



THE SPRINGFIELD

April 1976
Volume 40, Number 2

Homiletical Studies

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: JOHN 6:51-58

Jesus' assertion (v 51) produced bitter strife. His hearers react contemptuously in scornful disbelief. We are not cannibals! They did not comprehend that He was speaking of a spiritual appropriation. In v 53, instead of explaining, Jesus merely reiterates the statement. The figure of speech lies in the words "eating" and "drinking," which portray intimate contact with and dependence upon the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Men eat His flesh and drink His blood when they assimilate to their own being the benefits of that sacrifice. Unless men appropriate Jesus Christ by faith they have no life. Christ's flesh and blood stand in the same relation to the true life of a person that food and drink do to the physical life (v 55). Without food we die. Food becomes part of our life blood and permeates our system. Likewise, the eating and drinking of Christ refer to an acceptance of Christ whereby His life penetrates our being. Christ Himself comes to live in the believer (v 56), continually imparting to him what constitutes spiritual life. In Christ a man reaches the source of all life in the Father (v 57). As the Father is the cause of Christ's life so that Christ's existence is by reason of the Father (v 57), so the believer has life because of Christ. Obviously, Jesus is different and far superior to manna.

The central thought of the text is that only by eating, that is, believing in Jesus, can a person become alive and stay alive. The goal is that the hearers would actually trust in Christ and not just know about Him.

Introduction: Parents, no doubt, said to us, as we probably now say to our children: "Eat your vegetables—fruit; it's good for you." Children do not know in what way the food is good for them; so the exhortation generally accomplishes little. Jesus talks about another kind of eating and implies that it is good for us. But He goes on to spell out how it is good for us.

EATING WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

What's good about it?

- I. It puts us into a relationship with Jesus.
- II. It enables Jesus to live in us.
- III. It makes us alive and keeps us that way.

I.

- A. Jesus is not referring to physical but to spiritual eating.
 1. He is not talking either (v 54a) about sacramental eating and drinking (Lord's Supper) but, as the context shows, about a person spiritually appropriating Him by faith.
 2. The eating and drinking imagery stresses faith as a relationship to a person.
- B. Need to distinguish between head knowledge and heart knowledge.
 1. Faith is not the acceptance of a creed or the performance of a ritual.
 - a. "I still remember my confirmation instruction." "I still believe in the church's doctrines." "I say my prayers." "I try to follow the **commandments.**"
 - b. Not just mental assent to the truths of Scripture.
 2. Faith is an identification of self with Christ so that His words and will

are assimilated and become part of our very being. Faith is a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ that involves not only knowledge, but also assent, and confidence or trust. To believe in Jesus is to eat what is good for us. Such faith makes us Christians. Another good that comes from this eating is that it enables Jesus to live in us.

II.

- A. Jesus actually comes to live in the person—heart, soul, body—of the Christian (v 56; Re 3:20).
 - 1. We may not always feel His presence, yet He is in anyone who eats (believes) (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16b). Luther: "He and Christ are one cake."
 - 2. He who has Christ in his heart and person is a veritable miracle-man (Luther); Our tongue, Christ's tongue, our hands, Christ's hands.
- B. Jesus affects our whole life.
 - 1. He cleanses us daily with His grace.
 - 2. He enables us to think and to speak what is pure (our mind and mouth are Christ's, Ga 2:20; Jn 15:5).
 - 3. He influences all our relationships—with spouse, children, friends, strangers. Christ living in us—this eating is surely good for us. Christ in us is the difference between being dead and being alive.

III.

- A. Just as it is necessary to eat food to stay physically alive, so it is absolutely necessary to eat Jesus in order to be spiritually alive.
 - 1. Simply no other way exists to come alive and stay alive (v 53; Jn 14:6).
 - 2. Nurture relationship with Jesus through Word and Sacraments (Ac 17:11).
- B. We have life now ("has eternal life").
 - 1. No matter how listless you sometimes feel, Christ's own life pulsates within you (Ro 6:4c, 11).
 - 2. No matter how neglected you may feel at times, Christ is watching over you (Consider the stars in the firmament; many distant ones cannot be seen. Yet all are under the same heaven. There are eyes that have numbered them and know them. Christ knows and cares for you too).
- C. We shall come to a full, endless life.
 - 1. No matter how terribly death crowds upon us, "I will raise . . ." (v 54c).
 - 2. You have *His* word. It is for you. "Death be hanged. The Lord has promised me that I shall live" (Luther).

Conclusion: This is eating that is good for us.

During the great depression tramps often came to the parsonage door asking for handout. One day a man came to our door asking for money. Father told him we could not give him money but we would give him food. He took his lunch bag and left. But a few doors down we saw him throw it away. He had a craving only for alcohol. This is the question you and I need to ask ourselves in all seriousness: When the Bread of Life is offered to us in the Word and Sacraments, do we eat it or throw it away?

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: JOHN 6:60-69

The feeding of the five thousand had awakened wonder in the multitude, and they were ready at least to listen to Him speak about the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. But they appeared incapable of comprehending spiritual truth. Jesus intimates that their bewilderment will only be increased when He withdraws His physical presence from them (v 62). Those, however, who accept His words in faith will find them the channel of new spiritual life. Jesus is not surprised at their unbelief. He knew there was a traitor even in the circle of His close disciples. Now comes the crisis of unbelief (v 66). Disappointed that Jesus was not a political leader, the majority could not appreciate His spiritual teachings. But some did. Peter, speaking for the rest of the disciples, has found satisfaction in Christ; there is no one else whom they desire. Christ's claims are still tests of faith that produce crises in the lives of His followers, dividing the false from the true. His claims cause many who have been nominal Christians to turn back from Him; they give occasion to believers to confess their satisfaction and faith.

The central thought of the text is that the believer desires no one else besides Jesus because he finds complete satisfaction in Christ. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would resolve to stay with Christ who alone can satisfy them.

Introduction: Many people are good starters but poor completers. They get all excited about a project, but are unable to see it through. The same thing happens in the Christian life. Not everyone who starts off as a Christian ends up that way. Individuals who are Christians in their childhood and youth have long since quit going to church or showing any interest in Jesus Christ. One of the sad cases recorded in Scripture is Demas (2 Tm 4:10). Once a Christian, always a Christian? The danger of leaving Jesus is real. We need to resolve:

JESUS, I WILL NEVER LEAVE

I. Because He alone is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

A. So many left Jesus because they could not accept Him as the Christ and Son of God.

1. They were offended at His teaching (vs 60-61).
2. It is no different today. Unbelievers still find Christ's word offensive. They ridicule phrases like "washed in the blood of the Lamb." Nominal Christians will not let Jesus be the only Savior. They insist that they must do something themselves.

B. Jesus is the Savior because He is the Christ.

1. Despite the skepticism around them (v 66; 7:41; Mt 9:3), the disciples were sure Jesus was the Christ because they had been convinced by Christ's words (v 63b).
 - a. Drawn from the Old Testament (Mt 26:14; Mk 9:12).
 - b. Old Testament prophecies of Christ (Ps 45:7).
2. They believed that Jesus was the Christ who would deliver from sin (Lk 18:31). Only later did they understand how this was to be done (Jn 12:16), but they already accepted Him as Savior.

C. The disciples believed that Jesus was the Son of the living God.

1. He was the one of whom God had spoken (Ps 2:7). Incredible! God walking on earth!

2. Yet the disciples were convinced. They had seen His miracles. No ordinary man could do such things.
3. So they would not leave Jesus. There was no other Messiah. To leave Jesus would have been to deny and renounce God himself.
4. How about you? Will you stay with Him? Only the Christ, God's Son, can forgive your sins, hear your prayers, support you in difficulty.

The resolution not to leave Jesus is the result of Christ's Word at work in us. Jesus as the Son of the living God speaks words that accord with His character. The text calls them words of eternal life. Do not leave Jesus.

II. Because He alone has the words of eternal life.

- A. The disciples had no other to whom they could go.
 1. No teacher is like Him. No one speaks with the authority He does. No one's words ever did so much for us.
 2. Jesus' words of eternal life are the Gospel.
- B. The words of Jesus are life-giving words.
 1. The word in baptism created faith (1 Pe 1:23).
 2. Christ's words have created life in pagans who had "no hope and without God in the world." It transformed them.
 3. His word brings new life to men crushed by God's law and terrified in conscience.
- C. His words are words of life also because they sustain life.
 1. In time of care and worry (1 Pe 5:7).
 2. When sins are troubling (1 Jn 1:7; Mt 9:2).
 3. In time of death. Christians feel sorrow, but not as those who have no hope (Jn 11:25).

Do not leave Jesus by trying to make it all on your own, by dabbling in the occult or in astrology, by demanding and expecting revelations in addition to Christ's Word, by indifference.

Conclusion: Make this your resolution: "Jesus, I will never leave." Keep in touch with Him through Word and Sacrament. He will never leave you. He will help you in good and bad days to say what the sixth stanza of Hymn 365 (THL) says.

GA

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 7:1-8; 14-15; 21-23

The law of Moses prohibited contact with many things deemed to be unclean. If anyone touched them he was counted unclean and could not approach the temple until he had cleansed himself by the washing prescribed in the law. When coming from the market place, where there would be every kind of men and things by which they might be polluted, the Pharisees considered it necessary to cleanse themselves from any impurity by careful ablution. Also cooking vessels were cleansed. The purpose of the cleansing prescribed in the law of Moses was to awaken the Jews to the necessity of spiritual cleansing. But the Pharisees emphasized the external washing and lengthened the list of items and the number of washings that had to be carried out. This punctilious observance of tradition yielded little or no religious profit, for it drew away attention from the duty of far greater

moment—the cleansing of the soul from sin. Christ, who came to put an end to the old ceremonial law and to the vain traditions which now overlaid it, did not enforce these external washings upon His disciples. He meets the Pharisees' question by quoting the prophecy of Is 24:13. Jesus is saying (v 9) that your traditions are not instituted by God or by His prophets but are modern inventions that you want to defend. In vs 10-13 Jesus gives an example of one of these human traditions that sets aside God's clear commandment. In verses 14-15 Jesus addresses the whole crowd and reminds them that impurity springs from the heart, so that unless the heart is cleansed all external washings are in vain. What matters (v 21-23) is that the heart be right. "Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life" (Pr 4:23).

The central thought of the text is that a man's goodness or badness is determined not by outward performance but by his inward state. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would honor God by their obedience.

Introduction: Religious groups generally prescribe a code of conduct for their members, laws to be obeyed. There is a tendency to keep adding commands and prohibitions. Orthodox Jews today are expected to observe no less than 613 "do's" and "don'ts." The list of commands was growing already in Christ's day. The Pharisees were concerned about observing rules regarding washing. But were they thereby honoring God! We need to be concerned about doing the right thing. Above all, we need to be concerned about whether obedience to a code of right and wrong honors God.

OBEDIENCE THAT HONORS GOD

I. God-honoring obedience is not just an outward piety.

- A. The Pharisees were traditionalists who concentrated on outward cleansing (vs 3-5).
 1. Had added to the requirements of the Mosaic law (v 7b-8).
 2. Had overlooked the need to be cleansed within (v 6c).
- B. We are sometimes content with mere outward piety.
 1. When we make the church an end in itself ("churchianity").
 - a. Expecting to be saved partly at least through regular attendance, handsome financial contributions, redecorating the altar, and improving the organist's technique.
 - b. Getting people to church, no matter why they go or what they get out of it.
 2. When we allow devotion to God to take precedence over love to neighbor.
 - a. Pharisees had subverted fourth commandment (context vs 9-13).
 - b. We can get so wrapped up in the first table of the law that we forget the second (Mt 22:39) and find no time to get involved with persons.

Obedience which is nothing more than outward piety does not honor God. God looks beyond the word and deed to the heart from which they spring (Ps 44:21b).

II: God-honoring obedience flows from an inward purity.

- A. No human being is inwardly pure by nature (vs 21-22; Gn 8:21, "the imagination of man's heart is evil").
 1. The nonChristian is under the control of the sin which dwells within him by nature (Lk 6:45b).

2. The Christian, though no longer under the control of sin, has still to contend with a sinful nature or evil heart (Ro 7:18, 23).
3. It is difficult for us to realize the depths of the evil within us (Jr 17:9).
 - a. We are capable of falling into serious offenses (David, Peter).
 - b. We need to know ourselves (1 Cor 10:12) and ask for help (Ps 51-10).
- B. God cleanses our hearts by His forgiveness.
 1. The blood of Christ cleanses us (1 Jn 1: 7c; TLH 157, vs 1-2; 388, v 2).
 2. In Christ's purity we are pure (TLH 371, v 1).
 3. God-honoring obedience can come only from hearts purified by grace.
- C. God renews our heart (Eze 11:19b).
 1. As new creatures (2 Cor 5:17) we are able to obey God's commands (Ten Commandments).
 2. Our obedience, though imperfect, is pleasing to God (He 13:16b; Lk 6:45a). God wants obedient children who honor Him. Is yours a God-honoring obedience?

GA

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 7:31-37

The man who was brought to Jesus was dumb in the sense that he spoke unintelligibly, his deafness having adversely affected his utterance (v 32). Jesus took him aside (v 33), probably to fix the man's attention upon himself and upon Jesus. By thrusting His fingers into the man's ears Jesus was saying, "I am about to open these ears so they will hear." Likewise, the touching of the man's tongue with saliva from His own sacred lips focused the afflicted man's attention on what Christ would now do for his speech. These actions of Christ were acted metaphors that were intended to awaken the man's faith and to stir up in him lively expectation of blessing. Similarly, the looking up to heaven (v 34) was meant to remind the man of where he must look for the real source of his cure. Jesus sighed—literally, groaned—for He was touched by the plight of the afflicted man. He was reminded of all the bodily as well as spiritual misery that has come upon men because of sin. The actual word that Jesus spoke to the man, *Ephphatha* (be opened), is recorded by the evangelist. Jesus charged both the man and those who brought him (v 36), gave them clear and positive orders, not to publicize what had been done. Why? Perhaps now, as He was nearing the end of His ministry, He wished to discourage false notions of His messiahship which were built solely on His miracle-working powers.

The central thought of the text is that Jesus tailors His ministry to the individual. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would be confident that Jesus deals with them as unique persons.

Introduction: Who of us has not felt at times that nobody understands us, felt as though we were being used rather than dealt with as a person with a unique personality and a peculiar need? One of the great things about Jesus is that He is aware of our individuality. He knows the real you and the real me.

JESUS FITS HIS MINISTRY TO THE INDIVIDUAL

I. He finds ways of communicating with the individual.

- A. He found a way to let the deaf and dumb man know what He would do (v 33).
 1. He was aware of the man's peculiar problem and considerately took him aside.
 2. It would be easier to gain the man's confidence when he was away from the distractions of the crowd.
 3. By His actions Jesus stirred up the man's faith and heightened his expectations.
- B. Jesus has many avenues to the human heart today.
 1. He can use an illness or some other crisis situation to open our ears to hear His voice and to teach our lips to pray again.
 2. He can use beautiful music, the world of nature, or the words and touch of another person to sensitize us to higher values.
 3. He can use a church service or private devotion to touch our ears and tongue so that we receive His Word in faith and confess Him as our Savior.
 4. Jesus tries to get through to us in various ways because He feels compassion toward us in our peculiar needs (v 34b).
- C. Whichever way Jesus uses to communicate with you, His purpose is always to focus your attention on your need and on His power to help, so that you will look expectantly to Him.

II. He gears His help to the individual's need.

- A. For the afflicted man, one powerful word did it all (v 34c).
 1. The man heard and spoke instantly, just as if he had been hearing clearly and speaking plainly all his life (v 35).
 2. Not surprising, after such help, that the man and the crowd could not keep quiet but had to proclaim what Jesus had done (v 36b).
- B. Jesus helps us by means of His audible and visible Word (Word and Sacraments).
 1. No need exists for Him to change His message to suit individual needs. The Gospel is all-encompassing and will fit every need.
 - a. Need for security—"You are safe."
 - b. Need for self-respect—"You are loved."
 - c. Need for achievement—"You can live a service-centered life."
 2. The help Jesus gives us through His Gospel is heavenly, divine help and therefore sure and sufficient (v 34a).

Jesus fits His ministry to the individual. He wants to minister to you. Have you let Him? Having experienced His ministry, we too can say: "He has done all things well!"

GA

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 8:27-35

According to last Sunday's text plenty of people were willing to sing the praises of Jesus. They said: He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. In other words, they were impressed with His miracles and with the love which He displayed in performing them. They were ready to include Him among God's great prophets and that is where our

text takes up the thought, that people recognized Christ as John the Baptist, either as one like him, or even as John the Baptist risen from the dead. Others likened him to Elijah, the prophet who had called for such drastic decisions of God's people. Others were more vague. Not so, the disciples. They recognized Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, sent into the world. But even they were not fully convinced of the work that the Messiah was to perform. They were impressed with the fact, as the prophecies had predicted, that in the Messiah's day God's people would be great. The mountain of the Lord would rise above all the mountains. This they falsely applied to an earthly kingdom to be established by Christ. And that is what caused Peter to object when Christ showed that He must suffer and die. The fact that He mentioned that He would rise again did not seem to get through to any of them. It is not much different today. Modernism recognizes the greatness of Christ. He is considered a prophet, a great teacher, a wonderful example. But the message of the cross is passed over as a dark chapter in the history of our Lord. As Paul stated it so clearly, the preaching of the cross is foolishness to some and a stumbling-block to others. They do not see the need of it. Neither do they see the need of suffering in the lives of the children of God. That we should have to take up our cross, the cross especially appointed for us, matching our ability to bear it, the cross we bear only as Christians, suggests a life too somber, too restricted. Yet it need not be a somber life at all. It is a challenging life.

DO WE REALLY KNOW CHRIST THE LORD?

- I. The better we know Him the better we will confess Him as the Christ.
 - A. That means, of course, speaking of His suffering and death, as Savior.
 - B. But it includes the message of His resurrection, as Savior.
- II. The better we know Him the better we will follow Him as our Lord.
 - A. That requires self-denial.
 1. It means saying No to the flesh with its self-desires.
 2. It means asking that His will be done in our lives.
 - a. That we give up everything that smacks of worldliness.
 - b. That we enjoy all of the true blessings of our God.
 - B. It means that we take up our cross.
 1. Our cross is not a punishment for sin.
 2. Our cross is the shame we bear for Him who died for us.
 3. It is the cross of being called Christians, the most glorious name that anyone could call us.
 - C. Seeing Christ as Lord means to follow Him.
 1. He leads and helps us in the way of peace with God: a wonderful way.
 2. He leads and helps us in the way of love for our fellowmen: a challenging way.
 3. He leads and helps us in the way of life eternal: a glorious way.

Conclusion: May God open our eyes to see the glory of such a life in Christ.

MJS

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 9:30-37

Jesus and His disciples now leave Caesarea Philippi for their last tr-

through the familiar scenes of Galilee (v. 30). "He taught" (v. 31) means literally, He was teaching. Jesus wanted to forewarn His disciples, to prepare them for the dread reality of His death and the glory of His resurrection. "The Son of Man is delivered" refers to the Redeemer in His divine—human nature. Note the vivid present tense. "They were afraid" (v. 32): Mt 17-23 says, "They were exceeding sorry." The disciples had much to learn about the Kingdom and the qualifications necessary for admission to it. They debated who was the greatest, perhaps because only three of the disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration (v. 33). "He shall be last of all" (v. 35): Some think that this phrase means, "He shall be abased." It is more natural to interpret it as saying that he shall assume the last place as servant of all. This principle is the great paradox of the Kingdom of God: Fame before Christ and His Father comes by way of humble, unpretentious service, without thought of reward. "Taking him in His arms" (v. 35) means literally, folding him in His arms, embracing him. "Receive" (v. 37): One receives another by showing him kindness and love. "In My name" means out of faith in Me, in My stead, and for My glory. "You welcome Me": compare Mt 25-45.

Introduction: What is Christianity? More than anything else, Christianity is a way of life.

CHRISTIANITY IS A WAY OF LIFE

I. Faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

A. Jesus foresees His passion and victory.

1. Note Jesus' omniscience: He is the Son of God.
2. Note His great love (Jn 10:10.11.17).
 - a. He suffered for us (Is 53; Ro 5)
 - b. He won the victory for us (Jn 11:25-26; I Cor 15:55-57).

B. Faith looks to Christ alone for salvation

1. The disciples had trouble understanding.
2. We should understand and believe.
 - a. We have witnessed Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.
 - b. Salvation comes by way of faith alone (Eph 2:8-9; Ro 4:5; 5:1-5).

We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone. Faith is to be active in love.

II. Love which serves in Christ's name.

A. The disciples had much to learn about the place of love in the Christian life.

1. They disputed about who should be greatest.
2. This was evidence of selfish pride: they had much to learn.

B. Jesus teaches them and us.

1. We are to be busy in works of love also to little children (Lk 6:27; Ga 6:10; 1 Pe 3:11; Jas 1:27; 2:17).
2. Our works of love in Christ's name are done to Him (Mt 25:45; He 13:16).

To see Christ by faith as our Savior and to see His face in those who need our love: these are the ingredients of the Christian life.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 9:38-50

Those who cast out demons in Christ's name did so in faith. When the disciples forbid this action, they show a zeal, but not according to knowledge (v. 38). We should rejoice wherever the Gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed (v. 39; Php 1:14-19). There is no neutrality regarding Christ (v. 40). If he who gives a cup of water in Christ's name is rewarded, so also is the man who casts out demons in His name (v. 41). "His reward": God's rewards are always rewards of grace. "Offend" (v. 42) means to set a trap for one by causing him to sin by our bad example. "Millstone" means, literally, a millstone so large as to require to be turned by an ass. "Little one": the reference may be children, new converts, or those weak in faith. "If thy hand offend" (v. 43): see Dt 13:6; Mt 5:29; 18:8; Col 3:5; He 12:1. The hand, foot, and eye are members which frequently lead us to sin. "Gehenna" is the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where refuse burned day and night, a picture of eternal damnation (Lk 16:18). "Their worm" (v. 44): see Is 66:24. The worm that feeds upon them never dies, nor is the eternal fire quenched. St. Bernard says: "The worm that never dies is the memory of the past, which never ceases to gnaw the conscience of the impenitent." "Everyone is salted" (v. 49): For the unbeliever it is the penal fire; for the Christian it is the purifying fire, often painful and severe (1 Pe 4:12). "Every sacrifice": see Lv 2:13; Eze 43:24. "Salt is good" (v. 50): It is recognized for its antiseptic and preservative quality. "Have salt in yourselves": Christians are to keep in a healthy state spiritually. "Have peace": compare v. 33 where we find the disciples disputing. The goal of the sermon is to encourage Christians to guard against the sin of pride.

Introduction: Pride is the mother sin of all others. Since the disciples had evidenced pride in their concern over who should be the greatest, Jesus warns against the sin of pride.

BEWARE OF PRIDE

I. The manifestation of pride.

A. It shows itself in a sectarian spirit.

1. The disciples showed a sectarian spirit in rebuking the man who cast out demons in Christ's name.
2. Jesus rebuked them.
3. We Christians ought to rejoice wherever Christ is preached (Php 1:14-19).

B. It shows itself in giving offense.

1. Pride leads a person to do what he wants to do regardless of the effect of his action on others (Ro 14:15.21; Ga 2:11-15).
2. The dire consequences of leading another to sin.
3. What a sobering word for parents, teachers, and pastors.

C. It shows itself in not keeping a tight rein on the members of our body.

1. Many a person's hand, foot, or eye has led him away from Christ (Ps 1; 1 Jn 2:15-17; Mt 5:28).
2. It really would be better to have only one hand, foot, or eye than to have both of each and to be cast into hell.
3. Therefore Christians must daily drown the Old Adam (Ro 6:12; 13:14).

II. The cure for pride.

A. Have salt in yourselves: nurture your spiritual life.

1. Through the Law which helps us to see ourselves as sinners before God (Ro 3:20).
 2. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit empowers us (Ro 1:16; 6:1-11; 12:1; 1 Jn 3:1-3; 4:11).
- B. God uses affliction as a fire to purge us (1 Pe 4:12).
- C. Endeavor to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit by having peace with one another (He 12:14; Mt 5:9; Ga 5:22).

HJE

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 10:2-16

"Tempting Him" (v. 2): The Jews cavilled over Dt 24:1, especially the words "some uncleanness." Shammai held the term to mean fornication. Hillel was more liberal in his view. Jesus goes back to Moses (v. 3). The bill of divorcement (v. 4): see Dt 24:1-4. To prevent wholesale promiscuity and to protect the interests of the wife wantonly put away, the bill of divorcement was required. "The hardness of your heart" (v. 5): In simply putting away his wife, the man was going contrary to God's law. Here Jesus goes back to the order of creation, Gn 2:18-25 (v. 6). Marriage is leaving and cleaving (v. 7). "One flesh" (v. 8): This is true physically, in mutual care, and in purpose. The principle is that there is no divorce (v. 9). Simply dismissing one's wife is a form of desertion. *Moicheuoo* means to break the marriage (Luther: *Ehe brechen*), a sin against the Sixth Commandment (v. 11). Note "against her": to her harm. Note also the exception in Mt 5:31-32; 19:9. A woman's putting away of her husband was unheard of in Jewish society, but not in the Greek world (v. 12). "Little ones" (v. 13): Lk 18:15 calls them babes. "Touch them": Jesus put His hands upon them in blessing. "Rebuked them": The disciples felt this an imposition on the Master. "Displeased" (v. 14) means, literally, moved with indignation. "As a little child" (v. 15) means in the spirit of a little child. The goal of the sermon is to encourage couples to rededicate themselves to the goals of Christian married life.

Introduction: Each year thousands become married; each year thousands become disillusioned in marriage. Does it have to be? Like everything else good in life, marriage has to be worked at according to God's design for marriage.

MAKE YOURS A HAPPY MARRIAGE

- I. By being faithful to each other for life.
 - A. God designed marriage for the good of man.
 1. That man might not be alone.
 2. For mutual companionship (Gn 2:18).
 - B. Husband and wife are to be one flesh.
 1. One physically, expressing their love for each other also in sexual love (1 Cor 7:1-6).
 2. One in concern for each other.
 - a. Expressed in mutual help (Ga 6:2).
 - b. Patterned after the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-33; 1 Pe 3:1-7).
 - C. Husband and wife are to remain together.
 1. The problem of divorce in the Old Testament.
 - a. Men simply dismissed their wives.

- b. Moses demanded a bill of divorcement to guard against promiscuity and to protect the dismissed wife.
- 2. Jesus states the principle: no divorce (Ro 7:1-2).
 - a. To dismiss one's spouse is a sin against the spouse and the Sixth Commandment.
 - b. God wants couples to resolve their difficulties in a Christian manner.
 - (1) By confessing their faults to each other (Mt 5:23-25; Jas 5:16).
 - (2) By speaking forgiveness to each other (Mt 6:12; Mk 11:26; Lk 23:34).
 - (3) By strengthening their marriage through Word and Sacrament (Jn 8:31-32).

II. By bringing their children to the Lord Jesus.

- A. Children are a gift of God (Ps 127; 128).
 - 1. They give parents an opportunity to extend their love.
 - 2. They give joy and security to parents.
- B. Children are to be brought to Jesus.
 - 1. In holy baptism (Jn 3:1-15; Tt 3:4-7).
 - 2. In Christian nurture in home and church (Eph 6:4; Ps 78:1-8; Dt 6:6-7).

HJE

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (REFORMATION DAY): JOHN 8:31-36

"The Jews which had become believing" were those who accepted Christ's Messianic claims but interpreted them according to their own ideas of the theocratic kingdom. Their faith was most feeble and imperfect. Continuing and remaining in the Word of Christ is the characteristic of the true disciple. In the Word we find Christ revealed. "The truth" (v. 32): Compare Jn 7:16-17; 14:6. "Free": The reference is to freedom from sin and death. Without Christ, all men are slaves of sin, Ro 6:17-20. "We have never been in bondage" (v. 33): Whatever the fortunes of their political history, the Jews boasted that they were God's chosen people who had the promise of a Descendant who would rule all nations. "Whoever commits sin" (v. 34): Every doer of sin is a slave of sin. He thereby is held captive by sin. These Jews were not seeking deliverance from the bondage of sin; what they wanted was the realization of their national hopes. Because of sin, the Jews and all men by nature are the slaves of sin (Ro 6-7). Sonship is the only principle on which continuance in the house can be secured (v. 35). Slaves will be cast out, even though they may outwardly be members of the house. The Son is He who gives power to become the sons of God (v. 36; Ro 8:2). Man's freedom lies in accepting the freedom from sin and death won by Christ (1 Cor 7:22; Ro 8:35-36; 2 Cor 3:18). The goal of the sermon is to encourage the hearer to continue in Christ's Word.

Introduction: The Reformation was a victory for the Word.

JESUS PLEADS: CONTINUE IN MY WORD

- I. Then shall you be my disciples.

- A. Many refuse to accept the Word of God as God's Word.
 - 1. The Jews at Jesus' time refused His testimony (Jn 8:46).
 - 2. At Luther's time decrees of councils and popes were placed on a level with the Word.
 - 3. Today attacks are made on the truthfulness of the Scriptures.
- B. Hence Jesus' plea to His disciples to continue in His Word.
 - 1. Jesus speaks with authority as the Son of God.
 - 2. We have His Word in the Sacred Scriptures given by inspiration (2 Tm 3:16; 2 Pt 1:21).
 - a. The Scriptures are true and reliable.
 - b. They are sufficient for our salvation.
 - 3. We are to be learners of the Scripture, not lords over it.
 - a. Jesus constantly appealed to Scriptures as the supreme authority (Lk 24:47; Jn 5:39; 10:35).
 - b. So did Luther at Worms and at Marburg.
 - c. So must we.

Let us diligently hear the Word, read it, spread it. Then we will be disciples (learners), indeed.

II. Then we shall know the truth.

- A. The truth about ourselves.
 - 1. The Jews thought they were saved by race.
 - 2. Jesus tells them that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin (Ro 5:12).
 - 3. Luther knew the truth about himself only too well.
- B. The truth about God's grace.
 - 1. Revealed in Christ: The Son who frees (2 Cor 5:19; Ro 5:8).
 - 2. Justification by faith (Ro 3:28; 4:5; 1:16-17).
- C. The truth of God's grace in Christ sets us free.
 - 1. From sin and death (1 Jn 1:7; 1 Cor 15:55-57).
 - 2. Free to become sons and heirs (1 Jn 3:1-3; Ro 8:16-17).

HJE

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 10:35-45

"The two sons": James and John were cousins of Jesus. Mt 20:20 says that the request was made by Salome, their mother. The sons speak through their mother. Recently (Mt 19:28) Jesus had said that the apostles would sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel. Jesus answers the sons (v. 38). "The cup" refers to suffering. "The baptism": the figure describes Jesus' total immersion in His work. "Ye shall indeed drink" (v. 39): James was slain by Herod (Ac 12:2). Jerome remarks that Jesus did not say, "Ye shall not sit," or "Ye shall sit," but holds out the prize to all (v. 40). "Given by the Father": He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6). What Jesus condemns is the arbitrary, tyrannical exercise of power by the princes of the world (v. 41). The road to greatness is one of humble service (v. 43-44). He who fully deserves to be ministered unto because He is the Son of God comes to minister (v. 45). "Ransom": Christ paid the price to deliver us from the tyrants of sin, death, and the devil. "For many" means for all men; compare Ro 5:19. The goal of the sermon is to encourage people to the ministering life in the Kingdom.

Introduction: The desire for greatness is a basic desire of man. The road by which men achieve greatness makes all the difference.

THE ROAD TO GREATNESS IN CHRIST'S KINGDOM

I. Not the road of selfish ambition.

A. That is the road James and John wanted to take.

1. They imagined that Jesus would soon set up a kingdom on earth (Ac 1:6).
2. They selfishly wanted a place of prominence.

B. Jesus tells them that selfish ambition is not the road.

1. Jesus is soon to drink the cup of suffering.
2. James and John brashly say that they are able to drink of it.
3. Jesus predicts that they shall suffer for His sake, indeed (Lk 6:22).
4. He reminds them that prominence in the Kingdom is a matter of grace.
 - a. Given by the Father (Mt 25:34).
 - b. Given in grace (Eph 2:8-9).

Ambition in the kingdom: what a curse! What havoc it brings in one's place of employment, in the home, in the church. Selfish ambition is genuine Gentile behavior. It is a sin that calls for repentance.

II. The road of humble service.

A. Christ came to minister.

1. He deserved the world's acclaim for He was the Son of God (Jn 1:1.14; Lk 2:13-14).
2. Yet He came to minister.
 - a. He came preaching the Gospel and healing (Mt 9:35).
 - b. He gave His life as ransom for many (1 Tm 2:6; Ga 3:13; Tt 2:14; Ro 3:24; Eph 1:7).

B. Christ has left us an example to follow (Php 2:5-11).

1. God has already crowned us with greatness.
 - a. He made us His children (Eph 2:4-7; 1 Jn 3:1-2).
 - b. He has given us eternal life (Jn 3:16; 10:27-29).
2. Because we have heaven as a gift, we are to live a ministering life.
 - a. Telling the good news of Christ (Mt 28:18-20).
 - b. Serving one another (Ga 5:13; Jn 12:26).

The ministering life: What a privilege, what a challenge, what a joy!

HJE

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: MARK 10:46-52

Jericho, city of palm trees, was one of the most important cities in Palestine. Mt. 20 speaks of two blind men cured; Lk 18 speaks of a man cured as Jesus entered Jericho; Mk speaks of a cure as Jesus left Jericho. "Son of David" is a Messianic title: the blind man saw the prophet of Galilee as the Messiah (v. 47). Though charged by the people to be quiet, the blind man would not be restrained (v. 48). He overcame all earthly shame and fear. Not to grow weary in praying is the lesson for us. "Jesus stood" (v. 49): In spite of Jesus' preoccupation with His passion, He takes time for this beggar. "Be of good cheer": There is something very genuine and touching in the attitude of the people. They said: "Courage, rise, He calls you." "He rose" (v. 50) is,

literally, he sprang to his feet. "His garment" refers to his loose outer tunic. "Rabboni" (v. 51) means "my Master." There are six occasions on which Jesus healed blind people: Mt 9:27; 12:22; 21:14; Mk 8:24; 10:46; Jn 9:1. Though Christ knows our need, He would have us pray (v. 51). This story is another example of the victory of faith. The goal of the sermon is to encourage Christians to emulate the faith of Bartimaeus.

Introduction: Christianity places a premium on faith, implicit trust in God and His promises; often our faith is weak. It helps to witness the faith of a man like Bartimaeus.

A FAITH JESUS COMMENDS

I. Sees in Jesus the promised Messiah.

A. Bartimaeus did.

1. He heard of Christ's mighty preaching and of His miracles.
2. He concluded that Christ was the promised Messiah, the Son of David.

B. We, too, should see Jesus as the Messiah.

1. We, too, have in the Scriptures an account of His preaching and of His miracles (Ro 15:4).
2. We have seen Christ as the suffering Servant (Is 53).
3. Now we find in Him the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven. (Eph 1:7).

II. Cries persistently to Jesus.

A. Bartimaeus did.

1. Though rebuked by the people, he continued to cry.
2. He trusted implicitly in Jesus' power.
3. He trusted in Jesus' mercy, that Jesus would help him.
4. His hope was not misplaced. What a thrill to see, after a life of blindness.

B. Like Bartimaeus we should cry persistently.

1. Jesus has power to help us (Mt 28:18; Lk 1:37).
2. Jesus is merciful (He 4:15).
 - a. He always forgives when we penitently pray (Is 1:18).
 - b. He often gives us those temporal blessings for which we pray: daily bread, health in sickness.
 - c. When He does not remove our cross, it is always for our good (2 Cor 12:9; Ro 5:3-5; Lk 22:42).

III. Follows Jesus.

A. Bartimaeus follows Jesus as a living witness to Jesus' power and mercy.

B. We, too, should continue to follow Jesus (Mt 16:24).

1. In faith (Mt 21:22; Jn 14:1).
2. In works of love (Lk 6:27; Ga 5:13; Eph 5:12).

HJE

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: JOHN 18:33-37

This Sunday gives honor to Christ as the King. Hence this text. Bringing Jesus within the Praetorium, Pilate takes up the question of Jesus' kingship (v. 33). He knows the other charges of the Jews to be false. "Sayest thou this

of thyself" (v. 34): Do you make this inquiry from any serious personal interest, or are you merely echoing the formal charge of the Jews? "Am I a Jew?" (v. 35): Pilate meant, "I surely am no Jew." Christ's Kingdom is not a temporal Kingdom, but a spiritual and everlasting Kingdom (v. 36). The Kingdom is in the world, but not of the world. Otherwise Christ would have servants fighting for Him. Pilate wants a definite answer. He exclaims: "Then you are a King, just the same" (v. 37). Jesus replies that He is indeed a King. He continues by explaining the purpose of His coming into the world, implying His pre-existence. The truth which has been revealed in Christ is the grace of God in Him. The King of truth expands His Kingdom by the Word of truth. Everyone that is of the truth will hear His voice in faith (Jn 10:8.16.27).

Introduction: Christ was before Pilate. But Pilate was before Christ, as are all men, as Christ proclaims Himself to be the King of kings.

THE KING OF KINGS

I. The King.

A. Not an earthly king.

1. He had no army or other trappings of royalty.
2. When the Jews wanted to make Him their king, He refused (Jn 6:15).

B. But He was a King indeed.

1. King from eternity (Ps 24:8; Jn 1:1).
2. Predicted in the Old Testament (Zch 9:9; Is 9:6-7).
3. Born a King (Mt 2:2; Jn 1:14; Lk 2:1-14).
 - a. God and man in one person (Jn 10:30; Mt 14:33).
 - b. To bear witness unto the truth (Mt 9:35).
 - c. To die for the sins of the world (Jn 10:11; Mt 1:21; 18:11).
 - d. To rise again as conqueror of sin, death, and hell (1 Cor 15:55-57).

II. The kingdom.

A. The origin of the kingdom.

1. Planned in eternity through God's choosing of the elect (Ro 8:29-30; Eph 1:11-12).
2. Planned in Christ Jesus (Eph 5:25-27).

B. The extent of the kingdom is world-wide (Mk 16:15-16).

C. The blessings of the Kingdom.

1. Not security from want and war.
2. But the forgiveness of sins, eternal life (1 Jn 1:7; Jn 3:16; 11:25-26).

D. The growth of the kingdom.

1. Not by military might.
2. But by proclamation of the truth (Is 55:10-11; Mt 28:18-20).

E. The duration of the kingdom.

1. Earthly kingdoms rise and fall.
2. Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (Lk 12:32; 2 Tm 4:18).

F. All are members of the kingdom who hear His voice (Jn 8:31-32; 8:12; 12:35).

To the Kings of kings and Lord of lords be honor and power everlasting (1 Tm 6:15-16).