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Homiletical Studies

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 13:11-14

November 30, 1980

V11: "And that": and this, too. "The time": the time period at which we have arrived. "Hour": used to designate a specific time. "Sleep": carelessness, insensibility. "Belief": came to believe (ingressive aorist). "The salvation": our transfer to heaven. "Nearer": namely, to us. V12: "The night": the present world age. "The day": the heavenly age. We do not know the time, Ac 1:7; 2 Pe 3: 4-14. Jesus points us to the flood and to Sodom and Gomorrah. "The works of darkness": the works of the devil. "Let us decisively put away from ourselves" (aorist middle); separate our selves from all such works. The danger of yielding to them. "Let us once for all clothe ourselves" (aorist hortative subjunctive). "Weapons of light": cf. Eph 6:13. Light refers to God whose attribute is light. V13: "Honestly": becomingly (ASV), with decency (NEB). "Rioting": carousing (Gspd), cf. 1 Cor 10:12; Lk 2:34. "Chambering": prostitution, sexual promiscuity (NASB), cf. 1 Cor 6:15-20. "Wantonness": indecency (Gspd), sensuality (NASB). "Envy": jealousy. All are samples of the works of darkness. V14: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ": namely, as your armour. Luther: "Paul briefly draws into one heap all the weapons of the light." "Provision for the flesh": put a stop to gratifying the evil desires that lurk in your lower nature. The body is so responsive to sin, cf. Ro 6:12; 7:23. "Putting on Christ": 1) appropriating His righteousness, Is 61:10; Mt 22:12; 2) as our armour of defence and offense, Eph 6:13. Take Christ for your sanctification.

Introduction: Sleep is a gift of God, a great restorer of energy. But there comes a time when we have to wake up. So also spiritually, we are to arouse ourselves from the insensibility of spiritual sleep.

WAKE UP

- I. Because your salvation is near (v11).
 - A. It is in Christ: He is our salvation.
 1. He came into the world to be its Savior, Lk 2:11; Lk 19:10.
 2. He accomplished our salvation.
 - a. He kept the Law, Ga4:4.
 - b. He suffered our punishment, Is 53:5-6.
 3. The goal of His work is our salvation, Jn 3:16.
 - a. We have it now.
 - b. We will have it perfectly in heaven, Jn 14: 1-6.
 - B. This salvation is nearer than when we came to believe (v11).
 1. Because we may die at any time.
 2. Because Christ may come at any time, Mt 24:27.

Therefore, wake up. Don't be insensitive to such a glorious prospect.
Use the means of grace to be strengthened.

- II. Because you must take time to prepare for His coming.
 - A. Cast off the works of darkness (v12).
 1. Examples are listed (v13).
 2. All are inspired by the prince of darkness to lead us astray, 1Pe 5:8.

3. Don't indulge the flesh. Ro 6:12; 7:23.
 4. Drown the Old Adam by daily contrition and repentance.
 - B. Put on the armour of light (v12).
 1. That means put on Christ (v14).
 - a. Appropriating His righteousness. Is 61:10; Mt 22:12.
 - b. As our armour of defense and offense, Eph 6:13.
 2. Walk decently (v13).
- Daily drown the Old Adam; daily put on Christ by faith and bring forth the fruits of faith. That's staying awake.

HJE

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 15:4-13

December 7, 1980

V4: "Our instruction": objective, for our receiving instruction. "Through perseverance and through admonition": the perseverance which the Scriptures produce in us by the admonition which they apply to us. The encouraging of the Scriptures produces perseverance and hope, Ro 5:4-5. V5: Ro 14:lff.: Paul's thought is the unity of the Church, maintained by being clear on what the instruction of the Scripture is. "Minding the same thing": all holding the same convictions in accord with Christ Jesus, 1 Cor 1:30. Christ and His teachings in the Scriptures are the norm. V6: "With one accord": oneness in mind and oneness of mouth, that all may confess the same Gospel truth, thereby glorifying God. There needs to be unity in conviction and unity in witness. "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ": a concentrated Christian confession. According to Jesus' human nature, God is His God; according to His deity, God is His Father. V7: "By receiving one another": welcome each other as brothers. "Even as Christ": He received you; receive one another. "For God's glory": the glory of His truth and mercy (vv 8-9), particularly God's faithfulness to the Jews, His mercy to the Gentiles. V8: "I say": I mean, so as to explain. "To confirm": by fulfillment of the promises. V9: "The Gentiles": those Gentiles who glorify God. The oneness of Jew and Gentile centers in Christ and God the Father. "As it has been written": the Old Testament sees Jews and Gentiles joining in praise to the Lord. The joint praise is the subject of the quotations. The cause of all praise is the "shoot of Jesse." Ps 18:49: "I will confess Thee" because of the victories God gave David. V10: Dt 32:43: "His people": the faithful servants. V11: Ps 117:1: "Be praising" (durative present). V12: "Root": a live root sending up a sprout. "Hope": rest their hope of salvation. V13: "The God of hope": hope, joy, and peace flow from God. "The Holy Ghost": the mediator of these gifts. "Abound": be every abounding.

Introduction: Unity is a fragile blessing — in the world community, in the nation, in the family, in the church. To preserve the blessing of unity is every man's responsibility.

OUR UNITY IN CHRIST

I A Great Blessing

- A. Unity rests on the work of Christ (v12).
 1. He was God from all eternity, Jn1:1.
 2. He became man: the root of Jesse (v12).
 3. The purpose of His coming: to win the blessings of joy, peace, and hope (v13) for all men (v12).
- B. The Holy Spirit gives these blessings to all who believe (13).

1. He works through the Scriptures (v4).
2. He works through preaching.
 - a. To show God's faithfulness, Jesus preached to the Jews (v8), Mt 15:24.
 - b. To show God's mercy, Paul preached to the Gentiles (vv9-12).
3. The Holy Spirit unites Jew and Gentile by one faith under one King (v12), Eph 2:19-22.
4. All who believe have as their own joy and peace and hope (v13), Ga 5:22-23.

Let's praise God for His grace in redeeming and sanctifying us.

II. Our Responsibility

- A. The danger: Christians can put a stumbling block in the path of the weak, cf. Ro 14.
- B. Christians need to work for unity.
 1. By bearing with the infirmities of the weak (v1).
 2. By being like-minded (v5).
 3. So that with one mind and mouth they glorify God (v6) in worship and witness.
- C. The motive: as Christ also received us (v7).

Unity is a fragile blessing. Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph 4:3.

HJE

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

James 5:7-10

December 14, 1980

The "waiting" character of Advent seems to escape most Christians. The coming of the Lord, so long awaited by the Old Testament believers, has happened. Repeated celebrations of the Nativity seem to preclude any further waiting and yet, after the most joyous celebration of the Savior's birth, the believer must "come down to earth" in the everyday struggles with burdens, grief, injustice, persecution, etc., that make up life in our sin-alienated world. Thus it is important for the Advent preacher to focus people's attention on that time of fullness of salvation when the Lord comes again. Meanwhile we live in a time that demands patient waiting.

Introduction: There was a poor woman in Atlanta, Georgia, who for years had been supported entirely by charity. During this time she suffered from a disease that brought her great suffering. Now she was at the point of death and every moment was thought to be her last. Knowing her great faith, her friends were almost hoping for the moment of release. One of them said to the woman, "Are you ready to go?" "Yes," she said,

READY TO GO, BUT WILLING TO WAIT!

On the basis of today's text we see that this is a fine Advent motto for us all.

- I. Our confidence is based on the promises of our Advent Lord.
 - A. We know the promises fulfilled in His first coming.
 1. The promised Burden-bearer was described by the prophets. (See esp. Is 53, et. al.)
 2. In His ministry to people Jesus did bring relief to people suffering under sin and its consequences (today's Gospel).

3. Jesus is still touching people with His healing, renewing power today (Mt 11:28. The preacher should give current illustrations of Jesus' activity among the members of the congregation.)

By faith and experience we know the Lord has kept His promises of salvation. But what we have seen is only the beginning.

- B. We confidently await the fullness of glory yet to come when Christ comes again (vv7-8, also the symbolic picture of His kingdom in the O.T. Lesson).

1. We will see Jesus face to face and be like Him (1 Jn 3:1-2).
2. We will have the fullness of His eternal presence (Eph 1; Re 21:4; Ps 16:11; Ro 8:18).

Many Christians take God's promises in Christ rather lightly and yet how beautiful, rich, and full they really are!

- II. Knowing the promises works in us the patience needed for waiting through the "delays" before fulfillment (v7, Ro 5:3.5).

- A. Believers are definitely not exempt from burdens.

1. Persecution and injustice are common and to be expected (context, v10, Mt 5:11).
2. The Lord disciplines His people as He sees need (He 12).
3. Impatience under trials only adds to our problems (v9).

- B. We need to learn to "wait on the Lord" (Ps 27:14).

1. Christian patience is not Stoic resignation, "What will be will be."
2. It is rather a confident going with the will of the Lord, knowing that He has His purposes at work (Ro 8:28).

Patience is a Christian virtue much more sorely needed in our lives than most of us would admit. It is not easy to have or practice.

- III. Whatever happens we know the presence of the Lord's strength and help.

- A. This is the message of the incarnation we are preparing to celebrate soon.

- B. It continues among us through our faithful use of the Word and Sacraments.

Under the gracious instruction and comfort of the Holy Spirit we who know the Savior who has come and the Lord who is yet to come are able to face the "todays" of life with patience, confidence, and a sure hope.

Edwin H. Dubberke
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FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 1:1-7

December 21, 1980

In this lengthy introduction and address for his letter to the Roman believers the apostle seeks to establish his authority and credibility. He is a privileged slave (*doulos*) of Christ set apart (*aphorismenos*) for the Gospel. As he identifies that Gospel, Paul gives a most excellent summary of what it is, the Good News that God both promised and sent His Son to and for the world. The goal of his apostleship is to bring about obedience of faith (*hupakoen pisteos*) everywhere, in this letter especially to the saints in Rome. His vocation is more than a greeting; it is his sincere desire that his readers truly have grace (*charis*) and peace (*eirene*). The preacher on this Sunday should have this same purpose for his hearers rather than merely a rehearsal of who Paul was.

Introduction: A little boy who was the victim of a slum and a foster parent who abused him found great delight in gazing at the beautiful Christmas toys in store windows. He knew they were not for him because there was always the

glass between. One day he was run over and woke up in a hospital. When Christmas came, he was suddenly showered with gifts by those who cared for him in the hospital. In disbelief he stretched out his hands and said, "Presents for me?" The purpose of Advent and especially the lessons today is to guide people to the center and joy of Christ's birth that, as they look toward it, they too may gasp in amazement:

" A PRESENT FOR ME?"

It is beautifully summarized in the familiar words: v7b.

- I. Grace is the very heart of God's great gift to the world. Despite who we are and what we are, God does have a gift for each of us in the celebration that is just ahead of us.
 - A. This familiar and common word needs closer examination.
 1. Two shades of meaning of *charis* are:
 - a. That which bestows pleasure, sheer beauty.
 - b. Totally undeserved generosity in a gift.
 2. God's perfect Christmas gift is grace in the fullest meaning of the word (hymn 646, st. 3).
 - B. The Gospel is a declaration of pure grace.
 1. Grace moved God to give the promise of the "Seed of the woman" proclaimed by the prophets, v2.
 2. Grace moved God to send His own Son into our flesh, v3 (He 1:1-3a, Jn 1:14, Mt 1:18f, hymn 94, st. 2).
 3. Grace proclaimed Christ's deity and power in the resurrection, v4 (Ro 4:25, hymn 94, st. 3).

Oh, the beauty and wonder of grace as it is revealed in Jesus! God's forgiving love is so undeserved on our part, so generous on His part. But the real wonder is that it is aimed at each one of us — "For me!" "Grace to YOU . . . from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

- II. Peace is the blessed companion of the grace God has bestowed on us.
 - A. In view of the conflict that fills our personal lives as well as the world scene many question whether "Peace on earth" ever came.
 - B. Christ's peace is not absence of conflict and trouble but security and hope in it.
 1. Peace with God and full acceptance with Him is ours through Christ (Ro 5:1).
 2. This gives confidence that we are secure with Him no matter what happens (Ro 8:32 and 38-39).

EHD

CHRISTMAS DAY

Titus 2:11-14

December 25, 1980

Introduction: A few years ago a popular song was sung with the words, "Walk in my shoes." Some American Indians thought that the only way really to understand someone is to "walk in their moccasins." To understand another person we must attempt to walk in their circumstances and situation. To understand the poor, we have to become intimately acquainted with their sometimes bleak existence. To understand another person's belief, one must attempt to view life from his or her perspective. Christmas is a time when God appeared in order to walk in our shoes. Jesus was born so He could

WALK IN OUR SHOES

- I. Jesus walking in our shoes was a manifestation of God's grace.
 - A. Jesus, God's Son, was born of a woman.
 1. He came in our flesh to experience our sorrow, frustration, and pain, and the terrible consequences of our sins.
 2. He came in such poverty that He was laid in a manger. He showed God's grace by walking in our shoes. Not only the rich but the poor can feel affinity with Jesus.
 - B. God's grace appeared through Jesus to offer us salvation.
 1. He came to redeem us from lawlessness. We were under the Law, held captive in its condemnation and more ready to transgress the Law than to keep it.
 2. He walked in our shoes and on our behalf went to the cross, taking upon Himself our condemnation. Now by faith we have forgiveness of sins and freedom from the condemnation of the Law.
- II. Jesus walked in our shoes so we could walk in others' shoes. We see what Jesus did, but do not always see what we can do because Christ walked in our shoes.
 - A. He cleansed us so that we can live in a godly and sober manner.
 1. We have strength to live with a sense of moderation, as good stewards of our body and time.
 2. We strive to live in accordance with God's Law, loving others as He loved us.
 - B. Because He walked in our shoes, we walk as His chosen people.
 1. We are zealous for good works and willing to walk with others.

A member of our church is hospitalized. He is fearful, lonely, and anxious and needs someone who cares, someone to be with him. Are we willing to walk with that person by spending a little time with him or her?

2. We have the hope of the appearing again of Jesus to offer others. The glorious appearing of Christ on the last day is comforting to Christians.

Jesus walked in our shoes by becoming one with us in our flesh and in the circumstances of our life. That is God's grace in action. Now we can walk as redeemed people, empowered to do good deeds and so to walk in the shoes of others.

Dale Knutsen
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FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Galatians 4:4-7

December 28, 1980

Introduction: Christmas is over for another year. For the unbelieving world, it is certainly over. In fact, it was not really celebrated. Oh, gifts were exchanged and warm feelings were shared, but that is not Christmas. It is just the wrapping of Christmas. What about you? Is Christmas over, not to be thought of again for another year, not making a difference, not changing anything in your life? Our text presents to us *the* Gift of Christmas. It is intended to be received, opened all the way, and used every day. This is a good time to open the Gift, for the world's Christmas of commercialism and Santa Clauses and warm fuzzies is done with. Now we can look more carefully at the Gift and

OPEN THE GIFT ALL THE WAY!

- I. The Gift Partially Unwrapped: "Son born of a woman"
 - A. In God's full time it happened.
 1. This was not Caesar's time, not Herod's time.
 2. This was God's time according to God's timing.
 - B. God sent forth His Son.
 1. The miracle happened.
 2. It is a time of awe: "In the beginning was the Word . . ."
 - C. But here is where Christmas is often left in the wrappings.
 1. A manger, shepherds, wise men — a frozen manger scene in a store window, under a Christmas tree, on a church's snow-covered lawn.
 2. The Gift can easily be put away without asking, "Why?"
- II. Unwrapping the Gift More: "born under the Law"
 - A. This part of the story is not very pretty.
 1. It calls for looking behind ourselves at ourselves.
 2. It calls for seeing the deathly darkness that cripples marriages, ruins families, worships things, and twists governments and nations.
 3. To Karl Menninger's questioning book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, the answer is apparent: It got sugar-coated with excuses, rationalizations, denials, and worldly Christmases!
 - B. Why did He come?
 1. O. P. Kretzmann in *Hosanna in the Whirlwind*: "It had to happen because we were so bad" (page 37).
 2. The Law of God had to be satisfied, and we cannot do it.
 3. Yet we still cannot stop here, merely lamenting sin, stopped by guilt, restless and filled with undefined but certain dread.
- III. Unwrapping the Gift More: "To redeem those under the Law"
 - A. The manger is cross-shaped.
 1. Christmas without Good Friday is meaningless and hopeless.
 2. This birth would be just another birth, another statistic.
 - B. Mary's Child is Emmanuel, God with us, all the way to the cross.
 1. In the midst of His life is death.
 2. In the midst of His death there will be life.
 3. Yet we still cannot stop here, for the Gift is still waiting to be unwrapped all the way.
- IV. Unwrapping the Gift More: "adoption as sons"
 - A. It could have read "slaves" or "robots."
 1. But this is not life in the fullness of God's love.
 2. This is why God did not "shout" His love; He lived it among us into our hearts.
 - B. To be a "son" is to be part of the family of God.
 - C. Happy Birthday, sons and daughters of God! But there is still more.
- V. Unwrapping the Gift Even More: "sent forth His Spirit crying, 'Abba, Father'"
 - A. This is the first word of God's child.
 - B. This call is simple and childlike. Thank God!
- VI. We Look Forward to the Final Unwrapping: "an heir"
 - A. We live with the promise of an inheritor.
 - B. Christmas is the beginning of the Gift of eternal life.

Happy Christmas, child of the Child! God has sent you the Gift of the Christmas. Open the Gift all the way. Your name is on it. It is meant for you. Let the Gift unwrap your life that God may wrap you in Himself!

Richard G. Kapfer
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THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

January 4, 1981

Introduction: Christmas is a time for celebration. We celebrate with family reunions as we come together for the holidays to share our unity. We celebrate through the exchanging of gifts as a symbol of our love. We celebrate with parties to generate the feeling of "good will to men." But these are only worldly reflections of that which is our real cause for celebration in this festive season. As we are still in the near shadow of the Feast of the Nativity in which we celebrated our Lord's incarnation, let us continue our festive mood this morning by saying with Paul, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places . . ." (v3).

LET US PRAISE GOD FOR CHRIST'S BIRTH AND OUR ADOPTION

- I. Christ's birth and our adoption have their roots in the past.
 - A. The Father in eternity chose His Son to be the Savior (4 — "He chose us *in Him*"; v5 — "He destined us . . . to be His sons *through Jesus Christ*.").
 1. The Father foresaw that Adam and Eve would plunge the world into sin and that man would be helpless to save himself.
 2. The Father proclaimed the remedy, first to Adam and Eve (Gn 3:15 and Ps 22; Is 53).
 - B. The Father in eternity chose us to be His children (vv 4-6; Ro 8:28-30).
 1. Our election took place before the foundation of the world was laid (v4); before we were born (Ro 9:11).
 2. Our election was motivated by love (v5; Jn 3:16).
 3. Our election was effected by grace (v6; 2 Tm 1:9; Eph 2:8,9).
- II. Christ's birth and our adoption became realities in time.
 - A. At God's appointed time, the Word became flesh (Jn 1:14; Ga 4:4-5).
 Illustration (Kierkegaard): A prince, after visiting a village in his kingdom, found a maiden he wanted for his wife. Should he take her by force or impress her with his royalty? No, he decided, the girl would be his but she might never love him. Rather, disguised as a common laborer, he went and worked in that village and won the girl's love.
 1. Christ came into the world an infant, born of the Virgin Mary. Irenaeus: "He (Christ) came to save all persons by Himself; all, I mean, who by Him are regenerated (baptized) into God; infants and little ones, and children, and youths and elder persons. Therefore He went through the several ages: for infants being made an infant, sanctifying infants, to little ones He was made a little one, sanctifying those of that age, and also giving them an example of godliness, justice, and dutifulness; to youth He was a youth," etc.
 2. He grew to manhood to keep the Law perfectly in our stead (He 7:26).
 3. He suffered, died, and rose again for our salvation.
 - B. In God's appointed time, we became flesh so that we might receive adoption as sons (v5).
 1. We came into the world as sinners, deserving eternal death (Jn 3:5-6; Ro 5:12; Ro 6:23; Jas 1:15).
 2. By grace, through baptism, we became the adopted children of our heavenly Father (vv3-4, Phillips; Ro 8:14-15; I Cor 6:17-18).
 Illustration: As a judge declares an infant the child and heir of his adoptive parents (without any merit or conscious acknowledgment

on the infant's part), in like manner we are declared God's adopted children through baptism.

III. Christ's birth and our adoption should be celebrated now and through eternity (vv15-18).

- A. We celebrate the birthday of Christ with praise and thanksgiving.
 - 1. With festive voices we remember His birth in our yearly celebration of Christmas.
 - 2. With grateful hearts we proclaim the love of God through Christ to others and pray for their salvation and other needs (vv16-17).
- B. We celebrate our adoption through confession and service.
 - 1. Through eyes of faith we confess the hope that is in us (v18a).
 - 2. Through hands of faith we serve our fellowman (v15).
 Luther: "This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."
- C. There, we wait for the ultimate celebration in eternity when we will know "what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (v18b).

Ronald Irsch
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THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

Ephesians 3:2-12

January 6, 1981

This text is a parenthetical thought included in Paul's prayer to the Gentiles (3:1-21). Here the Apostle "dwells on the grace bestowed on him as apostle to the Gentiles, the high privilege of proclaiming to them their inclusion in the new people of God now realized in Christ Jesus" (Franzmann). V3: "mystery" — "To make known a mystery is to reveal it . . . Paul is speaking of the Gospel, the will of grace, the mystery hid from the ages during all these generations but now preached and published in all the world by Christ's messengers and fully manifest (Col 1:25,26). Paul is not speaking of some secret decree of God" (Lenski). V10: . . . "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." ". . . here the apostle stresses the fact that the holy angels praise God for being permitted to see how God gathers and builds His Church on earth. At the creation of the world they praised Him and shouted for joy. Here they sing a new song, praising His new creation. What an honor for the poor, despised Church on earth to have the angels look with pleasure upon the members of the Christian Church and for their sake to fill the heavens with songs of praise to God!" (Stoeckhardt).

Introduction: The Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord brings to mind the title of a television program that was popular some years ago. As a contestant, armed with a piece of mysterious information, proclaimed to a panel of celebrities, so Paul comes to us today to proclaim:

"I'VE GOT A SECRET"

- I. The Nature of Paul's Secret
 - A. Paul's secret is unlike the secrets of men.
 - 1. The secrets of men are sometimes purposely hidden. Illustration: The

majority of crimes are attempted or committed at night in an attempt to hide them.

2. The secrets of men are often those things of which we are ashamed — secret thoughts, words, and deeds.
- B. Paul's secret is a God-ordained secret.
 1. The secrets of God are such because they are beyond the understanding of man. Man's knowledge is limited (I Cor 1:18ff.) while God's is unlimited (I Cor 2:9-11).
 2. The secrets of God are for revelation, in time (vv5,8) or in eternity (I Cor 13:12).
- II The Content of Paul's Secret
 - A. It is the good news that Christ is the Savior (v11).
 - B. It is the good news that Christ is the Savior *of all* (vv6,8).
 1. In Christ Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike have the same inheritance (Col 1:27).
 2. In Christ Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike are members of the same body (Eph 4:5; I Cor 12:13).
 3. In Christ Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike are partakers of the same promise (Ro 1:16-17).
- III. The Proclaimers of Paul's Secret
 - A. The proclamation of the Gospel began already in the Old Testament.
 1. God first chose Israel to be His spokesmen (Ex 19:3-7) even though their knowledge of the Gospel was limited (vv4,5,9).
 2. When Israel fell away, the Lord appointed prophets to foretell the Savior's coming to the remnant of the faithful.
 - B. The proclamation of the Gospel reached a climax when the Savior was born.
 1. The shepherds heard the good news through angel messengers.
 2. The wise men were guided to the Savior by a star.
 - C. The proclamation of the Gospel continued in the apostolic age.
 1. Paul was a specially chosen vessel of God to proclaim the good news to the Gentiles (vv2,3,4,7,8).
 2. The apostles and prophets were also appointed as proclaimers of Paul's secret (v10).
 - D. The proclamation of Paul's secret continues today.
 1. The good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior is the old, old story that is ever new.
 2. The proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all is our responsibility and privilege today. Illustration: According to an old legend, when Christ returned to heaven the angels asked Him how He intended to keep the message of the Gospel alive. "That task I have given to the Church," was the Lord's reply. "But what if it fails?" the angels asked, "What is your alternate plan?" "I have no other plan," said the Lord.

Conclusion: Paul's secret, then, is no secret at all. It is the good news that God was made manifest in Christ Jesus so that we might receive the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (v8) — forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Let us not keep this secret to ourselves, but let us openly and boldly share it with others.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**Acts 10:34-38****January 11, 1981**

Vv34-35 focus on God's impartiality, which implies that His love is the same for all people and that all people are to be treated with uniform care and concern (Dt 10:17-19; Eph 6:9; Ac 10). V35 echoes Jas 2, which stresses good works as inevitably resulting from faith. "Fears" in v35 refers to the profound respect and awe shown to God by the person who realizes his absolute dependence on God's grace. Vv36-38 mark the beginning of an account of the earthly ministry of Jesus that Peter concludes in v41. God's impartiality of grace is rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who made peace between God and people. Anyone can be acceptable to God through faith in the good news of peace.

Introduction: Our treatment of others is often influenced by such things as power, wealth, education, and outward appearance. It is hard for us to be absolutely impartial. This text helps us to be less partial and more fair by reminding us that

GOD IS IMPARTIAL

- I. God treats everyone the same.
 - A. Outward circumstances do not determine how God treats people.
 1. Nationality is not significant. Peter had to learn this (Ac10).
 2. A person's being on the membership role of a church does not make him or her acceptable to God.
 3. Education, wealth, success do not determine a person's acceptability before God.
 - B. Anyone can have a saving relationship with God.
 1. Anyone who fears God is acceptable.
 - a. He stands in awe of God's power and deeds.
 - b. He realizes his absolute dependence on God's grace.
 2. Anyone who believes the good news of peace is acceptable to God.
 - a. Peace with God through Christ's life and death and resurrection.
 - b. Peace which flows from the forgiveness Christ earned.
- II. Since God treats everyone the same, we will try to treat people impartially.
 - A. Peter had difficulty doing this.
 1. He saw the vision three times.
 2. He still showed partiality (Ga 2:11ff.).
 - B. What a challenge it is to show impartiality!
 1. In the church to show that each brother and sister is equally important.
 2. In the world to show that each human being is the object of our sincere love and concern.

Conclusion: To say that God is impartial is to state a truth of great significance for our lives. We draw our life and purpose from God's impartial love. Our lives can then mirror the impartial love of God to those around us.

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SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**I Corinthians 1:1-9****January 18, 1981**

The salutation (vv1-3) and thanksgiving (vv4-9) are directed toward God. The

passive tenses (given, v4; enriched, v5; confirmed, v6; called, v9) and Paul's thanksgiving to "my" God emphasize what God has accomplished. "Paul is not complimenting the church; he is thanking God." "All speech" (v5) refers to the truth preached (Luther: "all doctrine"), while "all knowledge" is the truth apprehended. "The testimony to Christ" (v6) refers to Paul's own testimony concerning Jesus during his stay in Corinth (Ac 18:5). "Gift (v7) refers to blessings bestowed on all Christians and not to the "charismatic" gifts. In v8 "who shall confirm" can be taken as referring either to God or Christ. Both views have their difficulties. If Christ is referred to, then the following phrase, "our Lord Jesus Christ," seems unnecessary. If God is the antecedent of "who," He is nowhere mentioned in the immediate context. The opinion of this writer is that the phrase refers to God. "Blameless" (KJV) is used by Paul of our status before God in terms of justification (I Th 5:23; cf. Php 1:6) as well as of the quality of life a Christian can come to exhibit (Php 1:10; I Th 3:13). It seems best to understand blamelessness here in terms of both justification ("you were called into fellowship," v9) and sanctification ("not lacking in any gift," v7). The credit for both goes to God alone, who works them for us.

Introduction: It is easy to be worried or dissatisfied with the way things are. It takes real spiritual vision to see what God has done, and is doing. Even in the divided, troubled Corinthian church, Paul could see what God had done and give Him praise for it. We need that kind of perspective.

THANK GOD FOR HIS WORK IN US

- I. He has made us saints.
 - A. The testimony of Christ was confirmed in us.
 1. The apostolic word of Corinth.
 2. The same apostolic New Testament word to us today.
 - B. We are among those who call upon the name of the Lord.
 1. We know our spiritual helplessness.
 2. We call upon the only name given by which we shall be saved (Ac 4:12).

He has given us gifts.

 - A. All speech — the wonderful, pure proclamation of the unchanging truth of God's Word.
 - B. All understanding — the gift of grasping and believing the Word.
 - C. Living in the expectation of Christ's final revelation — all these are gifts of God and evidences of His grace.
- III. He will keep us until the end.
 - A. We can remain calm and restful in Him, for He will sustain us.
 - B. On the Judgment Day we can stand before Him without reproach, for He cleansed us by His grace and enables us to serve Him.

Conclusion: Paul told the Philippians God was working in them both to will and to work His good pleasure (Php 2:13). It was the same for the Corinthians, and it is the same for us. Keep that perspective. Thank God for His work in us!

JAG

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 1:10-17

January 25, 1981

Introduction: After its annual Evangelism Sunday in which the guest minister encouraged the members to invite their neighbors and friends to church, one disturbed member spoke to the guest minister during the coffee-fellowship time.

"You don't invite your neighbors when you have a family quarrel." He was implying that the congregation was having some differences of opinion and were quarreling about them. Quarrels detract from the joy of the faith and hinder the church's outreach to others. How does a congregation deal with them? Paul gives us a pattern to follow.

HOW TO SETTLE DIFFERENCES IN THE CHURCH

I. Identify the differences.

A. In Corinth there were factions.

1. Paul had received the news from members of the household of Chloe who had visited Corinth (v11).
2. Paul calls them *schismata* (v10), translated variously as "divisions, dissensions, schisms." *Schismata* was the word used for rents in a garment. The congregation was torn by splits. *Erides* (v11) is translated "strifes" or "quarrels."

B. Each faction identified itself with a person.

1. *Paul*. Some Gentiles especially may have stretched Paul's emphasis on freedom, turning "liberty into license," forgetting that they were saved, not to be free to sin, but to be free not to sin.
2. *Apollos*, who was a Jew from Alexandria, "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures" (Ac 18:24). Alexandria was the center of Greek intellectual activity. There men made a science of allegorizing the Scriptures. Here is an example of what they did from the Epistle of Barnabas, which came from Alexandria. From comparing Gn 14:14 with 18:23 the conclusion is reached that Abraham circumcised 318 members of his household. In the Greek language letters are used for numbers. So the Greek for 18 is *iota* and *eta* which are the first two letters of the name Jesus. The Greek for 300 is the letter *tau*, which is the shape of the cross. Therefore, the incident from the life of Abraham is seen as a foretelling of the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross.
3. *Cephas* is the Jewish form of the Greek word "Peter." Those who called themselves his followers were probably mostly Jews who sought to keep the Jewish laws, Judaizers or legalists.
4. *Christ*. Those who called themselves his followers may have been self-righteous Christians who claimed that they were the best Christians in the whole congregation — intolerant, self-righteous.

C. Identify the differences in our congregation.

1. Some differences of opinion concern maintenance matters.
2. Are there differences in more serious matters — doctrine, practice, mission?
3. There is the temptation to act like the factions in Corinth:
 - a. To seek freedom without responsibility.
 - b. To intellectualize the faith.
 - c. To be legalistic.
 - d. To be intolerant, self-righteous.

II. Understand the reason for the differences.

A. Human nature.

1. Basic selfishness, self-centeredness.
2. Pride — refusal to submit.
3. Envy and jealousy.

B. The influence of the devil. "The old evil foe now means deadly woe."

1. He causes misunderstanding.
 2. He confuses our loyalties.
- III. Deal positively with the differences.
- A. Approach with a loving spirit. Consider the example of Paul, who calls the Corinthians "brothers" (vv10-11) and beseeches, does not command (v10). See also Php 2:2.
 - B. Point to Jesus Christ.
 1. We are called to faith (vv2,9,26) by the grace given in Christ Jesus (v4).
 2. Christ is not divided (v13). Luther did not want to be called a Lutheran. He said in his earthy way: "Who am I, a miserable, stinking, foul bag of maggots, that the Church of Jesus Christ should be called by my miserable name. I am and will be no one's master. Enough for me is the sweet name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him I will always sing my song. If anyone will not sing with me, let him howl if he likes by himself."
 - C. Point to the unity of the church.
 1. We are joined together in fellowship (v10). The word "knit," *katērtismenoi*, is a medical term used of bones knitting together after a fracture. Note "same mind" and "same opinion."
 2. In this way God is glorified, Ro 15:5-6; Gn 13:11.
 - D. Point to the mission of the church.
 1. The church is sent to *euangelizesthai*, "evangelize" (v17). Paul is not belittling baptism. He baptized special converts. Stephanas was probably the first convert (1 Cor 16:15). Crispus was one the ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth (ac 18:8). Gaius had probably been Paul's host (Ro 16:23). Paul was glad the Corinthians could not use his baptism of them in fostering their factions, because he wanted only to point them to Christ.
 2. The church needs unity to accomplish its mission. Ph 1:27.

Conclusion: Instead of "in the name of Paul" they were baptized "in the name of Jesus." As a soldier swore loyalty "into the name of Caesar" so a Christian by his baptism was giving his loyalty unconditionally to Jesus Christ. It is His cross which has the power to change and unite His church (vv17,18,24,30).

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

February 1, 1981

Introduction: "Boast" is usually a negative word — something we do not want to be accused of. The dictionary gives the definition: "to brag; to speak of one's self or belongings in assertive and bombastic terms." Popular proverbs associate boasting with ignorance, pride, and lying: "A boaster and a liar are cousins"; "He that boasts of his own knowledge proclaims his ignorance." Kipling in *Mary's Son* penned these words: "If you stop to consider the work you have done and to boast what your labour is worth, dear, Angels may come for you, Willie, my son, but you'll never be wanted on earth, dear!" Yet our text today closes with an encouragement to boast, but then suggests that we learn how to boast properly. "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."

LEARN TO BOAST

I. The Encouragement of Boasting

- A. "Boast" (*kauchasthō*) is imperative. Paul quotes Jr 9:23-24 according to the LXX. The KJV translates the word "glory," as the RSV does, e.g. in 2 Cor 10-12, where Paul uses the word *kauchaomai* 20 times.
- B. The boasting must be done "in the Lord" (*en kuriō*). V31 is the climax of chapter 1, pointing to the power of the cross rather than man's wisdom. This theme is consistent with other passages of Scripture — Ps 44:8; 34:2; Ga 6:14.

II. The Basis of Boasting

- A. Not human wisdom. "God made foolish the wisdom of the world" (v20).
 - 1. The wisdom of the Jews. "The cross is a stumbling block to the Jews" (v23). The cross was a sign of accursedness (Dt 21:23).
 - 2. The wisdom of the Greeks — v23, "folly"; v22, "wisdom" (*sophia*). The Greek "wise man" was a "sophist," a word which came to mean a man "with a clever mind and cunning tongue, a mental acrobat, a man who with glittering tongue and persuasive rhetoric could make the worse appear the better reason." He spent endless hours in hair-splitting trifles. The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words. To them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected. But Paul disavowed "eloquent wisdom" (v17) and relied upon the cross alone.
- B. Not human accomplishments. V26: Most of the Christians in Corinth were not, according to human standards, "wise," "powerful," or "of noble birth." Jesus was a friend of sinners and publicans. Not many "rulers" believed (John 7:48). The Sanhedrin considered the apostles "unlearned and ignorant" (Ac 4:13). One of the reasons for which the early church was ridiculed was that it consisted largely of slaves and common people. Celsus in 178 A. D. wrote a bitter attack against Christianity: "workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and clownish of men were zealous preachers of the Gospel..." Augustine said, "God caught orators by fishermen and not fisherman by orators." But there were some Christians of the wealthier and educated class. In the New Testament there was Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus of the Council, Sergius Paulus, governor of Crete (Ac 13:6-12), and Dionysius of Athens (Ac 17:34). But God chose what is foolish to the world to shame the wise (v27). "God chose what is low and despised . . . that no human being might boast" (vv27-28). There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. A slave was a "living tool" to be treated like a hoe or a spade — tortured, abused, killed, discarded at will. Christianity treated the slaves as people and brought respect to women and children.

III. Boasting in Jesus Christ (v30).

- A. He is our wisdom (*sophia*). God made him our "wisdom." "This *sophia* consists of all the gracious, heavenly, and efficacious thoughts of God that are embodied in Christ Jesus." He is the Way, the Truth, the Life (John 14:6). *Illustration:* Diogenes used to complain that men flocked to the occultist and to the dentist but never to the man (he meant the philosopher) who could cure their souls. Is it any different today? People seek meaning in life, satisfaction, and fulfillment in the wisdom of the world rather than in the One who can cure and heal.
- B. He is our righteousness (*dikaioσunē*). "Righteousness" speaks of our being in a right relationship with God, because of the forensic act of God (2 Cor 5:21).

- C. He is our sanctification (*hagiasmos*). Sanctification in the narrow sense is meant here since it is subsequent to righteousness. Epicurus used to tell his disciples: "Live as if Epicurus always saw you." There is no "as if" for the Christian disciple. His Master walks with him every step. "The Gospel makes us not clever but clean, not ritualistic but righteous, not sanctimonious but sanctified, not revered but redeemed."
- D. He is our redemption (*apolutrōsis*). Christ paid the price by His death on the cross. We are delivered from bondage, set free. Tt 2:14; Ro 8:21-23; 1 Pe 1:18.

Conclusion: Cliff had lost his kidney as a result of diabetes. His brother donated one of his for a transplant. Then the disease took Cliff's eyesight. "Other than that I am in good health," he says, and he is headed for a school for the blind. On the plane he carried with him a small electronic device the size of a portable tape-recorder. "It's an opticon," he explained. "With this machine I am free. I can read. I move this little lens across a page while I hold my finger on this slide in the side of the opticon. The lens and the electronic gear translates the shape of each letter into small harmless pin-like pricks on my finger. Thus, I can feel the shape of each letter. It's like braille, but instant and electronic. However, it is slow reading since you must go letter by letter." What does Cliff boast about? What is the cause of his freedom? What do we boast about? Who is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption?

EJK

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

February 8, 1981

Corinth, from all descriptions, was a highly cosmopolitan city. Yet, according to 1 Cor 1:26, the Christians there were not noble, wise or mighty by the world's standards. They had a different kind of wisdom — Jesus Christ (1:30). Paul urges them not to be swayed by the diversions which Corinth offered. It was his extreme confidence in the facts put forth in 1:27-28 which led him to preach Christ and Him crucified rather than human wisdom. Lenski's assertion that the genitive, "testimony of God" (v1), may be subjective, referring to God's testimony to man, but may not be objective, "the testimony about God" (seen by Lenski as too general to mean the Gospel), is without proof. Whatever genitive it is, the testimony has "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (v2) as its central tenet.

In v4 Paul offers a contrast between the persuasive words of wisdom and the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The contrast stresses the difference between learned rhetoric and the Holy Spirit. Language devices may be used to give a message power and appeal, but to rely solely on such devices is dangerous for preaching and disastrous for the Gospel. V4 may also be seen as irony or sarcasm on Paul's part. He refused to come and preach to the Corinthians with "persuasive words of wisdom." Paul could well have come and impressed the Corinthians. He chose, however, to come and impress their hearts with the power of the cross.

The central thought of the text is that through the power of God — through the preaching of Jesus and the cross — comes faith that endures. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will rest his faith in the power of God rather than the wisdom of man.

Introduction: A power struggle involves two or more people attempting to exert their power on each other. The outcome is predictable. The person or group with the most power or influence always emerges on top. The power of

one group gives way to the power of the other. Because we Christians face trials and other situations in which the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh seek to overpower us, it is necessary that our faith be based on a power that will not give way to another. We need God's power as the basis for our faith.

IS OUR FAITH BASED ON GOD'S POWER?

- I. It is not if it is based solely on "superior" speech and wisdom.
 - A. There are many who offer such a basis.
 1. In Corinth there was much pseudo-intellectual pride. Fine words could tempt the Christians to follow a new way.
 2. We often look more at the form in which the message comes to us than at the message itself. Not just rock music or suave politicians catch our ear. Often we are captivated by "good preachers" who nevertheless fail to preach Christ and Him crucified.
 - B. Such a basis for faith is shaky at best.
 1. God has made the world's wisdom foolish (1:26ff).
 2. Faith founded on the wisdom of man cannot endure the tests of life. Such a faith has no guarantee that it will endure even until another persuader comes along.
- II. It is, if it is based on Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.
 - A. This is the central tenet of Christianity.
 1. Although Paul could have come with persuasive words of human wisdom to this group of people, he came instead with the message of Christ and the cross. He determined to know nothing but "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (v2).
 2. The message of Christ's death and resurrection is God's way of coming to us, of telling us that we matter to Him, and of bringing us to Himself.
 - B. With this message come the Spirit and power of God.
 1. Paul's preaching found its power here (cf. Ro 10:17; 1Cor 12:3).
 2. Such a power will not falter nor fail. The message of God's redemption of the world through Christ's death on the cross is all that is needed to bring us to God. A faith based on that message is faith based on God's power which can and will shore up a weak faith.

Conclusion: We do face power struggles in our lives. When your faith rests on God's power, you can be assured of strength in time of weakness. God's power is being offered to you now through the cross of Christ. It is a power that will not let you down.

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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

February 15, 1981

The proper understanding of this text hinges on how one understands the words "those who are mature" (v6 NASB). Some commentators suggest that this expression refers to those Christians among the Corinthians and especially in other congregations who were more mature in their faith and knowledge of God. The majority of commentators, however, understand Paul to be referring to all those who are Christians, which appears to be the most plausible interpretation. Accordingly, "wisdom" (v6) is not higher knowledge of God and deeper

understanding of His ways, but simply Christ and Him crucified (note 1:24).

The *de* of v6 ties the text to the immediately preceding thoughts expressed by Paul, in which he distinguishes between the wisdom of man and the power of God. Now he assures the Corinthians that he does indeed speak wisdom to them, the wisdom of God, predestined for their glory (as shown by the final clause of v7).

V8 presents a paradox. God's wisdom was to have Jesus crucified for the sins of the world. Yet had those who crucified Jesus known what they were doing, they would not have crucified Him. Here we see the humiliation and the exaltation of Jesus side by side: the Lord of glory crucified.

V9: "But just as it is written . . ." is to be combined with the "we speak" of v6. Thus v9 describes the wisdom Paul and the other apostles speak of (the most likely meaning of the plural "we" in vv6,7, and especially 10 and 12, where it is emphatic, being "the apostles").

V10: The Spirit who has revealed the mysteries of God — His wisdom in the cross — can be trusted. He who "searches all things, even the depths of God" has revealed these things to the apostles. No one can know the things of God ("thoughts," NASB) except the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can reveal God's nature. And the apostles have received no other spirit than the "Spirit who is from God" (v12).

The central thought of the text is that the mystery of God's wisdom taught by Paul and the other apostles is not understood by human wisdom but by the Holy Spirit. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will recognize the uniqueness of God's wisdom in the cross of Christ and not in the events of the world.

Introduction: Most of us like to consider ourselves mature. We strive to grow and learn in our daily lives so that we can meet each new challenge in a mature way. We want others to consider us mature. In our text Paul uses the term mature to describe Christians. He goes on to tell us that

GOD'S WISDOM IS FOR MATURE PEOPLE

- I. God's wisdom is not grasped by the immature of this age.
 - A. It is hidden from them.
 1. We cannot see God's nature on our own. We do not know what God is like without God's revelation. Our natural knowledge is limited. This limitation manifests itself in self-righteous attitudes and in despisal of God and His way.
 2. Those whose thoughts are entirely centered in this age will not see this wisdom.
 - B. Even when God's wisdom is seen, it is not always recognized.
 1. Those who crucified the Lord of glory did not recognize God's wisdom. They did not know what they did. Had they known, they would not have crucified Him.
 2. We did not crucify Christ, we were not there. Yet our sins were laid upon Him, making His death even more painful. Still we wonder why Jesus had to be crucified. We doubt the wisdom of God in the face of adversity.

Transition: If you are looking to the world for confirmation of God's wisdom in Christ and the cross, then you are looking in the wrong place. Often we find ourselves doing this. That is why it is important to hear God's wisdom — Christ and His cross — again and again so that we would grow in this wisdom.

II. God's wisdom is embraced by His mature people.

A. God's wisdom is predestined for our glory.

1. God's purpose in this wisdom is not to confuse and confound us. He has not predestined this wisdom merely to impress us with His greatness.
2. His wisdom is for our glory. God's wisdom is not just an inwardly turned contemplation but an outwardly turned love.

B. God reveals His wisdom to us.

1. No one knows God as God's Spirit does. He searches even the depths of God's nature. Then He tells us about God through the Scriptures. He can be trusted. His knowledge is trustworthy.
2. Paul and the apostles received this Spirit. Through them we too may know God. We may possess this wisdom. We may enjoy the blessings it brings. God wants us to embrace this wisdom by faith and to enjoy its blessings.

Conclusion: When we look to the world we will not see or enjoy the blessings of God's wisdom. God has revealed to us a different and better kind of wisdom. That wisdom which centers in the cross of Christ makes and keeps us spiritually mature.

DLB

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

February 22, 1981

As the Church encounters the evil forces of the world, conflict results. Church workers begin fighting one another instead of their common enemy. This same tendency shows itself when the morale of a team collapses when it gets behind in a contest. St. Paul wants us to transcend this human tendency. He draws attention to the functions of the persons of the Holy Trinity in the task of empowering, sustaining, and encouraging us in our part in the process of

BUILDING UP THE CHURCH

I. God commissions us to build up the Church.

A. God commissions the architectural plans.

B. God commissions the contract for the building process.

1. A skilled master builder is in charge of each task.
2. He provides instructive guidelines on how one is to build.

II. Jesus Christ provides the foundation for building up the Church.

A. All other foundations are excluded.

1. Exclusion of personality cults.
2. Exclusion of perishable foundations.

B. Jesus Christ provides an imperishable foundation.

III. The Holy Spirit dwells in those who build the Church.

A. He excludes the destroyers of God's temple who will themselves be destroyed.

1. Getting rid of futile worldly wisdom.
2. Getting rid of short-sighted craftiness.

B. The Holy Spirit builds up the church builders.

1. He relates us to our work in an encouraging way saying, "All things are yours . . .": (a) world, (b) life, (c) death, (d) present, (e) future.
2. He puts us into the possession of Christ.
 - a. As Christ is God's and the Father and Son are one, so we are

Christ's.

- b. Our Spirit-given relationship to Christ sustains us through all of the process of building up the Church.

Harold H. Zietlow

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

2 Peter 1:16-19 (20-21)

March 1, 1981

We need the assurance of God's helpful presence in Jesus Christ for forgiveness, providential protection, healing, comfort, and faith in His coming again in majestic glory to fulfill our salvation. The methodical references to the acts of the three persons of the Triune God in 2 Peter 1:16-21 observed by eye-witnesses provide the needed assurance now as it did for those whom Peter addressed. Christ's transfiguration foreshadows His majestic glory when He shall come again. The voice of the Father ascertaining Jesus' majesty adds sound to the picture track of the moving documentary cinema of Christ's authority to forgive, help, and save us. The Holy Spirit, like a mighty, rushing wind moving a ship, moves the holy writers to record the story with all of the details of the

WITNESSES TO CHRIST'S MAJESTY

- I. Eye-witnesses testify of Christ's majestic power and coming.
 - A. The "power" of our Lord Jesus Christ witnesses to His majesty.
 - 1. The eye-witnesses did not follow cleverly devised myths.
 - 2. The eye-witnesses testified of what they had seen.
 - B. The manner of Christ's "coming" witnesses to His majesty.
 - 1. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 2. The coming of Christ into the lives of people today.
- II. Ear-witnesses of the voice of God the Father testify of Christ's majesty.
 - A. The voice borne from heaven gives authority to the witnesses of Christ's majesty.
 - B. Those with Jesus on the holy mountain of transfiguration witnessed His majesty.
- III. Heart-witnesses of the Holy Spirit's prophetic message testify of Christ's majesty.
 - A. We pay attention to the prophetic word.
 - 1. It is like a lamp shining in a dark place (our culture too).
 - 2. The prophetic word given by the Holy Spirit sustains us until the day dawns in the transformation of our situation.
 - B. The Holy Spirit witnesses to our hearts, deepening our understanding of His inspiration of the prophetic writers.
 - 1. No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.
 - 2. No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man.
 - 3. Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, and their message of promise sustains us until the return of the majestic Savior.

HHZ

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 5:12, 17-19

March 8, 1981

Much of what is called "religion" in America today is really only human opinion and speculation. As people consider the great questions surrounding

their status before God and their eternal destiny they are concerned to know the *facts* of religion and not theories which can never engender spiritual confidence. This text affords the pastor the golden opportunity to present the two essential facts of true religion: (1.) All people are sinners by nature and under God's wrath; (2.) All people have been justified by God through the person and work of Christ (i.e., objective justification).

Textual notes: V12: *dī henos anthrōpou* certainly assumes and requires the historicity of Adam and Eve and the Fall account in Gn 3, as does the aorist verb *eiselthen. ho thanatos*: While people may deny or explain away sin, they cannot deny sin's curse since everyone experiences it sooner or later (since infants also die it must follow that infants are sinners and accountable for their inherited sin). *pantas anthropous . . . hemarton*: These words leave no person uncondemned before God; the *fact* of original sin must be emphasized in our contemporary milieu of religious pietism and moralism, which always seems to underestimate the seriousness of original sin, which "... is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again" (A.C.L. II). Luther reminds us that "this hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scripture . . . and recognized as the chief sin which is a root and fountainhead of all actual sin" (S.A.; F.C.). Vv17-19 — while we would concur with Lenski that the present participle *lambanontes* refers to "subjective justification," we would take exception to Lenski's bold denial of objective justification (p.382): "This logical future is stressed especially by those who take Paul's words to mean that all men were justified, pardoned, forgiven more than 1900 years ago . . . we have shown the untenableness of this opinion." Vv18 and 19 clearly teach that, while through Adam there is universal culpability, through Christ there is universal justification (cf. Kretzmann's discussion of v18ff); *iēs doreas* in v17 clearly excludes all works and self-righteousness.

Introduction: So much that is passed off as "religion" today is pure human speculation. In matters as important as our eternal destiny and salvation we want and need the facts.

LET'S HAVE THE FACTS ABOUT RELIGION!

There are two facts we must know:

- I Every human being by nature is a sinner under God's wrath.
 - A. God condemned the entire human race when Adam fell into sin (vv12a, 18a, 19a).
 - B. Our own experience shows that we have inherited Adam's sin since we have obviously inherited the curse on his sin (vv12b, 17a).

Transition: This fact condemns and terrifies us all. But there is another glorious fact we must know which can give us the peace of mind and eternal hope we need.

- II. Every human being has been declared "not guilty" by God.
 - A. Having taken the place for fallen humanity Jesus Christ has earned this "not guilty" verdict from God for the entire human race (vv18b, 19b).
 - B. Through faith in Jesus and His work we can be confident that we will live and rule as kings before God (v17b).
 - C. It is through God's Word and Sacraments that we receive the salvation which Christ earned for the world (v17b, "*hoi . . . lambanontes*").

Conclusion: Our hope for salvation is not based on any human speculation. It is a fact that we are all sinners as the Scriptures tell us only too clearly and as our own experience shows us. But it is also a glorious fact that God

has declared us all not guilty through Christ. Let facts be facts! Live in the certain confidence and joy that you are God's forgiven child as He has told you in His Word and Sacraments.

Steven C. Briel
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SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

March 15, 1981

Synergism has always been a bane for the Christian church. The Christian is always tempted to believe that he can cooperate with God in some small way for his salvation. In the face of all synergism the Christian pastor must cry out with our Lutheran fathers: *Sola Fide!*, "Faith alone!" But even here the pastor must be cautious lest he give the impression that the relative strength of one's faith is a contributing cause to the sinner's justification before God as do many of the fundamentalistic sects in America today. It is the object of faith which justifies — Christ Jesus and His objective atonement for the world! The believer must always be encouraged to look outside himself to God's promises in Word and Sacrament.

Textual notes: V3: *hē graphē*: This is Paul's court of appeal and must always be ours too. *tō theō*: Abraham was not justified merely because he believed, but because he believed *in God*; the forensic nature of *dikaiois* and its cognates must be emphasized — a sinner does not become righteous intrinsically through gifts of grace as Romanism teaches, but is declared innocent by God's gracious verdict for Christ's sake. V5: Paul places side by side the two words *ergazomeno* and *pisteuonti* to highlight the contrast between the two. *epi ton dikaiounta ton asebe*: Again, it is the *object* of faith which Paul emphasizes; furthermore, the forensic nature of justification is clearly taught in this phrase. V13: Note the vivid contrast between works and faith emphasized in the two phrases *ou gar dia nomou* and *alla* (strong adversative) *dia . . . pisteos*. V14: This is a general principle, that the Law always works wrath ("*katergazetai*" is present tense; the word is not *thumos*, an anger which boils up quickly, but *orge*, a settled, purposeful anger), as our Lutheran Confessions say, "*Lex semper accusans*". V 16: "*bebaian*" — One's salvation and status before a holy God can only be certain if based upon the certain foundation of God's grace alone, for, as Melancthon points out in Apology III, "If the remission of sins depends upon the condition of our works, it is altogether uncertain. For we can never be certain whether we do enough works, or whether our works are sufficiently holy and pure."

Introduction: "*Sola Fide*," "Faith Alone!" This was the battlecry in the Lutheran Reformation. That is, God accepts us sinners to Himself solely and entirely upon the basis of our trust in His promise of forgiveness which Christ has earned for the world. However, people are always tempted to believe that they must do something for God to be His children. But in response to this St. Paul reminds us

WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN BY FAITH ALONE!

I. God has always accepted people into His family or church on the basis of faith alone.

A. Even Abraham, the great Old Testament patriarch, was considered God's child simply because he trusted God's promise (vv3, 13, 17).

B. It is a general principle that no one can earn God's promises (vv4, 16).

Transition: God has always accepted people into His family upon the basis of faith in His promises alone because —

II. There is no other way in which we sinners could hope to stand before a holy God.

- A. Because we are imperfect sinners, God's perfect Law only intensifies our hopelessness and terror before God's consuming anger (v15).
- B. Our only spiritual hope is found in God, who through the work and merits of Christ declares the sinner "not guilty" (v5).
- C. Trusting in the certain promise of God's forgiveness given us in Word and Sacrament, we can have absolute confidence in God's favor and in our status as God's own children (v16, *bebaian*).

Conclusion: May we never base our hope of salvation in ourselves nor permit anyone to put any conditions upon our forgiveness. We are God's children by faith in God's promise alone. May we live and die with this confession on our lips — "Faith Alone!"

SCB

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Ephesians 5:8-14

March 22, 1981

It is often remarked that the Bible, though written centuries ago, still speaks powerfully to our present age. The proof of the Scriptures' timelessness is seen in our text. These words of Paul present to us the admonition to be what we are — the children of light — and to live as such. The conflict we, God's children, have with the darkness is an ever-present problem. We must know who we are and what we are to be doing. Furthermore, we need to be cognizant of what darkness is and where it leads us. In an age when there is such complacency and confusion about Christian living, Paul presents a very clear and timely message. Much is said in both Old and New Testaments about light and darkness. Of special interest are the use of the terms in John's Gospel and letters. The goal of the sermon is to show the urgency with which we are to pursue a life of obedience to the will of God.

Introduction: We need light for survival. We are not equipped to function in the dark. It is no wonder that light is used to signify that which is good and life-sustaining and darkness used to indicate all that is evil. The Apostle Paul uses these terms to teach important truths about the way in which we should live as God's people.

LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

- I. Living in darkness leads to death.
 - A. The darkness is sin and its power.
 - 1. Sin is the transgression of the Law.
 - 2. The source and power of sin is found in Satan.
 - B. Darkness produces unfruitful works (v11a).
 - 1. Paul speaks of the Ephesians' unfruitful works (Eph 2:2).
 - 2. The media are filled with stories of the unfruitful works of our time.
 - 3. We also produce unfruitful works (See Eph 2:3).
 - C. The consequence of darkness is God's punishment.
 - 1. By God's authority the government recognizes evil and punishes it.
 - 2. The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23).
 - 3. Jesus, the all-knowing Judge, will punish unrepentant sinners eternally.
- II. Living in the light leads to life.
 - A. Living in the light means we have the light of Christ (Jn 1:4).

1. Christ is the light of the world (Jn 8:12).
2. He did not sin.
3. He paid for sin.
4. He was victorious over sin and death.
- B. Living in the light means that we let our light shine (Mt 5:16).
 1. We seek out goodness, righteousness, and truth (v9).
 2. We examine our behavior so that we may be certain that it pleases God (v10).
- C. Living in the light means that we must react against darkness.
 1. We are to avoid its evil works (v11a).
 2. We are to reprove its shameful deeds (v11b).

Conclusion. Darkness is still very much present in our world. Its end is death. Our only hope is in Christ, the light of the world. He has brought us into His light. Let us, therefore, obey the admonition of the Apostle here and live as children of light!

Gerhard Bode
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FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 8:1-10

March 29, 1981

From the "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" of chapter seven, we come to the beautiful exclamation, "There is now therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus!" The entire eighth chapter of Romans speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit and the new life which He brings to us. It is a beautiful chapter of comfort. "No condemnation!" What an exhilarating statement! What joy it brings to us! And how great a response of thanksgiving it calls forth from us, poor miserable sinners that we are! Paul in these verses brings into sharp focus the difference between life in the Spirit and life after the flesh. We also see here a beautiful and clear description of how God justifies the sinner (vv3-4). The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearers to understand more fully the life which the Holy Spirit brings to us as forgiven sinners.

Introduction: Nothing is impossible with God. He can do anything. We are impressed by His ability to create a vast universe and our marvelous earth. But His greatest work is to take us sinners who are deserving only of eternal punishment and declare us "not guilty" because of the work of His Son. Now, as believers, the old life after the flesh is to be put aside. Now we have life after the Spirit. Yes, thanks be to God, we have life in the Spirit!

THANKS BE TO GOD — WE HAVE LIFE IN THE SPIRIT!

- I. Life in the Spirit means no condemnation (v1).
 - A. We have freedom from sin and death (v2).
 1. Sin and death are our greatest enemies.
 2. By ourselves we are incapable of conquering them.
 - B. God sent His son in the likeness of human flesh to become sin for us (v3).
 1. God did what the Law could not do (v3).
 2. In Christ the just requirement of the Law has been satisfied (v4).
- II. Life in the Spirit means transformation.
 - A. We no longer live after the flesh (v4).
 1. Those who live after the flesh seek the flesh (v5).
 2. They are hostile toward God (v7).

3. They do not submit to God's Law (v7).
4. They cannot please God (v8).
5. They end in death (v6).
- B. Now we live after the Spirit.
 1. We set our minds on the Spirit (v5).
 2. We have peace and life (v6).

Conclusion: Let us give thanks to a loving and merciful God who has done what no one else could do — save sinners. Let us give thanks by living for Him — by celebrating the life we have in the Spirit!

GB

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 8:11-19

April 5, 1981

V11: "If": the if of reality. "The Spirit dwells in you," Jn 14:16-18, 23. "Quicken your mortal bodies": see 1 Cor 15:53ff. We are wholly redeemed, body and soul; cf. Jn 6:39-40, 44-45. "By the Spirit": because of the Spirit. Note that the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned. V12: "Debtors": people under obligation. "Flesh": the flesh viewed as a power. We are debtors to the Spirit, Ga 3:26. V13: "To die": to die forever. "Through the spirit": through the new spiritual nature. "Mortify": if you keep up this killing, you will continue to live, Ga 5:24; 1 Cor 9:27. V14: "Spirit of God": the efficient cause. "Sons": sons by adoption. V15: "Fear": the slavish dread of punishment. "Spirit of adoption": our spirit, Ga 4:6, the new spiritual nature. "Cry": exclaim, like a boy in distress who cries, "Father." "Abba": Aramaic for father. V16: "The Spirit testifies" through the written Word. "Children of God" are born in regeneration. V17: "Heirs": cf. Ga 4:7. Our inheritance is what God has promised, eternal life. "Joint heirs": co-heirs. Christ is the supreme heir who has entered His inheritance, cf. 1 Cor 15:23. "Suffer with Him": suffer for His sake, Mt 10:38; 16:24; Ga 6:12. To evade the suffering is to refuse to bear the cross, Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23. V18: "Which shall be revealed": which is about to be revealed. "Sufferings of this present time": suffering in general, He 12:4-12. "Not worthy": the idea is that of weight. The glory outweighs the suffering, 1 Jn 3:2. V19: "For the creation's watching with outstretched head is waiting it out for the revelation of the sons of God." "With outstretched head": intently. "The creation": the creature world.

Introduction: Plastic surgery is a modern wonder. It can recreate a face marred in an automobile accident. We have been recreated spiritually.

YOU ARE A NEW PERSON

- I. We are children of God.
 - A. We have received the spirit of adoption (v15).
 1. By nature we could only be afraid (v15) because we were sinful and deserved punishment.
 2. The Holy Spirit regenerated us through the Word, Tt 3:5; Jn 3:1-15; Ro 1:16-17.
 - B. Now we have a new spiritual life.
 1. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (v16), Ro 5:5.
 2. He pours into our hearts holy desires, like prayer (v15), Ro 7:22.
 - C. Now we have the call to live like children.
 1. We are not debtors to the flesh (v12).
 - a. Our sinful nature tempts us, Ro 7:18.

b. To live to the flesh brings death (v13).

2. We are to mortify the deeds of the body (v13), Ga 5:24; 1 Cor 9:27.

Application: Rejoice in being a child. Live like a child.

II. We are heirs.

A. Now we may have to endure suffering (vv17-18).

1. Much of our suffering is self-inflicted.

2. The Lord chastens whom He loves, He 12:6.

3. We suffer at times also for His sake and the Gospel's, Mt 10:10ff.

B. Yet we have the hope of glory (v18).

1. All creation looks forward to it (v19).

2. We shall receive it.

a. Our souls will be with Christ.

b. On the last day our bodies will be raised and glorified (v11), 1 Cor 15.

c. The glory shall outweigh the suffering of this life. We shall be forever with the Lord, 1 Th 4:17.

Application: "Fight on, my soul, till death shall bring thee to thy God."

Conclusion: Remade, indeed. Thanks to the Spirit we are children and heirs.

HJE

PALM SUNDAY

Philippians 2:5-11

April 12, 1981

V5: "Let this mind": keep minding the one thing, namely, lowly-mindedness. "In": in the case of. V6: "Christ Jesus": His office and person. He is subject of all that follows in vv6-11. "He who existed in God's form," Jn 1:1. "Not robbery": not a thing of snatching, a thing for self-glorification, a prize for display, Col 2:9. V7: "Made Himself of no reputation": Himself He emptied, 2 Cor 8:9, namely, in that He took a slave's form when He came to be in men's likeness. "Likeness": In the incarnation Christ did not cease to be God. Even in the midst of death He had to be the mighty God. "Slave's form" refers to the humiliation. V8: "In fashion": Christ was truly human, except for sin, Jn 8:46; He 7:26; 4:15. "Humbled": abased. "Obedient" refers to voluntary obedience. "Death of the cross": death of one accursed of God, Dt 21:23; Ga 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21. Luther: "If I permit myself to be persuaded that only the human nature has suffered for me, then Christ is to me a poor Savior, then He Himself indeed needs a Savior." V9: "Exalted Him": Only the human nature could experience the exaltation. The full use of the divine attributes communicated to the human nature at the incarnation constitute the exaltation, Mt 23:12; Jn 17:5. "A name, the one above every name": see Eph 1:9-10; 20-24. "Name" equals revelation, that by which God and Christ alone can be known. V10: "Every knee": heavenly ones, earthly ones, subterranean ones. The devils and unbelievers shall bow, not with joy, but with dismay; cf. Col 2:15; 1Pe 3:18-20. V11. "Confess": acknowledge. Glory to God the Father": the glory of His grace, Eph 1:6.12.14.

Introduction: The world does not rate humility very high. It says, "Blessed are the strong who can hold their own." Jesus says: "Blessed are the meek" (Mt 5). "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Jas 4:6).

A TIME FOR HUMILITY

I. Christ humbled Himself.

A. He was in the form of God (Jn 1:1-14).

1. He claimed to be God (Jn 10:30; Jn 1:1).

2. He demonstrated by His miracles that He was God; He predicted His passion.
3. He confessed His deity before Caiaphas (Mt 26:64) and Pilate (Mt 27: 11).
- B. Yet He served (cf. O.T. lesson).
 1. He did not always use the divine qualities He had.
 2. He became obedient unto death.
 - a. He willingly suffered (Jn 10:11; Is 53:7).
 - b. He suffered for us (1 Pe 3:18; Is 53:4-5).
- C. "Let this mind be in you."
 1. Greatness in the kingdom comes through humble service.
 - a. By regarding others above self (v3).
 - b. By serving one another (Mt 20:26-28).
 2. Arenas for humble service are manifold.
 - a. Home (Eph 5:24 — 6:4).
 - b. The congregation (2 Cor 13:11).
 - c. Society (Ro 13:1ff).
 3. The greatest service we can render to anyone is to share the Gospel (Ac 1:8; Mt 28:18-20).
- II. Christ was exalted.
 - A. God raised up Christ.
 1. To show His acceptance as a sacrifice (Ro 4:25).
 2. To declare Christ to be the Son of God (Ro 1:4).
 - B. God set Christ at His own right hand (Eph 1:20-23; 4:10).
 1. He has a name above every name: King of kings and Lord of lords, (1 Tm 6:15; Re 17:14; 19:16; Is 9:6-7).
 - a. The God-man is exalted.
 - b. He is head of all things for the sake of the church (Eph 1:22).
 2. Before Him every knee shall bow.
 - a. The devil and all who were enemies of the cross in this life shall do so reluctantly.
 - b. Christians shall do so joyfully throughout eternity (Re 7:9-14).
 - i. Christians are exalted already in this life (1 Pe 2:9).
 - ii. In heaven we shall be glorified (2 Tm 4:8).
 3. "And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."
 - a. We do that now already in worship and witness (Mt 21:1-9).
 - b. In heaven we shall join the angels in singing: "Worthy is the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne" (Re 5:11).
 - C. We shall be exalted.
 1. Our exaltation to eternal life is God's gift to us, Mt 25:34.
 2. This hope should encourage us to live lives of humble service, Mt 25:14ff.; 1 Jn 3:3.

Conclusion: How great our hope is in Christ. What an incentive for us to be humble servants of our Lord by sharing with others the good news of Christ, our King, who once came in meekness but now reigns as King of Kings.

HJE

MAUNDY THURSDAY

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

April 16, 1981

The Lord's Supper is a feast and not a sacrifice, a feast in which the offering is eaten. At this supper the Lord is the host. Nor is the Lord's Supper merely a

commemoration, but a feast of union with the Lord and a communion with the other participants (1 Cor 10:17). Jesus gave thanks for the bread and the wine as vehicles for the nourishment and strengthening of the spiritual life. With this blessing He consecrated the bread and the wine for a new and holy purpose in the Sacrament; they were to be the bearers of the body and blood of the Lord. Jesus' words in the text are His last will and testament. It is the duty of a testator to use plain and simple words, avoiding terms that are misleading. The beneficiary has the right and also the duty to abide by the literal interpretation. Accordingly, we believe that when we receive and eat the bread we receive and eat Christ's body, and when we receive and drink the wine we receive and drink Christ's blood. Both bread and wine and body and blood are present. This is a deep mystery.

Introduction: When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He called it a "new covenant." A covenant is ordinarily a contract or agreement between two parties. The Lord's Supper, however, is a unilateral contract in the sense that Christ instituted it for no other reason than that He loved us. Tonight let us look more closely at

THE NEW COVENANT OF JESUS CHRIST

- I. It is a clear covenant.
 - A. There is no indication that Christ intended His words (vv24-25) to be understood in any but a plain literal sense.
 1. He did not say that the bread and the wine represent His body and blood.
 2. He did not say that the bread and the wine change into His body and blood.
 - B. We believe what Christ said even if we do not understand how it is possible for His body and blood to be present.
 1. We do not fully understand what electricity is, how the body transforms food into energy, how a seed produces a plant.
 2. It should not surprise us to find things beyond our understanding in God's ways with us.
- II. It is a gracious covenant.
 - A. Jesus offers us Himself.
 1. Since we receive His body given for us on the cross and His blood shed for our sins, we can be sure that we are also receiving forgiveness and salvation.
 2. Christ's real presence is a powerful assurance of His grace.
 - B. Jesus offers us fellowship with God.
 1. The barrier of sin between us and God has been removed.
 2. No sin need disrupt our relationship to God.
 - C. Jesus offers us fellowship with one another (1 Cor 10:17).
 1. We are one body in Christ.
 2. Our participation in this covenant testifies to a unity of faith.
- III. It is a responsible covenant.
 - A. We are to partake as believing people.
 1. Believing that Christ is really present.
 2. Believing that we receive in and with the bread and wine His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.
 - B. We are to proclaim His death until He comes (v26).
 1. By living as forgiven people.
 2. By being His instruments through which He carries out His work in the world.

Conclusion: In His new covenant Christ is saying to us, "I am your Lord. I gave myself for you. Now I give myself to you." Let us respond by saying, "We are your people. We believe in you. We want to live for you."

GA

GOOD FRIDAY
Hebrews 4:14-5:10
April 17, 1981

After exhorting and warning in vv11-13, the author takes up the main argument of the epistle, already alluded to in 1:3, 2:17f., and 3:1, namely, the priestly work of Jesus as superior to that of the Levitical line (4:4-12:3). V14: Jesus has passed through the spheres of the created heavens (perfect active participle of *dierchomai* indicating a state of completion) into heaven itself; that is, He is before the face of God (9:24). Unlike the Levitical high priest who passed through the veil to the earthly symbol of eternal glory, the "great high priest" passed through the heavens to the eternal glory itself. Since they have such a high priest, the readers are exhorted to "hold fast" both their inward faith and their confession of it before men. The present active subjunctive (*kratōmen*) means to keep on clinging to tenaciously. V15: Even though Jesus is such a great high priest, He can still sympathize with our weaknesses and understand our trials. Even though Jesus did not sin, it does not follow that He could not in His human nature have personal experience of temptation. Jesus felt the power of the tempter to seduce. V16: We can keep on coming to our high priest, confident that we will receive mercy and well-timed help.

According to the opening verse of chapter five, Jesus has the necessary qualities of a high priest, for He was chosen from among men and appointed by God. V2: The Levitical priests were able to show compassion to the erring because they themselves experienced weakness, infirmity (*astheneian*). V3: Their sin offering for themselves, first of all, was a prominent part of the ceremonial of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). V6: The quotation from Ps 110:4 shows that Christ's entry into His kingly priesthood, a priesthood that would never end, was prefigured by Melchizedek, who prior to the Aaronic priesthood united in himself the office of priest and king. Vv7-8: Christ was prepared and consecrated for the eternal priesthood which He entered after the human experience of suffering. V9: Having been made perfect (*teleiōtheis*, aorist passive participle), having completed the process of training, He became forever after the author, not of a mere ceremonial cleansing or temporary remission of guilt, but of eternal salvation. His one oblation of Himself upon the cross "at once consummated His consecration to the priesthood and effected the atonement." He offered one sacrifice for sins forever (10:12) and after His resurrection entered His eternal office of mediation on the basis of that one sacrifice.

The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would experience Christ's involvement as the great high priest in their daily lives. The problem is that Christ as the great high priest is often viewed more intellectually than experientially. The means to the goal is Christ's sympathy for us in a life marred by sin and His sacrifice for our sins.

Introduction: Good Friday impresses upon us Christ's intimate involvement with our existence. His death as well as the suffering that preceded it testify that He is what the text calls Him, a priest.

JESUS IS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

I. He sympathizes with us as no other can.

- A. With our weaknesses (v15).
 - 1. The Old Testament priest was able to sympathize with people in their weakness because he himself was beset with weaknesses (v2).
 - 2. Although Jesus had no sin, He felt the power of temptation to seduce as it worked through His human fear, desire, indignation, hope and joy.
 - 3. He knows how severe temptation can be for us.
- B. With our sufferings.
 - 1. In Gethsemane and on Calvary He endured suffering far greater than that endured by any Old Testament priest or anyone before or since (v7; Mt 26:39; Lk 22:44f).
 - 2. He pleaded with God to help Him and then was obedient to His Father's will.
 - 3. No matter what kind of suffering we go through, spiritual, mental, or physical, we can be sure that He sympathizes with us and will help us before it is too late (v16).

Transition: The temptations Christ faced and the suffering He endured culminated in the cross.

II. He offered a sacrifice no other could.

- A. A sacrifice to end all sacrifices.
 - 1. The Old Testament priest had to offer sacrifices continually for his own sins and for those of the people (v3).
 - 2. Christ offered the sacrifice of Himself, not for His own sins, but for ours (7:26-27). His resurrection and ascension proved the completeness of His sacrifice (v14).
 - 3. There is no need for us to do anything to make up for our sins. Christ took care of sin once and for all on the cross.
- B. A sacrifice that is the source of eternal salvation.
 - 1. God Himself designated Christ to be a priest whose sacrifice is eternally valid.
 - 2. He is the source of salvation for us as long as we obey Him, that is, believe in Him as our great high priest (v9).

Conclusion: God may sometimes seem far removed from us in our sin and temptation and suffering. Yet we know that Jesus is our great high priest whose sympathy sustains us and whose sacrifice renews us.

GA

EASTER SUNDAY

Colossians 3:1-4

April 19, 1981

Paul has shown in the preceding chapter that when his readers were baptized they died with Christ (2:20), were buried, and then were raised and made alive with Him (2:11-13). In this way they were restored to favor with God (1:21-23; 2:13), severed from their old life of sin (2:11), and set in the path of holiness (1:22). Now he reminds them (v1) that they can master the flesh by rising above it instead of fighting it on its own ground by ceremonial rites and ascetic rules. "The things that are above" (*ta anō*), the upward things (Php 3:14), are not abstract, transcendental conceptions, for they are where Christ is. His presence gives distinctness to our view of heaven and concentrates our interests there. "Seated" is placed with emphasis at the end of the clause in Greek to indicate the completeness of Christ's work and the dignity of His position. We are to "set" our mind on (*phroneite*), keep on thinking about the things above so that things

on earth, though we think about them too, do not become our master. The source of and power for such heavenly-mindedness spring from the life which came about through having died with Christ (v3). The aorist *apethanete* denotes the past act and the perfect *kekruptai* ("has been and is hid") the permanent effects. The Christian's life centers in Christ. As Christ is hidden, withdrawn from the world of sense, yet always with us in His Spirit, so is our life with Him. And if it is with Christ, then it is in God, for "Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:23). "No hellish burglar can break that combination." The term "hid" points to the mystery of Christ dwelling in believing hearts. Our life is not only with Christ, but it is Christ (v4), for He is its source and means and end. Since His ascension He has been hidden from physical sight; but when Christ appears, that is, whenever He is manifested (*hotan . . . phanerōthē*, a reference to the second coming), we will see Him in His glory (1 Jn 3:2), and we will be like Him. Our spiritual life will find organic expression also in a perfect and heavenly body.

The central thought of the text is that life in Christ makes for heavenly-minded living. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will live on a higher level than the earthly. The problem is that the world is too much with us. The means to the goal is our life in the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Introduction: The Gospel for today assures us that Jesus lives. "Because I live," Jesus promises, "you will live also" (Jn 14:19) — not just in a physical, earthly way, but in a higher heavenly way. Christ's resurrection reminds us that

WE CAN LIVE ON A HIGHER LEVEL

- I. Because we have died to sin (v3a).
 - A. Our sinful nature was buried with Christ in baptism (Col 2:12a); Ro 6:3-4).
 1. Since we are not yet rid of sin in our bodies, we continue to feel its effects.
 - a. We may become preoccupied with things earthly — making money, acquiring things, getting ahead.
 - b. Our minds may dwell on evil rather than on good, envying and lusting and coveting.
 - c. We sometimes forget that evil thoughts, as the ancient collect for the second Sunday in Lent puts it, do "assault and hurt the soul."
 2. Yet we can consider ourselves dead to sin (Ro 6:11a).
 - a. When Christ rose He destroyed sin's control over us (Col 2:11).
 - b. Our baptism enables us to crucify the sinful flesh (Ro 6:6).
 - B. Christ's power is available to us to put down sin in our bodies.
 1. The same power He displayed in His resurrection He now used fully at God's right hand (v3b). As the living, ascended Lord, He gives us power to live on a higher level. We do not have to set our minds "on things that are on earth" (v2). Nor do we have to occupy our minds with what is sensual and mean. Rather we can think on those things that are good and right and noble and true. Our thoughts are important. "As a man thinks within himself, so he is" (Prov. 23:7, NAS).
- II. Because we have been raised with Christ.
 - A. We were made spiritually alive in our baptism.
 1. Through faith in the forgiveness that Christ's resurrection guarantees us (Col 2:12-13).
 2. So that we are now sensitive to God's thoughts toward us.
 - B. Our life is hid with Christ (v3).
 1. Christ is withdrawn from the world of sense, yet with us always.

2. It is a mystery how we can be in Christ and He in us.
3. Christ in us (Ga 2:20), draws us to Himself, and enables us to think His own thoughts (2 Cor 5:14-15; Ro 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16).
- C. Our life will be manifested when Christ appears (v4).
 1. Our living Lord will come again, and then we shall be like Him in glory (v4; 1 Jn 3:2).
 2. Our life in Christ will have perfect bodily expression (1 Cor 15:35-49; 2 Cor 5:1-5).

Conclusion: Living on the earth, we cannot avoid thinking about earthly things. Yet neither earthliness nor earthiness sets the tone for our living. We Christians can live on a higher level because we have died to sin and because we have been raised with Christ.

GA

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 1:3-9

April 26, 1981

This pericope lends itself very well to the continuing celebration of Easter. While our joy in the resurrected Christ is tied ultimately to our own resurrection from the dead and eternal life, our celebration of new life takes place in the world now. We have learned with believers of all ages that we do not have smooth sailing. Our faith is put to the test regularly. This lesson leads us to recognize trials as a part of our lives until the end comes. It offers an explanation as to the purpose of these unpleasant events but, above all, power in the risen Christ to stand the tests.

Introduction: The resurrection of Jesus from the dead brought to an end the power of our common enemies, sin, death and Satan. A reasonable conclusion might be drawn that life for the people of God should be pleasant, a mere step away from heaven. It is true that the victory is complete and it is ours. But the battles continue to rage in the form of tests which God permits to come our way. Our Father did not limit the power of the resurrection to an empty tomb. That power is dramatically shown in every believer's life as it comes to aid them in time of trial. We must not feel cheated that trials come to us, easy as that might be; but we can be comforted, strengthened, purified, and even downright delighted with them because through Christ we stand the tests. These are the things Peter leads us to consider today because

YOUR LIFE IN THE RISEN CHRIST IS BEING TESTED

- I. Life in the risen Christ is a gift of God.
 - A. He raised Him from the dead.
 1. The Gospel for today continues to proclaim the joyous, astounding resurrection of Jesus.
 2. God has established through this act that our enemies have been defeated for us by Christ (Ro 4:25, Jn 14:19).
 - B. He gives us a new life of hope.
 1. God mercifully connects us to Christ by giving us a new birth (v3).
 2. This new birth qualifies us for an indestructible, undefiled, unfading inheritance in heaven (v4).
 3. This fact fills us with unspeakable joy through believing (v8). We get what by faith we are looking for (v9).
- II. The tests in this new life can be severe.
 - A. Every Christian has them.

1. The people to whom Peter wrote were scattered because of persecution. They suffered the burdens of refugees along with continued attacks on their faith (v6).
2. Today, Christians suffer the same age-old trials; only the details are different. (Here the preacher may elaborate on conditions which currently try to pull people away from Christ.)
- B. The purpose of these tests is to strengthen and purify (v7).
 1. We do, to be sure, deserve punishment for the sins which are always present and for which we should and do repent. But forgiven people are not punished to "pay for sin."
 2. Tests strengthen our spiritual muscles as we exercise our faith during them.
 3. Tests also burn away impurities. In times of stress we learn what is valuable and what is not (v7).
- C. These tests are temporary (v6).
 1. Very few people can claim to have had a particular trial all their lives.
 2. God mercifully sets boundaries of time and severity for trials (cf. Job).
- III. The new life in the resurrected Christ stands the test.
 - A. We are protected by God's power.
 1. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead protects believers.
 2. This protection is given during the fight to guard us from losing our grip on Christ. We are not kept out of the trial; we are in it — yet safe. To be beaten by adversity means that we have deliberately decided to be overcome (cf. a soldier who takes off his helmet during combat).
 - B. We will receive commendation when Christ comes again (v7b).
 1. Christ will praise and honor us on the last day because we endured through His gifts. That is His will.
 2. We will accept His praise because He wants us to have it. His praise of us compliments His mercy toward us.
 - C. Until then, our lives are filled with joy in spite of tests.
 1. So many feel there can be no joy until they die and go to heaven.
 2. We have joy now. It is that quality of mind and heart which is certain of victory, no matter how dark the days.
 3. We do not strive for joy. We are filled with it by God as He gives us life in the risen Christ.

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SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 1:17-21

May 3, 1981

Introduction: The First Epistle of Peter was written to Christians who had been scattered around the world by persecution, driven from their home towns and countries and forced to take up residence in a strange land. Thus, their situation of being in a strange land was easily likened by Peter to being a stranger, or a visitor in the world as a whole. In the same way, we who are living today are in the world temporarily. We shall be living somewhere else someday, and so we are strangers here — people on a visit — staying here just to work under God for a while. We continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus as children of God living a worthwhile life now. It is seldom easy. In fact, conditions around us often prompt the question,

CAN A CHILD OF GOD LIVE A WORTHWHILE LIFE IN A STRANGE LAND?

- I. Yes! God is your Father (v17).
 - A. He is not your Father because He preferred you to someone else (17b).
 1. Some think that they are responsible for being God's children — that all they have to do is call Him "Father" without any true regard for Him in the heart (Mt 15:8).
 2. God gives preferential treatment to no one. He judges them all with the same standard. He loves all with the same intensity.
 - B. He is your Father because He bought your freedom with a great price (v18-19).
 1. Silver and gold could not pay for our sins.
 2. It took the precious blood of Jesus, the Lamb without a fault or spot (v19).
 3. Your freedom was complete when God raised Him from the dead (v21).

Transition: The worthwhile life of a Christian begins with believing that God is his Father through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, a child of God can live a worthwhile life because
- II. The worthwhile life has been revealed to you.
 - A. It is not the worthless life which you inherited from your natural fathers. You were freed from the worthless life you inherited (v18).
 1. For the Jews it was the man-made traditions that had been appended to the laws of God.
 2. For the Gentiles it was pagan gods and superstitions.
 3. For us, who have such diverse backgrounds, it is any unchristian peculiarity that our folk had, which we still practice or hold as an attitude which governs our lives.
 - B. The worthwhile life is one that is attached to God by faith in Jesus.
 1. Faith is important. Your faith and hope rest in God (v21b).
 2. We must remember that without faith in Christ, everything we do has no value before God and only temporary value to men.
 3. Faith in Christ makes all that our hands touch possibly works that will last eternally. God notes them.
 - C. The worthwhile life is lived reverently.
 1. This is a two-pronged reverence or "fear": fear of sin and its consequences; fear of offending our loving Father. Both are avoided by *loving*.
 2. We who have accepted the Gospel are purified so that we can love one another.
 3. The life that is worthwhile is the one that copies the love of God. There is no better tribute that can be paid to a Christian than this: He loved his fellowman (1 Jn 3,4).

LFT

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 2:19-25

May 10, 1981

In St. Peter's world it was not unusual for Christians to suffer unjustly at the hands of those in authority over them. According to 1 Pe 1:6, Christians were already suffering, and Peter indicates in 1 Pe 4:12 that they could expect more of the same. Although our world differs from the world of St. Peter in many ways,

Christians can still expect to suffer unjustly. At school, home, and work those who have authority over us sometimes use their authority to make life difficult for us. Although we may not be brought to a martyr's death, life can be made very unpleasant for us. What is a Christian supposed to do? Follow the example of Christ!

In vv22-25 Peter draws on the picture of Christ's suffering as recorded in Is 53. Four times he refers to the way Christ endured suffering as foretold by the prophet. However, he makes it clear that our Lord has given us much more than a mere example to follow. Jesus suffered the consequences we deserve for our own sin (v24). His suffering means that we are restored to the fold of God (v25). Remembering this truth gives us the motivation to follow in His steps (v21). When we follow in His steps we can be certain that we are doing the right thing (vv19-20).

The central thought of the text is that the Christ who endured suffering for us shows us the way to endure suffering even when we are in the right. The goal is that the hearers would follow the example of Christ and patiently endure unjust suffering.

Introduction: The world has a way of dealing with those who cause unjust suffering. As one bumper sticker says: "I don't get mad — I just get even." Jesus has a different approach to the whole issue of unjust suffering. We do well to follow His example.

SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES

- I. We are rescued from suffering the consequences we deserve as sinners.
 - A. We deserve to suffer because of our sin.
 1. We are all guilty of sin (Ro 3:10-12, 23).
 - a. We are like straying sheep who have wandered away (v25; Is 53:6).
 - b. God is offended by our wandering ways (Eze 36:22,23).
 2. Those who are guilty deserve punishment (Mal 4:1; Is 13:11).
 - a. It does not always work that way in human courts.
 - b. It always works that way with God (Ro 2:6, 12; 6:23).
 - B. Jesus suffered the consequences we deserve.
 1. He did nothing to suffer the fate of a sinner (Is 53:8,9).
 - a. He was no straying sheep (v22).
 - b. He was the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11).
 2. He suffered so we could be restored to the fold of God (1 Pe 3:18).
 - a. His suffering for us opened the way back to God (v24; Ro 5:2).
 - b. His wounds heal the wounds suffered by straying sheep (v24; 1 Jn 1:7).
 - c. Instead of wandering like lost sheep, we can follow the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (v25; Jn 10:27-28).
- II. We suffer as a consequence of following Christ.
 - A. All followers of Christ face the prospect of unjust suffering.
 1. This is not the suffering we bring upon ourselves when we do wrong (v20; 1 Pe 4:15).
 2. This suffering comes when we do right (vv19-20).
 - a. Some Christians expect a life free of suffering (Mt 13:20,21).
 - b. Jesus never promised a life without suffering (Mt 10:17-18; 16:24).
 - i. His disciples suffered unjustly (Mt 24:9; 2 Cor 11:24-26).
 - ii. We can expect the same (Ac 14:22; 1 Pe 4:12).
 - B. We are called to patient endurance.
 1. We are tempted to fight back.

- a. We are tempted to condemn those who make us suffer (Lk 12:13).
- b. We are tempted to seek revenge (2 Tm 4:14).
- 2. We have the example of Christ to guide us (v21).
 - a. He did not condemn those who made Him suffer and neither should we (v23; Mt 26:62-63).
 - b. He trusted God and so should we (v23; ! Pe 4:19).
 - c. He was approved by God and we will be also (vv19-20; Mt 5:10-12).

Conclusion: It is never easy to endure suffering when we have done what is right; however, we are not called to do what is easy. We are called to follow Christ. Because Christ suffered for our sins, we can bear up under the suffering that comes to us as Christ's followers.

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 2:4-10

May 17, 1981

The Scriptures contain many different pictures of the Christian Church — the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the flock of Christ. Perhaps the most well-known picture is found in this text in which St. Peter describes the Church as a "spiritual house" (see also Eph 2:9-22). This spiritual house is made up of "living stones" which are built upon a living "cornerstone" (vv5-6). It is most fitting that Peter describes the Christian Church in this way. The name Peter symbolizes the intention of Jesus to use living stones to build a living Church wherever men and women share Peter's confession, "You are the Christ" (Mt 16:15-18).

This text carries a powerful message to an age in which people are tempted to dismantle the living Church and reconstruct a more modern version. For some people the reconstruction means replacing the living Cornerstone — Jesus Christ. However, no matter what new cornerstones are substituted the results will always be disastrous (vv7-8). The same disastrous results await those who would keep Christ as the living Cornerstone but replace the other living stones with lifeless ones. This spiritual house is not built of lifeless stones. Either people serve as a "royal priesthood" or they have no part in the living Church (vv5, 9).

The central thought of the text is that the Church is no lifeless institution; rather, it is a living community of believers in Christ who live as a holy priesthood continually offering spiritual sacrifices to God. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would fulfill their roles as living stones in the temple of God.

Introduction: A church is constructed of many different materials; and yet, those materials do not make the Church. The true Church is constructed of very unusual materials — materials that are not cold and lifeless. They cannot be sawed, hammered, or welded. These materials are living. They are

LIVING STONES FOR THE LIVING CHURCH

- I. Jesus is the living Cornerstone of the Church.
 - A. Some have tried to replace Jesus as the living Cornerstone (v4).
 - 1. Other stones may appear more precious.
 - a. The Jewish leaders preferred rules and regulations (Mt 23:4).
 - b. The cults offer new teachings (Ac 17:21; 2 Tm 4:3-4).
 - 2. Other stones are deceptive.
 - a. Those who build on the cornerstone of the Law are condemned (Ga 2:16; 3:10).
 - b. Those who build on the speculation of cults are disappointed (Ac 4:12).

3. When other stones are laid as a cornerstone, men will stumble over Jesus to their own eternal ruin (vv7-8; Ro 1:18).
- B. Only Jesus is chosen and precious as the Cornerstone (v4; 1 Cor 3:11).
 1. God has established Him as the Cornerstone (v6).
 - a. God spoke His approval (Mt 3:17; 17:5).
 - b. God confirmed Him by the resurrection (Ro 1:4).
 2. Those who come to this living Cornerstone find Him precious (v7).
 - a. They experience a marvelous change (v10).
 - i. They become part of the people of God (Eph 2:11-13; 19-22).
 - ii. They receive mercy (Is 1:18).
 - b. They will never be disappointed (v6).
- II. Believers in Christ are living stones built upon the living Cornerstone.
 - A. To be living stones means that we serve God in a holy priesthood (v5).
 1. In the Old Testament only a few were able to serve as priests and offer sacrifices.
 2. Today all Christians have the privilege of serving as priests and offering sacrifices (v9).
 - a. God does not want bloody sacrifices (He 9:12).
 - b. God wants spiritual sacrifices (v5; Ro 12:1).
 - i. He wants the sacrifice of personal devotion (He 13:15).
 - ii. He wants the sacrifice of service to others (He 13:16).
 - B. Some want to be stones in God's temple, but they do not want to be living stones that serve in a holy priesthood.
 1. Some are content to let others serve as priests.
 2. Some think they can retire from this priesthood.
 - C. God will not tolerate lifeless stones in His temple (Re 3:15,16).
 1. He built us into His temple at great cost (1 Pe 1:18-19).
 2. He wants us to serve continually (2 Cor 5:15).

Conclusion: What a privilege it is for us to be living stones in the living Church! May God enable us to fulfill our calling.

LWM

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 3:15-18

May 24, 1981

V15: The divinity of Christ is expressed in *hagiazō*, used also of the Father in the Lord's Prayer ("hallowed be Thy name," Mt 6:9). Cf. also Is 8:13. We are to be prepared to make a defense of our hope, and our hope is Christ. Lenski says that *apologia* is "the regular term for the defense which a defendant makes before a judge." The idea here is that Christ and the Christian are on trial before the world; the world is watching us to see if being a Christian makes any difference. The "defense" of Christ is our testimony of Him, given by our words and life style. We should bear this testimony with *prautes* (cf. 1 Cor 4:21; Ga 6:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; and especially Ga 5:23, where it is one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit). Our defense is also made with *phobou*. What does this mean? 1 Pe 3:14 says, "have no fear of them." But here *phobos* means proper respect (cf. 1 Pe 1:17; 2:18; 3:2). The RSV translation "reverence" is misleading. The TEV is better: "Do it with gentleness and respect." V16: Evil spoken against the Christian will be silenced by the Christian's good conduct more than by his words. The juxtaposition of *katalaleis* and *kataischunthōsin* emphasizes the boomerang effect of speaking evil against the Christian. Those who revile "good behavior in Christ" will be put to shame (cf. Zch 2:8-9). V17: 1 Pe 2:20b expresses

the same thought. The Christian will be persecuted for doing the right thing. Cf. 2 Tm 3:12. This is our cross, which we bear for Jesus. V18: Here is a *sedes doctrinae* for the Gospel: "Christ died for our sins once for all." Christ cannot be re-sacrificed in the canon of the mass. He died *once*. Christ was our substitute upon the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous. The consequence of this fact is expressed in the *hina* clause, "that he might bring us to God." We cannot approach God, much less live with Him in heaven forever, until our problem of sinfulness is settled. The datives in *sarki* and *pneumati* are datives of respect. Christ died in the flesh, i.e., in the state of humiliation, and He was made alive in the spirit, i.e., in the state of glorification. 1 Pe 3:18b should not be interpreted to mean that Christ died "according to His human nature" and was raised "according to His divine nature."

Introduction: If you had a dear friend who was on trial, and you were asked to be a character witness for him, you would certainly consent. Christ is "on trial" before the world, and you have been subpoenaed by the Holy Spirit to testify for Him.

SUBPOENAED TO TESTIFY FOR CHRIST

- I. Testify for Jesus by your style of speaking (v15).
 - A. God wants gentleness in our witnessing.
 1. The news of Jesus is sweet.
 2. Therefore, our manner of speaking should be sweet.
 - B. God wants respect for others in our witnessing.
 1. Know the personal needs of others to whom you speak.
 2. Speak when they will listen.
- II. Testify for Jesus by your life-style (v16-17).
 - A. Live with a clear conscience.
 1. We are continually forgiven because of Christ.
 2. We have joy in not having to "wear a mask."
 - B. You may have to suffer for doing the right thing (cf. 2 Tm 3:12).
- III. Testify for Jesus by telling what He did (v18).
 - A. The righteous one died for all the unrighteous.
 1. He died once — salvation is finished.
 2. He died for all.
 - B. He has risen from the dead.

Conclusion: Georgi Vins and many Soviet Christians have suffered for their faith in Jesus. Their godly life-style and bold speech have had a great impact on the world. What about you?

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THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Ephesians 1:16-23

May 28, 1981

V16: This verse looks back to v15. Paul thanks God because he has heard good things about the Ephesian Christians — their faith in Jesus and their love towards one another. But the verse also looks forward and gives us the clue to what the rest of the text is. Both the Greek text and the RSV punctuate verses 15-23 as one sentence. The central thought is really Paul's intercessory prayer for the church at Corinth, which could well be a pastor's prayer for his congregation. The NEB punctuation is helpful for making an outline of the text.

V17: The knowledge of God is the key thought in this verse. Lenski comments

on *epignōsis* and says it is “the knowledge which really apprehends God, true realization in the heart and not merely that of the intellect.” It should be a knowledge of God like that of Abraham, who “was called the friend of God” (Jas 2:23). We only know God personally through God the Son, Jesus (Jn 14:7).

V18-19: Paul moves on from a prayer for personal knowledge of God to knowledge of the hope which belongs to the Christian. NEB: “I pray that your inward eyes may be illumined, so that you may know what is the hope to which he calls you.” The hope is in the “inheritance” and the “power.” This same inheritance is portrayed in 1 Pe 1:4, and power is granted to the Christian now in this age. Cf. 2 Tm 1:7. We must be careful not to forget the power that God gives us and let our Christianity deteriorate into mere religiosity. Cf. 2 Tm 3:5. The living God is with us!

V20-21: The two complementary aorist participles state how God wrought His power: *egeiras* and *kathisas*. Christ was raised once and for all from the dead and He was exalted once and for all above everything. His exaltation is also expressed in Php 2:9-11. The phrase, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,” expresses Christ’s dominion over the angelic hierarchy, be it of angels in heaven or of fallen angels. His rule is permanent and extends into the age “which is to come.” Vv22-23: “He has put all things under his feet” alludes to the messianic prophecy of Ps 110:1-2, the Old Testament passage most frequently quoted in the New Testament.

Introduction: On Ascension Day Christ left His disciples visibly. If a pastor knew he would soon be leaving his congregation, we can imagine what his intercessory prayer would be for his congregation. It might well be the same as Paul’s intercessory prayer for the church at Ephesus.

A PASTOR’S PRAYER FOR HIS CONGREGATION

- I. Know God personally (v17).
 - A. He is a God of glory.
 1. He is holy (Is 6:3).
 2. He is love; He sent His Son, Jesus (Lk 2:14).
 - B. He reveals Himself in His Son.
 1. There is no other way to know God personally.
 2. Knowing God is the highest wisdom of all (1 Cor 1:21).
 - C. Our friendship with God grows deeper.
 1. Listen to Him through His Word.
 2. Speak to Him through prayer.
- II. Know the hope to which God calls you (v18-21).
 - A. You have a glorious inheritance.
 1. It is imperishable.
 2. It is kept for you in heaven.
 - B. God’s power in the Christian is great.
 1. He raised Christ from the dead.
 2. He made Christ King of kings.
 3. Christ dwells within you (2 Cor 13:5).
- III. Know that God’s plan for this world is in the hands of the church (vv22-23).
 - A. The church is the body of Christ.
 1. Christ as head of the body is Lord of the church.
 2. Christ has commissioned us to do His work.
 - B. His desire is to make the whole world the body of Christ.
 1. Christ died for all.
 2. God wants all to know it.

BJL

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

1 Peter 4:13-19

May 31, 1981

This text continues a theme developed earlier in the letter, namely, that it is the Christian vocation to imitate Christ in His suffering (2:21). Speaking to people who have apparently experienced first-hand the pressures of seeking to imitate Christ in a not so Christ-like world, Peter points his readers to a recurring Gospel theme, the joy of living *for* Christ right now related to the glory of living *with* Christ later (see Mt 5:11; Lk 4:32). The present thrust of v14 should be noted as Peter asserts the "here and now" blessing for those who are insulted on account of their relationship with Christ ("are blessed" — RSV). The verb "insult" or "reproach" in v14 (*oneidizein*) is frequently associated in the Gospels with the indignities endured by the suffering Christ (Mt 27:44). Peter's reference to the Spirit of glory and of God as the cause of the present blessing (v14) is surely to be taken as the Holy Spirit, who is, in fact, linked on several occasions in the New Testament with the suffering and persecution of God's people (see Mt 10:19f.; Ac 7:55).

The point is clear: the trials of God's people are ground for positive joy, since those who suffer for Christ have a present share of the glory of the End. The contrast of v15 is plain. Those who practice the wrongdoings listed deserve suffering, but those who suffer simply because of their standing as a Christian ("under that name," RSV) have no need to be ashamed. Significantly this suffering is part of the glory mentioned above. The ultimate reason for the tribulation of God's people (v17) rests with the unfolding of God's plan for the End. As preparation for the close of history, the people of God will be purified by tribulation (see Mk 13:8-13). This is not a pleasant picture, but the courage and determination of God's people should be strengthened by the knowledge of what awaits those who do not "obey the Gospel of God" (v17). The quote from Pr 11:31 (LXX) is sobering (v18). If God uses trials and suffering to strengthen us and finally spare us, we can, as Peter concludes, continue our "active well-doing" (*agathopoiia*) and entrust ourselves to the One who is in complete control, the faithful Creator.

The central thought of the text is that the suffering of God's people has both a present blessing and a future glory as the Lord uses tribulation to keep pointing us to His faithfulness. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would recognize that suffering because of their standing as Christians is not pointless. The problem is that we can often recognize no logical value in Christian hardship. The means to the goal is that our faithful Creator gives us unmistakable glory as evidence that our trials have both a present and final purifying value.

Introduction: It is a natural tendency to view hardship and difficulties as valueless. They signal lost opportunities and wasted time as people are forced, when they occur, to focus attention on them rather than on positive growth. Proper Christian thinking, however, would dispute the logic of worldly people who view tribulation as something of no value. The Lord uses suffering to prepare and purify His people for the End as well as to give them blessing and glory right now. This is hardly nonsense, even though Christians may ask as they experience hardship and trials,

HOW CAN YOU CALL THIS GLORY?

- I. Because hardship is an imitation of Christ's suffering.
 - A. We count it a privilege to suffer at the hands of the world, even as He did.

1. The world may not kill us, but it despises our trust and love.
2. The world cannot understand how we can rejoice when we are condemned, because the world cannot understand our willingness by grace to imitate our Savior.
- B. We remember the victory of One who suffered with a purpose.
- II. Because hardship is an indication of Christ's blessing.
 - A. We know that the Lord will be at our side when we are insulted on account of our relationship with Him.
 1. This presence is a great blessing.
 2. This presence brings us glory.
 - B. We acknowledge that even though we may experience pain and hardship, our place in the "household of God" (v17) will lead us to endure and rejoice.
- III. Because hardship is a proclamation of Christ's salvation.
 - A. We confess that the trials of this life are part of God's plan of salvation, by which He seeks to outfit His people for the life to come.
 - B. We rejoice to receive the judgment of our faithful Creator as He prepares us for the End.
 1. This judgment strengthens us, so that we can by His grace endure.
 2. This judgment spares us, so that we are graciously "scarcely saved" (v18 RSV).

Conclusion: It is natural to view hardship in only a negative way, but we have the Christian assurance from our faithful Creator that suffering for Jesus' sake is our blessing, glory, and preparation for the End. The world may ask how we can call hardship "glory," but by faith we are convinced that the Lord's special presence and purpose in suffering can lead us to call suffering exactly that — GLORY!

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PENTECOST
Acts 2:1-21
June 7, 1981

Luke is careful to develop the contrast between the believing community ("they were all gathered in one place," RSV) and the devout Jerusalem Jews (v5). The coming of the Spirit had the effect of bringing these groups together with positive results (see v41). The exact nature of the miracle of the Spirit's arrival is hard to describe. Luke uses comparisons: like the sound (noise) of wind and like flames which resembled tongues. The speech of those who received the Spirit was quite intelligible, yet foreign to them. It was a meaningful language, readily understood by those who were from that part of the world which used it. The word Luke uses for speaking has, according to both Septuagintal and classical references, the meaning of solemn and inspired speech but not ecstatic utterance.

The miracle of Pentecost should properly be identified as one of both speaking (v4) and hearing (v6). Words were the vehicle of the Spirit, both as attention-getters (v7) and substance-providers (v14f.), as Peter with the disciples used the occasion of an attentive audience to explain the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The quotation from Joel 2 (28-32) concerning the Day of the Lord is shown to have at least partial fulfillment in the events occurring before the crowd's eyes. It is a day of salvation (v21); that is the key to Pentecost. The many-faceted dimension of the phrase "being saved" is important as it implies (1) being in an undesirable state (moral or physical), (2) relief from this condition by the

action of another, and (3) a positive change and restoration, enabling one truly to live.

The central thought of the text is that the miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit, in all its detail, shows the power of Spirit-directed words in gaining the attention of people, leading them to hear, and helping them to call upon the Lord who can save them. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers remember that salvation is a Spirit-wrought miracle of both speaking and hearing, using words and the Word. The problem is that we have too much difficulty both listening and speaking, and that even when we hear the Spirit-inspired Word, we forget to pass the message along. This means to the goal is that the Spirit continues to come to us in the spoken and heard Word to assure us of our salvation and encourage us to speak of our salvation.

Introduction: Parents often admonish their children for not listening. They have to tell them repeatedly to complete their chores, to eat correctly, to develop good personal habits. Many mistakes on the job are also made because workers have not listened to directions. Too often we abuse words by not listening to them carefully or treating them too casually. This attitude is spiritually risky, because, as the miracle of Pentecost announces, the careful speaking and hearing of the Word means salvation. Indeed, in the Christian context,

HEARING IS BELIEVING

- I. Spirit-directed words are for hearing.
 - A. The Spirit came in a miraculous way to get people to listen.
 1. The crowds were attracted by men speaking in their own tongues.
 2. Though some mocked, most listened as the disciples spoke the Spirit's words.
 - B. The Spirit continues to enter the hearts of people through the ears of people.
 1. God's Word is a spoken and heard Word which has effect only in the Spirit-directed context of a speaker and a listener.
 2. It is the Spirit who opens both mouths and ears. People can never speak or listen without His power.
- II. Spirit-directed words are for saving.
 - A. The message of the Spirit announces salvation.
 1. His words through Peter proclaim the day of the Lord as God comes to people.
 2. Those who have heard and then call upon the Lord by His power will be saved (v21).
 - B. The work of the Spirit assures salvation.
 1. As He continues to come to people through the Word, the Spirit brings comfort and hope that salvation is sure.
 2. Those who have heard and been saved will joyfully speak the Word and share the Spirit's work of saving.

Conclusion: God's plan of salvation, which has come to us through the Spirit-directed hearing of His Word, includes using us, who have heard, as His mouth-pieces to speak, that others by hearing may also believe.

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