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Homiletical Studies

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 6:12-20

January 17, 1982

The discussion of immorality begun in the preceding chapter continues with a focusing on the sin of fornication. The maxim "All things are lawful for me" had evidently been used by the Corinthians to excuse sexual license. But the argument that eating meat which was merely ceremonially unclean was an indifferent matter could not be used to defend fornication. Food is a necessity for the body while fornication is not a natural necessity but a dreadful evil. The body was created for higher ends. It is the temple of God which will one day be raised up immortal to be with God (v14). The body is not only adapted for Christ but is in vital union with Christ (v15, *mele Christou*). The horror of deliberately taking (*poieso*) members of Christ and making them members of a harlot in sexual union staggers Paul. The words in v16, quoted from Gn 2:24 and explained by Jesus in Mt 19:5f, are in sharp contrast to the Greek view of the body as the perishing envelope of a man. According to the Scriptural view the body is the abiding vehicle of the Spirit (v17). To devote the body to a harlot one must first withdraw it from Christ's possession. Fornication violates Christ's rights in the body and also ruins the body itself. In battling sensual sins there is no victory except in absolute flight (v18, *phugeite* — present imperative). Have the habit of fleeing without delay or parley, says Paul. Gluttony, drunkenness, and wrong use of drugs are sins wrought on the body but not within the body in the same sense as fornication; none are so directly against the sanctity of the body as fornication. The venereal diseases that can result are bad enough, but here Paul is thinking mainly, if not exclusively, of the moral injury and defilement. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in us (v19), we cannot use our bodies as though they were absolutely under our own control; they belong to God. We are bought with a price (v20), the price of the blood of Christ (Ac 20:28, 1 Pe 1:18-19). Also in view of the destiny of the body it should be used to glorify God.

Introduction: In a society in which prostitution was a means of worship the Corinthian Christians were strongly tempted to practice sexual immorality. In a society in which sex itself has become an object of worship we too may be tempted to sexual immorality. Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that

The Body Is Not Meant for Immorality but for Glorifying God

- I. Our bodies are members of Christ.
 - A. Our baptism joined us to Christ.
 1. How inconceivable that one joined to Christ should join himself to a prostitute, becoming one with her and thereby breaking the sacred bond with Christ!
 2. Sexual immorality is a more direct defilement of one's body than any other sin against the body (drunkenness, gluttony, illicit use of drugs).
 3. The Holy Spirit who brought us to faith in Christ dwells in us. Who would wish to desecrate such a temple by sexually impure behavior? Let our bodies reflect whose temple they are.
 - B. We are not only joined to Christ but we belong to Christ.
 1. He bought us with the price of His own blood, redeeming our bodies as well as our souls. His redemption cleanses us from all sin, also sins of sexual impurity in thought, word, or deed.

2. We glorify the God to whom we belong when we use our bodies for holy purposes rather than to satisfy carnal desires. God who gave us our body and the sexual desires that pertain to it will help us by the power of His Holy Spirit to control those desires and to fulfill them in the marriage relationship.
- II. Our bodies will be raised up with Christ.
- A. It will not do to argue, as some of the Corinthians did, that since sexual behavior pertains to the body which will die, one can behave as one chooses.
 1. Such a view led to the absurd notion that sexual impurity was no worse than eating leuitically unclean meat, for meat too pertained to the perishing body.
 2. When it comes to eating foods not clearly commanded or forbidden by God we are free to behave in ways that do not offend fellow Christians. But fornication God has clearly forbidden. Unclean behavior is not only morally offensive, but it relegates the body to a temporary plaything.
 - B. The body will not be destroyed but will on the last day be changed into a spiritual and eternal body.
 1. That is why it does not make sense to treat our body as though it were only a perishing shell, to sin freely because "you only go around once."
 2. Let us glorify God in our bodies by striving for a holiness that reflects the heavenly holiness our bodies will one day have. Since we have already been raised up in our baptism to a new life in Christ, we have through Christ the power we need to shun immorality.

Conclusion: Our body, with all of its imperfections, is nevertheless intimately joined to Christ and will at last be raised up to be with Christ. No wonder God intended our body not for immorality but for glorifying God.

GA

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 7:29-31

January 24, 1982

The reference to the time being very short (v29) echoes Jesus' words in Mt 24:22 to the effect that if God had not shortened the time between Christ's first coming and the parousia many Christians would not be able to stand up. The point is that Christ's second coming could occur at any time and therefore Christians are to sit loose with mundane interests. Married persons, for instance, should carry on as under notice that the marriage relationship could end for them at any time. While Christians cannot cut themselves off from the world, the world should not cumber the soul. After all, the world is transitory; the form of this world is passing away (v31) and is constantly changing like a play being presented on a stage. Christians are not to make of these early forms more than they really are.

Introduction: How is the world treating you? Do you have family and friends? A satisfying job? A comfortable home? Perhaps a more important question is

How Are You Treating the World?

- I. As a world whose form is passing away?
 - A. Marrying and marketing, feasts and funerals all belong to the form of this present world.

-
1. These forms are constantly changing and will disappear on the last day when the earth is destroyed (2 Pe 3:10, 12).
 2. The garb of the world suits its fleeting existence.
 - B. Let us not make more of these forms than they really are.
 1. It is easy to become attached to the world, absorbed in the secular which cannot permanently satisfy (2 Pe 4:10). In Christ who presents Himself to us in the Gospel we have an eternal source of satisfaction.
 2. The world's passing forms can be utilized in making the Gospel known.
 - II. As a world you might have to leave at any time?
 - A. We can sit loose with worldly things when we remember that we may have to leave them at any time.
 1. Yet the world can be so much with us that our soul is cumbered and the eternal dimension of our earthly existence is lost sight of. That was the problem in Nineveh (Jon 3:1-5), and it is often a problem with us.
 2. A heart attack, stroke, or automobile accident can remind us of the fleeting nature of this life and that we can take nothing with us when we die.
 3. Faith in Christ enables us to distinguish more sharply between the temporal and the eternal and to use worldly things in such a way that they do not use us.
 - B. We strive to live each day as if it were our last.
 1. Whether our last day will be the day of our physical death or the final day of the world when Christ comes to judge, it will not be so long in coming that we cannot bear living out our life now. The time "has grown very short" (v31; Mt 24: 22 | Pe 4:7).
 2. The final day of the world on which all history will come to its climax and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ gives each of our days now a tremendous significance.
 3. Knowing that the time has been shortened when we must quit this world enables us to hang loose with earthly sorrow, joy, and wealth.

Conclusion: How are you treating the world? Being in but not of the world is the challenge the text sets before us.

GA

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 8:1-13

January 31, 1982

Introduction: Nothing in God's good creation is left untouched and uncorrupted by sin including the use of our minds and the acquisition of knowledge. In the Corinthian congregation the pursuit of knowledge led to a spirit of arrogance that flaunted Christian liberty at the expense of the weaker members. "Christ was the giver of knowledge . . . and this knowledge, they claimed, made them free; the knowledge and wisdom they possessed carried them beyond any previous revelation of God, beyond the Old Testament Scriptures, beyond anything contained in the Apostolic word. Before this ultimate knowledge of God, which they claimed to possess, all previous standards became meaningless, all former ties were dissolved, all taboos were gone: 'All things are lawful for me' --- that was their boast" (Franzmann).

Paul reminded them as he does us that true knowledge resides in the realization that God has known us and that this is reflected in loving God and in edifying our fellow saints. The question then is whether it is more important

To Know or to Be Known

- I. As important as it is to know about God —
- A. Knowledge and knowing are highly prized
1. Pursuit of knowledge about God is important (Php 1:9; Col:10; 2 Pe 3:18; 1 Pe 2:2).
 2. We are to grow in our knowledge of God (Eph 4:15).
 3. We, too, have discovered that knowing God as gracious brings freedom (Ga 5:1).
- B. Overemphasis on knowledge may be dangerous to faith.
1. It led the Corinthians to trust in knowledge above God rather than to trust and confidence in God.
 2. It manifested a sophistication that involved them in compromise.
 3. It led to an arrogance that disregarded the weak.
 4. It puffed them up at the expense of a love for God that builds others up.
- II. It is more important to be known by God.
- A. We are known by God in Christ Jesus.
1. Coming to this realization assures us of our salvation (Ro 8:29ff; Jo 17:3).
 2. If we do not know this, we really know nothing at all.
- B. As evidence of this we love God.
1. We practice responsible Christian liberty (1 Pe 2:16; 1 Cor 9:19ff).
 2. We become instruments of edification (1 Th 5:11; 2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:21).

NHM

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 9:16-23

February 7, 1982

Introduction: People like St. Paul make us feel uneasy. His singleminded devotion and absolute commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel jars us out of our easy going complacency concerning the necessity for such a proclamation and our part in it. Paul would do all, suffer all, be all, in order to proclaim the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles alike. He reminds us that, since we have the Gospel we are under a similar obligation. Like Paul, God has placed us under orders.

When It Comes to Preaching the Gospel We Are Under Orders

- I. Preaching the Gospel is not a matter of choice.
- A. We are the sent ones (by "constraint," "of necessity").
- B. We are entrusted with the stewardship of the Gospel.
- C. We have nothing of which to boast, since our receiving the Gospel is entirely the work of God.
1. We did not earn the blessings we have in Christ through the Gospel.
 2. We are obligated to do all we can to bring this same message of God's free grace in Christ to others.
- II. Preaching the Gospel is a matter of duty.
- A. As slaves to Christ
1. This is a voluntary servitude.
 2. To the Christ who bought us.
- B. As servants to all.
1. We become all things to all men.
 2. That we may be able to share the Gospel with others.
 3. In order to win more for Christ.

NHM

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
I Corinthians 10:31-11:1
February 14, 1982

The text concludes a section in which Paul has discussed the matter of giving offense to weak Christians by eating food sacrificed to idols. "Whatever" (v31) Christians do should be done to the glory or the honor of God rather than of themselves (1 Pe 4:11). God is honored when Christians do not give offense (v32) or give occasion for others to stumble in their faith and life. Paul's actions were qualified by his purpose that others would be saved (v33). In this respect Paul was an imitator of Christ (v1), who in His entire redemptive work sought to glorify God and to save all people.

Introduction: A person who seeks his own advantage and requires the adulation of others is sometimes referred to as a "glory hound." Because we are selfish by nature we tend to do what we do to the glory of ourselves. Paul points to a higher purpose, urging us to "do all to the glory of God." How can we be

Living to the Glory of God

- I. We live to God's glory when we avoid giving offense.
 - A. Some of the Corinthian Christians were evidently giving offense by eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 10:28).
 1. They had the right to eat such meat (1 Cor 10:23, 25-27).
 2. Yet it was well for them to refrain from doing so out of consideration for the consciences of those who regarded eating such meats sinful (1 Cor 10:29).
 3. Thereby they would be seeking not their own good but the good of their neighbor (1 Cor 10:24) and thus glorifying God.
 - B. We may offend others by insisting on doing what we have the right to do regardless of their conscience in the matter, for example, working on Sunday, drinking alcoholic beverages, wearing jewelry.
 1. While another's erring conscience cannot become the standard of our behavior, we must treat that person tenderly and control our indulgence, not to encourage his or her false scrupulousness but to avoid causing them to stumble, to do what they regard as sinful.
 2. The reference to Jews and Greeks is an admonition not to offend those outside the church. By wantonly engaging in what Scripture clearly designates as sinful we offend not only those in but also outside the church (Mt 18:6-7).

We live to the glory of God when we avoid foolish, inconsiderate, or sinful behavior that needlessly offends others.

In avoiding such behavior, our motivation is important.

- II. We live to God's glory when we are concerned about our fellow human beings' salvation.
 - A. Paul was concerned that all he did would encourage Gentiles to come to Christ and strengthen Christians in their attachment to Christ (1 Cor 9:9-23; Ro 9:3).
 - B. Here Paul was imitating Christ who in His redemptive work did not please Himself but humbled Himself to redeem all people (Php 2:4-8; Ro 15:3).
 1. His love for us moved Him to redeem us from our offensive behavior.
 2. When we know we have been saved we become imitators of Paul and of Christ in our desire for the salvation of others.

When this desire motivates our actions we are indeed living to the glory of God.

Conclusion: We all behave at times in ways that offend others. It is encouraging to know that Christ forgives us. He also moves us to be concerned that all people would experience His forgiveness. When that concern motivates our behavior towards others, we shall be less likely to give offense. What is more, we will be living to the glory of God.

GA

LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: TRANSFIGURATION
II Corinthians 3:12-4:2
February 21, 1982

“Such a hope” (v12) is one based on the abiding glory of the Gospel. “Very bold” refers to a plainness of speech which had not been possible for Moses. Neither do New Testament preachers need to act as Moses did (v13) who put a veil over his face to make the light endurable (Ex 34:33). The veil was symbolically identical with what prevented the Israelites from also seeing the transitory character of the law (v14). The truth that the old covenant was being done away in Christ still remained under a veil to the Jews (v15). A “man” (v16) refers to Israel. When Jewish people turn to the Lord, that is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit who gives freedom from the bondage of the Law. The Apostles can now serve the Lord with an openness and boldness not possible for Moses. They, along with all Christians, can see the glory of God directly, unlike the Israelites who saw it only reflected in the face of Moses. Furthermore, Christians are being transformed continuously into a likeness of God’s glory that is not transitory like the reflection in Moses’ face. Our spiritual assimilation into Christ comes from His glory and issues in a glory like His. The ministry that proclaims this glory is also glorious and can be carried out with courage, perseverance and honesty (vv1-2). Paul had been charged with deception, but it was impossible for him so to act. In his ministry he will not put a veil between himself and others. Rather he will plainly state God’s truths, appealing to the verdict of their conscience, and repudiating all crafty artifices.

Introduction: Although non-Christians often see the Christian ministry as a way of manipulating people emotionally and financially, and ministers sometimes do just that, a ministry which centers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is uniquely glorious. Paul describes

The Glory of the Gospel Ministry

- I. It is a ministry that lets us see Christ’s glory.
 - A. Christ’s glory consists of His person and work.
 1. That glory was seen by Peter, James, and John as a transfiguring radiance (Mk 9:3).
 2. That glory shines forth today when Christ’s ministers proclaim His Gospel.
 - B. Many today fail to see Christ’s glory. The saving significance of Christ’s person and work is veiled from many, just as the Jews of old were unable to see the fading light in Moses’ face.
 - C. We see Christ’s glory when by the power of the Holy Spirit we grasp the meaning of who He is and what He did for us in His death and resurrection. While the Israelites could not bear to look at the glory of the Law reflected in Moses’ face, we all can look without fear at the glory of the Gospel reflected in Christ.

We have in our midst a ministry which points us to the redemptive glory of Christ.

- II. It is a ministry that makes us glorious.
- A. We who have faith become glorious like Christ.
1. His grace transforms us into His image.
 2. We become partakers of the divine nature (1 Pe 1:4) and Christ lives in us (Ga 2:20).
 3. We become like Christ also as we conform ourselves less and less to the sinful world (Ro 12:2).
- B. We are transformed from "one degree of glory to another."
1. Christ accomplishes this in us through the work of the Gospel ministry — the Gospel in Baptism, Holy Communion, Absolution, and the Word.
 2. We will be perfectly changed into Christ's likeness in heaven. Unlike Elijah, we will have to go through physical death, but we can be sure of the high degree of glory awaiting us.

What a glorious ministry it is which by the Gospel can make us glorious!

- III. It is a ministry that glorifies Christ.
- A. That any man is a minister of the Gospel is a testimony not to his merit but to God's mercy.
1. Success in the ministry does not depend, therefore, on the minister's good qualities or cunning.
 2. A Gospel minister does not have to lose heart; success does not depend on him.
- B. Because he has his ministry only by the mercy of God, he can dare to speak the truth of God.
1. Like Paul, the Gospel minister seeks to speak God's Word to each person's conscience so that a sense of need is aroused.
 2. He points each person as plainly and openly as possible to Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and power.

The glory of the Gospel ministry is that it glorifies Christ and not the preacher.

Conclusion: What a precious gift to have the Gospel ministry in our midst! It is a glorious ministry because it lets us see Christ's glory, it makes us glorious, and it glorifies Christ.

GA

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: INVOCAVIT

Romans 8:31-39

February 28, 1982

"This" (v31, *pros tauta*) meaning "with respect to" refers back to the preceding verses where Paul has spoken of the suffering to be endured by those who will share Christ's glory (v17) and has disparaged the suffering in comparison with the glory (v18). Now he asserts the presence through all of the Christians's life of a victorious purpose of love. The argument of love is that God who has done so much is certain to do more. *Panta* (v32) means the whole of what furthers the Christian's life and contributes to his final salvation. Since all things work for the Christian's good (1 Cor 3:22ff), no possible adversary (*tris*) can make charges against Christians that would separate them from God. If neither God charges, nor Christ, nor Christ as judge condemns, no one else can either. Then no one can remove us from our state of acceptance with God (v34). Christians are the elect ones, owing their standing only to God's grace. Christ who rose and is now exalted pleads His people's cause. This is the Christian's security, the ground of his triumphant assurance. Despite all the troubles which have always come upon

Christians too, as the quotation from Ps 44:23 indicates, the love of God in Christ can reach and sustain through them all (vv35-36). Suffering for Christ's sake means entering into the fellowship of Christ's suffering, a situation in which the love of Christ is real and near and sure. These trials not only do not cut us off from Christ's love but give more intimate and thrilling experiences of it (v37). If Christ's love can hold us through death, what is left for us to fear? The horror of dying is annihilated by the love of Christ. Sometimes people fear life more than death, and that too the Apostle includes as a force that cannot separate from Christ's love. Beginning with angels, he goes on to list principalities and powers, moves on to dimensions of space, and then to any created thing. Nothing, whatever its nature, shall be able to separate us from Christ's love.

Introduction: The bumper sticker "God loves you" may seem trite but it does express a profound Scriptural truth. A deep need of human beings is to know that not only people but God loves them. St. Paul assures us that God indeed loves us so fervently and faithfully that

Nothing Can Separate Us from the Love of God

I. No condemnation by anyone.

A. We frequently experience condemnation.

1. People sometimes remind us of how we have not met their expectations and so we cannot expect their love either. We get so used to thinking of love as being conditioned on our good behavior that we think God's love works the same way.
2. Even if we do not experience outright or subtle condemnation by others, an honest look at our imperfections and failings can lead us to condemn ourselves. We then draw the conclusion that God must be condemning us because He could not possibly love such sinful people as we.

No matter what condemnation we experience from others or from ourselves and no matter how justified this condemnation seems to be, we do not have to think that God does not love us.

B. It is God who justifies us.

1. God condemned our sins in Christ and punished Him instead of us. For Jesus' sake God has accepted us; He willingly gave His own Son into death for us.
2. God responds continually to the resurrected Christ's intercessions for us.
3. God has elected us by His grace to be His own. Since He has called us to faith, He will keep us in faith.

Since neither God nor Christ condemn us, we can be sure that no condemnation by anyone can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ. Yet not only these judicial assaults but also direct assaults seek to separate us from the love of God. But these cannot do it either.

II. No affliction of any kind.

A. Afflictions can cause us to think that God no longer loves us.

1. We may be influenced to think this way by people who are quick to judge us, intimating that we must have done something to merit this affliction.
2. Being conscious of our sins, we can begin to think that God is punishing us.

B. But afflictions are not proof of God's wrath but of His love.

1. Afflictions are a way of entering into the fellowship of Christ's suffering, which is a privilege (Php 3:10).

2. Tribulation of all kinds has always been the lot of believers since Old Testament times.
3. Afflictions, no matter where they originate or what their intensity, can never make God stop loving us. We do not have to be afraid of the affliction of death or of life or of anything in all creation.

Conclusion: No matter how unlovely and unloved we sometimes feel ourselves to be because of condemnation and affliction, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. In spite of everything we keep achieving the most brilliant victory.

GA

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: REMINISCERE

Romans 5:1-11

March 7, 1982

“Peace” in v1 refers not to our feelings but to a change in God’s relation to us. Access to the holy God has been opened to us through Christ (v2) now and forever, for we have the hope of future glory. Peace, joy, and hope can last through tribulation (vv3-5). Tribulations test us, endurance in tribulation shows the genuineness of faith, and faithfulness strengthens hope, which, confirmed under trial, rests on the assurance of the love of God. The inner consciousness of God’s love in every circumstance comes to us through God’s Holy Spirit. We can be assured of God’s love because Christ died for the ungodly (v6). Love that reached out to ungodly people is surely love that cannot be doubted. God’s love is much greater than human love (v8) because God’s love is unconditional and spontaneous. In v9 the argument is from the greater to the less. Since we are now indeed justified, how can we not be saved from divine wrath? In vv10-11 the Apostle points out that reconciliation has been effected for all mankind and that faith appropriates this accomplished reconciliation. Thus our hope is sure. We not only have the hope of future glory but we rejoice and glory right now in our peace with God (v11). We Christians may and ought to feel certain of our final salvation on the basis of our justification.

Introduction: Sometimes we say to another person or to ourselves, “You’ll make it,” thereby expressing no more than a vague hope of wishful thinking. Not so Paul. He speaks with complete certainty. The import of the text is that

We’ll Make It,

- I. Through suffering.
 - A. Suffering can make us feel as though we are not going to make it — discouraged, depressed.
 - B. Yet suffering can be beneficial.
 1. Suffering produces endurance.
 2. Endurance produces character.
 3. Character produces hope — hope that we will make it.
 - C. We need never lose hope in the midst of suffering because the love of God stands sure.
 1. God showed His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners, God’s enemies. How much greater is God’s love than human love, which might be willing to sacrifice for a good person but not for an evil person.
 2. Because God continues to love us unconditionally and spontaneously we can be sure that we will make it through suffering.

II. To final salvation.

- A. Sometimes we may doubt our final salvation because we think we must do at least a little to make ourselves right with God.
- B. Our being saved from the wrath of God when we die is entirely God's doing.
 - 1. Through Christ we have access to God's grace.
 - 2. Standing in the grace of God we have peace with God. God is no longer wrathful toward us but has reconciled us to Himself.
- C. If God could bring about the reconciliation of sinful people like us to Himself, then surely He will see our salvation through to its final glorious end.
 - 1. We who believe in Jesus Christ can be certain of going to heaven.
 - 2. We can rejoice in what God did for us in justifying us and in what He will still do to bring about our final salvation.

Conclusion: We'll make it — through suffering to a final salvation. This is not just a pious sentiment; it is a sure confidence.

GA

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: OCULI

Romans 10:5-13

March 14, 1982

The righteousness that comes from the law must be an achievement (v5); the person who has done it shall live. But the whole Jewish sacrificial system proclaimed that no person could do the Law and thus claim righteousness in life. To keep the law is an impossibility because of sin. In v6 Paul makes use of Dt 30:11-14 to convey a message of righteousness by faith. Both the Law and the Gospel come to us through the written Word of God, and that Word we can take into our heart. The righteousness of Christ which is appropriated by faith is declared in the Word just as God's commandments are. For that reason it is not necessary for anyone to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down, as though righteousness had not yet been purchased and won by Christ. Nor is it necessary to secure that righteousness by descending into the abyss of death into which Christ descended. God has already raised His Son from the dead (v7). Christ's descent from heaven and His rising from the dead, His incarnation and His resurrection, we could not bring about by any effort of our own. And we do not need to. Christ, incarnate and risen, is here already in the Word and is God's gift to faith. No efforts of ours are needed; righteousness need not be achieved but only appropriated. The person who believes in his heart that God raised Christ from the dead can also confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord (v9). On the basis of such a faith and confession he is saved. Here is the difference between Law and Gospel. He who does the Law shall live, but he who confesses and believes shall be saved. The Word of the Gospel intends always to create and preserve faith in the heart, and faith always speaks out in confession (v10). Our heart believing unto righteousness and our mouth making confession unto salvation are two sides of the same thing. The quotation from Is 28:16 (v11) shows that already in the Old Testament no exception existed; the way of righteousness by faith is meant for all.

Introduction: People generally associate righteousness with abiding by the law. When a person does what the law demands he is practicing "the righteousness which is based on the law" (v5 — the law understood as the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses, Ex 20:1-17). Paul contrasts this human achievement of righteousness with

God's Gift of Righteousness

- I. A righteousness that came through Christ.
 - A. It could not come through us.
 1. Our righteousness based on the Law is imperfect, and God's Law demands perfection.
 2. Our falling short of God's standard is cause for God to punish us.
 - B. Christ achieved righteousness for us by keeping the Law perfectly and by bearing our punishment on the cross.
 - C. We do not need to work at becoming righteous enough for God to accept us.
 1. That would be as impossible as ascending to heaven to bring Christ down or descending into the grave to bring Christ up (vv6-7).
 2. Christ's life and death and resurrection guarantee God's righteousness to us as a gift.
 3. Our striving for righteousness on the basis of the Law is a response to this gift rather than a means of coming into a saving relationship with God.
- II. A righteousness offered in God's Word.
 - A. We cannot find this righteousness anywhere else.
 1. Not in mystical communion, as practiced, for example, by monks in the Trappist Monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts (featured in a recent documentary on television).
 2. Not in the world of nature, in fulfilling work, or in close human relationships.
 - B. God offers His righteousness to us only in the Gospel Word.
 1. Christ and His righteousness are actually conveyed to us in Baptism, Holy Communion, Absolution, as well as in the Gospel Word that we hear, read, and think upon.
 2. We do not have to search for this Word, for it is near us (v8).
 3. It is always God's purpose by His Gospel Word to create in our hearts a faith that issues in a verbal confession of Jesus as our Savior and Lord.
 - C. No one will ever have cause to regret receiving the righteousness offered in the Word (v11).

Conclusion: Not our righteousness based on the Law but God's gift of righteousness puts us into a saving relationship with God.

GA

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: LAETARE

Ephesians 2:4-10

March 21, 1982

The *de* (v4) is emphatic, introducing what God does in our sinful extremity (vv2-3). God's disposition toward those dead by reason of sin is one of unstinted, inexhaustible mercy. Even though sin is an abomination to God, He did not turn from us when we were immersed in it. Nor did He wait for us to begin to move toward Him. When we were dead, He made us alive, regenerated us. As God placed Jesus at His right hand in heaven, so He has placed His people with Him in heavenly places, that is, in places where the privileges of heaven are dispensed and the joys of heaven are already beginning to be experienced. The ground and reason for such kindness is Christ, specifically His atoning work. Faith which appropriates Christ's work has its origin in God's grace rather than in our

efforts. For that reason no believer can boast of his accomplishments (v9). Since we are a new creation in Christ, good works are the object of this new creation and not the cause of it. These good works are in God's eternal plan. God intended that they should actually and habitually be done by us. That the good works too originate with God is implied in the fact that we had to be made a new creation in Christ in order to have good works as an object. We had such little inward capacity for good works that we had to be created for them in Christ so we might do them. Good works flow from God's grace and are an ongoing manifestation of that grace.

Introduction: As one enters the state of Nebraska by car a sign announces, "Nebraska — The Good Life," referring to virtues like honest toil, family togetherness, and concern for one's neighbor. We Christians, however, have the good life wherever we live, for we have

The Good Life in Christ

- I. A life free from the tyranny of sin.
 - A. Sin caused spiritual death (v5a).
 1. Because of our natural birth in sin we had no power to do anything but sin, and we still experience sin's power in the tugging of our sinful nature.
 2. Because of the sin in our very being we, along with the rest of the human race, were under the wrath of God (v3b).
 - B. God made us spiritually alive (v5b).
 1. A new birth was possible because Christ died for us and rose again (v5c).
 2. The new birth took place at our baptism (Ro 6:4). That is when God gave us His grace and the faith to receive it (v8).
 3. This new birth frees us from sin's tyranny; sin no longer condemns and controls us.

But there is more to the good life than deliverance from death — we are lifted to a higher level.

- II. A life with a foretaste of heaven.
 - A. God himself raises us up to heavenly places (v6).
 1. This happens when we gather for worship.
 2. This happens when we experience fellowship with other Christians.
 3. This happens when we rely on God's promises of His presence and aid.

We are in "heavenly places" like those experienced by the disciples on Mt. Tabor and the disciples on the Emmaus Road.

- B. These touches of heaven on earth point us to the coming ages when God will lavish His kindness on us fully and forever (v7).
 1. Then all traces of sin will be removed.
 2. Then the heavenly hosts will admire the riches of God's kindness to us.

Even though sin often mars our life now it is still a good life because it is

- III. A life beautified by good works.
 - A. God's purpose in giving us life is that we do good works (v10).
 1. These good works God prepared in advance. The works are ready and only await live doers (Lenski).
 2. Christ in whom we live makes us partakers of His virtues of purity, humility, gentleness, and kindness.
 - B. The good works we do originate with God.

1. For that reason we cannot boast of them as our actions which earn merit for us.
2. Our good works remind us that our salvation is not of works but of grace and that we ourselves are a work, the workmanship of God.

Conclusion: We have no need to live in any particular state or country to live the good life. In Christ we can all have the good life.

GA

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JUDICA

Hebrews 5:7-9

March 28, 1982

The writer seeks to hold forth Jesus as the obedient High Priest, God's Son, that the readers might see that all He did was for them. As he reminds them of Jesus' Gethsemane experience (v7) he seeks to touch their hearts with the great love which moved the Savior to suffer and to die. In this short section he elicits obedience and the response of faith, even as Jesus faithfully said "yes" to the will of His father.

Introduction: Obedience is not a popular concept. It ordinarily awakens in the hearer an automatic resistance. However, there is much calamity and sadness, some of it eternal in nature, because we dislike the word "obedience." The text today shows us how Jesus, God's Son, was obedient to His Father. This fact has rich meaning for us.

God's Son Is Obedient

- I. Obedience can only flow from knowing the will of God.
 - A. Finding and knowing God's plan for my life is essential. Jesus knew His purpose. Do I know mine?
 - B. Checking with God for daily direction makes confident obedience possible. Have I been checking with God's Word? (v7)
- II. Obedience is equally important when signals of sonship are dim.
 - A. Indeed, could God will that I suffer as a son?
 - B. Indeed, could God will that I carry the punishment of another's guilt? Is that compatible with being a child of God?
 - C. Could the purpose of sonship be fulfilled when I am called into an action where God seems far away? Why are those loud cries and tears necessary?
- III. Obedience is essential in God's plan to accomplish His purposes.
 - A. "Learned obedience through suffering" (v8). Am I selfishly avoiding suffering? Is that disobedience? Could there be a connection?
 - B. Being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (v9) — a striking progression, from the obedience of God's only Son to the obedience of God's sons and daughters. If we break the progression, all (for us) is lost.

Ah, obedience is a good word!

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SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT: PALM SUNDAY

Philippians 2:5&11

April 4, 1982

“In you” (v5), in yourselves, in your heart, mind the things that Christ minded. He was “in the form of God” (v6), possessing all the attributes of God. Yet he did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, a prize to be tenaciously retained. Rather He “emptied Himself” (v7), not of the Godhead but of its manifestation, its glory. That is to say, during the period of His humiliation Jesus generally denied Himself the manifestation of the divine glory communicated to His human nature at the time of His incarnation. His humiliation was His own voluntary act. He took on the attributes of a slave. He appeared on earth as a man and then humiliated himself to the point of death on a cross, the most torturous and shameful form of death, reserved for slaves. Consequently God exalted Him (v9) in His resurrection and ascension. “Name” refers to the majesty, glory, and dignity which Jesus was given also according to His human nature. Thus the majesty and glory of Jesus are the object of Christian worship (v10). All creation is to honor Him. All creatures with the gift of speech are to confess with thankful adoration that He is Lord of all (v11).

Introduction: “Have this mind among yourselves.” Paul is talking about an attitude of humility. We are sometimes concerned about the lack of this attitude in ourselves and in others. Paul was concerned about the lack of it in the Philippians (vv3-4). God through Paul indicates that He wanted the Philippians and He wants us to have

An Attitude of Humility

- I. Humility shows itself in service to others.
 - A. Jesus “emptied Himself” in order to be one with us and to serve us. No trappings of kingly power for Him (Mk 11:1-10) but rather a slave’s death on a cross.
 - B. Such humility is not wide-spread in our world.
 1. Books like *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand and *Me, The Narcissistic American* by Aaron Stern spell out prevailing attitudes.
 2. We often flaunt our service, or offer it without regard for another’s needs, or we limit our service to “our kind of people.”
 - C. What an inspiration Jesus is to us — serving people in their totality, sensitive to their needs, never forcing Himself on them or stamping out their individuality.

But as we try to give ourselves in the pattern of Christ we can become discouraged because we never come up to His standard. Pride keeps popping up. Not even the virtue of humility is immune to the temptation of the devil. We all suffer at times from “acute inflammation of the ego.”
- II. Humility is possible when we depend on Christ.
 - A. For forgiveness.
 1. Christ’s resurrection in which God “highly exalted Him” is God’s stamp of approval on Christ’s atoning work, proof that all our sins (pride too) are forgiven.
 2. We do not have to excuse or make up for our failures to be humble. We can simply confess them and depend on Christ for forgiveness.
 3. With forgiveness comes humility, which is Christ’s gift to us, not simply an attitude we decide we are going to have. Christ puts His mind in us.

B. For power.

1. Christ has power to mold us into more humble people, for God bestowing on Jesus "the name above every name" means that Jesus has divine power to meet our every need.
2. We can tap this power continually in the means of grace.

Conclusion: Humility like many other good attitudes is hard to teach. Jesus is not only an excellent teacher, having modeled for us humility in service, but He puts His own humility in us. We can depend on Christ to cultivate in us an attitude of humility that shows itself in service to others.

GA

GOOD FRIDAY
Hebrews 4:14-5:10
April 9, 1982

4:14: As our priest Christ ascended to plead for us. 4:15: Christ was tempted as we are (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13; Mt 16:21-23; Ps 22:2-21). We have a high priest who can empathize with us. 5:1: High priests of the Old Testament were selected from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. They were mediators between God and man, offering sacrifices for the purpose of expiating their own sins and those of the people. 5:2: The first qualification of a priest was that he have compassion on others in view of his own sins. 5:4: The second qualification was that he be called. 5:5: Christ did not seek His own glory (Jn 8:54; 5:31, 43; 17:5). Christ is designated a priest by the Father (Ps 2:7; Ps 110:4). 5:7: As our priest Christ prayed for others and for Himself (cf. Gethsemane). 5:8: He was obedient to His Father, who sent Him. 5:9: "Being made perfect" means having completed His work. "To all who obey" refers to the obedience of faith (2 Cor 10:5-6; Ro 1:5).

Christ, Our Great High Priest

- I. Christ is a priest called by God.
 - A. In the Old Testament priests were called by God (v4).
 1. No one could usurp the office.
 2. Priests were called of God, as was Aaron (Ex 28).
 - B. Christ was designated by God as the great high priest.
 1. Christ did not glorify Himself (v5).
 2. The Father declared Him to be His eternal Son (v5).
 3. The Father declared Him to be a priest (v6).
- II. As priest, Christ offered Himself and obtained eternal redemption (v9).
 - A. Priests offered up sacrifices for sins (v1).
 1. They offered for their own sins (v3).
 2. This made them compassionate toward the sins of others (v2).
 3. They offered for the sins of others.
 - B. Christ offered the sacrifice of Himself.
 1. He was tempted, yet without sin (v15). He kept God's Law for us.
 2. He learned obedience by the things that He suffered (v8; Php 2:8).
 3. All who in faith obey receive the benefit (v8).
- III. Christ is still functioning as our high priest (v14).
 - A. Priests, like Aaron, died and had to be replaced.
 - B. Christ still lives (Eph 1:20-23; Php 2:9-11).
 1. He passed into heavens (v14).
 2. As our intercessor, He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (v15).

C. Let us hold fast our profession (v14).

D. Let us come boldly to the throne of grace (v15).

Conclusion: Good Friday is a day for thanksgiving to God for designating Christ to be our high priest and to Christ for having obtained eternal salvation for us. Let us come boldly to the throne of grace and hold fast to our profession.

HJE

EASTER SUNDAY
I Corinthians 15:19-28
April 11, 1982

In v19 Paul expresses the bitterness of the deception Christians would experience if Christ were not raised and there were no resurrection from the dead. Having demolished the negative proposition by asserting the fact that Christ has been raised and therefore there is a resurrection of the dead (vv12-18), the ground is cleared for the declaration that the Christian dead will rise in Him. As the first harvest sheaf, the firstfruit of the harvest, was a pledge of the harvest to come, so Christ is the firstfruit and pledge of the resurrection of His own. The resurrection has begun (v20). Christ is the antitype of Adam, the medium of life to the race as Adam was of death (vv21-22). As death in all cases is grounded in Adam, so life in all cases is grounded in Christ. There will be an interval, how long or how short we do not know, between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of the believers when Christ comes on the last day. At the parousia Christ will return the kingdom over which He has ruled by means of Word and Sacrament to His Father's hands, but this will happen only after all hostile powers have been put down (Eph 1:21; v24). The final enemy to be subdued (v26) is death in the sense that on the last day physical death will cease to hold Christians in its power. By delivering the kingdom to the Father Christ subjects Himself to the Father. Not that Christ will than be deprived of His kingdom and rule but rather that the Triune God will rule in the unity of the three Persons with all glory fully revealed. The Triune God shall be all in all. In that unity the God-man has His place.

Introduction: It is understandable how people who are enjoying life, or worrying about their relationship to God, would view death as "the last enemy." People who are suffering physical pain or mental anguish may, however, regard death as a friend rather than an enemy. Yet from the perspective of what God intended for us, that we should not die but live, death is indeed the "last enemy." The message of the text is that God has conquered this enemy for us; in fact,

Our Victory over Death Is Guaranteed

- I. By Christ's resurrection.
 - A. Christ is the firstfruit.
 1. Just as the first sheaf of grain offered as a sacrifice to God in the Old Testament represented the full harvest which was to follow, so Christ's resurrection is the first of many resurrections which will surely follow (v20).
 2. Because our resurrection from the dead is assured, our physical death can be regarded as a sleep ("who have fallen asleep," v20).
 3. The hope we have based on Christ's resurrection does not relate only to this life but also to life beyond physical death (v19).
 - B. Christ is the source of life.
 1. Death is an event in the history brought on by the first man Adam.

2. The second Adam, Christ the God-man, by His death and resurrection abolished death (v22; 2 Tm 1:10).

But when will this banishment of death occur for us in view of the fact that we must all experience physical death? "Each in his own order; Christ the firstfruit, then at His coming those who belong to Christ" (v23). Our victory over death is guaranteed —

II. At Christ's second coming.

- A. The triumphs of evil that we see around us, especially the devastation caused by death, will not continue forever.
 1. Christ is even now in control and will one day openly display His victory over all evil.
 2. In the meantime He will not permit any evil, including death, to destroy us (Lk 10:19; vv25, 27a).
- B. The day is coming when all the forces opposing God will be utterly destroyed (v24).
 1. The machinations of Satan, the schemes of evil people, the perversities of our sinful nature, the grip of death.
 2. From that day on there will be no more death — no more dying for us Christians (Re 21:4).
- C. The second coming of Christ will mark the beginning of a new existence in which the Triune God will be everything to us in a kingdom of glory without end (v28).

Conclusion: The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees our victory over death, pointing us to that day when we shall rise to endless life and death shall be no more.

GA