

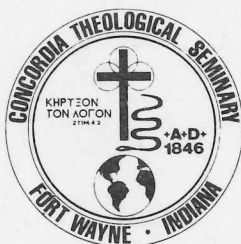
CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 47, Number 4

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1983

ANNOUNCEMENT

**THE SEVENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
ON THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS
A CONVOCATION FOR PASTORS AND LAYMEN**

**Sponsored by
THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER
OF LUTHERAN CONFESSIONAL STUDIES
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana
January 25-27, 1984**

**topic
THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS
AND THEIR PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY**

THE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 25, 1984

- 11:00 Registration
12:00 Lunch
1:30 Welcome - Dr. Robert Preus, President Concordia
Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana
2:00 "The Question of Biblical Authority vis a vis Rome:
Luther and Lutherans Today" - Dr. Hans-Lutz Poetsch
3:00 Coffee Break
3:45 "The Understanding and Use of the Scriptures in the For-
mula of Concord" - Dr. Arthur Drevlow
6:00 Dinner
7:30 "Hymn Festival of Luther Hymns" - Richard Resch
Chapel
8:45 Reception in the Commons

Thursday, January 26, 1984

- 7:00 Breakfast
8:50 Chapel
9:30 "The Principle of Biblical Authority in Luther's Large
Catechism"-Dean Richard Muller
10:45 Coffee Break
11:00 "The Principle of Authority in the Lutheran Confessions:
Luther and Melancthon and Their Use of Scripture and
the Church Tradition" - Dr. Lowell Green
12:15 Lunch
1:30 Organ Recital - Seminarian Paul Grime - Chapel
2:30 "The Role of Princes and Their Influence in the Lutheran
Confessions" - Dr. John Stephenson
6:00 Banquet - Dr. Paul L. Maier - "Once Again to Luther's
Table Talks"

Friday, January 27, 1984

- 7:00 Breakfast
8:50 Chapel
9:30 "The Use of the Church Fathers in the Formula of Con-
cord" - Dr. J.A.O. Preus

THE SPEAKERS

- Dr. Hans-Lutz Poetsch, Founder and Director of The Lutheran Hour, Bremen, Guest Lecturer at Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, Oberursel, West Germany, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
- Dr. Arthur Drevlow, Pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, St. James, Minnesota.
- Dean Richard Muller, Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
- Dr. Lowell Green, Former Professor at Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois and Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saint Catharines, Ontario, Canada, Author. Coordinator of the Concordia Academy.
- Dr. John Stephenson, Visiting Professor, Concordia College, Moorehead, Minnesota and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
- Dr. Paul L. Maier, Campus Pastor and Professor of Ancient History, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Author.
- Dr. J. A. O. Preus, Former President of Concordia Theological Seminary, (Springfield, Illinois) Fort Wayne, Indiana and Immediate Past President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Translator and Author.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

The fee for registration and program materials (including banquet) is \$52 per person, \$80 for husband and wife before January 10, 1984; after January 10 add \$5 (\$57 and \$85 respectively). In the case of pastors emeriti the fee is \$40 (including banquet).

Registration for a single day is \$20 (banquet not included).

College and Seminary students may register at no cost (housing, meals and banquet ticket must be reserved and paid for in advance).

Limited dormitory space is available for registrants and their wives. The fee for a room is \$8 per person per night. There will be two people in each room. Information on available motels will be sent upon your request.

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Ticket for banquet and program only is \$13.50 (reservation due no later than January 15).

The Seminary will provide limousine service from the airport for \$10 per person (one way) when given at least two day's notice of arrival time.

Please include your name, address and telephone number with your request for registration. Early registration requested to assure banquet ticket and housing.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS JANUARY 15, 1984

Send requests for registration together with the registration fee to:

**International Center of Lutheran Confessional Studies
Concordia Theological Seminary
6600 North Clinton Street
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825
or call,
219-482-9611**

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Check appropriate box:

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Pastor Emeritus (\$40) ☐ With my spouse (\$60) ☐
One day only (\$20) ☐

Housing: Dormitory room for myself only (\$8 per night) ☐
Dormitory room for me & spouse (\$16 per night) ☐

Meal plan (\$15 per person) ☐
Banquet ticket (\$13.50 per person) ☐

I will need transportation from the airport/train station/bus depot
on _____ at (time) _____ .

Luther on the Ministry

Eugene F. Klug

"We have this ministry," writes the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian congregation. (2 Cor. 4:1). He is speaking first of all of his office as apostle, chosen of the Lord; but he is enlisting their support in the conduct of the ministry in their midst. God has entrusted the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, to all believers as members of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The mandate of Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 makes each Christian a witness for the Gospel to the world around him. The church is built and preserved through the ministry of the Word. God's people, Luther reminds us, cannot be without God's Word. The church owes its existence to the Word, not vice versa. "Wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel," state the Lutheran Confessions (Tractate, 67). The world owes its continued existence to the unfinished task of the church in spreading that Word (Matt. 24:14).

However, there are not two ministries, as the above may seem to suggest. Christ establishes only one ministry for the building of His church through the Word. The mandate which places all believers under the responsibility to make disciples for the Lord is the ground upon which the public pastoral office stands. The term "ministry" thus has both a wide and a narrow sense. In the first sense it refers to the rights and duties in connection with the Gospel which belong by Christ's ordering to the totality of the spiritual priesthood of believers, (1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 18: 17; John 20: 23; 1 Cor. 3:21f.). Every Christian, young or old, man, woman, or child, possesses this ministry as a believing, baptized child of God, who by his faith is a member of Christ's church and His royal priesthood, along with all the privileges and responsibilities that accompany that station.

In the second sense, however, ministry is used in a narrow and the proper and primary sense in Scripture to refer to the *office* of the public pastoral ministry to which a qualified man is called and for which he is chosen, by God's will, through the Christian believers gathered at one place in a congregation. Though the rights and responsibilities of the spiritual priesthood are theirs, they are not each to administer the means of grace, Word and Sacraments, for themselves publicly, valid and efficacious though this might be; but they are to call a qualified man to do this in their name and stead. He does publicly, by the will of God, what

belongs to the ministry of the Word. His is an office specially designated by God, for the sake of the church on earth. (Acts 20:24; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor 4:1). His is the special aptitude to teach and minister beyond the usual capacity of the believers in general (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:2). He has the special call of the Christian congregation to perform these duties of ministry in their stead (Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11; Rom. 1:1). The church, or fellowship of believers, retains "the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers," as the Lutheran Confessions state (Tractate, 67), and this authority is a gift "which no human authority can wrest from the Church."

The distinctive nature of the public pastoral office must not be lost, however, as the great prerogatives and duties of the general priesthood of believers are blazoned abroad. There is need for the latter to be done, as Luther showed, because of the Romanist presumption which localized these powers in the hands of the ecclesiastical hierarchy from pope on down through the ordained clergy. But Luther never lost sight of the fact that God had established the public pastoral office *through* the congregation's call and for its sake. Walther very properly emphasizes the same truth in his theses on the ministry, *Vom heiligen Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*.¹

Previous to the declaration of the authority which resides in God's people, the Tractate had shown convincingly that the pretension of papal power and primacy by divine right (*iure divino*) was totally groundless, having neither Scriptural warrant nor historical basis (cf. Tractate, 1-37). Nor should the consciences of the faithful be bound by the godless presumption of the papal office which required recognition of such authority as necessary for salvation (Tractate, 38-59). Since the authority of the keys ultimately and first of all belongs to the priesthood of believers, the Tractate concludes that "there are just reasons why we do not obey" and, therefore, "it is right also to restore this jurisdiction to godly pastors, and to see to it that it is legitimately exercised for the reformation of morals and the glory of God" (Tractate, 76).

On the basis of Article V in the Augsburg Confession Walther notes that the first and primary emphasis of the confessors was to stress the ministry of the Word, the Gospel, by which God builds His kingdom or church of believers.² At the same time there is implicit in this article the establishment of the parish pastorate, Walther also insists. Article V of the Augsburg Confession reads as follows:

That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel . . .

That which is implicit here, namely, the pastoral office, is explicitly treated in Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession:

Of ecclesiastical order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XXVIII of the same Confession carefully articulates the power of the keys and specifies to whom they are given, stating that this power is exercised by one man or by several who have been called into the pastoral office. Thus, the ministry of the Word is the property of the general priesthood, but it is performed by God's careful ordering through the called ministers, who are called into parish pastorates through the instrumentality of the churches (AC XXVIII, 5ff.):

This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to their calling, either to many or to individuals.

Self-evidently the Gospel ministry which is the possession and the duty of all believers is in a very unique way, ordered by God, the task that belongs to the special office which He has established in His church, the pastoral office.

Luther's odyssey from the stranglehold of the Romanist priesthood, subjugated under the papal hierarchy, to the glorious freedom of the pastoral office under God and under God's people, the royal priests, was an arduous one. It was not the case of a rebel arbitrarily and thoughtlessly throwing off a burdensome yoke; it was rather the valiant struggle of a pious soul casting off the bonds of a shameless human bondage and gladly taking upon his shoulders the servanthood of his Lord and Master Christ, who had given great gifts to His church, including not least the holy ministry. To the royal priests belonged the task of evangelizing the world, Matt. 28:19; theirs was the responsibility under God of establishing in orderly manner the parish pastorate in their midst.

"Because of faith and the Word," what is otherwise ordinary, and no greater accomplishment than that of the worldling, the task of the Christian champion, like Abraham (who also had gathered his laurels in battle), becomes a truly elevated one.³ Luther bears in mind that as a man of God Abraham was "appointed bishop and teacher by God's voice," prophet, priest,

and pastor in his house, "a distinguished servant of God, than whom the world has nothing more sublime."⁴ Nor was Abimelech any less so when he repented. God gets His preachers oftentimes right out of the midst of the masses, out of the royal priesthood of believers. "Today many say that they would embrace the Gospel if the kings themselves were to preach it, but that sensible people are repelled because most preachers are so wretched, poor, despised, and downright plebeian."⁵ This is an obvious dodge, Luther avers. The godless unbeliever will reject even the noblest of men, even an angel from heaven. Take a case in point, Luther suggests from current history. "Did not our most illustrious prince of sacred membery, John, Elector of Saxony, teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the year 1530 through his frank confession at the Diet of Augsburg in the presence of Emperor Charles and all the imperial estates, and not he alone but with him and after him many others?"⁶ Luther's point is that God's royal priesthood of believers have always contended and witnessed for the faith, even as "also John, Elector of Saxony, of sacred memory, confessed Christ with great courage before the entire world." This is often "the lot of those to whom God has entrusted the ministry of the Word."⁷ But in them "He nevertheless has His little church," "for God is not without a people."⁸

Abraham's place as a prophet of God was unique. This Luther recognizes. But he also underscores the points of similarity between Abraham and every royal priest or believer. To be sons or pupils of the prophets it is not necessary "that future events be revealed to us," Luther states. "For the office of a prophet," in the broad sense here intended by Luther, "it is enough that we understand Scripture and are able to teach others and also to help one another with prayers."⁹ These are the earmarks of a "prophet" in the sense which applies to every believer. "Therefore the name 'prophet' belongs equally to all Christians," Luther contends, "and he who denies this also denies that he has been baptized and has been instructed through the Word."¹⁰ The Christian today dare not labor under some kind of delusion that he is an Abraham or an Elijah; but the Christian certainly is one of God's true spokesmen because he has His Word and because His Spirit dwells in him through that Word. Luther could hardly have described the general priesthood of believers any more vividly, nor its task of ministry any more realistically.

The Word of God is never an idle thing in a Christian's life like some bowl of soggy Rice Crispies that just lies there with no "snap, crackle, or pop." It not only has the power to bring a

person to faith, says Luther, but also "it will remind you to think about calling upon and praising God" with your life, and "it will make you a priest and prophet of God, one whose sacrifices will be most pleasing to God because His eyes have regard for faith."¹¹ Princes or peasants, the Word's transforming energy is there for each one, and thus Isaac and Abimelech were men in whom the Word had worked its miracle and made them men of God who "were baptized in the Holy Spirit."¹² Luther sees a remarkable convergence and confluence of God's purposes in bringing His Word into the lives of His people, according to which earthly and physical blessings or stations in life must serve the spiritual ends or blessings in their lives, be they parents, teachers, ministers, or whatever. "He has created the ministry of the whole creation" in order that His kingdom might come.¹³

What Luther has in mind is not just the general testimony of the natural realm concerning God's being and rule, but specifically the things that happen through His Word, His special revelation and means of grace. As a result "those things which the saints speak should be regarded as being spoken by God Himself."¹⁴ True, "when we teach the Gospel, baptize, call men to the ministry of the Word, and ordain ministers, we ourselves do not preach, we do not baptize, we do not ordain, but God is speaking through us." In one breath and with sweeping stroke Luther herewith accounts for ministry which all Christians have under God and then also the specific office of the public ministry to which the preaching of the Word and administering of the sacraments are entrusted. "So it is called God's Word, God's sacrament, God's ministry, and it is rightly said: 'God is speaking, God is baptizing' when He does it through ministers, since indeed all things are attributed to God which holy men have spoken."¹⁵ Luther recognizes that "even though we were all called" by our faith and Baptism to confess God to those with whom we have to do, yet "we cannot all preach," for that office belongs to those whom the congregation selects and "who are called in this way to proclaim the Word of God." So, while "in Baptism we all receive the chrism and the priestly garb," we leave the task of public preaching to others, who have been called for this special office by the royal priests, or Christian members of the congregation.¹⁶

Side by side with these truths is the parallel truth of "that common and spiritual priesthood by which we all sacrifice ourselves mystically" (Rom. 12:1) day by day in our Christian faith and life.¹⁷ Only unbelief could cause a man to forfeit such great gifts, as Cain did.¹⁸ A Christian is called to be faithful in his ministry as a child of God who is ruled by His Word, for "God

appoints me leader against the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18), against the raging of the whole world.”¹⁹ It is on the basis of this verse that papal pretension was wrongfully built; “but by this very statement Christ wants Peter to be a confessor and minister of the Word, not a tyrant who would burden consciences with human traditions; and thus, though “they say that Abraham was a layman,” he likewise was one of God’s Ministers, because he had God’s Word, believed it, and taught it.”²⁰

It is in the nature of the keys that faith should receive the promised forgiveness which they extend, since Christ “moves every Christian heart to faith so that when a man is absolved by the priest he may be sure that he is absolved by God.”²¹ Thus the keys are what God made them, not what the church supposedly has made them; and they are “the common property of all Christians,” even the lowliest.²² This is so because of the general calling to faith which gives Christians their status before God.²³ Of this fact the apostle Paul reminds Timothy, reminding him that his undergirding for his special ministry as a shepherd in God’s church is his “faith and the fruit of the Gospel” by which he has laid hold on eternal life.²⁴ It is not wrong to assert that every Christian, man, woman, and child, has the prerogatives which faith brings, the treasures of the keys, to hold and to administer. “Even a woman can baptize (in an emergency), and it is an uncontested fact that the person “who teaches and baptizes is a greater prophet than Jacob or Moses,” Luther states.²⁵ Yea, “even a child can absolve and can transfer from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God by no other means than the Word.”²⁶

It is especially in his treatise “Concerning the Ministry” of 1523 that Luther presses this great truth home. We are Christ’s brethren “only because of the new birth,” and not by tonsures, long robes, and the like; nor by the “episcopal ordinations” under the aegis of the papal hierarchy; nor by any other externals. The fact is that true priests before God are those by “birth,” that is, by regeneration, by Baptism. And this makes the ministry of the Word something which “is common to all Christians,” and this “highest office in the church” thus “belongs to all who are Christians, not only by right but by command.” Luther goes on to lay to rest the fictions of priestly powers belonging to the episcopally ordained clergy which made them into a kind of “miracle-working caste” in connection with the mass, the keys, penance, prayers, and judgment of doctrine. Luther does not minimize the pastoral office itself and “the right and command to commit such office to a minister by vote of the congregation,” but

he contends eloquently for the Scriptural truth that its powers inhere first of all in the royal priesthood of believers whose duty it is under God to see to administering of Word and Sacrament and to call qualified men into the preaching office. Christians may dismiss from their minds any concern as to whether they can be a true church of God or not, because they lack, or seem to lack, the episcopal authority claimed by the papalists. It is a thorough-going fiction, Luther reminds tender consciences, urging them to "take one's stand as on a rock" on this matter of the general priesthood and its lofty God-given prerogatives, duties, and responsibilities.²⁷

What belongs to all believers, however, is not to be done publicly by all, lest there be confusion in the churches. The public pastoral office exists by God's own design and purpose; it must not be omitted or made optional. "Christians are all priests," it is true; "all have a priesthood, but they do not all have the priestly function."²⁸ These comments are drawn from Luther's *scholia*, or commentary, on St. Paul's Epistle to Titus (1527). It is with Titus' office in mind that Luther states: "Although all can teach and exhort, nevertheless one ought to do so, and the others ought to listen, so that they do not speak at the same time." The apostle is very carefully instructing Titus concerning the pastoral office, Luther notes, as Paul states: "You have seen me ordain several elders in each city. Do the same thing. Moreover, I do not want you to ordain just anyone indiscriminately. Ordination was not performed as our bishops do it, but the elders gathered and performed it by the laying on of hands."²⁹

In his commentary on the First Epistle of Peter (1522) Luther reinforces the same teaching, calling attention to the fact that "those who are now called priests would all be laymen like the others," should they lack the divine call into their office from the Christian congregation.³⁰ In the same context Luther underscores that — while in other respects no distinctions are to be observed between Christians, whether male or female, young or old, in accord with Galatians 3:28 — yet for the pastoral office "one person must be chosen," and that person a qualified man, not a woman, for a "woman should not speak in the congregation," as St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14:34. The only exception which Luther sees as possible would occur "if only women were present and no men, as in nunneries," in which case "one of the women might be authorized to preach."³¹

So "the order must be preserved intact so that we do not teach in a confused manner," states Luther in his commentary on the

prophet Isaiah; and, moreover, Luther is frank to retain his high esteem for the called pastor by stating: "I would rather hear him who has been sent, and I will hear him, than preach myself, unless I were sent myself."³² He could hardly have stated his position on the office of the called pastor more forcefully and clearly. Such called pastors are certainly "reservoirs of the church" in whom "alone is kept the Word of God"; and the preached Word of God is a mighty force against Satan's assaults.³³ Luther very firmly upholds the position that the administration of the Lord's Supper should be done by the called pastors, not by every housefather, for that would "in the long run do much harm causing divisions and creating sects." He counters the plea that under tyrannical superiors it might then be impossible to receive the Sacrament, with the reminder that each man "can be saved through believing the Word," even if he cannot partake of the Lord's Supper.³⁴

Perhaps the classic passage, above all others, on the relationship between Christ and His church with a view to the ministry which He has entrusted to it comes in Luther's commentary on Psalm 110 (1535). First of all, Luther notes that Christ, the Word, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, is the preacher *par excellence*.³⁵ He notes, however, how God "confers this honor," that is, of proclaiming His saving Word, "upon all Christians."³⁶ Now, of course, Christ is no longer on earth personally preaching His Word, but He has purposed to do so "through the apostles and their successors," an office which He bestowed upon preachers through His general priesthood of believers, all of whom are priests and holy by their Baptism, by faith in His Word. This office is, then, "the common property of all Christians." They select presbyters, or bishops, or pastors, from those who are qualified, "the best, the most mature men, well-tried, learned, fit, and experienced . . . for the sake of the office," much like qualified men are selected for other offices. Thus, for example, one does not become a citizen by being elected burgomaster or judge, but one is elected to the office because one already possesses citizenship and is deemed especially qualified by one's fellow citizens.³⁷ "To take another illustration," Luther says, "a wife, the mistress of a house, does not become a woman by taking a husband. If she were not a woman already, the act of matrimony would never make a housewife out of her. No, she brings her female nature into matrimony, and then she receives the keys to the house."³⁸ "This is the way it is in Christendom, too," avers Luther, and then he goes on at length to say:

Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected

who shall lead the others by virtue of the special gifts and aptitude which God gives them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Eph. 4:11-12): "And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints" (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), "for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (that is, the Christian congregation or church).

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude of Christians. His office is conveyed to someone else, and he becomes a Christian like any other.

This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests.³⁹

What Luther here details at some length is nicely illustrated in one of his letters. The Reformation glow had barely begun to spread itself when, in a letter to his friend George Spalatin (September 9, 1521), Luther shared the following comments:

I really wish Philip [i.e., Melanchthon] would also preach to the people somewhere in the city on festival days after dinner to provide a substitute for the drinking and gambling. This could become a custom which would introduce freedom and restore the form and manners of the early church. For if we have broken all laws of men and cast off their yokes, what difference would it make to us that Philip is not anointed or tonsured but married? Nevertheless, he is truly a priest and actually does the work of a priest, unless it is not the office of a priest to teach the Word of God. In that case Christ Himself would not be a priest.⁴⁰

No demeaning of the pastoral office is intended, only a setting of the office in the right relation to the priesthood of believers, when Luther states that "this is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians"⁴¹ — namely, the latter is primary and

gives the needed platform on which the other, the parish pastorate, rests. To Luther it is inconceivable that the latter should exist without the other; but where the priesthood of believers is, there it is necessary also for a suitable, qualified man to be selected by them for the public ministering of the Word and Sacraments. Accordingly, Luther states: "The preaching office is no more than public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests."⁴² The ministry in the wide sense, then, and the ministry in the narrow and usual sense, referring to the pastoral office, are both seen as vital in God's ordering of things for His Church.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.F.W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, fourth edition (Zwickau, 1894).
2. Walther, p. 194.
3. *LW* 3, 322; *WA* 43, 106.
4. *LW* 3, 338; *WA* 43, 117.
5. *LW* 3, 340; *WA* 43, 119.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *LW* 3, 343; *WA* 43, 122.
8. *LW* 3, 345; *WA* 43, 123.
9. *LW* 3, 364; *WA* 43, 136.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *LW* 5, 5; *WA* 43, 432.
12. *LW* 5, 84; *WA* 43, 487.
13. *LW* 6, 258; *WA* 44, 191.
14. *LW* 6, 257; *WA* 44, 190.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *LW* 22, 479; *WA* 47, 189.
17. *LW* 9, 124; *WA* 14, 645.
18. *LW* 1, 299; *WA* 42, 220.
19. *LW* 5, 130; *WA* 43, 517.
20. *LW* 4, 141; *WA* 43, 237.
21. *LW* 32, 42; *WA* 7, 366.
22. *LW* 32, 51f; *WA* 7, 382.
23. *LW* 28, 46f; *WA* 12, 132.
24. *LW* 28, 374; *WA* 26, 113.
25. *LW* 8, 309; *WA* 44, 806.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *LW* 40, 18-43 *passim*; *WA* 12, 178-196.
28. *LW* 29, 16; *WA* 25, 16.
29. *LW* 29, 17; *WA* 25, 17.
30. *LW* 30, 55; *WA* 12, 309.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *LW* 17, 13; *WA* 31², 270.
33. *LW* 18, 401; *WA* 13, 686.
34. Margaret A. Currie, *The Letters of Martin Luther* (London, 1908), p. 336.
35. *LW* 13, 270; *WA* 41, 129.
36. *LW* 13, 294; *WA* 41, 153f.

37. *LW* 13, 331; *WA* 41, 208.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *LW* 13, 332, cf. also *LW* 39, 312ff.; 13, 65; *WA* 41, 209f.; 11, 413ff.; 31¹, 211.

40. *LW* 48, 308; *WA* Br 2, 387ff.

41. *LW* 13, 332, *WA* 41, 210.

42. *Ibid.*

Luther on Prayer

David P. Scaer

I. Prayer and the *Anfechtungen*

A. *Prayer as Deterent*

In Luther's theology, prayer and *Anfechtungen* are intimately related. One of the effects of the *Anfechtungen* in the life of the Christian is the personal awareness of his total helplessness in the face of the affliction. Through this sense of helplessness, the Christian is taught to pray correctly. *Anfechtungen* add both depth and dimension to prayer. Prayer indicates that the Christian has not given up hope and his willingness to seek help from God. The praying Christian means that Satan has not yet conquered. If the afflicted refrains from relying on his own power as Satan has tempted him to do, he is brought by the affliction face to face with God. In his helplessness the afflicted can go no place but to God for aid and assistance.¹ Prayer is the plea for aid.

Through prayer the afflicted Christian acknowledges that there is help from the Holy Spirit. Prayer in the hands of a Christian becomes a weapon to defend himself against Satan and to fight him back. Throughout the *Anfechtungen* the Christian is on the defensive and retreats from Satan. With prayer he begins to hold his own ground and then to take the offensive against Satan. In the moment of the *Anfechtungen*, Luther says, praising God is the most effective poison in destroying Satan. Very effective, according to Luther, is clinching the fists against Satan. No remedy is more effective than praying the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer destroys Satan as water puts out fire.²

In his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Luther utters some of his choicest words on prayer, placing it just one step lower than the office of the ministry (which is higher as it is entrusted with the tasks of preaching and teaching how Christians should live). Prayer must be part of every sermon.³ The sinful condition of the world which makes unbelief a constant reality for the Christian requires that he be constant in prayer:

He [God] also wants to indicate that because of all the temptations and hindrances we face, nothing is more necessary in Christendom than continual and unceasing prayer that God would give His grace and His Spirit to make the doctrine powerful and efficacious among us and among others.⁴

Even when the church's doctrine may be in order, the Christians will encounter offense and obstacles: "We battle against these continually with all our might, but the strongest shield we have is prayer."⁵ Even without a promise or command, the Christian in the middle of his *Anfechtungen* can find his own effective help through prayer. God, however, does not leave us in such a state that the only reason we pray is that no other solution presents itself. Prayer is motivated

not only by the desperate need of the Christian, but also by the father-son relationship which God has with Christians. God promises to hear the requests of Christians in the same way that a father does not give his son a serpent when he asks for a fish.⁶ By our needs God pushes us to prayer, and by His kind invitations and promises He invites us to pray.

B. Prayer and the Sense of Unworthiness

Right during the act of praying Luther himself was afflicted by sin, Satan, and his own conscience. Prayer was the occasion for *Anfechtungen*. As he prayed, Luther was afflicted with the thought that God was not hearing his prayer and that God was becoming angry with him. He asked himself during prayer why God should hear his prayers in distress if God Himself had sent that distress into his life. So troubled was Luther with the thought of his own sinfulness and his lack of worthiness to pray that all he could do was cry out, "Help, dear Lord." By bringing the Christian to the point where he can only cry out to God for help, God was accomplishing his purpose of saving the Christian.⁷

Luther would never understand prayer as an instrument in the hand of the Christian to manipulate God. Nevertheless, the Christian has to learn that God is near in the hour of need and that in answer to prayer He helps. Rather than seeing *Anfechtungen* as a hindrance to prayer, the *Anfechtungen* are themselves invitations to pray. God and Satan in "alliance" work in the life of believers to bring about God's will. If prayer became permissible only when a person was pious, then no one would ever be permitted to pray. The prayers of those afflicted in the *Anfechtungen* are indeed valid before God. The sense of our unworthiness does not make us ineligible to ask for God's mercy. It is in the very moment of the recognition of sin, the horrible and humbling sense of unworthiness, that the gracious hand of God becomes apparent. The personal recognition of sins provides the opportunity for prayer. Since the Christian's recognition of his sin and confession are imperfect, he does not know for what he should pray. The *Anfechtungen* have done their awful work and left him in distress and confusion. At that moment the Holy Spirit enters in with His help and in our stead offers up to God an acceptable prayer. This assistance provided by the Holy Spirit is above and beyond human comprehension. The concept that the Christian can pray only with the Spirit's aid again accentuates the centrality of God's grace in Luther's theology. Therefore, in prayer the only proper attitude is for the Christian to commit himself entirely into the hands of God. This committing of the self into God's hands means the willingness to suffer all weaknesses and *Anfechtungen* and at the same time never to give up hope that God will provide the necessary help. In this kind of situation the afflicted Christian is brought close to God. Prayer releases

him from his distresses and attaches him to God. It frees him from the power of the devil and places him again under the omnipotence of God. God's Spirit and Word again becomes effective in the life of the Christian and take the place of anxieties. This is the hour of salvation. Prayer and the *Anfechtungen* show what appears to be contradictory in Luther's theology. Prayer is the antidote against the *Anfechtungen* caused by Satan, but Luther will credit Satan in driving him to prayer.⁸

C. *Prayer as Faith's Plea in the Anfechtungen*

Thus, *Anfechtungen* and prayer are necessary for the Christian, not in the sense that *Anfechtungen* and prayer are good works that justify the Christian before God or even in the sense that the *Anfechtungen* and prayer constitute faith. This type of equation would negate the concept of *sola fide* as pure passivity in relation to the activity of God's grace. *Anfechtungen* are necessary not as a contributory factor to faith, but as an environmental factor. Faith springs up not in a condition of sinlessness, but surrounded by the world, the devil, and the flesh. Faith is engendered unencumbered as a pure act of grace; but as soon as it begins to grow it encounters forces which are bent on its destruction. Whatever Christian progress may have taken place is thwarted, stunted, and in some cases destroyed in the *Anfechtungen*. Prayer becomes the signal that faith will no longer retreat in the face of Satan. Prayer is the cry of a faith that realizes its own personal helplessness in confronting the *Anfechtungen* and throws itself upon God alone for aid. The *Anfechtungen* describe faith in conflict. Prayer describes faith approaching God for aid in the conflict. Therefore faith, *Anfechtungen*, and prayer exist side by side in the Christian.

II. Types of Prayer

A. *Constant Prayer*

Prayer should be regarded as a constant activity of the Christian. There are, of course, the commands that Christians should pray without ceasing and the promises of God to hear continually the prayer of the Christians. God never becomes weary of listening to Christians' prayers and answering them. By prayer faith shows that it relies on God totally. The desperate situation of the Christian, however, also provides an adequate motivation for constant praying. Luther cites the example of Joseph who for thirteen years prayed to God for release from his slavery. The only result was that his plight became worse instead of better. It appears to us that, without an immediate answer to our prayers, they are to remain unanswered. Through this activity, however, God was strengthening Joseph for the position of lord of Egypt. As long as the distress and affliction last, the Christian is given no other choice than to pray to God continually for aid. The continual praying of the Christian indicates that his faith is still active in the midst of affliction.⁹

B. *Spontaneous Prayer*

Luther encouraged spontaneous prayer. While laying down special prayers for certain days and parts of each day, Luther urged that Christians pray spontaneously. For example, horrible and monstrous things should invoke a plea for God's help and mercy. When experiencing something good, the Christian should be prepared to thank God right at that very moment. Such prayers should be formed by the Christian right on the spot "without any prepared and prescribed words."¹⁰ There is no suggestion that Luther approved of unrehearsed prayers in the church service. His words are directed to the Christian life in its ordinary circumstances. The spontaneous prayer reflects the daily situation of the Christian as he at the same time experiences conflicts and God's help. Just as *Anfechtungen* come without warning, so Christians should be prepared to pray at any moment.

C. *Regulated Prayers*

Those acquainted with Luther's Small Catechism are also aware that along with spontaneous prayers, the Reformer prescribed a daily regimen of prayers, with the Lord's Prayer being given the most important position. Following Luther's rule, it should be prayed eight times a day, at rising, at bedtime, and before and after each meal. Luther's reason for such attention to the Lord's Prayer is that its petitions are the continual wishes of all Christians even if during the prayer the mind might wander.¹¹ In his personal life Luther added to the Lord's Prayer as essential parts of his personal piety the Ten Commandments and several Bible passages.¹² With spontaneous prayer and the discipline of daily prayers, Luther was accomplishing the same goal of keeping faith alive. The discipline of reciting the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer brought the sinner to an awareness of his sins and directed him to that place where help could be found.

III. Absence of Prayer and Motivation to Pray

Prayer, for Luther, served as an indicator of the presence of faith. *Anfechtungen* accomplished this service negatively in that they showed that the Christian was in the middle of the battle against Satan. Prayer in a more positive way showed that faith was present since God was being sought for help. Luther was concerned about the absence of prayer, not because prayer was the means through which salvation was accomplished in the life of the Christian and the lack of prayer cut off God's grace, but rather because the lack of prayer signified that Satan was accomplishing victory over God in the Christian life.¹³ The Christian must be concerned about every disinclination to pray. Luther is forever the practical theologian and lays down a procedure for the Christian who has no interest in prayer. First he should pray the Lord's Prayer and then he should be prepared to throw every possible slander against Satan. Where there is no desire to pray, there the heart is hardened against God.

Luther sees value in the *Anfechtungen* in stimulating prayer in the life of the Christian. First, he suggests that the Christian should examine his own life and the lives of other Christians. There he will find all sorts of vices. This result will drive him to prayer. Secondly he should look at the condition of the church and the world, which are in shambles.¹⁴ These will get worse and, therefore, there will be more reason for the Christian to pray. Prayer finds its origin in the Christian faith surrounded by the *Anfechtungen*. God uses the misery of the human condition to direct the believer to come to Him in prayer.

IV. The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

A. *The Response of Faith*

In commenting on Romans 8:26, "For we do not know how to pray," Luther sees a more positive attitude in God when our prayers are not answered than when they are. "It is not a bad sign, but a very good one, if things seem to turn out contrary to our requests, just as it is not a good sign if everything turns out favorably for our requests."¹⁵ The correlation between Luther's view on prayer and the *Anfechtungen* is unmistakable. From a human point of view, God's refusal to act makes Him appear as if He is angry with the suppliant. Luther's favorable views on God's apparent negative attitude to the prayer of the Christian comes from his understanding of God and man. Divine wisdom is superior. Humanity is so sinful that each individual must be torn down to remove what is objectionable to God.¹⁶ God's ways are simply far above ours. When He begins to work for our benefit, He does it in a way which we simply cannot understand or recognize. Luther's attitude to unanswered prayer reflects his major themes of grace and faith. God works effectively in the life of the Christian by His grace, but before this grace can become operative, the Christian must become passive. He can no longer rely on himself. When the Christian is in a state of helplessness, God Himself begins to adjust our prayers and starts answering them. The Holy Spirit Himself prays and makes it possible for us to tolerate God's working in us. Luther writes:

Therefore, when everything is hopeless for us and all things begin to go against our prayers and desires, then those utterable groans begin. And then "the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26). For unless the Spirit were helping, it would be impossible for us to bear this action of God by which He hears us and accomplishes what we pray for.¹⁷

With the aid of the Spirit, Christians do not give up hope and confidence even when it appears at first that God is ignoring them.

The Christian's ability to accept from God what seems to be His disfavor flows in Luther's thought, not only from the Christian's acknowledgement of God's superior wisdom, but also from the hiddenness of God. Luther writes, "For the work of God must be hidden and never understood, even when it happens."¹⁸ The conception

of Jesus by virgin birth and His suffering and death before His glorification are cited as examples of how God's ways appear both as hidden and contrary to what human beings expect.

Luther briefly puts forth two examples of how people receive from God the exact opposite of what they are asking. The man praying for chastity receives more temptations and the one praying for strength is besieged by more weaknesses. Nevertheless, as the Christian bears up under these stresses, God is answering the prayer more effectively than the man could have ever imagined.¹⁹

B. The Response of Unfaith

Discontent with God's response to prayer indicates essential unbelief. Here Luther goes right to the heart of the matter in accusing those discontented with God of placing themselves above Him by putting more value on their wisdom than His. At this point the Reformer is very severe:

But they want to be like God, and they want their thoughts to be not beneath God but beside Him, absolutely conformed to His, that is, perfect, which is as possible, or rather, as little as possible, as that clay which by nature is suitable for a pitcher or some kind of vase can in its present form be like the form or the model which the potter has in mind, into which he intends to shape the clay. They are foolish and proud over this and know neither God nor themselves."²⁰

While salvation can only be received by the pure passivity of faith, the entire salvation process within the individual is slightly more complex as it involves *Anfechtungen*, prayer, and God's response to prayer. Faith engendered solely by God is never without the struggle of the *Anfechtungen*. Unless the Christian pleads to God for aid in the *Anfechtungen*, he can eventually be lost in this struggle between God and Satan in his life. Finally, his attitude to God's response to his prayer will show whether in his faith he really relies on God alone. Thus, the Christian who says that he relies solely on God but in actuality denies it, by refusing to accept how God is directing his life and by asserting his own will, makes the *sola gratia* inoperative.

V. Prayer and the Holy Spirit

A. The Spirit's Prayers as Actual Reflections of Individual Christian Prayers

Luther assigns to the Spirit an important role in the formation of prayers. Luther uses the illustration of an artist looking at rough material from which he will eventually shape his work of art. God is the artist who sees in us things which even we do not recognize. God takes our innermost feelings and desires and shapes us according to His design. Prayer for Luther involves the Christian's putting himself at the disposal of God for His purposes. The Holy Spirit refashions the Christian and his prayer.²¹

The Holy Spirit is not for Luther the great leveler so that the prayers of all Christians are essentially the same. This kind of

approach would make individual prayers mere formalities so that, through some type of mass production, God by the Holy Spirit would make all individual prayers conform to one sort of heavenly model. By using the illustration of the rough material to be fashioned into a work of art, Luther recognizes that not only that the individual remains important to God, but also that the individual in the depths of his being actually provides (in a passive way, of course) the rough material from which the Holy Spirit's prayers are made. The prayers of the Holy Spirit are not some kind of *creatio nova* or *creatio ex nihilo* so that the prayers have little or nothing to do with what we really are, what we really think, or what we really want. Quite to the contrary, the prayers prayed for us by the Holy Spirit are the kind of prayers we would pray if we were not burdened by the limitations of our human existence.

B. The Holy Spirit and the Christian's Weakness

The Spirit gives a new and larger dimension to our prayers. Luther makes the wise observation about Paul's words "we do not know how to pray" that they do not mean that Christians are praying for foolish or harmful things, but that they have not realized the full dimension of what God intends to give them because of their prayers. He astutely notices that Christians are described as praying out of "weakness" and not "iniquity." A prayer for anything foolish or wicked would not really be a prayer because it would not flow out of a converted will. Thus it is not that we ask for the wrong things, but rather that we do not ask for enough. Luther writes, "Therefore in heeding our prayers and coming to grant our requests God destroys our weak thinking and our still too humble ideas, and He gives us what the Spirit demands for us."²² It is as if a son wrote a letter to his father asking for silver and the father disregarded the letter and prepared to give the son gold. Since the son did not receive the silver which he requested, he was concerned that the father had disregarded the letter.²³

The co-praying of the Holy Spirit with the Christian demonstrates not that the Christian is getting stronger but that he is still weak. Our weakness prevents us from receiving the good which God intends for us. We would continue to flee from the good which God wants to give us if the Spirit did not prevent us. Luther says that we deserve to be called fools who should receive God's terrors so that these terrors could be received with joy.

VI. The Substantive Nature of Prayer

In commenting on Romans 12:12, Luther distinguished among three substantive ingredients which characterize prayer: the material or sensual; the intellectual; the spiritual or emotional.²⁴ While all three ingredients can and should be present within one prayer, it seems that for Luther a prayer can possess just one of these characteristics and in some sense still be a prayer.

A. *Material Nature of Prayer*

Material or sensual prayers consist mainly in mouthing words without any participation of the heart.²⁵ Such prayers are said to offend God and give the offerer of such prayers a false sense of security because he believes wrongly that such prayers are really acceptable to God and beneficial to himself. Luther's barbs are directed against the clergy who said their canonical hours without feeling and, to make matters worse, received money for it.²⁶ Also guilty of mouthing useless prayers are the lay people who say the Lord's Prayer without any understanding. This kind of praying is called material prayer because, although the outward substance or material is present, what Luther calls the real thing, the personal participation, is missing.²⁷

What is amazing is that Luther seems to reverse himself and does see some value in such rote material prayers and urges that they be not despised. Luther should at this point speak for himself:

To pray in this way is merely to perform an act of obedience because in addition to this, that it is a work of obedience, it is good in many other ways. First, because it drives away the devil, even if the prayer is only recited in the simplicity of the heart, that is, if "it is sung in the spirit" (I Cor. 14:15) and thus brings the Holy Spirit to us. This is symbolized in David's playing the harp before Saul.²⁸

Several reasons are adduced for not despising what Luther calls material prayers, those prayers which are not sincerely intended by the one who prays or hears them. First "the devil cannot even endure having the word of God read." Secondly, the word of God affects the soul even if it is not understood. Thirdly, the emotions and intellect are given an occasion to hear God's message. The fourth reason seems unclear at first glance. Luther says that "although many people who pray this way do not have the full emotional effect of these words, yet they often have a common and elevated spirit toward God." The Reformer is referring, it seems, to people who sincerely engage in worship forms in order to pray to God, but whose thoughts are inappropriate to a particular prayer.

B. *Assessing Luther's View on Material Prayer*

Some comment must be made on Luther's positive assessment of the material use of prayers—that is, those prayers prayed in which the intellect is not actually attuned to the message of the words used. First of all, there is no reason to be embarrassed by the reversal of Luther's position from regarding such prayers as offensive to seeing in them no small value. It is quite Luther-like for him to do battle with himself and come to the same issue from what appear to be opposing positions. The "Protestant" side of Luther, if we dare employ a 'Protestant-Catholic' distinction, finds material prayer offensive because for all practical purposes faith, the accompanying *Anfechtungen*, and struggling with the answer

to prayer are missing. Then steps the "Catholic" Luther to the fore, who must see some value to the objective words of God regardless of the attitude of the one who speaks them. There is some value in mouthing God's Word even if such obedience is extrinsic and superficial and does not really reflect the exact intentions of the one speaking them. Regardless of the attitude of the speaker of the Word of God, Satan cannot tolerate this Word. Whether Satan was driven out of Saul by the Word of God sung by David or whether the Satanically troubled soul of Saul was soothed by David's music might be exegetically debatable. Nevertheless, Luther sees the Word of God as a sharp defense and assault against the devil.

Luther's positive assessment of material prayer as giving an opportunity for the proclamation of the Word of God really reflects Luther's understanding of the objectivity of the Word. Certainly Luther would not want his followers to support financially or otherwise monastic or cathedral services just so that there might be constant prayer, but neither does he urge their destruction. The practices of Rome continue into our day. In addition, the Anglican Church within a more Protestant setting has morning and evening services where prayers are offered by those who have no known Christian convictions. Still such material prayers are not without value in God's total purposes. Luther's references to lay people who intend sincerely to worship God, but who do not really understand what they are saying, speak very appropriate and uncomfortable words against all of us who pray in terms acceptable to God and to the theologians but without real meaning to those who listen to us.

C. The Intellectual and Spiritual Natures of Prayer

Strangely enough, Luther says little about the intellectual ingredient in prayer. There is only the suggestion that those who are intellectually gifted must give strict attention to the meaning of prayer. Luther seems to say that he can live with the fact that many really do not and will not understand the words of prayer.²⁹ The intellectual meaning can exist with or without the spiritual participation. The imperative to "be constant in prayer" applies specifically to prayer in its intellectual and spiritual senses. This distinction between praying intellectually and praying spiritually is taken by Luther from I Corinthians 14:15, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the mind also." Praying "with the spirit" means the use of words--that is, the sensual and material ingredients--without any apparent meaning. This practice apparently is carried out by lay people and devout nuns who sincerely place their trust in God but who do not understand the words which they are using. Prayer at its best involves the use of words, intellect, and

spirit. Luther writes, "The mental prayer is the ascent of the mind, as well as the spirit, to God. This is the prayer of which he [Paul] is speaking when he says, 'Be constant in prayer.'"³⁰

VII. An Assessment of Charismatic Prayer

We would be somewhat remiss if we did not comment on the current charismatic use of the phrase "praying in the spirit" taken from I Corinthians 14:15 as a reference to the nonintellectual or unintelligible use of tongues. Without commenting on the original situation in the Corinthian congregation, Luther applies this passage to the situation at his time where the words of prayer did not really reflect the thoughts of the pious people praying them. In fact, they had little idea of what the words meant. Was Luther doing an injustice to the original setting of these words applying them to a situation which was almost the exact opposite of the situation in the Corinthian congregation? I think not. In the sixteenth century, prayers were recited by rote, and in the first century Corinth they were unregulated. Luther understood the exegetical application as involving first finding the principles and not merely looking for superficial similarities. Tongue-speakers in Corinth, monks praying in Latin (which they did not know), and lay people praying in the vernacular but without intellectual comprehension of the words all share a common desire to approach God with the emotion of their inner being but with the words coming out of their mouths not really conforming to what they are thinking.

FOOT NOTES

1. Paul Buehler, *Die Anfechtungen bei Luther* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1942), p. 200.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
3. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-1972), 21, p. 228.
4. *LW* 21, pp. 228-229.
5. *LW* 21, p. 229.
6. *LW* 21, p. 230.
7. Buehler, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
9. Ewald Plass, ed., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), II, p. 1090.
10. *Ibid.*, II, p. 1086.
11. *Ibid.*, II, p. 1091.
12. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 1083-1084.
13. *Ibid.*, II, p. 1079.
14. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 1084-1085.
15. *LW* 25, pp. 364-365.
16. *LW* 25, p. 365.
17. *Loc. cit.*

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18. *LW* 25, p. 366.
 19. *LW* 25, p. 367.
 20. *LW* 25, p. 366.
 21. *LW* 25, p. 367.
 22. *LW* 25, p. 369.
 23. *Loc. cit.*
 24. *LW* 25, p. 459.
 25. *LW* 25, p. 458.
 26. *Loc. cit.*
 27. *LW* 25, p. 459.
 28. *Loc. cit.*
 29. *LW* 25, p. 460.
 30. *Loc. cit.*

Homiletical Studies

EASTER SUNDAY

Matthew 28:1-10

April 22, 1984

Early on the first Easter morning the women hastened to the tomb of Jesus. They went early. They hurried because in the very warm climate it was essential that they do their work as soon as possible. They had remembered the spices and the various materials needed for the embalming task. Their minds were sharply focused on the task at hand. Therefore they were sad. They were still remembering the crucifixion and the death.

They had forgotten something. They had forgotten that Jesus, who had died, was the Son of God. They had forgotten (or could not believe) what He had said, that He would rise again on the third day. Thus as they approached the tomb they were completely taken by surprise to find God's angel sitting on the stone, the door of the tomb. His message was one of joy.

GOD'S JOYOUS RESURRECTION MESSAGE

I. Don't Be Afraid.

A. The earthquake had increased the fear of the women.

1. In it God spoke a message of judgment to the unbelievers and to the enemies of Jesus.
2. But to the women and those who loved the Lord it was assurance of His gracious presence.

B. The angel of the Lord sitting upon the stone, the door of the tomb, was God's spokesman.

1. His presence rendered the guards helpless. He filled them with fear and trembling.
2. To those seeking Jesus He was a messenger of great joy, inviting them to see the empty tomb, proof that Jesus was alive.

II. Come and see the empty tomb.

A. To draw near to God's angel, aglow with God's glory, was no longer an occasion of fear.

1. Sin was paid for. God declares the sinner "not guilty."
2. The penalty and punishment earned by man because of sin was paid for by Christ. God accepted the payment when He raised His Son from the grave.

B. Death has lost its powers.

1. Death came (set in) as the inevitable consequence of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve (Gn 3:1-7). So death has come upon all men.
2. In the living Jesus death's sting is gone. In Jesus the human spirit is brought back again to a right relationship to God. In the living Jesus eternal separation is turned into

eternal togetherness with God. In Jesus temporal death has become the doorway to eternal life. In Jesus our bodies too shall be raised up and perfected forever.

III. Go quickly and tell people that Jesus lives.

A. Especially those who are fearful, guilty, and sad.

1. Fearful disciples are gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. They are afraid that their faith has been misplaced. Tell such that Jesus is victorious over His enemies.
2. Guilty disciples remember how they forsook and denied the Lord, contributing to His suffering. Tell such that Jesus lives and that they are forgiven and restored.
3. The disciples are sad at the loss of their leader and friend whom they had hoped was the Messiah. Tell it to those who are sad at the death of a loved one and to such as are close to death that Jesus lives and they will conquer death.

B. Tell it by showing the power of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus met the women on the way and spoke to them (v9). Evidence of His resurrection is meant to be manifest in the lives of Christians. God's people are not meant to be enslaved by sin. When it is plain that we are freed from the slavery of sin (cursing, greed, selfishness, lust, chemicals, tobacco, etc.) then people can see that Jesus lives. He lives in us. We are freed to serve and to love our fellowmen.

C. Tell people to meet Jesus where He promises to be, namely in Word and Sacrament (v10).

This is a message of joy. The joy of it is multiplied as we see its lasting value, and as we see its application in every circumstance of life. Jesus lives!

Rudolph Haak
Cambridge, Minn.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 20:19-31

April 29, 1984

The problem with the disciples was not merely their concern for unfair pursuit or imprisonment by the Jewish leaders. They really were not sure just where they stood with their Lord. Suddenly Jesus is in their very midst, announcing His peace! His peace is not some self-induced euphoric state of mind; it is a new relationship with God through Him Who assumed the place of all who were by nature enemies of God.

The central thought of the text is that the peace of God is both real and available in Jesus Christ. The goal is that the hearers will focus on Christ as the source of their peace. The problem is that we are tempted to look at superficial, circumstantial "evidence," thus doubting the loving, mighty working of God for our peace. The

means are the things "written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (v31)

Introduction: The sermon is ended. The pastor says: "Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting." You've heard the words so often they almost sound commonplace. But when your best friend, who died a couple of days ago, suddenly is with you in a locked room and says, "Peace be unto you," it really grabs your attention! That is precisely what Jesus did. Let us give our attention to that about which men dream, talk, and fight endlessly:

PEACE

- I. Jesus declared peace.
 - A. What is this "peace"?
 1. It is not a mere feeling of tranquility. Being tranquil in the face of real danger can be deadly (Jn 14:27).
 2. Peace is the cessation of hostility between God and man, hostility caused by man's sin (Eph 2:3&4).
 - B. Jesus declares this peace because He made (won) this peace.
 1. By waging war against sin and Satan, the peace-destroyers.
 2. By paying the price of peace in His death on Calvary (v20; Eph 2:13-14).
 3. By rising from the dead Easter morning (v20).
- II. We are to declare peace.
 - A. That is our divine mission (v21). What a privilege!
 - B. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit (v22).
 - C. We are to speak it authoritatively (v23).
 - D. That is our common mission - people and pastor. Lk 24:33 indicates other believers were present besides the "eleven minus Thomas."
- III. We are to believe the declaration of peace.
 - A. Doubt is a common enemy - when cults seem to multiply, when our own church seems to drift, when personal problems challenge our faith.
 - B. Doubt is an historic enemy.
 1. We can identify with the disciples, who hesitated to believe the report of the women of Jesus' resurrection.
 2. We can identify with Thomas (v24ff.) who wanted hard evidence before committing himself to Christ again.
 - C. To believe is to commit ourselves to Christ. His loving, saving, lordship is evidenced by:
 1. His special appearance to Thomas and the accompanying exhortation (vv26-29; note the gift of peace once again. Ro 5:1);
 2. The many signs which Jesus did (v30);

3. The inspired record of it all - for our faith.

Conclusion: Cast doubt and fear aside. Be not faithless, but believing, for today Jesus has a word for you: Peace!

Lloyd Strelow
Covina, CA

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Luke 24:13-35

May 6, 1984

Our text does much more than present a made-for-Hollywood scenario of tragedy and tears turned into a triumphal conclusion. If Jesus were merely demonstrating His resurrection to these two disciples, He could have easily astounded them with His appearance. But "their eyes were holden" (v16).

Little is known of Cleopas or the other traveler - or of Emmaus. But much is learned about Scripture and Jesus. One must not allegorize or romanticize the invitation: "Abide with us" (v29). The two disciples did not yet recognize they were with Jesus. Nor does the "day is far spent" have anything to do with growing old. The invitation showed genuine hospitality to a stranger, especially one who had shared so well with them along the way. But this is not the main point. The "breaking" of bread (v30) seems to be just the sharing of the meal, not a celebration of the Lord's Supper, by which Jesus revealed Himself. Their eyes being opened (v31) is the counterpart to their being "holden" (v16).

The central thought of the text is that God reveals Jesus - in the Word and His work - as our living Redeemer. The goal is that the hearer will believe in and share the risen Jesus. The problem is that Christians are sometimes superficial in their study of the Word, thus leaving themselves open to doubts and assaults of false doctrines concerning their Savior. The means to the goal is the written Word (Scripture) which gives us the Living Word (Jesus.)

Introduction: It happens all the time! You look at a puzzle of lines and see something, only to look at it from another angle and see something quite different. Example: This 6 looks like a 6, unless you're looking at that figure upside down. You lose a small item on the carpet and search a wide area to find it. Fifteen minutes later you find it right in front of where you started. The Emmaus disciples seemed to handle things that way. But we shouldn't be too hard on them for not seeing - not recognizing Jesus. Actually, our text says "their eyes were holden." The question for us today is:

WHO SEES JESUS?

I. To see Jesus, study the Word.

A. Fallacies about spiritual growth, understanding, seeing Jesus.

1. "I'm interested in religious topics, even Jesus." So even

- these two disciples (v18), but that wasn't enough.
2. "I engage in a lot of religious discussion." The two disciples pooled their ignorance (vv14-15), but remained puzzled because they didn't see the risen Christ (v24).
 3. Living in a society that stresses sharing, people today love to talk about religion, but faith is not produced by sharing our ideas about Christ.
- B. He is already revealed.
1. To discover what kind of a prophet Jesus was (v19), the disciples should have dug deeper into the Word (v25; Jn 5:39).
 2. The O.T. directly points to Jesus as the Messiah (v27). Picture Jesus walking and recalling God's promise to Adam; Job's faith; Isaiah's portrayal of the suffering Savior.
 3. How shallow is our faith because we too often skim the Scriptures and skip over the O.T. promises of God's salvation for a lost world.
- II. To see Jesus, know His work.
- A. A mighty Prophet (v19; Jn 6:14).
 - B. One Who paid the ransom price (redeemed) (v21), crucified (v20), suffered (v26).
 - C. Entered into His glory (v26). Resurrection and ascension soon.
 - D. The "ought" of Christ (v26) is His love (1 Jn 4:9-10).
- III. To see Jesus, believe.
- A. Personally.
 1. The Emmaus disciples believed in Jesus as their promised, crucified, and risen Savior.
 2. With eyes of faith, we see Jesus as our Savior, Lord, and Conquerer of death.
 - B. Share your faith in Jesus.
 1. Share what is historically true: He came, He died, He lives for sinners.
 2. Share how Christ lives in your heart by faith.
- Conclusion:* Led by God's Spirit in the Word, you - and others through you - will see Jesus as Savior.

Lloyd Strelow

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 10:1-10

May 13, 1984

In many respects John's Gospel is unique among the four Gospels, the major source for our knowledge of the life and teachings of Christ. Almost all features of this inspired book are distinctive. John alone records the great discourse on the new birth, the Living Water, and Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, and the Light of the

World, and that Jesus is the Resurrection; John alone records at length the momentous Upper Room Discourse and events, and the great Intercessory Prayer (Chs. 13-17). Ninety-three percent of John's Gospel is not found in the Synoptics.

Witness is one of the key words of John's Gospel, occurring at least fifty times. By the use of this word John calls attention to individuals who witnessed to the deity of Christ.

John's Gospel presents many antitheses and contrasts. One great contrast powerfully presented is that between belief and unbelief. The difference between unbelief and belief is also depicted under the terms "darkness" and "light," or between "life" and "death." John regards all people in the light of their absolute antithesis: light and darkness, heaven and earth, truth and error, love and hate, Christ and the devil, God and the world.

During the years that Christ exercised His public ministry, He met with great opposition and hatred. Eventually this opposition, which began early in His ministry, resulted in His condemnation, crucifixion, and death.

Introduction: In many respects the situation today has not changed from that which existed in Jesus' day. Just as Christ was opposed in the years A.D. 26-30, so today opposition to Him is world-wide. This opposition and hatred of Jesus takes different forms. In certain lands it manifests itself by persecution resulting in imprisonment and sometimes in death. Today it is dangerous to be a Christian in countries controlled by some form of Marxist philosophy. Opposition to Christ is manifested in our society by humanists, atheists, agnostics, and haters of religion. Sadly, within Christendom there are theologians and pastors who are opposed to the Christ of the Bible.

In view of so much opposition and hatred of Christ in today's world, should we accomodate ourselves to the spirit of the times? Should we water down our teaching and preaching? With God's Word we answer: No!

LET US, DESPITE ALL OPPOSITION, PROCLAIM THAT CHRIST IS THE WORLD'S ONLY SAVIOR

This we assert because:

- I. Christ truly deserves the title of World's Only Savior.
 - A. Unlike the thief, Jesus enters the sheepfold by the door (v1).
 - B. Jesus proves Himself as the true Shepherd.
 1. Jesus calls His sheep by name; He knows them personally (v3).
 2. Jesus protects His sheep (v4).
 3. Jesus feeds the sheep (Ps 23:1). Jesus went so far as to give His life for His sheep (Jn 10:15, 10:11, 10:17).
 - C. Jesus is the door of the sheep (v9).
 1. Those sheep who enter God's sheepfold (the kingdom of

grace) will be saved (Jn 14:6; Hb 10:20; Ac 4:12).

2. Those who enter by Christ the Door will lack nothing for this earth or for a happy eternity (Jn 20:31).
3. Those who enter by Christ the Door will enjoy the abundant life while on earth (v10, 2 Cor 9:8).

Despite much opposition to the true Christ of Scripture, it is our duty and privilege to proclaim the Gospel of the Good Shepherd (Ac 4:12; Jn 15:1-10).

- II. All other self-styled saviors are robbers and murderers (v8).
 - A. In this text Jesus speaks of others who are false saviors (v2).
 1. They are false because they claim to be able to help people to be saved.
 2. Their call will not be heeded by true believers (vv4&5).
 - B. Jesus calls false messiahs robbers and murderers (v1).
 1. False teachers rob God the honor due Him (Is. 42:8).
 2. They encourage people to worship idols and false gods who cannot help. False prophets in Jeremiah's time did this.
 3. They encourage people to save themselves by their own works (cf. Ro 3:20).

Conclusion: In order to proclaim Christ as the world's only Savior, it will be incumbent on Christians to build themselves up in their most holy faith. Faithful use of Word and Sacraments will produce strength and determination to resist all false christs and their claims and create and maintain the energy to carry out Christ's command to evangelize the world.

Raymond F. Surburg

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 14:1-12

May 20, 1984

After Jesus had celebrated the Passover for the last time, in which the slain lamb was a type of Christ's sacrificial death, He left the Upper Room with His disciples to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, where His betrayal by Judas and capture by the temple guard were to occur. It took about one hour to walk from the Upper Room to Gethsemane.

Having announced to His disciples His separation and approaching death, the Savior spoke words of comfort and counsel to His disciples. These are contained in chapters 14-17, known as "the Farewell Address," which climaxes in "the High priestly Prayer." Chapters 14, 15, 16 are concerned with three dominant truths of this Gospel, namely, witness to the divine nature of Christ, the character and development of faith in Christ, and the experiences and qualities of the life in which faith issues.

The first twelve verses of chapter 14 contain the answers to mankind's basic needs and fundamental questions.

Introduction: Even though the twentieth century is quite different in many respects from the first century A.D., yet in some respects there are no differences. People today are asking the same basic questions as Jesus' contemporaries did, or for that matter, which early primitive people did. Where did the world come from? What is the origin of the planetary system? How did life originate? Why are human beings on this earth? Does our existence have any meaning? Is God interested in each person, considering there are nearly four billion on the earth today? Does man's life end permanently in the grave?

Since Christ's deity was certified by His resurrection from the dead, His answers given in John 14:1-12 are authoritative and dependable. Our text shows:

THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE RISEN CHRIST TO SATISFY MANKIND'S BASIC CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS

- I. Jesus is all-sufficient because He is the Way.
 - A. Jesus shows how to walk the straight and narrow path (Mt 7:13,14).
 1. Jesus tells us to avoid the evil way that leads to destruction (cf. Pr. 2:15; 12:15; 13:15; Is. 59:8).
 2. Jesus describes for His followers what is involved in walking on the narrow path (cf. Is 26:7; Jr 42:3; Lk 1:79).
 - B. Jesus is the only Way to the Father (v6; Ac 4:12; Jn 3:16).
- II. Jesus is all-sufficient because He is the Truth.
 - A. Jesus reveals the truth about sin and salvation.
 - B. Jesus reveals the truth about the great issues that make life meaningful (v6).
 - C. Jesus reveals the truth as to His Person.
- III. Jesus is all-sufficient because He is the Life.
 - A. Christ is the source of all forms of life - plant and animal (Jn 1:3; 1:6).
 - B. Christ is the source of all human life (Jn 1:3; Hb 1:3).
 - C. Christ is the source of spiritual and eternal life (Jn 17:3).
- IV. Jesus is all-sufficient as the Way, the Truth, and the Life because of His unity with the Father (vv9-11).
 - A. Christ is one with the Father because of His works' sake (v11)
 - B. Those who believe in the all-sufficient Christ will be able to perform mighty works (v12).

Conclusion: The words of John 14 are full of mystery. Human reason is tempted to question, yea, even to reject them. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to remove all doubts from our hearts and minds, and accept with every fiber of our being these remarkable and comforting claims of Christ. Christ alone can and does give meaning and purpose to life and answers and satisfies all basic needs and wants.

Raymond F. Surburg

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**John 14:15-21****May 27, 1984**

All of us have probably had the experience of walking down the tall, narrow aisles of a department store and coming upon a little child crying for his mother. With a voice choking with tears, the child cries out his deepest longing: "I want my mommy!"

A child is so much more open than an adult. We may not get lost in a department store and cry out our anguish, but we do, down deep in our souls, express that basic fear: What if I am all alone in the universe? What if no one is there to hear my cry and come to my side to wipe my tears, take my hand, and lead me safely home!

This is our cry when we are lost in grief or trial or spiritual doubt. We may fill our lives with many comforts in order to stop the feeling, but even these fairly shout our fear of being abandoned. In our text for today, Jesus reached out to His fearful, lonely hurting followers of all ages and said:

"I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU DESOLATE"

- I. The Spirit will come.
 - A. The disciples felt abandoned.
 1. Jesus' words (Jn 14:1-4) and Thomas' troubled question of abandonment (Jn 14:5).
 2. The events in Jesus' life that they would experience: arrest, trial, crucifixion, entombment - a feeling of abandonment.
 3. Soon: resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost.
 4. And yet - the fear expressed in Ro 8:35 - who shall separate us?
 - B. We experience the same feelings of abandonment.
 1. In the midst of trials, sickness, and death.
 2. When all our options seem to be bad.
 3. When we live with such rapid change - in family life, in jobs that are threatened, with nuclear threats, with economic problems.
 4. It is then that we know how precarious physical life is and how weak we are.
 - C. Jesus understands and promises another Counselor.
 1. One who appears on our behalf, a mediator, intercessor, helper.
 2. The Counselor is the Spirit of truth; the One who can be known and received only by faith; the One who dwells and lives in us.
 - D. We are not orphaned!
 1. The helplessness and precariousness of life are ultimate and overwhelming only if we live spiritually alone.
 2. But by God's grace through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, lives in us.

3. We are not alone, abandoned, mere objects of fate, spiritual nobodies going nowhere.
 4. Thus, we by the indwelling Spirit can say: Ro 8:35, 37-39.
- II. Jesus will come.
- A. Jesus spoke of His leaving.
 1. He would soon leave them by dying on the cross.
 2. He would leave them by ascending back to heaven's glory.
 - B. But Jesus gave a promise.
 1. "You will see me" - the resurrection and 40 days of Jesus' earthly presence.
 2. "Because I live, you will live also" - the promise of resurrection to all who believe on Christ.
 - C. Christ comes to remove desolation.
 1. He comes to live in us by faith (v20).
 2. He comes to shape love and obedience within us (v21).
 3. He comes to give the daily resurrection of grace and the final resurrection to glory (v19b).

Conclusion: All of these words were spoken at the supper table on Maundy Thursday. Soon the events that led to Jesus' death on the cross would be put into motion, and the disciples would wonder if Jesus had in fact failed and abandoned them. But on Easter Sunday He came back to deliver on His promises, and the disciples would know that He who was abandoned on the cross would, by the cross, never abandon them. By faith we know that also. The Spirit says so. The living Christ says so. "I will not leave you desolate."

Richard G. Kapfer
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THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Luke 24:44-53

May 31, 1984

At this time of year high schools and colleges throughout the nation are marking the end of an academic year with commencement exercises. The ending of one period of the students' lives will be noted, and the beginning of a new period in their lives will be anticipated. High school graduates look forward to jobs or college, and college graduates look forward to beginning their careers. They will say farewell to friends they may never see again or only occasionally. It is a time of ending and beginning.

The ascension of our Lord marks an ending and a beginning also. The earthly ministry of Jesus had been accomplished. Now, as recorded in the closing words of Luke's Gospel, Jesus gave final instructions to His disciples. Then he ascended on high to the position of eternal glory that He, the Son of God, had left in order to be our Redeemer. But this ending was truly a beginning, for now He would bestow on His faithful people

POWER FOR ENDING AND BEGINNING

- I. We end and begin with the powerful Word.
 - A. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Word.
 - 1. The sweep of salvation history: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms."
 - 2. Luke's Gospel: a record of fulfillment (Here the preacher will want to review Luke's theme and progression through the life of Jesus. Ascension provides a good opportunity to summarize Jesus' life from John the Baptist through the ascension.).
 - B. Jesus reveals Himself as the Center of the Word.
 - 1. He "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Without Christ the Word becomes a mere record of ancient history.).
 - 2. His death and resurrection is the key that opens up the Word.
 - C. The fulfilled, Christ-centered Word must be proclaimed.
 - 1. The proclamation: repentance and forgiveness in His name.
 - 2. To all nations.

Transition: Scripture's purpose is not a dead end. It is a new beginning, for it has power through proclamation to bring repentance, forgiveness, and new beginnings. Thus:

- II. We end and begin with the power of the Spirit.
 - A. We are called to be witnesses.
 - 1. What the disciples had seen in Christ: past tense.
 - 2. What we by faith have seen: past tense.
 - B. But wait! Power will come!
 - 1. Pentecost would "clothe" the disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. We too begin by the power of the Spirit to witness to Jesus Christ.

Transition: A witness is one who cannot but speak and live the endings and beginnings that God by grace has bestowed. As we begin, we receive the living Christ and thus:

- III. We end and begin under Christ's powerful blessing.
 - A. The ending point of Jesus' earthly ministry was the ascension.
 - 1. He ascended to heaven to receive all glory and honor.
 - 2. He ascended to bless His Church as its living, present Head through Word and Sacrament.
 - B. We are blessed with joy.
 - 1. The disciples did not mourn Jesus' leaving; they rejoiced.
 - 2. This is far different from Memorial Day sadness and helplessness.
 - 3. He who rose is with us, and He will return at His Second Advent.

Conclusion: So, filled with joy, the disciples waited and "were continually in the temple." We too await the Lord's return, not with sadness, but joy; not in weakness, but in His power. The ascension is the ending that brought new beginnings. It is power like that of our baptism, like that of our earthly lives that will end but begin again with joy and eternal life.

Richard G. Kapfer

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 17:1-11

June 3, 1984

The unifying word in this text is clearly *glory*. In some form the term is used five times in the first five verses, as Jesus sought to establish in conversation with God, the Father, that a mutual glorification between Father and Son has resulted from His faithful earthly duty, just as had been planned all along. Glory, in fact, was being distributed all around . . . to the Father for the splendid salvation plan which led man to "know" Him (vv2,3), to the Son for the faithful and sacrificing ministry soon to be fully accomplished (v4), and even to the struggling disciples whose glory came from knowing Christ (v7,8). This "High Priestly Prayer," as the 17th chapter of John has often been labeled, is in truth the Son recalling with the Father a magnificent ministry, faithful to its purpose and worthy of glory from and for both God and man.

The central theme of this text is that Jesus, fully aware that His mission of salvation will soon reach a successful culmination, is anxious to "spread a little glory" to the Father in heaven, through whom He also will be glorified, and to His disciples, in whom, through faith, He also dwells in glory. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will glory in knowing Christ and in participating by grace in a perfectly crafted salvation plan for which God in His fullness deserves all glory. The problem is that we are often slow to understand this glory and even slower to realize that life eternal is knowing God completely (v3), all because we too readily follow our natural inclination to be with ourselves alone and not one with God (v11). The means to the goal is that God leads us from sin to salvation.

Introduction: Sometimes people pat themselves on the back because no one else will do it. They want at least someone to acknowledge that they have done something praiseworthy. But God has honored us, not because we have done something worthy, but because He has. He has glory in the accomplishment of our salvation, and we share in this glory. In Christ's redemptive work there is no question that

THE "GLORY HOUR" HAS ARRIVED

- I. For a Father whose plan was perfect.
 - A. He gave Jesus the power to save (v2).
 - B. He guided the process from beginning (v5) to end (v4).
 - C. He directed His Son to the right people (v6) in the right way with the right words (v6).
- II. For a Son whose mission was accomplished.
 - A. He had surrendered His rightful glory in order to carry out His work (v5).
 - B. He did exactly what He was supposed to do.
 1. The meaning of eternal life was made plain (v3).
 2. The people to whom He was directed learned and believed (v8).
 - C. He would leave this world with confidence that salvation and strength were assured for His own (v11).
- III. For disciples whose faith is Christ-centered.
 - A. They are the recipients of a saving knowledge that only God could give them (v7).
 - B. They have a Savior who is praying for their endurance (v11).
 - C. They have the honor of reflecting the "oneness" which comes from knowing Christ by faith (v11).

Conclusion: When Jesus was on the verge of accomplishing everything He came to do, He knew the time for glory had arrived. His Father deserved glory, He received glory, and His people benefitted from the glory of His salvation. In Christ the "glory hour" has arrived, and He has honored us by inviting us through faith to share in it.

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THE DAY OF PENTECOST

John 16:5-11

June 10, 1984

The inability of Jesus' disciples to understand the necessary course of events in God's salvation plan is the not-too-surprising undercurrent which affects this text. Often Jesus explained, and often they grasped very little. This occurred even though the Savior was careful to "spoon feed" His hand picked followers only as much as He thought they could handle at one time (cf. v4). As the hour of His death and eventual departure approached, however, Jesus knew it was time to tell His disciples why He had to leave them. Predictably, they did not really understand (v5), and, in fact, they would not understand until the events that Jesus described finally took place. The incredible miracles of Pentecost surely confirmed exactly what the Lord had told His followers. It was the eventual and dramatic arrival of the Spirit that began the unfolding of the scenario described by Jesus in this text.

The central thought of the text is that the coming of the Counselor establishes the divine continuation of the work begun by Jesus as this Spirit enlarges the task of "convincing the world." The goal of the sermon is that the hearers will be involved in the Pentecost miracle by the "convincing" work of the Spirit in their own lives. The problem is the common failure to understand our need to be convinced, as if our understanding is complete enough and needs no further growth. The means to the goal is the Spirit's power, which can in the environment of the Word convince, soften, and bring movement to stubborn and stagnant hearts.

Introduction: Occasionally situations arise in which people have to admit that they have done as much as they are able and that further efforts would have little effect. This may happen to a physician treating a seriously ill patient or a teacher working with an uncooperative student. In similar fashion Jesus realized that His ministry had a limit beyond which it was important for someone else to keep the message moving. Having the assurance of the successful completion of His task, He could confidently announce to His disciples that, although He would physically depart, the Counselor would be sent to continue the work of underscoring the importance of

KEEPING THE MESSAGE MOVING

- I. By convicting the world of sin.
 - A. Faith cannot exist for long in the presence of a defiant sinful lifestyle.
 1. Unbelief is to be expected in a sinful environment (v9).
 2. The growth of sin effectively crowds out spiritual growth.
 - B. Faith can exist in the presence of the kind of "convicting" work that the Spirit has undertaken.
 1. In the Word of Law He convicts by accusation.
 2. In the Word of Gospel He heals by promise.
- II. By convicting the world of righteousness.
 - A. The arrival of the Spirit was God's announcement that Jesus completed His work with success and distinction.
 1. He completed His task so that the Spirit could begin His work on a worldwide scale.
 2. Jesus' departure is evidence that what He accomplished is righteous and perfect and complete (v9).
 - B. The arrival of the Spirit was the next step in convincing the world that righteousness has triumphed over wickedness.
 - C. The arrival of the Spirit provided the opportunity for more people to "see" Jesus than could ever have seen Him physically (v10).
- III. By confirming the world of judgment.
 - A. Because the Spirit came, the judgment against Satan is confirmed (v11).
 1. The ruler of this world could not stop God.

2. He was unable to control God's plan and its movement onward.

- B. Because the Spirit came, the victory of Jesus over sin is final and universal.

Conclusion: As Jesus departed and the Spirit arrived, God confirmed that the plan was moving ahead just as He wanted it to. The message was clear: the world is sinful and Satan has been judged. Hope rests alone with the righteousness of a Savior who defeated sin and Satan, and a Spirit who arrived to keep this message moving to all people.

David E. Seybold

TRINITY SUNDAY

Matthew 28:16-20

June 17, 1984

Christ directs the disciples to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee. Christ has promised to meet us in the Word (Ro 10:6-17; Jn 5:39).

On Trinity Sunday the emphasis is on the nature and work of the Triune God. The Creator of the universe is also its Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament (visible Word) brings (gives) salvation to men.

ALL PRAISE TO THE TRIUNE GOD

I. For His work.

- A. The Father in love created the world and sent His Son.

The heavens and the earth and, of course, man himself all testify to the loving kindness of the God whose mercy endures forever (Ps 136:1-9); whose tender mercies are over all his works (Ps 145:9).

- B. The Son in love redeemed the world.

The nature of this love is unconditional. Its purpose is not to get something in return. It was done, not for lovable but for unlovable people, for people in rebellion, haters of the God of love. (Ro 5:8-10, Ps 81:15) "All power (authority) in heaven and in earth" quite naturally should be given to Him (v18) because of what He has done. He deserves it. He should be worshipped (v17) by everyone (Php 2:6-11) Heaven and earth are reconciled in Christ.

- C. The Holy Ghost in love sanctifies the world. Through the Gospel He "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth; and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." In the Scriptures, then, the Holy Spirit not only describes God's great work, but He also distributes to the poor miserable sinners that which he describes.

II. For His mission.

- A. Sending men into the world (v19).

The message of redemption and reconciliation is for everyone (Mt 24:14; Lk 24:47). We have been given a "Gift" which we are happy to share with everyone we meet (Cf. 1 Cor 9:16-19). This is showing love for our neighbor.

B. Making disciples of all nations.

1. By baptizing them in the name of the Triune God (v19). This is one of the means of grace. Through it saving faith is born in people (Jn 3:5), and the forgiveness of sins conveyed (Ac 2:38).
2. By teaching them all things commanded (v20). This thought is comprehensive. All Scripture comes to us from the heart of Christ. People become disciples also through this means. However, the thought is also of continuous instruction for the sustaining of faith.

Conclusion: The assurance that He will be with us in the mission (v20) is for our comfort. Alone we would fail miserably. With Him, we cannot fail. By His mighty work of redemption Christ has purchased the power of the Triune God (the God of heaven and earth) and has put it on our side. The whole creation is now marshalled behind Him in our behalf. And "if (this Triune) God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro 8:31)

John Saleska

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 7: (15-20) 21-29

June 24, 1984

Introduction: The Sermon on The Mount, of which this text is the last section, seems to be almost a declaration of war, particularly against the pride, self-righteousness, and theology of the scribes and Pharisees. For example, "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ." (Mt 5:3) ". . . except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. . ." (Mt 5:20) "Beware of false prophets . . ." (Mt 7:15). The verses immediately preceding the text (15-20) dealing with false prophets dressed in sheep's clothing contribute heavily to a correct understanding of the text. The "thorns" and "thistles" (v16) could be considered the theology of "signs" and "wonders" which gives no good, nourishing food. The Jews sought and even required such signs (Mt 12:38 and I Cor 1:22). Many of today's media ministers (T.V., radio, tapes, etc.) lead people astray with their theology of signs and wonders. On the last day these "theologians" will have the nerve to stand in front of the mighty Lord of creation, who has done everything for the salvation of all mankind, and talk about their own works (v22). Christ calls them "workers of iniquity" as He drives them from His presence (v23). These "false prophets" appear good externally with their pious behavior, their preaching, and their "amazing" works, but this is only camouflage behind which lurks the ravening wolf who seeks to devour rather than feed. In

effect Christ is saying, "Give God's children the blessings of this Sermon (on the Mount)." Give them His Word which is real food, and you will be giving them "grapes and figs." This nourishment comes from the true Prophet who not only hears but is a genuine doer of the will of God. The text is about hearing the word of God and doing it.

HEARING AND DOING THE WORD

I. Hearers of the Word.

A. Those who are hearers only are foolish men (v26).

1. Foolish men do not really listen. They have ears to hear but they hear not (cf. Mt 13:13-17). ". . . fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Pr 1:7).
2. Foolish men do not really believe God's word - what Christ says about such things as pride and self-righteousness.
3. By nature we are all foolish men who do not listen or believe. We harden our wicked hearts when we hear the word. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Ps 14:1). That is, "no one will ever know what I do or call me to account."

B. Those who are hearers only trust their own works and righteousness to save them (v22; Ro 9:31-33, 10:1-3).

C. Those who are hearers only have no sure foundation when the storm comes. Sorrow, affliction, the shadow of death destroy their self-made, self-grounded house (vv26-27).

II. Hearers and doers of the Word.

A. Hearers and doers are wise men (v24).

"A wise man will hear and increase learning. . ." (Pr 1:5; Ho 14:9).

B. Hearers and doers build on a rock (v24). The "rock" is a solid foundation which will withstand the fiercest storms of life.

1. Building on a rock means trusting the Word of God (v24). This Word of God is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which provides comfort in every circumstance. "Even though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps 23:4). "When every earthly prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay . . . On Christ the solid rock I stand. . ." (TLH 370).

2. Building on a rock means to "bring forth good fruit" (Ps 1:3). This is the "doing" in the text which is produced by the hearing (v24); Jas 1:22; Ro 2:13).

C. Christ is ultimately the hearer and doer of the Word. He fulfilled it all for us (Mt 5:17-18; Jn 4:34, 5:30, 6:38, 8:29). Whoever trusts His righteousness and builds on this Rock will be safe and secure. He will weather every storm. In Christ he will have heard and done everything required.

Conclusion: When the Word of Christ is spoken, it pays to listen. His words are not empty promises as were those of the scribes and

Pharisees or those of today's "false prophets." By the Spirit's power His words produce both the hearing and the doing, because His words carry with them the authority of the God of heaven and earth (vv28-29).

John Saleska

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 9:9-13

July 1, 1984

Even though the Holy Spirit has stated clearly in so many texts that our Lord's grace is universal, many burdened by their sin or guilt doubt His love for them, while others infected with pietistic self-righteousness would try to limit God's grace in some way or another. This text once again, however, teaches us that our Lord's grace is not to be limited in any way by anyone, certainly a theme which can never be stressed enough. V9-- The ptc. *paragon* seems to imply a coincidental meeting between Jesus and Matthew but what often appears to us as mere coincidence is carefully ordered by the purposeful grace of Him who came to seek the lost; The ipv. *akolouthēi* is present denoting continued discipleship; The two aorists, *anastas* and *ēkolouthēsen*, reflect the decisive break with his former life made by Matthew here; v10-- St. Luke adds that it was Matthew himself who held this banquet; J. Jeremias reports that the *telonai* or tax-collectors were not only despised and hated but were "officially deprived of rights and ostracized" (*Jer., In the Time of Jesus*, p. 311). The Mishnah classified them as being "unclean." "If tax gatherers entered a house (all that is within it) becomes unclean" (Toh. 7,6). Note the stark contrast -- while 1st-century Judaism classified and condemned entire groupings of people our Lord freely loved and accepted everyone in His grace; The verb *sunanekeinto* shows that Christ's love is not aloof or abstract. Our Lord Jesus still feasts with sinners in His Holy Supper in a much more intimate way as Luther comments when he applies v12 to the Lord's Supper in his Large Catechism, "(Precisely) those who are heavy-laden with their sins (should). . . go joyfully to this Sacrament" (Par 70-71); v11-- The Pharisees, proud of their ritualistic cleanliness, had no word of comfort for those classified as "unclean" (their very name "Pharisee" meant "the separate ones," untainted by any ritual impurity); v 13--The words *eis metanoian* are found only in Luke's account.

Introduction: It is a constant temptation to limit God's free grace . . . But in this text the Holy Spirit shows us clearly that

JESUS IS THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

- I. Jesus is eager to bestow His healing forgiveness and grace on sinners.

- A. Jesus came into our world for this express purpose -- to forgive sinners (v13) for it is they who have great need for that which He gives (v12).
 - B. Jesus seeks out His elect and carefully calls them individually lest they doubt His love for them; even as He called Matthew by name (v9) today He calls His people by name in their Holy Baptism.
 - C. Jesus shows His love for sinners by sharing Himself with them in intimate fellowship; even as He feasted with Matthew and the other "sinners" (v10) today He invites His forgiven people to feast at His Holy Supper to assure them of His intimate union with them.
- II. Jesus desires His forgiven people to reflect His compassion for sinners to others.
- A. Jesus has called us to renounce our self-seeking past and follow Him in continuous discipleship even as He called Matthew to a new life (v9b *akolouthei*). Matthew, moved by the Savior's compassion, made a clean break with his selfish life of exploitation to follow his new Lord and Master (v9b).
 - B. God desires such compassionate living towards others more than religious ritual (v13a).
 - C. Only those who themselves feed regularly on the Savior's compassion will be able to extend the same towards others (unlike the Pharisees who fed on their own self-righteous pride and felt only disdain for others less "untainted" than themselves (v11)).

Conclusion: May God grant that we, who have been eternally befriended by Jesus the friend of sinners, might befriend other sinners, like ourselves, with such sincere and free compassion.

Steven C. Briel
Winfield, Kansas

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 9:35-10:8

July 8, 1984

Christ's Church can never afford to relax in her Christ-given mission of disciple-making. Our Lord's words in this text still call us to more fervent activity: "The harvest is great but the workers are few!" While careless misapplication of this text should be avoided, the pastor ought to use a text such as this to encourage young men and women to consider professional service to their Lord in the various ways offered in His Church.

Textual notes -- v35 -- impf. verb *periegeōn* suggests Jesus' constant activity and also the unfinished nature of it; of the three participles (*didaskōn*, *kērussōn*, and *therapeuōn*) note that two of them deal with the Word which was always primary in our Savior's ministry, which was to be primary in the apostles' ministry (cf. 10:7), and

which must also be of primary concern to the Lord's Church today; *tēs Basileias* is an objective genitive. The good news about the Kingdom was the content of the gospel Jesus was preaching; v36 -- The verb *esplangnisthē* is one of the strongest words rendered "compassion" and is used in the Gk. New Testament only of God and His Son; note the periphrastic construction (. . . *ēsan eskulmenoi kai errimmenoi*) emphasizing Israel's hopeless confusion and "lostness;" v37 -- Note the "*men - de*" construction which highlights the heart-rending contrast between the abundant harvest and the lack of laborers; v38 -- The harvest always remains the Lord's and not ours (*autou*), for God "gives His Spirit where and when it pleases God" (AC V). However, it is also true that the harvesting of God's elect is directly tied to the use of God's appointed means of grace, as this text clearly shows and AC V also carefully points out: "Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given" (see also, of course, the 3rd article in Luther's Small Cat.); 10:1 -- Three times in this pericope Matthew very carefully points out that this special "commissioning" was spoken to a select group (the apostles) and not to everyone, reminding us that we should not carelessly imply to people today that they can expect such "*exousia*" over demons and sickness; v6 -- the present impv., *poreuesthe*, implies that they should keep on going; v7 -- The substance of their preaching is once again *ēngiken hē Basileia tōn ouranōn*. What is this "Kingdom?" M. Scharleman says simply, "God active redemptively in Christ reestablishing His rule over and among men" (*Proclaiming the Parables*, p. 45). Luther's answer in the Large Cat. is perhaps still the best, "(It is) nothing else than what we learned in the Creed (about Christ and His work) . . ."; The perfect verb *ēngiken* suggests that in Jesus the kingdom is here; v8 -- these miraculous works served to verify the apostle's unique authority and these "signs and wonders" done by our Lord's apostles (recorded in the gospels but especially in the *Acts of the Apostles*) still serve to authenticate their written word which the Church proclaims today.

Introduction: In the past year many Americans have been rightly concerned over unemployment...But our text makes it clear that there doesn't have to be any unemployment lines in the Kingdom. Our Lord always needs more workers in His Kingdom.

WANTED — KINGDOM WORKERS!

- I. Who share in His compassion for the lost.
 - A. An entire world of confused and lost sinners lies before us (v36b); we were also at one time part of that confused and wandering crowd (v36, *ochlous*; I Pe 2:25; Eph 2:12).
 - B. It was our Lord's unmerited compassion which moved Him to come to our world to "seek and to save the lost" by dying for the world's sins and bestowing the forgiveness of sins by the Gospel (v35); it was our Lord's undeserved compassion which

- moved Him to seek and find us with His life-imparting Gospel in our baptism.
- C. Our Lord wants His forgiven and renewed people to share His compassion for the lost (v38).
- II. Who are sure of their call and mission.
- A. Just as no one will work without having been hired, so no one will work in God's kingdom without having been rightly called to do so; our Lord carefully called the apostles by name (vv2-5a); this same Lord has carefully called each of us by name in our baptism.
- B. He gave the apostles careful instructions as to their particular mission (vv5b-6). He has also given us our mission today (Mt 28:19a; Mk 16:15); some He calls to full-time Kingdom work as pastors, missionaries, etc. (Eph 4:11; 1 Tm 3:1), but all His baptized people are called to testify to His grace by word and deed (2 Cor 5:15; 1 Pe 2:9).
- III. Who have been properly equipped for their work.
- A. Jesus equipped His apostles with their necessary tool -- the message about the Kingdom, the Word (v7). It is the same Word about Christ that His Church is to take into the world today (Mk 16:15). God's own almighty power always accompanies His Word (v8; Ro 1:16) and is inherent to it.
- B. Christ gives individual gifts and talents to His people to be used in service to His Kingdom (compare and contrast the different apostles vv2-4). So today our Lord gives His people differing gifts and talents (1 Cor 12). Our Synod has established colleges and seminaries in order to develop those gifts and talents and equip people for professional service to His church.

Conclusion: There will never be any unemployment problems in Christ's Church. Moved by His Holy Spirit let us eagerly and joyfully serve our Lord in our respective callings, whether professionally or nonprofessionally as we sing, "Let none hear you idly saying, 'There is nothing I can do' . . . Answer quickly when he calls you, 'Here am I. Send me, send me!'"

Steven C. Briel

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 10:24-33

July 15, 1984

St. Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as the Teacher and the Fulfiller of the Law (e.g. 5:17ff; 7:28), and the disciple as the learner of Jesus' Word and the follower of His way (e.g. 5-7;9:9). Hence, the text is characteristic of the theme of the entire Gospel.

The initial question that confronts the interpreter of Matthew 10 is whether it has application today or whether it was intended only for the original Twelve? By what principle do we distinguish?

Answer: The entire Galilean ministry described in Matthew 8 to 10 is a fulfillment of O.T. Messianic prophecy. Some portions refer specifically to the ministry of Jesus and the Twelve while others have a broader application. The Messianic ministry has the imprint of the Servant of the Lord upon it (Is 42-53), namely, of suffering, of service, of compassion, and of final success. (See Franzmann, *Follow Me*, St. Louis, 1961, pp. 65-97). Thus Mt. 10:1-15 applies specifically to the Twelve, while the lessons are helpful for the entire N.T. era. Mt. 10:16-42 contains general eschatological utterances which apply to the broad "end time" (1 Cor 10:11). This is verified by the parallels in Lk 12:2-9; Jn 13:16; Jn 15:20 within their contexts.

The three-fold ministry of preaching, teaching and healing (showing compassion) continues to the present. The positive results of that ministry are acceptance, peace, and rejoicing. The negative reactions of rejection, persecution, and blasphemy are likewise with us yet. What the Messiah experienced, the disciples shall inevitably realize, because a "disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (10:24).

Introduction: Our discipleship is serious business. Our witnessing to the works of God is a mandate. Our success is already determined. In the struggle we do well to remember the maxim: The Church is like an anvil; it has worn out many a hammer!

DISCIPLESHIP IS MORE THAN ROLE-PLAYING

- I. Discipleship rests upon a real relationship with God, vv24-25.
 - A. The learner (disciple)-teacher; slave-master relationship.
 1. The Messianic imprint is on us since our baptism; our life is set.
 2. The blasphemy against us is evidence to our faith that God is present and at work through us.
 - B. Jesus Christ is Lord.
 1. How He became such -- His incarnation.
 2. He won us by His suffering and death -- His redemption.
 - C. We are His slaves-stewards.
 1. We were sinners who rebelled.
 2. We were won by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.
- II. Discipleship relies upon a real calling, vv26-31.
 - A. The calling and naming of the Twelve (Mt 10:1-4).
 1. This applied to the Twelve specifically.
 2. We too are sent: called, commissioned, and let loose (Mt 28:19-20).
 - B. The call involves suffering.
 1. It seems strange, but this is the mind-set we are to put on (cf. I Pe 4:1 or I Pe 3:18-4:6; Col 1:24; Ro 8:17).
 2. The three "fear not's!" in vv26, 28, 31. Luther's "Battle Hymn" based on this: "And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife."

3. The suffering centers in the teaching and preaching of the Word of Jesus: This is the thing said in the "dark" which we are to speak in the light; the "hearing in the ear" that we shout from the housetops.
- III. Discipleship reaches for a real reward, vv32-33.
- A. Confessing Jesus before men is a costly enterprise (cf. Mt 10:16-18).
 1. His attitude toward us on the Last Day will correspond with our attitude toward Him in this world.
 2. Witnessing to and for Jesus involves eternal consequences all along; hence, we must be serious about it.
 - B. We shall prevail.
 1. Grace is given for the task, i.e. He is with us always (28:20).
 2. Grace shall crown our labors (1 Cor 15:58).

G. Waldemar Degner

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 10:34-42

July 22, 1984

Albert Schweitzer agonized long over Matthew 10. He attempted to find a pathological flaw in Jesus' psychological make-up. His search led him to conclude that Jesus was a deranged psychotic, suffering from paranoia.

We do better by affirming Jesus' integrity as the Son of God in this chapter, and, also, by seeing the prescription of this text as the ongoing condition of the Apostolic Church. Above all the text emphasizes the total reliance of the disciple upon the grace of God in converting us to faith, in supplying our needs, and in assuring us of our final reward. This is the specific Gospel which every weary worker in the kingdom wants and needs.

The pattern for mobilizing the saints for service is clearly enunciated. The pattern was proscribed in the Messianic utterances of the O.T. and fully revealed in Jesus' own Messianic ministry. Not only the Twelve but also all subsequent disciples follow the etchings of His life. Thus the theme:

ARM YOURSELF WITH THE MIND OF CHRIST

- I. A reminder, vv34-35.
 - A. Not peace but a sword.
 1. The Prince of Peace will not have a cheap peace, the peace of compromise, or a peace with the world.
 2. His peace destroys sin and all love of evil, and it creates the new man in Christ: It is His last will, Jn 14:27ff.
 - B. A separation is required that cuts through all relationships.
 1. The Church which has its roots in the quiet privacy of the home now roots out every sinful relationship, even be-

- tween parents and children.
2. The divisions of enmity removed, the home is now the most pure church.
 3. As prophesied in Micah 7:6, this is part of the woes of the daughter of Zion, viz. that the kingdom of peace will be ushered in with the conflict of those who are in close physical union.
- II. A warning, vv37-39.
- A. What constitutes worthiness?
 1. There is nothing wrong with loving father, mother, son, daughter per se -- this is even commanded, e.g. by the Fourth Commandment.
 2. The lesson is: "more than me" -- a question of priority. Other loyalties must be defined.
 - B. Take up the cross!
 1. The pattern of Christ's suffering is the outline of our ministry.
 2. It tells us that grace alone can make and keep the disciple.
 - C. Find life or lose life.
 1. Life, *psyche*, is the life principle. It refers to temporal life and what supports it. To lose that life in contrition and faith is to find eternal life.
 2. This again points to grace -- nothing in us but God's enabling power toward us.
- III. A promise, vv40-42.
- A. The disciple is the extension and vehicle of Christ Himself.
 1. The persuasive call of the Gospel goes out through us.
 2. The peace of forgiveness rests on those who receive the messengers of God.
 - B. The disciple's work is never in vain.
 1. The most menial service (a cup of cold water) rendered to His messengers shall receive a reward.
 2. The blessings of grace are assured to us, and through us they are scattered to others.

G. Waldemar Degner

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 11:25-30

July 29, 1984

In one sweep of the hand Jesus sets aside all human claims to intellectual and spiritual prowess. Looking straight into the eyes of the debater of this age, the philosopher, the metaphysical theorist, he says the "true truth" is hidden from you. The map to find the hidden treasurers of what is really true about this universe and our place in it is not based on worldly wisdom. Jesus makes it clear, we do not move closer to God by climbing some intellectual ladder to the sky. Once before God dealt mightily with a tower of arrogance.

Jesus in our text deals with another of humankind's attempts to reach the heavens.

Introduction: The simple child's game of "Hide and Seek" could be utilized to introduce the concept of seeking to find that which is hidden.

THE HIDDEN THINGS OF GOD

- I. The hidden things of God are hidden from the wise and learned (v25).
 - A. God does not despise wisdom and learning.
 1. God is the Creator of our minds (Gn 1:31).
 2. God rejoices in our intellectual growth (Lk 2:52).
 - B. God does despise the so-called wisdom and learning that rejects Him (Ro 1).
 1. God is rejected when reason functions autonomously as the highest authority.
 2. God is rejected when reason acts independently of God's revelatory Word.
- II. The hidden things of God are revealed to little children (v25).
 - A. God chooses to reveal the hidden things.
 1. God is the first and prime mover in revelation (Mt 16:17).
 2. God chooses what to reveal (Col 1:25-27; Eph 1:9).
 - B. God chooses to whom He reveals the hidden things.
 1. God has an aversion to the arrogant (1 Pe 5:5c).
 2. God has a father's heart toward the intellectually humble (Mt 18:3).

Mark R. Oien
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EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 13:1-9 (18-23)

August 5, 1984

There can be little debate regarding the meaning of the "Parable of the Sower" because in vv18-23 of this same chapter, our Lord gives an authoritative, straightforward interpretation of the parable. The task of the preacher is to enable this clear Word of the Lord to be heard by 20th century ears. The following outline will primarily center on the good soil and what enables it to bear fruit.

Introduction: Mary, Mary quite contrary how does your garden grow! Well, it depends on a number of things, not the least of which is the soil. So it is for the Christian, the condition and attitude of the soil (the heart) are critical to spiritual responsiveness and fruitfulness.

GOOD SOIL PRODUCES GOOD FRUIT

- I. Good Soil hears the Word (v23).
 - A. Good soil has heard the converting Word.
 1. The converting Word is God's first intervention into our lives (1 Pe 1:23).

2. The converting Word transforms us into good soil.
3. The converting Word is God's power unto salvation (Ro 1:16).
- B. Good soil hears the sanctifying word.
 1. The sanctifying Word is God's continuous call for us to grow (cf. 1 Th 4:3).
 2. The sanctifying Word is God's continuous call to service (Eph 2:10).
- II. Good Soil understands the Word (v23).
 - A. The Word is understood only through the work of the Holy Spirit.
 1. The human disposition by nature is set against the truth of God in Christ (Ro 8:7).
 2. The Holy Spirit by softening our hard heart and making us into good soil graciously works understanding (1 Cor 12:3).
 - B. The Word is then understood in light of the cross.
 1. The theology of the cross alone reflects the truth of God in Christ (1 Cor 2:2).
 2. The theology of the cross alone produces the fruit God desires.
- III. Good Soil lives the Word (v23).
 - A. The Word is lived through an inward change of attitudes.
 1. The inward attitude toward God changes (Ro 8:15).
 2. The inward attitude toward our neighbor changes (Mt 22:39).
 - B. The Word is lived through an outward response.
 1. The outward response of a Christian toward God is worship (Ps 26:8).
 2. The outward response of a Christian toward his neighbor is service (Mt 7:12).

Mark R. Oien

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 13:24-30

August 12, 1984

Introduction: Both mystery and clarity appear in Jesus' parables. To the world they are a mystery, not only beyond comprehension, but also foolish. To the worldling the kingdom has never made any sense. Paul reminds us that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the world. It is—in this case—a genuine mystery! But to those who believe the Gospel the cross and the kingdom are precious truths and realities. This is not because Christians are exceptionally brilliant or spiritually superior. It is because the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts and opened them to faith.

The kingdom is indeed important because Jesus takes time to discuss its various aspects with a number of parables. Biblical mysteries are not "who dunnits!" They are indeed beyond the scope

of human reason, ergo they are mysteries. They are believed, trusted, accepted by God's children; they are never fully understood. The kingdom is one of these mysteries.

The text presents the mystery of

THE GOOD PLANTING OF THE KINGDOM

- I. God plants His kingdom in our world.
 - A. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Planter. The establishment of the kingdom is not the ideal or the work of men, but the will and work of God Himself. Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for all men. His blood has reconciled the world to God. Now Jesus "casts" His word into the world to call men to that reconciliation. God's work, not ours!
 - B. The good seed are the sons, the children, of the kingdom. God's Word is always effective. His Word brings results. What God sows, grows! The Word is the Good News that Christ is the Son of God and has given His life on the cross to redeem men from the bondage of sin and death. There is great comfort here for us. Our work in the kingdom, our "sowing the seed of the Word," will bring results. We never waste our time in mission work. God promises us: My word will not return to me void! (Is 55) God's work succeeds!
 - C. The field is the world. Here is a magnificent mission goal, the whole world. No one is excluded from this mission directive. God wills that the church is active all over the world. There is to be no part of creation excluded, big cities, rural, foreign, every corner of the globe is our responsibility. Our worst enemies are even our field of endeavor for Christ. The world is to be won for Christ.
- II. Satan attempts to destroy the kingdom.
 - A. Satan sows the tares in the field. Triumphalism is not for God's people. Many a missionary, clergy or layman, has made the mistake of believing that mission work is one triumph after the other. We need to be aware of the enemy, the deadly, powerful, consistent enemy, Satan. He does not want sinners to be saved, obviously! He will ravage the soul of anyone who confronts the Word of Christ. His tares are his triumphs! He "wins" souls as does Christ. Men whose hearts are enslaved to sin reject the Gospel of forgiveness. Satan will never rest; where there is Gospel there is Satan. Satan is well and active on planet earth!
 - B. God's children are tempted to destroy the tares. Every Christian knows the frustration of seeing evil prevail and people reject Christ. Christians know the disappointment of seeing believers succumb to the temptations of Satan and leave the faith. Christians want to do something -- expose the hypocrites, denounce the false Christians, pin-point those

destined for judgment! Our failure to trust God leads us to play God. God's plan will not fail!

- C. Christ warns us to be patient; He alone is the Judge. Jesus wants us to exercise the greatest patience with God's church. We are unaware who is the true believer and the hypocrite. We live in the kingdom militant, not the kingdom triumphant. The harvest time is not yet. Now we are to work and build, not to harvest and separate. God's timing, not ours!

George R. Kraus

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 13:44-52

August 19, 1984

Introduction: Whether we buy a diamond, a pearl or a simple piece of jade we take the purchase into the light and turn it around so we can view it from every side and facet. We inspect it for texture, color, flaws, beauty. We want to make a "perfect" buy.

In the three parables of our text Jesus invites us to take a great treasure -- the kingdom -- into the light and to look at it from three facets, to inspect it from three points of view. Let us look, then at

THE KINGDOM TREASURE

I. A hidden treasure.

A. This hidden treasure is Christ.

1. There is a dire need for this treasure. The world is lost in sin and guilt, "poverty stricken," spiritually "bankrupt," "broke."
2. Christ is the treasure because He offers the riches of forgiveness. He is the Way back to God. He is the treasure that gives life.
3. This hidden treasure has great value. God can give nothing greater than Himself; He does so in giving us His Son.

B. This treasure is hidden in a field.

1. The field is our world. The treasure, Christ, the kingdom, is now in the world, our world. The treasure is now with us and is to be found by us! Gal 4:4, Lk 2.
2. The treasure is hidden from natural man (I Cor 2:12; Eph 5:8).
- 3 Yet the treasure is intended for all. In the text a man (Greek word "man" is generic) finds the treasure. God has no favorites. Christ came to redeem all men.

II. A singular treasure.

A. Christ is the pearl of great price.

1. In His person.
2. In His work.

B. Christ far surpasses all other pearls.

1. No earthly treasure can compare with Christ. Wealth,

education, success are not equal to Him.

2. All other pearls are sold. All can be counted as loss compared to Christ (Phl 3:7).

III. A searching treasure.

A. In His Word Christ seeks us out.

1. Nets catch; they are not caught. Just when we thought we had to seek out the treasure suddenly the treasure finds us. In His Word God seeks us out and calls our attention to the treasure He has prepared for us in His Son.
2. Through His Word Christ invites the world to the Gospel. Furthermore, His Holy Spirit leads us to faith. His "fishing" is the mission work of the church in the world (Lk 4:43-44; Lk 5:10).
3. He catches fish of every kind. No one is excluded from the Gospel call. Men of every race and nation are called to Christ the Savior. All are welcome. Christ died for all.

- B. The "catch" is accounted for on the Judgment Day. Faith is required. Those who reject what Christ has done for them will be cast aside and abandoned by God. There will be an accounting for the souls of men.

Conclusion: Do we understand what these parables teach us? (v51) Understanding implies faith and trust, not mere intellectual assent. Let our answer be: Yes, I believe Christ is my Savior. No longer is He hidden. He is my pearl of great price. Because He found me I shall be in His kingdom forever.

George R. Kraus

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 14:13-21

August 26, 1984

The uniqueness of this text (always an important consideration, but especially so when a miracle account is under scrutiny) is threefold: 1) it is the first *deed* of Jesus recorded by Matthew after the "opposition chapters" (11-13) and the account of John's death (14:1-12); 2) unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew focuses on Jesus' *healing* (v14) when the crowd came to him; and 3) only Matthew records Jesus' pointed "you give them something to eat" (v16).

Lenski's comments on this pericope are generally excellent, especially his suggestions for harmonization with the other accounts of this miracle. He also notes the similarity between the language of 4:12 and 14:13, suggesting that Jesus withdraws from the limelight upon hearing of the Baptist's execution just as He had entered it when John was imprisoned.

The central thought of the passage is that Jesus used His power constructively when He was opposed (in this sense, the entire event is an elucidation of Jn 3:17). The goal of the sermon is that the hearers live constructive lives. The problem is that we tend to think

only of ourselves when we are "under pressure." The means to the goal is that Jesus brings the same love and power that He manifested in the text to bear on our lives.

Introduction: Hemingway styled courage as "grace under pressure." That may be, if "grace" is seen as mere elegance. But the *grace of God* is far stronger, far more active. It *does* something. In this text we see Jesus showing

CONSTRUCTIVENESS: GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

- I. Compassion for the crowd.
 - A. The setting for compassion
 1. Matthew begins reporting opposition to Jesus in chs 11-12. The parables are spoken "because seeing they do not see..." (13:13). Now Jesus is opposed at home (13:53-58) and by Herod (14:1-12).
 2. Jesus withdraws (v13), not so much out of fear of Herod as to mark a new phase of His ministry. He no longer seeks publicity.
 - B. It's hard to be compassionate.
 1. Our responsibilities put us under pressure. It would have been understandable if Jesus had turned the crowd away because He had a lot on His mind, or because He had to teach the disciples.
 2. When we know we are right, but are opposed anyway, we throw God's justice and love in His face. It would have been understandable if Jesus would simply have wanted nothing more to do with people, on that day or *any* day.
 - C. Jesus is compassionate.
 1. He healed their sick (v14). He did what was hard - impossible! - for sinners. He reacted constructively to the pressure situation. He fulfilled the Law, the sum of which is love.
 2. His constructive work was not easy. It entailed the cross (cf. Mt 8:17 and Is 53).
 3. The resurrection shows His last work is a constructive one. He does something.
- II. Delegation for the disciples.
 - A. The setting for delegation.
 1. The disciples seem to have learned the compassion-lesson well (v15).
 2. But now Jesus will teach them another lesson (v16).
 - B. It's hard to delegate.
 1. The busy executive could do things himself, perhaps even better. But he can't afford the time. Jesus can do things better. It would have been understandable if He had reflected on how easily men had misunderstood Him, and then decided to do it Himself.

2. We are even quicker to understand God than to believe Him. The disciples' reply (v17) shows a lack of belief, if not understanding. It would have been understandable if Jesus had said, "Just forget it."
- C. Jesus delegates.
 1. He said, "Bring them. . ." (v18). He did something constructive -- and something only He could do. But He did it with the disciples (vv19-20).
 2. The Father entrusted the salvation of the world to His Son. The Son took on human flesh. He is our Brother: He obeyed our obedience, He died our death. He was pleased to be the "delegate." In His resurrection He shares the blessings of His constructive work with us.
 3. He also shares His work (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). God doesn't need our help in either of the two kingdoms. Yet, while His power is of paramount importance, He does things through us. What a privilege! What a perspective for constructive living!

Conclusion: I've heard that a good engineering student never lets a locked lab door deter him. He picks the lock, if need be, to get the work done. Jesus got His saving work done, too -- even under pressure. In fact, that's when He did His most crucial work -- and we still benefit from it.

Ken Schurb
Columbus, Ohio

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 14:22-23

September 2, 1984

Introduction: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" How the words must have seared Peter's conscience, as they do ours. It is embarrassingly easy to identify with Peter as we hear

WHAT JESUS THINKS OF LITTLE FAITH

- I. It shouldn't exist.
 - A. Jesus takes care of His disciples (vv22-29).
 1. He sent them away - they would not be tempted to join the crowd that wanted to make Him bread-king (v22; see Jn 6:15). Similar with us - see 1 Cor 10:13.
 2. He came to be with them on the sea, though the danger was not overpowering (vv23-25; cf. Mt 8:23ff). He is with us too (Mt 28:20).
 3. He comforted them by identifying Himself (Vv26-17).
 4. He granted Peter's request with an enabling word (vv28-29).
 - B. But His disciples forget (v30).
 1. Peter thought the wind and the waves were a bigger threat

than Jesus was a help. We also face many forms of this-worldly materialism:

- a. Teenagers half-joking, "I hope Judgment Day doesn't come until after my date Friday."
 - b. Forgetting the Lord in our day-to-day concerns, relying instead on ourselves, our friends, money, cleverness, etc.
 - c. In the Church, a preoccupation with gimmicks. People then think the Church is only concerned with self-preservation.
2. We believe Jesus - but only partway. And that's worst of all. Peter was in no great danger till he got on the water and doubted.

II. Yet it doesn't stop Jesus.

A. He saves men of little faith (v31).

1. He is motivated by grace - the text leaves no question about Who is caring for whom.
2. He substituted for all - even those of little faith.
 - a. In His life of unflagging confidence in God (e.g., v23).
 - b. In His death, facing the danger that results from little faith.
3. Believing is receiving. Even when Jesus works a miracle (v32) its meaning must be apprehended in faith (v33). But faith receives Him and His forgiveness regardless of how great or small it is (see Jn 1:12).

B. He is the Son of God (v33).

1. This is the great reality that exists prior to - or even apart from - faith. Even Jesus' enemies had to recognize it (cf. Mt 4:3,6; 8:38; 27:54).
2. He had come to save, not destroy (Jn 3:17; 12:47b; cf. Is 42:3). As the Son of God, He carried out the saving plan. His substituting worked *because* He was God (cf. 2 Cor 5:19).
3. Those who have great faith are those who receive this great God in all His power and compassion (cf. Mt 8:5-13: 15:21-18).
4. His Gospel-word tells us about Him and brings Him to us. It engenders faith, just as this event strengthened the disciples' faith (see above, I. A. 3 and 4).

Conclusion: The Lord is more than worthy of our trust. For a Christian to have faith in Him is like a child loving his mother.

Ken Schurb

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 15:21-28

September 9, 1984

The Canaanite woman approached Jesus with a cry for mercy which is a Christological confession of faith. The title "Son of David" underscores her understanding that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah--an important theme in the text (cf. v24). Her use of the title "Lord" shows that she understood Jesus to be the Redeemer of the world to whom all turn for mercy. This woman's faith is unwavering in the face of the obstacles placed in her way. This faith is praised by Jesus (v28), and her request is finally answered.

Jesus' silence at her initial request (v23), the disciples' request to send her away (v23), Jesus' reply to the disciples about the scope of His ministry (v24), and Jesus' answer to the woman referring to the children's bread cast to the dogs (v26) are all overcome by the woman's unrelenting and persistent pleas for help. Even Jesus' reference to the dogs, however, is not an absolute snub of this woman's cry for mercy, since he refers to the household dog (note the use of the diminutive *Kunariois* and the reference to the household setting) rather than wild dogs which were an object of scorn. The woman recognizes this as a correct description of her position and continues to seek a scrap of bread falling from the master's table.

Jesus has just learned of the offense taken by the Pharisees at his teaching on defilement (15:12) and has withdrawn to the region of Tyre and Sidon. It is important to relate this event to that fact. The central thought of this text is that when people continually seek God's blessings, they will be blessed. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer will be persistent in seeking God's blessings, for God blesses those who diligently seek him.

Introduction: Too many people give up too soon. Suicide victims, divorced people, even those who relent in seeking God's help in prayer--these all might be thought of as giving up too soon. But what about us? Even those who never consider suicide and who pray regularly need encouragement not to give up on God. Here we have an example of one who did not give up. We see reason, therefore, to be persistent in seeking God's blessings and help. No matter the obstacle you face or the help you seek,

DON'T GIVE UP!

- I. It is sometimes necessary to persist in seeking God's help.
 - A. So many things seem to hinder us.
 1. The Canaanite woman faced many obstacles (see notes above).
 2. We get so much help in falling away from God. Friends, family and society--not to mention Satan and our own flesh all hinder us from persisting in seeking God's help.

- B. We give up too easily.
 - 1. Discouragement at delay in answer to our prayer causes us to let go. We seldom wrestle with God.
 - 2. What if the Canaanite woman had given up just before Jesus granted her request?
- C. God delays his help ultimately to bless us.
 - 1. Jesus really did not snub this woman. He sought to teach his disciples and her about His ministry.
 - 2. By waiting to answer our prayers, God seeks to bless us (cf. 2 Pe 3:9).
- II. God blesses those who seek his help.
 - A. This means approaching God in humility.
 - 1. The Canaanite woman recognized her place and did not presume to take that which was not hers. She accepted God's plan for her as it was.
 - 2. We must not presume to tell God how and where to act on our behalf. An attitude of repentance in God's presence is called for.
 - B. This means approaching God in faith.
 - 1. The woman's cry for mercy was a cry of faith, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. . ." Each title is important.
 - 2. Our God has had mercy on us in Jesus Christ. On the basis of His love in Christ, we cry to Him for help.
 - 3. If God has forgiven our sins, we can certainly count on His help in our homes and marriages, with our jobs and children.

The temptation to give up in seeking God's help is great. But when we consider the blessings that God has given us through Jesus Christ, we will realize that we will be blessed by God when we persist in seeking His help.

David L. Bahn
Vernal, Utah

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 16:13-20

September 16, 1984

The Church which Jesus builds is vitally connected with the correct teaching of who Jesus is. This teaching is inseparable from the result of that teaching. For this reason, the text does not fit easily into a category about Jesus or the Church. We must talk about the Church which is built on the teaching of Jesus.

The answers to Jesus' first question (vv13-14) indicate that the people of Jesus' day knew that Jesus was someone extraordinary. Jesus was not yet ready, however, to have it taught that He was the Christ (v20). This could too easily be misunderstood and thus thwart Him in His true messianic task (cf. 16:21f.)

The relationship between the rock (v18) and Peter must not be ignored. Though Peter is not that rock on which Jesus will build His Church, Jesus' Church is built on the rock of Peter's and the other disciples' apostolic teaching. When built on the rock of the Apostolic Word (cf. Eph. 2:20) nothing will overcome it (cf 7:24-25). "The gates of hades" (v18) is a pregnant reference. Hell may pour forth its hosts to assault the Church (Lenski). This assault will culminate in the death of the Lord of the Church and continue in the deaths of the martyrs. But no matter. The Church which Jesus builds will withstand the onslaught.

The central thought of this text is that Jesus is the Christ who builds His Church on the foundation of that teaching. The goal of this sermon is that the hearer will let Christ build His Church in His own congregation through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel.

Introduction: Men build churches by erecting buildings to the glory of God. But in spite of their beauty and importance, these are all susceptible to fire, decay, and ruin. Jesus speaks of building His Church which will always prevail. So as we gather in the building we call a church, let's

LET CHRIST BUILD HIS CHURCH

- I. He builds it wherever the Apostolic Word is taught.
 - A. The Apostolic Word is the message about Jesus.
 1. Jesus is more than someone special. Today, as in Jesus' day, this message must get to those who think of Jesus as a great teacher or a prophet or a holy man.
 2. This Apostolic Word must clear up our own misunderstandings about who Jesus is. Our confession of Jesus as Lord must constantly be renewed.
 - B. The Apostolic word points us to Jesus the Christ.
 1. To confess that Jesus is the Messiah is more than a recital of a mental understanding. To say that Jesus is God's Son without faith is of no use.
 2. The Apostolic Word is that word which the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in our hearts. That faith lays hold of Jesus as the Christ, the Savior of the world who died to secure the forgiveness of our sins.

Transitional thought: When the Word of God is preached and taught Jesus builds His Church And what a Church it is, for,

- II. He builds a lasting Church.
 - A. Many things seem to tear down the Church.
 1. Attendance wanes during the summer months. Families move. Few churches are "super churches." Scandals plague congregations. Rifts develop. Congregations split.
 2. We may be led to wonder whether the Church will survive.
 - B. But Christ's Church stands forever.
 1. Because of its nature: A communion of believers, it is not

tioned to the existence of one congregation or one system of polity.

2. Even the gates of hades have not overcome the Church though Satan tried: Jesus' death, the early persecutions of the Christians.
3. All that has happened through any attempt to destroy Christ's Church is that the Church has gotten stronger. His Church will always stand. Transition: Why does Christ build a lasting Church.

III. He builds His Church for an important task.

A. Christ's Church possesses the keys to the kingdom.

1. The Church has no authority to tell you what color house you must have, nor the brand of toothpaste to buy, not even for whom you must vote.
2. But the Church has authority. The authority is to forgive the sins of repentant sinners and to retain the sins of those who refuse to repent, to administer the Sacraments and to preach the Gospel.

B. Our important task is to use that authority.

1. We preach the Law and the Gospel. We comfort the despairing and confront the arrogant.
2. We seek to let Christ build His Church by using His Word and declaring His message of sin and grace to all.

David L. Bahn

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 16:21-26

September 23, 1984

Peter had just put into words the foundation fact on which the Church of God is established: Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." See last Sunday's Gospel. The disciples had come to know the person of Christ but had an awful lot to learn about the work of the Christ. Just as God intended to create a servant people when He called Abraham's family to be His people, so He sent His Son to be the true Israel, the Suffering Servant and Redeemer of the world. For Jesus the way to fulfilled purpose and glory was the cross and empty tomb. The way of cross-bearing and self-denial for those who would follow Him in faith was a difficult pill to swallow for Peter and the others--and still is for would-be disciples today! In fact, it is even difficult to preach about unless we remain squarely under the cross and in the Spirit's light.

Introduction: How great it is to know and relish Jesus, our "beautiful Savior," who by His cross has won for us forgiveness of sins and an eternal life in heaven. But like the disciples in today's Gospel lesson we still have a lot to learn about

CROSS LIFE

- I. Self-denial and burden-bearing are very contradictory to man's normal goal for life.
- A. Peter's visions of sharing messianic glory and power collided with Jesus' announcement of His coming suffering and death.
1. Peter and the other disciples were still blinded by the Jewish concept of the messiah as an earthly king who would bring victory, glory, and wealth to his people.
 2. This explains why Peter so strongly resisted the Lord's prediction of suffering and the cross (v22).
- B. In varying degrees the goals of man are self and success oriented.
1. People live for wealth, health, happiness, freedom to "do your own thing." (Illustrate with contemporary evidence in people's lives, advertising, etc.)
 2. Caught in the patterns of this world many Christians have great trouble with "self denial" (putting ourself out for others) and "crosses" (standing up for Christ.).
- Unfortunately, when we live for self-satisfaction only, at the end of life that is all we have (cf. v26.) God has something better for us.

- II. Real life is ours when we deny self-fulfillment in order to follow God's claim on our lives.
- A. Christ's life was controlled by the divine "must" of the Father's will for Him which climaxed on the cross (v21, Jn 4:34, Lk 22:42, etc.)
- B. In Christ God has filed His claim on our lives not only for the hereafter but for the here and now.
1. By baptism our sin and self died with Christ and we were raised with Him to new life (Ro 6:3ff, 2 Cor 5:15).
 2. The dimensions of life with and for Christ are:
 - a. We must deny self ("Deny" means "to turn someone off ...to disown him"--Lenski).
 - b. We must take up His cross which was the sacrifice of servanthood (text; Ro 12:1). Clarify that "cross" is not merely the pains of mortal humanity but the burden and cost of being Christ-like in life.
 - c. We must follow Christ in commitment to the will of the Father (Eph 5:1-2, 1 Th 4:3a). We are called to obedience after Christ's perfect example.

Conclusion: Peter missed the meaning and power of Christ's cross because he did not catch the promise of resurrection victory. In the power of our living Lord we can confidently live our Cross Life with and for Him.

Edwin Dubberke
St. Louis, MO

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 18:15-20

September 30, 1984

This text is commonly seen as the "sedes doctrinae" of "church discipline." Two extremes are common in approaching it: Seeing here the "proper" procedure to remove undesirables from the Church, or defending complete disregard of the Savior's instructions "because we don't have the right to judge people." We can only understand the text if we remember what the loving, seeking heart of our Savior is like. His all-consuming purpose was always to bring to the sinner the grace and forgiveness of God. The mechanics of church discipline are familiar, but the spirit of deep concern for weak, erring, fellow believers should dominate in a sermon on these words of our Lord.

Introduction: A vacationing family from the midwest was seeing Niagara Falls. While on Goat Island above the falls a younger son fell into the swift current. A teenage brother managed to grab him and cling to a rock. When it seemed the older boy's strength would not last until help arrived, the mother's cry, "Don't let go, he's your brother!" was enough encouragement so that he did hold on and both were saved. That mother's cry illustrates the Savior's concern for weak and endangered believers in the text and what He wants us to do about them:

DON'T LET GO, HE'S YOUR BROTHER.

- I. Whose responsibility is it to look out for stumbling Christians?
 - A. Any believer who sees a brother or sister in spiritual danger is obligated by our Lord to reach out with help (v 15; Ga 6:1-2).
 - B. Not to help lift up a falling brother is to share his guilt (cf. Eze 3:18ff).
- II. We must be fully aware of just who our "brother" is about whom we are to be concerned.
 - A. Common faith in Christ links us together like mountain climbers who are tied together in one cause (1 Jn 3:14, also Communion).
 - B. Each of us, not merely church officials, has responsibility for the weak and erring in the church, in the family, etc.
- III. It is essential to consider what sins should concern us lest we become merely judgmental.
 - A. Our concern is not just sins against our person but flagrant sins against God and His Word and which offend His people.
 - B. While we all daily sin out of weakness, when a believer persists in sin against God's clear Word his salvation is in jeopardy (v15b).
 - C. Since those closest to a person will first see the sin they have first responsibility to call the erring to repentance.
- IV. The seriousness of this Christian duty is emphasized by what is at stake (vv15b, 17b).

- A. Since sin separates from God, the person's salvation is endangered.
- B. Continuing open sin robs God of His glory and endangers other believers through bad example.
- C. For all that is at stake the strong measure of excommunication, as a last step is essential.
- V. It is the authority given by Christ Himself that promises effectiveness in this ministry to erring fellow believers (v18).
 - A. God alone can forgive sins but He works through His people to warn the straying and comfort the penitent.
 - B. It is God's word that really does both the judging and the comforting in Christ.

Conclusion: What a blessed work has been entrusted to us by our Lord. May He fill us with a unified concern to carry it out (vv19-20).
Edwin Dubberke

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 18:21-35

October 7, 1984

The central thought of the text is that we are to keep on forgiving others as God forgives us. The goal of the sermon is that we make forgiveness a way of life. The problem is our tendency to retaliate rather than to forgive. The means to the goal is God's generous, unstinted forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake.

Introduction: Not reconciliation but retaliation is the operating principle in the world. Jesus flatly contradicts the world's procedure and lays down a better principle. By means of the parable He is saying to us:

MAKE FORGIVENESS YOUR AIM

- I. Our forgiveness is empowered by God's forgiveness.
 - A. The debt God forgave was great (v24).
 - 1. Our debt of sin includes not only our transgressions but what we should have done and failed to do, like not noticing that lonely person, not speaking an encouraging word, not helping a neighbor in need.
 - 2. We cannot pay our debt (v26). Good intentions will not suffice. Our efforts won't expiate our guilt.
 - B. God forgave at great cost.
 - 1. Our debt to God had to be paid. Jesus paid it, down to the last penny (1 Pe 2:24).
 - 2. God forgives us for Jesus' sake (Mic 7:18). It is when we experience God's forgiveness that forgiveness can be our aim.
- II. Our forgiveness is an imitating of God's forgiveness.
 - A. We forgive from the heart (v35).
 - 1. This does not mean that we can always forget the offense. The memory of it may still disturb us at times.
 - 2. It does mean that we do not allow the evil which was done

to separate us from the other person.

B. We set no limit on our forgiveness.

1. The servant set a limit (v28).
2. Peter wanted to set a limit (v21).
3. We too stand accused of setting a limit. Yet if we are to imitate God's forgiveness the spirit of vengeance cannot be permitted to rise.

C. We reflect the love of God.

1. The unforgiving servant reflected hate, not love (vv28-30). Refusal to forgive causes distress among Christians and makes a mockery of God's forgiveness (vv31-33).
2. We are to reflect God's love to the meanest and the worst. The worst that can be done to us is still only a pinprick compared to what we have done to God. By forgiving we beget love rather than retaliation.

Conclusion: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion. . ." (Col 3:12-13). Let us make forgiveness our aim.

Gerhard Aho

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 20:1-16

October 14, 1984

It is natural to sympathize with the first workers. It seems only just that they should have received more than the last workers. But that is precisely the point Jesus is making. God operates differently than labor and management. God is so generous that we have difficulty accepting it. When Jesus first spoke this parable the grumbling of the first workers was a reference to the grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees over the graciousness of Christ toward publicans and sinners. The Jewish leaders had not been wronged; they were jealous (had an evil eye) that others had been treated generously. These others (tax collectors and sinners) who were considered last were nevertheless the first to receive God's gracious offer, while those considered first (Pharisees and scribes) were the last to receive it, if at all (v16).

The point of the parable is that as the owner dealt very generously with all his workers so God is generous beyond our understanding. The goal of the sermon is that we would be happy that God is so generous to all. The problem is that we sometimes live more under law than under grace and do our share of pharisaic grumbling about others receiving more than we. The means to the goal is God's amazing and undeserved generosity to us all.

Introduction: The wage question can be troublesome. Strikes and marathon negotiations are part of the economic picture in the world.

The wage question can be troublesome also in the spiritual realm. It troubled a rich young ruler who came to Jesus (Mt 19:16). Jesus offered him work and a fine wage (Mt 19:21), but the young man

went away dissatisfied. The question troubled Peter also (Matt 19:27). We too are often concerned about what we will get for following Jesus. In the text parable Jesus deals with

THE WAGE QUESTION IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

- I. The wages are based on grace.
 - A. God's pay scale contradicts our notion of rewards.
 1. The Jewish leaders grumbled about Christ's gracious offer to sinners (vv11-12).
 2. Even Peter thought he and the other disciples should receive more than others who had not left their homes and jobs (19:27).
 3. We too get jealous when God seems to be blessing others more than we.
 - B. Yet God deals fairly with us.
 1. No injustice has been done, for we have received the agreed-upon wage (vv13-14).
 2. God never promised to give us what we think we deserve for our efforts.
 3. Our grumbling reveals our loveless and unmerciful attitude and shows that we are more under the law than under grace than we perhaps realize.
- II. The wages are uniformly high.
 - A. God is generous to all (v15b).
 1. God is a real equal-opportunity employer.
 2. Whatever we give up we receive back a hundredfold, and finally eternal life (19:29).
 3. Isn't it wonderful that even those of us who worked only one hour also receive a denarius?
 - B. The work itself is already a reward.
 1. Just to be a Christian is a privilege - not a wearisome duty but a happy service no matter how long or how God lets us serve.
 2. There is no richer, fuller life than that of a disciple of Christ.

Conclusion: The wage question in the kingdom of God need not trouble us, for in the kingdom there is no unemployment and the wage level is uniformly high.

Gerhard Aho

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 21:28-32

October 21, 1984

The first son in the parable represents the tax collectors and the prostitutes who in living a sinful life refused to do God's will. Nevertheless, when John the Baptist came these outcasts of society repented, believed, and entered God's kingdom. They did the

Father's will. The second son reflects the attitude of the religious leaders who, though they saw the response of sinners to John's message, refused to be baptized by John. They appeared to comply, at least outwardly, with what John and Jesus were saying, but they refused to believe and in that sense failed to follow through.

Jesus invited the Jewish leaders to pass judgment on His simple story. Before they realized it they had implicated themselves. They were forced to admit that the reprobates who made no great pious claims for themselves were the ones who had done God's will by responding to His call.

The point of the parable is that obedience and not mere profession constitutes membership in God's kingdom. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would support their words with their actions. The problem is that we don't always do what we say we will do. The means to the goal is that God is merciful to us and calls us to work in His kingdom.

Introduction: There is an enormous step from good resolutions to good actions. We often fail to see a thing through. Sometimes this bothers us. At other times we don't really care. Whether it's intentional or unintentional, the problem remains. The text deals with this problem of

MATCHING THE DEED WITH THE WORD

- I. It is difficult to match the deed with the word because of our innate opposition to God.
 - A. Which sometimes shows up as open disobedience.
 1. Neglecting to hear God's Word and to support His Church.
 2. Becoming attached to the world and even to works of the flesh, such as drunkenness, adultery, quarreling, and revenge.
 3. Defending such behavior by saying: "I am what I am. I don't pretend to be something I am not. I tell it straight."

But is it praiseworthy for a child to tell his father blatantly, "I will not?" Is sin more acceptable because it is done openly?
 - B. Which at other times is a veneer of godliness.
 1. We may be decent people who attend church and observe Christian customs.
 2. But are we also people who see no need of repentance and who regard the Gospel as foolishness?
 3. What is the good of our respectfully answering, "I go, sir," if we have no intention of obeying our heavenly Father?
- II. It is possible to match the deed with the word because God calls all of us to work in His kingdom.
 - A. He calls those of us who are openly disobedient.
 1. God has a forgiving heart toward us. Jesus by His perfect obedience atoned for our disobedience and washed us from our sins in His blood.

2. Like the disobedient son who afterward repented and heeded his father's call, we can admit that we have behaved badly and trust in the Father's forgiving grace. Then we are matching the deed with the word.
God still prefers rude obedience to polite disobedience.
- B. He calls those of us who have been living a lie.
 1. He reminds us that Christ has atoned for our self-righteousness and hypocrisy. He assures us that He has no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies (Eze 18:32) and that He does not want to destroy us on account of our sins. It is this goodness of God that leads us to repentance.
 2. The more conscious we are of our sin, the more we yearn for God's forgiveness. Then we will not merely say, "I go, sir," and not go. We will match the deed with the word by daily confessing our sin and receiving God's abundant forgiveness.
 3. We match the deed with the word also when our faith produces God-pleasing deeds -- when we tell others what Jesus has done for us, when we invite them to hear God's Word, when we help the troubled and comfort the sorrowing.

Conclusion: It will be a continuing struggle to match the deed with the word. Yet it can be done because God enables us to repent, to believe, and to do God pleasing deeds.

Gerhard Aho

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 21:33-43

October 28, 1984

This parable, recorded also in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19, describes the miserable treatment the Jewish leaders accorded the prophets and finally Christ. The chief priests and Pharisees realize that Christ was speaking of them as the wicked tenants of the vineyard (v45). These leaders also caught Jesus' reference to Is 5:1-7 where Israel is described as God's vineyard. In response to Jesus' question (v40) they are forced to incriminate themselves. Then Jesus shifts the imagery by quoting from Ps 118 and showing that the tenants were also stupid builders who by rejecting the stone (Christ) had destroyed themselves.

The point of the parable is that while God has incredible patience He will finally destroy those who obstinately refuse to bring Him the fruit He is entitled to. The goal of the sermon is that we would bring to God the fruits of faith that He expects. The problem is that we who are tenants or renters too often act like owners. The means to the goal is that God is extraordinarily patient with us.

Introduction: It's possible to rent an amazing variety of things. God too has a rental arrangement. For centuries the sign has been out:

VINEYARD FOR RENT

- I. The terms specified.
 - A. God puts the vineyard into excellent condition (v33).
 - 1. He did so for Israel (Is 5:1-7).
 - 2. He does so for us through the good news of Christ by which He gathers and preserves us as His people.
 - B. God "rents" out the vineyard (the message of His love and forgiveness) by giving it to us and through it supplying us with faith, strength, and hope.
 - C. God expects us to pay Him rent in kind.
 - 1. He wants the fruits of faith (Ga 5:22-23).
 - 2. Because of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit fruit bearing is not a chore but a spontaneous outpouring in response to God's benefits.
- II. The difficulties encountered.
 - A. God had difficulties with His renters.
 - 1. They killed the prophets (vv 35-36).
 - 2. Finally they killed the Son Himself (vv38-39).
 - B. God still has difficulties with His renters.
 - 1. When we fail to love God's mission to the world.
 - 2. When we fail to love God's people.
 - 3. When we fail to love God's messengers.
- III. The action of God.
 - A. God shows patience.
 - 1. He kept on sending servants (vv34, 36). What a contrast to what we probably would have done under similar circumstances!
 - 2. He went so far as to send His only Son (v37). Through Christ's death God atoned for the tenants' selfishness and ours. To what great lengths God went to show His love and patience!"
 - 3. He is still giving us time to bring forth fruit. He keeps on loving and seeking our love.
 - B. Yet God's patience has a limit.
 - 1. When the Jewish nation rejected Christ, God gave the vineyard (the Gospel message) to the Gentiles.
 - 2. If we reject Christ, the Gospel will be taken from us and given to others. Christ the cornerstone will one day fall on us and destroy us.

Conclusion: God's sign is still out: Vineyard for rent. The terms are as generous as they can be. In His marvelous love God has surmounted all the difficulties we caused Him. How wicked we are if we spurn His love! What a privilege to be a tenant in God's vineyard and to bring Him His fruits!

Gerhard Aho

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Matthew 22:1-14****November 4, 1984**

This parable, along with the parable of the two sons and the wicked tenants, should be understood against the background of the final events in Christ's ministry. Jesus is relating Israel's shameful treatment of the prophets God sent to call them to repentance. Christ's hearers were well aware that kings dispatched armies to destroy opponents and to set fire to their cities.

The emphasis in vv9&10 is on the mercy that God extends to all sinners. Yet while everyone is welcome at the wedding of the king's son, each guest must have the proper clothes (vv11-14). The king himself provides the necessary garment. To refuse to wear it is to show contempt for the host. The person who insulted the king, refusing to sit at the banquet on the king's terms, represents the self-righteous person who rejects the righteousness God offers through Jesus Christ. Anyone who thinks he does not need the garment of righteousness Jesus secured for him must suffer the consequences.

The point of the parable is that although everyone is welcome at God's wedding feast, one can be a guest there only on God's terms. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would take seriously God's offer of grace. The problem is that we sometimes make God's gracious offer an excuse for sinning. The means to the goal is that God invites all sinners and provides them with the needed garment.

Introduction: One of life's pleasures is to hear the announcement, "Dinner's ready," when we're hungry. God has prepared a dinner-salvation. Forgiveness of sins now and life eternal. Quite a dinner! This dinner has been ready for a long time. God is still announcing:

DINNER'S READY

- I. God invites.
 - A. He doesn't command people to come.
 - 1. He doesn't demand that we first make ourselves worthy.
 - 2. He won't force us to eat.
 - B. Yet many refuse the invitation.
 - 1. They allow activities acceptable in themselves to become more important than God's invitation.
 - 2. We need to watch that we do not put off accepting God's invitation.
 - 3. The consequences of such procrastination can be drastic.
- II. God invites all.
 - A. He sends His messengers out again.
 - 1. He won't let rejection by some prevent the banquet from taking place.
 - 2. He wants the food to be eaten.
 - B. God shows no partiality or prejudice. When the respectable

people refuse He invites the lowly and the despised.

III. God invites on His terms.

A. He provides for each guest the needed wedding garment.

1. Not only has He prepared salvation but He makes it possible for all to partake of salvation.
2. The wedding garment is the righteousness Christ earned for us which alone makes us acceptable to God and qualifies us to be guests at God's wedding feast.
3. Without Christ's righteousness which we receive by faith we are doomed, for our righteousness condemns us.

B. While letting Christ's righteousness cover our sins we must be on guard lest we continue to love and practice sin.

1. That would amount to playing games with the grace of God.
2. That would mean that we are no better off than the blatant unbeliever.

Conclusion: God Himself has prepared a wedding dinner. What joy to hear Him invite, saying, "Dinner's ready," to hear Him invite us also, and to receive from Him the beautiful garment of Christ's righteousness!

Gerhard Aho

THIRD-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Matthew 23:1-12

November 11, 1984

According to vv2-3 the scribes and Pharisees were worthy of respect because they had inherited the authority of Moses. Insofar as their teaching was derived from the Scriptures and not from their own interpretations, that teaching was to be heeded. It was their practice that was to be shunned, for they bound or tied together like sheaves (*desmeuousin*, v4) heavy backloads of rules but made not the least effort to follow their own rules. Here Christ is denouncing not the law itself but the false inferences and deductions which put a yoke on the neck of disciples.

A second pharisaic evil Jesus warns against is ostentation in religion. Insofar as they did comply with their rules they did so only to get the honor of men. Phylacteries were little boxes attached to the forehead and the left arm near the heart containing pieces of parchment with injunctions written on them to keep in memory God's laws and dealings. The more zealous teachers enlarged the phylacteries to focus attention on their religious and careful observance of the law. The tassels fastened to the corners of the garments were supposed to remind the wearers of God's commandments. The Pharisees also coveted the place of honor at banquets and in the synagogues and loved to be respectfully greeted in public places (vv6-7). In v8 Christ does not forbid respect for teachers but con-

demns eagerness for titles and the desire for abject discipleship from followers. A good teacher will influence his followers to look to God and not to himself (v9). In v10 Christ censures the kind of spirit that manifested itself in the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 1:12) where one said that he belonged to Paul and another said he belonged to Apollos. Paul and Apollos were servants of Christ who alone is the supreme teacher because He is the Messiah, the Savior. True greatness lies in servanthood (v11). Such God Himself exalts (v12).

The central thought of the text is that religious forms must not degenerate into mere formality. The goal is that the hearers would use the forms of religion to serve God and not themselves. The problem is that we often use the forms of religion to exalt ourselves. The means to the goal is that Christ who humbled Himself all the way to a cross will Himself exalt His humble followers.

Introduction: Christians, both clergy and lay people, are often criticized for not practicing what they preach. Disagreement between the word and the deed can cause offense and weaken the church's witness. The leaders of the church in Christ's day were notorious for saying one thing and doing another. In taking them to task Christ reminds us that

WE ARE TO PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH

- I. Let's not substitute forms of true religion.
 - A. By emphasizing externals.
 1. Such as observing certain Christian customs only to fulfill what we regard as divine requirement.
 2. Such as using God's Word mechanically so as to lose its meaning and to quench the Holy Spirit (vv2-3a).
 - B. By loading people with obligations which we ourselves do not take seriously (v4).
 - C. By greedily grasping for titles and recognition and taking any means to obtain them (vv5-7).

The end result of not practicing what we preach is self-righteousness, unbelief, and perdition (the "Woes" Jesus pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees, vv13-36).
- II. Let's use the forms of religion to exalt God rather than ourselves.
 - A. Jesus is not opposed to our calling someone our father in the faith as long as in doing so we give highest honor to the Father who is in heaven (v9).
 1. Our fathers in the faith have led us to know that we are children of the heavenly Father by faith in the Christ (v10) who died for us and reconciled us to God.
 2. Our fathers in the faith encouraged us to live in the grace of the heavenly Father.
 - B. Nor does Jesus forbid the use of titles of respect and the giving of recognition for work well done.

1. These formalities can be a means of honoring God who provides leaders and blesses their work.
 2. Jesus wants us to quench the desire for self-glory that makes us eager for respect and recognition.
 3. He wants us to serve not ourselves but others.
- C. Whatever we do for others, even for the least of Christ's disciples, we do as to Him, and we shall not lose our reward (Mt 10:42).
1. The Christ who has exalted us by making us sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6) regards highly the smallest good we do for others.
 2. When we follow the forms of religion - worshiping, praying, giving money, observing God's laws so that we can serve others, we are thereby serving God. And God exalts those who serve Him. What an encouragement to practice what we preach!

Gerhard Aho

SECOND-LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Matthew 24:1-14

November 18, 1984

The disciples, disturbed by Jesus' words about the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 23:38), call Christ's attention to the seeming solidity of the magnificent temple complex (v1). Jesus speaks even more pointedly (v2), uttering a prophecy which was literally fulfilled when Titus ordered the total demolition of the temple, the walls, and the city. The disciples' question in v3 was prompted by their assumption that the temple's destruction was connected with Christ's final coming and the end of the world. They wanted to know whether this would come to pass in their lifetime or in the distant future. Jesus does not satisfy their curiosity but warns them of the dangers they will have to be on guard against before the end, the consummation of the age. In the succeeding verses (vv4-42) Christ foretells events which for the most part will precede both the destruction of Jerusalem and His final coming. The popular messianic hope of that day was political independence, and there were political Christs who advocated war against Rome. False Christs of other kinds have continued to deceive. Jesus warns the disciples and us to stay aloof from any such movement (vv4-5). The prediction concerning wars, famines, and earthquakes applied to the period both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. While these things would be taking place the disciples would be propagating the faith in many areas of the world. That activity and the resulting persecution will be duplicated in the lives of Christ's followers in future generations (v9). Many Christians, fearful of losing their lives, would inform against friends (v10). As if this were not bad enough, from within the Christian fold false teachers would arise--

Judaizers, Gnostics, and their present day counterparts, deceiving many with their pernicious doctrines (v11). All these troubles will contribute to a spirit of worldliness and selfishness that will weaken the love of Christians for one another. What is needed is patient perseverance in the faith (v13). The primary task of the Church is to get the Gospel message out to all nations (v14). Christ does not promise wholesale conversions, only that there will be extensive evangelization before the final day.

The central thought of the text is that Christ prepares us to cope with the crisis preceding the end. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would endure to the end by persevering in the faith. The problem is that we allow the crisis occurrences to weaken and destroy our faith. The means to the goal is that through the Gospel we make it known that Christ Himself works to preserve our faith.

Introduction: There will be an end to earth's poverty and riches, joys and sorrows, plans and enterprises. The last hymn will be sung, the last sermon preached. The earth we know, the life we experience, the existence we share with all human beings will end, for Jesus says:

"THEN THE END WILL COME"

- I. Signs of the end.
 - A. Many being deceived (vv4,5,11).
 1. By those who purport to be Christs.
 2. By false religious movements.
 - B. Nations being distressed (vv6-7).
 1. By wars and rumors.
 2. By earthquakes, famines, and recessions.
 - C. Christians being persecuted (vv9-11).
 1. The world's antagonism will be sharp.
 2. The result will be that the love of many Christians will grow cold.
 - D. The Gospel being preached.
 1. The Bible will be translated into more and more languages.
 2. Salvation will be offered to more and more people.
- II. Enduring to the end.
 - A. We endure by remaining in sound doctrine.
 1. Established in the truth through diligent use of God's Word.
 2. Thereby guarding ourselves against false teachings.
 - B. We endure by continuing in the faith.
 1. Clinging to Christ as our Savior.
 2. Finding in Christ strength to overcome callousness and despair.
 - C. We endure by exercising our faith in kingdom work.
 1. Spreading and helping others to spread the good news of salvation.

2. Thereby hastening the end so that the period of suffering is shortened and fewer fall away.

Conclusion: The end will come. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed. We who are in a faith relationship to Jesus Christ can endure to the end.

Gerhard Aho

LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Matthew 25:1-13

November 25, 1984

The concluding verse of the text shows that the context of the parable is Christ's teaching about His final return. The parable makes clear that those who are not prepared for His return will be excluded forever from His kingdom. When Christ comes it will be too late to get ready. Those who are unprepared are contrasted to those who are prepared, and thus the emphasis of the parable is on wise and foolish preparation. The ending of the parable echoes Jesus' teaching in Mt 7:21-23. Since the wise as well as the foolish girls fell asleep while they were waiting, watchfulness does not appear to be the point of this parable but rather preparedness.

The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would prepare wisely for Christ's coming. The problem is that we all tend to rely on inadequate and therefore foolish ways of preparing. The means to the goal is that Christ the Bridegroom Himself enables us to make the proper preparations and will receive us into His eternal kingdom.

Introduction: It is important to be prepared for life's exigencies--tests in school, market fluctuations in business, changes in middle life and old age. It is more important still to be prepared for the final event in human history. In the parable of the wise and foolish maidens Jesus is telling us to

BE PREPARED FOR THE LORD'S COMING

- I. Do not prepare for it foolishly.
 - A. We are foolish if we rely on Christian associations.
 1. Such as membership in the church.
 2. Such as the designation "Christian" or "Lutheran."
 - B. We are foolish if we rely on someone else's faith.
 1. Such as the faith of our parents.
 2. Such as the faith of an illustrious Christian ancestor.
 - C. We are indeed foolish because when Christ comes it will be too late to make proper preparations.
 1. Our fate will then be irrevocably fixed (v10).
 2. We will be left in darkness behind the closed door.
- II. Prepare for it wisely.
 - A. We are wise if we have an ample supply of oil.
 1. This is a way of saying that only through Christ are we adequately prepared because by faith we receive the

forgiveness of sins that Christ earned for us.

2. Wise preparation is possible because of God's gift of faith to us.

B. We are wise if we trim our lamps.

1. This is a way of saying that our faith must be nurtured by regular use of the Word and Sacraments.
2. As our faith is being nurtured we can go about our ordinary activities in the relaxed confidence (v5, "all slumbered and slept") that we are prepared to meet Christ whenever He comes.

C. We are indeed wise because we have attended to that which is most important--our relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

1. Christ will know us as His own.
2. We will enter the heavenly marriage feast with Him.

Conclusion: The Bridegroom is coming. Are we prepared to meet Him? It is possible to make preparations and yet not be prepared.

The Bridegroom soon will call us, "Come to the wedding feast."

May slumber not befall us nor watchfulness decrease.

But may our lamps be burning with oil enough and more.

That, with our Lord returning, we find an open door. (LW No. 176, st. 1)

Gerhard Aho

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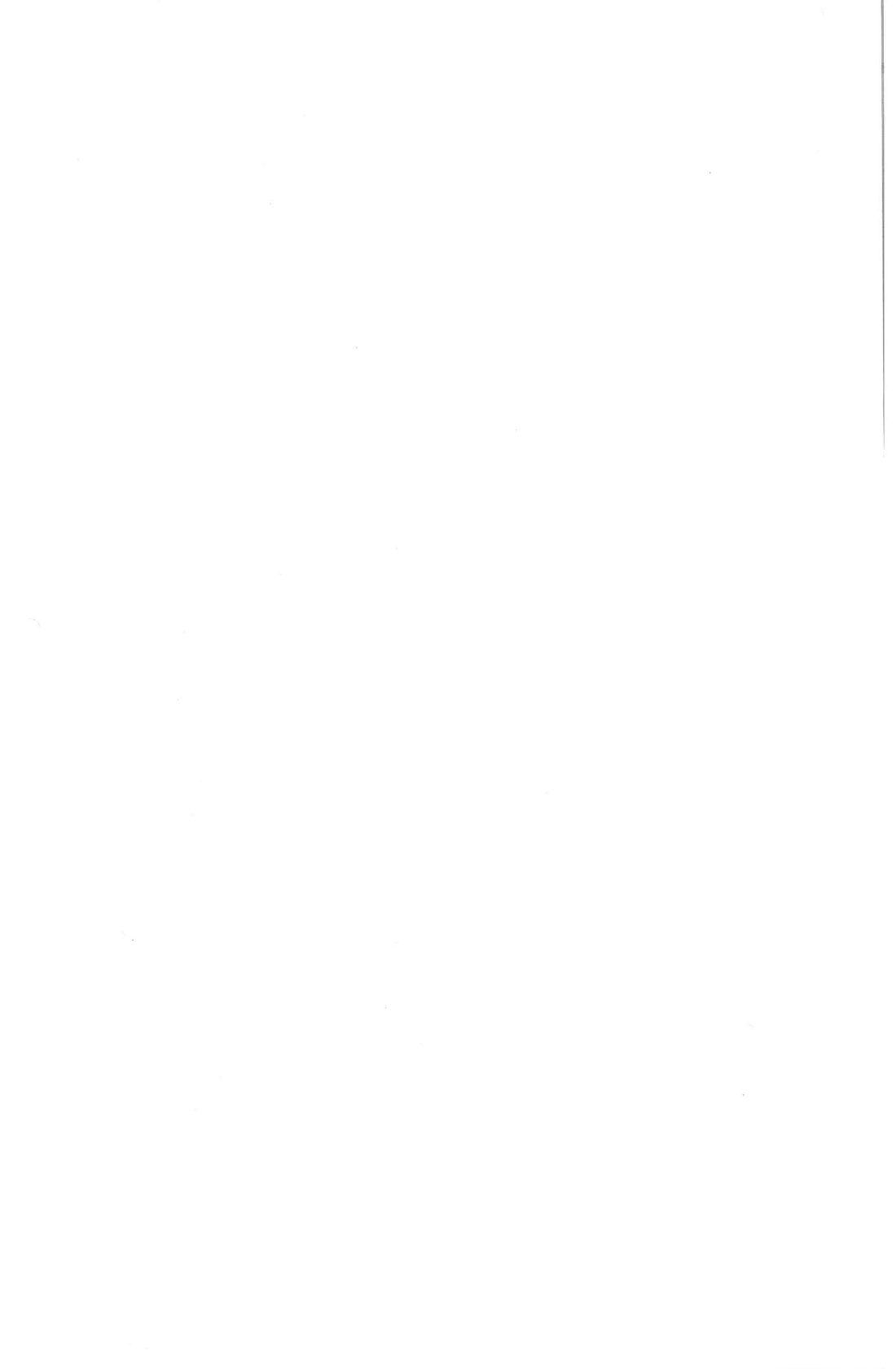
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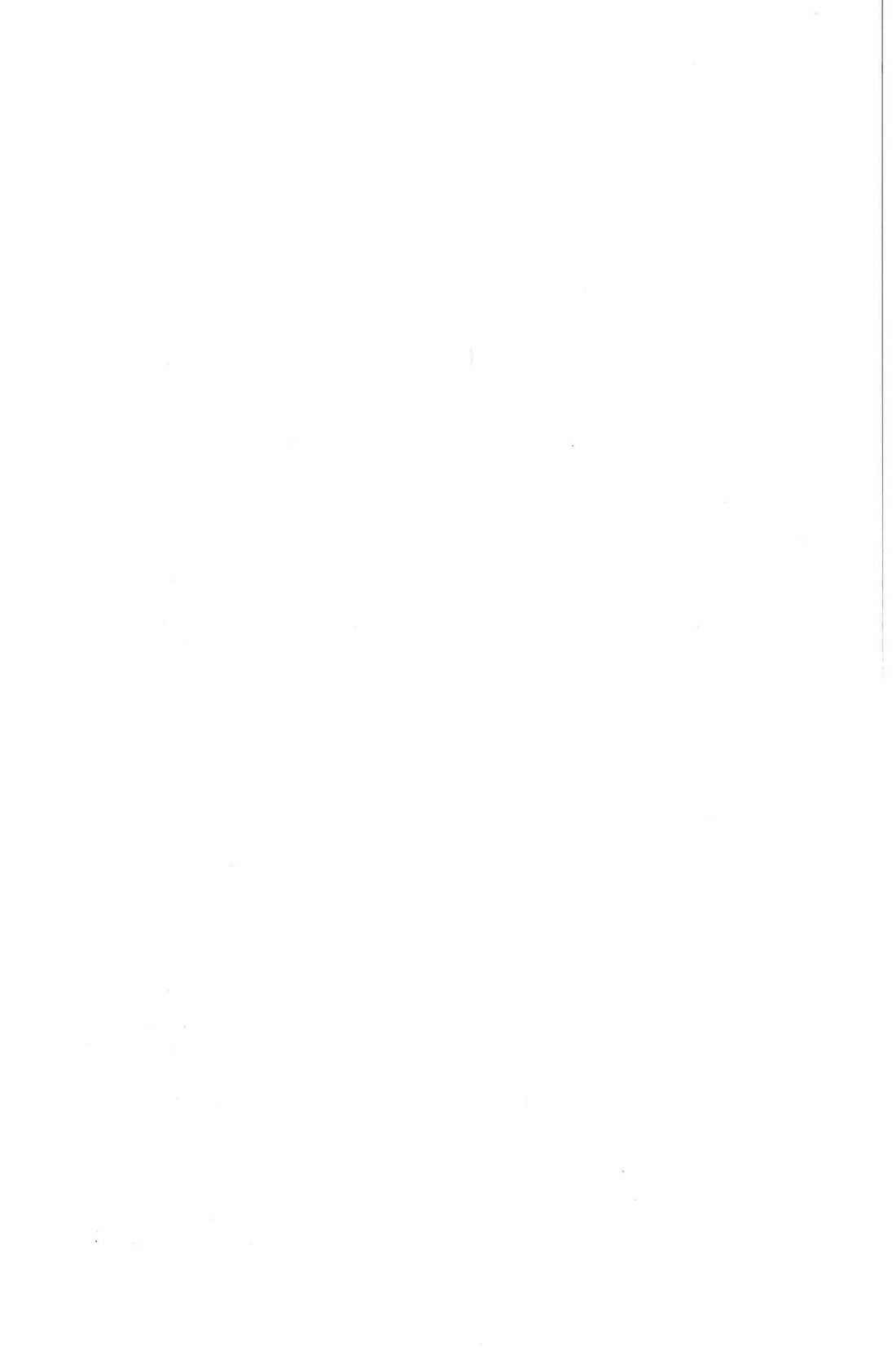
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