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Homiletical Studies

TRINITY SUNDAY

Romans 5:1-5

May 25, 1986

The "therefore" of verse 1 logically roots the justification of Paul's readers in that work of Christ which was appropriated by Abraham (chapter 14) through the same faith underscored here (vv. 1-2). The pivotal emphasis on the peace which we even now (present tense) enjoy with God (v. 1) provides for Paul's development of the thought that even sufferings serve the Christian's larger pilgrimage (vv. 2-5). The rich and multifaceted shalom of the Old Testament is undoubtedly in view with its broad implications of a right relationship with God and with the cosmos. An excellent article which surveys the scope of Biblical "peace" is that of H. Beck and C. Brown in the *Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 776-83. This context converts Pauline hope (v. 2) into a confident longing for that public display of God's glory which has already been manifest in the person and work of Christ. The future aeon had already sounded the end of the present futile age by the invasion of the kingdom of God. Whatever this epoch can serve up in suffering (v. 3), the one who has been justified perceives the partial and passing nature of its power. That new state of affairs which has been inaugurated in Christ will irrevocably and ineluctably exert its power on behalf of those whose hope has been sustained by the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). The advent of the eschatological reality will not disappoint, but will confirm the enduring benefits of that grace in which Paul and his readers "now stand" (v. 2).

GOD'S WORK IN CHRIST HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A NEW STATE OF AFFAIRS

- I. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, stated: "The wise man, in peace, prepared for war."
 - A. The history of mankind—ancient, medieval, and modern—demonstrates Juvenal's point.
 1. Cain's slaying of Abel has provided the paradigm for humankind.
 2. Our technological advances, far from aiding our quest for peace, have augmented our killing abilities and aggravated the threat of even wider destruction and death (e.g., laser and nuclear technology).
 - B. The hope of mankind—ancient, medieval, and modern—has been disappointed.
 1. No political system has successfully engineered a permanent peace (socialism, communism, capitalism).
 2. No psychological program has diverted the destructive disposition of its subjects (Fromm, Freud, Rodgers).
 3. No person has presented a pattern of enduring peace, be he statesman, diplomat, or guru.
- II. Paul, the apostle to the Romans, announced an already achieved peace.

- A. This peace was accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - 1. The change in the cosmos is the direct consequence of its movement from an unjust state to a state of justification before God.
 - 2. This justified status bestows peace.
 - 3. This peace is freely given to that faith which is focused on Christ
- B. This peace permits us to live as those liberated from the futility of false hopes.
 - 1. Christ's peace endures through the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms
 - 2. Christ's peace abides through the ups and downs of our psychological states.
 - 3. Christ's peace dispells the destructive force of our own rebellion against God.
- III. Christ's peace is that new alternative which St. Paul announced.
 - A. Every other option is worn out and has been found wanting.
 - B. As we live this new alternative of God's peace, the warring and dying world is declared "defeated" and called to a new hope.

Dean Wenthe

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Galatians 1:1-10

June 1, 1986

Paul opens this famous epistle with an extraordinary effort to define his own apostolic identity and mission. He has been "sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from dead" (v. 1). Several current commentaries (e.g., O. Betz, *Galatians*) have rightly focused on the clear conflict which is evident between Paul's claims and those at Galatia: who were contesting his credentials and credibility. These studies also show that Paul viewed such challenges not on the personal level of trying to stake out his own turf—he was only too happy to suffer humiliation if that would further the work (2 Corinthians 10-13)—but rather on the theological level of the Gospel itself. The effrontery that Paul faced was not a slap in his own face, but a direct assault on the Gospel of Christ which had been entrusted to him. Therefore whether it be Paul or even an angel who expounded another "gospel," that alien proclamation is to fall under God's condemnation (v. 8). As the contours of this contest in the primitive church emerge, it is clear that a segment of the community was championing a return to such laws as circumcision in a manner which rendered "Christ of no value to you at all" (Ga 5:2).

The rhetoric of Paul's opening admonition (v. 6-10) is more than literary flourish! It is the appropriate language for a community on the verge of abandoning its birthright. The juxtaposition of Paul's gospel with the counterclaim (vv. 6-7), the immediate appeal to eschatological condemnation of those who propound it (vv. 8-9), and the plea of Paul for a hearing (v. 10) all point to the watershed nature of the question for the apostle. Only by articulating the Gospel, irrespective of any human tribunal, can Paul remain a "servant of Christ (v. 10)." An illuminating monograph on this very point is John H. Schutz's *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge, 1975).

THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

- I. Mankind, by nature, makes religious decisions.
 - A. The choice to be a "good person" entails a larger set of assumptions about the meaning of our life.
 - B. The decision to be a "hedonist," "humanist," "agnostic," or even "atheist," whether consciously or unconsciously made, brings with it understanding and perception of the world round about.
 1. Man is here today and gone tomorrow. (Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die.)
 2. Man is the measure of all things.
 3. None of us can know life's meaning.
 4. There is such evil that God cannot exist.
- II. The religiosity of mankind is worn out.
 - A. All the alternatives have been tried and found wanting (cf. Ecclesiastes 1-11).
 - B. The purportedly "new" options turn out to be the same old choices in new attire.
- III. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is qualitatively different from mankind's religiosity.
 - A. The Gospel is a gift.
 1. It is bestowed freely by God in its proclamation in Word and Sacrament.
 2. It remains a gift and aloof from any claim that it is merited.
 - B. The Gospel communicates the person and work of Christ.
 1. The Gospel frees us from the self-deception that we can add to the work of Christ.
 2. The Gospel bestows the benefits of forgiveness and faith apart from any quality inherent in us.
 - C. The mission of Paul, his very identity, was indissolubly intertwined with the character of the Gospel.
 - D. As "servants of Christ" with Paul we have become new creatures and forsaken the false gospels of our worn out religiosity.

Dean Wenthe

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Galatians 1:11-24

June 8, 1986

The goal of the sermon is that the hearer recognize the Gospel as divinely authoritative. The problem is that we prefer to listen to comfortable messages from sources with which we are comfortable. The means to the goal is that God Himself reveals the message of salvation so we may derive our comfort from it, and thus, from Him.

THE WORD FROM THE TOP

(Note: This scenario might be used as a lengthy sermon introduction or, supplemented with points from below, it could constitute the entire message.)

Sherlock Holmes watched as Jude A. I. Zer, bureau manager of Church, Inc., screamed "Hypocrite!" at Paul d'Apostle. Zer had hired Holmes to investigate d'Apostle on in-house charges of fraudulent claims.

Changing his tone, Zer went on, "I mean, all of us at some time have not lived consistently with the high standards of the firm. That's a prime concern of mine. Perhaps you've gotten carried away with this 'grace.'"

Paul responded, "I'm not a 'weak sister' inside the firm, though I used to be a fierce opponent outside. I openly tried to destroy it. Your treachery sickens me because it's a prettied-up version of what I was doing."

"What?"; Zer raged again. "The nerve! By your own admission, you haven't been with the firm from its beginning! What gives a scum like you—"

"The Founder," d'Apostle said evenly. "Sure, I was a scum, and still am in many ways. Once I wouldn't have admitted that. But now I do, because the Founder personally let me in on things. I learned what a great investment He made to start this firm. Still more, He showed me that His investment paid off, unlike my speculations. That hit home. And it turns out that He'd had His eye on me all along. Not only would He cut me in on the action, free of charge; He wanted me to represent Him and offer the same deal to strangers."

"This is absurd," Zer told Holmes. "Ask any member of my staff..."

"It doesn't matter how many flunkies you consult," d'Apostle insisted. "I've got the word straight from the top."

"And you did not consult anyone else, Mr. d'Apostle?" Holmes wondered.

"No," d'Apostle said, "I spent the next three years in a place where nary a soul had heard of the firm. Only after that did I visit members of the board."

"Ah yes, the board," interjected Zer. "My colleagues and I have long-standing, affectionate ties with its members. And what do you have?"

"Virtually nothing," responded d'Apostle. "That's my point. I stopped by the home office for brief personal visit, but I only saw two board members."

"And you didn't try to get them to vouch for your activities?" asked Zer.

"The subject never even came up. Ask them," d'Apostle continued. "Then I travelled far from the home office and spent fourteen years working in a new place. Would I have done that if I'd been using the board as a front? By the way, people received me very well there, even though they knew my background."

Holmes concluded the interrogation. The next day he announced his findings to Zer, with d'Apostle present: "d'Apostle is telling the truth."

Zer stammered, "But my colleagues and I—our professionalism—our long-standing personal connections—our good business sense—and it's our collective word against his! How could you conclude against us?"

"More elementary than most, this is a simple case of elimination," Holmes explained. "I've checked d'Apostle's story, and it holds up. He consulted no one. Either what he says is sheer fabrication—unlikely, since he himself has a stake in the venture—or he really has had an audience with the Founder. No opportunity; no motive; ergo, no crime. But, Mr. Zer, I can only say I shouldn't want to be in your shoes if you ever meet the Founder."

Holmes turned to d'Apostle. "Now, don't think I approve of this. I too am a businessman. Giving your product away does show poor business sense."

Paul d'Apostle said, "Holmes, your argument is with the Founder, not me. Your conclusion that my message comes from Him will delight many people with whom I've dealt. But I'd hate to be in your shoes when you meet the Founder."

"Yes," Holmes mustered, "quite"

- I. The Word from the top is authoritative.
 - A. In spite of impressive counter-claims (experience, education, status).
 - B. Because it comes from the Highest Authority of all.
- II. The Word from the top is gracious.
 - A. As in Paul's case (see 1 Co 15:8-10; Php 3:4-11; Ro 10:2-4; Eph 3:1-13).
 - B. As the "very definite Word of God . . . that He is no longer angry" (Apology IV:262, q.v.; the formal principle undergirds the material principle).

Synergism in revelation is as dangerous as synergism in salvation!

Ken Schurb
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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Galatians 2:11-21

June 15, 1986

The central thought of the text is that Christians should abandon every suggestion of salvation by works. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would so rejoice in God's grace in Christ that they want nothing to supplement it. The problem is that we, in our weakness, do not live as people saved by God's grace. The means to the goal is the full impact of God's "not guilty" verdict on us because of Jesus' work.

Introduction: "The question of justification is an elusive thing," Luther said, "not in itself. . . but so far as we are concerned" (LW 26, 63). Indeed, we marvel that the great apostle Peter could send such deceptive signals about this all-important matter. In utter humility, then, we examine

THE MOST ELUSIVE REALITY

- I. As far as we are concerned, justification is most elusive.
 - A. Though we know better, we often make Christianity out to be essentially a matter of good conduct.
 1. This seems to make our religion practical.
 2. It seems not to relieve us of our responsibility to respond to God.
 - B. If Christianity is good conduct, we can look to others for approval. But we fear not getting it (v. 12).
 - C. When desire for approval motivates us, we fall into hypocrisy and compromise the Gospel (see v. 13 and compare FCSD VI:16)
 - D. If we compromise the Gospel, we cannot have its power (see v. 14a).
- II. In itself firm and sure, the reality of justification takes hold of us.
 - A. The sinner is righteous on account of Christ.
 1. We are righteous not by works (good conduct), but through faith in Christ (v. 16).
 2. Our goodness fails as much as anyone's, yet in God's view our sins are covered; else Christ would be a servant of sin (v. 17). In Him our justification (God's approval of us) is
 - a. Complete (2 Sm 12:13b; Ps 85:2-3; 1 Jn 1:7; see Apology XV:12).
 - b. Constant (Ps 32:1-2; Is 43:25; Ro 8:1; see Apology IV:317).
 3. Effectively speaking, only unbelief can harm us. It rejects Christ and returns instead to the condemning law (v. 18).
 - B. The dead live in Christ.
 1. There is no reason to go back. In Christ we have died to the law (diagonal, v. 19 'Jesus' active and passive obedience) and live, with Him, to God.
 2. He lives in us. We receive our life from Him by faith (v. 20a).
 - a. He "removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me" (Luther).
 - b. He empowers spiritual life: "'Paul is dead.' 'Who then is living?' 'The Christian'" (Luther).
 3. The basis of His exaltation—also in our hearts and lives—remains His sacrifice for us (v. 20b; see 1 Jn 4:10).
 - C. The "Defeated One" is glorified: Christ Himself.
 1. There is every reason to stay with Christ's grace. Its glory consists in His death, which cannot fail to provide us righteousness (v. 21; see Jn 12:23).
 2. The highest way to worship Christ is to avoid nullifying His grace or belittling His death (see Apology IV:154, which comments on Luke 7:36-50). This is practical in the best sense.

Conclusion: Sheep rescued from a burning barn often run back into the flames. We are the sheep of God's pasture (Ps 100:3). Why run to the law? Instead, we "enter His gates with thanksgiving," for "His steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 100:4 & 5).

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Galatians 3:23-29****June 22, 1986**

A large recreational van roared by me on the toll road flaunting a prominent rear bumper which said, "Spending our kids' inheritance." Boasting of our temporal earthly pleasures illustrates what St. Paul meant by the law of the flesh. Since our materialistic appetites can never be satisfied and continually war against our private and social best interests, the laws of Mt. Sinai was given us as a disciplinarian to restrain us from self-destruction. But neither the greedy passions of our flesh nor the law given to restrain us can ever provide for us the break-through to eternal salvation. Only the God-given inheritance of Christ's saving grace can create of us

PEOPLE WITH A PROMISE

- I. Reborn as sons of God (v. 26).
 - A. People with a promise see their origin as children created by their heavenly Father.
 - B. People with a promise see their relationship to God enhancing life.
- II. Clothed with Christ (v. 27).
 - A. People with a promise find identity in the fact that they are in a saving relationship with God through Christ.
 - B. People with a promise find motivation and assurance through the robe of Christ's grace.
 1. They know that by grace through faith they are properly clothed for the wedding banquet of God's Son.
 2. They are motivated to share their clothes with those who are needy, thus expressing their faith and love.
- III. Baptized in the Spirit (v. 27).
 - A. People with a promise are washed clean of unrighteousness.
 1. The water of baptism washes away sin and assures us of forgiveness.
 2. The word of baptism miraculously creates and sustains faith within whereby we trust in the saving promise of the Spirit.
 - B. People with a promise are born again into the kingdom of God.
- IV. Justified by faith (v. 24).
 - A. People with a promise are given the justifying righteousness of Christ as a gift.
 1. They no longer endure the shadow of the custodian, the law, to worry them about their salvation.
 2. They have the glorious liberty of the children of God with an inheritance which is incorruptible.
 - B. People with a promise are given the gift of faith and are assured of the heavenly home.
- V. Unified in freedom (v. 28).
 - A. People with a promise are freed from divisive and particularistic prejudices in order to move toward the inclusive unity in Christ's kingdom.

- B. People with a promise are freed from oppressive bondages for servanthood among the friends of Jesus.
- C. People with a promise are freed from the separating interpretations of sexist selfishness for oneness as brothers and sisters in the family of Christ.
 - 1. Sexists create discouraging separations of men and women.
 - 2. Christians edify, love, and help one another in the family of Christ.

Conclusion: Without the saving grace of Christ proclaimed to Abraham, we have no promise. The promised inheritance of salvation is not something we earn, nor is it something which can be taken away from us by a selfish generation of pleasure-seeking people who do not concern themselves with the future (the attitude expressed by the travel trailer's bumper sticker). The most precious inheritance which can be communicated to us is that we are secure as the divinely destined people with a promise of salvation.

Harold H. Zietlow

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

June 29, 1986

St. Paul dramatized the vast contrast between the life of bondage to self-destructive fleshly passions on the one hand, and the constructive fruits of the Spirit on the other hand. God gave us the rigorous structure of the law to constrain the explosive passions of the flesh. Christ came to free us from bondage under carnal vices and emancipate us for the positive purpose of bearing the constructive fruits of the Spirit.

LIVE THE LIFE OF FREEDOM

- I. Which was won for us by the obedience of Christ.
 - A. He was put to death for our trespasses and rose again for our justification (Ro 4:25).
 - B. In his active obedience, Jesus served as our model for a life of freedom in accordance to the will of the Father. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more" (1 Co 9:19). (Cf. also Luther's paradox on freedom and servanthood.)
- II. Which delivers from the destructive "passions of the flesh" (v. 24).
 - A. Deliverance from religious errors (sins toward God) such as idolatry, witchcraft, and heresies.
 - B. Deliverance from demonic physical vices such as fornication, licentiousness, and drunkenness.
 - C. Deliverance from destructive anti-social vices such as hatred, strife, and jealousy.
- III. Which puts us in line for the fruit of the Spirit (v. 25).
 - A. Free to bear fruit especially derived from the Gospel.

1. Love of God is enacted in our life of freedom. (The love of God for us and our love toward God and man is explained in 1 Corinthians 13.)
2. Joy is expressed as rejoicing because of God's grace has been good toward us, in spite of worldly adversities.
3. Peace is received from God as a fruit of the Spirit amidst worldly strife and exhaustive work. We experience composure in the stress of a challenging vocation and the limits of earthly life.
- B. Free to bear fruit in our social relationships.
 1. Patience comes as a fruit of the Spirit, even in an age of unprecedented situational frustration and destructive stress.
 2. Kindness has been shown to us in the saving mercy of Christ, which motivates us to bear fruit in kindness to one another.
 3. Faithfulness and loyalty are shown by those who have a saving relationship to God.
 4. Goodness is the fruit of the Spirit shown by the goals and character of the sinner changed by the righteousness of Christ.
 5. Meekness is the fruit of the Spirit marked by modesty and humility, shown by those who will inherit the earth.
 6. Self-control is exercised over the passions of the flesh directing this fruit of the Spirit toward an edifying life-style which glorifies God.

Conclusion: St. Paul described what it means to be slaves of the flesh or servants of the Spirit. Slaves of the flesh are consumed by destructive vices. Servants of Christ are characterized by fruits of the Spirit, which are positive, constructive, and fulfilling. The Christian faith and ethic are not vague or impractical, but urge us to launch out into action, to live the life of freedom.

Harold H. Zietlow

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16

July 6, 1986

The Apostle Paul's purposes in writing his Epistle to the Galatians were (1) to oppose the false teachings of the Judaizers who proclaimed that Christ did not free men from the law, but came only to confirm its teaching and accentuate the obedience which the law demands and (2) to recall the Galatians to the gospel which they had first received—the unchangeable gospel of justification by the free grace of God—simply through faith in Christ.

However, as Martin Franzmann writes, "The freedom given to the man in Christ does not absolve him of responsibility for his actions; rather, it heightens that responsibility. Man will sow what he has reaped. God will hold him accountable for what he has in his freedom done with the gift of the Spirit" (*The Word of the Lord Grows*, p. 59).

Introduction: As people who are the recipients of God's free gift of salvation, Christians have much for which they should be thankful. They also have

the responsibility to share this gift with others, both in word and in deed. In this morning's epistle the Apostle Paul gives us three suggestions for putting our faith into action.

A THREE-FOLD RESPONSIBILITY

- I. The child of God bears the burdens of a fallen brother (vv. 1-5).
 - A. He does so in a spirit of gentleness (vv. 1-2).
 1. The child of God will admonish a fallen brother in a kindly manner (v. 1a) because
 2. The child of God knows that he, too, is susceptible to temptation (v. 1b).
 - B. He does so in a spirit of humility (vv. 3-5).
 1. The child of God recognizes his own faults (v. 3).
 2. The child of God must bear his own burden of responsibility (vv. 4-5).
- II. The child of God provides support to a fellow-brother (vv. 6-10).
 - A. A Christian supports his leaders (v. 6).
 1. He supports them with his gifts.
 2. He supports them with his love and prayers.
 - B. A Christian's support will be sown to the Spirit and not to the flesh (vv. 7-8).
 1. The Lord will know the difference between that which is sown to the Spirit and that which is sown to the flesh (v. 7a).
 2. Sowing to the flesh will reap corruption (v. 8a).
 3. Sowing to the Spirit produces its own harvest of eternal life (v. 8b).
 - C. A Christian's support should be unselfishly given (vv. 9-10).
 1. It does not grow weary in well-doing (v.9).
 2. It looks for every opportunity to be of service (v. 10).
- III. The child of God glories in the cross of Christ (vv. 14-16).
 - A. The cross of Christ is the sole means of salvation.
 1. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision brings man into favor with God (v. 15; cf. Ga 5:1-12).
 2. Christ alone, through His expiatory suffering on the cross, procures eternal life.
 - B. The cross of Christ creates in man a new attitude toward the world (v. 14b).
 1. The world is crucified to the believer; i.e., it loses its attraction, its power, and its influence.
 2. The believer is crucified to the world; i.e., the world regards him as dead.
 - C. The cross of Christ brings blessings to the believer (v. 16).
 1. It brings the blessing of peace.
 2. It brings the blessing of mercy.

Conclusion: As people of God living in the freedom of the Gospel, let us gladly "bear another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Ronald Irsch
Rochester, Michigan

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Colossians 1:1-14****July 13, 1986**

Paul gives thanks for the Colossians' faith and love (vv. 3-4) grounded in their heavenly hope (v.5). The Gospel, not a local perversion of it, had produced this hope in them, and this same Gospel was manifesting its power wherever it was being preached in the world (v. 6). Having reminded them (v.7) that they had heard the Gospel of the grace of God from Paul's helper Epaphras, from whom Paul had in turn heard of the Colossians' love (v. 8), Paul informs the Colossians (v. 9) of his continuing prayer for them that they would grow in the knowledge of this Gospel so that they would not be ensnared by false wisdom but would have the ability to discriminate between the false and true and to grasp the relations in which things stand to each other. Such spiritual wisdom and understanding, centering in the Christ whom the Gospel reveals, issue in right practice (v. 10). It is God Himself who supplies the power to lead a life pleasing to Him and to persist in so doing with patient joy. With God strengthening them the Colossians would be able to lead lives of continual thanksgiving to the Father for the great things He has accomplished through His Son, for redemption, forgiveness, deliverance from darkness, and qualification of a heavenly inheritance (vv. 12-14).

Introduction: In trials we appreciate knowing that fellow Christians are praying for us. Intercessory prayer supports and sustains us. It is important to pray for each other and not only in times of trial. The greater the number of Christians praying at other times too, the greater the opportunity for the power of prayer to be shown. Implicit in Paul's prayer for the Colossians is an exhortation to us:

LET US ALWAYS PRAY FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS

- I. That they would grow in their knowledge of the Gospel.
 - A. As the message that announces our deliverance from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son (v. 13).
 1. Christ secured our redemption (v. 14).
 2. Christ assures us of forgiveness (v. 14).
 3. Through Christ God has qualified us for a heavenly inheritance (v. 12).
 - B. Growing in the knowledge of the Gospel is to be filled with the knowledge of God's gracious will (v. 9).
 1. This knowledge is not merely intellectual.
 2. Spiritual wisdom and understanding are needed—the knowing of faith (v. 9).
- II. That they would experience the power of the Gospel.
 - A. As the message which enables us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (v. 10).
 1. The more we live in the Gospel the more we are able to love one another (vv. 4, 8).
 2. The more we live in the Gospel the more we are able to bear fruit in every good work (v. 10).

B. As the message which strengthens us with divine power.

1. To endure steadfastly whatever life brings with patience and joy (v. 11).
2. To give thanks always to the Father and for each other (v. 3).

Conclusion: Let us always pray for our fellow Christians. We have great things for which to ask.

Gerhard Aho

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Colossians 1:21-28

July 29, 1986

The verses which immediately precede this pericope (Col 1:15-20) center upon Christ—His person, His position, and His work. In the verses before us Paul speaks to his readers about the effect Christ's person and work should have upon their lives. Regarding these verses (Col 1:21-18) Lenski states: "No Judaistic error that would limit the work of the God-man or its effect on the world of nature can find lodgement where the God-man and the mighty effect of his blood and his cross are known (v. 15-20). From objective statement Paul turns to subjective experience, to the effects experienced by his readers." (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 68.)

Introduction: In taking upon Himself flesh, Christ became our servant in order to save us. However, our Lord did not save us for a life of inactivity. Rather, we have been

SAVED TO SERVE

- I. Christ became a servant that we might be saved (vv. 21-23).
 - A. At one time our condition was hopeless (v. 21)
 1. We were estranged from God.
 2. We were hostile toward God.
 3. We knew only evil deeds.
 - B. Through Christ we have been reconciled to God (v. 22).
 1. This reconciliation was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross.
 2. This reconciliation has made us holy, blameless, and irreproachable in God's sight.
 - C. In order to realize our salvation, we must continue steadfast in the faith (v. 23).
 1. Focusing our hearts and minds on the Gospel.
 2. The Gospel is our only hope for salvation and the only hope of all creatures under heaven.
- II. We were saved that we might become Christ's servants (vv. 24-28).
 - A. Christ makes us willing to endure suffering (v. 24).
 1. We rejoice in our suffering for Christ's sake.
 2. We participate in Christ's suffering as a result of the world's hatred toward His followers.

3. We suffer for the benefit of Christ's church.
- B. As Christ's servants it is our duty and privilege to share the "mystery" of the Gospel (vv. 25-28).
 1. The Gospel has been revealed to us by faith.
 2. The Gospel is meant for revelation to all mankind.
 3. The Gospel centers in Christ, the hope of glory.
 4. The Gospel of Christ will lead men into all truth and present them before God holy and blameless (cf. v. 22).

Conclusion: The work of serving God is never an easy task. But as Christ's servants we do not despair. We live in hope, the hope of glory which will be ours, because through Christ we have been saved.

Ronald Irsch
Rochester, Michigan

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Colossians 2:6-15

July 27, 1986

The baptismal theology expressed by St. Paul throughout his writings provides for the Christian a great source of strength and encouragement. Luther said, "There is on earth no greater comfort than baptism." This pericope offers the preacher an excellent opportunity to share the meaning of baptism as it empowers the contemporary Christian for his daily walk.

Introduction: Aimless wanderers—that is what many individuals appear to be today in our society no direction, no purpose, no solid basis for living. At times possibly all of us even ask the question, "Where is life leading me?" In the midst of the questioning comes Good News; in Jesus Christ we are

MORE THAN WANDERERS

- I. Many wander in life due to the confusing and contradictory directions offered in our world.
 - A. Some seek direction for their lives through a philosophy that is based on financial power.
 1. Money appears to offer security and control.
 2. Money does not answer the real questions of life.
 3. Money very frequently fails, as was proven in the recession of recent years.
 - B. Some have no real direction in their lives because they live by a philosophy that says "satisfy the self."
 1. The media's many voices constantly tempt us to satisfy our own desires first.
 2. Such a philosophy alienates others and leaves one alone without approval or support.
 3. On account of the fickle nature of humankind, "satisfaction" is a changing thing found in new highs. How much is enough?

- II. Life that is rooted and united in Jesus Christ is life that has meaning and direction, today and for eternity.
- A. Humans will be nothing more than wanderers until their purpose and direction are found in their God.
 - 1. God has revealed Himself and His care for the individual in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Knowing Jesus Christ is to know life and its fullest meaning. Jesus has demonstrated Himself to be the source of life in His resurrection.
 - B. The Christian is a partaker of Jesus' life, and all of its merits, as he or she is united into Jesus Christ through the waters of their baptism.
 - 1. In baptism they are united into Christ, His death and resurrection. They are partakers of His victory, partakers of His life, coheirs of His Father. Life has meaning because heaven is our destination.
 - 2. The meaningless existence of the individual is put aside. A new beginning is made by God's creative grace. There is true satisfaction as God empowers us to give and to serve, replacing the emptiness of self-service.
 - 3. A new life is created through baptism. A life that has meaning and direction because of its attachment to Jesus Christ. Christ's mission becomes our mission.
 - C. The baptized believer is more than a wanderer because in Jesus the way is laid and the life is secured.

Conclusion: "Where is life leading me?" The life that is found in union with our Savior is leading us through the current struggles to the eternal arms of a loving and waiting Heavenly Father.

Wm. G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Colossians 3:1-11

August 3, 1986

This text and the message it yields complements well the content of the sermon offered in this journal for the preceding week. One's life has meaning only as the person is united to Jesus Christ, His life and merit. The manner in which the individual actually exercises his union in Christ will be seen in his or her day-to-day conduct. The one to whom life's true meaning has been revealed in Jesus—that person's spiritual vision should be set on the heavenly realm. The priorities of his life should reflect this new higher relationship.

Introduction: Last week we spoke together of the meaningful life—we are "more than wanderers." We have a direction for our lives. Today we continue our consideration of the meaningful life confident that we can and are

LIVING IN THE AWARENESS OF OUR DESTINATION

- I. Our new life in Christ permits us a new view of living.
 - A. One's priorities for life and the resulting conduct reflect a person's understanding of the direction his or her life should take.
 1. If life is found only in the current moment, then self-gratification is adequate to provide a fulfilling life.
 2. If life's fulfillment is to be reached by the acquisition of tangibles, then one should dedicate his energies toward building monuments that serve as milestones, measuring his progress.
 3. If life's ultimate fulfillment is correctly understood, it is to be found in Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, the individual who has such understanding in faith should direct his or her energies toward fostering his relationship with the Savior.
 - B. The conduct of those who have been granted new life in Christ should be a reflection of Him and His love active in them.
 1. New life in Jesus would suggest that the believer would strive to put away thoughts, words, and actions that were associated with the former life, roadblocks to our destination.
 2. New life would also suggest the positive striving for those things that re-enforce and better equip us for the life's journey we all must experience.

Transition: The journey to our final destination, God's eternal kingdom, may seem to be more than we can accomplish. The life of the believer has often been compared to walking the narrow path, while the path of the world seems to be wide and easy. However, we must never forget that the path our Lord sets before us, though it be narrow, is clearly marked. He has promised us the energy to complete the journey and has Himself preceded us on the trail to remove the barriers and open the gates that we might arrive at our destination safe and sound.

- II. Christ Jesus does all that is necessary so that we can complete the journey.
 - A. The word shared with us through the prophets and apostles clearly defines the path God desires His people to walk.
 1. We see in the life of Jesus the love, commitment to His heavenly Father, and perfect obedience to God's will that should be the goal of each of us, although we recognize how imperfect our efforts will be.
 2. In the Law, God's statements of yes and no, guidelines are offered for our thoughts and actions, even as Paul records many in this pericope.
 - B. We live in the resurrection of Jesus. Our new life found in His life granted to us through faith is the energy source needed for us to prevail over all adversaries encountered in our travel.
 1. Jesus imparts to us His merits as we are united to Him in our baptism, granting to us thereby the necessary energy through His Spirit to turn away from the easy path of destruction and choose the narrow path of life.
 2. Jesus forgives our sin and removes our guilt. He lifts from us the heavy burden of our wrongdoing that we may not be detained or destroyed along the way.

3. Jesus reigns at the Father's right hand, still overseeing and remaining involved in our struggle, assuring us that we never travel alone.
- C. The Lord Himself has made the path clear by His own death and resurrection.
 1. Jesus has Himself walked the path. He has torn down the barrier of sin through His perfect life. He has opened the locked gate of death by His resurrection. He has cleared the way.
 2. Jesus has done all that is necessary in order that, when the roll is called, you and I will be there to say, "By the grace of God I am here!"

Wm. G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

August 10, 1986

The faith theme of Hebrews 11 really begins at 10:36, where it is shown that faith in Hebrews is the same as the faith stressed by Paul in Romans 1:17 (Hab 2:4) and Romans 4:3 (Gn 15:6). Faith is trust in the God who pronounced man righteous for Christ's sake. The examples in Hebrews 11 are encouragements and models for us to let faith have its way in us. Hebrews 11 is an illustration of what is taught beginning in 10:39 and continues in 12:1. Faith is defined as the "substance" or "confidence" behind our hope, the "assurance" or "conviction" of what cannot be seen with the naked eye. Hence, Moulton and Milligan suggest that "faith is the title-deed of things hoped for" (pp. 659-660). J. Moffat (in Barclay) gives this definition: it is (1) belief in God against the world (cf. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego); (2) belief in the spirit against the senses; i.e., the real things are not material, but spiritual; and (3) belief in the future against the present (e.g., Fosdick once said that Nero condemned Paul to death years ago; as time passed, however, men call their sons Paul and their dogs Nero).

The heroes enumerated are those who refused the greatness of the world for the true greatness; they rejected the safety of earthly security and staked their lives on the promises of God. History proved them right. There are examples galore in current events certainly in our immediate forefathers, who immigrated to America, built churches, schools, and charities, and immediately proceeded to the foundation of missions. These records of old show that men can still live in the sunshine of God's favor and can accomplish great deeds. Moreover, they show that our faith can be molded by the examples of others and that these others walked in the steps of the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith, Jesus Christ (12:2). An incidental lesson, but significant, is the epistemology in verse 3: By faith we accept and "know" an *ex nihilo* creation, not because of scientific or empirical evidence, but because faith accepts the Word of God.

Introduction: Faith is the supreme characteristic of the Christian. Faith is not a passive thing nor a theoretical quantity, but it is a power that looks for-

ward. As such it is called hope. But faith also looks back and recognizes the great deeds of God. And it looks at the present with trust and confidence. All three dimensions work together to give certainty; Hope, trust, and knowledge are interchangeable. Such is Christian faith. We look to

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

- I. In Abraham we see how faith begins.
 - A. God's grace always precedes faith.
 1. Archaeology is supporting the biblical depiction of the idolatrous environment in which Abraham was raised and from which he was called (cf. Halley, p. 95).
 2. God's grace which called Abraham "to go out" is all the more amazing (v. 8).
 - B. God's call to sinners is always accompanied by His grace.
 1. Jesus' words had the power to effect what it asked (e.g., Jn 1:35ff; Mt 9:9; Lk 19:5).
 2. The call has always been "to leave and to follow" (cf. Ps 45:10).
 3. God's grace has called and kept us in the faith (cf. Third Article, S.C.).
- II. In Abraham we see the endurance of faith.
 - A. Only the word of grace guided Abraham.
 1. He "obeyed . . . and went out, not knowing whither he went" (v. 8) without maps, pictures, surveys of the place that he was to inherit.
 2. Even when the senses call it folly, faith is confident in the Word (v. 1).
 - a. True faith takes the senses captive and separates us from the earthly.
 - b. True faith hearkens only to the "voice" of God. Such trust glorifies God.
 - B. The "in-between times" are an adventure.
 1. Dangers and deprivations beset Abraham—only a portable tent, in hostile territory.
 2. The inconsistencies were heightened for Abraham: He was promised posterity, but his wife is sterile. Only faith could handle that situation (vv. 11-12).
 3. It is difficult to "wait" even when it is waiting on the Lord (Ps 27:14; 62:5; 69:3).
 4. Sarah conceived and hopes were realized.
 - C. We are living in "in-between times" today.
 1. In the "security" of our comforts we need reminding that we are strangers and pilgrims in the diaspora (1 Pe 1:1f).
 2. By "not knowing" where we are going and by following the Word, we remain open to God's guiding.
- III. In Abraham we see the end of faith.
 - A. Abraham saw the comforts of the world; besides, the two flights to Egypt and especially the command to sacrifice of his own son "tried" his faith (Ps 73:2-3).
 - B. The chastening of the Lord is a purifying force (He 12:3ff).
 - C. The goal was always clear to Abraham the City of God (v. 10), the heavenly country (v. 16).
 - D. All the saints of old "received" the promises. . . (v. 13).

Conclusion: Like a ship or airplane captain, Christians soon reach a "point of no return." As Christians we look only forward and upward, never back to the land we left. By faith we dare, we venture, and we finally win, by the grace that God supplies.

G. Waldemar Degner

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hebrews 12:1-13

August 17, 1986

"Therefore" (v. 1, NASB) connects the text directly to the immediately preceding chapter, the "great cloud of witnesses" (v. 1) referring to the heroes of faith described in chapter 11. These witnesses are adduced to encourage the Hebrew Christians in their Christian race. In the Greek there is a distinction between "encumbrance" and "the sin which so easily entangles us." The only way to run the race with endurance is to fix one's eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus is the one who makes faith possible, for by our baptism into Him, into His death and resurrection, we have been placed in the race which He has already pioneered and won. He will surely keep us to the glorious end. But Jesus is presented also as our example in the race; He endured dreadful hostility by sinners and yet, keeping the final outcome before Him, His glorification at God's right hand, He persevered in carrying out His saving task. The Hebrew Christians had not yet had to resist to the point of martyrdom in their Christian race (v. 4). They were faltering in the race, not only because they were failing to fix their eyes on Jesus, but also because they had forgotten the exhortation which explained God's purpose in disciplining His own (vv. 4-5). God is dealing with each of His children as a wise and loving Father who must frequently discipline His child. The author compares our earthly fathers' discipline to that which God meets out, reminding us that as we respected our fathers, so must we respect our Heavenly Father (v. 9). Discipline is never joyful (v. 11). Only afterwards do we see how it yielded peaceful fruit of righteousness, righteousness manifested in firm reliance on the goodness of God who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all and who therefore will give us all things that are good for us, also in the way of discipline.

Introduction: Scripture often compares the Christian life to an athletic contest in the form of a race (Ga 5:7; Php 3:14; 2 Tm 4:7). The text uses the race image to remind us

WE CAN PERSEVERE IN THE RACE

1. When we remember the witnesses.
 - A. There are many witnesses.
 1. Both in the Old and the New Testament (He 11).
 2. We are not alone in the race. The number of Christian runners is large also today.

B. Their witness is encouraging.

1. The witnesses of Hebrews 11 experienced some of the same encumbrances and sins as we (v. 1).
2. By faith they were able to lay aside hindrances (v. 1; He 11).
3. We can likewise lay aside hindrances by means of a faith which lets us distinguish between the permanent and the impermanent, the heavenly and earthly.

II. When we submit to the Father's discipline.

A. It is difficult to submit to discipline (v. 11a).

1. When sickness and troubles come we can begin to think like Job that God has become an enemy.
2. We may even rebel against God.

B. It is important to accept the Father's discipline.

1. Discipline testifies to the Father's deep love for His children (vv. 5-9).
2. By His discipline God has our temporal and eternal good in view.
3. Submission enables us to experience that good (vv. 10-11).

III. When we fix our eyes on Jesus.

A. As the supreme example of endurance in the race.

1. Christ endured much worse suffering than we will be required to endure (vv. 3-4).
2. Yet He persevered for us by keeping the final joy in view (v. 2).

B. Above all, as faith's enabler.

1. He authored our faith when in baptism He started us in the race.
2. He will perfect and finish what He has begun.

Conclusion: We can persevere in our Christian race when we remember the witnesses, submit to the Father's discipline, and fix our eyes on Jesus.

Gerhard Aho

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hebrews 12:18-24

August 24, 1986

This text points to the awesome experiences once associated with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, and then it reminds Christians of the more awesome privileges associated with the Gospel. A new equation comes out of this Letter to the Hebrews, namely, the responsibilities that ensue from the Gospel are greater than those which the Law entails. Henry Halley points to the summary thought of 10:26-12:29: "There has been one sacrifice for sin. There will never be another. Whoever will not avail himself of what Christ has done for him on the cross may as well make up his mind to say good-bye to God forever, and go his own way, and suffer for his own sin" (p. 654). People today need to be reminded of the thrust of Hebrews, namely, that despising the Gospel is really more serious than despising the Law.

Introduction: A slogan on Indiana's license plates reads: "Wander Indiana!" It is an invitation to tourists to enjoy Hoosier Hospitality. Our text from Hebrews 12 invites us to wander

FROM SINAI TO ZION

- I. This journey instills both fear and faith.
 - A. Ancient Israel felt great fear of the holy God who revealed Himself on Sinai (vv. 18-21).
 - B. Modern pilgrims on this journey still feel great fear of the holy God who reveals Himself in the warnings and rebukes of the Law. The Law shouts our sin, stirs up sin within us, and finally slays us (Ro 7:7-12).
 - C. The Gospel heals and nourishes us (vv. 22-24).
- II. This journey was planned and prepared by Jesus.
 - A. Moses led Israel to Sinai in accordance with God's plan.
 - B. Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, is the Pioneer who prepared and completed the journey for us (He 12:1-3).
 1. The active and passive obedience of Jesus is outlined in the explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism.
 2. What the Mediator of the New Testament has prepared He gives to us (v. 24).
- III. The journey involves both privileges and responsibilities.
 - A. Our privileges (vv. 22-23) are a present possession already.
 1. You have come to the City of the Living God (v. 22a), a spiritual fellowship.
 2. You have come to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven (v. 23a), the whole communion of saints and angels.
 3. You have come to God, the Judge of all (v. 23b). This God who judges in Mt. Zion is merciful, long-suffering, and kind.
 4. You have come to the spirits of just men made perfect (v. 23c). Even the saints of the Old Testament who waited for the fullness of time in Christ are all with God in the heavenly Jerusalem (He 10:14; 11:40).
 5. You have come to Jesus, the Mediator of a New Testament, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (v. 24). Jesus' work is completed for us. The Gospel is His will and testament. It is not a contract (covenant), in which the stipulations might change. The "blood of sprinkling" is the application of His work to our lives.
 - B. Our responsibilities are also a present possession already.
 1. Continue in the Word that warns of the dangers of growing weary and fainthearted, and even of reverting to Mount Sinai.
 2. Remember that we are the New Israel. Our obligations to God have all been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the once-for-all sacrifice. Keep your eyes fixed on the King in Zion!

G. Waldemar Degner

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Hebrews 13:1-8****August 31, 1986**

The text encourages the hearer to develop a life style that is in direct opposition to the cultural pattern of our modern society. "Independence" and "individuality" are the hallmarks of America today. The Biblical and secular understanding of these two words have little in common. The world views "independence" as freedom from something. God views it as freedom for something. The world views "individuality" as life for oneself; God views it as life for others.

Introduction: Health devotees are a dime a dozen today. On almost every street one sees joggers. Health clubs are in every city. Prime bodies in prime minds is a national business. Why? Yes, health is a concern today, and God intends that our bodies be in shape; but there is another and darker side to this national trend. The ancient Greeks had it in their games and art—the body beautiful and the philosophy of hamanism, the exaltation of the man himself and his reach for fulfillment, to taste the limits of life. How does the Christian faith address the concerns for today's reach for

INDEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUALITY**I. Culture and Fulfillment****A. Independence from all restraint is the world's view of freedom.**

1. Natural man seeks to be free from control by God or man.
2. Natural man in his self-defined, self-chosen independence believes he is in touch with reality (v. 9). Our culture seeks fulfillment in license—"if it feels good, do it!" Morality in the biblical sense is archaic, outdated, irrelevant. "I am 'god'; therefore I make my own moral standard, my own religious system."

B. Individuality is the standard for fulfillment.

1. Secular culture moves man into the centers of the universe (Da 4). Natural man's perception of fulfillment finally centers on the individual's understanding of life.
2. Individuality for modern man undermines relationships with God and man (v. 4). Marriage for the pagan is no permanent bond; the marriage bond is only one of many relationships that are not necessary. The big "I" seeks gratification in new and expanding relationships. Trust and stability are useable only as they serve "me" (cf Herod and Herodias, Mt 14:3). Individuality without God undermines and distorts relationships.

C. God condemns the world's perspective of reality.

1. God's temporal judgment is often observed in the lives of these people. The diseases of herpes and AIDS are two examples. People are not fulfilled by promiscuity. This is only one illustration relating to one area of life. There are numberless others. Addiction to drugs, alcoholism, child abuse, and so on are a way of life for frustrated and unfulfilled people. Unfulfillment is their fulfillment.

2. Judgment Day is the final denouement of reality, God's heaven or hell. All must face judgment. God is the final Arbiter and Judge (Jd 14, 15). Eternal judgment is everyone's "fulfillment."
- II. Promise and Reality
 - A. Jesus Christ is God's personal answer to man's quest, his need. True independence and individuality is found only in Christ, the God-man (v. 8; Jn 1:14).
 - B. Jesus Christ accepted the guilt of our sin and the death that is our inheritance.
 - C. Jesus Christ and His salvation are apprehended only by personal faith. Faith is not an academic exercise; it is the confidence which the repentant sinner has in the cross of our Lord.
- III. Regeneration and Fulfillment
 - A. Independence and individuality find expression in obedience to God's will. Man is free in living under Christ (Jn 8:31-32). God's Word produces fulfillment (v. 7).
 - B. The text urges a specific life-style demonstrating the independence and individuality of the new man (vv. 1-6).
 1. Christians continue in brotherly love. Here is freedom *for* loving others. This is not freedom *from* service or love.
 2. Christians entertain strangers. Here is independence for service to strangers. Here hospitality is the outward expression of love for the unexpected and uninvited (v. 2).
 3. Christians remember those in prison. Here is an individuality that confuses the world because the man of God loves the unlovable. It mirrors Christ's concern for the lost (v. 3).
 4. Christians hold marriage in honor. Here fulfillment is evident in the marriage bond. The Christian marriage demonstrates the perfect balance between independence and individuality.
 5. Christians are content with their possessions. Our relationship to things in this world is important. It reflects either fulfillment or frustration (1 Sm 21). Christians need a carefree attitude toward this world's goods (v. 5).
 6. Christians remember those who rule over them. Here we see the proper order of things and people. Our faith is paramount and in life (v. 6).

George Kraus

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philemon (2-9) 10-21

September 7, 1986

The text deals with people who run away from life. Some do face difficulties, problems that seem insolvable; others are overwhelmed; still others find escape in questionable ways. The text speaks of Onesimus, a slave who has run away from his slavery. Paul's letter to the former owner, Philemon, sets escapism on center stage. Here is Christ's answer to man's multitudinous problems. In short, the text deals with two concepts—freedom and slavery.

Introduction: We hear much today about slavery of all kinds. It may be addiction to heroin or cocaine. It may be a dictatorship. It may be poverty. Slavery can be found in all sorts of human conditions. Our epistle would have God's people see the reality of slavery and God's answer to it,

GOD'S OWN LIBERATION

I. From slavery

A. Our social structure often reflects a fallen world.

1. Physical slavery is a result of sin. Slavery is not a "dead" issue. People are held in slavery in many ways, not simply the ancient "ball and chain" (abuse of women and children, drug addiction, disease, dictatorship, etc.).
2. Spiritual slavery is the root cause of all slavery. Man placed himself in bondage to everything demonic in life by his rebellion against God. Man can no longer choose freedom; he is a permanent slave of sin and death. He also is under the judgment of God. Ananias and Sapphira are examples of slavery to possessions.

B. Spiritual slavery cannot be destroyed by man's efforts.

1. Psychology and psychiatry offer help for the symptoms, but cannot release man from his spiritual slavery.
2. Man is hopeless and helpless. His slavery sin allows no escape. Satan and the flesh will not release man; they control him to his grave.

II. Through redemption

A. Jesus Christ has broken the shackles of sin and death and devil.

B. Jesus Christ sets man free to be what God intends him to be.

III. For servanthood

A. We are free to serve. Paul calls on Philemon to be a brother to Onesimus in a new relationship.

B. The obedience of faith is obedience to love (vv. 5-6). Love is the motivating factor in the Christian's new life under Christ.

C. God's new life is a blessing to others.

1. The saving power of Christ is shared with others (v. 19). The Gospel is the most important gift one can share with another (vv. 7, 20).
2. The genuine concern and active love of the Christian for others is also a blessing to them (vv. 10, 11). Love in action does not look for escape valves. It leads us out of our petty self-concern and into a liberty of service to God's people. This is our real "escape mechanism."

George Kraus

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Timothy 1:12-17

September 14, 1986

The magnitude of the mercy for which Paul praises Christ is brought out in verse 13 where Paul describes himself as formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor,

and a violent aggressor. These words describe both deeds and words of spitefulness, someone whose insolence and contempt reek forth in outrageous acts. Before his conversion Paul acted in the ignorance of sinful unbelief. The *hoti* clause does not seek to lessen his guilt by means of an excuse but is an explanation; he was not acting against his better knowledge. The same mercy Jesus asked for His murderers (John 16:2) Jesus showed to Paul. Verse 16 makes clear that patience was in back of Christ's mercy. Paul's experience is a model of what Christ does in general. Because Christ's patience will not undergo a more severe test than in the case of Paul, no sinner ever needs to despair.

Introduction: Paul could never get over what the mercy of Christ had done for him. His magnification of that mercy constitutes the theme of every Christian's life.

I OBTAINED MERCY

- I. Despite opposition.
 - A. Paul's opposition was intense.
 1. He was injurious.
 2. He was a wanton persecutor.
 - B. We are basically no different.
 1. Although we have not engaged in the kind of persecution of Paul was guilty, we are no better than Paul because we are born with a sinful heart.
 2. We fail to meet God's standard (Jas 2:10; Ec 7:20), and God has the right to punish us.
 - C. But if mercy could be extended to Paul despite his sinfulness, nothing we have been or done or said can prevent Christ from extending that same mercy to us. But how is that possible?
- II. Through Christ Jesus.
 - A. Christ came to save us.
 1. By keeping God's law for us.
 2. By suffering on the cross the punishment for our sins. By His resurrection He testified to the completion of redemption. God is merciful through Christ, in whom alone is salvation (Acts 4:12).
 - B. Christ's mercy comes to us individually.
 1. We received that mercy at our baptism.
 2. Our faith in Christ's mercy is strengthened through contact with the Word of the Gospel and participation in Holy Communion.

Transition: Before we reach the heaven which Christ's mercy has opened to us we have a life to live. Mercy affects the way we live. It gives us purpose.

- III. For service to Christ.
 - A. Christ strengthened Paul for service.
 1. Paul's apostleship was tremendously rich in accomplishments.
 2. The strength Paul received to do all this was evidence of God's mercy.
 - B. We have obtained mercy so that whatever we do might be for Christ.
 1. Showing love and compassion to those around you, working at your job as well as you can, endeavoring to be faithful in whatever responsibility has been given to you—these are all ways of expressing your faith and thereby serving Christ.

2. We can be faithful in our service because Christ will strengthen us for it, just as He did Paul.

Conclusion: The mercy of Christ comes to me in my sinfulness, it comes to me through Jesus Christ, it comes to me so that I can serve Him. I obtained mercy! What a fitting theme song for the Christian's life!

Gerhard Aho

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Timothy 2:1-8

September 21, 1986

The church at Ephesus was a small, struggling congregation, and it could readily offer several good human reasons for being so. It was harassed by Roman officials, Jewish legalizers, and pagan religious practitioners. It was undermined by Greek philosophers who, by belittling the material world, encouraged all forms of immorality. And, it was shepherded by a young, inexperienced pastor named Timothy, who needed all the advice that Paul, his spiritual father, could give. Timothy's apparent indecisiveness had turned the Ephesian congregation into a timid group of souls. Like the disobedient King Saul (1 Sm 15:17) the Ephesians thought far too little of themselves, and their worship became, as it was in Isaiah's time (Is 58), an outlet for wallowing in self-pity.

Introduction: A church that looks only at itself will feel sorry for itself, but a church that looks to its gracious God and Mediator will look with love toward a world in need.

THINKING TOO LITTLE OF YOURSELF

- I. A church that looks at itself
 - A. An introspective church feels sorry for itself.
 1. It sees only the sins and shortcomings of fellow members.
 2. There is anger, strife, and quarreling.
 3. It engages only in mere trouble-shooting, taking an anemic and fatalistic approach to its internal affairs.
 - B. An introspective church assumes a cowardly, defensive posture toward the world.
 1. It can only whine and complain about the "troubles in the world today."
 2. It becomes "apologetic" (in the negative sense) and feels the need periodically to resuscitate its God.
 3. It becomes selfish with the boundless blessings of God, limiting the scope of God's saving activity to its own backyard.
- II. A church that looks at its God
 - A. It rejoices in the Savior-God.
 1. It believes in God's age-old plan for the salvation of the world.

2. It makes no apologies for God's unilateral decision to love the human race.
 - B. It rejoices in the Mediator, sent by our Savior-God at the "proper time," who has reconciled God to the world (God-to-man aspect).
 - C. It worships the God and Savior who freely accepts our offerings of thanks (man-to-God aspect). Worship forms a bridge between what we believe and what we do.
- III. A church that looks at the world
- A. A church that looks outward feels sorry for the world.
 - B. It proclaims the universality of God's grace.
 - C. It realizes that God's people are ambassadors of the King.
 1. It "goes on the offensive" with the grace of God.
 2. Its prayers testify that the human race, from the least to the greatest, in every corner of its existence, desperately needs the God we adore.
 3. It is mission-minded, accepting the challenge to relay God's love to the world.

Conclusion: Through the preaching of the law we quite rightly admonish people not to think too highly of themselves, and in this way we prepare them for the hearing of the Gospel. However, there is a proper time for stressing that, through the forgiveness of sins, God Himself has chosen us to be no less than His representatives to a fallen world, and therefore, we must not think too little of ourselves. The world needs what we have been given and what we have to offer.

James Bollhagen

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Timothy 6:6-16

September 28, 1986

In the busy schedule of a pastor there is always the temptation to offer the hearers too little interpretation of too much text, since such a sermon requires far less preparation time. This temptation could become a reality in the pericope before us. The question explored here is this: what are the riches that are truly worth a fight? The first half of the pericope dismisses the ever present wrong conclusion, that material wealth is the grand prize for those who believe (vv. 6-10). There is gain (literally, "good business") in godliness, but Christ crucified and risen, as well as the life lived in Him (v. 11), is what the real "good business" is. Today, as in apostolic times, there are some who say in effect that "the resurrection is past already," that is, that "two chickens in every pot" are the object of Christian hope (e.g., the "happiness theologians;"), but we move on to what the real fight is all about. Here is where the emphasis ought to be (vv. 11-16).

CLAIMING THE VICTORY

- I. The losing battle.
 - A. The sinful self is incapable of waging the battle.

1. Our greatest enemy is our own flesh; it is the ground in which all manner of perverse seeds take root (v. 10).
 2. We stand as prisoners of war in our guilt; we are helpless against the Accuser and our own "opinio legis" (the rewards and punishments mindset).
 3. We have no vision of the prize of war to be won; we long only for what the eyes can see (Ec 5:11), for what does not satisfy (Is 55:2).
- B. The prospect of defeat, death, is always before our eyes.
- II. Christ the Victor.
- A. Christ has faced all our enemies alone.
1. He is the courageous warrior against Edom (Is 63).
 2. He is the faithful witness who made the good confession for our sakes (He 2:10-18, Re 1:5).
- B. Through His death and resurrection Christ has won the eternal victory over sin and death.
- III. The good fight.
- A. The victory has already been won.
1. We know that Christ has done the fighting for us.
 2. We lay hold of a life which has already been given to us.
 3. We fight for the faith which comprehends the sum-total of our Lord's gracious work on our behalf.
- B. Christ continues to do the fighting for us.
1. He gives us the armor of salvation (Ep 6:10-17).
 2. He supplies the needed weapon, the Word of God.
 3. The resources of our mighty Lord are limitless (vv. 15, 16).

Conclusion: The apostle Paul followed his own advice and won the crown of eternal life (2 Tm 4:7). The "even now, not yet" aspect of Christ's victory is seen by comparing the two letters to Timothy; Paul loved Christ's "epiphany" (His first coming, 2 Tm 1:10), and he longed for Christ's "epiphany" (His second coming, 1 Tm 6:14).

James Bollhagen

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Timothy 1:3-14

October 5, 1986

In verse 8 the use of the aorist subjunctive suggests that Paul is not so much reprimanding Timothy as encouraging him not to be ashamed. Paul lets Timothy know that he (Paul) understands the difficulties which Timothy is experiencing. The "testimony of our Lord" is not testimony the Lord has made but testimony we make about Him in our preaching and teaching and living. The grace planned in eternity was manifested openly when Jesus appeared (v. 10). The "appearing" refers to everything connected with Christ including His exaltation. Death could not hold Christ, for His death expiated sin and destroyed death. We have the Gospel because Jesus abolished death, brought life, and made the Gospel a means of dispensing life to us. The Gospel shining into the world's darkness reveals Christ, the light of the world.

Paul is confined on a capital criminal charge with the prospect of being found guilty and executed. The world looks at this matter as disgraceful, but Paul is not ashamed since he is suffering on account of the Gospel. Despite Paul's imprisonment and expected martyrdom, he knew that Christ would be able to guard the Gospel and that the kingdom's work would not be stopped. It would go on until the final day.

Introduction: When I was growing up the boys on our street played football almost every day after school in the autumn in a vacant lot two doors from our house. Adjacent to the lot was a house in which a lady lived who did not appreciate young boys playing football. Occasionally a poor kick or deflected pass caused the ball to land in her yard. Each time that happened she moved quickly out of her house and got the ball before any of us could reach it. Then she kept the ball, even though we wanted more than anything else to take that ball and to run with it.

That lady was like some Christians who keep the Christian message for themselves. Timothy, Paul's helper, was tempted to do just that. He had shared Christ with people only to be rebuffed, mocked, perhaps threatened. Maybe Timothy was afraid of ending up in prison like Paul. At any rate, Timothy was tempted to hold back, to be less than bold in his Christian witness. Paul told him: "Don't be ashamed of testifying to our Lord, nor of me, His prisoner."

In some ways our situation is no different than Timothy's. People today are no more enamored of the Christian message than they were in Timothy's day. We Christians are a dwindling minority in the world. And when we strive to remain faithful to God's Word and to maintain doctrinal discipline people are going to regard us as intolerant and narrow-minded. So we will be tempted to hold back, to be less than bold. Paul is saying also to us: Don't be ashamed of testifying to our Lord. Don't keep the message to yourself.

TAKE THE BALL AND RUN WITH IT

- I. The Lord has saved us.
 - A. He has saved us not by virtue of our works (v. 9).
 1. We like to think putting up with bad situations gives us at least a few points with God.
 2. We sometimes compare ourselves with others and come out looking pretty good.
 - B. The Lord planned our salvation from eternity through grace alone (v. 9).
 1. God accounts to us the good works of Jesus.
 2. God imputes to us the cross-secured righteousness of Jesus.
 3. God guarantees our life and immortality through the resurrection of Jesus (v. 10).
 - C. The Lord has called us to salvation with a holy calling.
 1. In our baptism.
 2. Continuously through the Word, the same Word Timothy was taught by his mother and grandmother (v. 5).
 3. Through Holy Communion.

Transition: There is no need to be ashamed of a Lord who saved us. Take the ball and run with it.

- II. The Lord renews us by His power.
 - A. God empowered Timothy to carry out His ministry (v. 7).
 - 1. To guard the Gospel's sound words which had been entrusted to him as well as to Paul (vv. 13-14).
 - 2. To suffer if necessary for the Gospel (v. 8).
 - B. We need God's renewing power.
 - 1. We do not like to suffer and so we are sometimes more timid than we should be and accommodate ourselves to people's whims.
 - 2. It is difficult at times to do what we know to be right.
 - C. God's renewing power shows itself in our lives (v. 7).
 - 1. We are able to speak the truth in love.
 - 2. We are able to maintain self-control in difficult circumstances.

Conclusion: When, like the lady who kept the football, we are tempted to keep the Christian message to ourselves, to hold back, to be less than bold in our witness, then think of the kind of God we have. He has saved us by His grace and He renews us with His power. Let us not be ashamed of testifying to our Lord. Let us take the ball and run with it.

Gerhard Aho

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Timothy 2:8-13

October 12, 1986

Paul's reminder that the word of God is not imprisoned (NASB; RSV "fettered") is a comment on the power of God's Word, which others were carrying to the world even though Paul was imprisoned at the time of this writing, possibly facing his own imminent death (cf. 4:10-12, 17, where other workers are mentioned, scattered for whatever reason to the far reaches of the Roman world). The passage beginning at 2:11 is perhaps a quote of an ancient hymn (so Franzmann) which contrasts sin and its results with righteousness and ultimately God's grace. Note that finally God's grace is the end of the matter, a good reason indeed to remember Jesus Christ.

The central thought of this text is that Jesus Christ, the bringer of salvation and eternal glory, is to be remembered, and in that remembrance He is to be served. The goal for this sermon is that the hearer will be moved to serve Christ in his every-day life as he remembers the glory and grace of Christ. The malady is that we often forget Christ's glory and grace and therefore also forget to serve Him.

Introduction: When a husband remembers his loving wife and children while away from home, he will not waste money extravagantly on himself. He will be more faithful, and he may even be warmed with a sense of love in the middle of a cold lonely night. Or when teenagers take the time to remember their parents who care so much for them, they will respect their curfew and be home on time. Just such a remembering is what is urged for us in our text today. We who believe in Jesus would not want to forget Him. And here we are encouraged to

TAKE TIME TO REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST

- I. Take time to remember a faithful and loving Savior.
 - A. He is faithful.
 1. Though we have been faithless.
 2. He faithfully obeyed God fully, going to the cross for our sins.
 3. He will be faithful in giving us all He has promised, life and a glorious eternal salvation.
 - B. He is also glorious.
 1. He has risen from the dead, a glorious display of power.
 2. His glory is eternal, never wavering or faltering, always present and never ending.
- II. Take time to remember Him and serve Him.
 - A. Paul's example.
 1. Paul served Jesus because he knew and constantly called to mind all of His faithfulness and glory.
 2. Paul served fully—through imprisonment, stoning, shipwreck, and loneliness (vv. 9, 10; cf. Ac 20:17ff.).
 - B. Christ's encouragement.
 1. Whatever we lose for Christ's sake we will gain, and even more (vv. 11-12; cf. also Mt 16:24-25).
 2. Christ also gives us His Holy Spirit as we read and study His Word, hear it expounded, and receive His body and blood in the Lord's Supper.
 - C. Our challenge.
 1. We dare not deny Him by word or action. This fact calls for a pure and Christ-like life. There is grave danger to our souls if we deny Christ (v. 12).
 2. We must remember, finally, His grace and faithfulness to forgive us and grant eternal salvation.

Conclusion: Indeed, Christ is worth remembering!

David L. Bahn,
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

October 19, 1986

Having just finished a description of the lamentable spiritual decay to come in the last days, Paul's thoughts turn again to Timothy with a concern for him that he remain true to Christ, even in the face of deception and opposition to Christ's words and ways. The entire emphasis of Paul in meeting and overcoming this challenge is the use of the Word of God. The "sacred writings" of 3:15 are the Old Testament, as is indicated by Paul's use of the term "Scripture" in the very next sentence in a parallel reference. The Scriptures are, therefore, said to be useful in two significant ways—to make one wise to salvation (3:15) and to equip such an one to do "every good work" (3:17).

The only way in which Timothy can be sure to lead people in the true way, continues Paul, is through the use of Scripture—the very way in which Timothy was led to salvation in the first place. This is the central thought of the text. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer seek the truth of God revealed in Scripture. The malady is that we too often want to have our ears tickled by the latest religious gurus and the most inventive theologians. The Scriptures alone are inspired and able to bring us salvation in Jesus Christ.

Introduction: What are we to do in the face of the smorgasbord of religious junk food available to us today? Our ears are indeed “tickled” by the many different teachings offered everywhere. What a blessing it is to have a guide through this maze of contradictory false teachings. The Bible is the guide. And it is much more. As we consider the blessings which God gives us through it we will

THANK GOD FOR HIS GREAT BOOK

- I. This great book of God leads us to Jesus Christ and salvation.
 - A. “Where does a teaching lead?” is a vital question to ponder as we seek to know the truth.
 - 1. There are so many different teachers and teachings available to the religious mind—many even claiming to be Christian.
 - 2. Does a given teaching lead us to Jesus? This question can help us ascertain whether a teaching is true. If a teaching leads us to doubt our salvation by grace through faith in Christ, it is false.
 - B. God’s book leads us to salvation through Christ.
 - 1. He is the one who is the focus of the Old and New Testaments. He lived and died for sinful man. He rose again from the dead. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 - 2. God’s book leads us to trust Him. We learn of God’s love, the forgiveness of sins, and the splendor of heaven through the Word of God.
- II. This great book equips us to serve God.
 - A. If we are led to Christ, we are led to serve Him.
 - 1. He came and served fallen mankind.
 - 2. He calls us to serve Him. Here in this portion of the Bible, for example, Timothy is reminded of his duties as a pastor—preaching the Word, exhorting, instructing and training, and doing all these things with patience (3:16, 17; 4:2).
 - B. God equips us to serve Him through His book.
 - 1. We are given the Holy Spirit and His fruits (one of these is patience) through the Word of God.
 - 2. Scriptural teaching, furthermore, corrects errors, guides us in righteous living, exhorts us to live for Christ, and always brings us back to Christ for forgiveness and strength. What a great blessing is our Bible.

Conclusion: The Bible is more than a literary classic or a coffee table ornament. The Bible is God’s Word. It leads us to Christ. It equips us to serve Him.

David L. Bahn
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**2 Timothy 4:6-9, 16-18****October 26, 1985**

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are commonly referred to as the pastoral epistles. They provide a clear Word of God for the church, although they were initially directed to an individual brother-pastor. The sound pastoral theology set forth in these epistles, which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to His church through the Apostle Paul, is deserving of our constant study and application. Donald Guthrie appropriately sets the stage for a study of this particular text when he writes that the pastoral epistles "provide an illuminating commentary on Paul's last days. This is particularly true of 2 Timothy, where the apostle's noble example in the face of approaching martyrdom is vividly portrayed. It has been the inspiration of innumerable Christians nearing the end of their course and it will undoubtedly continue to be so" (*The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 53).

Introduction: For General Douglas MacArthur, distinguished American military leader during World War II and later in Korea, his last hurrah came in a speech delivered before the joint houses of Congress shortly after President Truman had relieved him of his duties in Korea. Amidst a swirl of controversy, MacArthur spoke to the legislative branch of government in defense of his military actions. But now he had been forced to retire and to return to civilian life. This would be his last hurrah. He concluded that speech with the now famous line: "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away."

You can probably recall other "last hurrah" occasions involving a public personality, a sports celebrity or a figure of national prominence. Such experiences can be moving, and yet they fade away. But in our text the Holy Spirit shares with us a classic example of what the last hurrah of a Christian is really all about. In his second letter to his co-worker Timothy, St. Paul wrote his last hurrah in addition to everything else which we can learn from the words before us, they can serve as model for

OUR LAST HURRAH

- I. Paul was prepared for his last hurrah (v. 6).
 - A. He knew that his death was imminent.
 1. He had already fought the fight (v. 7).
 2. He had run the race.
 3. He had kept the faith.
 - B. Paul could look forward to the future which God had ordained for him (v. 8).
 1. A crown of righteousness had been laid up for Paul and all believers.
 2. There would be a rescue from every evil and a place the Lord's heavenly kingdom (v. 18).
- II. Paul's "last hurrah" provides every Christian with a useful model of the whole Christian life.
 - A. The Christian should live with a sense of imminent death. But in the meantime

1. We must diligently fight the good fight.
 2. We must patiently run the race.
 3. We must persistently keep the faith.
- B. The Christian's last hurrah embraces the future which God has ordained.
1. A crown of righteousness awaits us.
 2. And although we must struggle before that day arrives against many evils, the rescuing work of Christ has reserved us a place in His heavenly kingdom.

Conclusion: May the Lord stir up within us a new sense of the importance of a lifelong last hurrah, a last hurrah which will not fade away. Those who are faithful unto death wear the crown of life. In the meantime, fight the good fight, run the race, keep the faith—the last hurrah. Today, tomorrow, and always—the last hurrah. Live your last hurrah in Jesus' name.

Randall W. Shields

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12

November 2, 1986

Paul, writing from Corinth, sent an initial letter to the Thessalonians that was filled with deep concern and warm affection for this recently established congregation. But it soon became apparent, as reports filtered back to the apostle, that a second letter was necessary. In this second epistle Paul would express his gratitude for the spiritual growth which the believers in Thessalonica were experiencing in spite of persecution. This letter would go on to calm those who were becoming confused or excited with respect to Christ's second coming. Finally, the apostle would exhort the congregation to keep clinging to the traditions which they had been taught, whether by the spoken or the written Word.

We all like compliments. For purposes of an introduction the preacher could begin by sketching a music recital, a school play, a staff meeting, or some related setting. In this setting an authority figure (teacher, director, supervisor, foreman) compliments those who have demonstrated progress in their training or who have performed well on the job. This statement could provide a connecting link into the text before us. The words, "Permit Me to Compliment You," could provide a useful summary of this text. In effect, Paul was complimenting the Thessalonian congregation. By way of application, the preacher could ask whether Paul's criteria for complimenting the Thessalonians have been met by the congregation to which he is preaching. The words, "Permit Me to Compliment You," capture the attention of the listeners. The impact of the words will hinge upon the identity of the one who compliments and the substance of the compliment. Both of these combined should encourage the listeners to accentuate those qualities that have elicited the compliment.

PERMIT ME TO COMPLIMENT YOU

- I. Paul was complimenting the Thessalonian congregation.
 - A. The authority of Paul's apostolic office insured the significance of the compliment. (These were no casual words from an unknown passer-by.)
 1. The Thessalonians were "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1).
 2. The Thessalonians had been the recipients of Paul's Gospel preaching: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 2).
 - B. There was substance to Paul's compliment ("We are bound to give thanks...we ourselves boast of you... vv. 3,4).
 1. The Thessalonians gave evidence of a growing faith.
 2. The Thessalonians expressed a mutual love for one another.
 3. The Thessalonians were a steadfast congregation in the midst of persecution and affliction.
- II. Paul's compliment was a message of encouragement to the Thessalonians.
 - A. God had been—and implied is the truth that He would continue to be—at work in the Thessalonian congregation.
 1. So that the Thessalonians might "be counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (v. 5).
 2. So that the Thessalonians might "be counted worthy of [God's] call" (v. 11).
 3. So that the name of the Lord Jesus might be glorified in the Thessalonians (v. 12).
 - B. God's grace in Christ Jesus was the source of this encouragement.
- III. Paul's compliment is a message of encouragement to us today also.
 - A. There is substance deserving of compliment in this congregation. (or the preacher could take an examination approach: Is there substance deserving of compliment?)
 1. Our faith.
 2. Our love for one another.
 3. Our steadfastness.
 - B. Such compliments should generate encouragement.
 1. In Christ, we have been made worthy to take seriously living in His kingdom.
 2. In Christ, we have been made worthy to take seriously our call.
 3. In Christ, we have been made worthy to bring glory to His name.

Conclusion: Let us focus then, on God's criteria of compliment. Let us be a congregation so encouraged by His compliments that others may desire to be part of our fellowship. It is the Lord's great pleasure to extend words of compliment to us.

Randall W. Shields

THIRD LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

November 9, 1986

The Introit intones pure Gospel. God is the subject for each of the five verses from Psalm 85. The Collect speaks of absolution and deliverance. Though presently unrevealed to empirical observation, Jesus is alive and active, according to the implication of *apokaluptetai* in Luke 17:30. The world exhorts the exhausted to draw upon their own limited resources. Christianity looks to God, absolving and delivering, alive and active in the person of Jesus Christ. We wait for this revealing. . . and we "keep watch" according to the imperative of the Alleluia Verse (Mt 24:42). "May the Lord direct your hearts"—your weary, burdened, burned-out hearts—into this blessed reality!

Introduction: The experts in time management posit "concentration of power" as a key to purposeful, productive living. This "concentration of power" consists, simply stated, in direction. The Apostle Paul understands the even greater import of direction in our relationship with God. And so our text this day contains Paul's prayerful desire that our Lord give us

DIRECTION FOR THE HEART

- I. Our Lord is the Path-Opener, the Obstacle-Remover (v. 5a; here a word study of "direct"—*kateuthunai*—yields valuable results.)
 - A. Obstacles do stand in the path!
 1. Spiritual apathy and lack of discipline plagued the Thessalonian Christians (2 Th 3:6-15).
 2. "Wicked and evil men" dogged the missionary efforts of Paul (v. 2).
 3. We can find "the Way" blocked by internal (Ro 7:23-24) and external (Eph 6:12) obstacles.
 - B. The Holy Spirit turns us to the Lord for direction (v. 5a).
 1. He takes the initiative to seek the lost (Lk 19:10).
 2. He keeps safe those who have been found and gives them growth.

Transition: Christ calls us (Mt 4:19; Jn 21:19) and by His call enables us to follow. But where?

- II. Our Lord leads us.
 - A. "Into (NASB) the love of God" (v. 5b, a subjective genitive, i.e., "God's love").
 1. God's love moved Him to give us life at the cost of a great sacrifice (Jn 3:16).
 2. The blood of that sacrifice (Jesus Christ) opens the path and removes the obstacles (Eph 2:13-14) to God's love (Eph 2:19).
 3. God's love, shared with us through His Word and His Son's precious Body and Blood, now empowers us to live lives with direction—His direction (see 2 Cor 5:15).
 - B. "Into (NASB) the steadfastness of Christ" (v. 5b, a subjective genitive, i.e., "Christ's steadfastness").

1. Christ's steadfastness took Him to Calvary (He 12:2).
2. Christ endured our problems and sufferings, giving us hope in their place.
3. Christ's steadfastness, communicated to us through the life-giving Gospel, sustains us in our weariness and restores our joy for life. What an antidote for burdened, stressed hearts!

Conclusion: If you have ever been lost (or had a child lost), you know the stress which besets a person, the gratitude which he feels toward someone who gives him direction, and the relief and joy which he experiences when he reaches his destination. Our Lord wants to give us that same relief and joy. May the Lord direct our hearts into the love of God and steadfastness of Christ!

Thomas R. Ahlersmeyer
Boca Raton, Florida

SECOND LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

November 16, 1986

Who else but a "saint-and-sinner" can appreciate the disparity between appearance and reality presented by the propers of the Second Last Sunday of the Church Year? The Introit's juxtaposition of Psalm 130:4 ("With You there is forgiveness") with Psalm 143 ("Do not hide Your face from me"), the Collect's acknowledgment of "exceedingly great and precious promises" followed by a petition asking that the "believer" "perfectly and without all doubt believe," and the Gospel's paradox of "more from more" and "less from less" (Lk 19:26) speak to the tension existing between God's activity and our experience of His work. The preaching text transforms this vexation into vocation by training our eyes upon the God-given victory of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. To a distressed world in need of "improved outlook skills" (Donald A. Tubesing), God here gives reality, God gives victory, God gives His Son!

Introduction: "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 57). For a nation of people obsessed with victory, we must find the New Testament somewhat puzzling. The word "victory" appears only five times on its pages, with three of those references found in today's text. Perhaps the Holy Spirit seeks to divert our attention from transitory, tension-filled "victories"—capturing the good parking space, getting the much sought promotion, cheering a favorite athletic team as it pommels its rival, triumphing over the "opposition" in a family argument—and to rivet our gaze on *the* victory, the reality of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15). Every Lord's Day morning celebrates the victory of the first Easter. So we lift up our hearts and rejoice that

GOD GIVES US THE VICTORY

1. God's Easter victory through Jesus Christ turns enemies into allies, foes into friends. These "adversaries" include

- A. Ourselves (Remember the famous quotation from the cartoon "Pogo": "We have met the enemy, and he is us!").
 1. Romans 5:6-11 (the reality of reconciliation, especially in vv. 10-11, beautifully serves the main point of "enemies into allies").
 2. Here is tremendous comfort for times when we think, "God can never forgive me," or "God must be punishing me!"
- B. Death (vv. 55-56a).
 1. Certainly sorrow surrounds the open grave at a cemetery.
 2. Sin gave death its sting (v. 56). Jesus has borne and removed all sin on Calvary's cross. "Death is swallowed up in victory" (v. 54) means death becomes a part of the victory.
 3. So our tears at the cemetery flow from the natural sorrow of parting, not defeat.
- C. Law (v. 56b).
 1. The law gives sin its power, since sin as "rebellion" feeds upon impossible standards.
 2. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law.
 3. The law (as God's will) now serves the Christian as a "lamp unto my feet and light unto my path" (Ps 119). Here we discover, not a powerful enemy, but a godly guide to growth in Christ-like living.

Conclusion: "Therefore" (v. 58a) we receive strength and victory on the basis of all Paul that shares in 1 Corinthians 15, the strength and victory of the resurrection. Paul shares this resurrection reality with "beloved bretheren," us, whom the Lord loves with an *agape*, sacrificial, faithful love. And Paul urges us to "be" (v. 58a) or, more properly, to "keep becoming" in our Christian living.

Thomas R. Ahlersmeyer
Boca Raton, Florida

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Colossians 1:13-20

November 23, 1986

Our world is far more like the people quoted in Luke 23:35-39 than like Paul in Colossians 1:13-20. Instead of the powerful, pounding, insistent words of the epistle, "He, He, He, He, in Him, in Him, in Him," we hear the taunting words, "If you . . ." That is the world in which the congregation lives, filled mostly with taunts and only occasionally, mostly on Sunday mornings, with a few triumphs. The text, then, must confront the taunts with the triumph of Him who is Conqueror and Savior, Lord and Brother. That is the preaching task.

Introduction: The ending of the church year is so different from the ending of the calendar year. Newspapers carry articles on the ten most important stories of the year. The last calendar page is torn off, and we have to remember to write 1987 on our checks. The year may end with some rather meaningless parties, but that is no surprise, because the ending of a year really is no big deal at all. The ending of the church year, however, is a big deal! It signals the end

of the narration of the greatest story in all of history and the new beginning of the recitation of that story for people of faith. In majestic words our text tells us about Him who is the subject of the story and the object of our praise, Jesus Christ. "Here is your King!" the text declares boldly. But did you listen to the Gospel? Most of those whom it quotes taunt Him and us with His humiliation: "This is your King, nailed to a cross and dying?" Both the triumph and the taunt go together. The crown without the cross is self-crowning. The cross without the crown is defeat. A cross and a crown—that is salvation! So we look to King Jesus, for in Him we see both.

TAUNT AND TRIUMPH

- I. The taunt and the triumph of Jesus Christ, the image of God (v. 15).
 - A. The taunt
 1. Herod's taunt and the slaughter of the innocents.
 2. Satan's taunt: "If you are the Son of God..."
 3. The taunt of those under the cross: "If he be Christ, the Chosen One..."
 4. The ignorant taunt of the disciples: "Now, Lord? Now the kingdom of glory?" (Ac 1:6).
 - B. The triumph: the obedience of the perfect one to the Father.
 1. Jesus' words: God is like a Shepherd seeking His sheep and laying down His life for them, like a father welcoming home a prodigal.
 2. Scripture's word (1 Jn 1:1-3).
 - C. Taunt and triumph for the Christian.
 1. The taunt.
 - a. "Grab the crown! You deserve it!"
 - b. "Stay on your knees! You'll never be good enough!"
 2. The triumph (vv. 13, 14).
 - a. The restoration of the divine image.
 - b. The manifestation of the divine image in us ("light," "salt").
- II. The taunt and the triumph of Jesus Christ, the first-born of all creation (vv. 16).
 - A. The taunt: Where is the majesty?
 1. Every power on earth and in heaven was created through and for Him.
 2. Yet Pilate struts Rome's power, soldiers offer mere vinegar, a crowd mocks, and even thieves cry, "Do something, then!"
 - B. The triumph.
 1. Isaiah described the purpose of Christ's humiliation (Is 53:5).
 2. Christ achieved His triumph, not as Judge, but as Substitute.
 3. Christ became subject to created powers that they might no longer imprison us.
 - C. Taunt and triumph for the Christian.
 1. Many created things beckon us to crown them as king.
 - a. Such things include one's work, family, bank account, possessions, and insurance policy.
 - b. Who is the king of the life of each of us here? Who wears the crown?
 2. The triumph of King Jesus is grasped by believing in Him (Jn 1:10-13).
 - a. The thief received the crown from the cross.

- b. At end of the church year, the Christian should unclutter life to see his eternal appointment and the waiting crown.

III. The taunt and the triumph of Jesus Christ, the head of the church and all things (vv. 19-20).

- A. The taunt: Look at the body hanging on the cross!
- B. The triumph.
 - 1. His physical body rose from death.
 - 2. His spiritual body, the church, lives and moves the grows.
- C. Taunt and triumph for the Christian.
 - 1. The weakness of the church and our weakness taunt us.
 - 2. The power of Christ in us is our triumph.

Conclusion: We live daily with the taunts of the devil, the world, and our flesh. But the Christ of cross and crown is moving us toward that final Last Day of the Church Year when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"! As we wait in anticipation for that day, our Lord of cross and crown says: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

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