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Announcement	263
The Theology of the Cross	Karl Wengenroth 267
Tongues: An Evaluation from a Scientific Perspective	Klemet Preus 277
Luther and the Confessions	Wilbert Rosin 295
Theological Observer	299
Homiletical Studies	301
Book Reviews	339
Books Received	353



Homiletical Studies

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Jeremiah 33:14-16

November 28, 1982

Chapter 33 closes the prophecies of future blessings which began with chapter 29. Unlike the lying prophets, Jeremiah does not minimize God's wrath against sin and the severity of God's judgment (vv 4-5), but he also speaks of Israel's and Judah's peace resulting from the forgiveness of their sins (vv 6-13). Jeremiah's vision of good things goes beyond the return of the chosen people from exile to "those days" and "that time" (v 15) when the Messianic Branch will spring forth from David's line. The members of the Messiah's kingdom will not only call Him "The Lord Is Our Righteousness" but they, unrighteous sinners though they are, will be declared righteous (Ro 3:21-26; 1 Cor 1:30). They will have access to the throne of God through the Messiah-King's mediation, prefigured by the sacrifices of the Levitical priests. In verse 17 the reference is to the eternal kingdom of the Messianic King and in verse 18 to the perpetual priesthood of the Messiah who is a priest forever and able to save those who draw near to God through Him (He 7:21-28).

The central thought of the text is that we are called righteous by God. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will be confident of their righteousness in Christ. Our problem is that we often make our deeds the basis for a God-pleasing righteousness. The means to the goal is that Jesus is our righteousness.

Introduction: God's good word to us today is that the Lord is coming. The Epistle and the Gospel tell of Jesus' coming on Judgment Day. His coming in judgment is a good word for us only because of the kind of Lord He is. Jeremiah points to His coming as a righteous Lord.

Jesus is a Righteous Lord

- I. He was perfectly righteous (v 15a).
 - A. The people of Judah and Israel yearned for a truly righteous king.
 1. Their kings almost without exception had been unrighteous and had led them to similar behavior.
 2. God promised them a lineal descendant of King David who would be completely upright.
 - B. Christ demonstrated a perfect righteousness.
 1. He was conceived and born without sin.
 2. He never committed sin (1 Pe 2:22).
 - C. His perfect righteousness makes our unrighteousness glaringly evident. Yet, the incredible thing is that
- II. We are called righteous in Him (v16).
 - A. We do not make ourselves righteous.
 1. We cannot become righteous before God by our efforts (Is 64:6; Ps 14:3).
 2. Jesus by His holy life, innocent death, and confirming resurrection gained a righteousness for us.
 - B. God imputes Christ's righteousness to us who believe in Him (II Cor 5:19).
 1. We have Christ's perfect righteousness (1 Cor 5:30; II Cor 5:21; Php 3:9).
 2. We are the "Judah" who have been saved to dwell securely without fear of the judgment.

Knowing the Lord's security moves us to make life more secure for all people.

III. He uses us to execute righteousness (v 15b).

A. In our country, as in the Israel and Judah of Jeremiah's day, there is flagrant unrighteousness.

1. Discrimination against minorities in housing and jobs.

2. Graft and cheating in high and low places.

B. We who have been made righteous are to be instruments of righteousness in the world.

1. Through various citizens' groups, mediation committees, and voting we can influence political and economic power structures in the cause of justice.

2. Inspired by Christ's unrelenting pursuit of justice when He lived among us and energized by His daily declaration of us as righteous in His sight, we strive to bring about righteousness in our community, state, and nation until that day when Christ comes to judge the world in righteousness.

Conclusion: Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Jeremiah. God's good word to us today is that Jesus has come, continues to come, and will come at the end of time as our righteous Lord.

Gerhard Aho

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Malachi 3:1-4

December 5, 1982

"My messenger" (v 1) points to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, spoken of already by Isaiah in 40:3, and specified by Christ Himself as the herald of His advent (Mt 11:10-11). "The Lord whom you seek" and "the messenger of the testament" are designations of the Messiah. Christ came "suddenly," only six months after His forerunner. Then, eight days after His birth Christ was presented in the temple (Lk 2:22).

Those who fail to heed the Baptist's message of repentance and who consequently despise the Messiah's mercy toward sinners will not be able to endure His judgment (v 2). The people of Israel had expected the Messiah to judge the heathen but they themselves were to be judged first. Judgment begins at the house of God, with the priests, the sons of Levi (v 3), who ought to have set an example for the people. Yet Christ's judging wrath is not a blind fury that merely destroys. Like a refiner's fire that separates the precious metal from the dross, and like a fuller's soap which, with its alkali, cleanses newly shorn wool and newly woven cloth of their natural oils, so Christ's purifying has as its purpose; correction and improvement. He restores His people to a holy fear and a clean devotion. He makes His people new so that they can perform genuine service, offering up their lives as pleasing sacrifices to Him (v 4). Christ is patient with sinners; that is why they are "not consumed" (v 6). He works persistently so that Christians, the "Judah" and "Jerusalem" of the present day, would present "right offerings," as "pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old."

The central thought of the text is that Christ's purpose is not the destruction but the purification of sinners. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will offer God-pleasing service. The problem is that we sometimes think God expects no service at all. The means to the goal is the patient love of God which moves us to God-pleasing service.

Introduction: Offerings are a way of expressing our relationship to God. The people of God in Malachi's day presented offerings of animals and crops while we tend to think of offerings as mainly money. Yet offerings include much more—thoughts, words, deeds, our whole selves. The persistent problem in Malachi's day was that the people's offerings displeased God. The same problem often plagues our offerings. What is the solution? The text tells us

How God Makes Our Offerings Pleasing to Him

I. He purges our evil.

A. By laying bare our sin, as a refiner's fire brings out the dross in gold and silver and a fuller's soap the unwanted oil in wool (v 2b).

1. Our sin of substituting ritual for repentance.

2. Our sin of thinking that God tolerates sin.

B. By condemning our sins.

1. By means of the Law preached by John the Baptist (v 1) and by faithful preachers since that time.

2. So that we fear His wrath, knowing that if His wrath were vented on us we could not endure (v 2a).

God makes our offerings pleasing to Him by bringing us to the awareness that we are sinners before Him. God purges our evil as He lets us see the magnitude of it and as He puts in us the desire to be rid of it. God, however, does not confront us with our evil to destroy us but to purify us. God makes our offerings pleasing to Him as

II. He purifies us for service.

A. By forgiving us.

1. Christ is the messenger of a testament of grace, not of retribution (v 1b).

2. That testament is expressed in baptism which bestows on us the forgiveness Christ earned for us (Lk 3:3).

3. It is because Christ is a forgiving Lord that we delight in Him (v 1b). As forgiven sinners our offerings are acceptable to Him.

B. By continually enabling us to present right offerings.

1. He helps us focus on His love for us so that we can respond more and more with loving actions (Php 1:9).

2. He helps us think about the excellence we have in Him so that we can more and more approve and do what is excellent (Php 1:10).

Conclusion: How we can delight in the Lord who comes to us again in this Advent season! This Lord, to whom we offer ourselves, Himself makes our offerings pleasing. He purges our evil so that He can purify us for service.

GA

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

December 12, 1982

Note the differences in the translations of the beginning of verse 18. The text is properly 3:14-18a in the RSV, but 3:14-17 in the KJV and NIV.

The preacher will want to refresh his memory of the world situation at Zephaniah's time. Assyria was at its zenith and little, beyond Zephaniah's prophecy which few heeded, presaged Nineveh's imminent fall. In Jerusalem the wickedness of Manasseh and Amon had yielded to the righteousness of Josiah. The boy king may well have been strongly influenced by Zephaniah who was himself probably of royal blood. At least fifty years have passed since the

ministry of Isaiah, and Jeremiah would not rise until the end of Zephaniah's work. The book of Zephaniah is a compendium of his life work. We need to remind ourselves that most of his preaching and writing was unwelcome prophecy of the day of the Lord and of judgment on both the nations and Jerusalem. Against this dark background the call to rejoice in our text is startling.

Our audience too might well be startled to hear the Advent call, which normally blends anticipation with repentance, here so unreservedly joyous. Here is no false tinsel Christmas. Here is none of the uninformed emotion of children shielded from this evil world's dark side. Rather the Holy Spirit, through Zephaniah, challenges us to recognize that

The Church Rejoices Because God Rejoices

- I. God Himself has reason to rejoice.
 - A. He has ratified His names among us.
 1. He is the Lord (vs 15, 17).
 2. He is the King of Israel (v 15).
 3. He is "God with us" (v 15; Eze 37:26-28; Mt 1:23; Is 7:14).
 4. He is your God (v 17).
 5. He is love (v 17; Jn 4:8; Dt 7:8; 10:15; Jr 31:3; Ro 8:39).
 - B. God's love for us removes all reason to fear.
 1. He casts out our enemies (v 15b; Dt 6:19; Mk 1:34).
 2. We have no need to fear evil (v 15c).
 3. He has taken away the judgments against us; even His own judgment against us is removed for Christ's sake (v 15a).
- When our God Himself is rejoicing the Church cannot stand with limp hands (v 16; Is 35:3; He 12:12).
- II The Daughter of Jerusalem, the Church, rejoices with all its heart (v 14; Is 12:6; Zch 2:10).
 - A. Even when times are dark and evil . . . (v15).
 1. Judah was threatened by foreign powers and by its own apostasy (Zph 1:2-3:13).
 2. External and internal forces threaten the Church's joy now.
 - B. Yet, the church rejoices.
 1. Judgments against both old and new Israel are satisfied by Christ, the victorious Warrior (v 17; Is 63:1; TLH 209).
 2. The Lord quiets us with His love (v 17; Ps 116:7).

Our joy as we prepare to celebrate the first Advent of our Lord is not artificially manufactured but is rooted in facts that cause God Himself to rejoice.

Warren E. Messmann
Rushville, Indiana

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 19, 1982

Micah 5:2-4

There are almost as many opinions on the meaning of "Ephrathah" as there are commentators. But the consensus is unanimous that "Bethlehem" means "bread-house." Incarnation means, in part, that the infinite God who is a spirit, came to live in the world of human senses, The Word became a baby sensible to

and sensible of human sight, hearing, touch, taste, and feeling. The text suggests that out of all the stimuli which bombard our senses in the Christmas season we want, above all, to

Behold the Bread of Life!

I. God Himself is the Baker.

A. He chooses the time.

1. Times of trouble seem unlikely (v 3; ch 4:9, 10).
2. He planned the "Bake Day" before any of the people involved knew about it:
 - a. Before Micah, writing 800 years before "Bake Day."
 - b. Before David (I Sm 17:12; Lk 2:4), the first conquering king of Israel.
 - c. Before Ruth gleaned Bethlehem's fields and became a gentile ancestor of Jesus through her second husband (Ru 4:11).
 - d. Before Rachel bore Benjamin and died at Bethlehem (Gn 30:23, 24; 35:18-20).
 - e. Before Adam and Eve fell and heard the promise (Gn 3).
3. God "greased the pan" from eternity (v 2b; Ga 4:4,5).

B. God chooses the place.

1. In men's view, Bethlehem seems unlikely (v 2a).
2. In God's economy, Bethlehem is His choice (Is 10:20-22; Ho 11:8; Mt 2:6).

God mixed the ingredients, stoked full of divine wrath the furnace of the cross, and brought forth the Bread of Life.

II. Come! Savor the Bread of Life.

A. This is lasting Bread.

1. Mother's bread is soon gone.
2. The Bread of Life is eternal (v4b; Eze 34:13-15).

B. This is nourishing Bread.

1. Jesus so describes Himself (Jn 6:32, 33, 35, 40).
2. Even when we are "punched down" as a loaf of bread must be, the yeast of God's love raises us up again (cf. Jn 6:47-51).

C. This is satisfying Bread.

1. The "short'nin bread" of this world leaves us even more hungry.
2. God's Bread of Life is strong, majestic, secure (v 4; Is 40:11; 45:22).

WEM

CHRISTMAS DAY

Isaiah 62:10-12

December 25, 1982

Advent touches Christmas with an intimacy which defies separation. This is especially true when preaching on an Old Testament text for the celebration of Christmas. The language of Isaiah leans forward to the New Testament events with clarity and certainty. The Christmas story recorded in the Gospel leans backward for prophetic support. The celebration of Christmas can use Advent language advantageously. All our celebrations are three legged — one in the past, one in the present, and the other in the future. Christmas has its roots in the prophecies, fulfillment in the event itself, and blessed effects for all ages to come.

Introduction: No other holiday gets more preparation than Christmas. Then, once the day is here, all celebration seems to evaporate into thin air. This does not happen to the Christian. Our preparation is part of the celebration and the rejoicing at the birth of God's Son continues. The arrival of our salvation is so important that our hearts join the believers of all ages in shouting:

Salvation is Here!

- I. Its way was prepared.
 - A. Preparation was made for a world held captive.
 1. The children of Israel suffered a national captivity more than once. Each case was a dreadful experience.
 2. Sin, which led to Israel's downfall, is the universal captor. We all know and feel this terrible bondage.
 - B. Preparation was made with a promise of deliverance.
 1. Isaiah painted a much needed picture of captives marching out of bondage, carrying a flag of freedom, traveling on a special highway.
 2. Isaiah prophesied in this figurative way that the world's Savior from sin would lead His people out of bondage.
- II. Its coming is bold.
 - A. A manger scene is humbly hiding a powerful event.
 1. That is God's Son in the stable (cf. the Gospel lesson).
 2. He boldly joins the human race to save it from temporal and eternal captivity. He is the One who brings salvation.
 - B. What He does and gives is already with Him in the manger (11b).
 1. His judgments against sin are as good as done.
 2. What He will earn by His life, death, and resurrection are ahead of Him, but the promise is as good as kept. There is no doubt God's Son will be victorious. He will hand salvation to believers.

Salvation can come only to those in trouble. Christmas has such tremendous meaning today because our troubles are no less intense than those of long ago. Christmas is here because salvation is here.

Lowell F. Thomas
Fort Wayne, Indiana

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Jeremiah 31:10-13
December 26, 1982

When the Sunday after Christmas is the day after Christmas, we have the opportunity to celebrate the same event three days in a row. The hush of Christmas Eve gives way to the festival sounds of Christmas Day. Our celebration continues on this Sunday, emphasizing the blessedness of God's people. There is a prosperity rooted in the ransom provided by the Messiah. We must not let the food, drink, animals, growing plants, and dancing folks get in the way of the Gospel proclamation. We can certainly appreciate the expression of spiritual richness in terms of physical feasting. After all, we are real people celebrating that

The Lord has Ransomed His People

- I. He came Himself to do it.

-
- A. His people were conquered by foes stronger than they.
 - 1. God permitted an enemy to scatter the Israelites and to take their country from them.
 - 2. Their sin was the cause of this scattering. We dare not grow weary of hearing the warnings of God against unrighteousness.
 - 3. They could no more overcome their spiritual depravity by themselves than they could undo their exile.
 - B. He came as a shepherd who gathers and cares for the people.
 - 1. This shepherd was born among the animals in a stable.
 - 2. Later on, He would call Himself the Good Shepherd (Jn 10).
 - 3. The worldwide unity of Israel (the New Testament church) was to be a spiritual one in the Redeemer. Geographic borders were of no importance to the gracious embrace of God.
 - C. The Lord sacrifices himself to redeem the people.
 - 1. Sacrificial activity was well known to the Old Testament people.
 - 2. This Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. The Babe in the manger is headed for the cross.
- II. Now His people rejoice.
- A. It is a celebration of abundance.
 - 1. Spiritual abundance is pictured by physical well-being and demonstrations of joy.
 - 2. We rejoice in a similar way in our abundant salvation offered to us in the water of baptism and in the bread and wine of the Holy Supper. Both tie us to the Shepherd's Body through the power of the Word. Our celebration is one of faith in the promises bestowed.
 - B. It is a celebration for all people.
 - 1. Those who do not know about the ransom cannot celebrate.
 - 2. We get to shout the news to the whole world. Epiphany is just around the corner and we can hardly wait to get there.
 - 3. Make sure you have the meaning of the celebration straight: The Lord has ransomed His people. The telling is part of the celebration.

The celebration of Christmas cannot end until everyone hears about Jesus, the one, great, final ransom.

LFT

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

January 2, 1983

Isaiah 61:10-11

Lutheran Worship lists Isaiah 61:10-62:3 as the Old Testament text for this Sunday in all three years of the three-year cycle. Isaiah 62:1-5, however, occurs just two weeks later as the Old Testament text for the Second Sunday after Epiphany in Series C of the three-year cycle, which forms the basis for this year's homiletical studies. The current study, therefore, will restrict the text to the last two verses of Isaiah 61.

In the first nine verses of Isaiah 61 the speaker is the Messiah (cf. 61:1-2 and Lk 4:18-21), who describes the purpose and results of His mission. The purpose is the establishment of the new testament (v 8) and the proclamation of the gospel

(vs 1-3). The results are the joy (vs 3, 7) and righteousness (v 3) of Christians, the establishment of the New Testament church (v 4), its extension to the Gentiles (vs 5,6,9), and the priesthood of all believers (v 6). In verses 10 and 11, on the other hand, the speaker is the church, responding with great joy to all that the Messiah has accomplished on her behalf. Thus, the rejoicing of verse 10 is connected with "the oil of gladness" (v 3) and "everlasting joy" (v 7); the "robe of righteousness" (v 10b) with the "oaks of righteousness" which are the "planting of the Lord" (v 3); the "praise" of verse 11 with the "mantle of praise" (v 3); the "nations" of verse 11 with the "foreigners" of 5 and the "nations" of 6 and 9. The bridegroom's headdress — symbolic of joy — mentioned in verse 3 similarly reoccurs in 10c. The word *p'er* is rendered "beauty" in verse 3 and "ornaments" in 10c by the King James Version. The Revised Standard Version and New American Standard Bible, with more consistency, use "garland" in both cases, but "turban" would be a more precise translation (Brown-Driver-Briggs, p. 802). Thus, the first clause of 10c, if translated literally, would read "as a bridegroom acts as a priest [with respect to] a turban," *khn* in the piel signifying "act as a priest." The meaning is that the bridegroom on his day of joy wore a special sort of turban usually worn only by priests (just as today bridegrooms and brides usually wear special garments which they never wear otherwise).

The "righteousness" (*tzdhaqah*) of 10b does not refer to the righteous acts of Christians. It is a "robe" placed upon us and stands in parallel position to "salvation" in the previous clause. Thus, it is the imputed righteousness of Christ derived from His vicarious obedience and satisfaction.

Introduction: Most of us probably received one or more articles of clothing as Christmas presents a little more than a week ago. Some of these clothes may wear out within a matter of months. Some may last for years. Some could conceivably endure for generations. Only God, however, can give us and has given us

Clothes Made to Last Forever

- I. Righteousness ("a robe of righteousness," v 10b).
 - A. We have no righteousness of our own.
 1. We were conceived in sin.
 2. We have sinned much in thought, word, and deed.
 - B. Christ has wrapped us in a robe of His righteousness.
 1. A robe woven for every human being upon
 - a. The warp of Christ's perfect obedience to the divine law which we have broken.
 - b. The woof of Christ's suffering and death to make amends for our sins.
 2. A robe placed upon every Christian through
 - a. The proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments throughout the world (v 11) and, thereby,
 - b. Through the creation of faith in every Christian by the Holy Spirit ("my God," v 10a).
- II. Salvation ("garments of salvation," v 10b).
 - A. Our salvation is based upon the righteousness of Christ described previously because, when God looks at Christians, He sees
 1. Not our sinfulness deserving eternal punishment (like soiled and rotten garments).
 2. But rather the righteousness of Christ (like clean and fresh garments; cf. Ga 3:27; Eph 5:25-27).

There is a proverb, "Clothes don't make the man"; and the proverb is certainly true in its intended sense that what a man is and does is much more important than what he wears. With respect to the "garments" of which Isaiah 61 speaks, however, clothes do make the man. The robe of Christ's righteousness makes him who wears it the heir of eternal life with God.

B. Our salvation leads to

1. Joy (v 10a). Many of the Christmas cards which we received during this last month probably contained a message something like this: "May the joy of Christmas be yours throughout the New Year." Most people, however, have already put away the joy of Christmas along with the cards and decorations. Yet Isaiah 61 gives us good reason to keep the joy of Christmas all year long.
2. Praise (v 11).
 - a. In private, to be sure, but also
 - b. In the presence of others ("before all nations") — attending congregational services, telling those outside the church of the righteousness in the sight of God which Christ has won for mankind, etc.

III. Glory (v 10c).

- A. Our glory is now visible only to the eyes of faith.
 1. The church seems to be losing its influence in the world.
 2. Individual Christians may be poor, unemployed, rejected, sick, etc.
- B. Our glory is, nevertheless, real.
 1. A glory assured by the Word of God (e.g., the priestly turban and bridal jewels of verse 10c).
 2. A glory, like our salvation, based upon the righteousness of Christ (v 10b, c).
 3. A glory imparted by God Himself through the gospel and sacraments (v 10b, c).
 4. A glory which Christ will make visible to all when He comes again.

Douglas McC. L. Judisch

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

January 9, 1983

Isaiah 42:1-7

The Greek word *epiphaneia* means "manifestation"; the Feast of the Epiphany and its season celebrates the manifestation of God in human flesh. Indeed, the central aspect of Epiphany was originally the celebration of the birth of Christ. In the fourth century, however, the observance of this event shifted to December 25, leaving Epiphany to commemorate two major events in which the deity of Christ was particularly evident — His adoration already in infancy by the magi and His baptism at the beginning of His public ministry as the Messiah. In the Eastern church Epiphany became the major baptismal occasion of the year, and Slavic Christians of the Greek rite call the day "Feast of Baptism" or "Feast of Light" (referring to the spiritual enlightenment worked by baptism). Unfortunately, in the Western church the connection of Epiphany with Christ's baptism receded so far from view that we were left without any commemoration of one of the most important events in the history of salvation. It is to fill this

gap, presumably, that *Lutheran Worship* has named the First Sunday after Epiphany "The Baptism of our Lord" and provided appropriate propers.

The passage selected from Isaiah is quoted or used at least fifteen times in the New Testament. The speaker being quoted by Isaiah in verses 1 to 4 and 6 to 9 is God the Father, the leading person of the Godhead with respect to the work of creation and preservation (v 5). The "Servant" (1a) of whom God the Father speaks in the first four verses is the Messiah, who, according to His human nature, was to become a humble servant (cf. Php 2:7-8). It is this same servant to whom the Father turns to address in verses 6 to 9. The Messiah would, indeed, be the only completely faithful servant of God, obeying Him impeccably ("in righteousness," v 6) and fulfilling perfectly the redemptive role for which He was "chosen" (v 1b) and "called" (v 6) by God ("faithfully," v 3; v 4). It is for this reason that God "delights" in Him (v 1b).

When God the Father says, "I have put My Spirit upon Him," He uses the prophetic perfect to describe the future anointing of the Messiah, according to His human nature, with the Holy Spirit in a unique way (Ac 10:38; Is 11:2; 61:1; Lk 4:16-21). Thus, all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in one verse ("Servant . . . I [as indicated by the first person verbal forms] . . . Spirit"); each is distinguished from the others, but all cooperate in the accomplishment of the salvation of men. It follows, therefore, that God puts His Spirit upon the Messiah, not in the usual measured manner, but "without measure" so that "the entire fulness of the Spirit . . . is communicated to Christ according to the flesh that is personally united with the Son of God" (FC-SD VIII: 72-75; cf. the whole section). This limitless possession of the Holy Spirit receives emphasis, above all, at the time of Christ's baptism, which was His official induction into His public ministry (cf. the Gospel of the day and its parallels, Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34). The events connected with the baptism of Christ likewise stressed the delight of the Father in the Son and the cooperation of all three persons of the Trinity in the work of redemption.

According to Isaiah 42, the point of the Messiah's investiture with the Holy Spirit would be to "uphold Him" (v 1), to "hold" Him "by the hand," and to "watch over" Him (v6) with respect to His Messianic service. The purpose of His labors would be to "bring forth judgment to the nations," the prominence of this theme appearing from its triple occurrence (vs 1, 3, 4). This *mishpat* is not the condemnation of sinners (which was already present on account of God's very nature as a just monarch). It is the judgment which only the Messiah could produce — a verdict of innocence by virtue of God's imputation of all human sins to Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all "nations" (v 1) on the face of "the earth" (v 4).

The announcement of this universal justification is the Messianic *torah* for which the Gentiles were inwardly yearning (v 4). The word *torah* is usually translated "law," but its basic meaning is really "instruction," and here the object of human longing is obviously not the law but the gospel. Through the proclamation of the gospel (whether directly or through His representatives) the Messiah was to strengthen the weak (v 3). Verse 3 pictures a weak faith (1) as a reed (water plant) already "cracked" and so almost broken and (2) as the wick (of an oil lamp) which is burning feebly and so on the point of extinction. The point is that the Messiah's proper work would be to save, not to destroy. Through the gospel He would also enlighten the spiritually blind and free those imprisoned in sin — in other words, create saving faith in unbelievers (vs 7-8; cf. Is 61:1; Lk 4:16-21).

The justification conveyed by this gospel would proceed from the Messiah's flawless "righteousness" (v 6), the humility of His ministry (v 2; Mt 12:15-22), and His vicarious death ("a testament to the people," v 6). The last event is implied by the word *b^eri^th*, usually but not aptly translated "covenant." A *b^eri^th* is basically a guarantee, an oath-bound obligation undertaken by someone to do something. Sometimes this obligation is made on condition of reciprocal action by a second party; in such cases the *b^eri^th* is to some extent, at least, a covenant. Here, however, the reference is to the oft-repeated unconditional promise of God to bestow righteousness upon the world through the death of His Son — in other words, the new testament (Mt 26:28; Mk 13:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; He 9:15-22). Here the Messiah is equated with the new "testament," since not only is He the testator (who dies to put His will into effect), but His righteousness is also the inheritance bequeathed to the will's beneficiaries.

Introduction: In various tales of yore a monarch disguises himself as a servant in order to escape attention for one reason or another. In many of these stories, however, the servant's speech or bearing makes somebody aware that he is, in actuality, a king. As we read the first part of Isaiah 42, we have the same experience. We immediately ask this question concerning the one of whom God speaks and whom He then addresses: Are we in the presence of

Servant or Sovereign?

- I. He is, in actuality, a sovereign.
 - A. According to His divine nature, Christ is Lord of the universe.
 1. Who has participated from all eternity in the interrelationships of the persons of the Triune God.
 - a. Begotten by the Father (Nicene Creed, Article 2), as the Father testifies at His baptism (Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:30, 34).
 - b. Participating with the Father in the spiration of the Holy Spirit (Nicene Creed, Article 3: "who proceedeth from the Father and the Son").
 2. Who has participated with the Father in His work (v 5) of
 - a. Creation (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16) and
 - b. Preservation (Col 1:17).
 3. Against whom (with the Father and the Holy Spirit) we have rebelled.
 - a. As a race almost from the time of creation.
 - b. Individually.
 - i. From the time of conception.
 - ii. In thought, word, and deed.
 4. Whose wrath (being one with the wrath of the Father and the Holy Spirit) we have necessarily aroused by our rebellion.
 - a. Because of His holiness.
 - b. Because of His justice.
 - B. Even according to His human nature, He is Lord of the universe.
 1. By virtue of a necessary communication of divine attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.) to His human nature.
 - a. Occurring at the time of His incarnation (conception).
 - b. Being attested by various events commemorated during the Epiphany season (adoration by the magi, miraculous events connected with His baptism, transmutation of water into wine, stilling of storms, transfiguration, etc.).

2. By virtue of His reception of the Holy Spirit (v 1).
 - a. With all His gifts in a measureless manner (Is 11:2; 61:1; Lk 4:16-21).
 - b. As attested by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the baptism of Christ (and initiation into His public ministry; Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:32-33).
- II. Yet He did truly become a servant.
 - A. Denying to Himself during His state of humiliation the full and constant use of the divine characteristics penetrating His human nature.
 1. Coming into the world as an infant born in humble circumstances.
 2. Conducting His public ministry in as humble a manner as possible (v 2; Mt 12:15-21).
 - B. Desiring to effect the justification of mankind (vs 1, 3, 4).
 1. A justification consisting in a verdict of innocence in the sight of God (Rom. 5:18-19).
 2. A justification accomplished by the Messiah's redemptive role.
 - a. By means of His perfect obedience to the will of God (vs 3c, 4, 6a).
 - b. By means of His vicarious suffering and death (v 6c).
 3. A justification conveyed to people through the gospel (v 4).
 - a. A gospel designed to save sinners by creating and strengthening faith in Christ (vs 3, 6, 7).
 - b. A gospel connected with water in the sacrament of baptism (Eph 5:25-26; SC, IV).
 - i. Baptism was instituted by Christ Himself in the name of those same three persons of the Trinity (Mt 28:19) whose cooperation in the accomplishment of salvation is so manifest in the account of Christ's baptism.
 - ii. The power of baptism is based upon the baptism of Christ and the public ministry which it initiated. The relationship between Christ's baptism and ours may be compared to that between a negative and the prints made from it in photography or a mould and the statues made from it.

DMcCLJ

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 62:1-5

January 16, 1983

The broad, fundamental application of the message is two-fold. First, God's confirmation of His love for us is meant to invigorate us by the Spirit's power to become a kind of "show case" to the nations of the world. The Lord means for the unbelieving people of the world to learn something about Him seeing us and hearing the Gospel message. Secondly, God's unrestrained rejoicing over us as His bride is altogether because of His gift of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. So the concept of marriage with its accompanying mutual joys is appropriate only because of what God has done in Christ and in giving His Spirit. Such unrestrained love and rejoicing expressed by God over His bride, the church, is the greatest motivation for the church to become in practice what the Lord holds it to be, namely, holy, faithful, strong, filled with gratitude and praise.

God is the Church's Bridegroom

- I. His love is restless and compelling.
 - A. He cannot contain His love for His bride; He must express it (v 1).
 - B. He cannot endure the reproach of having her righteousness obscured (v 1, "until her vindication goes forth").
Application: God awaits the audible response of the bride. We claim to love Him above all things. Say it! Praise Him! He longs for our restless expression of loving concern when, in our presence, His name is blasphemed or profaned or obscured. Speak out!
- II. He will give His bride a new name.
 - A. "My delight is in her" (v 4, Hephzibah).
 - B. "Married" (v 4, Beulah).
- III. He wants all the world to know His bride and His love for her.
 - A. Her salvation goes forth . . . as a burning torch (v 1).
 - B. All kings see her glory (v 2).
 - C. No more is she termed "forsaken" (v 4).
Application: (1) The Lord counts on us to be His spokesmen today. Proclaim Christ! (2) The assurance of His love for us is meant to bring delight to our hearts as He delights in us (v 5). In this assurance we are also enabled to be the kind of bride in which the Lord may rejoice, His servants in all that we do.

R. A. Haak
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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 61:1-6
January 23, 1983

The text is Messianic and speaks specifically of Jesus' coming as Savior of the world. Jesus quotes from this portion of Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19, stating that the very day He quoted this Scripture was the day it was fulfilled in the hearing of His audience. Thus, the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy is to be found in the redemption brought by Christ. Verses 4-6 speak in figurative terms of the New Testament church and its glory, setting the stage for chapter 62, where the church is pictured as the bride of Christ.

Proclaim Jesus!

- I. Tell what His coming means in freeing us from sin.
 - A. As we remember our sins we should expect any news from God to be bad. Instead, we have "good tidings."
 - B. Jesus binds up the broken-hearted.
 1. By restoring what was lost through sin.
 2. By releasing those held captive by sin.
 3. By proclaiming God's favor instead of His anger.
- II. Tell what His dying means in delivering us from death.
 - A. Jesus' death and resurrection change death into a doorway to abundant life.
 - B. Mourning is changed into comfort and celebration of victory.
 - C. Despair is changed into praise.
 - D. A wasted, meaningless life is changed into a life that demonstrates the power of God and His victorious presence.

III. Tell what His coming means for the church.

- A. The ruin produced by sin was rebuilt and repaired by Christ.
- B. Gentiles (people of every nation) are being added to its work-force and to the chorus of those who praise the Lord.
- C. With the addition of the people of every nation comes their wealth also. All is to be used in the ministry of the Lord and to His praise.

Conclusion: Oh, how the people of the world long for such a message! What a joy and privilege to proclaim it.

RAH

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Jeremiah 1:4-10

January 30, 1983

For clarity translate "I knew you" as "I chose you" (v 4). Jeremiah's call to the prophetic office is scarcely identical with a man's call to the New Testament ministry. The prophetic call came *directly* from God; the pastoral call comes indirectly from God through the church. The prophets taught infallibly by divine inspiration; the pastor must conform his teaching to the words of God written down by the prophets and apostles. Nevertheless, if these distinctions are made, what Jeremiah says concerning the prophetic office can serve as the basis for speaking of the pastoral office, since both involve the proclamation of God's Word to the world.

We know that it is as important to win a soul-winner as it is to win a soul. But how do we explain to people how God calls men into the ministry? Reviewing my notes written after interviewing hundreds of men called into the ministry, I have isolated three stages describing the dynamics which accounted for their desire to serve the church. These same three stages occur in Jeremiah's account of God's call into the office of prophet.

God's Call Into the Ministry

- I. Recruitment: He influences early experiences.
 - A. "I chose you" (v 5).
 - 1. God elected Jeremiah to function as one of the prophets chosen to bring God's message of judgment and mercy to his generation.
 - 2. God elects us to salvation before the foundation of the world, and the aspiration to the ministry receives motivation from this gracious election.
 - B. "I set you apart" (v 5).
 - 1. God consecrated Jeremiah as one in a long line of priestly servants.
 - 2. God sets us apart for the ministry by a sequence of consecrating events — including baptism, confirmation, and ordination.
 - C. "I appointed you" (v 5).
 - 1. God appointed Jeremiah as a prophet to the nation to influence its destiny with judgment and grace.
 - 2. God appoints us by calling us as pastors of congregations, commissioned missionaries, etc.
- II. Rescue: He encourages the hesitant excuse-makers.
 - A. He rescues us from lack of confidence.
 - 1. Jeremiah: "I am only a boy." God to Jeremiah: "Do not say, 'I am only a boy.'"

2. God gives Jeremiah and us tasks to accomplish. "You will go on the errands on which I send you." Vocational imperatives in the New Testament include the words of Jesus: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." Vocational involvement gives experience which makes us mature and rescues us from childish hesitancy.
- B. He rescues us from speechlessness.
1. Jeremiah: "Ah, my Lord God! Look! I do not know how to speak" (v 6). A British survey of human anxieties showed concern about speaking before an audience to be the greatest.
 2. God to Jeremiah: "You will say what I tell you to say (v 7). Jeremiah and the other prophets, like the apostles, taught by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have the Word of God written down by the prophets and apostles to serve as the basis of our teaching and so to allay our anxieties.
- C. He rescues us from fear.
1. Jeremiah had to face gigantic opposition and total social upheaval. Scholars allege that he did not marry for fear of the suffering which was to come upon the families of Judah during the wars and occupations.
 2. God's presence rescues us. "do not be afraid of them! For I am with you to rescue you." (v 8).
 3. Jesus said to His disciples and us: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
- III. Resource: He provides the message.
- A. God's Holy Spirit touches our lives in various ways.
1. Jeremiah: "God stretched out His hand and touched by mouth" (v 9).
 2. The Word with its dynamics of Law and Gospel touches people's lives as a resource of gracious "help in time of need" (He 4:16).
- B. God provides a resource in the substance of our message.
1. The words which God moved Jeremiah to speak and write by divine inspiration centered in the promise of the Messiah (e.g. 33:15-16).
 2. Our message, since it is based upon the Word of God (the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures), likewise centers in the Gospel of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ — His saving birth, death, and resurrection.
- C. God provides a resource in the challenge for our message.
1. God's call to Jeremiah: "See! I have made you an overseer this day over nations and kingdoms" (v 10).
 2. Three and a half billion people who need to hear the message of salvation are challenging us; the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

Harold H. Zietlow

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 6:1-8

February 6, 1983

Introduction: The ship of modern civilization is on a collision course with the reality of God. One church leader said, "We find it hard to proclaim the Word of God as law and gospel because our generation finds no meaning in the term "God." God shook up a similar back-sliding generation when he commissioned Isaiah as His prophet. When a generation drifts toward self-destruction, we trust in the prophetic message that God makes Himself known.

God Makes Himself Known

- I. As One who inspires reverence.
 - A. The revelation of God through His Word fills us with awe.
 1. He has revealed Himself to and through the prophets and apostles.
 - a. He appeared and spoke directly to Isaiah and the other prophets.
 - b. He reveals Himself to us through the words of the prophets and apostles in Holy Scripture.
 2. He enables the subjective reception of His revelation.
 - a. Isaiah saw and heard directly
 - b. We accept the inspired words of Isaiah and the other prophets by faith.
 - B. The revelation of God through the nature of this world and its history fills us with awe.
 1. He fills the whole earth with His glory (v 3).
 2. He shapes the course of history.
- II. As One who offers us forgiveness.
 - A. He awakens us to our need for forgiveness.
 1. "Woe is me! For I am lost . . ." (v 5).
 - a. The holiness of God strikes Isaiah with an awareness of his limits in contrast to God's purity and perfection.
 - b. The holiness of God awakens a sense of meaninglessness and despair in our modern generation when it gets a glimpse of its situation through the preaching of law.
 2. "I am a man of unclean lips" (v 5).
 - a. The holiness of God awakens moral guilt in each individual as he examines his conscience.
 - b. The holiness of God exposes our whole generation as compromising the moral will of God in a descent into social self-destruction.
 - B. He provides us with forgiveness.
 1. His mercy satisfies our need for a righteousness not our own.
 - a. The burning coal from the altar of God's grace touched Isaiah's lips (vv 6-7).
 - b. The tangible gifts of Word and Sacrament touch our lives in our worship services and elsewhere.
 2. His words make forgiveness a convincing reality for us. "Your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven" (v 7).
- III. As One who calls us into service.
 - A. The Lord's voice of vocation.
 1. "Whom shall I send?" (v 8). Who is the person for the job (qualifications)? What is the job for the person (needs)?
 2. "Who will go for us?" (v 8). The search is for motivated volition and for commitment ("for us" implies God-directed service as opposed to one's individual motives).
 - B. The servant's answer of commitment.
 1. "Here am I!" (v 8). I am available with qualifications to serve and with the attitude of commitment to the Lord's service.
 2. "Send me" (v 8). Lord, sustain me in my decisive motivation. Lord, empower me with the energy, health, and time to get the job done.

Conclusion: The three ways in which God made himself known to Isaiah reveal the majestic, forgiving, sustaining God whom we joyously confess and serve.

Harold H. Zietlow

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

February 13, 1983

Curiosity about the precise location where Moses received his "bird's eye" view of the Promised Land has long prompted archeologists to look for the exact site; however, the significance of this text is not primarily archeological. Clearly, the passing of Moses marks a dividing point in the emerging nation of Israel. He takes his place in the line of distinguished patriarchs (v 4), men whose lives were powerfully intertwined with the ebb and flow of Israel's history. Moses' purpose had now been fulfilled. It was time for him to be removed from the scene, not because life was finished with him (v 7) but because God was finished with him, even as He had said (see Nu 20:12). His career had been memorable, to say the least (vv 10-12), yet God would use another man to lead Israel into the land He had promised to her for so long. It was God, not one man like Moses, who would remain Israel's source of stability.

The central thought of the text is that, while great men may come and go, God is always the master of the history of His people, the One in control, the stabilizing force who grants leadership and uses leaders in the most effective way possible. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be sure that God can at all times be counted on to keep His promises (v 4). The problem is that human successes, great as they appear to be, may temporarily blind people to the ever-controlling hand of God, who always has the last word. The means to the goal are God's pleasure and grace which are eternally reliable.

Introduction: Historical commentators frequently play the game of proposing to name the greatest U. S. President, the most powerful general or war leader in history, the shrewdest politician of the century. While it may be possible to come up with the candidates for these "greatness awards," it must be noted that all of them are human and come to an end. Even the great leader of Israel, Moses, whose importance in history is unquestioned, had to die. His death occurred according to the terms set down by a God, who is Himself the eternal source of stability of His people. Moses served well for 120 years, but God is master of all forever. Deuteronomy 34 is truly a case of

A Concluding Career but a Continuing Control

- I. Human achievement can be memorable.
 - A. The career of Moses was unequalled in Israel.
 1. He knew the Lord "face to face" (v 10).
 2. He served the Lord with signs and wonders (v 11).
 3. He led the people with power (v 12).
 4. He died without weakness (v 7).
 - B. The leadership of Moses was remembered in Israel.
 1. The people mourned at his passing (v 8).
 2. The people respected his chosen successor (v 9).
- II. Divine government will be eternal.
 - A. God's guidance of His people is reliable.
 1. He promised the land of Canaan to His people beginning with Abraham (v 4).
 2. He brought His people to the land under the leadership of Moses (vv 4,11).
 3. The reliability of God's guidance is seen most clearly in Christ.
 - a. Who is the very image of God (2 Cor 4:4).

- b. Who is God's final reliable word to which people must listen (Lk 9:35).
- B. God's control over His people is constant.
 - 1. He provides the right leaders for the time (vv 4,9,10).
 - 2. He oversees and at the right time concludes the careers of these leaders (vv 4,5).
 - 3. He remains with His people from leader to leader and generation to generation to assure the fulfillment of His promises (vv 1-4).
 - a. All God's promises find their fulfillment in God's chosen one, Jesus Christ, who said, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).
 - b. Christ is the Gospel light that lightens our way to eternal glory.

Conclusion: The end of Moses' memorable career did not cause the fortunes of God's people to collapse. The true Head of God's people is God Himself, who in Christ exercises reliable and eternal control.

David E. Seybold
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THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT Deuteronomy 26:5-10 February 20, 1983

The text contains the words spoken by the Israelites as they presented their first-fruit offerings, the tithe of produce for those in need (see vv 12,13). God's people were to recite a kind of formula of remembrance (vv 5ff) as they presented their offering, retelling the deliverance from oppression during the Egyptian captivity and the blessing of inheriting the Promised Land.

The central thought of the text is that God's overflowing generosity should be remembered in the presentation of our offerings. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be moved to give by remembering God's goodness. The problem is that much of our giving is done without proper remembrance, with the result that giving turns into "coughing up" money or grudgingly giving our "fair share." The means to the goal is God's wonderful mercy and generosity which move us to give genuinely.

Introduction: Children sometimes have to be told repeatedly to perform certain actions because they may not yet understand why these actions are so important. They may not yet grasp the vital need for protecting their health through proper hygiene, so they have to be asked time after time, "Did you remember to brush your teeth?" or "Did you wash inside your ears?" Part of maturity is to understand why these activities are important and to do them willingly and regularly. Such is the case with Christian giving as a way of worshipping God. If we are to give willingly and regularly, it is essential to join our giving with the remembrance of God's giving. We are encouraged, then to

Remember God in Our Giving

- I. As a merciful God.
 - A. He showed mercy to His people of old.
 - 1. Watching over Jacob (v5).
 - 2. Hearing the Israelites' cries for deliverance (v 7).
 - 3. Giving them a land flowing with milk and honey (v 9).

B. He has shown mercy to us.

1. Sympathizing with us when Satan tempts us (He 4:15).
2. Helping us through Christ (He 2:18).
3. Bestowing His riches upon us when we call to Him (Ro 10:12).

II. As a powerful God.

A. He showed His power to His people of old.

1. Making them a great nation (v 5).
2. Delivering them with a mighty hand (v 2).

B. He has shown His power in our lives.

1. Defeating Satan with His mighty Word which He has given us (Lk 4:1-13; Ro 10:8b).
2. Assuring us of eternal salvation (Ro 10:9).

Conclusion: To give without remembering is pointless. Our giving will be genuine when as we give we remember God's mercy and power. Then our giving will also be a worshipping of the Lord our God.

DES

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Jeremiah 26:8-15

February 27, 1983

Jeremiah's experience in this text is an example of the treatment which the world accords in every age to Christ and those who loyally follow Him (Mt 10:22-25; Lk 9:21-25; Jn 15:18-21). Christ and His disciples, indeed, are often despised and rejected by those who claim His name, as St. Paul laments in Philippians 3:18. Verse 1 gives the historical setting for this pericope (see 2 Kgs 23ff. and 2 Chr 36ff. for addition details). This was not the first time Jeremiah had warned against the people's misplaced trust in the temple and their faithless religion (cf. Jr 7), reminding them of God's destruction of Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located and the ark of the covenant housed in the days of Joshua and the Judges. Many scholars believe Shiloh was destroyed around 1050 B.C. when the Philistines defeated Israel in the days of Eli (cf. 1 Sm 4:10-22). At any rate, Shiloh's destruction remained a solemn warning to God's people against rebellion (see Ps 78:59-66). Verse 8: It is the priests and prophets who lead the people against God's prophet. The sentence of death with which they threaten Jeremiah is an emphatic one (the Hebrew has a *qal* imperfect preceded by an infinitive absolute). Verse 9: It is significant that in repeating Jeremiah's "sermon" the angry mob deliberately deletes the "gospel" contained in Jeremiah's original words, namely, that God would have compassion on the nation if they would only repent (cf. v 3). Verse 10: It is the secular princes who come to Jeremiah's defense. Verse 13: In the face of almost certain death Jeremiah boldly calls for repentance. Repentance can never be postponed; it is now or never (2 Cor 6:2). One must never condition God's mercy upon man's repentance or good works; the gospel of God's free election of Israel is implied by the suffix attached to "God" ("the Lord *your* God"); also God's personal name is used in this verse, recalling God's great mercy and grace (see Ex 34:6 for the significance of this name). The word rendered "repent" in this verse means "to be sorry," "to have compassion"; no change of mind on God's part is implied. Verse 15: Jeremiah warns the people (the verb is plural) that should they carry out their intention against him they will be staining their hands with innocent blood, reminding us of the Savior's own trial when the people cried out, "His blood be on us and our children" (Mt 26). Jeremiah was delivered on this occasion (Jr 26:24), Christ was not (cp. Mt 26:26).

Introduction: Throughout the centuries God has spoken His Word to mankind. His Word has usually been despised and rejected by people secure in themselves. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that in these last days God has spoken to us directly by His Son (He 1:2). Christ, God's incarnate Word, was and is still met with rejection even as the prophet Isaiah wrote centuries before, "He is despised and rejected of men."

Despised and Rejected by Men

- I. God's word is often despised and rejected by those who are called God's people.
 - A. Jeremiah was opposed, not by the surrounding pagans, but by the "priests and prophets," who, of all people, should have known better.
 1. They were comfortable in their misplaced trust that as long as the temple stood they were safe (Jr 7).
 2. They wanted God's word silenced among them (v 8).
 - B. Our Lord met with rejection and opposition from the priests and scribes of His own day who were concerned only with the political security of their nation (Jn 11:48). They wanted God's word silenced as they cried, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"
 - C. Jesus is still despised and rejected by men today, for as St. Paul sadly laments, "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Php 3:18). Do we also try to silence God's word in our lives because we are too comfortable in our misplaced trust, whether this be in money, popularity, good health, family, or whatever? Do we find our security in these things rather than in Christ our Lord and so silence Him in our lives by neglecting His Word and Sacrament?
- II. God's Word is despised and rejected by men to their own eternal detriment.
 - A. God threatened to destroy Jerusalem as He had once done to Shiloh (vs 9:6). God carried out His threat when the Babylonians armies destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
 - B. Christ also warned those who despised Him during his ministry that their house would be forsaken (Lk 13:35). In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was once again sacked and destroyed, this time by the Romans.
 - C. St. Paul warns those today who despise Christ, "Their end is destruction" (Php 3:19).
- III. God's Word, though often despised and rejected, remains the sinner's only real security and eternal comfort.
 - A. Through Jeremiah, God still offered the people forgiveness and hope (vs 3,13), for God is always merciful.
 - B. In the person of His eternal Son God pleaded for Jerusalem (Lk 13:34), He pleaded for His enemies from the cross, and in His dying moments forgave the sins of the penitent thief.
 - C. Our Savior still extends to us today His full forgiveness and mercy. He seals His love to us with His body and blood in the Sacrament and offers us this certain promise: "Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies to be like His" (Php 3:21).

Conclusion: May we never despise and reject God's Word of love to us in Christ our Savior, but cling to Him in faith until He returns for us on the Last Day and we sing, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

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THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Exodus 3:1-8b, 10-15

March 6, 1983

Who is the "angel of the Lord"? In verse 4 He is clearly identified both as Yahweh and as God. G. Stoeckhardt comments, "The Angel of the Lord . . . is the Son of God." Jewish rabbis as well as Christian exegetes have seen in the burning bush a picture of God's presence with His people in their suffering and humiliation (Rashi). In Christ God has taken upon Himself our griefs and sorrows (Is 53). Verse 5: The place was holy because God was there. Verse 6: "Moses was afraid" — the text does not mean that he was afraid in the sense of feeling deep awe or respect, but that he was fearful, perhaps terrified. Verse 7: "I have seen" is preceded by an infinitive absolute for emphasis — "I have really or surely seen." In this verse God still calls the people "My people." God never forgets or forsakes His chosen ones even though all experiences may point to the contrary. "I know their sufferings" — the word rendered "know" is the Hebrew verb which implies much more than mere intellectual knowledge about someone or something; it implies an intimate relationship; it is the verb used to express the intimacy of the marital union (cf Gn 4:1). The word rendered "sufferings" is the same word used by Isaiah when he writes about the suffering Servant, "He carried our sorrows." In Christ God is intimately acquainted with all our afflictions, for in taking into Himself our nature He "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is 53). Verse 12: God gives Moses a sign that His word will be carried out; God always buttresses His Word with visible signs (e.g., the New Testament sacraments). In "you shall serve Me" the Hebrew uses the second person plural, referring to Moses and all the people. Verse 15: God calls Himself "I AM," in Hebrew a qal imperfect (used in the New Testament to refer to Christ, cf. Jn 8:58 and Jn 1:18 especially).

Introduction: People seek all kinds of saviors today from their problems and disappointments in life. The introit for today reminds us that there is only one real Savior from all our afflictions — our Lord God. It is to Him we are to look for salvation.

Look to Your Lord Alone for Salvation

- I. He knows all our sufferings and afflictions.
 - A. God knows that it is really our sin which has separated us from God who is the only source of real happiness; that our sin has brought down on us all our problems.
 1. Moses, who had once thought of himself as self-sufficient (cf. Ex 2:11-15), realized how imperfect he was as he stood before the holy God in the burning bush; he was unable to draw near.
 2. None of us can of ourselves draw near to this holy God either. He is a consuming fire and we are imperfect sinners; we must flee from God in terror.
 - B. God must come to us, as He has done in the person of Christ.
 1. Many have seen in the burning bush a picture of God's presence with His people in their afflictions.
 2. "God so loved the world . . . that He gave his only-begotten Son."
 3. This Son which God gave us is the Lord God Himself
 - a. He is the messenger of God to us (i.e., the "angel of the Lord") but also true God (v 4).
 - b. He is the great "I AM" (cp. Jn 8:58).

4. In Christ God has shared in all our afflictions and sorrows intimately, as Isaiah writes, "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (cp. also He 2:14-18).
- II. He has delivered us from our afflictions.
- A. He has conquered and scattered all our enemies.
 1. Through Moses God destroyed Pharaoh and His armies; at the Red Sea He delivered the Israelites from certain destruction.
 2. On the cross we see our Lord God battling all our spiritual enemies, enduring our curse. Rising from the dead, He has shown Himself the mighty Victor over sin, hell, the devil, and death.
 - B. He has prepared for us a paradise in which we will be free eternally from all which troubles and afflicts us in this life.
 1. He promised the children of Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, a good land and a "broad" land (i.e., room for everyone).
 2. Our Lord has promised us, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . in My Father's house are many rooms" (Jn 14).
 - C. He has given us a downpayment of this heavenly feast to encourage us in our hope.
 1. He gave Moses a "sign" that His promise would be fulfilled (cf. v 12).
 2. He has given us also a "sign" that His promises will come to pass. In the sacrament of His body and blood we are given a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come.

Conclusion: There is no other savior besides our Lord God. Let us look to Him alone for salvation.

SCB

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Isaiah 12:1-6
March 13, 1983

The six verses which make up Isaiah 12 are a sequel to the preceding chapter with its description of the blessings in the Kingdom to be established by the "root of Jesse" (11:10). "In that day" (v 1), of the Messiah's reign, His subjects will give thanks that though they have deserved God's wrath He is no longer angry with them and they can trust Him to be their strength (vv 1-2). The salvation the Messiah brings is an inexhaustible well (v 3), and for this salvation God's people are to give Him thanks in such a way that people everywhere will come to know how good and merciful God is (vv 4-6).

The central thought of the text is that God's people give thanks for God's salvation. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will thank God for His great and good deeds. The problem is that we too often see more reason to complain than to give thanks. The means to the goal is that God has worked out a salvation which meets our greatest need.

Introduction: Our thanks often get buried in complaint. There is much to complain about. God's people in Isaiah's time had reason to complain under the yoke of the Assyrians. Yet they also had reason to thank God as they looked forward to the day of Christ's coming. We, the inhabitants of Zion (v 6) for whom "that day" has come, see more clearly than did the people of Isaiah's time how great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel.

We Have Reason to Give Thanks to God

- I. For comforting us.
 - A. God's anger has turned away from us (v 1).
 1. He had reason to be angry because of our sin.
 2. But Christ bore that anger for us on the cursed tree of the cross.
 - B. God through Christ has provided an inexhaustible salvation (v 3).
 1. God never stops showing mercy to undeserving prodigals like us (see Lk 15:11-32).
 2. What God has done for us in Christ is like a life-giving spring that continually refreshes (Jer 2:13; Jn 1:16; 4:10; 7:37f.).
- II. For strengthening us.
 - A. We can trust God to strengthen us in our weakness.
 1. We feel our weakness in times of trouble and are sometimes afraid of what might happen to us (v 2a).
 2. God chose what in the world's eyes is foolish, low, and weak (see I Cor 1:27-30) to show how powerful He is. Our weakness allows His strength to come in.
 - B. He strengthens us to thank Him.
 1. We thank Him by reflecting on His great and good deeds.
 2. We thank Him by letting others know about His deeds through our support of the mission program of our church (v 4).

Conclusion: We Christians have reason to give thanks to the God of our salvation whose comfort never ceases and whose strength never fails us.

Gerhard Aho

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Isaiah 43:16-21

March 20, 1983

In the immediately preceding verses (vv 14-15) God announces the coming destruction of Babylon and the redemption of Israel. God had proved His might as "the Creator of Israel," and He can deliver His people (v 13). As He once made a way in the sea, delivering His people by extinguishing Pharaoh's army with a single "breath" as if quenching the wick of a lamp (vv 16-17), He can still commandeer the forces of nature to make now a way in the wilderness (v 19). As He led His people out of their Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea and then through a "howling wilderness" (Dt 32:10), so now He will make a way for them through a still more desolate tract. We do not know by what route the Israelites returned from Babylon, but they must have crossed arid and difficult desert. Yet the restoration of God's chosen people was not an end in itself but one more step in creating a people of God much greater than the offspring of Abraham according to the flesh. God has set out to do "a new thing" (v 19), a miracle so marvelous as to cause the former things to fade from memory (v 18). Not that God's people should erase from memory what God had done for them earlier, but they were to look to the future and not just to the past. The nation God had created was not to be buried in Babylon; it could expect a future that would eclipse the things of old, for God would gather a people from the ends of the earth (v 5f.) to declare His praise (v 21). God making rivers in the desert and wild beasts honoring Him (v 20) is picture language to describe the completeness of the new spiritual creation. The immediately following verses indicate that what God is about to do is not a reward for Israel's achievements but an undeserved gift. Instead of pleasing the Lord they had "burdened" Him with their sins and "wearied" Him with their iniquities (v 24).

The central thought of the text is that God's creation of a world-wide people of His own is a new and marvelous thing. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will see themselves as part of this new creation. The problem is that we sometimes brood too much on what we are in our old creation. The means to the goal is that God by His grace and power has made us His new people.

Introduction: We like new things, be they objects like clothes, cars, or homes, or experiences like physical vitality, advancement, or parenthood. Yet the new may not always be more enjoyable and useful than the old. God, however, is doing a new thing which is always superior to the old. God wanted the Israelite captives in Babylon to see this new thing which was springing forth. He wants us to see the new thing He is still doing.

See the New Thing God is Doing!

I. In making us His people.

A. The Israelites were God's "chosen people" (v20).

1. God did not choose them because of any excellence in them.
 - a. They had wearied God with their hypocritical offerings (vv 22-23).
 - b. They had burdened God with their sins (v 24), rebelling against Him (see Lk 20:10-12).
2. God made them a great nation purely out of grace.
3. God's restoration of their nationhood was a pure gift (v 14).

B. We today are God's chosen people.

1. We are included in the many God has gathered from all over the earth.
2. God's grace extends beyond one ethnic group or nation.
3. God's grace comes to us in His Word which is like refreshing water for us in the parched desert of our sins (vv 19-20).

See the new thing God is doing in gathering us also into a universal community of the redeemed.

II. In letting us experience His power.

A. God demonstrates His power today more spectacularly than when He drowned Pharaoh's army (v 16).

1. Christ by His death and resurrection vanquished the powers of darkness (Col 2:15).
2. This same power of the risen Christ (see Php 3:10) has made us God's people.
3. Raising many spiritually dead to life is the most marvelous miracle (Jn 5:20,24,25).

B. God's power demonstrated in Christ's resurrection is working in us to enable us to declare God's praise (v 21b).

1. We declare God's praise as we share Christ's suffering (Php 3:10).
2. We declare God's praise as we refuse to brood over our misery and look instead to the prize that lies ahead (Php 3:13-14).

There is no need to dwell on past sins or to brood on present miseries, for God has not only made us His own but He enables us to live as His people. See the new thing God is doing in letting us experience His power.

Conclusion: We may feel the lack of many new things in our life, be they objects or experiences. But there is one new thing in which all of us Christians have a part. This new thing God is doing is the most marvelous of all things.

Gerhard Aho

PALM SUNDAY
THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION
Deuteronomy 32:36-39
March 27, 1983

Our text takes us back to the Old Testament time of Moses' "swan song," in which he reviews God's past guidance and blessings and points to what the people can expect from God in the future.

The central thought of the text is that God deals with His people as it is necessary because He loves them. The preacher's goal is to lead God's people to repentance for shying away from God's gracious guidance and to strengthen their dependence on Jehovah. The problem is that we so easily allow little gods to intervene between God and us. The means to the goal is the eternal, effective love of God.

Introduction: As we today stand on the threshold of Holy Week, we begin our meditation on Christ's special work by celebrating His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The zestful songs of praise to the Son of David remind us of another song of praise — by Moses, as he prepared God's people for entrance into the promised land. Our text, part of that song of Moses, is a portrait of

How God Deals With His People

- I. God is in control.
 - A. This is true despite what we may be tempted to think — in view of persecutions, religious cultists, etc.
 - B. God (Jehovah) alone is able to destroy or make alive (v 39).
 - C. God's control is shown in His dealings.
 1. With Israel — both in the Exodus and in allowing their enemies to harass them (v 35).
 2. With us.
- II. God disciplines.

God allows difficulties and calamities:

 - A. To expose our helplessness (v 36b);
 - B. To expose our sin, especially our misplaced trust in other gods (v 37-38; Jdg 2:11-15; Mt 23:35).
- III. God loves.
 - A. He is moved with compassion for His people in their desperate need (v 36; Jdg 2:16,18; Ho 6:1).
 - B. In love He directs us back to Himself (He 12:5-6; Re 3:19; Jas 15:2).
 - C. God reveals Himself as the eternal God of love (v 39a; Ex 3:14; Is 46:4; Re 1:8).
 1. God's timing is always precise (Ga 4:4).
 2. God's method is always best (Jn 8:24).

Conclusion: Today's text is directed to the church of Jesus Christ, to us who profess Christ's holy name. We are constantly pressured to follow the false gods of our own efforts and the idols of society. We are reminded that God is ever in control. Even when He disciplines us, He is guiding us closer to Himself in love.

Lloyd Strelow
 Covina, California

MAUNDY THURSDAY**Jeremiah 31:31-34****March 31, 1983**

The Lord's Supper is the particularization of a new guaranty of pardon and peace through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Read Hebrews 8 as a commentary on this concept, as well as for enlightenment on the text.

The central thought is that God will bless His people with a new and better guaranty than that given through Moses. The goal is that the hearers will receive God's forgiving love and be bound to Him as their Lord. The problem is that we often are bound to our own deals and use God only when it is convenient for us. The means to the goal is the Sacrament of the Altar whereby God binds us to Himself.

Introduction: In introducing a five year warranty, one of the major American automobile makers asks how he could expect others to buy his product if his company were not confident of its own product. Consumers like warranties and guaranties. Such guaranties are really a legal obligation of the manufacturer to the consumer. Far exceeding the best human guaranty, our text presents

A New Guaranty

- I. It is a needed guaranty.
 - A. Israel invalidated the old guaranty.
 1. It was made during the Exodus, especially at Sinai.
 2. It was repeatedly disregarded by Israel (Jr 7:23-26; 11:10).
 - B. Our need is great.
 1. We desire warranties for watches, toys, typewriters, blenders, etc.
 2. People especially want to be assured that God loves them.
 3. Yet our sin works uncertainty and separation from God. Why do we have a confession of sin before we partake of Holy Communion?
- II. It is a valid guaranty.
 - A. It is given by the Almighty Himself (v 33a).
 - B. God has demonstrated His faithfulness in the past (v 32).
 - C. It is sealed by the shed blood of Christ (Jn 1:17).
- III. It is a blessed guaranty.

It brings His love (v 33) — all that being "their God" implies.

 - B. It gives the forgiveness of sin through Christ (v 34c; 2 Tm 1:9-10).
 1. Won on Calvary.
 2. Sealed to us in Holy Communion.
 - C. It produces inner motivation and renewal (v 33).

Conclusion: Tonight we observe vastly more than the initiation of another church rite. Here we have the personalization of the new guaranty prophesied by Jeremiah and brought into full reality by our Lord Jesus through the shedding of His blood on Calvary. God will not retract His guaranty of love. Let us thank God for His Gospel guaranty and receive it in His Supper with frequency and faith!

Lloyd Strelow

GOOD FRIDAY**Isaiah 53:4-12****April 1, 1983**

The primary theme in Isaiah 53 is atonement effected by the suffering of the Servant. The atoning work originates not with men but with God. No one in

history fulfills the role of the Servant other than does Jesus of Nazareth. Only He was adequate to effect the atonement of the whole world. As it is written in 1 Peter 2:21-25, "Christ also suffered . . . He Himself bore our sins . . . By His wounds you have been healed . . . For you were straying like sheep."

Introduction: We in our land go to great ends to assure that innocent people are punished for crimes they have not done. We assemble juries, administer polygraph tests, seek witnesses, for fear that an innocent person might suffer unjustly. We would rather see a guilty one go free than have an innocent one unfairly punished. Yet the message of Good Friday as foretold by the prophet Isaiah is that

The Innocent One Willingly Suffers for the Guilty

I. He was innocent.

A. He was not guilty.

1. He bore the sins of others, not His own.
2. He accepted the pain and agony of suffering people.

B. The world assumed He deserved the punishment.

1. They did not recognize His servant role.
2. They did not recognize their own need.

Transition: An innocent one was sent to suffer for guilty people, but there was no other way. The guilty could never have survived the horrors of the suffering. Only one was adequate and they crucified Him, Jesus Christ.

II. He suffered willingly.

A. He accepted the wounds on our behalf.

1. The wounds of our sinful nature would have been fatal for us if the Innocent One had not taken our place.
2. He did it *for us*. Paul says, "One will hardly die for a righteous man . . . But God shows His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:7).

B. His suffering worked healing for us.

1. The punishment he endured restored for broken man wholeness with God.
2. His wounds offered healing to the sin-caused wounds of every other person.

Transition: He suffered, was wounded, bruised, punished for the guilt of others. The cross is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus has taken on flesh to be the Servant. It is the wounds caused by a crown of thorns, the bruises caused by a mocker's staff, the pain of a body suspended between heaven and earth, the blood that pours from nail-pierced hands, that speak to the guilty; "this is done for your healing, for your salvation."

III. He suffered for the guilty.

A. We are the guilty.

1. We have gone astray from birth.
2. We continue to stray daily in thought, word, and deed.

B. The only hope for the guilty is faith in the Innocent One.

1. The innocent Servant did all for us.
2. The merits of His work are granted to those who receive Him in faith.

Conclusion: Luther says of these verses that they are the golden foundation of the Christian faith. The punishment was laid on Him that we might have peace.

Wm. G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD EASTER SUNDAY

April 3, 1983

Exodus 15:1-11

The exodus motif provides some magnificent imagery for communicating the message of salvation. Numerous analogies can be drawn between the event of Israel's release from captivity and the New Testament events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection. While one should be cautious not to fall into allegory, the crossing of the Red Sea and the resurrection of Jesus Christ offer some splendid points of intersection.

Introduction: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously . . ." These words sound as if they could have sprung from the heart and lips of a Peter or a John as they heard the good news, "He is Risen." But, in fact, these words are those of Old Testament believers, Moses and the children of Israel. They sang for joy because that which had appeared to them as an impassable barrier became a pathway to freedom, safety, and new life. On this Easter Day we have cause to join them in their song for through Jesus Christ the impassable barrier of the grave has become

A Pathway to Freedom and New Life

- I. We have been freed from bondage.
 - A. The children of Israel rejoiced; they were free.
 1. The children of Israel had been in captivity for four centuries, the burden of slavery becoming more repressive each day.
 2. Moses was sent by God as His chosen one to lead the people from their bondage. By the miracle of God, the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt.
 - B. God has also worked our freedom from bondage.
 1. As the children of Israel were in bondage to a foreign power, we are in bondage to the foreign power of sin and death. They are foreign because God did not create them.
 2. God sent Jesus as the leader to guide us from bondage to freedom. One greater than Moses came through God's power, with God's commission to release God's people.

Transition: Both were sent to lead, but both Moses and Jesus had a great barrier that had to be overcome if their people were to be truly free.

- II. We have a final barrier to overcome.
 - A. The Red Sea appeared to be a dead end.
 1. When the children of Israel arrived at the Red Sea, where could they go? The sea in front, the soldiers behind — it seemed hopeless.
 2. God intervened with power and grace. He gave Moses the power to open the Red Sea. What had appeared an impassable boundary was now a pathway to freedom.
 - B. The grave may appear to be a dead end.
 1. The ultimate challenge of man's life is to face the darkness of the grave. We cannot turn back, we cannot avoid it. Is there any hope?
 2. God's grace also intervenes in this dilemma of man. Jesus Christ, God's own Son, at the commissioning of His Father, opens the grave. Death could not hold Him. He opens the grave for all believers that they may pass from the bondage of this sin-ruled world to the freedom of God's eternal kingdom.

Transition: The children of Israel were led through the sea to safety and new opportunities. The grave is transformed by Jesus Christ so that it now serves as a pathway to the eternal freedom of God's heaven.

III. We have new life by God's grace.

A. The children of Israel were led to the promised land.

1. Awaiting the children of Israel was a land where they could live freely to God's glory.
2. God in His mercy had been faithful to His promise to them.

B. The Christian is led to God's heaven.

1. Awaiting the believer is God's heaven, the land promised, the place where God's children will be eternally free and able to praise Him fully.
2. God in His mercy worked through His Son has been faithful to His promise.

Conclusion: God opened the impassable Red Sea that the children of Israel might be free from bondage. He has opened for believers the impassable grave that they might be free from the bondage of sin and death. I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.

Wm. G. Thompson

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 8:26-40

April 10, 1983

Our Lord clearly indicated that His men were to witness to Him throughout the world (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8). This text is a demonstration of what happens when the Great Commission is taken seriously. Philip was eager to serve his Lord (Ac 8:5, 27). The Ethiopian was searching for truth (vv30-34). Philip proclaimed the Gospel message (v35) and the Ethiopian was moved by the Spirit to request baptism (v 36). Although verse 37 is most likely not in the original text, it is certain that the Ethiopian made a similar confession of faith, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v 37).

The central thought of the text is that we have a Gospel message to communicate to our world. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers make use of their opportunities to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Messages are important. A secretary takes an urgent message while her boss is out to lunch. If the message is not delivered, financial ruin may result. Government diplomats shuttle between nations carrying important messages. If these messages are not properly communicated, hopes for peace and cooperation in the world may be hindered. However, all these human messages are of little value when compared to the message God has for us. His message is

The Only Message That Matters

I. The message is found in Scripture.

A. The message is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Tm 3:15).

1. The whole Scripture points to Jesus (Jn 5:39).
 - a. Christ is in the Old Testament (vv 32-35; Is 53; Lk 24:25-27).
 - b. Christ is in the New Testament (Mk 1:1; Jn 20:30,31; 1 Cor 1:23).
2. Jesus is the Lamb of God (v 32; Jn 1:29).
 - a. He is the Lamb sacrificed for us (He 9:12, 14, 26).
 - b. He is the Lamb risen in victory (Ac 2:23, 24; Re 5:12).

- B. This message is connected with the Bible in a unique way.
 1. Other so-called sacred books present other messages.
 2. The inspiration of the Bible assures us of the truth of the Gospel (1 Cor 1:18-21; 1 Cor 2:7-10).
- II. The message is communicated through us.
 - A. God is counting on us.
 1. We have been commissioned.
 - a. Philip received a personal directive (vv 26, 29).
 - b. We have received directives addressed to the church in general (Mt 28:19; Ac 1:8).
 2. God has no other plan.
 - B. Are we being faithful?
 1. Philip was a faithful messenger (vv 27, 30, 35).
 2. Do we share his zeal?
- III. The message is employed by the Holy Spirit.
 - A. The message does not need our genius.
 1. We are not manipulators who "sell" the Gospel (v 35; 1 Cor 3:5-9).
 2. The message stands by itself (Ac 12:24; Ro 1:16; He 4:12).
 - B. The Holy Spirit converts through the message.
 1. The Holy Spirit brings people to faith in the Gospel (Jn 1:12, 13).
 - a. The Spirit moved the Ethiopian to request baptism (vv 36-38; 1 Cor 12:3b).
 - b. This same Spirit works through the Gospel message today (Jn 15:7, 8; 1 Pet 1:23).
 2. The Holy Spirit fills us with joy.
 - a. This joy comes from believing in Jesus Christ (v 39b; Ac 8:5-8; Ga 5:22).
 - b. This joy is a precious treasure (v 27; Is 35:10).

Conclusion: The Ethiopian had no idea that he was to receive such a marvelous message as he began to return home. His encounter with Philip changed his life. Now he had received the Gospel message in faith and he was ready to communicate that message to others. May God keep us faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and may He encourage us to be faithful communicators of the Gospel message.

Lawrence Mitchell
Bloomington, Indiana

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 5:27-42

April 17, 1983

Nowhere does Jesus say that our witness to Him will be universally accepted or appreciated. Our Lord says quite the opposite, "They will deliver you up to the tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake" (Mt 24:9). This text shows the opposition faced by the disciples and the determination they had to follow their Lord's command (v 29).

Today there is little risk that Christians in America will be put on trial for their faith; yet, in one sense our world does sit in judgment on our Christian witness. When Christians dare to speak up for Jesus Christ, the world judges us guilty and the result is often unpleasant. Yet we dare not give up witnessing and join the world. Our Lord's command is more important than any human command. Our Lord's verdict is more important than any human verdict.

The central thought of the text is that Christians are called to witness no matter what persecution they may face. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers remain faithful to the Great Commission even in the face of persecution.

Introduction: In recent years courtroom dramas have involved almost every segment of American society. No one is immune to being tried before a jury — not senators, congressmen, teachers, doctors, or lawyers. Christians have a long history of standing trial. Jesus Himself stood trial and so did His apostles. Even in today's world it is still clear that Christians are on trial.

Christians on Trial

- I. The charge is made against Christians.
 - A. Christians are accused of giving witness to Christ (v 28; Ac 4:18).
 1. Other crimes destroy life.
 2. This crime creates life.
 - a. It proclaims Jesus as Savior (v 30).
 1. The apostles did not preach themselves (2 Cor 4:5).
 2. The apostles preached the crucified and risen Christ (Ac 4:33).
 - b. It means sinners can be forgiven (v 31; Ac 10:43).
 1. God's forgiveness refreshes us now (Ps 32:1; Act 3:18,19; Ro 8:1).
 2. As forgiven people we will live forever (Ro 4:25-5:2; Ro 6:22-23).
 - B. God commands what men forbid.
 1. The command to witness is clear.
 - a. It was given to the apostles (Ac 1:8; 5:19,20; Mt 4:19).
 - b. It is given to us (1 Pe 2:9).
 2. The command cannot be negated.
 - a. The will of men may oppose God's command (Ac 4:1,2,18).
 - b. The will of God is most important (vv 29,38,39; Ac 4:19,20).
- II. The verdict is announced.
 - A. The apostles were found guilty.
 1. The evidence was overwhelming (Ac 4:33; Ac 5:12-16,25).
 2. The council was agreed in its verdict (v 33).
 - B. Is there any evidence to convict us?
 1. Do our words and actions give witness to our life in Christ (Mt 5:14-16)?
 2. Are we afraid of witnessing to someone we know (Mt 10:32,33; Mk 8:38)?
- III. The sentence is determined.
 - A. The apostles were beaten (v 40).
 1. This was no surprise (Mt 10:16-23).
 2. They could rejoice in the midst of suffering (v 41; Mt 10:24).
 - B. We may be treated unpleasantly.
 1. Not all will appreciate our witness (Mt 10:24).
 - a. Some may refuse to hear (Ac 24:24,25).
 - b. Some may mock us (Ac 26:24).
 2. We can still rejoice.
 - a. It is an honor to suffer for Christ (1 Pe 4:13-16).
 - b. God has His own good sentence for those who are faithful (Mt 10:22; Mt 25:21; Re 2:10b).

Conclusion: In most courtrooms the defendant hopes to be declared "not guilty." However, only as the Christian is judged guilty by the world can he know that he serves the Lord well.

Lawrence Mitchell

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 13:26-33

April 24, 1983

The proclamation of the Gospel in the Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch was undertaken by Paul and Barnabas at no small risk to their own welfare (2 Cor 11:26). Moved by the Spirit (13:2,9), it was Paul's intention to pursue God's Old Testament people (v 26). Thus, Luke shows Paul putting into practice the program clearly stated by him in Romans 1:16: "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Only after the approach to the Jewish community fails because of their stubborn rejection does Paul address the Gospel to the Gentiles (v 46). The setting for this proclamation in the synagogue is similar to that in which Jesus spoke to those assembled in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:16ff). Paul binds himself to his hearers with appealing works (v 26). The "message of salvation" is inseparably linked to the "Savior" spoken of in verse 23. He alone delivers and rescues sons of Abraham and Gentiles alike.

Paul minces no words when he highlights the truth that the criminal ignorance of both people and rulers (v 27) was responsible for the Savior's death (cf. 3:17, 1 Cor 2:8; Lk 23:34). His death was, however, the threshold to the victory of the resurrection (vv 30-31). The "messiahship" of Jesus, foretold by the Psalmist (Ps 2:7), is authenticated by the resurrection. The resurrection is not simply a temporary event or brief reprieve; it is rather the bold statement of our Lord's permanent conquest of death, sin, and the evil one.

Paul has more than good advice for people. His message is one of rescue to those whose sins have washed them overboard. It is this fact which leads him to make the bold statement, "we bring you the Good News" (v 32). This central thought of the text underscores the importance of proclaiming the message of the resurrection in order that people might believe in Christ. Our human dilemma becomes obvious in our stumbling slowness to proclaim the message or to believe it. Nevertheless, the Good News does prevail; it overcomes our reticence and unbelief, opens our eyes to the need of others, and enables us to share the message with others.

Introduction: A host of competing messages clamor for a hearing in our time. Only the message of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ offers the power to save us. Ours is

A Matchless Message to Proclaim

- I. This message is firmly rooted in the activity of God.
 - A. The history of God's Old Testament people. (Verses 16-25 reviews significant historical events which reveal God's dealing with His people).
 - B. The voice of the prophets appointed to be the Lord's spokesmen (v 27).
 - C. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead by the power of God the Father (vv 30-31).
- II. This message is intended for every generation.
 - A. It claims the attention of all.
 1. The family of Abraham (vv 26,32).
 2. Proselytes of the community at Antioch (v 26).
 3. The family of man in our time (1 Tm 2:4).
 - B. It meets the harsh opposition of many.
 1. The mind of man fails to grasp or acknowledge the significance of the Gospel (v 27).
 2. Estrangement from God leads to the miscarriage of justice (vv 28-29).

III. This message deserves to be proclaimed with confidence.

- A. God's promise can be trusted (v 32).
- B. The Good News mediates the forgiveness and victory of the resurrection to all who believe (v 26).
- C. Those who believe in the risen Christ proclaim the Gospel to others and live a life empowered by it (vv 15,31).

Conclusion: What a matchless message God has entrusted to us! The message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ transcends all others. It kindles a living faith which makes the people of God unashamed to proclaim it to others.

Eugene Krentz
Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 13:44-52

May 1, 1983

The Gospel makes its way in the real world, a world in which the harshness of events and the hardness of human behavior must be contended with (v 45). God understands the real world because His own Son felt the brunt of man's fury. This pericope sweeps away the illusions that people or preachers might have about how the Gospel will be received. The seeming success of the mission of Paul and Barnabas was evidenced in the broad response of the citizens of Antioch (v 44). But success was shortlived; the passion of the Jews inflamed by the multitudes (v 45) ultimately led to the expulsion of Paul and Barnabas from the city (vv 50-51; cf. 2 Tm 3:11).

The difficult thing for the Jews to grasp was the unsettling announcement that the Gentiles were also the objects of God's grace and mercy. No timidity was evident in the reaction of Paul and Barnabas to the protestations of the Jews. Luke refers to the boldness of Paul and Barnabas (v 45) and their appeal to the prophet Isaiah (Is 9:6) for the support of their mission. The Jews were doing battle with the prophet and with Jehovah who appointed Jesus to be the Messiah who would illumine the Gentiles (v 47; Jn 8:12; 9:5). Gentiles were to be numbered among those who belong to the company of saints; this fact incited the Jews to anger but the Gentiles to joy (v 48). The tragedy of Antioch is that what began so well ended with Paul and Barnabas shaking from their feet the dust (v 48) which would remain as a witness against the Jews in Antioch (cf. Mt 10:14; Mk 6:11; Lk 10:11).

This pericope underscores the thought that the Word of the Lord is, as Luther noted, "like a passing shower" and that we must give heed while the time is opportune. God has His own strategy for gathering the lost unto Himself. He does not allow His Word to remain idle in the marketplaces of the real world. The Word, sharper than a two-edged sword (He 4:12), stabs us awake in order that we might be freed from judgment and a preoccupation with the insignificant.

Introduction: In the real world the distance between seeming success and unsettling disappointment can be very short. Those who are close to Christ cannot afford to live under the illusion that people stand ready and waiting to embrace the Gospel. But we must take heart because the word about Jesus Christ and the cross is still

The Real Word in the Real World

- I. In the real world the Word is easily cast aside.
 - A. Superficial appearances are not evidence of the acceptance of the Word or of faith in the Savior which it presents (v 44; Mt 13:3-23).
 - B. Passionate emotions are stumbling blocks to hearing or believing the Word (vv 45,50).
 1. Jealousy leads to contradiction of the message (v 45).
 2. Jealousy results in persecution of the messenger (vv 45,50).
 - C. Rejection results in self-judgment (vv 46,47,51).
 1. It thwarts God's intention to seek and save sinners (v 46).
 2. It spurns the new life offered in Christ (v 46b).
 3. It leads to an unwillingness of God's people to exercise their calling (v 47).
 4. It destroys the opportunity to have the Word proclaimed (v 51).
- II. In the real world the Word is shared with outcasts.
 - A. God has selected them to be His people (v 48, Is 43:1; Ro 1:6; 8:30).
 - B. Outcasts are offered God's mercy and new life in Christ (v 47; Jn 1:4; 10:28; Ro 6:23).
 - C. They embrace the Word and manifest the life of faith (vv 48,52).
 1. They rejoice before the Lord (Ro 14:17).
 2. They are filled with the Spirit (Ro 8:14; 1 Jn 3:24).

Conclusion: In the real world God is not defeated by those who oppose His Word. Our Lord has overcome the world and the Gospel accomplishes His purpose. The real Word is and will remain the power which points those who live in a real world to a real Savior.

Eugene Krentz

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 14:8-18

May 8, 1983

The bold proclamation of the Jerusalem apostles in the face of Jewish opposition (Ac 5:12, 17-32), the dramatic conversion of the persecutor Saul to be a bold proclaimer of the Gospel (Ac 9:1-20), and the kerygmatic proclamation of Paul in Pisidian Antioch (Ac 13:15-16a, 26-33) in the face of rejection (Ac 13:44-52), serves as introduction to an evangelical healing in Lystra where there is a gross misunderstanding of the message by the natives in our text (Ac 14:8-18) and a violent persecution afterwards by the fickle crowd (Ac 14:19-20). Paul's message ("preaching the Gospel," v7) works faith in the heart of the Lystra man crippled from birth. Responding to Paul's command, the man jumps up and walks, healed by God's grace (vv 8-10). The local populace with their anthropomorphic religion begin talking in the Lycaonian dialect unfamiliar to Paul and Barnabas. Summoning the local priest of Zeus, they begin offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas whom they revere as Hermes and Zeus in human form (vv 11-13). Rending their garments in horror when they realize what is happening, Paul and Barnabas refuse the praise for themselves and ask the Lycaonians to turn from idolatry to the living God, who provides rain and abundant crops. Their words scarcely avail (vv 14-18).

Introduction: The proclamation of the Gospel has power to change lives and meet needs, but many people look for outward evidence of the Gospel at work and fail to credit the grace of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, like Paul and Barnabas we twentieth-century Christians are to be persistently involved in

Proclaiming a Misunderstood Gospel

- I. For specific human need.
 - A. Paul's proclamation of the Gospel met the deepest needs of the Lystra cripple.
 1. The man had specific needs — salvation from sin as well as help for his physical paralysis.
 2. He heard the Gospel and by God's grace believed.
 3. He was physically healed by the same grace of God.
 - B. The proclamation of the Gospel still meets our deepest needs today.
 1. We have specific needs — salvation from sin as well as help for a host of mental, emotional, social, and physical problems.
 2. We have heard the Gospel and by God's grace in our Baptism believe ("Peace I leave with you," etc., Jn 14).
 3. We find help for our other needs by the grace of God. (God removes some problems now, but He gives us the power to endure the others until He removes them all in the life to come).
- II. Despite an idolatrous reaction.
 - A. The Lycaonians tried to offer pagan sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, identified as Zeus and Hermes in human form.
 1. They saw only the man healed and not the Gospel of forgiveness which greatly exceeded that healing in importance.
 2. They rejected the Gospel and continued in their crude idolatry as they turned the messengers of the Gospel into idols.
 3. They persisted in their unbelief even after Paul and Barnabas clarified the Gospel of the living God.
 - B. Modern Lycaonians offer adulation to human beings who are instruments of God.
 1. People today, including well-meaning church-goers, often want to see already in this life all the blessings which will ultimately (in the life to come) flow from the forgiveness of sins. (Too often we desire "success stories" and a theology of glory at the expense of a changed heart and a theology of the cross.)
 2. People today often reject the Gospel and continue in their idolatry, turning the messengers of the Gospel into idols. (Often people glorify Christian television personalities, the pastor, or some more mature Christian instead of the living God.)
 3. People today persist in their unbelief even after the messengers of the Gospel clarify it.
- III. Through a clarifying response.
 - A. Paul and Barnabas refused adulation and redirected the Lycaonians to the Gospel of the living God. (Compare John the Baptist — "He must increase, but I must decrease." Also note Jesus' refusal to be a "Bread King.") They continued the proclamation of the Gospel unabated.
 - B. The messengers of the Gospel, themselves spiritual cripples saved by grace alone and healed by the Gospel, are empowered to refuse adulation and redirect idolatrous people to the Gospel of the living God. We continue the Gospel proclamation unabated.

Conclusion: The Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to change lives even though misunderstood by many. Changed by that Gospel, we persist in proclaiming it.

SJC

ASCENSION DAY

Acts 1:1-11

May 12, 1983

Luke addresses part two of his work to Theophilus, recalling the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He describes the forty-day post-resurrection period (Ac 1:1-3). He describes Jesus' final instructions to the disciples involving the promised full bestowal of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the kingdom from Jerusalem to Rome, the end of the earth (Ac 1:4-8). Jesus' ascension and the cloud (cf. Lk 9:34) leave the disciples gazing into heaven. The two messengers in white (cf. Lk 24:4) point them to Jesus' physical return at the Last Day.

Introduction: Columbia, our nation's first space shuttle, was launched on several important missions. Each involved careful preparation on the ground for the astronauts, important final instructions, the lift-off from the ground, and the mission itself with a return to earth to signal completion of the mission. Throughout the flight, ground crews and scientists participated fully in the mission. On this Ascension Day we Christians recall the last forty days of Christ's post-resurrection life on earth and His glorious ascension into heaven. Standing on the Mt. of Olives with the wide-eyed disciples, we discover that we are

Launched on the Mission of Our Ascended Christ

- I. By a forty-day reminder of His mission (vv1-3).
 - A. The disciples witnessed the Risen Christ with His nail-pierced hands.
 1. They needed His words and deeds to shore up their shaky faith and feeble understanding of His mission.
 2. They heard Him speak again of the Father's plan and of His role as the Suffering Servant in a sinful world.
 3. They observed His life, death, and resurrection as victory over sin.
 - B. Through the Word we also witness the risen Christ with His nail-pierced hands.
 1. We need His words and deeds to shore up our shaky faith and feeble understanding of His mission.
 2. We hear Him speak of the Father's plan and of His role as the Suffering Servant in a sinful world.
 3. We observe His life, death, and resurrection as victory over sin.
- II. By His final words of instruction and promise (vv 4-8).
 - A. Jesus prepared the disciples for their mission launch with these words:
 1. Wait for the promise of the Father (the power of the Holy Spirit).
 - a. They realized how their own power had failed.
 - b. They waited in prayer for the Holy Spirit to empower them for their mission as apostles.
 2. Witness to Me as King in word and deed from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Rome).
 - a. They had denied Him as King in word and deed.
 - b. They were limiting to Israel the spread of His kingdom.
 - B. Jesus prepares us for our mission launch with these words:
 1. Wait for the promise of the Father (the power of the Holy Spirit).
 - a. We often find our own power failing miserably.
 - b. The Holy Spirit empowers us through the Word and Sacraments for our mission as the church.
 2. Witness to Me as King in word and deed from your local setting to the ends of the earth.

- a. We often deny Him as King in our daily lives by what we say (or fail to say) and do (or fail to do).
 - b. We often limit to our own little groups the spread of the kingdom.
- III. By His glorious ascension and promised return (vv 9-11).
- A. Jesus empowered the disciples for their mission by ascending into heaven to rule the universe and promising His physical return.
 - 1. The disciples were dumbfounded at first by His ascension.
 - 2. They were redirected to Jesus and to their mission by the two messengers.
 - B. Jesus empowers us for the same mission.
 - 1. We are initially discouraged by His ascension.
 - 2. We are redirected by the Word to Jesus and to our mission.

Conclusion: Christ's world-wide mission lies before us. Ground preparation is complete. The power of the Spirit is available. For you and for me, it's launch time!

SJC

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 7:55-60

May 15, 1983

Introduction: Usually we think of a "martyr" as a heroic figure who died for his faith. But the more basic meaning of the Greek *martus* is "declaration." In the martyrdom of Stephen, the emphasis is on the message and the One behind it.

The Meaning of Martyrdom

- I. Christ is not gone (vs 55-56).
 - A. We think He is.
 - 1. Stephen had great courage. If we had been in his shoes, we might have been prone to think, "If only Jesus were here!"
 - 2. We often act, indeed, as if Jesus is gone. In the wake of the ascension, people have wondered if He is unable (*finitum non capax infiniti est*) or unwilling to help them, or even whether He can do the job as well as they.
 - B. But He is not.
 - 1. Stephen was an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus at the very time he stood before the council.
 - 2. Jesus is in glory, His "natural habitat" as God. But He is also the exalted Man, at the right hand of God — standing out of concern for Stephen. He is the Son of Man, who died "for the people" (Jn 11:50) but now vindicated and in a position to fulfill Matthew 26:64.
 - 3. Christ Himself reminds the council of this fact. He provides the climax and conclusion of Stephen's address. When the council opposes His witness, they oppose *Him*.
- II. The world has not forgotten, but it still attacks us (vs 57-58).
 - A. It rejects.
 - 1. The message (see verse 57a and contemporary anti-Christian movements).
 - 2. Christian people (see 57b-58a — being a Christian may not always help you win and keep friends).

B. It wrongs.

1. By being unfair to Christians. Stephen did not get "due process." What about Christians today?
2. By direct attack on Christians' "body and life." Stephen was stoned. Who knows what might happen to us?

III. Yet we follow Him (vs 59-60).

A. The martyr, like Stephen, dies in and for Christ.

1. In Christ we have died (Ga 2:20; Col 3:3). Christ's death is the basis on which God forgives us (v 60).
2. Our sufferings for belonging to Christ are an external confirmation that we do, indeed, belong to Him — Jn 15:18-21.

B. The martyr lives with Christ.

1. At death our souls immediately are "with Christ" (v 59; cf. Phm 1:23; 1 Pe 4:19), neither gone nor forgotten.
2. Christ's resurrected body is a token of our resurrection.

C. The martyr speaks for Christ.

1. Stephen held an auxiliary office, but he was active in witnessing and giving an answer for his hope (cf. Ac 6:1-10). We can be, too.
2. When Stephen spoke of Christ, Christ was there (anything but *gone*) to save. So it is when we proclaim Him (Mt 28:19-20).
3. Christ works through His Word, albeit sometimes in strange ways. After Stephen died, the Word was scattered throughout the region by persecution. Who knows whom God may touch through our witness, or precisely how He will do it?

Conclusion: Interestingly, "Stephen" means "crown." Stephen became a martyr, but God makes us "martyrs" so we can become "Stephens." (See also Hebrews 13:13-15.)

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