



THE SPRINGFIELDER

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HOMILETICAL STUDIES

ASH WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 6:1-6 (16-18) (19-21)

The name Ash Wednesday is taken from the medieval tradition of the penitents throwing ashes on their heads, lamenting over their sins. The text places the emphasis upon proper almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. There is no room for work-righteousness. Jesus warns against self-applause or expecting rewards for our spiritual efforts. All things done are done for Him, because of Him, and to Him alone! There is no room for hypocrisy in these acts. We are also exhorted to lay hold of spiritual treasures.

Introduction: When a person is justified by faith in Christ, good works will follow. He does these out of love for God; for the glory of God; and for the benefit of his neighbor. How important it is that good works never become that which is done ostentatiously.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF A JUSTIFIED PERSON REGARDING:

I. Almsgiving

A. Beware of being ostentatious as is the hypocrite.

Self-serving is not serving God (Mt 5:16).

B. Our giving is as good as our heart's motives.

C. An illustration of giving:

"Some have much and give little.

Some have little and give much.

Some have little and give all."

II. Prayer

A. All must be said for His sake and for His sake alone.

1. Words for the approval of men go no deeper than the lips.

2. They are actors who utter words that they do not inwardly possess (Mt 7:15).

B. The Lord's Prayer discusses the facets of good prayers (vv9-13).

III. Fasting

A. Seek not self-applause or rewards for our spiritual efforts (I Cor 10:31).

B. Do not look upon fasting or other works as a means of work-righteousness.

1. Salvation is unmerited, unearned, undeserved (Ro 3:22).

2. It is the imputed righteousness through faith in Christ that saves (2 Cor 5:19).

IV. Treasures

A. Definition: that which a man spends time and effort to obtain.

B. The objectives of his heart (v21).

C. Earthly treasures.

1. Corruptible and precarious (Jas 5:2).

2. If we work for them our hearts will be set on earthly things.

D. Heavenly treasures.

1. Incorruptible and secure (1 Pe 1:4).

2. If we work for them our hearts will remain on the eternal.
3. Jesus speaks an imperative to lay up treasures in the right place (v20).

We should not do works superficially for the recognition of others. We are to draw upon God to shape our desires and motives for Him and to Him alone.

WGH

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: MARK 1:12-15

During the days of Lent the scene of warfare is in our soul. We receive inspiration for the battle from knowing that Jesus fights for us. We are not alone. He understands. He enters the desert of self-denial. In the wilderness, Jesus faced the prince of the world. Christ was victorious. Christ in us will give us the victory.

Introduction: Jesus would begin His public ministry in Galilee by the preaching of the Kingdom of God, repentance, and "believe the Gospel!" There was an obstacle: Satan. We witness his attack, the combat, and the result!

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

- I. The reasons for the temptation by Satan.
 - A. Satan attempts to bring about man's eternal ruin.
 - B. For us to see God's help in our hours of trial.
 - C. For us to have an example to follow in times of temptation.
 - D. For us to rely upon Christ's grace to give us victory (I Cor 10:13).
- II. The resultant victory; Satan's temptations fail.
 1. The Saviour's victory by the use of the weapons of the Scripture (Eph 6:17).
 2. Satan departs for a season.
 3. Angels minister to Christ, and they minister to us (Ps 91:11, 12).
- III. The beginning of Christ's public ministry follows the temptation.
 - A. The divine visitation begins.
 1. The arrival in Galilee.
 2. John's imprisonment.
 - B. The message of the divine preacher.
 1. The true nature of the Kingdom of God is not political but spiritual.
 2. Repent! Believe the Gospel! (Ro 3:23-25).

There is nothing so persistent as temptation. There is nothing so faithful as God's help at those moments. Lead us, guide us, strengthen us, Lord Jesus, in all trials so that nothing will take away the "one thing needful"!

WGH

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: MARK 8:31-38

It is Reminiscere Sunday. We know of God's mercy and of His steadfast love. We must recall how often we forget what value God has placed

upon our souls. The high value that God places upon our souls is apparent from the fact that He did not deem the suffering and death of His own Son too great a price to pay for them. In the text the hour had come for Jesus to bring the disciples to that knowledge of what it was going to cost to redeem the souls of men. The price was to be His life! Our divine Lord prophesies of His rejection, suffering, and death. Simon Peter (vv32, 33) attempts to dissuade Jesus from going through with His prediction, showing that he and the others did not understand the value of the human soul in God's eyes. But Jesus teaches (vv34-38) a different view of the soul. Man either looks upon the soul as non-existent or as of little value. But God regards the soul as higher in value than anything else. God ransoms the soul (I Pe 1:18). The redeemed Christian should gladly take up his cross; even if it costs his life, he will save it (v35b).

Introduction: Since the beginning of history philosophers have argued over the question of the soul. Its existence in this life? Its continued existence after death? Human reason fails in the quest for answers. Jesus is the final answer to the questions about the soul:

THE VALUE OF THE SOUL

I. The soul as judged by man.

A. Some deny the existence of the soul.

1. Epicureans (I Cor. 15:32).
2. Modern-day athiests.

B. Others place a low value on the soul.

1. Their chief interests are in the body (I Jn 2:16).
2. Their chief interests are in the world (I Tm 6:9).

II. The soul as judged by God.

A. God's high regard for the soul.

1. God's and man's views are totally contrary.
2. The entire world is of less value than the soul.
3. The soul is immortal (Ec 12:7).

B. God ransoms the soul.

1. All human efforts fail to redeem the soul.
2. The price for the salvation of the soul is the sacrifice of God's own Son (Re 5:9).

Because God values the soul so highly, the Christian should eagerly lay hold of the forgiveness of sins by faith in the Redeemer and gladly take up his cross, even if it brings suffering, for glory awaits!

WGH

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 2:13-22

Contrary to the often portrayed "meek and mild" Jesus, these verses speak of strength and violence. The money-changers are driven out of the Temple. Jesus and His parents made their annual journey for the Feast of the Passover (Ex 23:17), when Jerusalem received pilgrims from many lands. Stalls for the money-changers were set up. (Dt 14:22ff allowed the Hebrew who traveled a distance to purchase the sacrificed animals he

needed. He also had to pay the temple-tribute. Egyptian, Persian, Roman, and other moneys circulated in the country.) Greed and power entered in, making its headquarters in the Temple (v14). The Church will always have its unbelieving leaders, preachers who turn the soul-saving Gospel to "gimmicks" of the age and professors who turn from the powerful Word of God to theories of men.

Introduction: "We must do all in our power to maintain, promote, and extend our Church by prayer, personal service, and financial support" (The Synodical Catechism, p. 136). There are, however, many forces seeking to annihilate the Church. Jesus discusses two such deadly forces.

JESUS CONFRONTS TWO DEADLY FORCES THAT SEEK TO DESTROY THE CHURCH FROM WITHIN

I. He drives the commercialism from the temple.

- A. God and mammon can become rivals within the sanctuary (Mt 6:24). Beware of the emphasis on sales, suppers, worldly schemes.
- B. Jesus asserts His authority by purging the temple. "My Father's house is not a house of merchandise" (v16).
- C. By using the Word, we must drive out other enemies within the Church.
 1. Mechanical observation of the liturgy.
 2. Prayer reduced to babbling (Mt 6:7).
 3. Power-bases, cliques, self-serving organizations.

II. Jesus encounters the unbelief of the leaders of the sanctuary.

- A. They request a sign.
 1. They had previously rejected the call of repentance from John the Baptist (Mk 3:2).
 2. They were unbelievers who only wanted a sign to discredit Him.
- B. He speaks of a future sign. His refers to His crucifixion, death, and resurrection as the ultimate stamp of approval on all His acts (vv 19,21).
- C. Unbelief rejects the sign, rejects the gift of the forgiveness of sins, rejects life eternal (Is 66:24)!

On behalf of the Church, we ask God to help us stand strong against all evil brought within its midst by the work of the unholy trinity: the devil, the world, and our flesh, as it seeks to undermine its godly purposes.

WGH

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 3:14-21

The chapter opens with the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a member of the Pharisees, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a rabbi educated in the Scriptures. He comes by night out of fear of being seen and critized. Jesus has made an impression on him but Nicodemus is not now a follower, only an investigator. In the long conversation between the two, Jesus gives a summary of His teachings concerning judgment, regeneration, God's love, salvation, belief, and unbelief. Our text turns to the contrast of belief and unbelief.

Introduction: In this important conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, our Lord speaks of the blessedness of belief in Him and of the tragedy of unbelief. Can there be any other truth more worth listening to?

CHRIST COMPARES THE BELIEVER AND THE NON-BELIEVER IN A
CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS

- I. They differ in their judgment on Him and His work.
 - A. Faith accepts Christ as the God-man.
 - B. Faith accepts Him as the Redeemer (Ro 5:1).
 - C. Unbelief sees Jesus as "just another good man": a teacher, a philosopher.
 - D. The unbeliever has no Redeemer (Mt 25:46a).
- II. They differ in their works.
 - A. Faith produces good works.
 1. These works are not perfect (Php 3:2).
 2. Faith strives towards the high ideals of the Christian life (Ga 5:22-26).
 - B. The unbeliever's works.
 1. Sin pervades all his works (Ga 5:19-21).
 2. God's final verdict on his works: "Workers of iniquity" (Lk 3:27).
- III. They differ in their final condition.
 - A. Faith reaps salvation.
 1. A state of bliss (Re 21:3,4).
 2. Eternal life (Jn 3:16).
 - B. Unbelief reaps damnation.
 1. A state of torment.
 2. Eternal punishment (Mt 25:41).

Nicodemus believed the truth of Christ's words. He became a follower of Jesus (Jn 13:29). May we all realize the difference between the believer and the non-believer and become a disciple of His, remaining faithful unto death and "receiving the crown of life."

WGH

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JOHN 12:20-33

Christ had made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. John records that the crowd gathered because they heard of his raising Lazarus after four days in the grave. The drawing of this great crowd forced the conclusion upon the Pharisees: "the whole world has gone after him" (Jn 12:19). In this crowd was a group identified here as "Greeks" (v20), probably Jewish proselytes from the Gentiles who had come to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. They make the request to see Jesus and are brought to him by Andrew and Philip. Jesus, whether directly or indirectly, makes an astounding series of statements. Given the Messianic expectations of the Jews at this time, Jesus seemingly places contradictory things side by side. The time had come for "the Son of Man to be glorified" (v23). This statement would have aroused in his hearers

anticipation of a conquering hero. However, subsequent statements left them bewildered, for Jesus spoke not in terms of conquest, but in terms of sacrifice and death (v32, 33).

The believer, drawn in faith to the one lifted up, dies to sin and rises to the life of righteousness and thus serves Christ. The Father is thereby glorified, and the believer is honored by the Father as one of his own (v25-26).

Introduction: People often have preconceived ideas about the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. It hinders them from accepting Christ in the fullness of His saving, life-giving power. Rather than glorifying Christ and the Father through Him by giving themselves to the service of their God, they are content to fritter life away in a lack of purpose or meaning. God's people are summoned again to the purpose of the Son of Man glorified through them.

THE SON OF MAN GLORIFIED

I. The Glory Given By the Father.

- A. The voice that came from heaven at His baptism and transfiguration.
- B. The voice heard on this occasion, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (v28, 29).

II. The Glory revealed in the Cross and Empty Tomb.

- A. Now the ruler of the world will be cast out (v31).
- B. Christ will be lifted up and draw all men to himself (v32).
- C. In that death, life will come (the grain of wheat: resurrection) (v24).

III. The Glory in and through His Followers.

- A. Those drawn to Him in whom the glory of salvation shines.
- B. Those who die to sin and give their life to Christ, who follow him, who serve him (v25).
- C. Christ is glorified and through Him the Father.

Conclusion: May we be led by the power of the Holy Spirit to manifest the glory of Christ in us and through us.

NHM

SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT: MARK 11:1-10

Jesus had been a pilgrim to Jerusalem on a number of previous occasions. But the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified (Jn 12:23). Jesus, by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, was making a dramatic claim to be the Messiah. The seemingly inconsequential remark that the colt had never been ridden upon previously (v2) reinforces the sacrificial purpose of Jesus' coming. For a beast, to be used for sacred purposes, must never have been used for any other purpose.

The use of a donkey further symbolized what kind of king Jesus claimed to be. In ancient Palestine, when a king went to war, he rode on a horse. When he came in peace, he rode on an ass. Combining these points with the song of the crowds (with its plea *Hosanna*—"Save Now"—and the confession that Jesus was the one promised to come from the house of

David), there is a remarkable opportunity presented to the preacher to lay the ground-work for a fruitful and blessed observance of Holy Week and the Feast of the Resurrection.

Introduction: The events of Palm Sunday all focus on God's great redeeming act in Jesus the Christ. Jesus' coming is according to promise, so that salvation might be secured for people weighed down by sin and burdened by guilt. Blessed is He who comes for us.

BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES

I. In the Name of the Lord.

- A. Jesus is God's promised one; He came in the power and glory of the Father.
- B. Jesus here makes a dramatic claim to be Messiah (Zch 9:9-12).
- C. The crowd acknowledges His claim in the words of Ps 118:25-26, "Blessed is he."

II. In Peace for Peace.

- A. The use of a donkey symbolized coming in peace.
- B. A beast used for sacred purposes must never have been used for any other purpose.
- C. By means of His atoning death and resurrection (Php 2:5-11), Jesus would be the "Pascal Lamb" at this, the greatest of all Passovers.

III. In Answer to Our Needs.

- A. *Hosanna*—"Save now!"
 1. The cry of a heart weighed down by its need of forgiveness and longing for salvation.
 2. A cry for God to break in and to save His people.
- B. God did break in and "save us"; the message of Good Friday and the ultimate victory of Easter by Christ is for us.

Conclusion: In answer to our cry for deliverance, Christ came and we are led in faith to call him "Blessed."

NHM

MAUNDY THURSDAY: MARK 14:12-26

Jesus took bread, perhaps half of a loaf that was kept to be eaten at the end of the celebration. He took the cup. In the Jewish ritual, the third cup was filled at the close of the supper. This was called, as by St. Paul, the "Cup of Blessing" (I Cor 10:10). Thereby Jesus brought into being the new covenant which summons man to exercise faith in the Christ. Christ set up and ratified this covenant by death, "the covenant of my blood" by the shedding of which the covenant is established (v24). So vivid is this fact in the mind of Jesus that the word "is poured out" (v24) means literally "is being poured out." The present participle is significant. To the Lord's mind the sacrifice is already being offered.

Christ promises moreover, to drink this wine new in the Kingdom of God; all the elements of festivity in the heavenly kingdom will be of a new and higher quality (v25). With this assurance and promise of their Lord to feast with Him in paradise, the Disciples could confidently enter with

Jesus into the singing of the *Hallel* (v26), as it found focus in the recurring verse, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 115, 116, 117, 118).

Introduction: Maundy Thursday blends solemnity with irrepressible joy. There is the solemn mood in anticipation of Good Friday's events. But also, the joy attendant to eating the feast which Christ himself prepares and hosts. The Lord's Supper not only points to the present where our souls are nourished by his precious body and blood, but also to the future, where we shall feast in paradise with him. To this end Christ continues to nourish his faithful people.

CHRIST AS HOST NOURISHES HIS DISCIPLES

I. Christ the Host.

A. At the Passover.

1. Preparations made, all things provided for (v14, 15).
2. The one and only Passover that Christ himself hosts (v14).
3. The "Passover Lamb" ready to be offered (v21).

B. At the Holy Eucharist.

1. The bread kept to be eaten at the end of the passover celebration (v22).
2. The "Cup of Blessing"—the blood of the new covenant. The sacrifice (vv23, 24) is already being offered.

II. Christ Nourishes His Disciples Then and Now.

A. The Passover's Significance—the Sustaining Promise.

1. It nourished by reminding Israel of God's great deliverance.
2. It pointed to the even greater deliverance in the final, all-sufficient sacrifice.

B. Disciples Nourished in the Holy Eucharist.

1. It celebrates the death of the risen Christ.
2. It celebrates the covenant of Christ.
 - a. This covenant was set up and ratified by Christ's death.
 - b. This covenant summons us to faith in God's great redemptive act.
 - c. The covenant includes God's promise, grace, and eternal salvation.
3. Souls are nourished by the very body and blood of Christ. For as the bread and wine are to the body, so the body and blood of Christ are to the soul.
4. It is a meal for his disciples only, those who in faith are able to join in singing the *Hallel*.

Conclusion: Come often in answer to Christ's invitation that our souls may be nourished and faith sustained until, with God's people, we eat with him, with the Christ, at his table in the Father's house, in the paradise to come.

NHM

GOOD FRIDAY: JOHN 19:17-30

The events that surround the crucifixion and death of our Lord are so familiar that we are in danger of missing their impact and meaning.

John, in the account before us, has some factors unique to his gospel that make the Good Friday message a spring of refreshment.

In the parceling out of Jesus' clothing, for instance, the soldiers divided them into equal shares, except when it came to Jesus' tunic. Unique to John's gospel is the detail that the tunic was without seam (v23). The description is precisely that of the linen tunic which the High Priest wore. It is here indicated of the Christ that He was the perfect High Priest through whom men come to God.

Of like significance is the use of hyssop (v29) to reach the sponge to the thirsting Christ. The very mention of hyssop would remind the Jews of the saving blood of the passover lamb. John here is saying that Jesus was the great passover lamb of God whose death was to save the whole world from sin.

Introduction: If we are to perceive the true blessing of the cross, we must also come to grips with the real suffering of Christ in our behalf. For Christ endures the agony of our sin and guilt that we may share in his triumph. Our sins cause his suffering, but His victory is for us.

THE AGONY AND TRIUMPH OF JESUS

I. The Agony.

- A. Physical suffering.
- B. Spiritual torment and death.

II. The Triumph.

- A. God's promises to his people come to fulfillment.
 - 1. In Christ the great High Priest.
 - 2. In Christ the Passover Lamb.
- B. The shout of triumph, "It is finished." Objective atonement is ours by faith.

Conclusion: When he is lifted up, he will draw all men unto himself.

NHM

EASTER SUNDAY: MARK 16:1-8

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

Four different terms stress the fear felt by its first witnesses. The term "amazed" (v5) carries the thrust of "struck with terror"; the "trembling" (v8) denotes "quaking with fear"; "astonishment" (v8) means "amazement" often coupled with fear caused by some event; "afraid" (v8) means "struck with fear" or "seized with alarm." That for which the women should have been prepared comes upon them unexpectedly. That for which they should have been joyful strikes fear in their hearts and renders them incapable at that time of carrying out the instructions the angel gave—"and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (v8).

Something unique to Mark's account is the command, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter" (v8). We perceive in this remark Jesus' great concern for Peter, tortured as he must have been by the memory of his denial of his Lord. For him there is a special invitation. Jesus is far more eager to comfort a penitent sinner than to punish him. That invitation, promise, and assurance belong also to us.

Introduction: Fear dogs our every step in life. Ours is the dilemma described in a Jerome Kern classic, "I'm tired of living and scared of dying." In the resurrection God speaks life and hope to the tired and burdened, but, above all, the fearful.

THE RESURRECTION: GOD'S GREAT ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

I. The fears that often weigh us down.

- A. The fear that comes from the unexpected. We don't quite know how to cope.
- B. The fear of the sinner in the presence of the holy.
- C. The fear that hopes will be shattered, unrealized or unfulfilled.
 1. Hopes in life so often are raised only to be dashed, or fail to live up to what we had anticipated or what had been promised.
 2. We fear to trust because of this.

II. The Resurrection: God's Antidote to fear.

- A. In the risen Christ, we are the heirs of God's promises. His strength and presence are there to help in every situation.
- B. The Resurrection is God's great "fear not" to our sins.
 1. God's invitation to Peter is one also extended to us.
 2. Through forgiveness, we are reconciled to God and have access to the holy God.
- C. In Christ, we have a living hope assured of fulfillment (1 Pe 1:3-5).

Conclusion: The life and hope assured us in the resurrection drives out fear; we can be confident and joyful now and eternally.

NHM

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER: JOHN 20:19-31

The old historic pericope permits another celebration of Easter, the greatest feast day of the church. It tells of the Easter celebration of the Eleven and their companions (Lk 24:33) when Jesus appeared and brought His own Easter message of peace.

John is only one of the holy writers. All testified of what they had heard and seen, giving us indisputable proof that Jesus is in truth the Christ, the Son of God, promised of old. We see ourselves and our hearers in the disciples. We often share their fears and want more proof of God's love. Things we see seem to contradict the promises of God. Often things are too good to be true. We are often slow to use and rejoice over our many blessings. Some have made great strides. Some still follow far behind.

THE EASTER BLESSING: A BLESSING OF PEACE

- I. Earned by Christ who was raised from the death He died for sin.
- II. Imparted by Christ to all and through all who believe in His resurrection.

BLESSED ARE YOU WHO BELIEVE IN THE RISEN CHRIST

- I. You have the word of faithful witnesses to assure you.
- II. You therefore need not see, experience, touch Him to know you are blessed.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS AN EASTER GIFT

- I. By Christ's resurrection from the dead He established the peace which He earned by His death.
- II. On the day of His resurrection He gave the gift of absolution to His disciples of all times.
- III. All those, but only those, who believe the Easter message can enjoy this blessed gift.

THE FRUITS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION ARE FOR YOU

- I. Yours is the assurance that Christ is indeed the Son of God and Savior of the world.
- II. Yours is the life in Him now and through all eternity.
- III. Yours is the peace which He earned by His death and established by His resurrection.
- IV. Yours is the right to confess Him with Joy in your Lord and your God.
- V. Yours is the gift to forgive others in Jesus' name.

MJS

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER: LUKE 24:36-49

Take note that Luke is describing the appearance of Jesus depicted by John in last Sunday's text.

The real message ought to begin with v 44. All had been foretold in the Scriptures. The whole O.T. canon, Christ tells us, teaches God's plan of salvation. Things did not just happen. God did not just turn evils of men into good. No one, to be sure, was pressured to rise up against Christ. They wilfully conspired against Him, but in doing so they fulfilled the Scriptures. All was foreknown and foretold.

Some hearers putting Easter cards away are apt to put Easter out of their minds. Were Easter greetings just words? Even Christ's Easter greeting? They may feel His peace has not worked for them. They may misunderstand the nature of His peace in the midst of difficulties, the enmity of world, etc. Their problems are still going on. Thank God for those who live in the Risen Christ, look to Him, trust in Him, rejoice in His forgiveness and find joy in sharing His forgiveness with others.

CHRIST TAKES US TO THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR PROOF OF HIS MISSION

- I. There His suffering and death were foretold.
- II. There His resurrection was also foretold.
- III. There it was foretold that forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to us and all nations.

DO NOT BE TROUBLED AND AFRAID

- I. Your Savior lives.
 - A. He made that clear to His disciples.
 - B. He told them to tell us about it.
- II. In Him you have forgiveness and peace with God.
 - A. Foretold already in the Old Testament.

- B. Established by Christ through His death and resurrection.
- C. Proclaimed by Christ and the Apostles for our assurance.

THE RISEN CHRIST AGAIN OFFERS US GREAT GIFTS

- I. Assurance of His resurrection.
- II. Understanding of His purpose in dying and rising again.
- III. Joy in the knowledge of the forgiveness that is ours.
- IV. Willingness to share the proclamation of forgiveness with others.

PEACE BE UNTO YOU—THE CONSTANT GREETING OF THE RISEN CHRIST

- I. In His constant greeting of Peace we have assurance.
 - A. That He still lives as He said He would.
 - B. That true to God's promises we are reconciled to God.
 - C. That in Him we have the promised victory over every evil that may beset us.
- II. In His greeting of Peace we have a continuing message.
 - A. Not of law, telling of God's wrath, which we surely deserve.
 - B. But of forgiveness day by day.
 - 1. Which is ours to enjoy.
 - 2. Which is ours to share.

MJS

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: JOHN 10:11-18

In last Sunday's text (Lk 24:36-49) Christ took us into the Old Testament, pointing out that His death and resurrection were clearly foretold and the purpose and worth of them clearly set forth. In approaching the text about Christ the Good Shepherd, it is good to begin again with the Old Testament. There the picture of shepherd(s) and sheep is often used. Ps 23 is known but certainly not fully grasped by all. Ps 100:3 calls us sheep of the Lord's pasture. In Ps 80:2 we pray, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." Better known are the words of Isaiah (40:11): "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." In Ez 34 the picture is quite different. The shepherds are the false leaders of God's people who ate the fat and took the wool and killed but did not feed the flock (v 3), who did not search for the flock (v 8), who even scattered the flock (v 12). The Lord then promised to bring back His sheep, to gather them from all countries and to feed them in a good pasture (vv 13, 14).

With this background Christ's hearers knew exactly what He was speaking about when He called Himself the Good Shepherd. And so do we. But we must take the text for what it is, an allegory, not a parable. We do not look for one point of comparison, but find a part of the picture in every picture word. We must be careful to note also that Christ uses several pictures in His discourse without mixing metaphors. He is both **the door** for the shepherds and the sheep and a shepherd Himself. Those who work against Him are both thieves and robbers and hirelings. Yes, they are even wolves. No one picture suffices. As in the Shepherd Psalm

(Ps 23) David changes the picture in the closing verses to a banquet meal, so Christ goes from picture to picture, expecting us to get the message that is so important. He loves us, cares for us, nourishes us, protects us, shields us from harm, rescues us from those who would mislead us, all because He has saved us by giving His life for our salvation.

JESUS, OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

- I. He gives His life for the sheep;
- II. He knows His own and is known by them;
- III. He brings in those that are still without.

NO PICTURE CAN DO JUSTICE TO OUR LOVING LORD AND GOD

- I. He chose us in eternity to be His own, for He knew us as His own before He brought us to faith in Himself.
- II. He gave His life that we might be His own.
- III. He knows our weaknesses and our sins and warns us against them, lest we wander from His way.
- IV. He nourishes and strengthens us with His Word in which He tells us of His love.
- V. He promises some day to lead us all to heaven where we will be gathered with all believers to worship and praise Him forever.

MJS

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: JOHN 15:1-5

The Bible uses various pictures to describe the intimate relationship between Christians and their Lord: the temple (Eph 2:19-22), the body (1 Cor 12: 12-13), sheep and Shepherd (Jn 10), and the Vine and the branches (Jn 15). In our text, the plea "Abide in Me" occurs ten times in ten verses. The imagery is a familiar Old Testament picture (Is 5:1; Eze 19:10; Ps 80:8-19). The husbandman is both vine-dresser and owner. The Father in mercy sent the Son to be the Vine; Jesus is the Vine from whom all spiritual blessings flow; we are the branches generated by the Vine.

The goal of the sermon is to encourage Christians to abide in Christ, to remain steadfast.

Introduction: The last wish of a dying person is always regarded as a sacred responsibility. On the eve of His death, Christ said to His disciples: "Abide in Me."

ABIDE IN ME

- I. Because of the blessings of this relationship.
 - A. Jesus is the true vine, and the Father is the husbandman.
 1. The Father sent the Son to redeem the world (Jn 3:16; 2 Cor 5:19).
 2. The Son won spiritual blessings for the world.
 - a. He conquered our enemies (1 Jn 1:7; 1 Cor 15:55-57).
 - b. He brought life and immortality to light (Eph 1:7; Jn 10:10).
 - B. You are the branches.
 1. We are clean through the Word.

- a. There are no self-generated branches (1 Cor 2:14).
- b. The Holy Spirit regenerates through the means of grace (Ti 3:5, 2 Cor 4:6; Jn 3:5-6).
2. As branches the blessings of the vine are ours by faith. (Ro 5:1-5; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Ro 4:5).
3. As branches we have the privilege of prayer (Mt 7:7-8; 21:22).

What a strong incentive the blessings we enjoy ought to be to us to abide in the vine. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (He 10:23).

II. Only by abiding in Christ can we bear much fruit.

- A. That is the purpose of the branch.
 1. To demonstrate that we are disciples.
 2. To glorify the Father (Eph 2:10).
- B. To aid us in fruit-bearing, God purges us.
 1. God purges us through the Word of the Law (Ro 6:23) and by trials (1 Pe 1:7; He 12:6).
 2. Through the Gospel He heals (Is 1:18).
- C. Without Christ we can do nothing.
 1. Without faith it is impossible to please Him (He 11:6).
 2. Dead branches are cast into the fire (He 10:31; Mt 25:41).
- D. Hence the plea: "Abide in Me."
 1. The means of grace, Word and sacrament, are the means for strengthening faith (1 Pe 2:2-3).
 2. A strong faith will show itself in the fruit of faith.

Let us continue to abide in Christ in order that we may enjoy life in Him and bring forth much fruit to His glory.

HJE

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: JOHN 15:9-17

The obedience of Christians is not a galling servitude, but a cheerful joyful expression of their love, a fruit of faith motivated by God's love in Christ. The goal of this sermon is to encourage Christians to love one another, motivated by the love of God in Christ and patterned after His love.

Introduction: The trouble with our world is that too many have given up on love. In school the big word is study; in industry it is efficiency; in international relations it is power. Jesus cries: "Try love."

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

- I. You have been made by love.
 - A. Elected: "I have chosen you."
 1. One by one Jesus chose His disciples (Mk 1:16-17; Jn 1:40-51).
 2. We have been elected from eternity (Ro 8:28-30; Eph 1:3-6).
 - B. Redeemed: Christ gave His life for His friends.
 1. By nature all men are enemies of God, (Eph 2:1-3).
 2. Christ died for the ungodly to save them (Ro 5:8-18).
 - C. Regenerated: "All things I have heard, I made known unto you."

1. The Spirit brings us to faith through the Word (Ro 1:16-17; 10:17).
2. He gives us joy in believing (Lk 2:10; Php 4:4).
3. Now we have the privilege of prayer (Mt 7:7-11).

If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (2 Cor 5:14; 1 Jn 4:7-11).

II. You have been made for love.

A. We are to love one another in various relationships.

1. Family (Eph 5:25-6:4).
2. Congregation (Eph 4:3).
3. At work (Eph 6:5-9).
4. All men, even enemies (Mt 5:44).

B. Love is normed by Christ's commands.

1. The prohibitions of the Law protect property and life.
2. The positive commands of the Law serve to help our neighbor.

C. Our love is to be like Christ's.

1. Universal (Mt 11:28).
2. Self-sacrificing (Php 2:4-8).

"Love one another." What a challenge! We have been blessed by God's love to enable us to bring blessings to others through love.

HJE

ASCENSION DAY: LUKE 24:44-53

The text summarizes the forty day period from Easter evening to the day of Christ's ascension. Jesus had spoken to His disciples about His impending death and resurrection (Mt 16:21). Here He points them to the whole Old Testament (Jn 5:39). He sees Himself as the fulfillment of the Messianic types and prophecies. Christ gives unity to the Scriptures. Note Christ's appeal to the authority of Scripture.

The goal of the sermon is to encourage Christians to be bold witnesses to the ascended Christ.

Introduction: We live between two mountain peaks: the ascension of Christ and His return to judge the world. In this period Christ wants us to witness to His saving work that men may await His final coming with joy.

BE BOLD WITNESSES FOR CHRIST

I. Because we have a story to tell which is both certain and great.

A. Christ assures us that He completed our redemption.

1. His saving work was predicted in the Old Testament (Gn 3:15; Ps 22; Is 53).
2. He suffered for us (1 Pe 3:18; Ga 3:3).
3. He arose again for our justification (Ro 4:25).

B. He ascended into heaven.

1. To reign as King of kings (1 Tm 6:15), as Lord and Head of the Church (Eph 1:20-23).
2. To intercede for us (Ro 8:34).
3. To prepare a place for us (Jn 14:2-3).

C. This message fills our hearts with joy.

1. Joy over Christ's coronation (Re 5:12-13).

2. Our joy is expressed in our worship (Ps 98).

What a great and certain message we have to tell the world!

II. Because we have the command to witness for Christ.

A. The command.

1. Directed to disciples (Ro 10:10; Mt 28:18-20).

2. Into all the world (Mk 16:15).

3. The message.

a. Repentance: contrition produced by the Law (Ac 2:38).

b. Remission of sins through the Gospel (1 Jn 1:7; Is 40:1-2).

B. The command is accompanied by the promise of the Spirit.

1. Fulfilled on Pentecost (Ac 2).

2. The Spirit continues to accompany the Word with His power (Jn 16:7-15; Mk 16:20).

Let us be bold witnesses. What a message we have! How much the world needs to hear it! How great the power of the Spirit who accompanies His Word!

HJE

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: JOHN 17:11b-19

Jesus prays that the disciples be kept from evil. Jesus has guarded His disciples, but now He is leaving them. The world will hate them. Yet He does not ask that they be taken out of the world, nor even that they be kept from temptation and sorrow. He asks the Father to guard them from the power of Satan, from sin and discouragement and despair.

The means by which they are to be protected is the truth concerning the Father (v 11b). The disciples' spiritual unity will be preserved by means of the revelation of the Father that Jesus has given them.

Jesus prays also for the sanctification of His disciples (v 17) in the sense that they may be set apart for the service of witnessing the truth. "Sanctify" does not refer specifically to holiness but to the consecration of the disciples to their appointed task (v 18). Christ chose them to testify to the truth. The truth, the word concerning the Father that Jesus has given them, is to be both "the instrument of their consecration and the sphere of their service."

Those living behind the iron curtain know the meaning of Christ's words, "The world has hated them." But also where there is freedom of religion the world bestows its favors on one condition: "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship Me" (Mt 4:9). We need protection so that we would not forsake Christ and, like Demas, fall in love with this present world (2 Tm 4:10). In a world where all kinds of religious opinions are promulgated, we need protection against teachings that depart from Christ's Word and distort His message. Christ still protects His own by means of His Word.

Christians are hated because they have God's Word. The Word condemns the world's wisdom as foolishness and its riches as rubbish. The Word sets forth a wisdom that is foolishness to the world. The Christian's acceptance of the wisdom of the cross separates him from the world. Yet the Christian is in the world to fulfill God's purposes: to be His witness and to be a salt and a light.

The central thought of the text, then, is that Jesus prays that His disciples may be protected in the world. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be assured of Christ's protection.

Introduction: When taking leave of fellow Christians we sometimes say, "God keep you." Thereby we express the wish that God would watch over them and protect them. Jesus expresses something similar in His high priestly prayer—that His Father would keep the disciples. Jesus is concerned that His disciples also today be kept.

JESUS' PRAYER FOR HIS OWN: GOD KEEP YOU

I. The need of protection.

A. Gone is the security of Jesus' physical presence.

1. He had guarded His disciples (v 12), but now He was leaving them.
2. They would have to remain in a world that hated them (vs 14-15a).

B. The unbelieving world is the Christian's enemy.

1. The world's prince is "the evil one," Satan (v 15b), who intends to destroy Christians.
2. The world regards God's grace as foolishness.
3. The world calls evil good and good evil.
4. The world's priorities are different from the Christian's.

We need protection because we live in a world that has not changed its basic attitude toward Christ and His followers. We need Jesus to pray for us, "God keep you." God is able to keep us. How?

II. The means of protection.

A. The revelation of the Father which Jesus has given.

1. The Father's love gives joyous security (vs 12a-13b).
2. The Father's love makes it possible to respond with love even to the world's hatred.

B. The Word of the Father which Jesus has given (v 14a).

1. That Word, as it has come to us in the Scriptures, enables us to shun false teaching which would destroy our faith.
2. The Scriptures guard our faith and thereby our unity in Christ (v 11b). We know the Father's love and persevere in faith through the Scriptural Word. Through this Word Jesus reveals to us many other vital truths. God protects us by means of His word. When Jesus prays for us, "God keep you," we know God can. Why should He keep us?

III. The purpose of protection.

A. We Christians have a job to do in the world (v 18).

1. We are sent to teach the Father's Word aright.
2. We are sent to hallow God's name by a godly life.

B. We need to be renewed in consecration (v 19).

1. So that we pursue our task with single-mindedness (Jn 34).
2. So that, while in the world, we would not be of the world (v 16; Ro 12:2). We are kept in the world for a purpose. Jesus has good reason for praying for His own, God keep you.

Conclusion: When we say to each other, "God keep you," we are not

saying empty words. We are reiterating Christ's own prayer for His own. That prayer relates to a real need, reminds us of divine power to protect, and directs us to our purpose in this world.

GA

PENTECOST: JOHN 7:37-39a

The Feast of Tabernacles, at which Jesus spoke the words of the text, commemorated the wilderness wanderings of Israel. For seven days the people lived in booths. Every morning a libation of water was brought in a golden pitcher from the pool of Siloam and poured out in the temple in commemoration of the water from the rock with which the Israelites in the desert had been provided. On the last day of the feast, the eighth and great day, this rite was probably omitted, either to suggest the blessedness of the people upon their entrance into the promised land, or to indicate the thirst for the greater spiritual blessings of which the prophets had spoken. Jesus must have seen in the multitudes at the feast those in all ages and lands who have been making their pilgrimages, thirsting, fainting, and distressed. Jesus makes the supreme claim (v 37b) that He is for the whole weary, unsatisfied, thirsty world what the riven rock had been for the Israelites.

Spiritual aspirations are satisfied when people come to Jesus and drink (v 37b), in other words, believe in Jesus (v 38a). Satisfied by Him, they will become sources of spiritual blessing to others (v 38b). Jesus adapts words from Is 58:11 and Zch 14:8 to emphasize that the influence of believers will not be meager but like "rivers of living water." This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost (v 39a). From the little group in the upper room "rivers" flowed to all. Grace has continued to flow to others in succeeding generations. The Spirit can effect blessing only because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension (Christ's glorification, v 39b).

The central thought of the text is that Jesus is the water of life that quenches spiritual thirst. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will continue to satisfy their spiritual thirst in Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Anyone who has traveled in desert regions—Death Valley, the Sahara, the Australian inland—can imagine the plight of a person who has run out of water. Physical thirst not a problem for us, although our drinking water may be chemically treated.

Another kind of thirst is the desire for peace and purpose. This thirst of the mind and heart needs to be quenched. We cannot survive on H₂O alone.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT SPIRITUAL THIRST?

- I. To do something about it, you must recognize it. Is is not easy to recognize, for most people do not, like Augustine, associate their restlessness with thirst for God.
 - A. The Jewish leaders were unaware of their spiritual thirst.
 1. The verses preceding the text describe Jesus' verbal encounter with the Jewish leaders at the feast (v 25-32).
 2. Self-righteousness prevented the Jewish leaders from experiencing spiritual thirst. They did not grasp the meaning of Christ's words (v 34-36).

B. We are not always aware of our spiritual thirst.

1. Smugness and self-satisfaction stop us from saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."
2. We think we do not need to grow in grace and in the meaning of God for our lives.

When we see that God has not yet filled every area of our lives, when we yearn for forgiveness, when we desire to be the kind of person God would have us be—then we are experiencing spiritual thirst.

II. Jesus tells us how to quench our thirst.

A. Jesus made a great claim in impressive circumstances.

1. The libation of water had rich associations for the Jews (Moses and the rock at Meribah; perhaps thought also of Is 12:3 and 55:1).
2. Jesus proclaimed himself as the source of salvation and means of quenching spiritual thirst.
3. Thirst is quenched by coming to Jesus, by believing in Him.

B. Jesus takes the initiative in quenching men's thirst.

1. By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost He quenched the apostles' thirst.
2. The Spirit comes to us in Word and Sacrament.
 - a. To make Christ's cross a living reality.
 - b. To show Jesus in the middle of our struggle.
 - c. To assure us of God's gracious concern for us.

III. The Spirit enables us to be channels of living water for others.

A. We can tear down walls of hatred and prejudice.

B. We can be fountains of goodness to others, until the fountain in us wells up into life everlasting where we shall never thirst again.

Conclusion: What are you going to do about spiritual thirst? "If any-one thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

GA