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Homiletical Studies

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Genesis 11:1-9

May 22, 1983

In verse 1 "one language" refers to speech in which particular words have the same meaning for all people. Migrating "from the east," that is, eastward, they found a plain — the Tigris-Euphrates valley east of Mt. Ararat. No stones were available in this area; so clay was baked in kilns and made into bricks. These in turn were held together by an asphalt-like substance that was available in the region. Building a city and a tower was no sin in itself (v4). The sin lay in men attaching their own name to the structure: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and tower." "These words are evidence of smug hearts which put their trust in the things of this world without trusting God . . ." (Luther). Instead of calling upon the name of the Lord (4:26), they planned to make a name for themselves. Instead of spreading through the earth as God had commanded (9:1), they defied God by gathering in one place. The same perversity of heart which is at the root of individual estrangement from God motivated people's joint endeavors. The Lord is said to come down (v5), conveying the idea that from God's viewpoint the gigantic structure was no more than a tiny molehill that required observation at close range if it was not to be overlooked. Luther comments on verse 6 that this is "a sort of complaint from God, who is amazed and grieved at the great arrogance of men." God must curb wickedness to prevent chaos. To keep control of His creation God now used language to cause confusion. But the root cause of the confusion was human sin which prevented a constructive filling of the earth and brought instead fragmentation and division into hostile groups (vv7-8). "Babel" (v9) is a play on the verb *balal*, "to confuse."

The central thought of the text is that God brings anti-god aspirations to naught by His judgments. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will exalt God's name rather than their own. The problem is that we so often exalt ourselves. The means to the goal is that God, by uniting us to Himself through Christ, has made it possible for us to exalt His name.

Introduction: The confusion that once resulted from people speaking different languages is symptomatic of confusion about their relationship to God. That confusion God dealt with in the text.

God Brings Order Out of Confusion

- I. By cutting short efforts to exalt our own name.
 - A. The tower builders sought to make a name for themselves (v4).
 1. In direct defiance of God's command to fill the earth ("lest we be scattered," v4).
 2. In a perversity which ignored the bounds of their creaturehood ("a tower with its top to the heavens," v4).
 3. In a rebellion which could only lead to chaos. Observe the chaos that results when we make a name for ourselves without regard for God - jealousy, enmity, violence, war.
 - B. God takes drastic measures to cut short human efforts at self-enhancement.
 1. God knew what the tower builders were doing (vv6-7). He is still aware of human presumption.
 2. The disruptive dispersion was God's way of reminding the tower

builders that He was to be honored, not they.

3. God comes "down" to us in events such as sickness, accidents, and the forces of nature to remind us that He is the Master of our destiny. When, instead of honoring God, we seek to make a name for ourselves, God has ways of cutting our efforts short and thereby bringing some order out of our confusion.

But God has another more effective way of bringing order out of our confusion.

II. By exalting His name.

- A. In mighty acts of judgment like the confusion of languages.
 1. Intended to show the futility of doing our own thing.
 2. Intended to elicit dependence on God.
- B. In gracious acts of mercy like the sending of the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26).
 1. The Spirit makes known that God united heaven and earth and joined people to Himself, not by a tower of bricks but by Jesus Christ.
 2. The message of what God did in Christ the Spirit makes intelligible in every language (Ac 2:11,38).
 3. When by the power of the Spirit we receive the message of forgiveness, God is exalting His name and bringing order out of our confusion. There is no need to be confused any longer about who we are and what our purpose is. We are people whom God has created, redeemed, and renewed. Our purpose is to exalt His name by trusting and honoring Him.

Conclusion: God is not a God of confusion but of order. Pentecost tells us that God brought and is continuing to bring order out of the confusion of Babel.

Gerhard Aho

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Numbers 6:22-27

May 29, 1983

The Festival of the Holy Trinity, which has been observed on the First Sunday after Pentecost since medieval times, holds a central position in the traditional Lutheran church year as the bridge between the "semester of our Lord" (the first half of the year, which celebrates various events in the life of Christ) and the "semester of the church" (the second half of the year — the "Trinity" or "Pentecost" season). Luther Reed (*The Lutheran Liturgy* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947], p. 519) states the case as concisely as possible: "Coming at the conclusion of the historic celebrations, Trinity Sunday . . . provides a fitting climax to the first half of the year and lends a dogmatic foundation for the Sundays in the second half with their messages concerning the teaching of our Lord as exemplified in the life of the church." In a day when the doctrinal and liturgical innovators of American "Lutheranism" seek to downplay the traditional adoration of the Holy Trinity as much as possible (cf. *CTQ* 41:3 [July, 1977], p. 49) it is the duty and privilege of true Lutheran pastors to celebrate this festival with gusto — expounding the doctrine of the Trinity with careful clarity and stressing its centrality to the life of the church. In pursuing these twin goals the preacher would do well to refer his congregation to the collect and preface of the day and to the ecumenical creeds (the Apostolic, the Nicene, and, above all, the Athanasian). Also of great usefulness is the First Article of the Augsburg Confession where the term "person," in speaking of the Trinity, is defined as "not a part or a quality in another but that which subsists in itself."

The "Aaronic benediction" is the only benediction specifically commanded by God (v22), although the New Testament church, of course, observes this ceremonial commandment as a matter of Christian liberty. Its common name derives from the restriction of its public use to "Aaron and his sons" (v22), the incumbents of the office of the public ministry in the Old Testament church (cf. 1 Chr 23:13). The synodical rubrics, therefore, rightly restrict its public use to the incumbents of the office of the public ministry in the New Testament church, the called and ordained servants of the Word of God. This benediction is not a mere wish but, like the absolution, actually relays the blessing of God to His people (vs 23,27). This truth is especially emphasized by God's statement that the benediction serves to "put My name upon the people" (v27), so that we are sealed again (as we originally were in baptism) as children of God. This same truth, moreover, is symbolized by the way in which the Lutheran pastor lifts up open hands toward the congregation as he speaks these words (a custom inherited from the Old Testament public priests — cf. Lv 9:22) and then concludes by making the sign of the cross on the people. The Mozarabic Liturgy incorporates the Aaronic benediction at a point previous to the reception of the sacrament, but Luther followed the tradition of the Old Testament church (cf. Lv 9:22) in placing this benediction so appropriately at the end of the service, making this comment: "I believe that Christ used something of this kind when He blessed His disciples as He ascended into heaven."

It is the proper name of God which is used three times in the benediction (vs24-26) as well as in the introductory verse (22). This *tetragrammeton* (so called because of its four consonants) denotes God as the only self-existent being (Ex 30:14-15), and since it is a proper name, its use often indicates a personal relationship between God and the people with whom He uses it. Most modern scholars believe that this name was originally pronounced "Yahweh," but we cannot be sure because the Old Testament church, prompted by a pious sense of awe, was hesitant to speak the name and so read the word '*adonai*' ("Lord") whenever the *tetragrammeton* occurred in Scripture. The New Testament church has observed the same custom, following the example of our Lord Himself and His apostles. (Traditional English versions translate the *tetragrammeton* as "LORD" using four capital letters, in order to distinguish it from '*adonai*', translated simply as "Lord.")

The threefold repetition of the *tetragrammeton* in the Aaronic benediction clearly refers to the three persons of the Holy Trinity (whose worship was as integral to the faith of the Old Testament church as to our own). Each of the three statements relates to the particular person to whom the Scripture ascribes the main role in the *opus ad extra* concerned. Thus, verse 24 speaks of God the Father, who leads in the bestowal of blessings in general, including the work of preservation. Verse 25 speaks of God the Son, who plays the main role in the work of redemption. The word "face" is often used figuratively to refer to one's self-manifestation to others — here God's self-manifestation to mankind in the promised Messiah, who is a divine light shining in the midst of spiritual darkness (cf. Jn 1:4,5,9,18; 2 Cor 4:6). The vicarious obedience, suffering and death of the God-man is the basis of the divine grace (undeserved favour) which issues in the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jn 1:14,16-17). Verse 26 speaks of God the Holy Spirit who has a particularly prominent part in the work of sanctification (in the broad sense). The word "face" ("countenance" is actually the same word as is translated "face" in the previous verse) again signifies a self-manifestation. Thus, the first clause relates to the Holy Spirit's communication, through the means of grace, of the divine grace earned by the Messiah's substitutionary work. The word

shalom ("peace") refers not to a *feeling* of peacefulness in the Christian, but rather to a wholeness which involves reconciliation with God and which the Holy Spirit establishes through the creation of faith in the human heart. (The word *sim* would be translated more exactly as "establish" than as "give.") Thus the final clause of the Aaronic benediction relates to the individual appropriation of salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ro 5:1,5).

In preaching on such a text the pastor must, of course, make it clear to his hearers that the external works (*opera ad extra*) of the divine persons are indivisible. Likewise, he must emphasize that the internal relationships (*opera ad intra*) of these persons rule out the modalist idea of theologians in some "Lutheran" churches that the divine persons are three different *ways* in which God has revealed Himself. (See F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, pp. 415-424.)

Introduction: This one Sunday out of all the Sundays of the year is especially set aside as the Festival of the Holy Trinity. Paraments of white and gold adorn the altar, pulpit, and lectern. Special hymns are sung, special passages of Scripture are read, and special prayers are addressed to God. Yet all the Sundays of the year are "Trinity Sundays." Every Sunday service is dedicated to the worship of the Triune God, and every Sunday service ends with the Aaronic benediction stated in the text. This blessing recalls and relays to us each week

God's Work for Us

- I. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Father
 - A. Who is the First Person of the Holy Trinity (Ecumenical Creeds, AC I).
 1. Of one essence with the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 2. Yet a person distinct from them.
 - B. Who is the source of all blessings (v24a; Jas 1:17).
 1. Material blessings (SC: Creed, I), especially
 - a. Creation (Mal 2:10)
 - b. Preservation (v24b; Ps 103:13).
 2. Spiritual blessings, especially
 - a. Sending His Son into the world (Jn 3:15).
 - b. Sending His Spirit into human hearts (Ga 4:6).
- II. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Son
 - A. Who is the Light of the world (v25a; Jn 1:4-5,9; Nicene Creed).
 1. For He is eternally begotten by the Father.
 - a. Receiving His being from the Father.
 - b. Yet existing from all eternity.
 2. For He, alone of the three divine persons, has become man (Synodical Catechism, p. 32).
 - B. Who is the source of divine grace (v25b; Jn 1:14, 16-17).
 1. Which we need above all things.
 - a. The ancestors of our race failed to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God.
 - (1.) They sought to place themselves on His level (Gn 3:5).
 - (2.) They proved ungrateful for all previous blessings upon them (Gn 1-2).
 - b. We all have likewise failed to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God.
 - (1.) From the time of conception.
 - (2.) In many and various ways.
 2. Which He earned for all people.
 - a. By means of His vicarious obedience.
 - b. By means of His vicarious suffering and death.

III. The Work Ascribed Especially to God the Holy Spirit

- A. Who is the Third Person of the Trinity (Ecumenical Creeds).
 1. Proceeding from the Father and the Son.
 2. Yet existing as a distinct person from all eternity.
- B. Who testifies to the saving work of the Son (v26a; Jn 15:26).
 1. Through the proclamation of the gospel.
 - a. In the reading of Holy Scripture, the words of which He taught to the prophets and apostles (1 Cor 2:13; cf. the witness of the Pentecost events, recalled last Sunday, to the infallible inspiration of the apostles in the performance of their teaching office).
 - b. In the sermons which the pastors of orthodox churches preach on the basis of Holy Scripture.
 - c. In the absolution.
 - d. In the benediction concluding the service (vs 23,27).
 2. Through the administration of the sacraments (Jn 3:5-6; Tt 3:5).
- C. Who thereby makes people whole (v26b).
 1. Creating faith in the saving work of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 12:3; Ga 4:6).
 2. Reconciling to God people who previously were inimical to Him (Ro 5:1,5; 8:7).
 3. Enabling us joyfully to adore the Holy Trinity as the One True God (Ps 73:25,26).

Douglas McC. L. Judisch

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 8:41-43

June 5, 1983

The pericope is the fifth portion of seven particularized portions articulated by Solomon in his dedicatory prayer upon the completion of the temple in Jerusalem. The text concerns itself with the hearing of prayers offered by people foreign to Israel. Many people were drawn to Solomon's court from all over the world. The "call upon" implies something more than a token courtesy of a visitor to Israel's "deity."

The name of God had become known through deeds of omnipotence. "The strong hand and the outstretched arm are connected together as a standing expression for the wondrous manifestations of the divine omnipotence in the guidance of Israel" (C.F. Keil). God's intervention is integrally connected to the covenant promises and the ultimate deliverance through the fulfilment of those promises in the Messiah. And so "the name of the Lord" is always used in the Scriptures to denote the working of God among His people or in His kingdom.

These prayers result from faith through the working of God in the lives of the petitioners. The naming of the Lord's name over the nation, temple, or the like presupposes the working of God within it and denotes the confession and acknowledgement of that working. "The name of Jehovah will be named over the temple when Jehovah manifests His gracious presence within it in such a manner, that the nations who pray toward it experience the working of God within His sanctuary" (Keil).

Introduction: The name of God is associated with the actions of God. God's name becomes virtually synonymous in Scripture with the manifestations of His

grace and power. To call upon the name of the Lord means to recognize and to trust that God has power to heal and deliver. The powerful and saving name of God is proclaimed and celebrated in that place where God has promised to meet and dwell among His people, in the sanctuary of God's house. Solomon's petition calling upon God to hear when a "foreigner . . . comes and prays towards this house," is, in effect, a witness to the fact that God has worked faith in the hearts of these "foreigners" through the spread of His name in the world. God's name has power — power to draw people, power to claim people.

The Name of God Has Power

- I. God's name draws people.
 - A. People hear of God's great works.
 1. God has done great things on behalf of His people.
 2. God's great acts are rehearsed and celebrated among His people, especially in their worship (v42) — including the prescribed ritual, ceremonies, sacrifices of the Old Testament, which all pointed forward to Jesus Christ (Col 2:16).
 3. God's name spreads because of His acts of deliverance (v42).
 - B. People are drawn to God.
 1. Drawn to the house "called by Thy name" (v43).
 2. Drawn for His "name's sake."
 3. Drawn out of a need to speak their petitions to Him (v43).
- II. God's name claims people.
 - A. People come in accordance with God's will.
 1. God wants His name to be known among all men (v43).
 2. God desires others besides Israelites to fear Him (v43).
 3. God desires His house to be the house called by His name (v43).
 - B. People are brought to faith by that name of God.
 1. Faith in that God who has power to help.
 2. Faith in that God who has power to save.
 3. Faith in that God who acts with power in response to their petitions.

Conclusion: The more the church proclaims the name of God — His acts of deliverance on behalf of His people — the more will people be drawn to Him and through that name be given His name as members of the family of God through Jesus Christ.

Norbert H. Mueller

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 17:17-24

June 12, 1983

Elijah speaks judgment upon Israel and her King Ahab. He is forced to go into exile, first to the brook Cherith, where he is fed by God through a raven; secondly, to Zarephath, a Sidonian village, where a widow is charged by God to care for His prophet. The widow, her son, and Elijah live under the promise that the bowl of flour and the jar of oil will not fail until God breaks the drought by sending rain.

The family delivered from hunger by God's miraculous intervention is struck by the sickness and ultimate death of the widow's son. Literally, "no breath remained in him." Elijah, who had come with a message of life, now is viewed as a messenger of judgment. The age-old question of the relationship of sin and suffering is brought sharply into focus. Elijah's words of response (v20) contain

no reproach of God, but express heartfelt compassion for the sufferer and spring from the living faith of a heart poured out to God in confident assurance that He will give aid. Elijah uses his body as an instrument to bring the boy back to life, just as in other cases of miracle there was an imposition of the hand.

The death served as a medium for the manifestation of the glory of God (cf. Jn 9:3). The miracle served to authenticate the messenger and the message of that God who is not merely the God of the Jews but the God of the Gentiles also (Ro 3:29; 15:8-12).

Introduction: God's goodness and judgment are at work in the world, also in the lives of those who know Him not, to prepare a way for the reception of His saving Gospel. Through Elijah God demonstrated His power over the calamity of nature and the personal tragedy of death, both symptoms of sin in the world, and drew a widow in faith to Himself as her God and Savior. Elijah, moreover, like all the prophets, proclaimed the coming of the Christ, seeking to bring people to faith in Him as the one who conquers sin and gives life to all who believe.

God Acts in Judgment and Deliverance

- I. The sign of judgment.
 - A. God's judgment is evident.
 1. Israel's apostasy brought the desolation of famine to the region.
 2. The whole creation groans in travail under God's judgment.
 3. Our suffering is a result of sin and God's judgment.
 - B. The ultimate sign is death.
 1. The widow considered herself to be under judgment.
 2. Death is but a symptom of this judgment.
 3. The ultimate kind of death — separation from God — is to be without hope and without God in the world.
- II. The sign of deliverance.
 - A. The evidences of God's intervention.
 1. Elijah was sent to the widow.
 2. He was perceived to be a man of God.
 3. Elijah, like all the prophets, proclaimed salvation through the coming Christ.
 - B. The ultimate sign of deliverance.
 1. The symptom of judgment was overcome; death occurred so that the glory of God might be revealed.
 2. The miracle validated the message and the messenger as coming from God.
 3. Faith was engendered and confessed by the widow. She was drawn to the ultimate deliverance.

Conclusion: Sin is an everpresent reality in our lives. We see sin's power in every experience of sickness, heartache, and death that we encounter. Our comfort is that God intervenes in this human condition in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who conquered sin and death and gives us life now and eternally.

Norbert H. Mueller

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Samuel 12:1-10,13

June 19, 1983

It would prove beneficial to the worshippers to make use of Psalm 51 somewhere in the service, preferably after the sermon. The Fifty-first Psalm is the personal and spiritual reaction of David to that which transpired in the text.

Introduction: Imagine the reaction of mighty King David to Nathan's "Thou art the man" (v7)! It was possible that the same indignant rage that David was ready to unleash against the "rich man" (v5) he would now unleash against the prophet Nathan. But such a reaction did not happen. Instead, we can conclude from Psalm 51 that David would have been ready to chant a *Te Deum* for the change God had brought into his life through the prophet Nathan. What happened in the text reminds you and me:

I Need to Chant a *Te Deum* for the "Nathans" in My Life

- I. Identify those who are the "Nathans."
 - A. Specifically, the one(s) specially called by my Lord through His church (i.e., my pastor).
 - B. Generally, people within the universal priesthood of all believers (i.e., members of my family, members of my household of faith, etc.)
- II. Nathans pointed David to his sin and its forgiveness.
 - A. At first David would not confess his sin.
 1. Nathan's previous preaching did not curtail David's adulterous scheming and murderous actions.
 2. David's own conscience did not curtail him.
 - B. God used the parable Nathan told to elicit from David a confession of his sin (v13) and so to rekindle his faith in its forgiveness.
 1. Absolution was pronounced (v13b; Ps 51:1-4).
 2. Restoration was assured (v13b; Ps 51:12).
 3. Pardon was guaranteed (v13b; Ps 51:9-13).
- III. "Nathans" point us to our sins and their forgiveness.
 - A. At first we may try to hide our sin.
 1. The Law hurts — crushing, convicting, convincing.
 2. We are slow to admit our sins because we think of Jesus more as a Lawgiver than as a deliverer from the Law.
 - B. When at last we, like David, confess our sins, God strengthens our faith in their forgiveness.
 1. Absolution is given.
 2. Restoration is assured.
 3. Pardon in Christ is bestowed.

Conclusion: In ancient times when a king's courier brought him bad news concerning the state of the kingdom, the king sometimes had the courier put to death. Such kings could not separate between the bad news and the bearer of the bad news. As people of a Heavenly King we are able to separate between the news and the bearer of the news. It takes courage for someone to speak to us the bad news about our sins. But when that news leads to confession and absolution we have reason to chant a *Te Deum* for the "Nathans" in our life.

Robert R. Krueger

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Zechariah 12:7-10

June 26, 1983

Introduction: The text describes the victory which our God has now achieved through the work of Jesus Christ. In a time when the people of God were plagued with false shepherds Zechariah foretells a day when the true Shepherd was to come and achieve a victory of eternal significance for His people. Our text gives us opportunity to

Celebrate the Feast of Victory

- I. A victory made possible by God's power.
 - A. God's power protects His church.
 1. God exercises His power through His Son, "the angel of the Lord" (v8), who by His incarnation became the warrior for God's people.
 2. God's power is such that no enemy, neither evil men nor Satan's hosts, can prevail against the church (v9).
 - B. God makes known His power to the whole church.
 1. Those with position and privileges will not be able to boast that their own power achieved the victory (v7b).
 2. The feeblest and the lowliest, too, will experience God's power (vv7-8).

There is no reason for one segment of the church to exalt itself over another; one group is not more deserving than another.

- II. A victory made possible by God's grace.
 - A. Grace was revealed in the death of Christ.
 1. The people of Jerusalem killed Christ because they detested him (Zch 11:8).
 2. Christ permitted them to pierce Him because He is the Good Shepherd (Zch 11) who had come to give His life for the sheep.
 - B. Grace is revealed in the effects Christ's death has on people.
 1. Many who pierced Christ mourned over Him later, weeping bitterly in repentance (v10; Jn 19:37).
 2. God continues to pour out His grace on us through His word and sacraments. We repent daily of the sins that caused His death and receive Him in faith as our divine Shepherd.

Conclusion: Let us celebrate the feast of the victory of our God. We share in His victory, for we experience His power and grace.

Robert R. Krueger

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I Kings 19:4-21

July 3, 1983

The account of Elijah's inner struggle and God's direction for his ministry would be an appropriate text for a pastor's installation. Yet it is appointed as a sermon text in congregations of which few will be installing a pastor on this day. We want to preach to the needs of our hearers, none of whom are prophets like Elijah and only a few of whom might be pastors not in a pulpit themselves. Yet all of us can easily experience the loneliness and dejection of Elijah as we are surrounded by a world which bows to and kisses the Baals of this generation. To

keep the attention of the hearer on one theme, the outline utilizes Elijah's cave experience more than the calling of Elisha, though the latter has been incorporated.

Introduction: We often regard the prophets of old as having a relationship with God that never wavered, and we berate ourselves when our faith is not strong. Elijah had his lapses, and so do we. But God does not desert us. As He revealed Himself to Elijah, He also assures each of us

You Are Not Alone

I. Our cry of desolation.

A. Elijah felt alone.

1. He had acted on God's behalf against evil (1 Kgs 17-18). He predicted a drought as judgment, eradicated the prophets of Baal, and foresaw refreshing rain. It appeared evil's influence was broken.
2. But Jezebel sought his life (1 Kgs 19:1-3). Instead of basking in victory, Elijah fled into the wilderness. We sense bitterness. He had been jealous for the Lord's cause, but the result has been Israel's apostasy to the extent that he finds himself alone and threatened with death (v14). Where is God?

B. As God's people, we can experience isolation.

1. Our nation is not as Christian as we often regard it. Studies reveal only sixty percent claim church membership. How many of them worship regularly? People bow down to the Baal of materialism and kiss the god of self-indulgence (v18). The desires of the flesh are manifest (Ga 5:19-21).
2. We can experience isolation. We stand up for our Christian faith and principles and can be rebuffed, if not belittled. If harrassment is intense, we might flee from the situation, mind our own business, become convinced that we are alone, that even God does not care (1 Kgs 19:9-11).

II. Is answered by God.

A. God's mission in our life continues.

1. Elijah was given new direction. God asks him why he is hiding, listens to his miseries (vv9, 13), but then reveals His intimate presence (vv 11-12) and sends Elijah back into his world on a new mission to effect God's will (v15-17).
2. God also has purpose for our lives, even in a sinful world. We do not influence the world when we hide from it. We also face the question, "What are you doing here?" (v13) and we hear Jesus' bidding, "Follow Me" (Lk 9:57-62). We are to know His will and do it. We are to proclaim His Gospel and live in it.

B. We are not alone.

1. God is with us. Not always in the spectacular, the strong wind, the earthquake, but in the gentle, firm voice which in Baptism certifies that we are His, which in the Sacrament of the Altar assures us we are forgiven, which in the Scriptures gives up direction, strength, and eternal hope in Jesus Christ.
2. We are with others. Elijah was informed of 7,000 fellow-believers (v18). Elisha became his companion (v21). We join with fellow-Christians and together support one another and carry out God's mission. Our mutual fellowship in Christ fends off loneliness.

Conclusion: God loves us no less than He loved Elijah. He fills our lives, too, with His presence. We are not alone.

Luther G. Strasen

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 66:10-14

July 10, 1983

This text from the final chapter of Isaiah projects the reader beyond the events of Isaiah's days. Isaiah had exposed Judah's basic sin, that of a wrong attitude and relationship to God. He warned the nation of its inevitable collapse, but also promised that a godly remnant would be preserved. From that remnant would come blessings as the Messiah effected world-wide redemption and final glory for His Church.

"Jerusalem" refers to "the place of the name of the Lord of hosts" (Is 18:7), the place where God dwells (Is 8:18). This Jerusalem is the kingdom of God's redemptive presence. It is His Church, where we who are His people live in His power now and in the hope of His presence in eternal glory. It was not, then, the purpose of God to eradicate His people, but to build a new Jerusalem on the foundation of a righteous and faithful remnant. Thus, Isaiah pictures God Himself nurturing and comforting Jerusalem.

Introduction: Hebrew writers more often used concrete terms than abstract ones. Isaiah wanted to convey God's continuous, strong presence with His people and does so in the concrete terms of a mother's bountiful care for her child. His prophecy still leads us to

Rejoice in God's Care

- I. Rejoice that God does not leave us.
 - A. God did not allow "Jerusalem" to perish. Judah deserved destruction because of its rejection of God (Is 1:4). Yet God promised that a remnant would survive (Is 1:9). Those who mourn for Jerusalem can rejoice (v10). God will not forsake the place of His presence (Is 49:14-15), His church.
 - B. God does not forsake us. Our sins call for condemnation (Ga 6:7-8), but Jesus proclaims God's presence: "The kingdom of God has come near you" (Lk 10:9). We are inhabitants of God's spiritual Jerusalem. We rejoice that He has claimed us to live in His presence and care.
- II. Rejoice that God prospers our lives.
 - A. We are nourished (v11). As children are nursed by a mother, even so we also receive spiritual nourishment from God in the close, totally dependent relationship we have with Him in Jesus Christ. As members of His spiritual family, living in His Jerusalem, we are sustained by God's acceptance and forgiveness.
 - B. We are comforted (vv12b-13). God's promise is that He will care for us. Now God Himself is pictured as a mother who delights in her child. He gives us all we need, carries us through life, comforts us during difficult times. He gives us spiritual prosperity, and we rejoice in His gifts and care.
- III. Rejoice that God gives us future hope.
 - A. Evil will be subdued (v14b). The hand of the Lord — His power — will uphold His people even as He vents His righteous anger against His enemies. God will come to judge (vv15-16).

- B. We will live in God's presence forever (v14a). God will give life to what was dead. We will see His victory. We will rejoice in His eternal presence and care.

Conclusion: We do not wait for heaven to rejoice. God is present now and cares for us now. Our joy begins now and will be complete when we celebrate in God's eternal Jerusalem (Rev 21:2).

Luther G. Strasen

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

July 17, 1983

The commandments and statutes (v10) were not too hard (v11) for the Israelites to keep because God had spoken in simple, straightforward language which even the uneducated could understand. Nor were God's commandments "far off" (v11). God had not kept them hidden in heaven or somewhere beyond the sea but He had condescended to have them put down in writing. But God brought His commandments even nearer to the Israelites; He put them in their mouth and heart (v14). Luther explains that for the Law to be in the heart the Law must be loved, which is impossible for us to do by our own powers. Yet the Law can be fulfilled only if it is loved. Luther asserts that "by this text Moses directs the people to another Word to come, which, when received in the heart, causes His commandment to be loved. It is as if He said, 'You will not fulfill My commandment when you hear it, but only if you love it with the heart. This you will not do unless the Word has been preached with the mouth and believed in the heart. So my commandment will become neither too difficult nor too distant.' " Luther is referring to the word of the Gospel which is preached by the mouth and then believed as a result of hearing. Paul refers to this Old Testament passage in Romans 10:6-8.

The central thought of the text is that we can do what the Lord has commanded because His Law is in our heart. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will be moved by love for God and His Law to do what God commands. The problem is that we often regard the Law as an annoying encumbrance rather than a delight. The means to the goal is that God Himself by the hearing of the Gospel changes our hearts so that we are able to love God's Law.

Introduction: We Lutherans hear so much about being saved by grace through faith without the deeds of the Law that we may overlook the need to keep the Law. While we do not have to keep the Law of God to be saved, we are to keep it. God through Moses encourages the Israelites and us to keep His Law when He says: "This commandment . . . is not too hard for you . . . you can do it."

God's Commandments Are Not Too Hard for Us

- I. God has made them known.
 - A. He made his commandments known to Israel.
 1. He did not lock them up in heaven but gave them to Moses on two tablets of stone. He also spelled out for them clearly and specifically many civil and ceremonial commandments.
 2. These commandments were read to the people publicly so they would always know what God wanted them to do.
 - B. God has made his commandments known to us.

1. While we have been freed from the civil and ceremonial regulations given to the Israelites (Col 2:16), God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, is still binding for us.
2. The Ten Commandments have been explained to us in Sunday School, in confirmation classes, and in sermons. They are a sure guide to what is right and wrong.
3. God has laid down moral absolutes: "Do this. Do not do that." The commandments are not too hard for us because we are not ignorant of what God would have us do.

But the knowing will not empower us to do them. Above all, what keeps the commandments from being too hard for us is that

II. God enables us to love them.

- A. We can love God's commands only when our hearts have been changed.
 1. A heart-change occurs when we hear the message of God's love for us in Christ, and that message creates faith in our heart (Ro 10:8-10).
 2. Faith in Christ produces love for God and His law, and a heart that loves God's law will be impelled to keep it (Dt 32:6).
- B. With hearts changed by the Gospel we can now use God's Law properly.
 1. We can acknowledge the Law's validity as accuser without despairing, for we continually find refuge in Christ.
 2. As we let God's Law guide us in doing God's will, we see the commandments as a loving Lord's urging to follow paths of righteousness on which He abundantly prospers us (v9).

God's love stimulates our love for God and neighbor and enables us to fulfill the Law (Ro 13:10).

Conclusion: Impelled by the love of God we can do it; we can keep God's Law. God's commandments are not too hard for us.

Gerhard Aho

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 8:22-35

July 24, 1983

Chapter 8 is the climax of the Book of Proverbs and, indeed, the wisdom literature in general, of which this book is a prime example. For the Divine Wisdom which Proverbs 8 describes in more detail than any other passage in the wisdom literature is the source of all true wisdom, and the spiritual apprehension of this Divine Wisdom is the goal of the whole corpus of wisdom literature. Almost all modern exegetes assume that the Divine Wisdom who speaks in Proverbs 8 is merely an instance of poetic personification — a rhetorical device employed to describe an attribute of God. The orthodox church, however (as taught by Athanasius, Luther, Calov, Fuerbringer, etc.), has always heard her Lord Himself speaking to her in Proverbs 8, recognizing the Divine Wisdom there as an actual hypostasis, the Second Person of the Trinity, the preincarnate Savior. That the ancient interpretation (prevalent already in Old Testament times) is correct follows from a number of considerations, such as the following: (1) that such an extended figure of thought would not be appropriate to the wisdom genre, (2) that the attributes of God cannot be said to be acquired or begotten (v 22), even in a figurative sense, (3) that the wisdom of God does not take precedence over His other attributes (v 22), (4) that the Wisdom speaking here is distinguished from the wisdom which He possesses (e.g., v 14) and dispenses (e.g., vs 10-11), and (5) that such an interpretation is

confirmed by various New Testament passages (e. g., Jn 1:1-4; 1 Cor 1:24,30; Col. 1:3; Lk 11:49-52 compared with Mt 23:34-36). The use of several feminine grammatical forms is no objection to the Messianic identification of the Divine Wisdom of Proverbs 8, since, for one thing, grammatical gender is not equivalent to sexual nature in Hebrew (and other languages). The use of such forms results from the feminine gender of the word *hokhmah* ("wisdom").

After His introduction, then, in the first three verses, God the Son is the speaker in the remainder of Proverbs 8. In verses 4-14 He declares Himself the fountainhead of all true wisdom (see especially v 14). In verses 15-16 He assumes responsibility for the preservation of order in the world through the governments instituted by Him. In verses 17-21 He proclaims the imputation of His righteousness and promises other spiritual blessings to those who trust in Him (see especially v 18). In verses 22-31 the Divine Wisdom reveals Himself as the eternally begotten delight of God the Father and the Father's agent in the creation of the universe. The KJV and NASB translation of *qanani* as "possessed me" is certainly superior to the "created me" of the RSV. The basic meaning of *qanah*, however, is "get," and a better rendition of the form here would be "has begotten Me" (compare the similar significance, "I have given birth," in Eve's expression of Messianic hope, Gn 4:1). Verses 22-23, therefore, underscore in this way the Father's eternal generation of the Son: "The Lord has begotten Me from the beginning of His way, a time prior to His works from long ago. From eternity have I been established, from the first, from times prior to the earth." The eternal generation of the Son is likewise denoted by the *po'ial* of *hul* ("I have been brought forth") in verses 24 and 25. His participation in the work of creation as the agent of the Father earns Him the title of *'amon* in verse 30; "master-workman" is the best interpretation (cf. Jn 1:1-4; Col 1:15-17; He 1:1-4; Re 3:1-4). It is the intense devotion to His creatures ("My delights with the sons of man") asserted by verse 31 that ultimately led the Divine Wisdom to become a man Himself in order to bring life once again to those who deserve eternal death (v 36). In verses 32-34, therefore, the Divine Wisdom proclaims Himself the only way to blessedness (cf. Ps 2:11). For those who find Him through faith find eternal life, since in this way they obtain *ratzon* ("goodwill, favor, acceptance") from the Lord (v 35). This acceptance by God is, of course, based upon the vicarious satisfaction accomplished by the Divine Wisdom when He had come into the world which He created.

Introduction: In healthy cultures the aged are regarded with honor as the repository of wisdom, a wisdom gained from their own experience in life and the tradition inherited from preceding generations. The teeth to emerge last, therefore, are called "wisdom teeth." Traditionally people have said, "With age comes wisdom," and have urged in disputes, "Let older and wiser heads prevail." The aged are not necessarily wise, but certainly the superlatives of age and wisdom combine in the Wisdom of God who speaks to us in Proverbs 8, one whom we recognize as none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. For, in conjunction with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, this Divine Wisdom is, of all beings in existence,

Oldest and Wisest

- I. This Wisdom of God is infinitely old.
 - A. That is, according to His divine nature.
 1. For He is eternally begotten by God the Father.
 - a. Receiving His being from the Father ("has begotten," v 22; "have been established," v 23; "have been brought forth," vs 24-25).
 - b. Yet existing from all eternity ("from the beginning of His way," v 22; "from eternity," "from the first," v 23).

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2. For He participated in the creation of the universe.
 - a. Scripture and the creeds ascribe the work of creation especially to the Father (Nicene Creed, I).
 - b. Scripture and the creeds, however, describe the Son as the Father's agent in the work of creation (vs 2-31; Jn 1:1-4; Col 1:15-17; He 1:1-4; Re 3:14; "by whom all things were made," Nicene Creed, II).
 - B. Although not according to His human nature.
 1. Which He assumed in the womb of one of His creatures.
 2. Which He assumed in response to the sin which has infected all other human beings.
 - II. The Wisdom of God is infinitely wise.
 - A. According to His divine nature.
 1. His wisdom is without defect or limits (vs 8-14; Ro 11:33).
 2. His wisdom is apparent even in the things created by Him (vs 27-30; Ps 104:24; Ro 1:20).
 - B. According to His human nature.
 1. Which He assumed despite the foolishness of all other human beings.
 - a. He created human beings with perfect wisdom-knowing only that which is good (cf. Gn 2:17).
 - b. Human beings became and remain fools seeking a "wisdom" contrary to the wisdom given by God.
 - (1) Adam and Eve sought such a wisdom in the forbidden fruit (Gn 2:5-6).
 - (2) Their descendants continued to seek such a "wisdom" (Ro 1:21-22).
 - (3) We still seek such a "wisdom" (evolutionary science, the attribution of errors to Scripture, charismatic claims to post-apostolic revelations, and the daily attempts of us all to rationalize transgressions of God's Law).
 2. Which He assumed, indeed, in response to the foolishness of all other human beings (cf. v 31).
 - a. Denying to His human nature temporarily (in the state of humiliation) the full and constant use of the divine attributes — including limitless wisdom (Col 2:3) — which were permeating it by nature of its union with His divine nature in the incarnation.
 - b. Living with perfect wisdom (keeping God's law perfectly) in our place (vs 20-21).
 - c. Suffering in our place the punishment which our foolishness deserves and so satisfying the divine wrath aroused by our sins (v 35).
 - d. Allowing subsequently to His human nature (in the state of exaltation) the full and constant use of the divine attributes permeating it — including limitless wisdom (Col 2:3) — on behalf of us, His fellow humans.
 - e. Dispensing His righteousness and all its effects to us (vs 18-19) through the gospel of the cross.
 - (1) Which appears foolish to the "wise" of this world (1 Cor 1:18-31).
 - (2) Which is actually perfect wisdom (vs 32-34).

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 18:20-32

July 31, 1983

Traditionally the subject of prayer was discussed on the Fifth Sunday after Easter, known by the Latin name of Rogate. The new three-year series of homiletical texts has reserved the subject of prayer for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost. Prayer, however, is a topic appropriate for any Sunday of the church year and is a Christian activity in which all children of God should engage daily. The admonition of St. Paul was: "Pray without ceasing." The saints of God, whether we observe them in Holy Writ or as their activities and lives are recorded in the annals of church history, have been men and women of prayer. Scripture contains many exhortations to prayer, many wonderful promises of answers to prayers, and many beautiful examples of prayers and of answers to prayer. There are different types of prayer: confession, praise, thanksgiving, and intercessory. Today we wish to consider:

The Bible's First Intercessory Prayer

- I. What prompted this prayer by Abraham?
 - A. God encouraged Abraham to pray.
 1. As the heavenly visitors concluded their visit, the Lord revealed to Abraham his intentions concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (vs 17-22).
 2. The Lord dealt with Abraham as a friend. The patriarch was taken in God's complete confidence. God made known His intention to punish the wicked cities. In a similar way God in His Word has revealed many important matters to His Christians which the hostile world does not know.
 3. Abraham immediately thought of the "righteous" in Sodom (v 23) — he thought especially of Lot. We too should be moved to sympathetic intercession by the bodily and spiritual distresses of other people. Constantly there are opportunities created by world conditions to pray for other people, in America and other parts of the world.
 4. The Lord frequently promised that He would spare Sodom if, there were fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, or even ten righteous people in Sodom. This promise encouraged Abraham to plead repeatedly and to become bold in his request (vs 24-32).
- II. What were the outstanding features of Abraham's prayer?
 - A. Abraham prayed as a child of God. He was aware that only the Lord's grace permitted him to pray in the way he did (vs 27,30,32).
 - B. Abraham's love toward others was outstanding. He was vitally interested in others.
 - C. Abraham's intercessions were bold. He demonstrated boldness of faith. We need not hesitate to ask great things of God.
 - D. Abraham's persistence is impressive. Again and again he dared to ask God for what might have appeared to be impossible for a righteous God to permit. We do not have to become discouraged when our first prayers are not answered at once.
 - E. Abraham appears to have been confident that the Lord would show mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah.
- III. What were the results of this first intercessory prayer?

- A. God dealt with the Sodom and Gomorrah in accordance with His holiness and justice.
 1. Abraham did not go beyond asking for less than ten righteous. Even the patriarch realized that it would be improper to ask for more consideration.
 2. God today is revealing his righteous anger against all wickedness of nations. The church must emphasize the guilt of America and of other nations when they fail to observe basic laws of the moral code. This is what the Old Testament prophets did.
- B. God saved Lot and his family Two angels were sent to Sodom to fetch Lot's family. The angels even took them by the hand and led them forth when they wanted to tarry.
- C. God certainly will not fail to guard and protect those whom He has made His own through Christ. Often He stays the doom of the world for the sake of the elect. He still desires to pluck the brands from the burning.

Conclusion: Today, just as in Abraham's day, God answers intercessory prayers in whatever way is in the best interests of His people. We who have become God's friends through Christ can boldly plead with God in intercessory prayer.

Raymond Surburg

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ecclesiastes 1:1; 2:18-26

August 7, 1983

The Book of Ecclesiastes belongs to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Approximately half is in poetry and half in prose. This is a Biblical book that has been greatly misunderstood. Some scholars have claimed that here we have a book written by an anonymous writer who was immersed in pessimism, skepticism, materialism, fatalism, and even nihilism. The view has been expressed that Ecclesiastes shows the influence of Greek philosophic thought. However, a fair reading of Ecclesiastes will not support these radical ideas, completely foreign to what one would expect to find in a book inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes belongs to the canon of the Old Testament, of which Paul said it was "God-breathed" (2 Tm 2:15).

The author of this book is identified in 1:1 as "the son of David, king of Jerusalem." Internal evidence confirms the traditional view that Solomon is meant by the phrase. The following descriptions in the text coincide with what is known about Solomon from the historical record in 1 Kings: (1) the author's unrivaled wisdom (1:16); (2) his wealth (2:8); (3) his extensive building projects (2:4-6); (4) his collection of proverbs (12:9).

Throughout its twelve chapters the book of Ecclesiastes shows two opposite life-views. First he states how a natural man looks at the world around him apart from God and shows how the man living "on the earth" and "under the sun" reaches the conclusion, "All is vanity" (read 1 Cor 2:14). Solomon speaks from the vantage-point of his own careful research in the course of his career (cf. Ec 1:13-14). However, the author writes as one to whom God has revealed Himself, and so he also sets forth the Christian outlook on life. The Christian has hope for the future, as may be seen from 3:14: "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever." The contrast in this book is between those who live "under the sun" and exclude God and those who live with their sights upon God who is "above the sun." This pattern of alternating perspectives continues throughout the book. In ascer-

taining the meaning and purpose of Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13-14 must be determinative of the book's purpose. With 1:13 the reader is ready to be introduced to Christ. "As the law was designed to lead men to Christ, so this book was written to lead those living "under the sun" to the Son" (cf. He 1:1).

Introduction: At the conclusion of the Sermon of the Mount Jesus told the parable of the two men, one who built his house on rock and the other his structure on sand. When the storms came and the winds blew, the house built on sand was washed away, while the other stood against the fury of the storm. Jesus sets forth two different ways of life; those building the houses of their lives on His teachings were like the man who built his house on a rock. Jesus taught his contemporaries that there were two roads which people may take in life — a narrow one and a broad one. Already Solomon in the tenth century B.C. was setting forth a similar truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in Ecclesiastes. The text explicates this teaching. Today we consider Solomon's instructions concerning

Two Different Philosophies of Life

- I. The way of the world — living from a perspective "under the sun," with no higher plane than this earth.
 - A. Experimentation with mirth, amusements, and wine ultimately ends in a feeling of vanity (2:1-11).
 - B. The accumulation of riches and gratification of aesthetic tastes ultimately will disappoint (2:4-6).
 - C. The realization that death nullifies everything attempted leads to a sense of futility, i.e., "vanity of vanities."
 1. At death man must leave all he has accumulated, not knowing whether a wise man or a fool will inherit it and enjoy it (2:13-14).
 2. Lack of information as to who will enjoy a person's accomplishments and toil makes for vexation and insomnia (2:22-24).
- II. The way of the wise — looking "above the sun," focusing on God.
 - A. Enjoy life. Eating and drinking should be recognized as a gift of God (2:22-24).
 - B. Surrender to God's decisions. Take them as they come (2:26).
 - C. Be satisfied with the talents that God has given you. Do not expect anything better. If man endeavors to build timeless pyramids through wealth, wisdom, pleasure, or achievement, he is doomed to futility.
 - D. Fear God, i.e., love God and be aware that at death the spirit of the Christian returns to his Maker (12:7).
 - E. See God alone as the one who bestows wisdom (2:26), which includes the wisdom of the plan of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion: The two philosophies which Solomon sets forth are still very much with us. How empty and meaningless it is to live merely "under the sun"! How satisfying and purposeful to look "above the sun"!

Raymond Surburg

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 15:1-6

August 14, 1983

Francis Pieper states: "In Lutheran theology the article of justification is the central, chief article by which the Christian doctrine and the Christian Church stands and falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). It is the apex of all

Christian teaching" (*Christian Dogmatics*, 11, pp. 512-513). Let us not conclude from this, however, that "justification by faith" is exclusively New Testament theology. Pieper goes on to say: "In the Old Testament, too, the Christian doctrine of justification occupies the central position" (*Ibid.*, p. 513). The text presents this truth most clearly. Regarding the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, H.C. Leupold writes: "In a very particular sense this is a monumental chapter, monumental in the testimony that it bears to saving truth. It is for this reason that Paul alludes to a word from this chapter when he established the truth concerning salvation (Ro 4:3; Ga 3:6). It is nothing short of amazing to find in the patriarchal age so clear-cut an answer to the question: How can a man be justified in the sight of God? The way of salvation was one and the same in the old covenant as well as the new" (*Exposition of Genesis*, I, p. 470). It is only appropriate, therefore, that a sermon on this pericope should focus on the important doctrine of justification by faith.

Introduction: We are living in an "I did it my way" kind of society. We have been programmed by modern technology and the media to believe that we can do all things by our own reason and strength. The world would have us believe that we can shield ourselves from the pitfalls of life and be our own determiners of future rewards. The Scriptures speak otherwise. Both Old Testament and New attest to the fact that

The Lord Is Our Shield and Great Reward

- I. The Lord is our shield in every time of need.
 - A. He shields in times of danger.
 1. Abraham may have feared retaliation from the kings he had recently engaged in battle (cf. Gn 14), but the Lord said, "Fear not . . .)v1).
 2. We often fear the unknown pitfalls of life, but the Lord says, "Fear not"
 - a. "Your sins are forgiven . . ." (1 Jn 1:9).
 - b. "I am with you always . . ." (Mt 28:20).
 - c. "Don't be anxious about tomorrow . . ." (Mt 6:25ff).
 - B. He shields in times of sorrow.
 1. Abraham grieved over the fact that in his old age he had produced no offspring to be his heir (vv2-3).
 - a. The Lord assured Abraham that one of his own offspring would indeed be his heir (v4).
 - b. The Lord also repeated His promise to Abraham that his descendants would be numerous — like the stars in the sky (v5).
 2. The Lord speaks to us in our sorrows to bring us solace and peace.
 - a. He invites us to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pe 5:7).
 - b. He promises that if we remain faithful unto death we will receive the crown of life (Re 2:10).
- II. The Lord is our great reward in time and in eternity.
 - A. We are His now — by faith.
 1. Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness (v6).
 2. We believe and it is counted to us for righteousness (Ro 4) and, accordingly, we receive the rewards of faith for this life.
 - a. We have peace with God (Ro 5:1).
 - b. We have a good conscience toward God (He 9:14; 10:22).
 - c. We have the assurance of God's protection and guidance (He 13:5; Ro 8:28).

- B. We are His forever — by faith (through Abraham's Seed we have the sure hope of eternal life, Ga 3).
1. We have become the children of God (Ga 3:26).
 2. We triumph in death (1 Pe 1:3; 1 Cor 15:55-57).
 3. We are heirs of heaven (Ga 4:7).

Ronald W. Irsch
Rochester, Michigan

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 23:23-29

August 21, 1983

The portion of Jeremiah's book from which the text is taken contains the prophet's pronouncements against Israel's unfaithful leaders, whether they be kings, prophets, or priests, who were subverting rather than promoting God's plan of universal salvation. Specifically, the words of the text are directed at Israel's spiritual leaders. "Instead of standing in awe of the Lord of heaven and earth, from whom no man can hide himself, they glibly mouth each other's lying dreams and the deceit of their own heart rather than speaking God's word faithfully, which by contrast is like fire . . . and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces." (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, p. 513).

Norman Habel, in his commentary on Jeremiah, summarizes the verses under consideration as follows: "A fourth unit (verses 23-32) . . . deals with the contrast between prophetic dreams and the direct Word of God. The opening questions are directed to those prophets who foolishly believe that they can escape God's scrutiny, as though He were a local deity with limited areas of control rather than the Lord of the heavens, whose eye can penetrate everywhere, even into the heart (cf. 17:10). These false prophets had been speaking in Yahweh's 'name,' that is, they claimed to represent Yahweh exactly. They maintained further that they received their communications from God by dreams (as distinct from visions seen when one is awake). Dreams are purely subjective, retorts Jeremiah. They express personal opinions, not God's direct Word. The prophet is at liberty to relate his dream if he wishes, but he has no right to pass it off as a sure word of God. Honesty (faithfulness) not hypocrisy (deceit) must characterize a prophet. A dream is like 'straw' when compared to the Word, the real 'wheat.' "

Introduction: There are all manner of preachers today who thrust their own brand of theology on poor, unsuspecting souls. Claiming special revelation from God or a special gift of interpretation, they mislead their hearers into believing that that which is of their own invention and for their own personal benefit is really the message of God's Word. Jeremiah, who also confronted teachers in his day that were passing off as God's truth their own lying dreams, would warn all who proclaim God's Word, whether formally or informally, that it is their obligation to

Speak God's Word Faithfully

- I. We who preach are motivated to do so when we remember that God's Word is true.
 - A. The Word of God is the source of truth (Jn 17:17; Eph 1:13; 2 Tm 2:15).
 - B. Those who claim to speak for God must speak His Word, not their own.
 1. He is everywhere (vv23-24); He knows those who lie in His name (vv25-28).

2. He warns us to shun those who speak not the truth (Dt 13:1-3; Mt 24:23-24).
- II. We who preach are motivated to do so when we remember that God's Word has power.
 - A. The Word is like a hammer (v29b).
 1. It has the power to condemn (Ro 5:16; 6:23).
 2. It has the power to crush.
 - a. In time (Jr 50:23).
 - b. In eternity (Mt 8:12; 24:51; 25:30).
 - B. The Word is like fire (v29a).
 1. It has the power to judge (v29a; Dt 4:23-24).
 2. It has the power to cleanse (Is 6:6-7).
 3. It has the power (*dynamis*) to save (Ro 1:16).

Conclusion: May God continue to raise up faithful proclaimers of His Word in every time and place who will speak His Word. God's Word is absolutely true and therefore utterly reliable. God's Word has impressive power and therefore accomplishes what God intends.

Ronald W. Irsch

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 66:18-23

August 28, 1983

The text brings to a close Isaiah's prophecies, in many of which the Lord speaks directly to His New Testament church. Here Isaiah pictures the risen, ascended, reigning Christ carrying on His work of salvation by sending out His New Testament messengers to the Old Testament priesthood. Through Isaiah God pronounced His verdict on the nation that had been chosen to be His own: I know their works and their thoughts. Hundreds of years later he would say to Sardis: "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Re 3:1).

Introduction: As this sermon study is being written the Sinai Peninsula is being given back to Egypt. Israel had hoped to hold it for itself. God's once special people are no longer His special people. God's Old Testament nation has ceased to possess His promises of nationhood and a land of its own. But salvation in Christ can still be preached to all nations and to all people — the Jews, the Orientals, the people in distant lands and on the islands of the seas. That is why

This Is Our Important Moment in God's Eternal Plan

- I. Hundreds of years before Christ it was Isaiah's privilege to preach the saving truth.
 - A. Most of his hearers were unbelieving members of God's chosen people.
 1. They trampled God's courts and lifted up bloody hands in a mock worship (Is 1:12-15).
 2. Yet Isaiah was permitted constantly to invite them to return to the Lord (Is 55:6-11).
 3. He even predicted the exile and the return of Israel to its own land (Is 45:1-6).
 4. At the close of his book he must show the hopelessness of their situation.

- B. A remnant remained faithful to the Lord through the Gospel preaching of this man of God.
 - 1. He had wonderful words of comfort for them, telling them God was their saving God (Is 40:1-5).
 - 2. He preached the saving truth to them throughout his ministry (Is 53).
 - 3. He assured the faithful that God who had created heaven and earth would go with them into captivity to watch over them (Is 41:8-11; 42:5ff; 43:1ff).
- II. We are the church of which Isaiah spoke in his final word of prophecy.
 - A. God has blessed us with ministers who know God's saving truths.
 - 1. We have the "gospel" of Isaiah and of Christ Himself and of His apostles.
 - 2. We are constantly training more men to serve in our seminaries.
 - B. Our New Testament Church is composed of members who know the Lord (Jr 31:31-34).
 - 1. God has blessed us abundantly with caring, loving people like yourselves.
 - 2. He has blessed us with the earthly means as well as the spiritual to carry on our mission endeavors.
 - 3. He will go with us to the "ends of the earth" to bring His saving gospel to people who even now have not yet heard His Word.

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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 25:6-22

September 4, 1983

Verse 1 of this chapter points to Solomon as the author. It is, therefore, important to read of Solomon's request for wisdom to rule his people, when the Lord showed His willingness to bless the new king (1 Kgs 3:5-9). Also read God's answer in the next verses and the description of his wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29-34). Note also Jesus' parable on choosing a seat at a wedding (Lk 14:7-11), His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14), and Paul's use of the last words of the text (Ro 12:17-21).

Introduction: Psychology is one of the common areas of concentration in college and university curriculums. We all are interested in why we behave as we do. Solomon in the text gives us Christian psychology at its best when he records

The Words of a King with Christ in His Heart

- I. Solomon teaches us to respect authority for our own good.
 - A. It is Solomon, the wise king, who said it first.
 - 1. He showed the wisdom God had given him by respecting the authority of God in his own life.
 - 2. He truly wanted his subjects to live happily under authority in their lives.
 - B. The Spirit of Christ was in him as he said it.
 - 1. Christ, the Master Teacher, taught the same truth to His disciples.
 - 2. He, the true Son of God, was Himself an example of His teaching.
 - C. Both of these, the king and his King, are saying it to us today.
- II. Solomon teaches us to seek peace with our neighbor for our own good.
 - A. Again, it is Solomon, an earthly king, who said it.

1. He knew, by searching his own heart, how easy it is to blame the neighbor for one's own mistakes.
2. He truly wanted his subjects to live in peace for their own good. By putting others down, you may end up at the bottom of the heap. Singing while others weep is heartless. What are we without a heart?
- B. Christ's wisdom again shines forth, especially in His commandment to love others as He loves us.
- C. Both are giving us the best advice for a life of peace.
- III. Solomon teaches us to love our enemies for our own good.
 - A. Solomon for years practiced what He preached.
 1. We have a description in the Word of his wise dealings with others. Honey is better than vinegar, which stands for sour or ill-tempered speech.
 2. We see in his later life the enmity he aroused in others when he turned from the Lord to his heathen wives.
 - B. In Christ we have the perfect Teacher.
 1. He even prayed for His enemies on the cross.
 2. He taught His disciples to follow His example.
 - C. Both the king and his King can help us to do the same.
 1. Solomon, by his bad as well as his good example.
 2. Christ, by His assurance that we can do even this with His help.

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SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proverbs 9:8-12

September 11, 1983

In this ninth chapter first Wisdom and then Folly are described. Both invite men to a feast. In verses 1-7 Wisdom's invitation is tendered.

Introduction: The Lord has told us that we believers have life, real life. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life." We Christians have the inside story. This fact is not always easy to remember, to believe with all our heart. Paul saw that the Corinthians had the temptation to forget this truth. So he wrote them: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called . . ." This Scripture reassures us we are

Today's Truly Wise

- I. Who they are (vs10-12).
 - A. They fear the Lord (v10).
 1. Recognize His prior importance.
 2. Stand in awe of His wrath against their sin (He 10:31).
 3. Respect His great love manifest in Calvary (He 2:3a).
 4. Fear to displease Him (Pr 8:13a).
 - B. They are blessed (vs11-12).
 1. They really live now (Jn 10:10b).
 2. They live forever hereafter (Jo 3:36a).
 3. "Wisdom is its own reward" (v12).
- II. How they grow (v9).
 - A. They are not satisfied merely with the fundamentals (He 6:1ff).
 - B. Love of God bids us "grow in grace" (2 Pe 3:18).
 - C. Paul desired to know Christ ever better (Php 3:8-10).

D. Spiritual growth comes through

1. Regular, every-Sunday worship (Ac 2:42).
2. Bible study (Jn 5:39).
3. Every-day Bible examination (Ac 17:11).

III. How they share (v8).

- A. Wise people will feel constrained to share their wisdom, since others are missing so much (Ac 4:20).
- B. Wise people expect some rebuff, since others are spiritually blind (v8a; 1 Cor 2:14).
- C. Wise people will not allow such rebuffs to discourage them, since they remember that the Spirit is mighty (v8b).

Conclusion: Wise people are always thankful and show it by sharing.

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