

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 44, Number 1

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48325

JANUARY 1980

Harry A. Huth, D.D., 1917-1979.....	1
Perceived Influences on Occupational Choice of Seminarians	William M. Cross 3
The Purpose and Fruits of the Holy Supper.....	C.J. Evanson 17
Luther's Understanding of "Church" in His Treatise <i>On the Councils and the Church</i> of 1539	Eugene F. A. Klug 27
To Raymond Surburg on His Seventieth Birthday.....	39
Raymond F. Surburg: A Selected Bibliography	41
Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology	46
Theological Observer.....	50
Homiletical Studies.....	62
Books Reviewed.....	79
Books Received.....	99

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Homiletical Studies

TRINITY SUNDAY

Romans 11:33-36

June 1, 1980

This text is not a "proof" of the Trinity. Yet it is strategically placed both in this epistle and in the liturgical calendar. The text provides a review of Christian doctrine as set forth in Romans 1-11 and the first half of the church year, and also serves as a logical basis for the Christian life, explained in Romans 12 and following. The goal of the sermon is to help the hearer realize that though he cannot understand God fully, he can trust God implicitly. The problem is that we want to shrink God down to test-tube size and analyze Him, or else we pretend that our faith is based on mere "mystery" rather than on a real, historical, Triune God.

Introduction: A husband becomes exasperated with his wife who has changed her dress for the third time: "I'll never understand that woman!" Parents make similar remarks about their children who turn up the disco music so loud the whole block can hear it. If we talk this way about people whom we see daily, is it any wonder that we say about God whom we cannot see: "I'll never understand God!" Such a statement may be made by parents mourning the loss of a young child, by a wife whose husband has lost his job, by a college student searching for life's meaning, by an aged woman who cannot understand why God does not take her to heaven now. Today, as we contemplate the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we too have reason to say:

"I'll Never Understand God"

1. I'll never understand God fully, but everything is from Him.
 - A. It is tragic that the majority of people consider themselves "self-made."
 1. The American ideal is the self-made, rags-to-riches man.
 2. Our society teaches us to claim our rights and to carve out our own future.
 3. Even Christians are tempted to think that God owes them favors because they are so pious.
 - B. God alone graciously gives.
 1. He gives as our Creator-Father.
 - a. Did God consult a Committee on Creation before He made our world? Or what scientist did He hire to map out the solar system?
 - b. The treasures of the earth are God's, and He gives them freely: water, sunshine, minerals, coal, air.
 2. He gives as our Savior.
 - a. Man is incapable of understanding, loving, or serving God (Ro 8:7).
 - b. Without the advice of a single person, God planned and carried out our salvation through Christ. Here we see His wise love (Ro 8:1a).
 3. He gives as our Sanctifier. The Holy Spirit gives faith that we may trust our Savior for pardon and life.

Transition: I'll never understand God fully. Yet this I know: He is the Source of all. I trust Him.

- II. I'll never understand God fully, but everything is by Him.
 - A. Our Father wisely provides.
 1. Look at our natural resources: water, annual harvests, solar power.
 2. Look at the "orders" God has provided: home, government, church.

- B. Our Savior graciously loves.
1. Repentant sinners need never worry about running out of God's forgiveness (Is 55:7), as we do about running out of oil.
 2. To assure us, Jesus gave us His Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion.
- C. Our Comfortor, the Holy Spirit, powerfully guides.
1. He knows how viciously the devil and the world attack our faith (1 Pe 5:8).
 2. He enables us to live victoriously (Ro 8:26-27).
- Transition:* I'll never understand God fully. Yet this I know: He is the Sustainer of all. I will use and enjoy His gifts!
- III. I'll never understand God fully, but everything is for Him.
- A. Earthly life is temporary.
1. We see it in plant and animal life.
 2. We have here no abiding city (He 13:14).
- B. Life is for God.
1. In eternity He planned that we should live to His glory.
 2. Through Christ's Resurrection He made our new life possible.
 3. The Holy Spirit will lead us to eternal life with God (1 Pe 1:5).
- Transition:* I'll never understand God fully. Yet this I know: Everything, my life too, is for Him. I will praise and honor Him.
- Conclusion:* No matter how long we live we shall never fully understand God. We can never program God's inexhaustible riches onto a set of computer chips. Yet we can trust God's mercy, enjoy His gifts, and praise Him..

LS

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 John 4:16b-21

June 8, 1980

Preparation for this sermon study should begin with at least one good reading of the entire first epistle of John. The context is essential to developing a sermon on this pericope. It will also serve as a reminder of how relevant the topic of the text is for today's believers. It would also be good to think through carefully and do some parallel-passage study on the significance of the different Greek words translated "love." It is obvious from the text that John is talking about a different kind of love than most think of when they use the word today (*agapē* compared to *erōs* and *philos*).

Introduction: The question "Whatever possessed you?" is often fired at someone who has done something contrary to their usual nature or to common practice. Their actions appear to be strange, even weird. In a world that talks so much about love, the same kind of thing will happen when people are

Possessed By God's Love

- I. This "possession" comes by the indwelling of God in our lives (v16b).
 - A. God is the "original copy" of what love is.
 1. This love is a deep concern that reaches out to benefit the one loved, in contrast with love that meets one's own need (*philos* and *eros*). God has no "needs"; yet how actively concerned He is for us sinners.
 2. This love is personified and exemplified in the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. 4:9f.).
 - B. God actually lives in those who are His.
 1. It happens when by faith we receive Christ as our own Savior and Lord (Jn 14:23).

2. It happens by the working of the Holy Spirit (4:13, 1 Cor 3:16).

Transition: Having God's love is more than merely knowing that He cares; it is being filled with and possessed by His very presence in our lives.

II. It totally changes our relationship with God (vv17-18).

A. We no longer need to fear Him.

1. As we face up to ourselves in the light of God's Word we have reason to fear His wrath.

2. In the cleansing forgiveness of Jesus we have pardon, acceptance, and peace with God.

3. As we individually grow in this love we can have victory over the many fears that attack us as Christians, especially when burdened by problems, illness, etc.

B. We now live in confidence as "His" people.

1. We know where we stand with God, while living in a world that is generally so alien to Him.

2. Without fear we are ready to face Him after this life.

Transition: Since psychologists remind us that fear is one of the most destructive forces in human life, to be possessed by love is to have a truly happy and abundant life.

III. It totally changes our relationship with other people (vv19-21).

A. Love that is of God is dynamic and explosive.

1. It cannot be and remain "just between God and me."

2. Its presence in our lives is demonstrated by the way it reaches out to others.

B. Finally, love is the grand end-product to which our Savior directs His redeemed people.

Conclusion: Most would agree that more unselfish love patterned after the love that flowed from God's grace would really change our individual lives and our world. Praise God, that is the love that possesses us in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Edwin H. Dubberke
St. Louis, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I John 3:13-18

June 15, 1980

This text leads us in a continuation and development of the topic of the preceding Sunday: *agapē* love. Christ's people need to be more aware of the sharp contrast between the love at work in them and the hate (*miseō*, "have malicious feelings toward others") that is at work in the people of the world. Note the significance of *menō* as used in last Sunday's Epistle and in this one.

Introduction: In the church year the festival half centers on how our salvation came about; the none-festival half (Trinity Season) concentrates on the blossoming life of those saved. It is significant that the latter begins with such emphasis on love (cf. the Epistle for the previous Sunday, vv19.21). Today's text would impress on us the realization that

Christian Love Is No Luxury

1. Love is a distinguishing mark of a believer (vv13-15).

A. It shows in their love for "the brethren."

1. Believers are united as God's children (see 3:1 in Phillips).

2. They know that they are loved by God.

3. They fulfill the Lord's command to love each other (Jn 13:34).

B. The world in its unbelief hates believers.

1. Unbelievers are still in the death and hopelessness of sin.
2. The lives of believers expose their evil and provoke their hatred.

Transition: In a world where self-interest reigns and people are infatuated by raw sex and violence, Christian (*agapē*) love will stand out in vivid contrast. This is not a matter of preference for a believer but a mark of genuineness (Jn 13:35).

- II. The obligation to Christian love is produced by Christ's love for us (v16).
 - A. Love for others, even fellow believers, is not easy.
 1. The many imperfections we see in others make them unloveable.
 2. It is not "normal" to love such people.
 - B. Only Christ's love can make us really loving.
 1. Jesus is love in its highest perfection (Jn 15:13, Ro 5:8, 1 Pe 2:24).
 2. Under the Holy Spirit the Savior's love compels us to love (*opheilomen*, "are bound to," NEB).

Transition: The beauty and power of the love we experience in Jesus demands that love for others, especially our fellow believers, flow out of our lives. It is not really left to the whims of our choice.

- III. Love is proven genuine by action (vv17-18).
 - A. Imitation love seldom gets beyond nice words.
 - B. Genuine love gets sacrificially involved with "brothers in need." (Elaborate with specific examples to which the hearers can easily and personally relate.)

Conclusion: How desperately the world around us, which is so naturally caught in the struggles and agony of hate, needs to see the kind of love that only God's people in Christ can really demonstrate.

EHD

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Peter 5:6-11

June 22, 1980

Despite the power and role of love in a Christian's life he should not be surprised to receive the world's hatred (Epistle, Second Sunday after Trinity). Peter's first letter was written to advise believers on how to bear up under suffering and trouble, to suffer "as a Christian" and so to "glorify God" (4:16). God uses sufferings for His purposes. Ponder Hebrews 12:1-11 carefully. Thus Peter advises: "be humbled" under God's hand. He Himself will "render fit," "set firmly," "fill with strength," and "ground on a solid foundation" (v10).

Introduction: Following Jesus involves taking up our "cross" and bearing "much tribulation." While these are a part of the school of faith they still mean burdens, grief, pain in our lives. Crosses often severely shake and test faith. Thus Peter advises us how to bear up under our testing and still confidently look for

The Crown Despite the Cross

- I. We must humbly submit to the Lord's powerful, guiding hand (v6).
 - A. This is extremely difficult for us to do.
 1. Our sinful ego resists all submission, especially if it means discomfort and inconvenience.
 2. In our "quick cure" society we are taught to seek and expect speedy relief from pain and trouble.
 - B. Only God and His word can work surrender in us.
 1. He gives us His promise that He only seeks our good (Jr 29:11, Ro 8:28).
 2. He reveals His power and faithfulness to us.

Transition: Burdens, pain, depression, turmoil, disappointment, grief are all realities in the lives of Christians. Only under the Holy spirit can humble submission open the way for God's will to be done in our lives.

- II. For strength we must depend on the Father's care and grace (vv7, 10).
- A. How tremendous is the fact that He cares about us!
 1. His grace to sinners is revealed in all that Christ is and does.
 2. It comes to each of us personally as He calls us to faith and to share in His eternal glory (Eph 1:3-12).
 - B. We can confidently look to God for strength and help.
 1. Life is filled enough with pressing, straining anxieties.
 2. He urges us to throw our anxieties on to the broad shoulders of His loving care (Ps 37:5, He 13:5b-6).
 3. He promises to supply what it takes to hold our lives together and keep us on a solid footing as we follow His leading through whatever "sufferings" come to us.

Transition: The "if's" of daily life that threaten us with sleepless nights or worse come when we bear our crosses alone. We take heart in His promises and are comforted by His presence now and the certainty of His glory hereafter.

- III. We must be on constant guard against the devil (vv8-9).
- A. Satan's goal is to rob us of the gifts of God's grace.
 1. We must remember that this enemy is very real, contrary to modern thought (cf. cults, etc.).
 2. We are most vulnerable to his soul-blinding lies when our hearts are heavy and our eyes filled with tears.
 - B. Peter describes well what our defense must be.
 1. We must be on guard so that the devil never gets a toehold in our lives.
 2. Resist the enemy with the weapons of our faith (Eph 6:10-18a).
 3. Remember the commonality of Christian experience in suffering the burdens and problems of life.

Conclusion: Finally it is so obvious that victory over the crosses that the Lord allows to come to us can be had only in His power and grace. We can never praise Him enough in return!

EHD

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Romans 8:18-23

June 29, 1980

Introduction: Picture a man sloshing along through a swamp. He is up to his knees in water and mud. Each step is heavy and hard. Every now and then, he pauses, stretches himself as far as he can, stands on his boot-tips, and tries to catch a glimpse of the high ground which he knows has to be ahead. That is where his cabin is, with dry clothes, good food, drink, and a soft bed. That is the thought which keeps him going. We all do some heavy trudging through life. Today, by way of our text, we catch a glimpse of what lies ahead for us. We see that there will be more of the same, but there is also our real homeland, heaven. We pray that the Spirit will strengthen us and cheer us with the glory about to be revealed to us while we are

Looking Ahead on Tiptoes

1. Our vantage point for looking ahead is a world full of suffering.
 - A. Paul describes it well by the use of the word, "groan." We groan much (vv18, 23b).

-
1. We groan from the troubles we foolishly bring upon ourselves (1 Pe 2:20).
 - a. By our sins, we bring suffering.
 - b. We make bad decisions and suffer the consequences.
 2. We groan when troubles come because we are believers (1 Pe 3:14). Because of our faith, we have stood for what was right and spoken out against some things, and so we have lost out financially or lost some friends.
 2. We groan when God chastises us as children to purify our faith (2 Cor 4:17). The burdens of sickness, trials, and tribulation that He lets come our way to try our spiritual muscles cause us to groan. You know what your burdens are.
- B. We do not suffer alone. All of nature is in waiting, suffering also (vv20-21).
1. Nature did not incur the suffering it endures as a result of its own sin.
 2. When man sinned, God subjected nature to ruin. God cursed the ground. Imperfect man would not get to live in a perfect world. It was made subject to vanity, destined to ruin, no matter what (Gn 3:17-19).
 3. Paul personifies nature and points out that it does not enjoy its ruin. It groans from the pollution, the ravages of beast and bug, waste, erosion, disease, and depletions. It looks ahead, stands on tiptoes, eagerly waiting the day when it will be delivered.
- II. We are looking ahead to the glory to be revealed to us.
- A. We have had a taste of this glory through the Spirit given to us (v23).
1. The Spirit has attached us to Jesus Christ. Christ has come and walked through the valley of the shadow of death for us (Ps 23). He groaned for us under the burden of the sins of the whole world. He won our glorious future for us. By faith in Jesus Christ we have the forgiveness of our foolish sins (Ro 8:1, 2).
 2. When we enjoy the forgiveness of our sins and then find peace with God, we have a taste of heaven. We can feel this in our spirits. And it is good!
 3. The Spirit gives us a taste of this through Word and Sacrament. We have tasted it in Baptism and often through Holy Communion and the proclamation of the Gospel.
 4. But this taste is just a down-payment. It is just enough to put us on our toes in eager anticipation of the complete glory yet to come.
- B. Complete glory will be brought by Jesus Christ (v23).
1. He will reveal Himself again on the Last Day, in all His glory (v18).
 2. Complete glory will be ours when we get the gift of His love, heaven. All things will be made new again. Even the created world will have a new start, doing again what it could when God first made it.
 3. We will be set free from all the things that make us groan. Make a list sometime. In God's Word there is a promise to counter every groan-causing trouble. We receive partial deliverance now, full deliverance in heaven.
- C. This glory makes present suffering unimportant (v18).
1. We will still suffer in the future. Count on it.
 2. But our attention will be focused on what is ahead. Have you never had a pain somewhere which you forgot momentarily because your mind was on something else?
 3. When the time to groan comes again, the glorious deliverance is the thing to put your mind on.

- a. Pray for complete deliverance to come soon.
- b. In the meantime, stand on your tiptoes by faith in waiting eagerly with all of nature for the glory of the Lord to rip away the vale of tears and replace it with the joys of salvation.

Lowell F. Thomas
Fort Wayne, Indiana

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Peter 3:8-15a

July 6, 1980

This pericope is obviously loaded with thoughts about the sanctified life of the believer. The drift into preparing a moralistic sermon will be easy. The word "righteous" (vv12, 14), must be understood properly as something imputed to believers. The righteousness of justification begets the righteousness displayed in sanctification. Anyone having both concepts rooted in his heart by faith has a good life and happy days in spite of sin and persecution by others.

Introduction: Everyone longs for the "good life." But what this amounts to has baffled most people in every generation. Most try to buy it, be it, or do it. But anyone who has tried that way has discovered the futility of that plan. There is a successful way. It happens when the Spirit leads us to believe that

Christ Is Lord of the Good Life

- I. The Lord has called us to have the good life.
 - A. He has called us away from a morally deficient life.
 1. The "tit for tat" philosophy rules and ruins many relationships (v9).
 2. He calls us to abandon the attitude of resentment against those who do good (vv10, 13).
 3. We know the above models well, for we have made them our own too often.
 4. We have learned the hard way that they are short on happiness. "The Lord is against those who do wrong" (v12).
 - B. The life Christ wants us to live is described in positive terms (v8).
 1. Live in harmony with your fellowman.
 2. Display a sympathetic heart.
 3. Love your fellow Christians.
 4. Have a tender-hearted nature.
 5. Humbly depend on God for everything.
 - C. There is a positive correlation between being morally good and enjoying life.
 1. We know that by reading the history of God's people in the Bible.
 2. Even the world espouses a general popular piety about being a "good guy" and having a "good day."
 3. But who can do this consistently and satisfy the standard set by God? Check last week's close encounters of the human kind. How elusive personal piety can be!
- II. Christ the Lord provides the good life.
 - A. He grants to believers an inner righteousness.
 1. Christ won the victory over the law.
 - a. He is the Holy One (v 15, I Pe 1:15).
 - b. He kept the law behind the virtues listed before.
 2. Christ paid for our impiety (I Pe 3:18).
 3. We have Christ and all He did in our hearts by faith (v15).
 - a. Christ's righteousness is ours.

- b. We have the forgiveness of our sins.
- B. He calls us to live a righteous life (v9b).
 - 1. We are not called to strain ourselves to become acceptable to God; we are accepted by faith.
 - 2. He gives us the ability to live a morally good life described by God.
 - a. He graciously comes into our lives through Word and Sacrament and empowers us to do good.
 - b. He graciously hears our prayers for help.
 - 3. He gives us a zeal or eagerness for doing good (vv11, 13).
 - a. Loyal, vocal active supporters of a ball team are called fans. But loyal, active supporters of God and good are tagged "fanatics."
 - b. Zeal in doing good irritates some who see it, and they try to instill fear in us for having Christ as our Lord. They still persecute us (v13, I Pe 4:12ff).
 - c. But Christ is the lord of our zeal. He is not our critic's choice for the good life.
 - 4. We fulfill our calling and enjoy the good life (v10).
 - a. The highest joy, the best days, are found in the holy life, provided and sustained by Christ.
 - b. Our lives are good in the eyes of God for Christ's sake.
 - c. Our lives are good for us in that we can love and enjoy life through Christ.

LFT

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Romans 6:3-11

July 13, 1980

"Baptized into His death" (v3) denotes our identification by baptism with Christ so that the whole experience of Christ, His being buried and then being raised from the dead (v4), has its spiritual counterpart in the baptized Christian. By baptism we have been made dead to sin in the sense that sin no longer controls us. Baptism is also a means of regeneration, the beginning of a new life which manifests itself in holy living. In v5 the emphasis is on the resurrection, on the rising with Christ to a new life after our baptismal burial. The repeated use of the future tense, "shall," indicates that God will work in us by the same power He showed in Christ's resurrection to deliver us from sin's dominion and to sanctify us. The "old self" (v6) denotes our unregenerate self, the old man or sinful nature. Our sin-possessed and sin-dominated personality being now crucified with Christ, we are no longer in slavery to sin and we should and can renounce it. Since our baptism united us with the risen Christ (v11), our baptism signifies that we are daily to put down the old man and to let the new man rise.

Introduction: Baptism is such a simple ceremony. Incredible what it accomplishes! In our baptism we are joined to Christ, identifying with Him in His death and His resurrection. Baptism continues to have meaning for us.

Our Baptism Promises Us an Ever Better Life

- I. It assures us of freedom from the dominion of sin.
 - A. Sin still seeks to gain control over us.
 - B. But we can consider ourselves to have power over it.
- II. It assures us of freedom to please our heavenly Father.
 - A. That will require careful listening to the new nature within us.
 - B. In the measure that we listen we find ourselves growing stronger, healthier, and more Christ-like day by day.

Conclusion: Baptism happened once to us, but that does not mean we forget about it. Our baptism helps us every day to lead a better Christian life.

MJS

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Romans 6:19-23

July 20, 1980

Paul uses the relation of slave to master (v19) to convey spiritual truths because he is writing to people whose past life made them peculiarly liable to temptations to licentiousness and whose moral weakness had to be reckoned with. Just as they had once yielded their bodies to uncleanness when sin was their master, so now, having come under a new master, they are to give their bodies in the service of righteousness to that new master, Christ. When they were servants to sin, they had no obligation to righteousness (v20), but the end of that service to sin is death (v21). The end of their new service is sanctification and eternal life (v22). In v23 the "wages" of sin (used usually to denote a soldier's pay) is opposed to "the free gift" of eternal life, which is not earned by us but is granted by the grace of God. Despite Paul's apology for using the slave-master figure (v19), the fact is that we are slaves to righteousness, for we belong to God as His *douloi* and to Christ who bought us with a price (1 Cor 7:23). But it does not follow that our service should be that of slaves. We obey not because we are under bondage to do so, but because love moves us (Ga 4:6).

Introduction: Many people abuse their body by overindulging in food and drink, work and play. Today there is a renewed emphasis on caring for the body. Health clubs offer varieties of programs for exercising and maintaining normal weight. Proper care of the body includes moral and upright behavior. The text confronts us with this question:

How Are We Using Our Body?

- I. Our flesh would like to make use of all of our members.
 - A. It comes with enticing suggestions.
 - B. It suggests a care-free life with no restraints.
 - C. It would, if it could, gain full control.
 1. Which would result in a life of shame.
 2. Which would eventually lead us to hell.
- II. Our spirit has better plans for us.
 - A. It comes with a call to godliness.
 - B. It offers a life free from slavery to sin.
 - C. It helps us to realize that a struggle will be going on (the flesh does not easily give up).
 - D. It knows of God's gracious rewards on earth and in heaven.

Conclusion: Your body is a wonderful gift from God. How are you using it?

MJS

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Romans 8:12-17

July 27, 1980

In the eighth chapter of Romans Paul repeatedly uses the word which is literally translated "flesh." Other translations are "my unspiritual nature," "my sinful nature," and "the lower nature." Even though in baptism the evil nature was drowned in us, it is still a force within us with lusts and desires that are opposed to God. According to v13 it is possible for a Christian to give in to the

flesh and eventually to lose his faith and fall into condemnation. It is our relationship to God as Father that moves us to “put to death the deeds of the body” (v13) and to be “led by the Spirit of God.” Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, the Christian finds himself desiring and actually doing the things that are pleasing to God. These desires and actions are evidence of the Spirit of God within us. They witness to the fact that we are children of God and heirs with Christ (vv16-17).

Introduction: We sometimes envy people with outstanding musical or athletic ability, or gifts of leadership, administration, or teaching. We think: “How glorious to be like that person.” But regardless of our position, occupationally, financially, or otherwise, all of us who are Christians are in a glorious position. Paul reminds us in our text that we are children of God.

Glory in This — That You Are a Child of God

- I. As God’s child you can glory in the victory of your spirit over your flesh.
 - A. Note that Paul sees the struggle still going on.
 - B. But as God’s children, we can gain the victory day after day.
- II. As God’s child you can glory in the blessings which are yours.
 - A. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word.
 - B. The Heavenly Father listens when we cry to Him.
 - C. Our loving God assures us that we will forever enjoy all that Christ earned for us.
 1. Many of these blessings are ours to enjoy day by day, right now.
 2. The best are kept in trust for us as heirs of God.

Conclusion: You and I can glory in what God has done, is doing, and will do for us, His children.

MJS

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Corinthians 10:6-13

August 3, 1980

In v 6 “examples” comes closer to the Greek *tupoi* than “warnings” (RSV). “Craved” expresses the original more accurately than “desired.” The reference is to Nu 11:4, 33 and Ps 95:7-11. The Israelites are intended (*eis*) as examples of what we must not do. The quotation in v 7 is from Ex 32:6, the people singing and dancing around the golden calf. Fornication (v 8) often accompanied idolatry, was even a consecrated part of it, as in Corinth where prostitution was part of the worship of Aphrodite. “In a single day” adds to the horror of the plague in Nu 25:9. *Ekpeirazōmen* (v 9) means “tempt sorely and utterly.” The Israelites so tempted the Lord (Ex 27:2-7; Nu 14:22; 21:5-6) and as a result were destroyed — were perishing day by day (imperfect) — by the fiery serpents (Nu 21:6). The murmuring, or grumbling, which the Corinthians were doing against Paul is likened to the grumbling of the Israelites after the punishment of Korah (Nu 16:41). In the retribution carried out by the destroying angel 14,700 perished (Nu 16:49). “These things happened” (imperfect tense to indicate that they happened from time to time) by way of example, the thought being the same as in Ro 15:4. The plural, “ends of the ages,” refers to the New Testament era culminating in the end of all things. The Corinthians, proud of their insight and knowledge, were in danger of falling from the faith. Yet there were some who were weak and worried about their capacity to overcome temptation. Lest they despair because their fathers in the wilderness had so failed to meet God’s requirements, Paul encourages them (v 13). God is faithful and knows how to deliver (2 Pe 2:9). God can keep them from evil by providing a way to escape for each temptation.

The central thought of the text is that the various temptations we meet can be

resisted with God's help. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would rely on God to help them escape temptation. The problem is that we think we can resist temptation by ourselves. The means to the goal is the faithfulness of God who continues to strengthen us through Christ.

Introduction: "We are set before and behind by temptations and cannot throw them off" (Luther). Temptation is not only the urge to tell a lie or to stay in bed on Sunday morning. Anything in our lives — small and great events, desires, and ambitions — can become a temptation when it threatens to tear us away from God. The text focuses on the vitally important matter of

How to Deal with Temptation

- I. Be aware of it.
 - A. Be aware that things not evil in themselves can become temptations.
 1. Entertainment can so occupy us, work can so burden us that there is no time to think about our relationship to God.
 2. We can be dancing around the golden calf (v 7) of success, with ambition so consuming us that we refuse even to consider whether it is good or bad.
 3. A desire even for such "good" things as food and the preservation of loved ones becomes a craving for evil (v 6) if it displaces loyalty to God.
 - B. Be aware of subtle temptations to immorality (v 8).
 1. In the sexual innuendos of much advertising in television and magazines.
 2. In the attitudes and actions of people who ignore the divineness of human sexuality.
 - C. Be aware of the temptation to complain about God (v 9).
 1. We have the right to complain to God, to bring our troubles and resentments before him.
 2. It is something else again to judge God's actions by accusing him of manipulating us.
 - D. Be aware of the temptation to grumble against other people (v 10).
 1. Blaming others for not coming up to our standards.
 2. Venting on them our frustrations and bitterness.

Transition: To deal adequately with temptation we will need to recognize it in many places and forms.

- II. Look to God to help us escape it.
 - A. We cannot cope adequately with temptation by ourselves (v 12).
 1. Our own fighting powers are so undependable that we succumb again and again — the temptation is beyond our strength.
 2. We get too involved with the fight itself which, after all, is not against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12).
 - B. We must stop squabbling with the demonic powers and look at Him who is standing for us and beside us.
 1. Christ stood in the wilderness; the tempter had to flee (Mt 4:11).
 2. Christ stands at God's right hand; the tempter too must serve him.
 - C. Look at the faithfulness of God (v 13).
 1. He permits no temptation to come to us that is not common to man.
 2. Through Christ, our supernatural food and drink (I Cor 10:3-4), he sustains us in the fiercest temptations.
 3. He always provides a way of escape that differs with different temptations.

Conclusion: The way to deal with temptation is to keep our eyes on our faithful God who will not let us down and who through Christ is able to help us.

Gerhard Aho

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Corinthians 12:1-11

August 10, 1980

Paul is not speaking about spiritual gifts like saving faith and knowledge of God which all Christians have but about *charismata* (v 4), in the exercise of which trouble had arisen in Corinth. The Corinthians' previous state of ignorance, in which they were led aimlessly by oracles of dumb idols, made it necessary for Paul to instruct them (vs 2-3). The background of v 3 is the cult of Caesar with its application of *Kurios* to the emperor. This cursing of Jesus is contrasted to the confessing of Him made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Confession of Jesus is to be seen as the context of the charismatic gifts. These gifts are not uniform but diverse (v 4). Different persons also render different services (v 5), and God energizes (*energō*) or operates in all these manifestations of gifts. (Not the Trinity in these verses.) The purpose of the gifts is the general profiting of all (v 7). Nine manifestations of the Spirit's work are singled out (vs 8-10). *Sōphia* (v 8) connotes wisdom of a practical nature, while *gnōsis* is knowledge that suggests deeper integrative insight. *Pistis* (v 9) is not saving faith but wonder-working faith. Acts of healing are distinguished from the broader workings of miracles or powers, since some of the miracles were not healings. Prophecy was not always prediction, but was always a speaking forth of God's message. Discerning of the spirits was much needed to tell whether the gifts were really of the Holy Spirit or were merely strange, though natural, phenomena or even diabolical workings. Discernment of spirits is the counterpart and safeguard of prophesying, for like the gift of prophesying it required a super-rational penetration. The tongues (*glōssai*) of v 10 were a phenomenon which was far from uniform, as *genē* implies. Interpretation was necessary for the church to benefit, and sometimes the speaker himself became the interpreter (14:13). The tongues which the Corinthians ranked first because of their sensational character Paul lists last with respect to profiting. Since all these gifts flowed from the one Spirit (v 11), boastful comparison and depreciation of less dazzling gifts were inappropriate.

The central thought is that the diversity of gifts among Christians need not destroy the unity of the body. The goal is that the hearers would be aware of this underlying unity in diversity. The problem is that we sometimes permit our various gifts to divide rather than unite us. The means to the goal is that a gracious God distributes gifts as he sees fit for the common good.

Introduction: The church is composed of people who are all different. This diversity can be an irritant. The church at Corinth was having problems because of a diversity of spiritual gifts. The point of the text is not that these same gifts are around today. God saw that they were needed then; other gifts are needed today. The point is that no matter what the gifts are or how great their diversity, there is still a unity.

The Unity in Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

- I. There is one source of the gifts.
 - A. One and the same Holy Spirit gives them (v 11).
 1. If our gifts are not as spectacular as those in Corinth, that does not mean they are not Spirit-given.
 2. The Spirit distributes as he pleases (v 11b). We have no reason either to boast or to feel inferior. We can neither demand nor earn the gifts.
 - B. The Triune God functions in them — the Spirit (v 4), the Lord Jesus (v 5), and God the Father (v 6).
 1. God provides power for the employment of the gifts, as fuel furnishes power for an engine

2. Proper use of the gifts shows God at work through us.
- II. There is one purpose of the gifts.
- A. Service (v 5).
1. To God — example: a church service of praise and adoration to God.
 2. To people — examples: strengthening the faith of others and providing for their bodily needs. Each gift makes for well-rounded service.
- B. For the common good (v 7).
1. The gifts are not to be used for mere display or self-honor.
 2. The use of each gift helps the congregation to function as a unit, for each one is making his contribution. We must not isolate ourselves from other Christians or work in opposition to them.
- III. There is one test of the gifts (v 3).
- A. Do they honor Christ?
1. By conforming to his Word.
 2. By glorifying him (Jn 16:14).
- B. Do they point people to Christ?
1. Is the possessor of the gift reminded of his relationship to Christ as Lord?
 2. Are other people reminded of the centrality of Christ?
- Conclusion:* Diversity there is in a Christian congregation. But there is also unity. That is why God's people can live and work together.

GA

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Corinthians 15:1-10

August 17, 1980

"Gospel" is used in this entire chapter with reference to the resurrection. This is the Gospel Paul "gospelized" to the Corinthians (v 1). Literally, "you are being saved" (v 2), "if you hold it fast." The peril of falling away is real. Christ having died, having been buried, having been raised, and having appeared are four items of "first importance" (v 3). *Huper*, "in behalf or instead of," has much the same sense as *peri* (Ga 1:14). "In accordance with the scriptures" refers to such passages as Is 53:5, 8; Ps 22; Zch 12:10. "Was buried" (v 4) is aorist to indicate the burial as a single act. *Egēgertai* is a perfect passive ("has been raised") to emphasize the permanence of Christ's resurrection. He is still risen. *Ōphthē* (v 5), "appeared," refers not a mere vision but to an actual appearance. Paul's adverbs of time (vs 5-8) indicate the chronological order of the appearances. Christ's appearing (v 8) probably refers to the appearing on the Damascus Road (Ac 9:5). Paul's reference to himself as one "untimely born" means that Christ appeared to Paul only after He had ascended to heaven. Paul knew his gifts and accomplishments and yet always felt that in himself he was nothing (v 9; I Tm 1:15), especially when he recalled his past bloody persecution of the Christians. He knew that he was forgiven, but he could not forget what he had done. He would not disparage his work but would acknowledge that God was at work in him (v 10; Php 2:13).

The central thought of the text is that the Gospel is an absolutely unique message featuring a crucified, resurrected, grace-bestowing Lord. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would see more clearly the Gospel's relevance. The problem is that the Gospel too often is viewed merely as an abstract truth. The means to the goal is that Jesus Christ in the Gospel supplies us with the grace we need.

Introduction: We hear so much about the Gospel. What is it? Paul says he preached it (v 1); so it is a message. But what kind of a message? A myth? A philosophy? A theory? The text sharpens for us the meaning of "Gospel." It spells out for us

The Gospel That We Believe

- I. The Gospel is a Christ-centered message.
 - A. It focuses on a Christ who died (v 3).
 1. Nailed to a cross to atone for our sins.
 2. On Golgatha when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea — Christ's death is a fact.
 - B. It focuses on the Christ who rose from the dead (v 4).
 1. God raised Christ to attest to the completeness of Christ's saving work.
 2. Christ appeared to many witnesses (vs 5-8) — Christ's resurrection is a fact.
 - C. Both the fact and the reason for Christ's death and resurrection are recorded in Scripture (vs 3b-4b). Thus the Gospel is both a Christ-centered and a Scriptural message.
- II. The Gospel is a people-oriented message.
 - A. It offers us renewing grace.
 1. We need renewal because of past and present sins (v 9).
 2. By the grace of God in Christ we are new people, accepted by God and able to accept ourselves (v 10a).
 - B. It offers us empowering grace.
 1. God's grace in Christ enables us to witness for Christ in all that we do or say (v 10b).
 2. Whatever we accomplish is due to the grace of God (v 10c). Grace comes through the Gospel, and grace is for people like us.

Conclusion: The Gospel we believe is not an abstraction but is rooted in human history. It is not a pollyanna philosophy but a message that speaks to a basic human need. Believing such a Gospel will never be in vain. By it we are saved (v 2).

GA

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 Corinthians 3:4-11

August 24, 1980

"Such is the confidence" (v 4): Paul needed no recommendation to or from the Corinthians other than the letter which they themselves were, a letter Christ Himself wrote when He fashioned them into His people by the Spirit. The confidence is not originated by Paul ("of ourselves," v 5), for the ability to form any right or true judgment about his work is from God in whose hands Paul is but an instrument. This verse answers the question posed in ch. 2:16. God had made Paul a sufficient minister of the new covenant rather than of the old (v 6). Paul's opponents at Corinth might have been Judaisers since he contrasts the two covenants. The old covenant was pre-eminently the covenant of Sinai (Ex 19:5), while the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah (31:31-33) and enunciated by Christ (Mt 26:28) is essentially the atoning blood of Christ which achieves what the old covenant was unable to do. The contrast between the written code killing and the spirit giving life is not between a literal and a non-literal interpretation of Scripture but between Law and Gospel. The Law kills in that it passes the sentence of death on those who disobey it. The Law as "letter" with its "thou

shalt” and “thou shalt not” had no life of its own and could not give life. The Gospel, which most fully reveals the work of the Holy Spirit, produces spiritual life. Yet the Law, despite its ministration of death, came into existence in a glory which shone in the face of Moses (Ex 34:29-30). But the brightness began fading almost immediately (v 7), which illustrates Paul’s contention that the Law has been superseded. In v 8 Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. In v 9 he states the antithesis between the Law and the Gospel: the Law condemns; the gospel bestows righteousness (Ro 5:18-19; Ga 3:21). The truth of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law makes the Gospel more glorious than the Law. The surpassing glory of the Gospel makes the glory of the Law seem like no glory at all (v 10). “Christ as the Sun of Righteousness has thrown Moses into the shade.” The glory which came through the law of Moses (v 11) is outdazzled by the splendor of the Gospel in the way moon and stars cease to shine after the sun rises. The ministration of the old covenant was only a transient flash of glory (*dia doxēs*), while that of the new abides in glory (*en doxē*); the ministry of the Gospel is permanent.

The central thought of the text is that the Gospel alone energizes a Christian life of service. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would serve God, their family, and other people by the power of the Gospel. The problem is that we too often act as if the Law gave power to serve. The means to the goal is the Gospel’s power to make and keep us alive for service.

Introduction: In confirmation instruction most of us memorized from the Catechism the main differences between the Law and the Gospel. It is easy to read and to say what these differences are. It is something else to let the Gospel energize all that we do and say as Christians. Paul’s statement that his sufficiency is from God is a way of saying that his service as a minister, an apostle, had been made possible by the grace of God revealed in the Gospel. It does not matter whether a Christian is serving as a pastor or in some other way.

The Gospel Alone Energizes a Christian Life of Service

- I. It is deceptively easy to make the Law our energizer to service.
 - A. The Law has a certain splendor (v 7).
 1. The Law revealed through Moses showed the splendor of God’s holiness.
 2. There is a kind of security in knowing what God wants us to do, in doing it, and then in thinking we have fulfilled our quota.
 - B. The Law fits our innate sense of due recompense for service.
 1. We feel that those who fail miserably to come through with what God demands deserve to be punished.
 2. We feel that we have not failed quite so miserably and that by being kind (“all heart”) to our family and going to church and saying our prayers we can escape punishment. Whenever we think God has to recognize our service, we are using the Law as our energizer. We are saying that the Law has more splendor than the Gospel.
 - C. Yet the Law is inadequate.
 1. It condemns us, all people, because we are not perfect (v 9).
 2. It kills: it gives us no power to do the right (v 6).
- II. The Gospel’s energizing splendor far outshines the Law.
 - A. The Gospel bestows righteousness (v 9).
 1. The only way to escape the Law’s condemnation is to have a righteousness outside of ourselves.
 2. The Gospel offers us the righteousness Jesus earned for us by His holy life and bitter death. By clinging to Christ’s righteousness, no matter how unrighteous we feel ourselves to be, we let the Gospel energize our service.

- B. Nothing can or will supplant the Gospel in energizing splendor (v 11).
1. The Gospel assures us as long as we live that our imperfect service is acceptable to God because of Jesus' righteousness. In Christ we are sufficient.
 2. The Gospel, in whatever form — Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Word in Absolution, preached or read — empowers us to be still better servants to God and to people.

Conclusion: There will never be anything as splendid as the Gospel. The Law's splendor was a passing thing. The Gospel is God's permanent way of making and keeping us His sufficient servants.

GA

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Galatians 3:15-22

August 31, 1980

If a ratified human will or testament is inviolable (v 15), how much more should we beware of distorting or setting aside God's testament given to Abraham (v 16). Paul sees the singular "seed" in Gn 22:18 as referring to Christ. Thus the promise starting with Abraham centered in Christ. The Law, given after the 430 years which the Israelites lived in Egypt (Ex 12:40), cannot weaken or annul the testamentary promise given to Abraham. Yet this promise, previously ratified by God through circumcision (Gn 17:10), is being nullified by those who say that the inheritance (heaven) is obtained by keeping the Law (v 18). This inheritance, prefigured by Canaan, is a gift and not something we must work for. If the inheritance cannot be gained by the Law, what is the purpose of the Law (v 19)? It was added after the promise had already been given "because of transgressions," to reveal transgressions, to show people what they are really like. In some way God used angels in giving the Law to Moses (Dt 33:2), but Moses had to serve as the intermediary (v 20). God approached Abraham directly without an intermediary, which shows the lesser importance of the Law in comparison with the Gospel. Is the Law, then, which held sway from Sinai "till the seed should come," in conflict with the Gospel (v 21)? It would be if its purpose had been to complete the Gospel. To use the Law in that way, as a means to salvation, would make the Gospel superfluous. Paul's point is that Law and Gospel are radically different in purpose and function. The Law serves the Gospel by declaring that all are sinners and therefore damned (v 22). The Law must be allowed to retain its purpose and function. The Law condemns so that people may give up the idea of earning their own righteousness and receive by faith the righteousness promised in the Gospel.

The central thought of the text is that the promise of the Gospel cannot be nullified by the Law. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would let God's promise stand. The problem is that we tend to use the Law, consciously or unconsciously, to nullify the promise. The means to the goal is that God on His part will never abrogate the Gospel's promise.

Introduction: It is a pleasure to deal with people whose word can be trusted, whose promises are kept. Their number seems to be decreasing. We have been disappointed so often in people who regard promises lightly and break them easily. We may begin to doubt the validity of any human promise. God is one whose promises we never have to doubt. The text makes clear that with God

A Promise Is a Promise

- I. God will never break His promises.
 - A. God gave a great promise to Abraham long ago.

1. The promise of a woman's offspring or seed — Christ (v 16) — who would redeem us from the curse of the Law and secure righteousness for us (vs 13, 11).
2. The promise that the salvation which Christ secured would be given as a gift to all who believe (v 22b).
- B. The Law which God gave later does not nullify the promise (v 17).
 1. God did not give the Law so that we could win heaven by keeping it.
 2. God does not contradict Himself. Either heaven is a gift that is promised or a reward that is earned. Both cannot be true (v 18).
- II. Nothing we do or fail to do can make God break His promise.
 - A. We attempt to make God break His promise when we use the Law to complete the Gospel.
 1. We believe in Christ, but think, as the Galatians did, that we must in addition fulfill certain demands of God's Law to get to heaven (v 18a).
 2. We arbitrarily single out certain requirements which we and others must meet in order to be true Christians.
 - B. We attempt to make God break His promise when we fail to use the Law properly.
 1. To show us our sin, for example, pride (a certain Sunday School teacher concluded a lesson on the Pharisee and the publican by saying, "And now, children, let us thank God that we are not like this Pharisee").
 2. To show us we cannot make up for our sins.
- III. So let His promise stand.
 - A. We have no more right to misconstrue or set aside God's promise than a person has to set aside a human will or testament (v 15).
 1. The Gospel's promise expresses God's disposition toward us.
 2. God intends the Law to serve the Gospel, not the other way around.
 - B. Remember that God comes to us first and foremost with a promise, not a demand.
 1. He does not come with requirements to be met or with a program of moral rearmament, but with a gift.
 2. A man went to the home of a poor woman with a gift of money to pay her rent. He knocked but there was no response, although the woman was there all the time. Afterward she said that she had refused to open the door, because she thought that it was the man come to get the rent. God stands at our heart's door and knocks. He comes with a gift, but many think that He has come for a payment. It is the Savior's knock, with news not of rent demanded but of rent paid. That is a promise.

Conclusion: People may break their promises, but with God a promise is a promise.