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Homiletical Studies

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Mark 11:1-19

December 2, 1984

Mark records Jesus' words, "a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat," which echo the old Testament requirement (Nu 19:2; Dt 21:3) that for sacred purposes unused animals had to be selected. Accordingly Jesus rode on the colt, the foal of the donkey, although, as Matthew indicates, both the donkey and its foal were brought to Jesus. There was nothing of ostentation in the animal upon which Jesus sat. The donkey was regarded as inferior to the horse. Only the eye of faith could see in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, Israel's King. The need for the colt, the use of it, the fact that it had to be borrowed are all elements in the lowly state of Jesus. Yet the people instinctively greet Him with the words of the 118th Psalm (vv 25-27) which are part of the great Hallel intoned during the feast of the passover and of the tabernacles when the people walked around the altar with branches of the palm and other trees (Lv 23:40). "Hosanna" is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew "Hosianna" meaning: Help the Son of David, may He succeed. While the people confessed Him as the Savior they did not realize the significance of their own words. They were greeting Jesus as sovereign in the kingdom of their dreams. Not even the disciples understood these things. Yet Jesus accepted this homage.

Introduction: The visit to a city of a prominent and famous person is an important event. But infinitely greater and more important is the visit to us of the Lord of heaven and earth. Once He came to redeem the world. Now He comes to reclaim it for Himself. He will one day come in power and glory to judge the world. On this first Sunday in Advent we celebrate Jesus' coming to us in the new Church Year.

JESUS IS COMING TO US

I. How does He Come?

A. In meekness.

1. There was no royal pomp or display when He rode into Jerusalem.
2. He comes to us in the lowly appearing means of grace to assure us that He does not despise any of us.

B. In omniscience.

1. He knew where the donkey and its colt were and what the owner would say.
2. He knows every situation and every person, also us as we really are.

C. In Power.

1. He helps us as only God can ("in the name of the Lord").
2. He delivers us from our sins and from eternal death.

II. How is He to be received?

A. By acknowledging Him as our Savior.

1. In repentance over our sins.
2. In reliance on His victory (symbolized by the palm branches).

B. By serving Him as our King.

1. In willing obedience (v 4).

2. By cheerful giving when "the Lord has need" (v 6).
3. With songs of praise (v 10).

CONCLUSION: How great it is that again in this new Church Year Jesus is coming to us! Let us receive Him as our Savior-King. He will one day receive us into His Kingdom of Glory.

Gerhard Aho

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Mark 1:1-8

December 9, 1984

The opening verse of the text is the superscription of the whole Gospel of Mark. The word gospel is used in its original sense as the glad news of salvation, the glad news which tells about Jesus Christ. In v 2 Mark mentions only Isaiah in quoting from the Old Testament, although the first part of the quotation is from Malachi. Malachi says the same thing Isaiah says, but Isaiah words the prediction more concisely (v 3). In v 4 the word Mark uses in the Greek for preaching denotes announcing clearly and distinctly what his superior, in this case God, has ordered him to announce. Mark summarizes the Baptist's message as "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," which means that the baptism John proclaimed and administered was connected with repentance and resulted in forgiveness. In vv 7 and 8 John announces the divine greatness of Jesus whose power exceeded anything the people saw in John. John is as nothing compared to Him because He (Christ) is God's own Son. In v 8 the point is not that the Holy Spirit was absent from John's baptism but that the Messiah would bring a full outpouring of the Spirit (Ac 1:5).

Introduction: Mark begins his Gospel by announcing: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." A beginning suggests continuation. There is a sense in which the Gospel begins continually and thereby makes possible new beginnings in the lives of people. We become aware of this continual beginning of the Gospel when we note Mark's emphasis on

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

I. With the fulfilling of prophesy.

- A. The Gospel began with the fulfilling of the prophesy in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 regarding the work of John the Baptist.
 1. John's work was to prepare people for Jesus by directing them to their need of repentance (v 2b-5b).
 2. John's work was to prepare people also by pointing them to Jesus as the God-sent Savior (v 7).
 3. John's work was carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit whose full outpouring would come with Jesus (v 8b).
- B. The Gospel begins anew in the ongoing fulfilling of prophesy concerning the Spirit's work.

1. For instance, Joel 2:28 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17) is being fulfilled today wherever men and women come in contact with the word about Jesus the Savior.
2. Likewise, Joel 2:32 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:21) is being fulfilled today wherever people come to believe in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel continues to make possible new beginnings for us and for others.

II. With preaching of good news.

- A. The Gospel began with the preaching of good news centering on forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
 1. Christ earned forgiveness for us by assuming our place and taking our sin (Mk 1:9-11).
 2. Christ secured our forgiveness by suffering and dying for us.
 3. Christ proved our forgiveness by rising from the dead.
- B. The Gospel begins anew in the ongoing preaching of Jesus Christ.
 1. This preaching is accompanied by the administering of baptism by which Jesus and His forgiveness are brought to the individual (v 4).
 2. This preaching, properly done, focuses not on the preacher but on the forgiving Savior (v 7b).

Conclusion: The continually beginning Gospel makes possible new beginnings for us. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit daily draws us to Christ and comforts us with the good news of forgiveness in Christ.

Gerhard Aho

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 16, 1984

General Introduction to Advent III and IV

Advent is a season rooted in "logical contradiction" or paradox. Our King has come . . . yet, we await His arrival! Heaven is ours . . . yet, we press on to make it our own! "See you King comes to you," majestically proclaims the Advent gradual (Lutheran Worship, p. 11). Yet, reading further from Zech 9:9 leaves us with this paradox: "humble and riding on an ass."

Orthodox Christianity's insistence that reason serve revelation appears especially paradoxical to the modern mind. The rationalistic Eve of Gn 3:6 personifies a certain discomfort we experience when making our minds captive to the Word of God. The Advent III and IV Gospel lessons provide the preacher with excellent opportunities to engender a "reason-in-service-of-revelation" mindset within listeners. John the Baptizer and the Virgin Mary are living, breathing, flesh-and-blood personalities who illustrate the trial and triumphs (i.e. "through the cross to the crown") of Advent living.

Please note the use of paradox in the following two sermon titles and themes. Rational thinking finds great delight in analogy—ascending to the heavens by reasoning from the known to the unknown. Paradox forces us to grab hold of God's revealed

Word in the face of life's absurdities and logical contradictions. Meditation on such passages as Ro 11:33-36, I Cor 2, and 1 Tim 3:16 will assist the preacher in perceiving and proclaiming the Advent paradox.

Advent III Insights

John the Baptizer seemingly intrudes upon the evangelist's lofty discussion of *Logos*. Thus, it appears that the very structure of Jn 1 lays before us a "lesson in contrasts." In addition, such contrasts as *skotia* and *phos*, *logos* and *anthropos*, the dialogue between the Pharisees and the Baptizer, and, perhaps, John's baptism and Christ's baptism (see *Luther's Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 175-181 . . . for opposing view, see Lenski, *The Interpretation of John*, pp. 113-117) present themselves in and about the text. The preacher might also muster support for the "contrast thesis" from the other Advent III Scripture lessons. "Inclusiveness over exclusiveness" (Is 61:1-3, 10-11), "future invading present" (1 Th 5:16-24), and "exalting the humble" (Lk 1:46b-55 . . . the "Series B" psalmody for Advent III) provide parallel exegetical support for a contrast of paradoxical treatment of the Gospel lesson.

Introduction: We hold "great expectations" this holiday season . . . but are they really that great? John's picturesque comparison of himself to Jesus (v 27) climaxes a series of contrasts in our text, showing how utterly different from mere human expectations is God's mode of action. What an appropriate message for our age! No wonder depression runs rampant during the holiday season. Is it that we expect too much from Christmas . . . or, too little! Maybe, just maybe, the hopes and expectations we attach to the secular celebration of Christmas are not worthy to untie the thong of our coming Savior's sandal! (Note: Try introducing this message by confronting the hearer with some of the secular Christmas goals and values that don't necessarily contradict, but fall short of, Christianity's faith and life goals . . . e.g. happiness, prosperity, popularity, etc.).

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

- I. It is "natural" ("reasonable") to hold such "great expectations!"
 - A. Just such expectations surround the ministry of John the Baptizer.
 1. Some must have expected him to be God! (Jn 1:8, 20-21, 25; Ac 19:1-7)
 2. Others expected him to be some king of reincarnation! (Jn 1:21, 25).
 - B. What kinds of "great expectations" do we hold? (Note: Here stress the disparity between "great expectations" and God's revealed way of acting.)
 1. There exists unsubstantiated optimism/pessimism regarding our lives. We are tempted to become mired in sin or sanctimony.
 2. There exist unsubstantiated notions regarding God, e.g. "I can't believe in a god who would . . ." or "My god is a god who . . ."

Transition: "Great expectations" reverse the creation process. We create God in our image by expecting Him to conform to our feelings, notions, plans, etc. Great are the expectations aroused by John . . . totally different is the fulfillment realized in Christ Jesus (see Jn 1:27; Mt 11:11). Great are our "reasonable" expectations . . . greater still are the unexpected actions of God which transcend our "reasonable" expectations!

- II. It is "supernatural" ("beyond reason") to expect the unexpected!
 - A. It is beyond reason as a darkened world to expect Light (Jn 1:7, 9-11).
 1. Yet, Jesus Christ comes as the Light for all! (Jn 1:7)
 2. Jesus Christ comes illuminating our lives with His forgiveness and life! (Jn 1:4)

- B. It is beyond reason for an unstable world to expect the *Logos*! (Jn 1:1—Here the etymological and Biblical meaning of *Logos* can be utilized.)
1. Yet, Jesus Christ comes as God's "final word" to a shifting, uncertain world! (He 1:1-2)
 2. Jesus Christ comes bringing the certainty of God to our uncertain lives.

Transition: Paul giving voice to the most unexpected, incomprehensible truth of all! (Ro 5:7-8—The "unexpecteds" reach their climax here with the atoning death and Easter resurrection of our Savior!)

Conclusion: Are our "great expectations" being fulfilled? Perhaps the hopes and expectations we attach to our Christmas celebration are not worthy to untie the thong of our coming Savior's sandal! The Gospel in Advent teaches us to expect the unexpected.

Thomas R. Ahlersmeyer
Boca Raton, Florida

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Luke 1:26-38

December 23, 1984

We find divine activity and human receptivity central to the Advent IV scripture readings. Both the Old Testament and Epistle lessons (2 Sm 7:8-11, 16; Ro 16:25-27) show God acting. Recipients of His grace can only respond in praise (see 2 Sm 7:18-29 and Ro 16:27). King David foreshadows the Virgin Mary's annunciation emotions when he exclaims: "Who am I . . . that thou hast brought me this far? What more can David say to thee? . . . for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken" (2 Sm 7:18, 20, 29).

We turn to Luke's Gospel to see these qualities in sharper focus. Perhaps no Scriptural character, with the notable exception of our Lord, illustrates divine activity (Lk 1:35) and human receptivity (Lk 1:38) as much as the Virgin Mary. In her we see an incarnation of our paradoxical Lutheran "theology of the cross." Time spent reading Luther's commentary on the Magnificat (American Edition, Vol. 21) will yield rich rewards and reveal how this trusting Galilean maid informed the Reformer's theology. Luther writes: "God is the kind of Lord who does nothing but exalt those of low degree and put down the mighty from their thrones, in short, break what is whole and make whole what is broken" (Vol. 21, p. 299). Luther also suggests Ro 12:16 and 1 Pe 5:5 as helpful parallel passages.

The annunciation's juxtaposition of lowly and majestic, the ordinary and extraordinary, brings a fresh perspective to the harried, activity-ridden preparations preceding Christmas. Gabriel's "no *hrema* shall be impossible" (v 37) and Mary's "let it be to me according to your *hrema* (v 38) point the way to a "religious experience" amidst the rush of Christmas 1984. Presents, pageants, postage, and pious platitudes must give way to a renewed and receptive listening to God's *hrema*. The ordinary becomes extraordinary when God so designates it. A study of the annunciation episode can assist us in being receptive to such designations.

Introduction: A journalist has stated, "A fact is like a sack . . . it only stands when filled with something." Can our ordinary lives, harried and rushed with pre-Christmas preparation, be filled with extraordinary meaning? The experience of Mary in our text answers with a resounding "Yes!" She shows us what happens

WHEN THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY

- I. The ordinary becomes extraordinary when God conceives! (Note: This message begins with a strong statement of God's Gospel presents.)
 - A. God conceived Jesus Christ in the mystery of the incarnation (v 31). Where religions often deal in prescription, here is a description of God coming to us!
 - B. God conceived the Gospel message of undeserved love and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:9). Where religions often appeal to logic, here is true divine logic "passing all understanding!"
 - C. God conceived in Holy Scripture a record of His love in Jesus Christ (2 Pe 1:21; 2 Tm 3:16). Where religions often place truth beyond grasp, here is God giving to us His very Word!

Transition: The Virgin Mary experienced the total activity of God. She, a humble Galilean, became bearer of all mankind's hope and dreams, "conceived by the Holy Spirit." The Virgin Mary also illustrates the wonder of receiving and exalted privilege in her "insignificance, lowliness, poverty, and inferiority" (Luther). So,

- II. The ordinary become extraordinary when God enables us to receive what He conceives!
 - A. The temptation exists for us to wallow in the ordinary. (V 34—Mary's innocent question sometimes becomes our jaundiced, skeptical approach to God's activity.)
 1. We sometimes want to turn God's gifts into our meritorious achievements.
 2. We sometimes want to define God's gifts according to our standards. (Note: Here might be an appropriate place to exalt sacramental theology.)
 - B. Recognition of the extraordinary lies in an attitude of acceptance (v 38).
 1. The coming Savior's rescue mission shows the extraordinary length He travels for His people (v 37).
 2. The coming Savior gives the words which fill our lives with the meaning of His rescue mission (v 38).

Transition: Does God still turn the ordinary into extraordinary? Simple water, bread and wine, words, in a book, flesh and blood . . . these are all ordinary things made extraordinary by God.

Conclusion: The angel Gabriel's words, "With God nothing shall be impossible" still hold true in December 1984. Can God fill our ordinary lives with His extraordinary meaning? In Jesus Christ, the answer is "Yes!" . . . yesterday, today, and forever. Our contribution to this miracle? the joyous response of faith which exclaims, "Let it be to me according to your word!"

Thomas R. Ahlersmeyer
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CHRISTMAS DAY

Luke 2:1-20

December 25, 1984

Introduction: We have again heard with joy the angel announce, "for unto you is born this night . . . a savior which is Christ the Lord." "A savior". A simple, yet profound announcement. The incarnation of Jesus Christ set in motion that great

redemptive act of God planned even before the foundation of the world. Jesus, true God, became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He became so like us that He was made to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. No wonder we have picked up the song of the angels and echoed and reechoed it ever since it was first sung that first Christmas Day.

We participate in the elect of God's corporate response to God's announcement, joining together in the unity of faith to make our confession in song. We together with all the saints of God proclaim our Spirit-wrought understanding and confession of God's revelation of Himself and His saving purposes in the gift of His Son.

From this Christmas service we must go back to everyday life with its duties and responsibilities, its problems and opportunities. Can the song and its joy go on? What does the angels' announcement of a Savior have to say to the circumstances of everyday life? Our text holds two suggestions. In our excitement they are usually overlooked. They are individual responses, one of Mary and one of the shepherds. Let's focus on

THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

as a message we are meant to keep and as a message we are meant to share.

I. Meant to keep.

A. The birth of Christ is an event of lasting meaning.

1. Important events, as time goes on, become increasingly meaningful and important to us.
2. The birth of Jesus Christ is such an event.

B. It was an event among the "all these things" that Mary kept in her heart.

1. She was one of "the faithful in Israel" who looked and longed for the coming of the Messiah (Lk 1:28,46-55).
2. Among "all these things" were some unusual occurrences:
 - a. The announcement of the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:26).
 - b. The visit of Elizabeth (Lk 1:39).
 - c. The visit of the shepherds. The story they told of angel announcements, heavenly choruses, the message of the Messiah's birth (vv 8-14).

C. Mary kept these things in her heart.

1. The Lord was strengthening and preparing her for the future (Lk 2:35).
2. The time would come when He of whom the angels sang would be despised, rejected, crucified, and buried (Lk 18:31-33).

D. Pondering the significance is essential for us (lit. "Bringing together", comparing and weighing of facts). (v 19)

1. God desires us to take the message to heart.
2. Through it God strengthens our faith.
3. The incarnation and birth of Christ and the purpose of His coming God makes to be our defense against temptation and sin, our fortress in time of trouble and distress, comfort and hope in sickness, death, and bereavement, wellspring of life that enables us to serve, to give, and to work in our Lord's church in our Savior's world.
4. The Christmas message "unto you is born a savior" is a message to keep.

II. Meant to share.

A. The shepherds told the message to all whom they saw, for the Savior was a gift intended for all (v 17).

1. The universal application "for all the people" and God's intended goodwill to the world (v 10,14).

2. All who heard the message were amazed (v 18).
- B. A message of significance you cannot lose by giving it to others.
 1. You don't diminish or lose love by sharing it.
 2. You don't become less happy because you make others happy.
 3. You don't lose Jesus Christ by sharing His message of life and salvation with others. The Christmas message is one we are meant to share.

Conclusion: In sharing the Christmas message with others, we will be "keeping it" for ourselves. That's the way God does things. Blessed Christmas.

Norbert H. Mueller

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:25-40

December 30, 1984

Introduction: The Christian lives out his life between the two comings of Christ. Even while we still celebrate the birth of our Savior, we consider its impact as it relates ultimately to His second coming. In this we find identity with Simeon and Anna, representatives of the "faithful in Israel" who looked for "the redemption of Jerusalem" and found it in the twenty-one-day old Jesus.

SIMEON AND ANNA ARE MODELS FOR US

of what it means to be "faithful" and to "look for" redemption in that same Jesus who is coming again.

I. The models described.

- A. Simeon was "righteous and devout." "By the Spirit" indicates the spiritual condition of one who walks with God rather than a special divine impulse (vv 25,27).
- B. Simeon was looking for the consolation of Israel (v 25).
- C. The Holy Spirit upon him (v 25).
- D. Anna was fasting, praying, and praising continually (v 30).

II. The models in action.

- A. Expressing conviction.
 1. Believed Jesus to be the salvation of Israel (v 30).
 2. Gave thanks to God for the fulfillment of His promises (vv 28,38).
 3. Remained convinced despite:
 - a. The apostasy of many.
 - b. The Savior's humble birth (Lk 2:7).
 - c. The Savior's humble submission to his human parents.
 - d. The Savior's ultimate rejection by so many in Israel (v 34).
 - e. The Savior's ultimate crucifixion and death (v 35).
- B. Confessing their faith.
 1. That in Christ we are "manumitted" - ransomed from slavery (v 29).
 2. That Christ is indeed the glory of the people of Israel (v 32).
 3. That in Christ we are assured of a blessed life and victorious death (vv 29,30).
- C. Witnessing to others.
 1. That Jesus is the Light (not simply a lamp) to all non-Jews as well as the glory of the people Israel (v 32).

2. Speaking of Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (v 38).

Conclusion: The people of God, while they wait, are people of conviction, people of confession, and people of witness.

Nobert H. Mueller

EPIPHANY

Matthew 2:1-12

January 6, 1985

Introduction: Matthew talks about "wise men." what academic degrees did they have? What had they discovered? What problems had they solved? Nothing is said about their educational accomplishments. Yet these men obviously occupied the upper echelons of the learned and enlightened of that day.

That nothing is said of their worldly knowledge emphasizes that fact that they possessed a wisdom not gained in this world's schools. They possessed a different kind of wisdom that made them truly wise. We can be like them.

WE ARE AMONG THE TRULY WISE

- I. When we seek Jesus.
 - A. The wise men, as many today, could have sought only worldly knowledge, riches, power, glory.
 - B. But they sought a King who frees from spiritual bondage, brings people into a spiritual kingdom, and reigns over them in love.
 - C. This Jesus the world needs today. We are truly wise when we seek Him no matter what it costs and what difficulty we must endure.
- II. When we allow God to guide us to Jesus.
 - A. Many seek Jesus but never find him.
 1. Because they look for Him where He cannot be found.
 2. Because they rely on their own wisdom or human philosophies.
 - B. God alone can lead us to Jesus.
 1. The star led the wise men first to the prophetic word and then to Christ.
 2. We have a still brighter star that leads us—the Old and New Testament Scripture. When we follow God's guidance in the Word, we will surely find Christ.
- III. When we worship Jesus.
 - A. The wise men "fell down and worshiped Him" (v 11).
 1. They acknowledged Jesus as their Savior-king despite His poverty and humble circumstances.
 2. We in faith worship Him and confess Him as our Lord.
 - B. "Opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts" (v 11).
 1. They gave cheerfully and generously.
 2. We open for Him our treasures.

Conclusion: We are truly wise when like the wise men we seek Jesus, follow God's guidance, and worship Jesus.

Gerhard Aho

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Mark 1:4-11

January 13, 1985

Introduction: What is the meaning of Christ's baptism? The Law of Moses did not require baptism. Baptism was not just a pious custom. According to Matthew, Christ was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). Mark, however, omits these words of Christ and focuses simply on what occurred at Christ's baptism. What Mark is emphasizing in connection with Christ's baptism may be expressed as follows:

CHRIST'S BAPTISM MEANS THAT GOD IS WELL PLEASED WITH US

- I. Because at His baptism Christ began His work of saving us.
 - A. Christ didn't need to save Himself for He was sinless.
 1. He had no need to confess His sins as did those who were baptized by John (v 5b).
 2. John admitted that he wasn't worthy even to untie Christ's sandals (v 7b), and that he needed to be baptized by Christ (Mt 3:14).
 - B. Christ began saving us by taking our sins and the sins of the whole world upon Himself.
 1. The payment for these sins fell due in Gethsemane and Calvary.
 2. As the Lamb of God Christ offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin.

It is because Christ at His baptism began His saving work, which He also completed, that God is now well pleased with us.

- II. Because at His baptism God accepted Christ for this saving work.
 - A. God showed He accepted Christ's work by letting the heavens open (v 10a).
 1. Heaven was closed to us because of sin.
 2. Because of what Christ did we now have an open heaven, free access to God.
 - B. God showed He accepted Christ's work by anointing Him with the Holy Spirit with power to carry out His work (v 10b, Ac 10:38).
 1. Because Christ received the Spirit He confers the Spirit on us.
 2. Our baptism is now an effective means of regeneration by the Spirit.
 - C. God showed He accepted Christ's work by calling Christ His "beloved Son" (v 11).
 1. In Christ we are God's beloved children.
 2. After our baptism we too are led into the wilderness of temptation. Yet God will not forsake His children but will support us with His angels (Mk 1:12-13).

It is because God at Christ's baptism accepted His saving work that God is well pleased with us.

Conclusion: Christ's baptism is important not only for Himself but for us. Because Jesus was baptized for our salvation we are baptized into salvation in His name.

Gerhard Aho

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**John 1:43-51****January 28, 1985**

Introduction: While interviewing a missionary to Latin America, I asked, "What is the greatest need of people in your territory?"

"The People of Latin America, especially young people, need the message of Jesus to integrate their personalities. Without it there are so many conflicting theories and fads which tear apart the souls of our people," he said.

When we say "people find themselves," we mean that they discover a new integration of their personalities, a new motivation for work. In a new context the old saying that "a person is what he does" becomes true. People can find themselves when they orbit into helpful activity which is oriented toward others in a secure faith-relationship to God.

If people lose touch with themselves they also lose touch with others and lose sight of God. When threatened with the destructive consequences of losing touch with man and God.

JESUS HELPS PEOPLE FIND THEMSELVES**I. Jesus helps people find each other.****A. Jesus found Philip (Jn 1:43).**

1. The initiative in the whole "finding" process comes from Jesus. Whenever it is mentioned that "I found it," we have to recall that Jesus first loved us and found us.
2. When the relationship was established, Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me."
 - a. Following Jesus meant the mature development of knowledge of and faith in Jesus to the point of committed discipleship where the follower says to others, "come and see (Jesus)" (Jn 1:39).
 - b. Modern evangelism training has urged training of new converts in "followship" to the point where they have profound commitment to Jesus expressed in prayer, worship, Bible Study, a sanctified life, and witnessing.

B. Jesus found Nathaniel by means of Philip.

1. The Holy Spirit leads others to Christ through us as instruments.
2. We witness most persuasively when we consider the potential of prospective Christians.

C. Jesus finds us through witnesses.

1. We express appreciation to these witnesses who led us to Jesus (parents, sponsors, friends, pastors, etc.).
2. We praise God for those who keep finding us when we lose touch with God.
3. We aspire to find others who can be reached for Jesus.

II. Jesus helps people find God.**A. Jesus helps us discover the humanity of God ("Jesus of Nazareth").**

Jesus is historical, as prophesied, fitting into a family lineage ("son of Joseph").

2. Jesus is personal, bearing family conditioned personality traits which enable us to understand his concrete embodiment in our human situation.

B. Jesus helps us discover the supernatural side of God.

1. We find the divine side of God revealed in Christ in the term, "Son of God." (Jn 1:49-50).

2. We find the divine side of the Christ-revealing God in the term, "Son of man" (Lk 18:31), a term pointing to the divine Messiah who will come again at the end of time.
3. We discover the divine side of Christ in the term, "King of Israel" (Jn 1:49). He is Lord of our destiny and the King of our lives.

Conclusion: When Jesus finds us, we find through Him a sound relationship to God and others.

Jesus also helps us find ourselves in service to others.

We have a model of "followership" which helps us find ourselves. This "followership" not only secures our identity and task-oriented action, but also crowns our lives with the highest joy.

Harold H. Zietlow

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Mark 1:14-20

January 27, 1985

Introduction: Rapid change challenges the security and meaning of our jobs. Those who have plotted likely trends in the future say that the trend to consider second and third careers will accelerate. Our own change in attitudes also pushes us toward another career. As we mature and develop skills and deeper wisdom we seek careers which provide greater challenge and more profound satisfaction.

Whether we are open to complete change in our source of income or not, Jesus offers us challenge and fulfillment as he persuades us to

CONSIDER A NEW CAREER

- I. By listening to Jesus' prophetic preaching.
 - A. Jesus calls us to repentance.
 1. Our sinful habits contribute to our self-destruction.
 2. Repentance makes possible a new beginning (Zacchaeus, prodigal son).
 - B. Jesus invites us to believe in Him.
 1. To believe means to surrender to the healing power of God as the woman with the flow of blood who touched Jesus' garment to whom He said, "... your faith has made you well" (Lk 8:48).
 2. To the paralytic Jesus spoke the healing gospel: "Your sins are forgiven," or, "Rise, take up your pallet and walk" (Mk 2:9).
 3. Believing in Gospel has been so helpful to us that we want to participate in a career of witnessing to others of Jesus.
- II. By learning from Jesus' teaching.
 - A. Regarding the time being fulfilled.
 1. In the fullness of time God revealed His intense love for us in the birth of Jesus (Ga 4:4).
 2. The prophecies of the past are fulfilled in the events of Jesus' life, demonstrating God's control over the flow of history.

- B. Regarding the kingdom of God being at hand.
 - 1. The present course of events is under the judgment of God.
 - 2. The future will follow the pattern of Jesus' resurrection and reign, for we will be raised from the dead and live with Jesus in God's everlasting kingdom.
- III. By leaning on Jesus' reaching.
 - A. Follow me (Mk 1:17).
 - 1. To follow Jesus means to let Him hold us in His arms long enough that we know His love and feel secure in discipleship.
 - 2. While following Him we know that as the shepherd reaches out to keep his sheep from disastrous straying so He will daily help us put to death the old man of sin and raise the new person forgiven and encouraged.
 - B. I will make you become fishers of men (Mk 1:17).
 - 1. Witnessing, like fishing, is an enjoyable experience.
 - a. We enjoy our vacations and retirement when fishing.
 - b. Pastor and laity alike have testified of the deep joy they have experienced when those to whom they witnessed came to faith and joined the church.
 - 2. Like the Greeks, the unchurched of our time are dissatisfied with shallow philosophies and are demanding, "we wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21).
 - a. Like the elderly lady in Wendy's ad, the unchurched "fish" of our time are asking, "Where's the beef?" because they want to see the persuasive luring power of law and gospel.
 - b. We witness to the power of the law and gospel best when we lean on Jesus' reaching through us with His death and resurrection for forgiveness and life everlasting.

Conclusion: While I was writing this outline I went to my mailbox and enroute met a second-career seminarian who was unloading boxes of clothing at the clothing bank which can be used by needy seminarian families.

"Did some send the clothing with you?" I asked.

"No, our family won't be needing it in the warm climate where we're going," he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"Nigeria," he said.

His family's commitment to become fishers of men reminded me of the on-going persuasive power of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and reaching in each generation, throughout the world.

Harold H. Zietlow

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Mark 1:21-28

February 3, 1985

Introduction: In politics, industry, education—whatever field of endeavor one prefers—modern man recognizes the need to determine the power base of any institution; that is, if he intends to climb to the top, to succeed. The thrust for power in our world is overt, relentless. It is the hallmark of the achiever in the things of

this world. Our text speaks of power, both demonic and Christ's. It speaks of Christ's victory over Satan and his minions; it speaks of His power for our lives. It points us to

THE POWER BASE

- I. The prince of this world has power.
 - A. Satan willed to be God himself.
 1. He and his angels rebelled against the person and the power of God (pride).
 2. He lost his bid to replace God and lies under the eternal judgment of God forever (accountable).
 - B. Satan turned his rebellion against God's creation.
 1. With God's sufferance he led our first parents—Adam and Eve—into rebellion against God.
 2. Our first parents came under judgment and lost their special relationship with the Creator. Sin now infected the world and death through sin.
 3. We and all mankind now lie under Satan's power and are instruments of his rebel will. In us there is no help and no hope. Satan bears us away with himself to stand before the eternal condemnation of the just Judge.
- II. The prince of heaven came to overthrow Satan's power.
 - A. Jesus came to our world to confront Satan and his minions.
 1. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, came to defeat Satan and rescue the world from sin, death, and the power of hell.
 2. Jesus Christ is the sole hope for man. He alone is the Champion capable of overcoming the evil power of Satan and returning creation forgiven to the Father.
 - B. Christ meets Satan in a battle for a man's soul.
 1. Satan's "angel" in possession of a man's body recognized Jesus: "Jesus of Nazareth!" He recognizes the divine power of the Son of God and His person.
 2. The evil spirit is seized with fear; he knows the power of Christ and is rightly afraid. With all his power base Satan is no match for the Son of God.
 3. The spirit's cry, I know who You are—the Holy One of God, is an admission of the power and victory of God's Son.
 - C. Jesus casts out the demon and brings salvation.
 1. Jesus rebukes the demon. The demon leaves his victim and flees from the presence of the only authentic power base in time or eternity. The man is convulsed; the demon does not want to give up; he would destroy the man if he could rather than see him freed by Christ.
 2. Christ alone can seize the world from slavery to Satan and free men to be children of God.
 3. By His death on the cross and His resurrection Jesus completely and finally crushed Satan and His kingdom. He appeased the wrath of God and cancelled out mankind's guilt, freed all men from slavery to Satan and sin, and gave eternal life to all who believe in the Christ.
 - D. Our lives now reflect His power in our hearts.
 1. The people in the text see the reality of Christ's victory over Satan. We too are to know that power from the Christ and trust in Him alone for our salvation. Christ's actions and words demonstrate His person and power (faith).

2. We live in confidence and joy at the complete victory our Savior has over Satan's kingdom. We seek ever to live by Christ's power and as His children (life style).
3. His power is in His Word. As we grow in His Word, we grow in His power. In times of stress and trial we depend on Christ; He never fails us (growth).

George Kraus

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Mark 1:29-39

February 10, 1985

Introduction: Unless we are professional "beachcombers" or "bowery bums," we have a purpose for our lives; or at least God intends that we do. Of all the questions man asks, perhaps the question *Why* is the most important. Why are we born? Why are we on this earth? Why does this happen? This list is endless. Our text speaks about the purpose and meaning of life, the life of our Lord. He did not come into our world on a travel tour. He was not here in order to "go slumming" with the lower unfortunates. He came with a purpose, divine and definite. He came to deal with sin and the effects of sin in the lives of people. Mark in our text gives an answer to

THE BIG QUESTION, WHY?

- I. Suffering humanity shows sin's effects.
 - A. Sickmess is one of the effects of sin in our world. We often speak of death and condemnation, but illness, famine, war, etc. are all the fruits of sin. The illness of Peter's mother-in-law is a sign of a sinful world. Our world is filled with these signs.
 - B. The disciples petitioned Jesus for help.
 1. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. His purpose for living on our earth was to overcome the effects of sin and sin itself. He came to deal with the disease, not just the symptoms. He came to destroy Satan and his works.
 2. Jesus responded by healing the woman. God is compassionate toward His people. He has come to rescue and redeem.
 - C. The Church today must proclaim that same message and Savior we find in the text.
 1. The proclamation of the Gospel is the power of redemption that frees people from Satan's power. It is the Church's prime mission.
 2. The assistance to those who suffer is a sign of our compassion and a sign of the final "healing" at the end of time, the day of judgment.
- II. Christ's dependence on the Father foretells sin's doom.
 - A. Jesus Himself "kept in touch" with the Father. His life and ministry were one of prayer and communion with the heavenly Father.
 1. Clergy and laity alike need a healthy spiritual life if they are to serve in the mission of God's Church effectively. Our success at ministry depends on God, not us. We must be in constant contact with His Word.

2. With the difficult demands of ministry the child of God must be prepared to meet these difficulties successfully with God's Word and prayer.
- B. As Jesus' life of communion with His Father was a signal of success in His battle against the Evil One, so in our lives, our dependence on the Word is a strong signal that we are prepared to carry on Christ's mission in a demon-filled world, a hurt world.
- III. Christ's acts show Him as the victor over sin.
 - A. His fame brings many sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. His fame has spread as a "miracle-worker." His ministry "forces" attention on Himself.
 1. Sin's evil effects are evident in Christ's time and ours. Sickness, accidents, handicaps, death are all signs of sin's presence and power in this world.
 2. Demon possession—here is the source, the well-spring of death and sin. Satan and his angels are evident in their possession of people. Demon possession is ignored in our technological culture, but its reality is there.
 - B. Only Jesus Christ heals the sick and casts out demons. His ministry demonstrates His victory over Satan and sin. The enemy lies defeated and crushed under the foot of the Son of God.

George Kraus

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Mark 9:2-9

February 17, 1985

The central thought of the text is that Jesus encourages the confused disciples by revealing Who He is in the Transfiguration. The goal of the sermon is that hearers appreciate Jesus' identity as Lent begins. The problem is that, like the disciples, we have much "raw data" on Jesus but we fail to "add it up" and see its true import. The means to the goal is that Jesus shows Who He is more clearly than ever in the Transfiguration—and goes to the cross.

Introduction: It's almost Lent. "Finally!" says the layman. "At last the preacher will talk about roosters, nails, and thorns, not high-blown theology." But if Lent is only about those things, is it about God at all? We need to consider

THE GOD OF LENT

- I. Is revealed in Jesus Christ.
 - A. In no one and nowhere else.
 1. During Lent, if we only stress the physical sufferings of Jesus—if we do not see "God forsaken by God" (Luther—cf. FC SD VIII 44)—our meditation is, at best, mere sentimentality.
 2. If our piety is stuck on such a low level in spite of better instructions (catechism, sermons, hymnody), no wonder we don't think of the Church or ourselves as possessing the dignity of representing God in the world.
 3. If we do not see God in Christ, no wonder we are reluctant to "give up" things for Lent. These are our gods (LC I 2-3), or perhaps diversions to keep our minds off an awful God.

B. Especially in the Transfiguration.

1. He is God.
 - a. His garments glistened as only God could make them (v 3).
 - b. Elijah and Moses—God came to both and spoke with them on Mt. Sinai. Now they come to speak with Jesus. But Jesus is not merely one of the prophets (cf. 8:28, 9:5-6). He is the One to be heard (v 7; cf. Dt 18:15).
2. He is Man. The divine glory was shown by His human body (*genus maiestaticum*—see Trench's discussion of *metamorphoun*, *synonyms*, pp. 263-65. Compare *morphe theou*, Php 2:6).
3. He is God's Son (v 7), the King and Suffering Servant (cf. Ps 2:7; Is 42:1). God went to the cross for us!

II. For the comfort of His followers.

- A. The Transfiguration was for the disciples' benefit.
 1. Note the focus on them in vv 2, 4, and 7 (though this event is not what Jesus spoke of in 9:1—see Mt 16:27-28).
 2. They usually missed the point, not catching the implications of what Jesus said and did. This is a special lesson for them.
- B. It benefits us today.
 1. It prepares us for Lent. "Jesus is God and Man" is nothing new, but it is the presupposition behind all He did.
 2. It prepares us for Easter (v 9). The Man Who is also God cannot stay dead. In the Transfiguration, we also get an idea of what a glorified body is like.
 3. It prepares us for Judgement Day, showing us the glory with which Jesus will return. But we need not fear (like in v 6).
 4. It prepares us for living until then, focusing our attention on God as He has revealed Himself—in His Son (v 7; cf. Jn 1:18), the Savior. Then the roosters and nails take on renewed meaning (see Koeberle, *Quest for Holiness*, pp. 158-60).

Conclusion: Jesus told them to keep this quiet until He rose (v 9). He has risen. Now is the time for us to tell about Him, knowing that we are telling about God.

Ken Schurb
Columbus, Ohio

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Mark 1:12-15

February 24, 1985

The central thought of the text is that Jesus is the One Who overcomes Satan and rescues people from the devil's dominion by His Gospel. The goal of the sermon is that hearers realize that the decisive battle against Satan has been fought and won. The problem is that we are such easy prey for Satan. The means to the goal is the Gospel message itself, which drives Satan out as it brings Jesus in.

Introduction: Who won? Mark tells us Jesus had a desert showdown with the Enemy, but gives no details and does not say who won. Of course, the outcome is implicit throughout Mark, especially in 3:27 where Jesus utters an axiom which sums up the theme of our text:

TO THE VICTOR BELONGS THE SPOILS

I. Jesus is the Victor (see vv 12-13).

A. We sinners are not and never will be, without Him.

1. In our own experience.
 - a. When we are tempted we "play around" with sin for a while instead of offering immediate resistance.
 - b. Soon we find ourselves taking "short cuts" around God's will. We do not do what we want (Ro 7:15ff.).
2. In the struggle between Satan and God.
 - a. The stakes are much higher than a few moral or immoral acts. Satan wants us. He is the Enemy.
 - b. Lurking behind every temptation is the temptation to unbelief. When we do not believe, Satan has us.

B. But Jesus was, from the very beginning of His ministry.

1. In Him, God took the initiative to confront Satan (vv 11-12).
2. He withstood "being tempted" (v 13).
 - a. To disobey the will of God (Mk 8:11, 10:2, 12:15), esp.
 - b. To take a "less costly" way (Cranfield; cf. Mk 8:32f; 14:32-42). The way He took led to the cross (Mk 10:45).
3. He put Satan in his place. From 1:13 on, Jesus was clearly in charge of every encounter He had with the demonic, just as He had the last word over His own death (Mk 16:6-7).

Transition: Like the college president who seizes faculty attention by firing two staff people in his first month, Jesus let Satan know right away that He was in charge. But He exercises His subsequent rule by His work of grace.

II. He claims His spoils (vv 14-15).

A. He preaches the Gospel (v 14).

1. The Gospel is well-nigh synonymous with Christ Himself (Mk 8:35; 10:29; also 13:10; 14:9), just as Christ was the focus of John's preaching (Mk 1:7).
2. In the Gospel, Christ brings His Satan-defeating power to people. It is the "one little word" that can fell the devil.

B. His message (v 15):

1. The *kairos* is fulfilled—after the era of Messianic expectation, He is finally on the scene to bind Satan.
2. The kingdom of God is near—because Jesus and the Gospel are near. He snatches us away from Satan's rule (see the discussion in LC III 51-56; also LC II 27, 31).
3. Repent and believe the Gospel—durative, for turning from sin to forgiveness is the heartbeat of an ongoing relationship with Jesus (cf. Ro 8:31-39).

Conclusion: People are easily led. Walk into a room full of strangers and announce that you are in charge—it's amazing how far you can get. But Jesus, the Victor, is truly in charge, as opposed to Satan and all the thought of men. His Gospel is not an empty claim. It extends His work to us and makes us His. To the Victor belongs the spoils!

Ken Schurb
Columbus, Ohio

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**Mark 8:31-38****March 3, 1985**

Mark 8 provides a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Having revealed Himself as Messiah through His miracles in fulfillment of the signs in the prophet Isaiah, Jesus now begins to teach His disciples what kind of Messiah He is. Immediately following Peter's bold confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus in this text offers the first of three passion predictions to alert the disciples to His Suffering Servant role which will lead to the cross. After exposing Peter's rebuke as coming from Satan and human reason, Jesus identifies the disciple as a suffering servant involved in taking up the cross and losing his life for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus moves on to the Transfiguration and then heads for an appointment with Calvary outside Jerusalem.

Introduction: So much of our Christian practice today is superficial, including our yearly observance of Lent. We pay lip service to Jesus Christ and express discipleship by attending church a little more frequently and putting a few extra dollars in a special envelope. In our text Jesus begins to introduce the disciples to His real purpose for coming and to the real meaning of discipleship. It comes across also to us as

A HARD LENTEN TEACHING

- I. About the Son of Man's suffering and death.
 - A. Jesus makes clear His role and mission as Suffering Servant. (vv 31-32a).
 - B. Jesus rebukes Peter's satanic misunderstanding (vv 32b-33).
 - 1. Peter wanted a popular Messiah who worked miracles. Peter needed the rebuke.
 - 2. We often need a rebuke also because we want a Messiah who is popular and takes care of all our needs.
- II. About the disciples' cross-bearing (vv 34-38).
 - A. Jesus calls us to lose our lives for His sake.
 - B. Jesus exposes our desire to save our lives and reveals the consequences.
 - C. Jesus went to the cross to save our lives so that we might lose them.

Conclusion: A hard teaching about suffering, rejection, and death in a hopelessly sinful, self-absorbed world, but a hard won victory for the risen Son of Man.

A hard teaching about cross-bearing and losing one's life for the sake of the Gospel in a wicked world, but salvation and a consistent power for living through His hard won victory.

Stephen J. Carter

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**John 2:13-22****March 10, 1985**

Last week's Gospel presented a hard Lenten teaching of Jesus regarding His suffering and death. This week's Gospel unleashes a bold Lenten cleansing by Jesus. Zealous

for the Father's honor, Jesus becomes incensed by the temple trade in animals and money. Whipping the offenders out of the temple and overturning the money-changers' tables, He comes into sharp conflict with the temple authorities. With His own authority challenged by demands for a sign, Jesus tells a riddle predicting both judgment upon the temple and its leaders and His own death and resurrection on the third day. Later the disciples understand His words and believe.

The sermon intends to help the hearer admit the need for cleansing because of disregard for both the Father's honor and the Son's authority so that the cleansing of the crucified and risen Savior might be received.

Introduction: Can you imagine standing in the darkness of a coal mine wearing a white suit? While in the dark, everything might seem fine, but when you return to the surface in the light of day, you become painfully aware of the need to have your suit cleaned. Many times we live in the darkness of sin and fail to see our need for cleansing. This morning in our text we see Jesus bringing us into the light as He enters the Jerusalem temple and initiates.

A BOLD LENTEN CLEANSING

- I. Jesus cleansed the temple of mammon-lovers.
 - A. The Jewish leaders disregard His authority by demanding a sign and raising a skeptical question.
 - B. The disciples fail to understand the meaning of His reference to the temple of His Body.
 - C. Jesus predicts the cleansing death and resurrection of the temple of His body with the disciples later believing His Word.
- II. Jesus cleanses us by His death and resurrection.
 - A. We often question Jesus' authority to challenge us and cleanse us or fail to understand His words.
 - B. Jesus points us to the cleansing death and resurrection of the temple of His body with the result that we believe His Word.

Conclusion: In a soiled white suit exposed to the light of God's Word, having flagrantly disregarded the Father's honor and the Son's authority, we accept the cleansing of Jesus whose temple was destroyed and built up again in three days. A bold Lenten cleansing indeed!

Stephen J. Carter

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

John 3:14-21

March 17, 1985

When John 3:16 is part of the sermon text, the temptation arises to keep it and toss out the rest. However, this Gospel kernal has an important context which contributes to its beauty. There is Nicodemus who was struggling with being born again and so asks: "How can this be?" (v 9) There is the Messianic type of Christ in the brass serpent Moses raised up to deliver the snake-bitten crowd. On top of that, the congregation will more than likely expect grand preaching on their favorite text. This

is an opportunity to let them have it with the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel.

Introduction: Have you ever taken a walk in Rattlesnake country? If you have, you know how important it is to keep one ear cocked for the sound of ominous rattle of a snake. Should you happen to hear one, expect your heart to jump in your throat and stay there until you're safely out of its reach. If the snake happens to bite you, you will need help promptly or you will die. Jesus referred to this situation in his conversation with Nicodemus. Just as people who are bitten by a poisonous snake need help, so Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler, needed help too. To make his point, Jesus recalled the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness when God sent poisonous snakes to bite the disobedient people. Moses made a snake out of brass and by God's direction, set it up in the camp. Whoever was bitten, could look at the snake and be saved. Needless to say, the people gladly looked at the brass likeness and were saved.

In like manner, God moves to save man from his predicament of sin. We want to listen to Jesus today and let His love draw us to salvation and a God-pleasing life. How can this all happen?

GOD SO LOVED US

- I. He sent His Son to be lifted up.
 - A. Mankind generally is like the children of Israel in their danger.
 1. We aren't plagued by snakes, of course.
 2. But we are plagued by sin, which causes death.
 - B. God sent Jesus.
 1. He came into the middle of our world, the snake pit, if you will.
 2. God lifted Him up on a cross. By His stripes we are healed (Is 53:5).
 3. John 3:16 captures God's plan. He so loved us that He sent His Son to be lifted up for us.
- II. He gives everlasting life to believers.
 - A. In the Old Testament wilderness, anyone who looked at the brass serpent was saved.
 1. They were given the invitation to be saved. No one forced them to look.
 2. Those who did were saved from the fiery venom.
 - B. Likewise, Jesus promises that those who believe have everlasting life.
 1. This is a gracious invitation to know who Jesus is, give assent to His grace, and trust Jesus to do what He promises. No strings attached.
 2. Believers have life now. It was as close to Nicodemus as the information and invitation Jesus gave to him. Believers have in their hearts right now the assurance that they are saved. God so loves us that He gives us eternal life.
- III. He draws people to believe in Jesus.
 - A. People are drawn to Jesus through Jesus.
 1. He came as a light to people in darkness. People are by nature in the dark; there is no self-created light. Jesus gives light to people who love the darkness because they were doing wrong.
 2. Believers are a lot like bugs who settle around the porch light at night during the summer. We have seen the Light of Jesus Christ and have been drawn to it. When we saw Jesus, He revealed our sins, then forgave our sins, and now in His light God sees us as righteous.
 3. God did not send Jesus into the world so that the end result would be

that people are ashamed, scared, and guilty. Rather He came so that we might have life through Him.

B. You can tell if God's love is drawing you.

1. How do you feel when you read: "Everyone who does wrong hates the light and will not come to the light. . .?" (v 9) Do you feel a need to stop doing what is wrong, let God straighten it up for you? That's God's love drawing you.
2. When we read: "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (v 16), do you get a feeling of relief down deep in your soul? That's God's great love drawing you.
3. Let it draw you. Don't be like a nightcrawler who comes out at night after a rain. When the light hits them, they zip back down into darkness. God does not want to harm you; He wants to save you. He has sent His Son so that by faith in Him we can live.

Now, come on!

Lowell F. Thomas
Fort Myers, Florida

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

John 12:20-33

March 24, 1985

Introduction: Have you ever noticed how ugly most buildings are when they are under construction? Everything seems cluttered up, the unfinished material sticks out all over, the ground about it is all chewed up from machinery and materials. We wonder if it will ever look nice. Eventually, the mess is cleaned up and work is done, revealing a truly fine, beautiful structure. The obvious lesson is that the thing of beauty could not have been made without the messy ugliness.

The same is true in the spiritual Kingdom of God. We often talk about the love, joy and peace which we enjoy by faith. That which preceded what we enjoy today was as ugly as anything could be. The path that led to our salvation and to the greater glory of God was paved with blood, pain, sorrow, and hell. Jesus walked that road by Himself for all people. The result is an unexpected glory for God and Jesus Christ which they share with us. Think about this with me:

WE SHARE THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S CROSS

- I. God's glory was the dominating purpose of Christ's life.
 - A. The time for glory was there for Jesus (v 23).
 1. Before this, the time was not ripe. "Mine hour is not yet come. . ." (Jn 2:4).
 2. The life of Jesus was arranged so that He could reveal the glory of the Father by word and deed, and then seal that glory by His sacrifice.
 3. Jesus prayed for this and received an immediate answer (v 28).
 - B. The glory that was to come to Christ and the Father is many sided.
 1. God receives glory every time He reveals Himself to us. It started in Old Testament times through the promise of the Savior. The glory of

God is evident from the good things said about God, especially that He is merciful.

2. When Christ was born, the heavens were filled with angelic voices praising God (Luke 2).
3. In His ministry, Jesus directed the credit to His Father in heaven. What He said and did was always to give God glory.
4. The revelation of the glory of God was inclusive. (Cf. the Greeks, vv 20ff.)
5. When the Bible talks of the glory of God and Christ, it is talking of God's righteousness, mercy, love, along with the total of all His attributes.

II. It was Christ's cross that produced His glory.

A. He despised the cross.

1. He was a man. According to His human nature, Christ did not look forward to the dreadful sacrifice. Listen to His personal struggle in v 27.
2. Jesus knew that His death would not be peaceful. Because the Father would forsake Him, because He would be suffering for the sins of all, His death was a frightfully depressing prospect.

B. However, Jesus knew that this cross had to be experienced to bear the fruit of His glory.

1. He likened Himself to a seed that must be planted (v 24).
2. Jesus admits that this is why He came into the world (v 27b).
3. He permitted Himself to be "lifted up" from the earth.

C. This sacrifice accomplished major items for God's glory.

1. The salvation of all men. "I will draw all men to myself" (v32 Cf. again the Greeks).
2. This sacrifice says the most about God: His righteousness, His mercy; everything that needs to be said about God was said when Christ died. That's glory!

III. By faith we share the cross and the glory.

A. We share the same attitude toward this life that Christ had, illustrated in the paradox (v 25).

1. He who loves life will lose it.
2. He who hates life will keep it unto eternal life.
3. This is a life that is lost in Christ—lost as far as the world is concerned.

B. Such a life will bring honor to us (v 26).

1. The glory we share as slaves of the Master is a gift.
2. The heaven prepared for us is the same one Jesus occupies (Jn 14:1ff.).

The glory God has and shares with us could not have happened without the cross. The cross is gory; but it is the stuff of which lasting glory is made.

Lowell F. Thomas
Fort Myers, Florida

PALM SUNDAY—SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

Mark 14:3-9

March 31, 1985

Introduction: The question that stands before us is, what can we do for our Lord on the eve of the week when He did everything for us? What can we do as we retell, relive the passion of the Christ? Can we go back in history and undo what was done?

Can we wake the three disciples and explain to them the import of the hour? Can we seek out Peter in the courtyard and help him avert his crushing threefold denial? No, of course we cannot go back and undo what already has been done. Then what can we do? Our Lord answers our query clearly in v 8 as He comments on the action of the woman in our text, "She hath done what she could . . ."

WE ARE CALLED THIS HOLY WEEK TO DO WHAT WE CAN

- I. We can come to be with our Lord this Holy Week (v 3).
 - A. We can be with our Lord in worship this Holy Week.
 1. We are with Him in the powerful texts of Holy Week.
 2. We are with Him in the Sacraments associated with Holy Week.
 - a. The Sacrament of the Altar on Maundy Thursday.
 - b. The Sacrament of Baptism during the Good Friday/Easter cycle.
 - B. We can be with our Lord in prayer this Holy Week.
 1. Through prayer we confess our sorrow over our sins which contribute to the need for His passion.
 2. Through prayer we offer our gratitude to Him for His passion on our behalf.

Transition: What can we do this Holy Week? We can come to be with our Lord and:

- II. We can pour out on Him our most precious gifts (v 3).
 - A. One precious gift we can pour out this Holy Week is to be His witness.
 1. We can witness to the death He died for all.
 2. We can witness to the life He lives for all.
 - B. Another precious gift we can pour out this Holy Week is to be His servant.
 1. We can be His compassionate and forgiving servant in our family.
 2. We can be His giving and helpful servant in our neighborhood.

Conclusion: What can we do as we stand at the portal of Holy Week? We can easily offer a litany of things we cannot do. However, the point this morning is that we can come to be with our Lord this Holy Week, we can pour out for Him our most precious gifts. Yes, indeed, WE ARE CALLED THIS HOLY WEEK TO DO WHAT WE CAN.

Mark Oien
Bedford, Mass.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Mark 14:17-26

April 4, 1985

Introduction: The title of an old TV game show, "Truth or Consequences", suggests that if one does not tell the truth there will be negative consequences, and if one does tell the truth the negative consequences will be averted. In our text, we have an interesting variation on this theme. Jesus tells the truth tonight and emphasizes this fact in both verses 18 and 25. However, even though the truth is told tonight, there still are consequences, negative for Jesus, positive for us.

TONIGHT JESUS TELLS US THE TRUTH

- I. The truth is Jesus was betrayed.
 - A. Jesus was betrayed by one close to Him (v 18).
 - 1. Judas was one of the twelve chosen by Jesus (v 17).
 - 2. Judas was sharing an intimate meal with Jesus (vv 17 & 20).
 - B. Jesus was betrayed in accordance with the divine plan.
 - 1. The divine plan is written in Holy Scripture (v 21).
 - 2. The divine plan is spoken of by Jesus Himself (v 21).
- Transition:* The truth is Jesus was betrayed. Yet on the very night He was betrayed
- II. The truth is He offered divine fellowship.
 - A. Jesus offers divine fellowship through the means of His Supper.
 - 1. Through the means of His Supper Jesus offers His very body and blood (vv 22 & 24).
 - 2. Through the means of His Supper Jesus offers a new covenant (v 24).
 - B. Jesus offers divine fellowship in the eternal Kingdom of God (v 25).
 - 1. Jesus has promised to receive us into His eternal Kingdom (Jn 14:1-4).
 - 2. In the eternal Kingdom of God we will live continually in the presence of the Lamb (Re 21:22).

Mark Oien
Bedford, Mass.

GOOD FRIDAY

John 19:17-22
April 5, 1985

The crucifixion of our Lord is such familiar ground that critical comments on this text are hardly necessary. On Good Friday the saints who attend worship simply want to remember what their Lord did for them. Our task is to help them do so in a meaningful, edifying way.

This is the conclusion of our Lent-long meditation on the Passion History. The following thoughts by Leon Morris in his commentary on John seem very fitting for the preacher's consideration as he approaches the Good Friday sermon: "John describes the horror that was crucifixion in a single word . . . The evangelists record the fact and let it go at that. The death of Jesus for men was their concern. They make no attempt to play on the heartstrings of their readers."

Introduction: When we were children we probably played "King of the Hill", or whatever name it went by. The object was to be the one on top of the pile of earth or snow. The one on the top pushed down those who tried to take his place. In many ways the game symbolizes the goals of people in life: To be on the top above others. What a contrast to this Good Friday as we remember our Lord as a king:

KING OF THE CROSS

- I. The crucifixion of our Lord Jesus was without question the darkest day in the world's history.
 - A. The injustice that led to Jesus' condemnation only heightens the bitterness of what He endured. (Elaborate briefly on the jealousy of the Jewish leaders, the trumped-up charges, the spineless concession of Pilate after repeatedly stating Jesus' innocence, etc.)

- B. The execution of the world's only perfect man was truly "cruel and unusual punishment," even for one who was guilty. (Elaborate on how crucifixion was not allowed for Roman citizens, the mistreatment by soldiers, the beating that itself could kill, the shame of carrying one's own cross, obviously an agonizing and drawn-out way to die.)
- C. In penitence and faith this day we are especially aware that the curse which fell on Jesus was rightly aimed at us (Jn 1:29, 2 Cor 5:19 & 21, Ga 3:13).

Although a symbol of horror and death the cross has rightly become the most powerful symbol for divine love to us who believe.

- II. The claim regarding Jesus' kingship has elevated the cross to a glorious throne. "This is the King of the Jews". (Note that John calls this "Titlos", title, rather than accusation.)
 - A. For Pilate it was a taunt to the Jews who brought the "problem" of Jesus before him and whom he hated.
 - B. For the Jews it was an embarrassment as well as a reminder of the very things for which they desperately wanted to be rid of Jesus (Jn 11:47-53).
 - C. For Jesus the title was only part of the truth.
 - 1. He is King of creation (Jn 1:1-3, Col 1:15-17).
 - 2. The cross was His glory as He fulfilled the Father's will (Jn 17:1-4, He 12:2).
 - D. For us "King" is a title we dearly love by which to know Jesus.
 - 1. At His cross-throne we find cleansing and new life (Ga 6:14a, 1 Jn 1:7b, Ga 2:20, He 4:16, etc.).
 - 2. Around His heavenly throne we will forever praise His love (Re 7:14-17).

Until then may we, by the power of His Spirit, hold Jesus as both King of our hearts and of our lives.

Edwin Dubberke
St. Louis, Missouri

EASTER SUNDAY

Mark 16:1-8

April 7, 1985

Easter is "old hat" to many who attend services on this day. For others it is the yearly spring trek to church. For a few it is another exciting personal encounter with a living, dynamic Savior. Preach resurrection victory in such a way as to feed the faithful and challenge the others with the life-changing power of an alive and present Christ.

Introduction: What a thrilling experience to again join the whole Christian church in celebrating the Festival of the Resurrection! Everything, the music, the singing, the words, the atmosphere, are all upbeat: "Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!" Yet apart from this day our lives so much reflect the spirit of those women who went to the tomb early the first Easter morning. They thought Jesus was dead.

It is said that on one occasion when Luther was depressed over the problems he faced his wife Katharine came in wearing a black mourning cloth. When Luther

asked who had died she replied, "The way you have been acting I thought God had died." To all of us the joyful announcement of Easter is:

GOD ISN'T DEAD—DEATH IS!

- I. The problem of "God is dead" attitude in our lives is more real and prevalent than we might care to admit.
 - A. Contradictory as the term is it well describes how people think of and deal with God.
 1. Refer to "God is dead" movement of a few years ago. It no longer makes headlines but its conclusions are popular.
 - a. The mess the world is in shows God isn't around
 - b. Man seems to be progressing well without Him anyway.
 2. This is not new since Adam and Eve acted as if God were not a factor in their lives.
 3. Someone summarized it well, "We're too busy to care about God." (Elaborate: Busy using or seeking material gains. Consumed by worry—illustrate with contemporary concerns and fears of people, economic, political, personal. Doesn't God care?)
 - B. Does this seem exaggerated or trivial for this festive day?
 1. How else can we explain the difference:
 - a. After the women in our text learned that Jesus was risen their lives were never again the same.
 - b. We have celebrated many Easters. Yet our lives, in terms of direction and problems, are much like those who do not know Christ at all. (Elaborate: Lacking meaning or hope for life, not clinging to God's promises in trials of life, swinging through life with our own standards.)
 2. The truth is: Of ourselves we are already dead spiritually; ahead lies inevitable physical death and judgment, ready or not.
- II. How different is life, now and in the future, when we grasp and share the victory of our glorious Lord.
 - A. By His resurrection we are assured of deliverance from and victory over the death sin brings.
 1. To accomplish this Jesus WAS truly dead. (Elaborate on the recent message of Lent and Holy Week—He died for us.)
 2. Christ's resurrection is God's endorsement of His sacrifice (Ro 4:25). Thus the resurrection is the basis for our deliverance from sin (Eph 1:7); for new life with the Father (Eph 2:1 & 4-6); for power to live life on a new level (Ro 6:4).
 - B. Besides deliverance from spiritual death Christ's resurrection establishes our own resurrection and a share in eternal glory. (Elaborate: Jesus' own promises, Jn 11:25, Jn 14:19; in Him we have new hope now, 1 Pe 1:3-4; fulfillment awaits us, 1 Cor 15:54-57.)

Rejoice tomorrow as well as today: Christ is risen! In Him we live!

Edwin Dubberke
St. Louis, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 20:19-31

April 14, 1985

The three year pericopic system has no Gospel Lesson variation for this Sunday. The Easter evening appearance of Jesus is prescribed for all three years and this obviously challenges the preacher to say something fresh each year.

The temptation is ever present to make the doubt of Thomas the focus of an entire sermon. It becomes quite easy to berate him (cf. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, p. 1379) and to simply shift the same malady to the hearers with a great many negatives.

While Thomas's doubt cannot be dismissed, it is instructive that the writer John declares that these signs of Jesus have been written that we might believe that He is God and so have life and joy in Him (Jn 20:31, 1 Jn 1:3-4, 5:13). The focus is on Jesus as the victorious Christ and God. The life and joy we have in Him dispels our fears and doubts and equips us to proclaim His salvation to others.

Introduction: If we had been in the room before and while Jesus appeared, we would have experienced the same emotions and responses. Fear, joy, doubt, faith. But then, don't we still? The good news of Jesus' saving power penetrates our lives. We respond in varied ways. Our faith is not always at the heights. But God wants us to grow in faith and life and in commitment to His mission. So He gives us the Word of His salvation. These things are written so that you may have

LIFE IN HIS NAME

- I. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - A. He is the living Christ (v 19). He presents Himself as the One whom death and time and space cannot hold.
 - B. He bestows peace (v 20). His death and resurrection overcome all that causes fear and doubt.
 - C. He commissions (v 21). The mission of the Father through Jesus continues as disciples go in His name to proclaim Him as the Christ, the Son of God.
 - D. He equips (vv 22-23). The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gives power to His Word of Law and Gospel through His disciples.
- II. So believing you may have life in His name.
 - A. The person and work of Christ bring us together as God's people. His death and resurrection are the answer to our sinful predicament.
 - B. Like Thomas, however, we can experience doubt. We are called to believe that which we do not see (vv 24-25).
 - C. Jesus comes to us. In Word and Sacrament. "This is written that you may believe." "Behold My hands and My side." "This is My body and My blood."
 - D. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in us. "My Lord and My God." "My sins are forgiven." "I believe and have life in His name" (1 Jn 5:4-5).
 - E. Our Easter life leads to Pentecost power. We who live in Him proclaim Him so that others may believe and have life in His name.

Conclusion: How blessed to believe, even though we have not seen!

Luther G. Strasen
Fort Wayne, Indiana

THIRD SUNDAY IN EASTER**Luke 24:36-49****April 21, 1985**

This text reports the events of the previous Sunday's Gospel Lesson from another perspective. The episode of Thomas is now recounted and further detail of Jesus eating to prove that He is alive is given. Also, the Lord affirms that the past days' events were the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and are the basis for new spiritual life which is to be preached to the world with Spirit power.

Introduction: Have you ever been overwhelmed with good news or some joyful event in your life? We almost don't know how to handle such an occurrence. But, once it settles in, it would be hoped that the euphoria would have lasting effects. When the disciples that first Easter evening saw Jesus alive, they experienced surprise and fright which turned to joy that was hard to believe. The New English Bible version translates the first part of v 41, "It seemed too good to be true." But it was true and Jesus instructed that

WHAT IS GOOD AND TRUE SHOULD BE TOLD

- I. It seemed too good to be true.
 - A. The reports were coming in. Sin and death had not conquered. The Lord had risen indeed! (Lk 24:33-35).
 - B. Jesus Himself appeared to them in the room. Joy and incredulity clashed (v 41).
 - C. Our reaction, too, is both awe and joy. It seems too good to be true that, despite our sin, God offers forgiveness and life through His Son.
- II. It is good because it is true.
 - A. It is not a human plan of salvation. Human efforts reject Christ (Ac 4:11) because of self-righteousness and deceit, and they have no truth (1 Jn 1:8).
 - B. It has always been God's plan, revealed already to the Old Testament faithful (v 44).
 - C. It is fulfilled in Christ (v 46). He is the Truth of God's salvation.
 - D. It is good because it calls for us to repent and offers the truth of God's forgiveness (v 47). Thus we become right before God (1 Jn 1:9).
- III. It is truth that is good for others.
 - A. God desires that His salvation be preached to all nations (v 47). Repentance and forgiveness will restore people to the goodness of God's light over against the darkness of sin (1 Jn 1:5-7).
 - B. The people of God are witnesses to the power of Christ's death and resurrection (v 48). All of us can preach of Jesus in our daily testimony to others.
 - C. The Holy Spirit gives us power to tell what is true and good (v 49).

Conclusion: God's salvation is never too good to be true. It is utterly good and utterly true and we can tell the world so that all people can experience its truth and goodness.

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 10:11-18

April 28, 1985

The concept of a divine shepherd is not exclusively a New Testament thought. Psalm 23 opens with "The Lord is my Shepherd;" and the prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, use the imagery of shepherd and flock in reference to God's loving care for His people. To the people of the Biblical times, both O.T. and N.T., sheep herding was a familiar scene and an example that they could easily understand. Today the imagery of our Lord as "the Good Shepherd" is a popular symbol for Christians. Jesus is pictured as the one who lovingly leads the flock, gently nudges the stray, and wisely watches over the needs of those He calls His own.

Introduction: Each of us occasionally has a mental picture of how we would want others to see us. Most often such thoughts are complimentary and grandiose. It seems unusual that our Lord would portray Himself in such a lowly role. A shepherd, how insignificant. Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world, the author of creation, a shepherd? But, not just any shepherd, rather the one true Good Shepherd. This simple title and seemingly lowly role conveys a multifaceted picture of who this Jesus is and what our relationship is to Him as our Savior. Jesus uses the imagery of the shepherd to describe for us the beauty of the relationship of a loving Lord to His people. In this text, Jesus claims for Himself the role and describes for us

THE QUALITIES OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

- I. Committed to His flock.
 - A. He is committed for life, His and the sheep's.
 - B. His commitment surpasses other earthly relationships.
 - C. His commitment is not broken by cares, concerns, or earthly pressure.
- II. Knows His flock intimately.
 - A. He knows each member of His flock personally.
 - B. He understands needs, weaknesses, problems, and every other aspect of His individual sheep's needs.
 - C. He provides for his flock in the manner he knows to be best for each sheep.
- III. Opens His flock to all that hear His voice.
 - A. The intimate nature of the Shepherd and His flock does not prevent other sheep from being welcomed into the fold.
 - B. The Good Shepherd has the capacity to care for all.
- IV. Loves His flock.
 - A. The most evident characteristic of the Shepherd is His love for His sheep.
 - B. This love is clearly demonstrated in that the Shepherd, of His own will, lays down His life to save the sheep.
 - C. In so proving His love, He is also capable of lifting His own life and that of the sheep out of the snare of death.

Conclusion: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hands." (Jn 10:14; 27-28)

William G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**John 15:1-8****May 5, 1985**

Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine to describe the living relationship the individual believer is to have in and with Him.

Introduction: Biology is the scientific study of life. The term comes from the Greek "bio" meaning life, and "logy" meaning the science or study of. Jesus in this parable uses an observable biological occurrence to teach a truth regarding our faith relationship with Him. Therefore, maybe we can think of today's message as a presentation on "faithology," the study of faith's function.

FAITHOLOGY

- I. Faith, our vital connection with the true source of life.
 - A. Jesus is the one true source of life.
 - 1. He has established the relationship.
 - 2. He provides for our needs, both spiritual and physical.
 - 3. He gives us access to the Father.
 - B. Union in Jesus gives us the ability to produce "fruit."
 - 1. Fruit bearing is a natural result of being alive in Christ.
 - 2. Continued fruit bearing requires an ongoing relationship with the Savior.
- Transition:* The believer, through his union in Christ, demonstrates his living relationship by the actions and fruits that proceed out of his faith. However, the one who becomes too careless or apathetic in that relationship can find his or her fruit lacking.
- II. Faith, to be strong, is to be used.
 - A. The non-fruit bearing branches demonstrate the void of faith in their lives.
 - 1. Such faithless branches cannot withstand the winds of life.
 - 2. Non-fruit bearing limbs have broken their connection with the Life-source.
 - 3. The end result of non-fruit bearing branches is obvious as the limb dries up, becomes brittle, and useless.
 - B. The Gardener-Father in His care for the vineyard, His Church, frequently "prunes" the branches, assisting them to be more fruitful.
 - C. A healthy limb is one which recognizes the true source of its nourishment and responds accordingly.
 - 1. The vital connection of limb to vine, believer to Christ, is maintained and nourished through regular use of Word and Sacrament.
 - 2. "By their fruits you shall know them."

Conclusion: The ultimate proof of discipleship is the fruit one bears. May all of our works flow from the grace of God active in us and through us.

William G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 15:9-17

May 12, 1985

The central thought of the text is that we are the friends of Jesus. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will exercise their responsibilities as friends. The problem is that we often fail to act like the friends of Jesus we are. The means to the goal is that Jesus has given us wonderful privileges as His Friends.

Introduction: We are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as our friend and we express this thought with songs like "What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear." But friendship is a two-way street. Not only is Jesus our friend but we are the friends of Jesus. Jesus says (v. 14):

YOU ARE MY FRIENDS

Let's look at what it means to be friends of Jesus.

I. We have the privileges of friends.**A. Christ has chosen us (v 16b).**

1. We were not able to choose Him (v 16a; Eph 2:3; 1 Cor 2:14).
2. He chose us purely out of grace (1 Jn 4:10; Ro 7:8).

B. Christ opens Himself to us (v 15).

1. He shares with us the truths regarding His redemptive work, our regeneration in baptism, and the blessings of His body and blood in Holy Communion.
2. He has divulged to us the precious truths of His Word.

C. Christ promises to give us what we ask in His name (v 16d).

1. Don't we need patience, love, perseverance?
2. Aren't there fellow Christians whose needs we can bring to Christ?
3. Don't our home and church have needs?

II. We have the responsibilities of friends.**A. We are to do what he commands (v 14b).**

1. Binding ourselves to the sound doctrine of His Word.
2. Practicing what accords with sound doctrine no matter how the world reviles us (Jn 15:18-19).

B. we are to love one another(v 17).

1. As Christ loved us (v 13).
2. Carrying each other's burdens, overlooking each other's weaknesses, forgiving.

C. We are to bear abiding fruit (v 16c).

1. No matter what the circumstances or how we feel.
2. There will be abiding fruit when we support the faithful preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments.

Conclusion: "You are my friends," Jesus said. Are you enjoying your great privileges? Are you carrying out your holy responsibilities? Blessed are you, friend of Jesus!

Gerhard Aho

ASCENSION DAY**Luke 24:44-53****May 16, 1985**

Introduction: Jesus must have lifted His hands many times during His earthly ministry, but the New Testament writers specifically mention the lifting up of His hands only in connection with His ascension. Can we attach any significance to Luke's reference to Jesus "lifting up His hands"? (v 50) Let's consider

THE MESSAGE OF THE LIFTED HANDS

The lifted hands of our ascending Lord tell us of:

- I. A sacrifice that cleanses us.
 - A. Christ's uplifted hands were nail-marked hands which testified to His having suffered as the Scriptures foretold (v 46a).
 1. The Scriptures make clear that Christ suffered for our sins (1 Pe 2:24a).
 2. The Scriptures also make clear that Christ alone was able to suffer sin's punishment for us (1 Pe 1:19; 3:18).
 - B. The nail prints in Christ's lifted hands tell us that He, the risen Lord, has made an effective sacrifice.
 1. On the basis of Christ's sacrifice and glorious resurrection the forgiveness of sins can now be announced to all (v 47).
 2. As we daily confess our sins we can be sure that Christ's sacrifice cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

Transition: The full dimensions of the salvation which accompanies our cleansing from sin will be experienced in heaven. But before we get there, we have work to do. The lifted hands of Jesus tell us of:

- II. A power sufficient for our task.
 - A. Christ's uplifted hands pointed to the heavens where He would be seated at God's right hand.
 1. To be at God's right hand is to have divine power and to use it fully.
 2. Ten days later Jesus clothed the disciples "with power from on high" (v 49).
 - B. Christ's uplifted hands tell us of power that is available to us for our task of witnessing to Him (v 48).
 1. The Spirit empowers us to witness with words as the apostles did on Pentecost.
 2. The Spirit empowers us to witness by actions as the apostles did when they returned to Jerusalem (v 52).
 3. Christ's power is not low amp or low wattage power. It is so great no gauge can measure it. Because of Christ's ascension we have a staying force that keeps us humble in success and a place of refuge in life's tragedies.

Conclusion: Let's get the picture in our mind's eye—Jesus ascending into heaven in the presence of His disciples, His hands lifted up in blessing. Those lifted hands tell us of a sacrifice that cleanses us from all sin and of power that is sufficient for our witnessing task.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 17:11b-19

May 19, 1985

Introduction: It means much to have someone praying for us. But sometimes our fellow Christians forget to pray for us, as we for them. There is one who never forgets to pray for us. The text is part of Christ's great prayer for His dear Christians.

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR HIS OWN: GOD KEEP YOU

There is need for God to keep us:

- I. Because of danger from without.
 - A. We live in a world that hates us (v 14b).
 1. The world hates us because we have Christ's word (v 14a) which judges the world's wisdom to be foolishness and proclaims a wisdom which is foolishness to the world.
 2. The world hates us because we are "not of the world" (v 16) but strangers and pilgrims here.
 - B. We live in a world that seeks to destroy us.
 1. By persecution and scorn.
 2. By guile and temptation.
 - C. God keeps us from the danger without.
 1. Not by taking us out of the world (v 15a), for he uses us to bring the news of salvation to others (v 18).
 2. But by guarding us "in His name" (v 11b), in the pure doctrine of His Word and in a godly life, thus preserving us from the devil's snares (v 15b).
- II. Because of danger from within.
 - A. Disagreements in Scriptural doctrine.
 1. False teachers do arise (Ac 20:29-30).
 2. All false teaching ultimately threatens the Gospel and is therefore not to be sanctioned (Ga 1:8).
 - B. Divisions over matters not prescribed by Scripture.
 1. Such as building or not building a sanctuary.
 2. Such as the amount to be given to a charitable cause.

Both disagreements in doctrine and divisions over externals destroy our oneness as Christians (v 11b).

- C. God keeps us from the danger within.
 1. By sanctifying us in the truth of His Word (v 17). To be sanctified is to be separated from falsehood and evil for holy and noble use. God's Word becomes our food and drink, our shield and refuge, our lamp and guide.
 2. By encouraging us to make faithful use of the Word and Sacraments (v 19b; Ac 2:42).

Conclusion: Heavenly Father, in accordance with your Son's prayer, keep us to the end amid the dangers that threaten from without and within.

Gerhard Aho

PENTECOST

John 7:37-39a

May 26, 1985

Introduction: Jesus spoke the words of our text at the Feast of Tabernacles, an eight-day-long celebration of the harvest. A ritual on the last day of the Feast reminded the Israelites of how God provided their ancestors, wandering in a waterless desert, with water from a rock. The rock gushing forth fresh water symbolized Jesus, the Rock of Ages, who was now among them and from whom living water was flowing. On this Pentecost we have gathered at this fountain. Jesus is still calling:

"IF ANYONE THIRSTS LET HIM COME TO ME AND DRINK"

- I. Jesus satisfies our spiritual thirst.
 - A. We all have a thirst.
 1. It can manifest itself in restlessness and frustration.
 2. It can become evident in a vague feeling that there is something more to life.
 - B. We try to satisfy our thirst in various ways.
 1. By pursuing wealth, fame, power, pleasure, only to have the acquiring of these things turn sour.
 2. We may strive to make ourselves right with God, only to experience more guilt.
 - C. Jesus alone satisfies our thirst by offering us Himself.
 1. His love, redemption, forgiveness, hope.
 2. We receive Jesus and all his blessings when we come and drink, that is, when we believe in Him.
 3. The Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament enables us to come to Jesus and drink.
- II. Jesus causes living water to flow from us.
 - A. This living water flows from every believer without exception.
 1. Think of the Samaritan woman, the women who visited Christ's empty tomb on Easter morning, the disciples on Pentecost.
 2. Not just drips and trickles but rivers and streams. Having been forgiven, we can forgive. Having been reconciled, we can be reconcilers.
 - B. This living water flows from the body of believers, the Church.
 1. From the Church's preaching, teaching, writing, singing, giving.
 2. Into a vast desert of human need.
 - C. This living water does great things.
 1. People are converted (Is 35:6-7).
 2. People are eternally refreshed with heaven's joys (Re 7:17).

Conclusion: "Let him who is thirsty come, and . . . take the water of life without price" (Re 22:17).

Gerhard Aho