

JULY 1989

Professor George Richard Kraus 161

**Sanctification in the Lutheran
Confessions David P. Scaer 165**

Homiletical Studies 183



Homiletical Studies

Epistle Series A

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Again this year our whole community suffered a great loss at the death of Dr. George Kraus, who often contributed to the *CTQ*. He will be long remembered for his strong pastoral preaching, his amiable wit and keen sense of humor, and his cheerful readiness to serve without hesitation in any task assigned him. His singular leadership as Supervisor of Handicapped Ministries will also be held in thankful memory by the entire church.

We will sorely miss Dr. Kraus. But we sorrow not as those who have no hope. *Requiescat in pace, frater George.*

Donald L. Deffner,
Homiletical Editor

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 3, 1989

Romans 13:11-14

It would be dangerous for a Christian to doze and fall asleep spiritually. Advent sounds the alarm to God's people, "Wake up! Your King is coming" (see appointed introit). In this epistle lesson St. Paul is warning God's people not to get careless and sleepy while they wait for the Lord to come back.

But this text not only sounds the alarm, "Wake up!" It also reminds us that our Lord is coming, not to condemn us but to deliver and save us as Paul writes, "Our *salvation* is nearer now than when we first believed" (v. 11b). Such is also the prayer of God's people in today's Collect, "Stir up your power, O Lord, and come that. . .we may be saved by your mighty deliverance." This prayer is also echoed in the hymn of the day, "Savior of the nations, come. . .you will win victories for us over sin. Might eternal, make us whole; heal our ills of flesh and soul" (*LW* 13). And so God's people do not wait for our Lord's second Advent with dread and fear but with excited and happy anticipation even as our children excitedly anticipate Christmas Eve. The pastor should use this important Sunday, then, to encourage

God's people to wake up spiritually and to get "dressed" in their Lord by trusting in His forgiving grace.

Textual Notes: This pericope is embedded in a section which deals with everyday living—obeying government authorities, paying taxes, loving people. This reminds us that a Christian waits for our Lord's *parousia* or second Advent, not by retreating from life into some pietistic, ascetic corner but by living in the world wherever God has put him.

Verse 11: The Greek word *kairos* is a very significant eschatological term in our New Testament and worth some serious study and reflection; it is also one of those terms (like *agape*) which must be thoroughly explained since we really have no suitable corresponding word in English.

Verse 12: In "the day is near" the Greek verb translated "is near" (*eiggiken*, in the perfect tense) is the same verb Jesus used to announce His first Advent (see Mark 1:15 and parallels); Paul is reminding Christians that we should not live as though our Lord's eschatological Kingdom is way off in the future somewhere but we should understand that it is as good as already here; with our Lord's first Advent the eschaton has already broken in on us; we should be living eschatologically every moment!

The two verbs in this verse, *apothometha* ("take off") and *endusometha* ("put on"), are both aorists stressing the urgency and radical nature of our Christian faith; the day is upon us. There is no time for the Christian to rub his eyes spiritually, yawn, and push the delay button on his alarm clock; he must jump up and get ready now!

Verse 13: The verb *perepatesomen* reminds us that Christianity is a life to be lived! A Christian does not wake up from spiritual sleep just to sit and put his feet up spiritually, he has been awakened in order to "walk around" actively serving His Lord; Christianity is not just doctrine to be believed but involves also a corresponding lifestyle.

Verse 14: The verb *endusasthe* is also used by St. Paul in Galatians 3:27 to describe what happens in Holy Baptism; its use here certainly recalls baptism and reminds the Christian that he should be living out his baptism every day as Luther teaches us, "Baptism signifies that the Old Adam. . . should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die. . ." The verb *poieisthe* is imperative in the present tense—meaning literally, "Stop making provision for and resist doing so in the future."

Introduction: I was frantic. The church bells were ringing and I had overslept. I was not even dressed. And I could not find my sermon.

Fortunately this was a dream or, should I say, nightmare? Perhaps some of you have shared a similar dream where you overslept and were not ready for something. . . A far worse nightmare would be a Christian who has fallen asleep spiritually and is not ready when Jesus returns for judgement. Are you ready? Are you awake? Today the "alarm" rings; the Lord cries out:

IT IS TIME TO WAKE UP!

- I. The day is dawning.
 - A. We should understand that we are living in a very special time and a very special day—the *kairos* (v. 11).
 1. Jesus has come and done and completed God's plan of salvation for the world; the wonderful story began with the conception and birth of a very special baby in a manger and was finished with His victory over death and the grave on Easter morning. . . "At the right time (*kairos*) God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those born under the Law. . ." (Galatians 4:4).
 2. All that remains is for our risen Lord Jesus to return and bring us with Him into our heavenly home; this is His promise, "I am going to prepare a place for you. . . and I will come again and take you to myself" (John 14).
 - B. This is no time to doze spiritually for our Lord warns us that He might return at any moment to take us to our new home.
 1. See our Gospel lesson for this morning, "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:42, 44).
 2. While this day will be terrifying for those who are not ready (Introit: "They will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse"), it will not be terrifying for God's people but will be the day of their salvation (v. 11b; see also the hymn of the day, *LW* 13, and the appointed Collect).
 3. St. Paul reminds us that every second brings us closer to the wonderful day (v. 11b-12a).
- II. We need to be dressed for the occasion.
 - A. And so Paul urges us, first of all, to throw off the rags of sin. "Put aside the deeds of darkness" (v. 12).

1. These “rags” or “deeds of darkness” are sins against God’s perfect will which make it impossible for those who wear them to stand before a perfect God, the rags of “orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy” (v. 13).
 2. The world around us dresses in such rags daily. . .we must make a radical break with all this. . .“Repent!” This is the message of Advent.
- B. Dress proudly in the beautiful clothes of your Lord’s forgiveness. “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14).
1. To be clothed or dressed with the Lord Jesus means to be dressed in His perfect holiness; all sins forgiven, all imperfections and rips and snags in our lives patched and repaired, all the benefits of His “incarnation” and passion freely given us and made our own.
 2. How does one dress in Jesus? God first dressed us in our baptism as St. Paul in another place tells us, “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).
 3. Our daily life should be a regular return to our baptism as we look anew to the promises our Lord made us when we were baptized; as Luther tells us in his catechism, “Each person should look on Baptism as his daily clothing which he is to wear all the time. He should keep on practicing faith and its fruits so as to stifle the old person-man and to grow up in the new” (*Large Catechism*).
 4. In the power of our Baptism we should live out our faith daily as we “walk around” (*peripatesomen*) “decently” (v. 13) showing love, honor, and respect to those around us (see previous context).

Conclusion: So, wake up! Throw aside those ugly rags of your sin. Dress yourself daily in the clean, new clothes your Lord Jesus has given you as you trust in His grace and forgiveness first given you in your baptism. Then you will be ready at any time to stand before Him unashamed as the psalmist sings in today’s introit, “No one whose hope is in You will ever be put to shame!”

Steven C. Briel
Corcoran and Maple Grove, Minnesota

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 10, 1989

Romans 15:4-13

This text seems at first glance to break apart a larger section of Paul's letter. Most commentators would tie verse 4 more closely with what precedes it than with what follows (cf. Lenski, p. 860). While this is true, there is also a close tie between verse 4 and the following verses. Verse 4 begins on a theme of hope and verses 12 and 13 end on this same theme, thereby "framing" this section with an important Gospel motif. To further highlight this Gospel emphasis Paul uses such terms as steadfastness (*hypomoné*, vv. 4,5), comfort (*paraklésis*, vv. 4,5), mercy (v. 8), joy (v. 13) and peace (v. 13). Thus, the instruction referred to in v. 4 is primarily the instruction of the Gospel, and not the Law. For this reason *paraklésis* should be translated as *comfort* or *encouragement* (following Luther [cf. *LW* 5:278] and the Formula of Concord, SD, XI, 12 and 92) and not as *admonition* as some commentators do (cf. Lenski).

Introduction: Our lives are often motivated by hope. Hope of a good job encourages a student to study. Hope for advancement spurs a worker to do his best job. Hope for the recovery of a loved one from serious illness helps us look beyond the troubles of the day. The Christian's life of faith is also strengthened by

HOPE FROM THE GOD OF HOPE

- I. Which is given to us in God's Word.
- A. To instruct us in God's grace toward us (v. 4a).
 - B. To give us steadfastness in faith (v. 4b).
 - C. To encourage us in life (v. 4b).

By the reading and study of God's Word we can receive constant guidance and power from God for our lives and faith.

- II. Which unites us with all Christians.
- A. So that we live in harmony with one another (v. 5).
 - B. So that we might glorify God together (v. 6).
 - C. So that we might receive one another in fellowship.
 1. As Christ received us (v. 7).
 - a. The Christ who became a servant to the Jews to confirm God's promises (v. 8).
 - b. The Christ who became a servant so that the Gentiles might glorify God (vv. 9-11).
 2. So that God might be glorified (vv. 7,9-11).

All Christians share this hope in Christ. Thus, by God's power we can break barriers of race, class, and nationality in the church and bring glory to God who does this through Christ.

III. Which fills us with joy and peace.

A. This joy and peace comes only to those who believe in God's promises in Christ (v. 13a).

B. Such joy and peace comes not through our human activity, but by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13b).

Conclusion: Advent is a time of hope given to Christians looking back on Christ's first Advent and forward to his second Advent. Our God is a God of hope because the benefits of Christ's future advent are as certain as his past advent. This grants joy and peace to all who by the Spirit's power trust in Christ.

Andrew E. Steinmann
Ann Arbor, Michigan

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 17, 1989

James 5:7-10

One of the prime manifestations of the weakness of the flesh in congregational life is a theology of glory which will not rest confident in the efficacy of God's means of grace, but insists on external evidence of the Spirit's power and the church's victory. Failing to see this evidence leads to grumbling ("groaning" or "sighing") against one another. The church's glory ("valuable crop") shall not be seen, however, until the *parousia* of our Lord.

The patience (*makromia*) enjoined by the apostle is patterned after our Lord's, both in duration (1 Peter 3:20) and in grace (Matthew 18:26-27). It derives from the gracious power of the Word, the return of Christ to effect our final redemption, and the judgment which will then occur.

BE PATIENT

I Because God's Word will bear fruit.

A. The power of the Word.

1. To create new life (James 1:18).
2. To execute justice (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

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- B. The gracious activity of the Word.
 1. It is never empty of the Spirit's power to work graciously (Isaiah 55:10-11).
 2. This activity is in God's hands, not our own (the farmer waits patiently for the spring and autumn rains which are out of his control).
 - C. Impatience is both the cause and the result of ignoring the gracious power of the Word to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify Christ's church.
 1. Impatience with the Word leads to human endeavors at church growth.
 - a. Based on sociology, not theology.
 - b. Which are often void of the genuine gospel of the atonement.
 - c. Which cannot be salvaged by token reference to the means of grace.
 2. Impatience with the Word leads to legalistic manipulation of God's redeemed people, insisting on visible evidence of the success of God's Spirit.
 - a. Manufacturing "rules" which, when applied, will "measure" sanctification.
 - b. Grumbling against those who reject our legalism.
- II. Because the Lord's coming is near.
- A. Even *now* the church is going through the "tribulation."
 - B. Even *now* Satan is bound.
 - C. Even *now* Christ may return.
 1. To prove to our senses what we now possess only through faith in his Word.
 2. To relieve his church from her burden of suffering and to glorify her with himself.
- III. Because the Judge is standing at the door.
- A. "We believe that he shall come to be our Judge".
 1. Our Redeemer, who has bought the field and produces the crop, will judge us by the gospel.
 2. His patience is seen in his delay so that this same gospel might protect those to whom we preach it on the day of judgment.
 - B. Impatience.
 1. Derives from our lack of confidence in the Word.
 2. Yields grumbling against one another.
 3. Which leads us into judgment against one another.
 4. Which is the usurpation of God's sole prerogative.
 5. Which is idolatry.
 - C. Let God's judgment against such presumption expose you and pronounce you guilty.

- D. Take refuge in the blood of Christ which has set you free.
1. Proclaimed to you from this pulpit.
 2. Pronounced upon you in the absolution.
 3. Joined to you in your baptism.
 4. Given to you in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Conclusion: How did the prophets persevere? By finding, deep within their righteous souls, that strength of heroism available only to the few? No, but by simple confidence in the truth of God's promise. His Word *does* render us righteous before him and is powerful to save. Christ's appearance is at hand, and he shall relieve us of all suffering. Our Lord *will* judge, and we who are covered by his innocence will find eternal joy. This is how we can endure with patience until that glorious day!

Rolf Preus
Racine, Wisconsin

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 24, 1989

Romans 1:1-7

Paul in these words links inseparably his call to apostleship and the burden of the apostolic ministry. As one "separated unto the Gospel of God" and as a "slave" of Jesus Christ, Paul has declared Jesus to the Gentile nations. Jesus Christ, long promised by prophetic writers in the sacred Scriptures, was according to the flesh a descendant of David, but also declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. We the church, called of God to be His saints, have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 7:14) with its promise of the Child to be born of a virgin and named Emmanuel, find fulfillment in the Gospel for this day which depicts the birth of the virgin-born Son who is to be named Jesus and is indeed the Emmanuel-God with us. The introit exhorts:

You heavens above rain down righteousness;
let the clouds shower it down.
Let the earth open wide,
let salvation spring up.

This exhortation is dramatically played out when the Christchild is born and heaven and earth are joined in the incarnate Son of God. This is summarized in the text. On this fourth Sunday of Advent, as we anticipate another Christmas feast, Paul's words are for us a summons to celebration, a celebration of Christ's incarnation.

CELEBRATION OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION

- I. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is Promised.
 - A. He is promised beforehand through the prophets and the Holy Scriptures (v. 2).
 1. He is true man "born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (v. 3).
 2. He is true God "declared as such by the resurrection from the dead" (v. 4).
 - B. The incarnation an absolute necessity.
 1. According to God's redemptive plan.
 2. Brought on by the tragedy of the human dilemma in humankind's inability to do anything about it.
- II. Through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ Grace and Peace are Secured.
 - A. The incarnation, the perfect obedience, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are two aspects of the same event.
 - B. Paul is separated unto this Gospel to bring about the obedience of faith among the people of the Gentiles (v. 5).
 - C. We are the beloved of God called as His saints. By God's grace the peace of God is our (v. 7).

Conclusion: In preparation for the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ both in celebration of His first coming, when indeed the heavens above rained down righteousness and the clouds showered it down, but also, in anticipation of His second coming, when He will come to receive us unto Himself, may our hearts be prepared and opened wide in order that by God's grace salvation spring up. No more fitting preparation could take place than that indicated in the collect for the day "Stir up you power O Lord and come among us with great might; and because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever."

Norbert H. Mueller

CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25, 1989

Hebrews 1:1-9

This text is not quickly digested; it contains a number of deeper theological statements (Lenski's exposition is excellent). How does the preacher unravel these verses and present them to the hearers without his sermon being "too heavy," "too deep," or disjointed? The challenge, of course, is to find a unifying theme which also brings out the unique character of the passage (note the author's description of Jesus as an heir, or as one who has inherited, in verses 2 and 4). Another question arises: how does Hebrew 1:1-9 relate to Christmas? A key point in this regard is that throughout these verses (except for the phrase "through whom he made the universe" in verse 2) the author is speaking about the *incarnate* Son of God ("Son" appears in verses 2, 3, 5 and 8). According to his human nature Jesus "inherited" a name (verse 4); what was that name? The answer is supplied by verse 5.

Introduction: At Christmas time we focus on Jesus our fellow human being, who entered the world in the way we all did—as a little baby. As we picture the scene on that first Christmas, and imagine the infant lying in the manger, that little child who later grows to manhood in Nazareth, let us keep in mind who this person really is. For Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, the man from Nazareth is

THE SUPREME HEIR

1. He is the supreme heir because of the name he inherited (v. 4).
 - A. The name he inherited is "Son"—that is, "Son of God."
 1. Angels and humans (believers) in a generic sense can be called "sons of God."
 2. However, the name "Son" attached to Christ indicates that he is the Second Person of the Trinity.
 - B. Christ inherited this name by the personal union of his human nature with the Second Person of the Trinity.
 1. That the Savior, the promised Deliverer, would be called "Son" according to his human nature was predicted in the Old Testament (v. 5).
 2. Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is very God (v. 8—called "God"); he is "the radiance of God's glory," "the exact representation of his being" (v. 3).

3. As the incarnate Son of God Christ is to be worshipped not only in his deity but also in his humanity (v. 6).
- C. Christ inherited this name by virtue of the work he did in and through his human nature in union with his divine nature.
 1. No other human being, no angel could have carried out the work Christ accomplished and so inherited this name "Son."
 2. Christ carried out his work, he accomplished God's will by means of the sacrifice of his body, the shedding of his blood.
 3. Christ's work accomplished "cleansing of sins" (v. 3).
- II. He is the supreme heir because he has inherited "all things" (v. 2).
 - A. Christ as a man inherited all things after his saving work was completed.
 1. Christ, according to his human nature, was exalted far above all his followers ("companions," v. 9), above all angels (v. 4), to the "right hand of the Majesty" in heaven (v. 3).
 2. As the heir, or inheritor, of all things, Christ, as both man and God, rules all things (v. 8), he sustains all things (v. 3).
 - B. Christ, the supreme heir, the God-man, has a just and eternal reign (v. 8).
 1. His will and purposes are being fulfilled.
 2. He controls and governs all things for the good of his people, the church.

Conclusion: People of God, as you in your hearts today go to Bethlehem and approach the manger, look at that baby with joy, wonder, and awe. For you are seeing Jesus, the supreme heir.

Walter A. Maier III
River Forest, Illinois

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

December 31, 1989

Galatians 4:4-7

St. Paul's straightforward outline of the action which God took to save mankind "at the fullness of time," does not dispel the enigma behind God's dramatic intervention into human history with the

incarnation of *Jesus Christ*. It is the task of the preacher to describe both the earthly reasonableness of the substitutionary action of Christ, yet at the same time impress upon the congregation the tremendous wonder of God's love behind it all. And as a further expression of God's love, the text also portrays an offer of an intimate yet exalted standing for the redeemed by their adoption into the very family of God.

Introduction: It was the time when even the most "civilized" nation in the world was nailing people to crosses. It was the time when, if we were God, we would have destroyed the world. Yet it was the time when God looked at the world and said, "I shall send my Son, so that He can get nailed to one of those crosses." It was a cruel and brutal time—a time in which the fires of human wickedness illuminated the deprivation of the world for all to see. Nevertheless, in the light of the star of Bethlehem we see the great mystery shining forth. For such a time as this was

A TIME FOR GOD'S LOVE

- I. God launched His rescue during the time of our slavery (v. 3).
 - A. For us it was a time of helplessness.
 1. The basic rules of the fallen universe applied to us (v. 3).
 2. All our efforts were doomed to futility (Romans 8:20).
 - B. God finds each of us helpless in spiritual death (Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 2:13).
 1. We were estranged from God (James 4:4).
 2. We were unable to save our doomed souls.
 3. We are inclined to choose slavery (vv. 8-9).

Transition: Ours was a desperate condition and, in God's wisdom, He judged that it was time for Him to take dramatic action.

- II. God determined it was the time to act in our place (v. 4).
 - A. Christ put Himself in subjection to the Law (Matthew 5:17-18).
 1. The work of Christ was to "give Himself" (1:3).
 2. He did what we were unable to do.
 - B. Christ put Himself under the punishment of God for sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
 1. The work of Christ took Him to the cross.
 2. He died as the sacrifice which makes atonement between us and God (1 Peter 3:18).

Transition: Having taken drastic action to redeem us from disaster, God's love further benefits us by raising us to the status of sons and daughters of God.

III. God offers us His love to the end of time and beyond (vv. 5-7).

- A. We are brought out from "under the law" by our adoption (v. 5).**
 - 1. We are given an intimate position in relation to God (vv. 28-31).
 - 2. We serve God as devoted children serve a loving father (5:1,13; Colossians 3:23-24).
- B. Ours is the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).**
 - 1. God gives us the Spirit of His Son to enter our hearts (v. 6; Romans 8:9-11).
 - 2. We benefit from our position as heirs and heiresses of God's tremendous estate (Ephesians 1:11-14,18).

Conclusion: Although it is seldom used as a Christmas carol, Martin Luther's hymn "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice" wonderfully portrays the Christmas message as conveyed in today's epistle reading, "He spoke to his beloved son: 'Tis time to have compassion. Then go, bright jewel of My crown, and bring to man salvation; From sin and sorrow set him free, slay bitter death for him that he may live with Thee forever'. . . The Son obeyed His Father's will, was born of virgin mother."

Jonathan C. Naumann
Ruislip, England

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 7, 1990

Acts 10:34-38

Introduction: The sin of partiality has forever been a product of the sinful flesh, also of the Christian. Read James 2:1-11 or Galatians 2:11-14 for examples of this sin in pristine Christianity. Acts 10, 11, and 15 are likewise speaking of this malady. Through the ages it has constantly plagued nations, races, political parties, the sexes, families, and the church. This Epiphany text offers us the cure for this sin which so easily and frequently besets us.

THE SIN OF PARTIALITY AND ITS CURE

I. The sin of partiality.

Like all sin, partiality harms our relationship with God, our fellowman, and also ourselves.

A. Partiality amounts to a denial of the true God.

1. The Bible describes God as impartial. This principle is found in both Testaments (Deuteronomy 10:17, Matthew 5:45, 1 Peter 1:17, and v. 34 of our text). God, unlike sinful man, is not fickle or guilty of skewed judgment nor does He treat people selfishly.
2. His Law and Gospel are impartial. Read Colossians 3:10-11 and Galatians 3:28. We can know God only through His Word, Law, and Gospel. The Law requires thoughts, words, and deeds which are the same for nations, sexes, etc. There are no favorites. The Gospel asks no questions about differences among people. It is the great leveler among men.

B. Partiality amounts to wrong attitudes to people.

1. We have already mentioned Acts 10, 11, and 15 and Galatians 2:11-14 as examples of partiality by Christians toward Christians. Note how Paul enjoins Christians in Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 3:25 about avoiding this sin.
2. It develops a wrong attitude toward self. When a Christian yields to this sin, he is trying to play God. He is catering to his own selfish desires. Think of the Pharisee in the Temple (Luke 18:11-12). Actually he despised man and God. He was blind to the true nature of God, the true nature of self, and the great need of his neighbor, in this case the publican.

II. The cure for partiality.

We remind ourselves of the nature of the sinful flesh of the Christian (Romans 7:18). Christians must be made aware of sinfulness and sin. God did this for Peter and the early Christians (Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 10, 11, and 15). With them we confess our sins of favoritism. But now comes the cure, the balm of Gilead.

A. It is necessary to fear God (v. 35). This is the Old Testament way of saying that we must believe in the proper cure. The Jews around Cornelius attested to his faith (v. 22).

1. Cornelius believed in the *promised* Messiah. Read Luther (*LW*, 26, pp. 209-211) for an excellent commentary on our text. The Jews who came to Peter were describing a Cornelius who was *already* a believer. In a sense, a believing Gentile became a model for Peter, an Apostle.

Verses 34-35 clearly show that Peter's faith overcame his own partiality and that he recognized the true faith of Cornelius, a Gentile.

2. We believe in the Messiah who *has* come. Verses 36-38 of our text give us a mixture of items not yet known and already known to Cornelius. In verse 36 Peter stresses the fact that Jesus is Lord of all. He has brought the peace of God to Israel. In verses 37-38 Peter assures Cornelius that this Jesus is very God of very God. (See the *Formula of Concord* [Tappert, p. 575, par. 36] for the correct understanding of "God was with Him.") Peter is assuring Cornelius that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
- B. This faith produces doing what is right (v. 35).
1. The Jews had attested to Cornelius' Christian living (v. 22). Peter acknowledges this (v. 35). This Gentile's faith and life were a model for God's covenant people. They remind one of Matthew 5:16. He glorified God by his living.
 2. We, too, must be diligent about impartial obedience (Colossians 3:10-11).

Conclusion: Like Cornelius and Peter let us repent of our sins, believe the Gospel, and live lives without fear or favor. Such believing and living overcomes partiality.

Harold H. Buls

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 14, 1990

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to God always for you. . ."

With these words the Apostle Paul begins this letter to the congregation at Corinth, to saints of God, sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Corinth had at one time been an impressive and important seaport and commercial center, built on a narrow strip of land with the Aegean Sea on one side and the Adriatic on the other. The invading Romans had razed the city to the ground in 146 B.C. About one hundred years later, Julius Caesar established a new colony on the **same ground**, calling it *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*. In 27 B.C.

this new Corinth was designated the capital of the new senatorial province of Achaëa. Soon Corinth was again a thriving city which attracted not only Romans but also Jews, and together with them, Greeks and Orientals and their strange and often morally depraved religions.

Paul arrived at Corinth probably in the Fall of 51 A.D. He sowed the Gospel seed, beginning at the synagogue, and with the aid of Aquila and Priscilla and his co-workers Silas and Timothy, a sizable congregation was gathered around the Gospel and the Gospel Means of Grace within a year and a half.

Now Paul had moved on to Ephesus. Word came to him of great troubles in the congregation. There was a friction, contention, and schism in the congregation. At least four major factions had been organized. In addition, the congregation was having much trouble over the question of its relationship to the rest of the community, its culture and morality. Many were coming to regard the Lord's Supper as a religious activity akin to the sacred meals of the pagans and the Resurrection of our Lord as a mythical statement of man's longing for eternal survival. All this comprises the content of 1 Corinthians.

And yet Paul begins his letter by looking beyond what the evidence of eye and ear can tell. He considers what God has done for us in Christ. Proper Christian rebuke must come in its proper time and place, but first must come the remembrance of all that God has done for us in Christ. Paul reckons not on the basis of what we or the members of the congregation at Corinth have done, but focuses his attention on the righteousness of Christ which God imputes to us for the sake of faith.

Faith always believes against the evidence. And so we should think of ourselves and of the church on the basis of the glorious, forgiving Word of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not on the basis of external evidences. The Gospel always calls us back to the cross and the resurrection (these are the two central themes of 1 Corinthians). The Gospel calls us to faith that God keeps his Word and does what he says it does, that Christian life and works may come forth naturally and faithfully from our faith in him. What joy there is in this knowledge. Thanks be to God for his grace and mercy in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

THE FAITH GIVEN TO THOMAS

- I. The Epiphany season has to do with evidences of God's activity in Christ.
 - A. "Faith believes **against** the evidence," as Luther reminds us.

- B. Thanksgiving flows forth from a fruitful heart—a heart in which God's Word has done its work.
- II. Paul gives thanks for God's gracious work in the Corinthian congregation.
- A. The unique history of Corinth.
1. 146 B.C. Its destruction.
 2. 27 B.C. Its reestablishment.
 3. 51 A.D. Paul's ministry.
- B. The special problems of Corinth.
- III. Faith sees above the outward circumstances and remembers all that was done.

Charles J. Evanson
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THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 21, 1990

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Throughout the church today, one hears the same lament over and over again—what's wrong with preaching? A brief survey of sermons reveals that what is missing is Christ himself, especially a clear and weekly proclamation of Christ crucified. This sad condition would cause the apostle Paul to launch into a harangue like the one in his first letter to the Corinthians, particularly in those first two foundational chapters.

The preacher for this third Sunday after the Epiphany may want to follow Paul's direction and talk about *the content* and *the style* of preaching. The sad state of preaching may have more to do with the theological darkness that has come over the church than a sudden crisis in the style of preaching. The other two lessons suggest that Epiphany is the season to see the light of Christ shine in the darkness. In both Isaiah and Matthew, "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." If Christ is not preached, then our preaching is in darkness. Are we a people who walk in darkness—who dwell in a land of deep darkness? Are we a people who, through preaching Christ, have seen a great light—who have had the light shine upon us?

In Paul's day, there were preachers who were more eloquent than he was. Through their human rhetoric and preaching style, they were

able to persuade some in the Corinthian congregation to move away from Christ and his cross. Methodologically, these men were good preachers, maybe even great ones, and they appealed to the human desire to be tantalized by a moving speech, even if the content was trivial or even bad. Some of these preachers developed their own personal following, an idolatrous kind of cult, that complemented the tendency among the Corinthians to create divisions coinciding with those who baptized them, i.e., a baptismal clique for Paul, and one for Apollos, and one for Cephas, and one for Christ.

Does this sound familiar? How many churches develop allegiances to pastors with dynamic preaching styles and charismatic personalities? How many people identify themselves as members of Pastor Perfect's church instead of Trinity Lutheran? Today's religious and secular culture tells us that there is a particular style of speaking that people like. But is not Paul telling us that, even in his generation, there was a style of preaching that was antithetical to the cross of Christ because it emptied the cross of its power? Paul's words prove, once again, that content must supersede style, that substance is more important than eloquence. As one homiletics professor said to his students, "I hope all of you are good preachers, but none of you are great ones." This sermon must be seen in the context of the rest of 1 Corinthians.

PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

- I. Paul cautions against eloquent wisdom characteristic of the age (1:17).
 - A. The wisdom of this age empties the cross of its power (1:17).
 1. Eloquent speech draws attention to itself and away from the cross.
 2. Rhetorical devices create false allegiance to the preacher's style.
 - B. The wisdom of this age is to be destroyed by the preaching of the cross (1:18ff.).
 1. The wisdom of God is Christ crucified (1:20-25).
 - a. A stumbling block to the Jews (1:23).
 - b. Folly to Gentiles (1:23).
 2. Faith rests on the power of God (the cross), not the wisdom of men (2:1-5).
- II. Paul cautions that individualism and cultural eloquence creates divisions within the congregation (1:10-11).
 - A. The Corinthian congregation was split over baptismal allegiances.
 1. Preaching Christ crucified (the gospel!) precedes baptism.

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2. Baptism is as important as preaching, but flows from it.
 3. Baptism does not divide the community, but unites it (10:1ff.; 12:12-13).
 4. The Lord's Supper is an expression of this unity (11:17ff.)
- B. The Corinthian congregation must focus on content and not on style.
1. Christ is the subject of every sermon.
 - a. A proclamation of the atonement of the world's sins (15:3).
 - b. A proclamation of the resurrection as victory over death (15:51ff.).
 2. The Gospel predominates in every sermon (Walther, *Law and Gospel*, pp. 403-413).
 - a. It is a proclamation of salvation in Christ crucified and risen.
 - b. It is a proclamation of Christ's presence through Word and Sacrament.

A.A. Just, Jr.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

January 28, 1990

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

This text is a practical application of Paul's dissertation in verses 18-25 on the wisdom and power of God over against that of the world's. His readers lived in a society which prized human wisdom and power (we are no different today) and in the preceding verses he questions them and instead holds high the foolishness and weakness of the crucified Christ as being true wisdom and power. Here, then, is the call to live in God's power which uses the lowly and despised to give us what the world in its wisdom and power cannot.

Introduction: It is difficult to live the Christian life. That is because we live in a world and society with a different set of values and goals than those of us who follow Jesus are called to have. To live our lives in Christ we draw power not from human wisdom or strength, but from all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. That is why we

BOAST IN THE LORD

- I. God gives us His power.
 - A. Power for life is offered elsewhere.
 1. Our society is no different than it was in Corinth. Human wisdom and economic power are used to influence human affairs. People boast in their powers and attract others to them who want to succeed.
 2. Also in the church. Large numbers in membership and finance, dynamic clergy and programs, beautiful buildings and community status attract us. Their "success" can give content and meaning to our lives so that we boast in them when, in fact, they are not what give us spiritual power.
 - B. God's power is in the cross.
 1. It is not influential as the world counts influence, power and success. The "foolish and weak things" in verse 27 refer to Christ crucified (v. 23) who evidenced anything but success and influence in His death.
 2. Yet it is the cross that "nullifies the things that are" (v. 28). Christ's death and resurrection wipe out the power of evil, sin and death, not human wisdom or strength. God's power through Christ alone gives us true life and worth.
 - C. We are called to trust in the power of the cross. By the Spirit's power we give up our claims to wisdom and strength and see ourselves as not wise and influential, even by human standards (v. 26) but as people who, despite our sins, are called by God to live in His power.
- II. So that we can live in Him and unto Him.
 - A. We then boast that in Christ God gives us righteousness, holiness and redemption, v. 30. That means nothing to those who rely on their own wisdom and strength. But we who believe value the wisdom of God who is Christ, who makes us right in His sight, enables us to strive for holiness, grants surety that we have been redeemed to belong to God.
 - B. We boast that our lives are renewed in Christ to live for Him and others. God's power in us is not just a theory, but a way to live with true success and influence. It is not a power over people, but with people. The Beatitudes, today's Gospel Lesson, are Jesus' call to live in God's power in humility, gentleness and forgiveness toward others. That is power and influence! It builds others up, rather than dominating and destroying them.

Conclusion: Jesus says that we are “blessed” when we live in God’s wisdom. We might be overwhelmed by what God calls us to be and to do. But in His power we are and we can. Our boasting gives Him the glory that we are so blessed.

Luther G. Strasen
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FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

February 4, 1990

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

The pericope which forms the Epistle for Epiphany 5 must be seen in light of the whole context of Paul’s *theologia crucis*. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Apostle states his main thesis: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” From this main thesis Paul argues his case for the cross by appealing to “the word of the cross” (1:20-2:5) and the wisdom of God which is imparted through that Word (2:6-16). God’s wisdom and power are *cruce tectum*—hidden under the cross. God works in opposites! Note the comment of Hermann Sasse: “By putting to death He brings to life: This we learn to believe under the cross of Christ. Our eyes see there only the suffering, the weakness, the agony of being forsaken by God, the disgrace, the crushing triumph of evil, and the victory of death. But for faith all these things are only the *visibilia Dei*, what God lets us see. Hidden deep within it all is the great event of the reconciliation between God and mankind, the victory of the world’s Redeemer, which must be believed against all appearances and against our reason’s doubting question, ‘How can this possibly be?’” (Hermann Sasse, “The Theology of the Cross,” in *We Confess Jesus Christ*, translated by Norman Nagel, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984, p. 51).

In our text, Paul personalizes the *theologia crucis*, that is, he shows how the foolishness of the cross is at once the content and method of his approach to the Corinthians. Peter Stuhlmacher writes “Paul himself, the apostle of the crucified and risen Christ becomes the proclamation of the cross for his congregation, in that in his life of suffering there congregations encounter him as the primary living commentary on his theology of the cross” (Peter Stuhlmacher, “Eighteen Theses on Paul’s Theology of the Cross,” in *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology*, translated by Everett Kalin, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, p. 159). Paul came

to Corinth clothed in weakness (see 2 Corinthians 10:10; 12:7-10), yet it was in that weakness that the power of God was made manifest so that faith might rest secure in the power of God rather than in the "wisdom of man" (2:5). As Victor Pfitzner puts it, "Paul's weakness served the course of the Gospel" (Victor Pfitzner, *Chi Rho Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982, p. 43). The preacher must let Thesis 20 of Luther's Heidelberg Theses serve as his motto: "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross" (*Luther's Works*, 31, p. 40).

Introduction: Does the cross contradict Christmas? Is Good Friday just one more illustration of the lyrics of a contemporary song that "the good die young"? How do you tie together the worship of the Magi with the mockery of the soldiers in Pilate's court? Where is the voice of the Father that proclaimed Jesus to be His beloved Son at His Baptism when that Son hangs alone on the cross?

The cross is not the negation of the Lord who was made known to the Magi by the leading of a star, revealed as only Son of the Father in His baptism, and manifested as Lord in His miracles. Rather the cross (and the preaching of the word of the cross) is the culmination of Epiphany. The cross is the lens which brings the light of Epiphany into distinct focus.

THREE EPIPHANIES IN CORINTH

- I. The Epiphany of Paul, the Weak Apostle.
 - A. Paul is manifestly weak in the eyes of the world.
 1. Paul lacks the style of the slick evangelists.
 2. Paul's proclamation lacks the philosophical content of the Greek intellectuals.
 - B. In Paul's weakness, the power of the Gospel is made manifest to the glory of God.
 1. God, not Paul, is the author and source of the Gospel.
 2. Paul's weakness is the arena where God's power is put on display.
- II. The Epiphany of Jesus Christ Crucified.
 - A. The cross is Paul's sole message.
 1. Paul proclaims what he is given to preach, "the testimony of God."
 2. God packages His power in His Word.
 - B. God's plan for the world's redemption is executed in the cross of His Son.
 1. In the weakness of the cross (suffering, death, God-forsakeness), God triumphs over sin, death, and hell.

2. The cross is not a cruel joke of fate, but the God-designed means of achieving the world's salvation.

III. The Epiphany of Wisdom and Power in and through the Spirit's Word.

- A. The organ of faith is the ear, that is to say, that faith comes by hearing the Word of the Cross.
 1. God's Word created the universe (Psalm 33:6). That same Word of power creates faith; thus a Christian is, in fact, a new creation.
 2. Through the Word, God imparts the wisdom of the cross which makes us wise unto salvation.
- B. Our faith is anchored in God's Word and not in things considered outstanding or spectacular by human reason.
 1. God used a lowly virgin named Mary as His instrument in giving the world the gift of His Son.
 2. God continues to use lowly means such as words inscribed in the Holy Scriptures, the mouth of a man called and ordained to speak in His stead, the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar to create and sustain faith.

Conclusion: The radiant light of Epiphany is not eclipsed by the dark days of Lent. It is through the shame of the cross that God makes His glory known to the world. It is the glory of our God that He saves sinners by giving His Son to suffer and die on the tree of the cross. "Even in darkness light dawns" (Introit) for those who have learned with the Apostle to know nothing but Jesus Christ crucified!

John T. Pless
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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

February 11, 1990

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

Wisdom, whether spiritual or earthly, is an important possession. Wisdom is the theme of St. Paul's first section of 1 Corinthians, and the same theme is repeated throughout the Book. What the Wisdom of the Gospel gains for us is further explained in the later chapters.

"Wisdom" is the first and most emphatic word of the text (v. 6) in the original text. ("Wisdom we speak among the mature. . .") This wisdom has these characteristics: 1) not of this age; 2) not of the rulers

of this age; 3) hidden or mysterious; 4) eternal, or ordained before the ages; 5) for our glory; 6) connected with and supporting Jesus Christ; 7) revealed by the Holy Spirit; 8) concerns spiritual things or realities; 9) is communicated in words taught by the Holy Spirit; and 10) cannot be received by natural man (v. 14).

People cannot find or know this wisdom of God without the Holy Spirit working through the Means of Grace—Word and Sacrament. However, many today are seeking spiritual wisdom elsewhere. They seek methods, leaders, books, etc., which will lead them down the path to greater and greater wisdom and spiritual power. These paths, instead of taking them to glory, end in slavery and in destruction, and finally in damnation in hell, as verse 6 says of the rulers of this age, that they are coming to nothing.

The wisdom of God (or wisdom of the Gospel) is of great importance, for it alone can lead us to glory. But this wisdom is given and becomes ours only by the working of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. Our means to this goal is sticking with the holy Word of God. There alone we learn of the Gospel—the love and grace of the true Almighty God. Through hearing the Word and receiving the Sacrament we are given the wisdom, we are brought to Jesus Christ, we are justified before God, we receive forgiveness and the sonship relationship with God, we are instilled with the Holy Spirit, and become communicators of this wisdom of the Gospel.

In verse 12, St. Paul claims that we have received the spirit which is from God. This is not the Holy Spirit, but is our true, renewed spirit. The term “spirit who is *from* God” never is used of the Holy Spirit. See Lenski.

Goal: Warn people against the false wisdom of syncretistic and universalistic spiritualism and teach them to seek the wisdom of the Gospel, the wisdom that leads to salvation and everlasting life.

Malady: Our God can only be known as our loving and gracious Father through the Word of the Gospel. The world can show us only a god who is angry and must be appeased through our hard labor and suffering, and who in the end leads to nowhere. The wisdom of the world leads people to do immoral, unhealthy, ungodly projects, which they think lead them to deeper and deeper spiritual enlightenment, but which actually destroys them.

Means: The Word in the Scriptures clearly contrasts the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of God is hidden from natural man, and is revealed only by God the Holy Spirit. We seek the remedy to our spiritual ignorance and folly in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

EDUCATION IN THE SECRET WISDOM OF GOD

Introduction: Secret knowledge is a valuable commodity. People have always sought out the secrets of the world, and today many are seeking the secrets of the universe. We love to keep secrets, and to keep them secure, so that others have to pay a high price to be let in on the secret. The true wisdom of God, however, is freely revealed and offered in the Gospel. We are not indoctrinated in it secretly, but instead we speak it openly and clearly to all people.

- I. The hidden wisdom of the world brings to nothing.
 - A. Hidden wisdom might make one a ruler in this age.
 1. Wisdom is a requisite for being a ruler.
 - a. The people of the world foolishly follow what appears to be wisdom.
 - b. God gives wisdom to his rulers, for example, Solomon.
 2. But wisdom does not insure that one will rule.
 - a. The wisdom of the world changes day after day.
 - b. The wisdom of God is not valued by the world.
 - B. But the wisdom of the world ends in futility (vanity of vanities).
 1. The price of wordly wisdom will destroy.
 - a. It will destroy one physically.
 - b. It will destroy one spiritually.
 2. The acquisition of wordly wisdom gains nothing that lasts.
 - a. It does not unite one with God, the Creator and Ruler.
 - b. It does not save one from everlasting damnation.
- II. The wisdom of God leads to glory.
 - A. The wisdom of God is founded in the Lord of Glory.
 1. It is hidden in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
 2. It is brought to glory in the resurrection.
 - B. By the wisdom of God we will be glorified.
 1. By it we are united with God.
 2. By it we will be taken into everlasting life.
- III. The wisdom of God demands to be revealed openly.
 - A. The Holy Spirit reveals the righteousness and love and grace of God. (See John 14:26)
 1. He does not do so immediately, for that only reveals an angry God.
 2. He does so through the Word and Sacrament (the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

- B. The Holy Spirit calls us to speak the wisdom of God publicly.
1. We speak spiritual realities, not shadows or imaginations.
 2. We speak openly to all, so that all might be saved.

Conclusion: Public education is sometimes touted as the salvation of our civilization. Public education in worldly wisdom, though most of the wise of the world keep their wisdom hidden, still would not be such a great help. We need clear education in the Gospel, the wisdom of God.

Thomas G. Bartels
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SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

February 18, 1990

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

In the first part of the Epistle, St. Paul has clearly expounded what the saving Gospel is—the wisdom of God in saving sinners by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Having laid this groundwork, Paul then continues to speak about the place and function of the office of the holy ministry (*diakonoi*, 1 Corinthians 3:5).

Paul here notes that God's ministers cannot be heads of rival cliques. They really are God's full-time servants. They are fellow-workers in the Kingdom. They are accountable to God for their service. They are to be examples to the flock of God (1 Corinthians 3:4). What these ministers bring is Jesus Christ—the Foundation of the Church. The Church is edified by the Gospel ministry God performs through them. This is to instill an attitude that trusts God's Wisdom (Christ and the Word), rather than the wisdom of the world.

Introduction: Almost everyone has an ideal dream house—a cottage on Cape Cod, a cabin on a lake in the north woods, a palatial mansion on 20 acres in the suburbs, a condo on Lake Michigan, etc. Well God gives us an ideal spiritual dream house. That dream house is the Holy Christian Church. It has a unique foundation. It is a unique building. Those who live in it should be instilled with a unique attitude.

 THE ETERNAL DREAM HOUSE

- I. The Perfect Foundation (*themelios*).
 - A. Jesus Christ is the Perfect Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10; 2:2), for He is God incarnate (Matthew 1:12), sinless (1 Peter 1:18-19), the only Savior from sin (Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12).
 - B. Christ is brought through the ministry of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), men like Paul, Apollos, and Peter.
 - C. The Church's defects should not be attributed to the Perfect Foundation, (Christ) but rather to the shortcomings of the sinful human beings who make up the Church.
 - D. To try and build the Dream House (the Church) on any other foundation (the reputation of human beings, human works, etc.) is wrong. On any other foundation than Christ, the house will fall (Matthew 7:24-27).
 - E. The Perfect Foundation (Christ) is brought to people through the ministry of Word and Sacrament (1 Corinthians 4:1).
- II. The Dream House—God's Holy Temple—The Holy Christian Church.
 - A. The Holy Spirit builds this Dream House (1 Corinthians 3:16).
 - B. This He does through the ministry of Word and Sacrament (1 Corinthians 4:1; 11:17-34; Matthew 28:18-20).
 - C. This Dream House is holy in God's sight, it does not have spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27).
 - D. Because we are still sinful and yet God's holy and righteous people, we often forget our holiness and commit sins like jealousy, have a divisive party spirit, fail to co-operate with our fellow Christian even in our local congregations, etc.
 - E. Here the Holy Spirit calls us to repentance and to remember who we are (God's holy people) and whose we are (forgiven children of God). We are individually living temples of God's Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and also we are corporately that living Dream House, God's Holy Temple, the Holy Christian Church (1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Peter 2:5).
- III. The spirit of those in the Dream House.
 - A. What this spirit is not:
 1. Is is not the spirit of—worldly wisdom (lording it over the Word, saying, "Not God's will but mine be done," chasing fleshly lusts. 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:5; etc.)
 2. It is not allegiance to human beings, nor is it the party spirit (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).
 3. These sinful spirits need the application of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11).

B. What this spirit is:

1. The sanctified response to God's grace in Christ comes from knowing we are Christ's. (He is the Head, we are the Body—claimed in Baptism, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; 10:1-5. No one is able to snatch us out of His hand, John 10:28-29.)
2. This helps us to see that all is ours—the world (Christians will rule as kings and priests, Revelation 5:10); life (Christ is the Life of the world, in Him we have abundant life, John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25-26; 14:6); death (Christ has conquered death, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58); things present and things to come (Christ rules all and has conquered all, Romans 8:31-39).
3. Christ is the Father's only begotten, chosen one (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 10:30). By grace through faith in Christ, we are God's dear children and will live in His Dream House for eternity.

Armand J. Boehme
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TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

February 25, 1990

2 Peter 1:16-21

Introduction: "I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes!" That is what we say when we're skeptical about something. When you see something with your own eyes you feel pretty confident that it is for real, that it's genuine, and you can put your trust in it. That is what Peter is saying in our epistle lesson for today. He is saying that his message is absolutely believable and true. In fact, he says that we even have

A MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY

- I. He tells an eyewitness account of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done.
 - A. Peter was there on the holy mountain of transfiguration (v. 18).
 1. He saw with his own eyes the glory of Jesus Christ as God (v. 16).

2. He heard with his own ears the voice of the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17).
- B. He was there when the Lord of Life gave Himself in death.
1. He gives witness of the fact that Jesus died on the cross for our sins (v. 9).
 2. He rose again to conquer the power of sin and death.
 - a. Peter has seen the victorious and resurrected Lord with his own eyes.
 - b. He gives testimony that the things he writes are the absolute truth.
 - c. He does not allow "cleverly devised myths" in bringing the word of life as the false teachers of his time were trying to do.

Transition: In fact, Peter says, his testimony is even more trustworthy than the fact that he saw them with his own eyes because these are the words and promises of God Himself given through His apostles and prophets.

- II. We have "a more sure word of prophecy" that is given in the pages of Holy Scripture.
- A. It is that sure word because this word of prophecy "never had its origin in the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (v. 21).
1. In an age when the "hand is quicker than the eye" we have a sure and certain Word of God.
 - a. It is even more certain than if we had seen it ourselves.
 - b. The Holy Spirit has convinced us of its truth as it is centered in Jesus Christ.
 2. We too have "witnessed" the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as we have been joined with Him by our baptism (Romans 6:1-7).
 - a. When everything seems to be in doubt around us we can have our faith in Jesus.
 - b. He is the center of that more sure word; it testifies of Him.
- B. "We will do well to pay attention to it." It is God's Word of absolute truth in an age of relativism.
1. In an uncertain world a more sure word assures us that our sins are forgiven.
 2. In an uncertain world a more sure word assures us in the midst of sickness that our Jesus never leaves us or forsakes us.

3. In an uncertain world a more sure word assures us in the midst of temptation that God does have a will for our life and will empower us to live for Him.

Conclusion: In God's Word we have a solid rock in the midst of a sea of uncertainty and doubt. That word points us to Christ. He is our certain hope. In God's Word we have "a more sure word of prophecy."

John C. Kaiser
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FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

March 4, 1990

Romans 5:12-19

In the text and immediate context, the words *one*, *many*, and *all* occur several times. Their meaning and relationship must be clearly understood and distinguished for a faithful exposition of the Gospel. In this text, the word *one* is contrasted with both *many* and *all*. In this context, the word *many* may be thought of as a synonym of the word *all*.

For a thorough study of this text, it would be prudent for the expositor to use a commentary other than the commentary on *Romans* by R. H. C. Lenski. In this text, Lenski sees only a subjective justification of individual sinners, and not the objective justification of which our text speaks. To follow Lenski to his logical conclusion, faith would be the cause of one's being justified. For a more thorough discussion of this problem, the reader is referred to *Exegetical Notes, Epistle Texts, Series A, Festival Season Sundays*, by Harold H. Bult (Concordia Theological Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, Indiana), pages 79-85.

The Lenten journey for the child of God is not just a time to sorrow over sin, but also a time to rejoice in the triumph of Christ. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

Introduction: “Why can’t I stop sinning even though I want to stop?” Does this question sound familiar? In this sermon the hearer is called to turn from the old inheritance to the merits of Jesus Christ and the more powerful and abounding grace of the Gospel.

THE TOTALITY OF SIN AND THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE

- I. Adam had a problem!
 - A. He disobeyed God (the trespass).
 - B. This disobedience is sin.
 - C. Sin causes death.
 - 1. Spiritual death.
 - 2. Physical death.
- II. I have inherited Adam’s problem!
 - A. From the *one*, Adam—to the *many* (all).
 - B. Without choice or effort on my part I already stand condemned.

Note: A distinction must be made between original sin which brings sin, death and condemnation (our inheritance) and actual sins which are the result of original sin. I sin (actually) because I was born a sinner (original).

- C. The trespass is very powerful since I was enslaved from conception (see III, B, 2).
- III. I must turn.
 - A. From the first Adam and the trespass;
 - 1. Which is my natural inheritance.
 - 2. Which brought death to me.
 - B. To the One who brought the free gift.
 - 1. Given for all.
 - 2. More powerful than the trespass.
- IV. Christ brings the solution.
 - A. He alone could bring forth the gift of salvation.
 - B. He gives His free gift for all.
 - C. The free gift is unlike the inheritance of Adam.
 - 1. It brings justification.
 - 2. It brings righteousness.
 - 3. It brings life.
- V. By grace I inherit Christ’s solution.
 - A. All that Christ has done is accounted for my salvation.
 - B. The Father bestows this free gift in the means of grace.
 - 1. In baptism I am made and called His beloved son.
 - 2. Through absolution, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the Lord’s Supper, I am strengthened in faith, and enabled to live in the sonship bestowed upon me by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: As people of God, we begin our Lenten journey with more than just deep sorrow over our sinful lives. God in His Son, Jesus Christ, has proclaimed His love and forgiveness of sins to all. While in the church militant, the problem of Adam and his inheritance (original sin) still clings to us, yet we may rejoice in the more powerful grace of God which not only brings forgiveness, but the power to *change* hearts and lives. Thus the grace of God proclaimed, and lived is much more powerful than sin, and sounds in our Lenten journey a note of victorious triumph through Jesus Christ.

Charles E. Froh
San Mateo, California

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

March 11, 1990

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

There are so many Greek words worthy of careful study in this portion of God's Word. The preacher might especially take note of these: *dikaioō* (justify), *kauchema* (boast), *misthos* (wage), *opheilema* (debt), *orgēs* (wrath), *bebaios* (sure or certain).

The forensic word *dikaioō* means "to declare just or right." It may be explained to the congregation, and committed to memory, in this fashion: Justified—"Just-if-I'd never done it!" When God looks at the sinner "cross-eyed" (through the cross of Christ), He enters into the account book (*logizomai*) "not guilty!" "Just-if-I'd never sinned!"

Kauchēma means a boast or object of boasting. It is the thing of which one is proud. Abraham was a man who had great works to "brag about," but his "bragging" or boasting would do no good before God (v. 2).

Misthos is pay or salary which is earned. *Opheilema* is a debt or bill that is a debt or bill that is owed. Man's works are counted as debt, which places him "in the red!"

Orgēs (v. 15) is deep-seated anger. Those who justify themselves by the law (the "braggers") have God's deep-seated anger upon them. They cannot comply perfectly with the Law's demands, even though they think they are doing quite well!

Bebaios means "certain, firm, sure." The promise of God (v. 16) is "firm" or "sure" in the sense that it is *solidly grounded* and will be

fulfilled. Those “of faith,” that is, the believers have the solid, certain promise of God. Grace makes forgiveness and eternal life absolutely certain.

Introduction: “You Can Be Sure!!” is the name of a tract [show tract if available] printed by our LCMS. It is an excellent tract, used quite often on evangelism calls. The emphasis of this tract is this question: Are you sure of eternal life? The very reason for the Bible, for the existence of the church (and this congregation) is to help people know for sure that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

What would you say? Are you sure of your eternal life? Today’s text points out that the “bragger” does not have that absolute certainty; but the believer does. Which one are you: bragger or believer?

BRAGGER OR BELIEVER?

I. The Bragger

- A. He tries to justify himself.
 1. The bragger believes he can “declare himself right” (righteous) by what he does.
 - a. This is his boast: “Well, I lived a pretty good life. . . I tried my best. . . I went to church every Sunday through snow, sleet, and rain. . . etc.”
 - b. His emphasis is “I”—centered, work-centered.
 2. To him, justified means this: “Just-if-I’d never done anything too bad!”
- B. The bragger may think he has something to boast about, but *not* before God.
 1. Even though he may accomplish good deeds in the sight of man (name some), notice how God views them:
 - a. He views them as filthy, stinky rags (Isaiah 64:6).
 - b. He counts them as a huge bill that is owed (v. 4), placing the “bragger” terribly “in the red!”
 - c. Since God’s standard is absolute perfection (Matthew 5:48), has the bragger done enough? Can he ever be sure?
 2. Even Abraham, as great as he was, could not boast (“brag”) before God (v. 2).
- C. For sure the “bragger” will receive just reward—God’s deep-seated wrath and Hell. “I may get soft and easy with people, but God never gets soft and easy, His law says He will punish braggers His justice demands He fulfill it!”

II. The Believer

- A. He “does not work, but believes on Him who justifies that ungodly” (v. 5).

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1. He knows he cannot “declare himself right” (righteous) before God by what he does, since he has learned the following truths:
 - a. Romans 3:19-20.
 - b. Romans 3:27-28.
 2. Instead of “bragging,” he confesses: “Just as I am without one plea. . .”
 3. Through simple trust in Jesus Christ, he knows he stands “not guilty!”, forgiven, and accounted as righteous (v. 5). To him justified means this: “Just-if-I’d never sinned!” thanks to Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- B. The believer is of the same faith of Abraham (v. 3).
- C. For sure the believer will receive God’s promised reward.
1. He will be made an heir of eternal life in heaven.
 2. It is for sure—absolutely certain—since it is based upon God’s gracious promise (v. 16).

Conclusion: Yes, the believer can be sure of eternal life—thanks to God’s sure promise!

Mark K. Schoen
St. Francis, Minnesota

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

March 18, 1990

Ephesians 5:8-14

Sometimes in Scripture darkness stands for sin and ungodliness while light stands for purity and holiness. The unbeliever is described as living in darkness and the believer as having come out of the darkness and living in the light. Christ shines upon all believers, that’s why they are no longer darkness, but light. One message for the believer from this text is: expose by your light the darkness you once were. Simply put, Paul says, “You once were darkness but now you are light. Live like light.”

Introduction: In this text light and darkness are contrasted. The contrast between the two is like day and night. And what happens when light shines in darkness? There is an allegory which very vividly answers that question: Once upon a time a cave lived under the ground, as caves have the habit of doing. It had spent its lifetime in darkness. It heard a voice calling to it, “Come up into the light;

come and see the sunshine.” The cave retorted, “I don’t know what you mean; there isn’t anything but darkness.” The sun asked, “What is darkness?” The cave replied, “Come and see.” One day the sun accepted the invitation. As it entered the cave it said, “Now show me your darkness!” But there was no darkness.

LIGHT OVERWHELMS DARKNESS

- I. We were all once sinful, lost and separated from God.
 - A. Our initial sinful, lost and separated state was darkness (v. 8a).
 1. Note that it is not that we were “like” darkness or “might have been darkness” but we were really and truly darkness.
 2. This darkness produces nothing but “fruitless deeds” (v. 11).
 - a. Walking in darkness shows one is not in fellowship with God (1 John 1:6).
 - b. Jesus explained to Nicodemus why darkness is loved rather than light (John 3:19-20).
 - B. Being darkness is being dead (spiritually) (v. 14).
 1. Living in darkness is living in the land of the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16).
 2. “Outer darkness” is where unbelief is leading (Matthew 22:13).

Transition: “For you were once darkness, but. . .”

- II. Now we are light in connection with Jesus (v. 8b).
 - A. Jesus is “the Light of Men” who shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome Him (John 1:4-5).
 1. Apart from Jesus we are nothing; we are darkness.
 2. In connection with Christ we are everything; we are light.
 3. It is Jesus who has rescued us from sin, death and the devil by His perfect life and sacrifice on Calvary’s Cross.
 - B. Because Jesus abides in one’s heart he is a person who has gone from darkness to light.
 1. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new come! All this is from God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).
 2. Those having Christ abide in their hearts “are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).
 - a. Jesus did not say “You might be” or “You should be” but “you are.”
 - b. One puts his trust in the light (Jesus) and becomes a light (John 12:35-36).

- c. Lights are not hidden, but allowed to shine forth (Matthew 5:14-15).

Transition: Therefore, remember that “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. . .”

III. Live as children of light (v. 8c).

- A. Since we are no longer darkness, we walk as children of light (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6).
- B. Living as children of light involves actions:
1. Bearing fruit (v. 9; Philippians 2:14-15).
 2. Finding out what pleases the Lord (v. 10; Romans 12:2).
 3. Avoiding and exposing deeds of darkness (v. 11).

Conclusion: We were all once lost and condemned. But thanks be to God! He has rescued us and in connection with Jesus we can shine forth to a dark and despairing world. The Christian’s call to his unbelieving neighbor is this: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (v. 14) as He has on me!

Stanley J. Zyskowski
San Leandro, California

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 23, 1990

Romans 8:1-10

Introduction: As the Lenten season progresses, the weight of this penitential season will be bearing down on us as we struggle with the theme of our battle to live in a world of pretend gods and false religions. All too often, however, the joy announced in this powerful text is diminished by a world where God’s condemnation has no power or meaning, where the meaning of a penitential season is unclear even among Christians, where “walking in Christ” has little or no impact on our daily life.

Into this world come the liberating words of our text: “there is no condemnation in Christ.” This is a story of freedom and liberation, a refugee story on a grand scale. Maybe to glimpse into the light of the Gospel we might roughly compare it to the many stories of political exiles that are so common in our midst today. Those who have personally known the repression and the fear of a closed society or even the injustice of being imprisoned for one’s beliefs can appreciate the exhilarating feeling of being in a freed land.

But even more personal is the struggle that goes on within each of us as we battle with our own sinful nature and the guilt we feel for our deserved condemnation from God because of sin. Ten times in this text St. Paul uses the word "flesh" to describe our sinful condition in which by nature we find ourselves at enmity with God (vv. 7-8). However, nine times he uses a form of the word "spirit" to reveal the source of our new relationship with God through Jesus Christ (v. 9) (KJV).

FREED TO BE ME

- I. I am caught in myself.
 - A. I am caught in my fleshly nature (vv. 1,3-6,8-9).
 - B. I am "carnally minded" (vv. 5-7).
 - C. I am at "enmity with God" (v. 7).
 - D. I cannot please Him (v. 8).
- II. I cannot free myself from my nature.
 - A. Guilt is my constant companion. I am not only at war with God, but within myself (7:18-24).
 - B. Following the Law can not save me (v. 3).
 - C. The law of man's achievement is only a law of sin and death (v. 2).
 - D. In such a condition I am a lost and condemned creature (7:24).
- III. Freed to be in Christ.
 - A. Freed from condemnation (v. 1).
 - B. Freed from the law of sin and death (v. 2).
 - C. Christ achieved this, our freedom, on the Cross (vv. 3-4).
 - D. Christ became a sinless man to free man from the sin that leads to death eternally (vv. 3-4).
- IV. Freed for exalted living.
 - A. The mind, now set on the Spirit, is life and peace (vv. 1,2,4-5,9).
 - B. Christ is in me, by faith, that I may be a "son of God" (vv. 10,14).
 - C. Real life and real living begins with the emancipation through Jesus Christ.
 - D. May we now fill our minds, our lives with the spiritual things of Christ Jesus, the Lord of our exalted lives.

Conclusion: The spirit of man longs to breathe free. The political prisoner expressed this desire to experience the joys of freedom of conscience. Yet many freed from man-made tyranny do not yet know the true freedom that Jesus Christ lived, suffered and died to obtain

for a suffering world. With St. Paul and St. John we rejoice in the Truth that sets each and every one of us free to be ourselves.

Daniel J. Vogel
Miami, Florida

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

April 1, 1990

Romans 8:11-19

Judica or "Passion Sunday" was the name ascribed to the Fifth Sunday in Lent when the emphasis was on Jesus' articulation of His own human destiny to face the torture of the cross. Series A emphasizes God's ability to bring life out of that which is dead as the topic that binds the pericopes for this Sunday together. The epistle is from one of Paul's most glorious and beloved chapters in the Bible.

Consulting a word study book on "peace" shows that the Old Testament Hebrew background of the word (*shalom*) has more depth to it than just peace. The word includes the concept of "wholeness" or a healthy "completeness" and "contentness."

Introduction: A major charge card company sought new subscribers to its service with the enticing claim that "Membership has its Privileges." St. Paul explains in today's epistle lesson that membership in the body of Christ has its privileges and benefits. Thus Paul addresses the question of why it is worth the price that discipleship sometimes demands of us in our faith-life in the Lord Jesus.

MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES

- I. Membership in Christ is a life or death matter because "the mind set on the flesh is death but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).
 - A. Without membership in Christ one is stuck in the flesh (John 3:6).
 1. The flesh is hostile to God (Romans 8:7).
 2. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8).
 3. Those "in the flesh" are naked and defenseless against the power of sin, death and the devil and are subject to the Judgment of God.

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- B. Membership in Christ gives the privileges of life and peace (Romans 8:6).
1. It enhances my life today by giving me "abundant life" (John 10:10).
 2. It gives me eternal life instead of death (Romans 6:23; 8:11).
 - a. Jesus died in my place that I might live.
 - b. Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death for me and for the rest of the church.
 3. It gives me "wholeness" (See above for the comment on "peace") (Romans 8:6).
- II. Membership in Christ need not ever be stolen away from me.
- A. I am an adopted son who is loved and need not ever return to slavery (Romans 8:14-17).
1. God is always near and will listen to my problems and respond to my needs.
 2. God doesn't give me a spirit of slavery that would lead back to the ways of the flesh.
 - a. Such a spirit operates out of fear.
 - b. Outside of God I would have much to fear but inside of Him I need fear nothing.
- B. Nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).
- III. In the light of the preceding I can view even suffering for Christ here on earth as a privilege.
- A. When I suffer for Him it is a sure sign that I belong to Him and will be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17).
- B. With Paul, we can view the present sufferings as not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

Conclusion: Membership in Christ has privileges that money cannot buy. If they could be bought many people would devote their lives to obtaining them. They are only given freely by a loving God who desires to enrich our lives now and forever.

Robert A. Dargatz
Irvine, California

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

April 1, 1990

A Topical Approach to April Fools' Day

In addition to expounding the assigned pericope for the day one might wish to treat a theme that capitalizes on the traditions

normally connected with April 1 (e.g., in an additional matins or vespers service).

Introduction: Although April Fools' Day is not a part of the church's official calendar, nor is it a special day that originated amongst the Jews or the disciples of Jesus, God has a lot to say in the Bible about the subject of fools. This morning we ask the question. . .

WHAT KIND OF FOOL AM I?

- I. There are those that God calls fools.
 - A. Those who suppress the truth about God in their hearts are fools.
 1. "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1).
 2. In professing themselves to be wise they become fools (Romans 1:21-22).
 - B. Those who despise wisdom and instruction are fools (Proverbs 1:7).
 - C. Those who mock guilt are fools (Proverbs 14:9).
 - D. Those who think only of this world and take no thought of the next are fools (Luke 12:20).
- II. There are fools in the eyes of the world for the sake of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:10).
 - A. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18).
 1. Worldly Romans might scoff, "You mean to say that your God allowed our soldiers to crucify Him? Jupiter would never be such a wimp."
 2. The foolishness of God is wiser than man (1 Corinthians 1:25).
 - B. The world says "Don't get mad, get even. Only fools think otherwise."
 1. Jesus turned the other cheek and loved His enemies.
 - a. While we were yet sinners He died for us (Romans 5:8).
 - b. "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).
 2. Jesus calls upon us (and empowers us) to take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23).
 - a. We can love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).
 - b. We can count all present suffering as nothing compared to the glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18).

Conclusion: The Bible instructs us about these two categories of fools, those who are fools in the eyes of God and those who are fools in the eyes of men for the sake of Christ. The question that deserves an answer on this day is "What kind of fool am I?"

Robert A. Dargatz
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PALM SUNDAY

April 8, 1990

Philippians 2:5-11

Before preaching on this text, one must read all of chapter two. It is a rather lengthy exhortation to humility and obedience. This *sedes doctrinae* on the humiliation of Christ (vv. 5-11) is given to stress the *example* Christ gives to us. Paul is encouraging us to *think* like Jesus.

The goal of this text is for the hearers to imitate Christ's attitude of humble obedience. The problem is that we as human beings like to glorify ourselves. The means of effecting a changed attitude is the power of the Gospel, as Paul emphasizes in discussing the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. Verses 1 and 13 also supply excellent Gospel motivation.

A few textual comments: The *NIV* does an excellent translation of this section. In verse 5 *phronimos* refers to the mind, attitude, how we think. Great care must be given to properly explaining *ekenosen* (v. 7). Christ laid aside the *full use* of the attributes of God. He did not give the attributes up or cease to possess them. *Buls (Exegetical Notes)* suggests this translation for verse 10: "because of the revelation of Jesus Christ." Most translations suggest a temporal *en*.

Introduction: "Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient unto death." Such an attitude is not often displayed in our world. We live in the "me generation." It is not considered a virtue to be humble and obedient, to serve and help others. Nonetheless, God's Word to us this day is that we adopt

THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST

- I. Christ's attitude has resulted in great blessings for us (vv. 6-8).
 - A. Jesus was indeed God and possessed all the power and majesty of God (v. 6).

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- B. But Jesus willingly chose to humble Himself, to lay aside the full use of His powers and the revelation of His glory, in order to accomplish our salvation (vv. 7-8).
 - 1. People are not generally like this. They try to grab all the glory they can.
 - 2. He became a man like other men, suffering from human need (Matthew 8:20), being faced with temptation (Hebrews 4:15). The event of Palm Sunday attests to Jesus' humility.
 - 3. He even allowed Himself to suffer and die so that we might receive grace and peace (Philippians 1:2).
 - II. Christ's attitude has resulted in exaltation for Him (vv. 9-11).
 - A. God rewarded Jesus for His humble obedience by raising Him from the dead and sitting Him at the right hand. Jesus did not arrogantly take this exalted state but received it.
 - B. God exalted Jesus so that we might come to repentance and faith (Acts 5:31; 1 Peter 3:22).
 - III. Christ's attitude is now a gift to us (v. 5; 1 Peter 4).
 - A. God wants us to have this same attitude of humble, willing obedience.
 - 1. Let us not think too highly of ourselves (v. 3).
 - 2. Let us consider the needs of others (v. 4).
 - B. God alone empowers us to follow Christ by working in us, making us willing and able (v. 13).
 - C. God also will "reward" us.
 - 1. Our works do not gain for us salvation.
 - 2. But they do receive an eternal "reward" of grace (Revelation 14:13; Matthew 19:29).

Conclusion: Jesus came into this world humble and obedient, with a mind focusing on service. Now as God's people, we are to receive and live out the gracious gift of his life and death for us.

Mark D. Boxman
Concordia, Missouri

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD EASTER SUNDAY

April 15, 1990

Acts 10: 34-43

If there is any occasion in the year on which we Christians may specially rejoice, exult, and exuberate, it is the glorious Easter

festival! Let the church bells peal joyously, let the steeple chimes ring out over the neighborhoods, let the organ pipes blend their tones in grand crescendos, let us place festival decorations in our churches, let us appear before the Lord in splendid attire, let us raise our voices in stirring hymns of praise, etc., all on this Sunday, the anniversary of our Savior's resurrection! For on this day, centuries ago, Jesus destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light for us all. On this day He marvelously guaranteed to us the fact and the benefits of our redemption from sin. All hail to

THE RISEN REDEEMER—THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION!

The message of God's love for the world and of rescue through Christ from sin, death, and damnation is the distinctive, surprising good news that Christian church has for proclamation to sinners in every New Testament generation. The text for this day recounts how the Gospel began to be brought to the Gentiles following the first Pentecost, reporting in specific (as well as in condensed form) Peter's presentation of it to the Roman Centurion in Caesarea (Maritima) and his household. We want to consider the apostle's words for the strengthening of our faith, and the heightening of our joy over the fundamental verities of our faith (I and II of the outline).

- I. He lived and died to become our Redeemer.
 - A. Peter and Cornelius were brought together as the result of visionary experiences God gave the two men (10:1-33). Peter learned that the Gospel was to be proclaimed to Gentiles as well as Jews (vv. 34-35).
 - B. Peter refers to the reports widely circulating (by divine providence) throughout Palestine regarding Jesus of Nazareth. These Cornelius certainly had also heard (vv. 36-38). Of all that Jesus did Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses (v. 39a).
 - C. What the reported activities of Jesus showed about Him was extremely significant. This significance was surely pointed out to Cornelius by Peter, and we must ever keep the same in mind and belief; namely, that Jesus was *true God* as well as true man; that He loved men and was eager to help all those who came to Him; and that, in doing his Father's will and following the Spirit's leading, He was living a perfectly religious life. Christ's active obedience was necessary, so that He might become men's Savior.
 - D. Peter speaks of the culminating event of Jesus' passive obedience, his death by crucifixion (v. 39b).

1. The reason He gave Himself into death by crucifixion is that He might be accursed and punished by God in all men's stead for all their transgressions, satisfy His justice, and provide a perfect redemption for the whole human race.
 2. To this end, Jesus had to be true man, to be able to keep the Law in men's stead and then suffer and die in their place. He also had to be true God, so that his redemptive obedience might be sufficient to provide them with a saving righteousness before God.
- II. He rose again to become the God of our salvation.
- A. Immediately, then, Peter referred to the mighty miracle of Christ's resurrection, stating (v. 40a) that God raised Jesus from the dead. The reality of the resurrection is undergirded in verses 40b-41.
 - B. Christ's resurrection was necessary for the following reasons:
 1. To make clear to men that God had accepted the sacrifice of His Son and the blessing of salvation was now open to all (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:17). Oh, believe this truth with all your heart!
 2. To become the object of saving faith. Faith has as its object the living Christ ("He is Lord of all," v. 36c).
 3. To give his apostles the command to preach the law (v. 42) and the Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith (v. 43). Eternal life, defined in John 17:3, is the believer's *now* (cf. John 3:36) and eternally in heaven (John 14:2-3) after the resurrection and glorification of the body (John 6:40; 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:52-57). This life empowers the believer to overcome sin and live righteously in the fear of God (cf. John 10:35).
 4. To exercise His lordship in behalf of the church (Ephesians 1:20-23).
 - C. To these truths all the prophets bear witness (v. 43): let Cornelius reckon with this, and acclaim the risen Christ the God of his salvation! To these truths also all the apostles bear witness. Let us on the basis of this united testimony acclaim Jesus Christ our living Lord and Savior, the God of our salvation; cling to Him in deathless allegiance; in His strength glorify Him through abundant spiritual fruitbearing (John 15:8; 1 Corinthians 15:58); and, filled with living hope, die in this faith! So help us God!

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 22, 1990

1 Peter 1:3-9

This text affords us opportunity to continue to focus on the resurrection of Christ as we are thrust from the grandeur of Easter into the "real world" where trials abound. This text clearly sets forth the theology of the cross (which must be central in our celebration of Easter). We have the opportunity here to show God's people that it is indeed the resurrected Christ who empowers us to live in this troubled world. Although trials are difficult, we have the confidence that they refine us in our Christian faith.

Introduction: We have just celebrated the resurrection of our Lord! The magnificence of that day, and the splendor with which we celebrate it, gives us a triumphant release from the trials and tribulations of this world. Indeed, Easter is a time to focus on the power and majesty of our victorious God. Yet for God the road to victory was the way of Christ's cross. Whether we speak of Christ or our own trials, we may ask: "Why are there trials in the midst of victory?" The answer to this question is the magnificence of the Gospel itself. No wonder Peter exclaimed: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He according to His great mercy having regenerated us to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v. 3).

TRIALS IN THE MIDST OF VICTORY

- I. Easter continues despite trials.
 - A. After Easter we may feel like we are on a roller coaster ride as we face problems in every day life.
 1. "There is too little contemplation of God, too little praise of him in our hearts, especially in our earthly distress" (Lenski, volume 11, p. 30).
 2. Even the strongest believer may ask: "How can these things be?" (One example might be John the Baptist's question regarding Christ's identity.)
 - B. Our subjective experiences do not change objective fact.
 1. We may have trials of all sorts (list a couple) but Christ is still raised from the dead.
 2. We may have temptations of all sorts (list) but Christ is still raised from the dead.
 3. We may confront all sorts of false teachings (list) but Christ is still raised from the dead.

- C. Christ came in order to triumph over these negative experiences.
 - D. No matter what happens to us or the church, that one (all important) historical event, Christ's resurrection, has been accomplished.
- II. Easter was possible only because of trials.
- A. Christ faced the same trials as we do.
 1. From His birth in a stable, to His exile in Egypt, to His betrayal, suffering and death, Christ suffered the same injustices as we do.
 2. Jesus was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15b).
 3. Jesus faced and condemned the falsehoods of His day (such as legalism and the cheapening of God's grace).
 - B. Christ was victorious over these things.
 1. God preserved Him always (remember especially God's preserving Jesus from Herod's massacre).
 2. Christ overcame temptation (see esp. Matthew 4:10).
 3. No one could accuse Jesus of doctrinal or moral error.
 - C. Christ could not have been our savior without trials.
 1. "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery. . .the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).
 2. Jesus had to be betrayed in order to be found by the rulers.
 3. Jesus had to be falsely accused in order to be sentenced.
 4. Jesus had to be abandoned by His own in order to be executed.
- III. Easter strengthens us to face trials.
- A. Christ's death and resurrection gives us the ability to persevere even as we "grieve in manifold trials" (v. 6b).
 1. We know Christ's work is complete and all-sufficient, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading (see Lenski, pp. 33-34a).
 2. "Many an earthly heir has never obtained his inheritance; false, faithless, weak guardians lost it for him. [Beyond that] we are amid [spiritual] foes who are bent on robbing us of our inheritance; but the keeper of Israel sleeps nor slumbers. . .The aim of this protection is salvation" (Lenski, pp. 34b-36).
 3. We exult (or "leap for joy," 6a) as we compare our times of trials here with eternity there (6b).
 4. We know God only allows these things "if need be" (6c).
 - B. Christ's death and resurrection shows how God purifies us.

1. Luther said: "God lays the cross upon all Christians in order to purify and cleanse them well that their faith may remain pure even as the Word is pure" (Lenski, p. 39).
 2. St. Augustine said: "In the fiery oven the straw burns, but the gold is purified" (Lenski, p. 39).
 3. It may seem strange to share trials with the ungodly, but we rejoice over the great cause and end they are used for.
 4. God's purifying work is to His "praise, honor and glory" (7b).
- C. We are especially blessed because we have not seen God (8).
1. It is interesting that Peter, who had seen Jesus, said this.
 2. Peter no doubt recalled Jesus saying: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!" (John 20:29).
 3. Rather than trials being a sign of weakness, even in the extremest tribulation, Christians have "unspeakable joy" (8).

Conclusion: The correct understanding of why we have trials in the midst of victory is the center of all theology. The New Testament certainly affirms this. Paul calls this "the foolishness of the cross"—but the "foolishness" which saves us nevertheless (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). James gives us this advice under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "Consider it all joy. . .when you encounter various trials" (1:2-3). Peter joyfully exclaimed: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3a). May we also glory in our trials until we obtain the end of faith, the salvation of souls (v. 9). Amen.

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THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 29, 1990

1 Peter 1:17-21

There is not a week that passes that we are not inundated by television commercials of auto dealers in the community who all boast, "Our cars are discounted! Only \$100 above cost!" We are also assured in our daily papers that one discount store has cut prices to the bare-bone and that they will "beat" any competitor's price. Which one of us has not been told by a friend, "I can get it for you wholesale," or "I can get it for you at a discount".

We become so accustomed to such “media hype” about getting things at wholesale prices and doing all our buying at a discount that there may be a danger in thinking all values of life can be obtained at a discount. As I see the words of Peter in the text, as he writes to the Christians in the provinces as Asia Minor during the sixties of the first century, I am convinced that

SALVATION DOES NOT COME AT A DISCOUNT

- I. Man’s salvation was not cheap.
 - A. Theoretically, the Almighty could have used the treasures of the world to redeem man from sin (“silver and gold”, v. 18). He owns all.
 - B. The Almighty could have demanded absolute obedience to His Law and Commandments for salvation. But “the futile ways of the past” under the Old Covenant failed; not because it was God’s fault, but it was man’s because in sin he failed to keep the Law (v. 18).
 - C. The cost was precious and dear to the Almighty. It required the sacrifice of His own dear Son. “As a lamb without spot or blemish” (v. 19). It is a picture of the perfect Passover Lamb that brought deliverance to God’s people of old. Let us never forget, “You were bought with a price.” Salvation does not come at a discount. It is not cheap! How precious is it to you?

Transition: Many people give God a quick “good morning” on Sundays if nothing else interferes in their schedule. They offer a “tip” in offerings if they feel they can spare the money that week. In a sense, they use God as a “911” number to call if matters really get “bent out of shape”. But the real children of God, who have come to know and realize what price was paid for their salvation, so cherish and value the truth that their salvation was bought with a terrible price, not at a discount, that they seek to glorify God with the wealth of all they possess.

- II. Man should not cheapen salvation.
 - A. Christians in the first century faced some real temptations to compromise or cheapen their salvation. They faced a real threat of persecution (the Neronic holocaust was about to begin). Thus, there was the temptation to compromise their faith and cheapen salvation.
 - B. Peter calls upon the saints to “live in this world as strangers” to the world’s system and standards of morality and salvation. They are to live in “fear”, which is an awesome respect for the holiness of God who will judge His saints according to their stewardship of the salvation which was purchased at great cost (v. 17).

- C. Thus Christ, who was chosen from the celestial halls of eternity to purchase us at a great cost, also has chosen us to bear His name before our world. We dare not cheapen the salvation which is ours, but we should rather glorify God and our salvation in all things for these belong to Him. We are called to live and testify with all the wealth of our lives that salvation does not come at a discount, (v. 20) but requires genuine commitment!

Conclusion: It was the German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoffer, implicated in the plot to assassinate Hitler, who, while in prison before his execution, coined the term "cheap grace." There is no such thing. God's grace is extended to sinners, but not at a discount. It cost the Almighty the death of His own dear Son on the cross of Calvary. We, who confess that we have been bought with a price and not at a discount, must also know we are precious in God's sight. We are not called to live in the lusts of the flesh, but in the fruits of the Spirit. For His children, salvation is not at a discount; it requires sacrifice and service.

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 6, 1990

I Peter 2:19-25

Two challenges confront us on a cursory reading of our text. First, we must resist the strong temptation to preach a sermon long on morality and legalism: "You had better submit or God will get you." Secondly, it is not obvious how the last verse fits in the pericope.

Closer reflection resolves both problems. Peter does more than quote Isaiah in verse 22; he alludes to all of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in verses 21-25. We want to show God's people today more than Jesus as an example—He is power. We sheep, who continually wander, need Someone who is at once Overseer and Shepherd. Show God's people the Christ whose absolute authority is always exercised in compassion and love. Exactly because the Lamb of God went passively to the tree, we are empowered to actively, positively and obediently serve even harsh masters. When we treat as expendable the things which this world values then the values of God are exalted. Jesus suffered to save all men. When we suffer *for His sake*, His Father is further glorified.

Not all our suffering is for Christ's sake. Our sin brings us pain. But when our faithful witness to Jesus' love earns us ridicule, shame, persecution, even death in this world, then it also earns His commendation.

In verse 19, *charis* may be an abbreviation for the Old Testament phrase "to find favor with God." *Hypogrammon* in verse 21 is a picture of a student learning the alphabet by tracing a pattern beneath his paper. In verse 24, note the paradox in "by his wounds you have been healed," a phrase especially meaningful to the slaves among Peter's first readers. They knew the lash and could learn and be empowered by Jesus' example of submission.

Introduction: Picture a young boy following his father's footsteps in the snow (or sand). He has no hope of filling Dad's footprints, but he stretches and balances to keep his feet inside the tracks. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, encourages us to:

FOLLOW JESUS' BIG FOOTPRINTS

- I. Jesus' tracks are too big for us to fill (vv. 21-25).
 - A. Jesus lived perfectly, without sin, for us.
 - B. Jesus died perfectly on the tree for us.
 - C. We cannot live perfectly nor die perfectly.
 - D. We need not "blaze a new trail" to find peace with God.

Jesus' gift of salvation calls us to respond (v. 21).
- II. Jesus' tracks show us the way (vv. 19-20; Matthew 5:39-48).
 - A. Submission is seen as weakness in this world.
 - B. True meekness is controlling powerful strength.
 1. Jesus did not "strike down" his tormenters, but prayed for them (Luke 23:24).
 2. When our witness bring us pain, we want to control urges to do the following:
 - a. Grow bitter.
 - b. Speak evil of harsh masters.
 - c. Grow lax in duty.
 - d. Forsake our faith in a futile attempt to gain temporal peace.
 - C. We witness by living model lives even in unjust situations (1 Peter 2:13-18; 3:1-6).

But the boy sometimes steps outside his father's tracks.

- III. Jesus goes beyond example; He empowers us to follow Him.
 - A. This Fourth Sunday after Easter still echoes with Jesus' resurrection and calls us to new life.

- B. The Good Shepherd (Gospel reading) is ready to carry you, His little lamb.
- C. By looking at Jesus, Stephen (first reading) had more than an example; he had strength to continue his witness even as stones broke his head.

Conclusion: The television evangelist who promises a life of ease and wealth is a false shepherd. Jesus promises you His comfort and commendation even as you suffer for Him by following His big footprints.

Warren E. Messman
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FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 13, 1990

1 Peter 2:4-10

Since 1 Peter is a series of exhortations to holy living, preaching on this epistle can easily degenerate into moralizing. The apostle, however, clearly sets his imperatives into the context of God's prior grace for us in Christ so that our activity for Him flows out of His love for us. Nowhere is this more evident than in the text at hand with its theme, "You are a *chosen* people" (v. 9).

The most prominent literary motif of these verses is a metaphor drawn from the Old Testament but used widely in the New Testament, going back to Christ Himself, namely, "Christ is the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him" (v. 4). Peter cites three Old Testament references that use this motif, Isaiah 28:16; Psalms 118:22; and Isaiah 8:14; and in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; and Luke 20:17) Jesus applied Psalms 118:22 to Himself in His conclusion to the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. The picture, of course, is that of God about to build His church and choosing as the cornerstone—that part of the building that would anchor it and align its walls as true and straight—precisely the stone that human architects had rejected, viz., the crucified Christ. In the eyes of men, He is an object of shame and disgrace, the antithesis of everything we treasure; but to God He is the beloved and obedient Son, the only One in whom God can realize His plan for the redemption of mankind. That is why Peter calls Christ the "living Stone" (*lithon zonta*), i.e., *life-giving*, for, as His resurrection reveals, not only is He alive but in Him is the life of men (John 1:4; 5:26) and

only in Him. That is why those who do not trust in Him must stumble and fall; they receive the penalty for their sins that they deserve instead of the salvation that God has prepared. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

From Christ "the living Stone" Peter extends the metaphor to believers as "living stones" (v. 5). So closely are they bound to Him by faith that His life becomes theirs and the Master Builder incorporates them into His Church. But the metaphor of "stone" cannot contain all that "living" includes; therefore, Peter switches from the structure itself to those who serve within it, a "holy priesthood" (v. 5), and at the end of the pericope He adds four more titles that combine the ideas of God's choosing us and our serving Him, "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (v. 9). As with "living Stone," these titles are rooted in the Old Testament (See Exodus 19:6 and Deuteronomy 10:15) where they belonged to Israel, her kings, her priests. But now God transfers these terms to those whose common bond is not ethnicity or race but faith in Christ; and He applies them not just to some among them (the descendants of David or of Aaron) but to all. All believers are royal priests.

Such titles suggest both status and service. On the one hand, to be called "a people belonging to God" and a "holy nation" reminds us that God in Christ has conferred on us a new status—no longer His enemies but His sons—and a new relationship with Him—no longer alienated from Him but justified. However, God chooses kings and priests to do something, described here by Peter as "offering spiritual sacrifices (*pneumatikas thysias*)" (v. 5) and "declaring the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (v. 9). Both expressions are very general, and so particular applications depend upon the vocations of those to whom the application is being made. However, in every case the goal of the Christian life is service to God. Thus, we must let His Word guide our lives, and we must do our duties not as men-pleasers or self-aggrandizers but as God's faithful and thankful servants.

Introduction: Look around and what do you see? In the Christian Church, all kinds of people—young and old, rich and poor, male and female, etc.—and with all kinds of reputations—good, bad, indifferent. Look within and what do you see? A perfect human being? Or something far less? And yet, in today's epistle lesson, St. Peter ascribes some very lofty titles to us all like "royal priesthood" and "holy nation." But how can people so different from each other be a "people" and a "nation" and how can you and I with all our faults and shortcomings be "holy" and "belonging to God?" The answer lies in

GOD'S CHOICE

- I. God chose Jesus Christ (v. 4).
 - A. In Isaiah 42:1 God calls the Messiah. "My chosen one in whom I delight."
 1. True God from all eternity and true man by virtue of His incarnation, the beloved Son of God was the only possible Savior of mankind.
 2. But to look at Christ who would have ever thought it? His birth in a stable, His upbringing in the Galilean hinterlands, and especially His ignominious death seem to disqualify Him even for worldly greatness let alone service to God.
 - B. But God chose Him from all eternity and revealed His choice in time and space—Jesus' baptism, the transfiguration, and especially His resurrection.
 1. Indeed, that humiliation which to us seems disqualifying became the means by which God accomplished His goal of our redemption.
 2. The perfect choice rendered perfect service to redeem us.
- II. God chooses us.
 - A. First of all, for faith (vv. 6-8).
 1. Many of Jesus' contemporaries rejected Him as do many today, for God's choice does not always fit in with our choices.
 - a. Do we want a "bread king"—a God who satisfies all our earthly desires?
 - b. Or a do-it-our self-sacrifice, etc.?
 - c. Or perhaps no choice at all—we are not interested in the things of God?
 2. But unbelief sentences us to death and damnation—without the Word of Life we remain in our sins.
 3. Trust in Christ brings us Christ's life here and hereafter.
 - a. The only appropriate response to God's promise is to believe.
 - b. In spite of all appearances to the contrary including the reality of our own sinful condition.
 - B. Secondly, for service in His church (vv. 5,9).
 1. In Christ God changes our status from enemies to priests.
 - a. What we do for Him depends upon our calling and is always marred by sin; but in Christ God accepts it all as "spiritual sacrifices."
 - b. They give witness to His grace by which he called us into the light of the Gospel.

2. In Christ God changes our relationship to each other from strangers into brothers—He overcomes all that divide us and calls us a nation, a people belonging to Him.
 - a. Our service for Him is service with and for each other.
 - b. The greatest service is to embrace others with the same wonderful light of the Gospel with which God has embraced us.

Conclusion: Instead of looking around us or within us we must keep our eyes focused on God's Word in Christ, for that is the reality that tears down whatever separates us from God and from each other. Whatever our circumstances we remember that in Christ we have received mercy, we are the people of God (v. 10).

Cameron A. MacKenzie