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QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 47, Number 2

APRIL 1983

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# Homiletical Studies

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Exodus 32:7-14

September 18, 1983

Moses was up on Mt. Sinai a long time, and Israel urged his brother Aaron: "Make us gods!" Aaron suggested: "Let me have your golden earrings!" (perhaps hoping the Israelites would refuse). The Israelites complied, and Aaron fashioned a "molten calf" (v4), perhaps the winged and human-headed bull which was the emblem of divine power from a very early date in Babylon. To Aaron this image seemed to be the smallest departure from pure monotheism for which the people would settle. Our text shifts back to Mt. Sinai to the conversation between the Lord and Moses.

*Introduction:* "Why am I here?" Some, no doubt, never become serious enough to ask this question. Many settle for inadequate answers: "Make a fortune. Leave a name. Have fun." Are we offered a loftier challenge? This brief conversation in the midst of an Old Testament incident offers suggestions on

### Really Making an Impact

- I. The sad situation (vs7-10a).
  - A. People have left God (v7). Indeed, Jesus pictures sin as "awayness" (cf. Lk 15: away from the fold, away from the purse, away from the father's house).
  - B. People have transgressed God's laws (v8a; Is 53:6).
  - C. People credit their blessings to other gods (v8b). Today they credit luck, "whom you know," ingenuity, "living right."
  - D. A just God must punish sin (vs9-10).
  - E. Most people pray only for the "good life" for themselves and their families:

God bless me and my wife,  
Our John and his wife,  
Us four and no more!
- II. The glorious outcome.
  - A. God has made us His people by means of events occurring in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Gethsemane, and Calvary (vs11-14).
  - B. Someone was the instrument of the Spirit in bringing you God's love, the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of salvation (cf. the prayer of Moses for Israel, vs11-14).
  - C. We must consider what friends, relatives, and neighbors are missing: God loves them, but they do not know it. God wants to bless them through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore.
    1. Pray for someone.
    2. Bring someone into contact with God's Word.
    3. Expose someone to God's love.

*Conclusion:* What more significant impact can one make upon a person than to bring him the news of God's love and eternal life.

George H. Beiderwieder, Jr.  
Decatur, Illinois

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Amos 8:4-7

September 25, 1983

*Introduction:* In our text the prophet Amos sternly rebukes many of his contemporaries in Israel for their wicked business practices. It is rather shocking to read about such corrupt dealings, since these occurred within a nation whose people were supposed to be the people of God. Lying at the root of this behavior was the evil of covetousness. This is something regarding which we need be concerned and on our guard as the people of God today. Amos' words have a practical significance for us (Ro 15:4). Let us direct our attention to the warning of the prophet and the theme it suggests:

**The Fearful Sin of Covetousness**

- I. It represents a tragic repudiation of a just and loving Lord.
  - A. Amos had a call to preach repentance chiefly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel about the middle of the eighth century B.C. Israel was characterized by great political power, material prosperity, apostasy from the Lord, oppression of the poorer classes, and manifest sins.
  - B. In our text Amos inveighs against the merchants who could hardly wait for religious holidays to pass so as to start selling their produce again — chiefly by crooked means which impoverished the lower classes (vs4-6).
  - C. Actuating the rich in these vicious practices was the sin of covetousness — the inordinate and incessant desire of the heart for more money and more of the material things money can buy. This is a fearful, soul-destroying sin. The covetous man is an idolator (Eph 5:5). Covetousness involves the repudiation of the Lord Himself and His love. It leads to other grievous transgressions, as God punishes sin with sin.
  - D. Amos communicates to Israel God's response to these evils.
    1. The Lord swears by Himself ("the excellency [or, pride] of Jacob," v7) that He will mete out punishment to the evildoers.
    2. Yet the Lord's very sending of the prophet to denounce and warn the people is evidence of His love for the fallen and His desire for their repentance and return to His blessing (cf. Am 5:4,6,8,14,15; Is 55:6-7; Ps 130:4,7; 86:5,15). There is forgiveness with God because of the sacrifice which the Messiah will bring (Is 53).
  - E. Tragically, the Israelites did not heed Amos' warning to repent. In 722 B.C. the terrible divine judgment struck — the deportation of the ten northern tribes. The greater tragedy is that most of those taken away also perished in damning unbelief.
- II. It must be persistently resisted in the power of the Lord.
  - A. The devil, the world, and the flesh tempt us to be covetous and to commit sins to which covetousness leads. If we are not guilty of those sins which Amos mentions in the text, our covetousness manifests itself in other ways. Examples are defrauding fellowmen in any manner; cheating in income tax payments; working incessantly, even to the neglect of the family; worrying; compromising spiritual principles for the sake of a raise or advancements; quarreling over the division of a family inheritance; spending to "keep up with the Joneses"; gambling; and refusing to give generously to the Lord (cf. 1 Tm 6:10).
  - B. How shall we resist covetousness?
    1. By acknowledging our covetousness as the sin that it is.

2. By believing that God forgives us because of Christ's redemption (Mt 20:28; Is 1:18; 1 Jn 1:7-9).
3. By drawing on the power of Christ to overcome this sin (Ro 6:11-14) in all its aspects.
4. By faithfully using the means of grace so that we are strengthened to live the stewardship life, giving liberally and joyfully to the Lord (2 Cor 9:6-7; 1 Tm 6:17-19; Ac 20:35) and relieving the needs of others (Is 58:7,10).

*Conclusion:* Fight the fearful sin of covetousness with all your might in Christ!

Walter A. Maier

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Amos 6:1-7

October 2, 1983

Each of us has been born into the world, as the crown of God's creation, in order to become His child and to serve and glorify Him in being and behavior. The latter we do when we live in love. Our text shows us that

### God Is Serious about Our Living in Love

- I. Living in love toward our neighbors, especially the brethren.
  - A. The prophet Amos addresses persons in Judah as well as Israel (note "Zion," Jerusalem, as well as "Samaria," the capital of Israel, v1).
  - B. The specific social sins for which Amos has to excoriate especially the affluent leaders of both nations are their toleration of violence and reclining in luxury at expensive feasts, in total indifference to the needy about them (vv3h-6a). Their great sin of omission is that "they are not grieved for the affliction [ruin] of Joseph" (v6:6b) — the gross disobedience to God on the part of all the people of Israel, over which the leadership manifested total unconcern. Amos announced impending divine judgment because of these sins.
  - C. In other words, there was no love for one's neighbor as for one's self — and here the reference is to lovelessness between *brethren* in the Old Testament church.
    1. The love they should have demonstrated is what the New Testament refers to as *agape*, a love marked by concern for others and their needs, coupled with the benevolent purpose of doing what is necessary to supply these needs — even at the expense of personal sacrifice when necessary. It is the love commanded by God in the summaries of the first and second tables of the law (see Mt 22:37; Dt 6:5; Mt 22:39; Lv 19:18b).
    2. *Agape* is perfectly exemplified in the love God had for the world (Jn 3:16). God was concerned for our sin-cursed race and gave His Son into sin-atoning, sacrificial death for the sins of all men.
  - D. It would seem that those touched by this love of God and saved by faith in Jesus would be filled always with love for God and fellowmen. Yet this is not the case. We think of our own sins against others, especially the brethren — if not those of the text, then, for example, indifference to the spiritual plight of the unbelieving about us, unconcern for the spiritual well-being of the brethren, offensive conduct toward and outright sinning against the latter.

- E. God visited lovelessness and its sinful manifestations in Israel with punishments — spiritual death, the destruction of the nation (v7), and damnation. Let us detest our sins of lovelessness and flee for pardon to the wounds of Jesus.
- II. Living in love toward God Himself, loving Him supremely.
- A. The basic problem in Israel was, of course, the people's lack of love for God Himself. Note in the case of the leaders their thanklessness to God, who had made Israel a great nation (v2); sacrilege in drinking wine from bowls consecrated for use in worship (v6a); the use of God's gifts to satisfy fleshly appetites; refusal to heed prophets like Amos and to receive God's promise of mercy.
- B. We grow in our love for God as we contemplate His great love which He showed us in sending Christ to die for us.
1. The love which God first showed us, God's love alone, moves us to love Him.
  2. As we love God for who He is and what He did and does, we live in love.

*Conclusion:* We are the children of Joseph, the New Testament people whom God loves. May the love of God for us move us daily to live in love toward our fellow Christians and toward God.

Walter A. Maier

## TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4

October 9, 1983

*Introduction:* After his policeman-son had been senselessly shot in a delicatessen hold-up, a distraught father sobbed: "Where will all this violence end?" The dead man's companion added bitterly: "Somebody's going to pay for this." We live in an age of violence and lawlessness. In recent years even the most ardent and optimistic supporters of the inherent goodness of man have been reluctant to predict, as they once did, a coming utopia when men will live together in peace and harmony. To us Christians, too, it often seems as if some alien force is in control, as if some murderous spirit has been unleashed throughout the entire land to maim and kill seemingly at will. And we cry out: "Why doesn't God do something?" It was this same kind of "mad scene" that distressed the prophet Habakkuk in his day and which caused him to call out to God for a judgment which would put an end to it all and bring salvation (Hab 1:2). But God seemed indifferent to the cry and even held in front of the prophet's eyes the whole range of human wickedness before Habakkuk was finally shown God's answer to man's violence.

### The Prophet Cries, God Answers

1. The prophet's cry concerned man's violence and degeneracy (vs2-3) and God's silence.
  - A. Violence involves sins against both the first and second tables.
    1. It is a sin against God, who alone gives to man life and health (Gn 2:7).
    2. It is a sin against man, doing wrong to our neighbors, whom we are to love as we do ourselves (Gn 4:8; 37:23-28; 1 Kgs 21:1-14; Mt 27:1).
  - B. Degeneracy ("iniquity," v3) involves disregard for law and order, the order and organization God intended when He created the world and man (Gn 6:5; 2 Tm 3:1-4).

- 
- C. God's silence has meaning.
    - 1. Silence does not necessarily mean indifference or unconcern (consider the case of the Syro-phoenician woman, Mt 15:23).
    - 2. Silence may be God's signal that He has a better way (Eph 3:20; Ex 14:13-16).
  - II. God's answer concerned a coming vision.
    - A. The vision was to be written boldly so that it could be read easily and proclaimed broadly. (This is the meaning in v2 of "that he may run that readeth it.")
    - B. The vision would be fulfilled later at a time fixed by God (v3; Ga 4:4-5).
    - C. The vision was a vision of the truth. "It shall speak and not lie" (v3b).
    - D. The fulfilment of the vision is certain, though delayed (v3c). It is a vision of the atonement, of justification through the Messiah (cf. Hab. 1:5 and Ac 13:38-41). The great sin offering is God's answer to man's violence and degeneracy (Is 53:6); the cross is the altar on which the offering for all sin (violence, contention, strife, etc.) was made.
    - E. The just shall live by faith in the vision.
      - 1. Faith is not self-confidence — our sinful pride being our own god (v4a).
      - 2. Faith is trust in the fulfilment of the vision, i.e., the Messiah and the atonement.

*Conclusion:* Now we know where to look for an answer to iniquity, strife, contention in our own lives. Calvary is where "all of it ends." "Somebody has paid for it." Through Christ we are victorious and will be victorious over all our enemies.

John Saleska

## TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ruth 1:1-19a

October 16, 1983

*Introduction:* Remaining steadfast in the face of losing everything (leaving everything behind) is a constantly recurring theme in the Scriptures. Abraham remained faithful even though leaving behind his homeland, kinsmen, and his father's house (Gn 12:1-5). Joseph remained firm in his trust in God despite the severest of trials (Gn 37,39). A great number of the Jews in exile in Babylon, having suffered the loss of everything, remained firm in their conviction that God could be counted on to take care of everything. Job suffered every imaginable kind of loss and yet said about God: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). Finally our Lord Himself left behind all the treasures of the universe, suffered the loss of everything, even life itself, and was forsaken by God. Nevertheless He clung tenaciously to His heavenly Father through it all.

### Remaining Steadfast in the Face of Loss

- I. Remaining steadfast despite the loss of material things (v1).
  - A. Loss of food(v1). So called "natural disasters" often lead us to conclude that God has forsaken us. God can be trusted to provide for His people (Ps 37:25).
    - 1. He provided bread for Israel in the wilderness (Ex 16:4-21).
    - 2. He provided food for Elijah during the drought (1 Kgs 17:6).
    - 3. He provided ministering angels to Christ after His fast and temptation in the wilderness (Mt 4:11).

- B. Loss of home (vs 1, 6-18). Familiar surroundings, with the comfort and security they offer, are often hardest to leave behind. God can be trusted to provide a place for his people.
1. He provided a home away from home for Daniel and his three friends (Dn 1:3-7).
  2. He provided a home and family for Moses (Ex 2:15-22).
- II. Remaining steadfast despite the loss of a loved one (vs3-5). The death of a loved one often leaves us bitter and angry with God (v13). But God can be trusted to provide for His people. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Ro 8:32).
- A. He can be trusted to provide a way of escape in this world so that we can bear it (1 Cor 10:13) — a "homeland" and "loved ones" for us to love and serve (vs16-19a; Ru 4:13-17).
  - B. He can be trusted to provide an everlasting homeland and a reunion with beloved family members and friends forever (1 Th 4:14-18).

*Conclusion:* It was the spirit of the Messiah that enabled Abraham, Joseph, Job, Naomi, and Ruth to suffer the loss of everything and still remain steadfast. Christ enables people to endure the loss of all things and still gain everything. Christ enabled Ruth to say: "... Whither thou goest, I will go" (v16). Through Christ we who were not God's people are called God's people (v16). Leaving everything behind, we will go where He has gone and lodge where He lodges; we will be His people and His God will be our God.

John Saleska

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Genesis 32:22-30

October 23, 1983

The New Testament invites us to take the name "Israel" or "New Israel" to ourselves, the church (Ro 2:38f; 9:25ff; Ga 4:26; 6:16; Php 3:3; Re 3:9). We are not, however, to engage in allegorizing and thus to gnosticize away the historical character of God's revelations of the past. The theophany at Peniel has been the subject of considerable criticism. We take it as it stands.

Another pitfall associated with this text is an unwillingness to admit that Jacob (or any of the patriarchs) sinned. Jacob too had a sinful flesh which led him to connive and deceive, e.g., to gain the blessing (Gn 27:6ff).

Jacob's wrestling match at Brook Jabbok was a pivotal point of his life. Before this crisis he had sought by "grabbing," "supplanting," and deceit to gain the blessings of God's grace. He drove a hard bargain for Esau's birthright (Gn 25:29-34), and he deceived his faith to obtain the blessing (Gn 27:6-29). Such devious dealings may have seemed a reasonable match to the actions of his surly uncle, Laban (e.g., Laban's substitution of Leah for Rachel, Gn 29:23ff), yet they displayed a lack of implicit trust in God and demonstrated Jacob's need for a transformed life.

God now commanded Jacob to return to the land of his fathers and promised to be with him (Gn 31:3). This return posed a formidable crisis for Jacob inasmuch as Esau's hostility — seemingly witnessed by the 400-man army — had been unappeased. Delitzsch rightly points out that Jacob's conscience was aroused by his previous treachery and even by fear of God Himself. This fear led to a prayer and a plan (Gn 32:9-21). The prayer is a confession of Jacob's

unworthiness (vv10-11) and his hope in the steadfast love and faithfulness of the God who promised to make Jacob's descendants like the sand of the sea (v12). Jacob's unnecessary plan was to appease Esau with various gifts.

The "angels of God" (32:1) who formed "two camps" (one for each of Jacob's parties) recall the general ministry of the angels to believers. However, the "Angel of the Lord" who wrestled with Jacob is unique. He took the form of a "man" (*ish*, 32:24); but in Him Jacob saw "God face to face" (v30); and He is specifically called "God" in Hosea 12:3-4 (cf. Gn 48:16). He was the pre-incarnate Son of God. Jacob named the place "Peniel" ("the face of God", v30) because he had "seen God" and still lived (cf. Ex 33:20-23; Is 6:5; Jn 1:14; 14:9). "Israel" (v28) is more than an appellation; it describes the character and work of the individual. It means "wrestler with God." All spiritual descendants of Israel are strugglers with God.

### You Can Have a Transforming Encounter

- I. It is an encounter with ourselves.
  - A. As we struggle against the flesh -- weakness, a cunning nature like the earlier Jacob.
  - B. As we struggle against fear -- when a burdened conscience accuses us as it did Jacob (cf. Ro 2:15; Ps 51).
- II. It is an encounter with our fellowmen.
  - A. Strive to live at peace with all men by means of God's way of reconciliation.
  - B. Be a peacemaker -- that is our mission (Mt 5:9; Col 1:20).
- III. It is an encounter with God.
  - A. God often appears as our adversary, in a crisis, in order to "test" us and help us mature (cf. Ho 12:2-4). We wrestle with "tears."
  - B. God promises us His blessings, especially a "faith that overcomes the world" (1 Jn 5:4-5).
  - C. God blesses us in Jesus Christ so that we become "princes of God."

G. Waldemar Degner

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

October 30, 1983

Two thoughts pervade the Christian exposition of this text. First, God does promise "rewards" for keeping His commandments. Luther put it thus in explaining the conclusion of the commandments: "But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these Commandments" (cf. Ro 2:6-8). Accordingly, we do not annul the law by our faith, "but we put the law on its feet" (Ro 3:31). The second thought that must occupy one's consideration is that not we, but Christ, came "to fulfill the law and the prophets" (Mt 5:17). Those who are in Christ now have Christ as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Our works do not count in attaining salvation; it is Christ's fulfilling of the law in perfect obedience that counts (1 Cor 1:30). Every obligation that we have toward God has been fulfilled by Jesus; we are free!

Moses leads the people of Israel to reflect on the past providence of God for the purpose of instilling obedience and gratitude. Thus the context (8:1-10:11) is a rehearsal of God's goodness in providing bread, shoes, clothing, and discipline during the past forty years (8:1-5). The goodness of God is to lead man to repentance (Ro 2:4), to obedience (8:6), and to a remembrance that it is God



“who is giving you power to make wealth” (8:18). The blessing of a good and fruitful land are not due to “our righteousness” or to our being better than those wicked nations who are driven out (9:4-6). Israel, in fact, had “been rebellious against the Lord from the day” that God chose her (9:24; cf. Ps 78). Therefore, how odd of God to choose the Jews! Only because of His steadfast love did God redeem Israel as His inheritance and not destroy her for her unfaithfulness (9:26; 10:10).

The text itself opens with the rhetorical question (v12) which we shall take in abbreviated form for the theme. The reply to the question is obvious. There are no intricate or burdensome rules required, but only a regenerated heart which recognizes the right relationship toward God (Mt 11:28-30; 22:37).

### What Does God Require of You?

- I. He requires us to fulfill our duty.
  - A. Toward God (vs12, 20) — fear (Dt 6:13; cf. 1 Pe 1:17); awe (Re 14:6,7); love (Mt 22:37); walking in His ways (Dt 8:6); service (vs12, 20); keeping His commands (v13); honoring His name (v20); cleaving to Him (v20).
  - B. Toward our neighbors (v19).
    1. God is good to all, evil and good (Mt 5:44-48), orphans and widows (v18), strangers (v19; Ps 146:9), afflicted (Israel in Egypt) and broken-hearted people (Ps 34:18).
    2. God asks us to love the stranger (v19) as well as those of the household of the faith (Ga 6:10).
- II. He provides us with motivation for the requirements.
  - A. He is a great and awesome God (v17).
    1. He is God of gods, Lord of lords, mighty, terrible, showing no partiality and taking no bribes (cf. Ps 136:2-3; Dn 2:47; Ex 20:3).
    2. He is the owner of heaven and earth (v14; cf. 1 Kgs 8:27).
  - B. His goodness and grace is central to the mystery of the Gospel (vs15, 18).
    1. His affection for Israel was completely undeserved (vs15, 21, 22).
    2. His goodness to orphans and widows illustrates His love (v18).
    3. He is our God by virtue of His choice (v21).

G. Waldemar Degner

### THIRD-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Exodus 32:15-20

November 6, 1983

*Introduction:* We “law-abiding” citizens are often annoyed when we get the book thrown at us for speeding or jaywalking. We say, “Why aren’t the police out there chasing *real* criminals?” At least, we think, we ought to receive a light penalty. But law-breaking is law-breaking. Our text shatters our excuses as it tells us about

### Throwing the Book at Sin

- I. Moses threw it.
  - A. The book is God’s.
    1. His words of authority — a reflection of His holy will.
    2. His words of loving concern.
      - a. “God Himself with His own fingers made a beginning of writing in order that . . . the purity of doctrine be preserved to posterity . . .”

- 
- (M. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, I: 54-cf. vs 15-16.
- b. These words derived from the God who rescued Israel from Egypt (Ex 20:2).
  - c. These words were meant for the good of God's people (Ex 24:12; cf. LC, I:333).
- B. But the people rejected it — and Him.
1. They tried to defend or excuse themselves (see vs 21-24). We do the same.
  2. Sin, however, is not to be taken so lightly. It is not the transgression of an impersonal absolute, nor is it merely a matter of selfishness. It is a direct affront to God, His holiness, and His loving communication.
  3. Moses, by breaking the tablets (v19), signalled the end of the relationship between God and Israel. Either God and man are in a relationship on God's terms — according to His law — or they will not be related at all.
- C. God silences all voices that sing other than His praise.
1. The stark reality of separation from God stops every mouth (Ro 3:19) — also ours.
  2. God's judgment finally comes, stopping mouths in death (v20). Note that God gives man what he wants. If man acts as if there were no word, no law, from God, God withdraws His word and loving presence. When Moses broke the tablets, that did not destroy the law, any more than when the people "broke" the law. But, as a result of their breaking the law, they are cut off from the source of life, God Himself.
- II. God threw it.
- A. So obedience could be upheld.
1. God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt (32:11) so they could be His kingdom of priests and holy nation (19:5-6). Now they had failed.
  2. God "threw the book" at His Son, who was "made under the law" (Ga 4:4) to obey in the place of Israel and all other men.
- B. So His glory could be manifested.
1. Moses pleaded that God preserve the people for the sake of His own honor (32:12).
  2. God "threw the book" at His Son because He had passed over former sins. In Christ's propitiating work, God took sin seriously and saved man with the law intact. Thus, God showed Himself to be righteous, even though men fell short of His glory (cf. Ro 3:23-26).
- C. So the promise could be kept.
1. Moses reminded God of the promise of descendants and land which He made to the patriarchs (32:13).
  2. God's Son "throws the Book" to us sinners. In it we read not only of earthly blessings and divine commandments; we especially find in it the message of what great things He did to save us. By this Gospel the living God gives us life, in and with the forgiveness of our sins (the law's stranglehold on us is *broken*). By this Gospel Christ dwells with us and leads us, just as He guided Israel (Ex 23:20; 32:34).

*Conclusion:* Sin is serious. God stops self-righteous mouths by throwing the book at sin. But when we see how God threw the book at His Son — and how

Christ throws the Book to us — our mouths can only be *opened* in praise.

K. Schurb  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## SECOND-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

**Jeremiah 8:4-7**  
**November 13, 1983**

*Introduction:* The “con” artist hustles people with offers “too good to be true.” They know the truth, but their greed gets the better of them. They fall prey to such schemes and end up saying, “How could I have been so stupid?” Stupidity is of the heart as well as the head. Our text serves as a warning:

### Stamp Out Spiritual Stupidity

- I. Not man’s wicked way.
    - A. Stupidity in Judah.
      1. The text is part of Jeremiah’s “temple sermon” (chs. 7-10), a warning against illusions of security based on the outward possession of the temple (cf. 7:4).
      2. Wickedness — a stupidity, too.
        - a. Though people routinely correct their mistakes (v4) and birds routinely migrate on time (v7a,a), Judah did not heed God’s voice (vs7c-9). This is not how God made things. It is ridiculous.
        - b. This refusal to recognize the truth about God and self (v6a) brought about a pitifully false outlook (v5b), and a lasting desertion of the Lord of reality (v5a). Every man actively and eagerly pursued his own foolish way of death (v6c). Not only is this sin; it is stupid.
    - B. We are no better. Not that we consciously decide to say “no” to God; we simply ignore Him in everyday life.
      1. For many, work becomes the great preoccupation and the source to which they look for sustenance and security.
      2. For others, entertainment is the problem. Radio and television can have a stupefying effect. They can distort one’s view of reality and drown out God’s voice.
      3. Modern people foolishly settle for shallow solutions — as in Jeremiah’s day (8:11).
    - C. Judgment shows our stupidity.
      1. Jeremiah had preached it in the verses just before the text (7:30-8:3).
      2. We must be reminded of it, too (2 Cor 5:10). God will call us to account, and all fantasies must then collapse (cf. Lk 19:15ff).
- Transition:* In the text even God eyes the scene with incredulity. He asks why men are so stupid, so wicked, so unwilling to take His way of life (vs5-6). This concern shows His grace.
- II. But God’s wise way.
    - A. God, the Judge, is not stupid.
      1. God is utterly realistic. Men will never find their way back to Him. So He comes to men.
      2. Jesus came prudently — and, by consistently acting on the basis of His knowledge, He succeeded in His mission (cf. the forms of *sakal* in Is 52:13 and Jr 10:21). He Himself bore the judgment for all wicked

human stupidity. For this reason God raised Him up and reversed His judgment against all men (cf. Is 53:11-12).

**B. He disabuses us of our stupidity.**

1. Not only is Jesus' work "impressive" to God; the message that God gave Himself leads us to trust Him for everything.
2. It is wise to believe the Gospel, because it is our true window on the reality of our relationship (*shalom*) with God (1 Jn 3:19-20).
3. God nurtures our wisdom and faith, in His lavish grace, by bringing us the reality of pardon continuously in the Gospel and sacraments (so we do not fall back into *constant* deception and stupidity).
4. Hard as it is to say "no" to temptation, it is wonderful to be able to affirm something so true, so basic, and so vital for our very lives. We say "yes" in penitence (cf. the introit for the day). It becomes a "natural" thing for us. It is a return to our baptism.

*Conclusion:* Penitence looks forward, too. It is the best preparation for judgment, since it comes to grips with the great realities — our wickedness and God's grace — with which the judgment will be concerned. It is the wise thing to do (cf. Jr 31:34).

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### THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 23:2-6

November 20, 1983

This pericope does not relate specifically to the eschatological emphasis which has traditionally dominated the last Sunday in the church year, being a prophecy of the first coming of Christ and the consequent nature of the New Testament church (already here on earth prior to its glorification). The main connection between the passage and the day's general theme is presumably located in the references to the *perpetual* security of the church (vs 4, 6). By virtue of the first coming of Christ the church will endure to the end of time and beyond to all eternity — secure not only from the enmity of devils and men in this world, but also from the wrath of God which will be poured out in scalding torrents upon this world at the second coming of Christ. Another connection between the pericope and the day is that the righteousness and security of the church of which this passage speaks (vs 4, 6), although now hidden from the eyes of men, will be made manifest to all on the last day. The eschatological orientation of verse 2, moreover, is noted below.

The speaker being quoted in verses 2-4 (as already in verse 1) is the Second Person of the Trinity whom Jeremiah calls "the LORD" (vs 1b, 2a, 2f, 4e), applying to Him the Divine Name to which God alone is entitled (cf. my remarks on Numbers 6, *CTQ*, XLVII, pp. 38-41), as well as denominating Him "the God of Israel" (v 2a). For it is clearly God the Son who, in accord with the general usage of both Old and New Testaments, figures here as the Shepherd *par excellence*, or Good Shepherd, of the church (e.g., Eze 34:23; Zch 13:7; Mt 26:31; Jn 10:11, 14; He 13:20; 1 Pe 2:25; 5:4; Re 7:17), from whom all ecclesiastical officials receive their authority (Jn 21:16; Ac 20:28) and to whom they are responsible (He 13:17; Ja 3:1). This accountability is stressed in verses 1-2 as God the Son charges the religious leaders of the Old Testament church with failing to "attend" (using the verb *paqad*) to its members (by teaching false doctrine, setting an evil example, neglecting pastoral duties, etc.), thereby causing many of them to fall away from saving faith in the Messiah. (The scattering and driving

away and the gathering of which these verses speak ought to be taken figuratively, like the “shepherds,” the “flock,” the “pasture,” and the multiplication mentioned here.) In consequence, God the Son threatens to “attend” Himself to His insubordinate subordinates (again using *paqad*, but now investing the word with a negative connotation by way of an artful contrast with its prior use). Thus, those religious leaders of Israel who remained impenitent — like all men who have died in their sins — were consigned to eternal punishment at the time of their death and will hear this sentence confirmed by Christ on the last day (cf. Mt 25:31-46; 2 Th 1:7-10).

In verse 3 God the Son promises that He Himself will someday bring people from all nations of the world in increasing numbers (“they will be fruitful”) into His church (cf. Jn 10:16). It will always be a minority group in the world (“the remnant”), but it will include all those whom God elected in eternity to salvation (“nor will any be missing,” v 4d; cf. Jn 10:14, 26-29). The Lord will accomplish this worldwide extension of His church by giving new spiritual leaders to the church (v 4a) to comfort terrified men with the good news that Christ has assuaged the wrath of God against mankind and has already decisively defeated the devil and all his allies (v 4b-c; cf. my study of 1 John 1-2, *CTQ*, XLVI, pp. 44-46). These spiritual leaders are the men whom we call the apostles and their successors as pastors (the Latin word for “shepherds”) of the New Testament church (cf. Jr 3:14-17; Jn 21:16; Ac 20:28), so long as these pastors remain faithful to the pure doctrine of the prophets and apostles (cf. Eph 2, *CTQ*, XLVI, pp. 62-65).

In verses 5-6 God the Father (“the LORD,” v 5) seconds the testimony of His Son (cf. Jn 8:14-18), enunciating more distinctly the basis of the developments described already, namely, the saving person and work of the King *par excellence*. He was to be, on the one hand, true God, since the Father states in a uniquely emphatic way (“this is the name by which He is to be called,” v 6c) that this King is entitled to be called by the Divine Name (v 6d). Yet He was also to be true man, a descendant (*tzemach*, “sprout”) of David. (The word *tzemach* refers not to one of many branches, but rather to a distinct new growth from a seed or, as in this case, a root. This word had become a technical term for the Messiah in Old Testament times [Is 4:2; Zch 3:8; 6:12]; even as “days are coming” [v 5] and “in His days” [v 6] were customarily used in prophecy to refer to the Messianic era of human history — that is, what we should call the present New Testament era.) Since He is true man, the King of Kings was able to serve as our substitute in keeping the law of God perfectly (“a righteous sprout,” v 5c; *hiskil*, “act wisely,” v 5d) and in suffering the punishment deserved by the sins of men. Since He is true God, this substitutionary enterprise was sufficient to “establish justification” (*mishpat*, v 5d) on a universal scope, a “righteousness in the earth” (v 5d), that is, a righteousness imputed to all the people of the world. In other words, because a man is also “the LORD,” His work constitutes “our righteousness” (v 6d; cf. Is 61, *CTQ*, XLVI, pp. 307-309; Is 42, pp. 309-312). This imputed righteousness is the very basis of the salvation (“shall be saved,” “shall dwell in safety,” v 6a-b) of the church (the names “Judah” and “Israel” being applied by *synecdoche* in both testaments to the church in general).

*Introduction:* On a restaurant menu a “kingsize” steak is the amplest piece of meat available. A “kingsize” box of detergent is the largest on the shelf, and a “kingsize” mattress is the roomiest of beds. The term “kingsize” derives its significance, of course, from the traditional position of kings as the most important people in the world, who could afford and expect the biggest and best of everything. Not all kings, to be sure, were of equal importance. Philip II of

Macedon was a sovereign of special significance, but his son, Alexander the Great, made his lustre seem pale by comparison. Pepin the Short was a monarch of moment in European history, but his son, Charlemagne, was of much more consequence. The most important ruler by far, however, in all of human history, is the King of whom Jeremiah speaks in the text, Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus Christ is truly

### A Kingsize King

- I. As to His Person.
  - A. His lineage.
    1. According to His human nature.
      - a. He is descended from an illustrious monarch — David, second king of Israel (v 5).
      - b. He is not unique among kings, however, in this respect.
    2. According to His divine nature (vs 2, 4e, 6c-d, 8).
      - a. He is eternally begotten by God the Father.
      - b. He is absolutely unique among kings in this respect.
  - B. His character.
    1. He is wise (v 5; cf. Pr 8, CTQ, XLVII, pp. 49-51, especially point II.B.2.b).
    2. He is righteous in a unique way (v 5).
      - a. All other kings — like us and all other human beings since the fall — have been conceived in sin and sin constantly.
      - b. He was conceived without sin (by virtue of His deity and virgin birth) and never sinned.
- II. As to His Work.
  - A. He condemns sinners.
    1. Specifically pastors who mislead His church or neglect its care (vs 1-2).
    2. Generally all sinners, even all Christians (with respect to the "old man" within us).
      - a. We have all strayed from the path laid out by God's word (cf. Is 53:6).
      - b. We have thereby forfeited God's presence and His protection from spiritual predators (Satan and eternal death).
    3. Ultimately, on the last day, all those without faith in His saving work (cf. Mt 25:31-46; 2 Th 1:7-10; 2 Pe 3:3-14).
  - B. He saves sinners (v 6a-b).
    1. By imputing to Himself all the sins of all people and so suffering
      - a. An ignominious death on the cross.
      - b. The full measure of God's wrath (Mt 27:46).
    2. By imputing to all men His perfect righteousness (v 6d; Ro 5:15-19).
  - C. He gathers and tends His people.
    1. He gathers them (v 3).
      - a. Through the proclamation of the Gospel.
      - b. From all peoples of the world.
    2. He tends them (v 4).
      - a. Calling qualified men to the pastoral office of the New Testament church (v 4a).
        - (1.) First directly in the case of the apostles.
        - (2.) Now indirectly through the divine call of His church.
      - b. Defending His people from all enemies (v 4b-d, 6b).