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# Homiletical Studies

## Epistle Series A

### THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 20, 1990

1 Peter 3:15-22

In verse 15, as previously in 14, Paul borrows phraseology from Isaiah 8 (vv. 12-13). Thus, the injunction to “sanctify the Lord Christ” clearly equates Christ with Isaiah’s “Lord of Hosts,” *Yhwh-Tzebhā’ōth*, a divine title emphasizing the all-powerful majesty of the One True God. To “sanctify” Christ in one’s heart is to set one’s heart apart to Him—apart, that is, from this sinful world (cf. Luther’s explanation of the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

Verses 13-22 provide a beautiful correlation between twin aspects of the *theologia crucis*—the cross of the Christian and the cross of Christ. The value of tribulation in the Christian life is, indeed, a recurring theme in this epistle (2:19-20; 4:14-19). It finds expression here in verse 17 but more pointedly in verse 14: Christian suffering is, in actuality, divine blessing. The purpose of verses 18-22, then, as shown by the introductory *hoti kai* (“because also”), is to assure suffering Christians of the truth asserted in verses 14 and 17. The worth of the Christian cross rests squarely on the worth of the cross of Christ, which, in turn, receives its authentication from the exaltation of Christ. His exaltation, in other words, places a divine seal of approval on His suffering unto death—as sufficing to assuage the wrath of God aroused by the sin of mankind (v. 18a, ending with “flesh”). More specifically, verses 18b-22 distinguish five stages in the glorification of Jesus: (1) the revivification of the body (v. 18b); (2) the descent into hell (v. 19); (3) the resurrection in the narrow sense (leaving the tomb to make His reappearance in this world; v. 21); (4) the ascension (v. 22a); and (5) the session at the right hand of God.

Verses 18b-19, indeed, constitute the *sedes doctrinae* of the *descensus ad infernum* which we constantly confess in the Apostolic Creed: “He descended into hell.” The best approach to the contrasting *sarki* and *pneumati* closing verse 18 is to take both as datives of sphere: “in the flesh” and “in the spirit.” (Thus the Authorized Version is wrong to translate “by the Spirit.”) At least four considerations urge this interpretation upon us: (1) It treats the two clearly corresponding datives in the same way (as opposed to the King James Version and most other interpretations). (2) It takes the two datives closing verse 18 in the same way as the *en hō* (“in which”) opening verse 19. (3) It treats the *sarki* here in the same way as the

three occurrences of *sarki* in verses 1-2 of the ensuing chapter: "Christ, then, suffered in the flesh. . ." (4) It likewise treats the *sarki* and *pneumati* in the same way as the same pair of words in 4:6. The sequence of thought, indeed, in both 3:18-22 and 4:1-6 confirms Luther's interpretation of *sarki* and *pneumati* as meaning fleshly (earthly) life and spiritual (heavenly) life respectively. (Thus, 4:2 speaks of one's "remaining time in the flesh.") In the case of Christ, then, as in 3:18, these modes of life equal the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation respectively. (Analogous uses of *sarx* and *pneuma* can be found in Hebrews 5:7, which speaks of "the days of His flesh," and in 1 Corinthians 15:44-45.) Thus, the *en hō* beginning verse 19 means that the descent into hell, like the revivification, belongs to the state of glorification. The *descensus* is not equivalent to death, nor does it involve any suffering of Christ. Rather, the Lord's soul returned to His body in the tomb (on Easter morn) and He then appeared in glory to the denizens of hell (the spiritual "prison" of verse 19). The message which He proclaimed (*ekeruxen*) there was not, of course, the Gospel, since there is no more opportunity of repentance in hell (cf. Hebrews 9:27; as to *kērussō* with law as its object, cf. Romans 2:21; Galatians 5:11). Contrariwise Christ there proclaimed His victory assured—which is not Gospel, but Law, to the devils and the damned. His message was the crushing of the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), the rout and, indeed, the eternal condemnation of Satan and all his allies. In this way, indeed, Christ "conquered the devil, destroyed hell's power, and took from the devil all his might" (FC-SD, IX, 2). (In Article IX of the Formula of Concord the Lutheran Church confesses the *descensus* more forthrightly than any other communion; on the rejection of this article in modern "Lutheranism," on the other hand, see Gotthilf Doehler, "The Descent into Hell," *The Springfielder*, XXXIX:1 [June 1975], pp. 2-19.)

Christ proclaimed defeat, of course, to all the spirits (*pneumasin*) of hell—the fallen angels (v. 22b) and all men who had died without faith (v. 19). Verse 20 provides but one example of these rebels now condemned to hear the Lord's shout of triumph. (No article joins the participle commencing verse 20 with *pneumasin* in verse 19; the idea is not "which. . . were disobedient" [King James Version], but "such as were disobedient.") The example chosen, however, is particularly significant, since the deluge was, of course, the most dramatic single condemnation of unbelievers in history (Genesis 6:5-7, 11-13, 17; 7:4, 21-23; 8:21-22; 9:11, 15). For the Great Flood swept into hell the souls of all then alive save eight when they hardened themselves against the prophetic preaching of Noah. Verse 20 refers to the period of a hundred and twenty years which God conceded the world between announcing the flood and effecting it (Genesis 6:3), mercifully allowing men plenteous opportunity to heed the call to repentance

sounded by Noah in word and deed—*id est*, his preaching and the construction of the ark respectively (cf. 2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7). Consequently, Jesus Himself uses the prediluvian generation as an example of cynical impenitence, making it typical, indeed, of the final generation of world history (Matthew 24:37-39; cf. 2 Peter 3:3-10).

The last clause of verse 20 is subject to recurring mistranslation. As usual, the word *diasōzō* means, not “save” (as *sōzō* does), but “bring through safely” (cf. Acts 23:24). In this connection the preposition *dia* is clearly used, not instrumentally, but rather, as in the prefix to *diasōzō*, locally. Thus, the Authorized Version errs in saying Noah and family “were saved by the water”; the NASB is correct except for the addition of the article: “they were brought safely through the water.” Anyway, Noah’s family were obviously saved *from* the waters of the flood, not *by* them (Genesis 6:17-21; 7:1-3, 7, 13, 23).

The first clause of verse 21 has likewise fallen prey to considerable misinterpretation. It begins with a neuter relative pronoun (*ho*), which (in the absence of any contextual requirement to the contrary) refers to the immediately preceding word, “water” (the neuter *hudōr*). The *kai* which follows, when used as here with a relative pronoun, serves simply to give more independence to the relative clause (cf. Acts 10:39; Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, p. 394, *kai*, II, 6). The word *antitupon* is syntactically separate from both *ho* and *baptisma*; actually, *antitupon* immediately follows and modifies *humas* (“you”). (E.G. Selwyn, following John Lightfoot, construes verse 21 correctly in this regard in his well-known *First Epistle of Peter* [1947], pp. 201-205, 298-299). Anyway, Peter’s use simply of “water,” rather than “flood,” rules out the common idea of baptism as counterpart to the flood (e.g., as its antitype). Baptism can scarcely correspond to water; it partially consists in water. Peter, in any case, clearly uses *antitupon* in its general sense of something “corresponding to something that has gone before” (BAG, p. 75). Obviously inappropriate here is the technical sense employed in Hebrews 9:24, namely, a “copy, antitype, representation. . . , according to Platonic doctrine, with reference to the world of things about us, as opposed to the true heavenly originals, or ideas (the *authentikon*).” And it would be an anachronism to invest the word with the technical significance which “antitype” assumed in post-biblical times, namely, the “fulfilment” of a “type” in historical terms (i.e., an entity or occurrence ordained by God to predict some future entity or occurrence in some respect). There is, therefore, no justification here to speak of the flood as a type of baptism.

Thus, the idea of 20b-21a is this: in the ark eight people were brought safely through water, which now as (in the form of) baptism saves

you who compose a corresponding entity. In actuality, then, we have not correspondence, but contrast here between the flood and baptism, while the correspondence comes between the eight souls in the ark of verse 20 and the *humas* ("you") of verse 21 (or *hēmas*, "us," depending on the textual variant chosen)—in other words, between the church of Noah's day and church of the New Testament. The point of correspondence appears in the word *oligoi*—the fewness of believers (then and now) in the midst of a hostile world (an idea easy to relate to the *theologia crucis* central to this pericope and epistle, as explained previously).

Verses 21b-22 (wherein *apothesis* and *eperōtēma* stand in apposition to *baptisma*) base the saving efficacy of baptism squarely on the exaltation of Christ (especially the resurrection). Verse 21b, more specifically, connects this efficacy, not with the physical results of baptism, but with the spiritual. The place of *sarkos* and *suneidesēōs agathēs* (at the beginning of the negative and positive explications respectively of the saving nature of baptism) evidently indicates genitives of sphere: "not [in the sphere] of flesh as a removal of dirt but rather [in the sphere] of a good conscience as an appeal to God." In other words, baptism saves us by establishing a satisfactory relationship between us sinners and the Holy God on the basis of the work of Christ (cf. v. 18a). For the biblical (and prebiblical) meaning of *eperōtēma* is "appeal," not "answer" (BAG, p. 285); and Peter describes baptism as actually effecting, not merely symbolizing, a "good conscience" (*pace* the comments of Reformed theologians).

A sermon on this pericope could well have the goal of enduring suffering with patience. The problem is that we instinctively resist suffering, especially if it be undeserved. The means to achieving the aforesaid goal is the blessing which God has attached to the crosses of Christians on the basis of the cross of Christ Himself.

*Introduction:* It is one of the most frequent questions in human experience: "What did I do to deserve this?" The occasion may be some inconvenience—an unexpected visitor or a lost key. The occasion may be embarrassment, insult, or injury. The occasion may be suffering much more severe—a painful sickness or the death of loved ones. Yes, all sorts of suffering tend to raise this question in the minds of each of us:

### WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?

- I. Actually, we deserve much more suffering.
  - A. We are all "by nature sinful" and "unjust" (*Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 6; v. 18).

- B. We have all, therefore, “justly deserved. . .temporal and eternal punishment” (*Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 16; v. 20)
- II. Actually, we receive much more than suffering.
  - A. We receive blessings from the sufferings of Christ.
    - 1. Accomplished for us in the state of humiliation (v. 18).
    - 2. Imparted to us in the state of exaltation (vv. 21-22).
  - B. We receive blessings from sufferings as Christians (vv. 14-17).

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

## THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 27, 1990

1 Peter 4:12-17; 5:6-11

The First Epistle of Peter has rightly been called a “Letter of Christian Hope.” It is not simply an apostolic optimism that leads to this designation but a realism that out of intense Christian struggle will graciously come deliverance and even glory. Peter needs no instruction about suffering. He is not surprised when it comes (4:2), how it comes (4:4), and even why it comes (5:8). His concern, however, is that his readers perceive both the nature of struggling and its purpose for them, in order that they might react in the God-directed way that will lead to their eventual triumph. In effect the apostle is affirming to every Christian, “Suffering should not be shocking, but it should be salutary.”

The goal of the sermon is to build on the reality of the believer’s struggle with a humble and sure hope that the Lord of grace will provide both direction and deliverance—to emphasize the eternal value of a faith that endures. The problem is that suffering is both easily misunderstood and often completely mishandled because sin can blind even believers as to its nature and purpose. The means to the goal is to uphold the “mighty hand of God” (5:6) as the only hope in guiding the believer through the unavoidable perils that litter the pathway of life.

*Introduction:* Physicians sometimes have to tell patients that they have a condition for which there is no immediate cure and that only time will eventually be their healer. This is not usually welcome news, since few enjoy living with suffering. Yet living with suffering is a spiritual reality for every Christian. In some measure all believers

have hardships. Understanding their nature, purpose, and outcome is part of faith, even as Peter reminds us in the text:

### WHEN SUFFERING LOOMS

- I. Consider its nature.
    - A. Suffering that results from personal wickedness is explainable.
      - 1. It is a consequence of sin.
      - 2. It should not be seen among Christian believers (4:15).
    - B. Hardship that comes because of commitment to Christ is unavoidable.
      - 1. It should not surprise us (4:12).
      - 2. It should energize us to know that we share in what our Savior endured (4:13).
  - II. Determine its purpose.
    - A. Trials can remind us that our Lord also suffered.
    - B. Struggles can show us that upholding the name of Christ, no matter how difficult, gives evidence of God's presence with us.
    - C. Judgment can convince us that our Lord cares deeply about our commitment to Him and looks for leadership from His "household" (4:17).
- Transition:* Although suffering can take many forms, some of which are understandable but others of which cannot be explained completely, Christians know that all hardship can have purpose and value, especially if the results of it can be identified and taken to heart.
- III. Contemplate its outcome.
    - A. Our helplessness will humble us (5:6).
      - 1. We have no power by ourselves to endure.
      - 2. We have a God whose helpfulness is complete (5:7).
    - B. Our predicament will awaken us.
      - 1. We cannot afford to become careless.
        - a. The devil is seeking us (5:8).
        - b. The "lion" is a formidable foe.
      - 2. We stand with "the fellow faithful" in knowing that our mutual trials are an inevitable part of our way to life.
    - C. Our future will enliven us.
      - 1. We know that our suffering will not last (5:10).
      - 2. We know that the God who has saved us will lead us through all trials and give us the gift of grace for which we dared to hope, His "eternal glory in Christ" (5:10).

*Conclusion:* Christians know it is not valuable to debate the existence of hardship. What has value, however, is a realization that suffering can lead by grace to a humble walk through even the most difficult life under the care of a mighty and loving Lord. Satan will “roar.” Vigilance under grace is needed. But the gift of eternal glory in Christ endures as our unsurpassed and certain goal.

David E. Seybold  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

## THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

June 3, 1990

Acts 2:1-21

How is it that God's great salvation, accomplished so long ago and so far away, can find and apply itself to our lives today? How can hearts turned from God and hardened by sin become receptive and change completely so that God now uses them as His agents of change for others? It all has to do with the mysterious, behind-the-scenes working of the Holy Spirit.

Christians today need to remember that Pentecost was not just a one-time event. The Holy Spirit continues to work in the world following Pentecost and He continues to work in our lives following baptism. The challenge is that we keep ourselves open to His working. Only then can God's gracious change be effected in our hearts and lives.

*Introduction:* It is acceptable and even desirable today to be spirited, that is, to have a vibrant and enthusiastic attitude toward life. We are encouraged to “catch the spirit” in everything from our support of the local athletic team to the way we choose which brand of gasoline to buy. Why it is easier for some more than others to “catch the spirit” is a secret that teachers, coaches, and anyone in the motivation business would pay dearly to find out. But it is really no secret when it comes to catching the most desirable spirit of all, the Holy Spirit. As we hear the story of Pentecost today, we twentieth-century believers are challenged:

### CATCH THE SPIRIT

- I. God has made it easy for His Spirit to be caught.
  - A. The Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost.



1. His presence was obvious to all in great signs and wonders.
2. Peter's sermon testified of God's desire to come close to us through His Holy Spirit.
- B. This special coming of the Holy Spirit was promised by God.
  1. His coming was spoken of in the Old Testament (vv. 17-21).
  2. Jesus Himself had promised His coming (John 14:16,26; 15:26).
- C. This outpouring was only the beginning.
  1. God generously pours His Spirit on all people.
    - a. Israel was not to be God's exclusive people.
    - b. We see a cosmopolitan involvement in the Pentecost experience (vv. 8-11).
    - c. All, regardless of age, sex, social status, or race, are the Holy Spirit's target (vv. 17-18).
  2. Since we continue to live "in the last days" (v. 17a), God's saving activity is still accomplished among us through the Holy Spirit.

*Transition:* God desires the salvation of all people. He wants to bring us that salvation by coming close to us; indeed, He wants to live in us. To that end, He pours out His Spirit on us so that He can be "caught" by faith and internalized.

- II. Once caught, the Holy Spirit changes people.
  - A. He convicts us of our sin and shows us our need to have the guilt of that sin removed.
    1. Convicted of their sin through Peter's sermon, the Pentecost people were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37).
    2. This sorrow over sin and desire for change is at the heart of the word "repent" ("*metanoes*," v. 38).
  - B. He works in us the desire to "call on the name of the Lord" so that we can "be saved" (v. 21).
    1. God's mercy and salvation are forced on no one.
    2. The Holy Spirit alone can enable us to say "Jesus is Lord" with all that statement implies for our forgiveness and salvation.
    3. Baptism is one means He uses to produce that change (Acts 2:38,41).
    4. The change of repentance and faith is a daily process which the Holy Spirit works in us.
- III. Once changed, we catch God's vision of a world in need.
  - A. Like the disciples on Pentecost, we become agents of change as we witness to God's change in us.
  - B. Pentecost goes on as others "catch the Spirit."

*Conclusion:* In this age of the Holy Spirit, may we continually catch that Spirit as He is poured out to us in Word and Sacrament. And may He make us spirited enough to join Him boldly in His work, "that all may call on the name of the Lord and be saved."

Paul E. Cloeter  
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## THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

June 10, 1990

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Paul was concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Corinthian Christians because they tolerated gross immorality within their community. Their Christian life was not in harmony with their Christian faith. Paul had written them about the immoral person and he had visited them concerning this matter. This letter was the third time he approached them about the toleration of sin (13:1-2). Paul urged them to examine themselves, to test themselves to determine whether or not they were holding the faith (13:5). His hope was that they would improve (13:9). This is the reason for his words of farewell in verse 11, "Mend you ways." In effect Paul was telling them that without repentance the Corinthians could not receive God's blessing. "Mend your ways. . .and God will be with you."

*Introduction:* A young man was about to leave a lengthy church meeting in the dark of night in a neighborhood with a high crime rate. As he was about to leave, the minister said to him, after calling his name, "The Lord be with you." On his way home the young man thought, "How many times I have heard those words in church, but they never touched me, until I heard them tonight." The doctrine of the trinity can become a mere formula to describe our God. But it must be more. It must be a personal experience to each of us who believe.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRINITY

- I. The formula without the experience will not bring a blessing.
  - A. This was the problem "Old Israel" experienced.
    1. The people believed that God was with them to protect them because they had the temple (Jeremiah 7:4).
    2. The people believed mistakenly that God was with them, but their lives were not in harmony with God (Amos 5:14).

- B. This was the problem the Corinthians experienced.
  - 1. The Corinthians did not accept Paul's admonition (13:1-2).
  - 2. Paul implies that God's blessing will not be with them if they do not change (13:11).
- C. This is often our problem.
  - 1. We accept the truth of our God as a formula, but we live unrepentant lives.
  - 2. We assume because we are baptized and are "church members" that we are saved.
  - 3. As a result, we do not experience the saving grace of Jesus and the transforming love of the Father or the securing fellowship of the Spirit.
- II. The formula is experienced personally when we do these things:
  - A. We repent of our sins.
    - 1. We heed the appeal of Paul to turn from our sins.
    - 2. We heed the appeal of Paul to mend our ways.
  - B. We hold on to the faith.
    - 1. We trust God's forgiveness.
    - 2. We realize Jesus is in us.
  - C. We live as brothers and sisters.
    - 1. We agree with each other.
    - 2. We live in peace.
- III. The experience of the trinity is a blessing.
  - A. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is our experience.
    - 1. It is real.
    - 2. It is personal.
  - B. The love of God is our experience.
    - 1. It is warm.
    - 2. It is all-embracing.
  - C. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is our experience.
    - 1. It gives security.
    - 2. It gives company.

*Conclusion:* The Triune God wants to be more than a formula to us. He wants us to experience Him personally. For this reason His Son lived among us and His Spirit lives in us. May you experience the Holy Trinity in rich measure.

David Schlie  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 17, 1990

Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28

This theologically wealthy pericope may likely cause the preacher to ask, "How shall I preach thee? Let me count the ways." Indeed, there are many possible approaches to the rich theological heritage offered here. Ironically, this same text poses a potential problem. Its familiarity may give rise to the preacher's lament, "They have heard it all before. It will make no real difference, anyway." The text, however, does make a difference, all the difference in the world. As its message is proclaimed faith is implanted and strengthened by the Gospel it conveys. The message of redemption through Christ Jesus meets the malady of mankind's unrighteousness. Through the means of the Gospel the unrighteousness of sin (malady) is conquered anew by the righteousness from God (goal). One possible handle to the text is the word "difference." The introduction to the sermon could discuss the obvious differences between people.

*Introduction:* People are *different* from one another. People *differ* in such ways as age, height, weight, hobbies, and backgrounds. Each child is unique. Each adult is unique. Differences are apparent.

### THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST MAKES

- I. In one sense there is *no* difference (v. 22). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This fact is evident in the Old Testament and the New. That same fact is evident in our own times and in our own lives. There is no *difference*. There is no exception among men, women, or children. The consequences of that fact touch each life with guilt, death, and damnation.
- II. But there was a difference. There was one who did not fall short. He was the One, Jesus Christ. That difference was evident in His perfect life. He kept the law perfectly. And that difference was evident in His suffering and damnation. He alone was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- III. And *what* a difference He makes. The difference He makes is presented in the text itself: righteousness apart from the law (v. 21); righteousness by His grace (v. 24); righteousness through faith (v. 22).
- IV. As His people we *celebrate* that difference. We gather around His Word and sacraments. We commemorate our redemption. We receive true joy.

- V. As His people we *communicate* that difference. We do so in word and deed. We do so to those who are within the family of God. We do so to those who are outside the family. We do so without distinction. Through our witness God works to convey the differences Christ makes to all nations.

*Conclusion:* The condemning message of God's law applies to all. There is no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. However, there was a difference. There was one who was an exception to that rule. That difference was evident in His active and passive obedience. And what a difference He makes! God's condemning law applies to all, without distinction. By His grace that truth also applies to you and to me. As God's people we celebrate the difference Christ makes. As God's people we are empowered by the Gospel to communicate that good news to all people.

Jan Case

### THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

June 24, 1990

Romans 4:18-25

*Introduction:* Have you ever felt a sense of complete hopelessness? It may be at a time of severe illness or a business that went bankrupt. Perhaps a relative was on a plane that was highjacked by a terrorist. The situation can be anything and any place. But you are absolutely helpless and therefore hopeless. Furthermore, your friends gave no help with their well-meaning comments: "Don't worry, things will come out all right." If someone wants to say, "Don't worry," he better have some solution to the problem. Hope is based on the ability and promise of aid in time of need. This text speaks to that point.

### AGAINST ALL ODDS

- I. Man's hope.
  - A. The world's foundation for hope.
    1. Based on a dying and decaying world.
    2. Based on weak and dying man himself.
    3. Based on dreams and promises without the ability to deliver.
  - B. Man's hope in action (vv. 19-20).
    1. Man's hope is based on an impossibility. Who can have hope in this hopeless situation?

2. Man's hope is wish, not promise. Man cannot deliver on his hope; he can only wish for luck.
3. Man's hope turns to bitterness and cynicism. Disappointment arises because there is no surety in the future.

## II. God's hope.

### A. God as foundation of hope.

1. The person of Jesus Christ is the foundation for all hope (v. 24).
2. The sacrifice of Christ as atonement (v. 25) is the cause of God's promise of help and friendship.
3. The victory in the resurrection of Christ (v. 24) is a guarantee of God's victory in all of life.

### B. Hope in the life of the Christian.

1. The Christian faces reality with confidence in Christ and His promises (v. 29).
2. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior is the requirement for hope. Trust in all God's promises builds hope (v. 21).
3. The Christian lives confidently in both faith and hope. They are two sides of a coin (v. 23).

George Kraus

## THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 1, 1990

Romans 5:6-11

Paul has asserted the power of the Gospel against the reality of human sin, which places us under the wrath of God. God justifies us by faith, not by the deeds of the law, a truth which Abraham learned. This justification by faith brings us peace with God, which enables us to glory in tribulation. The text gives us a new perspective on glory. Admitting the total failure of any self-glorification, we glory only in God's love through the death of Christ for us.

The goal of the sermon outlined below is that the hearer glory rightly in salvation through Christ's atoning blood. The malady is that we glory wrongly in ourselves and stand without strength under the wrath of God as ungodly sinners and enemies of God. The means to attaining the goal is the Gospel: Out of undeserved love, God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us with the result that He justified us, saved us, and reconciled us to Himself. He fills us with praise to glory in Him for daily living.

*Introduction:* Glory is a popular word in today's world and points to human achievement. Olympic athletes train and compete to win a gold medal. Candidates for political office hit the campaign trail to win a major election. Young business executives work long, hard hours to gain promotions and more prestigious jobs. We likewise walk the road to glory by personal achievements. In the text Paul starts with tribulation as a leveler of human achievement. By pointing us to God's love in Christ he gives us a new perspective:

### A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON GLORY

- I. We wrongly view glory as human achievement.
  - A. We often deny God's glory and seek our own (Romans 1:21-23). We give God token glory, knowing He made the world, coming to church occasionally for worship, going to Him for help in a pinch; *but* practically we seek our own glory through a comfortable, secure home environment, successful careers with advancement and salary raises, and enjoyable social activities and leisure.
  - B. In reality we are ungodly sinners and enemies of God (Romans 5:6,8,10). God exposes our self-glory.
    1. In the home we experience illness, marital strife, parent-child confrontations. We blame others but are exposed as ungodly sinners and enemies of God.
    2. In the business world we experience loss of employment, power struggles, or unbridled success without satisfaction. We blame others but are exposed as ungodly sinners and enemies of God.
    3. In the social arena we experience relocation, quarrels with friends, or weariness with unbridled pleasure. We blame others but are exposed as ungodly sinners and enemies of God.
  - C. Under God's wrath (5:9) we admit that we are without strength. At home, in business, in the social arena we admit our sinfulness. Tribulation brings us to a new perspective on glory. Human achievement totally fails.
- II. God leads us to glory only in Him through the death of His Son.
  - A. God loves us in our weakness (5:6-7).
  - B. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (5:8). He "justified" us and "reconciled" us to God (5:9-10).
  - C. Therefore, we glory only in God through Christ's atonement (v. 11).

*Conclusion:* God fills us with praise to glorify Him in our daily lives at home, at work, and in the community (*Lutheran Worship*, 210, stanza 1):

All glory be to God alone,  
Forevermore the Highest One.  
He is our sinful race's friend;  
His grace and peace to us extend.  
May humankind see his goodwill,  
May hearts with deep thanksgiving fill.

Stephen J. Carter  
St. Louis, Missouri

## THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 8, 1990

Romans 5:12-15

Many may be surprised at this location for this text, some perhaps viewing it as an irksome intrusion in Roman 5. On closer examination, we find it beautifully portrays the whole objective focus of our joyous Christian freedom—the unmatched grace of the Second Adam. The likeness and importance of Adam and Christ are not found in the idea that they are either the first or representative of two groups or eras. The key is that both usher in new eras, each distinct from the other. The consequences are staggering and of eternal dimensions. The context—especially that which follows the text—is crucial to its proper understanding and application.

The goal of the sermon outlined below is that the hearer would accept as his the gift of grace and life of the Second Adam, Christ. The problem is that we tend to see sin as little more than a series of bad mistakes, rather than a deadly disease infecting all people and bringing death. The solution is found only in the Second Adam, Christ, who ushered in an era filled with God's gracious love—not for Himself, but for all humanity.

*Introduction:* We frequently run into people and things which look or even act alike. My wife is a twin and is often mistaken for her sister. People observe a young man and comment: "Like father, like son!" Parents, proud of their family history and eager to pass their heritage on, often give a number to their offspring—like Jacob Smith IV. The text takes the lives of two people as they lived on earth—one from the Old Testament and one from the New—and compares them. Both are properly called "Adam." The question which you must answer today is this:



## WHICH ADAM IS FOR YOU?

## I. Consider the person.

## A. Adam I

1. He was specially created by God on the sixth day.
2. He was created in harmony with God.
3. He shattered that harmony through sin, distancing himself from God (vv. 12a,19a).

## B. Adam II

1. He was given to the world as a special gift of the Father (John 3:16).
2. He came in perfect harmony with His Father (John 1).
3. He maintained that harmony through perfect obedience (Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 4:15).

## II. Consider the product.

## A. Adam

1. He derails life with God (3:9-18,19a).
2. He destroys life with God (vv. 12,14,16b,17a,18a).

## B. Christ

1. He restores life (vv. 15,17b,18b,19b,21).
2. He renews life (5:1-4,11; 6:4c).

## III Consider the present.

## A. Danger

1. We could underestimate sin as a series of bad but relatively harmless independent acts in life.
2. We could underestimate Christ as one who merely points us to a new way in life.

## B. Delight

1. Jesus' grace outshines Adam's sin and its results today.
2. Jesus' grace overflows to me!

*Conclusion:* The Los Angeles basin is notorious for its smog, which can hide the nearby mountains from view, burn the eyes, and harm the health. Then come the mighty Santa Ana winds off the desert and they blow out the smog, returning the air to its pristine purity. Jesus came that you might have more than a breath of fresh air. He came to give you life!

Lloyd Strelow  
Tustin, California

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## THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 15, 1990

Romans 6:1b-11

This Sunday's pericope is from the third part of Paul's great theological letter to the Romans. Part I comprises chapters 1:14-3:20 and emphasizes universal sinfulness and guilt. Part II (chapters 3:21-5:21) has as its central thought the righteousness (justification) which God provides through the redemption of Christ, a righteousness obtained by us not through works but through faith. Part III (chapters 6:1-8:39) sets forth the Christian life. In 3:21-5:21 the doctrine of justification is central, while in 6:1-8:39 it is the doctrine of sanctification.

The doctrine of justification by faith has always been subject to misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and abuse. Therefore, as Paul has completed his exposition of the doctrine, it is natural that he should state and answer three of the most familiar objections offered by its opponents. The first is that such a method of declaring men just encourages sin (6:1-14); the second, that it allows sin (6:15-7:6); and the third, that it makes law a sinful or an evil thing (7:7-25). In connection with refuting the objection that justification by faith encourages sin, Paul also discusses the place of baptism in the Christian life.

*Introduction:* In August 1988 an elderly matron living in St. Clemens, Michigan, sent to 7800 Lutheran clergymen a letter-tract in which she implored them to ask God to show them the error of which they were guilty by teaching their flocks that through baptism they were born again. She sincerely believed that the Lutheran doctrine of baptism endangered the salvation of members who were taught baptismal regeneration. She once was a confirmed Lutheran but subsequently departed from the Lutheran church.

This woman is not the only person who has not or who at present does not understand the meaning and significance of biblical baptism. Many Christian churches in our day consider baptism a mere ceremony, which may be left undone according to one's pleasure. Many oppose infant baptism and claim that only adults are to be baptized. Even many who support infant baptism do not attach much importance to it.

Luther's Small Catechism treats baptism as one of the chief parts of Christian doctrine. The Wittenberg Reformer held and taught that baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil,

and gives eternal salvation to all who believe in Christ. He held baptism to be “the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Spirit.” Christ commanded His church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing people in the name of the trinity and to follow up by teaching all that Christ has commanded. Infants belong to all nations. That infants should be baptized is shown by the fact that Christ’s instruction was to bring little children to Him, “for of such is the kingdom of God.” Babies and small children can have faith; otherwise Jesus could not have warned against causing the little ones who believe in Him to stumble. Clearly the Savior taught: “Except a person is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The truth is that holy baptism is a sacrament which is of great importance and is to be remembered and utilized as long as the properly baptized person lives. In today’s pericope members of the Christian congregation can again be instructed and reminded of the value of baptism.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

- I. When a person is baptized into Christ something remarkable and wonderful occurs.
  - A. Baptism is no mere occasion to bestow a name on a child or rite of dedication of a child to God.
  - B. In baptism God accomplishes a great miracle; a person born dead in trespasses and sins and by nature an enemy of God is spiritually born again.
  - C. In baptism God does something which is not only valid for babyhood but for childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Yes, its effects extend into eternity.
- II. When a person is properly baptized into Christ, he is immersed into Christ’s death.
  - A. No less than three times Paul stresses this truth, that the Christian is baptized into Christ’s death.
  - B. This “being baptized into Christ’s death” involves being set free from sin.
    1. By His death on the cross Christ became the condemned sinner’s substitute.
    2. In baptism what Christ did for us, paying the punishment we deserved, is applied to the baptized person by the application of water and pronouncement of the baptismal formula.
    3. The blessings Jesus earned are credited to the account of the person baptized. The sinner is declared righteous by faith in Christ.

4. The baptized person becomes united with Christ in a personal union. This union is called "the mystical union."
- III. When a person is baptized into Christ, he becomes a partaker of Christ's life.
  - A. Christ died for our sins but was raised for our justification.
  - B. Through baptism a person enters into a intimate relationship with the Triune God. By virtue of the fact that Jesus rose again, who once was dead, so we arise to a new life, namely, eternal life.
  - C. Because of what Christ is and what He has done through baptism His life becomes our life. This is one of the great truths God has revealed through Paul (Ephesians 5:30,39;1 Corinthians 6:17; Philippians 1:21; Colossians 3:4).
- IV. When a person is baptized into Christ, he joins with Christ in the fight against sin.
  - A. One of Paul's major concerns in this pericope appears in the assertions in verses 4, 6, and 13.
  - B. Every Christian is obligated to overcome indwelling sin and develop a God-pleasing life.
  - C. Paul found in his own experience that a man's sinful nature had to be subdued and that the fight of faith was a daily one in which the Christian's baptism would be utilized. (See Luther's Small Catechism, Part IV, "What does such baptizing with water signify?")

*Conclusion:* All things that we need for our eternal welfare have been given to us in baptism. It is, however, just as true that we can lose everything. Let us hold fast to the grace of God which He has extended to us in baptism. Let us show by leading a godly life that we have not fallen from baptismal grace; let us hold fast to that which we have, that we may not lose the crown of life.

Raymond Surburg

## THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 22, 1990

Romans 7:15-25a

*Introduction:* We follow God as Christians. We do His will. Why should we go against Him? He has chosen and justified us and claimed us. Now we can live holy lives. We can experience victory.

We shall have no struggles, no problems. "The strife is o'er, the battle done."

### VICTORIOUS LIVING

- I. Life does not seem victorious.
  - A. I am doing something strange (v. 15).
  - B. I do not like it (v. 16).
  - C. I am a prisoner (v. 23).
  - D. I am miserable (v. 24).
- II. I cannot seem to live like a Christian.
  - A. Some say Paul is talking about two stages of faith.
    - 1. The first stage is carnal Christianity.
    - 2. The second stage is Spirit-filled Christianity.
    - 3. I must change from one stage to the other.
    - 4. Then I shall have victory.
  - B. Some say Paul is talking about a non-real, hypothetical situation.
    - 1. We should and can avoid such a situation.
    - 2. Only "backsliders" experience such a situation.
    - 3. We can go on to victory if we try.
  - C. The grammar will not allow these views (A and B).
    - 1. Paul uses the present tense; he is not speaking of a future stage.
    - 2. Paul never hints that we bring ourselves back.
    - 3. Other scriptures say the same (Galatians 5:16-18).
    - 4. My experience is the same—I am wretched.
  - D. These views are false hopes (A and B).
- III. But there is true and good news in Romans 7.
  - A. We must ask basic questions.
    - 1. How much must we change to be saved?
    - 2. When do we become acceptable?
    - 3. Is "acceptable" something we become?
    - 4. Can we escape Romans 7?
  - B. We must ask questions of Romans 7.
    - 1. Is this passage prescriptive of Christians?
    - 2. Is this passage descriptive of a process of salvation?
    - 3. Does this passage describe only saved sinners? (This is the solution to the puzzle. All other questions in III. A and B must answered negatively.)
- IV. It is wonderful to be described so accurately.
  - A. God knows, understands, and still loves.
  - B. Salvation does not depend on change but on Jesus.
  - C. Even the great Paul was weak and struggling.

- D. We can view ourselves in the present.
  - 1. Lost and found.
  - 2. Dead and alive.
  - 3. Sinner and saint.
- E. Jesus will deliver.
- V. So we celebrate the struggle of Romans 7.
  - A. It will always be present in this life.
  - B. God has accepted us.
  - C. We will win.

Klemet Preus  
Woodland, California

## THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 29, 1990

Romans 8:15-25

In Romans 8 Paul speaks of the Christian life in the Spirit. If we live according to the Spirit who lives in us, we can know we are God's children and as God's children we will share in His glory. Yet if we share in His glory, we must also share in the pain He suffered. The text deals with this present life of suffering on our way to glory. "I reckon" (v. 18) implies reasoning, calculation. We may consider an accountant balancing a ledger. The "suffering" side of the ledger is no comparison to the "glory" side. The glory that shall be revealed in us is the glory of the Lord (Colossians 3:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Our present sufferings are mirrored in the upheaval and bondage of all creation. All suffering and upheaval is tied to the fall into sin. "Creation," in verses 19-22, is best thought of as the non-rational creation, animate or inanimate, equivalent to all nature. "Earnest expectation" (v. 19) suggests an outstretched head or neck. Homiletically we might think of a craned neck at a parade, eagerly waiting for the spectacle to come. The "inward groaning" of verse 23 should be tied to the eager waiting which is a predominant thought of the verse and the text. It is not simply a groaning from pain, but a longing for final deliverance. The "first fruits" of verse 23 (i.e., the indwelling of the Spirit and the blessings He brings to our lives now) are like a "down-payment" or "first installment" of the eternal heritage of glory that awaits us (Ephesians 1:14 and 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). The Christian "hope" of verse 24 is more than the wishful thinking of this age. It is a certain hope based on the death and resurrection of our Lord (1 Peter 1:3). It is this hope for final "glory" (v. 18), "glorious

liberty" (v. 21), and "final redemption" (v. 23) that saves us from our troubles.

### HOW DO CHRISTIANS DEAL WITH TROUBLE?

- I. We accept it as a fact of life this side of heaven.
  - A. Paul does not question the reality of suffering for Christians.
  - B. All of creation suffers and reflects our human condition.
- II. We endure it, measuring it against the glory that awaits us.
  - A. There is no comparison in duration ("present" suffering).
  - B. There is no comparison in degree.
- III. We groan under it.
  - A. We are not stoics, but feel the pain.
  - B. This Christian groaning has the aspect of longing for what lies ahead, our final redemption.
- IV. We give thanks for it inasmuch as it lifts our sights heavenward.
  - A. Ease of life makes us complacent and earthbound.
  - B. Our sufferings move us to consider the "glorious freedom" that awaits us.

Dennis S. Perryman  
Acton, Massachusetts

### THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 5, 1990

Romans 8:26-27

Those who are using the Series A Epistles in the course of this year will already have been preaching from Romans for the past seven Sundays (eight if one includes Pentecost). Accordingly it is scarcely necessary to orient the preacher to the content of Romans. Yet a word about the larger picture of the context, about the form of this section and its sublime content is always in order.

Certainly the poetic quality of the verses forming 8:17-30, from which three successive texts are taken, is felt by everyone. St. Paul's words are not poetry in an outward sense, but the inner essence, the vision, the imaginative conception of the passage is artistic. We name just two examples to illustrate the glorious object of the Christian hope.

Note first how Paul's meditation on present conditions and future glory clusters about the Holy Trinity. The creation (sub-human

creation) is groaning in travail while it is awaiting the revealing of the children of God; thereby the material nature of creation will be renovated to its original status and become a habitat for the believers (God the Father, 8:19-22). The believers too groan while they await full release from the bondage to sin and the final expression of their adoption, the redemption of their bodies (God the Son, 8:23). At the same time there dwells within the believers (8:9) the Holy Spirit—what this chapter emphasizes—who is the seal of the believers' sonship (vv. 15,18), the assurance of the full blessings of God in the future under the picture of the first fruits (v. 23). Thus creation redemption, and sanctification merge in the apostle's mind.

Another picture that flashes through Paul's description is that of the rebirth, *palingenesia*, as it is called in Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. Nature will be renewed and transformed, thus making it a suitable abode for God's creatures. Believing mankind will be transformed so that they might capably rule over the new age (Matthew 24:45 ff.). Now already they have the "first fruit of the Spirit," which portends not only their full and final worship, but also the full harvest of the redemption of their bodies. Baptism, of course, is always the initial stage in this cycle.

The preacher ought always to remember that the completed work of Jesus Christ was for our justification (3:21-31). It is given to us in the Gospel (5:18-19), applied in baptism (6:2-11), and established in us by the Holy Spirit. So it is that 8:2 tells us: "For the law of the Spirit of life has in Christ Jesus set you free from the law of sin and of death." The Holy Spirit's indwelling is the installation and establishment of the "law of life" or the Gospel in the believer (see 7:22-23 and the four "laws"; 3:31). Calling the Gospel the "law of the Spirit of life" is another way of saying that the work of Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to the believer; the end of the law is fulfilled in us by the Holy Spirit.

*Introduction:* We are not alone. The Holy Paraclete is our inward companion (John 14:17). He goes with us to guide, teach, remind, and comfort us (John 14:25-26; 15:26-27). To this picture of the sustaining companionship of the Holy Spirit St. Paul adds that the Spirit is our intercessor. Jesus, of course, is our intercessor (John 17:20-26), but the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us. This is the "help" we need and have.

## MORE HELP FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I. The Spirit helps in our weakness in prayer (v. 26).
  - A. The significance of prayer.



1. We need prayer. In the weakness that Paul experienced from the “thorn” prayer “released” God’s grace (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).
2. Prayer “in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18) is a “help.”
3. The “help” of the Spirit in prayer is essential. The Greek word *synantilambanein* is used also in Luke 10:40 in Martha’s prayer: “Tell her to help me by taking hold of her end of the task.” The Spirit does the praying on our behalf and “for the saints.”
- B. The content of prayer (“what we should pray” is the main emphasis).
  1. Only God knows our real needs and the Spirit helps us see them.
  2. Only God knows the real needs of others and the Spirit helps.
  3. We do not know the “will of God” for us except in the cross.
- II. The Spirit helps us understand the mind of God (v. 27).
  - A. The Spirit searches our hearts.
    1. He finds the “inexpressible (ineffable) groanings” and delivers these longings to God’s throne (this is not glossalalia or ecstatic speech.)
    2. The Spirit interprets these pre-prayer thoughts to God.
  - B. The Spirit explains God’s will for the saints.
    1. He intercedes for us as our advocate (cf. 1 John 2:1-2 where Jesus is our advocate).
    2. He makes God’s will known to us by and through the Word of God.

*Conclusion:* The cycle of communication is completed by the Holy Spirit’s help. We have noted the cycle of the Holy Trinity in creation, redemption, and sanctification. Now we see how in our weakness the Spirit helps us understand our needs, interprets these to God the Father through Jesus, and then explains God’s will in our lives.

Waldemar Degner

## THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 12, 1990

Romans 8:28-30

The understanding of the much-loved first verse of the text (Romans 8:28) has to do with the inclusion of the thoughts of verses 29 and

30. The final emphasis is eschatological. Any good things that happen here (or bad for that matter) will pale in comparison to the full glory of God that will be ours at the resurrection. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer may be yet more certain of the blessings God has in store for him or her. The malady is that we too often lose sight of God's promises and blessings because of the cares and burdens of this world. The means to the goal stated is the great faithfulness of God to bring us to glory in Christ Jesus.

*Introduction:* How often the troubles and tangles of life here on this earth plague us so that we even lose heart and doubt the promises of God! Would it not be wonderful if we could live with a certain confidence and trust in God that would not be stopped by even the gravest of this life's terrors? Today let us listen and learn.

## HOW TO BE CERTAIN OF GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR YOU

- I. Look beyond your circumstances.
  - A. Not everything that happens is good.
    1. God never says that all things are good.
    2. Christianity is not the religion of the ostrich; we are not called upon by God to stick our heads in the sand and ignore the bad things that do happen in the world. Rather we are to look to God in the face of the bad things.
  - B. God is able, however, to bring good out of bad.
    1. Athletes say that there is no gain without pain.
    2. God promises that there will never be pain without gain.
  - C. God is, moreover, working behind the scenes to bring His own to the fullness of His eternal blessings.
    1. God's ways may not always be discernible.
    2. He is, nevertheless, at work in our world to bring us His blessings in Christ.
- II. Love God above all.
  - A. God works all things together for good for those who love Him.
    1. This is a conditional promise. We do well to remember that fact.
    2. To those who do love God there is a great promise: He works things out for our good (cf. Joseph in Egypt).
  - B. Loving God has to do with a proper understanding of the First Commandment.
    1. A "god" is that to which we look for the highest good.
    2. Fearing, loving, and trusting God really depends on remembering and understanding what God has done for us in Christ.

3. We love because He first loved us. We must consider God's love in the same way as Paul does here in the text, for this is the ultimate condition upon which all of God's promises are based.

III. Rely on the faithfulness of God to His word and promises.

A. Four key thoughts show how God brings us blessings.

1. Predestined. Our predestination in Scripture is always in view of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12) and always intended for our encouragement (cf. Jeremiah 29:11; Genesis 50:20). We do not have the mind of God; so we must view our predestination in the light of God's desire that all be saved through Jesus Christ who died for the sins of the whole world.
2. Called. We need not wait anxiously for the call to be part of God's kingdom. He has called us to come to Him and trust Him. Jesus has said, "Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "Trust in God, trust also in me" (John 14:1). His call brings us to a full and perfect relationship with Him because we are justified.
3. Justified. In spite of our sin, God has loved us. He sent Jesus Christ to be our righteousness, forgive our sins, and give us His perfection by faith. So we now look forward to being glorified.
4. Glorified. There will be a day of resurrection. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. We will be raised from death and given new glorious and eternal bodies. Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee of this promise.

B. The one key to full enjoyment of His blessings is faith.

1. God will do what He has determined to do.
2. We can have faith as we hear, meditate upon, and immerse ourselves in God's word.

David L. Bahn  
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

**THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

August 19, 1990

Romans 8:35-39

The goal of this sermon is to instill confidence that we will conquer every trouble through God's love for us in Christ. The malady is our doubting fear that something, someone, or some time in our existence

will leave us without God's love and salvation. St. Paul asks a question about some possible maladies which could cause such fear. The sermon must answer Paul's question. The means to doing so is to discuss each of these maladies (in groups). First we admit that each is a problem which by ourselves we cannot handle. Then, however, we assert, with promises of God and biblical examples of God's solutions, that in each possible problem we more than conquer the problem through God, who showed His love for us most clearly in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The form of the sermon is that of a musical rondo, of many verses with a refrain. In each "verse" a problem is introduced by means of a question. Then we show a biblical example of God's solution to a similar problem or we recall a promise from Scripture that God will conquer this problem for us. This leads to the refrain: also in this problem "we more than conquer through Him who loved us." Before the climax of the sermon the preacher generalizes from the specific maladies Paul mentions to show that nothing in life can separate us believers from the love of God. At this point the refrain changes (see outline). Because God in love conquers all possible problems for the Christian and because nothing can separate us from God's love (because of our justification in Christ), we come to the same conclusion as St. Paul (v. 37).

*Introduction:* You think you have problems? You do! Being a Christian does not make problems go away. But it does help conquer problems. Because Jesus suffered the penalties of sin in our place, God loves us. He also calls us to believe that nothing can separate us from His love. No matter what your problems might be, God's Word wants to convince you today that through Christ we can conquer all our problems.

### IN ALL THINGS WE MORE THAN CONQUER THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US

- I. In tribulation or distress we more than conquer through Him who loved us ("in tight spots," 1 Corinthians 10:13 or Luke 4:28-30).
- II. In persecution we more than conquer through Him who loved us (Matthew 5:10).
- III. In famine or nakedness we more than conquer through Him who loved us (Matthew 14:19-21; 6:28-30).
- IV. In danger we more than conquer through Him who loved us (v. 36; Isaiah 53:7-8).
- V. In death we more than conquer through Him who loved us (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

VI. In life we more than conquer through Him who loved us.

- A. No event can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus ("neither death nor life. . .nor things present nor things to come"; v. 28).
- B. No created thing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (vv. 38-39; Ephesians 1:20-22).
- C. No sin can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (vv. 33-34).

*Conclusion:* Believe these promises of God! God loved us when He had Christ die, rise, and sit at His right hand. Christ sits as conqueror over all creation. Therefore God will always love us, and we are convinced that nothing can separate us from His love (vv. 38-39). That is why we are also convinced that, despite all our problems, "in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us" (v. 37).

Mark Eddy  
Shumway, Illinois

## THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 26, 1990

Romans 9:1-5

In the text Paul expresses sorrow and Christlike love for his kinsmen who cut themselves off from God in spite of their many advantages. The sermon's goal is that the hearers reach out to unbelievers with the Gospel. The problem is our failure, in our unbelief, to care about such people. The means to the goal is to proclaim Christ's love for us in its many dimensions.

*Introduction:* Fighting apathy is crucial in the Jerry Lewis telethon, getting out the vote, and television advertisements for the SPCA. Christians fight a more insidious apathy:

### HAVE A CARE FOR THE UNBELIEVER

- I. In many ways we do not care.
  - A. We find it easy to dislike unbelievers.
    - 1. Maybe they flagrantly worship a repugnant idol. Or success, money, or knowledge are their idols. Or they regard our Lord as a joke.

- 
2. They often see us as irrational, unintelligent, unable to cope. We get disgusted with them and their hostility (see 1 Kings 19:9 ff.)
  3. They can be so shallow. For example, even “good prospects” might easily go to another church if the nursery at ours is located downstairs.
- B. We do not want to talk about such a “loaded” subject as the Gospel, for we fear that evangelism efforts will cost us respect and affection.
- II. Paul’s concern puts our lack of concern to shame.
- A. Paul felt sorry for people who had tried to kill him; we should have a care for our unbelieving neighbors. (The depth of Paul’s sorrow in verses 2-3 is unexplainable if he expected a general conversion of the Jews.)
  - B. Paul was moved with compassion for those who had more advantages (vv. 4-5) than most people we meet. Their need should move us!
  - C. Paul’s conscience bore him witness in the Holy Spirit (v. 1). Faith reacts in grief when it encounters unbelief. Our lack of concern with unbelievers around us shows our own unbelief—also a cause of grief.
- III. Caring concern for unbelievers grows from the ground of Christ’s love.
- A. Strong love. Such love moved Paul to yearn to undertake (v. 3) and moved Christ Himself actually to perform the noblest of all acts.
  - B. Self-sacrificing love. Paul uses an emphatic “I” (v. 3); Christ set Himself up to perish, that is, to be cut off from God, on the cross.
  - C. Substitutionary love. Paul uses the preposition *hyper*; Christ bore our sin (Psalm 40:12; 41:4; and 69:5). (See *Lutheran Worship*, 26, 276-91. “Unless He had taken upon Himself my sins. . . the Law would have no right over Him” [234].)
  - D. Saving love. Christ loved us in spite of our undeserving unbelief (see Matthew 14:30-31).
  - E. Successful love. Christ could die for us and the whole world, then rise to life (while Paul could not), because He is the man who is also God (v. 5, on which see Cranfield, Philippi, Stöckhardt), come for us.
  - F. Secure love. The contrast between the Jews’ plight and privileges raised the prospect that God’s Word had failed. But it had not failed (v. 6 ff.). The Gospel remains God’s definite word to us that He is not angry.
  - G. Shaping love. Of course, it is not that Christ was patterned on Paul; rather Christ’s love had such a profound effect on

Paul that it molded his love after the fashion of the cross. In fact, Christ's own love reached out through Paul, who had become a "little Christ"; it does the same with us.

*Conclusion:* Like Paul, we are moved to speak the Gospel out of love for our neighbors, but still more because we ourselves have been caught up into Jesus' saving work for the world. Now our Lord and Brother carries it out through our flesh and blood. How can we lack caring concern for unbelievers?

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## THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 2, 1990

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

The abundance of material in Romans tempts the preacher to stray from the text at hand. Chapter eleven tempts us to deliver a lecture on tree surgery. The pericope is chosen to help us focus rather on God's amazing grace. A second trap in preaching on Romans is to invest so much time in speaking to the situation of Paul's audience that we forget to make application to the people in the pews before us.

In verse 15 we note that "reconciliation" for Paul goes beyond a change of attitude on God's part. When the world is reconciled to God, both directions of the relationship are changed from death to life. While verse 28 is not part of the assigned text, it is germane that, where some translations use "election," *God's Word to the Nations* uses "from the viewpoint of God's choice."

*Introduction:* If I want to make a friend, do I begin by wooing someone else? No! If I want to make someone wealthy, do I begin by making him bankrupt? No! Yet Paul and the Holy Spirit tell us:

### GOD'S BACKWARD ECONOMY MEANS AMAZING GRACE

- I. The Lord often has to use backward economy.
  - A. The majority of the Jews rejected Paul and Jesus.
    1. Jesus told the Canaanite woman in today's gospel reading (Matthew 15:21-28) that He came first to the lost sheep of Israel. But they killed Him.

2. Paul, Apostle to Gentiles, consistently went first to the synagogues. But the people there stoned and imprisoned him.
- B. Too many in the “established church” today have no zeal.
  1. Too many born and raised in the church have only the smoldering embers of spiritual fire.
  2. The situation is all too clear from these things:
    - a. Small offerings.
    - b. Lack of participation in worship and Bible study.
    - c. Indifference to the Sacrament of the Altar.
  3. If you were charged with being a Christian in your everyday behavior, would there be enough evidence to convict?
- II. Amazing grace often comes in a roundabout way.
  - A. God wanted to save the Jews at all costs.
    1. Even if His Son had to die for them.
    2. Even if it meant first saving those to whom the Jews felt themselves superior.
  - B. God wants to save you at all costs.
    1. Even if His Son had to die for you.
    2. Even if it means sending Koreans or Chinese as missionaries to us.
    3. Even if the preacher has to offend us sometimes.

*Conclusion:* God does not care if you are a Gentile or a Jew. He wants you in His family. He has done everything to save you. Paul said he was willing to be all things to all people that a few might be saved. How many will be brought to faith because you have been saved?

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## THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 9, 1990

Romans 11:33-36

Our stated intention when we come to church is to worship God. We might even call our activity “Divine Service” and present an “Order of Worship” to those joining us. And yet, how difficult it is to truly worship God! We are so full of ourselves and our problems and the concerns of the world around us that we fail to get beyond



asking help or understanding or guidance or forgiveness. Paul concludes the difficult theological section of his letter to the church at Rome with a great doxology of pure praise of God.

It does not really matter what the subject at hand might be, the question of the conversion of the Jews as it was for Paul, or the quest for world peace, a safe environment, or financial security as it might be for us—we finally come to the end of our insights, energy, resources, and wisdom. At that point we are ready to look again at God as God and not just as an extension of ourselves. His power, wisdom, and knowledge are without limits! His judgments, decisions, and methods are beyond our understanding and yet are wonderful. We are humbled by the reminder that we neither know God fully nor are we His advisors. We who are so very limited praise God as the center and ground of all being. What is left to us but to join Paul in giving God praise?

*Introduction:* Let us do a hard thing this morning—let us really worship! Worship is not as easy or obvious as it sounds! We are so concerned about ourselves and the needs and questions and fears and habits that bring us here. It is too easy to focus on ourselves rather on God. We are like children who see the parent only as a way of finding satisfaction of their needs and take only a rare look beyond them. May God help us to worship Him this hour!

### GIVE GLORY TO GOD!

- I. We begin to worship when we come to an end of ourselves.
  - A. Paul struggled with the unanswerable questions.
  - B. We are limited in our insights and knowledge.
  - C. We are confronted with our arrogance—we want to judge God's ways and to tell Him what He needs to do.
- II. Worship happens when we are able to glimpse the wonder of God in Jesus Christ.
  - A. God is not limited in power, wisdom, or insight!
  - B. God's ways and judgments are beyond us.
  - C. God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ as a Father who loves, accepts, forgives, and saves His children.
  - D. Our only response is to offer thanks and praise.

*Conclusion:* Can we do it? Are we able to empty ourselves and to be filled with God? The final mystery is that God Himself enables us to worship and accepts our feeble efforts! All the more reason to praise the Lord and to worship Him with our lives!

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## THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 16, 1990

Romans 12:1-8

Many theologians divide Paul's letter into two sections, doctrinal (chapters 1-11) and practical (chapters 12-16). This pericope opens the practical section.

How practical are sacrifices in this Christian era? Believers sacrificed animals and birds to the true God from Abel through Mary and Joseph. Unbelievers have sacrificed these and humans to pagan gods down to the present. Christ on Calvary sacrificed Himself once and for all in atonement for the sins of the whole world. Now we need no longer burn up animal sacrifices to the Lord, our God. Paul, by inspiration of God, calls on us to give our bodies—our selves—as living sacrifices to God, which is our spiritual worship.

*Introduction:* Living and burning sacrifices are pleasing to God. Dead and burned out sacrifices do nothing for God. Living and burning sacrifices are for the one who sacrificed Himself for us. Dead and burned out sacrifices are meaningful only to the sacrificer. Living and burning sacrifices continue to serve the Living God. Dead and burned out sacrifices have never served the True God. Living and burning sacrifices are part of the Holy Christian Church. Dead and burned out sacrifices are separate from the communion of saints.

### YOUR SACRIFICE—LIVING AND BURNING OR DEAD AND BURNED OUT

- I. Sacrifices given without faith in Christ produce dead and burned out people.
  - A. Sacrifices given without faith in Christ produce dead people.
    1. God is not pleased with such sacrifices (Hebrews 11:6).
    2. Both the sacrifices and the people are dead.
  - B. Sacrifices of works without faith in Christ produce burned out people.
    1. Salvation by works, not faith, is the goal.
    2. The glory is intended for oneself, not for God (v. 3).
    3. Christians burn out because they are wrongly motivated.
- II. By virtue of God's mercy the Christian's sacrifice is living and burning.
  - A. God's mercy in Jesus Christ is our true motivation.
    1. Christ's sacrifice for us on Calvary atones for our sins.

2. Faith in Christ motivates us to be living and burning sacrifices for God.
- B. These living and burning sacrifices are holy and pleasing to God.
  1. Our bodies are given to the Lord as living sacrifices (v. 1).
  2. Our minds are transformed into godly minds (v. 2).
  3. Our gifts are used in the Savior's service (vv. 4-8).

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## THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 23, 1990

Romans 13:1-10

St. Paul in a straightforward way is instructing Roman Christians in the capital city of the empire to submit themselves (*hypotassestho*) to the governing authorities (v. 1). His argument follows an easily tracked, logical sequence.

There are several interesting exegetical features in the text. One is Paul's frequent use, with a variety of prepositions, of the verbal root *tasso* (literally, to place or station a person or thing in a fixed spot). The words translated "submit," "established," "instituted" (NIV) are all related to that verbal root. There is also the surprising reference to (pagan) government officials as "God's servants." But there are similar kinds of pictures in Isaiah 10:5-6; 47:6; and Jeremiah 27:6-8. Finally, it is instructive to note that Paul sandwiches his words about how a Christian relates to the political powers (Romans 13:1-7) between chapter 12, particularly verses 1-2 and 9-21, and chapter 13:8-10. That structure begins to give a redemptive Christian context to what he says about the Christian and governing authorities. In view of God's mercies to us through Jesus Christ, one altar where we transformed Christians offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, is the civic arena where we live.

The preacher may look at this text and wonder what Paul is doing. Why does he insert such a seemingly mundane topic into the midst of truly noble Christian themes? Are these simply the words of one who capitalized any number of times on his Roman citizenship and was several times pulled out of the fire by Roman officials? Are they the apologetic of one who wants to draw a clear distinction between

a law-abiding Christian movement and a more zealous, revolutionary Jewish community? Has Paul forgotten that mean-minded Nero sits on the throne and will soon unsheath his anti-Christian sword, even against Paul himself? And what about unjust laws and corrupt, persecuting governments, and biblical words like Revelation 13 and 17?

In the midst of these perplexing problems there are several considerations of importance. First, we must recognize that Paul is expounding the Fourth Commandment. God implements His providential care and love for us through intermediaries: parents, teachers, pastors, and government officials—from the Oval Office and halls of Congress to the local mayor's desk and the police officer in the patrol car. Our response of submission, respect, and honor to them is a measure of our submission, respect, and honor to God Himself.

Secondly, Paul's words in the text can be seen as a polemic against any idea which suggests that, since our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), we can view earthly authorities with indifference or contempt, as though we are above that sort of thing. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (Jeremiah 29) and Jesus' words about taxes (Matthew 22:15-22) are a good commentary on this point.

Thirdly, Paul is not deifying any form of government here. He is not dealing with the problem of a government misusing or abusing its divinely instituted authority. He is not covering the question of what to do when the demands of government are contrary to the will of God—although there are other Bible passages that do.

Fourthly, Paul is calling us to step out into the marketplace of the world, where the structures of government operate, and to recognize it as God's realm where ruling powers are His servants for our good.

The goal of the sermon, then, could be to encourage the hearers in their Christian callings to give obedience, respect, and honor to God's servants in the structures of government He has instituted. The malady is that in the world we neatly divide between sacred and secular. We spiritual people can treat that suspect secular realm with benign neglect or indifference or contempt. We fail to view the marketplace as an altar where we can offer ourselves as living sacrifices. The means to the goal is that our gracious God has instituted the authorities of government for our good as one facet of His providential care for us. And God's greatest servant, His Son, transforms us by His merciful love, so that we might have power to do good in this realm of the left hand where God also rules.

*Introduction:* We have been born and bred on the doctrine of the separation of church and state. For some it means that the government cannot tell us how to teach and practice our faith. For others it means that we have no business telling the government how to do its business; our business is to save souls. Then comes St. Paul with a text that seems to transcend the separation of those two realms as he speaks to us about Christians and governing authorities.

## CHRISTIANS AND GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

- I. We live in a world of governing authorities.
  - A. This fact is clear from daily life.
    1. We live under a whole system of laws.
    2. We vote for leaders nationally and locally to make and execute the law.
    3. Law officers patrol our street and highways.
    4. We pay income tax and accept social security checks.
  - In short, we live and move and have our being every day in a world structured by law.
  - B. It is equally clear that often this world is not congenial to us.
    1. We have our complaints: speed limits are too slow; some laws and policies are too confining; taxes are too high; etc.
    2. Because of scandals we have seen or warts we see, politics and politicians are suspect; it is a tainted world.
    3. In so many ways the government appears to be the adversary.
- II. But Paul's words ask us to look at this world in quite a different way.
  - A. A world structured with governing authorities has been established by God.
    1. The ways in which we think about and respond to the governing authorities are a measure of our relationship with God.
    2. Paul says Christians are to submit themselves to the governing authorities.
  - B. Paul's words are a real challenge to us!
    1. Submission is not a congenial concept to us.
    2. Some governing authorities hardly seem worthy of obedience, honor, and respect.
    3. As Christians we are concerned about "spiritual things"; we are wary of the "secular world."
- III. Now Paul puts this "secular world" into a sacred perspective for us.

- A. Governing authorities are one way our God cares for us.
  - 1. He loves us and the whole world.
  - 2. One way He implements His loving, providential care for us is through governing authorities.
  - 3. They are His servants for our good when we do what is right.
- B. In view of God's mercies we offer ourselves as living sacrifices in every arena of life (Romans 12:1-8).
  - 1. God's greatest servant, Jesus Christ, has transformed us by His death and resurrection for us.
  - 2. The civil world is also the altar where we offer ourselves to Him (cf. Romans 12:9 ff.).
  - 3. The civil realm desperately needs the witness of Christians living by the mercies of God.
  - 4. Having been loved, our love will fulfill the law in this arena of the world.

*Conclusion:* There is validity to the concept of the separation of church and state. But we cannot separate ourselves from living as Christians within the structures of the world God has established.

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## THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 30, 1990

Romans 14:5-9

The focus of this Sunday's pericope is the kind of people we are because we are the Lord's. In the Old Testament lesson (Genesis 50:15-21) we find Joseph forgiving and providing for his brothers. In the Gospel (Matthew 18: 21-35) we are told that, because the Father (Master) has forgiven us, we need to forgive others. The psalmody (Psalm 103:1-13) speaks the praise of the Lord "who forgives all your iniquities" . . . and "who redeems your life from destruction" . . . "who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

In the epistle, then, Paul puts all the focus on ritual aside and gets to the core of the matter: "whether you live or die you are the Lord's." The focus on Christ's resurrection should unite us in spite of varying rituals and observances. Because we are His, we can live life as His forgiven and forgiving people.

*Introduction:* "Who am I?" is a constant question in our world. Identity is important, but it can be perverted and turned inward. It is more important to know "whose we are" and what that makes of us.

### WE ARE THE LORD'S

- I. We are given our identity by the risen Lord.
  - A. He has created us. "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). As Luther says, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."
  - B. In baptism He has called us.
  - C. The devil, the world, and the flesh try to and do divert us.
    1. The narcissistic world tells us: "Do what feels good, do what is good for you."
    2. The flesh says, "I can do what I want with my body."
    3. Various groups lobby for "our way."
    4. In marriage, the family, and even the church we want to do "our own thing."
  - D. In His death and resurrection Christ reclaims us as His own (v. 9).
- II. We are given responsibility to live as the Lord's people.
  - A. To live as forgiven and forgiving people (cf. the Old Testament and gospel readings).
  - B. To live as servants.
  - C. To live with an eye to the responsibility which we have to others in the community of the church (vv. 5-6; Old Testament lesson).
  - D. To live as a called people in the community of the world (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

*Conclusion:* What a comfort to know: "We are the Lord's"! What a way to live—as forgiven and forgiving people!

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