

George Stoeckhardt

Lenten Sermons

F O R W A R D

At the request of Synod's publishing house the undersigned has permitted the publication of the following Lenten sermons, which at first were intended for the edification of my own congregation. They are an explanation of the Lenten story as the events followed one upon the other. It is self-understood that the old treasures of our Church, such as the explanations of Luther, Gerhard, and others, were used. It is in explaining the Lenten story that one can easily fall into the danger of explaining too much and interpreting the individual events of Christ's suffering in a very one-sided way. Then the explanation easily degenerates into play and does not attain the earnestness of the holy story. The thoughts are scattered and one loses sight of the whole story and the chief point. The author exerted at least a little effort to avoid this danger and to draw out the thoughts which were indicated in the text itself and the parallel passages, summarize them in a theme, and apply them to conditions in the church and the needs of the present time. May all who read the following Lenten meditations find in all the One Person to whom all Scripture points and also whom all explanations of Scripture have in view, the Crucified, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

- - - G. Stoeckhardt

INTRODUCTION

G. Stoeckhardt has a very special style, a style which is his alone. At first reading it seems clumsy and awkward indeed but upon reading one's way into it, one will see how skilfully the author used the thoughts contained in the text itself, and the style vanishes into the background.

I believe that you will receive the most benefit for your sermon preparation, if you would outline that portion of the sermon which you intend to use. You will find that the main divisions under the chief parts are placed in separate paragraphs, and sometimes in German they are very long. The translator tried to indicate the sub-thoughts by starting a new paragraph. The double spaces between paragraphs show where Stoeckhardt began his paragraphs; the single spaces where the translator tried to indicate the beginning of a new thought within the original paragraph. I say, "tried", because at times it was very difficult to know exactly where to start a new one.

May the Holy Spirit grant you His wisdom in using the work of one of the great leaders of our Lutheran Church in America to the edification of your congregation.

- - - The Translator

1st SERMON

Matthew 26:30-35; Mark 14:26-31; Luke 22:39; John 18:1

The Passion story is the best Lenten sermon. The entire Gospel is a sermon about the crucified Christ, the Word of Reconciliation. Especially, the history of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit inspired the evangelists to write it, is the great word of reconciliation, the heart and center, as it were, of the Gospel. It is a great, holy story. And they are great, earnest, powerful, and yet at the same time most comforting words which report this story. These words, clear and intelligible of themselves, pierce heart and conscience. Whoever after invoking the Holy Spirit holds them before his eyes and his soul, receives and enjoys the fruit of the passion of Christ. Nevertheless, because these words are so great, so rich and deep, we with full right also make them the subject of preaching and teaching. Yet we will really profit from such an exposition only if we take a good look at each statement of the evangelists and probe for its meaning. So, slowly, step by step, we will follow the path of suffering of our Lord and Savior as indicated in the Passion story.

We want to scrutinize each step of the way of suffering, each paragraph of the Passion story. Every Christian sermon, hence also the Lenten sermon, is a penitential sermon first of all. How great and serious our sins are we want to learn from this suffering. Each new glance toward the cross of Christ awakens in us the sigh:

I caused Thy grief and sighing
By evils multiplying
As countless as the sands.
I caused Thy woes unnumbered
With which Thy soul is cumbered
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands. (171,4)

Every Christian sermon, hence also the Lenten sermon and story, is above all Gospel, the announcement of God's grace. The word concerning the suffering and death of Jesus Christ is the most glorious sermon for faith and the most certain for absolution. We therefor say and sing:

Lord Jesus, we give thanks to Thee
That Thou hast died to set us free;
Made righteous through Thy precious blood,
We now are reconciled to God.

Furthermore, everything which we hear about the crucified Christ, as an earnest admonition and a reminder for sanctification. We therefore sing and pray:

I'll on the cross unite me
 To Thee, what doth delight me
 I'll there renounce for aye.
 Whate'er Thy Spirit's grieving
 There I'll for aye be leaving
 As much as in my strength doth lay. (171,15)

We wish to study from it how we should love those who sorely trouble us by their malicious deeds. Finally, the Lenten sermon is a sermon of comfort. The cross of Christ gives us comfort, power, and refreshment in our own suffering. We implore the Crucified:

Whate'er may be the burden
 The cross here on me laid;
 Be shame or want my guerdon
 I'll bear it with Thine aid;
 Give patience, give me strength to take
 Thee for my bright example,
 And all the world forsake.

Christ's cross, blood, and death is the most efficacious comfort at death.

Thy groanings and Thy sighings,
 Thy bitter tears and dying
 With which Thou wert opprest
 They shall, when life is ending,
 Be guiding and attending
 My way to Thine eternal rest.

May the Holy Spirit through the meditation on Jesus' great passion work repentance, faith, sanctification, love, and patience and from it give us wisdom, power, and comfort for our life, suffering, and death!

What we have said in general about the Passion Story will be confirmed immediately in the meditation of the first section. It reports how Christ by crossing the Kidron began his great passion. It, so to speak, contains the introductory thoughts, which prepare us for the bitter suffering of Jesus, particularly for his ordeal in Gethsemane, introducing us to a proper knowledge and appreciation. Of itself this crossing of the Kidron was not a part of his pain and torment; the reason for the crossing, the imminence of what awaited him in Gethsemane, the prospect of this first and all subsequent suffering made this an extremely difficult crossing. It was the beginning of the way of suffering, the gate through which the Lord entered upon the great road to martyrdom. So let us now consider:

CROSSING THE KIDRON

and meditate on,

- I. How Jesus in Crossing the Kidron Began His Suffering;
- II. How He Thereby Announced His Suffering to His Disciples;
- III. How the Disciples Faced the Suffering of the Lord.

I.

First, we will picture to ourselves How Jesus in Crossing the Kidron Began His suffering.

It was an earnest, meaningful crossing. Even before we hear his intention from the Lord's own mouth, we can ascertain its meaning from what we are

told about the point of departure, the goal of this crossing, and the place of the crossing. "Jesus went forth," he left the room in which he had celebrated the last Passover and the first communion with his disciples. For the last time he in humiliation ate and drank with poor sinners, for the last time as Master and Rabbi he entertained his disciples and sang praises with them. That doxology closed the blessed period of which Peter wrote later, "He went about doing good." He began a new one. Upon his doing followed his suffering. Henceforth he would not again drink of the fruit of the vine in the old way; now only gall to eat and vinegar to drink remained for him upon earth. Now he wished to suffer and die for poor sinners.

He left Jerusalem. There his arrest could easily have created an uproar. He could have easily aroused the people in his behalf who just a few days before had sung hosannas to him. However, he did not wish to die a national hero on an honorable battlefield fighting for freedom. He sought not the honor of a martyr. Even in death he pleased not himself. For poor sinners he would die. He intended only their rescue. Therefore he crossed at that peaceful place, the Mount of Olives, where his enemies could arrest him secretly then "railroad him through the courts," and do away with him as a criminal. Willingly, according to his own purpose, he went to meet his suffering, went directly to his goal, to the place where Judas could find him.

He had just celebrated the Passover. At the first Passover the children of Israel were earnestly enjoined not to leave the room where they ate the lamb, lest the angel of death who controlled the outside would kill them. The blood on the door protected their houses. But Jesus left the room. Courageously he went to meet the angel of death to be killed by him. "A Lamb goes forth, goes patient on, grows weak and faint, to slaughter led without complaint...and saith 'Willing all this I suffer.'"

It was a difficult crossing, yet the Lord entered upon it gladly and willingly; yes, courageously and joyfully he went to face his suffering and death, "when they had sung an hymn." The great hallelujah which he sang with his disciples still echoes. He closed that last Passover meal with special praise and thanks because he had already distributed the fruits of his suffering and death, his body, his blood, the forgiveness of sins. He had anticipated success in dying. He had no doubts as to the outcome of his passion. This way of pain served to redeem the world, to reconcile man with God. Yes, through the bitter passion of Jesus Christ, through his voluntary sacrifice we are redeemed. Therefore, together with our Lenten hymns, doleful songs, and sighs of repentance we sing a hymn of praise, silent hymn of praise.

"And his disciples also followed him." They also should taste the cup of suffering. They had received much good from the Lord, now they should also receive evil from his hand. We also must go out with Jesus to suffer and die with him. This is the most necessary result of his redemption, for which we thank him, that we carry his cross here. The Lord has often comforted us, as he did his disciples at the passover meal, refreshed us with his Word and Sacrament, led us to green pastures and to living waters. Hence we must also follow him into the dark valley of the Kidron. By that crossing Christ has earned salvation for us. However, if we want to reign with him we must suffer with him. Consequently, we will gladly follow him into suffering; he leads on, he has won the battle with the angel of death, he has slain the murderer; now death and the devil have no more power over us. With ringing hallelujahs we go even into suffering and death as to a wedding.

Jesus went out of Jerusalem with his disciples from the passover meal "over the brook Kidron." Kidron means "the black river." Its waters were dark. The water which was used for purification and washings and the blood of the sacrificial animals emptied into it. One could easily ford it, though at times its waters surged. The canyon through which it flowed was deep, dark, steep, and

covered with gloomy trees and brush. Into this dark valley Jesus descended; over the black brook he crossed. Isn't this significant? He now entered the dark valley of death and plunged into the waves of suffering.

This crossing of David's Son was similar to that of the first David, 2 Sam 15:16ff. When David heard of the insurrection of his son Absalom, he left Jerusalem, descended Zion, and went on foot with his whole house over the brook Kidron. The whole country wept loudly and all the people accompanied him. The sorrow which drove the first and second David over the Kidron was similar. Israel had forsaken the king whom God had enthroned in Zion. A trusted friend, who ate the king's bread, played the traitor; then Ahithophel, now Judas Iscariot. David let himself be cursed and stoned by Shimei; Christ exposed himself to the curses and blows of the Jews and ruler and finally let himself be hung on the accursed tree. Now, as then, a patient Lamb goes forth and opens not his mouth. Yet there is a great difference between the Kidron crossing of the first and second David. The second David was David's son and David's Lord, God's Son. David was being punished for his own sin. David's son and Lord took upon himself the sins of others, the sins of the whole world. Only of the second David can we say, "A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth the guilt of all men bearing."

The water used for purification and the blood of sacrificial animals, which prefiguratively cleansed the people from their sins, emptied into the Brook Kidron. Here in the Kidron valley the pious Jewish kings, Hezekiah and Josiah burnt the idols with which Israel had sinned, and strewed the ashes in the stream. When Jesus crossed this brook, he, as it were, took the sins, also the idolatry of the people, the sins of the whole world upon his back. Laden with the sins of the world, the Lamb of God climbed out of the Brook Kidron. Even at his baptism when he went out of the Jordan he, as it were, snatched up the sins which the penitent people laid down there. Even then it was said of him, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Now he wanted to atone for those sins which lay on him. We therefore repeat with even greater earnestness and emphasis, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Now he plunges into the waves of sin and punishment, into the billows of wrath and must soon complain with the Psalmist, "The waters are come in unto my soul." Ps. 69:1,

However, he won. As a champion he drank of the brook in the way and lifted up his head. Ps 110:7. The Kidron Valley, or as it is also called, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, was a valley of praise and victory. There the good King Jehoshaphat won a glorious victory over Israel's foes. The victory which Jesus wrested there in the Kidron, in Gethsemane over our foes, sin, death, devil, and hell, is a much greater, a more precious and wonderful one. He fulfilled what he prophesied through Joel, "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel." Joel 3:2.

For us, for his people's sake he struggled and won the victory. Henceforth, when we must go through the dark valley we fear no evil. To be sure, we hear the streams of Belial roar, as it sometimes here, sometimes there, foams through a canyon, yet we do not become afraid. Even if the water become deep, threatening our life, we know; the sting, the wrath is removed from pain and death. Christ carried that wrath for us. These enemies, sin, death, and the devil, are vanquished by the mighty Champion, David's Lord, God's Son. We also drink of the brook in the way and lift up our head and suffer and fight and win. At the exit of the dark valley is a garden full of scented trees, God's garden.

"The Mount of Olives," the garden on the Mount of Olives was the goal of this crossing. There Jesus had often "as he was wont" prayed in the still of night. Again he sought this peaceful, dark closet. In ardent prayer he now armed himself for his suffering. Oh that we would never lose the practise of

private prayer, especially not in days of trial. Otherwise we are lost. Here beneath the scented olive and fig trees the Lord must and wanted to begin his great passion. The offering which Jesus brought here was sweet incense to God. He saw and accepted it. Jesus' victorious battle on the Mount is soothing oil in wounds which sin inflicted on us. Tender grace, the gentleness of God flows from the pain of Christ into our exhausted soul. The bride in the Song of Solomon sings, "My beloved is gone down into his garden." 6:2. Yes, now the lovely spring has come. The Son of God wished to water the cursed earth with his sweat, blood, and tears. And we read, "The flower appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell." Song of Solomon 2:12.13. We also join in the song of the bride. The suffering of Christ, the sermon from the cross is for us a savor of life unto life. Even the sufferings of Christians send forth perfume to God, are a fragrant balsam for the Church; the death of the holy are precious before him. The Lord ascended to glory in heaven from the Mount of Olives. Through this dark valley of Kidron the way leads to the mount of ascension. Through suffering to glory!

II.

What this crossing of the Kidron and all the suffering which followed means, the Lord himself expressly states. Secondly, let us now consider how during the crossing he makes his suffering known to his disciples.

To be sure, Jesus often clearly prophesied to his disciples his suffering and its manner, the derision and mockery, the scourging and bonds, cross and death. And since the disciples found it so difficult to understand, he always referred to the prophets of the Old Covenant, who wrote of it, as proof that he did not by his own, perhaps mistaken, choice enter upon this difficult way, not that something human happened to him against his will. So also now, even when he was on the point of fulfilling his own prophecies, the Lord reminds them of the writings of the Old Testament. Long ago Zecharias proclaimed just exactly what took place that night, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Zech 13:7. God himself wishes to smite the Shepherd; he called the sword down upon the man who was his fellow, upon his only Son.

The way which God's Messiah should take was not only predicted by the prophets, it was also decreed by God. It was the counsel of God that Christ must thus suffer and die. On Pentecost Peter preached in this way to the Jews, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts 2:23. God himself according to his eternal predetermined counsel surrendered his Son into the hands of the Jews and gentiles. However, according to God's plan and providence, not only the sword of man smote Jesus. God himself wanted to smite the Shepherd. He smote him with his own sword, not with the sword of fatherly chastisement, but with the sword of vengeance. God emptied the vials of his anger upon Jesus. Alas, the sheep actually deserved that. We are all by nature erring, rebellious sheep. We hate God and resist his power. With out sins we have called down upon ourselves wrath, sword, and death. And the sword has fallen from heaven, yet instead of the sheep it smote the Shepherd. "What punishment so strange is suffered yonder! The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander." (143,4) The Shepherd suffered for the sheep. From now on we, the sheep are freed from the sword and wrath, from now on the sheep have life. Even if we are now and then chastised, it is the chastisement of a Father who loves us in Christ, not the punishment and wrath of the Judge.

This is the eternal counsel of God: through the death of the Shepherd

he wished to bring back the rebellious lost sheep, win them again, and lead them to life everlasting. Behind the devil's cunning and malice, behind Judas' betrayal, behind the murder by the Jews and gentiles operated this plan of God for our salvation. Behind the scourging, bonds, cross, and torture, behind that which lies before our eyes, we see in faith the hidden hand and plan of God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for the sheep, willingly died for us, his will agreeing with the counsel and will of God. Thus we are truly redeemed. By this gracious will and amazing counsel we comfort ourselves when sin, wrath, law, and conscience frighten us. The wrath which smote the Shepherd is fundamentally nothing but eternal mercy which surpasses all understanding; it is the open arms of the love of him who stoops to fallen sinners.

At the same time the Lord predicts what result the death of the Shepherd would have on the flock. "And the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Mt 26:31. This the prophet had predicted, and thus it happened. The disciples fled and forsook their Shepherd when he was taken prisoner. This was not just outward, natural fright. They were offended at Jesus just as the Lord had predicted, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." Mt 26:21. In that day they doubted whether Jesus was God's Messiah. They took offense at the deep, disgraceful suffering of the Lord. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Lk 24:21. This hope had almost come to naught.

With this word Jesus reprimands also us. Alas, so it has gone even with many Christians: in time of persecution they become afraid and flee. How easily we let ourselves be intimidated by cross and pain, by mockery and derision. And that is not merely weakness of the body. No, the soul takes offence. Sometimes, it does not want to enter our minds, that we should bear the cross after Christ and that those who are Christ's must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts. And now and then it happens that the crucified Christ himself causes offense to the Christian. That sin is so bad, so horrible, that sin brought the curse to Christ and also brings the curse to us if we do not yield to the death of Christ, that Christ's blood and righteousness overthrows all our own righteousness, that flesh and blood never can nor wants to grasp. That plan of God is too high and wonderful for us. And we will go completely astray and stumble at this divine foolishness, if the Good Shepherd himself did not hurry to our rescue.

That he also does. He himself wishes to gather again the scattered flock; he did it. "But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Mt 26:32. If we wish to understand God's plan aright, we dare not overlook this last purpose of Jesus' passion. According to God's counsel Christ must suffer and die and rise again and enter into his glory. Whenever he spoke to his disciples concerning the derision, spitting, scourging, and crucifixion, he also added that the Son of man would rise again on the third day. Not until the resurrection was the seal affixed to the plan and work of God. God brought from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, and thereby confirmed that he honors his death, that the ransom is sufficient, that he has accepted his sacrifice. Christ died and is risen again: thus the world is redeemed; thus sins are forgiven. The risen Lord immediately announced that to his frightened, doubting disciples, "Peace be unto you!" He assembles his scattered flock and leads them from Jerusalem, the den of assassins, to more protected Galilee. He fulfils the word with which Zechariah closed his prophecy of the sword of the Lord, "And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." Zech 13:7. And after he had thus confirmed his disciples, strengthened their faith, and promised them the comfort and power of the Holy Ghost, he sent them from that mountain in Galilee into the world, that they should bring other sheep which were not of his fold.

So the resurrected Lord deals also with us. He helps our weakness and

takes away offense. He opens our eyes through his Word, especially through such passages as deal with his resurrection, glory, and majesty, so that we know him, the Crucified and Resurrected, and understand the counsel of eternal love, and praise Christ who "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Rom 4:25. The Good Shepherd, who through his blood has won our souls to himself, himself precedes us, leads us step by step upon life's way, and especially when we go through the dark valley, he takes us by the hand and finally leads us through death to the resurrection, to eternal blessed life. Up there where Christ now lives and reigns with his Father is our Galilee. We now confidently want to follow him, and even if his word and his guidance sometimes causes us to stumble, we raise ourselves up again through his Word. We want to attract other sheep, who do not yet walk the true path, to strengthen and protect the weak and infirm next to us, and especially embrace the little lambs that God's counsel be known upon earth and all lands be full of his honor.

III.

We turn from the fulfilment of the prophecy to the words which the Lord spoke during the walk through the Kidron valley. We wish to direct our attention briefly to: How the disciples met the suffering of their Lord, how they considered that announcement of his suffering, with what conviction, with what disposition they drew near the place of suffering.

"Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Mt 26:33. That was not faith, courage, confidence, That was presumption. Peter did not believe that warning of the Lord; he considered impossible what the Lord said of them; he did not rely upon the Lord's power and strength, did not pray to him to guard him from such an offense; no, he wanted to stand by himself and defy the temptation. He trusted in his own power. He truly, heartily loved the Lord and supposed and wanted to be honest with the assurance of his love and faithfulness; but that he trusted so much in his own love and faithfulness, that was a great amount of self-love. That was fleshly presumption. Such carnal security made him proud and haughty. "Though all shall be offended because of thee," is the way he spoke. Thus he exalted himself over the other apostles.

This presumption made him blind. When the Lord repeated his saying and confirmed it with a "verily," and especially prophesied that he would take and give greater offense than all the other apostles, that soon after this talk, in this very night, before the rooster would crow twice, thus despite the first cry of the rooster, he would deny him three times, Peter saw and heard no more; he continued to speak and offered to die with the Lord even though he could not even once for his sake bear the ridicule of an insignificant maid.

"Likewise also said all the disciples." Mt 26:35. Yes, thus many Christians have spoken, "Jesus I will never leave, I will also confess my Lord Christ, and for his sake endure everything, even death." As long as the little ship sailed through fair weather everything went well; but when storm and stress arose on account of faith, it began to sink and such courageous people suffered shipwreck like Peter. They trusted in their own power. God preserve us from such fleshly presumption which lets go of the Word of the Lord, under-rates the brethren, struts securely and joyously, crosses the Kidron along with them, but falls in Gethsemane.

The Lord has spoken a similar word to us all as to Peter, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" 1 Cor 10:12. Ah, let us not overlook nor ignore these and other warnings, but above all when we catch sight of a dark valley, cling to the Word and the Lord, who endured the battle for us, implore him for protection and power in our weakness. Let us in good days, even now in the Lenten season, arm ourselves, hear, read, pray, sigh, watch, be on

guard, and thus humbly yet confidently follow Christ even to suffering. He, the Lord, gives his weak children, who anxiously cry to him, when a crossing of the Kidron stands before them, holy courage instead of fleshly presumptuousness, strong faith which joyfully and triumphantly says, "I can do all things" but "through Christ which strengtheneth me," Phil 4:13; "in all these things we are more than conquerors" but "through him that loved us." Rom 8:37. Amen.

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2nd SERMON

Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46; John 18:1.2.

By crossing the Kidron, the Lord had begun his suffering. It was an earnest, meaningful crossing. In the light of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, both prophetic and prefigurative, we saw that the way upon which Jesus set foot indicated a way through profound, severe suffering to glory. On the way Jesus himself revealed the counsel of God which he wanted to carry out, and admonished his disciples to await with humility, earnestness, and reverence those things which were about to happen. In spirit we enter the Garden of Gethsemane with the Lord and his disciples and thus into his great Passion. We will be presently ushered into the Holy of holies. The portion of the Passion story before us shows the deep, fathomless abysses of our Lord's suffering. It is impossible for us to sound the depths of this suffering with our reason or exhaust it with words. In this sphere our knowledge remains fragmentary. And yet from this flowing fountain of God's love and mercy, which lies hidden behind his wrath we draw grace upon grace, wisdom, comfort, power, wholesome admonition. We can not in one nor in many meditations comprehend the salutary thoughts which the Holy Spirit has put into words. Whenever we meditate upon the suffering of Jesus we always take only a few draughts from this living water. In order that the leading features of Jesus' suffering will come into their own, in order that we may see clearly the main points of the scene in Gethsemane, we wish to devote several meditations to this portion of the Passion Story. We can easily separate what is told us of the disciples of Jesus and his behavior toward his disciples from that which Christ alone did and suffered in God's presence. And on the other hand, we can separate his intense, severe suffering from the prayer he offered to God. Let us now picture to ourselves the afflicted, trembling Savior, wrestling with death, covered with sweat and blood, and pray the Holy Ghost, that he impress this picture upon our hearts and explain it to us correctly. I speak of

THE STRUGGLE OF JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

- I. The Nature and Violence of This Struggle,
- II. Its Cause and Purpose,
- III. The Fruits of This Suffering.

I.

To begin with we want to speak of the nature and violence of this struggle.

This struggle took place in Gethsemane, the place where Jesus often

gathered with his disciples. "Judas also knew the place." Jn 18:2. And Jesus knew that Judas would and should meet him there. Consciously and deliberately he went out to meet his suffering; consciously and deliberately he took up the battle with his invisible foes, which was before him. When he left his disciples and had taken only Peter, James, and John into the garden, he began to grieve, to tremble, and to quake. Yes, he willingly submitted to the suffering, pain, and terror; and he did not let himself be taken unawares. He indeed had the power to lay down his life and to take it again. By himself he lifted up the heavy burden which had been placed before him in Gethsemane. He took the bitter cup into his hands, himself placed it to his lips, and emptied it, even though he did so amidst much fear, anxiety, and struggle. He brought God a willing sacrifice.

And into what fearful depths of suffering he descended, we will in some measure learn to understand, when we examine the significant, weighty words which relate the events. He fulfilled what he himself had predicted, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Lk 12:50.

He began to be sorrowful. His eye, usually bright, became clouded; all joy fled from his face and soul. He himself testifies, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." His soul became darkened. His soul became sorrowful even unto death. As grief, care, sorrow can almost break a person's heart and prepare him for death, thus was Jesus sorrowful unto death. The waves began to engulf his soul.

And he began to tremble. Terror mingled with sorrow. As in a fever all his limbs began to tremble. Overpowering fear filled his soul, caused his heart to pound. Then was fulfilled what was prophesied of him, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid." Ps 18:4. Terror like an armed man fell upon him.

He began to quake. Timidity, fear, horror were added to the terror. He became greatly afraid among these strange, evil spirits which arose from the abyss and tortured him. He trembled; his courage failed, his soul was crushed like water; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." Ps 22:15. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about;...they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me." Ps 40:12. No human being could counsel and help him. That is why he tore himself free from his disciples and renounced the comfort of their nearness and intercessions. As a sick person tossing to and fro finds no rest, so he paced back and forth and finally, because he trod the wine-press alone and was left alone with all his anxieties, he fell upon his face on the ground.

He lost all his strength; the weight of suffering pressed him down. One could now say of him, "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." Is 53:4. He had to cry out with Jonah, "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight." Jonah 2:3b.4a. He lay on the ground like a worm and not like a man; he lay there like a sacrificial lamb on the altar of the earth. He humbled himself to such depths of human weakness and helplessness. All the misery and woe which can seize the human heart he also tasted to the bitter dregs.

Yes, true man! And yet at the same time true God! If this Sufferer had been merely a man, he would not have lived through that hour. The Son of God chose this woe instead of the joy which he could have had. The divine nature supported and strengthened his human nature, so that in spite of his sorrow until death he did not die of it; that in the midst of his fear and trembling he did not despair; it enabled him to arise again from his suffering. An angel also came from heaven, held before him the counsel of God, which had become hidden from his human soul, and consoled him with the glorious results of his difficult labors.

But this was only a short rest, a strengthening for a new battle. Alas, the comfort which this angel brought was at the same time deep humiliation. He, the Lord and Creator of all creatures, visible and invisible, accepted comfort and strength from an angel, a creature. For a short time he, as the Psalmist says, made himself lower than the angels. Once again he wrestled with death, praying more earnestly. As a dying person wrestles with death -- the body wants to hold on to the soul and the soul does not want to leave its beloved body -- as a dying person resists death, so and even much more earnestly Jesus wrestled with death. His sweat was like drops of blood which fell to the ground. The blood does not circulate in a person who exhausted unto death; it drains back to the heart and his face becomes pale as body and soul cease their activities; thus the weakness of death seized the Lord. It was an unusual exhaustion, weariness. Once again the suffering weighed so heavily upon his soul that it squeezed blood from him. It was hard work in the sweat of his brow, a heated battle which produced not only sweat but blood. There in Gethsemane, which means, the oil press, he trod the wine-press alone, as Isaiah says in the 63rd chapter. That is why his garments were dyed red like one who trod the grapes in a wine-press.

This is a miracle! This is contrary to all the laws of nature that blood should ooze through the pores of the skin like drops of sweat which fall to the ground. This is a miracle: this severe, bitter suffering! This is a miracle: this holy, innocent suffering! Jesus wrestled with death, poured out sweat and blood and yet no sinful murmuring or sighs came from his lips. He suffered in willing obedience. This is a miracle: true man and God pours out his own blood and waters the cursed earth with his life's blood. And the victory with which the battle ended is a miracle. It was the hero from the tribe of Judah who washed his garment in wine and crouched like a lion. The champion from the tribe of Judah finally conquered; already in Gethsemane he conquered and lifted up his head. He arose from prayer and battle. Isaiah speaks of the victor who comes from Edom in this way, "Who is this that cometh from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Is 63:1. -- However, we can understand as much of the miracle of the suffering and struggles of Jesus Christ as is necessary and profitable for our salvation. The Scriptures themselves have given us the key and revealed the cause and purpose of this suffering.

II.

In the second place we ask about the cause and the purpose of Jesus' struggles in Gethsemane.

The struggle was with invisible foes. Sin was such a foe. Jesus took sin upon himself. Alas, sin is a deadly poison. How just one sin can torture a person! When David had committed adultery, his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long; his moisture was turned into the drought of summer. And now Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He cries out, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." Ps 40:12a. He consented to no sin, yet he took upon himself all the sins of all men of all ages and let them be imputed to him by his Father. Their infinite guilt lay upon him.

Even a pious child of God has an aversion to wilful sin. The soul of pious Lot was tormented at seeing the godless goings-on in Sodom and Gomorrah. The holy angels flee from the abomination of sin; by sinning intentionally we chase them away. And now the holy Son of God, who knew no sin, to whom sin is an abomination, comes into such close contact with our sins; he takes them upon his shoulder, on his conscience; he let them be ascribed to him; now we understand why his soul was so sorrowful even unto death, why he trembled, shook, and feared. To be sure, we have no idea what he felt in that hour when the sting of

sin pierced his soul, for we are sinful men; the sin is our own. He carried and atoned for the sins of the whole world, and also our sins.

In that difficult hour this certainly pained Jesus the most, that his own people would reject and nail him to the cross, that his disciple should betray him, that Peter would deny him, that all disciples should forsake him. His sorrow only increased when he saw his disciples and returned to the battlefield. And even we, we, his disciples, his people mixed wormwood, gall, and vinegar into his bitter cup. We, yes, we by our sins have caused him labor. That we love him, our good Master and faithful Friend so little, that we so often leave him in the lurch and pursue others, that his word often means so little to us, that has caused his soul to be sorrowful unto death. Yes, the curse of sin and the law lay upon him. This heavy burden hurled him to the ground. There he lay on the ground as one cursed, judged, spurned.

The wages of sin is death. This pay was given to him even in Gethsemane. There he wrestled with death. For us death is a terror. Death was not a part of our nature at first. Death is not the natural conclusion of life, as many say who have never experienced any of the terrors of death. Death is the greatest monstrosity. God brought body and soul together, and therefore body and soul quiver and tremble and put up resistance when this bond made by the Creator is forcibly torn. Death is a fearful judgment upon fallen, sinful men. That is why Scripture says that death has ruled over men from Adam on like a king of terrors. Naturally, man shudders at the dark stream of Belial. Even for us death is contrary to nature.

What a monstrosity death must have been for the Creator himself, the Son of God, the Eternal Life! Whenever Jesus came into contact with the dead, when he had come to the deathbed of Jairus' daughter, when he touched the coffin of the young man at Nain, when he had entered Lazarus' grave, death had to flee and give up its prey. Now Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life himself, by his own free choice takes death upon himself. Now we understand why he wrestled with death. But what sort of wrestling, what sort of death struggle, what sort of horror of death, what sort of anxiety and sweat it was, we can not measure or understand. Not only temporal death but eternal death, hell, is also the wages of sin. And because the spirits of hell rushed in upon Jesus and tortured his soul with the pains of hell, we understand why he feared and trembled, why in such a surrounding horror and terror overtook him.

Satan rules in sin and death. Again he is tempting the Lord. The first time he wanted to get him to leave his work but had to leave him. But he yielded for only a while. Now he returned and sought to hinder him in his suffering and reconciling death. As at the first time he used the lust of the senses, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the lust and pride of the world and with these weapons tried to fell the holy God, so here in Gethsemane he held before his eyes all the terrors which he could invent; he showed him the bonds, the scourging, the stripes, the fistblows, the shame, mockery, ridicule, the nails, cross, and crown of thorns. He shot his fiery arrows straight into his soul and then spoke sweet, loving words at him; he could still spare himself and not drink the bitter cup. Only he who has looked the prince of hell squarely in the face and was victorious in temptation can suspect in a measure what Jesus suffered when he was sifted in Satan's sieve. It was a bloody battle without equal.

The last reason for that suffering was this: God himself had become his Son's enemy and had given him into the power of the devil, death, and sin. Christ bore God's wrath. We read of the Judge of the world, "He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Rev 19:15. As at some future time he will bring God's wrath upon all sinners who despised his grace, so he himself trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of the almighty God. God

visited upon him the iniquity of the world. God's wrath squeezed sweat and blood out of him. The fire of divine wrath drove his very strength from his body. He languished under the might hand of God as during the summer drought. Whoever has himself gone through similar depths of temptation and experienced how painful it is when God hides his countenance has tasted a drop from the sea of divine wrath which God's Son drained to the last drop.

Jesus stood firm under all these attacks and blows; he passed the test; he achieved the purpose of God's counsel. And this was the counsel and will of God, this the purpose of Jesus' suffering: our redemption and reconciliation. He carried our sin, our curse, our death, our hell, our wrath. He was a true man, flesh and blood as we are. His weakness proves that. And thus the second Adam repaid here in the Garden of Gethsemane what the first Adam had robbed from God in the Garden of Eden. By his obedience and deep humility he atoned for the sweet pleasure, the bite into the forbidden fruit. In him mankind repaid what they in the first Adam had taken from God.

He was and is true God. No person could have lived through that difficult anxious hour. And as the true Son of God he could conquer those foes who pressed him hard and conquer them he did. In the garden he was promised to mankind who would crush the serpent's head. And now he had appeared and fulfilled the promise; even here in the Garden of Gethsemane he conquered the devil. The prince of this world came and found no sin in him. And when he conquered Satan he also trampled upon sin, death, the curse, hell, whom the devil brought into the world. These foes no longer have any power over us nor any claims. The guilt has really been atoned for.

God is on our side - who can be against us? By his sweat and blood Christ has turned God's wrath away from us, appeased God's righteousness, and procured God's love and grace for us again. Even here in Gethsemane his precious blood flowed. That is our complete ransom. The Holy, the Pure exposed himself to sin, the eternal Life to death, the Son of God to hell and the wrath of God. That is perfect atonement.

And he did it willingly. He had begun to grieve, to tremble, and to fear; he shouldered the burden, the curse, the wrath; as a sacrificial lamb he placed himself upon the earth in order to atone for the children of the earth. That sacrifice was pleasing to God. Thus were we reconciled. Now we again have access to God; we will be admitted into the blessed paradise. "The angel guards the gate no more." The counsel of God for our salvation has been executed by this beginning of Jesus' suffering.

III.

Finally, we wish to consider a bit more closely the fruits of Jesus' suffering and especially ponder what benefits we derive from it, what results are brought to bear upon men's souls.

The soul-struggle of Jesus in Gethsemane is an admonition to repentance and a great comfort. One earnest admonition: he shows us how greatly our sins enrage the holy God, how his vengeance and zeal is aroused. What agony sin brings! How horrible sin is! Christ's soul-suffering reprimands our worldliness and lust of this life, our thoughtlessness and wilfulness. When we hear the complaint of the Savior, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," we ask ourselves, Are we filled with divine sorrow, this sign of true repentance? Are we heartily sorry for our sins which caused Jesus to be sorrowful even unto death? Is this our heart's confession: This is my one great misery, that I cannot love you the way I should love you?

Jesus' soul-suffering reprimands our indifference and carelessness. When we see our Savior fearing and trembling and shaking and fallen to the earth

before us, we ask ourselves, Do we tremble, have we the same dread of death, the judgment, the evil foe? Are we afraid of sin which gives us into the power of death and the devil? Do we shrink from such torment our whole life? Is our whole thought the question, "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Do we really work out our salvation with fear and trembling?

Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane reprimands our laziness and lukewarmness. When we call to mind the sweat and blood, the difficult labor, the hot battle of Jesus, we ask, Do we eat our bread in the sweat of our face? Or, do we take it real easy in our calling and responsibility? Do we struggle against the devil, world, sin, our own flesh and blood with all our powers? Have we resisted them to the point of shedding our blood? Yes, this suffering, this battle of the Lord admonishes us to struggle for divine sorrow, work out our salvation with fear and trembling, enter the kingdom of heaven and violence, and resist the evil even if it means shedding our blood.

The soul-suffering of Jesus also gives us great comfort. In tribulation and sorrow it assures us of rest and refreshment. Christ drained the bitter cup; tribulation is now a blessed cross and produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness. And since Christ himself was tempted, he can help those who are tempted. In times of spiritual temptation Jesus' struggle and victory supports and strengthens us. Even if the prince of this world comes, he finds nothing in us. Christ has crushed the head of the serpent. If our sins, our conscience worries and frightens us, we cover ourselves with the bloody garment of him who trod the winepress. In them we stand before God.

The blood of the reconciliation has watered this cursed earth. The curse has been turned into a blessing. A soothing, pure balm, tender grace flows from the bloody press in Gethsemane into our bleeding heart and wounded conscience. And even if our sins were as red as scarlet, Christ's blood can make them snow-white. If sin and Satan tempt us, if the world entices us, if the flesh is willing to do evil, then we can place our foot on the serpent's head and in the name of the Lord crush it.

In the power of Jesus' struggle and victory we can rule over sin. He gained the victory for us. And when death approaches, when the light of life wants to be extinguished and the gloomy night come over our souls, when we fear and tremble, sigh and groan, when the cold sweat of death comes upon our brow, when we breathe heavily and the heart pounds, then we direct our last look of faith upon Jesus, who groaned and sighed and trembled and for our benefit conquered death in Gethsemane. If we place the picture of his suffering before our eyes, we conquer fear and horror and confidently die and surrender our souls to him who in Gethsemane suffered so much in his soul for our sakes. He leads us through suffering and death into his heavenly paradise and there crowns us for whom he suffered, sighed, and wrestled. The church appeals to the anguish and bloody sweat of Jesus in her prayers, prayers of repentance, and litanies. Therewith we comfort ourselves in all our troubles, in life, suffering, and death. Amen.

3rd SERMON

Text: same as sermon 2.

"Christ in the days of his flesh had offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears." Heb 5:7. In the days of his flesh Christ prayed and cried. We often read in the Gospels that he remained alone throughout the night in order to pray. In Gethsemane and on the cross this prayer turned into strong cryings and tears. Jesus' wrestling in prayer that night

in Gethsemane concluded the succession of all night prayers.

Jesus' prayers were of a two-fold nature. He prayed as the Son of heaven, as the Redeemer. He spoke with the eternal Father as the only-begotten Son concerning the decrees and mysteries of eternity. He wrestled before God for man's salvation whom he was to and wanted to redeem. This was his priestly prayer which no one can imitate. In this manner he once prayed, praised, and thanked God, "I thank thee of Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.... All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Mt 11:25.27. He alone, only the eternal Son, only the Redeemer of mankind could speak that way.

But he also prayed as a man among men, as a brother among brethren; he laid all his human desires in God's lap and in so doing gave his disciples and us an example for our praying. Once his disciples had seen and heard him praying and then said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray!" They wanted to learn how to pray as he prayed. And Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. Lk 11:1ff.

Shortly before his suffering, before he began his great passion, Jesus had prayed once more. He uttered his high priestly prayer, John 17. Only he, the great High Priest of the world, could pray that way. But then he prayed with his disciples the hymn of the Passover meal. "He was not ashamed," as the Scripture say, "to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Heb 2:11b.12. The prayer which he offered in Gethsemane in the midst of his severe suffering of soul was both: a high priestly prayer, and a sacrifice as befitted him, the Redeemer, and an example of how we can and should pray. With God's help we want to make that clear to ourselves now. We fix our eyes only upon Jesus' prayer. We consider

HOW JESUS PRAYED IN HIS SUFFERING AND HOW HE TEACHES US TO PRAY

Jesus' prayer in his suffering in Gethsemane was:

- I. A High Priestly Sacrifice with Which we can Comfort Ourselves when our Souls are Distressed,
- II. A Holy Example from Which we Learn how we Should Pray in Suffering.

I.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane was a high priestly prayer with which we can comfort ourselves when our souls are distressed.

He trod the winepress alone in Gethsemane. Separated from his disciples, he prayed alone. He alone could so pray that if it were possible this hour might pass by, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" Only he, our Redeemer, should and could drink this cup; only he lived through such an hour. Otherwise, no other human being. With the help of this prayer we look into his heart.

A Christian shows what and how he is particularly in prayer. When in our closet we are on our knees before God and pray, "Lord forgive me my trespasses; wash me thoroughly from my iniquity; cleanse me with the blood of Christ!" -- in such a prayer our Christian faith shows itself as a living faith which seizes and appropriates to itself God's forgiveness and Christ's merit. If in a severe test a Christian is to prove his Christian faith and obedience, if he must make a difficult decision, if God demands a great sacrifice from him, he goes in secret to his God and then in God's presence in prayer he makes the decision; there he brings the sacrifice; there he stands the test. Then by what he does in his

daily life it becomes evident what happened in secret, what was already offered before God amid prayer and wrestling.

So Christ shows in prayer above all what and how he was minded. Think of his high priestly prayer! His prayer in Gethsemane also reveals his high priestly heart to us. By means of this prayer we look into the mystery of reconciliation and redemption. Here in God's presence he in prayer brought the holy sacrifice of obedience which atoned for our disobedience. For by his deeds and suffering it becomes clear what he had promised his God in secret. He was obedient even to the death on the cross.

We have heard of his struggle; we have already pictured to ourselves the great and severe things he had endured in Gethsemane. And when we pondered Jesus' struggle and suffering of his soul we have already noticed, that he willingly took all this upon himself. But what we have touched upon only briefly is for the first time clearly and vividly presented to view in the report of Jesus' prayer. From this report we perceive that this suffering was his will, his choice, his doing, that in suffering he learned obedience. The last time we caught sight of the Lamb of God bathed in sweat and blood, lying upon the altar of the earth. Now we look at Jesus the Priest, who sacrificed himself, who brought his own will, his own life, as the sacrifice to God. We poor sinners, we fallen children, we profitless disobedient servants can comfort ourselves not only with the bitter but also the obedient suffering of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That atoned for the disobedience of which Adam in all our names made himself guilty in paradise.

We can take comfort in Jesus Christ's disobedience only if Christ's obedience actually was our obedience, if Christ actually prayed and obeyed as our Brother, Surety, and Substitute, if through his disobedience he actually atoned for the entire, great, infinite guilt and punishment of our disobedience, if he has by his deeds shown a perfect, blameless obedience. This is exactly the case here. Jesus' prayer shows us that.

The sacrifice of obedience which Christ brought here in Gethsemane was our obedience. Christ was actually the Priest who is Surety, Substitute. He was our Brother; our flesh and blood, the second Adam. His suffering and obedience was true human suffering and obedience. Man atoned where man sinned. Man, the first Adam, fell into disobedience. Man, the second Adam, was obedient even to the death on the cross. In the days of his flesh and here in Gethsemane Christ offered prayer and supplication and strong crying -- prayer, supplication, cries of anguish such as usually come from an afflicted, despairing human heart. They were real human supplications and sighs, a real human prayer which he laid before God. He begged God for this hour to pass by without him drinking of this cup. "Let this cup pass from me!" "Take away this cup from me!"

Many pious exegetes of the ancient Christian Church could and would not believe that which this prayer Christ actually wanted to get rid of this cup by prayer. They explained his words thus: My Father, take the bitter cup away from the Jews which they must drink because of their sins, because of their murderous deed in crucifying me! Avert that fateful judgment which is threatening! They just could not believe that whereas Paul, only a servant of Christ, could joyfully boast of his death, "I have a desire to depart," Christ himself should be afraid of his death and if it were possible would want to avoid it altogether. Others, also believing exegetes of a later period, thought that Christ did not pray for the removal of the suffering and death itself but the wrath which lay in the suffering, and was heard in as much as he then submissively and confidently went to his suffering. Meanwhile, soon thereafter the severest of all hours of anguish and darkness and being forsaken by God came for the first time on the cross. There he again tasted and felt God's wrath. No, we can not evade or give a new meaning to Jesus' words; the meaning of the words, "Let this cup pass from me! Take away this cup from me!" are

immediately clear. That says: If possible spare me the bitter pains of the cross! Let this hour pass by! That means: Oh, avert, if possible, the painful, frightful death of the cross!

Jesus' prayer really betrays the fear and horror of death. We agree with Luther and our Lutheran Church. Luther says, "We cannot place Christ deep enough into his human misery." We understand these words, as our Lutheran fathers understood them, to mean that just as a human being who sees great suffering or bitter death before him sighs and supplicates and prays in the weakness of his flesh, "If possible, spare me and let this danger pass me by! Deliver me! Preserve my soul, my life!" Christ took all the results of human sin, all human suffering and weakness, also extreme weakness, fear, and horror of death upon himself; he indeed assumed Abraham's seed and in all things wanted to be like his brethren yet without sin.

We understand that those pious exogetes did not comprehend this deep suffering of Jesus, this cry from the depths for deliverance from death. When we pray, sigh, wrestle, and resist suffering and death that way, sin is always mingled with our human weakness: doubt, impatience, secret murmuring, silent opposition, disobedience. And we cannot understand how a man, how Jesus, can be afraid and pray without sin, with a holy mind and heart.

But the suffering and cross of Christ also is and remains foolishness, full of a thousand contradictions which we never can harmonize with our understanding and feelings. Meanwhile, we perceive this much and gladly rejoice in the fact that Christ so humbled himself for our sake in order that he might become a faithful High Priest and help us from sin and its results, from suffering, cross and death. He had a true human soul. He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." And he had a true human will which as our will had turned away from suffering and death. "Not as I will" -- according to the flesh! A true perfect human being! Not only God veiled in human form. True man according to body, soul, spirit, will! His wrestling in prayer was not a sham fight or shadow boxing; his suffering was not an illusion but true human suffering, praying, sighing, supplication, wrestling. And thus we human beings are really redeemed. Thus human sin, human disobedience was atoned for by human suffering, human disobedience. Thus we human beings comfort ourselves by this prayer of our Suretor and Brother, the man Jesus Christ.

And he actually bore all the guilt and punishment of our disobedience. He atoned for everything. We understand why Jesus in this moment recoiled from this cup and could pray, "Let this cup pass from me! Take away this cup from me!" It was no ordinary, human suffering and death. "Let this cup, this hour pass from me!" All the suffering of the human race, which sin drew along in its train, was here mixed together in one bitter drink; all the bitter roots of this accursed earth were squeezed out into this cup. The most bitter pains, bonds, blows, scourge, nails, crown of thorns, cross, besides spittle, disgrace, mockery, ridicule, curse, blasphemy, all the misery of sin, all the anguish of death, all the malice and terrors of Satan, the sum total of the wrath of God -- that was the great Passion which awaited the Lord, the first sips of which he tasted here in Gethsemane.

Isaiah says that sinful Jerusalem abandoned to the judgment has drunk of the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; she has drained the dregs of the intoxicating cup and wrung out the drops. Is 51:17. The Lord of hosts says to Jeremiah, "Take the wine cup of the fury at my hand, and cause all the nation, to whom I send thee, to drink it." Jer 25:15. And this full fury and wrath of God which was destined for Jews and heathen, all people, all humanity, should now be given to Jesus to drink. "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red, it is of full mixture." Is 75:8. The godless really drink all of it, as it says, and lick up the dregs. Christ drank it in the place of the godless. Whoever believes in him, him this cup passes by.

At times Jesus' disciples have tasted a few drops from the cup of suffering. For the Lord the cup was filled. All believers could and can say, Oh, sweet, blessed cross! Oh, beneficial cup! For the most bitter root, God's wrath, has been taken out of it. Christ must feel and taste all of God's wrath.

It was a difficult hour, an hour of suffering and death without equal, such as no other man ever lived through. In this one hour the pains of hell, eternal death closed in. God does not let us Christians be tempted above human ability. The burden, which was laid upon Christ, was beyond man's power, too strong for a man's heart and would have crushed him if he had been merely a man. But because he was God's Son from heaven and could say as no other man could, "Abbah, Father!" he was able to stand. His divine power helped his human weakness. His divine will supported his human will so that Jesus immediately recovered from his trembling and terror. He drained the cup which was intended for us to the dregs and by his priestly sacrifice delivered us from wrath.

Yes, Jesus took the bitter cup; even though his hand trembled and shook, he seized the cup of wrath. In this incomprehensible, infinite suffering he showed a unique, blameless, perfect obedience. His prayer proves that. In the weakness of his flesh he offered supplication, prayer, and cryings without sinning. Not the least bitter thought or remonstrance was mixed in the prayer, "Let this cup pass from me." The later exegetes, who say that here in Gethsemane Jesus subdued the temptation to sin which raged in his own flesh and blood, convert this true man and God into a sinful creature, deceive Christendom, and rob sinful men of the comfort that a sinless saint atoned for their sin and death. We repeat: We can not understand that the great weakness, which we see in Jesus, could be as sinless as a saint, that God's Son could be so weak. But in faith we humbly adore the great holy mystery of Christ's person and his priestly sacrifice.

Yes, he led a blameless, unsullied obedience. Before he said or even thought that this hour might pass by, he said and thought, "If it is possible" -- meaning to say, in case there would be another way according to the eternal counsel to redeem the world that it be granted. Only the way in which this counsel should be executed, namely through the death of the Mediator, had in this moment become darkened in his human consciousness, so that according to his human weakness he considered it possible that he could rescue man and reconcile God without suffering and dying. That the good and gracious will of God itself, whose will it is that all men be helped, could and dare be altered, that thought did not enter his mind. His divine wisdom now came to the aid of his human weakness. Every time he arose from prayer he was reminded of the divine counsel again, only that new weakness once again darkened this light. It is said and believed that according to the custom of pious Israelites Jesus turned in his prayer to the temple, which stood opposite the Mount of Olives, and thus in spirit looked into the holy of holies, where the mercy-seat formerly was and which, sprinkled with the blood of reconciliation, covered the Law and the curse of the Law. Thus he repeatedly called his work to mind, that by his blood he should become the mercy-seat which God intended to present to sinners. And Christ always again surrendered his human will to God's will, to his own divine will, which was one with God. He as it were could not find words enough to assert his complete agreement with God, "As thou wilt -- not my will but thine be done -- not what I will, but what thou wilt." And God, who gave him that bitter cup, he continually calls "Father, Abba, dear Father." That is perfect, holy obedience. Thus he placed himself, his life, his soul, his will, into God's hand and swore new obedience to the Father and renewed the oath, "I will redeem mankind; I will die for sinners." He brought God an acceptable, unblemished sacrifice.

Christ's perfect obedience comforts us; it covers our disobedience, our open and secret murmuring and opposition, our impatience and despair in suffering. Christ's obedience makes amends for our imperfect, defective obedience.

We Christians, who comfort ourselves with Christ's perfect obedience and merit, learn obedience ourselves in suffering. Christ has left us an example, that we should follow in his footsteps.

II.

Jesus prayer in Gethsemane is at the same time an example from which we learn how we should pray in suffering. From our text we will briefly learn three things about prayer during temptation, the manner, the content, and the answer to such a prayer.

Jesus went alone when he wanted to pray; he left his disciples behind. "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Mt 26:36. He tore himself away from the three disciples whom he had brought into the garden. A Christian who is out of practise in praying in his closet can not pray properly in the congregation nor can he in distress cry from his heart to God. Every groan of distress, every cry of anguish from the depths of his soul is a prayer. And it is most necessary in grievous trouble and temptation that we tear ourselves free from men, from earthly things, from the sight of his misery and distress and seek out the solitude and speak alone with God. Otherwise this power grows weak.

We read, "He kneeled down." Lk 22:41. As the Son of man he kneeled in respect before his heavenly Father: even in anxiety, distress, and terror we dare not forget the honor and humility we owe the holy God and Father in heaven. Those wild, insolent, violent cries of distress and anguish by which the heathen try to move their idols is not pleasing to God. But in all respect we are and should confidently pray, "Abba Father!" and should firmly believe that the God who is chastising us and giving us a bitter cup to drink is nevertheless a faithful dear Father. We should also persevere in our praying, sighing, imploring and not become tired but follow Jesus' example, who in a short time prayed the same words three times: we should pray the more earnestly the higher the water rises and the greater the distress becomes.

From Jesus' prayer we also learn what we should ask of God in distress. Only we dare never forget that there is a difference between his suffering and praying and ours; as the Redeemer he had to drink a different cup than we. However, the cup which God fills for us is often bitter enough; despite the fact that his wrath is taken out. Therefore the prayer is often pressed out of our heart, "Lord, let this cup pass from me! Take away this cup from me! Let this hour pass by!" And we also dare pray that way. Jesus himself in word and example taught us the 7th Petition.

In our weakness and temptation of body and soul we dare remind God of his omnipotence, "My Father, all things are possible unto thee." God waits for us to ask for his help. That is why he sends us distress, misfortune, poverty, sickness; he wants to test our faith and exercise us in prayer as he did the Syro-Phoenician woman. It does not show humility or faith if, the moment the Lord strikes us or others, we from the first lay our hands in our laps and comfort ourselves by saying simply, "The Lord's will be done!"

But above all we should pray for deliverance from evil not according to the flesh but the spirit, as Christ prayed, not being forced to, but adding of our own free will, "If it is possible" -- if it does not endanger our salvation or that of others. Yes, it is a well-known rule of prayer that for spiritual requests we pray unconditionally. Jesus as true man would have gladly been excused from the bitter pains of the cross. That was a human wish. But he subjected this wish to God's counsel and will, "Thy will be done!"

When from the anxiety of sin we cry out, "Out of the depths I cry to thee," gladly wishing to be relieved from the guilt and burden of sin, then we can pray without the condition and say, "Turn your gracious ear to me and hear my prayer!" For God's will is that we be delivered from our sins. That is why

Christ tasted death and drank the cup of wrath.

But when our desires are directed only for the removal of earthly injury and evil then we pray, "Lord, give me what you will -- be it death or life, the cup of joy or suffering." And, "'Not as I will but as thou wilt' help me now or later, all at once or gradually, in this way or that, here in time or hereafter in eternity." Or if we now and then must taste at least a few drops of the cup of wrath, in chastisement see and feel God's wrath, judgment, or curse, we supplicate without condition and say, "Lord, keep me in your grace! Strengthen my faith!" -- but let it up to God's counsel and will whether the thorn should be removed from your flesh or not, whether he will let us taste of the power of the world to come or not. For that is of no real importance for our eternal salvation.

And though such prayers are at first mingled with bitter groans, though the 3rd Petition is not without reason called the difficult petition, we nevertheless learn in time to pray more calmly and deliberately just as Jesus repeated the same words briefly for the 2nd and third time and finally, as though in passing, only alluding to the natural wish of being excused from this cup. Yes, finally, we can not only patiently, but like Jesus, joyfully and confidently place our will, our soul, ourselves completely into the hands of the faithful Creator and through the petition, "Thy will be done!" resounds the praise and adoration of the good and gracious will of God.

For Christ's sake God gladly accepts such an offering. As Christ was heard and, after he had drunk the cup, his anguish and judgment were taken away, and he was exalted to glory and even directly after his prayer was greatly strengthened by God, so that he arose courageously and resolutely from his prayer and went to meet the traitor, so God hears us; so he hears our every prayer in his way according to his thoughts, which are always higher and better than our thoughts. Either he takes the burden away after we are exercised enough or he gives us to drink of the bitter cup but then gives us also a strong, joyful courage and amid the cross assures us that the future glory is truly a great, sweet, comforting fact; and when he has finally delivered us from the last evil, then in eternity we will praise the wonderful ways of God and most ardently thank him for the bitter cup and the hours of trial. Amen.

4th SERMON

Text: Same as 2nd Sermon

Christ, especially in his last discourse, had often and emphatically stated, "Watch!" He knew very well what was in man. He knew the weakness of man. He foresaw that even the wise virgins would fall asleep when the bridegroom delayed. He warned his disciples, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Lk 21:34. "And what I say unto you," he adds, "I say to all, Watch!" Mk 13:37. All Christians need this admonition; for they all know how easily the things, joys, pleasures, worries, and cares of this world lull the soul to sleep. Therefore the apostles repeat this call, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. . . . Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day." Rom 13:11-13.

Yet not only those who are easily rocked to sleep by peace and good days but also suffering, tempted Christians are admonished in the letters of

the apostles to watch. To the Thessalonians who had to endure much from their heathen townsmen Paul cries, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thess 5:6. And Peter writes to the Christians of Asia Minor who were being persecuted, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour!" 1 Pet 5:8. And just before and during his suffering the Lord sharpens the call, "Watch!" "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." Mt 26:41. We hear this warning voice in our Lenten text.

After we have been witnesses of Jesus' severe struggle in Gethsemane, and heard the prayer which he offered God, we turn from the Lord to watch the sleeping disciples. We see ourselves pictured in them. Very easily and quickly we fall asleep in suffering and temptation when we really should watch most of all. Not only do the pleasures and joys of the world make Christians apathetic and sluggish. No, just like Jesus' disciples they fall asleep even for very sorrow. Therefore we willingly listen to the call of our Savior. What he told his disciples in Gethsemane he says to all, especially when it means suffering with Jesus, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation!" Let us write that in our hearts. He that hath ears to hear let him hear!

WATCH AND PRAY!

- I. This Call Reprimands Our Indolence and Unconcern,
- II. But it Awakens Us from Our Sleep.

I.

Watch and pray! With this call the Lord reprimands our indolence and unconcern.

Jesus does not become tired of admonishing and warning his disciples in Gethsemane, "Watch and pray!" He knows of no more urgent admonition than this one. As we must conclude from Luke's report, he said first to all his disciples, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." Then he cried to his three disciples especially, "Watch with me." And when they had fallen asleep, he tore himself away from his severe suffering, struggle, and prayer and awakened his sleeping disciples saying, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." And when he had ceased struggling and strengthened by God went to meet his physical suffering, he disturbed them again in their sleep and asked, "Why sleep ye? do you sleep now, and rest?" -- By "now" he intends to say: Now when the traitor and the murderous mob is at the door? And after he aroused them and they went with him to meet his foes, he told them for the last time, "Pray lest ye enter into temptation." We see how earnest the Lord is about these admonitions; how dangerous and disastrous the sleep of the disciples is. By the Lord's admonition our attention is called to the ruinous inclination to go asleep spiritually; we consider it as much too natural; we surrender ourselves to it only too easily and gladly, too thoughtlessly and weakly.

Yes, that is a great weakness, a serious defect of our corrupt fleshly nature: sleep, spiritual laziness. The flesh isn't only full of evil lusts and desires, but it is also slow and averse toward doing good. The body is an unyielding tool of the will. When it is supposed to work, we must often hitch it to a plow like a slow draught animal, or, when we should pray and worship God, we must be led like an unwilling sacrificial lamb to the altar.

But the spirit is also sleepy. The cares and joys of this life befog the thoughts so that it can no longer distinguish between evil and good, right and wrong, benefit and harm; they blunt the feeling for nobler interests and

weaken the will so that instead of ruling them it lets itself be ruled and driven about by temporal interests and circumstances.

Alas, the disciples, the wise virgins are the ones who sleep! Which Christians have escaped the distress caused by their indolent, sleepy Christianity! They light of knowledge kindled by the Holy Spirit is so easily extinguished by earthly things and interests that we do not see the plain way and will of God. The new will which rejoices in God's Law is still so weak and fragile; before we are aware of it we have done the evil which we had not wanted to do and the good which we wanted to do has escaped us.

And if we console ourselves because of the weakness of the flesh by claiming to have good intentions, it is often an imagined consolation. That they were ready to die with the Lord the disciples considered a good, holy resolution. But fleshly self-confidence and security was mixed with their honest intentions. So also our intentions are mixed with folly and dreams, unconcern and security. And how quickly our good resolutions are changed into reluctance, aversion, discontent! We fall asleep from peevishness and become apathetic. It is a common failing of Christianity, also of orthodox Christians: spiritual sleepiness and laziness. The sleeping disciples: a faithful picture of our condition.

The disciples fell asleep in Gethsemane while their Lord feared and trembled. The virgins slumber and pay no attention to how the Lord with sweat and blood seeks his bride. In the very hour when the Lord leads them across the Kidron toward Gethsemane amid suffering, struggle, and temptation itself, Christians become tired and sleep. The repeated urgent call of the Lord, "Watch and pray!" means to say, "You should know that the time is here, that this is the very hour to awaken from sleep, to watch and pray!" -- and reminds us how unseemly it is to sleep in Gethsemane, in suffering. We should be admonished for we often do not know that we sleep and consider sleeping as being awake, dreaming as reality. We are called to suffering since Christ also has suffered. The Lord gives each disciple his share, his cup of suffering. He shows each one his place in Gethsemane. He lets no one be tempted above his ability but he lays upon each on as much as he can bear.

The Lord took Peter, James, and John, the three disciples who had the privilege of seeing the glory of the Lord, deeper with him into the Garden of Gethsemane; before their eyes he began to be sorrowful, to fear, and to tremble. They could and had to bear more than the others. The more we progress in Christian knowledge and experience, the deeper Christ draws us into fellowship with his suffering. And this the Lord does intentionally. He sends the suffering, multiplies and intensifies it to test, purify, and strengthen our faith. We know very well that we can not avoid suffering and that the suffering of our soul is beneficial; we should then watch and pray, we should stand upright with feet firmly planted so that we do not sink under the burden, that the suffering attains its salutary purpose in us. But what do we do? We sleep and sometimes the most advanced, experienced Christians sleep the deepest while the danger is the greatest. For if the Lord carried out his duty as a Watchman and Awakener also over against the other disciples, as we must conclude from the context he did, he had to do it especially in the case of the three. Only with the greatest difficulty could they tear themselves from sleep; here Simon had become the weakest, and he forfeited the honor of the name Peter.

When great misfortune suddenly disturbs the peace and joy of worldly-minded people who not only sleep but are spiritually dead, then they really plunge into the dead works of the flesh and darkness, shame and vice or despair and try to deaden their aroused state of mind and grief. Some of this still clings to Christians; it is the vice of the corrupt flesh and blood. Instead of permitting himself to be aroused by cross and suffering and to seek God and eternal things with renewed earnestness, they bow their heads and become lax, apathetic, and indifferent. Like the disciples they sleep for sorrow. As

severe sorrow often causes shortness of breath and acts like a narcotic; so also the great weight of sorrow often paralyzes and stupifies soul and spirit, faith and prayer. The spirit indeed is willing and would like to honor God and humble itself under God's hand, but the flesh is weak. Their breathing causes faith and prayer to falter; all they can utter is Eli's tired cold sigh, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." 1 Sam 2:18.

The suffering of Christians, however, is not only a testing and a beneficial chastisement from God; it is, as the Lord says expressly, a temptation. In Gethsemane the time had now come which Jesus had foretold, when Satan sought to sift the disciples as wheat and hankered especially after Peter. The severe suffering of Christ in Gethsemane was a second temptation of Satan. And at the same time the temptation extends to the disciples of Jesus.

In suffering and great sorrow Satan draws near to us. Through bodily temptation, trouble, pain, need, want he wants to get us away from God, faith, and obedience. During the difficult hour of spiritual temptation he shoots his poisonous arrows into the heart and fills the soul with terror and horror, awakens sadness and despondency, and in such a way tries to extinguish the smoking flax and break the weak reed. Behind the world which threatens, ridicules, scorns, oppresses, and persecutes the Christian stands the wicked one, the prince of this world.

See how excited that mob of murderers is! Judas and the high priests do not have to wrestle with sleep but quickly and zealously prepare torches, lamps, swords. The world does not rest in its malice and hatred of Christ and tirelessly, cunningly forges bonds and chains for Christ and his disciples. And in the threatenings and curses of the world the roaring lion mingles his frightening voice.

Nevertheless we are to watch, supplicate, sigh, gird our loins, gather all our power, put on the weapons of light, in order that we may stand and conquer in the evil day and now as well. But the disciples of the Lord sleep so deeply and heavily right in the midst of swords, staves, scourges, and bonds! We are sleepy warriors. We ignore the foe, his cunning and power; we pay no attention to the snares and nets which are spread for us in the many dangers and temptations which surround us; we regard temptation as an insignificant, little evil which will disappear by itself; we think it scarcely worth the trouble to pray against it and go on our way securely and carelessly -- until suddenly Judas is at the door and the hellish laughter of the murderous mob awakens us from our dream; but then it is too late to arm and exercise ourselves in our weapons. Or we see the foe and become frightened at his power and believe that such a temptation is too severe for us, that we could not empty the cup; we lose courage, and do not earnestly believe and pray, but as the disciples gave the Lord unintelligible answers in their sleep and did not know what they spoke, so we grunt out a few thoughtless sighs and complaints and despair of helping ourselves and the help of the Lord. That's what has often happened to us. Oh, that we may correctly perceive and remember ourselves and our weakness! How unseemly it is to sleep in the midst of storm, struggle, temptation, and be ashamed of our laziness.

And not only in our own suffering but even when we see the same suffering come upon our brethren we often tiredly and peevishly close our eyes. Before their very eyes the disciples saw their Lord and Master tremble, fear, pour out sweat and blood, and yet they promptly fell asleep. And we see our brethren, Christ's brethren, poor humble Christians groan and sink under the heavy burden of suffering; we see how they wrestle with sweat, blood, and life itself for their very existence; we hear the complaints and groans of the tempted, afflicted, forsaken, and despairing -- and actually close our eyes, ears, and hearts and dully and indifferently pass by on the other side.

Nowadays people complain about the sleep which wants to make itself

master of Christendom, yes, even of orthodox Christendom. One often hears the wish and hope expressed that God would send tribulation and thus awaken the sleepers. That is the wrong way to figure. Had Christ in the days of his flesh said and thought, when he was grieved at the unbelief, indolence, and hardness of heart of his disciples, "I will wait until my time is ended, until I must suffer and die, when my weak friends will become heroes" -- he would have been bitterly deceived. Ah, no, temptation in itself, even severe temptation, does not necessarily arouse the sleeping from their sleep, but often submerges them in still greater indolence and dullness. The story in our text proves that. We therefore do not want to place our hope upon the future, nor in a later test, or a more opportune time, but now, while we are still in the beginning of suffering and must not yet resist to the death, in this time while we can still find it bearable but while dangers and temptations enough surround us, we must keep our eyes open, resist sleep, and be ashamed of our indolence.

Yes, we must be heartily ashamed; for such sleeping is not only disobedience, but deserves the greatest punishment. The Lord's repeated call reminds us not only of our indolence but reprimands it. The Lord had warned his disciples in advance, "All ye shall be offended because of me." Mt 26:31. And then when they wanted to and had fallen asleep, the Lord did not slacken in admonishing them, "Watch and pray!" Yet they time and time again fell asleep. They did not really take the Lord's word to heart. We also have the Lord's word. From every page of God's Word admonitions and warning shout with words like this, "Be vigilant! Watch and pray! Be sober!" We ignore this earnest voice. This is worthy of punishment.

The Lord's Word contains not only earnest admonitions and warning but the Lord speaks to us in a friendly and winning way. He said, "Simon, couldst not thou watch with me one hour?" He does not lay too much upon us. Only one hour to watch and pray. As Peter says in his epistle, we will suffer only a short time here below. Our suffering brings us into fellowship with Christ in his suffering. We are to watch and pray with him. This very suffering, this temptation proves that we are Christians, Christ's disciples. Therefore we should boastingly say, "Oh, blessed cross! It is the cross of my Redeemer! Couldst not thou watch with me one hour?"

Because we suffer with Jesus and Jesus with us, we have the power and ability to endure the trial. Is it not a terrible sin if we refuse this power and ability and, whilst we could bear the burden, in self-will and peevishness collapse under the easy yoke, the light burden of Christ, fold our hands in our lap, and fall asleep? when we rob ourselves of the blessed, sweet comfort with which Jesus refreshes his suffering disciples, when we are partakers of Christ's suffering? when we set aside Christ's power, comfort, and word, are not interested in watching and hearing, and brood over our own dark, gloomy thoughts?

Watching and praying is the only thing which the Lord demands of us. He does not say, "Wrestle! Struggle! Conquer!" He says, "Watch and pray!" We are only to watch, be on guard, pay attention to the dangers and the foes, and, when we catch sight of the foe, when suffering and struggle approach, to pray, to sigh to God. We are absolutely not to stand in our own power, but in God's power and with God's help; Christ will struggle and gain the victory for us; but in every case we are to perceive and admit the danger and our helplessness and desire and delight in his assistance. Yet even to lift up praying hands we are often too sleepy, too peevish. Is that not inexcusable?

II.

The Lord reprimands our indolence when he cries to us, "Watch and pray!" However, he also wants to help us. With this same call he awakens us

from our sleep.

The disciples sleep, but the Keeper of Israel does not slumber nor sleep. They are too annoyed to pray, so he prays for them; unflaggingly he goes back and forth; he speaks with his Father and then with his disciples. And finally, when he awakened them from their sleep and led them out to meet the foe, even then he once more impressively exhorted them. Until Judas arrived, he spoke with them and warned them against security; Judas interrupts him in such a talk, "Pray lest ye enter into temptation!"

And so he does to this very day. He can not deny himself. He constantly awakens us from our sleep. He remains with us in his Word. He sends his preachers and commands them to awaken the congregation in his name. He sends them to individuals who want to relax. He exhorts the Christians to spur, entice, and incite each other on. How faithful he means to be to us! How often we have set his Word aside, did not hear it at all, or heard it with half an ear, read it with sleepy eyes, and could scarcely watch one hour with Jesus, scarcely stick it out the one hour listening to the sermon, whereas we let ourselves be chained for hours on end by worldly trifles. And yet our faithful Lord and Master has not withdrawn his hand or Word and time and again speaks to us earnestly as a friend. And in the days of visitation and suffering he supports us with his powerful Word, picks our sorrowing, despairing heart from the depths by his Word and Spirit, and turns our eyes and attention to himself. And if one temptation has passed by and a second, perhaps a stronger one, soon follows, he utilizes the spare time fully and prepares us by his Word and Spirit for further resistance. This is his holy will: he wants to preserve us in temptation, he does not want to let us sink as once he had proven it in the case of Peter. In the midst of his shaking and fear, in the sorrow of his soul his heart still beats in burning love for his disciples, for us unthankful peevish children.

His Word actually has the power to awaken one from sleep. His call was so powerful that it actually penetrated the deep sleep of the three disciples. "Watch and pray!" -- that is not only the counsel of a faithful friend; it is a call to awaken us which at the same time gives us the power to do so. As the Lord caused the sick to get up with the words, "Arise!" and had recalled the dead to life, so his Word was and is able to awaken tired, fearful souls from the sleep of death. Yes, his Word can give life even to the spiritually dead. He says, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." Jn 5:25. It is indeed the Word of the living God. In Gethsemane Jesus had just called God his Father and by sending the angel God recognized him as his Son. The voice of God's Son penetrated into the depths and breaks all chains and bonds by which Satan has bound the soul.

And it is not only the voice of God's Son but at the same time the voice of a faithful friend, our Brother, who in a friendly and pleasant way associates with his brethren, even the weak and sleeping. So intimately he speaks to Peter, the way brother does to brother, friend to friend, "Simon, couldest not thou watch with me one hour?" Sympathetically he says to his disciples, "Sleep on now and take your rest." (German: "Do you want to sleep and rest now?")

He is a true man. Before the eyes of his disciples he had just humbled himself most deeply, -- to the very dust. He constantly returned from prayer to his disciples -- for the sake of his disciples in order to awaken and strengthen them, but also for his own sake; in his lonesomeness he desired the comfort of his fellowmen, and, when the disciples denied him this comfort and spoke only unintelligibly with him, he comforted himself at least by seeing the disciples, the people whose flesh and blood he assumed, for whom he was to suffer and die.

We perceive and hear this friendly, brotherly voice even today in his Word. It is put like that to win, bind, comfort, and strengthen man's heart. And that is why God's Son became a man in order to redeem us, to suffer and die for us. His call, "Watch and pray!" has power and finds a response in our

hearts; for it is the voice of our Redeemer and Bridegroom who has won his Bride and will not let go. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." He is so concerned that the temptation does not cause us to fall nor go astray concerning faith, love, and steadfastness. He says to his disciples before he admonished them for the last time to pray, "Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Mt 26:45. Once again he reminds his disciples of the fact that according to the Father's counsel he would be delivered to sinners as the Son of man and mankind's Redeemer in order to die for sinners, in order to redeem sinners by his death from the devil, sin, and all temptations. Our Redeemer who has gloriously executed God's counsel, cries with a loud voice, "Watch and pray!" Our past unfaithfulness, unthankfulness, and indolence should not deter us from grasping his saving, strengthening hand anew. Through his death he has taken away all our sins of which we should be ashamed. His grace and forgiveness encourages the fearful so that they during and in spite of all weakness they constantly approach Jesus and with the disciples follow him.

Yes, because his Word is God's call and the voice of our Brother and Redeemer it has the power to awaken and move our souls. It teaches us to watch, shows us the cunning of Satan, the deceit of sin, and the good will of God, teaches us to pray, incites and entices us to call, pray, praise, and thank. Just so that in all weakness we do not lose sight of Jesus and his Word completely, just so that we again come and hear although we often are timid and shy! The disciples had followed Jesus into the garden, remained close to him, could therefore always hear his voice, and, after they had forsaken him in his death, they drew near to his grave and immediately heard the Easter message, followed their Lord to Galilee and there heard what he had to say to them. If only we will hear and remain close to the Word! That is the only means whereby the Lord awakens our soul out of sleep and security.

Because the Word has power it also has results. The Lord Jesus really awakened his disciples from their sleep and in spite of their sleep delivered them from severe temptation in Gethsemane. He says, "It is enough." Mk 14:41. The first things which was ordained that he and his disciples should endure in Gethsemane was gone, had been conquered. Satan had not yet been able to turn the disciples away from their Lord and Master. And when soon thereafter they forsook him and Peter denied him, Jesus with his Word led the scattered group back together again, called them to repent, gathered, comforted, and strengthened them. Judas the lost child, whom he had to exclude from his high priestly prayer, was outside. But the eleven, who composed the circle of disciples in Gethsemane, were protected by the Lord's intercession, faithfulness, and watchfulness; even later in the tribulations of their apostolic office and in their martyr's death they were preserved.

Yes, our souls are indeed lifted up in his hands. That is why we are confident and certain. Such certainty does not nourish and strengthen fleshly security. In the final analysis the secure do not ask at all about the Lord and are not concerned about the salvation of their souls. The disciples of the Lord, even the weak, want to remain with the Lord; they want to be preserved and saved by him; they therefore, although often in great weakness, commend their souls to their faithful Savior and the Word of grace; though it may often be with clouded eyes, they look up to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith and in their weakness call, "Lord, increase my faith! Oh, God, forsake me not!" And the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their temptation, even the last trial. At the end he says, "Ye have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom." Lk 22:28.29. Amen.

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5th SERMON

Matthew 26:47,48; Mark 14:43,44; Luke 22:47; John 18:3-9

The Lord had said to his disciples, "It is enough." He had just ended his difficult struggle, his ardent prayer; he was still busy awakening and admonishing his disciples when Judas with the ungodly mob was at the gate of the garden. He goes from one suffering into the next. Wave follows wave. No rest is granted the suffering Savior. The suffering of his soul was past; immediately the physical suffering began. Satan, who has pressed the Lord's soul so hard, now led this murderous mob armed with swords and staves, lamps and torches into the field against the Strong One.

We remain on the Mount of Olives. First the Lord trod the winepress alone, then he associated with his disciples; our text shows him surrounded by foes and sinners who want to carry out their evil counsel and will against him. He carried out what he, trembling and fearing, groaning and wrestling, had promised God, "They will be done! I will drink the cup," and proved it by his deed. He was not such a human being who regretted any act. We weak sinful human beings are courageous when we do not see the foe and make heroic resolutions before the battle; but when the foe comes and the battle becomes earnest, then we begin to tremble and fear. It was the opposite with Christ. Amid fear and trembling he decided, "I will take bonds, stripes, scourge, and cross upon me! -- and now that the hour of carrying out the test had come he was calm and courageously met the foe.

Yes, the hour had not come when the Son of man would be delivered into the hands of sinners. Here on the Mount of Olives he was betrayed, seized, and bound. That is the second suffering which came to him in Gethsemane: after the mental suffering the arrest. The arrest of the Son of man is reported as the Lenten story continues. That could indeed offend the disciples as it still could offend weak Christians today, "God's Son arrested by men? The Holy One in the hands of sinners? Is that actually Christ the Son of God, the Savior of the world?" In order to remove this offence, the Holy Spirit inserted the important remark into the story of Jesus' arrest, "But all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Mt 26:56a. Christ himself cried as he let himself be bound, "But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Mt 26:54. Christ must be given into the hands of sinners.

It is true; sinners have seized him. That was a sacrilege without equal. Yet in all that the counsel of God was done, who makes even evil serve his purpose. We say: God gave Christ into the hands of sinners. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. God spared not his only Son but delivered him up for us all.

And not only the Father's but the Son's own will was also done. The Father gave his son into the hands of men. But the Son also surrendered himself to his foes. That is pictured to us most vividly in the Lenten text before us. Before it relates that Jesus was betrayed by Judas and seized by his foes, it is expressly noted and stated that this was not done without and against his will but according to his will, yes, upon his command. Jesus gave himself into the hands of his foes. This holy will, this unique deed of Jesus destroys all offence and contributed to our great comfort, strengthening us in our suffering. We see from this that he sacrificed himself of his own free will. His sacrifice is therefore acceptable to God; it is powerful and avails before him. From this we see that he was far superior to his enemies. He was the Stronger One.

In the end he obtained the victory. He is able to protect us against our foes. We therefore as the title to this portion of the Lenten story and our text for this evening's meditation say:

CHRIST SURRENDERS HIMSELF TO HIS FOES

That is

- I. A Proof of His High Priestly Love,
- II. An Indication of His Royal Power and Majesty.

I.

Jesus' high priestly love shines out from the text before us.

Jesus surrendered himself to his enemies. He goes to meet his foes, who entered through the gates of the garden, and offers himself. Before when his hour had not yet come he often withdrew from those who wanted to seize him. No person dared harm a hair of his head. He must work, preach, and do good as long as it was day. But now the night, the hour of darkness, the hour appointed by the Father had come; he not only did not evade his murderers but went up to them and surrendered himself to them.

When God wanted to settle accounts with sinful Adam in the Garden of Eden, man hid himself under the trees of the garden. Now when God wanted to settle accounts with the second Adam, visit upon him the sins of Adam and all humanity they did not have to seek and call for the second Adam very long. He was ready to withstand the malice and rage of men and the vengeance of God. He was as obedient as he had promised God he would be; he stood the test. He brought a fully conscious, freewilling, and therefore a living, efficacious sacrifice to God. As the Lamb of God he patiently faced the sword of the murderer. As Priest and Mediator he offered himself.

He went fully conscious to his suffering. "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon, went forth," Jn 18:4; that is what we read in our Lenten text. He saw the powerful hostile mob, the sword and staves; he knew what other fearful pains still awaited him. He knew that the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Yes, in eternity he himself had joined in forming the counsel of the Holy Trinity. Through his Spirit, the Scriptures, the prophets he had foretold it. In his first epistle Peter expressly says that Christ's spirit foretold his suffering and the glory which followed through the prophets. 1 Pet 1:10. On several occasions he had spoken to his disciples about the fact that the Son of man would be given into the hands of sinners. And even though shortly before in the moment of his deep humility when he cried, "Oh my Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," God's counsel had been obscured to his human consciousness, it was now clear again to his soul. He wanted to suffer in a fully conscious condition and so he did. He saw death, he tasted and felt the bitterness of death and that means also eternal death, the pain of hell and the wrath of God in body and soul.

Even if the Son of God suffered and felt the pain according to his human nature, he alone took all this suffering and pain upon himself. It was the suffering of God's Son, the Omniscient. How that happened we cannot understand. But we do know that because the God-man not only endured all the sting of sin, all the pains of death and hell and God's wrath but suffered, felt, and experienced all this fully and consciously, he repaid completely and fully the wages of sin to the last penny; thus we are redeemed not only from sin, death, hell, and wrath but also from an evil conscience, the fear of death, and the pain of hell. It was not as the Reformed say that this pain which the man Jesus endured on the cross disturbed the Son of God as little as the sun is disturbed

when a tree upon which it shines is felled with an ax. Then our comfort would be gone. Then we would have to cross the words, "For the sake of thy bitter suffering and death" out of our confession of sins, prayers, and confession of faith. For what would it profit us if only a man suffered bitterly and died?

And as Jesus went to his suffering fully conscious, so he also went of his own free will. "Jesus went forth," i.e., out of the inner part of the garden to meet the wicked mob. Then was fulfilled what his Spirit had predicted, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." Ps 40:7.8. He gave himself -- Jesus Christ the God-man. He, the true God, the All Knowing, the Almighty, who with his divine call, "I am he," hurled his foes to the ground, had given himself. What a great sacrifice! Divine and human will completely one in the obedience of suffering! Perfect obedience! He wanted to suffer; not only did he permit it; he not only gave himself like one who fearfully and desparingly at last gives in to the inevitable; no, he himself chose the suffering joyfully; he confesses from a full heart, "I come. My God, I do your will gladly." Oh, a precious worthy sacrifice of obedience! He gave himself as an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. Eph 5:2. By his will we are sanctified, reconciled, and redeemed. Heb 10:10. He was High Priest and Substitute. He surrenders himself to his foes and liberated his disciples. The Shepherd goes into death. Thus the sheep are free. And how his high priestly heart burns with love toward sinners! How he longs for death! In holy ardent desire to die for sinners he says to his murderers, "I am he! -- Arrest only me!" And when they lay stunned on the ground, he set them on their feet; he not only permitted but commanded them to seize him. His holy will and wish to die for sinners is much stronger and ardent than the evil will and plan of the foe to kill this Holy Person. "I cannot fathom with my reason to what one might compare this love. Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus unto thee."

You see, his holy, willing love has gone out into the world; he has completed his great work. As the perfect High Priest, as the Savior and Redeemer endorsed and crowned by God, he still stands in the midst of the sinful world of men; he sees all sinners and goes after them; through his Spirit and ministers he speaks to their heart and conscience, "Whom seek ye? I am he." As in the days of his humily he testified to the Samaritans who were convicted of their guilt and condemned by their conscience, as he testified to his anxious disciples after his resurrection, "I am he" -- the Savior of the world, so he still testified today, as the Exalted One who sits on the right hand of God, to all sinners, Jews and Gentiles, even to these most wicked sinners who carried these murderous weapons in their hands, "I am he -- Return to me! I have redeemed you by my bitter suffering and bloody obedience." He testifies to us all time after time, "I am he! Whom seek ye? For what are you still seeking? Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord." Prov 8:34. 35. And the bride replies, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad way, I will seek him whom my soul loveth." Song of Sol 3:2. And they hear and recognize the voice of the Bridegroom. Whoever has found and ever seeks and finds, whoever believes, he boasts, "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal 2:20.

II.

Jesus, however, not only showed and wanted to show his high priestly love by giving himself up but also his royal power and majesty.

He did not let himself be bound and seized because he was weak. Accord

ing to outward appearances he was a Nazarene, a despised descendant. For our sakes he wanted to become despised and rejected. Nevertheless he was and remains a King, the true Messiah of David's stem. At the very beginning of the struggle he showed that the Lion from the Stem of Judah had conquered. As the first David with merely a sling and a stone but in the name of the Lord of hosts ran to meet Goliath and won the victory, so the second David without sword and spear met the armed mob and laid it low with a single word of his mouth and thus presaged the final defeat of all his foes. He was the Stronger One who frightened the strong one of this world and has him under his control; in giving vent to their malice they dared go only as far as he permits. He is the Strong One who protects his poor, weak disciples and leads them unscathed through lions and scorpions, swords and staves. To strengthen our faith and hope we will ponder somewhat more closely this royal power and majesty which Jesus permits us to see behind his weakness and humility in the very moment when he becomes weak and allowed himself to be bound like enfeebled Samson.

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is the King, the King of the Jews, King of heaven and earth, who frightens and strikes down all his foes, the strong and defiant of the world. A strong well-armed host of all kinds of people from all stations of life, worldly and spiritual, lords and servants, important and unimportant, Jews and heathen came out against him. The main strength consisted of a host of Roman soldiers, at any rate a large part, since a captain of 1000 commanded them. However, the real ringleaders who had gotten this armed band from the governor were the Jews, and particularly the spiritual leaders of the people: the Pharisees, their strictest, holiest sect, then their fellow members of the Sanhedrin, the high priest, the elders and Scribes; and that none of the dignitaries be missing the leaders and wardens of the temple. They had delegated servants to arrest Jesus; they themselves would wait for him in the palace of the Sanhedrin; yet a few could not deny themselves the devilish, malicious joy of helping to capture the hind which they had hunted before, the innocent sacrificial Lamb. Later Jesus spoke especially to these high priests and leaders of the temple. But the leader of this murderous host was Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples.

And this murderous mob carried powerful weapons: swords and, in case it should come to hand to hand fighting with the disciples, staves, despite the shining moon, torches and in case the wind should extinguish them, lanterns. The attack was well planned. So Gethsemane, the house of prayer where Jesus was accustomed to pray with his disciples became a den of murderers.

Such an army with such weapons did not leave only at that time, nor did it leave only Jerusalem to go against Jesus of Nazareth, that despised, hated man. This army is always under arms and battles against Christ, his Gospel, Christ's Church and disciples. The first Christian church was persecuted for 300 years by the Roman army, tormented by the aroused heathen mob. And the synagogue of the Jews, the synagogue of Satan, helped to stir up the fires according to their powers. Many Judases and many apostates play the traitor. The pope and his followers attacked the teaching and church of Luther, the pure Gospel, forced the emperor to use the sword and aroused all the people against it so that even the simple zealously brought wood to burn the Lutheran heretics. And many false brethren and members strengthen the evil business. In our day the princes and rulers of the earth and the people in general are no less unfriendly and hostile toward the despised sect who call themselves Lutherans, especially the upright earnest Christians, even though open war has not broken out in all so-called Christian lands. However the false Protestant, the spurious Lutherans, the spiritual dignitaries, the heroes of the day, the well-known theologians, are our worst foes. Judas is also to be found today and furnishes the unbelievers with reasons and pretexts for derision, slander, persecution. Even the weapons which Christ's foes use have remained the same at all times:

swords, staves, imprisonment, governmental and police force, and lanterns and lights, the wisdom and enlightenment of this world, all kinds of stratagems, tricks, and lies. That is the power of the enemy.

Jesus and the church of Jesus go to meet this power without fear and dread, courageously and confidently. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them. The foes of Christ themselves suspect that their side is the weaker. To summon such a great host of armed soldiers against a poor rabbi of the Jews and his poor weak disciples, so much power, rage, malice, so much ridicule and wit against Christians scattered here and there, is that not foolishness? But it is at the same time proof of the weakness and secret fears of the foe. Their password is, "Jesus of Nazareth! Hence he is not from Bethlehem! Jesus a mere man! What have we to do with him?" But silently they do not lose sight of the possibility that this Jesus of Nazareth is the one who should come, that he is the one for whom the Christians confess him to be. Therefore this concern, this watchfulness and activity, the rage and bitter anger in the camp of the enemy. And with their weapons they strike and judge themselves. They seize swords and staves against Jesus, the King of truth, hence they give up all claims to reason and proofs for their accusations and blasphemies. Or they bring lamps and torches, the wretched dismal light of reason.

But what they secretly suspect and fear, Jesus of Nazareth now shows them; he showed them that then when he humbled himself the most deeply. Jesus went up to his foes, looked at them, and said, "Whom seek ye?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." They were blinded. In spite of the full moon, in spite of the torches and lanterns they did not recognize Jesus whom they had seen again so often these last days in the temple. As the people of Sodom were blinded so that they could not seize Lot nor find his house, as the Syrians were smitten with blindness so that they did not recognize the prophet Elisha when he came into their camp, so also were the eyes of these soldiers closed. Blindness is the beginning of Jesus' victory and judgment upon his foes. The unbelievers who have so often heard the Scriptures in vain finally no longer grasp the simple Catechism truth and do not understand what a child of seven years understands. The enemies of the truth and the pure Gospel at last lose all ability to hear the conclusive evidence of the orthodox church.

Obduracy follows upon blindness. Jesus asks, "Whom seek ye?" The reproach, "What, you are seeking your King, the Son of David?" lies in this question. "You are seeking to capture and kill me?" Now and then even the unbelievers and bitterest foes of the truth are conscience smitten by the penetrating voice which sounds through the Gospel, "Jesus, the legal King and Lord who has won all people through his blood and has a claim upon all souls." But woe! Like the Jews most shake off all such impressions and knowingly and maliciously harden themselves against the truth. With an evil conscience they persist in an avowal of unbelief, "Jesus of Nazareth, a mere man and philosopher. How does that Jewish rabbi concern me?"

With the words, "I am he," the Lord hurls these blinded, hardened foes to the ground. "I am he" -- that was the same voice which re-echoed on Sinai, "I am a mighty, jealous God" who had testified to the patriarchs, "I am the almighty God," who had spoken through the prophets, "I am the Lord of hosts." It was the voice of the living God. The word of the living God is amongst us; that is the protection and boldness of the church and Christ's disciples. And this word which we use is mighty enough to destroy and overthrow all the bastions of Satan and stun Christ's foes. Christ and the confession of his faithful witnesses have outlived the bloody persecutions in the Roman Empire, hurled the tyrants from their thrones, and helped the Church to gain the victory. The Gospel of Christ has judged the antichrist. He is conquered and lies on the ground.

And that our enemies cover us with ridicule and condemnatory words and do not even attempt to overthrow our evidence from God's Word is also a victory of Christ and his truth and the defeat of the foe. Christ raises up even

his defeated foes with his word and gives them permission and ability to capture and kill him. Even today he permits the enemies of the Gospel to do as they please; he gives the people of the earth, also his foes, time to repent. But woe to those who, as the murderers in Gethsemane, wilfully try Christ patience and persistently resist the power of Christ's truth, which testifies to their conscience! How all these enemies, the worldly foes as well as the spiritual, will become frightened and tremble when on that day he will visibly appear and shout his last, "I am he" at them! Then all his enemies will forever be his footstool.

All that we have said of the supreme authority and victory of Jesus over his foes is comforting to his disciples who must suffer much with Jesus in and from the world. That was the intention of the Jews and that is the intention of the enemies of the Gospel, "to destroy all the rest." We also know: he who is with us, Jesus of Nazareth and his holy precious Word, is stronger than all the power of earth and hell. We expressly hear at the close of our Lenten text that Jesus spread his almighty hand over his disciples, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Jn 18:8. -- "Of them which thou hast given me, have I lost none." Jn 18:9. In this den of lions Jesus' disciples were as safe as Daniel.

So the Lord also protects us. No foe dare harm a hair of our head. He does not let us be tempted above our ability and even though he finally honors his Christians with martyrdom, disgrace, and persecution, he, the King, the Victor, also gives them the power to conquer as he gave it to the apostles. He protects us body and soul. Our soul is in his high priestly hands which he has lifted up for his own in prayer so that none of us will be lost, in his royal hands which extend over us to protect, secure, and hide us. We remain with him and comfort ourselves in days of anxiety on earth by this Priest and King and confidently boast, "No one can take us out of his hands." Amen.

6th SERMON

Matthew 26:47-50; Mark 14:43-45; Luke 22:47,48; John 18:2,3.

We have already examined the hostile army which was to seize Jesus and also briefly mentioned the leader. He was Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve. He deserved the pre-eminence, the first place among the army of murderers. He even excelled the others, Jews and heathen, in malice. He was the most hostile, the bitterest enemy of the Lord. Even in the opinion of the world a traitor is the one enemy most feared, the most wretched, the most infamous scoundrel. The old heathen mentioned the names of the traitors, who betrayed their homeland to their foes, with loathing and handed down their remembrance to posterity to warn and frighten children and grandchildren.

The Word of Truth, the Holy Scriptures, paints this sin of betrayal in its true form and hideous black colors. When David fled from his Son Absalom, he went bowed and weeping, yet composed and humble, across the Kidron, and then across the boundaries of the promised land. He bore the malice and deceit of Ziba in silence; he let Shimei curse him. But when he thought of Ahithophel his trusted friend and counselor who became a traitor, he cried aloud, "O Lord,

I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." 2 Sam 15:31.

But above all is the betrayer of the Son of David, the Messiah whom Ahithophel's example foreshadowed, branded even in the writings of the Old Covenant. In Psalm 55 the true David, the Messiah, complains through the mouth of the first David, that the foe screams thus and the godless afflict him. He wishes for the wings of a dove, so that he could fly away and be at rest! But immediately he restrains himself and says that he wanted to endure it. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him." And he continues thus, "But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." Ps 55:12.13. That his friends and companion, his disciple dishonored him and magnified himself against him, that is unheard of and unbearable. For that reason he sighs in the 41st Psalm over the knavish tricks which his foes had resolved upon about him, and the worst, the most shameful trick he describes in the words, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." V.9. The 69th Psalm contained the prayer of the Messiah during his suffering. "The waters are come in unto my soul. . . . They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head." v.1.4. The bitterest, the greatest pain he manifests in the complaint, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children." V.8.

And with just as many and just as important words is the picture of the arch-roogue, miserable Judas, drawn in the New Testament. Even where Judas is mentioned for the first time, in the roster of the apostles, the shameful epithet is added, "Who also betrayed him." The Passion Story points its finger ever and again with special diligence to Judas the traitor. Even there where the boundless love, mercy, and faithfulness of the Savior is remembered, as in the story of the anointing in the home of Lazarus, at the foot washing, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, in the high priestly prayer, the name, the sin, the faithlessness of Judas is also mentioned as a black, hateful counterpart of the Lord's love, who loved his own to the very last. The Evangelist Matthew paints in detail the terrible end of the traitor with impressive words. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the eleven could not immediately recover from the horror with which the example of Judas had filled them. In the first conference which the apostles held, Peter, as it were, could not find words enough to characterize the sin and punishment of Judas according to its merits. The fall of Judas is presented in Holy Scripture as an earnest warning and fearful judgment.

His fall should serve as a warning for us Christians. For Judas was one of the twelve, a disciple of Jesus. We Christians indeed are startled at the malice and insolence of Christ's foes, Jews and heathen, but no less should we be afraid of ourselves, tremble at the thought that even as a Christian, a friend and disciple of Jesus can become an enemy of Christ, yes, more wicked than the godless Jews and heathen who nailed the Lord of glory to the cross. And said to say, Judas has become the forerunner of many other friends and disciples of Jesus! Let us therefore watch and pray, be afraid of ourselves, and be on guard, that we do not fall into the same unbelief and in wholesome fear and humility contemplate the warning example of Judas, which often and especially in our text meets us in the Passion Story; let us learn from it how we can avoid such a sin. With this in mind we will speak on

THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

and direct our attention to these points:-

I. What This Sin is,

- II. How it Arises,
- III. How the Betrayal Disguises Itself,
- IV. How Jesus Meets the Traitor.

I.

Wherein does the sin of betrayal consists?

Judas, one of the twelve, had betrayed Jesus. It is a sin of which only a disciple, a believer is capable. Betrayal is unfaithfulness, a fall from Christ. And only he can fall from Christ who at first had clung to Christ. Judas knew the Lord; with Peter the the eleven he had confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt 16:16. He knew that Jesus was from above and could easily have guarded himself against his enemies. That is why he had expressly impressed upon the Jews, "Take him, and lead him away safely."

He had also known the Love of Jesus. He had been a witness of the service of love and comforting words with which Jesus had wanted to assure and seal to his disciples his love as Shepherd and Savior; he witnessed the foot-washing and the Last Supper. He knew that Christ should redeem Israel.

That murderous mob, which he led, did not know what it was doing, when they took the Lord of glory and nailed him to the cross. Judas knew very well what he did, when he surrendered the Lord of glory to that mob. That is what the sin of betrayal consists of; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world is surrendered; he of whom one knows: this is the true God and eternal life and salvation is to be found in no other is rejected and despised. Is there greater folly and malice?

And not only have these Judases known that Jesus is he who should come, that Jesus is the Christ, but in the moment that they write Jesus a bill of divorce and press it into his hand they are conscious that they have renounced the Son of God, their only Redeemer. Judas saw up to the very time that he betrayed Jesus and preceded that mob the glory of the Son of God; he saw how he hurled his foes to the ground and mightily protected his faithful disciples; he saw the divine power and incarnate love.

Yet what is even worse, Judas had not only known certain facts about the Lord Jesus; not even the unbelieving Jews could have entirely avoided the impression that Jesus was he of whom the Scriptures testified -- Judas had also come to know the power and love of the Son of God, the Savior, in his soul. Once he had the living faith. In faith he had testified of the power of Jesus to the world; he had gone out with the other disciples, preached in the name of Jesus, healed the sick, drove out devils. And even shortly before at the foot-washing he had tasted the infinite love of the Lord. Jesus had washed also his feet. The sin of betrayal consists in forcibly throwing Christ, who had won him, out of his heart. What terrible power and unfathomable depths of malice! Christians who have tasted the gracious Word of God and the power of the world to come forcibly shake off the saving faith and all previous religious experience.

The heart is withdrawn from the only Lord, the Almighty, the Gracious and Merciful and is surrendered to sin and vanity as Judas did to mammon, attaching it to earthly things, seeking in temporal luxury one's happiness, heaven, blessedness, is a slave to greed or lust and passion. How disgraceful and degrading! The soul which hitherto delighted in and was refreshed by the gracious Word of God, Christ's grace, and the pure joys of heaven now fills itself with the husks which the swine eat, with vulgar lusts, with the unclean goods, joys, and honor of this vain world. Whereas Christ the Lord had hitherto guided body and soul and planned resolutions and works pleasing to God, such a Judas now places the will, mind, and thoughts of the soul and his members into the

service of unrighteousness, into the slavish service of greed, ambition, and the lust of the world.

What a frightful mixture of devilish malice and folly! Satan need now show and offer a Judas whose soul loves money and empty things in order to be able to bring him to the final step of apostacy all the kingdoms of the world and say to him, "All these things will I give thee, if you wilt fall down and worship me." Mt 4:9. Thirty pieces of silver is the ridiculously small gain, a wretched business advantage, a single fleeting intoxication of the senses which takes the last remnants of faith and piety from the heart. In the final contract which the devil draws up with the faithless disciple of Jesus he usually writes down a small amount. The game is that easy. So easily do Christians let themselves be deluded. If only we would view not only the great wealth, treasures, and honor the world, not only the grossly sensual, filthy lusts and joys of the world, but also the 30 pieces of silver, every quick easy gain, every friendly expression which the world casts upon us with searching eye and suspicious glance! A Christian can become a traitor for the price of a rag.

And the apostate now becomes the bitter foe of his former Lord. Judas was the most malicious foes of Christ. He was more guilty of the death of this righteous man than Pilate and the Jews who cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The innocent blood of Christ clung chiefly to his hands and burdened his conscience. Like a greedy hound he preceded the while nocturnal hunters and tracked the hind which had been chased before. It can be no other way. A sharp sting remains behind in the hearts of the disloyal who have knowingly and wilfully sold themselves to sin and Satan. They can not forget that they have rejected the Son of God, their Savior and now kick against the pricks. Their evil conscience boils over in poison, gall, rage, and enmity. Or their soul is filled with secret hatred and bitter anger against him who loved them and whom they once loved from their heart.

Alas, we are not speaking of a few exceptional cases. Church history can produce a large army of Judases. And the Lord knows of many more Judases than man does. In the ancient church there was a large society of deniers and betrayers, who had abjured Christ's name and made it their business to go and betray to Jewish or heathen persecutors the peaceful Gethsemanes where Christians were accustomed to pray and give honor to Christ. At the time of the Reformation the false brethren, who misused the freedom of the Gospel and lived according to the flesh, did the Gospel the greatest harm. After Luther's death they brought his young church to the brink of ruin through their alliance with Rome. And in this our day the treacherous companions in the faith, so-called Lutherans, are the bitterest foes of the old pure doctrine.

The latest events in the church which took place in our old homeland is just such a treacherous knavish trick which is played upon Christ and the newly awakened truth. So-called faithful confessional Christians and ministers have dreadfully mutilated the mysteries of the Christian faith and the congregation which Christ has purchased with his own blood, surrendered it to mockers and blasphemers, and use the sharpest weapons and words against the small flock of the faithful, who want to rescue the honor of the Lord and have therefore declared themselves free from all the foes of the faith. The prophecy of the Lord which should be fulfilled before the end, is frightfully fulfilled, "The love of many" -- many who formerly believed -- "will grow cold."

Even in this country there blows a cutting wind which easily cools faith and love. Here rules a religion of the world and mammon whose statutes directly oppose the way which Christ has taught. Just so we do not betray the pure teaching of Christ and our good conscience to this mammon religion, to the spirit of our times! Even in our circles there are known Judases, who have left use and now revile and insult their former companions in the faith; they are

known disloyal people and slaves of vice who, even if they do not mock, still injure the truth and give the the foe reason for blasphemy. And there are concealed Judases who deceit can not be proven but whose heart we can see clings to money and earthly things. There are pious Judases who deceive men but God even now says to them, "I know you not." And they also are counted among the Judases who completely deny the brethren and brotherly love, who turn their backs upon their Christian brothers, their poor helpless members in the body of Christ and leave them to their poverty, weakness, and helplessness, forsake their former bosom friends in the time of trouble and betray their secret sins and weaknesses to character assassins and slanderers. Whoever falsely betrays and slanders his brother walks in the footsteps of Judas Iscariot.

II.

That is the sin of Judas -- a black picture, not a trick of the imagination but, sad to say, a true picture from life. We must be on guard in time before the sin becomes too strong. We therefore ask in the second place, how this sin arises so that we can nip it in the bud.

The sin of Judas has its start in the evil heart. The evil desire, which looks out for the deceitful riches and joys of this world, has its root also in the heart of Christians. Judas had let this desire grow. Whoever gives way against his will to these things soon finds pleasure in these things which he at first detested; the will agrees with the lust of the flesh and thus after the sin has been conceived it brings forth the deed.

Judas had charge of the treasury and became a thief. At first he pilfered only a few farthings. But it was a serious, weighty step when the thought became the deed. Even the impure desire of the heart is indeed sin, an abomination in God's sight. But the fear of the Lord is moved deeply in an entirely different way when the evil root bursts from the confines of the heart into deeds. The little thief, the refined deceiver quickly becomes a great criminal.

When Judas noticed that the Lord did not immediately judge and reject him after permitting him the first encroachment, he became secure and impudent and accustomed himself to practise this deceit. If the first sinful deed is without serious consequences, if a person remains healthy and good fortune continues to smile, the injustice, the passion very soon becomes habit, his daily life. The heart forsakes its true moorings, loses its footing, takes a warped view of everything, thinks about wicked things, and body and soul fall into the slavery of sin.

At last in everything he saw and heard Judas had only money in view. Thus in his mind he had immediately converted Mary's costly ointment into money and wished that this money were in his purse. And in such a frame of mind the person is then capable of the most wicked, shameful rascality. All it needs is some tinder and it bursts into a bright flame. As Luther says, at first sin seems to be as light as a little feather which one can blow away. But if one wilfully plays and flirts with it, it suddenly becomes an iron chain from which one cannot free himself. At first the sin seems to be like a beautiful, sleek kitten. But when one pets it, it becomes a wild animal which seizes its prey and does not let go so quickly again.

The more the sin grows, the less of an impression God's voice makes upon him. The heart stupifies itself so that it cannot hear the Lord and his Word. At first the Lord warned Judas in a friendly way and intended to win him with love. He was silent about his thievery and that insidious speech which he uttered during the anointing in Lazarus' home. Woe when the sinner despises the patience, love, and gentleness of Christ! As a rule he also hardens himself against all earnest words, admonitions, warnings, and threats of the Lord.

That was the case with Judas. At first he was reprimanded in confid-

ence by Jesus. The word which the Lord let fall during the foot washing at the Passover meal, "One of you shall betray me," was at first understood by none of the twelve except Judas. Then public reprimand and correction followed. In the presence of all Judas was branded as the traitor. Jesus gave him the sop and said to him, "That thou doest, do quickly." Jn 13:27.

So even today the Lord warns and reprimands Christians who have turned aside to evil, deceitful ways. One word, which is spoken to all in general in the service, especially pierces the heart and conscience of a sinner who listens. He alone knows that he is struck; the minister and the rest suspect nothing. Woe to him who immediately pulls such arrows out of his heart, steels himself against the secret reprimand of the Lord, and wilfully turns his face when God's Son, the Omniscient, looks at him! Alas, usually such a sinner also despises the public reprimand. When the sin is revealed and is spoken of in the circle of brethren, then a hardened Judas goes away defiantly, as Judas Iscariot went away into the night, and Satan enters into him and lives and directs and rules in his heart just as he wishes. Whoever is afraid and trembles at the thought that he might be turned from a child of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit into a habitation of Satan, let him resist the first impulse of sin; let him daily struggle in the power of Christ's suffering against the evil desires of the flesh; let him call a halt and turn about if he is struck with surprise at the first evil deed; let him take all of the Lord's warnings to heart; let him apply all the admonitions of the Word to himself; let him accept brotherly admonition; let him pay attention to the patience of the Lord for his salvation.

III.

Oh that no one would be deceived! Oh that we would watch, pray, observe! This very sin also clothes itself in the bright colors of innocence. We will continue our meditation on how the betrayal disguises itself.

The hatred of Judas' hypocrisy disgusts us even more than apostacy. As we have already remarked there are indeed declared Judases who take their stand in the rank and file of the enemy and seize sword and stave. But at times Judases assume a different appearance and display a friendly face. Most traitors imitate Judas in this point also and conceal the hatred of their heart under the appearance of love and friendship.

According to plan, Judas approaches his Lord with the greeting, "Hail!" He wants to say, "My intentions are good; I do not belong to these murderers." "Hail" also means "Farewell; it must be this way; the Son of man must suffer and die." He said, "Master, master," that is, "My Lord, my Lord! I know who you are; I will remain faithful to you even though your enemies here take your honor away and cover you with shame." That is the sweet talk of the hypocrite, the traitor, whose heart is far from God. Time after time they assure the Lord of their love, faithfulness, and friendship. "You are mine, I am thine; no one shall separate us," and say, "Lord! Lord!" They are talkative and cite many Bible passages.

And Judas kissed Jesus, covered him with kisses. Thus he confessed, "I want your welfare; I am your friend." And as subjects kiss the king so Judas feigns submission with the kiss. So must Judases pretend fear and love by their actions, sing and pray real loud and pert, and come bowed, humble, and with a long face to the confessional service and the Lord's Supper. And yet their heart is far from God. Their piety and worship is a delusion of Satan.

The most terrifying thing about such hypocrisy is that they deceive themselves. The Judas kiss testifies to unbelievable blindness and obduracy. Whom did Judas intend to deceive? He was known to the Jews. Was it the Lord, Christ, the Omniscient, the Holy One? He seriously thought that Christ would

free himself from his enemies, vanish from them as he had done before, or like Samson tear his bond -- he became all excited when he saw that things took a different turn -- and he really believed that when the Lord would finally have gathered his disciples and founded his Messianic kingdom, he would again accept him in spite of this little lapse. He would not spoil his chances with the Lord.

Satan can hurl even Jesus' disciples, whose eyes were formerly opened, into such blindness and darkness that they think that even though they abandon the Gospel to the Jews and heathen and betray the church, Christ will carry on his work to completion without man's help, build his kingdom, and perform his miracles; that they believe the devil when he whispers in their ear, "Here all sins are forgiven," even mortal sins and continued persistent sinning does not harm a person; they intend to conceal the hidden malice of their heart from the Omniscient. Woe to those who are first awakened from their dream on that day by the cry, "I never knew you!"

However, when other Christians, who have not yet fallen so deeply, thoughtlessly greet and kiss the Lord, thoughtlessly pray and sin, or welcome and say good-bye to their Christian brethren with a hypocritical greeting and kiss, that is the beginning of Judas' hypocrisy. Therefore, let us look about us and watch and pray every day, "See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps 139:24. Let us kiss the Son with an upright heart so that he does not become angry with us, and let us serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

IV.

We, however, will not close this Lenten meditation remembering Judas and his godless knavery, but we will not cast a glance upon the Lord and note how Jesus meets the traitor.

Most earnestly does Jesus reprimand him. He indeed puts up with his kiss; he wants to and must endure everything. But he does not return the kiss. He refuses to return the greeting of malicious hypocrites; he does not know them; he denies them the Amen to their prayer; he withdraws from them when they hear the Gospel, the witness of his Spirit: you are God's child. He reprimands Judas and his fellows with the words, "'Wherefore art thou come?' Not to kiss me but to betray me? 'Judas betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?'" He calls the sin by name, betrayal, hypocrisy.

But in the harsh reprimand he still lets a few drops of his fathomless grace and mercy flow. He said, "'Friend!' Ah, you were that! Think of the old days! Return! How can you betray your friend, the Son of man, your only Helper and Savior, with a kiss? How can you? Oh, use your head! Awake from this frenzy! Look out for Satan's snares."

Thus Jesus speaks to this very day through his Word; thus he teaches us how to reprimand the rebellious with holy earnestness in the fear of the Lord, yet in such a way that we admonish them to repent as long as our voice reaches them. Judas despised the last word of Jesus. Let yourself be reprimanded, warned, admonished before you have come as far as Judas did! You still hear the earnest and friendly voice of the Lord. He still kisses you in the Gospel with the kiss of love. Therefore today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart!

Judas left Jesus and relinquished the booty which the murderers desired. Most Judases go the same way. However, Jesus also continues on his way, lets himself be caught, bound, scourged, crucified, killed, and takes all the sins of all men, even that of betrayal, upon his back. Not because he betrayed innocent blood nor because of this sin but because of his impotence and

unbelief, because he did not seek healing in the innocent blood of Jesus, because he despaired did Judas finally go to his own place.

Even among us we find the beginning of the sin of Judas: an earthly mind, greed, evil desires, lies and deceit, laziness, unfaithfulness in service to God. But all these sins we lay upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and cleanse ourselves in his blood! The cross and blood of Jesus Christ strengthens our faith, purifies us from sin, awakens us to love him in return! May our faithful Savior grant us faithfulness and steadfastness unto our end! Amen.

7th SERMON

Matthew 26:50-56; Mark 14:46-52; Luke 22:40-55; John 18:10.11.

After Judas had betrayed his Master with a kiss, Jesus' foes whom Judas led, came forward and arrested him. The hour longed for by the Jews had now come. Now they succeeded where they had so often failed before; Jesus was captured. They laid violent hands on the Lord. Physical suffering followed the spiritual struggle. Yet our today's Passion Story reports not only what Jesus suffered, but above all Jesus conduct in his suffering; it mentions how he received the first attack of his enemies, how he defended himself, how he instructed his disciples whom he had led into this struggle. We learn from our text how we as disciples of Jesus should act in similar situations.

In our text we again see this hostile army. These same foes still attack Christ's church today. This warlike mob was dispatched by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The unbelieving world, the mighty, the rich, the wise use their powers, their influence, their wisdom against the Christian Church. The unthinking mob, the rough, godless world also rages and storms against Christ and his Church. The Sanhedrin had stirred up the government and demanded the warlike mob. The false church feeds and stirs up the fires of hatred toward Christ and with unflagging zeal incites the world against the true Church. The heathen hate the Christians because in the name of Christ they reprimand the sin and godless ways of the world. The Jews, the Pharisees, and the scribes are embittered and angered at the Christians because in Christ's name they condemn their hypocrisy. They are also the foes of our church: the children of the world and the false church, false teachers, false brethren. And these foes give us no rest. We need not even bring this struggle and hatred on ourselves. We should not do that. In Gethsemane Christ calmly awaited the hour when his foes would come. When we on our part testify to God's truth, confess Christ, walk piously as our Christian calling demands, then this evil mob marches against us. Essentially, our struggle, as was also Christ's, is a defensive one. And how according to Christ's example we are to conduct such a struggle we learn from our text. And now we will ponder upon that:

HOW CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES DEFENDED THEMSELVES AGAINST THEIR FOES

- I. They do not Strike with the Sword,
- II. They Carry out Every Command of God's Word.
- III. They do not Flee but Stand their Ground.

I.

The disciples of Jesus do not strike with the sword, when they are attacked by their enemies. The sword is the weapon used by Christ's enemies. As Christ himself stated, his foes went out with sword and staves to seize him. Sword, staves, brutal power is the armor in the world and the false church attacks the small flock of Christ. God has given the government the power of the sword. In our text Christ confirms this right of the government. But sad to say, the government often lets the sword stay in its sheath when according to God's will it should use it to punish evildoers. On the other hand, it often draws and uses the sword contrary to God's ordinance. World history teaches how many unjust bloody wars the princes and lords of the earth have promoted. And church history tells of thousands of martyrs, innocent Christians who fell by the sword of emperors. The synagogue of the Jews, the false antichristian church has always been the cause of such murderous plans. She shirts for the blood of Christians. With indefatigable violence she wants to trample down the truth. She continually urges the princes on to use the sword, so that unknowingly they often shed innocent blood.

And the rabble, the servants of the high priest added their staves and clubs to the swords. How many confessors of the truth have died under the blows of the howling mob! One of the first martyrs of the Reformation, Henry von Zuetphen, whom Luther had praised, was killed with clubs and staves in a riot. And the world has become no better nor more merciful as its culture has progressed.

Wherever God in his providence permits the power of darkness to gain the upper hand, there they fearlessly attack the Church of the Lord with swords and staves and brutal blows. That is the case in our old homeland, Germany. There the state church rises up against the Old Lutheran Confessions with sword, fist, police, violent deeds. Thank God our Church here has been spared such encroachments of the world and the church in its most holy rights and duties.

Nevertheless, the spears and swords of the hostile mob is directed against us. The wise world scourges and jeers at true Christianity. The rabble mocks, slanders, calumnates Christians who do not travel the broad way. And mockery, scorn, slander are also swords and spears, burning arrows in our heart and mind. God has given husbands authority over wives and parents over children. But how many wives, how many young children also among us sigh under the fact that their spouse or parents want to tear their faith out of their hearts with threats and compel them to become unbelievers and fall from the faith! How often authorities forge a weapon from the power and position which God has given them against the religion of their subjects! The false church casts the very same missiles, lies, slander, defamation into our camp as does the common, conscienceless world. The fact that they seize the worldly, fleshly weapons against the truth and the confessors of the truth reveals them immediately as false teachers and brethren, even leading the coarse unthinking mob against the Christians and seek and find approval and adherents from among them.

Those are the weapons of the foes of Christ and the Church: The sword and temporal power. And how are even Jesus' disciples inclined? We see that in our text. Peter draws the sword and begins swinging. That was foolish, unreasonable zeal. What could the two swords of Jesus' disciples do against that well-armed band? Without having any business to do so Peter seized the sword. When he should have watched and prayed in Gethsemane he slept. Now he seeks and begins the battle without anyone commanding him to do so. Yes, the disciples ask the Lord, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" Lk 22:49. But Peter did not even wait for the Lord's answer. He followed his own spirit and will and injured Malchus by cutting off his ear.

against sword, power opposed to power. They want to help a good cause with the sword. Secular and church history show us well-known Christian princes who because of religious zeal wanted to convert the heathen with the sword and compel them to become Christians; it shows us Lutheran princes, excellent in every other respect, who tried to root out heresy with force, as if this hellish weed, false doctrine and heresy, could be cut off with the sword. In the old German provinces where in the past the Lutheran Church flourished, the frightful darkness of ignorance and unbelief has descended. And how do the Christians of those places, even the most earnest of them, plan on helping the fallen church? With the sword and with the power of the state. They ask the government for help in restraining unbelief, rebuild the church with taxes, and compel people to become Christians.

Thank God that we have nothing to do with the sword of the state. Yet we are also inclined and tempted to imitate Peter and the other disciples when someone wrongs us. Wives, children, and subjects over against whom parents and rulers misuse their divine power and office face the danger and the temptation of resisting their masters not only where faith and conscience demand it -- they must indeed do this for one must obey God rather than man -- but also in ordinary things which do not concern faith and religion at all, refuse them obedience, service, love, honor, and thus oppose force with force. If we are reviled and slandered because of our Christian faith, then we think we have an excuse, yes, even the right to repay evil with evil, invective with invective. We often detect a desire to repay false teachers and brethren who lie and slander us shamelessly in the same coin; we are overzealous more against the person than against the evil cause. Yes, one can also battle in a fleshly manner with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; one can lay rough hands upon God's Word and do more harm than good with it. And what does the Lord say to all this?

He said to Peter, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Mt 26:52. The Lord considers it an act of revolution when one opposes even unjust attacks and the violent acts of tyrants. He says to his disciples, "Suffer ye thus far." Lk 22:51. He verified his words with his example; he permitted himself to be seized; he put up with violence and injustice. Yes, he rights the wrong which Peter caused by his untimely, fleshly zeal and healed Malchus' ear.

We also will pay strict attention to our Lord's words and his example. This is what the Lord says to his Church, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Christianity, this spiritual kingdom, has nothing in common with the sword and the state." This is what the Lord says to the individual Christian, "Suffer ye thus far. Put up with violence and injustice!" We should maintain our faith and good conscience. For God's sake we dare not comply with the evil counsel and will, the godless commands and prohibitions of the foe of Christianity. However when we are abused and mistreated, despised and oppressed because of such alleged disobedience, therefore when we are reviled for the sake of Christ and the faith, we will be silent and endure it. Ah, we will guard against our own will and honor Christ's which, to be sure, fights against our nature; at all times, even in the heat of battle, we will let the sword in its sheath, bridle the tongue, restrain the fleshly angry heart, dampen the fire which is kindled by the flaming arrows of the foe, and, following the Lord's example, will also again in all ways make good the wrong which we have perhaps done by our fleshly untimely zeal. That is the will and command of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord also mentions in our text why he takes these steps against his foes; and why he restrains us from striking at random with the sword. He says to Peter, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Jn 18:11. The Father had decreed this suffering for him. He must drink the cup "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," that the counsel of redemption

might be carried out. He therefore gave up all claim to the sword and self-defence. That is why he refused the help and assistance of the legions of angels. In order to deliver and redeem us, in order to guard and protect us, in order to make our souls secure, the Lord met his foes unarmed and let himself be captured by them. In order to atone for our sins, our fleshly zeal, our vindictiveness, our impatience, our wrath, our passion Christ let the sword and force and injustice take its course. We heartily thank him that he kept his sword in its sheath and held his angels back. All our transgressions, our crimes, our encroachments are most certainly atoned for. For it was the Son of God who let himself be seized and captured. He indeed had the power to command the angels; it would have taken but a single little word. With his almighty miracle-working hand he immediately healed the wounds of Malchus. And the sacrifice of God's Son is valid and acceptable to God; for it was a free-willing sacrifice. He humbled himself, he wanted to suffer violence, with his almighty word he held the hosts of heaven back who stood ready to help their Lord and King against blood-thirsty murderers.

For similar reasons the Lord has also forbidden us the use of the sword. This is to our advantage. The bitter cup which we must sometimes drink is decreed by God our heavenly Father. We also know from the Scriptures that we must suffer with Christ. And that is good. In that way our faith is strengthened. Since we give up claim to all earthly weapons we seize with both hands the protection and assistance of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and learn to trust him. Thus others are edified, encouraged, and strengthened in the faith. When according to Christ's holy noble example we bind their wounds, do good to them, and bless them, we press a sting into the conscience of our foes. That is why we will let the sword remain in its sheath.

II.

Jesus' disciples carry out all points of God's Word as did their Master.

We are not to begin striking with the sword. The Lord forbids that. Instead, the Scriptures command us to seize the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Though we are to endure violence and injustice, we are not to be completely silent. We dare and should use the Scriptures, the Word of truth, to defend ourselves. But in using this scriptural sword we are to battle spiritually.

Speaking forcefully, the Lord turns to his foes who had arrested him. We read in our text. "In that same hour Jesus said to the multitudes." Mt 26: 55. His voice was his weapon. His Word is our weapon. And how we handle God's Word in similar cases, what and how we should speak when we must suffer with Jesus, the Lord teaches us with his reply.

First he convicts his foes of gross, flagrant injustice in a calm, collected voice. He says, "Are you come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me." Mt 26:55. Because of his teachings Jesus was persecuted by the chief priests and scribes.

Next he shows them: if it is a question of doctrine you could and should have convicted me of teaching false doctrine, since I taught publicly so often and so long in the temple. You could not have trapped me in my words. Indeed, you tried that and failed. How disgraceful that since you could do nothing with words you try to overcome me with swords and staves.

The Lord has given us also such words. We should bear witness to the truth when we experience violence and injustice, when the foe attacks our Christianity, wants to hinder faith and worship or scoffs, "It is nevertheless a question of doctrine, faith, conscience. Now prove to us that our faith is false. Let us deal with one another from Scripture. But you do not want that,

you do not want to discuss proofs on the basis of Scripture. You suspect and know that then you would be lost. Hence you resort to violence and misdeeds; rage and fuming, coarse mocking and blasphemy. And that is why you lay violent hands upon us, the innocent, upon the truth, and upon your own conscience."

But now Jesus' words become sharper. He continues; "But this is your hour." Lk 23:52 -- this hour of the darkness of night. You do not have a righteous cause. That is why you sneak about like a thief in the night. That is the way all the foes of Christianity act. The night time is their hour. They fish in muddy waters. They go about with secret, malicious intent. They do not begin the attack openly. Cunning and deceit is added to brutality and violence, and we are to uncover these secret crooked paths and say to them, "This is your hour, your way! You help yourselves with lies and deceit. You shy away from the light of day."

Jesus paints the hour and crime of his foes in even blacker colors. He also says, "This is the power of darkness." You are in the service of darkness, of Satan. Your actions and conduct prove that you are from the devil." In the name of Jesus we say that to tyrants, tyrants upon the throne, to church officials, to tyrants in the home who torment the consciences of their subjects, "You are ensnared by the devil. You are engaged in works of darkness." We say that to false prophets and brethren who trouble Christ's Church, "The devil has commanded you to do that. You are Satan's prophets." It is the will of the Lord that we employ all the earnestness, all the keenness, all the spears and swords of God's Word against the kingdom of darkness. It is against the Lord's will if because of fleshly considerations we blunt a single word of the divine truth.

Jesus also reminds his enemies of the divine might and power against which swords and staves are helpless. He called to their mind, "Formerly when I sat in the temple and taught you laid no hand upon me. God's hands kept you in check. And that you can seize me now is possible only because he has permitted it. You can do nothing against God. And God has permitted it so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled, that the counsel of redemption might be carried out. Against your will you must serve God and help to execute God's counsel. Therefore perceive: you are in God's hands. Woe to you if you continually resist God's hand, if you continue in your devilish work and resist God until the end! Then fear God's power and judgment." Then God's hand will seize and dash you to pieces." And in Jesus' name we also summon the foes of the Church, the foes of our faith and salvation before God judgment and testify to them, "You are in God's power, you dare and can not go any further than God permits, and woe to you if God must suddenly put an end to your growing presumption and say to you, 'So far and no farther!'"

Since we carry on our warfare and defend ourselves with God's Word, there is one thing we do not want to forget about completely. There is not only the sting of punishment but also the sting of the Gospel. Saul, the raging enemy of Christ, could not resist it. There is also a painful overtone of complaint re-echoing through Jesus' cutting reprimand, "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple!" Mt 26:55. He wants to say, "You also I taught and enticed! Oh, if only you had heard my voice! If you would only want to listen to my voice even now!" Sharp words against the embittered foes of Christ is proper. But as long as God still grants them time to repent, we also dare not become tired of repeatedly reminding them of the saving teaching of Jesus which still can give peace to their wild broken heart. It is possible that many of that band of murderers still let themselves be overpowered by these words and Jesus' example and by God's grace came to repentance and faith. Even the leader of the Jews had not yet sinned against the Holy Ghost but as the Scriptures testify acted

tion will also penetrate such and bear fruit who before, yes, who for a long time stiffneckedly locked and barred the door. Therefore we will speak and testify and not give up.

III.

True disciples of Jesus do not run away but stand their ground.

True Christians confess Christ in the very of the foe, even in the evil hour, and confirm their testimony also with their deeds, if needs be with suffering, blood, and death. To be sure, the disciples of the Lord did not do that at this time. That they did not defend the Lord with words, that they after they put the sword into its sheath were anxiously silent, was already fear and denial. And fear turned into flight. All the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. One your man was in such a hurry that he left his linen cloth behind and fled away naked.

Such is the human heart! It is a deceitful thing and desperately wicked. Every time later on when the wolf broke foaming and raging into Christ's flock, every time he stirred up persecution, fear, and tribulation against the Church, this same wretched scene could be witnessed: fleeing disciples who forsook their Lord, turned their backs to their flag, threw away their only defense and weapon. Even at the present time in the land of the Reformation where the hours have grown dark one hears the cries and sighs of the refugees, "Come! Let us flee! We must give in and yield something to the foe. We can do nothing. The Lord must help."

An earnest warning for us, if the trumpet should still call us into open battle. Of course, for Christians there is always a struggle, struggle in the midst of peace; we have foes far and near and they never leave us in complete rest. How have you stood in the past? Have you not sometimes remained silent when you should have spoken, confessed, reprimanded, and opposed the unbeliever? Have you not given in to the demands, pretensions, customs, and practises of the Christ-hating world in many ways and thus have forsaken the rule of the divine Word? That you think you do not have so many enemies may be due merely to the fact that you are friends with the hostile world.

For Jesus' disciples fear and flight is not such a little fault, as is sometimes thought but a serious sin. Why sure, after Christ had died and rose again he soon received his disciples, who fled and forsook him in Gethsemane, back into grace again and did not blame them much for this sin. But then they had also soon recovered from their fright and became more courageous; yes, they became lions and in the power of the Holy Spirit confessed the Lord Christ freely and boldly before that very Sanhedrin which ordered Christ's arrest; they stood fast, did not let themselves be intimidated by threats, preached the Gospel to every creature, and in part sealed it with their blood and life.

And the Lord admonishes us to do that; we are not to run but stand fast; we are not to surrender one tittle of the truth; we are to speak and act wherever the honor and love we owe our Lord demands it; we are not to be intimidated by any violence and threat whatsoever and be stopped in our race. Silence, fear, flight can lead to a bad end; it can spread to complete apostasy, misery, and shame. We will follow our Lord. He let himself be seized but he stood fast in suffering.

To be sure, one thing can hinder us and rob us of our courage and joyfulness of continuing to follow Jesus, that is, remembering our former unfaithfulness, cowardice, and fear of men. We have often run away from the Lord, perhaps farther from him than the first disciples. But that is the very reason why Jesus let himself be led away alone by the Jews without any companions; that is why he gave up all claim to the help and assistance of men and complained, "I looked for comforters but I found none." Ps 69:20; that is why

he must and wanted to tread the winepress alone in order to atone for our unfaithfulness by his being forsaken and alone. With courage and a good conscience we can and should follow him even into suffering or the hands of the enemy. All the time when we forsook the Lord will be forgotten. We can stand fast. He goes ahead. He strengthens and comforts us in the evil hour. And he sends his angels for whose help he gave up all claims to help you. His angels protect those who are to inherit eternal life. Let this be our watchword, "O Jesus, in faith I do not flee from but toward you though the hostile mob may take away my very garments. Whoever believes does not flee." Amen.

8th SERMON

Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54; John 18:12.13.19-24

After Christ has surrendered to his foes, they took him and bound him. After he had spoken the truth to the Jews, the chief priests and their servants, he let himself be arrested and bound. They took him and tied him and led him first to Annas, and then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas. He stood bound before the high priest. Our text particularly points to Christ's bonds.

Things went with Christ, the Savior and King of Israel, they way it had gone with Samson, the judge and deliverer of the people of Israel. Samson helped his people against the Philistines. And those of Judah, his brethren, went and bound their deliverer with two new cords and delivered him bound into the hands of the Philistines. That was the blackest unthankfulness.

But more terrible and shocking is the malice of the Jews who bound Jesus. Christ was greater, stronger than Samson. He had just shown his divine power and majesty to his enemies. With one word he felled those who seized him. And yet they dared to seize and bind this glorious person.

Christ was absolutely pure and blameless. Samson's life was besmirched with many a stain. Jesus had gone about in Palestine and done good. He had laid his hand upon the sick and wretched and they became better. His kind miraculous hands had just healed Malchus' ear. And these hands, these pure unsullied hands, which had done only good, from which only good had come, the Jews, his brethren, now bound. Greater outrage, baser ingratitude the world has never seen.

But even greater and more amazing is the Lord which willingly let itself be bound. Jesus put up with the cords which he like Samson could have torn in an instant. Sacred history tells us that when Isaac came with his father to the place designated by God, the same place where the bound Jesus stood, that the father tied his son to the wood on the altar and that the son calmly and patiently let himself be bound. Silently, without murmuring Christ also let himself be bound. Silently, without murmuring Christ also let himself be tied. He was the sacrifice which God had chosen. He was the true Passover lamb. According to the Law the Passover lamb of the Jews was set aside on the 10th day of the first month and kept for the day of the slaughter. We now direct our devotion to Christ's bonds.

THE BONDS OF CHRIST

That is our topic and we want to answer two questions from our Lenten text.

- I. Why did Christ let Himself be Bound?
- II. In What Respect did He not let Himself be Bound?

I.

Why did Christ let himself be bound? We learn the answer from the mouth of Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. At this time he was high priest; as high priest he had prophesied and without knowing and wishing to he had prophesied correctly. He had advised the Jews that it would be good that one man would be killed for the people. For the people, for all men, also for us Christ let himself be bound and killed. The words, "For the people, for us" shed light upon Christ's bonds. He is bound for us, to free us from our bonds. Men misused and brought disgrace upon the freedom which God bestowed upon them. They were free, free in God, free and blessed by obeying his will. God's Word and commandment was his sweetest joy. It was the freedom of righteousness. But through sin they forfeited and lost this freedom. They chose sin instead of righteousness. They freed themselves from God, his Word, and will. Sinful man considers God's Word and Law a burden which he tries to shirk. The watchword of the great of this world and of all people who follow them is, "Let us break their bands and cast away their cords from us," Ps 2:3 -- the bands and cords of the rule of God and his Anointed. They are rebels and impudently snatch at the crown of the Highest. With their hands they grab for everything after which they lust. They seek and seize sin, shame, and vice. With rough hands they tear all sanctified bonds, they tear down the fences which stand in their way, they trample upon God's ordinances. Their feet are swift to shed blood. With rapacious hands they seize the property, the marriage, the life of their neighbor. They shun no evil deed or unrighteousness.

And if their impudent striving and conduct meets with a stone wall or if for appearance's sake they let themselves be bound to a certain extent by scruples and a sense of honor, or if now and then they refuse to take any shameful gain or pleasure, then they let their evil tongue roam about that much the more unbridled. Behold, we keep our horses bridled so that they obey us and we turn their entire body. But the tongue, that restless evil, no one can tame. It spits out poison and uncleanness. And if any worldly person still has conscience scruples about filthy, shameful words, it just does not enter his mind that one can sin with one's thoughts as well. To put bridle and rein, bands and cords on the thoughts of the heart, that the world considers foolishness.

And this fleshly desire for freedom pricks the flesh and blood of the Christian as well. That is our sin: abuse of Christian freedom. We are free through Christ, free servants of righteousness. Through the Holy Spirit God has inscribed his Law in our heart. And Christ's yoke is easy, his burden is light. And yet we so often try to shake off this easy yoke, this light burden. When his Son reprimands, admonishes, and instructs us, our heart struggles against it. "I will not let my conscience be bound" -- thus the flesh then excuses itself. We would gladly have much elbow room and permit ourselves pleasures, joys, benefits which God's Word does not allow. Certain things, social intercourse, family affairs, business deals we place beyond the bounds and limits of Christianity and say, "Religion has nothing to do with that."

And as our dear God, so must our neighbor also suffer for our lust for freedom in various ways. How unfeelingly we often deny our brethren the sympathy, respect, care which we owe them! How little we understand the art of limiting out of love the power and freedom we have! We still walk too carelessly, too thoughtlessly, too unwisely. Our unbridled flesh plays us many a trick even when we mean well. We are not yet really accustomed to having the Old Adam subject to us. Such untrammelled ways and conduct is the naughtiness and folly of our youth. It wants to be free early in life. But sad to say, youth learns it from the adults and how poorly we watch our lips that they do not deceive, speak evil, and gossip! What poor watch we keep over our heart! We detect

little desire to put the bit and bridle upon the thoughts and wishes of the heart.

That is the sin and vice of men. And what is the result of such sin? What have we deserved by such abuse of freedom, such unrestraint? This freedom has led man into slavery. He has become a servant of sin. Sin, lust, passion, anger, hatred chain his members and bind his soul. His members are used in the service of unrighteousness and cannot get out of their accustomed path. The soul hungers and thirsts for the forbidden fruit and can not free itself of this desire. Sin, our wantonness and disobedience, guilt weigh heavily upon the heart and so chokes the conscience that it can no longer breathe freely and joyfully.

The bands of sin are Satan's bands. The devil holds mankind in a tight grip in unrighteousness. And so we shudder at the bands of death. Eternal death, God's wrath and judgment is the evil fruit of fleshly freedom. The sinner is free from God; he wanted to be free from God. And therefore God pushes him away and pronounces the sentence, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Mt 22: 13. Yes, we, we also, have by our unbridled acts and desires deserved the eternal bands.

But now we look away from our bonds and chains toward Jesus who is bound. He let himself be bound for us, in our place, the innocent for the guilty. He let his unspotted, charitable hands be tied and thus atoned for the wantonness, the encroachment, the outrages and evil deeds of our hands. Indeed, we often suppose that the injury our hands have done can be set right. But just place the sin alongside the Atoner. The one man who was to die for the people was the Son of man from heaven, the Son of the living God. The hands which created heaven and earth and mightily preserves and rules them were bound. The atonement weighs more than the sin. And willingly, patiently the Creator lets himself be bound by the work of his hands, but man who turned out such a failure.

This love, this pity towers above the malice, the shamelessness of all people. Jesus is tied by the heathen and Jews, by the Roman army, by the servants of the high priest. And the leaders of Israel, the chief priests, elders, and scribes who assembled about Caiaphas pleaded guilty to these bands. Heathen and Jews, important and unimportant have bound the man Jesus their brother, who was their flesh and blood. All the monstrous crimes which the men of the world, the great and the small, the righteous and the godless have committed against their brother, when they tore the sanctified bands of blood-brotherhood, are atoned and blotted out by the bands which the Son of man wore, which he willingly permitted to be placed on him by the children of men.

But the heathen and the Jews themselves were under a higher power, the power of darkness; they were bound by Satan. Satan bound his enemy by his deputies and tools. And when Christ, the Holy One of God, took upon himself the bonds of Satan, he nullified every law by which we had to do Satan's will, all the wantonness to which we let ourselves be misled by the wicked one.

Yes, a Stronger One than Satan had come upon Jesus. God's hand had given the Only Begotten into the hands of sinners. As Abraham tied his only son upon the wood of the altar, so God did not spare his only Son but let him be bound by the rough hands of sinners. But now he, the bound Son, urges the heavenly Father to forget all that whereby sinners laid violent hands upon his majesty.

Christ did not only permit himself to be encircled by the ropes which we placed upon him that night but also by the cords of eternal death. For the people, for all the people, in our stead he was killed. But it was impossible that the Son of God should always be held by the bands of death. Like strong Samson he finally tore all cords and by his resurrection finished and confirmed the great work of the redemption of sinners. As certainly as Christ the Son of

the Highest, the Son of man let himself be bound and finally burst all bonds and chains, so certainly are all men redeemed from the bands of sin, death, the devil, and hell.

And how he has commanded that the Gospel be preached to all sinners, Jews and heathen, release to the bound, freedom to the captive. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. The day of freedom has dawned.

We are free from the bonds and guilt of sin. If our conscience oppresses and alarms us, if our sins against God and our fellowmen, our unconcern, our thoughtlessness, our wilfulness, the remembrance of past sins, the remembrance of injury which we did by word and deed burdens our soul and takes away our breath, then we look toward Christ who was bound and believe what Christ says, "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" we are certain that God frees us from all sin. Even the devil must now be silent and dare not scold us any longer. A bridle has been tied over his slanderous mouth; he no longer dare accuse God's redeemed children.

We are also free from the dominion of sin. We need no longer serve sin. Wretched captives who for years on end were sold to shame and vice can by looking to Jesus their Redeemer who is bound throw away their chains. And even if we have to wrestle with sin all our lives, even if we groan every day and wrestle with the malice of the flesh, with lust and anger, with our wild, unruly Adam, we nevertheless return with joy and trust to our Deliverer and Savior who was bound but then has torn the bonds. And we come to know: he helps us, he exercises his judgment upon our old Adam, he frees us more and more from the service of vanities.

And when finally the bonds of death want to embrace and kill us, we direct our fading dying eyes to our Redeemer and boast and shout in triumph, "The bond is torn and we are free!" In the same moment that the prince of death tightens the cords of death, the cord is torn, the soul is free and rises to the throne of the Redeemer and not even can the body be kept forever by the bonds of death. It will rise freed from all service of fleeting life and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. That is the comfort of redemption which the bonds of Christ have won for us.

We must add one more point: Christ's bonds ease the bonds we carry for Christ's sake. There are the bonds of sin. They are the bands of disgraceful servitude. Yet there are also bonds of Christ which are sanctified bonds. Christ let himself be bound in order to comfort us in our bonds. True Christians must suffer and become bound with Christ. Paul was bound and imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel. And how many thousands of Christians have followed him into bonds and prison! But the bonds of Christ soften the Christian's bonds. In his letters Paul boasts, "I, a prisoner of Christ." Before his accusers, before the same Sanhedrin which bound Christ he with pride points to his bonds. Yes, the Church of Christ bears his bonds on earth. Only the false church of the antichrist is free and associates on good terms with the mighty of the earth. The true Church which preserves Christ's word in its purity is chained by the evil world and false church. In the old homeland our Lutheran Church lies in chains, is oppressed, hemmed in on every side, and delayed in its progress. And does not the spirit, custom, and culture of the nation among which we have begun our new home resist the spirit of true Lutheranism? And the individual Christians share in the fate of the Church. When we confess the Gospel and want to serve others with the truth, we find everywhere barriers and resistance. But from the midst of our bonds we join the Church of God joyfully and confidently in looking up to our Head, Jesus Christ, who was bound and now is free and has ordained the way we are to go: through bonds to freedom.

While our Lenten text is leading Jesus bound past us, it at the same time tells us in what respect Christ did not let himself be bound, in what respect he kept his freedom. He was led bound first before Annas, who was high priest previously, the grey-head of the high priestly family, and then before Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, who held the office of high priest that year. In the meantime the members of the Sanhedrin assembled in the house of Caiaphas. Exegetes are of divided opinion as to whether the judicial hearing of which the second portion of our text reports, took place before Annas or Caiaphas. The first is most likely the case. It makes little difference who was the high priest, who questioned Jesus about his teaching and disciples. Annas and Caiaphas were of one mind. At any rate our text tells us of a private hearing. The public proceedings before the assembled Sanhedrin followed later. There the Lord stood bound before the high priest, and awaited the hour when he should give account before the Sanhedrin. In the meanwhile the high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his teaching, certainly for the purpose of getting material for the accusation before the Sanhedrin from his answer.

Jesus met but did not answer the high priest as otherwise one who was a criminal ordinarily would answer his judge. He was bound and yet free. He did not let his doctrine be bound. He testified, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing." Jn 18:20. The word which he had from the Father he revealed to the whole world. And even now when he was a prisoner he appealed to his doctrine. Here he did not let himself be interrupted. He refused to give the high priest more complete particulars about his doctrine. "Why asketh thou me?" is as much as saying, "You do not have the right to examine me about my doctrine." The high priest intended to cast suspicion upon him because of his doctrine and disciples. In his question lay the reproach that by his teaching Jesus had gathered a following and led the people away from the Law of Moses and the teaching of the scribes. But not once did Jesus stoop to refute this suspicion and reproach. His doctrine was far above the judgment of the Sanhedrin. And thus he set his disciples free by his doctrine. We are free by faith in the words of truth. We keep this freedom. We will not let our teaching, our faith, our conscience be bound. We refuse to everyone, to all governments, yes, father and mother, the right to interfere in matters of conscience, conviction of faith, and worship. In these matters we stand only under God and before God's judgment.

This freedom of faith and conscience is at the same time freedom of speech. We believe therefore we speak and speak boldly and freely to the whole world what we think. Jesus also does not let this freedom be taken from him. He does not let his mouth be stopped. At his own free choice he was silent or spoke. He gave no answer to the high priest's impertinent questions. He did not repeat what he had previously said and taught.

But while on the one hand he held back the desired answer, he did frankly reprimand him. He said, "'I ever taught openly in the temple. Ask them which heard me, what I said unto them; behold, they know what I said.' Jn 18:21. Ask the people who heard me. As the ruler of the temple you yourself had plenty of opportunities to hear what I taught in the temple. Now the time for instruction is past. If anyone did not hear and accept my word, he has judged himself. You condemn yourself when without cause you ignorantly attack me and my teaching and my disciples who were obedient to my teaching. This is the punishment you deserve that I do not even once preach the Gospel to you." Something like this is what Jesus meant to say.

And the Son has made us free. We will not allow our mouths to be stopped. Without let or hindrance Paul, bound and chained, joyfully preached the Word. We take for ourselves the power and freedom to be silent if we choose

and to speak if we consider it suitable. The curious question, the unreasonable accusation of Christ's declared enemies we will not dignify by an answer. And if we open our mouths at another time we reprimand those thoughtless gainsayers. We testify to them, "You have despised preaching and the Word; the Gospel of salvation has been sounded freely and openly to all the world but you just did not want to hear it as long as you are alive. Woe to you when the Word is taken from you! If it should ever suit you to hear, when your hour has come, God's hour has perhaps gone by. Or if you have heard the Word and did not obey but resisted it, you pronounce sentence upon yourself. You do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life.

And as little as we allow our conscience, our faith, our speech, and our confession to be bound and hindered, just so resolutely do we keep and declare our freedom in our conduct. Jesus kept the divine right of his doctrine safe, spoke frankly, and was free and frank before the high priest. One of the servants who stood nearby struck Jesus on the cheek and said, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" Jesus replied, "'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?' Jn 18:22-23. Prove to me from the Scriptures that I owe the high priest honor and obedience in those things about which the high priest has asked me, about my office which I have received from my God! No, neither the high priest has the power and right to ask and reprimand me nor do you have the right to strike me." Before the judgment throne of the Word and doctrine there is no respect of person and office.

And thus frankly, with a joyful confident, courageous faith we meet all the foes of the truth. In matters of doctrine and faith, lord and servant, Jew and Greek, ruler and subject, father and son, mother and daughter stand on the same level. That we intent to show at all times by our actions and stand fast in the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free. As the prisoners of the Lord, bound in our conscience to the Word we defend our freedom until death. Amen.

9th SERMON

Matthew 26:58.69-74; Mark 14:54.66-71; Luke 22:54-60; Jn 18:15-18.25-27.

The Lenten story is a picture of confession and repentance. The sins of men which nailed Christ to the cross are presented bluntly, in glaring colors, and unvarnished words. Not only is the malice of the Jews and heathen, the foes and murderers of the Lord exposed by the evangelists. These sins of the Jews and heathen even serve as a mirror for us. In our natural heart the very same hostility toward Christ and his Word makes itself felt which finally expressed itself in the murder of Christ. No, in order that we may not doubt that also we, we Christians share in the guilt of the death of the Lord, that we by our sins have increased in size and weight the burden of guilt on the shoulders of the Lord, this story mentions and describes in detail even the sins of Jesus' disciples. A disciple, Judas, turned into the Lord's most deceitful enemy. And Peter denied his Lord.

And how many Christians have become Judases, known or secret traitors! How many Christians have fallen as Peter fell! Yes, not one of us has confessed his Lord and Savior as faithfully and resolutely as he should have. This is a common sin of disciples; it is also our sin: denying the Lord.

Our Lenten text shows how easily a disciple of the Lord can fall into this snare. How quickly Peter fell! Just a short time ago he had sworn faithfulness to the Lord until death and even drew the sword in his defense -- in the same night he denied him three times. Even though one can so easily stumble and fall with Peter, nevertheless denying Christ is a great, deep fall on the part of a Christian. If only for God's sake we would not comfort ourselves by thinking of such sins as passing, easily pardonable human weakness! That can turn the fall into one from which he cannot arise. May the Lord bless our present meditation so that in the light of Peter's fall we may repentantly perceive our sin, but then also shy away from and be afraid of denying him again the rest of our lives!

DENYING THE LORD, A COMMON SIN OF DISCIPLES

We see,

- I. How Easily and Quickly Jesus' Disciples Fall into this Sin,
- II. Yet how Heavily it Weighs upon the Conscience.

I.

Very easily and quickly can a disciple of Jesus fall into the sin of denial and stumble and fall as Peter did.

This sin springs from a person's heart. In the example of Peter is described the condition of the heart of so many Christians. No Christian, not even the strongest, can withstand this temptation by his own power. Watchfulness and prayer are the only protection against the attack. However, just in that point Peter did not understand himself. In the presence of the other disciples the Lord appealed to his conscience, "Simon, sleepest thou?" And we also forget only too easily to watch and pray earnestly; for that reason the temptation overpowers us so easily.

Peter's heart was unstable, changeable. Only through earnest, zealous prayer does one obtain a stable heart. Therefore, he fled with the other disciples. Suddenly he stopped and remembered something else. Yet without repenting of his flight he approached the Lord again and resolved within himself to be at least a witness of his suffering. Is that not our trouble and complaint, "I lack this constancy to do good?" Our heart rocks back and forth. One moment we walk away from the Lord, the next we draw near again. It almost depends upon our desire, mood, and inclination whether we care more or less about the Lord, whether we regularly, diligently, or scarcely and infrequently hear his Word. And unstable heart however is divided within itself, conceals within itself contradictory states of mind, views, and resolutions.

Peter followed the Lord into the palace of the high priest. He wanted to see what would happen. He still loved the Lord. He was concerned over the outcome of this business. And yet he followed from a distance, shy, timid, fearful. His heart swayed between fear and love. Complete love drives out fear. Fear is not in love. From this we recognize how little, how faint-heartedly we love, that the love of Jesus and fear of men are continually contending with each other for room in our heart. We are still concerned about our Savior, yet we are also concerned about getting along with men.

As he knocked on the door of the high priest, Peter did not dare to identify himself as the disciple of the Lord. Another disciple, who was known to the high priest and as an acquaintance of the high priest was able to get in, arranged for Peter to be admitted. Perhaps it was John, who often only quietly hints at his name in his Gospel. Now that John wants to describe the fall of his fellow apostle Peter he remembers also his weakness, that he did not follow Jesus to his death as a disciple of Jesus but as an acquaintance of the high priest. That is also our weakness and custom. In our relation with men we carry

on as if we were their acquaintances and friends, neighbors and fellow workers and gladly cover and conceal our Christian name and title. This unstable, divided, fearful heart is the source of the "Peter-sin," the denial of the Lord.

A second cause for such a fall certainly lies in the place and circumstances. The fire of coals became dangerous to Peter. He wanted to warm himself at the fire which the servants of the high priest had kindled in the courtyard against the coolness of the night. There in the company of rough menials and servant girls it was very hard to take a stand. There one could easily fall into temptation and howl with the wolves. Those servants of the high priest had already clearly betrayed at the capture of Jesus their hatred of Christ. Peter also knew and greeted them as murderers when he attacked them with the sword.

The same fire of coals we see burning far and wide also today. Where the children of the world, who turn their backs to God, to the Church, where unbelievers, the enemies of Christ assemble, be it in the theaters, dance halls, in the palaces of the rich, be it outside in the courtyards and low dens, there a dangerous fire glows and burns, the fire of hatred of Christ. Hearts which are kindled by evil desires, by worldly pleasures burn also in glowing rage and animosity against the Lord and his holy Word, which sharply condemns the conduct of this world. In such company a Christian can hardly stand and keep his faith. A wind blows there which can not tolerate faith. Certainly such places and circumstances, evil company and society hasten and promote the sin which grows up by itself out of the rash, cowardly heart.

Yet a denier dare not push the guilt on the circumstances. No, that is his guilt, that he enters into such dangerous places, that he betakes himself into such hard situations. That was thoughtlessness on the part of Peter, yes, fleshly, sinful self-confidence that he warmed himself at the fire which wanton servants had kindled. He acted here without the call, without the command of the Lord. He led himself into temptation. It does not serve to excuse our sins but it increases and advances the guilt, when we without a call, against God's Word and will, without fear and prayer, in fleshly self-confidence or frivolous carelessness mingle in the company of the children of the world and the godless about whom we know and must know how they stand over against the Church and Christianity, when we seek to warm ourselves at the unclean, stinking fires of the coal and straw of worldly amusements, which the people of the world who just do not know any better and not the Christian have lit. Social connections with the world is the wide open gate to denying Christ.

The evil heart is the source of this sin. Time, place, and circumstances hasten the same, namely when the Christian allows himself to be governed by place, time, and circumstances. However, the mockers of this world are the real tempters to evil, behind which in the case the evil enemy hides himself. And unstable Christian who does not guard his frivolous heart, who is overcome by place, time, and circumstances, who allows himself to be drawn into all possible kinds of company finds in the evil hour hardly power and courage to withstand the gross mockery of the world. The story of Peter's temptation sketches a clear picture of the mocking world.

First of all, picture to yourself that tribe of mockers in the courtyard of the high priest. The one girl, the gate watcher, had been secretly told by the other disciple of concluded it from his intercession for Peter, that also this one who entered, Simon Peter, was a disciple of Jesus, and uttered the suspicion as soon as she saw Peter. "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth," and followed Peter with this mocking talk up to the fire where he wanted to warm himself, regarded him sharply, kept it up, and tortured him before all who stood around with this question, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" -- until Peter before all denied the Lord for the first time. And when a little

while later Peter again had gone out of the inner porch of the high priest's palace through the gate, there outside for the first time had heard the cock crow and now returned and for the second time came to the attention of the gate watcher, she repeated and affirmed her first speech, and a second girl, who stood alongside, joined this mockery, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." And certain servants welcomed Peter, who now for the second time approached the fire, with the same conscience-tormenting question, "Art not thou also one of his disciples?" Thou art also of them." Peter gained a brief, one hour's respite by denying the Lord for the second time. Then a servant of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter cut off, recognized him; he had seen Peter attack with the sword in Jesus' behalf and raised the suspicion to a positive accusation, "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" And now the surrounding crowd, as it were, pronounced sentence on him, as though he were a convicted criminal, "Surely thou art one of them," and added to the first bit of evidence a second, "For thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto and betrayeth thee," and thus forced Peter either to confess his guilt or to make a yet stronger, coarser denial, a false oath. That is the picture of the world; the mocking world. And there is no difference between the rough common world and their mockery and the scorn of the refined world. There one as the other comes from the devil, the arch-slanderer. The polite, veiled, witty, refined mockery of the educated world is yet much more keen, cutting, and dangerous than the rough, clumsy slander of the common mob.

All the mockery of the world in the final analysis hits Jesus, the dearly beloved. "Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of Galilee" is the mocking name by which Jesus is known by the world. That means as the girl herself explained, "One of this man's disciples:" an ordinary man as all men, a despised man. And for the sake of this Jesus also Christians who hold Jesus Christ higher are abused and mocked. "You are also one of his, he belongs to them, one knows this breed, that is also one of those head-hangers, a gloomy person, one of those crazy ones;" in this fashion the world thinks and speaks of Christ. If one belongs first to "them," associates with "them," then he is looked on as a lost person.

The entire way of the Christian, their whole religion and way of life, in short, everything related to them is hateful to the world. For the sake of the name and word of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the truth the world hates and mocks the Christian; to be sure, as soon as the Christian goes along with it part of the way, laughs, jokes, sins with it, the world will easily forgive him his faith and silliness. On the other hand, the world royally rejoices when it can convict the Christian, those hated, holy people of a wrong, of a sin, of an actual sin. That was a cordial for those servants and girls, that they surprised Peter in a plain untruth. Particularly is also the speech of the Christian repugnant to the men of the world who imitate it sneeringly. The Christian may gently, mildly reprimand the sins of the world from God's Word, or he may confess the precious name of the Savior from sin, the one speech as the other only arouses the antipathy, wit, and mockery of the unbelievers.

The world is a mocker. Just believe that. Do not trust the so-called good natured world! Even if it for a time on the grounds of propriety restrains its mockery, its hidden poison: as soon as it has caught you in its net, then it will also show its sharp teeth. Yes, the world, also the educated world, is a spiteful mocker. It does not mock only from pastime and boredom. No, mockery is the poison of Satan which springs up from its innermost soul. The world is hostile to the Lord and those who are his. It can do nothing else, it must revile and slander. Everywhere, among the rough people, in the educated, respectable circles there are mockers by trade who set the tone, as there in the high priest's palace the girl and the relative of Malchus. Women are often masters in taunts and mockery. And when the right keynote is struck by the speaker the whole chorus joins in, and woe to the poor Christian who allows himself to be caught among this pack of hounds and wolves. They see themselves forced to howl

along. To be sure, it is and remains their guilt; they have to answer for it, if they give in to the evil and deny Christ their Lord, whom the world does not know, but whom the Christians know very well.

II.

How heavily the sin of denial weighs is the second point we want to ponder

One falls very easily into this snare, one can fall very quickly. Yet that one can stumble and fall so easily and quickly and sin and deny does not, of course, excuse this sin. Rather we want to remember what this means: to deny the Lord! Peter denied his Lord who knew him, graciously saw him, and called him to be his disciples, whom Peter in turn had known and confessed joyfully as the Son of the living God. It is a disgrace for an honorable man of the world to lie and deny, if he conceals, hides, refuses to admit what he knows, if he pretends to be someone he is not. We sing, "This one thing is needful, all others are vain; I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain." (366,7). That is the greatest, the most beautiful, the most blessed thing on earth, that in this wretched life we know him, the Lord and Savior.

And how unthankful, how disgraceful, yes, how foolish it is to deny and conceal this Jesus, the Highest, the Dearest, the Best that we have, to hide this Treasure which we carry in our heart, and to pretend before the world to be just as poor, naked, blind, and wretched as it is! That the Lord, the eternal God, the faithful Shepherd has recognized us, that is the fathomless grace which we will not be able to praise enough in eternity.

And we do not want to know him, know nothing of him? From our youth we have been taught, and we have also often experienced this truth, that in Jesus alone is salvation, how sweet, how refreshing, how comforting the name of Jesus is, what healing power it has; we know and believe that this name alone can save us. And we are ashamed of this name and deny him? Before whom? Before the world, before the deceitful, wicked world which so soon will disappear with its lusts and honors, which will be so quickly confounded with its spite and insolent talk? Before the world, this wretched, miserable race which can only conceal its ruin and bankruptcy with hollow, insane mockery? Alas, very often the world needs not even first put on its beautiful, shining uniform and complete its warlike preparations in order to awaken respect in us. A pair of miserable creatures and babblers as that maid and servant scare and frighten us!

Denying Jesus has many different forms and shapes. It takes place in words. One denies with his mouth that of which his heart is full, or at least should be full. First Peter met the maid with, "I know not what you say." I know nothing about what you are saying, that I should have associated with this Jesus of Galilee. Be still!" So Peter wants to know nothing of all the glorious miracles which he saw in following Jesus, nor of all the blessed words of life which he heard from Jesus' mouth. He strengthened his words and said, "I am not." "I am not his disciple. I know him not." If only it were or would be true that he was no longer Jesus' disciple and would have nothing more to do with his only Helper and Savior! If this decision were to be taken earnestly, it would make him the most miserable of all men. Yes, Peter was not ashamed to imitate the contemptuous, mocking talk of the servants about the Lord, "I know not the man." So disdainfully he speaks of his dear Friend and Master.

Alas, sad to say, great numbers of Christians have during the time of temptation, persecution in the first centuries, at the time of the Reformation destroyed their entire blessed past, their long years of sojourning with the Lord, the rich knowledge which they have gathered by a short, decisive, "I am not. I am not a Christian, a Lutheran. I will no longer be one!"

And if you, my friend, do not belong to those deniers whom church history mentions, have you not nevertheless under the title of a good, faithful

Christian and Lutheran perhaps done the same thing and spoken hard things against your God and Lord? If you have so much to do with the world of unbelievers, then before you expect it, words much the same as came from Peter have escaped you. When the world reproached you for your Christianity and Lutheranism, have you not often rejected such a reproach by saying, "We will be silent about that. That is enough. Are we not here now as friends and comrades?" When the world makes true Christianity ridiculous, mocking it by exaggeration, "Yes, Christians must always pray and look gloomy, they are much too stern and strict," and you knew very well that the true, honest Christianity had been dealt a blow with such talk and not an exaggerated Christianity, did you not often help yourselves out of the embarrassing situation by such expressions as, "No, I am not like that. We Christians are not so strict"? You did not want to be the kind of Christians as they actually are? Have you therefore renounced the blessed experience which you have had in your Christianity and which the world considers so foolish? Have you not now and again out of love to the world and its rotten peace joined the world in passing judgment upon your most holy Christian faith with derogatory, contemptuous words and replied to unbelievers and mockers, "Those are differences of opinion. Everyone can think as he pleases"? Alas, if one has rejected the confession of the truth once or twice with such frivolous talk, then in an evil hour it can well happen that he joins Peter in cursing himself and swearing, that he solemnly renounces Christianity and, incited on by mockers, does not permit the slander that one is such a simple foolish Christian to stand.

And one's entire conduct also agrees with such talk. Yes, one can deny the Lord Jesus by one's air and deed as well, if one is silent at the wrong time while others are speaking against Christ, if one puts on a friendly expression when sinful jokes are being cracked. Peter's entire attitude, his cowardice and fearfulness, his impurity agreed with his sinful talk.

If one first learns to talk like the world, then one also gradually becomes accustomed to its ways and customs and by that very same way forsakes and denies the narrow, thorny path of the persecuted sect of the Nazarene. His walk loses its Christian color and conforms to the world. He no longer listens to the words of the Lord Jesus, the admonition and warning of Scripture and the sermon; he no longer is so careful in following the Lord and in a little while is thrown completely from the circle of the disciples of Jesus and travels in the broad, comfortable rut of the world. And even if one preserves a few appearances of piety, he nevertheless denies the power of godliness.

We see that the one weighs as heavily as the other: the frivolous, wicked, and at last blasphemous conversation by which one frees himself from Christ whom the world mocks, and the deeds of a denier who turned aside from the true way. And this sin weighs so heavily because it grows so quickly. One denial follows upon another, one word leads to another. Soon Peter has denied the Lord three times. And because one often attempts to correct and make good one's earlier words with other words, one falls very deeply and entangles the tongue and conscience in the most foolish, presumptuous words. If at first one leaves the narrow way in only a few things, follows the example of the world, and ignores the voice of the Lord, soon one little bit after the other is torn from the Christian garment and he wears much more easily and comfortably the new garment fashioned in the style of the world.

This sin has caught and entangled very nearly the whole human race. It blinds and confuses even the soul and the mind to such an extent that one becomes deaf and dumb to all the warnings of the Lord just as Peter did not hear the first cock crow. This sin very soon becomes a mortal sin; it hurls one from grace into wrath. Whoever constantly says, "I am not Jesus' disciple" and walks according to these words neither is nor remains Jesus' disciple.

With his threefold denial Peter had fallen from the faith. Woe to all who are ashamed before the world of Jesus' name, or who under the appearance, in the delusion of piety and love of Jesus deny the power of faith and Christianity! Woe if they hear the terrible word, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." Mt 10:33. Oh, that none of us must hear this word on that day! May the Lord in grace preserve us from this! Amen.

10th SERMON

Matthew 26:74,75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:60-62; John 18:27.

Last time we pictured to ourselves Peter's deep, serious fall. Holy Writ tells us also of the sins of the saints. It presents deeply moving examples. David, the man after God's heart, besmirched himself by an infamous and bloody deed from which we turn aside with horror. Peter, the disciples of the Lord, whom the Lord honored the most highly, denied his Master who he knew so well before a few wretched men and girls. We shake our head at such contemptible cowardice. We read of such kinds of offences which the saints of God have given in the Scriptures.

What shall we say about them? Shall we take offence? See, more is told us of these saints than that they fell so deeply and were so wretchedly confounded. Holy Scripture also tells us of David's and Peter's repentance. Through God's power and grace these deeply fallen men rose again from their fall and received mercy. And God erases the sins of the repentant, casts them into the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more in all eternity.

However, God has intentionally perpetuated in Scripture the remembrance of the sins of the saints, David's sin, Peter's sin. He moved the holy men whom he inspired to write the Scriptures to record also such offences so that this power and grace shines the more brightly in contrast to this black background. The amazing power and grace of God turned these offences into shining examples of repentance and absolution. For no amount of money would we let David's and Peter's fall be taken from Scripture, otherwise we would lose the most amazing, powerful comfort we can have which we draw from the restoration and pardon of these sinners. Such examples of repentance, the example of frightened, humbled David, repentant Mary Magdalena, bitterly weeping Peter, the malefactor on the right hand are like pearls and precious stones which shine forth from God's Word and immensely refresh and gladden our heart. The repentant tears of Mary Magdalena and Peter are like gentle dew which trickles from the Scriptures into our tired, cold heart. Let Peter's repentance be the subject of our present Lenten meditation. From this story we perceive what true, honest repentance is and how the sinner comes to repentance.

PETER'S TEARS, A SHINING EXAMPLE OF REPENTANCE

We see,

- I. How the Lord Calls the Sinner to Repentance,
- II. Wherein True Repentance Consists.

I.

How does the sinner come to repentance? That is the question which is nearest at hand. Peter fell by his own fault, however, he could not now or ever arise by his own power. The Lord raised his fallen disciple up again. And as the Lord dealt with Peter, so he deals with us all. He it is who calls the sinner to repentance.

The twofold crowing of the rooster was the first, the outward cause of Peter's repentance. The crowing which reminded him of the word of the Lord roused him out of the delusion and sleep in which he lay trapped. God made use of this unimportant means, since he wanted to rescue a soul from ruin. All the servants of the high priest's palace, yes, the chief priests and elders themselves in the counsel chamber also heard in this night, in this morning, the rooster crowing just as on other nights and mornings. This double crowing was meaningful to Peter. It rang in his ears on this night in a far different manner than usually, pierced his heart and conscience. He perceived in the crowing of the irrational animal yet another voice. It reminded him of the admonition and prophecy of his Master. The disciples of Jesus even later could not forget the rooster which woke Peter on that night. The Christians placed a rooster on their church steeples. Those who wandered about and did business in the market place and in the streets of the city should every time they looked up to the rooster on the spire be called to reflect, stand still, and think a while whether or not the constant driving of the world had pulled them as well into the sin of Peter, whether they actually remembered the Lord before and amongst men.

To this very day the Lord employs similar natural means to arouse secure, sleeping sinners. If a Christian has once begun to deny the Lord Jesus, be it by word or deed, when he has learned to echo the mocking, Christ-hating opinion of the world, if he has accommodated himself to the ways of the world in his calling, business, dealings, relations, in his pleasures, then that happens as happened to Peter, he loses the knowledge of himself, the clear reflection, the calm decision; his spirit and conscience are troubled as though bewitched. Then God has to call loudly and knock strongly indeed, so that he may learn to hear again. However, God leaves nothing unattempted. Our faithful Lord does not want to allow any soul, which he has bought, especially no Christian's soul to whom he has already made himself known, to destroy itself; he takes even the creatures into his service, so that they help him awaken those who are sleeping.

To be sure, God turns the sinner only through his Word; however, he also uses created, natural things and means to call his Word to the sinner's mind. Natural events in which the world, the common crowd sees only daily, meaningless accidents are for the Christian, above all for the fallen disciple, often loud, piercing cock crows which urge themselves strongly on the conscience. We perhaps have sketched a plan which promises profit and enjoyment, and we have already made preparations for carrying it out, when suddenly an unexpected obstruction lies in the way and frustrates our plans. That is a cock crow, a warning from above, "Take heed that you have not entered upon an evil, deceitful way!" In the midst of happiness and peace there suddenly falls a heavy tribulation upon the home, sickness or even death. That is a cock crow for the perplexed, a reminder from above, "Have you perhaps departed from the right path of the disciple of Jesus, from the narrow way of following after Christ, and consequently have the idea of denying and leaving the Lord?" If enemies, envious people revile and slander us, we will be silent and consider, "Perhaps the Lord has commanded them to do that, perhaps we have deserved such blows." If good friends warn us, we will greet them as messenger of God whom the Lord does not send to us without reason. Yes, just when such a word of warning and judgment, such an accident and mishap rushes straight up and suddenly strikes us, the Lord is certainly calling to us.

While Peter was still speaking, the rooster crowed suddenly for the second time. One mishap, one calamity follows upon the heels of another, the

admonitions and warnings repeat and repeat. Oh, if only we hear the second, the third call. Otherwise we might become so completely deaf and indifferent, that the loudest trumpet call can no longer awaken us.

Meanwhile the cockcrow was only the outward cause of Peter's repentance. As the rooster crowed for the second time, the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Probably whilst he was led tied from Annas to Caiaphas, from one wing of the high priest's palace into the other, Jesus turned to the side and looked at the fallen disciple. This look of Jesus pierced Peter through and through. In that way Jesus calls the sinners to repentance, especially the fallen disciples. He turns to them, otherwise they would never again arise. He it is who converts them, because he turns to them.

He looks at them through his Word. Here in the Word, in the Scriptures, in the sermon we hear the voice of Jesus, here the eyes of Jesus burns. The Word of God, the Spirit of Christ in the Word shines into the innermost part of the heart and penetrates to the very marrow. It was an earnest, reproachful glance which Jesus gave Peter. The look was an eloquent sermon, "Peter, see what these men are doing to me, these soldiers and servants of the high priest have tied me; the Sanhedrin will now pronounce sentence upon me. Oh, they do not know what they are doing; they are blind and hardened. That you, my disciple whom I loved, who loved me, that you have also uttered the sentence, 'I do not know the man,' that you untied the bond which bound me and you pains me much more. You must know what you do. You know me. I had warned you." The Lord turned aside from his bonds, from the slander of the Jews and looked at Peter. What he did to him in his suffering cut more deeply into his soul than what his enemies did to him.

Thus the Lord looks, thus he speaks also to us when we have sinned against him, when we have denied him, "You, my Christian, my friend, my disciple, what have you done to me? I can put up with the blind, foolish world, what the hardened Jews and the ignorant heathen speak against me and how they slander me. But that you let yourself be overcome by their mockery, that you did not remain true to me, my heart is broken about that." That word, that passes upon all who hear the sermon and read the Bible. Again, by means of the sermon, through one's Bible reading the Lord especially fixes his eye on this and that person, upon you and me and reproaches him for having denied his faithfulness and love. The Lord speaks especially to the fallen disciple, "You, yes, you have denied me. You knew me and still you were ashamed of me before men. You follow me and yet you suddenly allowed yourself to be seduced and you left the way of life. In having sinned and done evil, in transgressing a commandment you have denied me, your Lord and Savior, denied the will of your Master. Yes, you have denied my power and grace which could have shielded and protected you in your hour of weakness."

Behold, however, this voice gradually changes and sounds gentle and mild. It was an earnest glance which fell on Peter. And as the Lord looked longer at him, as his eye met the eye of the fallen disciple, his countenance became clearer, friendlier. Who might it be among us whose spiritual eye has never met the friendly glance of Jesus the Savior of sinners? Whoever has tasted of grace says, "Yes, I know this glance." That look of the Lord was the enticing Gospel, "Yes, Peter, your sins hurt me, taste bitter to me, yet see here my bitter suffering, my bands, the unjust sentence to death -- all that took place for sinners, for fallen disciples also, out of love also for you. It is true that your words, 'I know him not,' were like fist blows, slaps in the face; but I was silent and endured it. I atoned for all sins, your sins as well. Therefore, stand up! return! Your sins lie on me. See my tied hands; I permit you to return; yes, come into my arms!" That is the voice, the friendly voice of the Gospel which sinners, the fallen disciples hear, "Your sins, your

denial lie on him, on the innocent, bound Lamb of God who will be led to death. This Jesus, the bearer of sins, the Savior look graciously on you; he wants to forget; he has already forgotten what you spoke against him, wherewith you grieved him. He rejoiced heartily, immensely if you return now, turn to him, look on him, and seize his pity. He is always the one and the same, just and pious and eternally faithful. He is and remains your Savior, therefore may you remain his disciple, or if you have denied your discipleship become again what you were and whereby you were so blessed!" In that way the Lord raises his fallen disciples.

Such words of ardent love take fire in the heart. And even those who have not yet fallen as deeply as Peter, who in weakness indeed often stumble and oogle with the world, who however have not yet lost the faith and grace, those he unceasingly follows with the same glance of love, with his anxious waking eyes. Oh my Christians, only turn not your eyes away from this Savior and his Gospel!

II.

In that manner the Lord calls the sinner to repentance. We also learn from the example of Peter the real nature of that true repentance which is worked by the Lord.

When the rooster had crowed for the second time and the Lord looked at him, Peter remembered the word of Jesus which he spoke to him, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny my thrice." He had forgotten this world completely. Now that the hand of the Lord touched him, he remembered it. Now he recognized that he sinned by despising the warning of the Lord, that he had actually denied the Lord three times.

That is the beginning of true repentance, true contrition, recognition of sin. The sinner who is touched through the hand and spirit of the Lord now sees what he did not see before; he sees his sins and transgression in the most glaring light. He remembers those words through which the Lord warned him before. He says to himself, "Oh, yes, the Lord has surrounded the way of sin with a strong enough fence. How often, how earnestly he had admonished me, 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation! Remain in my, remain in my love.' I despised his Word, I forsook and denied him, my faithful Lord and Master." The faithless remembers all the words which were spoken to him by men, pastor, elders, Christian friends, at confirmation, in so many sermons, at so many occasions, "Remember Jesus Christ! Be thou faithful unto death!"

And to this remembrance is added deep, bitter sorrow. The penetrating glance of the Lord kindles a fire in one's heart. The sin, the denial burns in the soul. Thus it was with Peter. He had to leave the courtyard quickly. In solitude his heart was full and gushed over. He began to weep. A great flood of tears burst out of his innermost soul and he wept bitterly far, far into the night.

The holy evangelists tell only of the tears of Peter but do not describe the condition of his heart which is shown by the tears. What moved Peter's soul in that bitter hour cannot be described by words. This is true contrition and repentance; sorrow, burning sorrow over a recognized sin; grief, godly grief. The fallen disciple is deeply grieved for having grieved the Lord. The grief of heart flows over by itself into hot tears. Grieving, repentant David testified that he watered his bed the whole night with his tears. The prophet Joel admonished fallen Israel, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart." Joel 3, 12b, 13a. If the heart is rent, deep sighs, grievous tears also follow. Mary Magdalena bathed the feet of the Lord with her tears.

And if the tears do not always flow as freely as they did with David, with Mary Magdalena, with Peter, if a disciple who has denied his Lord comes to

repentance and recognizes his serious, deep fall, it will also be to some extent known and clear by his deportment, by his conduct, by his earnestness in behavior and speech that big things move him inwardly. And when men are not looking at him he will call upon God in the stillness, in the solitude which he seeks out with Peter.

The tears of Peter reflect themselves also in the daily contrition and repentance of the upright Christian. They step daily before their God and speak out of a shaken heart, if they have not sinned to death, but stumbled and swerved out of weakness, "Forgive me, Lord, when my conscience says the world, devil, and sin have torn me from you. I am sorry for them. I come to you again; here is my hand, you are mine, and I am yours."

Not only does remembering sin, sorrow, and grief belong to true repentance, but above all remembering the grace of the Lord and a happy reliance upon his mercy. These two parts make up repentance: contrition and faith. Because Peter wept so, he also clung in spirit to the friendly glance of the Lord. This glance had bored so deeply into his soul that he could not again forget it. He also certainly remembered the word of Jesus, when he said to him, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Lk 22:32. He recognized that the Lord had kept his promise, had prayed for him during his denial, had remembered his fallen disciple in the midst of his own bitter suffering, looked graciously at him, and called him to repentance. He must say, "The Lord is much concerned, that I do not go completely astray, that my faith does not fail forever, that my soul will be saved." And in that manner he had certainly expected the mercy and grace of his Savior with confidence and seized the absolution in faith which the friendly glance of Jesus already had offered him in advance. Three days later he ran with John to the open grave of the Lord, light of heart, of a good conscience to thank him for the forgiveness of which he was certain in that hour of the night.

The repentance, the faith of Peter lets itself also be recognized in that sign of genuineness: love to the Lord. In the bitter tears of repentance hot tears of love are also mixed, such tears with which Mary Magdalena wet the feet of the Lord. Soon afterwards he swore his love to the Lord. That is true repentance, true faith. The repentant sinner, who is touched by the glance, by the spirit of the Lord remembers the grace of the Lord, the gracious promise, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden! Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," is confident in the intercession of Jesus which is likewise promised to him as it was to Peter, takes comfort in the bitter suffering and death of Christ, and by this dries his bitter tears. With such faith there awakens at the same time a new, ardent love to him who also in love remembers him. Whoever lives in daily repentance, whoever has faith daily lays hold of Christ's blood and merit and soothes therewith his conscience which is disturbed with daily sin. Whenever a Christian steps out of his closet of prayer he is as certain of the absolution of his God as Peter was after he stopped weeping.

The shining example of Peter's repentance is for that reason also highly comforting to us poor, weak followers of the apostle because from it we perceive that also incomplete, yes, repentance only begun is true repentance. Even the great repentance of Peter was not complete. He did not yet dare to make amends for his sin before the servants, to go back into the high priest's palace and openly confess to those before whom he had denied, "I have sinned. I am his disciple and also will remain one."

We therefore will not despair when we painfully prove to ourselves the weakness and frailty of our repentance, when we grieve over the fact that our sins trouble us so little, when we miss the ardor of faith and love. Even when repentance is true and upright, it is for that reason not yet complete.

Yet the spark which the Lord has kindled in our heart will continue to glow, and in the future increase. Under the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, repentance continues, grows steady, becomes constantly deeper, more earnest, ardent, strong. A few weeks after his lamentable fall we see Peter standing before the Sanhedrin. There he confessed his Lord Jesus with a joyful courage and rebuked the sins of the Jews who hanged the Prince of Life on the tree and killed him. Finally, he also glorified his Lord with a martyr's death. He who had denied the Lord will and certainly must afterwards show the uprightness of his repentance by henceforth without shyness confessing Christ before men.

And that is the final comfort which we draw from our text: not the manner and way, the quality, the earnestness, the depth of our repentance, not our atoning makes us pure and holy. It was not those bitter tears of repentance which washed Peter clean from his stain. The suffering, dying Redeemer set the fallen disciple on his feet, received and justified him again. Only the blood of Jesus Christ makes us clean from sin. Only the grace of Jesus Christ makes the repentant sinner righteous and holy. May the Lord preserve us in his grace, for then are we helped. Amen.

11th SERMON

Matthew 26:59-68; 27:1; Mark 14:55-65; 15:1; Luke 22:63-71.

We sing in our Lenten hymn, "O dearest Jesus, what law hast thou broken that such sharp sentence should on thee be spoken?" In the Lenten text before us we hear the sentence of death which the Jews pronounced upon their King, which the children of men pronounced upon the Son of God. After Christ was examined privately by the high priest and was asked about his disciples and his doctrine, he was formally put on trial. In the meanwhile the chief priests, the elders, and scribes, the members of the Sanhedrin had gathered during those night hours in the high priest's palace. Jesus was led bound before this highest court of Israel. Never in any other place on earth did such a terrible, inhuman criminal court ever convene as in that Easter Eve in judgment upon the Holy One of God. This horrible court and sentence properly hid itself under the darkness of night. And in order that this wicked, unjust sentence would be legally correct, it was, as we hear at the close of our text, repeated and confirmed at dawn. Then was fulfilled what was written of the hind which had been hunted.

Moreover, the burning hatred against Christ the Son of the Most High which animated those judges we perceive from the circumstances; against all sense of justice he who was condemned was smitten by rough fists and frightful torture before the execution of the sentence of death only at that time. White-hot, burning hatred toward Christ: that is the heart and mind of the sinful fallen world, yes, also of the pious Jews who boast of God's Law. And this hatred toward Christ does not cease until he is done away with. The world, even the pious world, the false church has always condemned Christ, Christ's way, Christianity, the true Christians to death. Christ and Christianity have no rights upon earth. If it is endured in places for a while, it is grace, yes, God's grace which for a time binds the hands and gags the mouth of men's malice. Today we want to ponder with one another this evil counsel and will of men which God's counsel and will turned to good.

MEN PRONOUNCE THE SENTENCE OF DEATH UPON THE SON OF MAN

We draw the following thoughts from our text:

- I. Christ was Sentenced Without a Good Reason,
- II. Only Because He was God's Son.
- III. They were in Dead Earnest about This Sentence.
- IV. Those who Passed Sentence upon Christ Pronounced the Death Sentence upon Themselves.
- V. In this Bloody Sentence we However Perceive God's Gracious Absolution.

I.

Christ was sentenced without just cause. Before the Sanhedrin could sentence Christ it had to produce the grounds for such a verdict. Every legal decision rests upon a proven complaint.

First of all, we hear in our text how Christ was accused. This accusation was a lie. The highest tribunal of the Jews sought false witnesses against Jesus so that they could cause his death. The Law of Moses says, "If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong, then both the men between whom the controversy is shall stand before the Lord, before the priest, and the judges which shall be in those days; and the judges shall make diligent inquisition, and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified against his brother, then shall ye do to him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother." Dt 19:16-19a. But see, the Sanhedrin which should have unmasked, rejected, and punished the false witnesses, itself came forward as false, malicious witness against Christ. Then was fulfilled what the Psalms and the prophets had often predicted, "False witnesses are rise up against me." Ps 28:12.

This false testimony betrayed itself at once as lies and slander. Every tissue of lies is absurd, against common sense. And so also here the false testimony of the many false witnesses did not agree. At last two false witnesses arose; they arose as it seems from among the judges sitting there (hence they were even judges and chief priests) and gave false witness against Christ and said, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Mk 14:58. But even this testimony did not agree. One witness contradicted the other and destroyed the force of his testimony. Had Christ said, "I can demolish the temple," that would be something else than if he had said, "I will demolish it." Only the last statement seemed to give the accusation some grounds. Christ had never said that he wanted to or could demolish the temple, but he had said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple." Nor had he spoken of another temple which he intended to build but the same temple which the Jews would destroy he would rebuild. There was a kernel of truth in the false testimony: the one witness spoke of a temple which was not made with hands. This proved that Christ had not talked of the temple at Jerusalem but of the temple of his body which the Jews would destroy but which he intended to resurrect again after three days.

The screams of the false priests and prophets, "Here is the Lord's temple! Here is the Lord's temple! This man has spoken blasphemy against the temple, the holy place!" dispensed with all grounds. The wicked judges whom Satan had blinded and hardened knowingly, maliciously turned truth into lies, white into black, good into evil. With that talk about the temple the Lord had indicated the greatest blessing which he wanted to give the human race: his death and resurrection. By this means he wanted to establish God's kingdom on earth. And the Jews defamed and slandered him as though he wanted to destroy God's temple, God's kingdom. To all of this Christ says nary a word. Even when the high priest asked him, "Answerest thou nothing? What is it which they witness against thee?" Mk 14:60 he was silent and answered nothing. This silence was clear proof of his innocence; this silence tore the whole web of lies of the Jews. Those false, foolish, nonsensical accusations deserved no answer or

refutation.

Thus the world judges Christ, Christianity, Christ's disciples to this day. Every time Christians are brought to court, every time the world openly or secretly talks about Christians they were and are false complaints and accusations, lies which are not believed even by the slanderers themselves.

The world intentionally seeks not only witnesses, but false witness against Christians. These complaints and lies contradict each other and contain the most absurd reproaches. At one time they say, "Christians are bigots, misanthropes, proud Pharisees who despise other sinners." And then, when Christians absolve repentant sinners and receive them into their fellowship, they say, "They are friends of publicans and sinners; they lower themselves to the level of the common people." The pious world, the false church cries aloud, "The Lord's temple! The Lord's temple! The Christians are robbers and destroyers of the temple!" And it is the true Christians who preach and testify of Christ who permitted the temple of his body to be destroyed and raised it again three days later; who preach and testify of Christ's death and resurrection; who faithfully confess Christ the crucified and by such witness rescue sinners from death and build up God's kingdom, the spiritual temple, who are decried as hating sectarians who entangle and destroy Christendom because they pitilessly condemn other opinions and views, antichristian lies and false doctrine and destroy the temple built by men, human greatness, wisdom, virtue, glory. Following the Lord Jesus' example we are silent in the face of such senseless accusations. We do not give the clumsy lies the honor of contesting them. That is the sin of the world: false witness against Christ.

Meanwhile the germ of all sin and malice is found also in our flesh and blood. As we turn away in horror from the clumsy sins and lies of the world, let us at the same time examine ourselves, whether we have often obeyed our evil flesh and blood and also given false testimony against Christ, against his disciples, his insignificant brethren, against our brethren, falsely accused them, picked up the first best rumor from the alley and carried it further without looking at it. In silence let us also confess our own guilt.

II.

Christ was condemned without good reason simply because he was God's Son.

When he was silent, the high priest asked him once more saying, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Mk 14:61. "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Mt 26:63. Jesus said, "Thou hast said, I am." And in the second session of the court at dawn Jesus declared once more, "If I tell you, ye will not believe." Lk 22:67. I have repeatedly told you who I am, that I am come from the Father and return to the Father, you do not believe it, you do not want to believe it. 'And if I also ask you, ye will not answer, nor let me go,' Lk 22:67, that is, if I would compel you to confess by my questions that I have not spoken or worked by my own power you will be silent; nevertheless you would not let me go even if you would have to agree that I am from above." And when they all asked him, "Art thou the Son of God?" he answered them, "Ye say that I am." Lk 22:70. Shortly before his death Jesus confirmed, yes, took his oath to the important evidence which he himself declared his whole life, "I and the Father are one. Before Abraham was, I am. I am the Son of God." He testified to all mankind through human law, document, and seal, he solemnly and unmistakably swore that he is Christ, the Son of the Highest. We thank him that he sealed our most holy faith, "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jn 6:69 with such powerful proofs. Now men cannot have a single doubt about the person of Christ. He stated under oath to his foes and slanderers, before the Sanhedrin, "I am Christ, the Son of God." After the high priest

such testimony he tore his clothes and said, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" Mt 26:65.66. They all condemned him and said, "He is guilty of death." Mt 26:66.

The Holy One of God was condemned as a blasphemer. According to Moses' Law blasphemers should die. But that was gross hypocrisy when the high priest tore his garments. The sanctimonious judges cannot deny that Christ really was he whom he claimed to be. When he asked them they had to become silent and agree to his testimony. That doubled, powerful, plain testimony, "I am God's Son," cut deeply into their heart and conscience. Yes, just because he was God's Son, because he had touched their conscience with the truth, he was condemned to death. They hated this prophet sent by God; they did not want to listen to the voice of heavenly truth; they did not want to be reprimanded. Because God's Son continually disturbed their conscience they saw no other way of getting peace than through the death sentence pronounced upon God's Son.

And this death sentence was confirmed by all the families of men. The world cannot tolerate the voice of God's Son. It suspects and feels: in a Christian sermon, in the Word of Scripture a higher power is at work; the Christ of whom the Christians speak is not an ordinary man. Yes, this Christ, the Son of God reprimands their sins and tells them the truth. That the world and the pious, upright, self-righteous of all things cannot endure. And because the truth, because God's Son testifies to their conscience they condemn Christ and all Christianity and would gladly see this disagreeable name blotted out from the earth. For that reason they brand Christ's disciples as worshippers of Jesus, idolizers, and through such hypocritical speech conceal their own blasphemy.

Yet before we become angry at the malice and devilish hypocrisy of the world let us look to ourselves and ask whether we also have not often taken from Christ, God's Son the honor we owe him. Have we not often torn our garments, become irritated over our neighbor's sins and wrong, and yet ourselves refused to obey the voice of God's Son in the Scripture and the sermon? would we not like to see many words of the divine truth, this or that unpleasant Bible passage which pricks our conscience erased from the Scriptures? Yes, we are guilty, accessories to the crime in the death of God's Son.

III.

They were in deadly earnest in passing this sentence. The Satanic hatred against Christ is revealed in the abuse by which they most unjustly confirmed the sentence. The men who held Jesus mocked him, they spit in his noble, holy face which so often filled his foes with fear and terror, that noble face which had enticed the sinner to come to him. This bright, clear mirror was befouled with spit which came like poison and gall from angry hearts. He did not hide his face from shame and spitting as the prophet predicted. What they did not dare do to the meanest criminal or an irrational animal, that they did to God's Son, the living God, the almighty Creator, and brutal abuse was added to the mockery and spitting. The servants of the high priest smote Christ's face with bare fists.

And even more painful was the impudent slander which must have affected the Lord, the Holy One; they put a blindfold over his head, then hit him and asked, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?" Mt 26:68. Because these men indeed felt that they lied concerning that sentence upon Christ, God's Son they stifle their conscience with coarse, common blasphemies and shameful deeds.

To this very day Christ looks down from the throne of glory upon the deeds of men. And the malice, the filth, the uncleanness of the world, the impudent transgressions of all divine and human laws, the insolent violation of

all divine and human rights is also mockery and spitting; they are also blows and slaps in the face of the Son of God who sits upon the throne of God. Through these Christ is blasphemed.

Christ lives and works in his Word. And it is the pious world, the false church which reviles, mocks, befools, tortures, mangles, and mutilates the Holy Scriptures, the Word of truth. Christ is honored, and loved as well as despised and reviled in his insignificant brethren on earth. At all times the "Christ-hating" world, the antichristian church has not only condemned Christ's disciples and deemed them worthy of death but has also tortured, reviled, and hit the innocent martyrs with fists as they did the Lord.

Alas, we likewise cry out and sigh,

I caused thy grief and sighing
By evil multiplying
As countless as the sands.
I caused the woes unnumbered
With which Thy soul is cumbered,
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands. (171,4)

The holy, noble countenance of Jesus, the Son of God, his image is impressed upon the soul of us Christians by Word and Sacrament. And with our unholy, fleshly thoughts, with all kinds of jokes and tomfoolery, with earthly, vulgar anxieties, with greed and avarice we defile this holy picture, this bright mirror. Many times we also cover Christ's head and blindfold his all-seeing eyes when we permit ourselves this and that which grieves his holy eyes. Therefore we must confess from the depths of our soul and say, "Kyrie eleison! Lord, have mercy upon us!"

IV.

Yet those who pronounce sentence upon Christ, God's Son, and persevere in this evil counsel and will pronounce the sentence of death upon themselves.

Because the Jews intentionally sought false witness and reviled Christ, they were condemned in their own conscience. Because their own conscience condemned them, they sentenced Christ for the second time. In so doing they wanted to silence the judge in their hearts. Christ predicted for the second time that from now on, if they would ever see him again whom they killed, they would see him, the Son of God and man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

He whom they condemned would at some future time appear as their judge and given their their due reward. The Sanhedrin, Jerusalem, the Jewish nation saw in the year 70 A. D. the power and glory of the Lord and learned his vengeance and punishment when he permitted country and people to be judged and destroyed by the Romans.

All unbelievers who condemn Christianity to death judge themselves. Even now their conscience pronounces sentence. And how they will tremble and be alarmed when they will see the Son of God come in human form in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory, when they must appear before the judgment throne of the man whom they so shamefully condemned on earth! Then he will make all his foes his footstool. Then he will pronounce the sentence of death upon them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angel!" Mt 25:41. Then these condemned will be covered with insult and shame and be tortured forever in hell. Then they will be repaid to the last penny what they did to Christ, the Son of the Beloved.

V.

However, we who repentantly, beseechingly, imploringly look in faith

and trust to the crucified Christ, we perceive in the sentence of death which was pronounced upon him God's gracious absolution. We confess our sins to him, judge ourselves, call ourselves guilty of having so often denied him honor and obedience, abused his Word and commands, injured him in our brethren, grieved and insulted his holy eyes with vile lusts and thoughts. Yet we fasten our eyes of faith upon the innocent, patient Lamb of God who stands silent and dumb before his judges. Behold, he is the Lamb of God who carries away the sins of the world! Patiently he lets himself be accused, sentenced, condemned. He did not hide his face from shame and spitting. He gave his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Thus he atoned for our sins and transgressions.

In the sentence of death which was pronounced upon him we now hear God's absolution. Who can accuse God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who will condemn? It is Christ who died, who was unjustly sentenced to death and died on the cross and then rose again and sits at the right hand of God and took our place. Without cause and reason he is accused, indicted, reviled, and remained silent in the face of all this. So now the law and the accuser, Satan, must be silent even though he has found reason enough to accuse us. In and with that unjust sentence which he passed upon Christ through the Jews his claim on the guilty is canceled. Through the insult, spitting, pains, torture which Christ endured honor, pleasure, joy, salvation in kingdom of heaven has been won for us. He is and was truly the Son of the living God: all the guilt of men has been atoned. He is truly the Son of man, the Brother, Suretor, and Substitute: through him we are freed from eternal judgment. We thank him for his innocent, bitter suffering and death and we also want to prove our thanks by willingly suffering wrong, by curbing ourselves when wicked tongues cut and destroy our gentleness and our name. We will swear allegiance to this Son of God and man, our Redeemer until death. When he will return in the clouds of heaven he will prove to us that he has truly redeemed us from death, judgment, and damnation. Amen.

12th SERMON

Matthew 27:2-10.

Jesus was led bound to the high priest Annas and from Annas to Caiaphas and finally still bound to the governor Pontius Pilate. The Jews delivered their King and Messiah to the heathen. The Roman judge should confirm the Sanhedrin's sentence of death. While the holy evangelists follow Christ's trial step by step, they at the same time point, as from a distance, to certain persons who had no part in the trial, yet who belonged to those who helped to put Christ to death. What happened to Peter and Judas in that night and morning when Christ was sentenced is described in detail in the Gospels and the description of this person affair is intertwined in the report of the public proceedings. Peter and Judas, two the the Twelve, assisted in their way in having Christ put to death.

It is not only the world, the Jewish and heathen world, which pronounces the sentence of death upon Christ, the Son of God. Even we, even our sins, the sins of the disciples are the cause of his death. We also have caused him labor by our sins and wearied him with our iniquities. That we should never forget when we hear of the wicked tricks and intrigues which the godless, hostile world weaves against Christ. Peter and Judas, the two disci-

ples of Jesus, show us Christians, as it were, our place in the Lenten story. They, as though they were our substitutes from among the circle of the disciples, there joined in the plots and actions. The whole world in all its stations and parties have delivered Christ to death. And Christ has born the sins of the whole world, also the sins of his disciples, our sins. There is complete forgiveness in him. If with Peter we arise from our fall and amid tears confess to him how we have sinned against him, we will experience the power of Christ's death in our conscience. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us as well from the sin of denial. Anyone who comes to him, the Redeemer of the world even though he were a traitor will not be cast out.

But woe to them who reject, despise, deny, and betray Christ the Crucified, and the blood of the Redeemer! Woe to the world because it does not believe the great sermon of the Crucified and Resurrected One! Woe above all to the Judases, the disciples who have betrayed the Lord of glory, and then turned their back to the grace of the Savior! Our text for this evening clearly pictures the fearful end of Judas as a frightening example. At all times and places Judases have crept into the circle of disciples. Many Judases, known Judases forsake the Church and go over to the hostile world. Very many Judases, disguises Judases, concealed hypocrites take their place in the church.

We have already dealt with the horribleness of the sin of Judas, the betrayal. Those who are not frightened away from such sin and malice might be frightened at the fearful end of Judas. Let us all be warned to watch and pray that we do not fall into temptation! Assuredly Satan seeks to catch us as well in the net by which he led Judas to hell. We say,

GOD PRESERVE US FROM THE TERRIBLE END OF JUDAS!

I. From Judas' Repentance!

II. From Judas' Reward!

I.

Our today's text reports Judas' repentance. When Judas who had betrayed him saw that Jesus was condemned to death and was led bound from Caiaphas to Pilate; when he perceived the serious turn this affair would take which he himself had helped to plot, he was filled with remorse. He had constantly hoped that just as he had done in the past Christ the Lord, whose omnipotence had so often bound the hands of his foes, would suddenly tear his bonds before the Sanhedrin, pass through the ranks of frightened judges as a conqueror, and avoid any more plots on their part. However, this expectation was not fulfilled. Christ was the rather bound, mocked, beaten, wounded, and led from one executioner to the next. The Son of man must indeed go as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed. Suddenly Judas recognized his serious sin. He really was convinced, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," v.4. When the innocent, tormented Lamb of God was led away before his eyes to Pilate's judgment hall, the scales, as it were, fell from his eyes, "Alas! I have betrayed this innocent Lamb. I have given him into the hand of the executioner." Ah, that was a serious crime. "I have betrayed the innocent blood." Judas also perceived that Christ was innocent in his dealings with him. Jesus had earnestly and faithfully warned him. Yet he had wilfully cast aside all these warning. He had to say to himself, "Yes, Jesus is righteous, I am the guilty one."

Regret, bitter regret over the wrong done was added to the knowledge of sin. He regretted it. The sight of the innocent, bound Christ condemned to death, his former friend and Master, cut deep into his heart and conscience. Anxiety and terror filled his soul. "Alas! If only I had not consented to that evil counsel! If only I were back at the supper table! If only I had given up

that murderous scheme in Gethsemane! Woe is me that I cannot turn time back since that sin still lies at my door!" Such thoughts would have tormented him. And his regret he proves by the knowledge of his guilt. Frankly he confessed to the chief priests, his comrades in sin, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." V.4.

Since he returned the 30 pieces of silver, he wanted to cancel his part in that contract of blood. He called off the agreement with his friends; yes, he finally threw the 30 pieces of silver, the blood money away to get rid of it. He had become nauseated with it. Thus his regret was noticeable also in his works.

The same thing has happened to many sinners. When the plans and desires of godless men miscarry, then they experience a sort of "gallows-repentance;" they become angry with and hate themselves and condemn their folly.

But above all, former disciples of Jesus who betray and surrender the Lord of glory for the sake of money or earthly advantages and pleasures and who then in an evil hour come to know what an evil exchange they have consented to likewise often go through the pains and torments of such a "Judas-remorse" on their way to hell. When their vain hopes come to naught they all at once recognize, "Alas, what evil we have done in letting go of the righteous Jesus and God's Word! Yes, we are guilty; we have denied and betrayed the known truth. Jesus is innocent. He admonished and warned us plenty of times. We have stifled and killed our good conscience."

And such knowledge awakens painful grief and sorrow. They actually regret their unfaithfulness. They yearn for those old days when Jesus their Lord and Master was their delight and joy. "Alas, paradise is lost! Honor is lost! Innocence is lost! Lost forever and ever! The crown has been taken from our heads!" So they think; that vexes them

And money and goods, the delights and baubles of the world through which they let themselves be corrupted and deceived now disgust their soul. The sin which once was his greatest delight now tastes so bitter. Job says of such people, "They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they have no helper. They came upon me as a wide breaking in of waters; in the desolation they rolled themselves upon me." Job 30:13,14.

They also renounce the friendship of their old friends, their companions in robbery and murder, their tempters, confess their sins, and say, "We want to have nothing more to do with you." Very often these rebellious people behave most piously. Their remorse is not merely a play of words. Their complaint, their cries of woe come from a broken heart.

Yes, it is true remorse. The law had carried on its work in Judas as in Peter. And yet we say, "God preserve us from the remorse of Judas!" For it was a remorse without faith. Peter believed and sought absolution. Judas refused to believe. Judas believed Satan more than God. Satan frightened Judas with the sin to which he had seduced him. Satan reproached him with the innocent blood which he had betrayed. Satan said to Judas, "This blood clings to your fingers, weighs heavily upon your conscience. You cannot cleanse yourself from this stain nor is it possible to shake off this burden. Once and for all times the brand, the mark of Cain the fratricide, of Christ's murderer, a traitor is stamped upon your forehead."

And the devil taught the same speech to his comrades and servants, the chief priests. They gave Judas the devil's absolution, "What is that to us? see thou to that." Mt 27:4. "His blood be on us, and our children." Mt 27:25. "We will answer for our part in Christ's murder. You just carry your share! You, and you alone have betrayed him. Why did not accept our pieces of silver? Why did you open to us the gates of that peaceful garden? Why did you kiss your Master? You did it. See thou to that!"

And so behold! Judas who at first obeyed the voice of Satan and the

chief priests, now also believes these same wicked companions, these murderers and liars after the crime, after he regretted his evil deed. He believed Satan the father of liars; he believed the chief priests, these priests of Satan. He believed the thought, "Yes, the guilt, the chief guilt lies upon me. And my sin is greater than can be forgiven." He indeed recalled the Gospel which his former Master had preached, the absolution which he had pronounced upon repentant publicans and sinners, fornicators and adulterers. He indeed remembers how Jesus had followed his soul with his faithfulness and grace till the very end, to the very last hiding place. He had just seen the Lamb of God who was now bound, who, as he could know from his former talks, carried the sins of the world. But he cast these thoughts from his mind and clung firmly to those thoughts which the devil gave him, "You are lost! There is grace for all sinners but not for a traitor." He believed the preaching of Satan; he turned his back to Christ, the Redeemer and as unhappy Ahithophel his prototype in the Old Testament he went out and hanged himself. That is the remorse of Judas, remorse without faith. That is the devil's repentance.

The devil also believes and trembles. That is the way which Satan leads souls to eternity. First he seduces men into sin; he seduces even Christians to greed, debauchery, and the lust of the world. Afterwards when he has succeeded he ridicules his wretched victims and derides and accuses them for obeying him and hurls them into despair. First he makes the sin small and insignificant. What are 30 pieces of silver? Afterwards he magnifies the sin and turns the 30 pieces of silver into 10,000 pounds, a sum beyond repayment. At first he dazzles the credulous with God's mercy with pardons the sinners weakness and is completely silent about God's holiness which is displeased with a godless life. Afterwards he preaches to sinners solely and alone of God's revengeful holiness and destroys faith in the grace of God.

And woe! So many Judases, so many apostates who for the sake of the temporal pleasure of sin have forsaken and betrayed the Lord, now even after the sinful deed, after the fall continue to believe and follow the devil. They listen only and alone to the voice of their frightened conscience which completely condemns them. They believe their wicked friends who have deceived them, their tempters who refuse to take the guilt of the misled upon themselves, "See thou to that! Why have you followed us?" From afar they indeed see Jesus, the Crucified, the innocent Lamb of God who died for the sins of all. Yes, they recall the blessed times of the past when they saw and tasted the goodness of the Lord. They hear the voice of the Gospel, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. No sin is so great that it cannot be forgiven." That they know, that they hear anew. But woe! Their soul has already sunk too deeply into the dark thoughts of death. They close their eyes to the friendly light of the Gospel of Christ. The conscience cries unceasingly, "You are lost! You have frittered away your grace!" And Satan's gospel obtains the victory. These wretched people either hurl themselves violently into outer darkness as Judas and Ahithophel did, or apathetically they go their own way farther and farther from the face of Jesus Christ into the night of despair until the eternal night suddenly closes upon them.

II.

May God preserve us from Judas' remorse and from Judas' reward which follows it! Judas hanged himself; he departed this life by means of this terrible crime and, as Peter testified to the eleven after the Lord's ascension, went to his own place, the place which was his due, which he himself had chosen, into the kingdom prepared for the devil and his angels. He gambled away not only his bishopric, his apostleship according to the word of prophecy, "And his bishopric let another take!" Acts 1:20. He, he had forever forfeited his soul and salvation. His frightful death shows that he died under God's wrath. After he hanged himself he burst asunder in the midst and all his bowels gushed out.

In this way the truthful righteous God who does not let himself and his grace be mocked branded this traitor and former disciple.

Other traitors, traitors and blasphemers of the grace and truth of God's only begotten Son died just as miserably as did Judas and were cursed and struck down with shame and disgrace by God's own hand. Arius, the arch-heretic who threw the old Christian Church into confusion with his lies and as the first of all Christian preachers blasphemed Christ, God's Son publicly from the chancel, received the same reward which Judas did, and when upon the emperor's command was to be reinstated into his bishopric without having repented died suddenly and spilled his bowels. God preserve us from the horrible reward which the devil pays out to the apostate and impenitent in hell!

Judas' example is a memorial to God's holiness. God does not let himself be mocked. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Heb 10:26,27. Judas' repentance is a memorial to God's righteousness. The sinners and godless do not remain in the judgment. The Lord does not spare even the pious who have fallen from the faith into sin and persevere in it. He is no respecter of persons. That a person for a time believed and was God's friend does not save him. Ezekiel says, "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression. . . . Neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth." Ezek 33:12. The example of Judas is proof of God's might and power. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Mt 10:28. Alas, how many judases have traveled this way and gone to their place!

Ah, greed is a root of all evil which some have coveted after and have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. Love not the world! The world passeth away and the lusts thereof. Only he who does the will of God abides forever. Guard yourself against greed! Beware of unrighteous mammon! Unrighteous gain is a "Judas-reward" which pursues one into hell. The tormenting thought, "For a paltry sum you have sold your Savior and salvation and purchased hell as your eternal inheritance," is a worm which will not die and a fire which will not be quenched.

In hell the traitors will receive their reward. But even upon earth the curse which follows Judases leaves deep traces. Even in death Judas earned a reward upon earth. He had earned a field with his unrighteous reward. That is what Peter says in the Book of Acts. The 30 pieces which in weariness and despair he had cast into the temple after the chief priests refused to accept them were used by them to purchase a field in which from that time on the strangers who died in Jerusalem during the festival were to be buried. That was a hypocritical deed. They had paid Judas the blood money from the temple treasury. Now after it had done its job it should not return to God's treasury. But in this hypocrisy there also was mingled a horror over the abomination of betrayal. Even these foes with whose help the betrayal took place despise a traitor. The infamy connected with the betrayal is, as it were, perpetuated through God's decree. Outside the city a potter's field was purchased for the blood money, and henceforth strangers were buried there. And thus Judas' horrible betrayal remained in the memory of the later generations, inhabitants of Jerusalem and strangers. The name of the cemetery, "Field of blood," reminded all those born later on of the fateful 30 pieces of silver which cost Christ, the King of the Jews his life.

And not only were the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the pilgrims who visited Jerusalem reminded of that monstrous crime of Judas by the name of the

cemetery. This crime and its frightful results is according to God's counsel and will perpetuated in the Scriptures. In the Lenten story a monument such as he deserved is erected to Judas who hanged himself. Why, this frightful vision was held before the eyes of even God's people of Old Testament times. Even the prophets had foretold Judas' sin and end. Jeremiah in purchasing a field with cash shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem indicated the judgment which threatened the traitorous Jews. The prophet Zechariah says that Christ the Shepherd of Israel would be sold by the Jews, especially by Judas, for 30 pieces of silver and that from this money a potter's field would be bought. This field of blood and the prophecy of the Old Testament of this field and the Gospel report of the literal fulfilment of this prophecy on Good Friday is, as it were, the reward which Judas deserved and earned. His sin and the curse of his sin, his end is presented to all generations and also to Christians who search in the Scriptures as a mighty memorial of God's earnestness. When we read and hear this story we indeed cross ourselves and say, "God preserve us from the end, from the reward of Judas!"

Yet other memorials of God's wrath which have been visited upon traitors are noted in the history of the world and the Church. Not only have the real murderers of Christ, the Jews been overtaken by the final wrath and their house left desolate. Sad to say, entire Christian families have been addicted to the "Judas-sin" and before the whole world Judas' reward was also pain them. The flourishing church of the East gradually became worldly and heathenish and denied the faith, and then God sent the Turks who turned the old prosperous provinces of the orient into cemeteries and fields of blood, into waste land. In Medieval times the Christian Church of Europe fell from Christ to the pope who also traded and bartered with pieces of silver and sold heaven for silver. However the pope, the antichrist was also appointed to be punished in these countries. The whole Christian Church which was subject to him had become a decaying carcass. And alas, in those countries where for 200 years the Lutheran Church one flourished, the "Judas-betrayal", unfaithfulness has also gained ground. For the sake of earthly advantage and profit Christ is sold to the state and the spirit of the times. And so there as well the garden of God lies troubled and dead like a field strewn with dead bodies.

What earnest, fearful warnings for us that we do not covet the unrighteous reward! Oh that we may keep our Zion, our souls pure and free from unrighteousness, from greed and a worldly mind and life, which is to gain the upper hand in the last times! Oh that we may not deny, betray, and sell the grace and truth which is revealed and given to us! Oh that such a "Judas-monument" may not be erected to our name, to our congregation, to our Church! Whatever sins we have committed against the Lord, even the greed and love of the world whereby we have denied faith and love, those let us penitently confess, wash ourselves in the innocent blood of Christ, God's Son, and for the sake of the blood of Jesus Christ because we are so dearly bought, and for the sake of our soul's salvation guard ourselves against the wicked ruinous ways of Judas! May God strengthen and preserve us in the faith and some day give us our eternal heavenly inheritance for the sake of the blood of Christ! Amen.

13th SERMON

Matthew 27:2.11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-32.

At night after the institution of the Lord's Supper began the great Passion of the Lord. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had fought out the bitter bloody battle against the invisible foes, death, the devil, sin. Then followed the horrible night in which the sentence of death was pronounced upon him. We have dealt with the most frightful works of darkness which during that night were perpetrated upon the Holy One. Judas had betrayed his Lord and Master and at the end of the same night reaped the reward of unrighteousness. The people of Israel, the Sanhedrin had condemned its Messiah, the Son of the Beloved to death.

We now accompany the Lord further on his way of sorrow and today and in the succeeding Lenten meditations picture to ourselves the events on the morning of Good Friday. "And it was early" we read in our text, when the multitude of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, and the scribes bound Jesus anew and led him from Caiaphas to the tribunal of the Romans and handed him over to the governor, Pontius Pilate. The hind which was hunted in the past was driven from one tormentor to the other; the innocent Lamb was led from one hangman to the other. After the Sanhedrin had in the early morning hours confirmed the sentence of death in its second meeting, he was immediately early that morning handed over to the worldly court by the spiritual court.

The Jews hurried. Before the Passover festival, before they ate the Passover lamb, that hated and feared Messiah should be executed. The children of the world, the children of wickedness are wiser and more determined, quicker and more energetic than the children of light. They do not rest until they have carried out their evil counsel.

The evil counsel and will of the Jews came from the devil. The devil rejoiced that finally he had caught the hated Seed of the woman who had been born from the condemned human race and had begun to destroy his work upon this accursed earth. And therefore he hastened his prey to his death. The worldly judge who was the highest court and decided cases involving life and death was to confirm the sentence of death passed by Satan and his synagogue. The portion of the holy Lenten story to which we devote our attention in the future explains the great, earnest words of our confession, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

We see Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of heaven and earth before the tribunal of the world. It was the most insolent, unlawful trial which had ever been held on earth. It has been entered into the annals of Roman history and the New Testament. Even today the whole world speaks of this amazing trial. Yes, an amazing trial! It results in the justification and glorification of him who was condemned in an unjust way and the curse, the damnation of the unjust accusers and judge.

The deeds of this trial are not yet ended. Christ foretold to his disciples that they would also be led before kings and princes. The Church of Christ, the religion of Christ ever since it has been upon earth is in a continual struggle at law with the world. Just as the world decided against Christ, so it decides against Christians and Christianity. But this action serves to glorify those condemned. On Judgment Day the last word in this lawsuit will be spoken. Then Christ with his Church will triumph. Today we ponder only the beginning of the trial in Pilate's judgment hall. But in this beginning the whole character, the further course, and the very end of this trial is already indicated. We therefore give this Lenten meditation this title:

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY BEFORE THE TRIBUNAL OF THE WORLD

We picture to ourselves,

- I. The Judge,
- II. The Accusers,
- III. The Accusation,
- IV. The Defence,
- V. The Verdict of God.

I.

The judge before whom Christ was arraigned was the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. At one time the glory and pride of the Romans was their power -- they were lord of the world; so was also their Roman justice and law which became a part of the code of laws of the later nations. In the behavior of Pontius Pilate we recognize the lord and judge. As lord and master he showed his eminence in condescending to meet them halfway; contrary to his usual custom he went out of the judgment hall to the Jews, since they themselves hesitated to enter his palace. He got ready to judge according to the law and justice.

He began the trial with the words, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" He wanted to examine the case more closely. He did not let the worthless, invalid accusation, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee" stand. With a bit of anger and bitterness he replied, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." And when the Jews then presented another accusation which had more substance, "He has made himself king, he is an insurrectionist and a rebel," he simply did not believe their assertions and began a formal examination.

However, the virtue and justice of this heathen had its limits. We know from world history; as almost all Roman governors, Pontius Pilate was a selfish greedy ruler. Favor and money were of greater importance than Roman justice and law. We also know from the Scriptures: Pilate was an inhuman, blood-thirsty tyrant. Without valid reasons he once caused the blood of the Galileans who were sacrificing in the temple to flow in a veritable blood bath. With such a disposition he naturally did not care about God and religion though he could have found the living God and the true religion in Palestine just as easily as other Roman officials, officers, and tax collectors. He ridicules the Jewish law, "Judge him according to your law." At once we can expect that the Holy One of God would not receive a fair trial from this corrupt, godless judge. It was against justice and fairplay that Pilate without further ado honored the accusation of the Jews and began the examination, because he knew from the start that the Jews had surrendered Christ out of envy.

The governor, Pontius Pilate, is a faithful picture of the rulers and judges of this world. Pious, God-fearing rulers and judges are always the exception to the rule, are like roses among the thorns. Great lords have indeed a sort of flexibility and politeness, are sometimes pleased with seeming humility and affability toward subjects and the common people. They fulfil the letter of the law to a certain degree and preserve for the most part at least the appearance of justice. But greed, avarice, ambition has corroded the administration of justice and especially public life just as universally today as in the days of the Caesars. And such a government can be maintained only by harshness, oppression, despotism. It has never been different in the world and it never will be different. To be sure, the rulers and judges of the world have no special interest in condemning Christ and the Church of Christ. Pilate was very much put out and annoyed that that trial came to him. Later on when the persecutions of the Christians had begun the Roman emperors issued a proclamation against

tracking down Christians. But when once this disagreeable, annoying question is presented to the government it is a rarity if the Christian religion receives justice and clemency. We dare not be surprised at that. For the rulers and judges serve sin, hate therefore the good, and there is no fear of God in them. They merely smile at and ridicule the law and customs of God's people.

Yet Pontius Pilate is not only a picture of the might and the judges of the world but in him, in his disposition, in his attitude is especially mirrored the ways of the world. He was a worldling of the first water. A behavior outwardly proper, a certain geniality and friendliness, a certain but by all means limited truthfulness, fairness, justice but in spite of all that a love of darkness, sin, greed, lust, a complete lack of true love toward men and a true love and fear of God! Those are the traits of the men of this world who are the spokesmen upon earth and set the pattern; how can one expect that such people will be favorably disposed toward Christianity when it comes to their notice?

II.

Yet much worse than the judge is the plaintiff. We know these faithless cunning accusers, the Jews, and particularly the rulers of the Jews from the first trial in the palace of Caiaphas, where they had acted the part of the judge. Their malice and hypocrisy comes to view in this new trial as well. They did not enter the judgment hall, so that they would not become defiled but might eat the Passover. They thought they would defile themselves if they would enter a house in which the death sentence would be passed, the house of an uncircumcised. This was a self-made law of purification, which surpassed the law of purification which Moses had commanded. They wanted to eat the Passover at purification with clean hands, and yet they were on the point of besmirching their hands, their conscience with blood and murder. That was satanic blindness.

Outright lies followed hypocrisy. They said to the governor, "If he were not a malefactor we would not have given him up to thee." They knew very well that Jesus was not a malefactor, a criminal worthy of death, either according to the meaning of the Jews or the heathen. They knew that he had not spoken or done a thing against the emperor and that it was not blasphemy when he called himself the Son of the living God. But nothing else was possible. They must adorn their satanic work and purpose, the murder of Christ, with devilish lies and hypocrisy if it was to have some sort of sacred halo in the eyes of the world. They were hardened liars and hypocrites. Their heart was filled with satanic hatred against the Holy Ghost.

They dared not judge Christ according to their law, for they did not have the power of life and death. They said to Pilate, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." This was their firm resolution, Jesus must die. Their bitterness against Christ outweighed their bitterness against the Romans and the foreign rule of the heathen. Just so they could kill Christ, the glory of Israel, they recognized the hated Roman government, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," they felt their bondage; they knew that this was the punishment for their sins and stubbornness.

But in their blindness and hardness they burned with desire to fill up the measure of their sins. "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." They knew that the prophecy that the scepter would not be taken from the Jews until Shiloh would come but that at the time of Christ the scepter would have departed from Judah. Now the scepter, the government was taken from the Jews. That was one proof for the fact that time was fulfilled. But they forcibly closed their eyes to the bright noonday sun. The promised Messiah who had appeared must die and even if it should mean their eternal death.

This generation of accusers of the holy God burning in hatred toward Christ has not died out on this earth. At all times the Church of Christ has two foes at her side: the heathen, the unbelieving world and the false church, the kin and gang of liars and hypocrites. That tribe of Jewish chief priests has arisen in the pope and his court. The soul of the papal religion is hatred and murder of Christ concealed by hypocritical customs and ceremonies and by impudent lies which those hypocrites themselves do not believe. They have not accepted the love of the truth and have hardened themselves in their opposition against the plain truth and in their shame and malice. Therefore God has sent them strong delusions.

And from of old it has been the custom and practise of the antichristian church to surrender true Christians who confess the Lord Christ to the temporal government and kill them with its sword. What is more, they made a virtue out of a necessity. The Jews felt themselves hindered because they dared not kill anyone. This antichristian band however even boasted of their virtue, that they themselves would not shed blood with their own hand. And wherever Christians are dispossessed by the government for the sake of confessing Christ, even in modern times, there were as a rule the spiritual leaders, the heads of the church, yes, the false, apostate church which has brought the suit. And the false Christians, the hypocrites and liars among the Christians are the ones above all who knowingly or unknowingly accuse the name of Christ in the eyes of the world, who cause the world to hate and despise the Christian religion.

III.

And now what is the accusation? It reads as follows: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king." Lk 23:2. The accusation deals with rebellion and insurrection. It could have a certain degree of fact because at that time a few rebels had appeared under the pretence that they were Israel's messiahs and saviors and had misled great numbers of Jews. It was indeed the truth that Christ had said, "I am a King, I am the Messiah." He had come for the very purpose of establishing the kingdom of Israel, to redeem his people from the power of darkness, to save all the lost. But he wanted to deliver, redeem, save the souls of men. His kingdom was a kingdom of peace in which poor, sorrowing publicans and sinners could find rest for their souls. In this kingdom the law that they serve each other was to apply.

So little was his kingdom founded upon discord, insurrection, strife, and dissension. Christ left the worldly government untouched, himself paid the emperor's tribute, and commanded his friends and foes to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. The past night he had repulsed Peter who had seized a sword. That accusation therefore was false testimony which stamped Christ as a blasphemer. What the rulers of the Jews foisted upon Christ was their own sins. Only too gladly would they have deserted Caesar and would certainly have saved their Messiah from death and become his most enthusiastic followers had he actually set himself up for a rebel. And to charge one's foes with the crimes which one is brooding over himself is the most hateful and satanic way of accusing and slandering someone.

This accusation has not ceased to sound ever since the name of Jesus Christ has been known and confessed upon earth. Already at the time of the apostles and soon thereafter the disciples of Jesus were decried as malefactors, i.e., as criminals against the state and emperor, and as such were accused and judged because they worshiped Christ and him alone as their God and King and not the emperor; but in the other obligations they paid the tax to the emperor and prayed for all in authority. Later under the same claim the antichristian church delivered the innocent whom it called heretics as rebels to the government whilst

in reality there was and is no more wicked rebel than the pope. And even in our days in so-called Christian countries the true Christian religion is regarded askance by so-called Christian officials or even oppressed and shown ill will. And the hypocrites and liars, the false brethren and teachers who are faithful neither to God nor man are the very ones who nourish this evil reputation and persuade the world that their false religion is friendly to men, whilst the true Christian religion is a religion odious, dark, and dangerous to men.

The world believes that and views the Christian with a suspicious eye even when no scandalmongers are near. We can never make the unbelieving world change its mind. Even if we assure and prove to it that we merely seek our own salvation and mean well to the world, that we preach peace and love, that from our hearts we are subject to all worldly laws and government, parents and officials: we will never talk the world out of what it has once gotten into its head, that the Christians are criminals, disturbers of the peace, mischief-makers who do not permit others their innocent pleasures and do not let everyone believe as he likes.

IV.

And what is the best defense against such base, untrue accusations? How did Christ defend himself against his accusers before Pilate's judgment seat? He did not answer. He was silent. That was a splendid, striking proof of his innocence. Those accusation were not worth refutation. It was a public lie. Every Jew knew what Christ had taught and done.

Jesus' silence was proof of his royal majesty. He was above such absurd accusations. They did not disturb him. Silently, unafraid he stood before the judge and looked his accusers right in the eye. Even the governor was amazed at his silent majesty.

Yet his silence was at the same time patience. He again declared even on this new degree of suffering his readiness and willingness to suffer and die for sinners. It would not have taken the legions of angels. With the power of his voice he could have so overawed or inspired the bystanders and the Roman judge that he could have been freed from his bonds. He wanted to suffer.

Silence is a good, safe weapon against the coarse, absurd accusations of liars and hypocrites. In so doing we can often prove our innocence the best possible way. And we have become a royal race, kings and priest through Christ. Therefore we also should despise and trample the slander of Satan under foot. Since it pleases our Lord and King that we should be like him through suffering, who would not gladly remain silent and suffer and for Jesus' sake let ourselves be slandered?

V.

In this drama God has a word to add. The very beginning of the trial which we are now considering causes us to recognize what God's verdict is, what God expresses. Through God's arrangement and guidance it so came about that the Jews had Christ crucified through the Romans "that," as our text notes, "the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die." Jesus had said several time that the Son of man would be lifted up and thus indicated his death on the cross, the mode used by the Romans to execute criminals. The cross was the accursed tree. This trial before Pilate terminated by Christ dying upon the cross and taking the curse of sinners upon himself and redeeming us from the curse.

In a speech which he made after Pentecost to the Jews, Christ's murderers, Peter declared, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and

foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts 2:23. In this that Jesus was delivered to the heathen God's counsel and foreknowledge was fulfilled. God's hand, God's sentence interfered in these proceedings and in an amazing way fashioned the unjust sentence into an absolution for the entire sinful world. Thus it becomes clear that Christ bore and atoned for the sins of the whole world, Jews and heathen. Yes, God directed affairs in such a way that Christ did not suffer and die secretly against the law, as Stephen was stoned as a blasphemer, but publicly and solemnly in the presence of the Romans and the Sanhedrin and the entire Jewish nation on the tree of the cross, and that this trial was then also loudly and clearly made known to the whole world so that all the world knew that all sinners are free from all sins and unrighteousness. Christ was therefore glorified before Jews and heathen as the Son of God and Redeemer of the world. And now when Christians suffer and are reviled and condemned for Christ's sake and with Christ, they know and believe that thus they fulfil God's good and gracious will, that that serves their best interests, their salvation, that that is their honor and the way to salvation. Therefore praised be our Redeemer and King, the Son of God, from now on to all eternity! Amen.

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14th SERMON

John 18:33-38.

We have pictured to ourselves the first scene from the great trial before Pilate's tribunal; the high priests came forward with the accusation that Jesus made himself king and perverted the people. The section of the holy Lenten story under consideration reports the first judicial examination of the accused on the part of the Roman governor. After Pilate heard the accusation of the Jews, he again went into the courtroom and called for Jesus and asked him and said, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" This question seemed to be completely according to the nature and course of the trial -- after the judge heard the accusation he asked the accused whether he agreed to the crime he was charged with -- but in this case it was most unfair. Pilate himself could say that this Jesus who stood bound before him, whom the rulers of the Jews had handed over to him was not a King of the Jews who was dangerous to the Roman Empire. He had probably heard something of the hope of the Jews. To be sure, the Jewish expectation of the Messiah could arouse the suspicions of the Roman judge and governor. For the Jews looked for a king and messiah who would free Israel from the power of the heathen and establish a worldly kingdom. But it was clear that this Jesus of Nazareth whose death the Jews demanded was not that eagerly expected King and Messiah of the Jews. Jesus therefore simply turned the question back with the words, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" Pilate certainly had not come upon this thought that this Jesus should be the King and Messiah of the Jews by himself -- truly did not look like one -- but he had snatched up the conversation of the Jews. However, it was not proper for a Roman judge to let himself be moved in his decision by the talk of the people.

After that reproof Pilate dropped this theme with the words, "Am I a Jew?" meaning to say, "How can I by myself know something of the law, religion, and hope of the Jews?" and simply wanted Jesus to account for "what he had done," what evil he had done; for his people and the chief priests would not have

delivered him up without absolutely no cause whatsoever. The great authority of the Jewish high priest struck his eye, even though he saw through their evil intentions. Pilate was not judging correctly to suppose that the rulers of the Jews must be right at least in some degree and Jesus wrong. Respect of persons dare not be placed in the scales in matters of judgment. And first Jesus vindicates himself from the charge and suspicion as though his teachings were in any way dangerous to the Roman Empire. "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." That is a short, brilliant defence of the Christian religion over against the false accusations and reports which circulated among the Jews and heathen, unbelievers and hypocrites.

Whilst Jesus defends his kingdom against the reproach that it was concerned with the kingdoms of this world, he admitted that he has a kingdom, that he also has servants in this kingdom, that he is a King, only that his kingdom is not of this world but has an entirely different origin. Because of the Lord's reply Pilate wanted to hear more of the kingdom of this amazing King. Not so much as a judge but as a man and a heathen he asked, "Art thou a king then?" Thereupon Jesus gave him the well-known, wonderful testimony, "Thou sayest that I am a king." to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." This was not so much a vindication of his doctrine and cause as a confession of the truth which he made before Pilate, the heathen, the substitute of the ignorant heathen, hoping to arouse the conscience of this heathen. Pilate's reply, "What is truth?" and the verdict of innocence which he then rendered outside to the Jews, "I find no fault in him at all," proved that that testimony to the truth had made an impression.

This in brief is the course of this private examination within the courthouse. It was a confidential talk between Jesus and Pilate, judge and heathen. However, God intentionally so guided affairs that this conversation became known and the Holy Spirit wrote it into the New Testament, so that all who hear and read it might rejoice in Jesus' wonderful testimony. The Apostle Paul praised the Lord Jesus Christ in his First Letter to Timothy for making a good confession before Pontius Pilate and there means particularly that confession which we hear in our present Lenten text from the mouth of Jesus. This testimony of Jesus was a brilliant vindication of his cause and an excellent confession of the truth before the world.

All of us who through God's grace are called into the kingdom of Jesus Christ have the duty and calling likewise to vindicate and declare the cause of Jesus, our most holy faith before the ignorant, unbelieving world. With the words he uttered in Pilate's courthouse, Christ gave all confessors of the truth an example. Paul therefore charges his son Timothy, "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Tim 6:13,14.

Yet this confession of the truth which Jesus gave before Pilate and which he wishes to declare to the ignorant world through us is at the same time profitable to us, Jesus disciples, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction. For we often still have false, earthly, fleshly thoughts concerning the kingdom of Jesus Christ and let ourselves be moved in our actions by such false thoughts. Therefore, let this be the subject of our meditation:

THE GOOD CONFESSION OF JESUS CHRIST BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE:
"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD."

Jesus' kingdom is

- I. A Kingdom of Truth, and therefore
- II. A Kingdom of the Cross.

I.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world. First of all, Jesus points to the origin of his kingdom, "It is not from hence," and so it is from another place; it has entered this world from above. Only then would the rulers of the world have reason to fear Jesus' kingdom, if it would have the same origin as the kingdoms of this world. This is the course of the world and its kingdoms: sometimes here, sometimes there a new city, a new nation, a new kingdom springs up. The beginnings are small and unpretentious. But suddenly it breaks forth mightily and subjugates cities and nations. Thus Rome was for centuries a small, despised city. At the time of Christ it had become the chief city of the world. Rome was therefore afraid that what it had done to other peoples and countries would some time befall her. Consequently, it could be afraid of little Judea. But this King of the Jews was absolutely above the suspicion that he would snatch at the crown of other kings and rebel against its worldly rule. His kingdom was and is not from hence, not from the world, not a product of this world which contends for room with others.

Jesus testifies of himself, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world." Hence he had come into the world. That was something else than when other men come into the world or are born. Jesus separates the two, "I was born" and "came into the world." He descended into this world of men from another world. He was sent from above, from the Father as Pilate was even more clearly told later on: the Son of God. He was born, became a true man, flesh and blood and wanted to establish his kingdom among men. But this kingdom of the incarnate Son of God was not to be a worldly kingdom, but it was and is a kingdom from above, the kingdom of heaven. Even though the Lord gathers men, his brothers into this kingdom, he does not turn them against temporal government nor withdraw them from their earthly duties and obligations.

And now Jesus explains more clearly the nature of his kingdom after he had indicated its origin. He says, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." The kingdom of Jesus Christ upon earth was and it is a kingdom of truth. Luther says, "Outside of witnessing to the truth it has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with this world." The office and work of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God here upon earth was to bear witness to the eternal truth among men, to teach men that wisdom which is from above to reveal to men what he himself had heard and seen. And that is the office and work of the servants and disciples of Jesus upon earth, the office of the minister, the duty and calling of all Christians to bear witness to the eternal truth to the entire ignorant world.

Now which is the truth to which Jesus gave testimony? He testified that he had come from above and was the Son of the Father, and as the only begotten Son of his Father he revealed the living, true God to the world. And he bore witness that this is life eternal that men might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. And this very thing we also confess to the ignorant world, that that God whom Christ revealed to us, the Father of Jesus Christ is the only true God and that only in him and in his Son Jesus Christ the truthful is to be found salvation and life and that repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Jesus and his kingdom are concerned with entirely different things than those with which the lords of this world are concerned.

Of a truth, this King does not reach out for the crowns of the kings

of this world. He has entirely different crowns in mind for his own in the kingdom of his Father. Through his Word and testimony he gives eternal, heavenly, true riches. To be sure, through this testimony of the truth the world is at the same time convicted of its misery and weakness, that all its power and glory, its honor and offices, its pleasures and joys, its riches and treasures are empty, fragile supports and idols, that everything which is in the world will disappear, and whoever clings to the world is eternally lost. For only in that God whom Jesus has revealed and in his Son is salvation and life. Everything outside of him is glitter and deception, falsehood and deceit.

The confession of Jesus Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world," and, "To this end was I born and for this cause cam I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," condemns the kingdom of the Roman antichrist which does not yield to the Word of truth, which has turned the truth into lies, and instead of witnessing to the truth deals, barter, and trades with worldly crowns, honor, offices, with worldly treasures, gold and silver. The false church indeed competes with the kingdoms of this world.

That good confession of Jesus Christ concerning his kingdom reprimands all Christians who mingle the spiritual and worldly kingdoms, who seek protection and safety for the Church from the government, who set up ranks in the ordinances of the church, and turn the service of this office into dominion, reprimands all half-Christians who want to set their heart upon worldly business, honor, riches, and joys and want the world and Christianity to make peace with each other.

Christ differentiates exactly between his true and his false disciples. After he had given testimony concerning his person, office, and work, he describes the mind and nature of his subjects. "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice." That is the mark of the true disciples of Jesus. They hear his voice; they believe and obey his testimony. That is the only demand of his subject. In the rest Jesus lets his disciples do as they wish, whatever conforms to their calling upon earth, what they as men owe their fellow men. He not interfere with them that they may work with all their powers, earn bread, provide for their homes, serve their neighbor, pay the government its tax. Just as long as they hear his voice in all this and surrender themselves to his Word. To be sure, all who really hear the voice of their Shepherd and King and let themselves be led by him are already taken out of this world. Their heart no longer belongs to this world but to God and is at home in heaven. For only he who is born of the truth and renewed by God hears Jesus' voice. Through the testimony and confession of the truth, through his Word and Gospel Jesus wins the hearts of men. Through the Word of truth he leads souls out of the world and translates them into his kingdom, into communion with the Father and the Son. Not the Jews and high priests who were not of God and heard not his Word, not the hypocrites and Pharisees who outwardly plumed themselves with the name of God and the appearance of piety whilst their heart clings to the world and sin, no, only those who are born of God, reborn through the Word and Spirit and walk in a new spiritual life and being are the true servants and subjects of Christ's kingdom.

And through the Word of truth Christ, the King of the Jews and all men intends to come into this world, conquer it and win it over to himself. He is King of the Jews and heathen and claims all the souls of men. He does not draw men away from temporal government, for it has authority only over body and life, money and goods. But Christ does seek to tear the souls of men from the authority of darkness, from Satan's lies and net with which the entire world is bound. Thus he aimed to win the soul of this heathen by that good confession of the truth which he made before Pilate. And when we Christians, who through God's grace believe and hear the voice of our King, vindicate our faith before

the world and confess Christ and the truth before men, our intention is only to protect ourselves or the divine truth from disgrace, but above all, to convince and with the ignorant, unbelieving world through the Word of truth.

Through Jesus' reproof, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" above all through Jesus' good, wonderful confession Pilate's conscience was smitten. During this private conversation the look of God's Son, the King of heaven fell reprovably, admonishingly, enticingly, piercingly into the soul of this heathen. With the word, "What is truth?" Pilate just barely concealed his unrest. He hurriedly left the presence of Jesus, went out to the Jews in order to avoid the power of the truth. With the pronouncement, "I find in him no fault at all," Pilate wanted to soothe and satisfy his conscience. Every good, brave confession of the truth makes an impression. And when the unbelievers do not agree but rather affect calmness and indifference, their conscience has nevertheless been often smitten. They flee the Word and the truth so that they will not be disturbed further and perhaps finally be won over. Certainly God's truth which Jesus Christ confessed, which his servants confess is a power upon earth and will obtain the victory, and bring the chosen children into the eternal kingdom, and some day, when heaven and earth and all the kingdoms of this world disappear, will judge and condemn the adversaries who struggle against God.

II.

As long as the earth remains the kingdom of Jesus Christ is and remains a kingdom of the cross.

Because Christ's kingdom is not of this world and because it is a kingdom of truth, it is a kingdom of the cross. This King of the Jews indeed lets the worldly rulers in peace but they will not let him in peace, will not appreciate him, not even tolerate him. The rulers of the world crucified the Lord of glory and persecuted his disciples and confessors That dare not astonish us. The world loves only its own and hates all else which is not like it. Now the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world. It therefore is hated by the world. It is a kingdom of truth and reprimands all lies and unmasks all hypocrisy. The world loves sin and lies and therefore hates and persecutes Christ and his Church.

Christ had exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and chief priests and injured their pride. Therefore the Jewish rulers did not rest until they had gotten this prophet out of the world. Through the testimony of the hidden glory and majesty of his kingdom Christ laid bare the pretence of the Roman Empire. In so doing he reprimanded Pilate's love of the world and his vicious life. This was the last reason why Pilate withdrew his heart from the voice of truth and finally became an enemy of the truth.

The world is in desperate straits. It lies under the influence of Satan, the father of lies. And men love their chains and let themselves be deluded and deceived. They therefore repel the witness of the truth and seek to suppress and kill the truth, so that they can find rest for their conscience. And so it is that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is and remains a kingdom of the cross.

Christ also submits to his lot. Since he wanted to have the joy, he endured the cross and despised not the shame. He gave himself into the hands of the Jews, that they would hand him over to the Roman judge. He did not intend to rebel. He wanted to suffer. Even now as he stood bound before the highest tribunal, guarded by Roman soldiers he could have easily set himself free. He was truly from above. He needed merely to pray to his Father, not to his heavenly servants, and legions of angels would have triumphantly delivered him from the hands of these murderers into which he had been betrayed. If his kingdom were of this world, his servants would have fought for him. But now his

kingdom was not from hence. No, he wanted to suffer and die and dying also as a martyr to bear witness to the truth. And all true disciples and confessors of Jesus Christ, all who are of the truth have the mind of Jesus and gladly and willingly suffer with him and for the sake of Jesus and the truth endure those things which the world inflicts upon them and God ordains.

But we also know why Jesus, the King of truth, suffered and died. It was to promote the truth. All humanity, none excluded had fallen from the living and truthful God, from the life which is from God into eternal ruin. And God so loved the lost world that he sent his only begotten Son into the world and gave him up unto the death of the cross, so that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. Christ so loved the fallen world, so that he, the innocent of whom Pilate testified, "I find in him no fault at all," assumed the roll of condemned sinners, so that he pledged his divine life, his royal blood for the lost world, so that he, the true living God gave up his heavenly glory and descended into the deepest depths of fallen mankind, into death and damnation, hell and forsakenness by God in order to lead the fallen children to their Father, reconciled them with God and raised them up to his and his Father's glory. And after he had completed that, through his Word, the Gospel of his reconciling death, he founded his kingdom upon earth, and he who is of the truth hears his voice and calls himself after his name, suffers mockery and disgrace with him here, so that they may partake of the joy of his eternal kingdom. Amen.

15th SERMON

Luke 23:5-12.

In the Lenten story we see two kinds of foes of the Lord: Jews and heathen, determined enemies of Christ who hated the King of the Jews to death, and indifferent, conscienceless, frivolous worldlings who despise Christ the King of truth and therefore in the end also consented to the murder of Christ. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, belonged to this latter class of Jesus' enemies.

From the previous portion of the Lenten story, the private conversation between Pilate and Jesus, we recognize that the testimony of the truth from Jesus' mouth had not failed to make its impression upon the conscience of this heathen, that inwardly Pilate was disturbed and for that reason could no longer resist the words of Jesus, and that he was now determined to defend his innocence before the Jews and resist their evil design. To be sure, Pilate shrugged off the impression with great effort. He would gladly have set Jesus free, but he showed no inclination to honor the truth completely and perhaps even become a disciple of the truth. Then indeed would he have had to deny all ungodly ways and worldly lusts and his entire heathen life. He just could not do that. He could not spoil things completely with the Jews, who demanded Christ's death, merely to help Jesus. As our text shows, he therefore sought to shift the blame for the whole affair from his own shoulders and send his case to another judge. Thus Pontius Pilate is a faithful picture of the frivolous world, which at first does not intend to injure anyone, not even Christians, which is completely satisfied if it can pursue its sinful lusts undisturbed, the frivolous world which now and then is frightened and smitten by the voice of the

truth, but very quickly stifles this voice.

The Jews were of a different stripe. They gave indifferent, wavering Pilate no peace. When Pilate had testified to Jesus' innocence, they began to accuse him so much the more vehemently and shamelessly. They were impudent liars and hypocrites. They accused Jesus, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." It is true, Christ had gone throughout all Palestine beginning at Galilee and had taught. But as Peter later testified, he "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Acts 10:38. He had preached peace and good things to come. The Jews knew that. But for that reason, for the sake of the good which he taught and did they hated him.

Because Jesus planted the kingdom of God in Palestine through his teaching, he destroyed the works of the devil. The leaders of the Jews were of their father the devil and could not bear the thought that their father's kingdom and their own authority and influence should suffer loss. So again, also before Herod they accused Jesus harshly. They were determined, malicious enemies of Christ and of the truth.

To this very day we perceive in the ungodly, hostile world in addition to the frivolous, godless worldling the despisers of religion and the truth, the resolute, underhanded children of malice, who hate Christ and his Gospel with their whole heart and are offended when here and there Christ's Word take fire, and who with all their powers work against the kingdom of Jesus Christ and in this battle tell the most impudent lies and accusation. Particularly do we number false teachers, false brethren, hypocrites as being in this class of Christ's foes.

Besides Pilate, yet another representative of that first class of unbelievers and godless appears in our present text. We hear of Christ's trial before King Herod. At the close of the text we are informed that Pilate and Herod became friends. That was natural; for they were of like mind. Herod was also a real man of the world, by outward confession a Jew but in disposition and life a heathen. He was a common adulterer and murderer, a feeble, weak libertine. God's truth had approached him just as it had Pilate. John the Baptist had preached repentance to him. We know how Herod rid himself of this faithful witness and stifled his conscience. He was dead in transgressions and vice; he therefore despised also the second witness to the truth who stood before him on that Passover festival, Jesus Christ who was greater than John. He ridiculed Christ, to say nothing of injuring him, nor of satisfying the evil, unjust desires of the Jews. In his attitude is mirrored the mind and way of the frivolous world of mockers and despisers.

Of course, the chief person even in our present Lenten text, as through the entire Lenten story, is the suffering Redeemer, who was led along a new stretch on his bitter way of suffering. The Holy One of Israel is placed opposite the dissolute worldling and adulterer.

Our text bids us ponder the great, gaping contrast between these two men. First it directs our eyes to this godless king and his attitude over against Christ, and then upon Christ, the Holy One of God and his attitude toward Herod. Let us now contrast these two, Christ and Herod, Christ and the race of men whose place Herod takes. Let this be the subject of our meditation:

CHRIST, THE HOLY OF GOD, AND THE FRIVOLOUS WORLD

We ponder two points:

- I. The Frivolous World's Attitude Toward Christ,
- II. The Holy Christ's Attitude Toward the World.

I.

First we see the attitude of the frivolous world toward Christ from the conference between Pilate and Herod. Pilate and Herod, who in the end entered into formal pact of friendship, were worldlings of the same stamp. Only that at the time when he came into contact with Herod, Pilate's conscience still made itself felt. When Pilate heard of Galilee, that Jesus began to teach in Galilee, he asked whether he came from Galilee. In that case the accusation of the Jews assumed a little substance, because shortly before in Galilee several rebels, e.g., a certain Judas of Galilee, had arisen and stirred up the nation. Pilate was thus offered the opportunity of assigning this disagreeable affair, from which he would so gladly have withdrawn, to another judge. Herod, who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, was Tetrach of Galilee. So Herod seemed to be the first one called upon to pass sentence upon Jesus of Galilee. Pilate did not reflect very long and sent Jesus bound to Herod.

We also see from this impulse Pilate's restless conscience but at the same time the wretched subterfuge, the miserable excuse with which he soothed his conscience. Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem and was hailed into his court. According to Roman law he was the only authorized judge. In no way could he shift his responsibility. Yet it would have helped and relieved him, if Herod would at least pass a private sentence upon Jesus which would serve to support the judicial sentence. It served Pilate right that without having attained his purpose Jesus was sent back to him by Herod, that Herod assumed neither to pass sentence nor even privately confirm the accusation of the Jews.

That is the way of the frivolous world. If it is at the point of or sees itself compelled to commit a definite wrong, it gladly seeks the help of others, places the blame on others, or at least implicates others. It feels relieved if for a crime, e.g., deceit, bankruptcy, it finds a worthless tool who will give his name to the cause, or find accomplices and partners who will shoulder at least half of the blame and responsibility.

But it avails nothing. Each one is and remains responsible himself for all his deeds and decisions and merely increases his guilt if he draws others into his sins.

Alas, even Christians many times help themselves out in difficult situations with similar subterfuges. If a certain annoying duty must be done by which he will perhaps make enemies for himself, he tries everything in order to foist this ticklish task upon others. If he has to reprimand obstinate brethren, chastise badly reared children, he is tempted to lay this burden upon the shoulders and conscience of others. Those Christians who have the first duty and call of admonishing and rebuking their neighbor without further ado gladly push the matter upon the minister and the minister perhaps upon the congregation. Parents suppose that this or that disciplinary measure is the job of the school, the teachers suppose it belongs in the home. And thus everyone seeks to get himself "off the hook." However, one's conscience is not absolved. Let us guard ourselves that we do not fall into the tricks and mesh of the frivolous conscienceless world.

That is an example of the frivolous world's attitude toward Christ, how the world deals with truth and righteousness, with conscience matters. Herod now for a while entered into the role of Pilate. When Herod saw Jesus he was very happy. Many exegetes suppose that he was particularly happy to see Jesus so that he could convince himself that Jesus was not the resurrected John the Baptist, as his evil conscience had at first convinced him. But Herod had long since deadened his conscience. Our text clearly indicates the reason for Herod's joy: he hoped he would see a sign from him, that Jesus would reveal the glory of his miracles before him, in order to convince him of his innocence. Herod's joy at the sight of Jesus was also something else than when we read

earlier of him, that he heard John gladly. That also was not the desire for salvation. Yet John's word had penetrated his conscience. Now his conscience was dead. Murder and adultery were by now completely forgotten. It was curiosity and the desire for pastime which decided him to converse with Jesus. He was a royal adulterer, a cultivated, educated tyrant and libertine, and as he for a change sought pleasure and joy in the art and wisdom of the Greeks, so Jesus and his ability to perform miracles should also amuse him for an hour. And when Jesus refused to perform a single miracle, he asked him many things, asked him many impertinent questions, perhaps of his origin, his miracles, the persons whom he healed, questions by which he merely wanted to satisfy his curiosity.

Herod is a picture of a true worldling. All the children of the world sin in the manner of Herod. Here are some who live in gross unchastity, except that they try to conceal the fact artfully. Others are a slave no less to their fleshly lusts, although they are not exactly gross adulterers. And the conscience which strives against this shame and evil lust is soon choked off. The children of the world are murderers of prophets as Herod was. They kill the admonisher and preacher of repentance in their own breast. And now suddenly, unexpectedly Jesus, the Holy One of God comes to the attention of these secure, frivolous sinners. At one occasion or the other they hear Christ's Word. They prick up their ears. They seek physical, sensual, and for a change spiritual, even religious pleasures. But they merely make a frivolous game of the truth. They do not seek salvation and peace for their souls. Inwardly they are completely satisfied, cold, and deaf. For the sake of conversation they at times most gladly hear an eloquent sermon which occupies their thoughts; they even gladly hear pious, edifying talks, e.g., how God helps and delivers in trouble. They pay close attention when the talk turns to God's frightful judgments. Something like that is interesting. And they know how to ask all kinds of questions, e.g., what God did before the creation of the world, how a donkey could talk; or if they are somewhat more cultured and educated, they draw all kinds of profitable lessons from the Bible about nature, the history of nations, ethics, and the like. But of the real content of the Bible, the one thing which is needful, the question of how one can be saved, they want to hear and know nothing.

Let us all examine and discipline ourselves. The easy mind with which one so often hears and receives Jesus and his Word, the Word of eternal truth, the Gospel of salvation is and remains the chief sin of Christians. If one has the inclination and whim he most gladly hears God's Word. If one does not have time, he remains away from church. And when he comes and hears, he perhaps notices different things in the sermon and often fails to hear the real message. Examine yourself, my dear Christian! Whenever you hear a sermon about Christ, does this question occupy you, "What can I learn today about Jesus from the sermon for my soul's salvation?" And even those Christians who seem to be most zealous, eager, and rich in knowledge and know how to ask questions about all kinds of difficult articles of faith and dispute much, often ask questions with the mind of Herod, seek to enrich their knowledge or want to let their wisdom be seen and heard; it is not always the asking, seeking, searching of concerned, troubles souls eager for salvation. Oh that we would earnestly reprimand and judge our levity!

When Jesus had said enough by his deep, earnest silence and pressed a prick into the heart of the king, the joy at the sight Jesus turned into the very opposite, into disgust, aversion, and contempt. Herod and all his courtiers who were minded as he was despised Jesus, despised the earnest, deeply moving sight of the silent, suffering holy Son of God, despised the lesson which this Master of Israel gave him. Even here in Herod's palace was fulfilled the word which Jesus had predicted to his disciples, "He shall be mocked and spit upon." A flood of mockery was poured out upon Jesus from all sides. And in order to

ridicule this King of the Jews in the eyes of all the people of Jerusalem, Herod clothed him in a white garment and sent him back to Pilate in this fool's garb. Herod was not filled with hatred and bitterness over against this King of the Jews to the same degree as the chief priests who stood by and harshly accused Jesus. He did not carry out the will of the chief priests; he did not prove that Jesus was a criminal; by clothing him in a white garment he rather declared him innocent, a great but quite innocent, harmless fool. Yet this good-naturedness which virtually placed him above the chief priests dare not be ascribed to him as virtue. He despised Christ with his whole heart, hence was also his avowed foe. He wanted to have nothing to do with him.

This is the way the frivolous world behaves when it has satisfied its spiritual curiosity, when it hears from Jesus, from God's Word, from the sermon one little word which does not please it, when its sins and vices, its levity is earnestly reprimanded. The thoughtless worldlings are too frivolous to begin an earnest battle. Their feelings and consciences are too insensible so that even the sting of bitter truths finally hurts no longer. They despise all doctrine and reprimand, treat it with laughing contempt, ridicule and joke about it. "We must allow the Christians these things; they are innocent, harmless people; they believe in ridiculous folly; their folly hurts no one; may God preserve us from such folly!" These are perhaps the thoughts and speeches of the frivolous mocker. It is merely a deceptive good-naturedness. Such deep, heartfelt contempt is insulting just as well as burning hatred. Frivolous mockers just as well as malicious blasphemers are both foes of Christ the Holy One of God. They despise and ridicule the admonitions and warnings of earnest Christians. And if they build and trust in their pious feelings and good intentions, they deceive themselves. They resist the truth and resist the Lord Christ.

Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. First Pilate was friendly and polite to Herod in honoring him as the Tetrach of Galilee. Herod repaid him by recognizing him as the highest judge of Judea. Each granted the other the honor of passing judgment upon this King of the Jews. Their like mind also came to light in this transaction. Both recognized the innocence of Jesus but at the same time despised him as a fool. This like-mindedness was the real basis of their friendship. Since that time many great men, judges and lords of the earth who at first hated one another became friends with one another in their hatred against Christ. The fallen world which loves its sin and ruin is the foe of Christ. In resisting Christ, be it by hatred or contempt, all the children of the world are alike. And for that very reason the children of the world, the foes of Christ seek the friendship of one another because they feel and suspect that that Jesus of Nazareth is the Stronger One. Hence they must assemble all their powers in order to resist him. Even the frivolous "name-Christians" gladly unite and befriend one another in order to mutually strengthen and comfort each other in their levity.

II.

Only a few words of our text indicate Christ's attitude toward the frivolous world, his attitude toward the frivolous king of Galilee. We read of Jesus, "And he answered him nothing." Jesus, the Holy One treats each sinner who meets him differently. At first he conversed with Pilate and made a good, beautiful confession before him. The truth had come close to him for the first time. On the other hand, the spiteful, untruthful, hardened Jews, his accusers, Jesus did not deign to answer. And likewise he was silent and remained silent when Herod pressed him with his questions. Herod had already heard the truth from John and hardened his heart. Jesus therefore reproved him with silence.

The quiet, earnest silence of Jesus was a tormenting punishment for Herod. Thus the Lord bore witness of his holiness to this frivolous sinner. He

was not going to cast his holy things to the dogs nor his pearls before swine. The severest judgment which lay hidden in Jesus' silence consisted in this that by this very act Jesus abandoned Herod, refused him his grace, surrendered this hardened sinner who merely mocked him to his hardness. Thus Jesus the Holy One of God is considered wrong among those who are wrong.

Through his Word he reproves sin, the lust of the world, levity, security. But when words do not help nor bear fruit and the sinner despises all earnest and well-intentioned admonitions, then Jesus, the Holy One begins to be silent, withdraws his Spirit and grace, suspends his work. Under the preaching of God's gracious Word the frivolous, obstinate sinners become only the more wicked and hard. What a fearful judgment upon mockers and despisers! Hence, let us check our levity and patiently bear all earnest words of Jesus, even all bitter truths, so that he does not in the end reprimand us with silence! The Lord's servants should also carry out the office of the Word according to his example and speak and be silent at the right time.

Jesus was silent. He was silent and suffered. He permitted all things to befall him, even ridicule, mockery, contempt. He wore the white garment, the garment of innocence. He, the innocent atoned for the sins of the world, also our sins. He allowed all false accusations to pass over him in silence and protects and defends us with his suffering and silence, when the foe accuses our life. He, the Righteous and Holy One, covers us, our disgrace, our shame, our levity with the garment of his innocence and righteousness.

Because he suffered for the sins of the world, he as yet also bears with the sinful world with great patience and has graciously spared us to this hour. But woe to those who despise and trifle with his suffering, his blood, his grace and patience! Some day he will summon them before his righteous judgment throne. Some day he will speak to them in his wrath. Hence, let us repent of our sins, our levity in time. Oh, Jesus Christ our Redeemer, help us! Amen.

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16th SERMON

Matthew 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:13-32; John 18:39,40.

The Lenten text before us reports a new step forward in the trial which the Jews had opened against their King, which lost, condemned men began against the Son of God. The voice of righteousness was now but weakly and timidly heard. The judge became more and more confused and quiet. On the other hand, the cries of the accusers took control. The unjust accusation turned into a rough roaring and cry for death. The lawsuit degenerated into a wild tumult.

After Jesus had been returned by Herod to the governor, Pontius Pilate, after Herod had refused to take this burden from the conscience of his Roman friend, once more Pilate convened the chief priests, the rulers, and the whole nation of the Jews, who had brought Jesus to him, gathered the embittered foes of Jesus around his tribunal, once more asserted the innocence of Jesus Christ, and tried to come to an agreement with his accusers. He shrunk from the proper way; he simply could not use his authority as judge, set Jesus free, and thus expose himself to the hatred and hostility of the Jews.

He therefore sought in devious ways to attain the same ends. However, there is no future in using devious ways. Pilate fell into constantly greater, more painful difficulties. The first compromise which he offered the Jews was this, "I will chastise him and let him go." And when the Jews showed no desire

to agree, the custom at Easter time when the Jews asked for a prisoner at the Passover time offered him a welcome opportunity for a second compromise. He sought to steer the accusers to ask for the freedom of this bound, captive Jesus of Nazareth; so he placed that wicked, detestable criminal, who at that time was in prison, alongside the innocent King of the Jews. But it went far differently than he expected. Now the fire of the hatred of Christ burst into bright flames. They used this new opportunity which was offered them for their own purposes. They demanded the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.

That one of the most wicked and common criminals was placed by Pilate at his side and was preferred by the Jews is a gripping passage from the passion of the holy and righteous Son of God. "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas or Jesus?" Whether to choose Jesus or Barabbas can still be a question for certain people. And there are people who choose Barabbas and reject Jesus. It is an earnest question of deep, decisive meaning, of universal meaning: Whom do you want? to whom do you cling? with Barabbas or with Jesus?

This question is asked of all men who hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It demands a decision -- for or against Christ. It means: What do you want; both are presented to you, sin and righteousness, death and life, hell and heaven, Christ and Belial, God and the devil! God indeed wants to deliver all men from ruin and save them through Christ and wants that earnestly. But sad to say, so many people, yes, most people defy the Lord and the truth and choose for and force on themselves death, hell, and damnation.

Jesus Christ is the precious stone, the cornerstone, which God has laid in Zion, who is presented to the whole world through the Gospel, a rock of salvation and deliverance. Blessed are all who build upon and trust in him! But he is also a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. And sad to say, most people are offended in this stumbling block and fall and are dashed to pieces. This earnest, important question which no one can avoid we now want to ponder: What think ye of Christ? What is your attitude toward Christ? To whom do you cling? To Jesus or Barabbas? We place this question in the center of our meditation and want to watch the different ways it is answered, and which the correct answer is.

JESUS OR BARABBAS?

- I. Some Ask for Barabbas' Release and Demand the Death of Jesus.
- II. Others Waver to and fro Between Christ and the Word.
- III. We, However, Renounce Wickedness and Cling to Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One, To Jesus the Crucified!

I.

Some ask for Barabbas' release and demand the death of Jesus. Those are the people like the Jews. The Jews were the declared and avowed enemies of Jesus. To be sure, mostly the chief priests had condemned and surrendered Christ out of envy and, as our text informs us, persuaded and provoked the people to vote for Barabbas and against Jesus. Even if the chief priests and rulers of the Jews were the real ringleaders, the same idea lived in the whole Jewish nation. They all envied and hated this Jesus of Nazareth and concurred in the Sanhedrin's sentence of death. For to all Jesus had told the truth which they could not tolerate. Jesus attacked their pride, their proud trust in being descendants of Abraham, in the circumcision, in the outward righteousness in the Law and had overthrown their Messianic dreams. The voice of the prophets was repugnant to them all. As far as that goes, it had been only a hypocritical Hosanna which they had sung to the Lord on Palm Sunday. Only if he would have

founded a temporal kingdom in Jerusalem at that time would they have become subject to him. That Hosanna was not far removed from, "Crucify, crucify him!"

Even before this the Jewish nation had decided against their Prophet and King. For that reason they also persistently demanded the death, the crucifixion of Christ before the judgment throne of Pilate. They were completely deaf and dumb over against the evidence of the innocence of Jesus. They had long ago smothered their conscience. So it was that a compromise, half-measures would not satisfy them. The zealous, determined enemies of the truth are just like the determined friends and lovers of the truth, hostile to all compromises. The Jews could not be satisfied that Jesus would first be chastised and then set free. The voice of this prophet should be forever silenced in the grave. And then when Pilate reckoned on their good will and gave them the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, the murderer and rebel, in satanic malignity they showed their evil will and with a loud voice in burning bloodthirstiness they cried, "Crucify, crucify him!"

It was like the roaring of insane men, of wild, unreasonable animals. They denied all human feelings, the last impulses of pity, all reason, all shame; yes, they dishonored their own morals and religion. The Jews were able to start a wonderful Easter custom with the Roman governor to remember the gracious sparing of their first-born in Egypt, the pardoning and exemption of a criminal of their seed. They thereby gave evidence of the great grace of their God which even then disposed human hearts to be mild and forgiving even toward the grossest sinner. But this Jesus of Nazareth had no claim to justice and right, to grace and pity. Over against their own King and Messiah Israel denied in the grossest way their own law which consisted in the double commandment of love. The Jews were not ashamed and did not hesitate to prefer that infamous Barabbas, who was condemned even by the heathen, to Jesus whom one called Christ and who really was Christ. Barabbas the murderer was dearer to them than Jesus the holy and righteous, the Prince of Life. With that choice they exposed their religion, their descent from Abraham, their Jewish Church publicly to the heathen. They who detested the heathen as unclean and did not wish to set foot in any home of a heathen on Easter did not blush to swear allegiance to a murderer and a criminal, whom the heathen had rejected from human company and had been destined and kept for the death of the cross rather than the legal King of Israel. Their hatred of Christ brought them that far. With loud ravings of "Crucify, crucify him!" they cried down and silenced the last protest and impulse of human feelings, human reason, and human shame.

This raving Jewish nation is a striking portrait of the world and just of the respectable, righteous, pious world, the glittering, false church. That is the mind and way, this the conduct of all determined enemies of Christ and opponents of the truth, of all liars and hypocrites. They envy and hate Jesus Christ the King of the Jews and the heathen, the King and Prophet of truth, just because he witnesses to the truth. They hate and abhor the Gospel of Christ because it reveals their sin and righteousness, their hypocritical piety, because it frustrates their fleshly thoughts of religion and morality.

And this hatred is deadly enmity. The known, determined enemies of the truth do not rest until they have silenced Christ, the voice of the truth. It is not enough to scourge Christ; he must be crucified. It is not enough that Christ's Church is given a blow now and then, that she is shoved off into a corner, pressed into the corner, for the hated name of Jesus still resounds from that corner. No; this is their will, their intention: there where they live and carry on their business and pander to their lusts, the Christian Church should find no room, the name of Jesus should not be known in their province, within their borders. That is the password of the false, especially of the anti-christian church; this is the watchword of seducers, the false prophets, and the seduced, of all who believe the lie, "Crucify, crucify him!" They want to know nothing of this Jesus whom one calls Christ, and who is the only Lord and

Savior; he should not come to their attention; his voice should not enter their ears. If God would not protect his Church with his powerful arms, the Jews and companions of the Jews would have swept her off the world long ago.

And this hatred of Christ makes people completely irrational. The enemies of Christ deny and slander Christ contrary to their own principles, their own morality and religion. They feign a religion of love, gentleness, toleration. However, over against the Christian Church and the true disciples of Christ love, mercy, toleration is not confirmed but forbidden. They are proud of their virtue and honor, of their monkery and false holiness. But when it means fighting Christ, then they have a common interest in and make friends with Barabbas, with open scoundrels, robbers, and murderers. If they can harm the cause of Christ, the Gospel then they tear the mask off themselves and lay aside all shame and take lies, murder, disgrace, vice into the bargain. We often view the world and just the respectable, pious world with unsuspecting eyes and do not consider it so dangerous; perhaps we let ourselves be persuaded that these people are virtuous to a certain degree. However, here in our text the picture of the world is drawn without the mask. This gross, insane crowd which set Barabbas free and demanded the cross, death for Christ -- that is the world, the righteous, pious world which surrounds us.

II.

Others, on the other hand, waver to and fro undecided between Jesus and the wicked world which holds to Barabbas. Pontius Pilate is an example of such wavering, halfhearted people. Through the testimony of Herod, even though it was scoffing testimony, the impression of his innocence, which he had received from Jesus' own mouth and behavior, was strengthened. Repeatedly and with the strongest words he acknowledged and swore to the innocence of Jesus before the mob of malevolent accusers who delivered him out of envy, as he well knew. "I have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod" Lk 23:14,15. He was still opposed to crucifying Jesus, the innocent man and completely smothered the voice of his conscience, the voice of justice. He felt his responsibility as judge. And yet ye did not want to spoil things also with the Jews. The favor of the Jews, his honor, his authority, his income were worth more to him than his office, call, and duty. And if he also wanted to free Jesus gladly, he still did not want to become a disciple of Jesus, did not want to profess the truth, still did not want to deny his sins and lusts.

Hence, his heart was divided, and he now showed his lukewarmness and indecision in his conduct and behavior. He summoned all his skill, cunning, and power to mediate between Christ and the Jews. He wanted to run half with the Jews, scourge and chastise Jesus, but to some extent administer justice also to Christ and free him after the scourging. How greedily he seized the evasion which the petition of the Jews afforded him! According to his custom he should free a prisoner at Easter time. There at least without hesitating a moment he should have immediately freed Jesus and said to the Jews, "You have your wish. I will free Jesus your King. And that settles this affair." It was already an injustice, a serious wrong which he did to Jesus in placing him, the innocent, on the same level with Barabbas the murderer. Now, however, he thoroughly blundered in the matter and lost the favorable opportunity through folly when he relinquished the choice to the Jews and asked, "Whom will ye that I release unto you?" He divested himself of his title as judge and surrendered the decision to the Jews, the enemies of Jesus. He wanted to deal cleverly and win the favor of the Jews and in addition with the freeing of Jesus tie in the appearance of gentleness and generosity, when he acceded to the request of the Jews and did them a favor.

However, this cleverness was the greatest folly. He surely knew the

mind of the Jews; he could have said to himself that they would choose Barabbas and not Jesus. He was smitten with blindness. Meanwhile, worse than the folly was the consciencelessness of this action in that he himself gave Jesus, whom he should have defended, into the hands of his enemies. God warned the unjust judge before he played this wicked scene to the end most emphatically through the dream and the message from his wife, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Mt 27:19. However, his halfheartedness had already taken away all power for good. He despised that warning, stifled his conscience, and let the choice and decision in the hands of the Jews. He was completely confused and dismayed as if desperate, could help himself only with perplexed, senseless questions when the Jews contrary to his wish demanded Barabbas and cried, "Crucify!" over Jesus.

Pontius Pilate, this wavering reed, is a picture of all halfhearted people. That is the way and practise of the judges and rulers of this world. They wish to satisfy their office and conscience to some extent, do not want to strike justice rudely in the face, however, they also do not wish to ruin their chances with the world, with the people, with the mob which is hostile to God and Christ. Hence their whole policy and philosophy of government is an adjustment between two irreconcilable enemies. They will be disgraced in their wisdom. Because they do violence to the truth out of love to Christ's enemies, because they injure the Church and Christianity and want to protect and save the Church by moderately oppressing it, they fall into ever greater dilemmas and embarrassments. Ever louder and unashamed the enemies of Christ demand the death of Jesus, the annihilation of the Church.

Pilate is an example of a good-natured man of the world in whom the truth once awakened his conscience. Such a person would indeed like to obey his awakened conscience but only to a certain degree. He does not want to deny his sinful, lusty nature and want to remain a good friend of the world. He therefore gropes and wavers anxiously to and fro in order to find the golden mean. He rejects the demands of the truth which to his mind are extreme and all too strict; he has made it his principle that if he goes with the world and sins, he will observe certain limits, keep a certain moderation and scruple. Alas, that unfortunate person notices quite soon that he has fallen on slippery ground and sinks ever deeper into the swamp. The world, the godless and conscienceless world unceasingly makes demands, the unmerciful demand that its friends completely silence their conscience and go arm in arm also with Barabbas, and if it has to be, even make friends with vice and disgrace.

Pontius Pilate is a warning example to Christians. Alas, there are so many halfhearted Christians! So many Christians who have become fond of Jesus and have looked into the kingdom of the truth, into the grace and majesty of the holy, righteous Son of God, become lax and lukewarm, turn their eyes, ears, and heart again from the Gospel toward the world and then come to the unfortunate thought which they consider special wisdom, that of mediating between Christianity and the world, bringing Jesus and Barabbas together. First of all they break off the points, corners, and margins of Christianity in order to make it bearable for the world. And if the world demands more and more concessions, they throw one piece of their religion after the other overboard. Hence, they become weaker, ever weaker and are finally completely incapable of any resistance. They sell their conscience to the world and hand the helm of their little boat over to their seducers. To please men, their friends they sin against their own better knowledge and conscience and consent to joys, lusts, unrighteousness which prepare only torment for them. And time and time again they do not hear the earnest warning of God. Finally the world presents the last demand: deny completely and swear off Christ, his Word, the Church, and the wild cry of the world confuses and disconcerts them and completely takes

away from them prudence and the ability to reflect. One already clearly foresees how the last decision will turn out. God preserve us from such halfheartedness and lukewarmness! The lukewarm are an abomination to the Lord Jesus. He will spue them out of his mouth!

III.

We, however, renounce all wickedness and cling to Jesus, the Holy and Righteous, cling to Jesus the crucified. By God's grace we have known that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews denied before Pontius Pilate when they asked him to give them a murderer, is the Holy and Righteous One, the Son of God, the Prince of life. Acts 3:14.15. We believe and have known that he alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life. And therefore we embrace him and faithfully and believingly cling to him until death and for his sake deny the wicked, vile world. We know indeed and every day we see the mind and ways of the world, that the great, the pious, the wise, the righteous of the world compose one family with the Barabbases, with the unrighteous, the robbers, the murderers of the world. We therefore deny the world and its ungodly ways and follow Jesus, the Holy and Righteous.

Of course, we see Jesus, the Holy One of God, the Prince of life, amid severe suffering, covered with shame and disgrace. He was made equal to, yes, thought less of than Barabbas. He was considered and treated as a robber and a murderer. He was as the scum of humanity, a source of mockery and loathing in the eyes of the world, a spectacle to the angels. But he wanted to suffer thus and silently bore all that.

And he suffered innocently. Herod, Pilate, Pilate's wife testified to the innocence of this righteous Man. And through his innocent, patient, bitter suffering he atoned for the sins, the shameful deeds and crimes of all sinners and evildoers upon earth; he has atoned for our sins, what we have done out of malice and weakness. Amid the "Crucify him! crucify him!" of his murderers, amid the roaring of the great bulls and fat oxen, amid the roaring of the ravening lion which lurked in the background the innocent Lamb silently fulfilled his called of suffering and redemption. And now the cries of the foe, the treats and accusations of the Old Evil Foe by which we are alarmed must become silent. The Good Shepherd acts as our substitute and protects and defends us. Therefore we cling to Jesus, yes, to this very Jesus the crucified! When the wicked, evil world hates us for the sake of this Jesus, revils and persecutes and rushes in upon us with its brazen demands, we do not despair. Willingly we suffer with our Jesus and even in suffering preserve a good conscience. Jesus, thou Crucified, strengthen us and grant us faithfulness and steadfastness until our end! Amen.

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Matthew 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19; John 19:2-7.

This is a real Lenten text. Here the holy Evangelists sketch a gripping picture of the suffering Redeemer. We would indeed prefer to be silent and worship him. The simple and yet meaningful words which describe the pains of the Lord seem only to lose their earnestness and weight by explanation and interpretation. Above all, we must ask the Holy Spirit to explain Christ's

pains to us aright and engrave them deeply upon our heart.

The suffering Christ is the chief person in the entire Lenten story. Our other Lenten texts directed our attention particularly to the godless accusers of the Lord and the unjust judge. The Holy One of God, who was put on trial, stood more in the background and was silent and suffered. The false testimony and murderous cries of the Jews, the miserable questions, answers, sentences, and subterfuges of Pilate were in the meanwhile scourge, lashes, and thorns enough for his innocent soul. Yet now the suffering Redeemer comes into the foreground on a new step of the trial reported by our today's text.

Christ's pains are the real theme of this portion of the Lenten story. Pilate had resolved upon a course of action and announced his resolution to the Jews, "I will therefore chastise him, and release him." This resolution, insofar as it had to do with Jesus' scourging, he now carried out, after the attempt to substitute Barabbas for the King of the Jews had failed. If only Pilate would have freed Jesus immediately after the scourging! However, he could not nor did he want to resist any longer the renewed demand of the Jews, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" So it was that the crucifixion followed the scourging.

But since Pilate had almost made his final decision, he could have at least spared the Lord the scourging. Ordinarily, it was Roman custom either to scourge or to crucify a criminal or a slave. He who had been sentenced to the cross need not first feel the scourge. The fault lay in Pilate's halfheartedness, in his weak, fleshly sympathy; it was the cause that against all custom the innocent Jesus had to suffer both punishment and torment, first the scourge and then the cross. Yes, as our Substitute and Redeemer, he was to drain the cup completely which the Father gave him. Not a drop of the bitter cup of suffering was to be spilt. Therefore the Lord Christ was first scourged. And yet other pains and shame were connected with the scourging. The soldiers vented their spite on him. We cannot picture it in words nor thoughts what the Lord suffered and endured in Pilate's judgment hall.

In the inner court of the courthouse the rack was being made ready for the Lord. But his suffering, his pain and shame did not remain hidden from the Jews outside, the furious enemies of Jesus. Pilate led the tortured and tormented Jesus out garbed in the crown of thorns and the robe of purple and said to the Jews, "Behold the man!" Christ did not suffer in secret what did not become public. However, the Redeemer's countenance of suffering is held up not only before the Jews but the entire world.

God has presented this Christ with his crown of thorns, with his purple robe, with his stripes and wounds to all sinners -- in his Word. In the writings of the Old Testament this head full of blood and wounds, this spit-covered countenance was drawn in clear lines. The prophets predicted not only his death, but also the blows and wounds, the shame and spitting of the Messiah. And the Lord himself predicted to his disciples several times, "The Son of man shall be mocked and spitted on; they shall scourge him and put him to death."

And the Gospel which shows the fulfilment of the prophecy has now gone out into all lands and informs all people, all sinners of the torment of God's Son. To all who hear it, who see this picture in the Bible does this cry go out, "Behold the man!" Men should look at this man who scarcely resembles a man and reflect more carefully upon what this man wants to say to them. Almost just as frequently as the picture of the crucified Redeemer is the picture of Christ's torments, the thorn-crowned head with the title, "Ecco Homo," "Behold the man!" exhibited in Christian homes. Yes, indeed, this picture is worth considering and contemplating. It promotes our salvation, the healing of our souls, if we diligently and daily picture to ourselves the suffering countenance of this man. Therefore listen to the cry:

BEHOLD THE MAN!

- I. A Man of Sorrows and Acquainted with Grief!
- II. But He was Wounded for Our Transgressions and was Bruised for Our Iniquities.
- III. And Because Christ Suffered for us in the Flesh, we Intend to Cease Sinning.

I.

Behold the man! Of a truth, he was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as the Prophet (Is 53) really says: a man of pain and sickness, a man upon whom pain and sickness left its name and impression. We people of flesh and blood become silent and stiffen at this sight, or apathetically and listlessly we pass this man of sorrows by. His suffering is much too great and deep for us. And even if we learn to know and understand a little of his suffering, we have an aversion to him, we want to turn our face away from him. We saw him, but there was no form which would have pleased us. First of all, take a good look at the torment and disgrace of the Lord!

Pilate took Jesus and scourged him; that is, he turned him over to certain soldiers for scourging. His clothes were taken away, his pure, holy flesh was exposed; he was bound to a stake and the lashes of the scourge fell upon his back. How deeply pain sometimes cuts into our flesh! It, as it were, pierces soul, marrow, and bone. And see, Christ, the Holy One of God, had pure flesh which was much more tender than our flesh and blood, and a body to which sin, pain, and death were contrary to its nature, whereas our corrupt flesh and blood is accustomed to the evil, to sin and all wickedness. As a rule the Roman scourge was a whip with pointed slugs tied into the lash. Every lash of the scourge cut a deep wound into the flesh and forced blood from the back. And the Roman soldiers used the scourge mercilessly. The Romans did not know the Law of Moses according to which a criminal should not receive more than forty lashes.

The coarse soldiers would have rejoiced that after the long conversation between judge and accused they now dared take a hand in this business. The murderous cries of the Jews certainly incited their murderous lust. And Pilate himself had impressed upon them that they were not to spare the King of the Jews as they scourged him. He would be much pleased if Jesus would really be maltreated. He then hoped to arouse the sympathy of the Jews more easily in order to save Jesus from the cross. It is said that during the scourging the flesh was often completely torn off and the ribs and bones of the criminal were laid bare. In any event no torment was spared the Lord, which otherwise was the lot of a malefactor. Thus it was predicted; thus the Messiah complains, "The plowers plowed my back; they made long their furrows." Ps 129:3.

The scourging was a punishment according to the law, which in this case had been applied most wrongly, because it was used against an innocent person. The soldiers did one more thing; contrary to all justice and law they acted out an impudent, murderous playlet with him whom they scourged. Behold the man! Think of the pains which were added to the scourging! The soldiers who had held Jesus thus far, also those who had scourged him, now called their whole gang together. With their comrades they wanted to amuse themselves for a while in the torment of this innocent man. So they dreamed up new torments and pains. They platted a crown of thorns and placed it upon his head -- or as the words really read: they laid the crown of thorns about his head and pressed it deeply into his head on all sides so that all around the blood spurted out and trickled down upon his cheeks and face. What's more, they struck him upon his head with their fists and with the reed and increased the bitter pains. They also struck him in his noble countenance. Yes, the whole head was sick, the

entire body was covered with wounds and swellings. He was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, wounded and bruised.

Vile mockery was added to that torment. While the soldiers placed the crown of thorns upon Jesus, a fragile reed was placed into his hand, and an old torn soldier's cloak put on him for a purple cloak; they ridiculed this King of the Jews and his kingdom of which he had spoken. But the most wilful, the most offensive acting was that they bowed the knee before him, worshiped him, greeted him, and said, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Yes, the acting and the joking degenerated into shocking sacrilege: they spit in his face. Otherwise one shies away from spitting upon an animal. To spit upon a man is the most disgraceful abasement of God's noblest creature. And Jesus was an innocent man, as the soldiers well knew, yes, a holy man; he was more than a man.

Behold the man! See and consider also how this man suffered and endured all this. This man was a King, yes, the King of heaven and earth. He really was whom he had said he was and what the Jews set down as blasphemy. He was God's Son; he did not make himself that; he was that from eternity. With a glance, with a wave of his hand he could have struck down these coarse, mocking, blaspheming soldiers and immediately called down their deserved reward upon their heads. But he restrained himself; he held back his power and majesty. He patiently took all this unjust torment, the disgrace and mockery upon himself. As it was foretold of him (Is 50) he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. He did not avoid the blows but voluntarily held his head and body ready for those who misused him. Even if a person permits all to befall him, his patience soon ends the moment the ridicule goes to extremes. No one lets himself be spit upon without murmuring and objecting. But Jesus did not hide his face from shame and spitting. Grace, amazing grace! Amazing patience!

II.

Behold the man! A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities.

If we consider this unique Lenten picture aright, this earnest countenance of suffering, we recognize our own picture therein, our sin, our iniquities. We sing in our Lenten hymn,

Yet, O Lord; not thus alone
Make me see Thy Passion,
But its cause to make make known
And its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin
Wrought Thy deep affliction;
This indeed the cause hath been
Of Thy crucifixion. (140,3)

Lo, this man is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, our sins as well, my sins and yours.

The sins of the world press heavily upon his head and lie upon his back. The soldiers who scourged him, mistreated, crowned him with thorns, jeered, ridiculed, and spit upon Jesus are a picture of the frivolous, insolent, godless world. That is the world's attitude toward Christ, the King of the Jews, the God of the Christians. The world, the coarse, common world, the refined, educated world ridicules this God and King, jeers at Christians who worship him, laughs at the faith and the hope of Christians, the heavenly kingdom

to come of which we speak and sing. The world ridicules God's Word, the Gospel in which the countenance of Jesus Christ is unveiled and revealed to us. The coarse, common, and the refined, wise mockers of this world tear, pluck to pieces, and mangle the Bible and degrade the very earnest and comforting words of Scripture. And thus they befoul and disfigure the countenance of Jesus Christ which is drawn in the Scriptures. The careless, wilful world hates the preaching of the Christ bitterly, gives vent to its rage and malice against Christ, and thus spits in his face and on his Word.

And the pleasantries, mockery, wantonness of the world can turn very easily, in a moment into coarseness, impudent violence. What did the faithful of the Old Covenant have as their reward from the unbelieving world to which they preached of their hope? "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword." Heb 11:36,37. What did the Roman emperors, the pope do to the faithful witness of Christ? How have they tried to destroy the Church of Christ? Lead was poured slowly upon Christians, they were cast into boiling oil, roasted upon coals, torn with white-hot tongs. Their wounded bodies were rolled back and forth upon broken pottery and coals. Salt and vinegar were poured into their own wounds. The poor were wounded and beaten with clubs and cudgels, with sticks and pikestuffs, with switches and whips, with lashes and ropes. That is the world's opinion about Christ, Christ's Church, his faithful confessors. Yes, it is the world and its sins which has so greatly maltreated the Lord of glory. And he is the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.

We, however, do not exclude ourselves from those of the world which scourged and tormented Christ. Not only did the heathen servants, the ignorant unbelieving world, but even the sins of Christians tormented him. Alas! there are so many hypocrites to be found among Christians. They despise Christ and his Word in their heart, are unconcerned about the will and command of this King, live according to their own lusts. And if they intentionally permit their devotion to be seen before men, sing and pray, and call upon Jesus, salute him, and bow the knee before him with the congregation, they do the very same thing which those soldiers did. They ridicule Christ the Lord.

There are so many half, lukewarm Christians, who resemble uncertain Pilate, who waver to and fro between Christ and the world, and finally become the prey of the world. They have indeed put on Christ in Holy Baptism. At that time the noble picture of the heavenly King was impressed upon their soul. But now that they have joined the world in a wild, disorderly life they befoul and deform this noble image. Out of love to the world they sin against their good conscience and thus wound and torment it. Isn't that the picture of wretchedness: a conscience troubled, bleeding by sin, a heart subdued, enslaved by the world which has lost all power, all which it can do is weakly and helplessly quiver and groan but which can no longer bring forth earnest sighs of repentance.

However, let us not forget about ourselves. We must all confess,

I caused Thy grief and sighing
By evils multiplying
As countless as the sands.
I caused the woes unnumbered
With which Thy soul is cumbered,
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands. (171,4)

Have we not many times stabbed and kicked our Christian conscience? Have we not also defiled body and soul with all manner of uncleanness, with lust and greed and thus insulted and dishonored the Christ within us? Have we not

often joked about the Lord Christ, about God's Word, for instance for the sake of appearance have thoughtlessly prayed, listened, sung, and bowed the knee? Did we not at times loathe Christ's Word so that we would have liked to spit upon it especially when it touched a sore spot in our own heart and life? We also are guilty of tormenting Christ. We also have scourged and ridiculed and pressed the thorns into his head. Surely, he was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities.

This man, this suffering, tormented Christ who suffered in the flesh, reprimands our sinful, fleshly ways. Our lascivious, sensual flesh continually produces poison and weeds. Our hearts are crammed with the thorns of lust, greed, and worry. Our proud heart puffs itself up and despises God and men. By nature we are all unclean, as though burdened and befouled with filth, spittle, dirt. Even all our natural righteousnesses are as filthy rags. There is nothing sound in our body. The whole head is sick and the heart is faint. We are thoroughly corrupt, deformed by sins.

And by our sins we have deserved punishment and torment, the scourge of divine wrath. What we really deserve is that God would pour the eternal oil of hell upon us for the evil lust which works in our flesh. By our pride we have deserved that God would clothe us in eternal disgrace and shame.

But behold, this man, Jesus of Nazareth has now come and taken upon himself all our uncleanness and everything which we have merited and for our benefit let himself be rejected, spit upon, tormented, scourged, and crowned with thorns; he suffered in the flesh for us, and from a carefree, thankful heart we sing,

My burden in Thy Passion,
 Lord, Thou hast borne for me,
 For it was my transgression
 Which brought this woe on Thee.
 I canst me down before Thee;
 Wrath were my rightful lot.
 Have mercy, I implore Thee;
 Redeemer, spurn me not! (172,4)

He has atoned for our lust and pride by his pains and disgrace. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

From his birth on he was pure and holy; he was innocent. To the very end Pilate stressed his innocence. He, the Innocent, took the place of impure, sinful men, of lost and condemned men. His patience and willingness to suffer was an acceptable sacrifice to God whereby we have become acceptable to God. He actually was what even the Jews who hated God could not deny, God's Son; and his blood, which covered his holy, noble countenance and streamed over his holy body, yes, this blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin, cleanses our conscience from all evil works, from all vain, base words and thoughts. So it is that this picture of the suffering Redeemer is our most precious remembrance. We join the bride in the Son of Solomon in singing, "My beloved is white and ruddy." Song 5:10. As long as we have breath, in the hour of death we will not let this picture out of our eyes but fasten our heart, mind, and thoughts upon our wonderful King and Bridegroom, the most beautiful of the sons of men, who is clothed in the purple of his own blood.

III.

And because Christ suffered for us in the flesh, we want to cease from sin. Behold the man! This man, this tormented Christ, this King with the crown of thorns directs to all men, to all sinners the earnest admonition henceforth

to cease from sinning. Pilate led this scourged, bleeding Jesus before the people of Israel. Since he so solemnly confirmed his innocence, he indeed also wanted to appease his conscience because he had so maltreated this innocent man. He made one last effort to wrest this Jesus from the hands of his murderers. With what he had done, he wanted to have done enough and no longer lay violent hands upon his holy person. Sad to say, his weak, wavering will was soon broken like a reed.

This King of the Jews in the crown of thorns and purple cloak exhorted his people to repentance. Yet they did not give up their evil design but now really cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" That is the way of the wicked world. It wants to know nothing of this King with the crown of thorns. It hardens itself against the preaching of the suffering Redeemer and becomes only the more wicked and thus by themselves turn the Gospel of their salvation into a snare, into a preaching of the judgment.

But let us take the exhortation and warning of the apostle of Jesus Christ to heart; because Christ suffered for us in the flesh, let us arm ourselves with the same mind and cease from sin. 1 Pet 4:1. We promise faithfulness and obedience to this King and Bridegroom. We cannot forget how much it cost him to redeem us and obtain us for himself. Out of honor and love to him we flee and deny all ungodly ways and worldly lusts and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. And if our flesh and sin, lust and pride press hard upon us and assail us, we look into the countenance of the suffering Redeemer and call upon and flee to the King with the crown of thorns: through the Spirit we will kill the activity of the flesh. And if it should please our Lord and King to cause us to conform to his image, to impose upon us a portion of his disgrace or to chastise us with sickness or other woes, we kiss his rod and thank him that we are permitted to suffer in the flesh and die to sin and grow well according to our soul. Let us remain faithful to this thorn-crowned King until death, so that then we will receive from his hands the crown of life, the crown of honor. Amen.

18th SERMON

Matthew 27:24-26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24,25; John 19:8-16.

In this portion of the Lenten story we hear the conclusion of the trial which the Jews conducted against their King and Messiah before the judgment seat of Pilate. Pilate passed the final sentence. He condemned the innocent man to the death on the cross. From the very start he had left the straight way of justice and righteousness. He let himself be influenced by the hatred and rage of the Jews, something which no judge should allow. Nor could he stop on this steep way as he would have liked; he was swept along by the evil will and violence of the chief priests and the Jewish people until he satisfied them completely.

He exerted every effort in order to escape this last decision. At first he wanted to convince the Jews of Jesus' innocence and set him free with their consent. He would have gladly transferred the decision to King Herod. But neither the Jews nor Herod did what he wanted. He placed the rebel and

murder Barabbas in the place of the innocent Jesus and the Jews set Barabbas free. Finally, he had Jesus scourged and tormented. But the cry of the Jews, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" was stirred up anew at the sight of this Sufferer. And finally the murderous Jews sprang the trap in which they had caught the Roman judge and compelled him to confirm the sentence of death which they had already passed upon the Son of God in their council. Nevertheless, Pilate was and remained answerable for his unjust sentence. It was his judicial decision.

As we have very often remarked in the past, Pilate is a picture of the unjust judge and ruler of this world. Christ and Christ's Church are the ones who have the most bitter experiences with the injustice of worldly government. When once the government has begun to deal and bargain with the avowed and angry foes of Christ, then of itself it binds its hands and upon its own responsibility must finally condemn the righteous and pious upon earth.

Pilate is a picture of the men of this world, the good-natured, weak worldlings who try to make their conscience agree with their sins, a picture of the half-Christians who try to reconcile their Christianity with the world. In the example of Pilate we have repeatedly pictured to ourselves the unprincipled, godless standpoint of these halfway and lukewarm people. They are driven more and more into the corner by godless leaders and advisers, by the determined foes of the truth and finally are forced to make that final decision which they would like to avoid making. And this final decision goes against Christ. However, they themselves are guilty and must some day answer for their decision. Let us hold on to these basic thoughts for our meditation:

THE LAST DECISIVE SENTENCE OF THE WORLD UPON CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

- I. A Final Appeal to the Conscience of the Unjust Precedes the Final Decision.
- II. Nevertheless, the World Stifles its Conscience and Rejects Christ, the Holy One.
- III. But Behold, the Stone Which the Builders Rejected has Become the Cornerstone.

I.

A last appeal to the conscience of the unjust usually precedes the final decision.

Before Pilate made the final decision, he arranged a final hearing with Jesus. And in this hearing the Lord once more placed a sting into his conscience. When Pilate heard the word, namely the talk of the Jews, "He made himself the Son of God," Jn 19:7, he became the more afraid and went in again into the judgment hall and said to Jesus, "Whence art thou?" Pilate was afraid -- of that innocent, scourged, tormented King of the Jews; he was afraid that those words of the Jews could have some basis of fact, that this Jesus of Nazareth might perhaps be more than a weak human being; he might have descended from a higher world. He recalled that first speech of Jesus, "My kingdom is not of this world."

But the impression which the words of the Jews made upon him was only fear and terror. He gave not the least evidence of regret and sorrow over his great wrong which he had done to the innocent Jesus. He also was not yet willing to change his attitude, to be earnest in resisting the evil will of the Jews, or to submit to that King from above, the King of Truth. That question, "Whence art thou?" was not a sigh of repentance, nor a cry for help but a natural product of terror, merely the outbreak of agitation and dismay. This thought alone moved him: Jesus could be in a certain sense God's Son and take vengeance upon him some day. And this thought, this naked fear of punishment and revenge is in itself neither praiseworthy, nor wholesome, nor pleasing to God.

Therefore the Lord vouchsafed Pilate no further answer; to the question of his origin and his kingdom he gave him no further information. In the first private hearing he had said enough and Pilate had heard the voice of truth. Christ the Son of God does not let himself be mocked. His silence was a sharp reprimand. He left Pilate in his fear and terror. Least of all, did he give Pilate that comfort which he would have welcomed most of all, that is, calming his fear aroused by his unjust treatment, excusing this weakness in him, and laying all the guilt upon the Jews, the wicked accusers. Jesus' silence spoke enough; it was an earnest appeal to Pilate's conscience.

To this very day the Lord deals the same with these men, with worldlings who sin against their better conscience, with the worldly Christians, the half-Christians who deny their better knowledge. These unfortunate creatures also fall suddenly into fear, terror, dismay. They hear the voice of truth in their conscience. They fear the vengeance of God's Son whom they reviled and treated so vilely. But their fear is not a fear of the Lord. No groan over their great wrong, over the misery and wretchedness of their soul, no honest sigh for help and deliverance comes from their frightened heart and conscience. They fear only wrath and punishment but they do not shy away from sin, but love sin and are in no way willing to free themselves from the cords of sin. They do not long for deliverance from the bonds of servitude to sin. They do not earnestly ask for salvation and deliverance of their souls.

They want only comfort and ease of mind over their sins from the Lord, the assurance that sin is not so dangerous and ruinous as their aroused conscience tells them. For such frivolous, wilful sinners the Lord has no comfort. He surrenders them to their terrors, fears, and despair. If only these wretched people would understand the silence of the Lord and grasp why he refuses to answer them, that he does not hear sinners. God preserve us from such dreadful fear, from all hypocritical repentance which does not shy away from sin but only fears wrath and does not yearn for the mercy of the Lord! If only we would let ourselves be warned when the Lord is silent at our anxious imploring and praying and then examine ourselves as to what hinders us in having our prayers heard!

When Pilate received no answer from the Lord, he became indignant, shook off fear and terror, and revealed the rough, rude side of his nature, "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Jn 19:10. He was a miserable coward. He did not dare show his power which he had as Roman judge and governor toward the angry Jews. But before this bound Jesus who did not resist him he boasted of his authority and power. Jesus answered this question. He gave him no information as to his origin. The answer which he gave was also a reprimand. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." Jn 19:11a. Hence, he reminded the governor of the power which he received from above, that God had given him this power, but that God clearly had given the government the power and the right to punish evildoers and to praise the pious, and that God, the highest Ruler, will some day summon the government officials and judges to give account if they abuse their power and punish the just and set the godless free.

Jesus adds, "Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." The greatest guilt lay upon the Jews who misled Pilate and compelled him to misuse his judicial powers. Yet because Pilate had received power from God, he was guilty before God if he let himself be swayed by the Jews who had no right or power in this case to make this decision. Thus the Lord warned the unjust judge once more of the future accounting before he handed down his final, decisive sentence.

Pilate is a forerunner of the judges of this world, also of many so-called Christian rulers. Out of love to the godless, from fear of the people they twist the law, but over against the despised, powerless Church of Jesus

Christ they brag of their power and authority. Pilate is a true picture of the inferior worldling and worldly minded Christian. They have an obstinate and fearful heart. If they receive no comfort, no license for their sinful acts, they comfort themselves, soothe their conscience, shake off fear and terror, and show their spite, the pride of their wicked heart. They make use of their power and freedom. They persuade themselves that they are their own masters and can do as they wish and thus persevere upon their wicked way and will.

But before they take the last fatal step, the Lord knocks for the last time at their conscience. Through his Word which they hear on some occasion he reminds them of the responsibility, which they owe God for their commissions and omissions, and points them to the Last Day of accounting and judgment. At times he strengthens this call by heavy blows, by which he tries to bend the stubborn heart and to prove to the sinner that he is in the Lord's power. He also knows how to humble the great, the judges and rulers of the earth and at times lets them feel his stronger hand in order to warn them against unjust decisions. If only we might not fail to hear the knocking of the Lord, when he calls us from a wrong way on which we have decided to go! If only we do not defy the Lord and insist upon our wrong ideas and intentions as though we were lords of our own life!

II.

Sad to say, the world does not let itself be warned and stifles its conscience and rejects Christ, the Holy One. We see this in the example of Pilate. He now started anew in the defense of the King of the Jews. He bent every effort to set him free. The silence and the last words of Jesus had left a sting behind in his conscience. But it was the last, very weak resolution. The Jews on their part renewed the struggle and undertook the last assault upon the Roman tribunal. They stuck to their password, "Crucify, crucify him!" and finally supported their demand by an appeal to Caesar. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend. We have no king but Caesar." Jn 19:12,15. This argument had its effect. Even if Pilate had in the end given up the friendship of the Jews, he would never give up the friendship and favor of Caesar upon whom his office, honor, income, his entire earthly fortune depended. And because he feared that the Jews might accuse him before Caesar of protecting a rebel, because he saw that a tumult arose under his very eyes before the tribunal which could bring him into bad repute, he yielded to the will and request of the Jews and stifled his conscience and suppressed the last impulse of a sense of justice and shame.

Of course, he sought to soothe his screaming conscience. He took water and washed his hands before the people and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." Mt 27:24. And the Jews who had cast aside all fear of God long ago gladly took the responsibility upon themselves. "His blood be on us, and on our children." Mt 27:25. They were guilty of the great sin. They even ridiculed the sin, the guilt, the coming vengeance, whereas Pilate had reluctantly decided upon the unjust sentence of death and had begun to tremble at the thought of the coming judgment. And the Jews also paid dearly for their blasphemy. The innocent blood of Christ has come upon them and cost the lives of more than a million of their people, and to this very day burdens the godless nation as a grievous curse. But Pilate also committed sin. He could not cleanse his conscience from his participation in the guilt of Christ's murder with water. His conscience with its accusation would never be completely at rest, and what was foretold him was also fulfilled as history tells us. He lost the favor of Caesar, was dismissed from office, and died a wretched death.

Pilate's sentence and decision has, as it were, become law for the judges and rulers of the earth which in the trials against the disciples of Christ and his Church is authoritative. Then the rulers, among whom authority,

honor, respect weigh more heavily than justice, duty, and responsibility, give their conscience the last push; they also wash their hands in innocence and justify their sentence of death with the regard they owe the spirit of the times, the wish of the masses, the ringleaders of this godless generation, but thus they undermine their own station, their throne and judgment seat and fall under the judgment of the highest Judge from whom alone they have their power.

As Pilate, so all half-Christians and lukewarm Christians, who have sold their conscience to the world and sin, come to a wretched end. As a rule they stifle and kill the last impulse of their conscience. How seldom it is that a single one, who has decided to travel a crooked path, who lets himself be ensnared in the net of the godless, still comes to his senses in his last hour and repents! Fleeting money and goods, honor, respect in this world count for more than truth and the kingdom of heaven. They wash their hands in innocence and push all the blame upon their evil friends and advisers. To be sure, the ringleaders of unbelief have the greatest guilt and because they impudently joked about sin and God's wrath they will suffer double. But the seducers can not now or ever release the seduced from their guilt. They retain their sin and the sting of guilt in their conscience and some day must become silent when God begins to reckon with them.

Ah, it was an earnest, weighty decision which Pilate delivered on that day of preparation, on the eve of that great festival about the sixth hour according to Roman figuring, that is, early six o'clock in the morning and which he loudly announced to all the people from the pavement of Gabbatha. He decided that the request of the Jews be granted. It was his decision. All posterity accuses Pilate of murdering Christ: suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified by Pontius Pilate. Barabbas who for sedition and murder was cast into prison, for whom the Jews asked, he set free, but Jesus, the One Ridiculed and Scourged, he gave to their will to be crucified. An earnest, pregnant hour when a judge and ruler of the world frees the godless and condemns the pious! An earnest, pregnant hour in the life of man when a person who was a Christian or had been convinced of the truth of Christianity finally decides for sin, unrighteousness, hell, and damnation, yes chooses Barabbas, shame, and vice and rejects Christ, the heavenly King and says farewell to him forever! May the Lord in grace preserve every one of us from making this fatal choice!

III.

However, the stone which the builders rejected has become the corner-stone.

In the trial which men instituted against his Son, God also has a few words to say. He took the decision of Pilate into his hands. That sixth hour was decisive for the salvation of all sinners. God honored and exalted him whom the Jews and heathen rejected and condemned to be crucified and made him Lord and Savior of the Jews and heathen. He did that at Easter and Pentecost.

But already in the Lenten story there are indications which point to the future exaltation of the Sufferer. Throughout the whole Lenten story, including our text, shines the eternal counsel of God. Christ testified before Pilate that God gave him the power to free or to condemn him; and even if Pilate condemned Christ against all divine and human law, it still took place with God's permission, who had the highest power and could indeed have hindered this sentence and its execution. Where Pilate and the Jews thought evil, God meant it unto good. Hence, according to God's eternal counsel Christ was surrendered to Pilate and was given by Pilate over to the death on the cross. Yes, God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all.

This counsel of God was amazing; God carried everything out gloriously. Barabbas, the insurrectionist and murderer was set free and instead of him Christ, the Holy One, the Son of God was condemned. Barabbas took the place of

all sinners, all men. We are all sinners and evildoers, yes, rebels and murderers before God: we have rebelled against God and refused to obey his Law; we have hated and envied our brother, and he who hates his brother is a murderer. We have deserved death, the cross, temporal and eternal torment and damnation. But God himself laid our sins and iniquities, our punishment upon Christ; what we deserved Christ took upon himself willingly; by his stripes we are healed. Christ, the Holy One, God's Son was condemned; thus Barabbas was freed; thus we poor, wretched malefactors are freed from the judgment and need not fear the final judgment and sentence of God. The blood of the righteous Christ, the blood of the Son of God is condemned and finally shed on the cross; and this blood has reconciled the sinners and malefactors of this world with the greatest God and Judge. In Word and Sacrament this blood comes over sinners and cleanses us from sin and iniquity and frees us from an evil conscience and protects and defends us when the foe accuses our life.

Thus through the unjust verdict of Pilate and its execution God has absolved the unjust world and made this Stone which the builders rejected the Cornerstone; he made Christ the crucified Lord and Savior. Now he stands upon Gabbatha, sits upon God's throne at the right hand of the Almighty and gathers to himself through the Gospel of his cross, blood, and death a great people upon earth, the whole Christian Church. Blessed are all they who take their refuge in this Rock of salvation! Of course, all sinners who even now despise the Gospel of the Crucified and Resurrected, despise his blood and trample it under foot, are and remain guilty of the blood of God's Son; henceforth, they have no other sacrifice for their sins; they will be dashed to pieces upon this Cornerstone. We, however, embrace this Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate and remain faithful to him until death. May God strengthen us through his Holy Spirit that we for all time renounce the devil, the world, and sin, and struggle and come out victorious under Christ's banner! Let this be our watchword, our constant final word: Lord Jesus, I live to Thee; Lord Jesus, I die to Thee; Lord Jesus, living or dying I am Thine! Amen.

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19th SERMON

Matthew 27:31,32; Mark 15:20,21; Luke 23:26; John 19:16,17.

Up to this point we have heard of Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane, his arrest, the sessions of the worldly and spiritual courts. Yet all this was merely a preparation and prelude to the last great, mighty drama which God wanted to present to the world upon Golgatha. We now, as it were, enter into the new, holy place of Christ's suffering. We think of his high priestly course as he entered the heavenly sanctuary by his own blood. We think of his sacrifice when he offered himself perfectly to God to atone for the sins of the people, the whole world.

In the following section of the Lenten story which describes the high point of Christ's suffering, his torment, his death on the cross, the language becomes shorter, more compact. In few and simple words the evangelists inform us what the Lord experienced and what he amid suffering still did and said. They do not describe in detail the impression of the severe suffering upon the soul of the Holy One. To have a proper, fruitful meditation of Lent does not mean that one must paint the pains and torments of the Redeemer in glaring colors. Human thoughts, human words cannot sound the depths of this suffering.

Yet we are not to leave these short and powerful words which the Holy Spirit himself has spoken so quickly. We intend to pause at each separate statement, at each phrase of the last, great suffering and ponder upon the extent to which also this world is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for comfort, for correction. From all the details we recognize God's earnestness, the greatness and seriousness of our iniquities, but also the inexpressible goodness and love of God our Savior. The whole story of Good Friday is a blooming, scented paradise. From each blossom we draw strength, comfort and refreshment.

The section which is our first meditation tells of the last bitter journey of the Lord from the judgment hall of Pilate to Golgatha. During the past night Jesus had to go over many a difficult way, from the room where he celebrated the last Passover to Gethsemane, from Gethsemane to the house of Annas, from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod back to Pilate. However, the most bitter trip was the one which our Lenten text related which the Lord undertook in the morning of Good Friday. That was in reality the way to death. To this very day pilgrims in Jerusalem are shown the street along which the Lord is said to have been led. To this very day its name is in the mouths of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, even the Turks and unbelievers: The Way of Sorrows. Whether the street which today is pointed out is really the path which Jesus then traveled is uncertain. The true way of sorrows is marked for us here in the Scriptures in clear words. What we read serves for our improvement and edification, yes, for our joy. Every step upon this way of sorrows is filled with blessing. The Lord's way of sorrows covers our sinful way and strengthens and comforts us as we carry our cross. We will now picture this to ourselves:

THE WAY OF SORROWS

- I. Along which Jesus was Led,
- II. And which we must Go with Him.

In spirit we accompany the Lord on the way of sorrows along which he was led.

Early six o'clock on the morning of that Good Friday, hence according to Jewish reckoning with the dawn of the Passover, the final sentence had scarcely been passed that Jesus be crucified, when in a moment all preparations to carry it out were also made. Some produced the cross, others dug a hole on Golgatha for the cross; the accusation which was to be fastened to the top of the cross was quickly written. The wicked mob knew no peace or quiet until they carried out their murderous intentions. The children of this world, the enemies of Christ, are wiser, more energetic and zealous in their way than the children of light, the friends of Christ.

The soldiers took charge of Jesus. Jesus, the Lord of glory was passed from one hand to the next just like a plain, common article. None wanted to keep him, every one tried to get rid of him again as quickly as possible. Judas surrendered the Lord to the servants of the chief priests, the Jews to Pilate, Pilate would gladly have transferred him to Herod, and finally handed him over to the soldiers who hustled him completely out of the land of the living. That indicated that the Lord was to die for all, Jews and heathen, lords and servants, for the whole human race which rejected him. As the Mediator and Substitute of all of us, he traveled also this last difficult way from Pilate's house to the place of execution.

The soldiers took off the mantel and clothed him in his own garments. Because of the blood-soaked purple robe the figure of the Lord had become unrecognizable. That is why the soldiers took off this robe which was not his own, let the crown of thorns stay on his head, and clothed him in his own clothes which he wore before so that all who knew him before might know him again, so that it would be clear to all, that it was this Jesus of Nazareth who now was being led to the place of execution. Yes, that very Jesus of Nazareth, the great prophet, who had done great signs before the eyes of all Judea and Jerusalem, spoken such powerful words to all, who by word and deed had testified that he was Israel's Messiah, the promised Savior and Redeemer, now went to his death and by his suffering and dying intended to crown his work as Messiah, confirm and seal his love as Savior and Redeemer. The Lamb who goes forth is really the friend and Savior of our souls.

The soldiers led him away so that they could crucify him; they led him to the place of execution like a lamb led to the slaughter. They led him away who was weary unto death, drove him by pushing and hitting, threatenings and cursings, and the mob which a few days before had cried out hosanna and honored him with palm branches as the King of Zion, now looked down full of contempt, with secret malicious joy upon this thorn-crowned King, who was led to death as the greatest of all criminals.

But this difficult, bitter way of our Mediator and Redeemer eases our last difficult journey. For man born of woman, for the sinful person this is the most difficult journey, the going to death and the judgment. However, since Jesus has traveled this way in our place, we can joyfully die and confidently step before God's judgment throne.

The soldiers led Jesus outside the door. The Passover lamb was to be killed outside. The Law of Moses commanded that the skin and flesh of the animal which was not placed upon the altar was to be burned outside the camp. The red cow from whose ashes the waters of purification were prepared was burned outside the borders of the camp. This Jesus, who was killed outside the city gates, tormented in the flames of hell, was and is in truth the Pascal Lamb given into death for us, for sinners, for the impure. As filth and trash is swept out of the city, so Jesus was pushed outside the holy city, a cleansing sacrifice for the entire world by which humanity is cleansed from its filth. Christ is killed outside the city of Jerusalem -- a Savior and Reconciler not

only for the Jews, but also for those outside, all heathen. As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us (Heb 13:12,13), we also must and want to go outside Jerusalem which became a Babel, leave behind the sink of corruption that this world is, so that our eyes may behold the Priest and King in his beauty.

"And he bearing his cross went forth." These words particularly mark the last bitter journey. After the difficult struggle and the bitter torments of that night he still must bear the cross through the streets of Jerusalem. The burden of the cross was laid upon his shoulders already cut to ribbons by the scourging. And he did not shrug off this burden; he carried his cross. Thus Isaac carried the wood which his father laid upon him. While Isaac carried the wood, he asked his father, "My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham replied. "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Gen 22:7,8. Isaac might have suspected that he himself was the lamb which God provided. Jesus the son of Abraham and Isaac knew most clearly and positively as he carried the wood why he carried it, that he was the Lamb which God provided from the beginning which should die for the sins of the whole world.

He bore his cross, the very same cross which God had appointed for him before the foundation of the world. Because he knew that, he, as Isaac, also bore patiently and willingly the burden imposed upon him. Love to the fallen world, his ardent love for sinners made this burden, this journey easy. Ah, how we should thank the Lord that he did not throw away this wood as well he could have, that he did not let the angels take the wood from him, that he was obedient to the Father even unto the cross, that he persevered to the end, that he held to his will and purpose, to his holy, gracious will to take our burdens from our shoulders!

The cross was the accursed tree. Only criminals were condemned to it. In and with the cross Jesus bore the curse which burdened the sinful world. Surely, he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows. Behold, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In and with the cross he bore our sins himself in his holy, unspotted body. And with his stripes we are healed.

The load Thou takest on Thee,
That pressed so sorely on me,
It crushed me to the ground. (171,6)

He is not ashamed of his burden. "And he bearing his cross went forth" is a majestic word. This disgrace is his honor. This cross is his badge, his royal crown, his diadem, his scepter. Also when he took the cross upon his shoulders, he fulfilled the word, "And the government shall be upon his shoulder." With the cross he gained the victory, hurled sin, death, and the devil into the dust. This cross is now his banner. Around this sign he gathers the redeemed. Joyfully and proudly we swear allegiance to this sign and coat of arms of our King and Savior.

II.

That is the way of sorrows, the Lord's blessed way of sorrows, and this very same way we must go with him.

We are told that when the soldiers had gone outside the city gates with Jesus, a man by the name of Simon, a stranger from Cyrene in Libia, perhaps a secret disciple of Jesus as many think, met them and that they laid that cross upon him that he might bear it after Jesus. The cross which Jesus at first had borne was passed on to this stranger. Simon of Cyrene is, as it were, a substitute for the remote world of heathen. Christ's cross is intended also for these far off heathen, the very same cross which Christ endured and through

which he wiped out sin. All heathen, all far away, all sinners are the true heirs of the fruit of Christ's death on the cross. What Jesus earned by his cross-bearing, he procured for us. What he bore, suffered, earned, and won is our possession.

Simon carried Jesus' cross after him until the top of the hill, and in him we perceive our forerunner. We who comfort ourselves in Christ's cross are also called to carry the Lord's cross after him. With him we must here travel the way of sorrows and endure disgrace with him. We upon whom the fruit of Christ's death on the cross has come, of which we rejoice and boast, that Christ carried the cross for us, in our stead, we also have the holy obligation to walk in imitation of the Crucified. Jesus says, "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Mt 10:38. Because we are Christians, disciples of the Lord we are cross-bearers.

We draw salutary teaching concerning the cross and cross-bearing, concerning comfort under the cross from our text, the story of Simon of Cyrene. First of all we learn: for the most part the cross comes suddenly, unexpectedly. Simon of Cyrene came from the field, wanted to return to the city to his home, expected no misery; suddenly at the city gate there met him this procession of criminals, and before he can think what this procession could mean he himself was drawn into following Jesus and harnessed into Christ's yoke. That is the rule in the Christian's life. Often a Christian is in good spirits, goes his way in a happy frame of mind, and is not intent upon anything wicked, when suddenly, like lightning out of the blue, trial and tribulation strike him down. The cross seldom sends advance notice. In the main it is an unexpected guest which does not leave as easily and as quickly as it entered in.

In the second place we learn from Simon's example how man, the Christian as well inasmuch as he has flesh and blood, feels toward cross-bearing. Simon of Cyrene had to be compelled to bear the cross; at first he resisted it. So it is also with us. Do we always look on the cross as a welcome guest? Who does not at first try to shake it off? Which Christian has never groaned under the cross, yes even secretly murmured against it? The cross presses and cuts deep into one's flesh and blood, into the natural heart.

But in the third place, we wish also to note the comfort while bearing the cross. A Christian has comfort under the cross. Simon of Cyrene carried Christ's cross; he followed bearing Jesus' cross. Likewise, a Christian recognizes very soon what that misfortune which struck him means. It is the cross of the Lord, the cross of the Redeemer. He has suffered so much for him; shall he not for his sake also gladly suffer and bear something? Tribulation does not come by chance; Christ has laid the cross upon us. God's will and plan is being carried out. From eternity God foreknew our cross.

And that is a good, gracious will of God. Christ means well when he gives us a share of his cross. The cross is a proof of love, not of the wrath, displeasure of the Lord. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. Because the Lord carried the cross, he ground off its sharpest edges. He alone bore the curse, the accursed tree. And if he lays the cross upon us afterwards, the curse is no longer in this cross. The cross does not oppress the soul and conscience. We know that the most oppressive burden, sin, guilt, the evil conscience, has been removed from us for all time by Christ.

The cross does not threaten, curse, or frighten us but looks gentle and friendly to us. It is in the cross that we see and taste the friendliness, goodness, and kindness of the Lord. We become aware that Christ precedes us on the way of sorrows, that he is at our side and helps us carry the burden. Jesus himself carried the cross the greatest distance, until outside the city gates, only during the last stretch up the hill did it lay upon Simon's back. He lifts it, helps us carry it; he supports the arms, strengthens the unsteady knees; he does not let us be tempted above that we are able. And as he himself was spared the cross for a time but then upon Golgatha had to taste the bitterest

woes of the cross, so he procures alleviation and relief under the cross and makes us skilled, able, and willing by a small cross to bear a heavier cross later on and thus exercises us in the school of the cross.

But with the cross he also places a blessing upon our backs and furnishes a blessing in the home. For Simon the way of the cross was blessed and brought his house eternal gain. He became a true confessor of the Lord. He therefore also made known to his children the name of the Lord. His sons, Alexander and Rufus, were afterwards trusted members of the Christian congregation in Rome. Rom 16:13. The cross advances us in the knowledge of Christ, in faith, in hope. The cross is a blessing for the entire family which also must suffer when one member suffers. For Christians the cross is the true of life, a healing medicine. Only Christ's cross atones for sin. On the other hand, the cross of the Christian helps to crucify the flesh. Suffering and bearing the cross helps the Christian to cease from sin and live no more in the lusts of men. 1 Pet 4:1.2. So it is that the cross is an easy yoke, a light burden. At the death of a Christian it still is said, "He carried Christ's yoke." The cross and misery finally come to an end. Through the cross we go with Christ to glory. We praise and glorify the Lord that through his cross and cross-bearing he took the curse from us and sanctified our cross. Amen.

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20th SERMON

Luke 23, 27-31

In our Lenten text we are still on Jesus' way of sorrows, on the way to Golgatha. Our text reports something more about the procession. The thorn-crowned King leads the way. Simon of Cyrene followed him carrying his scepter, the cross. Two malefactors went along. And the soldiers, the hangmen and executioners drove those wretched sacrifices on ahead. But now a large crowd followed Jesus. The chief priests, the Pharisees, and scribes accompanied him. These ringleaders and the Jews, who were enflamed by the bloodthirstiness of their leaders and had cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!", feasted their eyes on the suffering King of Israel. Many of the people, especially the strangers who had come to Jerusalem for the Easter festival, had joined the crowd out of curiosity. So it is everywhere. Wherever misfortune strikes in the city, there the curious gather. Thus man has degenerated; the human heart has become so inhuman that it seeks its pastime and amusement in the pains and torment of its neighbor.

In that crowd were also a great number of women. They wept and lamented over Jesus. They appeared to be of a different mind and disposition than the rest of the crowd. They appeared to be secret friends and disciples of the Lord; one would be tempted to conclude from their tears that they swore allegiance to the suffering Redeemer. In any case, their lamentation was a proof of Jesus' innocence. Otherwise the women accompanied also an infamous criminal to his death with raging cries curses. Of course, there were amongst that large mob a few true Israelites whose heart had been opened to the Redeemer of Israel. The Lord did not acknowledge the lamentation and the tears of the daughters of Jerusalem. He did not acknowledge them, not even the most of them, as being his own. He did not accept their sympathy, called upon them to weep over themselves, over their children, over their people, over their city, because of the great disaster which Israel had to expect. He threatened them with the coming

judgment. Hence, for the most part, they were unconverted women who rent their garments but not their hearts before the Lord their God.

We see from this story, that the unconverted, the children of this world, the foes of God and Christ do not all show one and the same color and character. Some bid defiance, ridicule, blaspheme. Others are tender-hearted and good-natured, are easily moved, weep and lament. And yet it is not the true repentance which pleases God. That is the way of the world. One time it laughs and jokes, the next it weeps and howls. The lamentation of the daughters of Jerusalem is an example of the sorrow of this world, the sorrow which brings forth death. According to the testimony of the Lord, the lamentations of the world will finally die away into the cries of the anguish of Judgment Day, into howling and gnashing of teeth in hell. Nevertheless, from the lamentation of the daughters of Jerusalem, from the sorrow of the world, we can draw the opposite conclusions. From that we recognize the opposite, which lamentation pleases God, which the true sorrow is which the bitter suffering and death of Christ should awaken. This verdict of the Lord upon the lament of the women was and is intended for the purpose of causing sinners, the carnal man, to be warned and converted from the heart. The Lenten text before us contains a powerful admonition to repentance, to the sorrow which is not to be repented of. Hence, listen now to

THE LAMENTATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

In it we see:

- I. An Example of the Sorrow of the World which Worketh Death,
- II. An Admonition to True Repentance which is not to be Repented of.

I.

The lamentation of the daughters of Jerusalem is an example of the sorrow of the world which works death.

Women followed the procession with loud sobs and groans. They bewailed Jesus, they smote their breast, even tore their clothing. And they wept over him. And this lamentation, these tears were not sheer, gross hypocrisy. They did not pretend as did Judas when he kissed the Lord. The sight of this man of sorrows who was about to sink under the burden of the cross awakened their sympathy. They could not imagine, their human, womanly feeling opposed the idea that this good man who had healed their sick and wronged no one was being led to his death.

However, this condolence did not soften the pains of the Savior; these tears were no balm for his wounds. Jesus turned around and restrained their tears, "Weep not for me!" The daughters of Jerusalem did not deny the nature of their nation; they were the children of their fathers. It was merely fleshly sympathy which they showed, the overflow of the natural heart. It was a blind sorrow. They did not see and recognize the great work of God before their very eyes; they did not know the time of their visitation. They did not recognize the true cause of the unique suffering of this Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps they were angry with and secretly cursed the leaders of their nation who had wrung the death sentence from the Roman judge. But the sin and guilt of Jerusalem, their own sins were hidden from them. They did not take to heart the powerful earnest words of that great Prophet which he spoke in the temple of Jerusalem. They belonged to the secure of Jerusalem as the prophet describes who gave themselves and their children earthly, perishable food and joy, who delighted in temporal luxury and were unwilling to hurt the fleshly lusts of their heart. According to our text, according to what the Lord did, thus must we judge of the

majority of those weeping women.

Hence their lamentation is an example of the sorrow of the world. The world, the unconverted people, and also the unconverted women know very well how to weep and lament. The children, the daughters of this world lament and howl and behave like miserable people when a misfortune grasps them by the throat, when their lusts and joys are suddenly turned into pain and sorrow. They also share in the misfortune of others, in the misery of their neighbor. The children of the world pity, bewail even Christians, God's children with whom they ordinarily do not agree, when they groan under the cross. And their tears and lamenting are not pure hypocrisy; they come from the heart. But from the natural heart. It is fleshly sorrow, fleshly emotion. They do not recognize the mighty hand of God which oppresses them or others. Even if God's finger and arm is ever so clear and noticeable they do not see and feel it. They see only what is right before their eyes. They know nothing of their sin and guilt, the source of all affliction.

While they give in to the feelings and impulses of their fleshly heart, they stifle the impulse and voice of their conscience. Their eyes overflow with tears. But behind this feeling and tender mood is hidden a hard, cold heart which fights off divine sorrow. Such tenderhearted people are occasionally moved to tears even by a sermon, perhaps by the description of Christ's suffering on the cross. But they refuse the reprimand and correction, do not want to rend their heart, do not want to deny the flesh and their natural way, refuse to repent and improve their lives, hate the rebirth, the new way.

And as long as we are also flesh and blood, we pay tribute to worldly sorrow. How many times we have already deceived ourselves concerning our repentance and have mistaken the natural, fleshly feeling, the soft mood of our heart for piety! How quickly a Christian shakes off the earnest impression, the seriousness of God's visitation, the seriousness of the Word, the seriousness of the cross of Christ! How soon weeping, lamenting, sorrow, condolence turn into laughing, cheerfulness, thoughtlessness! Let us take care that we do not deceive ourselves with a false, fleshly Lenten meditation!

But the sorrow of the world works death. The lamentations of the daughters of Jerusalem should turn into cries of woe and anguish of the last wrath. Jesus says to them, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us." The Lord predicted to the daughters of Jerusalem, but in and with them all Jerusalem and Israel, the judgment because of their impenitence. Not at his fate, but at their own, at the fate of their city should they weep, just as the Lord himself had wept over Jerusalem a few days before. The Lord describes the difficult time which awaited Jerusalem in the words of the Prophet Hosea, "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us." Hos 10:8. As he himself spoke three days before to his disciples about the end of Jerusalem, "And woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!" Mt 24:19 so he speaks here, "The days are coming, in the which they shall say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."

Under the shadow of the cross this Jesus of Nazareth still showed himself as the Son of God and the Judge of the world. His majesty shone through his deepest disgrace and humility. At the very time when he was led to the slaughter Jesus still knew that he had come from God and now would leave the world and return to God. His resurrection, his ascension, his sitting at the right hand of God, his return to judgment, his glory stood clearly before his eyes, as he was sentenced, as he bore the cross on which he should die. As during the night before the Sanhedrin, so now when he collapsed under the cross, he came forward as the future Judge of all Jerusalem.

As he had spoken, so it came to pass. The last woe, the final wrath came upon the children of those fathers who nailed Christ to the cross. Even many a witness of Christ's crucifixion saw for himself the anguish of Jerusalem. Then the daughters of Jerusalem began to howl still more dolefully over their own calamity and over the misery of their children. Then the merciful hands of the women killed their own children and roasted them. Then mothers called the barren blessed. Then the strongest men trembled and quaked and said to the hills, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us!" and sought refuge in the holes of the mountains and caves and full of anguish and despair finally ran into the burning temple in order to be buried under its ruins.

And that is the way it will be also at the end of the world. All the families of men will howl. Not only the proud tyrants and persecutors of the Church, not only the out and out scoundrels and transgressors, no, all who lived after the flesh and were satisfied with the piety, remorse, and sorrow of the world and did not turn from their whole heart to their God and Savior will tremble and fear and wring their hands and then too late and vainly call upon the Judge for mercy. This is the way St. John describes the great day of the Lord, "And the kings of the earth, and the great men and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Rev 6:15-17.

In order to confirm the truth of his prophecy, Jesus pointed the daughters, the inhabitants of Jerusalem to his own cross and suffering, "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If the green tree is cast into the fire, how the dry wood will burn all the more! If the innocent Son of God must suffer and die, how much the more will sinners, the unfruitful trees be punished and tormented! St. Peter writes, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1 Pet 4:17,18. The sufferings of the Christians here on earth are signs of the future unutterably great torture and pain of the godless. May God in grace spare us that!

II.

But the lamentation of the daughters of Jerusalem is at the same time a reminder of the true remorse of which no one should repent. From the false, fleshly lamentation, remorse, and repentance of the daughters of Jerusalem we can gather the true remorse and repentance to which Christ's suffering should awaken us. He was the Judge of the world who shortly before his death once more pronounced a woe upon Jerusalem. But through the pronouncement of the judgment one can hear also the voice of the Redeemer. As Jesus walked under the cross he stirred thoughts of peace in his soul. By that earnest sermon he wanted to lead the inhabitants of Jerusalem to true repentance. And certainly these words were not in vain to all who heard them. Many of those women reflected and wept tears of true repentance.

The Lord's words are profitable also for us for reproof, for repentance and improvement. True remorse is the knowledge of sin and God's wrath, is sorrow and pain over one's own sins and iniquities. The appearance of the Lamb of God who carries the sins of the world awakens remorse in us. We should justly weep and lament over ourselves, over the greatness and seriousness of our sins which caused the Lord Jesus his bitter suffering.

Alas, the man born of flesh is flesh! The children of the world walk after the lusts of the flesh. During these very earnest days, while one bears in mind the suffering and death of Christ, the world adores the lascivious

flesh. Even Christians have not completely laid aside the old way. This also was the sin of Jerusalem: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. How many of us still indulge the flesh! Because we permit the flesh to indulge itself, Christ must suffer in the flesh. The sensuality and pride of the daughters of Jerusalem, the sons and daughters of men press like an alarming yoke upon this Holy Person. The excesses of our sinning, corrupt nature squeezes sighs, sweat, and tears from him.

Alas, by nature we are all dry twigs without sap, power, and life; by nature we are dead in sin! All the beauty, all the skill and virtue of man is hay, dry wood. All his works, even those seemingly good, holy works, are dry leaves on a dry twig. How unfruitful has also our life been! How many dead works have done from day to day! And our iniquity, our fleshly wantonness, our spiritual dryness and deadness is so deeply entrenched, weighs so heavily that it could be atoned for only by the death of God's Son. What a fearful judgment it is that the green tree is cast into the fire! Luther says: "What will happen to the sinner if the dearest child is thus smitten? What inexpressible earnestness must it be which strikes such a great, infinite Person." Yes, we, we have caused the Lord trouble and labor by our sins!

Whoever sees the truth of this and is heartily sorry about it will not begrudge his pain and remorse. But faith is also a part of true repentance. We lift our eyes of faith to the Lamb of God who carries the cross and in and with the cross our sins. The green tree is cast into the fire. Christ, the Pure, the Innocent, the Righteous whose life sparkled with the fruits of righteousness, Christ the living, the Prince of life, the Son of God, the Lord of life and death, the Ruler and Judge of the world went into death and gave his innocent, divine life for the redemption of many. This ransom outweighs the guilt of the entire world. Now the dry twigs, the poor sinner is spared. Now for Christ's sake God forgives us our sins. Yes, Christ, the green tree, the Prince of life has died.

But the green tree could not decay. The Prince of life could not remain in death and be held by death. He passed through death uninjured and lives in eternity; in the place of sin he has brought eternal righteousness, life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Through his power and might we are freed from the bonds of the flesh. Through the Gospel we are grafted as twigs into Christ the green tree, he the vine, we the branches. This brings a new way in us. And Christ continually prunes his branches through the Word, through the cross of tribulation so that they will bring forth more fruit. Out of love and honor to him we daily crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts. We go with him through death into life and will in his Paradise become green and blossom and praise his glory as beautiful green trees of heaven. May the Lord grant us divine sorrow which works salvation notto be repented of and preserve us as long as we walk in this sinful flesh for the sake of his suffering and death. Amen.

21st SERMON

Matthew 27:33-35.38; Mark 15:22-24.27.28; Luke 23:32.33; John 19:17.18.

In spirit we accompanied the Lord upon his last sorrowful journey.

Now we come to Golgatha, the site of the execution. This is a holy place, the holiest place upon earth. Of this place it can be said: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Ex 3:5. This is a mystery which was hidden from the beginning of the world: Christ the crucified. The cross of the Redeemer: the end in view of Old Testament history, this the beginning of the New Testament, this the heart of the story of God's kingdom, this the center of world history. The Lamb who was killed upon Golgatha, upon the altar of the cross, God had chosen from eternity. The Lamb who there is killed receives praise, glory, honor, power, adoration in all eternity; he is the refuge, the joy of mankind, the delight of the angels. Truly, we now step upon holy ground; we must take our shoes from our feet; we must leave behind our human understanding and wretched rhetoric. By our own trimmings and embellishment we hide the cross of Christ. Here we want to remain upon a safe, even way, examine the words which the Holy Spirit has spoken, show what lies in the words themselves, and add the application to these words of the story, which God's Spirit has given in other passages of Holy Writ.

First of all, we picture to ourselves the story of the crucifixion of the Lord. Each separate stroke, each word is of meaning. To be sure, the form which is drawn for us in these words is not a form which pleases natural man. We see only suffering, untold misery, unspeakable insult and disgrace, the deepest contempt, curse, and wrath. To the natural man, Jews and Greeks, Christ the crucified is and remains a stumbling block and foolishness. If we do not turn away our eyes from the sight on the cross but look more deeply into the eyes of the Sufferer, when we open the hard, rough shell we will find and taste the sweet kernel which is hidden in the word about the cross. To us the crucified Christ is divine wisdom and power. The Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures even give us the key to his mystery. Christ's cross and disgrace bring to light many clear, precious, comforting words of God. And therefore we pray that the Holy Spirit will open the eyes of our understanding so that we behold our joy in this most beautiful of the children of men. Our Luther says of the crucified Christ: "To our eyes there will be no delight in him; for you clearly see how disgracefully, how miserably, how wretchedly he hangs there. But look at him with your heart; then you will find a garment and treasure for which you will never be able to thank him enough." Therefore, we now preach

CHRIST THE CRUCIFIED

- I. To the Jews a Stumblingblock, to the Heathen Foolishness,
- II. But to us the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.

I.

Christ the crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to the heathen.

First we ponder the story of the crucifixion, the pains and disgrace of the Crucified, and hold our thoughts strictly to the limits which the holy evangelists have set through their words, adding nothing nor taking anything away. The very words tell us enough. I admit we find no form or comeliness. In any portion of the Lenten story we dare never forget who he was who suffered so miserably there. Even our text for today describes his person exactly. It was Jesus, that Jesus to whom all of Scripture point. As our text testifies, he fulfilled the Scriptures. It is he of whom Moses and the prophets spoke, Christ, the Messiah and King of Israel who should redeem Israel; it was the Lord Jehovah whom they nailed to the cross. But if in our meditation we step by step hold the person, this great person before our eyes, the mystery becomes only the darker to our natural reason, the offence the greater. To this very

day there is no notice taken of a crucified person, if he is thought to be a person accursed. But Jesus, the Savior, Christ, yes, God on the cross, the One Crucified whom one should worship: that for human reason is the epitome of all folly; that offends natural man.

As our text reports, the soldiers, the hangmen brought Jesus to the place which in Hebrew is called Golgatha, that is translated as the place of a skull. Whether Golgatha received its name from the skulls of those executed or from its round shape, or whether even before this time it was a well-known place of execution or first became a place of execution with the crucifixion of Christ we cannot decide with certainty. It is enough that the Scriptures call our attention to the name: Golgatha, the place of execution. Yes, a place of execution the like of which exists nowhere else upon earth! Usually criminals who are unworthy of this world and of living are led to the place of execution and there killed. Here upon Golgatha the Lord who had come from heaven, who had sought only man's good, of whom the world was not worthy was executed, tortured to death.

Before the soldiers laid hands on him again, they gave the Lord vinegar to drink, wine mixed with myrrh and gall, a bitter drink. Such a drink was customarily given to those who were to be nailed to the cross to stupefy them and thus the pains of the crucifixion would be lessened. When Jesus tasted it, he would not drink it. He refused this bitter drink in order to drink and taste in complete consciousness the bitter cup which the Father now gave him. He kept a clear mind. He felt all the unutterable torments of that long, fearful six hours, from the third hour to the ninth; he wanted to feel them; he wanted to see and taste death and the bitterness of death. We cannot possibly conceive the feelings of pain of God's Son which he experienced in his holy, tender body which had no experience with evil. Our heart and feelings are too dull for that. We can merely say and maintain that Jesus tasted, felt, and experienced in fullest measure and to the very end all the pains and torments which goes along with a crucifixion. Alas, those were unmentionable pains!

"And about the third hour," we read in our text, "they crucified him." That was a memorable hour, that third hour, nine o'clock in the morning! A brief word: "They crucified him." In this one word all the woes of the world are contained. They crucified him, "Jesus in the midst." That it was Jesus whom they crucified, Jesus of whom the Scriptures testify, this remark indicates a distress before whose greatness and depth human thoughts and words become silent and shrink away.

We know from history how the crucifixion of criminals was handled. The wretched evildoer was first deprived of his clothing and fastened to the cross which had been laid flat upon the ground. The arms were stretched apart, the legs stretched tight and then hands and feet were fastened to the cross with nails. And that happened also to this Holy One in Israel. The hands which had done only good and had been active in the service of suffering mankind, the feet which had been run tired and sore so that peace might be preached near and far in Israel, in Galilee, Samaria, Judah, even beyond these boundaries, that the sick in all the cities, market places, and villages might be helped, would be placed against the hard cross and pierced, wounded with blunt nails.

After the criminal was fastened to the cross, the cross with its burden was set upright, placed into a hole, and packed around firmly in the earth with pegs and stones; now the one condemned hung between heaven and earth. The wounds in hands and feet grew larger, the blood flowed in rivulets; all the bones were severed and put out of joint. The internal, noble organs, the viscera became enflamed and with every passing minute the torment increased. History reports that a crowd broke out into loud weeping and sobbing when it caught sight of a slave who was crucified at Damascus. And here on a post hangs the Lord, God, who made heaven and earth and writhes like a worm, not like a man.

Israel's Messiah sobs and laments as David perceived it in the spirit, as Psalm 22 reports: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me." Ps 22:14-17. This was the bruise in his heel of which Moses had spoken. Gen 3:15.

The deepest disgrace and shame was added to the nameless pains. Intentionally the evangelists hold Christ's disgrace clearly before our eyes. They use many words. "And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death." Lk 23:32. "They crucified him at the place called Golgatha, and two malefactors with him, one on the right hand, and the other on the left, and Jesus in the midst." Jn 19:18; Lk 23:33. "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors." Is 53:12; Mk 15:28. Punishment by crucifixion was in itself a disgrace and shame which was inflicted only upon the commonest criminals, despised slaves. When Roman citizens had committed a crime worthy of death, they were executed with the sword. And that Jesus was crucified between two well-known, infamous men, two murderers, increased his disgrace. Everyone who saw that would have to think and say: He is also a criminal; he hangs in the middle; he is perhaps the worst of the three. Even among the Jews everyone who hung on the tree was considered banished and cursed. Moses had written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Dt 21:23; Gal 3:13. And when it can be said of this person who was banished and accursed, "He is Israel's Messiah, of whom the Scriptures testify, the King of glory! Honor him!" then such talk, such a demand on Jews and heathen is in every way foolishness and most offensive to the natural man. He was despised and rejected. Yes, he was so despised that we hid our face from him and would like to hide them from him even now. And he who does not feel aversion and offence covers his head and thinks and says, "No, such a faith, faith in one who is crucified, a religion and worship of that kind is of no use to me. That is too unusual; I do not understand it; that is too hard and high for me." But thank God that he has opened our eyes and revealed the mystery of Christ's cross!

II.

For us the crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

All through the suffering, pains, and disgrace, we perceive the beauty of this King and Savior. Beneath the hard, rough shell we taste the sweet kernel. Christ's cross, the word about the cross is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. From Scripture we learn to understand the meaning of Christ's suffering on the cross. The Holy Spirit has explained everything to us.

The word of the cross is profitable for reproof. Christ's cross is an earnest, powerful sermon of repentance. Here in a clear mirror we see our sins and God's wrath. The Scriptures say, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." Is 53:5. "I restored that which I took not away." Ps 69:4. Our sins and misdeeds are the cause of these sharp pains, this deep disgrace. If we place ourselves under Christ's cross, we know who and how we are, that we are sinners, yes, sinners and criminals, evildoers, malefactors, robbers and murderers in God's eyes. "He was wounded for our iniquities." The two malefactors at the right and left hand are pictures and images of us. Sin, every sin is a misdeed, a crime. We have done evil, robbed, seized the forbidden fruit, and have coveted evil. We have done wrong and violence to our neighbor, killed him with hatred, wrath, bitter words with every power at our command. We have robbed God of his honor, refused to worship and obey him, despised his Word, and considered it common. Before God we are malefactors,

evildoers, robbers, murderers.

Christ's entire body was covered with wounds, stripes, bruises, disgrace, shame. In this picture we know who and how we are. We are completely unclean, full of blemishes; from the crown of our head to the sole there is nothing sound in our body. We have sinned with thoughts, words, and deeds, we have stained body, soul, and spirit. The thorn-crowned head of Jesus reminds us of our proud, wicked, ungodly, unholy thoughts. The silent, pale mouth of the Crucified reminds us of the deluge of vain, useless, evil words which have crossed our lips. The pierced hands of the Crucified remind us of the work of our hands, of all the evil which we did, the good which we wasted; his pierced feet remind us of the crooked ways which we have gone. Yes, we sigh and lament:

'Tis I who should be smitten,
My doom should here be written:
Bound hand and foot in hell. (171,5)

Our sins are the thorns, nails, pricks which wounded this Holy One. We have caused him much labor, prepared torment, pain, disgrace for him by our misdeeds. Truly, we, we should be put into the stocks or in irons, upon the rack, hanged on the cross. What Jesus bore and suffered we have deserved; it was our just reward.

The crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God for us. The crucified Christ has been made by God to be wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. The cross of Christ is also our comfort, our refuge. Thither we flee when the enemy of our soul pursues us. Therewith we comfort and protect ourselves against all sins and misdeeds. Christ has suffered "the just for the unjust." 1 Pet 3:18. In our text he again appears as the Substitute of sinners and evildoers. He was reckoned among the evildoers, placed on the same level as they were. He passed for one of them, as one of us.

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him." Our chastisement lay upon him. Is 53:5. "Christ was made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Gal 3:13. He was reckoned as one of the evildoers. Thus the Scriptures were fulfilled. God's counsel has been carried out. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Is 53:6. "God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." 2 Cor 5:21a. "God spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all." Rom 8:32.

And the Son submitted to this counsel and will of God. He refused the bitter drink which was to benumb him; for us, for our benefit he wanted to taste and drain the cup of God's wrath. Willingly he, he himself, bore our sins in and with his body on the tree. 1 Pet 2:24. "Jesus for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Heb 12:2. On the cross love, eternal love who bears all things, endures all things, which does not let itself become embittered glorifies itself. He suffered "as a lamb brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Is 53:7. In great patience, in strong love he endured, overcame, outlasted the unmentionable torments, the nameless disgrace of the cross. His patience, his love was stronger than suffering, cross, and death. It was the Lord of glory whom they crucified. 1 Cor 2:8. He stood firm, he remained the victor, he conquered all pain and disgrace, sin stripes, curse, wrath.

Thus we were redeemed and God was reconciled. Christ paid, paid fully what we had taken. He redeemed us from our vain conversation according to the tradition of the fathers with his precious blood. 1 Pet 1:18,19. He offered, killed, destroyed our sins on the cross. 1 Pet 2:24. He fastened the handwriting which was against us to the cross and thus blotted it out and took it out of the way. Col 2:24. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal 3:13.

With his stripes we are healed. He crushed the head of the serpent when His heel was bruised by him. Christ has reconciled us to God. "Having made peace through the blood on his cross by him." Col 1:20. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor 5:19. These are the precious fruits which blossomed on the cross, which we pluck from the cross of Jesus Christ. That is the reward of his labor and work of which we are to partake.

And thus the crucified Christ is preached everywhere upon earth. The cross of Christ is the sign and standard around which the people gather. Is 11:12. Christ's cross is the altar upon which the blessed Seed is sacrificed so that the blessing of Abraham could come to the heathen. Christ the crucified is now presented to all sinners as the true mercyseat. Rom 3:25. "God hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." 2 Cor 5:19. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so is the Son of man lifted up so that whoever believes in him should not be lost but have everlasting life. Jn 3:15. Whoever looks in faith to Christ the crucified has eternal life.

The Crucified himself works this faith. The word of the cross is the powerful means to convert the sinner. The Lord himself has promised, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Jn 12:32. Jesus who endured the cross is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Heb 12:2. We preach Christ alone, the Crucified, his patience, his love. By such preaching sinners, even the great, are overpowered and won.

Love then flows from faith. In the bottom of our heart sparkles the name and the cross of Christ. We joyfully sing, "He who is on the cross is my love." And from love to the Crucified flows love to the brethren, love to sinners. Christ the crucified is made unto us sanctification. He who believes in him willingly carries his cross after him and with patience runs the race that is set before him. Heb 12:1. Those who belong to Christ now crucify their flesh with its affections and lusts. Gal 5:24. He who has known Christ wants to know of no other; the world is crucified to him and he to the world. Gal 6:14. And when we die, we raise our dying eyes to the Crucified. He who dies thus dies well. Christ the crucified is made redemption unto us by God. And in eternity we will then join the heavenly hosts in praising the Lamb who was slain. Rev 5:9. May the Holy Spirit impress this precious picture, Christ's cross, deeply upon our souls and seal the word of the cross in our hearts! May he preserve us from folly and offence, and may he let us know ever better that the crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God! Amen.

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22nd SERMON

Luke 23:34.

This is the first word from the mouth of Jesus the crucified. The seven words from the cross shine like precious stones, like friendly stars in the dark night of suffering. These seven words shed light upon the unique suffering of this peerless righteous person. The Holy Spirit who lives within the believers as an old exegete strikingly remarked often is accustomed to give the most powerful testimony in the very hour of death when one steps from time to eternity. We preserve the last words of dying men of God like a precious testament. The last words of the patriarch Jacob, the last discourses of Moses the man of God, and Joshua, the last words of David, the swan song of

Simeon are preserved in Scripture. History has handed down the last words of the martyrs and other proven, faithful servants of God, the last words of our prophet, Dr. Martin Luther. These words serve to strengthen our faith. However, an entirely different strength and power lies in the last words of the dying Redeemer, the last words which the Son of God spoke in the days of his flesh, during his humility. It is only reasonable that we set aside a special meditation for every one of these great words.

Now we hear and ponder the first word of the Crucified, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Ever since that Good Friday when Christ was nailed to the cross these words have been comfort and Gospel for troubled sinners. It is a prayer, an intercession, the most powerful, sublime intercession which was ever expressed upon earth. And the Lord did not say this silently to his Father but prayed aloud. All those standing around were to hear it. This prayer, this intercession is at the same time a most comforting Gospel which refreshes our weary and heavy laden soul.

This very first word from the cross also explains the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Even the children of the world, the unbelievers to whom the crucified Christ is otherwise a stumblingblock and foolishness must here indeed be amazed and astonished, and praise Jesus' intercession for his murderers as the most sublime example of human love, of love toward one's enemy. Through these words we can look into the soul and mind of the great Sufferer upon Golgatha. From it we perceive how he was disposed toward his Father, and how he is minded toward us, toward sinners and evildoers. Let this now be the subject of our meditation:

THE INTERCESSION OF THE CRUCIFIED

It is

- I. A Testimony of His Obedience to the Father,
- II. A Testimony of His Love to Sinners.

I.

The intercession of the Crucified is a testimony of his obedience to the Father.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "Father!" Thus Jesus prays to God. Usually, the moment those crucified were hung on the tree of pain and experienced the full, fearful torments of crucifixion they began to complain loudly, to scream, to howl, to curse God and man. Even the upright have often uttered harsh words when an unexpected measure of suffering and woe fell to their lot. The suffering, severely visited Job, the prophet Heremias to whom his task of reprimanding at first seemed an unbearable burden cursed the day of their birth and thus murmured against God who had given them life and sent this suffering. But it was a Man, righteous to an unusual degree, who suffered there upon Golgatha. This righteous man had never done anything wrong, saying nothing wrong even in the midst of the severest suffering. No complaint, no accusation do we hear from his mouth. No, even as he had placed the bitter cup to his lips and drank from it in gulps, only the most gracious words cross his lips.

That God who had given him up into the hands of the unrighteous, who had sent him this bitter cup he calls "Father." When in Gethsemane he trembled and feared at the presentiment of his approaching suffering on the cross, he wrestled with God and amid sigh, tears, and bloody sweat cried to God, "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." There also he called God his Father and conformed his will to God's will; nevertheless, without becoming disobedient he appealed to the Father's heart and asked whether he could

not be spared this suffering. Now that that which was feared had become a fact, since suffering without measure surrounded him and the waters closed over him, his last prayer and question became silent. Again he cried, "Father! dear Father!" -- but desired nothing for himself; he prays only for men. His soul is calm, completely calm in God. The beloved Son rests in the bosom of the Father despite the fact that body and soul were being tormented by the most terrible pains. Yes, he was obedient to the Father to the death on the cross.

The suffering Redeemer knew full well why he hung on the accursed tree, why he had surrendered to the Father. The will of God his Father was clear to his soul. His words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," show that. And his will agreed with the will of the Father. After and because he had yielded to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, he also willingly carried out God's counsel and undertaking. In eternity the Father said to the Son:

"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith,
 "And free men from the fear of death,
 From guilt and condemnation." (142,2)

And the Son replied:

"Yea, Father, yea most willingly
 I'll bear what Thou commandest;
 My will conforms to Thy decree,
 I do what Thou demandest." (142,3)

And now that this eternal counsel and will of the Father and the Son, the Triune God would be put into action, now that the great decisive hour had come which God saw from eternity, Christ said, "Yes, Father, you are my Father, I am your Son; what you want me to suffer that I will now and gladly. Your will, my God, I do gladly, and I have your Law in my heart." Of a truth, this obedience was a sacrifice acceptable to the Father, a sweet odor. Now more than ever he testified to the Son, "You are my Son in whom I am well pleased."

And by the obedience of the Son, by his will we, as the Scriptures say, are sanctified, redeemed, reconciled with God. Heb 10:10. For in our stead, for our welfare the Son gave his Father such obedience. There are two circumstances particularly which confer Christ's suffering on the cross its worth, its sweet power and meaning. First of all, we should think of the great, costly price pledged for us, namely the holy precious blood of Jesus Christ, the pure, unspotted Lamb, the Son of God. This ransom outweighs the guilt of the entire world. Secondly, we take comfort in the very obedience which Christ showed in his suffering. Because the Lamb of God as priest offered himself, because Christ turned his suffering into a deed, the greatest, most glorious deed of obedience, because he the great High Priest, the Son of the Father suffered and died so gladly, so willingly that is why his offering was so sweet and acceptable to God. In this way God was reconciled to sinners for whom Jesus suffered and died.

And this obedience of the Son, the Redeemer is at the same time the pattern, the source and power of the obedience which we owe God. We who have Christ's name are also exercised in the school of the cross. When cross and suffering begin, when we become anxious and tremble at the things which are to come, at the dark days which open, then we also wrestle with God and say, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." And God hears the sighs of his children, even though not always in the way they mean and wish. He strengthens them and gives them power to carry the burden which seems unbearable to them. Through his Spirit, his Word he exercises them in faith, patience, obedience.

In this way they become ever more patient, modest, humble. And when the final, severest blow strikes, they are more patient than they were at first. The petition, "Remove this cup from me!" is heard no more. Only the one word, coming from the heart, crosses their lips, "Father, dear Father!" They are certain: through this very suffering God offers himself to them as their Father. They know: it is his counsel and will which has gone out to them, and his is a good, gracious will. Thus they rest in the will, in the heart of their Father and whilst they are suffering they, as the apostle says, commend their soul to their faithful Creator. 1 Pet 4:19.

II.

Secondly, and above all the intercession of the Crucified is a testimony of his love to sinners. "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." This word of the crucified Redeemer testifies to a love which actually covered the multitude of sins. It is an inexhaustible fount of love and grace from which all poor sinners of the world until the end of days unceasingly draw comfort and refreshment, which provides a subject for the songs of praise of pardoned sinners in all eternity.

This righteous man on the cross upon Golgatha is different not only from sinners and unrighteous men who reviled again when they were reviled, and repaid every wrong with cursing, but also from other upright men. When the prophet Elijah was surrounded by the soldiers whom the king of Israel had sent, he caused fire to fall from heaven upon his persecutors. When Elisha was mocked by impudent, godless scamps, he called for bears who destroyed these mocking boys. Christ also left his affairs in the hands of him who judges righteously; but before the judgment seat he prevents the Judge from acting and begs for forbearance, patience, and mercy for his persecutors and murderers. What the Holy Spirit testified in Scripture of the suffering and death of Jesus, that Christ, the suffering Redeemer confirmed and sealed with his own mouth, yes with the very first word from the cross. Scripture testifies and says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities," Is 53:5. "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet 2:24. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin," Eph 1:7. It comforts us particularly that the Redeemer has testified of himself, of his own suffering and death. In the night in which he was betrayed, shortly before the beginning of his last, great passion, he told his disciples that his blood would be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Now that he has arrived at the high point of his Passion, he repeats what he said before, "Father! forgive them." Forgiveness of sins is the fruit of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures testify and say that Christ's blood is better than Abel's. Heb 12:24. Abel's blood cried to God for vengeance. Christ's blood cries: Mercy! Mercy! This eloquent, loud, powerful voice of his blood Christ himself pointed to when he cried, "Father, forgive!"

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is a high priestly intercession. Sacrifice and prayer, intercession were the two main duties of the Old Testament high priest. With the blood of the sacrifice and incense the high priest of Israel entered once a year on the great Day of Atonement into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of the nation. He sprinkled the blood on the mercyseat to expiate sin. The incense pointed to prayer, to the intercession which he brought to God as Israel's mediator. So also Christ on that great Day of Atonement, on Good Friday, entered into the holy place, went to God with his own blood to expiate the sins of the world, and at the same time offered to God the fragrant incense of prayer, intercession.

In behalf of sinners he entered in with sacrifice and intercession. When Israel once murmured against Moses and Aaron and God had sent a terrible

Aaron the high priest placed burning incense upon his censor and with it stepped between the living and the dead. Thus was the plague stayed. Num 16. Thus Christ, the true High Priest stepped before God with prayer and intercession and averted his wrath which wanted to destroy the world. When Korah's faction had rebelled against Moses and Aaron, the earth opened its mouth and led the rebels alive to hell. When mankind, Jews and heathen had rebelled against God's Anointed, his beloved Son and nailed him to the cross, one would have thought that the earth should have opened its mouth and swallowed these impudent murderers. Of a truth, the world was and now is ripe for wrath and judgment. But the Son himself, the Crucified stops the Judge, the righteousness of God and beseeches and says, "Father, forgive them!" So Christ the Mediator and High Priest still stands before God and prays for sinners. He is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.

However, Christ's intercession has an entirely different meaning than if a sympathetic person intercedes for a poor evildoers and appeals for the grace and indulgence of the judge. Christ's intercession was not merely a soft-hearted imploring and praying which is uncertain whether it will attain its aims or not. Christ has a reason and the right to pray so. Whilst he beseeches the Father for forgiveness, in his folded hands extended toward heaven he holds before his eyes the ransom price with which he paid for the guilt of the world, his holy precious blood. He says, "Father, I bear and suffer what sinners have deserved; now sinners are free." He says to God not only, "Merciful Father, be gracious to sinners!" He also says, "Righteous Father, I consecrate myself for sinners; here is the expiation; now you dare be angry with sinners no more. Their guilt has been paid." What in our eyes is grace, undeserved divine grace and mercy, that the Son, the suffering Redeemer demands of his Father as his right. Confidently, certain that his prayer will be heard he prays, "Father, forgive!" Thus he prays to this very day for sinners whilst he shows the Father his pierced hands and feet. They guarantee the hearing of his prayer.

But now let us look more closely at the people for whom Christ asks for forgiveness, for whom he has won forgiveness of sins, so that we can rightly estimate his love. "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do." This he said after the soldiers had nailed him to the cross. Hence, these his murderers who pierced his hands and feet he had first of all in mind. They indeed did not know what they did. They knew nothing of the hope of Israel. They did not understand the meaning of the words, "Jesus, the King of the Jews." And Pilate who had given Jesus to these rough soldiers was also one of the ignorant. True, he suspected that Jesus had come from above. His conscience had been scared. The truth had come close. Yet he had not known the Lord of glory. Jesus' intercession included also the blind ignorant heathen.

Even the Jews? They knew better, they had Moses and the prophets to whom the Lord himself had appealed many times through preaching and miracles. There are exegetes who exclude the Jews from Christ's intercession. Scripture, however, calls their exposition lies. After Pentecost Peter preached to the Jews, the real murderers of Christ in this way, "Ye killed the Prince of life. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." Acts 3:15.17. According to the testimony of the apostle, the Jews, even the leaders of the Jews, the chief priests and scribes were also among the ignorant for whom Christ prayed.

Of course, Christ and his apostles had no intention of minimizing and cloaking the sin of the Jews. The sin of the Jews was serious enough. They had hardened themselves against the clear word and work of Jesus; they resisted the truth and were therefore under wrath. The Lord himself had even applied the word of the Prophet Isaiah to the people of Galilee and Judea, that they had eyes to see and did not see and ears to hear and did not hear. The judgment of hardening had already begun in Israel during the lifetime of Jesus. However,

this hardening had not yet gone to extremes. Only a few of the most malicious enemies of Jesus had committed the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost. In the very night when the leaders of the Jews pronounced the sentence of death upon Jesus they, of course, were not without guilt, having been seized, blinded, conquered by the power of darkness and did the will of the devil. Not until the Jews rejected the preaching of the apostles, the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ, the Word of the forgiveness of sins was the judgment of hardening completed, and then also the final wrath soon came upon them.

To be sure, to us this love is incomprehensible, that Christ the Son of God reckoned that serious sin of the Jews and also their leaders, the murder of Christ which revealed the evil, venomous mind and enmity of the Jews toward God and his Anointed, as ignorance and even asked for forgiveness for these most wicked foes. There was no more wicked Jew and Pharisee than Saul. This Saul, when he had become Paul and an apostle, did not later cover or excuse his former sin but openly confessed it. He even calls himself a persecutor of the Church. Yet he says of himself, that he "did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Tim 1:13. At that time he had not known Christ.

Christ's intercession also extends over all sinners. "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Is 53:12; No evildoer, no scoundrel is excluded. As long as it is possible, the Lord puts the best construction even on hatred of God, disobedience, unbelief and lays it to ignorance. Christ offered himself for all sinners and evildoers, prayed for all on the cross. That is a precious, powerful comfort also for us when our sins and transgressions, our disobedience and unbelief lays heavily on our conscience.

And Christ's intercession which embraces the sinners of the whole world, this powerful prayer was also heard. Christ's intercession produced results in heaven and on earth. God could not close his ears, his heart to this prayer. God is now reconciled to mankind, to his enemies, to us all. Now we have redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By his offering, with his intercession Christ has won the adoption of children for us. We all are now God's children through faith in Jesus Christ and call the Father of Jesus Christ our Father. Of course, only believers receive and enjoy this blessed fruit of the suffering and dying, of the intercession of Jesus Christ.

But also the faith, the conversion of sinners is a fruit and a blessed result of the sacrifice and intercession of Christ. Because of Christ's intercession God has patience and tolerates this sinful world and grants time for repentance. Because of Christ's sacrifice and intercession the Father gives the Son a huge number as his inheritance. Isaiah says, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Is 53:12. Hence, the conversion of sinners is based on Christ's sacrifice and intercession. It is God alone, God's hand which converts the sinner, who works faith, who draws the souls of men to Christ.

And because Christ prays for evildoers and is even now before God and intercedes for sinners, God calls sinners through the Gospel, God's hand, God's Spirit works mightily through the Word on the hearts of men, works faith when and where he will, and gives great numbers as the Son's inheritance. Yes, beloved, we owe also our conversion, our faith to the sacrifice and intercession of Christ our Redeemer. Christ's intercession is mighty in heaven and on earth, is a comforting, powerful Gospel for sinners. Through the Word from the cross and also through the words which came from the mouth of the Crucified the heart of the sinner is opened. If this ardent, warm love for sinners on the part of the Savior is presented to sinners, the proud, hard heart is conquered the most quickly. The strong are overpowered and conquered. Jesus' love toward sinners,

his love for his enemies then also kindles love in the hearts of believers, ardent love in return, so that we love him who first loved us, and for the sake of Jesus love our brother and also sinners, our enemies, and pray for our foes. Jesus' love incites and entices us to all good works.

And even though we sin, sin repeatedly, we have an Advocate with the Father, we comfort ourselves in the continual intercession of our Redeemer. Jesus' intercession is the power behind the Fifth Petition which we pray daily, our daily remorse and repentance. Of course, this great surpassing love and grace is not to be abused by the sinner. He who despises all this, who sins against grace, sins against Jesus' intercession, who knowingly, wilfully sins after he has come to the knowledge of the truth, from him Jesus finally withdraws his intercession, he henceforth has no more offering for his sins. There is a sin unto death for which Jesus no longer prays, for which we also are not to pray. May God preserve us from this! Oh, that the offering and intercession of our Savior is lost to no one! Amen.

23rd SERMON

Mat 27:37; Mk 15:26; Lk 23:38; Jn 19:19-22.

The murder of Christ, this detestable crime, this wrong which cries to heaven hid itself behind the appearance and form of justice, civil legality. Christ was formally examined and sentenced by the spiritual and worldly courts. And even in the execution of the sentence, the crucifixion they preserved the letter of the law. Pilate commanded that a superscription be prepared and placed at the top of the cross. This also was the law among the Romans that, whilst the poor evildoer was led away to the place of execution, a herald who went along publicized the guilt and the cause of death with a loud voice and that then in large letters the title of the crime was fastened at the top of the cross. And now this last thing also happened at Christ's crucifixion. The blessed Christ was made like criminals even in this point. That title on the cross increased and completed the disgrace of crucifixion. Yes, the slanderous inclination of the blind world here stepped over the limits of justice and law and human fairness.

Usually among the Romans and to a certain degree among all educated people the honor, the human worth of the condemned criminal, and the earnestness of the law and the execution of the sentence is respected. On the other hand, Christ was more disgracefully treated and drawn deeper into the dust and dirt than a criminal usually was. The hatred and enmity of men smashed the form of justice. That a constable of the court struck Jesus on the cheek during the trial, that in the house of Caiaphas and in the court of Pilate Jesus was so horribly mocked, ridiculed, and spit upon had in itself been contrary to all law. But not until the crucifixion did the bitter gall of the hostile world truly pour itself out. Pilate again let raillery, ridicule, and abuse flow into that superscription of the cross and thus injured the respect of the Roman law. The title did not simply mention the cause of death nor describe the crime. No, in the words, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," lay more bitter mockery. Therefore, even in this text the disgrace of Christ's cross is clear.

As Christ was given into death according to God's counsel and foreknow-

ledge, so particularly in this story of the superscription on the cross, in that what Pilate wrote and did and what he did not do, what the Jews vainly desired the hand, the miraculous guidance of God is known. To a certain degree God even upon Golgatha turned the shame of the crucifixion into honor. He ruled the thoughts and hand of Pilate. As Caiaphas the high priest had uttered a truth against his knowledge and will with the words, "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not," Jn 11:50, so also that libel on the cross had a deeper meaning of which Pilate knew nothing. All four evangelists intentionally report this incident to the smallest detail. This report lets it be known that here we are dealing with something more than legal formality. The superscription which Pilate fastened to Jesus' cross gives us just as well as the very own testimony of the Crucified information as to the meaning of this unique suffering and dying. Today we understand the real, true meaning of those words after the premeditated counsel of God is gloriously carried out before our eyes. We would want to write no other title for the crucified Christ than the one: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Even if one would select other words as these, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world," one would express the very same thing which is contained in the writing of Pilate. Even the Jews who read that superscription suspected something or the true meaning of those words. They therefore asked Pilate for a correction of the title. Yes, fundamentally, it is a title of honor, a testimony of honor which God caused to be posted for his beloved Son through the hand of the unrighteous.

We therefore direct our attention to

THE TITLE ON THE CROSS: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS

- I. It is a Monument to the Shame and Disgrace with which the Blind Labeled the Holy God.
- II. But by God's Guidance it has Become a Title of Honor, a Name of Honor which all Believers Praise in Eternity.

I.

The title on the cross is a monument to the disgrace and shame which the blind world attached to the holy God. As our text notes, this title on the cross should first of all mention the cause of death for which Jesus was blamed. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." These words remind one of the accusation of the Jews, "Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." Jn 19:12. The Jews turned their Messiah over to Pilate as a rebel. That accusation and the verdict which Pilate then passed and the title of the verdict were lies, the most disgraceful slander. With the show of right, with the form of justice, with the credentials and seal of Caesar, by testimony from the government the most impudent lies are often confirmed and receive validity and respect.

Meanwhile, Pilate was not so earnest with the reproach, "Jesus is a rebel and a ringleader," as it could seem. The Jews were quite right that in order to brand Jesus publicly as a rebel, he would have to write more exactly, more clearly, "He said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" That Pilate curtly stated, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," pointed to a special purpose of the Roman judge. He had heard of the hope of Israel, that the Jews expected a Messiah, a King. Even during his discussion with the Jews he had also learned that a great part of the people from Galilee and Judea regarded this Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah and had often honored him as such. For once Pilate admitted this opinion.

Now the Jews had surrendered their Messiah for whom they hoped so

long to the heathen judge so that he would be crucified. What folly! Thus the Jews ridiculed their own hope, their own religion. This lack of reason Pilate had scourged previously with the words, "Shall I crucify your King, your Messiah?" But the Jews had then compelled him to do this, had extorted the sentence of death from him. Pilate would have rather freed Jesus. Of a truth, he was not friendly to the Jews even though he had done their will from fear of men and the willingness to please men. Hence it was, as it were, a small act of vengeance that in the superscription on the cross he named this condemned Jesus of Nazareth after the Jewish manner, called him a King of the Jews, gave him a title which reminded the Jews of their promised Messiah, their Messianic hope. In so doing he ridiculed the hope of Israel. "This crucified Person whom the Jews surrendered to the heathen the King, the Messiah of the Jews!" Because this Jesus of Nazareth really was he of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, the King and Messiah of Israel, that ridicule of course boomeranged.

Yes, deep disgrace! The Son of the Exalted had come to men to redeem and save them, and gave his life for them. And ridicule, mockery, and shame: that was the reward for his great love. Just because he sought their best interests the ignorant world abused the Holy One of God. Christ willingly took this disgrace upon himself. As he was silent to the impudent accusations of his foes, so even now on the cross he let all invectives pass over him and endured the lampoon placed above his head.

Oh that we may understand Christ's disgrace correctly! If we look at it more closely and read, ponder, and study this inscription on the cross, we read our own disgrace and shame in this title. Because we have sinned, have sinned so disgracefully Christ had to bear disgrace. We lost our honor with God and men. If men can repeat many slanderous things about us, we dare not pity ourselves. But we are in even worse repute with God. We have indeed nothing whereof we can boast before God, no honor, no respect. We have stained our honor a thousand times. We must be ashamed of ourselves. What miserable creatures we are! - And still we are greedy for vain honor, seek after noble titles, or fly into a passion and grow angry if our neighbor injures our good name and our honor just a bit! Ah, all these things, honor, good name, good works, respect, title are nothing; they vanish like the chaff in the wind; they look like lies when we place ourselves under Christ's cross with them. There our true title and name are affixed: we are poor, worthless, dishonorable creatures. It is our disgrace and ignominy with which Christ is burdened. Ah, in view of the cross and Christ's disgrace, the inordinate desire to flatter ourselves and our friends with beautiful, high-sounding names, titles, and eulogies should disappear. At all times we should confess that we are what we in truth are: poor, wretched, vile sinners who are honored and saved only by the disgrace and the cross of Christ.

With that superscription Pilate betrayed not only his own opinion but chiefly the mind and thought of the godless world. Such is the attitude of the blind world to Christ. The world constantly mocks and disdains the hope, the faith, the religion of Christians which reads: Christ the crucified. "A King, a God on the cross!" The blind world can only laugh, joke, shake their heads, and finally grow bitter and angry over such madness. That superscription on the cross is, as it were, the beginning and the first of all the countless libels in which the world, the blind, ignorant, unbelieving world has poured its hatred toward Christ, its gall and bitterness. All derision amounts to this: "Jesus of Nazareth, the Despised, the Crucified? he should be the King of the Jews and the Savior of the world? he should be God and King? him we should call Lord?" Such a Lord and King, who so completely destroys all the world's might, honor, and glory with his cross, his disgrace, this world cannot endure and accept, and in order to free itself from him, it mocks him and tries to heap ridicule

upon this hated "Christ-and-cross-religion" with witticism, jokes, abuse and cause it to lose its standing.

All who bear Christ's name bear also Christ's disgrace. He who really confesses Christ's name in this world, who considers Christ's disgrace as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, than the empty delights of sin, who would rather stand and live under Christ's cross than live in peace with the world is despised, abused, ridiculed, yes, hated and persecuted for the sake of this name and confession. That was the title which the sainted martyrs bore on their forehead; that was the cause of their death, that they were Christians, swore allegiance to Christ the crucified, the Son of God. The heathen, the Romans, even the Romans of the Papal Church in other respects also repeat evil things about Christians, call them evildoers, rebels, and the like. Yet thus they belie and deceive their own better knowledge.

All true and alleged sins were immediately forgiven Christians the moment they had disavowed Christ and the only saving faith. Everything else the world pardons Christians just as long as they deny Christ and are silent about the name of the Crucified. Only at the price of being ashamed of Christ's name and cross can a Christian ransom himself from disgrace and contempt. But woe to the Christians who consider the world's treasures, lusts, honor, and respect greater than Christ's disgrace! Blessed are all who are reviled for the sake of Jesus' name and willingly let themselves be reviled!

II.

However, what the world regard as disgrace, that God considers honor. The title on the cross has by God's direction become a title and name of honor which all believers praise in eternity.

This title is proof of Christ's innocence. No other crime but that he made himself a King could the Jews bring against Christ. The accuracy of this complaint even Pilate soon perceived. And what he had often stated before to the Jews, "I find no fault with him at all," he confirmed by the writing which he placed on the cross: Yes, a King of the Jews; but what a King, a King who lets himself be bound, crucified, killed; verily, Caesar has nothing to fear from such a king! The very mockery of Pilate proved Christ's innocence. God the Lord had so guided events that no other cause for death would be written on the cross of the Redeemer, that one did not read the words, "Evildoer, rebel, blasphemer," there but a name which in truth had no stain in itself. He our high priest carried the high priestly plate on his forehead which Aaron once word, "Holiness to the Lord." This King, this Innocent man whom his foes could accuse of no sin intercedes for sinners, for the unrighteous.

The ridicule and mockery of the world must at all times serve to confirm the innocence and truthfulness of the Christian religion and therefore the honor of Christ. God makes evil things, the hatred of Christ serve his purposes, his honor. When the world mocks this foolish faith, the foolish hope of Christians, it proves that in reality it can charge Christianity of nothing else, no real guilt. It must recognize: the Bible teaches no evil; it even gives useful teachings and rules; in other respects Christians are innocent people, only that foolish delusion and faith is unbearable! That Christians cling to Christ and accept his unusual ways and despise that which has a name and esteem in the world, forsake and deny the lust of the world: that is the real wrong which is laid on the Christians' head.

We will examine those four important words which, made readable for everyone, were written in three languages on the cross, so that we truly recognize and praise God's wisdom. God suggested to Pilate what he should write. What he wrote went far beyond his understanding, his powers of comprehension. He did not know what he did. However, to us God has revealed it through his Spir-

it.

There on the cross the name "Jesus" could be read clearly, the precious name which was intended from eternity for this man, which had been conferred upon him by the angel before his birth, his holy name, the desire of angels, the comfort of sinful men. Jesus, that is, Helper, Savior. This name was fastened to the cross. Through his very cross, through his suffering on the cross, through his death on the cross this Jesus has helped us and redeemed and rescued us from sin, curse, death. Yes, this name is fastened to the cross, firmly fastened; therefore, we should know that there is salvation in no other than in Jesus the crucified, and that no other name is given men by which they should be saved than the name Jesus the crucified.

"Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Nazarene;" this is the way Pilate had written. That is a name which prophecy conferred upon the Messiah. Nazarene, that is, he who is despised. As a despised shoot the son of David should grow forth from the earth. And at the very moment that Jesus hung on the cross he was the most despised and rejected. But he was the very Messiah, the Servant of God of whom the prophets testified, the Messiah of Israel, the Redeemer of the world. That is why he became so insignificant and humble and despised so that he might lift us worthless creatures up out of the filth and dust, disgrace and contempt and honor us. The One on the cross is verily the Savior and Redeemer who should come into the world. That Nazarene, that despised shoot should according to Scripture grow up, be exalted on high, and become a great King.

Therefore Pontius Pilate quite logically and according to the Scriptures added the third title, "King of the Jews." In spite of suffering and disgrace nevertheless a King, the King of Israel and Son of God of whom the entire Scriptures testify! And this very cross is the weapon of this King. By his very cross and blood, by his own blood this King, the Son of God, has won, gained, and purchased our souls. Thus we have become his own. The cross is the banner of this King around which his subjects assemble. By the preaching of the cross the true Israel, the Church of God is gathered.

That writing was to be read in three languages, in the language of the Jews, and then in the language of the Greeks and Romans, the two known world languages at that time. The Gospel of Christ the crucified is to be preached in all the languages of the world. By a large gathering from all lands, peoples, tongues this King of Israel will be praised. According to prophecy the King of the Jews should also rule over the heathen. By his cross, his death the King of the Jews has not lost his kingdom and rule but then first really established and confirmed it.

And also in the very circumstances that the Jews desired a change in the superscription and Pilate refused this request and firmly declared, "What I have written I have written," God's hand ruled which turns the hearts of men and princes as it pleases him. Pilate insisted upon what he had done. In the long run he did not want to let himself be criticized and enslaved by the Jews. Of course, this resoluteness and energy came too late. He should have opposed and resisted them earlier before he passed that unjust verdict. That is the way it has gone with many fickle and misled people. Not until afterwards, when it is too late, after they have consented to the evil deed do they become hard and vexed and angry with those who seduced them. No, one must resolutely oppose the evil at the very beginning. However, that Pilate at that time consented and nailed Christ to the cross happened by God's permission. God's counsel and will was being done. This served to redeem the world, to honor and glorify Christ.

And that he now changed nothing in that superscription, in that title of honor of the Crucified, that the malice of the Jews here ran up against a barrier, with this God, whose hand rules all things, wanted to imply and show that Christ's kingdom is eternal and unchangeable, that Christ rules even among his enemies, that all the malice rage, and hatred of the godless cannot overthrow

Christ's throne. They cannot take his title away from him nor rob him of nor lessen his honor that he is Christ the King of Israel, the Savior of the world, the Son of God. They will never be able to wipe out his kingdom, his Church. Those whom Christ has purchased with his own blood, who are Christ's own, who from eternity are enrolled in the Book of Life with Christ's blood, no power of earth or hell can tear them out of his hands. Their names can never be erased from God's book. What God has written that he has written, that will remain. So it is that the lampoon on the cross is the verification and confirmation of our salvation. Amen.

24th SERMON

Matthew 27:35.36; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34.35; John 19:23.24.

In our meditation we are still under Jesus' cross. We looked at the title which could be read at the top of the cross. Now we hear what happened under the cross. All the individual features of that event on Golgotha and all the small, the apparently most insignificant accidental circumstances have been preserved. It is a great story; every small feature takes on importance. Every new happening which is reported calls our attention to a new suffering of the Crucified. Sufferings beyond calculation surround him. And now we are reminded of the fact that just our sins, which are as many as the sand at the sea, caused the Lord those countless pains and that gloomy army of torments. However, we gladly tarry under the cross of the Redeemer. We know it promotes our joy and we do very well if we find ourselves in the suffering of the Savior. Each new torment and outrage suffered by the Redeemer which is presented to our view brings us new comfort.

Our present Lenten text reports the action of the soldiers under the cross. The soldiers who had nailed the Lord to the cross and fastened the superscription on the cross parted Jesus' garments among them and cast lots over his vesture. That is a small, seemingly meaningless line on the Lenten painting, which the holy evangelists have sketched. Such a scene was repeated every time a criminal was crucified. According to Roman law what he left behind, his possessions became the booty and possession of the executioners, the soldiers, a reward for their bloody work. With special detail the holy evangelists report this parting of Jesus' garments. Thus they direct our attention for a brief period away from him who hangs on the cross and compel us to observe the actions of these rough soldiers. That is an example and mirror of the sinners of the world. We recognize from this the ways of the faithless people of the world, all of whom go astray like sheep. Then the word of Scripture, which our text quotes turns to the prophecy of Psalm 22 which was now fulfilled, directs our thoughts and attention to the chief person, to whom who hung on the cross and endured the theft of his clothing without objection. We perceive: he actually is God's Messiah, God's Lamb who carries the sins of the world. Therefore let us speak on

HOW THE CRUCIFIED WAS ROBBED OF HIS CLOTHING

I. First we Watch the Soldiers who Committed this Robbery; in their

Example they Show us the Sins of the World.

- II. But then we Direct our Glance Toward Him who Hangs on the Cross and Silently Endures the Theft of his Clothing; that is God's Lamb who Takes Away the Sins of the World.

I.

First we watch the soldiers who committed this robbery; in their example they show us the sins of the world.

After they had crucified Christ, they took his clothing and made four piles, for everyone a pile. There were four of them. The under-garment which was sown together from various pieces of cloth they tore and divided it in this way. But when they came to Jesus' coat which was not sown but one piece from top to bottom, they said, "Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be." Jn 19:24. And so they shot dice for it. From this deed of the soldiers we can draw conclusions about their disposition. Their mind was directed toward robbery, booty, and earthly possessions. This, as it were, was part of the trade of the Roman soldiers, the mercenaries, that they took possession of someone's property unjustly and enriched themselves whenever and however they could. That they were so scrupulously careful over the division of Jesus' clothing shows how greedily they strove for gain. It was not a great legacy which this poor Jesus of Nazareth left behind: a coat, and a mantle, that was the sum total. And yet the soldiers leaped upon this booty as though they were to pocked a great treasure.

From this we see their customary attitude. On such a wretched piece of clothing they fasten their heart and desires. That is man's way. That is the nature of the world: greed, avarice, vanity. To these things are the eyes, the desires of men directed: gain, possessions, money, tinsel, finery, clothing. The children of men live from and satisfy themselves with such things; like those soldiers they devote all diligence, zeal, concern, and care on such things; they attend to these things night and day. They sit, figure, and calculate how they can make the best gain, how they can seize an advantage. Such an earthly, vain nature is ordinary and common. An insignificant earthly bauble, some miserable profit can so agitate and excite the thoughts and desires of the greedy, vain children of the world that they forget all else. Their heart hangs and clings to dust and ashes, to the filth of this earth.

This dividing of the clothes was also, as our Luther remarks, disgusting buffoonery. Thus the soldiers played tricks, joked, gambled, and betrayed their rough nature as soldier. They are a true picture of this world, the lascivious, frivolous, wanton world which delights in dissolute foolishness and cannot live without rough jokes, games, and pleasures. Yes, indeed, the children of the world are wise and zealous in their way and evaluate all things in terms of their goal, know how to make a profit from all the little things, as did the soldiers from the division of the clothes, use everything for their advantage, enjoyment, and pleasure. However, it reveals a rough, riotous life.

The soldiers robbed that poor Jesus of Nazareth. True, according to Roman law his estate was their inheritance. But it still was martial law, a law of the robber; all the more since Jesus was being innocently killed. It was a brutal deed that they finally took even his clothes from that poor Jesus who already had endured so much and hung him naked on the cross. All sympathy was long since stifled in these rough, heathen, soldiers. They show only the way, the natural ways of all the children of men. This is the nature of the world, thus is it minded toward their brethren. The natural man born of woman is cruel, hardhearted, tyrannical, knows no consideration and mercy when its own advantage and enjoyment is at stake. The selfish children of this world have no sympathy for the poor, oppress the oppressed only the more, and alarm the frightened.

The world lives from robbery and booty. The rich and great of this world enrich themselves, practise usury, are skinflints at the expense of the poor; suck the goods, blood, and strength out of the little man, the day laborer so that they can fill their sacks. The respectable, glittering world is in reality nothing else but a common rough band of robbers. And the common hangers-on learn the same tricks from the great. It is that poor Christ whose clothes are taken. The world and the false church has time and again grabbed the mite of the widow, the testament of pious Christians. Part of the cross of the Church on earth is that it must suffer the robbery of its property, alas, that the Church often allows its own children to suffer want and would rather make sacrifices for the world and pay tribute to it.

The soldiers were common, rough, callous people. And naturally, the mind and feeling for the spiritual, invisible world had truly died. They had read the superscription on the cross and then mocked the Crucified, "If you are the King of the Jews, save thyself!" Of course, they did not understand these words. They were completely ignorant. However, like Pilate, so had also his underlings noticed something of the innocence of this Jesus. Such a criminal they had never had in their power who amid all blows, pains, and wanton mockery remained silent and did not change his expression. After they had nailed him to the cross, he had even prayed for the evildoers, even for them. This word: "Father, forgive them," they had heard. Even if they had not completely understood it, this word should have aroused their astonishment and amazement, "What, one who is sentenced, who suffers injustice and yet he prays for his foes?" The remarkable, hard, bitter suffering of this righteous man, the sight of the Crucified should have for at least that short while that they kept watch under the cross tamed their wild spirit and kept it within bounds. So we would think. But no, under the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth they divided the spoils, shot dice, carried on their tomfoolery, and then sat down and guarded him, and did this job like other military jobs.

Even the people who stood around and watched and on that Good Friday gazed to their heart's content at that crucified Christ shows the same callousness and unfeelingness. That is the way, the mind of the world. Thus is the world minded toward God and Christ. The children of the world are indifferent and insensible over against all the impressions of a higher world. True, there are hours when they suspect something of the holiness of God and his Christ, when the holy God testifies of himself in their conscience. Even the love, patience, and longsuffering of God is not unnoticed by them. But the sensual, rough people despise all that and stifle all the urgings of their conscience in the hustle and bustle and enjoyment of life. They oppose the earnestness and love of God with a hard, iron, adamant heart. The cross of Christ has been set up in the midst of humanity. The sound of the Gospel of the crucified Christ has gone out into all lands. And under the cross of Christ, the Son of God, in sight of his bitter torments and deep shame the jolly world haggles, practises usury, plays, dances, jumps around, roars and rages and carries out all its wantonness and cannot nor does it want to set limits to its greed and lust. So evil, so corrupt is mankind.

II.

But now we direct our gaze upward to him who hangs on the cross and suffers the robbery of his clothes; he is God's Lamb who bears the sins of the world.

Our text notes that with the division of the clothes the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." Mat 27:35. Contrary to their knowledge and desires the soldiers fulfilled the Scriptures by their wicked robbery and served the

counsel of God. It is the Messiah who speaks in the 22nd Psalm. Thus these very seemingly trivial accidental circumstances which are so minutely described, the parting of his garments and disposing of his cloak by lot, proves that he who is on the cross is really the King of the Jews, God's Messiah. According to Scripture he should suffer and has suffered and also this robbery of his clothing heightened his pains and disgrace. His clothing was violently torn from that scourged, bleeding body covered with fresh wounds and welts. Thus the old wounds opened anew. And it was insult and shame which was done to this holy Man of God that he was thus stripped naked on Golgatha. But by this suffering, by this disgrace he atoned for the punishment which mankind deserved by its wickedness and wantonness. He is the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world. He did not prevent the soldiers from robbing him of his clothes but silently took on also this suffering. He suffered willingly. He was a patient Lamb. His great patience has conquered all the malice and meanness of the godless world. That was the kind of love which bears all things and endures all things. And for the sake of Christ and his better suffering God as yet bears with this impudent rough world in great patience and longsuffering; of course, it is his earnest will that everyone repent.

Jesus became poor for our sakes so that we through his poverty might be rich. Christ was poor in his birth as he lay in a manger, poor in his life when he did not have a place where to lay his head, poor, the poorest of all in his dying when he gave up the covering of his body. Poor, naked he hung on the cross. That was insult but no disgrace for him. He had no reason to feel ashamed. He was clean, holy, innocent, unspotted from his birth. He had a tender, pure, chaste body, and in this body a pure unspotted soul. His soul was a mirror of divine honor, of heavenly radiance. Yes, body and soul God's temple in a unique sense! It was an innocent, unspotted Lamb who was sacrificed there upon Golgatha, it was holy, precious blood which flowed from the cross.

And we must have such a high priest who would be holy, unspotted, separate from sinners, yes, higher than the heavens. We belong to the sinful lost world, we are members of a corrupt race. We are unclean and spotted from our birth on. We bear the spotted garment of the flesh from our birth. Our heart is wicked, full of evil lusts and malice from youth on. We have besmirched our body and soul with vile lusts and desires, greed, concerns, hatred, wrath, pride, haughtiness. We have nothing, nothing wherewith we could cover our nakedness before God. All human virtues and civil honorableness is nothing but a filthy garment before God, even though it glitters before men. Beneath the dress of respectability bears the evil, corrupt heart from which comes all wicked thoughts. We are poor, naked, blind, wretched, miserable before God. But Christ has covered us with the garments of righteousness and with the cloak of salvation. Now we clothe ourselves in the innocence and holiness of the Most Beautiful of the children of men. Christ's blood and righteousness is our beauty and glorious dress. With them we cover our nakedness. In them we will stand before God.

And when Thy glory I shall see
 And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
 Thy blood my royal robe shall be,
 My joy beyond all measure;
 When I appear before Thy throne,
 Thy righteousness shall be my crown, --
 With these I need not hide me.
 And there, in garments richly wrought
 As Thine own bride, I shall be brought,
 To stand in joy beside Thee. (142,6)

Yes, they are the saints who have seen the holy seer in the spirit, clothed in white raiment, who have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb.

Christ the crucified who of God was made unto us for righteousness was also made to be our sanctification. We should lay aside the mind and ways of the world and become like Christ, be minded as Christ Jesus was. Christ made himself of no reputation in all things, not only his form as God but also all his human rights, his earthly possessions, even the garment which he wore. Thus we should tear our heart and mind free from earthly baubles, possessions, and property, forsake the treasures of the world, serve our poor brethren, the Church of Christ, with our treasure. We will remember which the riches are for which we are indebted to Christ's poverty: innocence, righteousness, life, salvation. What are the goods and lust of the world to us? Christ let his garments be taken away, hung naked on the accursed tree. How can we still find delight in clothing ourselves in silk, purple, and costly linen, in adorning ourselves with stylish clothing, jewelry, and permanent waves? The sight of Him who was crucified should make us disgusted with all pride and vanity. Another adornment is more becoming, a gentle quiet spirit, a pure chaste heart and modest ways. That is precious in God's eyes. May Christ's innocence sanctify and purify our souls! By his great patience and love Christ has given us an example. He allowed all things to come upon him, let himself be reviled, beaten, pierced, even let the last bit of clothing be snatched off. Thus it would be disgraceful for us who swear allegiance to the Crucified, if we wanted to wrangle and quarrel with our brethren over property and goods, over vain baubles. Christ's patience and love should cause us to oblige our opponents willingly, let him who quarrels with us have our cloak and garment, endure all wrong, yes, even insult and shame and slander with a quiet, gentle spirit. We know indeed: if we suffering with Christ, we will also rule with him. And even now we have in Christ our Redeemer contentment and joy and full satisfaction. All else we will regard as filth so that we can gain Christ. Let this be our treasure and greatest good, our dress, our pride, our delight, our honor, our comfort in life and death, our glory and boast now and in all eternity: Jesus the crucified! Amen.

25th SERMON

John 19:25-27.

Of the seven words of Jesus on the cross which gave information about his bitter suffering and death, we have heard and pondered the first: "Father, forgiven them, for they know not what they do." Which was the second and which the third is uncertain. Some say that the promise given the repentant malefactor, "Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," is the second one. Others think that soon after the crucifixion Jesus uttered the well-known words of comfort, "Woman, behold thy son," and, "Behold thy mother," to his mother and his disciple whom he saw under the cross. In reality, it makes no difference which of these two words Jesus spoke first. Only the Evangelist John reports Jesus' conversation with his mother Mary and with his friend and disciple John and connects this report directly after telling of the parting of the garments. Hence in our Lenten meditation we keep the same order.

Jesus of Nazareth the crucified was robbed of his clothing, had let go of the last covering. This clearly shows that his end is near. In view of his approaching end he also made his testament and made a final arrangement for his mother Mary and his friend John reported in our Lenten text. This legacy concerned the earthly future, the physical welfare of these two people who were closest to him during his life. Christ the great High Priest, who on that great Day of Reconciliation offered the greatest sacrifice for the sins of the entire world, still had to that very hour an eye for the small affairs of earthly life, for the physical wants and needs of his mother and friend. Christ the Redeemer of the world, who bore the weal of the entire world on his heart and in those anxious hours earned the eternal salvation of mankind on the cross, provided at the same time for the physical well-being of those two people dearly loved by him. That is a great, unique love. This love we now want to ponder and recognize in it that

THE REDEEMER OF THE WORLD IS CONCERNED ALSO FOR THE PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF HIS LOVED ONES

We ponder these four points:

- I. Who His Loved Ones are;
- II. How the Redeemer of the World Provides also for the Physical Needs of His Loved Ones;
- III. To what He at the same Time Exhorts His Loved Ones;
- IV. How Even in this Word from the Cross Jesus' Savior's Love is Revealed in this Onslaught of Suffering.

I.

First, we visualize to ourselves who his loved ones are. Our text points above all to the persons who stood directly under Jesus' cross. It begins thus, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother." V.25. In Mary the mother of Jesus was fulfilled at that time the word which she had heard shortly after the birth of her son, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Lk 2:35. That Son whom she had carried in her womb, whom she had brought into the world, whom she had nourished and with motherly concern had reared, whom she also had served later on, she now saw horribly mutilated, wounded to death, hanging on the accursed tree. The cuts and blows which had struck the dear body of her child had also gone deep into her mother's heart. She, as it were, felt with her Son the nails and thorns which pressed out his blood. Helpless she stood under the cross of her Son. She could not help him. She must let it happen, must calmly watch everything which his embittered foes did to make him suffer. She felt the way parents or children, or a spouse feel who stand at the deathbed of a dear child, or of a father, mother, or a spouse, seeing their beloved die before their eyes, wrestling with death and cannot help nor keep him back in this life. She could scarcely see her beloved child die because of the pain. Yet she did not go away. She remained standing at the cross. Love toward her Son kept her firmly there.

However, Mary also knew about the mystery of her Son. Even before and immediately after the birth of her child, great amazing things were said of him by angels and men. And she had preserved and pondered all these words in her heart. She herself had seen the great deeds and miracles of the Lord through which he revealed his glory. It pointed to greater radiance, greater honor and glory. When Jesus was bound and sentenced, she indeed thought that he would at the last hour, perhaps like at the wedding at Cana, take charge with his divine power. Instead of that she saw him now covered with insult and shame, dying.

That was a severe test not only for her mother's love but also for her faith. True, from the mouth of the prophets she had heard of the ultimate

fate of her Son and certainly also knew the prophecies of the suffering and death of the Son of man which he himself had uttered. Yet, this word was still hidden to her at this time as it was to the disciples. In spite of this she stood firm in the faith. One does not see her, as was usually the case with the sorrowing, wringing their hands in despairing pain, tearing hair and garments; nor does one see in her the violent gestures of a mind set free by sorrow. She was calm and resigned, the humble maid of the Lord even now under the cross. She did not despair. She did not completely cast away her trust in her Son, the Son of God. She believed without seeing, without understanding how the difficult, dark riddle would be solved.

Next to Mary, Jesus' mother, stood her sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who after the death of her husband with her sons James, Judas, Simon and Joses had become one of the followers of the Lord and had accompanied him on his journeys. She followed him also on the way to the crucifixion and stood under the cross. She was a faithful disciple. The third woman who is mentioned here was Mary Magdalena, probably the great sinner to whom the Lord had forgiven many sins and who therefore also strongly loved him, who in ardent love had wet the Lord's feet with her tears and dried them with the hair of her head. In this Jesus of Nazareth she had known the Savior of sinners, and to this Savior and Redeemer she also remained faithful in his death. Love is stronger than death: this the Son of Solomon says.

These women under the cross shamed the disciples who had forsaken the Lord. The weak women were more courageous and stronger than those heroes, the apostles. This courage, this strength did not come from flesh and blood. It was the grace of the Lord that they stood firm. His grace is mighty in the weak and makes the weak strong, whilst the strong who rely upon their own power become weak, tired, and ashamed. However, one of the Eleven had returned from the flight and followed Jesus even to be beneath the cross, John, his faithful friend whom the Lord loved, who had leaned on his bosom. He had looked the most deeply into the mystery of the incarnate Word. And his faith, his love to God's Son outlasted the temptation. He did not leave his side, even if he at that time on Golgatha understood as little as the other disciples and Mary the mystery of the death of God's Son. These faithful people passed also among the Jews and heathen soldiers as the closest relatives of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore they were allowed to stand at his side unmolested.

These faithful people under the cross are a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ the little flock of believers. Jesus himself had once said, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God and do it." Lk 8: 21. Those who believe in Christ the Son of God, hear and do his Word, love Christ from their heart, they are his brethren, his friends; they are his loved ones. They have not chosen him but he has chosen them. Thus our of pure grace he has drawn also us to himself. We believe in God's Son and love and follow him, as those women had followed him. By his grace we are called to be his followers. Today, after all was fulfilled we also understand what was written by Moses and the prophets about the Son of man, the mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ the Son of God. We know that with his blood he bought us, won us, our souls so that we thus became his own. So we say and sing:

Here I will stand beside Thee,
From Thee I will not part;
O Savior, do not chide me
When breaks Thy loving heart.
When soul and body languish
In death's cold, cruel grasp,

Then, in Thy deepest anguish,
Thee in mine arms I'll clasp. (172,6)

Those who belong to the Lord, they also endure with him even if they themselves are visited by cross and suffering. They are partakers of his suffering, companions of his tribulation. 2 Cor 1:5. Through his grace they are strengthened and preserved. In the end the Lord knows them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." Lk 22:28. As they are now companions of his tribulation so they will some day be companions of his glory as those Marys and John afterwards received the news of the resurrection of the and saw the Resurrected. Here on earth the Lord comforts his loved ones. He provides for them so that they pass through this dangerous life safely. He also provides for their physical well-being. That his second word from the cross shows us.

II.

Now we see how the Redeemer of the world provides also for the physical needs of his loved ones.

He saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by. In that earnest, decisive hour, as he entreated and procured forgiveness for the sins of the whole world, as he brought his concern, the sins of the whole world before God, he still had an eye for the little concerns of his faithful followers, for the worry and sorrow of his mother, his friend from whom now the best Son and Friend was being taken. He regarded them with heartfelt sympathy. He felt himself the pain of separation. He was a man as all the children of men. He suffered as a man in the flesh and tasted the death of the children of men and all the woes of death. Therefore, he had human feelings and sympathy with the needs of his friends whom he left behind on earth.

Jesus Christ is our faithful High Priest. He has taken pity on our misery, the wretchedness of our sins, offered our sins on the cross. However, because he is a faithful High Priest, he has a heartfelt sympathy with his brethren after the flesh for all their wants, also all the wants of the body. Sympathetically, full of pity he today looks upon the needs of his own. His loving eye is directed toward all the afflicted, sorrowing, lonesome, forsaken, widows, and orphans. He does not look away from the isolated little flock, his church which must still suffer much here on earth. He sees, he knows all our secret sorrows, wishes, and concerns. What moves us is well-known to him. Nothing is too small and too insignificant so that he would not consider it worth his notice. He knows all our ways. He is indeed the omniscient God.

And as the almighty God he himself also takes hold of the matter and comforts and provides and guides and protects his own. He was nailed to the cross. He did not violently tear himself free from the cross, as he well could have done. He wanted to suffer and die and find an eternal redemption for mankind, win an eternal salvation. Yet it was the almighty Lord whose hands and feet were pierced. For see, he takes the destiny, the future of his mother, his friend into his hand. He says, "Behold thy son. Behold thy mother." Indeed, now he himself tore the tie which united him to his mother and friend. He gave his mother another son, his friend another counselor. Now he ceases to be Mary's Son and John's Friend. But he gave his mother, his friend a substitute for himself, "Behold he is your son. Behold, she is your mother." As he tore the old bond he tied a new one. Thus he provided a home on earth for his mother, to his friend he also gave a faithful companion for his future life. Thus the Redeemer of the world provided for the earthly well-being of his beloved mother, his dear friend.

Thus he provides for his own, thus he provides for us. He is our Savior and Redeemer and has won eternal life for us and in heaven has provided an eternal place. However, he spreads his hand in protection, blessing, and

comfort also over our earthly life. He comforts the afflicted, the forsaken, the lonesome, sends them a helper and friend: he brings and joins people together so that they help and comfort each other. He unites spouse and spouse, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends, fellow believers. True, he also tears the ties of love as he himself dissolved that intercourse with his mother and friend. At times he inflicts painful wounds and gaps. But he again binds up and give us a substitute.

He is the almighty God. All things are within his power. Our life, our future lies in his hand. According to his will and pleasure, according to his love and faithfulness he orders our life and leads his own hither and yon from place to place, and protects them on all their ways and hears their petitions and desires and gives them what is good and profitable for them. To his own, to those who love him all things must work together for good. What a great comfort this is that we dare say: even our earthly well-being and welfare, our entire life lies in the hand, on the heart of the Redeemer, the Son of God! He is the Protector of His Church who appoints and provides a refuge for it on earth amongst hostile mankind so that it can always remain somewhere.

III.

To what he at the same exhorts his loved ones when he says, "Behold thy son. Behold thy mother," is the next thing we want to ponder. This word of Jesus strengthened the trust of the grieving mother, the grieving disciples. From this they knew how faithfully their Lord and Master, their friend too care of them. They would thank him for this faithful care for life. And since we are to conclude from these words that the Lord takes pity also on us as a father on his children, that he has body, life, soul, and all things in his hand, we should in childlike joy trust him, commit all things to him, should not choose our own way but with every step look at the hands of our Savior as he lead us, and follow his beckoning. The love of the Redeemer which spans our entire life also our earthly walk incites and influences us in a right way to ardent thanks, faith, trust, love in return, obedience. When we truly perceive how much he is concerned about our well-being, then we place ourselves in his service and also gladly do his will as it concerns our brethren. What we should do in his name, according to his will, to our brethren we perceive from his testament from the cross.

The word, "Woman, behold thy son," contains a directive for his disciple John; the other, "Behold thy mother," is a directive for his mother Mary. John is to show a child's love to the mother of Jesus, as though he were her son. And Mary should regard John as her own child. For this sake, for Christ's sake John should accept Mary and Mary John and each serve the other as though thus they served Christ.

That is the Lord's commandment, the new commandment which Jesus the establisher of the New Covenant has left behind for his disciples, that they should love one another as he loved them. That is the Lord's will for his believers, that they should comfort the poor, forsaken, lonesome, burdened, sorrowing, widows, and orphans and ease their distress. We should look after the needs of the saints as though thus we were serving Christ himself. No more does Christ walk visibly on earth. We can today no longer serve him as did those pious women who once followed him. However, his brethren, his afflicted suffering brethren he himself in his dying hour as he hung on the cross has set in his place so that we do to them what we should do for the Lord if he himself would today visibly stay and go in and out amongst us. Mary is to see in John, John in Mary a substitute for His person. Hence, Jesus' disciple John out of love to his Lord and Master also took His mother into his house from that moment and thus testified his friendship to Jesus beyond death. Oh, that we would also walk

in the footsteps of this disciple!

With this second word from the cross, with this last service which he shows to his mother and disciple the Lord himself has given his own an example. To his dying hour he fulfilled the Fourth Commandment and kept up his friendship. Thus Christian children should love, honor, cherish, and provide for their parents even when they become old until they depart in death. That is true Christian friendship which remains until death. Yes, as Jesus in the midst of his suffering until his mouth closed in death, as he even with bound hands did good, bestowed comfort, sowed love, so should we do good and not become tired, not let ourselves be prevented from comforting others and scattering a blessing even by cross and suffering, by our own distress. That is Jesus' last testament to his own.

IV.

Finally, we still wish to ponder how even in this word from the cross, in this onslaught of suffering Jesus' redeeming love is revealed.

Jesus the crucified provided also for the physical well-being of his loved ones and wishes that we help, support, and comfort one another in all the distresses of life. Yet the Lord never loses sight of the final great purpose which his life, suffering, and death served: the redemption and deliverance of mankind. He shows his mother Mary not only the love of a son, his friend John not only the love of a friend; he revealed to both also his Savior's love which above all has the well-being of souls in view. Since he left this legacy behind, he had a wise, wholesome purpose. John, the disciple who leaned on his breast, his most trusted friend, and Mary, his mother could and should serve each other well also in the greatest thing which is on earth. John who above the other disciples saw into the depths of the divinity of Christ was the best pastor for Mary and well able to further Jesus' mother who first saw in this Jesus always her child, her flesh and blood, in the knowledge of God's Son. And on the other hand, Mary could make clear to John the truth that the eternal Word actually became flesh with what she knew and shared from the childhood and youth of her Son. Much of what John as apostle later taught the Christians he certainly first heard and learned from Jesus' mother.

The same Savior's love accompanies our every step. When Jesus, the Lord and Master of our life brings Christians together, and also on the other hand, when he separates Christians who have found and loved one another, he has the salvation of souls in view. For that reason he has placed spouse, parents, children, brothers, friends, fellow believers at our side so that we may strengthen them in the saving faith and on the other hand be furthered by their service. And also seeming, temporary loss, separation, pain, cross, sorrow serves to strengthen faith. No matter how the Lord may direct and turn our ways it serves for the welfare and advantage of our souls, it serves for our salvation.

On the cross the Lord has worked out our salvation, won eternal salvation, and above all atoned for our sins. For without forgiveness of sins could no one be saved. And also the onslaught of suffering reported by our text is part of his mediatorship. Christ was obedient to his death on the cross, and loved his own to the end.

And also here he is our substitute. With this he made good for our lack of obedience, love, friendliness, which we have failed to show to our spouse, parents, children, brothers, friends. If our want, our poverty, our guilt should sometime fall heavily upon our conscience, we look up to his cross and comfort ourselves in his perfect love and his blameless obedience. Christ tore the bond which united him to Mary and John, he tore himself free from mother and friend; now he wanted to be alone, be alone with God and do his duty before God. That is why he also called his mother "woman." Now she had nothing more to do with that which he alone wanted to and could carry out: the cleansing

of our sins, the reconciliation of the world with God. We also see in this text the Lamb of God who carried the sins of the world. Also our sins has he borne and atoned for, our unbelief, faint-heartedness, our despair, impatience, our spite and wilfulness, our thanklessness and disobedience, our reluctance, our lovelessness and unfaithfulness with which we have sinned against God and man. Because he tore himself free from mother and friend, did without the comfort of a mother and love of a friend, he also atoned for that which we in natural, fleshly love did too much, perverted, foolish parental love, filial love, love for friends. All our sins we lay upon him and then with that much more confidence commit all our affairs, body and soul, present and future, to him and remain his own in time and in eternity. Amen.

26th SERMON

Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37.

In the previous Lenten text we saw the Crucified surrounded by his friends and faithful followers. His eyes rested with pleasure on the little host of the faithful who stood under the cross and did not forsake him in disgrace and suffering. We saw how his gracious hand ordered and guided the future life of his loved ones. In the text before us we see the crucified Christ surrounded by a large pack of malicious spiteful foes and hear the horrible curses and blasphemies which are spit out against the Holy One of God. Then was fulfilled what had been predicted of the Messiah, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him....They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels....I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me." Ps 22:7-9; 13.14.17. "Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise; for the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries; but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love." Ps 109:1-5. Literally were all these prophecies fulfilled on that great Good Friday upon Golgatha. These curses and blasphemies are also part of the suffering of the Messiah. And he took also this suffering willingly upon himself and thus atoned for the sin of the world. We will not speak of this:

HOW THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST IS BLASPHEMED BY THE WORLD

We direct our attention

- I. To the Blasphemies of the Godless World,
- II. To the Great Patience with which God's Son Bore the Curses and Blasphemies of His Foes.

I.

First, we direct our attention to the blasphemies of the godless

world. The crucified Christ was the butt of the mockery and derision which in rage, hatred, and bitterness the godless world, Jews and heathen, hurled at him. He was indeed, as Simeon had predicted, a sign to be spoken against. All who on that Good Friday came to Golgatha to satisfy their lust and curiosity, all who passed by Jesus' cross, the entire nation of the Jews blasphemed him and accompanied their blasphemies with derisive gestures, shook their heads, and thus also expressed their indignation. They said, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself." Mt 27:40. They acted as if they were zealous for the temple, the sanctuary, and that now he is atoning for the deserved punishment of his blasphemy.

But this talk was nothing but lies. They opened their lying mouth against him and spoke with a false tongue. That testimony was not able to stand before their own court. With the words, "Destroy this temple!" Christ had meant something entirely different, had in fact pointed to that which was now being fulfilled in him. Against better knowledge and conscience the Jews twisted his words and persisted in their lies and slander after they had come to naught as they themselves had heard. This was insane talk, without any understanding, a monstrous production of their blind rage and hatred of Christ. At the same time it was malicious talk. They spoke maliciously against him. This was bitter mockery, "How wonderfully you are destroying the temple of God and building it in three days; save yourself!" You have not been able to destroy the temple, it still stands; but now you are lying on the ground and have come to naught and cannot help yourself.

"If you be the Son of God, come down from the cross," v.40b, thus they spoke and continued to blaspheme. The great deeds and miracles with which Jesus proved to the Jews that he was God's Son, for which sake the Jews had often praise d him and exalted his name into the heavens were all at once forgotten. Malicious scorn and mockery, "If you actually are God's Son descend from the cross, let us see a sign and a miracle and help yourself," that was the thanks for his love. The chief priests, scribes, and elders, the members of the Sanhedrin and the leaders of the people together with all the common folk mocked him. The elders, priests, scribes, these honorable, pious, learned people, were even more wicked than the common people. They said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." V.42. He had helped very many in Israel. He had traveled about in the land and had done good and had made all well who were overpowered by the devil. The leaders of the people made fun of his kindnesses which he showed to the poor and the sick, made fun of his ardent love as Savior, before all the people. "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Physician, heal yourself!

They continued, "If he is Christ the King of Israel, the chosen of God, let him now come down from the cross that we may see and believe him." Thus they ridiculed the great and wise ones in Israel who well knew the prophecy of the Messiah, Israel's Messiah. No, he cannot be the Messiah, the King of Israel, the Chosen and Anointed of God, who hangs there on the cross, on the accursed tree. Such a Messiah and King we do not want to have! He should be the Chosen of God whom God has surrendered like a criminal to the hands of the heathen? If he is anyhow, let him prove it and come down from the cross, then we will believe.

In this mockery lay at the same time horrible hypocrisy. They had seen enough of Jesus and had not believed. They did not want to believe. Even when afterwards he rose from the dead they did not believe. Israel's scribes drew their blasphemy from the Scriptures, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" V.43. These blasphemous words which David placed into the mouth of the Messiah's foes they uttered with their lips. With these words of the Psalmist they blasphemed the Messiah's trust in God. Yes, they reviled and cursed him. They concluded from his suffering that God cursed and rejected him. If he were God's beloved Son, if God would delight in him he would deliver him. The murderers who were crucified with him also reproached him with the same thing and reviled him, "If thou be Christ,

save thyself and us." Lk 23:39. Conscious of their crimes with which they truly had deserved death on the cross, and in spite of the nearness of death and the torment of eternity, they still cursed God who had surrendered them to such pain, cursed Christ because he did not help himself and others. If the Jews and their leaders thus screamed and blasphemed, it dare not surprise us that also the rough, ignorant, heathenish soldiers ridiculed the Crucified and offered him bitter vinegar out of sympathy for the dying, helpless King of the Jews.

That was the mob of wicked people who surrounded God's Anointed. They were the great bullocks and fat oxen who threw open their jaws against him, "They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion," is the way the suffering Messiah laments in the Psalm. Behind the mob of wicked men, the bullocks, the fat oxen stands Satan the roaring, ravening lion, the liar and murderer from the beginning, the arch-slanderer. This was the well-known voice of the deceiver: if you are God's Son, then command that these stones be made bread; jump from the temple; descend from the cross! Through those horrible curses and blasphemies the devil wanted to shake the faith, the Crucified's trust in God and lead him astray in regard to God, God's Word and will, his work of redemption. It is a picture from hell, from the kingdom of the devil, which is here sketched for us.

This mob of wicked men is a picture of the world as it today lives. The world is a godless tribe of mockers and blasphemers. The common world, the rough mob pours out its lust for pleasure, its energy, its wild spirits, its displeasure and exasperation in mockery and curses. At the market, on the streets, in all factories, we today still hear those horrible words of the Jews and heathen from Golgatha. The great, wise, and educated of this world are still more wicked. Their blasphemies are indeed more refined, but much more pointed, bitter, and poisonous than the common mockers of the alleys.

That is the religion, Satan's religion to which the children of this world swear allegiance: mockery and blasphemy. Their prayers are curses. If they speak of God and divine things, then it is done in unbelief, with a refined smirk, with inner contempt, in blind hatred and zeal. However, those to whom ridicule and curses were their daily bread in good days also seek in evil days comfort and easing for their burdened heart and conscience in confused murmuring and curses; they curse and blaspheme until death, until they enter eternity, as that one malefactor on the cross. Yes, many who in peaceful happy times for the sake of propriety restrain and control their tongue can no longer in misfortune control themselves and reveal the evil depths of their heart when circumstances press them. The tongue of the children of men whose heart is blinded by Satan is kindled by hell.

And it is Christ the Lord who is set as a sign who is spoken against from all sides. The unbelievers, the mockers of this world twist and pervert Christ's Word, the Holy Scriptures, as did those Jews. They attribute to the Scriptures contradictions, absurd, even disgraceful things which they cannot prove, which are revealed as lies. What they cannot flatly deny that they laugh to scorn and ridicule. They curse and mock with Bible passages as did the scribes of Israel, fish out of the Scriptures their malicious missiles. Christ, God's Son, the Chosen One of God is reviled and blasphemed by the educated and uneducated. Christ, a rabbi of the Jews, who passed himself off as God's Son and said, "I am God's Son," he was only an ordinary man and his life ended on the cross: that is the verdict of the world concerning Christ. This blasphemous talk is uttered from the pulpit in the old and new world by many preachers. Christ, the King of Israel, the King and Messiah of the Jews and heathen, the Savior of the whole world is jeered at by the world. Because he helped mankind his Savior's love is repaid with scorn and mockery. His miracles and kindnesses are derided and called sham, a lie, deceit. Especially the crucified Christ,

who through his cross and blood has redeemed the world, is the target of the biting, malicious arrows of the children of men. The old heathen considered Christians for fools for worshipping a God on the cross. Today the preaching of Christ crucified is to the wise and unwise still the embodiment of folly and superstition. That the Son of God used his blood for the sins of the world, that God demands blood, a bloody atonement, that the alleged Christian world considers a rough, heathenish idea. To the dishonor of Christ's suffering the Papacy has appointed the shining works of the saints and monks as the way of salvation and the ladder to heaven. All who place the merit, the will, the works of men alongside the merit of Christ, who teach that man can help himself or can still assist a little bit in his deliverance and salvation revile the cross and the blood of God's Son.

Christ crucified is mocked and blasphemed in his members, in his Church. The true Church which preaches the narrow way of repentance, faith, sanctification and follows in the footsteps of the Crucified is branded as an enemy of God, as a foe of true religion, the religion of the love of all men. True Christians pass for desecrators who lay violent hands on the sanctuary, on the rights and freedom of mankind. Christians who suffer here below with Christ are reviled and mocked because of their faith and trust in God: where is your God? what good does your piety do you, your praying? Yes, God often lets his loved ones and his chosen people often sit in dust and ashes, whilst the children of the world have good days and everything in abundance and enjoy honor and respect.

The world also accompanies its blasphemies with mocking gestures and deeds. By outrageous crimes which read into heaven, through their malice and tomfoolery they mock the religion of the crucified Christ. Alas, even men who call themselves Christians and pass for Christians let themselves get entangled in the ridicule by the world. Must we not urgently warn our youth against thoughtless swearing and cursing? All who walk thoughtlessly mock Christ's cross. All who are friends with the children and mockers of this world share in this sin of the world. Even in the souls of pious Christians do not sometimes wicked, blasphemous thoughts arise: has God forsaken me? am I really one of God's elect? has my Christian faith not deceived me? Who has not yet been disturbed by such malicious arrows from Satan?

II.

Now we look away from the godless world, this mob of blasphemers which moves around Christ's cross to the crucified Christ and recall with what great patience God's Son endured the curses and blasphemies of his foes.

Really, not a syllable is mentioned in our text of Christ himself. However, this silence of Scripture testifies of Christ's silence. He did not revile when he was reviled; he threatened not when he suffered. We can imagine that his holy soul was pierced, tormented, and tortured by the curses and blasphemies of the Jews and heathen as though by knives and swords. For a pious Christian every curse word is a stab in his heart. But Christ was silent to all this, silent, endured it, and prayed as the Psalmist says, "I prayed." He commended his troubles to God. Whilst those great bullocks and fat oxen screamed and bellowed, he perhaps prayed the words of Psalm 22, "I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round....But be not thou far from me; O Lord; O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. Ps 22:10-12; 19-21. He knew very well that in that hour Satan tempted him. Indeed, the cross of the Redeemer was a thorn in the devil's eye. Therefore he wanted to tear Jesus from the cross, by means of these unheard of blasphemies of his foes move him to use his omnipotence.

But Christ resisted him, withstood this hard test also. He let himself be reviled and abused and continued in suffering and continued until the end the work begun. Now we must thank our Savior that he did not at that time help himself, that he did not descend from the cross but remained on it and completed the cleansing of our sins! Now we must thank God the heavenly Father that he at that time did not deliver his Son and did not come to help him but let the full storm pass over him! Thus we are helped, thus we are redeemed. We must thank the great patience of God's Son for our salvation. By his bitter and patient willing suffering and death he atoned for our sins and the sins of the whole world, yes, also for those curses and blasphemies of the godless world. However, after he had completed the work of redemption on the cross and had shown patience and obedience even unto death, he indeed showed his divine power and glory. He did an even greater miracle than if he would have descended from the cross and destroyed his foes with one word of his omnipotence or would have smitten them to the ground. After he died on the cross he again arose from the dead and through his resurrection he gloriously proved that he is the Son of God, so that we now see and believe. To be sure, even now as he sits upon the throne of glory he controls himself and has patience with the sinners and mockers of earth. True, when we hear the blasphemies of the drunken, mad world rising upward and we see its sacrilege we sometimes think that the earth must open and swallow these sinners, or fire must fall from heaven upon them. But God, God's Son is patient and wishes that everyone repents. To be sure, all who abuse all the grace and patience of the Savior and do not want to renounce their sacrilegious ways, and die in their sins will finally be struck down by the vengeance and wrath of God's Son; they will howl eternally and gnash their teeth; in them will Christ fulfill what he has threatened them in the Psalm, "As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garments, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually. Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul." Ps 109:17-20. But also those who have known and tasted the grace and truth of God's Son but crucified Christ again, and have trampled God's Son under foot and ridiculed him and considered the blood of the New Testament unclean and reviled the Spirit of grace, henceforth have no more offering for their sin, but a terrible waiting for the judgment and the fire of indignation which will consume the enemies. Heb 6:4-6; 10:26,27.

We want to consider God's patience for our salvation and daily repent and believe and in word, deed, and walk praise and bless him whom the world reviles and blasphemes and follow his example. Christ's patience is a holy picture for us who are called to a similar cross and suffering. When unbelievers demand of us the reason of our hope which is in us, then we will joyfully give an answer and testify of Christ. If unbelievers attack our most holy faith and lie about it, we will unmask these lies and place God's truth in the light. And if Christ's foes begin to curse and blaspheme, then after Christ's example we will be silent and endure it and pray. We will not cast our pearls before swine nor give what is holy to the dogs. And we will remember what Christ's apostle writes, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." 1 Pet 4:14. Truly, we suffer no harm if the world curses and damns us because of our Christianity. Even this must work together for good. If the world hates us and reviles and rejects us, we flee to God and commend our soul to God and cling so much the more closely to our Savior. The hatred of the world confirms our faith, our trust in God. If we know that the world can help itself against Christ with nothing else but impudent lies, gross curses and blasphemies, we will be so much the more certain that our faith, that God's Word is the truth. And in the midst of the bellowing of the bullock and lions, in the midst of the

derision of the world we feel God's peace. The Spirit which is a spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. 1 Pet 4:14. Our faith is the victory which overcomes the world, also the hatred, the enmity and blasphemies of the world. May God strengthen and preserve us in the faith for Christ's sake! Amen.

27th SERMON

Luke 23:39-43.

When Christ was crucified, the word of Scripture was fulfilled, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Is 53:12. They crucified two criminals with him, one to the right hand and the other on the left. These three who were crucified on Golgatha seemed to be in the same guilt and condemnation. But what a powerful difference there was between these three! The One who hung in the middle, who was judged to be the most wicked, who wore the crown of thorns, who was reviled, cursed, and blasphemed by the passers-by was in reality no criminal, was not a sinner as we and our children are; no, He was the Lord of glory, the Son of the living God. The criminal on the right hand had indeed stupidly lived wickedly, and received what his deeds were worth; yet on the cross he ceased sinning. Our text describes him as one of God's saints, who entered with Christ into glory. The criminal on the left hand was and remained a criminal and cursed and blasphemed until he died and then went to his place, to the place of damned souls.

Christ's pains and death on the cross were unusual, were the great sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world with God. The crucifixion pains of the two crucified with him had in both the same cause, were in both the well-deserved punishment of their crimes. And yet what a wonderful difference in the same guilt and punishment! What a difference between the dying of the criminal on the right hand and the end of the criminal on the left! The innocent Joseph who languished in prison because of his piety was a type of the suffering Messiah. As Joseph lay in prison he found himself in the company of two criminals, both of whom had acted most wrongly against their lord and king. During one night each of these two prisoners had a dream and their dreams were very similar. But what a different interpretation to both! As different as the ultimate fate of the two criminals! The cupbearer was elevated to royal joy and honor. Pharaoh's baker went to the gallows.

Something similar happened on Good Friday upon Golgatha. Heaven was opened to the criminal on the right hand; the criminal on the left was hurled into hell. The same amazing happenings are continually repeated in the history of the world and the Church. Two people in men's eyes are completely alike in life and death, both are sinners, perhaps malefactors, criminals, and finally both receive the wages of sin--death. However before God there is a difference. One will be accepted, the other rejected. Of course, the heart of the malefactor on the right hand was different toward Christ and God than the heart of the one on the left. The one of the left cursed and blasphemed until the end and hardened his heart. The one on the right hand was converted from the bottom of his heart. However, that he was converted was the Lord's work and grace. Thus it is and remains a wonder, a riddle to our eyes, why God granted repentance to Peter, whilst the judgment of hardening and demerit devolved upon Judas; why Christ the Lord kindled the beautiful light of faith in the criminal on the right,

whilst his companion remained in darkness and was hastening to meet outer darkness. That we cannot fathom. Two people are in the same guilt, the one is converted and saved, the other is surrendered to a hardened mind. That is, as Scripture testifies, as our conversion reminds us, an impenetrable mystery. That is part of the unsearchable ways and judgments of the Lord.

What God has hidden from us we are not for God's sake to explore nor judge with our foolish reason. We pray to the great, wonderful God in dust and ashes. Nor is it necessary for us to uncover the mysteries of God. In the Scriptures we have clear bright truths before us which give us enough to think about and are beneficial for our salvation. Even the Lenten text before us offers us enough material which is worth pondering and meditating upon it serves and is profitable for our salvation. This text clearly shows the way which leads to damnation, and the way to salvation. The example of the malefactor on the left hand is an earnest, impressive warning. He had spent his life in sin and shame, was a robber, a rebel. Even before his death great grace was offered him. The crucified Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the Savior of sinners, thieves, robbers, murderers hung close to his side. But he despised it all, despised also the rebuke of his converted comrade in sin, continued to curse, to blaspheme and harden his heart and chose hell instead of heaven. It is terrible when a person serves sin and vice his entire life. But even more terrible is it when the sinner his whole life, even at the very end, in the hour of death rejects God's Word and grace and to his last breath murmurs against and blasphemes God. It is a horrible scene when a sinner, who is smitten and marked by God and cast down by God's hand, instead of humbling himself under God's almighty hand curses his misfortune and curses the God who punishes him. However also all those who cover their love and service of sin with the semblance of respectability and uprightness, who before the world pass for honest, honorable people, perhaps even avoid gross shame, yet trample God's Word and Law under foot, despise their neighbors, waste their life and to the end persist in their perverted mind and will and defy both the earnestness and goodness of God are in the same position and damnation with the criminal on the left. And not only for hard, secure sinners, no, also just for us, the disciples of Jesus has the example of the malefactor on the left been set as a warning. So that we do not misuse the example of the repentant malefactor; so that also no one postpones his true repentance to the last moment with the idea that it is easy for a sinner to turn to the Lord even in the hour of death; so that all of us fear God with our whole heart and not continue in sin hoping for grace, we should truly ponder and take to heart what the Scriptures say of the malefactor on the left. He who sins wilfully has no more sacrifice for his sins. However, he who lets himself be frightened by this example, let every depressed sinner whose heart and conscience is burdened by sin confidently look from the left to the right hand, and hear and believe the sweet Gospel which the malefactor on the right announces in and with his example, which the crucified Christ preached to that one and to all repentant malefactors. This other example shows us clearly the way of life, the way of repentance, faith, and sanctification which ends in eternal life. Hence, now we deal with

THE REPENTANCE OF THE MALEFACTOR

and ponder

- I. Wherein it Consisted,
- II. How the Malefactor Came to such a Repentance,
- III. What Promise was Given the Repentant Malefactor.

We ask first, wherein the repentance of the malefactor consisted, When the criminal at the left blasphemed Jesus and said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us," v.39, the other answered, rebuked him, and said, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." Vv. 40.41. That sounded entirely different from what his comrade had expressed. Whether also this malefactor on the right at first joined in the blasphemy, since Matthew remarks that also the two malefactors crucified with Jesus reviled him, and then stopped his blasphemy, or whether Matthew intends only to say in a general way that also from this side, from those who were crucified with Jesus abuse poured forth, we cannot definitely decide. At any rate, the criminal at the right was also a robber, evildoer, criminal and equally his companion in everything until suddenly on that Good Friday a change took place in him. He confessed that he and his comrade were justly in this condemnation, that they merely received what their deeds were worth. Hence, he confessed his evil deeds. He regretted his disgraceful lost life. He did not excuse himself with one syllable. He considered himself worthy of punishment and condemnation. He felt God's hand which smote him, God's wrath. He was afraid of God. Suddenly terror and fright had come over him.

The repentance of the malefactor is a picture of true repentance, a mirror for us. That is the way which is prescribed to sinners. The malefactor's repentance is the door to life. Not only are robbers, thieves, adulterers, fornicators, selfish in the same guilt as these two malefactors. And not only do the honorable before the world who perhaps avoid shame and blasphemy but despised God and his Word, despise their neighbors, live only to themselves and waste and squander their entire life in the service of vanity stand on the same step as does the malefactor. We all should perceive our picture in him. We are all sinners, that is, we are all before God malefactors, criminals, transgressors. We have robbed God of what is his. He who is remiss and lazy in attending services robs God of his dues, his honor. Whoever is angry and quarrels with his brother is guilty of death and the judgment. How many idle hours of our life have we lost and wasted! We must confess that we are unprofitable servants.

But blessed are we if we truly confess this and as poor malefactors and evildoers stand before God, if we regret this and sigh over the fact that before God we are so poor, blind, naked, and wretched. He who is truly penitent, also feels something of God's heavy hand, tastes something of God's wrath and damnation. And sometimes that is the bitter fruit of sin which everyone tastes in whom sin becomes alive. When an adulterer, a thief, a murderer repents, he knows very well of what he repents. If we examine our own life just a little bit in God's presence, explore our own heart and ways, we will find reason and cause enough for repentance, for the malefactor's repentance, cause us to be afraid, to tremble, and to quake, yes, cause us to lose courage and despair.

In spite of this the malefactor on the right did not despair. Faith followed remorse. He perceived and confessed that he and his comrade in sin deserved this punishment but not the third Person who hung in the middle and whom his comrade reviled. Of Him he testified that He had done nothing amiss. What a conderful confession! In this Jesus of Nazareth who was reviled and cursed by the whole nation of Israel as the worst sinner and criminal he saw a holy and righteous Person who had done nothing wrong in his entire life, a saint the like of whom there was no other on earth.

Still more! He said to the Crucified, "Lord!" "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He saw in the Crucified, the reviled King the Messiah who some day would return to his kingdom with great power and glory. What a great, wonderful light in the darkened soul of his criminal! What great faith! He did not look at what was before his eyes: disgrace, humility,

contempt, curse, condemnation, but behind the shame and suffering he saw the innocence, holiness, glory, and majesty of God's Son. It was an honest, true faith. He believed in Christ. He believed that this Holy One was the Lord, God's Son, the Redeemer and Savior of sinners. He therefore asked him and said, Lord, remember me!" That was humble faith: remember me in grace! Grant me only a gracious look when you return to your kingdom, to your glory. I will gladly be a doorkeeper in the house of my God. He was content with the crumbs of the dogs.

And yet what a confident faith! He confidently hoped for a part in Christ's kingdom, in the kingdom of glory. He did not doubt that a poor malefactor would have a place there. He believed that this King on the cross, this Holy One would cover the sins of all sinners, also those of the malefactor, also his sins and shame with his holiness and righteousness. Thus trustingly he turned his head and heart to this Savior and fled with guilt-laden soul into the wounds of the Crucified.

That is true faith, faith which saves the sinner. True faith is not offended at Christ the crucified, at the word of the cross, at the afflicted condition of Christ's Church but sees in the Crucified the holy, unspotted, glorious Son of God, of equal majesty and honor with the Father who rules forever and ever. Faith knows Christ, the Savior of all sinners and evildoers who with his righteousness and with his obedience atoned and made good everything which we have done wrong. True faith is humble, praying and sighing: Oh Lord, remember me, grant me just one look of grace, only the lowest step in your kingdom! However, faith is also absolute confidence. He who believes does not doubt that in spite of all shame which he has placed on himself he will be honored in Christ's kingdom. When sin frightens the soul, when it feels wrath and damnation, the soul of the believer hides itself in the wounds of the Savior. A converted sinner has his eye fixed steadily on Christ. He is his glory and boast, he wants to know no other.

The malefactor's faith which lived in his heart, even though it had not begun until the hour of death, came clearly to light before his death. It expressed itself in prayer and confession. He prayed to the Lord and freely and publicly, before his comrade in sin, before the blaspheming Jews confessed him as the Christ. His faith showed itself in love. He had a heartfelt pity for his comrade. He rebuked therefore his sins and pointed him to the One who had done no wrong and who atoned for all the transgressions of all sinners with his innocent suffering and death. He proved his faith in patience. He did not murmur over his suffering on the cross, he did not ask the Lord to help him from the cross but willingly surrendered himself to the punishment of death he deserved.

These are the precious fruits of faith which one finds on the tree of life of all converted sinners: prayer, hearty devotion, courageous confession of Jesus' name which conquers all timidity and fear; love, pitying love which wants to rescue the soul of his fellow-sinner, and therefore does not grow slack in prayer, intercession, exhortation, reprimand; patience, which does not detest the cross but greets it, conquers all temporal pain and tribulation and waits for the eternal inheritance and the heavenly treasure. Truly, that malefactor should be counted among the saints whose example we should imitate!

II.

However, how did the malefactor so suddenly become a saint? Whence this powerful change? Secondly we want to notice how the malefactor came to repentance. The disciples of Jesus had learned to believe because they saw Jesus' glory. The malefactor saw Jesus' deepest disgrace and humility at which his disciples were offended. However, he saw and heard enough of Jesus which

could lead him to repent. As an Israelite he knew something of Israel's hope, of the prophecies of Scripture. Of course, until that day they had remained a dead letter. Undoubtedly, he had also heard of the great things, the rumors which filled the entire land of the Jews, the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth. When he was sentenced to death and was led to the place of execution, this great Prophet was moved very close, right under his eyes. He was led with him to the place of execution. The malefactor had also heard the first earnest words of Jesus which were directed to the daughters, mainly the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that powerful threat of the judgment. As he thought upon the words, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" he indeed asked himself the question: If the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders are dry wood which must soon burn, what kind of a brand for hell am I? Furthermore, he had also been a witness of Jesus' crucifixion and he must have been amazed at how patiently Jesus let all pain pass over him. He heard the great word from His mouth, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then, as it were, scales fell from his eyes; he said to himself: He actually is what the title on the cross alleges, the King of the Jews; He is the one who should come, Israel's Messiah. The predictions of the prophets speak of a suffering Messiah. Yes, indeed, he is right when he says of himself: I am the Son of God, the Son of the Father. He prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers, his deadly enemies; then he will have a few drops of grace left over also for me. Those words of Jesus from the cross and the sight of the Crucified, which in itself was a living sermon, awakened repentance, remorse, faith, love in the soul of the criminal.

We have and hear the same words. In the Word the crucified Christ is sketched before our eyes. We now know much more of this Jesus than the malefactor, we have a clearer insight into prophecy and fulfilment. From our youth we have learned about Christ. Sunday after Sunday the crucified Christ is preached to us. Should not our hearts be truly awakened to remorse and repentance, to faith to love, to love in return, to thanks, to sanctification? Christ's Word, the preaching of Christ is the means of grace through which that criminal came to repentance, through which the sinners on earth, gross criminals and the more refined, self-righteous sinners come to the knowledge of the truth.

But had not also the other criminal seen and heard everything which the malefactor on the right saw and heard on the way? He did not repent but hardened his heart. That was his fault. Grace was offered richly also to him. How did it happen that this one malefactor who was in the same condemnation and acted just as wrongly and godlessly as his fellow was converted and believed? That came only from the Lord. The Lord had looked at him as earlier he had looked at Peter. Christ's Spirit, the Spirit of grace had made those words of Jesus, the words of Scripture, the preaching of Jesus' cross alive in him. The repentance of the malefactor is a work of grace, a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

Everytime a sinner, a secure, proud sinner repents it is the work of the Lord's hand and Spirit. That we have known and confessed our misery, our nakedness, that we are sinners and have nothing whereof to boast before God; that we believe in Christ, praise the Crucified in whom the world is offended; that we, even though in great weakness, serve this King in holiness and righteousness which pleases him; that we wait and hope for his eternal kingdom, that we must thank only and alone God's mercy, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of grace. He has placed the Word which we heard into our heart, made it alone in our hearts, he has opened our heart, born us anew. However, through the Word, by preaching the Holy Spirit carries out his work and office in us. Hence we will not refuse the Word, gladly and diligently hear the preaching of Christ, so that our repentance will last and our faith be strengthened.

III.

Finally, we ponder the great promise which was given the repentant malefactor. Jesus said to him, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The petition of the malefactor, "Remember me," did not remain unanswered. The Lord remembered him in grace. He was still received in grace. Ever and again the Lord fulfills his Word, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Even if a poor evil doer comes to him at the last hour and desires admittance and appeals to the grace, to the mercy of Jesus, it will be opened to him. Yes, Jesus receives all sinners. This word of comfort will be made known from the days of Christ's humiliation until that day when he will return in great power and glory to sinners to earth, to malefactors and to the honorable sinners; till then it will be laid on their hearts.

The Lord also promised Paradise to the malefactor. To the poor sinner who had already begun to taste damnation, before he sank into the abyss Paradise was opened. For that very reason Christ suffered on the cross so that he might open Paradise to sinners. At Christmas time we praised and hailed the little Child:

He opens us again the door
Of Paradise today. (105,8)

But just through his suffering and the shedding of his blood did the incarnate Son of God open the gates of heaven. To sinners on earth heaven, the joys and glory of heaven now stand open. To poor sinners and criminals, who have lost and forfeited life, who are not worthy to live on earth but are worthy of death, who before they breathe out their last breath still flee to Jesus as they are, as poor sinners and criminals worthy of death and desire only one thing from the crucified Savior, grace and mercy, instead of the torment and pains of hell which they have deserved will be given to taste for Jesus' sake the delights and joys of heaven, the sweet manna of Paradise, the tree of life, the water of life. Even now they shine before God in the dress of the righteousness of Jesus Christ and should and will some day come to honor with Christ and rule, rejoice, and triumph in his kingdom. To poor sinners, who here until their last breath must groan and suffer under the curse of sin, as the malefactor on the cross will, when they are finished suffering, be opened the city with gates of pearl and golden streets, their lamentation will be turned into a song. For sinners, for malefactors and evildoers on earth the same holy, unspotted, incorruptible inheritance is given and prepared which is a portion and the joy of the holy angels.

"Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," says the Lord, "with me!" With Jesus to whom in suffering and death the malefactor gave himself, should he be in Paradise. That is the climax of salvation: fellowship with Jesus. Those who here go with him the way of the cross, die to the world and sin, and become like him in suffering will there be companions of his resurrection and glory. To pardoned sinners Jesus is their One and All. Jesus the Crucified is here their boast, glory, and song. The Lamb who was slain and sits upon the throne is there the delight and feast for their eyes. The Lamb upon the throne will feed the blessed and lead them out and in to springs of living water.

"Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," say the Lord, "today!" The malefactor had prayed to the Lord to remember him when he came into his kingdom, into his glory. Jesus gives him more than he asked for. This very day, on that Good Friday he should enter with Jesus into Paradise. That also happened soon, after Jesus had spoken this word, Jesus took the soul of the poor criminal as blessed booty with himself into Paradise. Yes, "blessed are the dead which die

in the Lord," in faith in the crucified Savior, "from henceforth." From henceforth, from the moment they die they become blessed from that hour, completely blessed. In the moment that death seizes them, when hell and damnation perhaps still frightens them, in the very same moment when death closes his trap is the soul free, free from the flesh, completely free from sin, death, and devil and hurries to its home, to the heavenly Paradise, is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, into Jesus' lap. And when the Lord will some day come in his kingdom, in his glory then also the body which here labored, suffered, and groaned in the slavery of sin and was rubbed sore by death will receive honor and will be wonderfully glorified, fashioned like the glorified body of God's Son.

That promise which was given the malefactor is given also to us. "I say unto you," is the way the Lord speaks, who in spite of cross, suffering, disgrace, contempt had the might and power to open and close heaven, the greatest power in heaven and on earth. Jesus Christ the Lord who was dead and behold he lives! the faithful truthful Witness, the Son of the living God has given us this most precious promise of all. He can and also will keep and fulfill what he has promised us.

In order that we do not doubt he confirmed the promise of eternal life with an oath, with a "Verily." When God's Son, when the living God swears by himself, then the matter is true and certain. As certainly as we are sinners and malefactors and feel sin in the flesh, so certain should and will we sinners be saved. "Verily!" With special emphasis, with firm, joyous voice the Lord must have spoken this word, "Verily, I say unto you, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." That hour which the poor malefactor will never forget in eternity was for the Lord himself an hour of great holy joy. That refreshed the suffering Messiah in his great pain when he washed the soul of this sinner with his blood and thus prepared it for eternal life. The hour when this sinner repented there was also joy in heaven before the angels of God. They are hours of joy for the Lord when he rescues a soul from ruin. Oh, that we on our part may not deny the Savior this joy! Amen.

28th SERMON

Matthew 27:45-47; Mark 15:33-35; Luke 23:44,45.

What took place on that Good Friday on Golgatha was crucial for the entire existence of the world, for eternity, for the eternal lot of mankind. That is also the reason why all the separate circumstances of that great story are reported by the evangelists in detail. That is why the individual hours which indicate a progress in the suffering of Christ are given. It was about the sixth hour after midnight, six o'clock in the morning, when Pilate sentenced Christ to be crucified. It was about the third hour after sunrise, nine o'clock in the morning when Jesus was nailed to the cross. And about the sixth hour after sunrise, twelve o'clock noon, the event took place which is related in our text. "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." Mk 15:33. From twelve noon until three in the afternoon a thick darkness covered the whole land, that is, the entire world. This was not the usual darkening of the sun, as happens in the course of nature

when the moon comes between the sun and the earth. Such a darkness takes place only at the time of the new moon. When Christ died on the cross, it was the time of the full moon. The Passover of the Jews always fell in the time of the full moon in the third month. It was an unusual, miraculous darkness which our text reports. The sun lost its light, at God's command withdrew its rays of light. This was the same miracle of God's omnipotence as when at Joshua's time God commanded the sun to stand still for half a day, as when at the time of King Hezekiah the sun went backwards ten degrees on the sundial. According to the testimony of antiquity this darkness was noticed in Egypt, in Asia Minor where the stars were seen shining during the day, in Rome where this unusual event in nature was recorded in the state records. The sun became dark, and thus the earth lay in darkness. Heaven and earth, as it were, shuddered at man's cruelty, the Jews and heathen torturing the Lord of glory to death on the cross. Heaven and earth sorrowed over the dying of God's Son, their Creator and Preserver. This darkness, the terrors of nature pointed to that which at the same time took place in the soul of the Crucified. This miraculous event which causes us to shudder was, as it were, a picture of the nameless anguish which pressed the groan from the Crucified, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In our text all the stress lies on this word which the Redeemer shouted in the ninth hour. That is an amazing word into whose mysterious depths no mortal can look. Some who stood under the cross, some Jews said when they heard this, "This man calleth for Elias." The prophecy of the Prophet Malachi concerning Elijah who was to precede the Messiah and prepare the way for him was misinterpreted by the blind Jews to mean that the old Elijah who died would return and announce the coming of the Messiah, the coming of his glorious kingdom and rule. Those mockers played on this. They wanted to see whether Elijah would come and show the suffering Messiah at least this one service of love and take him down from the cross. This was bitter ridicule. Christ had not called upon Elijah but on his God. "Eli, Eli," that is, "My God, my God." We dare not be surprised that those hardened Jews did not understand the real meaning of the suffering Redeemer. None of us can fathom the depths of this unique groan, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Here we stand before an abyss. Meanwhile, if we stand still here in prayer and ask for light from the Holy Spirit, we understand one thing, how from this horrible abyss comfort, blessing, grace gushes forth for the sinful children of men. Therefore we now study:

CHRIST FORSAKEN OF GOD

- I. This is an Unfathomable Mystery.
- II. Yet from this Deep there Flows Forth Comfort, Grace, Peace for poor Sinners.

I.

The cry of the Crucified, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" contains an impenetrable mystery. Here the Messiah complains to God of his misery in the words of Psalm 22, which has been written just for him. It was a cry from the depths, a groan of an alarmed heart grieved to death ascending heavenward. This word of the suffering Redeemer is proof of the fact that the suffering of the cross did not pass without leaving a mark upon him, that he felt most deeply the suffering of death. The eternal Word actually became flesh and suffered in the flesh and the suffering of this time, even death.

And it was not the usual suffering of this age of which our text speaks. Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What he

said was the truth. He was forsaken by God. Jews and heathen had conspired against him. He was a cleansing sacrifice for mankind, as Psal 22 says: a reproach of men, and despised of the people (v.6). The godless world does not grant the Son of God, who visits them in grace, any abiding place on earth. It rejects him. He therefore hung between heaven and earth. His friends, his disciples had forsaken him. He himself had loosed the bond which united him with his mother Mary and with his friend John. He had renounced the protection and assistance of even the angels. And now he who was forsaken by men and angels complains, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was forsaken also by God. God has surrendered him into the hand of the unrighteous, to the pain of the cross. God had withdrawn his help and assistance from him. He therefore prayed after the manner of the Psalmist, "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" v.1b. Still more! God had also withdrawn from him the light of his countenance, had withdrawn comfort, peace, grace from his soul. He no longer answered him. He must therefore groan, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." V.2. He was completely forsaken by God.

We have no conception, no idea of the depths of this suffering. We cannot comprehend what it means: forsaken by God. That is not the usual torment of this earth, not the usual suffering of this time. No creature, no person on earth was ever in the strictest fullest meaning of the word forsaken by God. Whatever lives and moves on earth lives and moves in God according to the word of Scripture, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Here on earth shines the countenance of God's grace. Eternal love goes after the lost children as well and seeks and entices and calls them back. Of course, the proud children of men who harden themselves against the voice of grace God finally surrenders to their hardened mind and withdraws his Spirit and grace from them. That must be a frightful condition of the soul, when the gracious countenance of God is turned away from a sinner. Oh, that none of us will ever experience that! However, all people on earth still live within the reach of God's goodness. God lets his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. As long as the breath of life is in them, they all see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. It is a trial and a punishment which extends over time and the earth, which surpasses all the comprehension of men: God withdraws from any creature each and every light of his grace and mercy, his patience and longsuffering, his goodness and friendliness. That is the pain of hell, that is death, eternal death. In hell there is no more any remembrance of God. Into hell falls not one glimmer of the light of divine goodness. There one finds outer darkness. There the creature has lost all support, all peace of mind. There one finds nothing but howling and gnashing of teeth. Where there is no grace, love, goodness, there is wrath, terror, gnashing of teeth. What one notices of God in hell is wrath vengeance, fiery zeal. Forsaken by God: that is the condition, the torment of the devil and his accursed angels and condemned men. Our eyes, our thoughts are too dull and weak, we cannot estimate this abyss, this death of death, eternal death. God grant that none of us learns to know these depths of Satan!

Forsaken by God is a nameless torment, an unbearable punishment even for sinful, rejected children of men. The damned in hell strive against their lot, of course in vain. But he who on Golgatha lamented over being forsaken by God was a holy sinless person. He had done nothing wrong, had done, spoken, thought, willed only what was godly, heeded God, was obedient to his God even to the death on the cross. This unique righteous man, this pious, upright man was now forsaken by God, by that God whom he had so faithfully served, whom he had trusted his entire life. The mark the punishment and torment of being

forsaken by God made on the tender holy flesh, on the innocent, pure soul of Jesus, a soul dedicated and betrothed to God, we have not the least idea.

Yes, he who was forsaken by God was not only a righteous person, a man in whom God was well pleased. He was God's only Son. God did not spare his only Son but gave him up into the pain of the cross, into death, into eternal death. God's Son, the Holy One of God, he who is the reflection of his glory and the image of his essence in the dwelling of unclean spirits, in the place which re-echoes with curses and blasphemies, the Son of the Most High in the depths of hell! What deep humiliation! The only begotten Son of the Father, the Son of eternal love who is in the bosom of the Father, rejected by God the Father cast away from his countenance, under the wrath of the Almighty, struck down by final eternal wrath which burns down into the lowest hell! Ah, words and understanding fail us in order to comprehend aright this cry of the crucified Christ, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" We do not know what kind of suffering it was: God's Son who is in the bosom of the Father being forsaken by God. We can only plainly and simply state the sentence and declare that it is the truth because Christ himself has confessed it: God's Son, the eternal Son, actually was forsaken by God, the eternal Father -- forsaken in the fullest, deepest sense of the word, forsaken as the devil and the cursed are forsaken by God in hell. During those three anxious hours when darkness covered the earth, Jesus' soul was full of the night, darkness, and terrors of eternal death.

Jesus cried loudly and said: Why, why have you forsaken me? He could not understand how it was possible for his God to forsake the Only Begotten. This word, "Why, why?" discloses a new depth of suffering. In that hour the connection of his suffering with his past life and his life to come, with the purpose of his incarnation disappeared from the view, from the human consciousness of Jesus. God's counsel was for the moment obscured, as before in Gethsemane when he prayed God that if it were possible the cup of suffering might pass him by. What deep humiliation! The incarnate Son of God, the Crucified who twisted and writhed on the accused tree was a riddle to himself! Anxious and perplexed he asked: Why, why all this?

Yet even in the deepest humiliation he did not deny himself. He groaned and cried out of the depths of one forsaken but he did not despair. Otherwise he had nothing, absolutely nothing in common with his fellow sufferers, with the devil and the damned spirits. Even when he lay captive in the kingdom of the devil no angry thought came into his soul. Rather, before he poured out his anxious complaint and question before God, he said, "My God, my God. Eli, Eli." Thus his question and complaint was a prayer, a holy prayer and sacrifice, not the cry of alarm, not the yell of rage of a despairing soul. We look into new depths, into the holy depths of God.

"My God, my God," this is a cry from the depths of hell. Otherwise there is no remembrance of God in hell. Only that there one curses God, that one screams, rages against God and gnashes one's teeth. That was the first time, the only time that a prayer, a holy God pleasing prayer ascended to God from the place of damned spirits, from hell to heaven! Prayer, invocation, adoration of God from hell: yes, this is a marvel which surpasses all thought and comprehension. Christ who was forsaken by God still clings firmly to God, to his God and Father. He did not let go of him even though he was forsaken. That God who was angry with him he called his God, to whom he affirmed his love and faithfulness. That was unique obedience, unique love and faithfulness which surpasses human measure and understanding.

Only God, the eternal Son could speak thus, "My God, my God," the Son who was united with the Father by eternal divine bonds, not only with the bond of love but with the bond of the same essence. God had actually forsaken his Son, cast him to hell, left him to wrath. However, God's Son, the eternal God

and the bond of fellowship between the Father and the Son was stronger than death, hell, being forsaken by God.

At the voice of God's Son, "My God, my God," hell must become silent and dumb. A prayer, a holy sacrifice to God IN HELL! That was proof that hell, the fortress of Satan, hell with its malice, hatred of God and blasphemy, with its rage, its howling and gnashing of teeth was overpowered. For a few hours Christ was in this state of being forsaken by God. Yet he needed but taste eternal death, eternal wrath for only a moment and he had also forever and ever conquered and destroyed eternal death. For he was the eternal God who is over all who also mocks hell. With this cry, "My God, my God," Christ again raised himself from the depths of hell, trampled upon hell, and his Father, who forsook was so much the closer and dearer to him.

II.

Truly, we stand here as though before an abyss. However, from this depth flows forth grace, comfort, peace for poor sinners.

We grasp and understand as much of Christ's mysterious Word from the cross as is beneficial for our salvation and comfort. He who thus groans and laments, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" appears at the close of Psalm 22 in the midst of his brethren, surrounded by children and children's children, by a great number of people. He entered in in the place of his brethren according to the flesh. He is the Substitute of mankind. He restored that which he did not take away. This was Adam's fall and sin: he left the living God who had so highly honored him and so gloriously adorned him. This is the sin of men: they have not thanked God as God but have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image similar to corruptible man and birds and four-footed and creeping animals. This is the sin of Israel, God's people, over whom God groans, "They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisters, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Jer 2:13. This is our sin: we have forsaken God, the living God. We are by nature completely estranged from God, without the knowledge of God, without fear and love of God, without trust in God. Our fleshly mind is enmity against God. If we look back on our life, our commissions and omissions, we must confess: we are people who have forgotten God. All the love, faithfulness, care, goodness, grace of our God which we have experienced from our youth we have repaid with thanklessness. How easily and quickly our eyes and thoughts turn from God, from God's countenance, from God's Word and voice! In the hour of trouble and danger we forget God, our only refuge and protection. In the hour of temptation we let ourselves be blinded and deceived by a perishable treasure, by vain delight and desire, so that we lose sight of God, the fear of the Lord, God's Word and command. That is the sin of us all. We have all gone astray like sheep, have forgotten God the only Shepherd. We indeed deserve that God would forget and forsake us, cast us away from his presence, out of the reach of his goodness and love, out into outer darkness. We have deserved death, hell, wrath, damnation. But now Christ the faithful obedient Servant, the Son of God, the Son of God's delight, entered in our place and has paid for our imprisonment, also the imprisonment of eternal death. By anguish, cries of alarm, groans, suffering did he pay for it. But also through patience and obedience. Even amid the anguish of hell he still trusted God, called upon God. The chastisement lay on him, so that we might have peace.

And so he was also taken from anguish and judgment. He confesses in Psalm 22, "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his faith from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." V.24. With the cry, "My God, my God," he conquered all wrath, hell, damnation. And for our benefit! He is our Savior and Redeemer. He redeemed us from death

and the devil, from eternal death, from the torment and pains of hell. The contemporary exegetes and teachers of Israel in spite of the Lord's own confession deny that Christ actually endured the punishment and pain of hell. God's Son in hell: to them that is an offensive thought. But in denying this they also rob Christendom of the comfort that they are redeemed from the last, severest, and bitterest fruits and results of sin. Then hell at its time can still assert its claim on us. We believe that the Scriptures so clearly testify, even though we cannot understand it, that Christ, God's Son drank also the cup of eternal wrath. And for that very reason we can also confidently boast: O death, where is your sting? hell, where is your victory?

Because Christ, our Lord and Savior, the King of Israel was forsaken by God, we know and believe that God will not forsake and reject us in eternity. Now we can joyfully sing, "God hath forsaken none." Even when the cross and tribulation conceal from our sight God's friendly countenance, we nevertheless know that God remembers us, "Though a woman may forget her child, yet will I not forget thee." Is 49:15. Even in death he remembers us, as he remembered the poor malefactor, this brand saved from hell. For Christians death is no more the gate to the other death but the gate to eternal life.

It is true, that one hears pious beloved children of God, earnest Christians more often cry out and groan similarly, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The temptation of the pious is that they at times indeed think that God has forgotten them. They see and taste nothing of grace, light, comfort in their hearts. Yet they do not murmur against God. They cry, "My God, my God." "Jesus, my dear Master, my dear Savior have mercy on me." And they also become aware that their calling, groaning, praying is finally heard and after the dark night they see God's countenance shining. Meanwhile, what the pious experience in the hour of temptation is only similar to what Christ experienced on the cross. Christ was really and truly forsaken by God. When Christians complain of being forsaken by God, it is only a delusion and imagination. In truth, they are not forsaken by God. It is only an illusion of wrath, an illusion of hell. For by his bitter suffering and death Christ has once and for all destroyed wrath and hell. Yes, indeed, over the abyss of suffering, of being forsaken by God shines that eternal love with which God has loved us and in the very face of hell and its terrors we Christians can boast, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom 8:38,39. Amen.

29th SERMON

Matthew 27:48,49; Mark 15:36; John 19:28,29.

Although Jesus Christ was indeed in the form of God, he made himself of no reputation and humbled himself and became obedient unto death. He reached the lowest degree of humiliation when he had been forsaken by God for a short while, when he was in anguish and judgment and in deepest anguish of soul cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" At that time his soul was sunk

into the night of eternal death, then his soul was tortured by the terrors of hell. His spirit was dimmed, benighted when he anxiously lamented and asked, "Why, why?" The eternal counsel of God which he fulfilled by his very suffering and dying, which he announced in his very suffering was darkened to his human consciousness. But when he said, "My God, my God!" he in the midst of wrath and damnation grasped the hand of his God and Father, his eye sought the countenance of the Father which had hidden itself from him and found it again.

When Christ added the other word, "I thirst!" the darkness had already begun to depart. Rays of light from God's countenance had again fallen into his soul. For our text expressly notes that Jesus knew that everything had been fulfilled, and that in order to fulfil the Scriptures he cried out, "I thirst!" The counsel of redemption again stood clearly before his spirit. To be sure, this fifth word from the cross, "I thirst," does, on the other hand, show that his suffering, yes, his pains of hell were not completely gone. In that he thirsted and groaned because of this great thirst and then accepted the bitter drink, he completed the measure of his suffering.

Being forsaken by God was the climax of the Redeemer's torment of soul. He had indeed suffered in his soul. "He shall see the travail of his soul," Is 53:11, is what the prophet says. The soul-struggle in Gethsemane was the beginning of his great Passion. And when he was betrayed by his disciple, denied by the rest, sentenced by his nation, and accused before the heathen judge, when he was mocked and spit upon and cursed on the cross and blasphemed, his soul surged and tossed, groaned and bled. In the deepest anguish and pressure of soul, when he was forsaken, rejected by God he had found himself robbed of all of God's grace, all comfort. The burning thirst of the crucified Redeemer, on the other hand, was the climax of his physical torment. His body was bound, wounded, bruised, scourged, tormented on the cross, and after several hours of the torment on the cross the bitter pain had turned into that burning thirst which pressed the groan from him, "I thirst." And as the suffering of the Lord showed itself in its great power and greatness about the ninth hour, so did also his love, his love as Savior. We now wish to visualize his suffering, his love in the fifth word from the cross:

I THIRST!

- I. This Word Betrays the Bitter, Harsh Pains of the Suffering Redeemer.
- II. This Word also Testifies of the Great, Ardent Love of the Redeemer.

I.

The word, "I thirst," reveals the bitter, harsh pains of the suffering Redeemer.

"I thirst!" that was a cry of pain. After several hours of pain on the cross the burning, gaping wound, the raging fever had generated a terrible thirst. Those who have been seriously sick know from experience that of all the physical pains heat, parchiness, thirst is indeed the most distressing pain. Jesus was wearied and exhausted unto death. Look at all the things he had endured since the last evening! His suffering had increased from hour to hour, yes, from moment to moment. His physical pains, his severe soul-struggle, finally, the great loss of blood had taken all his strength. He no longer knew what to do. He had to groan and say, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death," Ps 22:14,15. After his powers were drained away he lamented from great exhaustion and lassitude, "I thirst!" However we know: all this he suffered for our benefit. In order that we might be redeemed

he came to the "end of his rope." His life, his heart's blood, all his strength, his last power he risked for our redemption and salvation. His bitter suffering is our comfort, is our joy and refreshment.

The thirst of the Redeemer proves that God's Son actually became a man and assumed all the weaknesses, failings, burdens, and sufferings of men. Nevertheless, this thirst of the Crucified was not the usual suffering of this time. Our text gives a special meaning to what it reports of the thirst and the bitter drink of the Crucified. It emphasizes that also by this very progress of suffering the Scriptures were fulfilled and the eternal counsel of God was completed. The burning thirst of Jesus Christ is a special, important part of the work of redemption. This suffering is on the same level as Christ's being forsaken by God. The pain of one dying who languished from thirst is a nameless torment. When one has perhaps for a whole day under the burning sun panted and thirsted and found not a drop of water in the desert and finally gives up his soul from thirst and exhaustion that is the essence of all misery on earth. Yet this torment is only a weak picture and prelude of the heat, the dryness, the thirst by which the damned in hell are tormented. Thirst is also a hellish pain. When the rich man was in hell and in torments, he lifted his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom, he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Lk 16:23,24. However, this prayer was denied him.

The physical torment of the damned culminates in burning, unappeased thirst as we saw that the highest degree of anguish of soul of the damned was in being forsaken by God. Because men have forsaken and denied God, the living God they are forsaken and rejected by God, cast out into outer darkness. Because men have lusted for the evil, torment instead of pleasure will be poured out to them in hell. During his whole life the rich man had turned his back to God, despised Moses and the prophets. He therefore was separated from God and heaven by a deep impassible abyss. All his days he had lived well and happily. That he must atone for in hell by shortage, want, and thirst.

When Adam had tasted of the forbidden fruit his entire nature was twisted, corrupted, poisoned. And this deadly poison, on the one hand enmity against God, on the other the evil lust and desire, was implanted into the flesh and blood of all of Adam's children. Evil lust is born into them, they have sucked it in with their mother's milk. It always brings bitter fruits. Evil lusts ruin men, as the Scripture says, and this ruin is eternal ruin. He who sows to his flesh and does the lusts and works of the flesh of the flesh reaps eternal ruin. When Lust and sin are finished they bring forth death, eternal death. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life: that is the food, the pasture, the drink, the cordial of sinful men. Those who have received their good things here on earth and have satisfied their lusts will be tormented in eternity, must there languish and thirst.

And the damned in hell thirst not only for water but thirst for the sinful joys and pleasures of this earth but must there do without them. Heaven and the joys of heaven are closed to them. Not even the husks of this world with which they satisfied themselves will be granted them. The evil lust, the tickling of sin has remained. But not one drop of cooling for their burning tongue will be granted them.. By an unquenchable desire which will never be appeased will they be tormented. Here on earth this torment begins. All who drink of the poisonous springs of the lust of the world and the lust of the flesh always thirst again; and the more they drink, the more unrestrainedly they satisfy their evil desire, the stronger this thirst and longing becomes. In feverish restlessness they are driven from indulgence to indulgence and find no satisfaction. And this restlessness, this rising desire increases and ends and is paid for in hell.

Alas, we also, we all have drunk of this water, from this evil spring

which engenders only thirst, tormenting thirst; we also have often lusted for the evil thing and have given in to the flesh, to the wantonness of the flesh or burdened our soul by excess and luxury. This wicked tinder works also in our members and takes deep root in our heart. We must tear our heart out of the body, if we would want to sweep out the evil, sinful lust and desire completely. Even if we keep the members of the body within bounds, spirit and soul nevertheless revel in evil lust. We are therefore by nature the children of death, wrath, hell. We have all deserved the pains and thirst of hell.

But behold, Christ took pity on our misery and wretchedness. He became poor for our sakes and by his poverty, by the poverty and privation of his life atoned for our want of moderation, pride, all our fleshly excesses and dissipation. He was clean, chaste, unspotted, did not afflict God's eyes by one sinful thought; and though he might indeed have joy he endured the cross, yes, the pains and thirst of hell in our place and atoned for the evil lusts of men and all the wicked works which have come forth from them and satisfied the pains of lust, the torments and punishment of the fires of hell and instead of the torment of hell has earned and won for us pleasure, delights, and all the glory of paradise.

Indeed, we Christians detect and lament over the bite of the fruit which has impressed its traces deeply into our nature; we are indeed ashamed when we really examine and inspect ourselves of Adam's shame, of the evil lusts and desires which have forced their way into heart, blood, nerves, and all members. We stand before God as unclean. Yet we know: this inherited contagious disease is atoned for by Christ's torment and pain by his terrible thirst. For Christ's sake God considers the injury made good and in spite of our evil corrupt heart looks in a gracious and friendly way on us in Christ. Our sinful mortal body is our daily burden. Yet we know: the body is also redeemed by Christ's pains and cross and bitter torments of body. We hope for a perfect blessedness for body and soul, for the glorification of the body. But everything which is to become green and bloom in God's kingdom must be reconciled. And we know: our body is also reconciled since Christ sacrificed his body amid terrible pains.

The punishment of hell lasts to eternity. The damned must eternally thirst and lack in hell and torment and to eternity receive easing of their pain. They languish unceasingly. That is the fearful earnestness of God's holiness and righteousness. After the temporal delights of sin follows eternal reckoning and punishment. Is that eternal punishment really canceled by Christ's pains and suffering? It was indeed a short time during which Christ languished and thirsted in the fires of hell. But he who cried, "I thirst!" was the one to whom all the Scriptures and prophecy pointed, the promised Seed, God's Messiah, who was to crush the head of the serpent, God's Son, God himself, the living God. The living almighty God who satisfies every living thing, who makes the earth fruitful so that it produces plants for man, who feeds all the springs of the earth, who brings on the clouds and causes it to rain upon the just and unjust, who fills and rules heaven and earth, he became a man and now robbed of all the help, all the comfort of the creature and languished from great thirst and no human being is found on earth who refreshes the Creator of the world with a little drop of water. The Creator himself, the eternal God sprang into the waves of the pains of hell and in one swallow, with the one groan, "I thirst!" drained eternal wrath to its very dregs. He is indeed infinitely greater than all created things, than all the angels, than all the princes and powers of hell. The torments of hell are exhausted, outweighed. For those who are in Christ, who cling to the crucified God there is no more hell; in eternity they find fulness of joy and pleasures at God's right hand forever more.

The last suffering which had been sent to the Redeemer was the bitter drink which men offered him in his great thirst. The word of Scripture was fulfilled, "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar

to drink." Ps 69:21. As he so miserably cried out, "I thirst!" one of them who still stood under the cross ran and filled a sponge with vinegar which stood there in a vessel, placed the sponge on a reed, a hyssop, and held it to his mouth and gave him a drink. That was bitter mockery. This impudent deed of this one person was strengthened by the mocking talk of those standing around, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come and save him." Mt 27:48. They, as it were, begrudged the Redeemer this bitter drink. Elias should come and help him. But Jesus did also this last thing and accepted the vinegar, and thus took upon himself all the mockery, ridicule, and thanklessness of the impudent wanton world, atoned also for our thanklessness with which we have so often repaid him for his blessings. Yes, he truly was God's Lamb who carried the sins of the world and did not push aside any sin of man which was laid upon him.

II.

Because Christ willingly bore and suffered everything, this sacrifice is valued before God. We are truly reconciled and redeemed. The word, "I thirst!" and the willingness with which Jesus took and drank the vinegar testified particularly of the great ardent love of the Savior.

Everything which he suffered, also this last physical suffering, his thirst, his pains of hell was a freewilling suffering. Because he wanted to fulfill everything, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, he cried loudly, "I thirst!" He thirsted because he wanted to thirst out of love for men. As he before easily controlled his hunger in the wilderness so he could have now on the cross controlled his thirst, held in bounds by his omnipotence. But no, he made himself of no reputation, let his omnipotence rest, surrendered himself to this human weakness, this painful suffering out of love to lost condemned mankind. He wanted to drain off all torment and punishment, taste even the last bitter dregs of divine wrath; therefore he cried, "I thirst!" and with this cry appointed also the bystanders to fulfil the prophecy of the prophets. He longed for this last bitter drink. He hastened toward his goal from which he was but a step away. He longed for our redemption. His heart burned in holy, divine love for his brethren whose curse he had taken upon himself.

"I thirst!" This word points also to the thirst, to the longing of his soul. From the beginning pious exegetes have understood it thus. He thirsted for peace, salvation, and life, for the salvation of men, of sinners. From the beginning his food, his joy had been to carry out God's will for the children of men. If he could bless the soul of a poor sinner as the woman at Jacob's well and offer that soul the water of life this was a refreshing drink for the Redeemer. And because he knew that he should redeem and bless mankind by suffering and dying he longed for the bitter cup. On the evening before his great Passion, when he for the last time ate and drank with his disciples, he said to them, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you." Lk 22:15. Now the blessed hour had come near when he himself would die as the true Passover Lamb for the sins of the world. When he suffered the most severely, drank the bitterest dregs of sin, of wrath, as he languished in hell, he cried loudly, "I thirst!" I thirst and long for the salvation and life of mankind. His burning pain, his glowing thirst was a burning, glowing love as Savior. The Lamb, the great friend and Savior of our souls said, "I will gladly suffer this, gladly take even the pains of hell upon myself so that the sinner will receive eternal life."

Truly, this mighty love of the Savior which breaks through death and hell is a fire which catches fire in the heart of men. Whoever truly ponders this love of the Redeemer, in him awakens a mutual love, thanks, zeal, ardor. Our Redeemer, God's Son staked his divine, his heart's blood, his life, all his

power, his last strength to redeem and save us; should we not let our salvation cost us something? Should we not love him, our only Savior, from our heart and praise and thank him? More he does not ask. So he thirsted for our salvation, for our peace and life; he has prepared everything for us and says to us and entices us: Come, for all things are now ready! Who should not hunger and thirst for his grace, for the word of grace? Here at the cross the water of life wells forth which stills all thirst, which flows forth into eternal life. Therefore, come all who are thirsty, come and drink, and buy without money! Desire the pure milk of the Gospel! Whoever drinks of this water, whoever opens his heart to the love of the Savior, he out of love to the Savior denies all the lust of the world and the flesh, he crucifies his flesh with its affections and lusts, he has a loathing and horror of the stale joys of the world and the transitory delights of sin. Jesus, God's Lamb, the Bridegroom of our soul, He is his delight and joy and love. He who loves this Savior who first loved him consecrates body and soul to him; he also willingly takes the drink of vinegar, if that should be, which the godless world offers him; for Jesus' sake he gladly endures ridicule, mockery, thanklessness. He whose heart the love of the Redeemer has set on fire faithfully follows the Lamb until the end and from then on heartily yearns for the blessed eternity where the Lamb will give his own to drink with pleasures as from a river. Amen.

30th SERMON

John 19:30.

"It is finished;" thus Jesus spoke after he had received the vinegar. These words were entirely different from what he said before: "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" and, "I thirst!" Those were groans from the depths, groans from one worried to death, a soul tormented by the pains of hell. "It is finished!" that was a shout of joy, a shout of victory. What an amazing change in a few moments! Shortly after Jesus cried, "I thirst!" and had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished." In Psalm 22 which Jesus prayed in its entirety during those last, anxious, dark hours, lamentation finally changes into praise and thanks. The prophecy was fulfilled. While he still hung on the cross, Jesus was snatched from anguish and judgment. He dies on the cross like a hero who retains his courage and victory. Like a hero he stands in the arena who has done all things well and rejoices in his victory.

Jesus' words on the cross serve to clarify his intense suffering on the cross which to us seems strange and incomprehensible. Each new degree of suffering, every step forward in his Passion Christ indicated by a clear, concise word. Now that he is at the end, he places a brief subscription under the sum-total of his suffering which sheds light into all dark corners. "It is finished;" with this word he spans his entire Passion from the beginning to the end; he already looks ahead to the very end, his death. He himself would inform the world on the meaning of his death. And if he himself were to give such an explanation, it, of course, would have to be given before his death. Jesus accepts death, the end of his suffering as a de facto event and under his severe suffering which he ended with his last breath, he affixes his great seal with the words, "It is finished." He who suffered and died on the cross was indeed

the promised woman's seed. His heel was bruised, the ultimate end of which was death. However, in that he died, whilst he prepared himself for death, he crushed the Old Serpent's head and revealed himself as the Savior of the world. We shall now plunge into the meaning of this great word:

IT IS FINISHED!

We wish to ponder three things:

- I. What these Words Mean,
- II. What Comfort we Derive from these Words,
- III. What Power Issues forth from these Words.

I.

First of all, we want to look at what these words mean. "It is finished!" thus the Lord cried out after he had received the sour wine, the last bitter drink, after he had endured the last fearful test, the pain and torment of hell, being forsaken by God and the burning thirst. After he had first tasted the bitterness of death, yes, even eternal death, he considered his dying something easy, the desired end to his torments. "It is finished;" with these words the Lord announces his end, the conclusion of his suffering. He had suffered everything which had been ordained for him to suffer. He had suffered to the end, he had fought the battle to the end. The gruelling battle was finished.

When with his disciples he started on his last journey to Jerusalem which was to bring on his death, he had spoken of the cup which he would drink, of the baptism with which he would be baptized, of the cup which no one else could drink, of the baptism with which no one else could be baptized. Shortly before his great Passion he said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." Jn 14:30.

Now he had drained the cup to its bitter dregs, now he had received the baptism of blood. He had withstood with his life's blood the prince of this world who with all torments of earth and hell had taken the field against him. He was unable to get the better of Him. He had gone through a bottomless abyss of suffering without sinking and drowning. Thus he set his seal to the end of his suffering with the victor's shout, "It is finished!" All the suffering of his earthly life had terminated. No one else suffered as he did. His entire life was uninterrupted suffering. Now all things were overcome, finished.

With the end, with the completion of his suffering he had also fulfilled the purpose of his suffering. We know very well why the Son of man suffered and died. The purpose, the mission of his life was to redeem the sinful world. And it was through this very suffering and dying that he carried out this work. He gave his life for the redemption of many. "It is finished;" with these words Jesus wanted to say: the great work of the redemption, the salvation of sinners is completed. Despite all obstacles which Satan, the enemy of God and man had laid in his way he succeeded. He did all things well.

Moses and the prophets had already testified concerning this great work. All Scripture pointed to the Messiah, Christ, the Son of God. Especially the prophets and the Spirit of Christ, as Peter writes, testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. 1 Pet 1:11. Of this Jesus all the prophets testify that through his name all who believe on him should receive forgiveness of sins. Acts 10:43. So then, with the word, "It is finished," the Lord simultaneously announced the fulfilment of the Scriptural prophecy. The prophecy is sealed, Scripture is fulfilled. All happened,

was completed which was written of the Son of man.

What the prophets had testified also concerning the future glory was immediately fulfilled, the fulfilment was hidden through the death of Christ. In Scripture, in the prophecy which was announced to mankind from the very beginning of the world is reflected God's eternal counsel and loving will. Before the foundations of the world were laid, before heaven and earth, before man was created, before men fell into sin, in eternity God already decreed the redemption and planned the great work of delivering fallen mankind. Christ, the Lamb of God was foreordained before the foundation of the world was laid. 1 Pet 1:20. With the word, "It is finished," the Son of God confirmed the fulfilment and completion of God's eternal thoughts. The decree of redemption was now victoriously and gloriously carried out. Just when it seemed as if God's counsel and work, which God wanted to carry out through the Son of man, would be defeated, just as the few faithful wanted to despair of Israel's redemption, Jesus cried out, "It is finished."

The redemption of the world is God's greatest deed which he has revealed to us, the greatest and most wonderful work which ever occurred on earth, much greater and more glorious than the work of creation. When God created heaven and earth in six days, he himself affixed the seal on his work and completed everything which, as the Scriptures say, he saw and testified that everything was good, very good. And then the morning stars praised God, all of God's sons shouted for joy. Job 38:7. With what joy and satisfaction, with what inexpressible delight must God have sealed and completed this incomparably greater work of redeeming fallen mankind! The word, "It is finished," is the testimony of the eternal God: Yes, everything is successfully concluded, everything is good, very good. The word, "It is finished," is God's seal on all his works. The work of creating and preserving the world would indeed have been frustrated, that first testimony, "It is good," would have been brought to naught, if this great yea and amen on Golgatha had not followed. As the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world cried out into the world, "It is finished!" what a shout of triumph must then have risen on high! Then all the heavenly hosts sang in full choirs, Glory, glory to God in the highest!

II.

The thing over which all the holy angels rejoice, in which God is delighted is the salvation of sinners. To us, us applies the great word, "It is finished." Secondly, we will therefore consider, what comfort lies in this word for us. To us, to us sinners has salvation come, for us salvation has been won through Christ's suffering and death and by that great word, "It is finished," this salvation is sealed. Yes, it is finished, we are redeemed. We believe this and are absolutely certain that Christ has redeemed lost, condemned mankind.

We are delivered from sin and from the curse of sin. All of us have experienced how deep and horrible the ravages of sin inherited from Adam are, how heavily its guilt rests upon the conscience, how grievously a single sin and transgression can wound the heart. Sin causes anguish and pain. Who has not felt the sting of sin? And he who has been spared a grievously troubled conscience and temptation has nevertheless noticed throughout his entire life that sin does not let the heart have any peace. Our soul is restless and is tossed to and fro because sin incites and goads us unceasingly. And it is useless for a person to try to shake off this burden himself, through good intentions and good works try to rectify his failings and try to make amends for the wrongs he had done; it is useless for a person to try to silence the evil conscience by much praying, calling, screaming, by his own wrestling and struggles.

Then we hear the word from the cross, "It is finished." Through someone else, through Christ all is finished. All sin has been disposed of,

the accounting record of debt has been torn up, the curse erased, wrath atoned. We are reconciled with God. God has forgiven us everything by which we have insulted him, he no longer has a thing, not the least thing against us. Sin which came into the world through Adam has been taken out of the world; the barrier between God and man has been removed. It is finished. Sin is abolished. In all our dealings with God sin has nothing to say. From now to all eternity we need not pay a single penny of our debt. All has been paid. It is finished. By one offering, by Christ's offering we are forever perfected.

Through sin death has come into the world. Death is an enemy, a terror to all the living. No living person can make friends nor establish peace with death. Our entire nature resists it. Anyone who sees death merely from a distance, anyone who himself has not yet been in danger nor has seen anyone die has easy thoughts about dying. But he who has had a close brush with death or has seen his loved ones die, he knows that the horrors of death, the woes of death, the sorrow of death are unutterable anguish. A person thinks that he could not endure it, the heart is going to burst.

But then we hear the word from the cross, "It is finished." Death is conquered. Christ has received the wages of sin, has paid it. Death has lost its sting. Even though it still frightens and seizes man, it still is merely a lifeless picture. Christ has tasted death for us and hence we are delivered from the fear of death, hence we need never experience personally what it really means to die. Yes, it is finished, even dying is completely finished. We are born into this life of death, but since Christ has intervened and conquered death, for us death in its true form is and remains an unknown woe. Only that from a few insignificant experiences of the fear of death can we infer and suspect what a dreadful evil death is and thus have the more reason to thank God that we are delivered from death.

We are redeemed from the devil. The devil has the power of death. By nature and birth we are in the devil's chains. Because we have all surrendered to the devil's temptation, he has won a claim upon us. When he accuses us we must become silent. Oh, how dreadfully many Christians are still tormented by the devil.

But then we hear the word from the cross, "It is finished." The serpent's head is crushed. The devil has lost the battle. The devil's kingdom and authority and dominion ended, when Christ cried, "It is finished." Now we know that the devil lies when he still condemns us, and that he is carrying on his usual game with us when he torments and assails us. He has no power over us neither in life nor in death nor after death.

It is finished. All our enemies are defeated, sin, death, devil are judged and overthrown. Righteousness, perfect righteousness which avails before God, life, heaven, salvation has been won for us. There is peace on earth, and good will toward men. That is: it is finished, all things are ready. The wretched should eat and be filled. Your heart shall rejoice forever. Whatever we might wish, happiness and salvation for time and for eternity, a salvation which transcends all wishing and praying is now ready and is offered to us in the Gospel. All wishes, sighs, yearning of the human heart are fulfilled, are heard. All is finished.

III.

And thirdly, we will ponder the power which proceeds from this Word. It is finished, all things are ready. We need only accept and believe it. Of course, he who does not believe goes away empty. Through faith we appropriate to ourselves everything which Christ has gained and won for us by his suffering,

dying, and bleeding. He who believes in him is righteous, is cleansed from all guilt and crimes, is lord over death and the devil, and an heir of eternal life. To be sure, that faith which comforts itself in Christ's work and sacrifice is not according to everybody's taste. Nor can we believe in Jesus Christ by our own reason and strength. However, Jesus, the very one who completed everything on the cross, is called and is also the Author and Finisher of our faith.

And through this very preaching of the cross, through the office and word of reconciliation faith is engendered, nourished, and preserved. If the sinner who is frightened over his misery, who trembles in his bonds hears the word, "It is finished," the wound is healed, the chains are snapped; he arises from the dust and takes new courage, lets go of his anxious thoughts and worries and trusts in that which Christ has done and suffered for his sake.

Through the comforting word of the Gospel, "It is finished," the weak, wavering faith is supported and strengthened. If we look to ourselves, to our sins and weaknesses, we begin to tremble and despair. However, we turn our eyes from our own works and walk and cling to Christ's work and merit and rest in the word, "It is finished."

And the more deeply we look into this pious mystery, "It is finished," all is completed, the more joyful and confident our heart becomes. Yes, now it is God's will that we believe and accept what Christ has done and completed. The greatest and best in this life is that we believe and persevere in this faith until the end. And in the power of Christ and his sacrifice, in the power of this word, "It is finished," we will finish it.

The Christian's faith shows itself in the sanctified life. This also is God's will, is the assignment of our life, our daily occupation; we are to live holy lives, rid ourselves of sin, and resist the devil. Whoever wilfully serves sin or still obeys the devil cancels Christ's work for himself; he loses grace. To be sure, it is most difficult to deny sin and the world and the lust of the world. Time and again we will be overpowered by sin and the devil. However, in the power of Christ and his sacrifice, in the power of the word, "It is finished," we can carry on the struggle and be the victor. He who firmly believes, "It is finished," I am delivered from sin and the power of the devil, struggles to his feet, tears off the bonds of sin, the temptations of the devil; he again and again conquers the evil with the good.

A Christian who believes in the Savior shows his faith in all kinds of good works. God's will is that we fill out our lives with the fruits of righteousness, that we faithfully tend to our calling and serve God in it, that we show love to our brethren and spread Christ's kingdom on earth. In the power of Christ and his work, in the power of the word, "It is finished," we can accomplish it. Whoever rejoices and comforts himself in the sacrifice and merit of Jesus Christ, his completed work, his reconciliation and redemption is willing to bring rich offerings of thanks and love, he is delighted to serve God and do God's will to his brethren.

The faith of the Christian shows itself by patience. Scripture prescribes our way also: through suffering to glory. Here below we must suffer much. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And Christ's suffering and dying and great patience, which carried everything out victoriously to the very end, strengthens our patience, so that for Christ's sake we endure everything. He who firmly believes that Christ has completed everything, that he is reconciled to God by the death of his Son knows and believes that cross, suffering, adversity is not wrath and punishment but pure love and grace, and gladly surrenders himself to Jesus' easy yoke. Whoever in faith is certain that Christ has completed everything and earned life and salvation, knows and is certain that all suffering at last changes into glory; he sees the crown which beckons after the conflict, and confidently sets upon his journey: through suffering to glory.

Yes, Christ's work and sacrifice, Christ's word, "It is finished," is

the light and power of our life, of our labors, of our patience. In his power we will also complete it. Because he has completed it, we will also complete ours and at the end of the journey will joyfully cry out, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." 2 Tim 4:7.8. May God through his Holy Spirit impress this great word, this seal of completion, "It is finished," deeply upon our souls, so that we will know and experience in life and in death: It is finished. Amen.

31st SERMON

Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30.

The words of our text before us announce the death of Jesus. The last word of the Lord from the cross was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." That was the cry of a dying person. With these words he gave up his spirit. Yes, he finally died. When one of our loved ones falls sick unto death, we still hope to the last moment for a change for the better. Not till then may we believe that he is dying until the fact which we feared has happened. And even when the loved one lies dead before us, we can scarcely grasp it. We think we deceive ourselves. Jesus' faithful disciples, as they themselves testified after his resurrection, had hoped to the last that he should redeem Israel. Their hope was connected to the physical life of Jesus. They had hoped to the very end that he would still perform a miracle and before the eyes of his foes descend from the cross. This did not take place. His bitter, painful suffering ended in death.

Yes, Christ died according to the Scriptures. 1 Cor 15:3. Christ must suffer and die and thus enter into his glory. This was the eternal counsel of God. Thus it was foretold. The first promise, which announced the Redeemer to the fallen first human pair, already pointed to the death of the Deliverer. The serpent should bruise his heel. The prophecy of the Old Covenant reached its highest point in the announcement of the suffering of the Messiah. Isaiah spoke of the servant of God who was to be obedient unto death. The end of his pains and torment he describes in the words, "He hath poured out his soul unto death." Is 53:12. Christ's entire life aspired toward this goal: death. Christ preached the Gospel, gathered disciples from the people of Israel through his Word, revealed his glory to his disciples, and taught and instructed them until they believed and knew that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. After they knew this he led them a step further and spoke with them of his last days, of his suffering, dying, and rising again. The apostles of Jesus Christ preached the death of Christ in their letters and built the whole Christian faith upon it and showed that the death of Jesus was the salvation of the world. And thus for the past 2,000 years the death of the Lord is preached in the Church and extolled and praised by Christians. The Son of man came to save the souls of men. And it was by his death that he delivered them. The Scriptures testify that in his death Samson, the judge and deliverer of Israel, wrought greater deliverance when he pulled down the temple of the Philistines than during his lifetime. So through his death Christ has brought us salvation. Now we speak of

THE DEATH OF THE SON OF GOD

We say:

- I. Christ Truly Died.
- II. However, His was a Miraculous Death.
- III. Through the Death of God's Son Salvation has Come to us.

I.

Christ truly died. It was a true, natural death. Christ actually died. With the words which the death of the children of men is usually described, the Gospel announces the death of Jesus. "He bowed his head and yielded up the ghost. He gave up his ghost, his spirit. He gave up his spirit. He commended his spirit into God's hands." His was a real dying. His head bowed, his cheeks lost their color, his eyes faded, his lips turned pale, the pallid power of death covered his countenance. Those who saw him die became aware of it. Yes, now this is the end. He has ceased living, ceased suffering.

He did not die in a room, not in silence and lonesomeness. He died openly before all the world. Jews and heathen were witnesses of his death. Lifted up on the cross, he breathed out his spirit. And he cried loudly, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Mankind was to know what now happened. He himself made known his death. The death of Jesus of Nazareth is an assured, guaranteed fact. Christ truly died.

Christ became like his brethren in all things. He was like them in life. He was like any other person and was found in likeness as a man. What people usually experienced and suffered on earth also came to him. He hungered, thirsted, he was often tired, his soul was often sorrowful. So he was like his brethren also in death. He went the way of all flesh.

He truly died. He yielded up his spirit, the spirit departed from his body. That is death: separation of body and soul. The soul leaves its dwelling. Ah, for a mortal man it is a painful hour, a hard blow, when the bond which united body and soul which had been tied by the Creator himself is severed, when the soul is wrenched from the body and the soulless shell then falls pale and stiff to the ground and sinks into the grave. That happened also to Christ. The bond of body and soul was loosed. Only that Jesus had before his death already tasted the real sting, the bitterness of death. Yes, he truly died.

II.

However, his was a miraculous death. Although Christ actually, truly died in the manner of all the children of men, yet his death was different from the death of others. As it is, there is a difference between the death of the righteous and the death of the godless. The godless, as the Scriptures say, are carried away like cattle. The righteous who die commend their spirit into God's hand. Those who see a righteous person die say: Let me die the death of this righteous person! Of a truth, he who died on the cross on Golgatha was not a criminal. He was a pious man. That even the heathen centurion who was at the cross knew and confessed. He died with God. His last cry was a cry to God. He comforted himself in God his Father. That God, who forsook him for a small moment, he now calls Father. He died in faith and trust in God. To him he commended his spirit. He died with God's Word. As he died a word from Scripture, a word from the Psalms, crossed his lips, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." Ps 31:5. In his death throes he prayed through Psalms 22 and 69. God's Word accompanied him in death. Yes, he died the death of a righteous person.

And yet Christ's death was different also from the death of other pious and righteous people. He died, as Matthew and Mark report, with a loud cry. Dying, he still cried aloud, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." That was astounding, unusual. Usually a dying person gives up his tired soul with a weak, soft groan. He has no more power to speak and cry aloud. Death enters because one's powers fail. The powers of life fade away; that is why the pulse stops and the heart ceases to beat.

Christ did not die from exhaustion. He was not killed by his countless, unutterable pains. No, even as he died he still had and showed his power. There was still life in him. He could indeed have halted death, yes, held it back completely. He had the power and might to conquer all the torment of death. He did not die because he had to die. He died because he wanted to die. It is said of other children of men, "All men living are but mortal." Jesus wanted to die. He testified of himself, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Jn 10:18. Later, he also took his life out of death. Hence, it was his free will and decision that he give up life and die.

We are not the lords of our life. When our hour has come, then it is true: so far and no further! We cannot add one inch to the length of our life. Christ was a free Lord of his life. And so, entirely different from other men, he gave up his spirit while in full possession of his own power and placed it in God's hands. We indeed say, and rightly so, for the Scriptures also say it: Christ died according to the flesh. The Jews and the heathen are Christ's murderers. But he willingly surrendered himself into the hands of sinners and after he had done this also allowed suffering and death to touch and wound him. He himself unloosed the bond of body and soul, the ties which hold body and soul together. Christ's death was his free deed, a great miraculous work of Jesus Christ.

And as such he himself announced, lauded, and glorified this great work with his last word on the cross, "Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit." That was the cry of a forerunner. Usually, a herald announced a deed which his lord intended to complete. Christ made known his own work, his death to the world. In the sense in which Christ prayed that word of the Psalm can no other person imitate it. He took his spirit into his hand, according to his will, after his power and placed it into the hand of his Father. He gave himself to God. He offered himself to God. His death was an offering, a self-sacrificing offering, an offering of his will, his free love.

It was an unusual, miraculous death. In a unique sense Christ called God "Father," in a sense as no other person, no righteous person can call God Father. He was indeed the only begotten, eternal Son of God, himself God by nature, begotten of the essence of the Father. During his entire life Christ professed to men that he was God's Son. After he began his great passion, he still confirmed this confession before the Sanhedrin by his holy oath. With this confession he died. That God to whom he commended his spirit he calls Father. Hence, he who died on the cross was God's only Son.

Just because Christ was God's Son he had power over life and death, power of his own living and dying. Accordingly, we speak of the death of God's Son. The Son of God died. The Son of God became man. The Word was made flesh. God's Son took the human nature into communion with his person, and thus he appropriates to himself that which man has. Thus his suffering and dying is also his own suffering, his own doings, sufferings and acts of God's Son. As the life of Jesus of Nazareth draws to its close, we look into the astounding, bottomless depth of his person, the person of the God-man. We cannot comprehend it, yet we say and sing, "O sorrow dread! God's Son is dead." The eternal Word God's Son who has life in himself, who with the Father and the Spirit alone has immortality, who gives and preserves life, who alone can deliver from death, becomes a man and dies. God's Son united, wedded himself to the flesh and blood

of the children of men.

And this union is indissoluble. Now God's Son is and remains man into all eternity. This Jesus Christ is and remains the God-man, did not stop being the God-man for a moment even in death. Body and soul were separated. But the bond which united the human nature with the divine nature of Christ was not broken. Even in death God's Son was and remained united with the body, which then was taken from the cross and laid into the grave, and united with the soul which he himself had placed into God's hands. This is one of the depths of divine wisdom which our human eyes cannot penetrate. Because the body which was carried to the grave was God's holy corpse, it was not possible, as the Scriptures say, that this body should see corruption and be forever held by death. Because he who died on the cross was God's Son, Christ was also made alive and now lives forever in glorified nature before God. Here are bounds at which we must stop, which our searching, thinking, and speaking dare not cross. We are unable nor do we want to explain and describe more closely what according to Scripture we have briefly stated and confessed. However, this does not end our Lenten meditation. Over this bottomless depth, "God's Son is dead," hovers a sweet, blessed light. We will still look into this light and feast our eyes. We say finally:

III.

Through the death of God's Son salvation has come to us. It is an amazing but saving death, a healing death. That is clearly revealed. That we understand. From this spring we draw salvation, comfort, grace, peace, power and strength for life and death, for time and eternity. We know: Christ, God's Son, died for us. He gave his life for the redemption of many. He died for us, in our stead. If one died for all, then all died. 2 Cor 5:14. Scripture says this. Since the eternal Word became flesh, since God's Son assumed the human nature, he entered in the likeness, in the place of the children of men. For us, in our stead did he fulfil the Law and yield obedience, for us, in our stead did he suffer and now also die. He died the death of the children of men, our death. He truly died as men die. We died in him. What he won, worked, and earned by his death belongs to us.

We men had to and must die because we have sinned. Death is the wages of sin. Through Adam sin and death has come upon all men. We all stand under the verdict, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen 2:17. All of us bear the image, the nature of fallen Adam. All of us have eaten from the forbidden fruit, have lusted for wicked things, have done evil. We have forsaken God, the living fountain. And outside of God there is no life. Therefore we must all die.

However, Christ, God's Son died for the ungodly. Rom 5:6. He was delivered for our offences. Rom 4:5. He died for our sins. 1 Cor 15:3. Scripture testifies to this. In and with his death he has choked up sin, the source of death and all misery, chopped off sin the root of death and all evil. He died our death, the death of the sinner. He received the wages of sin. He truly died in the manner of the sinner. If one died, then all have died. Then in and with him we, as the Scriptures testify, are dead to sin. He who is dead is freed from sin. Rom 6:7.11. We have nothing more to do with sin. Sin has no claim upon us. We are now rid, freed, released from all sin, guilt, and misdeeds. Christ died; he died the death of the righteous. He was righteous and holy from birth and kept this holiness and obedience until death. The righteous died for the unrighteous. 1 Pet 3:18. Thus we are now righteous before God through the death of this righteous Man.

Yes, we are reconciled with God through the death of his Son. Rom 5:10. Sin had separated us from God. This partition has been torn down through the

flesh of Christ, through his suffering and death in the flesh. Christ has reconciled us in the body of his flesh, through death. Col 1:22. Thus we have come close to God, are united with God. God became man in order that he might lead fallen mankind back to God, man who had slipped from his hands, and reunite them with God. And it was through his death in the flesh that he attained this goal. Through the veil of his flesh, through his death he entered into the holy place to God (Heb 9:11,12; 10:20) and took us with him into it. When he died, he, as the Redeemer of sinful men, cried aloud, "Father!"

And the Father of Jesus Christ is now our God and Father, is fond, affectionate, and reconciled to us through the death of his Son, and now loves us as a father loves his children. Christ's death was his own will, his deed, a free-willing sacrifice. This sacrifice was pleasing to God. God accepted it. Christ's death was a sweet incense to God.

And since he once offered himself for us, God is now fond of us in the beloved. Yes, God is reconciled, completely reconciled. What lies in the scales is the death of God's Son, God's pains, God's death, God's blood. Through them all the guilt of the godless world is completely outweighed. God's Son died. God himself is dead. Christ remained what he was even in death; he was and remained the God-man. He was not overpowered and conquered by death. His death is not a destruction. Christ's death did not harm this holy person, the person of the God-man. Rather, because of this person this death received eternal, everlasting worth. Through his death Christ, God's Son, found eternal reconciliation and redemption. Heb 9:12. Certainly, we are reconciled with God through the death of his Son.

And so now we believe and trust God our heavenly Father in life and in death; we are not afraid. We have confident courage before God. Nor are we frightened at death. Because of sin men must be its slave their entire lives through the fear of death. However, because Christ, God's Son now died for us, we no longer fear death, hell, and the devil who has the power of death. We now go joyfully through this life, even though we know that in the end we cannot escape death. The death of God's Son is the power and comfort of our death. Through him we are righteous before God and now we also die the death of the righteous. We can die as he died. When we die we speak God's Word, especially the word of Christ's suffering, blood, and death. When we die, we pray to our God and Father. We pray as already so many thousands of pious have prayed on their deathbed, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and add the words of the Psalmist, "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Ps 31:6. We die believing and trusting and in death place our souls into God's hands, into the hands of our Redeemer as a precious chosen pledge. There it is eternally sheltered and safe. In the power of Christ's death we find through death the way to God, the way to eternal life. As long as we live and suffer here below, we in prayer daily commend our souls to the faithful Creator and Father.

That what really makes death bitter, Christians taste and experience before death during this life. For it is God's will that we during our life here below die to sin, mortify the flesh, deny the world. And that we can do in the power of the death of Jesus Christ. Through faith we are partakers of his death. In the power of the death of Christ, God's Son we die to sin every day and mortify the members which are on earth, and thus in the course of time die to this world. We reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and the world. Rom 6:11. Through the death of God's Son also the power and dominion of sin is broken. Through him we can rule and be victorious over sin. Thus every day we carry the death of the Lord Jesus about with us.

Christ, God's Son has redeemed, purchased, and won us for himself by

his death. Now we are his own, he is our Lord. Christ died and rose so that he might be Lord of the living and the dead. Rom 14:9. He died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again. There is one Deliverer who has helped us out of death when we feel bound for life. Christ, God's Son died according to his free will, at his own discretion, out of free love. Out of free love he gave his life for us into death. Greater love has no one than when one dies for his foes, for the godless. And through this love he has chained us to himself. Then let us live for him who died for us. If we live, we live in the Lord; if we die, we die in the Lord. Therefore, living or dying we are the Lord's.

Christ died for all. That we have heard often. But sad to say, many, the majority despise this great word, this precious Gospel of the death of God's Son and remain in death. Oh, that we may know it correctly! Oh, that the death of God's Son is not in vain for any of us! Amen.

32nd SERMON

Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-41; Lk 23:47-49.

We have meditated upon the suffering and death of Jesus upon the cross. Our present Lenten text reports what happened directly after the Lord's death. They were great astounding things. The veil in the temple tore, the earth quaked, the rocks split, the graves opened and gave up their dead. The Jews and heathen who stood under the cross were suddenly of another mind. The centurion who led the Roman guard, and the soldiers who were with him, who first had tormented, mocked, and nailed him to the cross, prayed to the very one whom they crucified. Many of the Jews who at first joined in crying, "Crucify! Crucify him!" beat their breasts and regretted their crime. And those faithful disciples who had followed Jesus even to Golgatha stood at a distance and were amazed at all that which they saw and heard.

All this, however, was the result, the effect, the impression of the amazing death of Jesus Christ. At the very moment when Jesus departed with a loud cry, "Behold, the veil in the temple was rent in twain." This was a direct result of Jesus' death. Of the centurion and the Roman soldiers we read in our text, "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw that he so cried out, and the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, and glorified God." The same thing is reported of the Jewish people, "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned." It is expressly reported that the women who followed the Lord saw all this.

Hence the great events which had just occurred had made such a powerful impression on the people. A miracle of God is reported here. God, the Almighty interfered and rattled the pillars and foundations of the earth and made the dead alive. That Jews and heathen, the murderers of Christ were converted to Christ happened through the power and workings of God. God the Lord made himself known through his powerful sign at the death of him who had departed on the cross. He testified thereby that this was his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased, and that he made this Jesus the crucified both Lord and Christ for the entire world.

The story of the suffering and death of Jesus is the greatest story which ever happened on earth. This great event divided the history of mankind into two parts. The time of the Old Testament was gone. A new, the New Covenant had dawned. The sinners of the world, a people from the Jews and heathen who unanimously, from one mouth praised God now gathered about the cross of Jesus. The death of Jesus made the dying world alive again. A new breath of life passed over the cursed world, yea, life out of death. The death of Jesus worked mightily backwards and forwards (in time). Even in the story of the Old Covenant its traces are marked. The saints of the Old Testament, who hoped in Christ, had already found a blessed end through Christ. They now became, in part immediately after his death, partakers of his resurrection and glorification. When we pondered the suffering and death of Jesus, we dealt with the meaning, fruit, and results of his Passion, his death on the cross. And what happened directly after Jesus' death explains the unusual death of this unusual righteous Man. Hence, we now ponder:

THE MIGHTY RESULTS OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

- I. On all Creatures,
- II. On the Hearts of Sinners,
- III. On the Souls of Believers.

I.

We learn from our text of the powerful results Jesus' death had on all creatures. Jesus' death affected all nature. When Jesus had died with a loud cry, the earth quaked, the rock split, graves opened. All nature quaked and trembled to its innermost foundations. Secular writers also tell of an earthquake which about that time frightened people in the east and swallowed up villages and cities. All creatures, as it were, sorrowed over this death and were frightened at this great event.

This miracle of God had meaning. It was to indicate that there was a relationship between all creatures and the One crucified on Golgatha, that this Jesus was the Lord and Creator of all things, the eternal Word through whom all things were made, that the Departed is the Judge of the world before whose countenance heaven and earth will some day tremble and disappear.

What we confess is true: Oh sorrow dread! Our God is dead. It is God the Lord, the living God who with a loud cry departed there on the cross. That is why all nature, even the kingdom of the dead, is agitated and upset. We have believed and known that this Jesus Christ, David's Son of Bethlehem, is God's true Son. That is our Christian faith. And his death has not destroyed this faith. Rather, the story of his death only serves to strengthen and seal our faith.

Because of the powerful quaking and trembling of the earth, the veil in the temple also tore from top to bottom. This event is consistently reported by the evangelists. That also did not happen by accident. That also was a meaningful sign. That colorful magnificent veil in the temple separated the Holy from the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies, behind the veil the Lord Sabaoth was formerly enthroned in a cloud on the cherubim of the ark. However, this throne of the Lord was concealed from the people of the Old Covenant. The veil indicated that at that time the way to holiness had not yet been opened. Heb 9:8. The priest who offered sacrifices in the court and burned incense in the Holy part could not cleanse consciences from their sins by these earthly, material sacrifices. And even when Israel's high priest entered once a year through the veil into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the reconciliation on the mercy seat in order to atone for the guilt of the people every

year, he had to repeat this sacrifice every year and always sacrifice anew for his own and the people's sins to show that the perfect sacrifice had not yet come; Heb 10:1-4.

But now Christ, the Son of the living God, the great High Priest had come and through his own blood had entered into the Holy of Holies and appeared before God and thus had found an eternal redemption and with it forever perfected those who are sanctified. Heb 9:12; 10:14. In the moment when the great sacrifice of reconciliation had been completed upon Golgatha, upon the altar of the cross, the veil in the temple tore. Thus the barrier which still separated the sinner from God had fallen. By means of that visible veil in the temple God wanted to testify that now a new living way was prepared, Heb 10:20, that through the blood of Christ the Holy of Holies above was opened, that sinners now have free access to God. Sin was atoned, God reconciled. Therefore, we can now draw near and step before God with full assurance, free from an evil conscience. Heb 10:22. We need no other priest and sacrifice. We ourselves are priests before the Lord. We have free access to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy of Holies, heaven is open to us, wide open. The veil tore from top to bottom. Whoever wishes can enter through the wide open gates.

A further result of that powerful earthquake was this: the graves were opened and many of the bodies of the saints who slept arose and left the graves after the resurrection of the Lord and came into the holy city and appeared to many. Thus many of the Old Testament saints who previously had hope in Christ and rested in their chambers were made alive at the time when Christ died on the cross. Who these saints were and how many is not told us. Nor is there any profit in musing upon this and guess who they were. After Christ had risen at Easter they also stepped out of their seclusion and showed themselves in Jerusalem, the holy city and appeared to many. Many disciples of the Lord who earlier had seen the Lord himself; the Resurrected also saw those saints who had left their graves and told this amazing event to others. However, those resurrected saints no longer had their life, their walk here upon earth. Only momentarily, here and there they appeared to the living. Now they live with Christ the Lord in whom they hoped, live before God in a new way and life, in a glorified body, then also ascended with Christ into heaven and became partakers of his heavenly glory.

That is an authentic event. And through this event the fact is well-founded that through the death of Christ, God's Son death had lost its power. Death can no longer hold on to its booty, can no longer keep the bodies of the saints chained in the realm of the dead. Sin has indeed been atoned through the death of the Mediator and thus its wages have also been repaid. The wages of sin is death. Now it no longer has any power, any right over those who are in Christ Jesus. The prince of death also, the devil who has the power of death is judged. Now we sing joyfully, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Certainly, he who hangs on the cross is God's Son. He is the true God and eternal life. He is the One who had said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live." All who believe in this Jesus the crucified, all the saints who live and die in the Lord, who die relying on his death never see death, will never be held by the bonds of death. They will arise and live with Christ forever. What happened to the graves of the saints after Jesus' death was the beginning of the resurrection of the just, the resurrection of life. On Judgment Day the earth will quake again, all the graves will then open, this great event of the resurrection of the flesh will then be complete. Yes, we will arise and our vile body will be like the glorified body of God's Son and we will be partakers of his glory. This is certainly true. Who will doubt the power of God? Even now there are glorified bodies in heaven.

II.

Moreover, we see from the events of our text, the results of Christ's death upon the hearts of sinners. The centurion under the cross and also the Roman soldiers whom he commanded, who watched Jesus were so gripped and moved by this great happening that they exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man and the Son of God." That centurion had seen and heard that which had happened to Jesus on Good Friday. He had heard how Pilate had sworn before the Jews to the innocence of this prisoner, had indeed also noticed that the Jews had surrendered him from envy and hatred. He had been a witness of Jesus' great patience, how when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not. He had heard the great amazing words of the Crucified, the intercession which he made for his murderers, the promise which he gave to the poor malefactor, the last word when he committed his spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father. And when he saw how Jesus died with such a cry, and saw the great signs and wonder in nature, he became very frightened but then praised God and said, "Certainly this was a righteous man and the Son of God." The same thing happened to the soldiers. They agreed with his testimony.

Was that merely a natural fright, natural agitation and amazement such as perhaps when a flippant, godless person is frightened and confused when he sees extraordinary signs in nature? Was that exclamation, "Certainly, this was a righteous man and the Son of God" the confession of a heathen, that is, the expression of heathen superstition? Was this the sense and meaning, "This was a son of the gods, a son of the highest god Jupiter!"? Many exegetes have understood the story and words of the centurion this way. Truly, the holy evangelists would scarcely have introduced this one expression into the holy story. And it is expressly reported that those heathen praised God. These heathen were therefore actually converted to the living God. This conversion was the result of what they saw and heard. The death of Jesus itself, the great cry with which he departed, the earthquake, the shaking of nature was a loud, eloquent sermon, a distinct testimony about Christ the Son of God. This preaching made an impression. God's hand moved the hearts of these heathen. What they already had seen of Jesus and had heard from the mouth of the Crucified suddenly became alive in their souls. Now they knew whom they pierced, whom they, of course, ignorantly had attacked. First they became frightened. They knew and confessed, "This was a righteous man and the Son of God." They had therefore taken, scourged, ridiculed, and crucified an innocent person, yes, the Son of God. Will not God's Son take immediate vengeance? Is not that mighty earthquake perhaps the thunder of the approaching judgment? Certainly, such thoughts awakened in their hearts.

But other thoughts prevailed. "They feared greatly and glorified God." They praised God for all that they had seen and heard. They praised God that he had let this innocent Son suffer the pains of death on the cross. They perceived that this Jesus was the Son of God and Savior of the world. He had prayed for the malefactors, for his foes, for they themselves; he had opened Paradise for the malefactor. Yes, these heathen believed and confessed that Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Savior of sinners to the glory of God the Father. The conversion of these heathen under the cross was a glorious fruit of the reconciling death of Christ.

And all the people who were present and were witnesses, when they saw what happened, smote their breast and returned. Many of the Jews repented and were turned to their Lord and God. The powerful preaching of Christ's death and the language which the sings of the mountains, hills, and rocks spoke through God's grace burned in their hearts. It was as though scales fell from their eyes. They recognized who he was whose crucifixion they had asked for, violently demanded, in whose torments they had gratified their lust, that this Jesus actually was God's Son, the King in Israel, the Messiah who was to come. Hence,

they smote their breast, were grieved in their hearts that they had helped to kill their King and Messiah. But then they certainly took comfort also in this, that Jesus was the One who by his very suffering and dying should redeem Israel from all its sins.

Thus already on Good Friday, immediately after Jesus' death the word of the prophet, that the Servant of the Lord who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities would have seed and prolong his days was fulfilled. Is 53:10. What was written was fulfilled, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide his spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death." Is 53:12. What Jesus predicted of himself was fulfilled, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Jn 12:24. And, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Jn 12:32. The moment it had died the grain of Wheat had brought forth fruit. Christ who had been lifted up on the cross had immediately drawn many to himself. The Son of God, the Redeemer saw immediately at his death his joy and had fruit. Even on Golgatha he gathered for himself a people from among the Jews and heathen.

Today his seed sprouts and grows green upon the earth. His seed has grown great. More and more souls from all nations has the Lord drawn to himself. Now it is a great people which worships Christ the crucified and praises God for the salvation for which it must thank the death of Jesus.

The death of Christ, this great event continues to work until the end of days. That is the correct means to convert sinners and to save them. To be sure, sinners no longer see and hear what those Jews and heathen saw and heard, do not have the Crucified before their eyes, do not see those signs and wonders which happened then. But we still preach the crucified Christ, the Gospel of Christ, the Son of God, the Righteous who suffered and died for the unrighteous. And this preaching has the power to move the hearts of sinners so that they come to their senses, are frightened and are heatedly grieved over their sins, that they also are guilty of the death of the Son of God, that they have grieved and offended God; but then that they can also praise God that he has done everything so gloriously, that he did not spare his only Son but delivered him up for them all. Truly, this Jesus the crucified is God's Son! That is the confession of the repentant sinner. Yes, God himself is dead. And our God is greater, stronger than sin, death, and devil. Now we are certainly redeemed and are reconciled with God through the death of his Son. Therefore to God alone be glory.

III.

Finally, our present text mentions the impression which Christ's death made upon the believers. The relatives, his mother and brothers, and many women who had followed him from Galilee still stood there about the cross of the departed Redeemer. Among them especially the women who are frequently praised in Scripture as faithful disciples of the Lord are mentioned: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, the mother of the children of Zebedee, John and James. These faithful people had for a longer time been followers of the Lord. They had for a longer time known that Jesus of Nazareth was the One who should come. They had also shown their faith in love. These pious women had served the Lord with their goods, with their assistance. And then they had come with him to Jerusalem and whilst the apostles had fled at the beginning of the suffering, they had accompanied the Lord to Golgatha and remained faithful until his death. And even after he had died, they stood there, they remained standing, they could not so quickly give up seeing their beloved dead Master. Love held them firmly there. They stood at a distance. They were indeed over-

and wonders in nature. In these anxious moments God's counsel had become dark to them also. They did not know where it would all end. Yet their attitude, their relationship to Christ remained unchanged. Even in death they loved him whom they loved in life, for whose sake they had forsaken everything. Their Friend, whose eyes turned white there on the cross, whose mouth had closed in death was and remained the magnet which drew their soul. They could not be set free of him.

Christ's death has this result upon the souls of believers. This great death which they cannot forget lies on their mind and heart. They remain with him, they don't want to and cannot part from him. He is at once the One whom their soul loves. Jesus the crucified, who is their love and the life of their soul, enfolds them in his arms of love and never lets them go and strengthens and keeps them in his love.

For us Christ the crucified, the death of Christ and the fruit of his death, and the love which he revealed is painted in the Word. For that reason we hold fast to that Word, we do not leave it, we hear, learn, read it day and night. Through this Word faith and love is strengthened. Through this Word Christ the crucified shows himself to our heart. Through the Word his love is poured into our heart. And even if we are often intimidated and frightened and trembling and lacking courage we stand at a distance and do not understand the counsel and ways of God, we do not stagger and leave the place but direct our eyes steadfastly to the cross of the Redeemer, to the Gospel of Christ and his reconciling death. Then we will be preserved. We remain in his love. May the Lord be gracious to us and grant us faithfulness and constancy until the end for the sake of his suffering and dying! Amen.

33rd SERMON

John 19:31-37.

We have dealt with the mighty signs and wonders which occurred directly after Jesus' death, with the powerful impression which Jesus' death made on the minds of men, Jews and heathen. This was reported to us by the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Our present Lenten text is taken from the Gospel of St. John. What we hear here happened late Good Friday afternoon, perhaps shortly before the sun set. For after all, some time elapsed until the Jews made that request to Pilate and Pilate had sent the soldiers for this stated purpose. So we hear that the Jews asked Pilate that those crucified might be taken from the cross before nightfall. They certainly were the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees, chief priests, scribes, who made this request, who more than others were zealous concerning Moses' Law. It is written in Moses' Law, "If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance." Dt 21:22,23. Hence, this was the law in Israel. If anyone committed a sacrilege worthy of death, he was killed, perhaps stoned, and then his corpse was hung on a tree so that the curse of that sin might be plain to all; but before night the corpse was again removed from the tree and

buried so that the holy land would not be defiled. This regulation of the Jews applied also to the punishment of crucifixion which the heathen Romans inflicted. This exceeded the Law. Among the Romans the custom usually was to let those crucified hang until they were killed by their torments, and often the corpse was abandoned to be food for the birds. On the evening of the day Christ died the Jews ate the Passover lamb and this evening also happened to be the beginning of the great Sabbath, the first day of the Passover festival. The Jews thought that this festival would be profaned if the corpses would remain hanging on the cross during this festival. The miserable hypocrites! They had no scruples about killing this innocent Jesus by the hands of the unrighteous, him who to the end had confessed that he was their King and Messiah, God's Son. However, in observing the laws of the Sabbath and feast days they proved to be so scrupulous and serious and conscientious. The worst and most abominable hypocrisy is to omit the greater and weightier, repentance, faith, love, mercy, and to make insignificant things, yes, the commandments of men a matter of conscience for oneself and others. May God preserve us from this!

The Jews had still another motive for their petition. The leaders of the Jews had also seen and heard some of the great signs and wonders which happened at the death of Jesus and were frightened over them. They were afraid of the One hanging on the cross. They doubted whether he was actually dead. They had no rest until they knew his grave was well guarded. That is the way it goes with hypocrites. They have an evil conscience and therefore a fearful heart. Pilate, who was disgusted with this affair, granted the request and sent the soldiers out to break the legs of those crucified, hence kill them, and then take them from the cross. There were four of them. So two began on both sides of the cross and broke the legs of the two crucified with Christ and thus dealt the deathblow and then met in the middle at the cross of Christ. But when they came to Jesus they noticed that he was already dead and did not break his legs. Viewed outwardly, the fact that the soldiers broke the legs of the two but not Jesus' was a trivial circumstance and event. The other other double fact which our text reports, that one of the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus with his spear, opened his side, and that blood and water flowed out, seems to be just as meaningless. No one would attach any importance to these small events if God's Word and Spirit had not expressly pointed to them. The Evangelist John who reports this expressly emphasizes that thus the Scriptures were fulfilled and adds his own important evidence, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true." V.35. John further remarks that he testifies to this "that ye might believe." What he relates and bears witness to is intended for the faith of the reader. Accordingly, that was done to strengthen faith, faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Reconciler of the world. This is the important content of this text. We find in it

A THREEFOLD TESTIMONY OF THE RECONCILIATION ESTABLISHED BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST

It is,

- I. The Fact that the Soldiers did not Break Jesus' Legs,
- II. The Lance Thrust which one of the Soldiers Gave Jesus,
- III. The Detail that out of Jesus' Opened Side Flowed Blood and Water.

I.

The fact that the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs is evidence of the reconciliation which is established through Christ.

According to the counsel and plans of the Jews the legs of the crucified Jesus should also be broken. He should take upon himself this last disgrace

as well and thus be stigmatized as one hanged who is cursed by God. Yes, indeed, he was hanged, crucified, and cursed. He bore the curse, the curse of the Law, was cursed before God. But you see, he had become a curse for us and redeemed us from the curse of the Law. The very circumstances that the counsel of the Jews was thwarted, that his legs were not broken pointed to the redemption established through Christ. This last disgrace God averted. In so doing he wanted to testify that this crucified Person, this Hanged One, this cursed Person belonged to the generation of righteous, to the saints of God of whom the Psalmist says, "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." Ps 34:20. The Lord looked after this suffering righteous Man. He was the Lamb whom God had seen from the beginning. He who hung on the cross, who had been offered and sacrificed on the cross was the Passover Lamb who according to God's counsel should die on that Easter of the Jews. The Law said of the Passover Lamb, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof." Ex 12:46. As John remarks, this very Scripture was fulfilled when the soldiers passed Jesus by and left his legs uninjured. Thus the evangelist marked Jesus the crucified as the true Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is the testimony of Scripture and of God regarding this One who was hanged. Since that time all Christendom sings in praise: For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified: he is the true Passover Lamb to whom Israel's passover lamb, the Passover festival, the Easter festival of the Jews pointed. The lamb which the Jews killed Easter eve, for the first time in the night when the angel of death went throughout Egypt and killed all the first born of Egypt but spared the sons of Israel, in the night when Israel went out of Egypt, the lamb which was to remind the children of Israel in later years and generations of their deliverance from Egypt was according to the regulation of the Law taken from the goats and lambs. It was a sheep from the flock. Jesus the true Easter lamb was also a sheep from among the flock, from among the flock of mankind, a member of the human race, flesh and blood like all the children of men.

The Passover lamb of the Jews had to be a year old, in the best age, hale, healthy, and vigorous, and without blemish or defect. Christ the true Passover Lamb was innocent, unspotted, separate from sinners; yes, a gentle, holy, innocent lamb without guile and malice.

The Passover lamb of the Jews was separated from the rest of the animals before the festival and kept for this definite purpose. The Lamb of whom we sing and say, the great Friend and Savior of souls was appointed and predestined by God before the foundation of the world was laid. The beloved Son of the Father, God's only child was God's Lamb. He was to suffer and make atonement for the unfaithful children.

The Passover lamb of the Jews was then killed on the fourteenth day of the first month and roasted in the fire. So also Christ, our Lamb, the Lamb of God was killed on the Passover festival of the Jews as the true Passover Lamb, tormented and killed on the cross, burned by the fires of God's wrath, and patiently suffered everything as Brother for brethren, Shepherd for the flock, the Righteous for the unrighteous. God's only beloved Son sacrificed himself for lost, condemned sinners and thus wrought an eternal redemption and delivered the guilty from sin, death, devil.

The blood of the Passover lamb which the children of Israel painted on the posts of their doors protected them from the destroying angel, from death and destruction. The blood of the Lamb Jesus Christ which was shed on the cross protects us from wrath and ruin and frees our souls.

Neither was a single bone of this Lamb broken or damaged. God held his hand over this Lamb. In death he declared his faith in him. Thus he testified that this sacrifice was acceptable and pleasing to him. Therefore through

the sacrifice of this Lamb we are certainly reconciled to God. Now the real Easter, the day of redemption, the great Sabbath has dawned. Now there is lasting uninterrupted peace. God is pleased with his works, is pleased with mankind, with sinners for Christ's sake. We therefore cling to this Lamb.

As the children of Israel had to eat up all of the Passover lamb, so we in faith take this Lamb, Jesus Christ into ourselves and carry him in our hearts and take comfort and find joy in him, are happy in God and celebrate Easter all our days in the unleavened dough of purity and truth.

We celebrate the Passover as the children of Israel did, when they hurried away. We are journeying from this place through the wilderness to Canaan. We are journeying in order to enter into our rest; for we know: there is a rest prepared for the people of God.

II.

The second fact which our text reports and which in a similar way seals the mystery of the redemption and reconciliation is the lance thrust which one of the soldiers gave the dead Jesus.

One of the soldiers pierced the heart of Jesus with his spear either in rough wantonness or more likely in order to make sure he was dead in case he still had the breath of life in him. We know that he had already died. That was the last wound which was inflicted on Jesus' body. And the Evangelist John reminds us of the fact that also this feature from the suffering of the Lord had been predicted by the prophets. The Prophet Zechariah made mention of this lance blow in his book. And from this prophecy we recognize how meaningful this sign was. The entire passage to which John refers reads as follows, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Zech 12:10. The prophet here points to the time when the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea will own and recognize him whom they first killed and also just pierced as their Messiah, when they recognize him as the Person he is, as the Lord Jehovah. The Lord says, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." They will perceive that they laid hands on their Lord and God and did violence to him, and will then regret and lament over their deed, as one laments and is sorrowful over an only child, over the death of the firstborn. This lament and sorrow will be true repentance. The Lord will give his people the Spirit of grace, who works grace, grants grace for repentance, for faith, the Spirit of prayer, of petition, who beseeches God for forgiveness, for mercy. And such entreaty will not be in vain. The prophet adds the other to that prophecy, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered. Zech 13:1,2. Repentant Israel will receive grace and forgiveness, be cleansed from its sins and purified from all the abomination of idols. St. John remembers this prophecy just as he reported the death of Christ on the cross and the piercing by the lance, the last blow which Christ received even in death. He means to imply that those very Jews who had killed, wounded, and pierced Christ through the hands of heathen, that the murderers of Christ, Jews and heathen would once more awaken from their intoxication and will recognize, regard, worship, entreat him for grace and forgiveness whom they pierced. He points to the amazing change which should take place in the hearts of Jews and heathen.

After the death of the Messiah the prophetic word should be fulfilled, as John testifies. "They shall look on him whom they pierced;" v.37; that is

what John says after he had just mentioned the piercing by the lance. And lo, at that very moment, even on that Good Friday the fulfilment began. Many people of the Jews beat their breasts and lamented over the Messiah whom they had helped to kill. We have already heard of that.

And the heathen also looked on him whom they pierced. That heathen soldier perceived who he really was, the Righteous One, the Son of God. A few days after this happened, on the following Pentecost Peter stood up and showed the Jewish nation, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that it was the Lord Jehovah, the Lord of glory, the Prince of life whom they killed by the hand of unrighteous men, hanged and killed on the tree, but he also remarked that they did this in ignorance, they had not yet known him and emphasized that now God in and with Christ's resurrection made this Jesus whom they crucified Lord and Christ. When the Jews heard this they were pierced in their heart. Thousands repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2: 41. Many others from Israel were added and swore allegiance to the very One whom they or their fathers had pierced.

This Jesus whom the Jews killed and pierced by the hands of the heathen was preached also to the heathen. Now they said: Behold, he is your God! And thousands upon thousands from all nations and tongues have regarded, known him, believed in him and were cleansed of their sins and now serve God in Christ Jesus. Wherever the Gospel of this Jesus, the Crucified, the Wounded, Pierced One is preached, behold, the eyes of the blind are opened, the veil is removed from their faces so that they know him whom they had not known at first. Wherever the Gospel of Jesus the Crucified is preached, that lament of which Zechariah speaks, the lament of repentance is raised. Through this Gospel God gives his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace and prayer. And this prayer is heard. Wherever the Gospel of Jesus, the Crucified, the Pierced One resounds, there is an open fount against all sin and impurity, the sinner is justified, cleansed, purified, sanctified. Many a sinner who has lived on in his blindness is finally seized through the Word, through the Spirit of the Lord, opens his eyes, opens heart and lips and say from a sorrowful, deeply moved but thankful soul: Alas, that I have come to know you so late! We all pray and confess:

I wandered long in willing blindness,
I sought Thee, but I found Thee not,
For still I shunned Thy beams of kindness;
The creature-light filled all my thought.
And if at last I see Thee now,
'Twas Thou to me didst bow! (399)

Through God's Spirit and grace we have come to know: we are guilty, also guilty of the death of God's Son. Our sin is this serious: it has cost the life, the pierced heart of God's Son. However, we now know: he is the Lord, the Lord Jehovah. He says, "I wipe out your sins." He is mightier than sin, death, and hell. Yes, we have an open fount against all sin. We flee into Jesus' wounds, into Jesus' open side. By his wounds we are healed. There we find rest for our souls. Confidently we with Thomas place our hand into his open side and say, "My Lord and my God." Through the open side of Jesus we look into the flaming loving heart of our God. Just when sin and death cause us anxiety and assail us we flee to this free city and pray: (Hymn 145, 1 can be used here. The original German hymn verse may not be translated.) But woe, woe to all, Jews and heathen who do not want to see whom they have pierced! Woe, if they first know him on that Day when he will appear in his great power and glory! Then all the nations of the earth will howl when they see him whom they have pierced. Rev 1:7.

The third testimony and seal of the reconciliation established through Christ's death is the detail that blood and water flowed from Jesus' opened side.

For this point the apostle produces no testimony from the Old Testament as for the first two facts. But that much the more powerful is his own testimony here: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true." V.35. John testifies moved by the Spirit of God, by the Spirit of truth. It was a meaningful sign, an amazing occurrence: from the side of the dead corpse of Jesus flowed blood and water. No natural cause can be given for this. The skill of the exegetes who have here tested their medical knowledge has come to naught. The one has contradicted the other. No, this was a miracle, contrary to nature: that out of the dead corpse flowed fresh, life-giving blood and, in addition, water as in streams. Usually upon death the blood clots. This was a sign that in this corpse, in the dead Jesus who had really and truly died, there still was life, as Luther remarks. By this sign God wanted to indicate something. And, as Luther says, it was this: "The blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ still loves and flows, it has not congealed, not become cold; it flows and wells forth even after he is dead, and all who are sprinkled by it have forgiveness of sins and are children of eternal life. Learn this!" Yes, the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ lives and works even after his death as long as there are sinners and cleanses and washes sinners from all their vices. That is what the blood and also the water which flowed from Jesus' side means. That is clear symbolical language. The sign indicates this of itself.

The Evangelist John as with finger lifted up points to the open side of Jesus and to the blood and water which like a stream flowed from this source. He himself saw with his own eyes the precious blood of God's Lamb. We do not see it with our physical eyes but it is sketched clearly enough in the apostle's word and testimony. This is the blood of which St. Paul testifies: that God has purchased the church for himself through the blood of Christ, Acts 20:28, that God's peace was made through the blood of Christ, Col 1:25, that God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation in and through his blood, Rom 3:25, that Christ, God's Son entered in once into the holy place and obtained an eternal redemption, Heb 9:12; of which St. Peter testifies, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Pet 1:18; of which St. John writes, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." 1 Jn 1:7/ It is the blood of reconciliation, the precious redemption, the treasure the like of which is not to be found in the depths of any mine, the treasure which is more precious than all the gold and silver on earth, the ransom which weighs more heavily than all the guilt of the world. It is the blood which cleanses from sin, comforts hearts and consciences, which fills our soul with courage and joyfulness, the strength of our labors, in sorrow our laughter, in joy our harp. It is the blood which at the last opens to us the gates of heaven, our purple, our crown on our head in which we confidently appear before the throne of the Most High Father. Already in Gethsemane Christ sprinkled the earth with his blood. On the cross on Golgatha the blood streamed from head, hands, and feet. A drop of this blood can cleanse the whole world of all its sins. Now the Lord poured it all forth and emptied it out upon the earth. Truly, thus are we reconciled. thus are we richly granted entrance into the eternal kingdom. This blood is our own. Through the Word, Baptism, Lord's Supper we are sprinkled with it. This Jesus is the one who comes with his Spirit with water and blood, 1 Jn 5:6. We are sprinkled, cleansed, reconciled. This blood of purification is the anchor and comfort of our faith in life and in death!" Amen.

34th SERMON

Matthew 27:57-59; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:37-40.

On the evening of Good Friday, the preparation for the Passover, still before the beginning of the great Sabbath which began with the setting of the sun on the day of preparation, there took place what we hear in the portion of the Lenten story just read and in the portion to follow, what is told us of the preparation of the body of the Lord for burial and of the burial itself. The Jews were still intent upon having the corpses of those crucified taken from the cross before the beginning of the Sabbath and the faithful followers of Jesus wanted to prepare a final resting place for the Lord on the day of his death. And God's counsel was carried out through the counsel and plans of men. On the very same Good Friday was Christ to be laid to rest in the grave and on the peaceful Sabbath in the grave and on the third day rise again.

In all the separate events of the great Lenten story we perceive the hand of the Lord. On the day the Jews ate the Passover lamb Christ was sacrificed on the cross as the true Passover Lamb. He truly died. Our present Lenten text also guarantees the fact of Christ's death. We hear that when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus he was amazed that He was already dead, since those crucified usually did not die until they had suffered their torments for a much longer time. Christ, God's Son was born miraculously and died miraculously. Willingly he himself gave his life for us, of himself, of his own power and choice he gave his life into death. But he truly died. The centurion whom Pilate questioned, who was under the cross testified to the Roman judge that Jesus of Nazareth was really dead. The death of Christ is, as it were, legally attested and confirmed. The name of Jesus the Son of David was entered during the rule of Caesar Augustus in the birth register of Roman subjects. The name of Jesus of Nazareth was now also entered in the list of the dead. It is by human testimony, by a legally confirmed act that Jesus died on the cross. He truly died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And he then was also buried according to the Scriptures, according to God's counsel and fore ordination.

However, our text does not report the burial itself. It points to the people who arranged for the burial of the Lord. We find here a brief biography of two of Jesus' followers who now excelled the others after his death. The name of Joseph of Arimathea and that of Nicodemus have retained a place of honor in the great story of the suffering and dying of Christ. These two belonged to the small flock of the pious in Israel, to the Church of God who stood under the cross and gathered and increased in number under the cross, to whom the holy evangelists call our attention several times. The pious women who followed Jesus to Golgatha and also the faithful disciple John are mentioned several times. We have heard of the people who beat their breast there under the cross and knew him whom they pierced; we have also heard of the heathen soldiers who there confessed that Jesus of Nazareth the Crucified was God's Son. Among that holy seed which there burst into bloom under the cross of the Redeemer were also the two men of whom our text speaks.

That first Church on Golgatha already showed the manner and form of the Church of Jesus Christ the crucified. Not manywise, great, rich after the flesh has the Lord chosen. They were insignificant people from the Jewish nation who came to their senses, they were weak pious people who worshiped the Crucified, heathen soldiers who honored him whom they had first killed. Yet

God has chosen a few rich, great, wise. Those very two men who were honored and respected among the Jews had God selected and appointed as his instruments to show his Son honor even in death, to arrange an honorable burial for him. In these very two disciples the Lord glorified his might and grace. Therefore, when we remember these two men, we do this to the glory and praise of divine grace, the grace of the Savior Jesus Christ. The faith of these men, their courage as confessors, the great love to the Lord which they revealed was also a fruit of the suffering and dying of Christ. And in the power of that grace we emulate their example which is here presented to us. We learn from our text:

HOW EVEN IN DEATH THE LORD FINDS FAITHFUL DISCIPLES AND CONFESSORS

- I. So it was then.
- II. So it is even Today.

I.

So it was then. First of all, we are told something more of Joseph of Arimathea. This Joseph came from Arimathea, a little town lying not far from Jerusalem, the birthplace of the great prophet Samuel. He was a rich man and also a distinguished man, a councillor, a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest authority of the Jews. And this rich distinguished man had a good name among his people. That means, that he was a good, pious, honorable man, an upright Israelite. As Zacharias and Elisabeth, as all the pious of Israel, he walked blamelessly in all the laws of the Lord. Just because he was a pious man he certainly also made the right use of his wealth, gave generously of that which he had. And as councillor he always voted and judged according to the law and justice. He therefore did not consent in that unjust counsel and decision of the Jews upon Jesus of Nazareth. His justice and piety came from the right source, from the right mental attitude, from faith. He waited for the kingdom of God. He belonged to that small number of believers, the true Israelites who waited for the redemption. And he had now believed and known that this Jesus of Nazareth was the One who should come, the King of Israel, the Son of God.

In our text he bore the honorable title of a disciple of Jesus. He was a believing disciple of Jesus. Of course, as the Evangelist John remarks, at first he was a secret disciple of Jesus. At first he kept his faith hidden from fear of men, from fear of the leaders of the Jews. He was a weak disciple, but still a disciple. In this very man the Lord wanted to confirm his word: that the smoking flax he would not quench and the bruised reed he would not break. Behold, at the very time when it was the most dangerous to defend Jesus he entered the lists in Jesus' behalf. He did not consent to the evil counsel of the Jews, to the verdict of death which the Sanhedrin passed upon Christ. Whether he in that meeting voted against the verdict of the crowd or by his remaining away betrayed his attitude, it certainly was also known and plain to the Jews, the councillors, that he was not of one mind with them, that he sided with this Jesus.

And after the death of the Lord, when the chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people blasphemed and cursed the Crucified, he did the contrary and honored the One hanged. "This smoking, almost completely extinguished flax now burned brightly and shown like the beautiful sun." So says Luther. Joseph of Arimathea took the risk and went to Pilate and asked that he might take down the corpse of Jesus. He dared this. Yes, indeed, that was a bold step. Freely and openly he embraced the crucified King of the Jews and mocked at the danger which threatened from his people and his fellow councillors, the Sanhedrin.

Without ceremony Pilate granted Joseph his petition. He had done enough for the Jews, crucified, killed the hated King of the Jews. More the Jews could not demand. So he humored the followers of Jesus and gave them the

dead corpse. And Joseph left Pilate to go to Golgatha, took the body of Jesus from the cross, carried this precious burden from the place of sacrifice, and prepared for an honorable burial, purchased costly linen in which to wrap the body of their beloved Master.

That was love, great love. That was faith, strong faith. All at once this weak disciple became strong and outshone the other disciples, even the great apostles. The called disciples of the Lord, the eleven, whose lead the other followers of Jesus had followed and with their examples had pointed out the way, had all been offended that night in their Lord and Master, had become weak and despondent and fled. Even those pious women who had served the Lord during his travels on earth and had followed him to the place on Golgatha now stood timidly and fearfully at a distance. Then this secret, weak disciple stepped forward, entered the breach and in this evil dangerous hour honored the Lord, the Crucified.

Fear of men was not the only hindrance which Joseph had to conquer. These days the other disciples bowed their heads in sorrow. They had hoped that this Jesus, their Lord and Master would redeem Israel. This hope had come completely to naught. They themselves were offended at the Lord himself, at his humiliation. On the other hand, Joseph of Arimathea, in spite of the death of the beloved Jesus, still waited for the kingdom of God. He placed his hope on this dead Man himself. That he thus honored, loved, and cherished this dead Man was proof of his faith, of his hope. That is a miracle in our eyes. God wanted to show in such an example that everything does not depend on the running and chasing of men but on his mercy. Therefore, he let the great apostles who had become too self-confident and trusted in their power stumble and fall, so that they themselves would not know what to make of it.

Therefore, he raised Joseph this weak, trembling reed, this weak disciple and exalted him highly and placed him at the head of the believers. Truly, this faith, this strong joyful faith, this courage of a confessor, this love, this ardent love did not come to Joseph from flesh and blood. That was given to him by God. That was God's power which is strong in the weak. That was a work of God's grace, the grace of the Savior Jesus Christ, a fruit of his Passion. The great story of the suffering and dying of Jesus, this powerful sermon had kindled a fire in this weak disciple, a holy fire. Brightly it shines forth. The Spirit of God had seized him, had equipped him with courage, power, strength from on high.

In our text Nicodemus is placed alongside Joseph of Arimathea. He also was a rich, distinguished man, yes, a wise and learned man. He belonged to the sect of the Pharisees who were well versed in the Scriptures. At first he also was a secret disciple of Jesus. Secretly he came to Jesus that one night, out of fear of the Jews. That night the Lord had given him an earnest lecture, had bent and crushed his proud Pharisaical mind, had shown him that whatever is born of flesh is flesh, but then had also lovingly and comfortingly preached to him the Gospel, had planted in his heart the heavenly wisdom, "God so loved the world," etc. During that night Nicodemus had received another heart, he had become a new person, a disciple of Jesus. But at first he kept his faith hidden. Meanwhile, when his sect, the sect of the Pharisees took council on how they wanted to capture Jesus secretly, he defended the innocent Man and said, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" and because of his defense had to endure the mockery, "Art thou also of Galilee?" Jn 7:50-52. And now after the death of the Lord he had completely conquered the fear and timidity of the flesh and openly swore allegiance to Jesus the crucified before his people, before his sect. Yes, he also loved much. He brought myrrh and aloes along, about one hundred pounds, precious, costly frankincense and offered it to the Lord. In his soul as well the Lord's grace, the death of Christ had worked a miracle. The Lord made also this man

a vessel of his grace, honor, and glory before all the world.

II.

And as it was then, as in his death despite disgrace and contempt the Lord found faithful disciples and confessors, so it is today. At all times Christ the crucified has those who worship him in Spirit and in truth, faithful disciples who are not afraid of disgrace and suffering. Yes, weak disciples become strong, secret disciples step out of their hiding place and give honor to the Lamb who was sacrificed on the accursed tree. At all times one can observe the amazing change which our Luther describes in the following words, "This change will always remain in the Church. Some of the strongest will be weak and will not be able to stand because of offense. On the other hand, the weakest will excel and by a joyful confession let it be seen that there is no lack of people who know and confess Christ.

And in days of tribulation and persecution this change comes to light. When the Church is flourishing and moves along in power, when Christ lets his miracle of grace shine in his Church, then he also draws many disciples after him. Then disciples are found, many who take the lead, who guide others, who spread the knowledge of Christ and work diligently in the vineyard of the Lord. On the other hand, there are others, secret disciples who still do not dare to confess Christ openly, who still keep themselves far removed from the fellowship of the saints, who still are captive of the fear of men and still are very weak in faith and in love, bruised reeds, smoking flaxes. But how amazingly can the roles suddenly be changed! Just when suffering begins, when the Church begins to suffer, the strongest heroes often become children and flee from their banner and creep into a hiding place. In reverse, the weak come out of their rooms and enter the lists and hold the banner, the cross of Christ high and encourage others to faith and confession. Such a change has always been in the Church.

So it was at that time, at the death of the Lord the great apostles abandoned the Lord even before he stepped upon the great street of pain which led to Golgatha. Then Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea entered in their place.

That is the way it went later on. At the time of the Reformation great, learned, pious men who knew well the corruption of the Roman Church and the Lord Christ, had even testified of Christ in their writings, when the time for the decisive conflict came broke down and did not break the chains of their Babylonian captivity. Many renowned theologians and teachers of the Lutheran Church became deserters when the war broke out immediately after Luther's death and denied the truth which they knew. On the other hand, weak disciples of the truth, whose knowledge was small but who faithfully preserved their small power, unknown, obscure people went forward and even suffered the martyr's death for the sake of the testimony of Jesus. During this century the Church of the Reformation, which had almost died, once again rose out of its sleep of death. Everywhere in German speaking countries brave witnesses arose, faithful preachers who led many to Christ. And behold, when persecution arose because of the Word, when the pure doctrine was assailed, blasphemed, ridiculed, suppressed, many of the first witnesses became afraid, and began to be silent and gave in to the powers, abandoned the field to lies. On the other hand, secret, weak disciples, who at first had remained hidden for a long time, received courage, raised their voice, reproved these lies and wrongs and loudly confirmed the faith of the fathers.

That is God's secret, amazing wisdom and grace. He destroys everything which wants to be something and makes something out of that which is nothing. He lets the strong fall and lifts up the insignificant, weak people from the dust and through the weak carries out his counsel and will. Oh, that we would note this well! Therefore, let no one boast of his strength, his wisdom, virtue, piety, so that he might not fall and come to naught! On the other

hand, we will receive and value the weak in faith. Who knows what God can make out of them! He lets the upright succeed. Whoever means to be faithful and honest with God and men, whoever loves his Savior from his heart and waits for the kingdom of God and would gladly be saved as Joseph and Nicodemus, but at first are very weak, timid, and doubtful and do not at one time tear all the cords of the fear of men, earthly considerations and obligations, him God can indeed lead still further and further and strengthen in his faith and Christianity. Perhaps at the time when one thinks of it the least, when the offence is the greatest, the weak little flame will burst forth and consume the stubble and torns and give a clear light. All depends on God's grace. Both, weak faith and strong faith is God's work and gift. He alone wants to have the praise. It is the grace of the Savior Jesus Christ the crucified who works all in all. He who hears the Gospel of Christ and takes it to heart, he who rightly considers that Christ, God's Son gave himself, his own life into death for sinners, that he sacrificed everything, even himself for our sakes through God's grace gains a holy courage, an ardent zeal so that he in turn for Jesus' sake gladly denies everything, sacrifices everything, gives himself wholly and completely to the Lord.

The faith which the Lord has kindled, nourished, and strengthened then also shows itself in the same way as it did in Joseph and Nicodemus. The one in whom the Lord's Spirit and grace has become mighty, then also dares something for Jesus' sake, he spites the world, he conquers fear and weakness, he no longer pays attention to the opinions of men, does not seek honor among men, no longer takes notice of good, distinguished friends, of his peers, but breaks out of his shell, courageously and joyfully confesses his Lord Christ before all the world in word and deed, and also gladly takes the mockery of the world, the shame of Christ upon his head, he gives Christ the Lord alone the honor. He in whom the spirit and grace of the Lord has become mighty also tears through other cords, the cords of greed, of earthly cares, he with Nicodemus sacrifices his best treasures for the Lord's sake, for the sake of the kingdom of God, he adds rich gifts and alms as a sweet incense to the Lord. He in whom the spirit and grace of the Lord has become mighty loves his Lord and Savior with his whole heart, as intimately, as ardently as Joseph and Nicodemus. We no longer have the Lord's corpse before us so that we can bury him and prepare a soft bed for him. But we have Jesus himself with us in his members. What we have done for one of his most insignificant brethren that we have done to him. Hence, let us treasure our insignificant brethren, honor them, serve them, help them and show them every kindness as much as we are able. Thus we serve the Lord. May the Lord be gracious to us, give us much grace, make his grace strong in us and diligent in all good works, and grant that we love and remain faithful to him until death! Amen.

35th SERMON

Matthew 27:60.61; Mark 15:46.47; Luke 23:53-56; John 19:41.42.

We have already learned to know Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the chosen instruments who showed the last honors and love to the Lord in his death. The portion of the holy Lenten story before us reports how they buried Jesus. The story of Jesus' burial is here presented in brief, simple words.

At the place where Jesus was crucified, on the hill Golgatha, was a garden and in the garden a new grave which was Joseph's. Because it was the preparation of the Jews, since the Passover was about to begin, they laid Jesus in this grave, so that the body might rest in the grave at the beginning of the Sabbath. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus began his great Passion, in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea on Golgatha he finished it. The grave was near to the place where Jesus' cross had stood. Soon at this grave, within three days God's glory should be revealed. This place of triumph lay close to the place of the deepest disgrace where Christ suffered the curse of the Law. In God's kingdom disgrace and honor lie close together.

Jesus was laid into Joseph's grave. Joseph of Arimathea, the pious councillor had already in his lifetime ordered his grave in his garden. Luther says, "Rich people should think of such things and in their summer homes prepare similar monuments which should remind them of future things and draw them away from present day things." Hence, it was the grave of another into which Jesus was laid to rest. To the very end, even in death the Lord observed the rule, "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He wanted to remind us that we are guests and strangers on earth.

The grave was hewn into a rock, and the undertakers, Joseph and Nicodemus, rolled a large stone in front of the grave. Therefore, no one could open the grave except by force. It was foolish, laughable talk that the disciples of Jesus had come and had secretly stolen Jesus' corpse. It was a new grave into which no one had ever been laid, which had not be polluted by the odor of death and corruption. Most important, no dead person had ever been carried into that garden. Into this new grave, the grave of a rich man the body of Jesus was laid after it had been wrapped in fine linen together with fragrant spices, myrrh, and aloes. Thus the Crucified received a distinguished, honorable burial. Nor did he lack a funeral procession. The pious women, Mary Magdalena, and Mary the mother of Jesus and other, who had followed him from Galilee and had served him during his life, honored him even in death. They followed him to the grave and seated themselves opposite it and watched where and how his body was laid. After the Sabbath on the third day they wanted to continue the work of burial, anoint the body of the Lord even better, and during the stillness of the Sabbath prepared the spices. Their faith, their hope had died completely, only a little spark of trust still glimmered under the ashes. But their love to the Lord had not grown cold, their hearts burned and glowed in love to their dead Lord and Master.

That is the story which is here told us, a simple and yet a great and meaningful story. Usually, it is a tragic story when one lays a beloved dead person into the grave. One hears much lamentation and weeping. The soul of the sorrowing is cast into gloom, troubled. Yes, death and the grave awaken dark thoughts. However, since this dead Man, Jesus of Nazareth was laid into the grave on Good Friday evening, after the story of this burial which is here told by the holy evangelists, we have gained entirely different, new thoughts of death and the grave. The burial of Jesus is meaningful for our faith and hope. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians that Christ was buried according to the Scriptures. 1 Cor 15:4. The Scriptures of the Old Testament already point to this unusual burial. The suffering Messiah points to it in Ps 22 when he says, "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Ps 22:16. During his lifetime Jesus had predicted, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Matthew 12:40. According to the Scriptures, according to God's counsel and will Christ was also to be buried. The burial of Jesus was provided for in the predetermined counsel of God. This portion of the Lenten story is also of meaning for the great work of redemption. We say here also: For us, for us! We thank the Lord for also this grace and love, that for our sakes he

let himself be laid to rest in the grave. So for our comfort let us now ponder:

THE BURIAL OF CHRIST

- I. This is the Last Step in His Humiliation.
- II. But at the same Time it is a Prelude to His Exaltation.

I.

The burial of Christ is the last step in his humiliation. It is the evidence and seal of his death. Christ was buried. We see from this: he truly died. Before one who is dead is buried, one customarily examines very carefully to see whether he is really dead. When we see one of our loved ones being carried to the grave there is no doubt that he is dead. That which one at first considers impossible, "What? actually dead? The pulse is gone, the breath has stopped!" that becomes certainty when one prepares to bury the dead. When he then lies in the grave he is completely cut off from the land of the living, he is dead, gone, he has left the present world. Alas, and so often this becomes true, "Buried, forgotten!" Now Christ is buried, laid into the grave just like the dead in the world. Hence, no mortal man can doubt any more: he truly died. Yes, earlier it was carefully proved before the Roman judge that he was dead. That is why he allowed Joseph to bury him.

We know the meaning of Christ's death. He who died on the cross testified of himself even in death that he was the Son of the heavenly Father. Immediately after his death God testified to his Son with signs from heaven. And the people who saw him die testified to it and confirmed it, "Verily, this was the Son of God!" God's Son sacrificed himself for us. We are reconciled with God through the death of his Son. Christ died for us, for our sins. He who suffered and died on the cross was God's Lamb who carried the sin of the world. This Lamb of God is now buried, interred in the earth; hence, no sinner should doubt any longer that the work of the redemption is completed. The sinner is redeemed. The wages of sin have really been repaid. The burial of Jesus is proof of this. Yes, Christ died and was buried according to the Scriptures. That is the comforting Gospel which is now preached to sinful mortal men. Christ offered himself on the tree for our sins and then took them with him into the grave and locked them in the grave and covered them with earth where they must remain. When Christ, God's Lamb suffered and died he conquered the prince of death, the devil and was then laid in the grave and there in the grave gave the final death-thrust to the devil foe who chained mankind. Christ died and was buried; mankind is now redeemed from sin, death, and devil.

The burial of Christ is the seal of his death. However, it is the last degree of his humiliation. Christ is buried. That is the last terror and the essence of all terrors for men who are flesh and blood: the grave, an open grave. The living, the healthy shy away from it. They are not happy to think about death and the grave. And the sick, the dying tremble before the grave. To be sure, it is pain, curse, and punishment when a person is torn out of the land of the living and locked into a coffin and grave.

Thus it was not from the beginning. That is not the way which had been originally ordained for man: from the cradle to the grave. Man was to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. But after man had sinned, the verdict was pronounced upon him, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This verdict we announce and execute on our dead when we surrender them to the grave, earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. That is the bitter fruit and result of sin, that man dies and is buried and decays in the grave. Corruption, the odors of corruption is the deepest humiliation for man who is made in the image of God. A decaying human corpse is a sight of horror.

And behold, also this man, Jesus of Nazareth, after he died on the cross is buried. Christ humbled himself unto the death on the cross, yes, to the grave, placed himself in the dust of death. That is misery and great distress.

O darkest woe! Ye tears forth flow!
Has earth so sad a wonder
God the Father's only Son
Now is buried yonder. (167,1)

That was the last difficult sacrifice which sin demanded. God's Son the prey and booty of death and the grave! However, we indeed know: Christ humbled himself for our sakes. He redeemed us from the curse of the Law, from the curse of sin when he became a curse for us. He took all disgrace, even this last disgrace of burial upon himself. Hence, we need no longer fear death and the grave. Christ laid in the grave before we are, for us. Thus the grave is robbed of its terrors.

For the Christian the grave has now become a quiet chamber of rest. Those who walked in their uprightness enter into peace and rest in their beds. Christians who have become God's children through Christ and who pass their time on earth as guests and strangers, who are sick of the wicked godless ways of this world, who are an abomination to themselves because of their sin, who feel the sting of living in the flesh, yearn for the grave, yearn for the hour when they will be completely free, free from the misery of the earth, free from the labors of sin, free from all the misery of this vale of tears, free from the service of vanity.

Christ, God's Child, God's Lamb celebrated the Sabbath in the grave. The Passover dawned over his grave, with his burial. All who are in Christ, who live and die in Christ and have fallen asleep in Jesus' wounds, then also celebrate the Sabbath in the grave, they enter their rest. They have become partakers of the death and also the burial of Christ and will then be exalted with him and be honored. Even the story of the burial points to the future honor which should come to that great One who died and was buried on Good Friday.

II.

At the same time Christ's burial is the prelude to his exaltation.

Christ's burial was amazing, unusual. It was not without meaning that Jesus' body was laid in the grave of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. Thus the Scriptures were fulfilled. Christ was buried according to the Scriptures. Scripture was fulfilled to the last detail. Isaiah who foretold the death of God's Servant, spoke also of his burial. In Isaiah 53 we read according to the text, "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." Is 53:9. He was to rest in the grave of a rich man. That is exactly the way it happened. The Jews had intended to have the three crucified buried in a criminal's grave. They had asked Pilate that the bodies of the crucified be taken from the cross. However, something else than what they thought and wanted happened to this Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate had given Jesus' corpse to Joseph of Arimathea and he gave him a resting place in his garden and laid him, wrapped in fine linen, in his new grave. In all this the Scripture, God's counsel and will was done. Christ was not to be covered with earth like a criminal in a disgraceful place. God had planned an honorable grave and an honorable burial for this dead Man. And he also found it.

Thus Jesus was honored even in death. He was an important dead Man who was there laid in the grave, worthy of all honor. Yes, the Lamb who was killed and now lies in the grave is worthy to receive praise and honor and power and adoration. Hence, this dead Man, the Crucified, who died on Golgatha and

was buried, was honored and praised from generation to generation by all peoples and tongues. For he is God's Son, God the Most High himself. Even in death and the grave this dead Man still is what he was from the beginning, God by essence, the eternal living God. Even in death and the grave Christ is still the God-man. Death and the grave have not loosed the bond which unites divinity and humanity. This is a great mystery worthy of being accepted by all. In this man Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In this body which is laid into the grave dwells the fullness of the Godhead. He who is laid to rest in the dust of death is the very one who made heaven and earth and all things out of nothing. In this dead body dwells the eternal power of God. Truly, this dead Man is stronger than death and the grave. Through the lowliness of his burial shines his divine honor.

And just this dead Person is our Lord and God, our Mediator and Redeemer, our Brother and Suretor. He is the Head, we the members. We are partakers of his glory. We are sanctified through the blood of the Lamb, through the Spirit of Jesus. Those who believe in Christ are vessels of honor, God's children through Christ, God's temple. Even the bodies of the Christians have this honor. They are God's temple. Therefore, when a Christian is carried to the grave, a noble seed is placed into the earth. God protects his body. We do not cease being in death and the grave what we have become through Christ, God's Child, the God-man, namely God's children. As little as Christ's "God-man-ship" was destroyed and undone through death and the grave, so little is the Christian's adoption as God's children. Our souls then rest in God's arm and lap and see the joys of Paradise. And despite death, grave, and corruption the body is preserved in the grave by God. It has not slipped from the hand of God, the hand of God's Son. At his time he will reveal our honor.

The burial of Christ is the prelude to his exaltation. The details point from afar to the coming resurrection. The Lord's body was anointed with myrrh and aloes, this anointing was to be completed after the Passover. The ancients, also the Israelites, anointed their dead and prepared the ointment from very fragrant spices in order to preserve the precious bodies of their loved ones as long as possible and keep away corruption. That now happened to the Lord also. That was an indication that he above all should not see corruption. In Psalm 16 the Messiah says, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Ps 16:10. This word was applied by Peter when he preached to the Jews, and by Paul when he preached to the heathen, to the crucified and buried Jesus of Nazareth and to his resurrection. Acts 2:24-32; 13:34-47. God's Holy One dared not and should not see corruption. Hence, it was impossible that he should forever be held by death. This seed which was placed into the earth should soon come forth again from the earth and bring much wonderful fruit. Yes, without knowing it the people who buried the dead Jesus and were his funeral procession prepared the great work and miracle of Easter Sunday. The body of the Lord was only loosely wound in the linen. Hence, on the third day he need but lay it aside as one is accustomed to lay aside his garments. A stone was rolled before the opening of the grave. The Lord wanted to and was to break through the closed grave, through stone and lock and thus show his divine power, his glorious victory. The pious women on the quiet of the Sabbath prepared the spices in order to return early in the morning on the following day to the grave. They were to be the first there to hear the joyful Easter message.

And all this is written and happened for our comfort. We draw hope from Jesus' grave. A fresh fragrance of life wafts from Jesus' grave as though it were nothing but myrrh, balsam, and casia. His grave has dedicated and sanctified our graves. He is the head, we the members. There is only one difference between the head and the members. He, the Holy One of God did not see corruption. He was buried after the manner of men, as the dead are usually

buried in the world. But the Holy One of God was spared corruption because he was the Holy One and from his birth and conception had a spotless, pure body. Our bodies dies, is buried, and decays. No Christian is spared corruption. And that is to our benefit. Thus the sinful body ceases completely to exist. The flesh dies and corrupts and will never rise again. However, on that Day the body of the righteous will rise free from sin, free from all evil. The prophetic word will be fulfilled, "Your bones shall flourish like an herb." Is 66:14. The noble seed which is placed into the earth will sprout forth from the dust of corruption. The bodies of the righteous will share in the honor and glory of their head, be like the glorified body of God's Son and shine brightly in spotless, incorruptible beauty as the sun. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, but also by the burial of Christ, God's Holy One this blessed end is guaranteed and sealed to us. Christ was buried according to the Scriptures: thus we comfort ourselves in his death, in his redemption. Christ was buried according to the Scripture, according to God's counsel and will: therefore we hope that we also will become partakers of his resurrection. May God seal this comfort, this hope in our hearts! Amen.

36th SERMON

Matthew 27:62-66.

When Joseph was sold by his brothers and then thrown into prison in Egypt, but after severe suffering had again been exalted and been made ruler over the whole land of Egypt and become a deliverer and provider for thousands and for his own family as well, he at the end of God's amazing ways confessed before his brethren, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." Gen 50:20. Yes, people, Joseph's brothers, had meant it evil, denied their brother, betrayed, sold, and meant it evil with him; they wanted to be rid of this irksome dreamer. But God had meant it unto good, had used these means to deliver many souls, and had also meant it for good and refreshed Joseph after a longer period of tribulation and through him preserved many people during a famine.

It has often happened that God's counsel, God's good, gracious will has been carried out through the malice of men. The most memorable and the most wonderful example of this amazing wisdom, guidance, and rule of God is the great story which we have pondered: the story of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This story tells us of the greatest, the most horrible crime which ever happened on earth. Jews and heathen had united to torment the Holy One of God. And they also had meant it to evil. They wanted to hurry this hated prophet and his irksome doctrine completely out of the world.

God the Lord, however, used this evil counsel and will of men to save lost and condemned mankind from their sins and deliver them from the pains of hell. The betrayal of Judas, the Sanhedrin's sentence of death, Pilate's unjust judicial sentence, the scourging, the crucifixion, the death of Christ resulted in the redemption and reconciliation of the world. Of all of God's works this is indeed the greatest, the most praiseworthy: the redemption through Christ Jesus. From eternity God had foreordained it. And even Christ's enemies must against their will assist in victoriously carrying out this work. In the separate details of the Lord's passion we have perceived the amazing hand of God.

And it is also the conclusion of the holy Lenten story that confirms this truth, this fact, that God's counsel and purpose is fulfilled and completed despite the malice, yes, just through the malice of men. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the conclusion, the seal of the great work of redemption. Through his resurrection Christ is gloriously proved to be God's Son. Through his resurrection the truth of his doctrine, the validity of the atonement which he made is confirmed. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead it has become clear that this Jesus Christ has actually conquered sin, death, and devil and laid these foes at his and our feet. We have already remarked that in the midst of suffering and conflict the victory had already been determined. Christ's amazing signs and circumstances after Jesus' death testified that the Crucified, the one who died had in no way lost his might and power in his death.

The story of Christ's burial points to the coming exaltation and resurrection from a distance. Just this last result of the great story, the resurrection of the dead, Christ's foes, the hardened Jews tried to prevent with all their powers. For that reason they placed armed guards at the Lord's grave. They, as it were, wanted to keep the dead in the grave under lock and key. They also wanted to prevent the disciples from saying, "He is risen from the dead," suppress this rumor about Jesus.

The story of Christ's resurrection proves how greatly their evil counsel failed, how fundamentally their wicked thoughts came to naught. However even that which is related in our text, the last portion of the Lenten story, of their last evil design points to the amazing counsel of God, points to the fact that God meant it unto good what they had meant unto evil. The precautions which the Jews took in order to cut off this last deceit must against their will serve to promote God's great work, the awakening of the crucified Christ. We will not follow this thought, that

EVEN CHRIST'S ENEMIES MUST PROMOTE GOD'S WORK

- I. Men Meant it unto Evil.
- II. But God Meant it unto Good.

I.

Men meant it unto evil. In this last Lenten text Christ's enemies are once more presented to us: the leaders of the Jews, the chief priests and Pharisees, the Roman judge Pontius Pilate who made a covenant against the dead Christ. We are told of the last monstrous example of malice of the murderers of Christ. First we are told of the abominable hypocrisy of the Jews, the Jewish leaders. The next day, which followed the day of the preparation, on the day after the preparation during which Christ had died, hence on that quiet Sabbath the Jews took this final counsel against their archenemy Jesus of Nazareth who now rested in the grave. The Jewish chief priests and the Pharisees usually thought much of their ceremonies and the commandments of the elders, especially the laws of the Sabbath. They would not move a finger on the Sabbath, not even to help a suffering brother. They had so often decried Jesus as a desecrator of the Sabbath because he had done good on the Sabbath, had healed the sick. And just that great Sabbath of the Passover they considered holy and inviolable. In order not to defile themselves for the Sabbath, they would not enter Pilate's judgment hall on the day of preparation. In order that the Passover might not be desecrated they had asked Pilate to take the corpses from the cross before it began.

But now what did they do on that Passover itself, on the day after the preparation when all preparations for the festival should be ended, on that Sabbath when the pious disciples of the Lord did not work according to the Law and prepared the spices at home, when the Lord himself rested in the grave?

Then they went to Pilate, were not afraid to enter the house of a heathen, and resumed that cursed judicial business which irked Pilate himself, and obtained an armed company from Pilate, went with the soldiers to Jesus' grave, showed them the place, sealed the stone, and thus scornfully trampled on their own Sabbath law. They were lying hypocrites. They dissembled to Pilate when they called him "sir" and flattered him whilst they hated the Roman rule.

That is a picture of the false church. The papal monastics wear the same garment only for show. They also cling painfully to their rules and ordinances, live a rigorous life, and shine before the people. But if they can cast a stone at Christ and his Gospel, the Sabbath is quickly broken, the festive garment and holy appearance is torn; then no sacrilege is so great that it will not agree with their conscience. These are the morals and religion of the world. The world gladly puts on a pious mantle and acts very properly and correctly. They give themselves the appearance of virtue, honor, decorum. Love of their neighbor, universal love of men, tolerance passes among them as a holy inviolable rule. But when the Lord Christ and Christianity enter the picture then all rules of fairness and tolerance are forgotten, then they punch their own principles, the principle of love, tolerance, patience right in the face. They are all together hypocrites, arch-hypocrites, who do not believe Christ and his Gospel. No honorable people are among Christ's foes.

Furthermore, our text reveals the knavery and malice of Christ's foes. The wicked Jews were not satisfied with having their hated King and Messiah crucified and buried; even in death, in the grave they permit him no rest. They reviled and blasphemed this dead One. They said, "We remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again." V.63. They called the Lord, as even they had called him previously Beelzebub and a Samaritan, a seducer, heretic, false teacher, and deceiver. They depicted him as a trickster, a seducer of the people who traveled throughout the land and everywhere alienated the people from the government and the laws of the fathers, beguiled the simple with witchcraft and devilish wonders, set himself up as the Messiah, and played up freedom and golden days to those who followed him. But now the deceit was unmasked. This benefactor of the people has indeed found his deserved reward on the gallows and now rests in the grave. All the hope which he awakened in the people and his disciples has not come to naught. In the same way they slandered his disciples as deceivers. They expressed the conjecture that his disciples might come, steal him secretly from the grave, and thus continue the deceit and pretend to the people that he fulfilled his promise, that he rose on the third day. Nor were they content with slander and blasphemy; they again used power and obtained an armed company from Pilate in order to take to the field against this dead Christ. That was glowing, devilish hate.

At all times that has been the mind of Christ's foes, the mental attitude of hypocrites. The saints of the papacy, all hypocrites, the pious children of the world do not become tired of slandering and blaspheming faith, the religion of the Christians. And just this dead Christ, the crucified Christ is overwhelmed with slander. Christ promised the kingdom of heaven to his disciples, to his believers; but he has long since died and his promise still is not fulfilled. The Gospel of Christ, the comforting promise of forgiveness of sins, that one is righteous and saved through faith in Christ is decried as deceit, as the most dangerous heresy. This teaching makes people secure and leads them into destruction. Christians, the true disciples of the Lord pass for seducers of the people who against better knowledge and conscience conjure up all manner of fairy stories before the people and strengthen superstition. If Christ the Lord rests and is silent only once and lets his followers suffer for a while and does not immediately interfere, then they say, Now where is your faith? Your faith has deceived you.

However, the malice of the enemy goes further and again and again

sword and spear is seized. They do not let even the dead Christ rest. The wicked mind and counsel of the world is aimed at wiping out Christianity root and branch. The persecutors of Christians are never satisfied with humbling the Church and pressing it into a corner. When Saul was still a Jew he not only found his delight in persecuting Christians in Jerusalem but had no rest and went by order of the Pharisees to Damascus in order to hunt out disciples of Christ there. In the lands in which the papists again suppressed the Gospel, Luther's pure doctrine they as much as they could removed and killed the true doctrine and, when the Church of the pure Word was already dead and lay prostrate, still dragged the last heretics out of the corners and holes. The hostile world gives the Lord Christ and Christianity no pardon. No one dare attempt to remember this great dead Person in praise in its hearing, in its circles. The name of the crucified Christ is taboo and cursed. To all other idle chatter, to the most sacriligious jabber the world, also the pious world, grants free course; only conversation about Jesus the Crucified and Risen One is not permitted and where it wants to rise stifled and suppress it with force.

Meanwhile these foes lie and play the hypocrite in the very things which they speak and contrive against Christ the crucified. The Jewish chief priests and scribes really did not believe their own allegations that the disciples of Jesus would come and steal Jesus' body. Those fearful men who had fled away at the first meeting did not awaken the suspicion that they would undertake such a bold attempt and show off before the people with this Christ whom their leaders nailed to the cross. A particular consideration lay at the bottom of those malicious schemes of the Jewish leaders against the dead Christ. They feared this dead One, they therefore hated him so completely unto death and into the grave itself. By means of Caesar's soldiers they wanted to protect themselves against this crucified and buried Man. They also had seen and heard some of the miraculous signs which had occurred after Jesus' death. They had also become aware how the secret followers of Jesus, their fellow councilors Joseph and Nicodemus suddenly against such heroic courage and came forward. That looked suspicious to them. They thought awakened: What if this Deceiver actually were God's Son? What if he would actually make that true which he predicted, "After three days I will rise again?" Then woe, woe to his murderers! Yes, Jesus' word of his resurrection, what Jesus had once said to the Pharisees in Galilee of the sign of Jonah and in Jerusalem of rebuilding the temple of his body ate like a gnawing worm, like a hidden fire in their heart and conscience.

A bad conscience added to their fear. Their conscience had told them that this Jesus had not taught and done his miracles as a juggler and magician, not with the power of the devil but with the power of God's finger had touched them. Hence, they struggled against their own conscience with their hatred of Christ. After they had nailed Christ to the cross and buried him, this secret anxiety and fear had only increased. The fateful third day drew near. With alarm they saw it draw closer. They suspected what was to occur; but in incomprehensible rage, spite, and malice, as though in despair they opposed the Stronger One to the very last. They defended themselves against him even to blood and if they themselves should be defeated.

That is the extreme degree of malice and spite, of hatred toward Christ and God, when unbelievers, liars, and hypocrites against the testimony of their own conscience defy God's might, the power of the truth. Yes, indeed, Christ's foes really do not believe their own talk; they have an evil conscience, they are afraid of that Crucified whom they revile and blaspheme and trample under foot. They suspect that the tables can be turned, so that they fall to the ground and he arises in power. However, in spite of this they fight to the very end with all their powers, despairingly as though to the death against God and God's Word, against the Gospel, and their own conscience.

Of a truth, an awful depth of malice!

In the Passion story the heathen judge Pontius Pilate is also counted among Christ's foes. In our text he shows the same behavior which he had observed earlier in that unjust verdict. He was a refined, flexible, crafty worldling. He proved to be just as polite, gracious, and obliging to Christ's foes, the chief priests and Pharisees as to Jesus' followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. He immediately granted the petition to the one as to the other. But no one was ever to come to him again with that question of their religion. He was a despiser and a mocker. The truth had needled him also. However, he had immediately torn the sting from his heart. He wanted to hear no more of these things. Thus he also despised those last words of the Jews, what they said of Christ, and mocked the fears of the Jews as well as also the hopes of the believers when he said, "Ye have a watch; go your way, and make it as sure as ye can." V.65. Just take care that this dead Man does not rise!

A true picture of the worldlings who are not concerned about religion, believing anything, these despisers and mockers of this world! They are friendly and polite to everyone, Christians and nonchristians, but no one should annoy them with questions of religion and Christianity. Such talk they despise from their heart and have their fun over it, mocking superstition and the true faith. Fundamentally, these neutral people are counted among Christ's enemies and pull in the same yoke with the declared opponents of the Gospel, join them in fighting Christ and his kingdom just as also Pilate approved and supported this final hostile attack of the Jews upon Christ, on that dead Christ.

II.

Men thought it unto evil. But God meant it unto good. God has also a little word to say. First of all, God allowed this to happen so that the Jews could play their last little wicked part against his Anointed, so that they would surround his grave with Roman soldiers. God let them have their way. Finally, he surrendered his foes, the opponents of his Son to their perverted mind. That was a terrible but deserved punishment. Then also, when Christ had arisen he revealed his Son neither to the unbelieving Jews nor to Pilate. They had despised the mighty signs and words of Jesus and hardened themselves to the very end to the voice of God's Son. Hence, God surrendered them to the judgment of a hardened heart, let them sit in their fear and anxiety. This secret anxiety and fear and their evil conscience was already an indication of the last wrath, the beginnings of the pains of hell. Thus God deals with the wrong-headed, with the embittered, hardened foes of the Gospel who snort and rage to the bitter end against Christ. He is a righteous God who does not let himself be mocked and surrenders those who simply will not let themselves be shown and chastised to their unbelief and superstition, to fear and terror, and finally to the pains of hell and damnation. Hence, let us fear God and make use of God's grace and patience, so that some day we do not fall into the hands of God's majesty!

However, while God let Christ's foes have their way to the very end, he at the same time took their evil designs into his hand. Against their will they must honor Christ and the truth. God trapped these cunning men in their own lie and deceit. The one lie canceled the other. First they pretended that his disciples would come and steal the body of Jesus and took preventive measures so that it should and could not be stolen, placing watchmen and guards at the grave. Thus this deceit was sufficiently prevented. How could they later, when Christ had risen, still insist that his disciples had stolen him? God frustrates the thoughts of the wise, the unbelieving. He entangles their thoughts. At last they lie, revile, and blaspheme without any reason or sense. One lie cancels

the other. They lie, blaspheme, and say that all Christianity, the death and resurrection of Christ, is a fairy tale, an invention and deceit of superstitious Christians. And they they again deride and ridicule Christianity, the religion of the crucified Christ as an unheard of, unbelievable piece of folly. How can people fall into such folly and invent such unbelievable tales?

Against their will the Jewish leaders must bear testimony to the truth. They helped spread Jesus' word, "In three days I will rise again." This word was a thorn in their eye, a sting in their conscience. That they so earnestly fought against it proves that they were not completely indifferent to these words. The enemies of the Gospel, without knowing and intending to, must often bear testimony to the truth of the Gospel. Whilst they challenge the Gospel they take these very words into their mouth and spread them and bring them to the people. And the zeal with which they fight against these words indicates that these words are not dead letter, not empty prattle, that there actually is something to these words.

According to God's counsel and will Christ's foes must glorify Christ, confirm the truth of the Gospel, promote God's work. To their wicked work and design God gives a direction which they themselves think of the least. The Jewish leaders sealed the grave of the Lord so that no one could open the grave without breaking the seal and carefully guarded it through a host of soldiers. Thus they did only what they could in order to hinder God's great work, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. However, God turned the matter around. By these preparations they must in his hands work his purposes. On their part the wicked Jews excluded the possibility that people took Jesus' body from the grave and reproved as lies the foolish talk that the disciples had stolen him. When on the third day the grave was then empty, the seal broken, the stone rolled away, that could have happened only by a miracle of God. Yes, God himself awakened his child Jesus. The soldiers kept people away. God alone had a hand in this. According to God's counsel, Christ, God's Son broke through stone, bar, and seal. His glorious resurrection is the surest support of our redemption. Thus the wicked Jews had to assist in confirming our most holy faith: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and was buried and on the third day rose again.

Similar things have happened at all times. Christ's enemies have merely furthered God's work, Christ's kingdom through their spite, malice, and enmity. After the great work of the redemption was completed, after Christ died and rose again, the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is preached to all people to the salvation of the world. God's work to this day is that through the Gospel he gathers for himself a Church from all people and tongues. Christ's foes, the unbelievers have ever and again raged and stormed against the Gospel and Christ's Church. However, by their raging and murdering they have not destroyed but built God's kingdom. When the Jews of Palestine persecuted and scattered the Christians, the Gospel came to the heathen. When the pope with his holy saints opposed Luther's doctrine with every possible opposition, spared no means or weapons, summoned every possible lie and slander, violent deed and murder against the Gospel, this nonsensical hatred must merely contribute to bring the truth of the Gospel so much the more clearly to the light of day and strengthen the faithful confessors in their convictions. All the evil plots of the hostile world to this very hour tend only to promote, confirm and spread God's kingdom. God still gathers his Church through the Gospel of the crucified Christ and leads it to the consummation. We persevere to the end in the way and work of God: it is the glorification of the congregation, the resurrection of the righteous. Christ's foes oppose it and want to stop God's work. They ridicule this last deceit, Judgment Day. They summon all their skill and power, set all the powers of nature in motion in order to make

their earthly house, the world, stand absolutely firm. However, in so doing, they heap sin upon sin, disgrace upon disgrace, stumble over each other in their sacrilege, in their blasphemy and thus merely speed up the work of the Lord, work to their own grave and ruin. The raging of the people, the unbelief and impudent mockery of the world which reaches up into heaven confirms our faith, our hope. Certainly the hour is near which brings us our redemption. Now we still suffer with Christ and stand under the cross. However, under this very pressure and cross we praise God and say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." 1 Pet 1:3.4, Amen.

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Completed this 3rd day of August, 1962.

SOLI DEO GLORIA