.
    - a. Not lording it over others (vs. 25-26).
    - b. Not operating with a "might is right" principle.
- B. We can serve in this way.
  - 1. Because Jesus has ransomed us from sin's power (Ro. 6:6, 18; 8:2).
  - 2. Because we are already great in Jesus Christ (Ga. 3:26; Mt. 12:49).
  - 3. Because service is not only our duty but our delight (Ps. 40:8; Ro. 7:22).

Concluding thought: The secret of beautiful living is to serve rather than be served, following the example and through the power of Jesus Christ.

GA

### JUDICA, THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 11:21-45 (MARCH 12, 1978)

Martha laments but does not upbraid Jesus for arriving so late (v. 21). Her expression of hope (v. 22) indicates that at this time Jesus was for her a great prophet; not until a little later was He, for her, true God (v. 27). Jesus' promise (v. 23) is interpreted by Martha as a reference to the resurrection on the last day. There is resignation in her answer as well as assurance based on Old Testament Scripture such as Ps. 17:15; Dn. 12:2; Job 19:25ff. With His words in v. 25-26 Jesus strengthens Martha's faith, directing her attention away from Lazarus to Himself, specifically to what He would do. He *is* the resurrection, not "shall be." The death of a person who believes in Jesus opens the way to true life which is lived in a body-spirit entity. Indeed, the person who believes in Him lives already (v. 26), and even though the believer must die he will emerge victorious from death. When Jesus asks Martha if she believes this, she expresses the same conviction as Peter in Jn. 6:69. Mary addresses Jesus (v. 32) just as Martha did, but her pain seems to be more

poignant, for she is able to utter nothing more. Jesus also is silent. Now the Jews who came to offer their condolences stand before Jesus wailing with Mary (v. 33). Jesus is deeply troubled by the sight (v. 33) and groans with emotion mingled with impatience and indignation. He is greatly agitated. No doubt Jesus' displeasure was the result of His contemplation of the power of death that had brought such calamity upon the human race. Jesus expresses His emotion also in tears (v. 35), revealing His true humanity in His compassion. His tears are not understood rightly by all (vs. 36-37). Those standing nearby are not left to be merely idle spectators but are made lowly assistants (v. 39). As the stench from the grave reaches Martha, she wavers in her faith, convinced that her brother will not be restored to life and that she and Jesus should be spared the sight of the corruption which had set in. But Jesus guides her back to the promise of His power (v. 40). Jesus prays (v. 41) with assurance, making clear that this act is the work given Him by the Father. The awakening from the dead is effected through Christ's word. This miracle, apart from His own resurrection, most vividly portrays the glory of His Godhead.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus strengthens faith in Him as the Lord of life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would cling to Jesus as the source of life in the midst of death. The problem is that Christians often lose sight of the life they have in Christ. The means to the goal is that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Introductory thought: People often say, "If I would see I would believe." Jesus says: "If you would believe you would see the glory of God." When a loved one dies He assures: "The dead one will rise again." And He asks: "Do you believe this?" What is our answer? What we need is

#### Faith In The Lord Of Life

##### I. Faith involves struggle.

##### II. Faith sees the glory of God.

##### I.

- A. It is hard to believe when Christ delays (Jn. 11:5).
  - 1. A loved one dies despite our earnest prayer that he live (Jn. 11:3).
  - 2. We are then besieged by many "ifs" (vs. 21, 32), blaming circumstances, others, and ourselves, and questioning God's love.
- B. It is hard to believe that all things are under God's direction.
  - 1. That He hears our prayers (Jn. 11:5-6).
  - 2. That He does more than we can ask or think (Jn. 11:4, 15).
- C. Still we can believe.
  - 1. Knowing that His tears mingle with ours at the time of death (Ps. 33:35).
  - 2. Even when we cannot see His ways or understand His thoughts.

##### II.

- A. Faith sees the glory of the Lord now (v. 25a).
  - 1. The Lord resurrects us from spiritual death to spiritual life (Eph. 2:4-6).
  - 2. The Lord enables us to live anew each day (v. 26 "whoever lives"; Ga. 2:19-20).
- B. Faith sees the glory of the Lord in death (vs. 25b, 26b).
  - 1. Death is seen not only as the destroyer of plans and the separator of loved ones.
  - 2. But as the doorway to heavenly life.
- C. Faith sees the glory of the Lord on the Last Day (v. 24).
  - 1. Jesus will call us from the grave, as He called Lazarus, and our bodies, though decayed, will rise (v. 43; Jn. 5:28-29).



2. Not in the wrappings of death but with glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:49), 54-55).

3. To experience glorious, endless life (Re. 7:16-17; Is. 35:6; 1 Pe. 1:3-5).

Concluding thought: There is no need to grieve over loved ones who have died in the Lord, for we have faith in the Lord of life. We can cling to His precious promise (vs. 25-26), our comfort in life and in death.

GA

**PALM SUNDAY: MATTHEW 26:6-13**  
(MARCH 19, 1978)

According to Jn. 12:1 it was six days before the Passover that Jesus came to Bethany. The verses (vs. 3-5) immediately preceding the text express the hatred of Jesus' enemies, but the supper and the anointing described in the text are tokens of love. The devotion of Jesus' friends and the exuberant love of Mary are in striking contrast to the sinister plans of the Jewish leaders. The man in whose house the supper was given (v. 6) had been leprous and had been made well by Jesus. He wished to show his gratefulness to the Master. According to John (Jn. 12:3), the woman (v. 7) was Mary, the sister of Martha and of Lazarus. Now she did not wish only to receive from Jesus but to give a token of her esteem. The ointment she poured on Jesus was very expensive (v. 7). Her deed was inspired by her ardent love for Christ. The disciples' displeasure was instigated by Judas (Jn. 12:4). "Why" (v. 8), a word of censure and cutting reproof. They considered Mary's act senseless extravagance and in questionable taste. Mary remained silent and Jesus stepped into the breach in her defense (v. 10). The love of the Lord is beneficent. Even luxury and embellishment are permissible when done to the glory of God. We cannot be sure whether Mary knew that Jesus would die in Jerusalem and that she was now anointing Him for His burial (v. 12). It is more like that Jesus construes her active devotion as much richer and greater than she had supposed. He thinks so highly of what Mary has done that He holds her act up (v. 13) as a model for all good deeds for all times.

The central thought of the text is that Mary performs an exemplary good deed. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be active in good deeds. The problem is that Christians sometimes disparage good works because they are not saved by them. The means to the goal is Jesus' acceptance and commendation of good deeds.

Introductory thought: We are entering Holy Week when so much evil was done to Jesus. But a week before His death He must have been cheered by a very good thing done to Him. He holds up what Mary did as an example for us. Here is a model for all time of

**Deeds That Honor Jesus**

**I. They are the fruit of faith.**

A. Externally good deeds that spring from motives other than faith do not honor Jesus (He. 11:6).

B. Mary's faith moved her to act (v. 7; Jn. 11:3).

1. Her faith was created and sustained by Jesus' Word (Lk. 10:39, 42).

2. Faith in Jesus always produces good deeds (Mt. 7:17; 12:35; 1 Jn. 3:3; Ga. 5:6).

3. Only the believer can do truly good deeds.

**II. They reflect love for Christ.**

A. Deeds done to reflect love of self, to gain recognition and praise, do not honor Jesus

- B. Deeds of *agape* are needed (1 Cor. 13:2, 13).
    - 1. With them we show love for Him who died for our salvation (v. 12).
    - 2. With them we honor Christ's body, the church.
  - III. They represent effort on our part.
    - A. Mary gave the best she had.
      - 1. The ointment was "very expensive" (v. 7).
      - 2. She could have used the money for herself.
    - B. There is a correlation between goodness and sacrifice.
      - 1. We must sacrifice the claims of the self—squelch the flesh with its desire for self-indulgence.
      - 2. How much have we sacrificed (Mk. 12:44; 2 Cor. 8:2-3)?
      - 3. Think of how the church would be blessed and Christ honored if we gave our best.
  - IV. They receive the Lord's commendation.
    - A. Some do not commend them.
      - 1. Hypocritically some find fault (Judas, Jn. 12:4).
      - 2. Others thoughtlessly join in (v. 8): "Why spend so much for missions, the upkeep of the church and ministry, etc.?"
    - B. Deeds that honor Christ have abiding value.
      - 1. Fault-finders will pass away.
      - 2. Good deeds are a perpetual memorial (v. 13; Re. 14:13).
      - 3. Therefore we can leave our vindication to Jesus.
- Concluding thought: Are we engaged in ugly fault-finding or in doing beautiful things that honor Jesus?

GA

MAUNDY THURSDAY: JOHN 13:1-17  
(MARCH 23, 1978)

When Jesus sat down He waited in vain for one of the disciples to perform the customary foot-washing. But their minds were filled with a sense of their own greatness and dignity. So Jesus gave them a memorable object lesson to remind them that greatness is measured by service. John describes the incident from the viewpoint of Christ's great love (v. 1). Even though Jesus knew that the resolution to betray Him had already formed in the mind of Judas (vs. 2, 11), and even though He was fully conscious of His own dignity (v. 3), He performed the menial service of washing His disciples' feet, also of His betrayer. His act was interrupted by a dialogue with Peter which reveals the spiritual significance of the act. His sense of Jesus' dignity was the compelling motive in Peter's refusal (vs. 6, 8a). The Lord, the Son of the living God, shall not wash the feet of a sinful man. But Peter did not grasp the importance of this act (v. 7). If it were not done, Peter would have no part in the friendship of Jesus and in all Jesus would impart that night to His disciples (v. 8b). Now Peter, typically, went impulsively to the other extreme (v. 9). Jesus' answer (v. 10a) obviously refers to a spiritual cleansing. The foot-washing portrays spiritual purification from daily sins. Having been justified by faith, the believer is indeed cleansed from the impurity of sin. But since the believer's sinful flesh still leads Him into evil ways, he needs cleansing or forgiveness from the guilt and stain of sin each day. The footwashing is also a token of mutual service and helpfulness. The disciples are to imitate Jesus in loving, lowly service (vs. 12-16). They need not literally wash each other's feet on every occasion, but rather they are to bear one another's burdens in the spirit of love. Christ calls such service blessed (v. 16) because it is done in a spirit quite different from the love of vain glory shown by the disciples in their strife about who would be the greatest.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus reveals His unfailing love by washing His disciples' feet. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be renewed daily, both inwardly and outwardly, by the love of Christ. The problem is their tendency merely to admire the love of Christ. The means to the goal is that Christ in His unfailing love daily cleanses us from sin.

Introductory thought: Jesus kept on loving His disciples despite their self-seeking (v. 1b). Even though He knew one would betray Him (v. 11), and even though He was conscious of soon entering the glory from which He had come (v. 3), He performed for His disciples, also for His betrayer, the menial service of foot-washing. In that act was shown in all the beauty of its perfection

### **The Unfailing Love Of Jesus Christ**

#### **I. A love that makes us clean.**

##### **A. The foot-washing portrayed Christ's loving work of spiritual cleansing (v. 10).**

1. Peter did not understand the real significance of the act (vs. 6-8a, 9).
2. Though justified by faith and thus purified from sin, we still sin daily.
  - a. Flesh and blood lead us into evil.
  - b. We need daily cleansing from daily defilement.
3. We are assured that Jesus is ready and able to give this cleansing when we see Him stoop to wash His disciples' feet.

##### **B. If our feet are not washed, we have no part in Jesus (v. 8b).**

1. We confess we need to have our feet washed when we pray daily, "Forgive us our trespasses."
2. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us (1 Jn 1:9).
3. We have a part in all that Jesus earned for us by His suffering and death.

We are daily made clean all over. The love Jesus showed in washing His disciples' feet does not fail us either.

#### **II. A love that makes us humble.**

##### **A. The foot-washing provides us with a pattern for humble service (vs. 12-15).**

1. Christ's act is a picture of His voluntary humiliation whereby He stooped to save (Php 2:6-8).
2. But literally washing one another's feet will not bring us any nearer to the mind of Christ.
3. We follow Christ's example when we bear one another's burdens (Ga 6:2).
  - a. Concerned for their physical comfort.
  - b. Aiming to secure their spiritual and moral cleansing.

##### **B. The love of Jesus enables us to "wash one another's feet."**

1. That love transforms our hearts so that we get rid of arrogance, envy, and anger.
2. That love guides us in a spirit of lowliness and helpfulness.

Blessed are we when we let the unfailing love of Jesus move us to imitate Him (v. 17).

Concluding thought: The love of Jesus will not fail. He who washed His disciples' feet will cleanse us daily and empower us to humble service.

GA

**GOOD FRIDAY: JOHN 19:30b  
(MARCH 24, 1978)**

Jesus summons His waning strength, lowers His head, and cries with a loud voice the words from Ps. 31:6 (recorded in Lk. 23:46), "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" Now He dies with Scripture, even as He dies according to Scripture. With this word He summons death. The power of death does not deprive Him of life who had life in Himself. He enters death of His own free will, just as He willingly suffered Himself to be made a prisoner and to be bound. He came to death, as the Fathers have put it, and death did not come to Him. Calling out with a loud voice, He proclaims that truth to all. Here is an awesome mystery: The Son of God died. What John says in the text emphasizes Christ's willingness to die and His consciousness of dying. As the Father's beloved Son, He gives His life into the Father's hands in order to receive it again from Him on the morning of the resurrection. Thereby Jesus teaches us not only how to live but how to die. Through His death He gives us strength to die as He did.

The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be confident that in the midst of death they possess life. The problem is that they are often fearful as they think about the death of others as well as their own. The means to the goal is that God through death destroyed death.

Introductory thought: "God isn't dead" was a bumper sticker response to the death-of-God theology some years back. Of course, God isn't dead; God cannot die. And yet today we are brought face to face with an awesome fact: God died! What happened on the first Good Friday is incredible. Let us look at

**The Incredible Death Of Jesus Christ**

- I. His death as real.
  - A. We cannot fathom how the God-man could die, and yet His spirit left His body.
  - B. His body hung lifeless, His lips no longer spoke, His eyes no longer saw, His ears no longer heard.
- II. His death was voluntary.
  - A. Death comes to us because of something—illness, accident, murder.
  - B. But Jesus came to death, giving up His spirit when He was ready to, in full possession of His faculties, in full control (Jn. 10:18).
    - 1. Died only when He had accomplished all things (Jn. 17:4).
    - 2. Died only when He had finished the atonement.
- III. His death was the death of death itself.
  - A. Because Christ took upon Himself the penalty for our sin which causes death (Eze. 18:4; Ro. 8:3; 1 Pe. 2:24).
  - B. Because death could not hold Him who was sinless and who had made a perfect atonement (Ro. 6:4, 9).
- IV. His death means life for us.
  - A. Death has now but the "shadow" (Ps. 23:4) of its former menacing power, for it is not a step into the unknown (Ps. 118:17; 2 Cor. 5:8).
  - B. Death is, now the avenue to God's presence, which is eternal bliss (1 Cor. 15:54c, 57).

Concluding thought: What an incredible death! Because Jesus died, "It is not death to die." The sting of death has been removed. We can live well, and die well.

GA

**EASTER SUNDAY: JOHN 20:1-9**  
(MARCH 26, 1978)

Verse 1: Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. Mary may have reached the tomb before the other women (Mt 28:1). Verse 2: Mary made her own deduction. She should have followed the Scriptures. "We know" implies that Mary came with the other women. Verse 5: John respected rabbinic law and did not go into the sepulcher. Peter did. Verse 7: The grave clothes were laid aside with apparent care. This would not have been the case had Jesus' body been stolen. Verse 8: "He believed," i.e., Mary's report or that Christ had not been taken away by others from the grave. Verse 9: What John saw brought all the prophecies of the Old Testament together, e.g., Ps 16:10; Is 53:10-11. Furthermore, Jesus predicted His resurrection, Jn 2:19; Mt. 20:18-19. "They knew not the Scriptures": They were blinded by overwhelming emotion. Introduction: The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, 1 Cor 15:17-20.

**He Is Risen**

**I. Faith looks at the evidence.**

- A. Mary had the evidence but drew the wrong conclusion.
- B. Peter and John had the evidence but were blinded by overwhelming emotion (v. 9).
- C. We have conclusive evidence.
  - 1. The Old Testament prophecies, Ps 16:10; Is 53:10-11.
  - 2. The predictions of Christ, Jn 2:19; Mt. 20:18-19.
  - 3. The testimony of the angel at the open grave.
  - 4. The testimony of Jesus' enemies.
  - 5. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, Jn 20:11-18; Jn 20:19-31; Lk 24:13-35; 1 Cor 15:1-8.

The evidence of Christ's resurrection is overwhelming, and faith rejoices in it.

**II. Faith rejoices in the consequences.**

- A. Jesus is indeed the Son of God, Jn 2:19.
- B. Jesus is with us as our living Lord, Mt 28:20.
- C. The Father has accepted the sacrifice of Christ, Rom 4:25; Phil 2:5-11.
- D. Christ's resurrection is the pledge of our resurrection, 1 Cor 15:20-23; Jn 11:25-26; Jn 14:1-3.

What treasures there are for us in the empty tomb! "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

HJE

**QUASIMODOGENITI, THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER:**

JOHN 20:24-31  
(APRIL 2, 1978)

Verse 24: Thomas is an example of an anxious skeptic. "Thomas was not with them": This was his first mistake. Verse 25: Thomas's second mistake was that he discounted the unanimous testimony of reliable witnesses. Verse 27: Note the patience of Jesus. Thomas is now convinced and boldly declares Christ's divinity. Verse 29: Believing is seeing; that is faith. Verse 31: The miracles are a part of Christ's proclamation of Himself as the Son of God; they are Christ's sign language intended to bring men to faith. The goal of this sermon is to encourage people to walk by faith, not by sight.

**"Jesus Lives To Strengthen The Faith Of Anxious Doubters"**

- I. Thomas doubted because he lived by the philosophy "seeing is believing."
  - A. His first mistake: He was not with the others when Jesus appeared.
  - B. His second mistake: He discredited the report of the witnesses.
  - C. His third mistake: He demanded to see before believing.
  - D. We doubt sometimes for the same reasons.
    1. Solitude is the breeding ground for doubts and anxiety, He 10:25.
    2. We are tempted to doubt the promises of God; He 13:5; Peter walking on the water.
    3. We are tempted to look for some sign to bolster our faith, M 12:38; 1 Cor 1:22; Mk 8:12.
- II. Jesus encourages us to walk by faith, for believing is seeing.
  - A. Jesus deals patiently with Thomas.
    1. He shows him the evidence.
    2. Thomas confesses, "My Lord and My God."
  - B. Jesus encourages us to live by the philosophy, "believing is seeing."
    1. We have a sure word to guide us.
      - a. The word is given by inspiration, II Tm 3:16; II Pe 1:21.
      - b. The word is truthful, Jn 17:17.
    2. The Word has precious promises.
      - a. Of God's power, Mt 28:20.
      - b. Of God's wisdom, Jn 21:17.
      - c. Of God's love in Christ, II Cor. 5:19-20.
    3. Faith clings to the Word.
      - a. Against circumstances, Lk 5:5; cf. the wise men, the centurion, the Syro-Phoenician woman.
      - b. Against feelings, Ps 42:5.
    4. Faith is rewarded by sight, for God is faithful to His Word. Examples: Abraham; the children of Israel at the Red sea and Jericho; Gideon against the Midianites.
  - C. The ultimate sight is in heaven, I Jn 1:1-3.

Let us walk by faith and not by sight, for "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

HJE

**MISERICORDIAS DOMINI, THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER:**

LUKE 24:13-35  
(APRIL 9, 1978)

Verse 13: Emmaus, the modern Kalonich, was six or seven miles from Jerusalem. This appearance of Christ probably took place between four and six p.m. on Easter Sunday. Verse 16: "Their eyes were restrained": Overcome with sorrow, they did not recognize Jesus. Jesus wanted to give them a lesson in believing the Word. Verses 17-23: Our faith and hope are often subject to vascillations and uncertainties. The disciples had the facts, but a wavering faith. Jesus' coming changes things. Verse 18: Literally, the question is, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know?" "His glory" following the resurrection Christ's human nature shares always and fully in the attributes of His divine nature. Verse 27: Christ found Himself everywhere in the Old Testament, Jn. 5:39-40. Verse 30: Many feel this breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper, but the idea is debatable. *Artos* was a general name for food, including drink. Verse 31: "He vanished"—an evidence of His state of exaltation. Verse 34: The appearance to Peter is not recorded in the Gospels, but Paul places this appearance first, I Cor. 15:4-8.

Introduction: Easter proclaims the living Lord as promised, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

### The Abiding Presence Of Christ

#### I. As our Companion through life.

##### A. The disciples desperately needed Christ as their companion.

1. Their spirits were low and their hopes shattered.
2. They had evidences of the resurrection, but little faith to accept the evidences.
3. Sometimes we become so overwhelmed by tragedy that it is difficult to believe God's promises, Mk. 4:40.

##### B. Jesus joins the Emmaus disciples.

1. He knows about them, and he knows about us, Jn. 11:11; Ps. 139:1-4; Is. 49:15.
2. He joins them, but they do not recognize Him—how much like ourselves when tragedy strikes.
3. He wants them to tell Him all, Mt. 7:7.
4. He points them to the Scriptures.
  - a. They testify to Him as Saviour and Lord, Gn. 3:15; 12:3; Is. 7:14; 9:6; 53:1ff.
  - b. Their hearts burn within them as the fire of faith is renewed, Mt. 18:20.

In our anxieties, let us remember that Christ is with us. Let us diligently seek Him in the Scriptures.

#### II. As Head of the Christian home.

##### A. Jesus enters the home of the Emmaus disciples.

1. They constrain Him to come in.
2. As Jesus responds, they are blessed.

##### B. Jesus wants to bless our homes too with His presence.

1. Homes are in trouble when Jesus is not there.
2. We need to constrain Him to be present.
  - a. As we pray together at meals.
  - b. As we read and share the Scriptures, Jn. 8:31-32.
  - c. As, prompted by His love, we confess our faults to one another and forgive one another.

Let us welcome Christ into our homes by seeking Him in the Scriptures and following Him in Christian living.

HJE

### JUBILATE, THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 10:1-10 (APRIL 16, 1978)

Verse 1: The text was spoken in the temple, immediately after Jesus healed the man who had been blind, Jn. 9:1-41. The sheepfold was a yard with a high stone wall to keep out wild animals and other intruders. The gate was guarded by a porter. On the contrast between true and false shepherds, cf. Jer. 23:1-4; Ezk. 34; Zach. 11:4-17. Verse 2: A "parable" is literally any speech differing from the common way of expression. "They understood not": In rejecting Christ, the Pharisees and Scribes become thieves and robbers. Verse 3: The sheep know the voice of their shepherd. He has names for each of them. Verse 4: Overnight several shepherds may use the same sheep fold. In the morning the sheep heed the call only of their shepherd. "He goeth before them": this is still the custom in the East. Verse 5: Sheep do not trust a stranger as they do their shepherd. The sheepfold is the Church of God. True pastors enter by the gate, Act. 20:29. False teachers climb over the wall, Rom. 16:17-18; Mt. 7:15. Luther says: "All who do not preach Christ are thieves and robbers." Verse 7: Jesus is still the door because He is the only Savior, Jn. 14:6. Verse 8: "All who come before us," i.e., making themselves doors. Verse 9: The thief wants to make the sheep his own, not to give them pasture; to sacrifice them to his

purposes, not to deal graciously with them for theirs; to destroy, not to give life. The three great blessings they have are: 1) deliverance from all enemies; 2) liberty to go out and in, the liberty of the children of God; 3) sustenance. Verse 10: The thief comes to take away, to use the sheep for his selfish purposes. But Christ has come to give life—true, lasting, eternal life in its fullness.

Introduction: There are various pictures of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Christian: We are branches in Christ the Vine, members of His Body, His bride, stones in the spiritual temple. The most familiar picture of all, however, is that of the Shepherd and His sheep.

#### **The Intimate Relationship Between The Shepherd And His Sheep.**

- I. The relationship of the Shepherd to His sheep.
  - A. Christ is the door.
    1. He came to give His life for the sheep, Jn. 10:11.
    2. He is the only door, Jn. 14:6.
  - B. Christ gives rich blessings to His sheep.
    1. Unlike thieves and robbers—false teachers, Ac. 20:29.
      - a. The thief wants to make the sheep his own, not to give them pasture, Rm. 16:18.
      - b. He wants to sacrifice them to his purposes, not to deal graciously with them for theirs.
      - c. He wants to destroy life, not to give it, Mt. 7:15.
    2. In contrast Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
      - a. He calls His sheep by name.
      - b. He gives them safety in the sheep-fold.
      - c. He sustains them by leading them out and goes before them, Ps. 23.
      - d. He gives them life now and eternally, Jn. 10:28.
- II. The relationship of the sheep to the Shepherd.
  - A. They enter by the door through faith, Rm. 3:28; Rm. 4:5.
    1. They are deaf to the voice of others.
      - a. False teachers, Rm. 16:17-18; Mt. 7:15.
      - b. The devil, the world, and their own flesh.
    2. They hear His voice.
      - a. The warnings of the Law.
      - b. The encouragement of the Gospel.
    3. They follow Him.
      - a. In faith.
      - b. In Christ-like living.

Let us diligently hear the voice of our Good Shepherd in His Word and seek to follow Him in our lives.

HJE

#### **CANTATE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 14:1-12 (APRIL 23, 1978)**

John 14 is the beginning of Christ's farewell discourse, spoken, no doubt, partly in the Upper Room, partly on the way to Gethsemane. Few passages are more replete with the love of Jesus. "Let not your heart be troubled": That night much would happen to agitate the disciples. The cure for agitation is faith. Verse 2: He promises the disciples mansions where they will enjoy His presence forever. Verse 4: His going involved suffering. Verse 5: Thomas was expressing doubts which others may have had also. Verse 6: "I am the Way": Jesus prepared the way to heaven. He is the Truth: His every word may be trusted implicitly. The Truth directs the Way. Christ is the Life, the fountain,



the giver of life. There is no other Way, Truth, and Life. Verse 7: To know Jesus is to know the Father, Jn. 10:30; Col. 2:9. We know the Father by faith. Verse 8: Philip felt that if he saw the Father that would be enough to establish his faith. Verse 10: Christ's word and works are not performed separately from the Father. The essence of the Father and the Son is identical. Verse 11: He who refuses to believe Christ's word has the unquestionable testimony of His works. Jesus repeats what He told the unbelieving Jews, Jn. 10:38. Verse 12: "Greater works": Converting sinners through the preaching of the Gospel is greater than healing physical infirmities. The reason Christians can perform these greater works is that Jesus is going to the Father, namely, through the cross. The great works of converting men are works of the exalted Christ.

### Rejoice That You Are A Christian

- I. You have the assurance of heaven.
  - A. Jesus promises us heaven.
    1. He is going to prepare a place.
    2. He will come again to receive us unto Himself.
  - B. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
    1. He prepared the way by a substitutionary death.
      - a. He paid the debt of sin.
      - b. The way is now open to all.
    2. He is the Truth.
      - a. He speaks the truth.
      - b. He is faithful to His word.
    3. He is the Life.
      - a. He is the true God and eternal life, Jn. 1:1.
      - b. He gives life in fellowship with God now and eternally, Jn. 3:16.
  - C. By faith life is ours.
    1. No man comes to the Father without Christ, Ac. 4:12.
    2. By faith heaven is ours, Jn. 3:17-18; Jn. 11:25.
- II. You know the Father.
  - A. The request: "Show us the Father." v.8.
  - B. The response: "He that has seen me has seen the Father," Col. 2:9.
    1. Jesus and the Father are one in essence, Jn. 10:30.
    2. The Father shares in the words and works of Jesus, v. 10.
  - C. Faith sees the Father in Christ.
    1. Faith knows from the words of Jesus that God is gracious, Jn. 1:14-17.
    2. Faith sees in the works of both that Jesus is the Son of God and that God is all-powerful, Mt. 28:18.
- III. You can do greater works than Jesus.
  - A. Jesus performed mighty works.
    1. He healed the sick and raised the dead.
    2. But all those whom he healed finally succumbed to physical death.
  - B. By faith we can perform greater works.
    1. Saving men's souls, Mt. 28:18-20.
    2. By telling them the good news that Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord, has gone to the Father to prepare a place for us.

HJE

### ROGATE, FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER: JOHN 14:15-21 (APRIL 30, 1978)

Verse 15: The fruit of the loving relationship between the disciples and their Lord is that they keep His commandments. Where there is no faith there is no

love. Where there is no love, there is no real keeping of the commandments. Verse 16: Jesus Himself had comforted His disciples; now that He was about to leave them visibly, He promised the Comforter. Verse 17: The Spirit of Truth never deceives or misleads believers. The truth He teaches is the Gospel. Unbelievers refuse to see and know the works of the Spirit, I Cor. 2:14. Only believers know Him. Note the reference to the Trinity in this section: The Son prays to the Father, and the Father sends the Spirit. Verse 18: He will not leave the disciples orphans, without a guide. He will return in the means of grace. Verse 19: When He goes to the Father, the world will not see Him visibly; but the disciples will see Him spiritually, by faith. Verse 20: "I in you": The presence of Jesus in the believers assures them of His grace and power for their sanctification. Verse 21: The love of the Father motivates and follows upon the works of the Christian. We show our faith by our love.

### We Are Not Orphans

#### I. We have the Holy Spirit as our comforter.

##### A. He regenerates.

1. The world cannot receive Him, I Cor. 2:14.
2. He comes in baptism, Jn. 3:1-15, and the Word, Rm. 1:16.
3. He dwells in us, II Cor. 6:16.

##### B. He abides with us forever.

1. He abides through the Word which He inspired, II Pe. 1:21.
2. Through that Word He guides us into all truth, Jn. 16:13; Jn. 8:31-32; Rm. 8:16-17; Rm. 5:3-5.
3. Through the Word He impowers us to love, vs. 15-21; Php. 2:13.

#### II. Jesus Himself comes to us.

##### A. Jesus is about to leave.

1. Before Him lies the cross of reconciliation, II Cor. 5:19.
2. Beyond lies the victorious resurrection and ascension, I. Cor. 15:55-57, Php. 2:9-11.

##### B. He promises, "I will come to you."

1. He promises to be with us always, Mt. 28:20.
2. He comes through the Word and the Sacrament, Lk. 10:16.
3. By faith we see Him.

##### C. He gives hope for the future.

1. "Because I live, ye shall live also," Jn. 11:25.
2. Then we shall know, I Cor. 13:12.
3. Then we will be forever with the Lord.

HJE

### EXAUDI, THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION: JOHN 17:1-11 (MAY 7, 1978)

The pericope divides into three sections: vs. 1-5, Christ prays for His own glorification; vs. 6-8, Christ prays for the disciples as those who have kept the Word; vs. 9-11, the distinction between the disciples and this world. A good sermon should be followed by a good prayer; so the sacerdotal prayer follows the farewell discourse. Verse 1: "The hour" refers to the time of Christ's suffering and subsequent glorification. "That Thy Son may glorify Thee": The work of Christ glorifies the Father's grace. Verse 2: "Power over all flesh": By His suffering and death Christ gained all men for Himself, since He redeemed all. As many as the Father has given the Son in the election of grace will have eternal life. Verse 3: To have eternal life is to know the Father of mercy and Jesus Christ, the Mediator of grace. Verse 4: The work is the great work of atonement. Verse 5: Jesus prays for the day when, also according to His human nature, He will be glorified, with full and unrestricted exercise of all the

divine attributes. Verse 6: "Thy name": He had told and showed the disciples the feeling and intention of the Father towards sinful men. To keep God's Word in faith and obedience is discipleship. Verse 8: This verse teaches the eternal generation of the Son; cf. John 1:1-14. Verse 9: Jesus' prayer for His disciples. Verse 10: Note Jesus' assertion of His unity of essence with the Father. Luther notes that the phrase, "All that is thine is mine," permits nothing to be excluded. Verse 11: "Keep": The work of preservation in faith is the work of God the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. "That they may be one": Unity in faith unites all true believers in the external church; unity is a goal to be worked toward.

Introduction: We are in the Holy of Holies as we see Jesus at prayer.

### Jesus At Prayer

#### I. Jesus prays for His own glorification.

##### A. He glorified the Father.

1. By His preaching and healing (v. 6) He demonstrates that God is gracious, Mt. 11:25; Jn. 1:14.
2. By finishing the work (v. 4).
  - a. The work of atonement, Php. 2:5-8.
  - b. To give eternal life to those who know God and Jesus in faith, vs. 2-3.

##### B. He prays for His own glorification.

1. He prays that, also according to His human nature, He may be glorified, v. 5.
2. This prayer was dramatically answered when Christ entered upon His state of exaltation, Php. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:20-23.
3. He is glorified in the believers because they are the fruit of His labor of love, Re. 7:14.

#### II. He prays for His disciples.

##### A. The disciples are those who have kept Christ's Word, vs. 6-8.

1. They accepted Christ's Word in faith.
2. They are now God's and Christ's, vs. 9-10.

##### B. Jesus prays for His disciples.

1. That they may be kept in the faith.
  - a. They are beset by the devil, the world, and their own flesh, v. 11.
  - b. Only the power of God can keep them, Jd. 6.
2. That they may be one.
  - a. In the holy Christian church all Christians are one, Ep. 4:4-6; Ga. 3:28; I Cor. 12:13.
  - b. In the visible church unity is a goal to be worked toward, Ep. 4:3.

HJE

### PENTECOST: JOHN 20:19-23 (MAY 14, 1978)

Verse 19: The scene is Easter Sunday evening. The fearful disciples were aware of the preceding events: the report of women, the appearance of Christ to Mary, the account of Peter and John, and the report of the Emmaus disciples. Luke implies that more than the eleven had gathered. "Jesus stood in the midst" of the disciples in His glorified body, subject to the laws neither of time nor space. "Peace be unto you": This is the peace He won and He alone can give, Jn. 14:27. Verse 20: "He showed them His hands and His side": He is the living One who was dead but is now alive. "Glad": extreme dejection and fear are converted into the joyful conviction of the truth. The disciples heard, saw, and handled the Word of Life, Jn. 1:1. Verse 21: The

first "peace" gave a new revelation; the second "peace" was a summons to service. "As my Father hath sent me," etc.: This is Christ's divine commission to His Church. Verse 22: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost": The Holy Spirit is Christ's parting gift to His Church. Verse 23: "Whosoever sins yet remit," etc.: This is the office of the keys, the peculiar church power to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent. Cf. Mt. 18:15-19; Ac. 2:37-39.

### Jesus In The Midst Of The Church

- I. He gives the command to preach the Gosepl, v. 21.
  - A. Jesus was sent to seek and to save the lost, Mt. 18:11.
  - B. He sends His disciples on a similar mission, Ac. 1:8; Mt. 20:18-20.
    1. The world is still lost in sin and death.
    2. Christians are to seek the lost.
- II. He gives the message, vs. 21, 23.
  - A. A message of peace, v. 21.
    1. Christ won peace for all, II Cor. 5:19; Col. 2:14.
    2. Christians are to proclaim this peace, Is. 40:1.
  - B. A message of pardon, v. 23.
    1. The sins of penitent sinners are to be forgiven them.
    2. The sins of impenitent sinners are to be retained, Mt. 18:15-17; Mt. 23:37.
- III. He gives the power, v. 22.
  - A. His promise was fulfilled on Pentecost, Ac. 2.
    1. The Holy Spirit worked in the apostles, giving them boldness.
    2. He worked through the apostles, bringing three thousand to repentance and faith.
  - B. The Holy Spirit is Christ's abiding gift to His Church.
    1. He works in us, Jn. 16:13.
    2. He works through us, Jn. 16:7-11.

HJE

### THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY: MATTHEW 28:16-20 (MAY 21, 1978)

The pericope from Matthew 28 represents the point of connection between the ministry of our Lord during the days of His incarnation and the continuing work of the Holy Trinity in the life of the Holy Christian Church. Just as the entire Godhead was active in the person and works of Christ in the days of His ministry, so the Holy Trinity is involved in the apostolic ministry. The person and works of Christ are joined to the ministry of the apostles (who proclaim the Word of God and administer the Sacraments of Christ in the name of Christ), so that we may know the fruits and effects of Christ's saving work among us.

Matthew characteristically uses the phrase *hoi dodeka mathetai* and, after the passion and resurrection, *hoi hendeka mathetai* in the same sense that the other evangelists use the term *hoi apostoloi*. In fact, Matthew uses the latter term only at 10:2 in the listing of the names of the Twelve. The Twelve are something more than simply an "inner-group" of close disciples; they have been particularly chosen by Christ to be His designated representatives to speak and minister in His name and on His behalf (10:5ff). They have fulfilled that commission, and in the last hours of the passion, they have deserted Christ and dispersed. Judas, one of the Twelve, has betrayed Him and taken his own life; Peter has denied Him before witnesses.

Thus, the call of Christ, coming here after the record of the resurrection, tells the remaining eleven that they have now been forgiven and reconciled to

God in the death of Christ. The risen Lord comes before them to reestablish their apostolate and give them a new responsibility: to go out in the name of Jesus with a new and glorious proclamation, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize in the name of the Triune God, and teach the whole counsel of God.

In this ministry, the apostles are to understand that the crucified and risen Christ goes with them. What they say and do in His name is done on His authority (*exousia*). Christ has Himself received this authority from His Father and here indicates to the eleven that it is the spiritual power which will lend authority to their words and actions. What they have received of hope and mercy is now to be communicated to others through the apostolic ministry that Christ gives them. As apostolic messengers, they do not represent their own persons or offer their own message. They represent the person of Christ and speak in His name, on His authority. "When (preachers) offer the Word of Christ or the Sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead" (Apology VII/VIII, 28). This post-resurrection appearance and Word of Christ to His eleven stands at the foundation of the whole life and ministry of Christ's Church in this world.

#### In The Name Of Christ

- I. This appearance and Word of Christ mean forgiveness for sinful apostles.
  - A. The eleven were more than ordinary followers:
    1. They were called directly by Christ (10:1-4).
    2. They were charged with a special responsibility.
      - a. In His name they cast out demons.
      - b. In His name they heal the sick and infirm (10:5ff.) and announce that the Kingdom of God is near.
  - B. At His betrayal, they fled (26:56).
  - C. Here on the mountain they are restored and given a new apostolic ministry.
    1. The death of Christ reconciled them to God.
    2. In the name of Christ they are sent forth into the world.
      - a. To make disciples.
      - b. To baptize.
      - c. To teach the whole counsel of God.
- II. The apostles receive authority from Christ Himself.
  - A. They are sent forth to minister in the name and stead of Christ. What they do is done in His name and place.
  - B. Christ is at work in their words and acts.
    1. In their work of making disciples, Christ's gathering of a people for God is carried on.
    2. In their baptizing, the fruit of Christ's redemptive work is continued.
    3. In their teaching, Christ is building up His Church.
- III. The Good News for us.
  - A. Christ provides the plan and foundation for His Holy Ministry and holy Church.
  - B. The Church is built upon the apostle's teaching and ministry. (Acts 2:42).
    1. Ours is an apostolic faith and church.
    2. The ministry of the church does not change.
    3. To this apostolic work Christ promises His presence and blessing.

*Almighty and Everlasting God, who hast given unto us Thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee that Thou wouldest keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see Thee in Thy one and eternal glory, O Father, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit dost live and reign, one God, through all ages.*

Charles J. Evanson, Fort Wayne, Indiana

**THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 7:21-29**  
(MAY 28, 1977)

The lessons find their center in the unfolding of the Will of the Father in the Law and Gospel. The text represents the fusion of two separate pericopes. The two are certainly neither antagonistic nor irreconcilable. In fact, the second appears to flow naturally from the first: his "house" is solidly built who builds upon Christ the Rock. Having recognized this, we ought also to recognize that we will have to put our principal emphasis on either verses 21-23 or verses 24-29; we cannot adequately handle both in the same sermon.

The speaker of verses 21-23 is our Lord, addressing Himself primarily to the first disciples who have gathered around Him, but within the hearing of the multitude as well (5:1ff). In the wider sense, His word is addressed to everyone who hears it, and the message of that word is that to follow Him does not mean to escape the judgment which will issue from Him in the last day. One does not avoid judgment in this life or the end of days by claiming to belong to Christ, regardless of statements to this effect in some contemporary preaching.

All of us must face the temptation to deny Christ by denying the necessity of a Christian life, a life of discipleship, sanctification, and growth in grace. In our preaching we are to call forth that confession which speaks and at the same time moves beyond speech to "do the Will of My Father who is in Heaven."

**"He Shall Come Again To Judge Both The Living And The Dead"**

- I. These words are familiar to us as our weekly confession of faith and hope.
  - A. They are a confession of the complete Lordship of Christ Jesus.
    1. This judgment was seen already in His coming into this world (John 9:39).
    2. In the end of days, He is to come again as Judge of all.
      - a. He will judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).
      - b. His authority to judge comes from the Father (Romans 2:5ff.).
  - B. They are a reminder that it is we who are to be judged. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10).
- II. These words of Christ stand as a solemn warning, a strong preaching of the wrath of God over all forms of ungodliness in our lives.
  - A. What is condemned is our lack of attention to Him, for our devotion is often self-interested and insincere.
  - B. What is condemned is our indifference to His Word.
    1. In the strongest language, He calls us to repentance and amendment of life. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).
    2. He pleads with us to turn away from every form of self-righteousness, to seek comfort and help from Him (11:18ff.).
  - C. What is condemned is our reticence to follow Him by rejecting and despising our sins and trusting alone in Him.
- III. At the same time, for those who trust in Him, these words are a sweet assurance of His mercy and forgiveness for all our sins.
  - A. Assurance that in our confession and intention to grow through the means of grace, we have something that will endure forever.
    1. We have been baptized into death with Him, and raised up to new life in Him (Romans 6:3ff.).
    2. Our Communion of His Body and Blood strengthens us in faith and certifies our hope in Him.
    3. Our confession and absolution is the fruit of daily struggle to be faithful.
  - B. Assurance that we are indeed building upon the Rock that is stronger than we (Ps 61:2).

*O Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us perfectly to know Thy Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that, following His steps, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who lives and rules with Thee in the communion of the Holy Spirit, one God, throughout all ages.*

CJE

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 9:9-13  
(JUNE 4, 1978)

In every age the Church has had to face the temptation to cut the Gospel from its grounding in specifics and transform it into a kind of general statement. We have all fallen victim to this temptation at one time or another, for example, when we speak of a sense of thankfulness or having a forgiving nature in rather unspecific terms. In this pericope of the calling of Matthew Levi, we are confronted with the grace of God. What are we to make of it? When the scholastics separated this grace from its scriptural foundations, they turned it into a substance to be spoken of in terms of quantities. Our own temptation is to turn it into a kind of abstract and benign graciousness in which we may comfortably immerse ourselves. The Lutheran Reformation reminded Christendom that the grace of God is His unmerited favour which He shows us in our Lord Jesus Christ. The power of this grace is always revealed and demonstrated in particular acts and situations. In both the Old and New Testaments, this mercy is neither unspecified nor undefined "mercifulness." There is always a specific context, a defined situation in which mercy is given and received.

In Luke 18, Jesus tells the parable of the poor sinner who, unlike the proud Pharisee, prays in humility, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." The writer to the Hebrews reminds us how Jesus became subject in all things on our behalf, and was made perfect (complete) through sufferings, and tasted death for us, "so that He might be merciful and faithful as high priest before God, to expiate the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). In Luke 6, Jesus turns to His disciples, and says, "Be therefore merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful."

The Call Of Matthew Reveals The Mercy Of God For Us

- I. That Jesus should call Matthew into His discipleship is a statement of the mercy of God.

Matthew stands in need of mercy, but he does not deserve it. We know that he was a tax-collector. Tax-collectors were obvious sinners; persons to be avoided by church-people. Matthew does not appear to have been an exception—at his table were "tax-collectors and sinners."

- II. That Jesus should eat with sinners is capable of misinterpretation.

- A. It could be misunderstood by the so-called righteous members of the community. And it was!

1. To such it appears as though this act of Christ stands as a specific repudiation of their moral accomplishments and goals.

- a. In the most important sense, it is. Natural man, even at his best, is inclined away from God and toward evil. He labours under the delusion that he can justify his own existence. He is selfrighteous, puffed-up, and always excuses himself.

- b. In a lesser sense, it is not, for civil righteousness is important. Without it, life in this world is chaotic!

2. To such self-righteous persons, the action of Jesus appears as veritable proof that He is not the Christ.

- a. This is the triumph of self-serving human opinion.
- b. This is the rejection of God's mercy.
- B. It could also be misunderstood by open sinners. To such it may appear as though nothing is required of them—no change, no repentance, no sorrow, no confession, no resolution.
  - 1. In one sense, something is required. If one cannot enter heaven by moral achievement, neither can he enter by indifference and sloth. This is Pharisaism in reverse! No one enters the Kingdom of God, except by mercy.
  - 2. In another sense, nothing is required. Whatever is accomplished for our justification is wholly the work of Christ.
- III. That Jesus should eat with sinners is a proclamation of the mercy of God.
  - A. His presence creates a hunger for righteousness and salvation.
  - B. His presence reveals that God neither deserts us nor rejects us in our low estates. Christ became sin for us.

*We beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy clemency to show us Thine unspeakable mercy that Thou mayest both set us free from our sins and rescue us from the punishments which for our sins we deserve; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and rules with Thee in the communion of the Holy Spirit, one God, throughout all ages.*

CJE

**THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 9:35-10:7**  
(JUNE 11, 1978)

The pericope for Trinity Sunday has impressed upon us the importance of the apostolic office and the work of those who have been called and ordained by the Lord, in and through His Church, who minister in the name and stead of Christ. "They do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Lk. 10:16), 'He who hears you hears Me.' When they offer the Word of Christ or the Sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead" (Apol VII/VIII 28).

This Sunday's text takes us back to the commissioning of the Twelve as apostolic representatives of Christ, even though, as we have already mentioned, Matthew does not use the designation "Apostles." This act represents the beginning of what, in the resurrection and the final words of our Lord, will be seen to be the most essential work of the Church of Christ.

**The Calling Of The Twelve**

- I. What precipitates this calling and sending forth?
  - A. "He had compassion" (9:36).
    - 1. For the sake of His compassion, He healed the sick (14:14).
    - 2. For the sake of His compassion, He fed the multitude of five thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish (15:32).
  - B. This compassion moves Christ to action.
    - 1. He directs His church (disciples) to pray (37).
    - 2. He sends the disciples forth in His name, with His authority (10:1-42).
- II. This is only the beginning. The work of the apostles here given is circumscribed and limited, for the work of Christ has not yet been completed.
  - A. Limited nationality. The apostles are restricted to the Jewish race, for "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22). They are not to go among the Gentiles or Samaritans. St. Peter reminds us (1 Pt. 4:17) that judgment begins with the household of God.
  - B. Limited task. The apostles are called here to cast out unclean spirits



and heal the sick, proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven is near at hand in the person and work of Christ.

III. This calling and sending-forth is a foretaste of the Gospel.

A. Limited though it is, here is the seed from which, with the resurrection, the Gospel springs forth. The kingdom of heaven appears in this world in the person and work of Christ.

1. He has compassion upon us (Nicene Creed: He came for us men and for our salvation).
2. He has healed us with the healing of divine forgiveness.
3. He has suffered and died on our behalf.

B. This event is the little spring in the desert from which the mighty flood of the Holy Gospel issues forth. It is a long journey from this moment to Good Friday, through suffering and rejection, infamy and death. But the goal is clear. It is the working out of the compassion of Christ for us and all the world.

*Merciful God, we beseech Thee to cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church that, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed Apostles, it may so walk in the light of Thy truth that it may at length attain to the right of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and rules with Thee in the communion of the Holy Spirit, one God, throughout all ages.*

CJE

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 10:34-42  
(JUNE 18, 1978)

The words of our Lord are the continuation of the instructions, warnings, and promises spoken to the Twelve previous to their first going-forth in the name of Jesus. They have been given Christ's own authority to minister in His Name. Along with this authority will come open persecution and hatred. The disciple must be fearless, remembering that the Father in heaven knows even the number of the hairs upon his head. In this situation our Lord calls His disciples to bold confession and recognition of the constant and easy temptation to denial.

Confession (*homologia*) is far more than an unaffected acknowledgement of the special status of Jesus among men; rather it is a solemn and binding statement that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Such a statement is at once (1) a mark of discipleship (as the present passage indicates), (2) an elementary form of *martyria* (I John 1:2), (3) a public statement (John 1:20), and (4) a basic element in Christian worship, more especially baptism and ordination (I Timothy 6:12). The words of Christ in Matthew 7:21-23 (cf. Trinity I) make it clear that such confession necessarily incorporates acts which spring from right words.

The Words Of Christ

I. The words of Christ remind His Church of the necessity of bold confession in the face of constant temptations to denial.

A. The true nature of confession (*homologia*).

1. An essential mark of every follower of Jesus (cf. Luke 12:8).
2. An essential mark of testimony to the person and works of Christ (Acts 4:8-12).
3. An act of obedient and faithful worship (I Timothy 6:12).

B. The danger of denial is always present.

1. Even the Twelve fell victim to this temptation.
  - a. Peter was victimized by fear of personal safety (Matthew 26:69-75).
  - b. Judas Iscariot was victimized by personal interests (26:14ff.).

2. The temptation still faces us today.
  - a. Denial by weakness, immaturity, personal interests, etc. (as Peter and Judas).
  - b. Denial by sloth, selfishness, failure to bring forth the fruits of faith (7:23; 25:12).
- II. The words of Christ stand as both a warning and a promise.
  - A. A warning that our confession must be bold, obedient, and faithful, even in the face of great dangers to body and spirit.
    - a. It must be built upon the Word of God.
    - b. It must be nurtured by the Sacraments of Christ.
  - B. A promise that Christ will be with His people to bless and strengthen them.

*Almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee: through the same, Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and rules with Thee in the communion of the Holy Spirit, one God, throughout all ages.*

CJE

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: ROMANS 6:2-11  
(JUNE 25, 1978)

How superficially we have interpreted the truth and content of the holy Christian faith. We live in the world of the *understandable*, a world which exalts human thought. At the same time we think deeply only with great difficulty. We surrender to our emotions in every area. In matters of faith, each becomes his own master without meditating on the mystery of the faith. The Apostle Paul speaks of a great mystery in Baptism. *Symphotoi* (v. 5) refers to things which grow together and therefore belong together by nature. *This is how close our Heavenly Father reckons us to His Son—so that nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from Him, unless we break the connection.* We have been baptized into death together with Christ and buried with Him in the waters of Holy Baptism. This is a great mystery, which is not shaped according to our human terms and knowledge; rather it is the life-long work of our faith to believe it and seek to understand it.

**This Is A Great Mystery**

- I. Baptism binds the death and resurrection of Christ to us. (*Homoiomati* (likeness) refers to exact image, not mere similarity, v. 5).
  - A. When we are baptized, we are joined together with Christ in the death which He has died on our behalf.
    1. By it we know that Christ died for us.
    2. By it God the Father reaches out from heaven and takes hold of us, and puts us alongside His only-begotten Son. *"I will always consider you together with Him. What you have been and done, this He has borne for you on the Cross. What He is and does this you will always wear and carry."*
  - B. When we are baptized, we are joined together with Christ in His victorious resurrection, by the act of God.
    1. By this means, the victory of Christ is our possession.
    2. It is as though Christ came to us and said: *"I am going to make an important journey, for your salvation. I will come down from heaven; I walk on earth; I will be hated and despised; I will suffer cruelly, I will hang on the cross and die; I will descend into the*

*depths of hell—and I will take you along with Me. We are bound together for all eternity.*

C. Today this happens in no other way than by Holy Baptism.

1. During His earthly ministry, Christ Jesus did not baptize. He took men, women, and children directly into the Kingdom of God by His Word and Blessing, e.g.; the thief on the cross.

2. But before His Ascension, He left this commandment to His Church, to be observed through all the ages. He instituted this Means of Grace; our total understanding of Baptism is based upon this foundation.

II. Holy Baptism is not an indifferent, unimportant, or empty ceremony.

A. It is not a human action at all. It is God who works through Baptism. He uses human voices and human hands and earthly water. But He does it; for only God can accomplish such great things.

B. He plants us together with His Son, washes and cleanses us, and causes us to be born again. He plants faith in our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit is in the water.

C. Thus, Baptism is necessary for all, including children.

III. Baptism is a new life together with Christ, beginning in time, and fulfilled in eternal life. Luther: It is God's greatest sermon on the pure grace of God.

A. It is the source of comfort when sins oppress us.

B. It is center of faith and trust when temptations and sins assail us. We are sinners in a sinful world, but we are forgiven.

C. It is a call to turn away from sin and follow Christ in every sense of the word. "To receive Baptism is one thing; to live in Baptism is another."

CJE

#### THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 11:25-30 (JULY 2, 1978)

Again two separate sayings of our Lord are conjoined: the first, a public prayer, which takes the form of a declaration of the Son speaking to the Father, and the second, the call and invitation of the Son to weary sinners.

Some commentators have remarked that verses 25-27 seem more characteristic of the Fourth Gospel than the Synoptics. This has led some to posit that we are here confronted by a short liturgical saying which has been grafted into the Matthaean Gospel. Such a thesis is not necessary to explain the presence of these words, which are reminiscent of the Good Shepherd discourse in John. In fact, the Synoptics include two types of prayer by our Lord. On the one hand, we find prayers in which Christ represents suffering and afflicted sinners before His Father with Psalms and lamentations (The primary examples of this are the Gethsemane prayer, Mark 14:34; and the cry of Psalm 22, Mark 15:34). On the other hand, we find prayers in which Christ stands as the exalted Son of the Heavenly Father in perfect communion with the Father. The verses of the first part of our text represent this latter type of prayer. (Further examples are found at Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:16.)

It is as the perfect and exalted Son of the Father that our Lord urges the invitation of verses 28-30 upon those who hear Him, whether in the first century with His own voice, or in the twentieth century through His Church. This call or invitation represents an event which comes about in the preaching of the Gospel. Yet the call is never simply a past or complete event; it is always at work in the present moment. To those who are not yet Christians, it is a call out of the world and into the Church - a call to Holy Baptism. To those who are within the congregation, it is a call to sanctification and movement toward eternal life.

### The Call Of Christ

- I. The Addressees.
  - A. A call to those who labour. All labour and all the fruits of human labour perish. Only the fruit of Christ's labour endures.
  - B. A call to the heavy-laden. The burden is the Law which Christ alone perfects and fulfils within Himself.
  - C. A call to the weary. Christ endures great weariness in mockery, affliction, temptation, and prayer on our behalf.
- II. The Roots of our Calling.
  - A. To the stranger - a call to Baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ.
  - B. To the Christian - a call to live in the power of Baptism.
- III. The Goal - To Bear the Yoke and Burden of Christ.
  - A. The sign of His Cross - our insignia and confidence.
  - B. The burden of the cross
    1. To mature in faith toward God.
    2. To grow in love toward one another.
    3. To be built together in our mutual hope in Christ.

Conclusion: The call and invitation of Christ is extended to each of us. For those outside the Kingdom it is a grace-filled invitation to leave the world and enter. For those within it is, again, the invitation of the grace of God to grow towards eternal life.

CJE

### THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18:23 (JULY 9, 1978)

It is interesting that Luke's account of the parable of the Sower, and that of Mark (4:1-20) are missing from the three-year lectionary of the ILCW. The apparent reason is the predominance of what many modern critics claim to be inauthentic interpretive material. Thus, in most scholarly circles, verses 1-9 in the Matthean account represent the original parable as spoken by our Lord, and verses 18-23 constitute a later allegorical interpretation which recasts the *Sitz-in-Leben* of the parable for the missionary situation of the early Christian community. The short parable of the Sower found in the recently discovered Coptic text of the Gospel of Thomas (9) is seen as a vindication of this position. It is, however, the text as it stands in the Gospels which is inspired and authoritative. We have no legitimate right to disregard the latter part of Matthew's text of the parable - and with it the texts of Luke and Mark - as though the interpretation of the parable represents an inauthentic addition to the parable or a curious example of the interpretative skills (or lack thereof) of the early Christians.

### The Parable Of The Sower

- I. The Church Bears God's Truth to the World.
  - A. In the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Sower of the Seed.
  - B. In those who speak the Word of Christ in His name and by His command.
- II. The Truth of God is Variouslly Received.
  - A. The Evil One is always ready to snatch it away.
  - B. The tribulations and persecutions to which the Word gives rise harden hearts and close ears against it.
  - C. Cares, prosperity, and delectations strangle and choke it.
  - D. By some it is heard and understood, and brings forth great fruit.

### III. This Parable Stands as an Admonition, a Warning, and a Consolation.

- A. Admonition: Let the Word be sown! This is the essential work of the church in our own day.
- B. Warning: Recognize the obstacles raised within your own life and mind against the proper sowing and nurturing of the Word of Truth.
  - 1. Remember the importance of the weekly gathering of the congregation around the Word and Sacraments.
  - 2. Support in every spiritual and material way the sowing of the Word.
- C. Consolation: The Word will bring forth fruit, whether or not that fruit is evident to us.

CJE

### THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43 (JULY 16, 1978)

Again, we have a parable with interpretation conjoined - this one concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord has in the parable of the Sower promised that there will be a rich and abundant harvest. The Church receives these words as a promise, because no great harvest is yet evident and the field is plagued with insects and weeds. What shall be done about them?

Melanchthon speaks to the problem in Apology VII/VIII. On the one hand, the field may be identified as the whole world (VII/VIII.19): "Therefore this passage is more against our opponents than for them since it shows that the true and spiritual people will be separated from the physical people."

But at the same time, it must be remembered that our Lord Himself identifies this parable as a word about the Kingdom, which in this world appears hidden within the visible church. This visible church is of necessity *ecclesia mixta*, containing within it both bad and good, hypocrite and faithful, weed and wheat. Christians are warned against the danger of schisms which precipitously and prematurely divide this visible structure. Against such schisms we implore the help of our Lord (*Litany*, Third Intercession). Schisms and dissensions among believers are to be avoided, as sins against love. "Christ has also warned us in His parables on the church that when we are offended by the personal conduct of priests or people, we should not incite schisms, as the Donatists wickedly did" (VII/VIII.49).

#### The Parable Of The Field

- I. The Field is the visible Christian Church. Hidden within it is the true Kingdom of believers, created, sustained, and sanctified by the Means of Grace.
- II. A Call to Patience and Endurance.
  - A. The Kingdom is secure; the harvest will be reaped.
  - B. All that is impure will be burned on the Last Day.
  - C. Let no scandal or dissension divide, discourage, or destroy us. Satan cannot destroy the Church; she shall shine like the sun in the Day of the Lord.

CJE

### THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 13:44-52 (JULY 23, 1978)

The pericope marks the conclusion of a string of parables of the Kingdom with three short parables: (1) The Treasure Hidden in the Field, (2) The Pearl of Great Price, (3) The Dragnet. The concluding words speak of the scribe who is an expert in Mosaic Law and who, by becoming a disciple of Jesus,

preserves the insights of the Law and adds to them the blessings of the Gospel. The central theme is found in the first two parables. The Kingdom is to be desired above all things; it is such that a man will dispose of all things in order to acquire it. In the first parable, as in the parables of the unjust steward and the unjust judge, our Lord shows how "the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). In the second parable, the point is reinforced; dedicate yourself to God's Kingdom and know that no other claim upon you has its value.

#### The Kingdom Of God

- I. What is a treasure? It is something of surpassing value. The man in the parable is willing to sell everything he owns to possess it. What is the treasure that we are to desire and possess? It is the Kingdom of God. For it we must be willing to make great sacrifices.
- II. What is a pearl? It is an example of something precious. In Judaism, godly wisdom was compared with pearls in value. Here the pearl stands as a simile for the saving blessing of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 7:6).
- III. Both parables stand as an indictment of false values and misguided human effort. But there is great promise also attached: It is the purpose of our Heavenly Father, in and through His beloved Son, to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). The Apostle Paul reminds us that this treasure (*thēsauros*) of wisdom and knowledge is hidden in Christ (Co. 2:3). He give us a new life as a treasure (2 Cor. 4:7) which in this life we carry about in our own frail bodies.

CJE

#### THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 14:13-21 (JULY 30, 1978)

This pericope has received little mercy at the hands of interpreters. Some have pictured this episode as a friendly picnic at which the crowds learn the great "miracle" of sharing by following the good example of Jesus and His disciples. They are inspired to open their lunch-baskets and share with less fortunate friends and neighbours. At the other end of the spectrum, some have totally disregarded the historical circumstances of this episode, and turned it into nothing more than cultic and ritual action, serving as a kind of proto-type to the Holy Eucharist.

With the announcement of the death of John the Baptist, the ministry of our Lord enters a new period. As when the Pharisees took counsel to kill Him (12:9-15), this new phase begins with a period of withdrawal from the disciples and the multitude. The way of the cross is becoming more clear; it is the way to Jerusalem which Christ must follow. The end of the road is not yet in sight. Although the Messianic significance of the ministry of Christ is not evident to the multitudes, Jesus is openly showing Himself to be the Messiah, the minister the compassion of God (v. 14). It is within the context of this larger ministry that we find the special significance of this miraculous feeding.

#### The Fulness Of God's Compassion

- I. Christ Jesus is Himself the measure of the compassion of God.
  - A. The ministry of John the Baptist bore witness to that compassion. He prepared the way for Christ.
    1. Zecharias predicted it in the words of the Benedictus (Lk. 1:78).
    2. John himself spoke of it in pointing others to Christ (Jn. 1:18).
  - B. It is compassion which is at work in this great miraculous feeding.
    1. He showed compassion in healing the sick (v. 14).
    2. He was moved by compassion to feed the fainting (vv. 15-16).

3. He showed the measure of compassion by supplying an abundance.
- II. We have been provided with the abundance of God's compassion in Christ Jesus.
- A. We are clothed and covered by it (Co. 3:12-17).
  - B. We are inspired by it (Phil 2:1-2).
  - C. To refuse to receive it and offer it means to deny the love of God. (I John 3:17).

CJE

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 14:22-33  
(AUGUST 6, 1978)

This pericope introduces a series of sayings and events recorded by Matthew, Mark (6:45-52) and John (6:16-24), but not by Luke. The particular characteristics of the Matthean account of walking on the water are two in number: 1) The confession of Peter, "You are the Son of God in truth," presaging the great confession of Matthew 16:16. This represents a new element in the Matthean account, whereas in the Markan account, the term "Son of God" is used already in connection with the Baptism of Jesus. Matthew does use the term in reference to the temptation, which is directed specifically against the Sonship of Jesus (4:3,6). Further, Jesus says in the Sermon of the Mount that sonship belongs to the "blessed" (5:9, 16, 45, 18).

2) The sinking of Peter. Human faith, even when directed toward our Lord, is totally inadequate. In fact, it is not faith in its proper sense at all. What is important is the cry of Peter, "Lord, help me!" Julius Schniewind remarks, "Here Peter calls our Lord by His 'last name': 'Helper, Saviour'."

Lord Help Us

- I. Jesus is Helper and Saviour.
  - A. This is the meaning of His name (Jesus/Joshua).
  - B. It was for a Helper and Saviour that God's people prayed.
    - 1. David's Psalter, the Bible's 'Prayer Book' (Ps. 10:14; 30:10; 54:4), expresses this desire.
    - 2. Isaiah pointed ahead to One who would save God's people (Isa 19:20).
- II. Peter Calls Jesus by Name.
  - A. In his cry for help (30).
  - B. In his confession of faith (33).
- III. Jesus extends His hand.
  - A. To Peter, to rescue him from the deep (v. 30).
  - B. To His faithful people, to rescue us from the depths of death and hell (Ps. 130: 'Out of the depths. . .').

CJE

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 15:21-28  
(AUGUST 13, 1978)

After healing many of the afflicted who have been brought to Him, Jesus now leaves the area of Gennesaret. From there He travels towards the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. Centuries before Elijah the Tishbite had been sustained in this same region by the widow of Zarephath, and had raised her son from the dead (I Kings 17:8-24). Now the Messiah to whom Elijah bore witness comes into the same region, and again a woman comes to Him and cries out to Him on behalf of her daughter,

"*eleeson*" (v. 22). This prayer is familiar in both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Ps. 4:1; 6:2, *et al.*). The original sense of *eleos* with reference to God is His own faithfulness and steadfastness (*chesed*, Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:5, 15, *et al.*). Here the specific reference is to the need for the goodness and mercy of God in specific situations of need. In the Pauline literature, the term will take on specific reference to the salvation which God offers us through His Son, our Lord (Gal. 6:16). The roots of this understanding are found in the words of Christ, in that it is *eleos* that God requires of men, and *eleos* that He shows to men (cf. Mt. 9:13). The phrase "bread of the children" (v. 26) is a veiled reference to the manna by which God continued to show His favour to the children of Israel in the wilderness.

#### Have Mercy, Lord

- I. "Lord declares His almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity." This ancient collect phrase serves to focus our understanding of this healing miracle.
  - A. That our Lord heals and saves is an instance of the steadfast mercy of God.
  - B. It is this steadfast mercy for which the woman asks. Her prayer is joined to that of God's ancient people, even though she herself is not of the family of God.
- II. The mercy and pity of God are not always immediately evident.
  - A. The Lord's response is not immediate and unconditional.
  - B. The condition is a faith that does not shrink from continued prayer.
- III. The cry of the woman is the cry of the church.
  - A. Together with her we ask for the mercy and steadfast love of God in Christ to touch us.
  - B. Together with her we confess the compassion of God, manifested in the person and work of His only-begotten Son.

CJE

#### THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 16:13-20 (AUGUST 20, 1978)

A review of the sixth chief part of Luther's Small Catechism and the sections relating to the Office of Keys and Confession in the Large Catechism and the Smalcald Articles is in order as a preparation for a sermon on this pericope. A comparison between the Lutheran emphasis on the Keys and the Reformed emphasis on "Church Discipline" (Heidelberg Catechism, qq. 83-85) shows that, in the latter case, it is discipline alone which is administered on the personal level, and no distinction is allowed between the Keys and preaching. In the Lutheran Church, however, the administration of the Office of the Keys is the individual and concrete application of the Word of God to the individual. Early Lutherans did not hesitate to regard the Office of the Keys as a sacramental power given to the church by her Lord. Reference may be made here to the comments under Holy Trinity Sunday, regarding apostolic authority; for possession of the keys in biblical and Jewish tradition represents authority to act. It is the royal steward who possesses the keys of the palace (Isa. 22:22). Further elucidation of the meaning of this power is found in Matthew 23:13, which shows that the disclosure of the will of God in the Scriptures is exercised by means of preaching, teaching, and dividing. The power of the keys is a judicial power, indicating authority to judge the sinful and promise forgiveness to those who believe (G. Kittel, ed., TWNT, III, p. 751).

One may well ponder whether or to what extent the proper exercise of the



Office of Keys can be restored in the modern-day congregation. Some pastors may feel that the need for the sacramental exercise of the Keys has been effectively off-set by pithy sermon applications and general pastoral counseling. Luther's witness to the significance of sacramental absolution may be a helpful reminder to us: "I know what comfort and strength private confession has given me. Nobody who has not fought often and long with the devil knows what it can do. I would long since have been strangled by the devil if I had not kept confession" (WA 10iii, p. 61f.).

#### Forgiveness Of Sins

- I. The great message of the Christian Church is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins.
  - A. It is built upon the confession of the lordship of Christ (v. 16f.).
  - B. It is bestowed upon the church (v. 18f.).
  - C. It is exercised through the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament.
- II. The best appreciation and reception of this forgiveness is built upon a good confession.
  - A. We learn to confess our sins sincerely.
  - B. We receive the Word of Absolution as from Christ Himself.
- III. Confession is a practice of great value.
  - A. It is a constant discipline.
  - B. It is an invitation to enter fully into the Law and Gospel.
    1. To confess specific sins.
    2. To receive Christ's specific word of forgiveness for us.
  - C. It is a call to repentant living. The gift of Absolution commands a new life and empowers us in Christian growth.

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#### THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY: MATTHEW 16:21-26 (AUGUST 27, 1978)

With the confession of the lordship of Christ and the delegation of the fruits of His redemptive work (16:13-20) are coupled the announcement of the specific terms of that redemptive work in the Passion which our Lord must endure on our behalf. The pericope may be divided into three parts: (1) the announcement of the coming Passion (this is the second of five such announcements in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (*vide* 12:40; 17:9; 26:2); (2) the Petrine protest against the Passion and the rebuttal of Satan; and (3) the statement of the conditions of discipleship.

Concentrating on this last division, two passages stand out. The first, Matthew 10:38ff., reminds us of the word of our Lord upon the occasion of the first sending-forth of the twelve apostles. To labour by the command and under the authority of the Christ means as well that one must be willing to share His fate at the hands of the world and the forces of Satan. "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." The second passage, I Peter 2:21, exhorts the church, on the basis of the sufferings of Christ, to follow His example and enter into His sufferings. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."

#### The Cross Of Christ And The Cross Of The Christian

- I. The sufferings and cross of Christ stand at the very center of His earthly ministry.
  - A. "For this have I come. . ." (John 12:27-28).
  - B. "And I, when I am lifted up. . ." (John 12:31-32).

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- II. Sufferings and crosses stand at the center of our Christian life.
- A. All mankind suffers; indeed, all creation suffers because of sin (Rom. 8:19ff).
  - B. Unjust sufferings point us to our Lord.
  - C. In sufferings we are made to be like Him (Rom. 8:29).
- III. Christ's sufferings and cross stand at the center of our faith and hope.
- A. By them our salvation has been secured.
  - B. By them our eyes are opened to see the secret blessing of our infirmity and the joy of sacrifice.
    - 1. He offered Himself for us.
    - 2. We offer ourselves to Him (Rom. 12).

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