

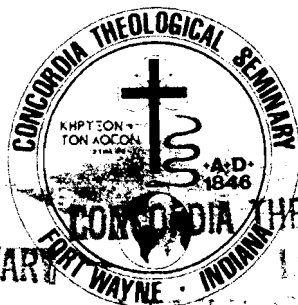
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Homiletical Studies

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 13:11-14

December 2, 1979

In verse 11 "this" refers to "love your neighbor as yourself" (v10). "To awaken from sleep" finds a close parallel in thought to 1 Th 5:5ff. The argument there is: "you are sons of the day; live like it, so that the Day does not catch you sleeping and unawares." The preferred reading is: "our salvation is nearer." This clause refers to the Parousia, which draws ever closer. "Salvation" here refers to the consummation of our salvation in Christ, the first fruits of which we have received already. It is parallel in thought in Php 3:12-14. See also 1 Th 5:8 for a future sense of "salvation"; there it is the "hope of salvation." For another reference to the nearness of the Parousia as a source of comfort and motivation, see Php 4:5, "the Lord is near." In verse 12 "the day is at hand" is a reference to the Last Day. See Ro 2:5,16; 1 Cor 1:18; Eph 4:30, 6:13; 1 Th 5:2, 4. With respect to "the night is almost gone, and the day is at hand" see 1 Jn 2:8 for a close parallel in thought. The phrase "the armor of light" in this verse is parallel to "the Lord Jesus Christ" in v14. With the words "put on . . ." Paul urges the Christians in Rome to appropriate and to use for themselves that which they already possess. We read in Gal 3:27 that those who have been baptized into Christ *have put on Christ* (aorist middle). To put on the armor of light is a close parallel in thought to Eph 6:11-17, where the Ephesian Christians are exhorted by Paul to put on the whole armor of God; see also 2 Cor 6:7, the "weapons of righteousness," and 2 Cor 10:4, "the weapons of our warfare."

Introduction: Have you ever prepared for an event in your life that was so big that everything you did was centered around it, even though it had not yet happened? That is how we Christians should view the second coming of our Lord Jesus. And the day of His coming is getting nearer. Paul tells us in this text,

The Day Is Fast Approaching!

- I. Remember that it is getting close.
 - A. Salvation has belonged to us since we first believed (v11).
 1. We believed through the Word which we received, through baptism, or through hearing.
 2. The Holy Spirit moved us to respond in faith and to trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness of sins.
 - B. But now the fullness of salvation is approaching; we await the hope of salvation (1 Th 5:8).
 1. It will be the end of trials for us.
 2. We will receive the crown of glory, the prize at the end of the race (Php 3:12-14).

Transition: Yes, it is getting close. And it means so much that we want to be prepared right now. Therefore, we

- II. Live as though the Day were already here.
 - A. Put aside the deeds of darkness.
 1. Recognize such deeds for what they are; deeds of *darkness*, not of the light.
 2. Reject them, consciously, in the power of the Spirit; repudiate them forever.

B. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. He is ours already, now and forever.
2. Use His power to live in the light, to love our neighbor.

Conclusion: The Last Day will be a day of rejoicing for us, the day when we begin to enjoy the full blessings of the salvation that is already ours through Christ's work. That day is getting close! Live today as if it were already here!

Jeffrey Gibbs

Scappoose, Oregon

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 15:4-13

December 9, 1979

This pericope ends the discussion begun by Paul in 14:1 of the Christian's duty and privilege of accepting his brothers and sisters in Christ without prejudice over questions which are truly adiaphora. The verb "accept," found twice in v7, occurs in 14:1, 3 and Phm v 17, and these are the only uses of this verb in all of the Pauline literature. On "for our instruction in v4," see also 2 Tm 3:16. On "hope" see Ro 4:18; 5:2,4,5; 8:20,24; 12:12. "Hope" is an inherently future concept; it is the attitude that looks confidently to the future on the basis of what has been promised or fulfilled in the past. In v5 "to be of the same mind" does not refer purely to doctrinal concerns. It is also a plea for mutual esteem and forbearance, a plea begun at 14:1 and continued through this section. In v6 "with one accord" and "with one voice" place strong emphasis on unity as the end desired by Paul, which will result in the glory of God among men. According to v8 — Christ became a servant for two reasons, which illustrate (in this context) the perfect example of acceptance which the Romans are to emulate. Christ fulfilled the promises given to the (Jewish) fathers, and he caused the Gentiles to glorify God along with the Jews. The quotations in vv9-12 are cited according to the Septuagint. Verse 13 is to be regarded as the final summation of the whole section that began at 12:1. It repeats the concept of hope mentioned in 15:5, but is related to 15:4-12 only by virtue of the placing of 15:4-12 in the large section.

Introduction: One of the biggest problems in our world today is prejudice; people pre-judge other people. In the text Paul speaks eloquently about

Accepting One Another**I. Christ gives us the example of acceptance.****A. He did not please himself (v3).**

1. This is our problem; we want to go our own way.
2. But look at Christ, who sacrificed and suffered for us.

B. Christ became the servant of all.

1. He brought together the most diverse groups of people in the ancient world — Jews and Gentiles.
2. He takes us from every walk of life and brings us close to God and to one another.

Transition: So we have the example. But we need more, we need the power to go against our selfish nature and to do the thing that Christ has shown us.

II. God gives us the power to accept one another.**A. It is only through the gift of God that we can be of one mind (v5).**

1. We cannot achieve spiritual unity by ourselves.
2. With Paul, we constantly beseech God to grant it.

B. God's acceptance of us is the key.

1. Paul gives us the motivation and the power: "Accept one another, for Christ has accepted you!"

2. The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-34): Servants of God who have experienced His acceptance are able to accept others.

Transition: So we strive for the goal. Sometimes we succeed. It is important to remember the result.

- III. God's name is glorified when we accept one another. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Conclusion: Our life together is to be marked by acceptance. We can learn to deal lovingly with one another, bearing with each other's faults and foibles. We have the example, Christ. We have the power from God, through Christ. We know the result — God's name is glorified.

JG

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

I Corinthians 4:1-5

December 16, 1979

Factionalism is a problem that often plagues Christian congregations. At Corinth Paul was confronted with petty rivalries, jealousy, and strife. Some boasted of following Paul; others, Peter; still others, Apollos. Each faction exalted the man they followed and detracted from the others. Paul had to remind the congregation of the proper God-pleasing attitude they should have toward their leaders. In v1 Paul exhorts them to regard him and his co-workers, Peter and Apollos, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. "Servant" refers to a lowly obedient slave, while a "steward" is a slave who has been given the dignified position of responsibility over his master's valuable possessions (Lk 12:42-48). These possessions are the "mysteries of God" or gifts of salvation offered in the Gospel (Eph 3:1-6; Col 1:27; 2:2; 4:3). V2: Faithfulness to these "mysteries of God" is required of every steward (1 Pe 4:10; 1 Cor 9:16-17; Lk 12:42). V3: Some within a congregation will judge their pastor according to human standards. Paul is not going to concern himself with that. V4: Paul does not deny that he is a sinner, but he affirms a clear conscience with regard to his faithfulness as a steward of God's mysteries (2 Cor 1:12; Ac 23:1). Yet this is not the basis of Paul's final acquittal on Judgment Day. Paul does not speak of his justification in Christ, of which he is absolutely certain, but of rendering an account of his faithfulness. The Lord alone is the one who examines him. V5: Men judge by external means. God sees into the heart. On Judgment Day all shall be revealed (1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 10:16-18; 1 Th 2:3-4). The hidden motives of men's hearts will be brought to light. Any praise that is due will come as a gift of God's grace.

The central thought of the text is that Christ alone has the final word on examining the faithfulness of his stewards as they deliver the saving mysteries of God in Jesus Christ.

The problem in the hearers' lives is that they often unjustly judge God's stewards on the basis of mere human wisdom and expectation. The goal is that the hearers would highly value the called ministers in their midst for the faithful work they do in bringing to them the mysteries of God.

It Is Faithfulness That Counts!

- I. Pastors do well to remember this.

- A. The Lord requires that pastors be found faithful stewards (v2).

1. A steward is entrusted with the master's valuable possessions. Lk 12:42.

2. Pastors are entrusted with the mysteries of God (v1).

- a. A mystery is something that is hidden.
 - b. The mysteries of God are revealed in the Gospel. Eph 3:1-6; Col 1:27; 2:2; 4:3.
- B. The Lord gives various opportunities to his faithful stewards. 1 Cor 3:5-6.
 1. Every pastor has his own unique capabilities from the Lord. 1 Cor 12:4-11; 28.
 2. A pastor uses his capabilities as a servant of Christ (v1).
 - a. It is tempting for a pastor to set himself up as master instead of servant over his congregation.
 - b. He is to serve faithfully in a spirit of lowliness even as the Lord faithfully served. Jo 13:12-17; 1 Pe 5:3.
- C. A faithful servant and steward has no cause to be ashamed (v4).
 1. Not that a pastor is sinless and never fails.
 2. But a clear conscience comes from serving faithfully under the forgiving grace of Christ.
- II. Congregations do well to remember this.
 - A. As a servant and steward of Christ a pastor is responsible to Christ alone (vv3, 4).
 1. Congregations often unfairly judge their pastors according to human standards and peculiar whims.
 - a. They make unfair comparisons with other pastors.
 - b. They thereby criticize the Lord of the church for His wisdom in granting a congregation its pastor.
 2. Inasmuch as a congregation possesses the Word of Christ it has the responsibility to examine the faithfulness of its pastor to that word (v4b).
 - a. To "test the spirits" is a God-given right of every congregation. 1 Jn 4:1.
 - b. Every congregation should follow the example of the Bereans. Ac 17:11.
 - B. When the Lord comes again He will examine all men to see if they have been faithful (v5).
 1. The inner motives of the heart now hidden will be brought to light (v5).
 - a. Now it is impossible to know with certainty a person's reasons for service rendered to the Lord.
 - b. The proper motivation to serve the Lord faithfully is always God's grace in Jesus Christ. 1 Pe 4:10-12; Php 4:13.
 2. Faithfulness will be graciously rewarded, according to God's grace (v5).
 - a. The Lord will praise those who have served him faithfully. Mt 25:23.
 - b. The Lord's praise will far outweigh any human praise now.

David P. Johnson
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THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Philippians 4:4-7

December 23, 1979

Verse 4: "Rejoice," says Paul while sitting in a cold, dark dungeon. Clearly, Paul has more in mind than outward laughter. Joy is paradoxical, for it can exist in the midst of sorrow and persecution. Joy is "in the Lord," in all that a rela-

tionship to Him means. V5: "Forbearing Spirit" might best be described as yielding in gentleness and kindness to others and not demanding one's legal rights even when wronged or persecuted. The same term is used to refer to the gentleness and kindness of Jesus in 2 Cor 10:1 and Mt 11:29. This yielding in gentleness is produced by the expectation that "the Lord is near." Christians are people who are on their way to heaven. That makes a difference in the way they live on earth. V6: To "be anxious" means literally "to be of a divided mind," as Martha was anxious about much (Lk 10:41). "Prayers and supplications" both refer to the privilege of coming to God and calling upon Him. These two things are the heart-throb of the Christian faith. "Requests" are the specific, concrete, individual petitions which are the content of our prayers and supplications (1 Jn 5:15). Prayer is made with "thanksgiving," which is the attitude of all true prayers. V7: The "peace of God" is the objective peace that exists as a condition between God and man through the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus Christ (Eph 2:13-17). This peace "passes all comprehension," which does not mean that we cannot understand it. It means literally, "exceeding all mind." God's peace is the remedy for man's worries and anxiety. The human mind is not capable of giving lasting peace. The "heart" is the center of human personality. Included in it is the "mind" which produces a man's thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions. The peace of God guards and protects the heart and mind from those things that cause anxiety.

The central thought of the text is that the peace of God in Jesus Christ gives us cause for rejoicing; it creates peace between people; and it gives peace of mind and heart. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would live as people who are at peace with God, themselves, and others. The problem in the hearers' lives is that they are frequently filled with doubt, anxiety, and strife. The means for overcoming the problem is the peace that has been given to us in Christ.

Introduction: Peace is an elusive thing in our troubled times. Just when the world thinks it has achieved peace, conflict breaks out once again. Peace can also elude us in our daily lives. We need to be reminded again of the peace that is ours.

The Peace Of Advent Makes A Difference In Life

- I. It prompts us to rejoice again and again (v4).
 - A. All people desire joy and happiness in this yuletide season.
 1. Some seek it in the things and circumstances of this world. Lk 12:16-21. But true joy eludes them.
 2. In our lives there are things and circumstances which are anything but joyful.
 - a. Paul was suffering as a prisoner when he wrote his epistle of joy.
 - b. True joy is paradoxical — it is maintained even in the face of affliction. 2 Cor 7:4-16, 1 Th 1:6, 2 Cor 6:10.
 - B. The Christian's source of rejoicing is "in the Lord" (v4).
 1. We rejoice because our Prince of Peace came to establish peace between God and men. Lk 2:24, Ro 5:1, Eph 2:13-17.
 2. The peace which Jesus gives is not the peace which the world gives. Jn 14:27.
- II. It enables us to be at peace with others.
 - A. We can let our forbearance be known to all (v5a).
 1. To forebear with someone is to yield to them in gentleness and mercy.
 2. We can be harsh and unmerciful at times with others.
 - B. The nearness of the Lord's second advent moves us to be gentle with those we know and love (v5b).

1. Those who live only for this life care only for themselves.
 2. The peace of knowing our citizenship is in heaven gives us grace to be gentle and forbearing.
 - a. We remember how mercifully gentle our Lord has been with us. 2 Cor 10:1, Mt 11:29.
 - b. Our relationships with those around us can thus be a reflection of the relationship that reaches into heaven above us.
- III. It enables us to be at peace with ourselves (vv6, 7).
- A. Our lives are full of anxiety and worry (v6a).
 1. Such things try to rob us of our advent peace.
 2. Worry is nothing less than unbelief regarding God's fatherly care.
 - B. In anxious moments we can go to the Lord in prayer (v6b).
 1. We can ask Him anything and everything. 1 Pe 5:7, Ps 55:22.
 2. We pray in a spirit of thanksgiving, knowing that He hears us.
 - C. The advent peace we have in Jesus Christ will see us through anxious moments (v7).
 1. This peace is beyond anything that our minds can do to rid us of worry.
 2. This peace will guard and keep our hearts and minds from being drawn away by the cares of the world.

DPJ

CHRISTMAS DAY, THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Titus 2:11-14

December 25, 1979

That St. Paul is quite concerned that Titus speak to the concerns he has listed in chapter 2 is shown in 2:15. The primary emphasis of Titus 2 is ethical in nature with instructions for various groups of people in the congregations (e.g., the aged or the young). Paul cannot, however, bring these concerns to Titus' attention apart from the gospel which he puts forth as the reason for adorning "the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect" (2:10).

The text itself has a strong two-fold nature, with both justification and sanctification being spoken of in these verses. The Christmas flavor of this text is found in the words, "... the grace of God has appeared" (v11). For similar thoughts tied specifically to Jesus cf. Tt 3:4 and 1 Tm 1:10. The idea of v11 is that one may see the grace of God in Jesus' birth. There is also an important thought expressed in the words "for all men" (v11 RSV). Jesus' appearance was not for the benefit of a select few. All those to whom Titus was to speak (cf. 2:1-10) were to benefit from His appearance.

The phrase "training us to . . ." (v12 RSV) may be taken in a two-fold sense. It expresses the reason for Jesus' teaching ("training us that we might . . .") as well as the content of that message ("training us to . . ."). Part of the indicated instruction in the text is that one is to look for the appearing of the "glory of our God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (v13). In these words St. Paul refers to the final coming in glory of Jesus at the eschaton. Jesus is further identified as the one who gave Himself for us, thus indicating His vicarious suffering and death. Neither His first appearance as the Babe of Bethlehem nor His final appearance as the Judge coming in glory may be separated from His vicarious satisfaction.

The central thought of this passage is that God's grace has appeared in Jesus, and through that appearance He has called us to live sensibly in this age.

Introduction: It is not often that we receive a gift or offer of some "special opportunity" without any strings attached. We may even wonder if God has attached any strings to His offer in Jesus. We might well ask,

Why Did God Show His Grace In Jesus?

- I. So that He might bring salvation to all.
 - A. Jesus was born for the sake of all men.
 1. Some people may feel that they have little need for this infant lying in the manger. They have even less need for the Savior of the cross.
 2. This "grace" has appeared for all men. Even those who "have no need for Christ" are objects of God's love in Jesus.
 - B. He brings this salvation to us by His act of redemption.
 1. Jesus' birth cannot be separated from His death. Jesus' birth would be meaningless without His death and resurrection.
 2. In death Jesus "bought us back" from our captor. He has paid for every lawless deed. Jesus laid down His life to ransom everyone who needs ransom.

God had a purpose in showing His grace in Jesus. He wanted to bring salvation to all men. In doing so He made us His own . . .

- II. So that we might live sensibly in this present age.
 - A. By denying worldliness and ungodliness.
 1. Keeping our minds fixed on this world and its allurements is not such a denial. That is precisely when the message of Christmas gets lost.
 2. Saying no to sin and being zealous for good deeds is such a denial.
 - B. By looking for the blessed hope of God's glory.
 1. A blessed hope is one that does not disappoint. It must have a firm base. It must be well-founded.
 2. We have such a hope in Jesus. He will come once again. Before His birth men longed for His coming. He did not disappoint them. Since His death and resurrection men have looked for Him. He will not fail to keep His promises.

Conclusion: When we deny worldliness and ungodliness such as is common at Christmas-time, we are living sensibly according to God's standards. There are no strings attached to God's show of mercy in Jesus. He did show His mercy in the birth of this child, but He had no hidden agendas or ulterior motives. God showed His mercy in Jesus to bring salvation to all men, and to teach us to live sensibly. In short, God wants the very best for you. We can be thankful that He did show His grace in Jesus.

David L. Bahn
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THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Galatians 4:1-7

December 30, 1979

Paul fiercely battles against the notion of salvation through the Law (especially relative to circumcision) in his letter to the Galatians. In 3:1-4:31, Paul sets down the facts which show the doctrine of justification by faith to be far superior to the teaching of the Judaizers who were troubling the Christians at Galatia.

In speaking of this superiority, Paul shows how God's sending forth of His Son did away with that which held man in bondage (especially the ceremonial law). This pericope is intimately tied to the statement that those who belong to Christ are "Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (3:29). There is a distinction between being a minor (under supervision and bondage) and coming of age (when the position as son is enjoyed). Just as the minor may not perform any act except through his representative, so Israel was bound to work through the mediation of the priests and to be subject to the Law of Moses. Paul equates the pre-Christian state of the Galatians with childhood (v3).

The birth of Jesus — the Messiah appointed by God — is seen to be anything other than happenstance by the words of v4, "in order that." Jesus was sent *in order that* He might redeem those under the law; thus the purpose of Jesus' being sent forth was not left to the impulse of the moment. Through Him we are adopted as God's sons. The fact that is established in 3:29 (that we are sons) is seen to bring with it specific privileges. Those who are sons by adoption are no less privileged. These are given the Spirit of His Son.

The central thought of this text is summed up in the words, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (v7 NASB).

Introduction: There is nothing quite as exciting as learning that you may be an heir to a large fortune. But usually only the close relatives of those who pass away are selected as heirs. Unless you are closely related to someone with a great fortune you may never experience such an excitement. As Christians we can lay claim to a different kind of inheritance. But the basis of this inheritance is not changed. Therefore, we can be glad that

God's Son Makes Us Sons Of God

- I. Because of this we are no longer held in bondage.
 - A. We were in bondage to the elemental things of the earth.
 1. The law, sin, and our own selfish desires all tie us to this world. They all hold us in bondage to themselves.
 2. This is a pernicious bondage. It does not easily give up its captive. This bondage prevents us from enjoying our inheritance as God's sons.
 - B. Jesus came to redeem us from this captivity.
 1. He was born under the law — under the same rules and regulations to which we are subject. As a man He knew the limitations of our flesh and the harsh requirements of the Law.
 2. He underwent all this to live and die as our substitute — buying us back from our bondage. He paid the price to redeem us — His own innocent life.
- II. Because of this we may now enjoy our full inheritance.
 - A. We have the gift of the Spirit of Jesus.
 1. We have this gift because we have been redeemed and are now God's sons by adoption. Without Christ's redemption we could not enjoy this blessing.
 2. As adopted sons we enjoy the blessing of calling God our Father as Jesus Himself did (although, of course, in a different sense).
 - B. All things that God has are now ours.
 1. We no longer need to be under guardians and managers as we enjoy God's many blessings. He freely gives them to us — life, health, prosperity, and hope.
 2. We also may look forward with confidence to the full enjoyment of all of God's bounty — the mansions of heaven. He gives it all to us as His own sons and heirs.

Conclusion: You may never fall heir to an earthly fortune of great proportion. That excitement may never be yours. Yet as Christians we all enjoy the blessings of being heirs of God. This comes about through Jesus whose birth we celebrate. He is God's Son who has made us sons of God; and because we are sons we are also heirs to His great fortune. Thank God that He sent forth His son to adopt us as His sons!

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

Isaiah 60:1-6

January 6, 1980

In Isaiah 59 the prophet says that all the earth, including Zion, is wicked and helpless in that condition. God, however, takes upon Himself to secure salvation and promises that a Redeemer will come to Zion (59:20). The text moves from this promise to the future time, with the prophet exhorting Zion as if the Redeemer had already come. Epiphany reminds us that the promised Savior has indeed come for all people.

Zion (God's people) is told to "arise" and to "shine," to become plainly visible. They now can, for they are no longer in darkness with the rest of the nations; the promised "light," the "glory of the Lord," has come to them (v1). "Glory of the Lord" denotes God's presence or holiness, often depicted as fire or light (Ex 24:17, 40:34, 1 Kgs 8:11, Lk 2:9, Ac 7:55). The Hebrew *zarach* ("has risen") is the word used to describe the rising of the sun (Mal 4:2). As the sun rises and brings light to the land, so also has Jesus appeared bringing spiritual light.

In vv2-3 the future is again used. The earth lies covered in the darkness of sin (59:9-10). The nations turn to Zion for light, but Zion herself does not produce it. The Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is the Light and the Glory of the Lord (Lk 1:79, 2:32, Is 49:6, Mt 4:16, Jn 1:4, 8:12). The nations can come to Zion's light (vv3-4) because the Savior's coming has changed Zion from darkness into light (2 Cor 3:18). Having been transformed, Zion is to be a beacon to all the world (Mt 5:14).

In vv4-6 people from all the earth turn to the light of Zion. God's people rejoice as others join them in God's light. Treasures are brought to Zion to be used in the praise of God (vv5b-6). The "wise men from the east" (Mt 2:1ff) were among the first to fulfill this prophecy, turning to the Savior of Israel and giving Him gifts.

Introduction: The church does not appear splendid, for churches consist of ordinary people who struggle and often fail. Yet Christians have a radiance; they can and do shine. The prophet urges:

People Of God, Rise and Shine

- I. Rise and shine for His light has entered your darkness.
 - A. The Light of Christ has appeared amid the darkness of the world (vv1-2a).
 - B. His glory has become His people's glory (vv2b-3). In and through Him God's people are holy and righteous.
- II. Rise and shine, that all the world might see your light.
 - A. The Redeemer saves not only Zion, but all the world through Zion (vv3-4).
 - B. God's people beam out what God has done for them and for all people in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Appearances notwithstanding, the Christian church is beautiful and glorious because Christ is our light. Let us be the church.

Robert C. Zick
Monroe, Wisconsin

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Romans 12:1-5

January 13, 1980

Paul has just finished explaining to the Romans (1-11) the salvation of God. He has concluded with the doxology: "For from Him and through Him and to

Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (11:36). Salvation from sin is the merciful work of God alone (11:22, 30-33). Romans 12 details man's proper response to his gracious God.

In v1 the response is designated as worship. God is to be worshipped not only at certain places on certain days; but a Christian's entire life is to be "a living and holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." The rest of the text, and most of chapters 12-15, goes on to explain this total and true worship.

Throughout Epiphany the Gospel readings show Jesus revealing Himself as the Son of God. When men understood who He was they worshipped Him (the wise men, the disciples at the Transfiguration). So in the epistle to the Romans, Paul's delineation of who Jesus is provides the impetus for worshipping Him.

"By the mercies of God" refers to all that God has done for us in Christ. Spiritual worship consists in conforming our life to the holiness of Christ. Since Christians are transformed, new people in Christ, to conform to the world would be a contradiction of their new nature. With the use of their minds, they are to grasp more clearly what God has made of them and what God's "good and acceptable and perfect" will is. "The grace given" to Paul (v3) is his apostleship. In that grace he does not lord over the body of Christ but serves it by admonishing against any self-righteous conceptions. The faith in which each Christian stands has been given to him by God. There is no cause for boasting. Every Christian is what he is by his connection to Christ; apart from Him "none is righteous" (3:10). No one in the body of Christ is any more worthy than another. All should serve one another as Christ serves them.

Introduction: Worship is found wherever people pay homage to a higher being or power. Christian and non-Christian alike worship. But not all worship is alike. Paul in the text directs us to

True Spiritual Worship

- I. Such worship is possible only by the mercies of God (vv1,3).
 - A. A person who senses no need of God's mercy cannot worship God properly. People naturally think too highly of themselves.
 - B. When God's mercy covers our sin, our worship is acceptable to God.
 1. God has revealed His mercy in Christ.
 2. Faith too, which grasps Christ, is a work of God's mercy.
 3. Connected to Christ by faith, we Christians are able to carry out true spiritual worship.
- II. Such worship is practiced by living according to God's will (vv2, 4-5).
 - A. We are to live as transformed people.
 1. Not living as the world lives.
 2. But understanding and doing that which is good and acceptable and perfect in God's sight.
 - B. We are to live like Christ, nor lording it over one another, but serving one another according to the will of God.
 - C. We are to live so as to perform a unique function in the whole body of Christians.

Conclusion: There is more to worship than attending a church service. The service is indeed the high point of our weekly worship. But worship should radiate from the church service to all of life. To worship is to live as Christians by God's mercy.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Romans 12:6-16

January 20, 1980

The first eleven chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans spell out in beautiful detail the central doctrine of the Christian religion — justification by faith alone. Self-righteousness and smugness on the part of the Roman Christians because of their relationship to God have been condemned by the apostle. What, then, should their attitude be? Chapter 12 provides the answer. They are to "present [their] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (v1). They are, by the grace of God, one body in Christ. Paul proceeds to outline for them the manner in which the members of this body should behave toward one another.

The central thought of the text is that Christians can express their God-given unity in many ways. Not only is this unity a result of God's grace, but the manifestation of the unity is made possible only by the grace of God.

God's Gifts Are To Be Used

- I. They are to be used with the awareness that they differ.
 - A. Each Christian is to use the particular gift or gifts which he or she has been given.
 1. It may be the gift of expounding God's Word, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, helping, acting mercifully (vv6b-8).
 2. As we Christians live together, we can learn to appreciate our different gifts (v6a) and how these can contribute to our wholeness in Christ's body.
 - B. Each Christian is to use his or her gifts as fully as possible.
 1. Not only are we Christians by the grace of God but also every gift we have is by grace (6b).
 2. The nature of the gift itself (6b-8) indicates how it can best be used.
- II. They are to be used with genuine love.
 - A. In ways that show we empathize with our fellow Christians.
 1. Rejoicing with them in their joy and weeping with them in their sorrow (v15).
 2. Associating with the lowly (v16).
 3. Honoring our fellow Christians (v10b).
 - B. In ways that show we care about their total persons.
 1. Practicing hospitality.
 2. Zealously serving both their bodily and spiritual needs.

Conclusion: To express our God-given unity by using the gifts God has given us in a great privilege which we Christians have.

Rolf Preus
Clear Lake, Minnesota

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (TRANSFIGURATION)

2 Peter 1:16-21

January 27, 1980

The words of this text remind us that God's Word is no myth (v16). The Good News of Jesus Christ was not dreamed up by a committee in a smoke-filled room. The historical facts of the Gospel are supported by eyewitnesses (v16). Peter even had the special privilege of witnessing the transfiguration of his Lord and hearing the testimony of God from heaven (vv17-18). All the events witnessed by Peter and the other apostles confirmed the message of the prophets in God's Old Testament Word (v19a). This should surprise no one because the God

who cannot lie is the true Author of the Scriptures. Although Peter does not explain all the mechanics of how this takes place, he makes it very clear that God is responsible for the words of the Scripture (vv20-21).

Since God's Word is true and only God's Word brings the Good News of Jesus, it is like "a lamp shining in a dark place" (v19b). As we wait for our Lord's return, God's Word is the only Word we can trust. It alone will sustain us "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (v19b).

The central thought of the text is that the Word of God, in which we discover the Good News of Jesus Christ, is completely reliable. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer pay careful attention to God's Word as a light to guide us through this life.

Introduction: Many books have been written on many different subjects. These books may be interesting and informative. Only one book deserves our undivided attention — God's Word, the Bible.

Pay Attention To The Word

- I. Only God's Word is completely true.
 - A. The Gospel is not some fabricated story.
 1. There is much fiction in our world.
 2. God's Word is not fiction (v16).
 - a. Men who were eyewitnesses recorded the Gospel (v16).
 - b. The historical facts confirmed the truth of the prophets (v19).
 - (1) This is what Jesus taught His men (Lk 24:25-27).
 - (2) This is what His men taught others (Ac 3:18).
 - B. Men have no right to sit in judgment over God's Word.
 1. God is the Author.
 - a. The prophets did not speak by their own impulse (v21).
 - (1) False prophets spoke in this way (Eze 13:3).
 - (2) Their message was worthless (Eze 13:6).
 - b. The prophets spoke at the direction of the Holy Spirit (v21).
 2. No man has the right to question God (Job 38:1-2).
- II. Only God's Word brings us the Good News of Jesus Christ.
 - A. It shows us Jesus as Lord.
 1. There have been other great men in other books.
 2. No other man is like Jesus.
 - a. No other man displays power like His.
 - (1) We see His power at the transfiguration.
 - (2) We see other examples of His power (Ro 1:4).
 - b. No other man uses his power for our good the way Jesus does.
 - (1) His power saves us (Ro 1:16).
 - (2) His power sustains us (Mt 11:28).
 - B. It shows us Jesus as the beloved Son.
 1. Jesus was the only One to please God the Father fully.
 - a. We see this at the transfiguration (v17).
 - b. We see this at other times (Mt 3:17; Jn 12:28).
 2. Jesus is the only One who can truly please us.
 - a. Other people may disappoint us.
 - b. Jesus never disappoints us (Jn 6:35).

Conclusion: Let us direct our attention to God's Word. It is truly a lamp shining in a dark world.

Lawrence W. Mitchell
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SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

February 3, 1980

When Paul spoke of competing in a race and running for a prize, the Corinthians understood him (9:24). Every three years Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games (similar to the Olympic Games). Athletes trained very hard so they could run in a race where the prize was perishable — a pine wreath (9:25). Today, some people exhaust themselves in a race where the prize is the best car, the best house, the best furniture, etc.

Christians are in a race of which the prize is imperishable (9:25). This prize of heavenly life with treasures that can never be taken away (Mt 6:19-20) has already been won for us by Jesus. He won it by completing the cruel race to the cross. Because He received the crown of thorns, we have the crown of life. Why, then, must we run for a prize already won by Jesus? The answer is that the prize is only for those who keep the faith.

The central thought of the text is that we must always strive to keep the faith and so win the crown of life. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers remain faithful throughout life.

Introduction: Many people are running and jogging for their health. Some claim that this kind of running can prolong life. However, there is another kind of running that yields another kind of life. This is running in a race where the prize is heavenly life.

Run For Your Life

- I. We are in a race.
 - A. Some people run after perishable prizes (9:25).
 1. The Greeks did.
 2. People today still do.
 - B. Christians run for an imperishable prize.
 1. It is more valuable than any other prize (Jas 1:12; Re 21:4).
 2. It is God's gift to us (Ro 6:23).
 - a. The prize has been won for us by Jesus.
 - b. The prize is for those who complete the race in faith (Re 2:10).
- II. We need training to compete in the race.
 - A. Athletes must condition their bodies so they can compete.
 1. A race demands all the energy of an athlete.
 2. Only the best-trained win (9:25).
 - B. We must train our spiritual muscles for the race.
 1. Our race is exhausting.
 - a. It is longer than any marathon. It lasts all our life.
 - b. There are many obstacles along the way (I Pe 5:8).
 2. Only rigorous training will prepare us.
 - a. It may hurt for a while (9:27; Jas 1:2-3; Col 3:5, 8, 9).
 - b. God will make us strong through Word and Sacrament (Ro 1:16; Php 1:6).
- III. We can never relax in our race.
 - A. Past performance is no guarantee of future success.
 1. Athletes cannot rely on their past triumphs.
 2. The Israelites could not rely on their past experience.
 - a. They were greatly blessed (10:1-4).
 - b. Nevertheless, many of them died in the wilderness (10:5).
 3. We cannot rely on the past.
 - a. We have been blessed (I Pe 2:10).

- b. What lies in the past is not important (Php 2:13-14).
- B. We must constantly strive to win the race.
 - 1. This was the concern of St. Paul (9:27).
 - 2. This must be our concern (He 12:1).

Conclusion: May God grant us the strength and determination to run the race for life so we can finally say with St. Paul: "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tm 4:7).

LWM

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9

February 10, 1980

Paul is speaking to the Corinthians, who were exposed to the boasting of some supposedly "super-apostles" (11:5). These false teachers (11:13) could not say enough good things about themselves and were bold enough to take advantage of the Corinthians (11:20). They boasted of their heritage and of their service to Christ (11:22-23). Perhaps they also boasted of visions and revelations from God. However, these men did not boast of their own weaknesses or of the sustaining power of God. As Paul defends his ministry against these "super-apostles" he refuses to be like them and boast of his own greatness. Instead, he boasts of his own weaknesses and humiliating experiences (11:24-33; 12:7-8). This kind of boasting is really confession. It is an admission of weakness. Through this kind of boasting Paul shows that God's strength is so great that He can accomplish His purpose by using weak men (12:9).

The central thought of the text is that only God's strength counts in a world that prefers to rely on its own greatness. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would trust in God's power and not their own personal strength.

Introduction: There are many examples of boasting in our world. All this boasting may impress other people but it does not impress God.

Boasting That Counts

- I. There is a kind of boasting that counts in the eyes of the world.
 - A. It emphasizes personal strength.
 - 1. This is how the false teachers at Corinth boasted (2 Cor 11:5; 21-23).
 - 2. This is how some people boast today.
 - B. It denies the importance of God.
 - 1. This kind of boasting gives all the credit to men.
 - a. People who depend on God are seen as weak.
 - b. People who are self-made are seen as strong.
 - 2. This kind of boasting turns a man into a fool (Lk 12:16-20).
 - a. Human achievement has no lasting value (Ps 49:16-20).
 - b. God will judge the proud (Is 2:11-12).
- II. There is a kind of boasting that counts in the eyes of God.
 - A. It is a confession of personal weakness.
 - 1. This is what St. Paul did.
 - a. He could have boasted like the false teachers.
 - (1) He had more reason to boast of success than they did.
 - (2) He chose to boast of his humiliating weaknesses (11:30).
 - b. He knew he had no reason to boast of his own greatness.
 - (1) He was a sinner (1 Tm 1:13, 15).
 - (2) God's grace in Jesus forgave him (Eph 2:4-9).
 - 2. This is the only kind of boasting we can do.
 - a. We are sinners like Paul (Ro 3:23; 1 Jn 1:8).

- b. We are saved by grace like Paul.
 - (1) It is God's free and undeserved gift (Ro 3:24-25).
 - (2) We can only confess our unworthiness.
- B. It praises the power of God (2 Cor 10:17).
 - 1. God's strength is most clearly seen when we are weak (12:9).
 - a. This was the experience of St. Paul.
 - b. Today, weak men give great testimony to the power of God.
 - 2. God's strength will not fail us (Is 40:28-31).

Conclusion: We have no reason for boasting of our own strength. The only boasting that counts gives glory to God.

LWM

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

I Corinthians 13:1-13

February 17, 1980

Coming exactly fifty days before Easter, as its name implies, Quinquagesima Sunday serves as "an orientation toward Lent," which starts on the following Wednesday. Lent, whatever else it may be, is the story of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fortunately in English the word "passion" has a double meaning: great suffering and great love. Both concepts are discussed in the readings which set the mood for Lent (sometimes called *Passionszeit* in German). The Gospel (Lk 18:31-43) is a narrative account of Christ's determination to go to Jerusalem, even if this journey means suffering and death, for love allows him no other alternative. This sacrificial love of the Master becomes the source, norm, and motivation of Christian living, as Paul reminds us in the Epistle, which, in the words of Edward T. Horn III, is nothing less than "a classic of poetic prose and sets forth the ideal of love and its superiority . . ."

Introduction: The text quickly makes clear that Paul is discussing *agape*-love, not sensual (*eros*) or even fraternal love. His model throughout is nothing less than that of the Master, for this "more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31) could be fulfilled by none other than Him who was "the Way."

Paul's Hymn To Love

- I. Love: the Motivation (vs 1-3).
 - A. Of knowing.
 - 1. Speaking ("tongues of men and angels," i.e.) known languages).
 - 2. Teaching ("prophetic powers").
 - 3. Understanding ("all mysteries"). Without love these things are naught.
 - B. Of doing.
 - 1. Believing ("as to move mountains").
 - 2. Giving ("all I have").
 - 3. Dying ("my body to be burned," martyrdom). Without love these things are naught.
- II. Love: a Definition (vs 4-7).
 - A. By elimination. Since love is "patient and kind," it is *not*
 - 1. Jealous or boastful.
 - 2. Arrogant or rude.
 - 3. Insistent on its own way.
 - 4. Irritable or resentful.
 - 5. Ready to rejoice at wrong, (but rather is ready to rejoice in the right).

B. By affirmation.

Since love is "patient and kind," it

1. Bears all things.
2. Believes all things.
3. Hopes all things.
4. Endures all things.

III. Love: The Consummation (vs 8-12).

A. Of the life of the Church.

1. Its teaching (prophecy).
2. Its speaking (tongues).
3. Its knowing (understanding).

B. Of the life of the saint.

1. His growth.
2. His understanding.

Conclusion: For Paul, the enduring triad is "faith, hope, love . . . these three" (v 13). Others have been suggested, as Plato's triad of "the good, the true, and the beautiful." But Paul's has power, for the love he praises was lived, by *the* Person, in history, even the same Jesus who now lives, in eternity, for us — His Church. The love that made possible the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection is the same love that will bring about the final transformation of heaven and earth. Because of Jesus, Paul can say, "the greatest of these is love."

C. George Fry

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT (INVOCAVIT)

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

February 24, 1980

Lent's forty days have as precedents the forty days of Moses on Sinai (Ex 24:18), Elijah on Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8), and Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:2). Like the saints of old, in this season we seek to clarify our calling. For that reason Lent has a four-fold purpose: (1) the preparation of the Christian for Easter and the celebration of the central mysteries of the Faith (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ — by some this is done through fasting (*Fastenzeit* is an old German name for Lent); (2) the proclamation of the Gospel of the cross to the world through preaching (reflected in the American custom of "special services" held during the season and directed toward "outsiders"); (3) the education of the catechumens in the Faith through teaching, in anticipation of their confirmation (often on Palm Sunday; today's catechumens are usually children; in the Ancient Church they were usually adults being prepared for baptism on Easter eve); and (4) the imitation of Christ by the believer through serious reflection on our calling — growth in grace ("Lent" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term for "lengthen," referring to the longer days of spring; but there can be a happy application to our growth in grace in this season) and service.

The last idea prevails in the lessons for today. Both Epistle and Gospel "are concerned with the proper orientation of the Christian life." By a strange coincidence, the very name of the day, *Invocavit* ("he called," or, more correctly, *Invocabit*, "he shall call"), suggests the notion of "calling" in the double sense of prayer and service. The Collect asks God "to defend us" in our Christian walk. In the Gospel the temptation of Christ is recounted, how Christ fulfilled his calling in spite of demonic opposition. In the Epistle the afflictions of Paul are described, indicating how Paul led a victorious life in spite of the work of the adversary. The Epistle, like the lesson from the Apostle for last Sunday, reads like a "prose-poem," a veritable litany of the Christian life — in all conditions, by all means, as God's elect.

Fulfilling Our Calling

Introduction: Paul begins with a magnificent affirmation of the Lutheran doctrine of the “universal priesthood of believers” (vs 1-3), and then urges us to fulfill our calling.

- I. In All Conditions (vs 4-5).
 - A. Physical conditions.
 1. In much patience.
 2. In afflictions.
 3. In necessities.
 - B. Social conditions.
 1. In distresses.
 2. In stripes.
 3. In imprisonments.
 4. In tumults.
 - C. Spiritual conditions.
 1. In labors.
 2. In watchings.
 3. In fastings.
- II. By All Means (vs 6, 7, 8a, b).
 - A. Moral means.
 1. By pureness.
 2. By knowledge.
 3. By longsuffering.
 4. By kindness.
 - B. Spiritual means.
 1. By the Holy Ghost.
 2. By love unfeigned.
 3. By the word of truth.
 4. By the power of God.
 - C. Social means.
 1. By the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.
 2. By honor and dishonor.
 3. By evil report and good report.
- III. As God's Elect (vs 8c-10).
 - A. For social blessing.
 1. As deceivers, and yet true.
 2. As unknown, and yet well known.
 - B. For physical blessing.
 1. As dying, and behold, we live.
 2. As chastened, and not killed.
 - C. For spiritual blessing.
 1. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.
 2. As poor, yet making many rich.
 3. As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Conclusion: Paul's litany is reminiscent of his great affirmation in Ro 8:25-39 in response to the question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The response? Nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” and prevent us from fulfilling our calling as God's servants.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (REMINISCERE)**I Thessalonians 4:1-7****March 2, 1980**

The readings for the Second Sunday in Lent fall into the pattern of the old Gospel hymn, "Trust and Obey." The Gospel, the story of the Syrophenician woman (Mt 15:21-28), is a compelling account of trust (Jesus said to the woman, "Great is thy faith"). The Epistle, from one of Paul's earliest writings (if not, indeed, his very first known letter), is concerned with the obedience that follows up faith. The Collect refers to both lessons, asking that God would defend us "From all adversities which may happen to the body, and from evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul . . ."

Commentators variously describe this Pauline passage as "a plea for marital ethics," "the duty of purity and love," "and "the call to personal purity." It was originally included in the pericopes of the Church as an example "of the purity of life expected of the Neophytes to be received by baptism at Easter." Because Paul bluntly admonishes the Thessalonians that they "cannot be Christians and be sexually loose," we can see that this Scripture is as relevant to our modern permissive society as it was to the decadent days of the Caesars.

How We Ought To Live

- I. An Apostolic Exhortation (vs 1-3).
 - A. To live right.
 1. As you ought ("how you ought to live").
 2. As you want ("to please God").
 3. As you can ("as you are doing").
 4. As you will ("you do so more and more").
 - B. By divine might.
 1. Through divine instruction ("what instruction we gave you through the Lord Jesus").
 2. Through spiritual motivation ("this is the will of God").
 3. Through moral dedication ("abstain from immorality").
- II. An Apostolic Admonition (vs 4-6).
 - A. For holy matrimony.
 1. Which is God's intention ("take a wife").
 2. Which has God's commendation ("holiness and honor").
 3. Which carries God's protection ("the Lord is an avenger").
 - B. Against sexual immorality.
 1. Which is an offense against personality ("like heathen").
 2. Which is an offense against the family ("transgress").
 3. Which is an offense against the community ("wrong his brother").
 4. Which is an offense against the Deity ("the Lord is an avenger").

Conclusion: Though not implicit in the passage, evident from the context is God's desire to forgive and restore the penitent, to strengthen the tempted, to perfect those striving for purity and justice. For where there is condemnation of sin, there is also the promise of benediction for the repentant.

CGF

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT (OCULI)**Ephesians 5:1-9****March 9, 1980**

The discrepancy between confession of the lips and confession of life is a bane with which we must contend. To bring our lives into conformity with God's will is something for which we constantly strive. The desire and will to be an imitator

of God comes only from our new life through the Gospel. Paul appeals to the "Beloved," to those to whom Christ has shown love, that they become imitators of Christ. Once you were darkness, i.e., the natural condition of death which is opposed to life. We are light, light itself, not a lamp, by virtue of the fact that we are children of light, of God Himself. Paul urges us to be what we are, lights, using Christ as our model.

Introduction: Typically children mirror the actions and attitudes of their parents. They do so because they want to be like those whom they love. As children of God, children of light, we are to be imitators of Him. We are to be

Shining Lights

- I. We cannot be shining lights if we continually give into our sinful nature.
 - A. Our "old" nature tries to pull us down into darkness (v8).
 1. It tries to pull us down into immorality, greed, and covetousness.
 2. It is a constant battle to resist this pull into sin.
 - B. Knowing that the wrath of God comes upon the disobedient deters us from sinning (vv5-6).
But what moves us even more to avoid sin and to pursue holiness is the knowledge that
- II. We are children of light.
 - A Through Christ's death and resurrection God has become our loving Father.
 - B. In our baptism we became partakers of the life only God can give — of goodness, peace, and power.
- III. Now we live as children of light.
 - A. The light of Christ affects our whole being — our plans and goals, desires and decisions.
 - B. As long as we remain attached to Christ, we will be able to shine.
 - C. We will shine with Christ's light in public and in private (v8; Eph 4:32; Ga 6:2; Ro 12:16-17, 19, 21), walking in love and righteousness and truth.

Conclusion: Our sinful nature, as well as Satan and the world around us, are working hard to drag us down into darkness. But we do not have to give in to them. In Christ we are new people — shining lights.

NHM

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (LAETARE)

Galatians 4:21-31

March 16, 1980

The pericope confronts us with the question, "Since we are free from the bondage of the law, why do we insist on going back into slavery?" This question Paul addressed to the Galatian Christians. He uses an allegory to point to the issues, to the implications, and to the only answer for the Christian.

Introduction: Booker T. Washington, in his powerful autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, depicts his struggle to realize freedom in his station in life. We who were born slaves of sin have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. One of the strange paradoxes of life is that we must constantly battle against the temptation to go back into the slavery from which Christ delivered us. Paul reminds us what it means for us that we have come

Up From Slavery

- I. It means that we have been born free as children of promise.
 - A. Our natural birth brought us into slavery (vv23-24).

1. We were in bondage to sin and to the law.
 - a. We were spiritual children of Hagar, who represents Sinai and the legalistic, servile attitude.
 - b. Whenever we try to make ourselves right with God by keeping the law we are reverting to the slavery into which we were born.
2. We cannot by ourselves escape this slavery and inherit eternal life.
- B. The new birth God gave us in baptism makes us beneficiaries of God's promises.
 1. His promise is that salvation is a free gift by faith without the deeds of the law.
 2. In this second birth we became spiritual children of Sarah who represents Calvary and the forgiving grace of God in Christ.
 3. Our freedom was gained by Christ in whom Abraham already believed.
- II. It means that we can live free as heirs of God.
 - A. Free from the law.
 1. From the curse and punishment of the law.
 2. From the demands of the law that we must keep it to be saved.
 - B. Free to endure persecution.
 1. Persecution will come (vv29).
 2. We can endure the cross like Christ "who for the glory that was set before him endured . . ." (He 12:2).
 - C. Free to look for our inheritance.
 1. As God's children, our inheritance is sure (vv30-31; 1 Pe 1:4).
 2. We can have a long-range view. How freeing it is to know that whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Conclusion: Why should we want to be slaves again when God has made us free?

NHM

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT (JUDICA — PASSION SUNDAY)

Hebrews 9:11-15

March 23, 1980

The text reminds us that the whole Scripture bears witness to and focuses on Jesus, the Christ. The writer of Hebrews takes us back into the heart of the ceremonial law which is a prefiguration of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In preparing the sermon on this text, the preacher may want to read the Old Testament background and review the meaning and significance of the various sacrifices and offerings, especially those to which the text refers. The preacher will also be concerned to fathom how this Old Testament prefiguration was fulfilled in Jesus Christ in that unique, one-of-its-kind, once-and-for-all redemptive act upon the cross.

Introduction: We are familiar with the role of the mediator in labor-management disputes. He tries to get both sides together. A mediator was likewise needed to get both sides together in the dispute between God and the human race. Not God, but human beings caused this estrangement. But it was God who brought about reconciliation through the mediating work of His Son, Jesus Christ. The text reminds us that

Christ Is Our Mediator

- I. The mediator of a new covenant.
 - A. The old covenant.
 1. The covenant God made with His Old Testament people was acted

out and celebrated in the ceremonial sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple worship which reached their climax in the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:14-16).

2. These sacrifices were types of Christ.

B. The new covenant.

1. The covenant established by God with His New Testament people reached its climax in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ.

2. Christ entered into the tabernacle not made with hands, (incarnation) and into the very throne room of God (v11). Taking with Him His own blood (v12), He offered the unique sacrifice, once for all (He 10:10-12; 10:14).

II. The mediator of greater things.

A. Who secured for us an eternal redemption (v12).

1. He "redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil" (Luther).

2. The forgiveness, which He secured for us is perfect and complete (v15).

B. Who urged us from dead works to serve the living God (v14). Luther: "To live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

C. Who gained for us an eternal inheritance.

1. "He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity." (Luther).

2. The life now begun reaches fulfillment in heaven (v15).

Conclusion: Jesus is the greatest. Through Him we have bold and free access to God.

NHM

THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

Philippians 2:5-11

March 30, 1980

Introduction: As a way to confess His faith, a business man put this sign on his desk for all who came in the office to see — and then to ask the meaning: "I am Number Three." The explanation was always the same. God is number one in my life; others come second; I am in third place. That is a lesson we can learn from this text.

I Am Number Three

I. Jesus is Number One.

A. He was God from eternity (Jn 1:1).

B. He became a man of humble station (vs 6-8).

C. He died and rose for us (v8). Whoever believes in Him has eternal life (Jn 3:14-15).

D. God has highly exalted Him.

1. God has given Him a position of supreme honor (v9).

2. He is Lord of all (vs 10-11).

Illustration: As a father and his son were driving with the car window open, a bee flew in. The boy became almost hysterical, for he was allergic to bee-stings and could go into convulsions. The father slowed down the car and as he did so was able to reach out and grasp the bee in his hand. He kept his fist closed long enough to feel the sting and then said, "Don't be afraid, son. The stinger is now in my hand. The bee can't hurt you." Jesus took the sting of our sin upon Him (was made a curse for us, was made sin for us) — we are free and have new life.

II. Others are Number Two.

- A. We learn as new persons in Christ to think as He thought. The reason that St. Paul wrote this great section on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ was to hold up this example of Christ as a pattern for the Christians at Philippi to follow (v 5).
- B. We learn obedience to God (v 8). In Gethsemane Christ could have called in twelve legions of angels, but He prayed, "not My will but Thine be done."
- C. We learn humility (v 8).
- D. We learn to put others before ourselves. "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves" (v 3).

Illustration: Two sisters who had lived apart in different cities for several years came to live together again. After a time, one said, "I don't know what happened to you, but you are a great deal easier to live with than you used to be." She had become a Christian and was learning to say, "I'm number three."

III. I am Number Three.

- A. I learn when I die and rise as Jesus did. In my baptism my sinful self died and a new person came out of the water (Ro 6:3-4). As I daily renew my baptism the old man is drowned and the new comes forth (Small Catechism IV:4).
- B. I learn when I confess Jesus is my Lord. He "... is my Lord ... that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" (Small Catechism II:2).

Erwin J. Kolb

MAUNDY THURSDAY

I Corinthians 11:23-32

April 3, 1980

Maundy Thursday changes the mood of Holy Week from somberness to celebration, as we change the altar color from violet to white. We celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Sacrament which is central to the life of the Christian and the Christian church. It is a time of celebration. It is a time to remember, for that is how we celebrate. Jesus said it twice, (vs24, 25) "Do this in remembrance of me."

Introduction: The family of a ten-year-old girl was moving to California from the Midwest. This meant that she would be separated from her playmates, and one who was especially close to her. Before she left she gave her special friend her best bracelet and said, "Keep this to remember me by. Every time you look at it think about me." So the girl in the Midwest looks at the bracelet on her arm and remembers her friend thousands of miles away in California. She remembers her love and friendship and the good times they had together. Jesus said to eat bread and drink wine with which you eat My body and blood, and as you do it to remember Me.

It's Time To Remember**I. Remember the broken body and shed blood.**

- A. This is more than a sentimental remembrance of which Jesus spoke. Holy communion is not just a memorial meal. Stanford University in California, renowned for its scholarship and magnificent buildings, was built by parents in memory of a son whom they had lost. Today no one thinks of the son when they hear of Stanford University.
- B. Christ's body was broken and His blood was shed on the cross. No bone

was broken, as with the pascal lamb, but His body was tortured, beaten, hung limp to die. The blood flowed from His head, His hands, His side.

- C. We receive Christ's true body and blood in the Sacrament (v 27: "... in an unworthy manner . . . guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord"; v 29: "... judgment upon himself"). It is not necessary to understand how this can be in order to receive them. Only believe. At the Marburg Colloquy Zwingli said, "Then you believe that your teeth are chewing and your stomach digesting the body of Christ?" Luther replied, "That is what Paul implies. Would you trample God's Word because you cannot understand it? My faith does not make the sacrament; it merely accepts it."
- D. We receive the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament (Mt 26:28). That is why He died. As we eat and drink the broken body and shed blood, we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

II. Remember the New Covenant.

- A. The New Covenant is built on God's grace and the sacrifice of Christ. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (v 25). The Old Covenant was fulfilled. We live under the grace of the New Covenant, receiving continual forgiveness.
- B. We wait for his coming. "Proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). People in the Old Testament celebrated the Passover annually to remember their deliverance from bondage in Egypt as they waited for the coming of the Messiah. In the New Covenant we celebrate the Lord's Supper often to remember our deliverance from sin by the Lord's death as we wait for His coming again. As we eat and drink we remember Him and we tell each other that He is coming again — soon.

EJK

GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

April 4, 1980

Introduction: On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, a long procession of mourners passed the casket of the assassinated Abraham Lincoln. In the vast throng was an elderly Negro woman with her four-year-old grandson. As they came to the casket of the great emancipator, the aged woman stood motionless for a long time, looking down at the lifeless form with hot tears running down her cheeks. Then she lifted the little grandson so that he too could see the body of the dead President. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she said to the little boy, "Honey, take a long look at that man. He died for you." On this Good Friday, in a much truer sense, we want to take a long look at the one who died for us.

The Son Is A Servant

- I. God's Son became a Servant.
 - A. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah.
 - 1. To the people of Israel (Israel was suffering oppression from heathen powers, Assyria and Babylon; God gives them hope through a promise of final victory through the words of the prophet Isaiah).
 - 2. To us today as we read the same words, now in the light of their fulfillment some seven hundred years after they were spoken.
 - B. God calls the promised one "My" Servant (52:13; 52:11). Twice He mentions "the will of the Lord" (v 10). Jesus was conscious that He was sent to do the will of the Father. In Gethsemane He said, "Thy will be done."

- C. Jesus is identified as the Son — before Caiaphas (Mt 26:63-64), by Paul (Ga 4:4; Col 1:15-16).
- II. God's Son became the Savior.
- A. He was sacrificed as a lamb.
1. Sin demands a penalty. The Old Testament system of sacrifices was based on the principle, "Without shedding blood, there is no forgiveness."
 2. The sin of mankind demanded the a human lamb without spot or blemish. Jesus became the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29).
- B. He willingly offered Himself as our substitute.
1. He offered Himself (53:7: "opened not his mouth . . ."; 53:10: "offering for sin"; Mt 26:62: "Answereth thou nothing?"; 53:54: He could have had twelve legions of angels, but He wanted the Scripture to be fulfilled).
 2. He became our substitute. The biggest words in Scripture are "for our," 53:4-5 ("our griefs, our sorrow, our transgressions").
 3. The Servant-Savior fulfilled the Scripture. Think of the scene of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday and listen to the words of Isaiah's dramatic, descriptive poetry; read 52:14; 53:2-3; 52:4-5. Justin Martyr, who was converted from paganism to become a leader in the early church, said, "To declare a thing should come to pass a long time before it has come into being, and to bring it to pass, this or nothing is the work of God."
- III. We become servants.
- A. God exalted His Servant (52:13; Php 2:9). *Illustration:* The despair of the cross becomes a sign of victory. When one is visiting Lincoln's Memorial in Washington, D.C., a guide may point out that there are two ways of looking at the face of Abraham Lincoln. From one direction he looks cheerful and jovial, but from the other is he downcast and disheartened. We can see the cross from two perspectives.
- B. God makes us sons and servants (53:5, "made whole," "healed").

EJK

THE FESTIVAL OF EASTER

I Corinthians 5:6-8

April 6, 1980

Verse 6: "Your glorying" means the thing you boast about. The Corinthians gloried in things which they ought to have been ashamed of, like not disciplining the incestuous man, going to court against a brother, desecrating the Lord's Supper. "Not good": *Agathos* means noble. Paul uses *litotes*; he means "the thing of which you are boasting is detestable." "A little leaven": A little yeast soon permeates the mass; so sin unchecked permeates an individual's life and the life of the congregation. V.7: "Therefore" is missing in the best manuscripts. "Purge out": The most essential Jewish regulation was the absolute putting away of every trace of leaven at the time of the Passover (Ex 12:18-19). This is a type of sanctification. "Old" means belonging to the unregenerate condition. The Christian is to cast out the old leaven by daily contrition and repentance. "Leaveneth the whole lump": Leaven works secretly and corrupts. "Unleavened" means purged from old sins (2 Pe 1:9). Christians are pure for the sake of Christ's atonement (Jn 15:3). "For even Christ": A paschal victim has been offered for us. Now the angel of death passes over us (Jn 1:29; 19:36; 1 Pe 1:9). V.8: "The feast" refers to the Christian feast of Christ's resurrection. We are to keep it continuously. *Kakia* means wickedness, malice, spite. *Poneeria* means the active exercise of a

vicious propensity. "Sincerity" means free of all admixture, all that corresponds to an unsullied, uncontaminated, and genuine Christian character. Luther: "Let us continually live properly, as at an eternal Easter festival."

Introduction: Easter day long ago was a great day of joy all around: Mary, the Emmaus disciples, the eleven. The text seems to encourage us to celebrate Easter every day.

Let's Celebrate Easter Every Day

I. In faith.

A. Christ is our passover.

1. He was slain as the passover lamb to deliver us from death (Ro 5:19-21).
2. On the third day He rose again.
 - a. To show the Father's acceptance of His sacrifice (Ro 4:25).
 - b. To declare His victory over our enemies (I Cor 15:55-57).

B. By faith in Christ we are pure (unleavened).

1. In Christ we have the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14).
2. In Christ we have eternal life.
 - a. Now in fellowship (Jn 10:15; Jn 8:12; 9:5).
 - b. Eternally (Jn 11:25; Re 7:9ff.).

Let us reflect everyday on what Christ did for us and on who we are by faith, children and heirs (I Jn 3:1-3; Ro 8:17).

II. In godly living.

A. Let us cast out the old leaven.

1. Malice and wickedness too often, like leaven, get into our lives (Ro 7:19ff.).
2. Let us cast out the old leaven.
 - a. Lest it permeate the whole being (cf. David and Bathsheba; Judas).
 - b. By daily contrition and repentance (cf. the prodigal son; David, 2 Sm 12:1ff.).

B. Let us seek to live in sincerity and truth.

1. Bringing forth the fruits of faith (Mt 5:16; Eph 2:10).
2. As children of the new life (Eph 5:8).

Conclusion: Let us celebrate Easter every day, rejoicing in the victory over sin and death which Christ won for us on the cross and guaranteed to us in His resurrection. Let us reflect our joy by drowning the Old Adam and putting on the new man.

HJE

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

I John 5:4-10

April 13, 1980

Verse 4: "Born of God" is equivalent to begotten of God (Jn 6:37, 39; 17:2). "Overcomes": The same verb occurs in both the present indicative and the aorist participle. Christ won the victory over the kingdom of darkness, and we share in that victory. In conversion, we also receive new spiritual powers to fight against and overcome the temptations of the world. V.5: The true faith is to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and that God is gracious to us for Jesus' sake. The heretic Cerinthus said that the divine *logos* that came upon Jesus at His baptism left Him at His passion. V.6: "This is He": The eternal Son of God is identical with the historical person, Jesus. "Came by water and blood" — TCNP: "He it is whose coming was attested by means of water and blood." The foundation of our faith is firm, since it rests on the powerful testimony of

God Himself. "Water and blood" refer to Christ's baptism by which He formally entered upon His work and to His death by which He accomplished our salvation. "The Spirit bears witness": It is the work of the Spirit to testify regarding the truth, to teach the truth. He bears witness to the divinity of Christ (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). V.8: "There are three that bear witness" — NEB: "These three are in agreement." The Holy Spirit is the chief witness. He works faith. He teaches the value of Christ's baptism and His suffering and death. The three witnesses all point to Christ as Savior. V.9: "The witness of God is greater" — NEB: "Surely divine testimony is stronger." The apostle shows with what confidence we ought to accept the testimony of the Gospel. The Gospel is the testimony of God Himself. "For this is the witness of God," — Weymouth: "For God's witness is what He has testified about His Son." V.10: "The record" is the testimony. The Holy Spirit assures the believer that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior. Unbelievers are both foolish and blasphemous. They are without excuse for rejecting the witness of God's Spirit.

Introduction: Is Jesus the Son of God? This is an important question because our salvation rests upon the answer. Many see in Christ only a man, a great moral example, a great teacher. But He is more. We confess: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God . . . true man . . . is my Lord." The text gives witnesses to this truth, and

All Three Witnesses Agree That Jesus Is The Christ Of God

I. Water

- A. At His baptism Jesus formally entered upon His work as prophet, priest, and king.
- B. At His baptism, the Trinity witnessed to Christ's divinity.
 1. The Son was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Lk 3:22).
 2. The Father spoke from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).
 - a. The preexistence of the Son (Jn 1:1, 14).
 - b. Sent by the Father to redeem the world (Jn 3:16).
 3. The Spirit descended on Him (Jn 1:32-34).
 - a. Also according to His human nature Jesus had the fulness of the gifts of the Spirit (Lk 4:18).
 - b. Empowered by the Spirit He did His work. What a powerful witness to Christ's divinity (v9).

II. Blood

- A. Christ shed His blood.
 1. The world needed redemption because of sin and death.
 2. Christ died for sin and for sinners.
- B. But Christ also arose from the dead.
 1. To prove that He is the Son of God (Ro 1:4; Jn 2:19).
 2. To give us the assurance of His victory over sin and death (1 Cor 15:55-57).
 3. To guarantee heaven to us (2 Tm 1:10).

How sure we ought to be in our faith in Christ as the Son of God and our Savior.

III. The Spirit

- A. He calls.
 1. Through the Gospel (Re 22:17).
 2. He offers the treasures Christ won.
- B. He enlightens: He brings to saving faith.
 1. Some indeed refuse the invitation and make God a liar (v10; Jn 1:11).
 2. He brings us to faith in Christ (vs5, 10; 1 Cor 12:3; Ro 8:16).

C. He sanctifies: He gives new spiritual powers.

1. In the world we still face temptations (1 Pe 5:8).

2. Faith overcomes the world.

Let us use our faith every day. Let us live in it and die in it.

HJE

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 2:21-25

April 20, 1980

Verse 21: "Hereunto" — Goodspeed: "This is the life to which you have been called" (1 Th 3:3). Peter gives the inspiring example of Jesus. Suffering for Christ is a part of the believer's calling (Ac 14:22). The meekness, patience, humility, and endurance of Christ should encourage the Christian to bear the Cross. "For us" — not only in our behalf, but also in our stead. "Example" is, literally, something provided by a writing or drawing master which was to be exactly reproduced by His pupils. "Follow" means to follow His steps one by one (Mk 16:20; 1 Tm 5:10, 24). V.22: "Guile": In both His actions and words Jesus was blameless. "Did no sin": John 6:46. "He threatened not": Instead He prayed: "Father, forgive them." V.23: "Reviled not again": Is 53:7. He did not seek His own revenge. "Committed Himself" — Weymouth: "Left His cause in the hands of the righteous (just) judge." Cf. examples from the passion history. V.24: Here St. Peter shows the meaning of Christ's patient suffering. "Bare our sins": took our sins away by taking them upon Himself and suffering the punishment (Mt 8:17). *Autos* is emphatic — "He Himself." "Being dead to sin" — Weymouth: "That we might break with sins." We died to sin in our baptism (Ro 6:2-11; Ga 2:19-29), and we must die to sin every day. The secret of the Christian's ability to bear the cross lies in this verse. "Heal": Is 53:5. V.25: "Going astray" — NASB: "Continually straying" (Is 53:6). "Returned": This return happened in our conversion.

Introduction: Instinctively we try to avoid suffering. Peter's hearers were suffering persecution because they were Christians. We are subject to this kind of persecution every day.

How To Handle Suffering As A Christian

I. Recall Christ's suffering for you.

A. He bore our sins (v24).

1. We were like sheep going astray (v25; Is 53:6).

2. He bore our guilt and suffered our punishment (2 Cor 5:19-21).

B. The benefit is ours.

1. By His stripes we are healed (v24).

2. We are now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (v25; Ro 8:17; Ps 100:3).

It's easier to bear the cross when you remember that He bore it once for you.

II. Follow His example in suffering (v21).

A. How Christ faced suffering.

1. He did no sin (v22).

2. He did not practice deceit to escape suffering (v22; Mk 14:49).

3. He threatened not (Lk 23:34).

4. He committed Himself and His cause to God.

B. How we follow His steps. We should be dead to sins, particularly to the sins of deceit and retaliation (1 Pe 3:9).

1. To this life we were called (v21; 1 Pe 3:15).

2. Our righteous deeds may be instrumental in winning others (Mt 5:16).

Let us bear the cross after Jesus until, by God's grace, we receive the crown.

HJE

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 2:11-20

April 27, 1980

Verse 11: "Strangers and pilgrims": Strangers were foreign settlers in a strange land. Pilgrims are visitors in a foreign country. Christians are sojourners on earth. "Abstain": Do not follow the practices of the strange land in which you are sojourners. "Lusts": Ga 5:16-21. Christians are to wage war against the flesh. "Soul" refers to the spiritual nature. V.12: Christians were called atheists and blasphemers of the popular religion, enemies of the state. "As evil doers": Ac 17:6-7; Ac 19:37. "Day of visitation": The day of visitation is any day in which God visits man with the Gospel. "They shall behold": The word implies close scrutiny. Many an unbeliever has been won by the conduct of the Christian. V.13: "Ordinance of man" refers to human institutions. "For the Lord's sake": not from human motives, such as fear of punishment, but because it is God's will that you do. Christians were accused of going contrary to the decrees of Caesar (Ac 17:7). The existence of government as divine order is to be acknowledged. V.14: "Punishment of evildoers": cf. Romans 13:3-4. V.15: "Put to silence the ignorance": Silence the ignorant talk of foolish men who speak against the Christians as evildoers. "Put to silence" means muzzle. V.16: "As free": free in Christ. "A cloak of maliciousness": Christian freedom must show itself, not in license, but in willing obedience to constituted authority. The pretense of Christian liberty must not be made a covering of wickedness. "As the servants of God": His service is perfect freedom. We are to serve our fellow man remembering that we are God's servants. V.17: Peter illustrates the well-doing he enjoins. "The brotherhood": This word is peculiar to St. Peter. "Fear God": Revere Him. This is the motive for honoring a king like Nero. V.18: "Servants" are, literally, household servants. Many of the early Christians were in the condition of servitude. "Fear" is reverence, respect (Eph 6:5). "All fear": not only the fear of punishment but also the fear of neglecting duty. "Forward": unreasonable, overbearing, cruel; literally, crooked or perverse. V.19: "Thankworthy": Literally, this is grace, a mark of His favor in granting the ability; pleasing in His sight. "Grief": literally, griefs (Mt 5:39). "For conscience toward God": literally, for conscience of God. TCNT: "Because conscious of God's presence, of His will." "Glory": report, fame, renown. V.20: "Buffeted": if you receive a blow. Blows were common in the lives of slaves. "Acceptable": wins the approval of God. Christian suffering brings honor to Christianity and is thankworthy in the sight of God.

Introduction: Strangers and pilgrims — that is who we are. Redeemed by Christ and made God's children by faith, we are citizens of heaven. Our task is to live as strangers and pilgrims here on earth.

Live As Strangers and Pilgrims

- I. In your personal life.
 - A. Abstain from fleshly lusts (v11).
 1. Fleshly lusts war against the soul (Ga 5:16-21).
 2. Abstain from them by daily contrition and repentance.
 - B. Live honorably according to God's Law (v12).
 1. Men may indeed speak against you, as they did against the Christians in Peter's day.
 2. But our good works may be instrumental in leading them to God when the Gospel comes to them.
- II. In relationship to government.
 - A. Government is a divine ordinance (v13; Ro 13:1-7).

1. For the punishment of evildoers.
2. For the praise of them that do well.
- B. Christians are to submit to the government's laws (vv13-14).
 1. This rule does not obtain, of course, when a law of the land goes contrary to God's law (Ac 5:29).
 2. But we are not to turn our freedom in Christ into license (v16; Cf Ro 14).
 3. The effect is that with well-doing you may put to silence those who may charge you with being enemies of the state (v15).
 4. The motive for Christian obedience is "the Lord's sake" (v13), acting "as the servants of Christ" (v16).
- III. In relationship to your employer.
 - A. Be subject with all reverence (v18; Fourth Commandment).
 1. It is easy to do when masters are good and gentle.
 2. But it is not so easy when they are overbearing and cruel.
 - B. But Christians are to be obedient even to inconsiderate masters.
 1. There is no glory in being punished for your faults (v20).
 2. But it is praiseworthy if a person suffers even when he does well (vv19-20).

HJE

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

James 1:16-21

May 4, 1980

Verse 16: "Do not err": Be not deceived, make no mistake about it. To say that God can in anyway be responsible for sin is a blasphemous thought which Christians should never entertain (cf. context), because good gifts come from God. V.17: "Father of lights": Father of the heavenly lights. "Variableness": no variation, never subject to change. The sun rises and sets, but God does not change. "Shadow of turning": shadow cast by turning. God does not change, as we see changes in the heavenly bodies, sometimes light, sometimes part shadow (1 Jn 1:15). God's merciful countenance is hidden from His children. V.18: "Of His own will, etc.": Our conversion is an act of grace. He begat us with the Word of truth, the Gospel (1 Pe 1:23). "Begot": literally, brought forth. "Kind of first fruits": First fruits of the Judean harvest were consecrated to the Lord; so we Christians are set apart from the sinful world to be creatures of God (Eph 2:10; 2 Th 2:13). V.19: "Swift to hear": quick to listen. If anger wells up, the Christian should control himself. V.20: "Worketh not the righteousness of God": the righteousness which God demands and requires. Beck: "An angry man doesn't do what is right before God." Outbursts of wrath do not meet the approval of God, but His condemnation. V.21: "Filthiness": all that is vile, sordid, sensual sins. "Superfluity of naughtiness": excess of malice. *Kakia*: not vice in general, but the vicious nature which is bent on doing harm to others. "Meekness": gentleness (Mt 13:3ff). "Engrafted Word": the Word implanted in your hearts. Christians should daily use the Word and accept its message of salvation and sanctification. The seed implanted in their hearts is supposed to grow into a strong, healthy plant.

Introduction: In Old Testament times, harvest time was always a joyous time. People thanked God by offering to His praise the first-fruits of the harvest.

You Are God's First-Fruits

- I. You are first-fruits by His grace.
 - A. God blesses us with daily bread.
 1. Lavishly.

2. Constantly (v17).
- B. He has blessed us with spiritual life.
 1. He has begotten us.
 - a. By nature we were enemies (Eph 2:1-10).
 - b. He regenerated us (Eph 2:8-9).
 2. He has regenerated us through the Word.
 - a. Baptism is the visible Word (Tt 3:5; Jn 3:5).
 - b. The written and spoken Word are the power of God (Ro 1:16).
 3. Now we are children of God and heirs of heaven, first-fruits of His grace.
- II. Live as first-fruits of God's grace.
 - A. We have been regenerated to live lives which glorify God (Eph 2:10; Ro 12:1).
 - B. We are to lay aside sin.
 1. Filthiness in deed, word, or act (Jas 1:14).
 2. Malice.
 - a. A malicious person is generally "slow to hear, swift to speak, and swift to wrath" (v19).
 - b. Wrath does not work the righteousness that God demands.
 - C. Power comes from the Word (v21).
 1. Christians have the Word in their hearts by faith (v21).
 2. The Word is able to save our souls (v21).
 - a. It strengthens faith (Jn 8:31-32).
 - b. It strengthens us for godly living.
 3. Therefore we are to desire the Word to grow (1 Pe 2:2).

Conclusion: Let your life be filled with the praise of the Giver, God, for you are the first-fruits of His grace.

HJE

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

James 1:22-27

May 11, 1980

Verse 22: Christians are not merely to hear the Word, but are to act on it (Ro 2:13). James combats mere head-Christianity. Faith should be active in love (Ro 10:17). Hearing only can be a dead custom, a habit without life. Unless sanctification follows justification, people are deceiving themselves. V.23: "Beholding his natural face": literally, the face of his birth. Here is a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. V.24: A man who just glances in a mirror and forgets is like the man whose hearing of the Word has no relationship to his life (Lk 8:15). V.25: With forgetful, vain hearers, the Apostle contrasts true believers. "Perfect law of liberty": the faultless law that makes men free; the perfect law of liberty, that is, the Gospel, which teaches us that true liberty is in Christ, prompts to a life of sanctification. "Doer of the word": He obeys and acts upon the directives of the Word. "Blessed": God gives rewards of grace to encourage us. Part of the reward is realizing the power the Word of God has in one's life. V.26: "Seems to be": thinks that he is. "Religious": engaged in going through the rituals of religion. "Deceives his own heart": He is just fooling himself. If a person boasts of being religious but does not control his tongue, his religion is vain (Mt 7:21). V.27: James describes what pure, real, unsoiled, selfless religion is all about. "Before God": in God's eyes; literally, our God and Father. "Undefiled": spotless. Faith is to manifest itself in two ways: (1) in taking care of those who have no protection, the fatherless and widows; (2) in keeping one's self unspotted from the world. Piety is to be directed toward others and toward ourselves (Mic 6:7-8).

Introduction: We are encouraged: "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor 13:5).

How Genuine Is Your Christianity?

- I. Hearing the Word but not doing is not good enough.
 - A. The hypocritical hearer hears.
 - B. But he does not do, like the man who looks in the mirror and forgets.
 1. He does not accept the Word in faith (Mt 23:37).
 2. He brings no fruits of faith. Example: the man who does not bridle his tongue (v26; Mt 7:21; Mt 13:3ff).
 - C. He deceives himself (v26).
 1. He imagines that he is pious, like the Pharisees (cf. Mt 23).
 2. But he excludes himself from the kingdom (Mt 7:21-23; Mt 25:41; 1 Jn 3:17).
- II. A genuine Christian hears and does.
 - A. He looks into the perfect Law of liberty (the Gospel) and continues in it.
 1. He accepts in faith the freedom from sin and death which the Gospel talks about (Ga 5:1; Is 61:1).
 2. He continues in the Word (Jn 8:31-32; Ps 1).
 - B. He manifests his faith in his life. Luther: God's free man is also a servant and subject to all men.
 1. He visits the fatherless and widows (Mt 25:34-40; Mic 6:8; 1 Jn 3:18).
 2. He keeps himself unspotted from the world (1 Jn 2:15-17).

HJE

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Acts 1:1-11

May 15, 1980

"To do and teach" (v 1): The present infinitives suggest linear action, still going on. The *te-kai* binds together the life and teachings of Jesus, emphasizing that Jesus is still carrying on from heaven the work of his disciples which he started on earth before His ascension. "Presented Himself alive" (v 3) at intervals during the forty days: His appearances were proofs (*tekmēriois*), sure signs of his resurrection. "Baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v 5) is a reference to Pentecost. "Asked" (v 6): an imperfect — repeatedly asked. After Christ's resurrection the disciples' expectation of a political kingdom revived with new force. How they needed the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit! Not the power they were concerned about (political), but spiritual power for spreading the Gospel (v 8) would come upon them from the Holy Spirit (referring back to v 5), who would enable them to be His witnesses throughout the known world. He was taken up as they were looking directly at him (v 10), were looking steadfastly (imperfect). The two men were really angels, their white robes signifying perfect holiness and heavenly glory. Christ will come in the clouds (Re 1:7, Mt 26:64, Lk 21:27). "In the same way": literally, "so in like manner" (v 11). The fact of His second coming and the manner of it are described by this emphatic repetition.

The central thought of the text is that Christ's ascension moves us to believe in him and to witness to him. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would see more clearly how Christ's ascension relates to their Christian faith and life. The problem is that we often see no connection between Christ's ascension and our faith and life. The means to the goal is that the ascended Christ sends us His Spirit to strengthen our faith and empower our witness.

Introduction: When a fire has trapped people in a burning house, or someone is seriously injured, drowning, or choking, apathy can result in fatality. When a

contract has to be signed, an examination taken, a paper written, a house built, apathy is out and concerned action is in. Then it is appropriate to say to ourselves or to others, "Don't just stand there; do something!" In a way, that is what the angels were saying to the disciples as they stood gazing into heaven. "Why do you stand looking into heaven?" as if to say, "Don't just think about his leaving you, but about what you must do. His ascension lays an obligation on you." It lays an obligation on us too, for we are His disciples. The two angels are saying to us:

Don't Just Stand There: Do Something!

I. Look for Jesus to come from heaven.

- A. Doing something is not restricted to activity with the hands and feet. We are doing something when we look in faith to Jesus Christ as the Lord who will come again visibly from heaven (v 11b).
 - 1. We believe He will come again because He is powerful and glorious enough to do so (Php 2:9). God exalted Jesus, for He finished the work of redeeming us.
 - 2. We believe Jesus will come again because God has given Him the task of final judgment (Jn 5:22).
 - 3. We believe that no matter what happens in this world, Christ is the Lord to whom everyone will give account.
- B. We look in faith to Christ to bring His kingdom in triumph.
 - 1. It is not an earthly political kingdom, as the disciples thought (v 6).
 - 2. It is "the kingdom of God" (v 3c) in glory — the fullness of our salvation.
 - 3. We leave the exact time of the kingdom's coming to the Father (v 7) and look expectantly for everlasting life.

Transition: Faith-doing results in life-doing.

II. Witness to Jesus everywhere on earth.

- A. We are doing something when we witness to Jesus with our hands and feet and mouth.
 - 1. We speak about Christ's death and resurrection (v 3) and what Christ means to us.
 - 2. With our words and actions we express our care and concern for people around us.
 - 3. We support our church's mission program so that Jesus may be known to "the end of the earth" (v 8).
- B. Our witnessing is empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. "Before many days" (on Pentecost, ten days after Christ's ascension) the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and were thereby enlightened and emboldened to proclaim the Gospel (v 5).
 - 2. The Holy Spirit comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and we receive power (v 8) to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Christ's ascension guaranteed the Spirit to the disciples and to us for witnessing.

Conclusion: He is gone, in one sense, but let us not stand looking into heaven. Christ will come again. He is with us now through his Spirit to strengthen our faith and embolden our witness. There is no need just to stand there. Away with apathy! Let us believe more firmly and witness more zealously until He comes again.

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION

1 Peter 4:7-11

May 18, 1980

The "charity" spoken of in v8 is none other than "agape" love. We may not have the same need for physical hospitality as some did in the early church, but we do have need for emotional support. In our society many children are virtually abandoned, husbands and wives barely talk to each other, workers are impersonalized and computerized. The liturgical context of this day's service is important — a "hiatus" between Christ's Ascension and Pentecost. Similarly, Christians are in a waiting period between their Lord's first and second coming. That waiting should not be mere thumb-twiddling.

Introduction: We who know God's forgiving and powerful love in Christ are called the "church." As we worship and work together, we constitute a Christian community. Our test shows us how we can be

A Caring Christian Community

- I. A caring Christian community is strengthened by its Lord.
 - A. He leads us to anticipate our final salvation with Him in heaven (v7).
 - B. He strengthens us through our worship.
 1. In worship, we meet our Lord.
 - a. We bring to Him our sins, doubts, anxieties.
 - b. We receive from Him His love, pardon, presence, power.
 2. Our Christian community, the church, rightly emphasizes a Word-and-Sacrament ministry so that we can glorify God (v11) by caring about one another.
- II. A caring Christian community is dominated by love.
 - A. Love shows itself in unselfish concern for the needs of others, perhaps at great cost to us.
 1. Loving those closest to us, other members of the Christian community (1 Cor 12:12).
 2. Loving continuously, even though this goes against the world's way (Jn 13:35; 1 Th 3:12).
 - B. Love covers sin.
 1. By refusing to major in the minor faults of others.
 2. By forgiving as we have been forgiven (Mt 18:22).
- III. A caring Christian community is earmarked by service.
 - A. The ability to serve is God-given.
 1. He gives that ability to every Christian.
 2. Christian service is directed to others, especially other Christians (v10).
 - B. There are many kinds and opportunities for service.
 1. In our daily speech we can share His love with others.
 2. In our daily activities we can reach out as caring Christians.
 - a. Showing Christian hospitality.
 - b. Helping to integrate new members into the congregation.
 - c. Listening to someone else's (maybe your children's) problems and joys.

Conclusion: God does not expect us Christians to solve magically the world's problems. Yet He will help us to make life more pleasant for others and for ourselves through our service in a caring Christian community.

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PENTECOST SUNDAY**Acts 2:1-13****May 25, 1980**

Like other well-known texts for feast days, this one runs the risk of shallow treatment by the preacher or hearer who feel they have heard it all before. Peter's Pentecostal sermon is not part of the text, but follows, and should be used as proof of the Spirit's message. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers, enriched by faith, would use the Spirit's power to witness boldly to God's love in Christ. The problem in that, while admiring the Spirit's Pentecostal out-pouring, we either ignore His power today or expect it apart from the Word.

Introduction: We fear the power of the atom, the tornado, and the crooked politician. Yet not all power is destructive. The power in the ballot box, in the batter's box, or in the safe-deposit box may be good. To be of service it must be released. The Feast of Pentecost spotlights for us the good power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians have not yet understood how much they need His power in their lives.

Who Needs Spirit-Power?

- I. The Holy Spirit gives power to witness.
 - A. This power was promised by Jesus (Ac 1:8).
 - B. It was demonstrated by signs: the sound of wind, the tongues of fire.
 - C. It was evident as the apostles boldly spoke (Ac 2:14). (Compare their behavior on Pentecost to their previous behavior. Jn 20:19.)
 - D. Christian witnessing today needs the power of the Holy Spirit.
 1. Our congregational and personal evangelism will be impotent without the Spirit.
 2. In the Spirit's power we can share Christ with unbelieving relatives or neighbors.
- II. The Holy Spirit gives power through the Word.
 - A. The disciples *spoke* in different languages as directed by the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:4).
 - B. They spoke the Word clearly.
 1. You caused Christ to be crucified (Ac 2:23, 36).
 2. God raised Jesus to life! (Ac 2:32). Speak God's wonderful things (Ac 2:11).
 3. As witnesses, we are called to speak clearly the word concerning Christ.
 - C. The Spirit still works by means of the Word.
 1. Beware of those who claim direct visions from God.
 2. To see the Spirit's power at work, use His Good News to answer your neighbor's spiritual hunger. Nice pastors, beautiful choirs, or picturesque churches can never do it.
- III. The Holy Spirit gives power for faith.
 - A. The Holy Spirit changes people.
 1. Some will continue blocking the Spirit's efforts to change them (sneering and stubborn unbelief, Ac 2:13; Mt 12:31).
 2. Yet changed hearts and lives are always the goal of the Holy Spirit.
 - B. Changed lives give evidence of the Spirit's power.
 1. On Pentecost, three thousand people were led by the Spirit to repentance and faith.
 2. Since Pentecost the Holy Spirit has continued to change one person after another from sinner to saint.

3. The Spirit's power is available to you in the Word and the Sacraments.
 - a. To strengthen your personal faith in Christ.
 - b. To help you witness to Christ.

Conclusion: Who needs Spirit-power? We might just as well ask: Who needs water? Every person, you and I, need Spirit-power. Without it no one can become or remain a Christian.

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