

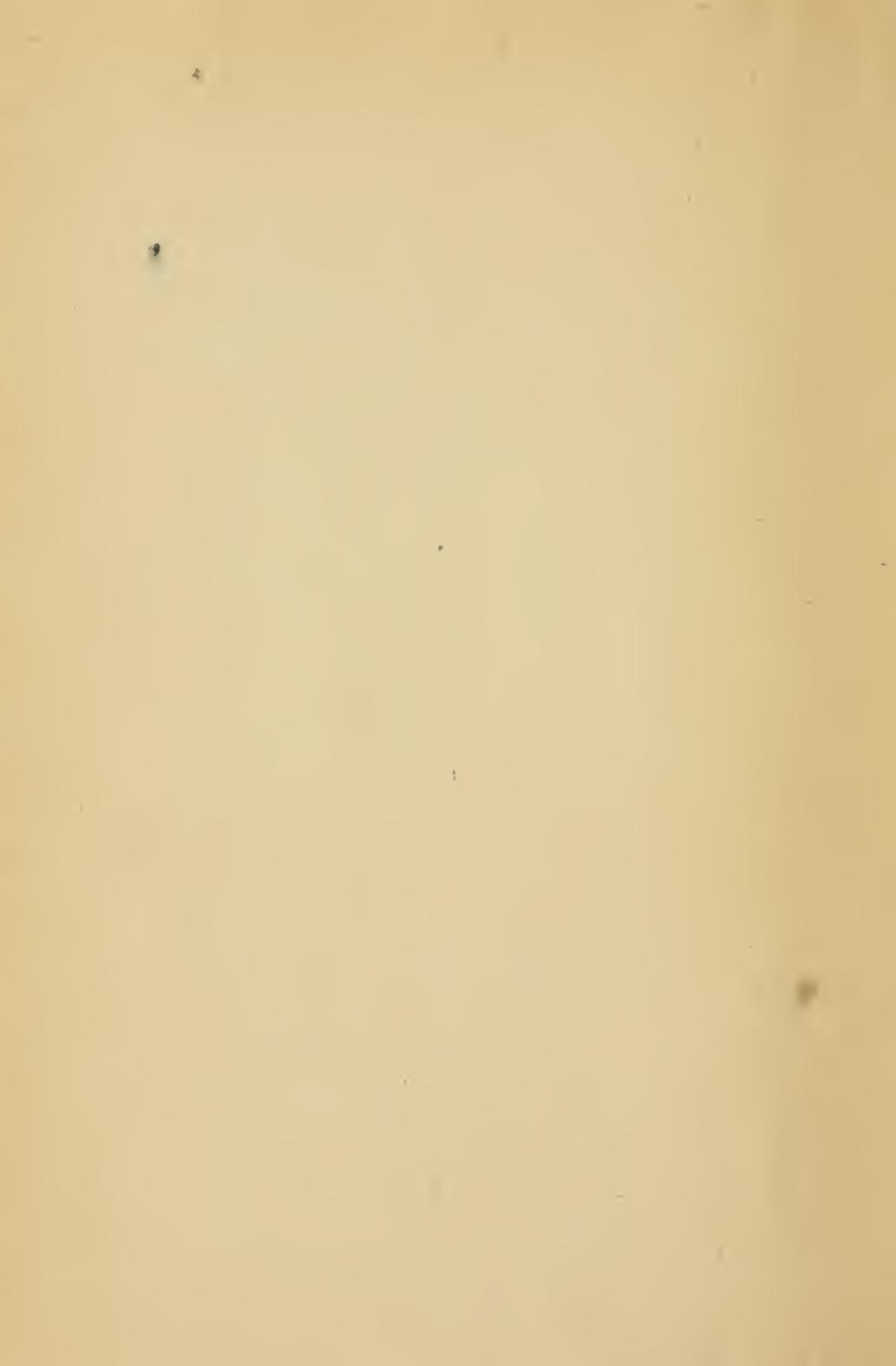
*Gospel Sermons.*

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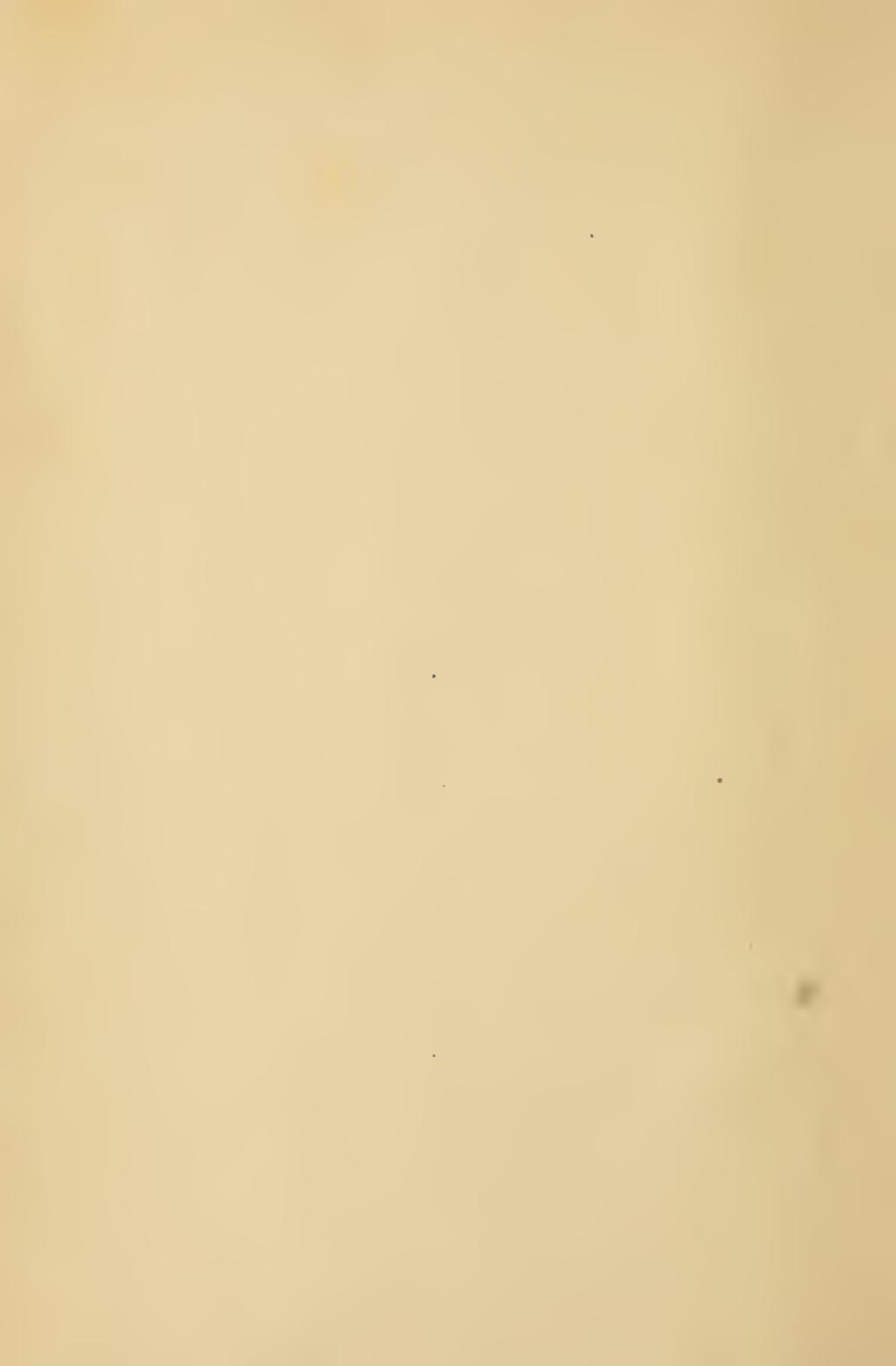
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Country sermons







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GOSPEL SERMONS.

COUNTRY SERMONS

VOL. III.

— BY —

✓  
F. KUEGELE,

Author of Book of Devotion, Your Confirmation Vow, Etc.

— † —

MOTTO: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1, 16.

AUGUSTA PUBLISHING COMPANY,

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*Haines* 1899. *Stone Va.*

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BALTIMORE:  
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## PREFACE.

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In compliance with the wish of the author of this volume, the undersigned, although feeling himself utterly unable to do justice to the subject will attempt to make a few introductory remarks, after having read the advance sheets.

Here we have some "Gospel Sermons," sermons on those Gospel Lessons selected by the ancient church from the four Gospels as texts to be expounded to the congregation on the respective Sundays and Festivals of the church year. This present volume comprises the first half of these Gospel Lessons, which however, God willing, will soon be followed by the second part. As Lutheran postils in the English language on these texts are very few, the author certainly is entitled to the gratitude of the English speaking Lutherans simply for having published in book form such an excellent guide for young pastors, sermons eminently qualified to be read during public worship to congregations whose pulpits are vacant at the time and a treasure for instruction and edification in the family circle. These sermons were originally not written for print; they were preached to a beloved and devoted congregation. Already in 1884 and the following years the greater part of them has been published in the "Lutheran Witness," at the urgent request of many brethren by the Rev. Kuegele, who now for twenty and nine years has been employed in that great and glorious work of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the highest office of mortal man on earth; but one fourth of these present sermons never before have appeared in print and the former have been revised and enlarged. Some of the sermons which were published in former years were submitted to the judgment of expert English scholars by whom the language was pronounced plain and lucid.

Our very modest author having at the earnest request of so many brethren, reluctantly consented to this publication of the Gospel sermons, terms them COUNTRY SERMONS, Vol. III., "because he delivered them," not in an imposing church edifice of a large city, but in a plain church building in the country and because he arranged them for print in that country parsonage of the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, where he composed that precious booklet "Your Confirmation Vow," that gem "The Book of Devotion," and the two former volumes of sermons on free texts. The writer of these lines however makes bold to say that such sermons,

these very sermons, ought to be spread and read throughout the whole country, farmhouses, villages, towns, large and largest cities included, aye, throughout the world, and not the least by people listening to flourishing rhetorical efforts of renowned D. D.'s in the metropolies; for they are genuine *Lutheran* and Scriptural in mould and cast. These sermons of our Country Parson, whose name is not adorned with a glittering D. D. need no praise or recommendation, because they most vigorously recommend themselves to the reader by their contents and form. In full keeping with the motto, (Rom. 1, 16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation,") from which the author preached his inaugural sermon to his present congregation, the aim and end of these sermons is to bring the hearer and reader unto salvation through the knowledge of Christ Jesus. They bear the stamp of fervent prayer, of careful study and meditation, and of spiritual experience, those signs and marks of a genuine Theologian and Doctor of Divinity. They contain *nothing* but the Word of God, (not human science and wisdom; for as the world in its wisdom lapsed from the knowledge of God, it is His pleasure through the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe,) "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say," so that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ. And they contain this Word in all its purity, for the author in the school of the Holy Spirit has well learned that sublime art "to rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2, 15), to preach the law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness, to terrify the self-righteous and secure, and to comfort the despairing souls, to bring to the knowledge of sin, and also to faith in Christ Jesus, and to make them rejoice with divine joy and certainty of their eternal salvation. Here we find the proper application of the Word of God for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness and for comfort and consolation. For although these sermons are eminently doctrinal in the best sense of the word, setting forth in plain, simple language the correct meaning of the text and the doctrine contained therein, yet they are not lacking in humble but firm reproof of false doctrine, in modest but keen correction, laying bare and condemning sin and unrighteousness in all forms, in heartfelt beseeching and exhortation by the mercies of God, to walk in the path of righteousness and to do good works, behooving Christians, in sweet cheering comfort and consolation for those afflicted by earthly tribulations or spiritual temptations. The heart and soul of these sermons is the doctrine of justification, that a poor sinner is justified before God not by works or merits of his own, but by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ the only redeemer, but nevertheless *al!* the counsel of God for the salvation of sinners is declared in them. Loud and clear do they ring out praise to the unspeakable love of God the Father who gave His highest treasure in order

to save the world, lost in sin, from wrath and eternal destruction, praise and thanks to the unfathomable mercy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who shed His blood and laid down His life and rose again from the dead to redeem His enemies, thanks and glory to the Holy Ghost who by the Gospel calls, enlightens, sanctifies, keeps in the true faith, forgives sins and leads unto eternal life. The author not only emphasizes faith as the only way to apprehend Christ's merits, he also clearly shows how this faith is obtained and kept. He constantly points to the means of grace, the Gospel, holy baptism and the Lord's supper as the hands of God which bring and give to us Jesus' merits, faith within the heart, and which are the firm foundation whereupon to build and rest the certainty of our salvation. While reading we can not but observe, that these sermons must answer the special wants of the hearers, and the demands of our time.

The several doctrines of our holy religion are set forth in not too lengthy sermons, in plain, simple, concise words, in a very clear and logical style, in strict conformity with the Confessions of the Lutheran church, without an unhealthy effort to rouse the feelings and to stir up the emotions, but simply to convince and win the heart and soul for the truth, to give them healthy spiritual food and to ground their faith on the immovable Rock of salvation.

These sermons are truly Lutheran model sermons. Luther says: "Accursed and execrated be all preachers who in the church strive after high and subtle things, and bring them before the people and preach them, thereby seeking their own honor and glory and trying to please some ambitious persons." And in our Confessions (Apology Art de Missa) we read: "Nothing does more to attach the people to the church than good preaching." And again, Ap. Art de Missa): "Audiences are held by useful and clear sermons. And the true adornment of the churches is godly, useful and clear doctrine, the devout use of the sacraments, ardent prayer and the like."

May it please God in His goodness, to let this book find its way to many thousand homes, wherever the English tongue is spoken. May He grant grace to abundantly bless the reading of these Gospel Sermons unto the spiritual welfare and the eternal salvation of all that take them into their hands; and may the good Lord, who enabled the author to preach these sermons "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" grant, that he may be able to publish the rest of the Gospel Sermons and sermons on the Epistles in like manner, for His honor and eternal glory.

St. Louis, Oct. 22d, 1899.

C. L. JANZOW.

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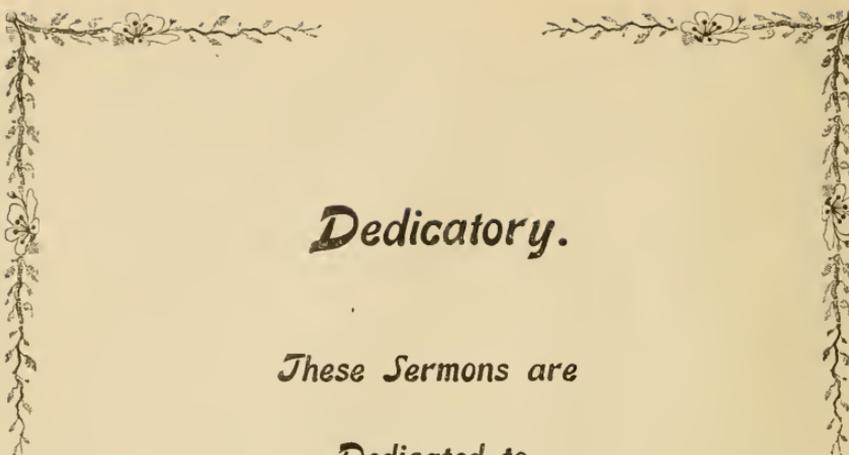
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Page 1st. 7th line from below read : "church year."  
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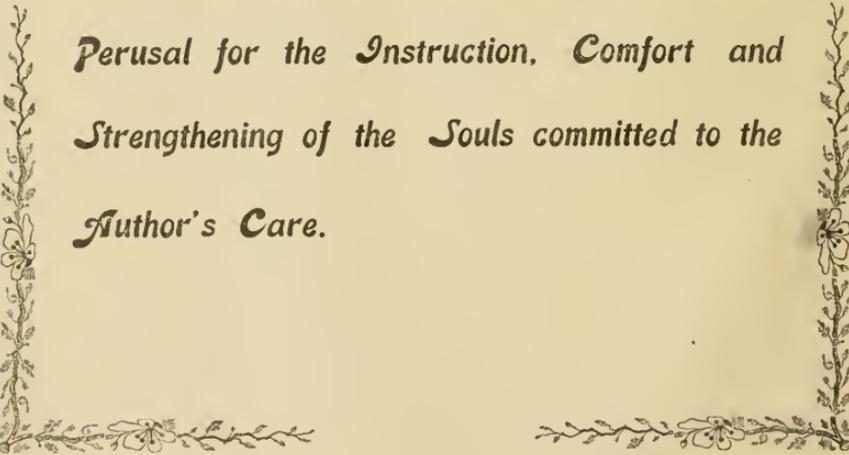
*Dedicatory.*

*These Sermons are*

*Dedicated to*

*the Coyner's Evang. Lutheran Congregation,  
from whose Pulpits they were delivered.*

*May Jesus Christ, the chief Shepherd  
and Bishop of His flock, bless their frequent  
Perusal for the Instruction, Comfort and  
Strengthening of the Souls committed to the  
Author's Care.*



## I. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

---

TEXT: And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. Matt. 21, 1-9.

### BELOVED IN CHRIST, THE LORD!

We to day begin a new church year. Wisely did the church arrange so, that she begins her year a month before the beginning of the secular year. The noblest and best first, as also the Lord says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That which the church year brings is more precious, than anything which the secular year can bring; and to make provision for the soul, is more needful, than to make provision for the body. Properly, therefore, does the church begin her year before the beginning of the secular year. And as we begin the church year first, so all the year round that which it brings should be and remain foremost in our hearts and minds.

Without the church year the civil year is only vanity; for "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul"? Will not every one who eagerly employs the civil year to gather earthly treasures and gives no heed to the church year be obliged to confess at the end of his lifetime: I have

lived a lost life. In the church year I did not lay up for myself treasures in heaven, and now I must lose that also which I gained in the worldly year. But the church year with its Sundays and Festivals makes time the portal of a blessed eternity; for out of the Gospel, the seed which is scattered in the church year, grows forth that golden fruit which abides forever. With a sacred joy we should annually greet the coming of Advent because our time of grace is not yet ended, and we should gird our loins anew to put in the sickle and to reap another harvest for the soul.

But when do we seek the kingdom of God? What must we do to obtain His righteousness? To seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness is the same as to come to Jesus. Come to Jesus! For if you are with Him, you are in the kingdom of God and have the righteousness of God. Come to Jesus, then you begin the new church year right.

Come to Jesus, is a subject which is much preached on, and preached on in many different ways. Sometimes it is preached on right, but more frequently wrong. It is preached on right, when the hearers are taught, that in them there is no health, no ability, no strength to come to Jesus, but that He alone is all unto them; for then they are led away from themselves unto Him alone. But this subject: Come to Jesus, is preached on wrong, when it is so preached as to cause the hearers to think that of themselves they have the ability to come to Jesus; for then they are not led unto Him, but are taught to rely upon themselves. Whenever it is preached that Christ is the world's Savior who has prepared salvation for all men, but His salvation is, so to say, hedged in, and it remains for man to clear away the hedge, to penetrate through, and to place himself into possession of this salvation, then He is preached wrong; for then He is made a Savior by whom no man on earth could ever be saved, because man, dead in trespasses and sins, can do nothing of himself to come to Jesus. Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus Christ has not only earned salvation for us, but has also made provision for imparting His salvation to sinners. Do you ask: If there is no power and ability in me, how shall I come to possess His salvation? The prophet answers in these short

words: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" Why shouldst thou stop long to enquire: How shall I come to Him?

BEHOLD, HE COMES TO THEE.

Let me set forth:

- I. To whom He comes;
- II. In what sentiment He comes;
- III. How we should receive Him.

I.

Our text describes how the Lord, when coming to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, entered that city as a King in the midst of a multitude. The narrative is plain and well known, and I will not tarry long to repeat it. Riding on a despised animal, the multitude spreading their garments and olive twigs in the way, and the children crying: "*Hosanna to the Son of David,*" so the Lord entered Jerusalem. Only this once in all His walk upon earth did the Lord assume the role of a king, and the reason why this was done the Evangelist tells plainly when writing: "*All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*" All this was done to fulfill these words of the prophet Zechariah. These words, therefore, are the centre of the whole text. Hence, with the prophet I cry out unto you: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*"

Unto whom does He come? "*Tell ye the daughter of Sion,*" says the prophet. He comes to the daughter of Sion. Sion was the mount on which the temple stood, the mount of God, where He had His dwelling place. The daughter of Sion, in the language of the Scripture, were those who worshiped on mount Sion, pre-eminently those who worshiped there in spirit and in truth. The true daughter of Sion were those hungry and thirsty souls who, like Anna the prophetess, were waiting for the salvation of Israel to come out of Sion. To these hungry and thirsty souls the Lord came so that they were filled with rejoicing and began to sing:

*“Hosanna in the highest.”* But He came not alone to those penitent souls who were waiting for His salvation. He came to the whole city; for at His entrance “all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?” He came even unto those traffickers in the temple; for He overthrew the tables of the money changers and the seats of the dove venders. He came also unto the chief priests, and scribes; for when they censured Him for accepting such praises from the children, He justified His action by the Scriptures. These two latter classes of people, as, indeed, the majority of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, did not rejoice over His coming, yet He came unto them, and they have now no cloak for their sin. On the day of judgment the sentence will fall heavily upon their heads: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Then, He came bodily, visibly; now, He comes spiritually, invisibly. There, He came to the nation of the Jews, to whom does He now come? He yet comes to the daughter of Zion. In Mount Zion, where the temple once stood, the Lord is now no more worshiped. But there is still a daughter of Zion. Who this daughter of Zion is, the Scriptures tell us distinctly. Thus we read in the second chapter of Isaiah: “Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” The daughter of Zion are those amongst all nations who learn the Law which went forth out of Zion, who cling to the Word coming forth from Jerusalem. Again we read in the 50th Psalm: “The Lord hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.” The meaning is plain, on Zion the light of the world began to shine; that light is even now carried over the earth from the rising to the setting sun, and those are the daughter of Zion who are enlightened by this light. The daughter of Zion is the community of saints, the goodly company of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, who cling to Him as the Beloved of their soul and their most precious treasure. To these He comes, as He promised, saying: “If a

man love me, he will keep my words: and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The hearts of those that believe in Him, and therefore, love Him, are His dwelling place to which He comes ever anew. His habitation, which He adorns with all the everlasting treasures won by His obedience unto the death of the cross. Indeed, the heart of a believer is His favorite dwelling place, dearer to Him, as it were, than the seat of glory at His Father's right hand; for He departed from that seat of glory in order to gain the heart of man for a dwelling. He can not stay away from a believing heart. Behold, ye lovers of the Lord, your King comes unto your hearts.

But does He not come to any others? As He came to Jerusalem, came to many who received Him not, so He yet comes to many who refuse to receive Him. Unto Jerusalem, He came riding on a beast despised by men; so He yet comes riding on a chariot which is offensive to men, even the Word of the cross. Coming through His Word, He comes to all those to whom His Word is proclaimed. Among these, however, there are many like unto those money-changers and dove-venders in the temple who mind only the things belonging to this life; many like unto the chief priests and scribes who trust in themselves that they are pious. Yet He comes to them seeking entrance into their hearts, desirous to make His abode with them. Because He comes through His Word I can cheerfully proclaim to you: Behold your King comes unto you; if you love His Word He comes to your hearts as His cherished dwelling place; if you thus far have despised His Word, He comes to you to conquer your wayward heart and to prepare it for Himself for an habitation.

Behold a Stranger at thy door!  
He gently knocks, has knocked before,  
Has waited long, is waiting still;  
Why do you treat a friend so ill?

## II.

But how does He come? Does He come so that we may welcome Him with gladness? Or does He come so that we must be terrified at His coming? That He comes through His Word, we have

already heard, but in what mood does He come? What does He seek? What does He bring? Why does He come at all? All this the words of the prophet tell us: "*Thy King cometh unto thee, meek.*" The prophet says: He comes. He is not brought, but He comes. He is not led to you bound hand and foot so that perforce He must come, although He would not. He comes to you of His own free will and choice. There is no power in heaven or on earth that could force Him to come to you, if it were not His own will. Neither does He come, because you argued with Him, urged Him, and persuaded Him. He is not a hard man with whom it takes much pleading to persuade Him. He comes urged, persuaded, hastened on by His own compassion, love, grace and mercy. So St. Paul writes to Titus: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration." And He Himself said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." Before you asked Him, yea, when your tongue could not yet utter a word, He came to you in the washing of regeneration. Not because He stood in need of you, or because you urged Him, but what constrains Him to come to you, He declares in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah saying: "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." For His own sake He comes to you. His own desire to dwell in you is so strong that thereby He is obliged and compelled to come to you.

Here you have the answer to the question: how shall I come to Jesus. He comes to you. You can not come to Him, but He comes to you. Without Him you can do nothing, and begin nothing, and what you begin without Him is all sin. He must first come to you; He must lay the first stone in you. Of yourself you can not even with sincere longing desire Him to come to you: for if you desire Him He has already come to you and has created that desire in you, as David says in the 21st Psalm: "Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness." Therefore Luther truly says in a sermon

on this text: "Learn from this Gospel, how it comes to pass when God begins to make us pious, and what is the beginning to become pious. There is no other beginning, than that thy King come unto thee and begin in thee." So Luther, and what he says here is most assuredly true. There is no other beginning to become pious, than when this King comes to us and begins in us. We do not make the beginning by cutting away the brush and clearing the way for Him, or by casting out the enmity against God, by putting away the heart of stone and overcoming malicious resistance. If we could thus commence conversion, why should we not also continue it? But "it is God," says St. Paul, "which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And what is His good pleasure? To come to us, to clear the way, to break the will of the devil, the world and the flesh in us, to take away the heart of stone and thus to prepare in us an habitation unto Himself. O a glorious truth! We must not come to Him, He comes to us. Suppose it were the contrary; suppose He would not come to you, but you must come to Him, what then? Why, all your lifetime you would be obliged to inquire anxiously: What shall I do to come to Jesus, only to find that you can do nothing. But blessed thou; for "*behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*"

Do you ask: What then am I to make of all those Scripture passages which command me to come to Jesus? Does not He Himself say: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden?" So He does say, and glorious words they are. But you must not overlook two facts: In the first place, He does not say: you can come, He only says: "Come unto me." The command to do a thing does not necessarily include that we are able to do it. In the second place, you should remember, when He calls, then men come, yet not because they are able to, but because He calls them. He is the almighty God who does impossible things. He called when there was nothing,—and heaven and earth sprang into existence. To our understanding an impossible thing. He called the light and it shone forth out of darkness. He calls the dead and they come. He called Lazarus and he came out of the sepulchre, not because he was able to, but because the Lord called him. He

comes and calls men through His Word and they that sleep awake, rise up, and come to Him. It is all of Him; the Word is of Him, the calling of Him, the awakening, the rising, the coming, all of Him. O thou, my fellow Christian, who desirest Him needest not harass thy soul how to come to Him. "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" And you that have Him not with you, you money-changers who love only the things of this world, you self-righteous who think yourselves good enough without Him, you have no excuse; for He surely comes to you to make His abode with you, but you bid Him go hence. Surely, you will be left desolate.

"*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.*" He comes as a King. What kind of a King is He? He is King of the universe, but as such he is not spoken of here. He is the King of Sion and as such He comes unto thee, "*meek,*" kind, good. He does not come as a king of wrath and vengeance, He comes as the King of mercy. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Neither does He come like other kings who come to their subjects to exact and to take from them, this King comes to bring and to give. What has He to give? Is He a rich King? Yea, He is rich. He has grace, He has righteousness, He has the Holy Ghost, He has peace with God, He has light, He has life, He has salvation. He is a rich King. He labored hard, He sweated blood to win treasures and He won great riches. And His delight is not in possessing, but in giving away His riches, and therefore He comes unto you to bring you all these things.

I have said that He does not come to you because He is in need of you, and that is true; for He is rich and stands in need of nothing. I hope you will not regard it a contradiction when I now say, He comes to you because He needs you. Why does He need you? O He needs sinners to make them righteous. He needs the dead to make them alive, He needs the blind to make them seeing, He needs the sick to make them whole, He needs the sad to make them glad, He needs the condemned to save them. Because He delights in bestowing His riches on others, therefore He needs you and comes to you to adorn you with His treasures. And O with

what rejoicing does He fill the empty soul with His riches! He is like unto that father receiving his lost son: shoes must cover the feet, a ring must adorn the hand, a chain must encircle the neck, a fatted calf must be brought to the table. If there is rejoicing before the angels of heaven when a sinner repents, much more does this King rejoice in making the poor rich. "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee*"; receive thou Him and sing:

Welcome, King of glory, now!  
Hail! my Savior, Lord art Thou.  
Here too, in my heart I pray,  
O prepare Thyself a way.

### III.

How should we receive Him? Do you say: How shall I worthily prepare the house for the King of Sion? Are you afraid that He will not find things with you as they ought to be? Did I not tell you a moment ago, that He comes to prepare for Himself a dwelling in you? Of course He will not find things with you as they ought to be, otherwise you would not need Him at all. Because you are soiled and ragged, He comes to you to cleanse and to clothe you. Do but pronounce Him welcome, then all is well.

Or if you are still anxious to know how to receive Him, let me tell you. When the prophet here says: "*Thy King cometh unto thee*," make out of the "thy" a "my" and out of the "thee" a "me" and say: "My King cometh unto me." Does it startle you that you should be so bold? Here you are to be bold. Paul was a great sinner, yet of this King he boldly said: "Who loved me and gave himself for me." He is thy King who bought thee and comes to thee in the Gospel: hold thou Him. Do like Jacob did on the banks of Jordan when wrestling with this King; for when the King said: "Let me go," Jacob answered: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." That is the right kind of reception; grasp Him saying: Here Thou art and here Thou shalt abide; for Thou art my King and I will not let Thee go, mine Thou shalt remain.

If you thus receive Him as your King then you will also be ready to do as the multitude in our text did. You will be ready to take your garments, that is, whatever you possess in this world,

and laying them under the feet of Jesus you will say : 'These things I possess as though I possessed them not, but Jesus is mine, mine forever ; He is my wisdom, He is my righteousness, He my salvation. And if He is thus become your one and all, your heart will join in with the multitude entering Jerusalem and will sing : "*Hosanna to the son of David : Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ; Hosanna in the highest.*" Amen.

## II. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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TEXT: And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves lest, at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Luke 21, 25-36.

The advent, or the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the world, is threefold. His first advent was His incarnation, when He came into the flesh to redeem the world with suffering and death. In this manner He will come no more. After He was once offered on the cross He will not be sacrificed again, because entering in once into the holy place by His own blood He obtained eternal redemption for us. His second coming is His spiritual coming to the hearts of men through His Word and the holy sacraments. Through the Word of the Gospel and the holy sacraments He comes to us knocking at the door of our hearts and offering us grace, pardon, righteousness and eternal life in His blood shed for the remission of sin, as He commanded John to write to the church of the Laodiceans: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any

man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me." His third advent is yet future; it will take place when He comes to judge the quick and the dead, and to consummate all things.

His first coming was done in poverty and great lowliness; for He was born in a stable and was laid in a manger. His last coming will be done in majesty and great glory. The snows of the north and the burning sands of the south will yield up their dead, and all nations will be gathered before Him. On that day all things will be made right. They that loved and honored Him will receive the kingdom, and the despisers will be banished from His countenance forever; for He is just and will judge righteously.

When is He coming? On what day and date will resound the trump that wakes the dead? Time and again presumptuous men have fixed the day and the date of the Lord's coming only to find themselves deluded. It is a vain and idle, yea, even a presumptuous and a blasphemous undertaking for men to name the day and the date of the judgment; for what God has kept hidden no man can search out. Of the day appointed for the judgment the Lord said: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." What the angels of heaven cannot cipher out, what Jesus Christ Himself in the days of His flesh and in the state of His humiliation did not know, no man should attempt to unravel.

Christ tells us the object of God in hiding the date of the judgment when adding to the words already quoted: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." To inspire our hearts unto watchfulness and prayer let me speak to you:

#### ON THE COMING OF CHRIST UNTO JUDGMENT.

- I. He comes without delay surely;
- II. He comes to the unbelieving terribly;
- III. He comes to the believers comfortingly.

#### I.

We live in those times of which the apostle Peter prophesied when writing: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking

after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." These scoffers have now come in multitudes, ridiculing the prophecy of a judgment day, and denying the very existence of God. But they are "willingly ignorant," as Peter says; for there is a voice in the bosom of man, which convinces him that there is a day coming in the which he will be made responsible for the deeds done in his body, a day when every one shall reap what he has sown. Peter therefore gives this answer to the mockings of these scoffers: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The fact that the Lord has not yet come to judgment is not a proof that He will not come, but a proof that He is a gracious Lord granting men time for repentance.

The certainty of the Lord's coming to judgment is attested by the Scriptures in manifold ways. Here the Lord mentions a number of signs which precede and presage His coming: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*" And after mentioning these signs He distinctly says: "*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*" What the signs in sun, moon and stars are the Lord tells us in Matthew 24, saying: "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

Have these signs been fulfilled already, or is their fulfillment yet to come? This question is of paramount importance, because these things must precede the judgment and if they have not yet come to pass we can not yet expect the Lord's coming. There are two things which we should here bear in mind. In the first place the Scriptures exhort us in many passages to hold ourselves in

readiness alway to appear before the Son of man, even as the Lord says at the end of this Gospel: "*Watch ye therefore, and pray always.*" If we are to be ready *every* day to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we may be called on to do so *any* day. In the second place we must bear in mind that the Lord is here speaking of signs which were to come to pass before the last day, certifying that the end of the world and the day of judgment will once come, and these signs must be of such a nature that the great mass of mankind does not regard them signs, neither believes it that they foreshadow the judgment; for, according to the Scriptures, men will live securely as they did in the days of Noah when the Son of man will come. Whilst men are scoffing the prophecy and disregarding the signs, that day is to come upon them "*as a snare.*"

Such things which men do not count signs of the Lord's coming are eclipses of the sun and moon, the disappearance of stars from the firmament, great storms, earthquakes and the like. Many smile scornfully when these things are pronounced signs of the coming judgment. They say, how can a thing which is brought about in a natural way and by natural causes be a sign that the Lord will come to judgment? But why should it not? The rainbow is also produced by natural causes, yet God appointed it a sign that the earth should no more be destroyed by a deluge, and this sign has proved true unto the present day. So Christ has appointed these natural things for signs of His coming. Certainly, if the darkening of the sun is to be a sign, it must be a temporary darkening which lasts for a short time only; if the falling of the stars is to be a sign, it is evident that the falling of a few stars only is meant; for when the sun is extinguished to shine no more, when all the stars fall from the heavens, then the last day is come and there will be no more room for signs presaging it. Other passages of the Scriptures compared, it becomes very evident that the Lord is here not speaking of miracles, but of things which can be explained in a natural way and which men generally do not accept for signs, otherwise, the day of the Lord could not come upon them "*as a snare.*" Let the scoffers scoff. Often must they themselves bear witness that these very things are really signs of the coming end;

for when these things do come to pass, when the storm-winds unfold their strength, or the solid ground begins to quake under their feet, then are those same scoffers filled with terror, lest the day of judgment have come.

All these signs have been fulfilled time and again, and their manifold repetition assures us that the coming of the Lord is nigh at hand. Few, indeed, regard these signs and these few are derided by the world as superstitious people, but the last of all signs will be the sign of the Son of man. There in the clouds it will appear and that sign no one shall ridicule; for all shall see it and every one shall know what it means.

That the signs shall not fail, but that the coming of the Lord will surely follow them, the Lord here illustrates by a comparison: "*Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*" Infallibly as summer follows after the budding of the trees, so infallibly will the Lord's coming follow after the preceding signs. The Lord confirms it with a solemn assertion saying: "*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.*" The Jews have been scattered among the nations of the earth since 1800 years, yet they have preserved their characteristics as a people. They are to-day the same stiff-necked generation as in the days of Christ, and every Jew we meet at this late day and in this far western land is a living testimony of the truth of the Lord's Word and the certainty of His coming to judgment.

The signs are fulfilled, the Lord has promised it and His Word will not pass away, He will come. The day is appointed in the council of God and, whether it be to-morrow, or centuries hence, come He will, and *He will come to the unbelieving terribly.*

## II.

Of that day the Lord says: "*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunken-*

ness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." As a bird when suspecting no danger is suddenly caught in a snare, so will the inhabitants of the earth be surprised suddenly by the coming of the Son of man. "As in the days that were before the flood," says the Lord, "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." This then is the reason why the day of judgment will come upon the inhabitants of the earth as a snare, because they are not expecting it, but live securely saying like that evil servant: "My Lord delayeth his coming." Following their usual pursuits and apprehending no danger, ye rather saying, there were no last day, or it would not come in a thousand years, the nations will suddenly behold the sign of the Son of Man. Especially three vices does the Lord mention in our text as prevalent at His coming: "*Surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life.*" The Lord describes the generation of the last days as delighting in eating and drinking, as having their whole hearts in the cares, pleasures and treasures of this world, as did the Sodomites even in the morning of the selfsame day in which their city was destroyed. Plainly a description of the world even as it now is. Our age is marked by material progress and prosperity as none other in the world's history. This is right and good in itself, but because man is by nature inclined to be earthly minded, material progress and prosperity have the tendency to draw the heart and mind more to the earth and earthly things. What does the world now want? It wants peace, ease, new conveniences and new enjoyments and many unblushingly say, men had been hoaxed long enough with the hope of a heaven in the hereafter, they wanted their heaven on this earth. And where are those who are waiting and watching for the Lord's coming? Are they not a paltry few as compared with the host of the earthly minded?

But the greater the imaginary security the more dreadful the waking. What consternation will seize upon the wicked when the flames of the burning elements will suddenly envelop them, as the

waters of the flood came upon the inhabitants of the first world. Must they not be filled with terror like a bird finding itself caught in the meshes of a net? When God spake the ten words from the top of mount Sinai, the children of Israel could not bear it. They fled thinking that they must die. How much more will the unbelieving be terrified at the sound of the trump of God summoning them to the judgment! When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, John saw in a vision that "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Why will the unbelieving strive to flee from that day of wrath like a bird struggles to free itself from a snare? Because their own conscience pronounces their sentence beforehand. Here on earth a criminal may hope to escape by denial, or bribery, or flight, but in that judgment none will escape. That Judge will not be deceived; for His eyes penetrate the very bowels of the earth seeing what is done in secret. He will not be bribed; for He is just and will render unto every man according to his works. He will not be resisted; for He is almighty and has power to destroy both body and soul in hell. How will the fornicator be overwhelmed with shame when his deeds done under cover of darkness will be brought to light! How will the miser tremble when he is judged as an idolater! How will the spiteful quake when they are pronounced murderers! Then will the scoffer cease scoffing, when he will see the Same whom he denied "*coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*"

When once the apostle Paul before Felix, the governor, "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," Felix began to tremble. How shall the ungodly tremble when the Judge will descend and in thunder-tones will speak to their conscience: I am Jesus who once came to purchase you with my own blood, but whose love ye despised and whose Word ye rejected, and

now I am come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel. Woe, woe will be unto them that will not be found worthy to stand before the Son of man.

Their sighs are unavailing,  
The day of grace is past and gone,  
They trembling stand before His throne,  
All unprepared to meet Him.

Jesus Christ, the ordained Judge of the world, will come without delay surely; He will come to the unbelieving terribly, but *He will come to the believers comfortingly.*

### III.

Whilst consternation and despair will fill the hearts of the unbelieving at the Lord's coming, rejoicing and gladness will be with the believers. "*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" Who can "look up and lift up his head," who can be bold and rejoice greatly, when all the world must despair, when the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and the elements will melt for fervent heat? These words the Lord addresses to those who believe in Him, who love Him, and who long to be with Him. Whosoever loves the world, or any thing in the world more than Jesus, can not rejoice, he must sorrow at the loss of his heart's treasure; but those who love the Lord more than aught else, whose dearest treasure Jesus is, will rejoice with exceeding great joy, when they will see Him coming who is the joy of their hearts and the desire of their souls. Quick as thought will the believers be transformed and the sleeping saints will start forth out of their graves their bodies glorified and together, a glorious, shining throng, they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That will be the day of the church's triumph, when the children of God, separated from the wicked and hypocrites will rise upward with a shout saying: Come is the day of our redemption, that glorious day which we loved, unto which we hasted, and for which we longed.

To rejoice over His coming we must have faith and trust in Him. Therefore we should daily inquire of ourselves: Heart, where is thy love? is it in the world, or is it with the Lord? Where is thy treasure? is it on earth beneath, or in heaven above? Wouldst thou flee if to-day thou shouldst see the Lord coming in the cloud? We daily pray in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come." Is it truly our desire that the kingdom of glory should come, or does our heart gainsay what our lips pray? The man who does not desire the Lord's coming, who does not, as St. Paul says, "love his appearing," is none of His. I do not say that no one is a Christian who experiences a feeling of dread when picturing to his mind the terrors of the last day; for ye know that there are two things in the Christian, the flesh, which dreads, and the spirit, which loves the Lord's appearing. But by the spirit the Christian crucifies the flesh and beholding the signs foretelling that the Lord is nigh, he "*looks up and lifts up his head.*"

With these words the Lord aims to cheer up those of His followers who are depressed in spirit and weary in their pilgrimage. He bids them take courage anew whenever they see a sign presaging His coming, and He consoles them with the word "redemption." From what will His children be redeemed by His coming? They will be redeemed from "the body of this death." In this life the Christian must often sigh with St. Paul: "I find that, when I would do good, evil is present with me," but when the Lord comes, then will "the law of sin" be purged out of our members; for to the Corinthians St. Paul writes: "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." If delivered from the body of sin, then also from all the evils which sin has brought upon us, a glory which we can now conceive of but darkly. Must we then not rejoice beholding signs which show that our "*redemption draweth nigh*"? Does not a weary traveler rejoice when he sees signs that he is nearing home? What else are the followers of Jesus Christ than pilgrims in this world? Their citizenship is not here, they "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." On the journey they are exposed to the hardships of the way and the inclemencies of the seasons, but

the Lord's coming shall end this pilgrimage; then shall they come to the city which they seek; then shall they enter the rest which the Lord has prepared for them with His suffering and death. Ought not these weary pilgrims take courage anew as often as they see signs come to pass, telling them that the day is drawing nigh which will end their toilsome and dangerous pilgrimage and will bring them to their eternal home?

O ye weary souls, that are "chastened every morning!" look up; lift up your heads. The trees have budded; the frosty winter is well nigh ended; summer is at hand; the signs are fulfilled; your Savior must soon come to lay low the heads of the haughty; to destroy this earth so full of sin and woe, and to create the new heavens and the new earth. He comes to deliver you from all evil.

Blessed, blessed every one who will be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of man! And worthy to stand before Him, every one will be found, who appeals to the sufferings and death of Jesus of Nazareth as the atonement for his sins, and who says: I am indeed a miserable creature, sold under sin. Not for a single day can I refrain my heart from evil, but my Lord has bled and died for my sins and has put them away; and He will come again to deliver me out of this evil and perverse world and to receive me unto Himself.

In this faith, my beloved fellow pilgrims, faint not. Yet "*watch ye, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*" Watch, that ye err not from the faith; watch, that ye be not enticed into by-paths. Press on in the narrow way praying: Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

### III. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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TEXT: Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet: For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Matth. 11. 2-10.

All our faith, all our consolation and all our hope rest on the fact that the Son of God was made flesh to establish a tabernacle of God with men, and that Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem, educated in Nazareth and crucified on Calvary, is indeed the promised Seed of woman, the Salvation of Israel out of Zion. On the certainty of these two facts rests all our hope of salvation; for if the Son of God had not been made flesh, we would yet be in our sins; and if Jesus Christ were not He that was promised to the patriarchs we would be deluded people. Were it not true what Christ Himself testified: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father," were this not true, then we would be without hope in the world. But, thanks be to God, the fact that Jesus Christ is in deed and in truth the promised One, is established beyond a doubt. The history of His birth, life, sufferings, death and resurrection, His miracles, His doctrine and the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament in Him, prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is Jehovah, our righteousness, the root of Jesse, the glory of Israel and the light of the Gen-

tiles. He is the One; for He is "declared to be the Son of God with power," and "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen."

What the fathers most desired,  
 What the prophets' heart inspired,  
 What they longed for many a year,  
 Stands fulfilled in glory here.

Permit me to-day briefly to set forth :

THAT CHRIST IS INDEED THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

This He proves in our Gospel

- I. By His miracles;
- II. By the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

I.

The object of this Gospel, as well as of that for the following Sunday, is, to demonstrate that He who came to the daughter of Zion, conducted into the city of Jerusalem by a multitude of people with singing and shouting, is truly the Savior sent by God, the Same who will come to judge the world.

But before speaking of this we must take notice of an item in our text, which might appear very strange to some and which infidels sometimes abuse to make of it an argument against the Bible. It is the question of John the Baptist: "*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*" Should John not have known that Jesus was the promised Messiah, or should he, perhaps during his imprisonment, have fallen into doubt? Neither the one nor the other can be assumed. It is, of course, true, even the greatest saints of God may fall into doubt and sin, yea even into idolatry, for which Solomon is an example who, in his old age, was seduced by his heathenish wives to build altars to idols. It is not to be denied that John the Baptist might also have fallen into doubt, but that he did not is indicated plainly enough in the Scriptures. John had seen the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove and remain on Jesus; unequivocally he testified: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" again and again did he "bare record that this is the Son of God." Moreover, he rebuked king Herod

because of Herodias, his brother's wife, saying: "It is not lawful for thee to have her," and in this testimony John remained steadfast, although it cost him his life. He was not a wavering man, as the Lord here says to the multitude concerning him: "*What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*" Here the Lord plainly says, that John was not like a reed swaying to and fro in the wind, and as he was steadfast in his confession we conclude that he was also steadfast in his faith.

But though John himself was not in doubt as to whether Jesus was the Messiah, yet the disciples of John were. When John was in prison and the fame of Jesus began to spread abroad, the disciples of John, being anxious to know if Jesus was truly the One promised, reported His deeds to their master. In order, therefore, that they might become fully convinced, John sent them to Jesus with this question; for John well knew that the Lord had more testimonies for His identity, than only the testimony of His precursor. Not for his own sake, but for their sake did John send his disciples to put this question to the Lord. This is also indicated by the form of the question; for John does not send them to ask: "Do I," but: "*Do we look for another?*" So John's disciples came and proposed this question to the Lord, and incontrovertibly does He prove to them that He and none other is the Messiah.

He answered: "*Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" When the disciples of John came to Jesus, they did not find Him alone, but in the midst of a great multitude of people, surrounded by sick and ailing ones. There they proposed their question to Him, but He did not simply answer: I am Christ, neither did He appeal to the testimony of John, but He first of all appealed to His works. The Lord does not require them simply to believe His word; for then they might have answered as the Pharisees once did: "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true;" but as He answered the Jews: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works," so also here. The Lord answered them in a twofold manner: first in deeds and then in

words. St. Luke, after stating the question put by John's disciples, writes: "And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight," and then St. Luke subjoins the answer of Christ. When the messengers of John had proposed their question to Christ, He first answered by deeds, performing a number of miracles before them, and then He appealed to these miracles which they had seen with their own eyes.

How do the miracles of Christ prove Him the Son of God and the promised Deliverer, since many others have also performed miracles? When a miracle is performed, when the ordinary course of nature is changed simply by a word, either God must Himself be present in His own person, or the act must be performed in the name and power of God; for no creature, not even an angel, can, without using adequate means, change the course of nature appointed by God. Now prophets and apostles did perform miracles: Moses struck the rock with his staff and water flowed from it; Elijah prayed and fire fell from heaven; Peter commanded a lame man sitting at the entrance of the temple to rise and walk, and he arose and walked; but only and alone in the name of the Lord did the prophets and apostles perform these works and they never performed miracles by their own power. Their miracles, therefore, prove nothing more than that the power of God was with them, that they were sent by God and that their word was the Word of God. But Jesus Christ performed miracles in a far different manner. He did them in His own name and by His own power. When once a leper said unto Him: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" He did not answer: In the name of the Lord be thou cleansed, but He said: "I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." The miracles of Christ, therefore, prove more than only that the power of God is with Him and that His Word is of God; they prove that He Himself is God; for He that can change the course of nature simply by a word spoken in His own name must be God, who alone has such power. Christ must be true God, because He performed miracles in His own name and by His own power; and, indeed, He performed a countless number of miracles. As we

read in the Gospels He performed miracles at all places wherever He went and yet St. John writes: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book."

Christ's miracles prove that He is the Son of God who is come into the world a Savior; for in them all He wrought deliverance from some evil. Requested to give proof that He is the One which was to come, He appeals to His works; and well may He; for these, certainly, prove to an evidence that He is Jehovah, our Savior.

## II.

After the Lord had answered the disciples of John in deeds, proving Himself the almighty God, He also answered them in words, proving that He is the One spoken of by the prophets; for He answered them in words written by the prophets long ago, thus showing that these were fulfilled in Him. So the prophet Isaiah had written: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." And the same prophet had written: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." By thus answering them in words of the prophets, Christ meant to tell the disciples of John: Ye know, according to the prophets, the Messiah is to perform such miracles, and now with your eyes ye do see me performing these works.

Next to His works, He appeals to the doctrine which He was preaching: "*The poor have the gospel preached to them.*" This also had been foretold by the prophets, that the Messiah would preach the Gospel, glad tidings to the poor, as the Anointed of the Lord spake by the mouth of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." When Jesus once read these words publicly in the synagogue at Nazareth, He began His explanation with the words: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Of the same the Lord re-

mindèd the messengers of John that in that very hour this prophecy was fulfilled in their ears; for when they came to Him, He was preaching to the multitude, and not the rich and the proud, but the poor, the humble and the lowly were gathered about Him. To these He proclaimed the glad tidings, that the kingdom of God was at hand, and the heavens were now opened. Ye know, those sighing in the bondage of sin, the publicans and sinners, flocked to Him, and to these He proclaimed deliverance from their burden, the gracious forgiveness of their sins. Here again the Lord tells the disciples of John: Ye know, according to the prophets, the Messiah is to preach the Gospel to the poor; ye see here a multitude of poor gathered around me, and ye do hear me proclaiming to them the acceptable year of the Lord; "*go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see,*" and be ye believing and not unbelieving.

Of one more prophecy of the Scriptures the Lord reminds them saying: "*And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" Thus we read in the 118th Psalm: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." In the 4th chapter of Acts Peter quotes these words as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, saying to the high council: "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, this is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which became the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other." But most clearly did Isaiah foretell that many would be offended in the Messiah. In the 53d chapter he says: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not." And more directly in the 8th chapter: "He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." This prophecy was repeated by Simeon in the temple. Taking the child Jesus up in his arms, he said unto His mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." Jesus

Christ was sent for the salvation of Israel, but it was foretold that He would be a stone of stumbling to many, His own people would despise Him, and the rulers in Israel would reject Him.

All this began to be fulfilled while John the Baptist was yet living. No sooner did Christ commence to preach and perform miracles than the builders, the priests and scribes, rejected Him, and many of the people took offense in Him, and this, too, the disciples of John saw and heard, this prophecy also was being fulfilled in Him.

In very deed the Lord gives to these men a thorough answer; He proves to them beyond a question that He is the Messiah, and at the same time He earnestly warns them not to be offended in Him, not to make light of His testimony, but to acknowledge and to receive Him as their Savior. Thereupon the Lord dismissed them; for now they could make no other conclusion than this: He that performs the works and preaches the doctrine which the prophets foretold of the Messiah must be the Hope of Israel; now Jesus of Nazareth does these works and preaches this doctrine; therefore there can be no doubt that He is the promised One.

When the disciples of John had departed, the Lord proposed one more convincing proof to the people that He is the Messiah. He began to speak of John the Baptist, and concerning him He says at the end of our text: "*Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" This prophecy was recorded by Malachi, the last of the prophets, and it plainly foretold that one would come who would prepare the hearts of the people for the reception of the Messiah, and here the Lord declares that this prophecy was fulfilled in John. From the whole office of John it is evident that he was sent to be a way-preparer; for he preached repentance unto the forgiveness of sins, and continually pointed to Christ as the Redeemer and Savior of the world. For this reason he was also more than a prophet. The prophets could only say: He will come; but John could say: He standeth among you. John could point to Him with the finger saying: This is He. How unmistakably this prophecy was fulfilled

in John is also evident from the words following those here quoted by the Lord; for Malachi continues: "And the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." John came first, but Christ followed immediately after, and as John decreased, Christ increased.

Let me impress it upon your minds that the Lord here in our Gospel does not only testify that He is the promised Messiah, He proves it with such evidence which neither man nor angel can refute. It is clear as day, He is the One. No one, therefore, has any just reason not to accept Him as the Messiah and Savior. But, alas! even unto this day it is with the great multitude of people as the Lord says of the Jews shortly after our text: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." The great mass of people always find something in Christ to which they object. They want to, and will find some reason to stand aloof from Him. Some take exception to one thing, some to another. The proud take exception to His humility, the rich to His poverty. Those wise in their own conceit are offended at the simplicity of His Gospel, to the selfrighteous His doctrine of grace is a stone of stumbling, and the lovers of sin hate His instruction.

It is a sight which fills the heart of every lover of the Lord with sadness, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is offensive to the world at large, that the good seed finds a good soil only with a very small remnant, but even this sorrowful observation should serve to confirm our hearts in the faith of the Gospel. The fact that the Gospel is so repugnant to the natural man and yet marches in triumph over the face of the earth, conquering a heart here and a company of souls there, is a proof that it is a Word of divine power given unto us from heaven. But this same truth should also teach us to look well to ourselves and to watch lest our own hearts be offended in Christ, seeing we also have yet the flesh to contend with.

Unto us the light of revelation shines more fully than it did even unto John, wherefore the Lord says: "*He that is least in the*

*kingdom of heaven is greater than he,*" because a well informed Christian has a clearer knowledge of Christ and His work, than men could have before His work was finished. And since He has revealed unto us the fulness of His grace, let us not reject Him; let us not close our hearts against Him that He can not make His abode with us. Of the Jews the Lord testified: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." If the Jews had not had the unquestionable evidence that He was the promised One, they would not have had the terrible sin of knowingly and maliciously rejecting Him. We are placed in a similar situation. We know that Jesus of Nazareth is the One that was to come; we know that He is come into the world to save sinners, and, knowing this, let us see that He may not say unto us in the day of judgment: Ye knew that I had come to save you, but ye would not.

Remember well His peculiar word of promise when He says. "*BLESSED is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" Yea verily, is that man blessed who is not offended in Christ, who receives Him with joy and abides in Him alway. He is blessed in his faith, because in Christ he has the propitiation for sin, and peace with God; blessed in his life, because sin can not rule over him, but in the power of Christ he gains victory on victory over the flesh; blessed in his afflictions, because the Father is conforming him to the image of His Son; blessed in his death, because by it he enters in to a better life; blessed in the grave, because he is asleep in Jesus; blessed in his resurrection, because he will rise to meet the Lord in the air.

Consider the immutable foundation on which our Christian faith rests. Our Redeemer is the Lord of heaven; His works prove Him such; His doctrine nourishes the soul with imperishable hope; in Him the prophecies of old are yea and amen. O let us cleave unto Him and not turn from Him, but say with Simon Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen.

#### IV. SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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TEXT: And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.—John 1, 19-28.

The children of the world mould their opinions with regard to religion according to the spirit of the times. They shape their religious beliefs after the views which are most fashionable and popular in their time and country, and, when new opinions come into vogue, they are ready to adopt and to praise them. They are like the weather-cock, turning with the wind of popularity and fashionableness, and many professing Christians are controlled by the same spirit. They are always ready to adopt the ideas, ways, and practices which take best with the mass of the people, and they do not want such teachings and practices which are hated and denounced by the world. Even among preachers, those are found who advocate the principle that religion should progress and change with the times. They say, if one thing does no more draw, it should be dropped, and if a new thing comes up which does take with the masses, it should be adopted.

But those three men at Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, were not of this mind. When king Nebuchadnezzar set up a new god and at his command the princes and the mighty men of his kingdom fell down to worship this new god, these three men would not bow to it or worship it. And though they saw that all the great and the noble did it, yet they did not accommodate themselves to the multitude, neither did they yield when they were bound hand and foot to be cast into the fiery furnace. On that great festive occasion, the dedication of this new god, the noblest and mightiest from a score of nations were assembled, and they were all weather-cocks turned by the wind of royal favor, eager to please the king by bowing to a new god, and only these three men were so "selfish and stubborn" that they would not do as the others did. Did not that multitude have reason to think those three selfish men deserved death, because they were so stubborn as to refuse to do as all the others did?

Yet it was neither selfishness nor stubbornness with those three; they only showed themselves faithful to the true religion. Every true Christian, who has come to a lively knowledge of divine truth and right, cannot swim with the stream of popularity and fashionableness; he must abide by the Word of the Lord, or he will cease to be a Christian. DEAD FISH DRIFT DOWN STREAM WITH THE CURRENT, LIVE FISH SWIM AGAINST THE CURRENT.

Saving faith is a living power and it will not allow the tongue to remain silent, it will prompt unto confessing with the mouth. When Peter and John were commanded by the high priest "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus," they answered: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Though the prospect of a violent death was presented to them, yet those apostles could not but confess Jesus before men. And why not? Simply because the fire of faith was within their hearts. A soldier who will not confess himself to the flag to which he has sworn, and will not fight for it, is not a faithful soldier, but a traitor; and whosoever would be Christ's, but will not confess Him before men, will, when the hidden things of darkness are brought to light, be found as one who sought the honor of men more than

the honor of God. To awaken our hearts unto boldness in confessing Christ let me to-day speak of :

JOHN THE BAPTIST, AS A FAITHFUL AND A FEARLESS CONFESSOR.

Let us consider :

- I. The occasion of his confession ;
- II. His confession of himself ;
- III. His defense.

I.

The life of John the Baptist was a very extraordinary one. When he was born both his parents were old, and well stricken in years. The child's birth was announced by an angel to his father Zacharias whilst he was executing the priestly office in the temple, and for a sign of the truth of his message the angel said unto Zacharias : "Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed." Before John was born he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and on the day of his circumcision, his father suddenly received his speech again.

Extraordinary was also John's manner of life. "He was in the deserts" where he dressed in raiment of camels' hair, and ate locusts and wild honey. When the time had come in which he was to exercise his office of making "ready a people prepared for the Lord," he came to the Jordan, "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." No man had preached so powerfully in Israel as John did since the days of the old prophets. Therefore his words created a commotion throughout the whole land, and thousands flocked to him to be baptized of him. This drew the attention of the high council at Jerusalem to John. This council was the highest ecclesiastical authority in the land, and its duty was to watch over the temple and the true worship of God, and to see that no new, heretical doctrines and practices were introduced. Now the preaching of John was something new and baptizing with water something unheard of, so the council resolved to send a delegation of priests and Levites to John to make inquiry of him, as to who and what he was, and by what authority he introduced these new things. This action of the members of the high council would have

been right and good, if only the motive and object had been right. They, however, did it not from zeal for the honor and the true worship of God, but rather to promote their own selfish ends. But whatever the motives of those high-standing men may have been, it was certainly not a mean delegation which they sent. This embassy was composed of men occupying a high rank in society and they were backed by the highest authority. Before this august and powerful embassy John "*confessed, and denied not, but confessed.*" Be it emperor or king, pope or bishop; be it father or mother, sister or brother, whenever it is required, the Christian is, as St. Peter writes, to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him." Wherever and whenever it is required, a Christian is to confess Christ. This is a plain duty and I will at present not enlarge on it.

## II.

The first question put to John by the embassy was: "*Who art thou?*" This question obliged John to give testimony concerning himself. If John had not known it before, this question would have obliged him to look to himself asking: Who art thou? Knowledge must precede confession. No one can confess that of which he knows nothing. We must first know ourselves before we can give testimony of ourselves, and we must first know Christ before we can confess Him. Commonly people look to others and inquisitively ask: Who is this man? or what is that woman? Far more important is it to ask one's own self: Who art thou? "Let every man prove his own work," says the apostle. 'To know one's own self that is beneficial. Let him that would make a confession look to himself and ask: Who art thou? Dost thou know what a Christian must confess? Dost thou know and hold the pure truth of the Gospel of Christ? Art thou sure that what thou confessest is the truth of God and not thine opinion only? Let him that would make a confession look to himself and ask: Who art thou? Art thou prepared to make a *faithful* confession? Who art thou in thy faith? Dost thou know and hold Jesus and His salvation? Who art thou in thy life and conversation? Dost thou "walk

worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," or like unto those of whom Paul wrote with "weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"? To be true and faithful confessors we must know that the doctrine which we confess is not human opinion, but God's truth, and this truth we must believe in all sincerity of heart and must walk agreeably to it.

John the Baptist did know who and what he was. Without hesitating he answered straightway: "*I am not the Christ.*" The question was put in such a form that he might have answered in many words, but he understood that they wanted to know, whether he claimed to be the Messiah, and he answered straightforward: No. He did not seek evasions and equivocations, they did not need to ask him twice, his answer was to the point. So they ask further: "*What then? Art thou Elias?*" And he saith, "*I am not.*" The Jews thought, before the Messiah would come, Elias the Tishbite, who had lived in the times of Ahab, would himself personally return from heaven. This was an error. The meaning of the ancient prophecy was not that Elias would again come down from heaven, but that a man would come in the spirit and power of Elias. This prophecy was fulfilled in John. But the meaning of those asking was: Art thou that Elias who was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot? Therefore, not to be misunderstood by them, John answered: I am not. Again they ask: "*Art thou that prophet?*" And he answered, "*No.*" John was indeed a prophet, and more than a prophet, but here again the Jews were laboring under an error. They thought, when the Messiah would come, He would be accompanied by a special prophet, and these men wanted to know, if John claimed to be that prophet. Therefore he again answered: No, I am not the prophet you mean.

Surely, John confessed a good confession before that high and influential embassy. If he would have answered them according to their wish and liking it would, doubtless, have brought him great earthly advantage, but, though they would have offered him the whole Roman empire, he sent them away with No and Nothing. And in regard to this he did not leave them in doubt. He used no dubious words, but spake clear and plain. They did not need to

study over his answer, whether it was piped or harped. That trumpet in the desert did not give an uncertain sound.

John's confession is to be an ensample for us. What we are not we must not pretend to be. John's answers were short and distinct: No, I am not. He was not a hypocrite. What he was not he did not profess to be. If a man claims to be what he is not that is deceit and not a confession, and "the Lord will abhor a deceitful man." Neither was John enticed by honor and gain to deny the truth. Honor and gain must not bind the tongue. That which we know to be God's truth, we must never deny for the sake of expediency. We must steadfastly confess the truth, though it cost us the friendship of men and worldly gain. Manifold are the advantages which the world offers for denying God's truth: the wicked offer their friendship; secret societies, their assistance; errorists, honors and gratifications. Be not enticed thereby, but always say: That which I know to be God's truth I will also confess before men, and if in turn I must experience the hate of men, or must sustain worldly loss, yea must even lose the earthly love of those nearest and dearest on earth, it is sufficient unto me if my God honor me. "Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Better far to lose the whole world, than to deny the truth of God: for whosoever denies that truth, denies Christ Himself, because the Lord not only says: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me," but also adds, "and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come."

Again, as John put his confession in words which were not dubious, so should we be careful to use words which may not be misunderstood. This is an important point in our times, when dubiousness of confession is, so to say, the order of the day. Do you, when meeting with infidels, make such concessions to them as to leave them under the impression that you only half believe the Bible? Do you talk of religion with the children of the world, but in such a manner that they think you in no great earnest about it? Are

you when speaking with those erring in the doctrine careful not to contrast truth and error too sharply? Alas! that so many professing Christians, when called on to make a confession, do it in words giving only an uncertain sound. Even whole church bodies seek after formulas to which different parties may subscribe, so that in words they agree while differing widely in sentiment. But what is this? Certainly double-dealing, and not confessing. John did not so. When those questions were proposed to him, he might have made a speech of an hour or two, so that they who were sent to him would have stood in amazement and would finally not have known, whether John meant to say yea or nay. John's answers had neither hooks nor crooks. Our confession should always be round, sound, plain, straightforward, bearing the true character of a confession. If a skeptic ask you, what you think more reliable, science or the Bible, and you make many words to demonstrate, that the Bible might be explained in agreement with science, will not such a confession, or rather denial, serve only to strengthen that man in his infidelity? We Christians must not only "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us," but we should also give that answer in such a way as to leave no doubt concerning what we do and what we do not believe, so that, though our testimony be rejected, it may leave a sting in the consciences of the enemies of the truth.

So John did; for after confessing what he was not, he also frankly confessed, what he was: "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*" Remarkable! When a chance was given to John to claim honor for himself he, we might almost say, gruffly said no, but called on to say, what he was he answered in words of the Scriptures: "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*" John did not make himself more, but he did also not make himself less than he was. For himself he claimed no honor, but what God had made him that he freely confessed. We should freely confess what we are not, but we should also not deny what God has made us and has given unto us. This every true Lutheran will do. It is frequently said of us Lutherans, that we are proud and want to be

better than others. This saying is not true. In ourselves we are not a whit better than others; for we are children of Adam as well as others, but this we do say that God has given to our Church the pure doctrine of His Word, not because of our merit, but because of His mercy. Of ourselves we say that we are children of Adam as well as the barbarians are, but of God's doings we say that He has given us the knowledge of His truth, although we deserved it not. And this is to be our constant confession that we are nothing, and that "the Lord hath done great things for us," in order that men may see that we seek not our own honor, but the honor of God.

This too is noteworthy in John's confession that he was not backward in confessing that very truth which he knew to be most offensive to them that were sent to him. He says: "*Make straight the way of the Lord.*" They that were sent were of the Pharisees, who trusted in themselves that they were pious, but John plainly told them, they were not fit for the kingdom of heaven, they must turn to repentance and look for salvation to the one coming after him. Our modern expediency men would say, John might have known that this would offend those men, as it also did. John did not go by expediency. We must never aim to conceal, or to avoid confessing those truths which are most offensive to people. A true physiciau will prescribe to each patient the remedy which will cure his ailing, let it taste never so bitter. We should always be intent on setting those truths before men which are most needful to them, and if they will not receive them we shall be without responsibility.

And what! if men will not receive our testimony? If they hate us and persecute us because of the confession of the truth? John the Baptist's head was carried to king Herod in a charger, but from the confession of the truth he did not waver. In the world the confession of the truth brings evil reward, but we seek our reward not in this world, yea rather, we look not for any reward, but because in Christ Jesus we have the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, therefore, we confess Him and His truth before men.

### III.

This confession of John was not pleasing to the members of that august embassy, and they now began to assail his preaching

and his practice; for "*they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*" They clearly meant to say: If thou art neither Christ nor a prophet thou oughtest to know that thou owest subjection and an account of thy doings to the priests at Jerusalem, thy spiritual superiors, and how canst thou without their permission or sanction introduce this new thing of baptizing with water for the remission of sins? They accuse him of transgressing God's order and of bringing up a new and heretical thing. This was a grave accusation; for it is not allowable that a single man should undertake arbitrarily to change a single ceremony in the church, much less to introduce a new sacrament.

But John knew of whom he was called and he had a ready answer. "*I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*" He said: I need not to be authorized by the high council at Jerusalem. I have my authority from Him, who is coming after me and who was before me. I am the servant, He is the Lord; I apply the water, He works the forgiveness of sin. John had the authority of the God-man; for Jesus Christ was born after John and yet He was before John, and God Himself bare witness to the truth of John's testimony, when at the baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended and abode on Him and the Father said: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Well might John baptize for the remission of sins, because he did it by the command of Him who was come to earn forgiveness for sinners and who had the authority to institute new means through which to impart His forgiveness unto men.

After this One those priests and Levites ought to have inquired that they might have learned to know Him, but they did not. John's preaching was not pleasing to them and they had no inclination to inquire after Him by whom John was sent.

Art thou like unto them? Dost thou know Jesus Christ, or is He yet a stranger unto thee? He is thy brother, partaker of thy flesh and bone, and dost thou not know Him? He laid down His

life for thee, becoming obedient unto the shameful death of the cross, and thou knowest Him not? He has earned for thy soul the cleansing from sin by His blood, and thou knowest Him not? He came to thee in holy baptism to establish a covenant of grace with thee, and dost thou not know Him? O haste, and employ all means to learn to know Him. Hear His Word, search the Scriptures, call on His name for the light of His Spirit, and thou shalt experience the blessedness, whereof He speaks in His prayer: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." And if thou knowest Him then confess Him before men, and strive to become ever more familiar with Him, and He will know thee and will own thee and will do for thee what He promised to His own saying: "And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Amen.

# CHRISTMAS.

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## FIRST SERMON.

TEXT: And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David): to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2, 1-14.

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by the Virgin Mary is the most important event which ever transpired since the world began, neither will it find its equal until time shall end. The night in which the Sun of righteousness arose in Bethlehem is blessed above all nights: blessed in the heavens above, blessed on the earth beneath, blessed in time, blessed in eternity. In that night shone forth the good will of the Father, the love of the Son, the benignity of the Holy Ghost. The deed which God did in that night is the astonishment of the angels, the terror of the devils, the salvation of men. In that night was brought in the First-begotten into the

world, of whom it was said: "And let all the angels of God worship him." In that night the wonder of wonders transpired: God Himself is become man. In that night a child was born in whose tiny body dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The Almighty and Infinite is become an infant. The Eternal One, who alone inscribes the names of them that shall be into the book of the living and when the hour-glass of their time has run down blots them out again, did in that night insert His own name into the roll of mortals. In that night the Immaculate, before whom the heavens are not clean, took upon Himself the form of sinful flesh, and now we sinful mortals are called His brothers and sisters. In that night He was born who took upon His shoulders all the sins of all men and found a fount of righteousness copious enough to justify the world before God and the Father.

O an important night! a blessed night! a holy night! a night without an equal! The company of the elect together with all the hosts of the heavens, the cherubim and seraphim, the thrones and dominions, the principalities and powers from eternity to eternity shall sing of the deed done in that night and shall not sufficiently praise it. We, too, stammer infantile thanks unto Him for this amazing deed, and, though our highest praises are inadequate, yet we know that they are pleasing unto Him; for He has come to be our Savior. This is what I would to-day awaken in your hearts: faith, trust, and confidence in Him as your Savior. But not only the great mysteries of His incarnation are qualified to enkindle our faith, specially attractive and edifying are also the smaller circumstances of His birth. Permit me, therefore, to-day to picture to you:

THE KINDNESS AND LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST SHINING FORTH  
FROM THE SMALLER CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS BIRTH.

The life of our Lord Jesus Christ upon earth is very distinct from that of all other men. He alone could say: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" In the world's history many great ones of the earth are, indeed, represented as men of sterling character and great deeds, but if we examine the various circumstances of their life, small events, and particularly their conduct in private life, we soon find that those great men, famed for virtues, were by no means

without faults, yea, perhaps were addicted to degrading vices. Not so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world to be the Savior of sinners, and not only the great and important events of His life demonstrate this, also small circumstances, occurrences apparently insignificant, they all correspond with His office and contain sweet consolation for the sorrowing hearts of penitent sinners. He did not make a step, He did not speak a word, He did not do an act which does not tell us that He is the Friend and Savior of sinners. Indeed, if we examine the small occurrences of His life we are greatly strengthened in our faith and our hearts are made warm in love toward Him. Permit me to prove this from the history of His birth.

The journey of His parents from Nazareth to Bethlehem already contains a very comforting circumstance. According to the counsel of God this journey had to be performed, in order that the prophecy, Jesus should be born in Bethlehem, might be fulfilled; but whilst on other occasions God repeatedly sent command to Joseph by an angel it is remarkable that this journey was brought about by a decree of Cesar Augustus. Yet unborn Jesus subjected Himself to the command of the emperor, and thus indicated that He would be under the law. God could very easily have brought Mary to Bethlehem without its being done in obedience to the law, but it was to be in obedience to the law that even from this small circumstance we might learn, this child was to be under the law to redeem us from the curse of the law, "that we might receive the adoption of sons." He became a servant on earth, subject even to human authority, that we might be made sovereign lords in the kingdom of heaven.

The infant in the stable was a prince by birth. His mother Mary, as well as His foster-father Joseph, were of the royal lineage of David. This is a proof that He is the One who had been promised; for unto David God had said: "I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." This promised eternal king is Christ; for He sits on the throne of David abiding King forever. But He was a prince without any civil right

to the inheritance of a kingdom and without the least prospects of ever obtaining scepter and crown ; for his foster-father Joseph was a carpenter and not a king. He was not to be a worldly king, and never came to be one. But why was He a prince without a lawful claim to the inheritance of a throne? Surely, any one who is to be a king and does not inherit a kingdom must conquer one. Christ was a prince by lineage, but without a civil right of succeeding to a throne betokening thereby that He came to establish a kingdom by conquest. And He did conquer a kingdom. He invaded Satan's kingdom and took from him his spoil, and now He rules as the King of grace with the scepter of grace over all those souls which hunger and thirst after the grace of God. In civil right He had no more any claim to the throne of His father Solomon, but He conquered a kingdom, and if He was strong enough to deliver our souls which Satan had bound with such strong fetters, He is also able to preserve them unto life everlasting.

The child Jesus was a prince by birth, but a very poor prince indeed. Of the riches of Solomon nothing descended to Him. He was born as lowly as ever a beggar's child can be born. What His poverty signifies, Paul declares when writing to the Corinthians : "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." We were poor, poor in our souls, poor in God, poor in heaven, and He became poor on earth, poor in money, poor in friends, poor in joy, to earn for us the fatness of His house, the friendship of the angels, the pleasures of the new Jerusalem. Through His temporal poverty eternal riches are ours. He brings us not gold, not silver, but He brings us the white linen of righteousness before God.

Jesus was born in a village. At present the place numbers about 2,000 inhabitants and in all likelihood it was not very much larger at that time ; for the prophet Micah says : "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Why did He prefer to be born in a village rather than in a splendid city? In a village He was more easily found

than in a city. To find a stranger in a large city is often not easy, and who could find an infant, as yet without a name, in a city like Richmond? Christ was born in a village where He was easily found, because He desires to be found by every one. The shepherds did not need to wander about long to find Him; for the town was not large. Thou, too, needest not wander about far, if thou wouldst find Him, for He is the King of glory who cometh unto thee, the good Shepherd who seeks thee. Seeking some one in a large city you are in anxiety about finding him. Seeking Jesus you need be in no such anxiety. He comes to you even at this Christmas-day. See, that you receive Him kindly. He is worthy of a kind reception; for He brings you the bread of life, even as the name of His birthplace indicates.

Bethlehem is the name of Christ's birthplace which means: Bread-house, or House of Bread. Around Bethlehem much grain was raised, whence its name. It is significant that Christ was born in a village with this name. All works of God agree in harmonious symmetry. Fitly is He born in Breadhouse who is the Bread of life. He says: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger." As natural bread is the nourishment of the body, so Christ is the nourishment of the soul. The soul in which Christ dwells is satiated, its desires are stilled. Natural bread satiates the body for a time, Christ satiates the soul forever. He that partakes of natural bread will hunger again, but the soul that partakes of this Bread of life will hunger no more, even as the Lord said to the Jews: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." Jesus is so precious a food for the soul as both to satiate it and to give it strength and vitality to live forever. The soul which partakes of this food cannot die, because its food is a living food. At Christmas you give sweetmeats to your children and friends: do not let your own souls starve, but feed them with the bread which came down from heaven that they may be filled with life and light and joy. Behold, the love of the Father in sending this living bread down from heaven: Do not, do not des-

pise His love, but take and eat. Why! the whole earth is now become a Bethlehem, a Breadhouse. The bread of life is scattered among all nations, and would you let your souls starve in such great affluence? Because He came to be the food of our souls this Child was not only born in Bethlehem, the Breadhouse, He was also laid in a manger. That which is put in a manger is not put there for safe keeping, but to serve as food. O let Him not complain: I am the bread of life, but no man desires me. Rather say unto Him: Lord, I am an hungered, feed me. And let no one be bashful in stretching forth his hand for this bread; for in order that no hungry soul might be abashed by the sense of its unworthiness He was born not in a palace, but in a stable.

Jesus was born in a stable. We are not to pity Him on account of this. We should rather rejoice over it; for it, too, affords sweet consolation. If a common man is to enter a kingly palace his heart palpitates and his feet are loth to ascend the marble steps, particularly if his dress is torn and soiled, but who is afraid to enter a stable? Some are; the proud are; they fear to soil their finery. So the selfrighteous will have nothing of Christ's righteousness, because they think themselves clean, or clean enough without being washed by Him, but unto us who know our uncleanness before God that stable is a welcome shelter. If He had been born in a stately palace we might think, He had come only for noble and well dressed people, to such whose consciences are not soiled with flagrant sin, but being born in a stable, an unclean place, surely represents Him as coming to the unclean. He was born in an unclean place, because He came to take upon Himself our uncleanness. Soiled and ragged clothes are not a hindrance in entering a stable. If your soul is soiled by wickedness and your heart rent by remorse, do not dread to go to Jesus and to cast down your sins at His feet; for He is come to bear our iniquity. Or do you perhaps say, your conscience is too badly scarred, your soul too much soiled? Surely, the deeper the sense of your abjectness, the more should it drive you to the stable. Does your conscience say that you are an outcast? Aye, but where do the outcasts find refuge? Do not those who must shun the eyes of men find shelter in stables? Jesus is

born in a stable. He is come to save sinners. From his holy sanctuary on high He came to the unclean place of this earth to cleanse the unclean.

Does sin appear before your view  
Of scarlet, or of crimson hue?  
If black as hell, why should you doubt;  
He will in no wise cast you out.

Does He save sinners? Will He not cast out? O let me seek Him! But where is He found? That stable is decayed long since. Shall I climb to mountain tops? Shall I sail to the uttermost parts of the sea? My friend, you will find Him in His swaddling clothes. He was not wrapped in costly silks, an article which only the wealthy can have, He was wrapped in linen cloth as new born babes in warm countries generally are. A very common article which every one can obtain. Even so now He is wrapped in an article common and cheap: the Word and the sacraments. Bibles are cheap, the church-doors are open for every one, the sacraments cost no money: "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Behold, how excellent His love! Hold His wrappings and you have Him. Hear His Word, use the sacraments, grasp His promises and you shall not fail to find Him, and, having Him, you have the light of life.

Therefore was He born in the night, because He is come to be the light of the world. Fitly in the night; for night it was in the hearts of men. All nations were walking in idolatry and blindness, in vice and hopelessness. Night it remains in the heart until Jesus comes and kindles in it the light of faith and hope. Like a wanderer in a dark night, becoming aware that he is in the wrong way, but not being able to see and not knowing in which direction to turn, becomes more and more bewildered and cannot help himself, so is man without Jesus. Without Him man must walk in uncertainty. His conscience does, indeed, tell him that he is not in the right way to communion with God, but knowing nothing of a safe and sure way, he can not but walk in uncertain, evil and pernicious ways. Therefore the heathen sought help from their

idols and inquired for light from sorcerers and diviners only to sink into deeper darkness. But in Bethlehem has arisen the "true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Seek ye light? Seek it not in yourselves. Reason is a light for the life that now is, but of the world to come it knows nothing certain. Seek ye light? Seek it in Him who says: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Receive the light which shone forth in Bethlehem, and it will be a light unto you even in the valley of the shadow of death.

This Light sent His messengers that very night to turn the darkness into light. This heavenly light of the angels bright did not shine in a temple or a walled city, it appeared to the shepherds in the open field, in token that this child is He of whom the Lord said by the prophet: "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." There is no place unto which the rays of this light had never penetrated. Brightly does it shine over us in this far western land. Be glad and rejoice in this light, all ye, that love the light more than darkness.

I have endeavored to set forth that even the smallest circumstance of Christ's birth pictures Him as our Savior. It is but an attempt; for in Him the smallest is too deep for human understanding and too high for human speech. Remember the little that has been said, and rejoice that we have a Savior whose every act is full of comfort and consolation for the soul. Amen.

# CHRISTMAS.

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## SECOND SERMON.

TEXT: Luke 2, 1-14.

When Moses reviewed the great deeds which the Lord had done for the people of Israel, he was filled with the admiration of God's mercy and goodness and he exclaimed: "Yea, he loved the people." When we consider the deed of God which this day commemorates we cannot otherwise than be filled with the admiration of God's condescending love, and we are constrained to open our lips and to say: Yea, He loved the world, loved it with a divine and everlasting love. Since the Word was made flesh, since God is born man we can no more doubt the love of God toward us.

God created man in His image and placed him into Eden to enjoy immortal happiness, but man lent his ear to the voice of the Old Serpent and of his own free choice he deserted to the camp of God's enemy. Now God is born man to re-unite man unto Himself, to restore in him the divine image and to bring him again to the paradise lost. Yea, He loved the people.

He came into the world not as a great and mighty Lord. He was not born in the gilded chamber of a splendid palace. No heralds on swift horses with rich trappings were sent out to proclaim His birth. No chambermaids were set to work to prepare a soft bed in a silver cradle. Filled with wonder and love the church sings:

For velvets soft and silken stuff  
Thou hast but hay and straw so rough,  
Whereon Thou King, so rich and great,  
As 'twere Thy heaven dost throne in state.

He was born in a stable and was bedded in a manger. He came in poverty, because He came to make us rich. Yea, He loved the people.

Surely, we have reason to rejoice over His birth. And to enkindle our hearts with the right Christmas joy, let us once more hear

THE MESSAGE ANNOUNCING HIS BIRTH.

Let us consider:

- I. By whom the message was brought; and
- II. What it contains.

I

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in the stillness of the night, in the seclusion of a stable in a village. The world knew nothing of it and His own people to whom He had been promised so long were not aware of it. In the ordinary course of events it was to be expected that the people of the inn and the next door neighbors would have learned the next morning that an infant had been born in the night. But it was not the will of God that the birth of His Son should remain hidden, it was to be made known unto men that the time was fulfilled and that the promised Deliverer was now born. For His messenger God chose one of His angels bright, and he came upon the shepherds clad in celestial light and thus ran the message which he brought: "FEAR NOT: FOR, BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE. FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD. *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" When the angel had delivered his message the air was presently filled with a multitude of shining spirits and the canopy resounded with the many voiced song: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

This reminds us of something which is of pre-eminent importance in these infidelic times, when so many are not willing to believe that there is anything in existence over and above those things which can be perceived with the bodily senses. Beside this visible world there is an invisible world of spirits, and this spirit world has exercised a vast influence on man and through him on this visible world.

How did sin and wickedness come into the world? It did certainly not grow out of the ground, neither did God create man wicked, nor did He create him so that he became wicked of himself. God is good and He can in no way be the author of evil. How sin came into the world is a question which puzzled the heathen philosophers and to which they could give no certain answer. We know it. When God had finished the work of creation, He beheld every thing that He had made and it was very good. There was no sin and no evil in the world. But there is a spirit who hates God and is always intent on destroying His works. He, through the serpent, tempted man and succeeded in seducing the first man to transgress the commandment of God and so man became a sinner. When Adam had become a sinner he could no more beget children in the image of God which he had lost, but it is written of him that he "begat a son in his own likeness, after his image," that is, he begat a son who was of a corrupt and sinful nature like his father.

From the spirit world did sin come into this world. Indeed, Satan, that Old Serpent, who first seduced man, has a vast host of evil spirits under him and he brought them into this world and they established a kingdom of darkness in which they rule over men, as Paul writes: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." These evil spirits seduced men to idolatry, as Paul testifies saying: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God," and to a thousand harmful and destructive vices. Yea, often evil spirits took bodily possession of men and even unto this day cases of bodily possession by devils occur in heathen lands as missionaries report. From the spirit world did sin come, and by sin death and the army of evils under the sun.

But as there is a world of evil spirits so there is also a world of good spirits. One of these, the angel Gabriel, was sent to the virgin Mary to announce the birth of Him who is called "the Son of the Highest." Perhaps the same Gabriel, or another of heaven's highest angels was the messenger to the shepherds. We see here that the angels of heaven were so rejoiced over the birth of this child

that they crowded the air over and around Bethlehem singing praises to God in the highest strains. The infant in the stable was not born for the angels, yet we here behold that the spirit world was greatly interested in His birth, seeing those bright spirits which surround the throne of God winged their way to the city of David to sing hymns of joy and praise.

Why did the good spirits rejoice so when God was born man? The apostle John tells us when he writes: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." For this reason did the angels of heaven rejoice so greatly over the birth of this child, because He came to undo the work of Satan and to deliver men again from the power of darkness. And He did commence to destroy the works of the devil so soon as He entered on His public office by delivering those who were bodily possessed of evil spirits. They could not resist Him, but when He commanded them they had to go out. In his first chapter, St. Mark introduces the evil spirits in a man saying: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." They recognized in Him their destroyer and He did so destroy the works of the devil that, through His Gospel, idolatry has been overthrown in many lands and bodily possessions have almost entirely ceased in Christendom.

But bodily deliverance was not the actual object of His coming. He was born into this world to deliver the souls of men from the power of sin and death. This is the grand object of the incarnation of the Son of God that when the soul leaves the body it can not be clutched by the evil spirits and dragged down to the place of torment, but shall be taken up by the spirits from on high and carried to the realms of everlasting light. So let us hear *the news which the message of the angel brings*, and let us take it to heart.

## II.

"*Fear not,*" says the angel to the terrified shepherds. Ye are sinful mortals and the light of heaven must appear terrible to you, because God dwells in a light which the sinner cannot bear. But

here is no cause for terror ; for behold I proclaim to you the birth of your Deliverer who comes to take away all cause of terror from your hearts.

Jesus, the Abolisher of fear. If you have Jesus with you, you need not dread the presence of God ; for in Christ He is a reconciled Father. With Jesus you need not fear the devil and his minions ; for He is their destroyer. With Jesus you need not fear the threats of the law ; for He has satisfied the demands of Moses. With Jesus you need not dread the valley of the shadow of death ; for He has taken away sin, the sting of death. With Jesus you need fear no evil. Jesus dwelling in your hearts will make all things work together for your good.

*“Fear not.”* Why not? *“For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.”* “Behold”! An exclamation of wonder. Yes, here is the wonder of wonders. The Everlasting is become a new-born babe. The Almighty a feeble infant. He was before the hills were made and He is but a day old. The Carrier of the universe must be lifted by His mother. God is made man and yet remains God. The God-Man is bedded in the manger. He was called “Wonderful” by the prophet, and verily He is Himself the greatest of wonders.—“Behold”! An exclamation to direct attention. Look and see and consider well. Here is something worthy of your attention. God is born man. Whosoever hears it, let him incline his ear and lay it to heart and weigh it in the mind ; for God is born man that man should be born again into a godlike and never-ending life.

*“Behold, I bring you good tidings.”* I am not a messenger of evil. I am not come to threaten you with wrath. I will not summon you to the judgment. When the wife of king Jeroboam came to Ahijah the prophet, to inquire of him about her sick son, he met her with the words: “I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.” Here comes this messenger from heaven, the Lord’s angel in heavenly splendor. What does he bring us? What can we expect, we, who have robbed God of His glory and have corrupted our ways before Him? What else could we expect but a heavy message? We are all like unto the prodigal son. We must

all confess: "I have sinned against heaven." Hearing that a messenger comes from heaven, must we not feel like turning and fleeing and hiding from him? But behold, he opens his mouth and he says: "*I bring you good tidings of great joy.*" An angel from the God of heaven sent to bring good tidings to men! What greater honor could be done to this earth? That is joy, great joy, in comparison to which the joy of the world is nothing but a fleeting shadow.

What is the joy of the world? O, the world counts Christmas a glorious time. Everybody quits work, and laying aside all cares each one is intent on that which he counts his best enjoyment. Some want dances and parties where liberties are allowed which otherwise are counted very indecent. Some want one luxurious dinner after another loading themselves with sweetmeats. Some seek the saloon with its drunken brawls, and perhaps go home to abuse their family. And when the holidays are over many a one is sick, or has spots in his conscience which are a troublesome thing. The joy of the world is a vain joy, quickly past and leaving only an empty desire.

And the Christian? He, too, does not despise the earthly gifts of God, he rather truly enjoys them partaking of them in moderation, and much joy does it bring him to cause joy to others surprising them with gifts. But the Christian's true Christmas joy is the gift of the Father in heaven which is laid in the manger. Honor to the earth that an angel came to it as a messenger from heaven, but his message tells of greater honor. God Himself is born man to walk with men upon earth. And since He is born man to become our brother, who can doubt that He has thoughts of peace towards us?

Tell abroad His goodness proudly,  
Who our race hath honored thus  
That He comes to dwell with us.

What can He be to us and what can He bring us when He was born so long ago and so far away? Hear the angel say: "*Which shall be to all people.*" He is born unto all people, not one single one excepted. Over Him all people and all sorts of people should

rejoice. Rejoice over Him, ye kings ; for He is the King of glory. Rejoice over Him, ye princes ; for He is the Prince of life. Rejoice over Him, ye lawyers ; for He is our Advocate with the Father. Rejoice over Him, ye farmers ; for He is the Sower of that heavenly seed which brings forth a never-ending harvest. Rejoice over Him, ye gardeners ; for He is the Rose of Sharon. Rejoice over Him, ye soldiers ; for He is the Captain of your salvation. Rejoice over Him, ye tailors ; for He brings the garments of salvation. Rejoice over Him, ye merchants ; for He is come to purchase your souls. Rejoice over Him, ye poor ; for He is come to make you rich. Rejoice over Him, ye hungry ; for He is the Bread from heaven. Rejoice over Him, ye thirsty ; for He has the water of life. Rejoice over Him, ye sick ; for He is the Physician of the soul. Rejoice over Him, ye men ; for He is the Hero from the tribe of Judah. Rejoice over Him, ye women ; for He is the woman's Seed. Rejoice over Him, ye virgins ; for He is the Virgin-born. Rejoice over Him, ye children ; for He is come to bless you. Rejoice over Him, ye that sit in darkness ; for He will be your light. Rejoice over Him, ye weak ; for He will be your strength. Rejoice over Him, ye widows ; for He will be better unto you than a husband. Rejoice over Him, ye orphans ; for He is the everlasting Father. Rejoice over Him, ye lost ; for He will guide your feet in the way everlasting. Rejoice over Him, ye sinners ; for He is the Friend of sinners. Rejoice over Him all people. Let your hearts be enlarged and your souls lifted up and sing :

My heart for very joy doth leap,  
 My lips no more can silence keep ;  
 I, too, must sing with joyful tongue  
 That sweetest ancient cradle-song :  
 Glory to God in highest heaven,  
 Who unto men His Son hath given.

Why this great joy ? *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”* All described already, save the little word *“unto you.”* This word *“unto you”* asks you to receive Him into your heart. Make it *“unto me”* and let your heart rejoicingly say : Unto me the Savior is born, my

Savior, my Jesus. Open thy heart and say unto Him: Open are to Thee all portals. Behold, I am waiting.

Come, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart, that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

For this purpose was He born into the world that He might be born in our hearts. And O! that every one here present could to-day gladly say: He is born in me. He is mine and I am His. Blessed, thrice blessed are all those in whose hearts He is born. He makes them kings and priests unto their God. Since He came down from heaven for man's sake they that hold to Him must be exalted high as the seraphim. With these let us unite our voices and sing: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" Amen.

## SECOND CHRISTMAS DAY, OR SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

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TEXT: And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. Luke 2, 15-20.

On the first day of Christmas, I invited you to joy and gladness, because of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, in Bethlehem of Judea. With what right did I call on you to rejoice over His birth? If a tried and condemned criminal is already standing on the scaffold, but before the deathstroke is dealt a messenger arrives bringing a pardon, which saves him from an ignominious death and restores him to life and liberty, may not such a one fitly and justly be called on to greet the arrival of that messenger with joy and exultation? Ye were such tried and condemned culprits. The law had tried you long ago, and had found you transgressors; for it says: "Ye shall be holy," and ye were not holy. Therefore the law had pronounced the sentence upon you, that you were to die eternally in hell, gnawed by that worm which never dies. But before the sentence was executed this messenger of pardon arrived, who Himself is the destroyer of our death, the conqueror of hell, who has restored eternal life unto us, who brings the message: Ye shall

not die, but live. Is not this reason for rejoicing? What! our hearts should not be enlarged with gladness when God Himself has come to us into our flesh to free us from bondage and to transport us to His glorious liberty! Surely all people at all places even at the uttermost sea should take harps and, chanting rapturous songs of praise, should nevertheless confess and say: Our praise is not a worthy exaltation of the Lamb of God, which came down from heaven to take away our sins; and though the multitude of the angels should join in with their celestial voices, yet we could not sufficiently praise Him.

But alas! the world cares nothing for His birth. In the midst of Christian lands many thousands blasphemously and publicly deny Him with their tongues and many more thousands with their deeds. In our degenerate days, Christmas, with the majority of those that are called Christians, has lost its original object, for which it was introduced by the ancient church. To them it is no more a time to ponder the birth of Christ, but only an extra time for merry-making, to walk in "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Many celebrate Christmas in such a manner, as though during this time of the year they were at liberty to break every command of God's law. But as in all things which we do, be they great or small, there is a responsibility resting upon us, so also in our celebration of Christmas. It reminds us that the Father in heaven has conferred a gift upon us.

#### HOW SHOULD WE CONDUCT OURSELVES TOWARD THIS GIFT.

I answer: We should do what the shepherds of Bethlehem did, we should

- I. Seek Christ.
- II. Praise Him.

#### I.

Of the high festivals which the church celebrates Christmas was introduced last. But it is of equal importance with the others; yea, it is the foundation on which they rest. If we could not celebrate Christmas we would have no Easter and no Pentecost. It is

the loveliest of all our church festivals, because it reminds us, that the best and noblest which the heavens contain is given unto us, and thus it portrays to our minds the eternal and infinite love of the Father. The sum and summary of all Christmas sermons, if they be Christmas sermons indeed, is simply this: 'The Father did not refuse to give us His own and only begotten Son with all that He is and has. Therefore it is also meet for us to consider, under what obligations we are put by this gift of the Father; for every one receiving a gift is under obligations to the giver. That which Christmas brings us, is not only to be our joy so long as the holidays last, it is to be *that* bread by which our souls are nourished all the year round, yea all our lifetime and also in eternity. But if the gift of the Father is truly to be and to remain the nourishment of our souls we must conduct ourselves towards it in the right manner. What are our obligations regarding the Christmas-gift of the Father in heaven?

First of all it is our duty to accept His gift with gladness, and to appreciate it. Despising a gift is an offense against the giver. Christmas reminds us, that God the Father has given us a noble gift. Must He not be greatly offended, if we do not consider His gift worthy our notice, and negligently pass it by? Is not that slighting the goodness of God? Christmas is indeed a festival of rejoicing, but there is also something grave and serious about its celebration. The God of heaven presents to us His very best and dearest. He gives it freely without asking any compensation from us. Must it not excite His anger, if His present is despised? Can He let that man go unpunished, who despises His Son? Of those, that despise the Messiah, it is written in the prophecies of Malachi: "Behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven: and all the prond, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." The connection of the passage shows, that the prophet is speaking of the time of the incarnation of the Son of God, and he says, those despising Him would be burnt like stubble. All those despising the gift of the Father will be burnt with unquenchable fire and they will not be

few in number. With what jealousy the Father watches over the appreciation of His gift is manifest from the very manner in which He gives it. The Father did give this gift for the whole world; it is there even for the most blasphemous scoffers, but only those who properly appreciate it come into actual possession of it, whereas those, who do not appreciate it do also not possess it and only multiply the wrath of God against themselves. Having before praised to you the gift itself let me briefly set forth, how we come into the actual possession of this gift.

To be partakers of the gift of the Father we must do what those shepherds of Bethlehem did, we must seek Christ. If those shepherds would have disregarded the message of the angel to them, or, if they would have doubted it, thinking: Who knows whether it is true; or, if they would have said: It may be true, but to seek this Child we would be obliged to leave our flocks in the darkness of the night and they would be in danger of being torn by wild beasts or stolen by thieves, then they would not have found Christ, nor could they have rejoiced over Him. In order to find and possess we must seek. The Lord does not say: He that neglects to seek, will nevertheless find; He says: "He that seeketh, findeth." To him that knocks it shall be opened. The man who does not seek the gift of the Father, will never be in possession of it. Whosoever will not knock at the door of Bethlehem, has no part in Christ, and he indeed justly remains empty-handed. If the master of a house has spread a festive table and invites and urges the guests to help themselves, that guest justly departs hungry, who *will* not do the bidding of the housefather. Even so the hearts of those justly remain empty, who, though invited and urged, will not do the bidding of the Father in heaven; who will not say with the shepherds: "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" Whosoever would have part in Christ must have a desire for the gift of the Father, he must wish to possess it. As God the Father did not irresistibly force those people occupying the inn at Bethlehem to make room for Joseph and Mary, but rather permitted His Son to be born in a stable, so He does to-day not obtrude His Son

upon any one against his will. He lays Him in a manger, and, as it were, cries out unto the world: Here is a gift for you; it is free to all; let every one that would possess it, seek it and take it. If we are nevertheless not in possession of the Father's gift, although He urges it on us, the fault is ours and not His. Let us not be indolent. Let us seek Him, while He may be found. The Father owes us nothing. If we, who are called Christians, no more desire and seek His gift, who knows but that the Father might again let His Son be born in a stable, that is, take the Gospel from us and give it unto heathen nations. If Christ is to dwell with us we must desire and seek Him.

How shall we seek Him so as to be certain of finding Him? If one seeks a thing, but seeks it at the wrong place, or, perhaps with eyes closed, he will not find it. Hence in seeking Christ we must know *how* to seek Him. I answer: We should seek Him in like manner as the shepherds; for they *did* find Him. Now the shepherds sought Him as such, who knew that they were in need of Him; for they were greatly elated at finding Him. Even so should we seek Him, because we stand in need of Him. If we come imagining that we can help ourselves, and need no help, He will have nothing to do with us; for He has not come to help those that can help themselves, His office is to help the helpless. Nor must we seek Him trusting in ourselves that we are righteous, or we will be offended at the form of sinful flesh, in which He appeared. We must seek Him as sinners; for He is come to be the Savior of sinners. Not as rich, lest we be offended at the miserable stable, His birthplace, and the manger, His cradle, but as wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Not as proud and lofty-minded, or the stable door might be too low for us, but with empty heart and hand; for He is come to be our all in all. The language of our heart must be:

In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Those shepherds were not offended at His lowliness, poverty and misery. They did not exclaim: Should we acknowledge such

a beggar's child our Lord? Those men were glad, if they did but find Him. Do you say: I would fain be the Lord's, if only it would not bring disgrace before the world; but I do not like to see my neighbors shrugging their shoulders at me. Friend, if that is your sentiment you are seeking yourself and not the Lord. The shepherds were rejoiced to find the Lord, although His surroundings were by no means lordly. If He is indeed your heart's desire, you will press on to Him and not look to the consequences or stumble at the opinions of others. We should seek the Lord for His own sake. Seek thou the Lord, remembering what He said to Abraham: "*I am thy exceeding great reward.*"

The shepherds sought the Child willingly and eagerly. Examine the angel's message, and you will find that he had not commanded the shepherds to seek the Child, nor had he admonished them or even advised them to do so, he had simply proclaimed to them, what they would find at Bethlehem. Yet they say: "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.*" They were full of the desire to see Him, willingly they set out to seek Him, cheerfully they left their flocks to hasten to the Lord. We are to seek the Lord with desire and longing, because He is the highest good. Not in a half-hearted way, so that it makes but little difference to us whether we find Him or not, but with zeal and fervor, as men seeking a precious treasure. Willingly should we seek Him and should not wait till misfortunes and afflictions drive us to Him. In good days we are not to say: I do not need the Lord, and when the evil day comes, I will have time enough to turn to Him. In good days we are to seek Him, that He may be with us in the evil day. As it is said of the shepherds: "*They came with haste,*" so we should early and hastily seek the Lord, and not wait till we can find no more pleasure in sin. With gladness we should forsake the world, making the heart free from that which is in the world, to possess "*the Pearl of great price.*" As the shepherds said: "*Let us now go,*" so let us now seek the Lord. To-day let us seek Him; before to-morrow comes the clock of our lifetime might perhaps have run down, and who shall seek Him in the grave? To-day God gives His Son, to-day He is to be found, to-day the heavens are open, to-day let us

seek Him. Do not let this Christmas-tide pass by without earnestly seeking the Lord. And if you do seek Him you will surely find Him; for He is come to be found.

Where shall we seek Him? where shall we find Him? The shepherds went to Bethlehem, there they found Him in the manger of a stable. Must we undertake the far journey to Bethlehem in order to find Him? Going there we would find nothing but an impoverished village of several thousand inhabitants, and on the spot where tradition says that Christ was born, we would find a monastery instead of the stable, where we might see the Savior of the world in pictures, but no more as an infant in a manger. In the same manner as the shepherds found the Lord in the stable, He is no more to be found on earth, and a pilgrimage to the Holy Land would not bring us a single step nearer to Him. He is just as near in the uttermost parts of the earth, as at Bethlehem.

But where shall we find Him? Must we complain with the Bride in the Song of Solomon: "I sought Him, but I found Him not." Must we seek Him at random, or has He promised to be found at a certain place and in a certain way? Most assuredly He has, and there where He is to be found to-day, the shepherds had already found Him, even before they found Him bodily in the stable. If the shepherds had not previously already found the Lord in a different manner, their finding and seeing Him bodily in the manger would have benefited them just as little as it did the Pharisees, who also saw Him with their eyes, heard His voice with their ears and touched Him with their hands, but nevertheless remained children of wrath. It is not the sensible seeing and feeling the Lord which saves. Judas, His betrayer, had kissed Him, yet the Lord calls him "the son of perdition."

Where and how had the shepherds previously already found the Lord? They had found Him by the faith of the Word. They say: "*Let us now go and see this thing which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" Now the Lord had made this thing known unto them in no other way than by the word and message of the angel. In the Word the shepherds found Christ. In the Word we find Him. In His Word He desires to be sought, and there He will be

found; for unto the Jews He testified: "Ye have not his word abiding in you; for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not." They had not Christ dwelling in them, because they believed not His Word. Therefore He goes on to instruct them where to seek and to find Him, continuing: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." He tells them, to have Him abiding in them, they must search the Scriptures. These are His testimonies; in them He is to be found. He and His Word can not be separated. Where His Word is there He is also. The Word of the Gospel is the manger in which He is laid. If we grasp the Word we have Christ Himself; for He is as good as His Word and will not go back on His promises. Surely, the grace of the Lord is great. He has made it very convenient for us to seek Him. We need not cross the ocean, we need not ascend up to heaven or descend down into the deep, His cradle is His Word and that is nigh unto us, even in our ears. Do you seek Christ? My friend, grasp the cradle and you have the Child.

How can we lay hold of the Word? Evidently not with the hand, but the shepherds say: "*Let us now go and see this thing, which is come to pass.*" Mark well, they do not say: Let us go and see, whether this thing is so, they say: It is come to pass, let us go and see it. They laid hold of the Word by faith, by believing it; they had no doubts of the Word, but depended upon it. Nor must we overlook that they regarded the Word which they heard as the Lord's own Word; for they do not say: Which the angel, they say: "*Which the Lord hath made known unto us.*" They believed the Word, not because an angel had proclaimed it to them, but because it was the Lord's Word. It is not sufficient simply to regard the Scriptures as a word of truth; for other writings we also receive as words of truth. We must receive the Scriptures as God's own Word. Neither must we look to the person of the preacher, but to the Word itself. Whether an angel or a sinful man proclaim it, makes no essential difference, because it is not the excellency or the skill of the preacher, but the Word itself which brings Christ nigh unto us. If we thus hold fast the Word of the Gospel as the Lord's own

Word, then we have Him in it. Let us therefore imitate the example of the Thessalonians of whom Paul writes: "When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God." Behold, the importance of clinging to the Word! Let us search the Scriptures with eagerness, knowing that, if we have His Word, the Lord Himself can not be far distant from us.

## II.

In the second place, the shepherds set us an example for imitation in their praising the Lord. On this permit me but a very few words. The shepherds returned to their flocks "*glorifying and praising God,*" and in particular it is said of them: "*When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*" Those men were so rejoiced at finding the Lord, that they could not be silent, they had to speak of Him to all whom they met. Their hearts were so full that they could not refrain from singing praises to God, or from communicating their joy to others. When we have found the Lord we must exalt His praise, and one of the chief praise-offerings, which we can bring to Him, is, to freely confess His name upon earth before friend and foe, high and low. Those shepherds very likely met some high-standing and proud people, but they were not ashamed to speak to them of the Child in the stable. Never must we be ashamed to confess Christ before men. The scornful smile of respected and influential men of the world should not deter us from speaking of our Savior. This praise, confessing Him before men, is so pleasing to Him, that He has promised to confess those in heaven who confess Him on earth. Though we make ever so many discouraging experiences, we should ever again speak of our Lord, and thus strive to make others also partakers of our joy. Those shepherds were the first Christian missionaries, spreading abroad the fame of Christ. Praying for those who yet walk in darkness and striving to win souls for Him in our family, in our neighborhood and wherever we find occasion to speak of Him, is an offering of sweet smelling savor unto the Lord, praise "pleasant and comely."

And now let us imitate the virgin Mary who "*kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*" Let us not forget the Christmas tidings in a day or in a week. Let us store them away in our memory, not to let them lie there idle, but to occupy our minds with them and to converse on them in our hearts. It is a glorious thing that the Lord did not only once come into our flesh to redeem us, but daily comes to us in His Word. Let us keep His Word in our hearts that He depart not again, but abide with us continually. Amen.

## NEW YEAR'S DAY.

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TEXT: And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2, 21.

Dearly beloved fellow Christians!

God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant unto you in this new year, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that throughout the year Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, and ye may be rooted and grounded in love, knowing that the love of Jesus is better than wisdom and riches.

The return of the year teaches too solemn and useful a lesson, as that we Christians could pass it by unnoticed, though New Year's day, as such, is not a church festival. The change of the date on our almanacs appears to be an insignificant thing, but it proves to us that it is true what Solomon says: "All is vanity." There is nothing stable under the sun, every thing is subject to mutability and change. Transient is every earthly thing. Time is transient; it continually progresses, and no one can stay it. The past year is passed and gone, and cannot be called back again. Time is like a shadow which passes by and returns no more.

As time is so must everything be which is in time and subject to time. It must all be temporal, vain and vanishing. Examine the rocks of our mountains, and you will find that even they are subject to decay. Like wind and weather all earthly things are continually changing. They are variable as the moon. What is wealth, honor, happiness? It is like the Chameleon which often changes color suddenly. The man who to-day is rich, honored,

happy, may to-morrow be poor, despised, miserable. Most impressively does David picture the vanity of man's life and doings when he says in the 39th Psalm: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." David desired this knowledge from the Lord that his life and doings were vanity. Man's life and doings are, indeed, a vain, transient thing. Where are those stately Romans who rode in golden vehicles and prided themselves in being lords of the earth? They have disappeared like a shadow; scarcely a few of their names have been handed down to us. Of all the myriads who have lived in the lapse of time the names of some thousands are inscribed on the pages of history, the rest have passed away without leaving a trace behind them. What shall be known of us a hundred years hence, if the world will yet stand? Our place will know us no more, yea perhaps the very remembrance of us will be forgotten; no one will know that we ever were, and no one will care to know. Man lives a short time on the earth and then sinks into oblivion.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

Yet man lives so securely as though the earth were to be his dwelling place forever, and he considers not that his days are as a handbreadth.

Of the vanity of all earthly things the return of the year reminds us, and it should persuade our hearts unto wisdom, to seek the things which are not vanity, which will cause our names to be remembered forever. Where shall we seek them? Not in the things of this earth; for "the world passeth away and the lust thereof," and the works of man crumble to atoms. Seek the tower of Babel

which was to reach up to the skies! Ask for the names of its builders! They are forgotten, and they will never be known; for they were proud men, and their names are not written in the book of life. By great deeds we cannot inscribe our names on the indelible pages of eternity; only by holding fast the covenant, which the Immortal One has made with us, shall our names be immortalized in heaven. To do this I beseech you through the mercy of my Lord at the beginning of this new year.

When do we close the old and begin the new year in a manner pleasing to God? I answer:

WHEN WE DO IT IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

IN His name we end the old and begin the new year, if we

I. Believe that He is the propitiation for the sins of the past; and

II. That He will be our Helper and Savior in the future.

I.

*“And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus.”* Circumcision was in the Old Testament what baptism is in the New, the sacrament of reception into the covenant of grace with God. As baptism “works the forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation,” so in the Old Testament the children of the Israelites through circumcision obtained the forgiveness of sins, were delivered from the power of death and the devil, and were made heirs of eternal life. As Peter said of baptism: “Be baptized for the remission of sins,” so circumcision was for the remission of sins.

Now in our text we read of the Child Jesus: *“And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child.”* The child whose birth we celebrated eight days ago, was also circumcised; it, too, received the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins and of deliverance from death and the power of the devil. Does not this contradict the words of the angel to the virgin Mary when he

said: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This Child was not conceived and born in sin like other children. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," even from the womb. What strange thing, then, is this that He was circumcised? If He was holy and undefiled from sin, why did He receive the sacrament which was instituted for the remission of sins? If He was the Son of the Most High, why did He receive the sacrament of reception into the covenant of grace with God? If we would tell an angel of heaven that he must be baptized, what would he answer? Would he not say: I am not a sinner, like you mortals on earth, and I need not be baptized for the remission of sins. Where there is no sin, baptism would have no meaning, because it is "for the remission of sins."

Now here we behold this wonderful spectacle that the Most Holy One, God's own Son, is circumcised. Think of God coming down from heaven and being baptized as though He were a sinner needing forgiveness! Jesus Christ, who is the true God, is circumcised as though He were a sinner and needed forgiveness. Infidels and Rationalists would make of this a flat contradiction saying, if He had been the true God, He could not have consented to receive the sacrament of the forgiveness of sin. But we Christians must not be led away from the Word by the inferences of human reason. It is, indeed, a wonderful thing that the same one whom the angel called "Christ, the Lord," after eight days was circumcised as though He had been born a sinner like other children; but in this wonderful thing is embraced the mystery of our redemption. St. Paul explains this beautifully when he writes to the Galatians: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." This Child was not a sinner, and, therefore, not subject to the law. He had committed no sins, and for His own person did not need circumcision. Nevertheless He was put under the law and was circumcised as though He were a sinner. Wherefore? St. Paul

answers: "To redeem them that were under the law." He was not subject to the curse of the law, but others were; He had not sinned, but others had: He did not need forgiveness, but others did. Therefore He was circumcised not for His own sake, but for the sake of others. Who "these others" are the apostle defines when he adds: "That *we* might receive the adoption of sons." *We*, you and I, had sinned and needed forgiveness. Therefore Christ was put under the law to fulfill it in our stead, and so to deliver us from the curse of the law. He was circumcised for our sake to earn forgiveness of sins for us.

We have sinned, and that the sins, even of the past year alone, have been neither few nor small we cannot deny, neither should we attempt to deny it. Now from eternal Justice the decree has long since gone forth: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This decree puts us under the curse; for none of us can say that he has done "all things which are written in the book of the law." But there was One in heaven who was moved with compassion to us-ward, and He made this agreement with eternal Justice, that He would come down to the earth, He would assume our nature, He would step into our shoes, would put Himself under the law and in our stead would fulfill its requirements and for His sake we should go free from the curse. At Christmas we heard from the message of the angel that He did come, and our to-day's Gospel tells us that He went to work very early to fulfill the contract made with Justice in eternity and revealed to the patriarchs of old. When eight days old He was circumcised, He the Holy One, as though He were a sinner, and so He demonstrated that He had taken our place under the law. Let fastidious persons say of our text, the Bible ought not to speak of such things as circumcision, because they were offensive to delicacy; to us who, by the grace of God, have come to an understanding of the counsel of God unto salvation, know, that this text is one of the most glorious verses in the whole Bible, because it tells us that we have a Savior who did indeed perform the requirements of the law. Those drops of blood which He shed at His circumcision are unto us the earnest, the pledge that He did do

what He had agreed on with eternal Justice, and, hence, that the penalty pronounced by the law is removed from us.

That we, my friends, have not kept the law can now no more prevent our salvation, because Christ has kept it for us. Though I have transgressed the law, yet Christ has fulfilled it for me. If now I grasp Christ's fulfillment of the law and appropriate it unto myself as mine own, then I have a fulfillment of the law, and this is just as good and just as valid before God as though I had never broken the law, but had kept it most perfectly; "for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." This is our trust that Christ is the propitiation for our sins; that His fulfillment of the law is ours; and if we do heartily believe this, then the sins of the past year are, before God in heaven, a thing of the past and are no more taken into account against us. This is the way to rid ourselves of the sins of the old year, to claim the work of Jesus as our own. This is ending the old year in the name of Jesus, to believe it, to rejoice over it that He saves us from our sins.

## II.

If we so by faith in Him begin the year in the name of Jesus, we have a quiet conscience concerning the past, knowing that He is the propitiation for our sins; and in Him we have also a Helper for the future, a Friend on whom we can depend. "*His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" Jesus was the personal name of the Lord, the name by which He was known when walking on earth. It was not by accident, nor merely by human choice, it was by the counsel of God that He received this name Jesus; for He "*was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" Already before His conception His name was given Him by an angel. It is, therefore, not an earthly, or human, but a heavenly, a divine name. Not His mother, God chose it. Now if God gave Him a name it must surely be an appropriate name, and so it is; for His name tells us what He is and what He does. His name was given Him when He

was circumcised, and even then He was already doing what His name denotes; for the word Jesus means Redeemer, Deliverer, Helper, Savior. *Savior* is the name of the child circumcised at Bethlehem. The reason why this name was given Him the angel tells us when saying unto Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." He is the true Jesus, He is *the* Savior.

In earthly things there are many that may be called saviors. A skillful doctor is a savior in sickness, when he gives wholesome medicine; parents are saviors of their children, providing for them; kings are saviors of their subjects, when defending them; money is a savior out of many difficulties to him that possesses it. But these all are poor saviors. When need is greatest they forsake those who trust in them. A doctor can not cure death; money can not deliver from the compunctions of conscience. When remorse begins to lacerate the heart, when the law, death and hell strike terror to the soul, when Satan begins to say: Thou art a sinner and thou art mine, then all earthly saviors forsake us, then their comfortings are vain and they become manifest as miserable saviors. But when need is greatest then Jesus is the true Savior; for He has come to save us from our greatest need, to save us from our sins. Insignificant are all external evils in comparison to the evil of sin; for temporal afflictions, though they last for years, last for a time only, but sin drags down to eternal destruction. Though I would be obliged to beg my bread at the doors of hard-hearted strangers and though I must sleep under the canopy of heaven, and be made wet by the dews, yet having Jesus for my Savior I would be far better off than a millionaire who has made *gold* his savior; for gold will procure comforts and luxuries for the body, but Jesus will deliver out of every trouble. If the burdens of this life oppress me, Jesus, my Savior, cheers the heart with the hope of a better life to come and He knows how to soften every sorrow and sweeten every toil. If my sins trouble me, Jesus, my Savior, is come to save me from my sins. If Satan accuses me, I answer: What right shouldst thou have to condemn since Jesus, my Savior, hath bruised thy head? If hell threatens to devour me, I answer: Jesus, my Savior, ascend-

ed on high and led captivity captive. Though I must walk through the valley of the shadow of death I have a staff on which to lean : Jesus, my Savior. A bright star of the morning greets me from beyond the river of death : It is Jesus, my Savior. O! what sweetness is comprised in the word Jesus, Savior.

None shall claim my heart beside,  
None but Jesus crucified ;  
Savior, I am only Thine,  
Other love shall ne'er be mine.

“Thy name is as ointment poured forth,” says the Bride in the Song of Solomon. Delightful to the believing soul is the name of Jesus, delicious as the savor of precious ointment, lovelier than the lily of the valley, sweeter than the rose of Sharon. Shall we not in this dear Name begin the year ?

Dark the year lies before us. None of us can tell, what it will bring him, whether it will exalt him on earth, or lay him low in the dust. We Christians who do not seek that which is of the world, but have our eye fixed on the eternal home above, can, as pilgrims in a strange land, not expect much good in the world. Of some things, indeed, we do know that they will be in this new year. Satan will be our enemy, the world will tempt us, our own flesh and blood will try us, perhaps death will knock at our door. Where shall we find one to depend on for comfort, help and deliverance ? Thanks be to God, we know of one : Jesus, our Savior. “Our God is the God of salvation ; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.” Begin the year in the name of Jesus. If He is with you, you can be bold against Satan ; for He is come to destroy the works of the devil. If He is with you, you can triumph over the threats and allurements of the world ; for He has overcome the world. If He is with you, you can rule over the sin dwelling in your members ; for He gives the Spirit that lusteth against the flesh. If He is with you, you can be cheerful in affliction ; for if you suffer with Him, you shall also reign with Him. If He is with you, you have a Friend whose “loving kindness changes not.” Trusting in His name we can cheerfully sing :

Jesus' Name shall lighten pain,  
And in all our ills relieve us ;  
Losses thus shall turn to gain,  
And to blessings what seemed grievous ;  
Jesus' Name is Sun and Shield,  
Here must all our sorrows yield.

In this world every thing is changeable, and man more changeable than aught else. Man is indeed to-day red, to-morrow dead, to-day rich, to-morrow poor, to-day glad, to-morrow sad, to-day respected, to-morrow rejected, to-day beloved, to-morrow hated.

Thank God, that in this world of changeableness we have one thing which does not change, the Word of our God, which tells us of the Rock of Ages cleft for us. In Him let us hide our souls; then let times change, let fortune change, let men change; in the clefts of the Rock of Ages there is an unchangeable hiding place. May you dwell in Him and He in you. Amen.

## SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR.

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TEXT: And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. Matth. 2, 13-23.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, as it had been foretold; for thus God had spoken unto David by Nathan the prophet: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." From this and other similar passages of the Scriptures the Pharisees, as blind leaders of the blind, concluded that, when the Messiah would come He would establish a worldly kingdom and would rule at Jerusalem as a mighty mon-

arch. They were indeed blind leaders. Had they examined the Scriptures with an unbiased mind they must soon have understood that Christ, being an everlasting king, could not be a worldly monarch. Earthly kings are of few days and must soon leave their dominion to others. But the idea that the Messiah would make Jerusalem the capital of a mighty kingdom, suited the carnal wishes of the Pharisees, and so they themselves adopted it and taught it to the people. In the time of Christ, therefore, it was the common belief amongst the Jews that the Messiah would liberate them from the dominion of the Romans and would make them a ruling nation on the earth. So deeply was this false opinion concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom rooted in the minds of the people that it was extremely difficult for the apostles to extricate themselves from it. On the day of the Lord's resurrection those two disciples going from Jerusalem to Emmaus yet said: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." He had truly redeemed Israel with an everlasting redemption, but they meant a different kind of redemption, namely civil and political redemption. Even at the Lord's ascension the disciples still asked: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" To the very last they cherished the fond hope that He would restore liberty and self-government to the Jews. Not till after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost did the apostles fully understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. This false notion, inculcated by the Pharisees, is entertained by the Jews unto this day. Fondly, but vainly do they expect the Messiah yet to come, to gather them out of all nations and to establish a glorious kingdom at Jerusalem.

In Christendom also many have erroneous and mistaken views concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom. The Roman Catholics teach that the church is a visible body under a visible head, that it should have authority over the civil powers and should reign in worldly glory. Millenarians, similar to the Jews, harbor the fond dream that Christ would yet come to rule over the earth in a visible kingdom for a thousand years. Many, when they have embraced Christ, think, they ought now to fare happily and prosperously in all things.

All such opinions, as though Christ's kingdom should be an external kingdom, glorious in this world, or, as though following Christ ought to bring worldly blessings and happiness, are against the nature of Christ's kingdom on earth and they are in conflict with the Scriptures. Neither should they be regarded as harmless; for they bring great danger to the soul. Of those like unto seed sown on a rock the Lord says: "Which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." When temptation comes upon them, they fall away. If a man thinks in following Christ, his path must be smooth and he must fare happily, and then he finds that he must climb over rocks and suffer wounds from thorns, he is in great danger of being offended in Christ, and is tempted to turn back and to walk no more with Him. To avoid these dangers it is important to be rightly informed as to the nature of Christ's kingdom, in order that we may know what to expect of Christ and with Christ. Let us therefore to-day consider:

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM AS SHOWN BY HIS  
FLEEING TO EGYPT AND THE MURDER OF THE  
INFANTS AT BETHLEHEM.

We learn here:

- I. That Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of the cross; and
- II. That in it is manifested the hidden power of God unto salvation.

I.

At His birth and again at His presentation in the temple glorious things were spoken of the child Jesus. In addition to this wise men from the far East came to Jerusalem inquiring: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." And when they found Him at Bethlehem they worshiped Him, and opening their treasures "they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh." Thus far the history of Christ speaks unto us of honor and praise brought unto Him both by angels and men. But very soon He had to suffer the persecution of men. He was come into the world

to be a landmark of salvation to the meek and the lowly, the contrite and the broken-hearted. Hence it could not be otherwise than that He must be a rock of offence to the proud, a stumbling-block in the way of the world, a sign offensive to all who are not contrite and broken-hearted. When still an infant He was in the way of one mighty on earth; for when the wise men had departed, "*the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*"

This Herod was not a Jew, but an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. An ambitious man and favored by opportunity he succeeded with the aid of the Romans to make himself king over Judea. History tells of few tyrants so unfeeling and bloodthirsty as he. He spared not his nearest relatives, but under nefarious pretenses he put many of them to death, including his sister, his wife and three of his sons. When this bloodthirsty tyrant heard by the wise men that the long expected King of the Jews was born at Bethlehem he at once began to fear for his throne. Herod wanted to remain king and to perpetuate his throne. Therefore this child was in his way, and he was quickly resolved that it must be put out of the way. The infant Jesus was already hated and His destruction plotted. He had to flee for His life and He did flee. | Wonderful spectacle! The King of kings, who in the eighth chapter of Proverbs says: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice," flees to save His life from the hands of a petty tyrant.

Behold here the nature of Christ's kingdom on earth. When He was born there was no room for Him in the inn, He had to be born in a stable in great lowliness and poverty. Now there was no room for Him in Bethlehem, nay, not in all Judea. He had to become an exile from the land of promise and had to seek safety in that land in which Israel had once been held in bondage. And He did flee. He might have stayed at Bethlehem. He might have taken up the contest with Herod. He might have caused fire to fall from heaven and consume the murderers sent by Herod. He might have stationed the angels a fiery wall around Bethlehem. He

might have inspired the people of the Jews with sudden courage to rise up against their oppressors, and He might have given victory to their arms to drive both Herod and the Romans from the land, and to seat Him on a throne of gold and ivory. That, that would have been something great and glorious before the world. Then His praise would have been in every mouth. But He flees! That is inglorious, disgraceful before the world. In like manner we read at the end of this Gospel: "*But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee; and He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.*" Here again we behold Him seeking safety in obscurity. He hides to escape the power of a man. He "made himself of no reputation," says St. Paul, "and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself." He surely humbled Himself when He submitted to flee from the country by night, when He took upon Himself exile and hardships, and sought seclusion to escape the hands of wicked men. This all is not glory in the sight of men.

Now as the King, so the kingdom. The Christian must fare similarly on earth as did Christ; for He said to the disciples: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Christ experienced the hate of the wicked and endured all manner of suffering on earth: even so the citizens of His kingdom must also be hated by men and must undergo sufferings. This is illustrated here by two plain examples. The first is Joseph and Mary. On account of the Child Jesus they were obliged suddenly to arise by night, to forsake all and set out on a long and perilous journey to a strange land, and when they returned even then they were not free to choose their place of abode. For the Child's sake they had to dwell in seclusion. The persecution aimed at Christ fell upon them also; they had to take part in it. And not only they, but also the infants in and around Bethlehem; for Herod, "*when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children*

*that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men."* For Christ's sake these children had to suffer death. It did not simply happen so to them, because Herod was a bloodthirsty tyrant; for Herod would never have thought of putting those children to death if it had not been for this Child Jesus.

In these latter days the name of Christ has, indeed, become great on the earth; nevertheless His kingdom is yet a kingdom of the cross. Unto this day following in the footprints of Christ does not bring honors and worldly advantages. The true Christian, walk he ever so inoffensively, is yet hated by the wicked and despised by the world. Many a humiliation must he experience and many a conflict must he endure.

Nevertheless there is victory and glory in the cross of Christ. Though in the judgment of the world the kingdom of Jesus Christ appears weak, fleeing, vanquished, perishing, there is a hidden power active in it which makes it triumphant in persecution, victorious in defeat, invincible to the enemies. This power is hidden to the world, but manifest to them with whom is "the secret of the Lord." Let us observe the working of this power as shown by our text.

## II.

In the secret chambers of his palace king Herod concocted the plan to destroy the new-born King of the Jews. He was certain that the Child was born at Bethlehem, but at Bethlehem there were many children, and not knowing which was the one, Herod resolved not to search out the Child by inquiry; for he feared the parents might be caused to take warning and might flee. To make perfectly sure of the Child's destruction Herod determined to have all children in and around Bethlehem, that were two years old and under, suddenly put to death. This was a bold, wily and, as far as human sagacity goes, a sure plan, because there was no human possibility of Joseph and Mary being warned. But Herod's secret plan was soon made known to Joseph, and Jesus escaped. Here is

that secret, hidden power which is active in the kingdom of Christ. Herod was baffled when he thought he had succeeded in his scheme.

And Herod was not only baffled, he in fact by attempting to destroy Christ only promoted the cause of His kingdom. Herod did succeed in cruelly murdering a large number of innocent children, but who was the gainer and who the loser? Herod was not the gainer; for the One whom he aimed to destroy, escaped him, and the blood of those innocent babes may many a time have risen up before the eyes of his mind an accusing witness and, surely, it burns on his soul forever; but those children, being of Jewish parents, had been received into the covenant of grace by the sacrament of circumcision and were saved. Early were they secured from all danger and made perfect. If Herod was not the gainer, those infants were certainly not the losers. Yea, by the satanic scheme of Herod they obtained the high honor of being the first martyrs for Christ in the New Covenant. Aptly does Luther say on the death of these infants: "This death is unto them a peculiar honor before God and all His angels and saints, and in salvation they will receive a special reward for it." In the judgment of the world Herod fared prosperously and those infants perished miserably, but here again is that secret, saving power in Christ's kingdom which, in fact, made them the victors and Herod the vanquished.

Herod also gave occasion for the fulfilling of the Scriptures. By his persecution Christ was obliged to flee to Egypt, from where He was called back by an angel of the Lord, and so the prophecy was fulfilled. "*Out of Egypt have I called my son.*" Herod caused the mothers at Bethlehem to raise a cry of lamentation over their murdered infants, and so was accomplished the prophecy: "*In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*" Because Archelaus was also a tyrant, Joseph was afraid to go into Judea and went and dwelt in Nazareth, and so the prophecy was fulfilled: "*He shall be called a Nazarene.*" Behold again the working of that secret power in Christ's kingdom, making Herod subservient for the fulfilling of the Scriptures. Herod thought to destroy Christ, whereby the prophecy

of the Scriptures would have been thwarted, and he knew not that his acts served to promote the fulfilling of the Scriptures. Yes, there is an invisible power in Christ's kingdom by which even His persecutors are made instruments for the promotion of His kingdom.

One thing more remains to be mentioned: "*But when Herod was dead.*" Though a fugitive the Child Jesus was living, but Herod died, or rather, he perished in the most miserable manner conceivable. Not long after the murder of those infants a disgusting disease befell him: his body swelled prodigiously, worms grew in his flesh and when he was in such a condition that barely the places could be distinguished where his eyes had been, he attempted to kill himself with a knife, and was prevented only by his cousin. Behold again that hidden, wonderful power in Christ's kingdom: Jesus, the infant Child, living, Herod, the mighty persecutor, dead. So it has been unto this day. Christ, and with Him the Church, abides, but the enemies and persecutors perish. /

Why was this sorrowful occurrence comprised in the plan of redemption? and why is it written? The object is clear. Man had fled from God, and Christ came to restore man again to communion with God. He suffered ignoble flight that we should no more be obliged to flee from the countenance of His Father. Out of His humble fleeing grows our approach to the throne of glory.

This clearly illustrates the nature of Christ's kingdom. It is a kingdom of the cross, but by the cross, and under the cross it triumphs with everlasting victory. In Revelations 7th chapter we read that John saw "a great multitude, which no man could number, before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," and it was said unto him: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." They came out of great tribulation, but they had the palms of everlasting victory in their hands. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom whose citizens are led from cross to glory, from labor to rest, from defeat to victory, from death to life.

Because this is the nature of Christ's kingdom, we should gird our loins and prepare our hearts to be true and loyal citizens in His kingdom. Never should we expect worldly gain from following Christ, remembering what He said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." We can not expect to be carried to heaven on downy beds of ease; for Christ said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." We must not hope to avoid the enmity of the wicked, or the scorn of the world; for Christ was hated and obliged to flee, and He warningly says: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

But when we must bear the cross, suffer affliction, feel the enmity of the world and the scorn of the wicked, our hearts should be cheerful and we should never despair. The kingdom of Christ, though it appear to be made an end of, has never yet been overthrown, neither will it ever be. When affliction threatens to overwhelm us, we should call to mind that those standing before the throne of God came out of great tribulation, but now hold palms in their hands, as Christ also suffered, and by suffering entered in to His glory. Our hearts should be settled in the words of Paul: "We are cast down, but not destroyed." The Lord may suffer His own to be cast down, but He will not suffer them to be destroyed. When it appears as though our enemies must prevail, and we must perish, we should not falter. If men seek to do evil unto us we know that, under the providence of God, they are only working for our good; as the Scripture saith: "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God."

Very pertinently does Dr. Luther write: "The example of these innocent babes is written to teach Christians, when they suffer they should not suffer as murderers, thieves, adulterers, or as busybodies in other men's matters, I Pet. 4, 15; for such sins should not be found among Christians. They are to fear God and are to avoid giving any offense. And yet the world shall assail them and shall not let them alone, so that their sufferings are like unto the sufferings of these innocent babes, who certainly had not deserved such a death at the hands of Herod, but had to suffer it alone on

account of the child Jesus. So are we to suffer; then we have the comfort that Christ suffers with us, as He said to Saul, Acts 9, 4: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Then it must needs follow: either bodily help must come to us, or the tyrants cause us, the sooner to be delivered from this evil world and to come to Christ, our Lord and Savior."

Whatever may betide, we should follow Christ cheerfully knowing that His kingdom on earth is a kingdom of the cross, but that He has an everlasting kingdom of glory in heaven in store for us, and if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.

Here through scorn and frown,  
There the glorious crown;  
Here in hoping and believing,  
There in seeing and receiving:  
After scorn and frown  
Comes the glorious crown.     Amen.

## EPIPHANY.

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TEXT: Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wisemen, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. Matth. 2, 1-12.

From time immemorial both the genius and the superstition of man have been occupied with the stars of heaven. This can not appear strange to us. In a still, clear night the canopy of the firmament displays a scene grand in its immensity and of surpassing beauty. When we step out into the open air on a starlit night the eye is attracted upwards, and admiring their beauty we wonder, what the stars are, how many there are, by what laws they hold their station, perform their revolutions, and the like. Hence when the people were scattered over the face of the earth after the confusion of

languages at Babel, and many of the nations lost the knowledge of the true God, the heavenly bodies became one of the first objects of their superstitious adoration, and to these they began to ascribe those powers and influences which belong to the Deity alone. The science of astronomy also was fostered very early among some of the ancient nations, and in fact much of what we now know of the constellations and revolutions of the heavenly bodies we owe to the observations and the researches of men who lived thousands of years ago.

Because the heathen worshiped the heavenly bodies as gods the science of astronomy degenerated with them into the superstition of astrology. The heathen believed that this earth with its plants and productions is governed by the stars in their various signs and constellations, and to these they in particular ascribed a controlling influence over the life of man both in his good and evil fortunes. So entirely were many of the heathen nations given to this superstition that in all their undertakings and doings they would first inquire after the sign and constellation, and these they regarded either as good or evil omens. It is to be deplored that so much of this heathenish superstition is still lingering in lands which have been Christianized for centuries. To plant, to sow, to harvest, to travel, to wed, to fasten a horseshoe over the door for good luck and a score of other things belong to heathenish idolatry and not to Christianity. We Christians are to walk in the fear of the Lord, and not by signs. Our lives and actions are to be governed by the Word of God, and not by the stars.

But the abuse of a thing will not annul the right use of it. The firmament of the heavens with its myriads of stars does certainly preach a powerful sermon to us. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork," says the 19th Psalm. The stars with a silent, but a powerful voice proclaim the creative power, skill and goodness of God. In their countless multitude the stars are made a special comfort to the church. Leading Abraham, the father of the faithful, out of his tent in a starlit night God the Lord said unto him: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them,"

and then God promised him: "So shall thy seed be." As the stars are a countless multitude which no man can number, even so those who have stood and who do stand in the faith of Abraham, and these are his true, spiritual seed. In the stars the Lord also gives signs which presage His coming to judgment and which are to serve for the warning of the wicked and the comfort of the pious; for He said: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." Extraordinary phenomena in the starry skies are to remind us that the Lord is coming to destroy this present earth and to create new heavens and a new earth. In another passage the stars are made an emblem of the reward for patient and prolonged labor in the Lord's service; for thus Daniel writes: "They that be wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." But of all Scripture passages in which the stars are mentioned those are the most lovely and comforting in which our Lord Jesus Christ is compared with, or is even directly called a star. Hence allow me to speak of:

#### THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM,

setting forth

- I. Who and what is meant by this Star; and
- II. How we should make it the hope and compass of our lives.

#### I.

This Gospel narrates an occurrence which was not pleasing to the Jews, but which is specially comforting to us who are descendants of Japhet. It is the coming of the first Gentiles to worship Jesus. Who and what these men were is a matter of secondary importance. The main truth contained in this text is this, that Jesus is born a Savior not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. The scribes and Pharisees taught that the Messiah would be the Savior of the Jews only and not of the Gentiles. They thought, only by becoming Jews could the Gentiles obtain part in the Messiah. This error was refuted early in the very infancy of Jesus; for God Himself led those Gentiles to Jesus, and spake to them in a vision, and so acknowledged them His own. And the text does not say

that the wise men were circumcised and became Jews, but as they had come, so they departed again to their own country. Their coming was indeed a strong testimony for this blessed truth, that unto this Jesus should the gathering of the Gentiles be, the more so because they were led to Him so wonderfully by a star, showing that He is the Star of hope for all nations.

Who, then, is the Star of Bethlehem? It is none other than Jesus Christ Himself; He is the true Star of Bethlehem. In Him is fulfilled the prophecy spoken by Balaam saying: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel." This Star out of Jacob arose when Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and that none other than Jesus Himself is this Star is clear from Balaam's prophecy; for he explained himself when adding: "Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion." This Star is He of whom the Old Testament so often declared that He would have dominion in the earth, a world-wide and an everlasting kingdom, and this the Lord Himself confirms at the end of the book of Revelations saying: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." The true Star of Bethlehem is Jesus Himself.

Therefore He very properly revealed the fact of His birth to the wise men of the East by the appearing of a star. There have been various conjectures concerning this star. Some have said that it was the Holy Ghost in the form of a star; others that it was a bright and shining angel leading those men; others that it was the light shining over the shepherds of Bethlehem, supposing that this light had been visible in that far away land. These and similar things are conjectures which have no sure foundation in the text; for the wise men distinctly say: "*We have seen his star in the east.*" It was a star, yet not one of the planets or of the fixed stars; for after shining a while it disappeared and only on the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem it appeared again and went before them and stood still over the place where the child Jesus was. We will not deviate from the Scriptures, if we regard it a star which God

caused to appear for the special purpose of leading those men to Jesus.

But how could those men know by this star that the promised King of the Jews was born? Some have supposed that these men came from Arabia, the same country whence came the queen of Sheba, and that the aforementioned prophecy of Balaam had been preserved in that country. Others have supposed that these men came from Babylon, to which city the word "magi" would seem to point as their home. There Daniel had lived and prophesied, and he and his prophecies were no doubt remembered a long time at Babylon. When Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream the king "made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." It is likely that the teachings of Daniel, who was one of their greatest and wisest men, were preserved in that school of learned men and, indeed, they might have had prophecies uttered by Daniel which are not recorded in the Sacred Volume. But these things also are more or less probable suppositions and I have mentioned them the more to emphasize the facts given in the text. The text does not say from which country these men were, neither does it tell, how they could know by this star that Jesus was born, but it does say that this star was the means by which it was made known unto them that the promise given to the Jews was now fulfilled. This star was the agency by which they were brought to Judea. God dealt with those men through means, although in their case through extraordinary means.

May we too expect to be led to Jesus by some specious means, by dreams, by visions, by peculiar sensations and the like? We have no promise that God will deal with us in that way, and if we expect it we are expecting God to do for us what He has not promised us. Those wise men from the East were led by a star, but God has nowhere promised that we too should be so led. Neither should we overlook, but should carefully consider for what purpose that star served those men. It did not lead them directly to Bethlehem where Jesus was, but the appearing of this star only gave them occasion to travel to Judea, the land in which dwelt the people pos-

sessing the written oracles of God. Arriving in this land they directed their steps to Jerusalem, its capital city. Why did God so dispose that those men had to travel this roundabout way? What did they find at Jerusalem?

O in that city they found a most valuable treasure, even the written Word of God. This Word was proclaimed to them by hypocrites, it was communicated to them by that bloodthirsty tyrant, Herod, but it was nevertheless the Word of God, and having the sure Word of prophecy they had a solid and immutable foundation on which to rest their faith. This Word gave them the assurance and certainty that they had not been deceived or misled. It is indeed to be assumed that those men were already acquainted more or less with the promises given to Israel, but at Jerusalem they found that particular Word in which the birthplace of the Savior was named, and in this Word they now had the infallible certainty that the star by which they were led was not a false guide.

Though God does now no more use such wonderful means, yet He still so deals with men as to cause them to inquire after and to give ear to His Word. One is laid on a bed of sickness, another is stricken with poverty, another must mourn the loss of loved ones, another is saved from death or great misfortune by a peculiar intervention of providence, and by these things God strives to draw men to Christ and His Word. I knew a man who was well to do in Europe, but he immigrated to this country and here he was poor and had to work hard for a scanty living, yet he thanked God for it and pronounced his immigration his best fortune, because here he found the true Gospel preaching, by which he obtained the living assurance of his soul's salvation. His immigration was his earthly loss, but his heavenly gain, because by it he was brought to a place where he could hear the true Gospel preaching. God will lead men wonderfully, yet His guidances are not in themselves means of conversion and salvation; good and evil fortunes are only agencies which God uses to direct men to that one thing by which alone the saving knowledge of Christ is obtained, the Word of the Gospel. St. Peter gives testimony unto this and says: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take

heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Why is the Gospel called a light? Certainly because the Star of Bethlehem shines in it. Jesus Christ is the sun and centre of the Scriptures. The Gospel preaches Christ and every one who in singleness of mind gives heed to the Gospel will realize the truth of His promise when He says: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Therefore we who have the Gospel should certainly not be idle, but we should imitate the wise men from the East. What did they do?

## II.

When the wise men had learned by the appearing of the star that the promised Savior was born, it was soon settled with them to go and to seek Him. This could certainly bring them no earthly gain, but it must rather have brought them earthly loss. Whatever their occupation may have been it had to be interrupted for a long journey and this journey itself was by no means a pleasure trip, because it must have taken them through desert lands where dangers and hardships beset them. To those men the one important thing was to seek and to find Christ. Even so should it be with us. The one thing needful, the one thing of paramount importance to us should be to seek Christ and to be found in Him. We need not travel to a foreign land to find Christ. St. Paul writes: "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach." In the Word of the cross Christ is preached unto us and we have the Book of His testimonies lying on the mantlepiece. Seeing we are favored so greatly should it not also be our favorite occupation to read the Word of Christ, to ponder it in the heart and to become the longer the more intimate with Jesus? Was there ever a time when the Book of God was placed within the reach of every one as it is now? In our days the very poorest can possess a Bible and when the Word of life is made so plentiful should we then not improve our opportunities for the benefit of the soul? We can go to the house of God every Lord's day, and the Bible invites us to read every morning and night, and

if the Star of Bethlehem is not shining in our hearts it is owing alone to our own willful neglect and we are left without excuse.

But in this text a sad fact is recorded which is found but too true at this day also. Those men from the East traveled for days across the desert and their strong desire to find the Lord helped them cheerfully to endure all hardships and to brave all dangers. Surely their hearts must have thrilled with joy when they reached the land of Judah, that chosen land of God's own chosen people. They went into this land, but no sign of an extraordinary event could be seen. They went to Jerusalem, but there was no display of festive joy. They inquired for the new-born King of the Jews, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem looked at them with surprise, because they had heard nothing of the birth of a prince. They insisted that the promised King was certainly born, because they had seen His star in the East, and now Jerusalem began to feel alarmed. Perhaps they applied to king Herod, perhaps he heard of these strangers and drew them to his court. He was anxious in this matter, because he feared for His throne. Hence he quickly made inquiry of those versed in the Scriptures and though with guile in his heart he told the wise men what Micah had prophesied. Yet even now, when the attention of the chief of the people was directed to the fulfilling of this prophecy in such a remarkable manner, nevertheless not one of them made a move to accompany the wise men down to Bethlehem. They had to go alone. For centuries the Jewish nation had been looking and waiting for this their promised King and now the news of His birth seemed evil tidings to them. Why? O! Herod, the Edomite, was king, and they thought to dethrone him would cause tumults and commotions, and they did not want to be disturbed in their money making and pleasure seeking. Must not the indifference and the earthly mindedness which they observed at Jerusalem have been a sore trial to the faith of those strangers from the far East? But they stood the test. When the Jews would not go to worship their King those strangers went alone.

We live in a land which is called Christian, but how many of its inhabitants are there, whose first love is Jesus Christ, whose

highest aim is to be found in Him? Surely they are a minority, not to say a remnant only. The great majority is given to money making and pleasure seeking. And this often becomes a cause of temptation to the Christian. The devil will suggest that he is foolish in not thinking and living as others do, and his own flesh will draw the Christian to fall in line with those who are traveling the broad way. Let us therefore well note the example of these wise men. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not go with them they went alone. If others will not go with us to seek and to follow Jesus let us go alone. If father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife will not go with thee, go alone, and make haste to secure the salvation of thy soul. Here is the Word of the Lord proclaiming this great and glorious fact: The long promised King of the Jews is born and He is thy Savior. Let thy soul flee from the land of destruction and find salvation with this King, and let it not hinder thee, if the multitude go not with thee. Yea, if even those dearest to thy heart will not go with thee, go thou alone. "Let us now go," said the shepherds, after the angel had spoken unto them, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Amen.

## I. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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TEXT: Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's Journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2, 41-52.

“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” These words the Lord spake after the deluge, when He smelled the sweet savor of Noah's burnt-offering. Man is of a corrupt nature, and hence it necessarily follows that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.” This corruption which is in the nature of man naturally begins to exert itself early in his very infancy. To this Solomon bears witness saying: “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child,” and of himself and the Ephesians St. Paul says: “We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” This is the testimony which God Himself bears concerning the childhood and youth of man, and its truth is attested by

the experience of all ages. Excepting our Lord Jesus Christ there was never a child born upon this earth whose heart was not prone to all manner of evil. Where is the mother who does not know that a child is inclined to do just that very thing which it is forbidden to do? If not that which is good is early implanted into the heart nothing will grow in it save only the weeds of wickedness and vice. How some can assert that children are innocent and have no sin is hard to understand. Infants are indeed innocent in comparison to grown up sinners, but to say that they are without sin is contrary to the declaration of the Lord: "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," and what it brings forth will self-evidently be on the same order. "The child is a chip of the old block," and in youth the evil propensities of nature are peculiarly active.

By the grace of God there have been many who were pious and virtuous in their youth, as we see in Joseph, Daniel, Timothy, the virgin Mary and many others. And there are yet many young people of praiseworthy piety and virtue, but their piety is not of natural growth. They are made pious by a godly education and the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart. On the other hand we have numerous examples of great men of God who had to regret the sins of their youth with bitter tears. When David, the man after the heart of God, looked back to his youthful days he was constrained to sigh: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." Job, whose piety the Scriptures laud so highly, in the days of his affliction said: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." St. Augustine, one of the greatest divines the church ever had, could think of his youth only with tears of remorse and shame. But why multiply examples? Is it not a fact that many of the most God fearing Christians must lament over some grievous sin committed in their younger years, or must even sorrow over an entirely misspent and lost youth? Legion is the name of those who must sink into an early grave covered with disgrace, or must carry bodily sufferings unto old age, because of missteps made in their youth.

Never was the truth of this word: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," more patent than in our times.

Newspapers and statistical tables demonstrate this to an evidence. Not only is unchastity, stubbornness against parents and superiors and other sins of youth daily on the increase, the number even of heinous crimes perpetrated by mere striplings is continually growing. It is no more an unheard of or even a rare thing that murders and burglaries are committed by boys. Yea verily, the heart of man is evil from his youth, and Paul prophesied truthfully when he described the generations of "the last days" as being "proud, disobedient to parents, unthankful, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."

Woe, therefore, would be unto all men, if there were not a Savior of youth. But thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Savior not of the old only, but also of the young. He has power to forgive sins both to the old and to the young, and when He does forgive the sins of a penitent sinner He forgives them all, whether they have been committed in youth or in age. Our today's Gospel speaks to us of our youthful Savior, and it pictures Him in colors which may well delight our eyes and console our hearts. Let us see what this text tells us of

#### THE HOLY CHILDHOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Permit me to state :

- I. In what His holiness consisted ; and
- II. What salutary use we should make of it.

#### I.

Our Lord Jesus Christ possesses a threefold holiness or righteousness. He possesses the essential holiness of His divine nature, which He has in common with the Father and the Holy Ghost. As the true God He is holy in His nature from eternity to eternity; yea, He is even holiness itself. Secondly, He possesses the perfect holiness of His human nature. Conceived by the Holy Ghost He was born without sin, and He never did sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Thirdly, He possesses that holiness or righteousness which He earned as mediator between God and men by His holy

obedience, His bitter suffering and His innocent death. These are the three kinds of holiness which Christ possesses. The two first kinds,—the essential holiness of His divine and the essential perfection of His human nature—, He has and keeps for Himself eternally, but His merited holiness, which He earned by His living, suffering and dying on earth, He has not for Himself. This holiness He has for us ; for He did not live, suffer and die for His own sake, but for our sake. He was not under any necessity whatsoever to acquire or earn holiness for Himself, because He was already holy both in His divine and in His human nature. This holiness which He won by His active and passive obedience He purchased as our representative for us and He gives it unto us freely. Now when I here speak of the holiness of Christ's childhood and youth I do not mean the essential holiness of His divinity, nor do I mean the essential perfection of His humanity, but I am speaking of that holiness or righteousness which He, as our substitute, obtained for us, and the acquiring of which He commenced in His infancy and youth by His holy life and walk.

Now the child Jesus walked in holiness toward God, toward men and toward Himself. Above all things He walked holy and unblamable toward His Father in heaven. This is evidenced by two things which we are told of Him in this text. It tells us that He walked in the obedience of the law. "*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem.*" In the law of Moses it was commanded unto Israel : "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose ; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles." Those Jews dwelling at a great distance from Jerusalem were permitted to celebrate the two last named festivals at home, but at the Passover, or Easter, all males twelve years old and over were bound by the law to appear before the Lord in His sanctuary. This command of the ceremonial law was invariably observed by Jesus. Indeed it seems that He accom-

panied His parents every year, even before He was twelve years old; for the text says, that Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem every year and that, when He was twelve years old, the child Jesus tarried behind at Jerusalem. This would seem to indicate that He had accompanied His parents before. In all cases the instance recorded here shows that Jesus punctually observed the law from His childhood. He was the Giver of the ceremonial law, its Lord and not its subject, but He voluntarily put Himself under the law "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." He went to Jerusalem regularly at the feast of the Passover, because He was that true Lamb of the Passover which was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

But Jesus did not only walk in the obedience of the ceremonial law. Outwardly the Pharisees also observed the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, although they understood not their true meaning. Jesus did more. He walked in all the holiness of the moral or natural law which was binding not on the Jews only, but on all the nations of the earth. He did what none other can do, He loved God above all things with all His heart. This is here instanced by His tarrying at Jerusalem without the knowledge of His parents. It was the will of His Father in heaven that He should be in the temple just at that time and then and there should show forth the first rays of His divine glory for a testimony to the elders and rulers of the people, and when it came to doing the will of His Father which had sent Him He had no more any regard of men, not even of His parents. When His mother complained of the anxiety with which they had been obliged to seek Him He rebuked them saying: "*How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" He declared to His mother, she ought to have known that He must be about the work which His heavenly Father had given Him to do, and if she had remembered this she would not have needed to be in anxiety about Him, neither could she have entertained the thought that He had dealt unkindly with her. Some one might here raise the question: Why did Jesus stay at Jerusalem without the knowledge of His mother? Why did He not tell her beforehand, what He was about to do? I simp-

ly answer: This I do not know, nor does it concern me. There may have been many reasons for it. Perhaps it was so done, because He, as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, was to appear in the temple without father and without mother. In short, so it was the will of His Father and so He did, and it was strictly in accord with the law. In his final blessing over the people Moses says of a true Levite: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word; and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law." In the performing of the office unto which He was sent Jesus could have regard of no man; for no man could help Him in it, He had to do it alone and gave Himself wholly to it, as He later on said to His disciples: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

As Jesus walked in immaculate holiness toward God, so also in untarnished virtue toward men. He had no pleasure in the vanities which the young generally follow after. When Joseph and Mary found Him they did not find Him in a tavern, or in a theater, or on the street in bad company, or lounging idly at a corner, they found Him in the temple, where the God fearing and the pious were to be found. We must not imagine that Jerusalem contained no places for worldly enjoyments. The inducements to sinful pleasures were just as seductive in Jerusalem as in other cities; but Jesus was found in the temple. In His childhood and youth He never did any thing by which any one could have been offended, or for which He might have been justly rebuked. Twenty years later He challenged the Jews publicly in the temple, the place where the people congregated from all parts of the country, to bring a charge against Him saying: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Saying this He needed not to fear, that some one might step forth and say, at such a time and place he had heard or had seen Jesus speak or do evil. When He preached at Nazareth, where He had lived till to His thirtieth year, His former acquaintances and neighbors did indeed thrust Him out of the city, because they could not bear His doctrine, but they could bring no charge against Him, ex-

cepting that He was a carpenter's son, and this was certainly not a sin. He never did any thing in His juvenile years which even His bitterest enemies could have reprehended in Him.

Walking unblamable Jesus walked in all gracefulness and loveliness. When He was yet young in years the words of the 45th Psalm were already fulfilled in Him saying: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips." This passage will help us to account for what is here said of Joseph and Mary: "*They, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*" His parents could not only depend on it that Jesus would do nothing amiss, they also knew that with acquaintances He would be well cared for, because He was beloved by all on account of His exemplary behavior. Towards His parents He was humble and obedient; for the text says: "*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.*" He gave them the honor due unto parents and He obeyed their commands most willingly. In this connection we should not overlook that Joseph and Mary were poor making a living by the labor of their hands, and doubtless Jesus had to help earn their support. This much we know from the Scriptures that He worked at the carpenter trade; for when He once preached at Nazareth the people asked: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" As His conduct towards all was lovely, so in particular toward His parents He performed all the duties of a son in the full sense of the word and so He fulfilled the righteousness of the fourth commandment.

Finally we here read of Jesus: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" This is said according to His human nature; for as the true God He possessed all wisdom from the very first moment of His conception, but in His human nature He humbled Himself for our sake, and hence He increased like other children. Here a mystery is touched on which is inscrutable to our understanding, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. It is the same One who possesses all wisdom and yet increases in wisdom. These words therefore show that in His youth Jesus was by no means idle, but He diligently

applied Himself to increase in wisdom and all those things which are pleasing and comely before God and men.

Jesus Christ so walked in His childhood and youth that neither God, nor any man, friend or foe, nor He Himself could find any sin, fault or neglect in all His life and doings. A perfect youth without blemish. And now we should also consider of what benefit the holiness of Christ's youth is unto us, and what use we should make of it.

## II.

The right use and application of Christ's holiness in His youth is threefold: It is to be unto us a mirror, a consolation and an ensample.

From the holiness of his youth we should learn to see the unholiness of our own youth. We Christians are not to look at sin as the children of the world do, who count sin a small matter and say that the excesses of youthful days are excusable. Before God no sin is excusable, He simply makes the demand: "Ye shall be holy," and this concerns the young as well as the old. Were you a holy child? Did you walk blamelessly in the law as Jesus did? Did you never delight in sinful things? Did you please and never displease your father and mother? Did you diligently apply your youthful years to increase in wisdom and all that is pleasing with God and men? Look for the answer to these questions in your bygone years and see, whether you can proudly lift up the head and say: I have nothing to accuse myself of? To the old Adam the asking of such questions is indeed not pleasant, but it is profitable for the heart and soul and we Christians must never want to deal too gently with the young man Absalom. Seeking excuses and trying to whitewash ourselves is not the right way; we must be humble, upright and always giving honor to the truth, and surely, if we compare our youth with that of Jesus Christ, there is not one of us who has not much reason to pray: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions," though we had been ever so dutiful and virtuous sons and daughters. If God, from whom nothing is

hid, begins to ask questions concerning our youth, we are verily not able to answer Him one in a thousand.

But this text reminds us of this great comfort that by Christ's holy youth we are saved from our sinful youth. Commonly we think of Christ's passive obedience much sooner than of His active obedience. Remembering our redemption we are apt to think only of Christ's suffering and death, and are not so apt to remember His active obedience that He fulfilled all righteousness by walking in the law, and so we often overlook one great source of comfort to the soul. We are redeemed by the doing, as well as by the suffering of Christ. In order to redeem us it was necessary for Him both to suffer the punishment for the sins which we have committed, and to supply the good which we have omitted. He had to do that which we ought to have done and did not do. In His youth He had to supply the good which we ought to have done in our youth, but which we failed to do.

That the holy walk of Christ in His youth is a part of His work of redemption admits of no doubt; for all that He did on earth He did for us. He also plainly intimates it here by the word "*must*" when He says: "*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" The business unto which the Father had sent Him was our redemption and of this business He said when He was twelve years old that He must be about it. Later on He said to John the Baptist: "It becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," which includes the righteousness of youth. When yet a boy He was laboring in the work of our redemption, and He was laboring in it by His holy walk in the law. He kept in our stead what we had not kept; what we neglected He supplied.

This, therefore, is the use which we are to make of Christ's holy youth: we are to appropriate it and make it our own and bringing it before the throne of the Father we should say: Lord, my God, in my youth I was not as I ought to have been. I fell far short of that righteousness which Thy law demanded of me, and justly couldst Thou condemn me for the sins of my youth. But I appeal to the work of Thy Son, my substitute. He fulfilled all

righteousness for me, His youthful holiness is mine and for His sake Thou wilt not remember the shortcomings of my youth.

Dressing our souls in His righteousness by faith we should also strive to follow the ensample which He has left unto us. It was about fifty miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem, but Jesus was never missing at the festival of the Passover. He went to the temple. He inquired of the teachers in the temple and gave answers to their questions. When twelve years old, His whole mind was intent on performing the work unto which He was sent. "*Wist ye not,*" He says, "*that I must be about my Father's business?*" He was subject to His parents, and the last verse of our text says of Him: "*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man.*"

Here, my young friends, you have an example to follow. Walk in the footsteps of your youthful Savior. Now, while you are young, is the *right time* to follow Him. Only this one point let me to-day urge upon you. It is a very common idea that youth is the time to enjoy one's self, and that the right time to become pious and to serve God is the latter part of life. That is an idea invented by the devil, and it is continually populating hell with thousands and thousands of souls. But you will say: Is there not a truth in it? I answer: To deceive souls the devil always mixes together truth and falsehood. There is, indeed, a grain of truth in that idea. It is true that youth is the time to be joyous. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth," says Solomon, but he adds: "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Youth is the right time to rejoice, but with innocent and not with carnal and sinful joy. It is true, a young man or maiden should not go about hanging the head and groaning all the day long. But if there is some truth in the first part of that saying, the latter part, that old age is the right time to become pious, is altogether false. In old age every one should be pious, but old age is not the *right time* to become pious. On the contrary, *youth* is the right time to become pious. To make the saying right you must put it thus: Youth is the right time to be joyous, and youth is the right time to be pious. Both should go together. The *right time* to graft a

tree is, certainly, not when it is become old and the limbs are already dying. Grafts very rarely do well on an old stump of a tree. The *right* time to graft a tree is when it is young; then it may grow lustily, and become a tree rooted in the soil, strong and healthy. In your infancy the spiritual man was engrafted in you by the Holy Ghost through baptism. Should you tear out those grafts and throw them away? Or should you suffer them to die from neglect? Foster those good grafts that from year to year they may grow stronger and become a tree able to withstand the storms of life. In youth walk in the footprints of your youthful Savior, then you will be prepared in old age to walk in the footprints of your patiently suffering and triumphantly victorious Savior.

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” Amen.

## II. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast, had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. John 2, 1-11.

When God, after the six days work of creation, "saw every thing that he had made, it was very good," but sin entered into the world, spoiled the creation of God, and now the world is a vale of tears and full of evil. Yet the creatures of God have not become evil in themselves. Man only became a sinner, other creatures became subject to vanity, but there is no sin in them, as St. Paul writes: "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." In these words St. Paul does not contradict Moses, who says that God cursed the earth; for God did not in its own nature make that evil which before He had made good, but to man

and on the account of man the earth is cursed. Though the creature is no more so precious as it was before the fall, yet the greater evil is this, that man does no more receive the creature with thanksgiving, does not regard it according to the Word of God and does not sanctify it by prayer. This is one of the greatest evils under the sun, that man does not regard the works, doings and ordinances of God according to His Word; for if man receives and uses the creatures of God according to God's Word, then that which was cursed on account of sin again becomes to him a blessing which brings true and genuine joy.

An evil of evils it surely is, if man does not look at things right, as he ought to. If I, a minister of the Gospel, look at my office through the spectacles of the flesh, or the old Adam, I can see nothing in it but labor and trouble and humiliation; but if I look at my calling according to the Word of God, in the light of God's promises, then it is, as it were, surrounded by a halo; then it shows in colors which make it something desirable and lovely, and if I could *always* and *only* look at my calling in this light I would truly be a happy man. Similar it is in all things. If man would look at everything in the light of God's Word, and would receive it with thanksgiving, that would heighten every joy, lighten every burden, sweeten every cross and, notwithstanding its multitude of evils, to that man this earth would be half a paradise.

So it is also with the holy estate of matrimony. With many unhappy husbands and wives the chief fault is that they do not look at the estate of wedlock in the right way. If husband and wife do not look at their estate in the light of God's Word, but have regard only of their own wishes and notions, the result is that they overlook and do not see the blessings which they enjoy, but see only the evils; yea, often regard that a curse which in fact is a blessing, and so they make themselves unhappy, when they might live contented and happy. If all husbands and wives would say with Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," serve Him in all things, serve Him in days good and evil, serve Him according to His Word, this must surely bring true and lasting happiness to every house, for "godliness is profitable unto all things,

having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Diligently therefore should we give heed to the words of Mary to the servants saying :

"WHATSOEVER HE SAITH UNTO YOU, DO IT," AS AN  
EARNEST EXHORTATION TO THOSE WHO ENTER  
AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN WEDLOCK.

I. So enter the estate of matrimony that you can cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding.

II. So live in wedlock that Jesus can sit at your fireside.

I.

Among the many subjects for a discourse which this Gospel offers let me to-day speak from the words of Mary to the servants : "*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*" She directed the servants to do, whatever Jesus would tell them, no matter how strange it might appear. What Jesus says we are to do, however useless and unreasonable it may appear. This rule holds good in all things. He is the Lord, we are the servants. It is for Him to command and for us to obey.

What has Jesus to say to those who intend to enter the estate of wedlock ? We read here : "*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee ; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.*" This couple evidently regarded the day of their marriage an important day and they made it a festive occasion. None should think lightly of marriage ; all, both the married and the unmarried, should count it a sacred state. Getting married on mountain tops, on bridges, on rail road trains, or in other fantastic situations, is not in keeping with the sacredness of wedlock. Marriages should always be performed in a solemn manner as a solemn matter. God Himself has highly honored wedlock, as we know from His Word. Before the institution of matrimony God took counsel with Himself, similar as He had done before the creation of man. God Himself brought the woman to man ; God Himself pronounced the

blessing upon them, and added: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." And all this God did before the fall, in paradise, when man was yet in the state of holiness and perfection.

After the fall of man God has highly honored matrimony by guarding and protecting it in a special command of His law, saying: "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" and by threatening: "I will be a swift witness against the adulterers." And God has at all times proved Himself a swift witness against the transgressors of this commandment, as the destruction of Sodom and so many other examples show. God has also preserved this estate at all times and among all nations. On the whole face of the earth there is not a nation without this institution; it is found amongst the most savage tribes. Highly, also, did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, honor this estate by making the beginning of His miracles at a wedding. When He was about to enter on the public exercise of His office and wanted to begin to manifest forth His glory, He went not to the temple, not to the kingly palace, He went to the wedding of a poor and humble couple and there He performed His first miracle. By this action He sanctioned the estate of matrimony and honored it above all other estates. "Marriage is honorable in all." Think not lightly of it, but count it honorable and sacred.

The couple in our text invited Jesus to their marriage. There, my young friends, is another thing which Jesus wants you to do. He wants you to invite Him to your wedding. You can of course not invite Him in the same manner as that couple at Cana did, but you can nevertheless invite Him, and if you do invite Him, He will be sure to be there and His blessing with Him. Jesus will not intrude Himself on you if you do not want Him at your wedding, He wants to be invited, but when He is asked He does not stand on ceremonies, He comes; for He has said: "Ask, and it shall be given you." Remember that it is a matter of vast consequence, whether you invite Jesus or not. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." His blessing will build your house and He will make it a place of true happiness. Let Jesus be the prime guest at your wedding.

When by the Word the Lord is Guest,  
And all through faith and prayer is blest,  
There with God's grace will all be filled,  
And God Himself that house will build.

This asking Jesus you should not put off till the morning of your wedding day. It should be done earlier. Young people are inclined to regard marrying a light thing and they are apt to forget or overlook the fact that there is a very serious feature about it. The bond binds for lifetime, and whether you will be happy or unhappy in this world depends largely on the companion of your life. Therefore before choosing a life's companion you should ask God to guide you by His counsel and should give you the spouse of His choice. When Eliezer was sent by Abraham to win a bride for his son he fervently prayed the Lord to show him the damsel whom He had appointed for Isaac, and when Eliezer's prayer was quickly and manifestly answered he returned thanks unto God and said: "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." Do likewise. Before choosing turn in fervent prayer to God. If you do like the people before the flood, of whom it is written: "They took them wives of all which they chose," if you choose only after the lust of your own eyes without God and without prayer and your wedded life turns out unhappy, then your conscience will convict you that it is a just punishment for your forgetting God; but if you enter on an engagement with fervent prayer in the fear of the Lord and in after years affliction comes to your house you will have the goodly comfort that this is certainly so the counsel of God over you and must be for your good.

From our text we can pretty safely conclude that this couple, or one of them, was of kin to the virgin Mary, or that there was some connection between the families. There is another point to be considered in advance. The Bible forbids the marriage of relatives to the third link of kinship, as we read Leviticus 18th chap. This rule forbids the marrying of one's step daughter or one's sister in law, being in the sense of the Bible the third link of kinship. Though not forbidden in the Bible the marriage of first cousins does not appear advisable and in some States it is prohibited by civil

law which Christian citizens should always obey. In the Old Testament the Jews were strictly forbidden to intermarry with the heathen as the concluding chapters of the book of Ezra so forcibly show. In the New Testament marriage between those of different religions, or church connections, is not forbidden expressly in so many words, but whether it is advisable is a very different question. Experience abundantly shows that difference in religion very frequently becomes a source of discord between husband and wife and not seldom it causes permanent estrangement of the hearts and renders the union a most unhappy one. Much less should a Christian choose an infidel for a consort. When in the first world the children of God began to intermarry with the ungodly, they too became wicked and their progeny became more wicked. It is scarcely possible for a Christian daily to sit at the same table with a scoffer and yet not to be seduced from the faith. Neither should the point of morality ever be overlooked. If a Christian lady marries a man of whom she knows that he is addicted to some vice she has no reason to complain when in after years he abuses her. If you marry a drunkard you must live with a drunkard. All these things should be considered before the engagement.

The couple in our text had been engaged and they faithfully kept their engagement. In our time and country engagements are treated altogether too lightly. Instead of regarding it as permanently binding many look upon the engagement only as a time of trial and think, it might be broken off at any time, or at the option of either party. But the holy Scriptures speak of the engagement as creating the marriage bond. In the 1st chapter of Matthew Mary is called Joseph's wife and he her husband when they were only engaged. According to the Scriptures it is the mutual consent and agreement which creates the bond of wedlock and the marriage ceremony is only the public confirmation of the bond which existed before already. While it is true that some things will annul an engagement for which a divorce could not be granted by the church, yet as a rule a formal and valid engagement must be counted as binding as marriage itself. This might seem a hard saying to some, but a little thinking must make it evident to every mind. Can any

person be counted of a trustworthy character who like a butterfly will flit from one flower to another? If plural marriages are wrong can plural engagements be right? Could you cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding after breaking your promise given to another, or even to two or three others? Surely, Jesus will not be the companion of promise-breakers, unless they repent.

The contracting parties in our text were not a run away-couple, or Jesus would not have honored their wedding with His presence. Their relatives and friends were there, and they came together honestly and honorably and in no disreputable manner. For a right and valid engagement the consent of the parents on both sides is required. Young people frequently think that marriage is only their own personal affair, and it did not concern father and mother, but their thinking so will not make it right. Could you cheerfully invite Jesus to your wedding when marrying without the consent or against the will of your parents? Indeed not; for Jesus will not be the guest of those who dishonor and disobey father and mother. We read of one in the Scriptures who married against the will of his parents and who blasted the happiness of his aged mother. It was Esau, in whom was no fear of God. If your parents have raised you with much labor, care and expense they are certainly worthy that you ask their counsel or their consent in choosing a spouse. Neither should a young man of integrity ever entertain the thought of seducing a lady to marry him against the will of her parents. You are not allowed to steal another man's money, much less are you allowed to steal his daughter. Wait until you can have her in such a way that you can invite Jesus to your wedding. On the other hand parents should not allow their child to keep the company of a party to whom they are opposed, because doing so is giving *silent consent* and they have afterwards no right to complain, if it ends in a manner which is not pleasing to them.

Finally we learn here that weddings should be celebrated in Christian decency and order. Many argue, a little excess at weddings and the like occasions, would do no harm, and to justify riotous behavior appeal is sometimes made to the words of this text,

when the ruler of the feast says: "*Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*" Examining carefully we soon find that these words are so far from sanctioning excess that they rather prove the very contrary, because they speak to us of the moderation practiced at Jewish weddings. With the Jews it was customary to appoint a governor of the feast whose duty it was to see to decency and order, and who had to test the quality of the wine and to determine the quantity which should be allowed the guests. At first a moderate quantity of good wine was given and then only weak or liberally watered wine, and this was done to prevent drunkenness. So this very text is a strong testimony for the decency and sobriety with which Jewish weddings were celebrated. A marriage is a proper time for joy, but excess is not joy and it should have no place at Christian weddings.

Shall I yet speak of purity, indicated by the water-jars in the text? "Flee fornication." "Keep thyself pure." "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." See that thou enter wedlock a chaste youth or a pure virgin. I assure you, this will be a great factor for your earthly happiness and it will save you life-long compunctions of conscience. Seek the Lord early. Let your heart become acquainted with Him while you are young. Let Jesus always remain your first love, and so walk that with a clear conscience and a glad-some heart you can invite Him to your marriage, and rest assured, long as you may live, you will never find a reason to regret these things.

## II.

"*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it*" in your wedded life.

Because the bond binds for life the happiness of groom and bride should continue through life and not for a few honeymoons only. You want to know: How can I preserve the happiness in my house for all time? I am happy to say that I can show you a way, a sure way, a tried way, and the way is this: Let Jesus sit at your fireside and rule in your house by His Word. Jesus is not to be a transient guest like other wedding guests, He should be kept

in the house, He should dwell in the hearts of husband and wife and He should be invited to speak to them and to their whole household every night and morning at their family worship. I say, this is a sure way of preserving happiness in wedded life. Why so? Very simply for this reason: When husband and wife discover that each loves the Lord Jesus, this becomes a new bond between them and it affords them exquisite joy to know their souls one in Christ Jesus. This mutual love of Jesus knits their hearts together more firmly than even conjugal love can. It truly makes them one heart and one soul. Their highest love is one, their innermost joy is one, their hope is one.

This mutual love of Jesus is also a safeguard against discord and an estrangement of the hearts. Temporary discords and quarrels may arise in that house, but if the husband has been hard and unkind the love of Jesus will prompt him to make amends; and if the wife has been contrary, querulous or in other ways has angered the husband, the love of Jesus will not let her rest, it prompts her to acknowledge and to seek reconciliation. Where there is the mutual love of Jesus the bond between husband and wife will continually grow and when they are wrinkled and grey the bond between them will be far stronger than it was in their youth. I say, happy the house in which dwells the love of Jesus, where both husband and wife are one in faith, one in the desire to continue in the Word of Christ. O ye, my Christian brothers and sisters, if the heart of your spouse is yet void of the love of Jesus, strive by all means to plant it there. It is the noblest of mission work and you will find your reward already in this life.

Where the mutual love of Jesus dwells cares and crosses will indeed not be lacking. Just in Christian families these are often thickest and heaviest. But Jesus dwells there and He has strong shoulders and is skillful in making the shoulders of the weak strong to bear burdens with ease which otherwise would crush giants. Truly does He say by the prophet: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." If Jesus dwells in the house and the heart does become weary, He knows the right season, when to speak

a word to the weary heart whereby it is refreshed and quieted. A Christian family has in Jesus a helper and comforter in every trouble, a helper whose help is sure, a comforter whose comfortings are lasting. This we see here in our text: "*The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*" She made the need of the young couple known unto Him to obtain help for them. She was confident He would help at the time and in the manner He knew to be best, and her confidence was not put to shame. When His time had come, He furnished wine of a superior quality, and in such quantity that it was more than sufficient for the marriage feast. And in what wonderful manner did He go about it! He says: "*Fill the water-pots with water.*" Might not the servants have said: "He must be jesting. Wine we want, and He says, bring water." But all of a sudden the water proved to be wine. It appeared as though the water must make the lack of wine the more apparent, yet it proved to be the desired help.

Where the mutual love of Jesus dwells, both husband and wife will be happy to occupy the God-ordained order toward each other. The husband will not despise his wife, neither will he count her his servant, but he will remember that Eve was taken from Adam's side near his heart; and the wife will call her husband lord, as Sarah did Abraham, and she will not want to rule over him. This talk of the so-called emancipation of woman is a cankerworm gnawing at the very heart of society. When the woman aspires to be the man she loses those very graces which are most attractive in her and she destroys her own happiness. In Christian wedlock the wife needs and wants no emancipation. She is happy in her station, happy to make her house happy.

Invite Jesus to your wedding and let him not go away again. Grant Him room in the heart, room in the house, and you will find Him a Friend indeed and a Savior in need. Amen.

### III. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour. Matth. 8, 1-13.

When that leprous man besought the Lord saying: "*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,*" the Lord did unto him according to his desire, answering: "*I will; be thou clean.*" Unto the centurion He likewise said: "*As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.*" Similar words the Lord used on various occasions. Touching the eyes of two blind men He said: "According to your faith be it unto you." To that Canaanite woman who stopped Him in the way by kneeling before Him, He said: "O woman, great is thy

faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." So also David says of the Lord in the 145th Psalm: "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him." From these and many similar passages of Scripture it is evident that God deals with man according to his faith. In the great day of the Lord every man will be judged according to the faith, the trust, the treasure of his heart, as the Lord declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

That God judges man not according to outward works, but according to the faith, trust and treasure of his soul is nothing remarkable; for it is the sentiment and the intent of the heart and mind which makes the outward act either good or bad. "Either," says the Lord, "make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." As the heart and mind is, so will the act be. Therefore God judges not by the act of the hand, but by the faith of the heart. Only because the outward act manifests the faith or unbelief of the heart, do the Scriptures at sundry places declare, that man will be judged according to his works.

Because God treats with man according to the faith and trust of his heart, therefore our weal or woe is dependent on this, whether the faith and trust of our heart is right or wrong. All those putting their trust in that which is vain and unstable will perish, only those putting their trust in that which endureth forever will not be confounded, even as Solomon says: "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish." The trust of the miser will perish when he finds that he can carry nothing out of this world. The trust of him relying on the friendship of men will be lost; for man is fickle and he passeth away like a shadow. Lost will be the hope of those trusting in their integrity and doing right; for they will be put to shame when they hear from the lips of the Judge: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Lost will be the hope of those claiming perfect

holiness; for "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not."

Because God will judge us according to the faith of our heart, we must make sure that we have the right faith, and that it rest not on a perishable and uncertain foundation, but on the Rock of Ages which remains to all eternity. Now in our text we have the example of a faith at which the Lord Himself marvelled. This therefore can not be an uncertain and deceptive, it must be the true faith. Let us look to:

THE CENTURION AT CAPERNAUM AS AN ENSAMPLE FOR US.

- I. In his humility; and
- II. In his faith.

I.

This centurion was not a Jew, he was a Gentile; for he was an officer in the Roman army, and the Lord said that in Israel He had not found such great faith as his. What it was in which the greatness of his faith was manifested is expressed in his words when he says: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*" The Lord had offered to come and heal his servant, but he confessed himself unworthy that the Lord should step under his roof, and he wanted nothing but only a word from the Lord. The first in which this man serves as an ensample to us is the consciousness and the free acknowledgement of his great unworthiness.

If man is to have that faith which justifies from sin and which brings life everlasting, his heart must have certain qualities without which the true faith can not take root in it. The man who is not sick, or who does not know and feel his sickness will always refuse medicine. The man who is not sorrowful will smile sarcastically, if another labors to comfort him. What must be in the heart, or what qualities must the heart have before the true and saving faith can be kindled in it? Above all other things the heart must have the knowledge of sin. So long as a man does not consider himself a sinner he can not possibly believe that his sins are forgiven. Offer the forgiveness of sin to one who is not aware of having sinned, and

he will repel it as something of which he is not in need. The knowledge of sin must always precede faith.

This knowledge of sin must not be a knowledge connected with carelessness, but such a knowledge which makes the heart sorrowful, downcast and humble before God on account of sin. The inhabitants of Sodom also knew that they sinned, but sin was a delight to them: they were not humbled on account of it. Our knowledge of sin must be of such a nature that it constrains us to say with the Psalmist: "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly," and to sigh with him: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation." Our knowledge of sin must be such that it renders the heart broken and contrite. So long as a man has not come to this knowledge that he has sinned, and by sin has merited eternal damnation, so long he will always reject the Gospel. Only when man has come to this knowledge, that he is unworthy of God's favor and worthy only of everlasting shame and contempt, only then is his heart a soil in which the Gospel of grace and pardon can take root. If a man thinks that he deserves heaven he can not and will not accept it as an undeserved gift. Only when he has come to this knowledge that he has no claim on God whatever, that according to right and justice he must be banished from the presence of God forever, then only will he be ready to accept as a gift that which he knows himself unworthy of. There is something similar in worldly matters. We sometimes find poor people who are in need of pecuniary assistance, but who are too proud to acknowledge their poverty and to accept aid. If money is offered them they will say: "I am not so low down that I must beg." We must come to such a knowledge of our unworthiness, we must get *so low down*, that we are ready to accept the salvation of God as a free and unmerited gift.

This knowledge of his own unworthiness the centurion at Capernaum possessed in a high degree, and he frankly confessed: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.*" How came he to speak thus? Was he perhaps so poor that he was ashamed to let the Lord see his wretched habitation? or was he so

flagrant a sinner that he feared people might regard it an unworthy and offensive thing for the Lord to go to the house of so wicked a man? Nothing of the kind. This man was neither poor nor despised. He was of high standing, rich and highly honored, even by the Jews; for as Luke tells us, the elders of the Jews besought Jesus in behalf of the centurion, saying: "That he was worthy for whom he should do this." In his own estimation he was unworthy, but in the opinion of others he was worthy. He was indeed a pious man "rich in good works." He had forsaken the worship of idols and turned himself to the true God. He loved the Jews and their religion so much that he built a synagogue for them at Capernaum. He did not despise his servant, but did all in his power for him. For his piety and benevolence this man was praised by many, yet he did not come to the Lord arguing, because he had done this and that the Lord should have regard of him and should help his servant. He forgot all his good works and thought only of his great unworthiness.

Would we be partakers of the grace of God in Christ, we must also remember our great unworthiness. If we think that we have anything whereof we might boast before God we can not be acceptable in the sight of Him of whom the apostle says: "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." What are we, and what have we on account of which God would be bound to have regard of us? We were born in sin, we grew up in sin, and we "daily sin much." There is not a day of our past life in which we have not failed manifoldly, and though we strive to live without sin, yet it cleaves unto us continually. We are sinners by nature and, hence, can not be without sin even for a moment. Now if we are continually offending against God, as none of us can deny, of what good are we worthy at His hands? Surely, not one good thing would we have to enjoy, if God would impart to us only that which we are worthy of.

This is the sentiment of all those that are godly: they think themselves unworthy. They are all minded like David who says in the 32d Psalm: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every

one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." The children of God all pray for the forgiveness of sin. Search through the Bible and see, if, among the many heroes of faith whose names are recorded therein, you will find one single one who thought himself worthy before God. Every one of them humbled himself and acknowledged his unworthiness. The patriarch Jacob confessed: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." Isaiah says: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Paul pronounced himself "not meet to be called an apostle" of Christ. All the children of God that ever lived on earth acknowledged their unworthiness before God, and, truly, whosoever thinks himself worthy of God's favor is a proud Pharisee, and not an humble follower of Jesus.

## II.

As in his humility, so also in his faith the centurion may well be an ensample for us to follow. Garrisoned at Capernaum, where Jesus so often tarried, the centurion must have heard of His preaching and His deeds, and when his servant was taken sick he employed the first opportunity to appeal to Jesus for help. "*And when Jesus entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.*" These words involve a petition for help, but this the centurion did not express in words, and we will not be wrong in concluding that he thought it sufficient to communicate the fact to the Lord and needless to add any thing more. He trusted, if Jesus would only hear his distress He would at once be ready to help. His faith was great, because he had great confidence in the willingness of Jesus to help. Never should we doubt the Lord's willingness to hear, to help and to save. We should rather account it sufficient, if our distress is made known to God, agreeably to the word of the apostle: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Whatever distresses the

heart we should make it known unto God and then leaving it in His hands we should be quiet and give thanks unto Him.

The centurion's confidence was not put to shame; for Jesus forthwith answered: "*I will come and heal him.*" This readiness of the Lord served to call forth a clear expression of this man's great faith. Instead of hastening the Lord to come he said: "*Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*" This man did not only express himself unworthy that the Lord should come under his roof, he also declared it unnecessary for the Lord to go to so much trouble; He should speak a word and that would be sufficient; for if he, being a subaltern officer, could accomplish many things by a word, much more must Jesus, being the Almighty God, be able to do with a word whatsoever He pleased. He meant to say to the Lord: Speak the word that my servant shall live, and he must live. The centurion wanted nothing more from the Lord than a word only. He had no scruples: a word from the Lord was all that was needed.

Faith builds on the Word. If we have the Word of the Lord it is to be sufficient unto us. Many want something besides the Word to rest their faith on. The Jews wanted "a sign from heaven," but Jesus answered: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." Because the Jews would not believe His Word, but wanted something more, He pronounced them an "evil and adulterous generation." So it is yet. Many are not willing in all simplicity to believe the Word alone, besides it they want some other sign of God's grace. Some want God to bless them in worldly affairs before believing that He is gracious unto them. Some want a joyous feeling as a sign of their conversion. Some want this, some that. "*Speak the word only*" says the centurion. To require anything beside the Word is altogether wrong. It is an offense against God. If an honest and trustworthy man promises a thing to you and you say that his word is not enough, he must give you some other security in addition to it, he will be offended, because you doubt his word. Now if it is an offense against an honest

man to ask some other pledge beside his word, how much more is it offensive to God, if we are not willing in all simplicity to accept His Word, but ask some other security beside it? Faith, if it is the right faith, builds on the Word and on the Word alone. The centurion relied on the truth and power of Christ's Word, and he wanted nothing more to rest his faith on, and his faith the Lord praised highly, saying: "*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.*"

Why are the children of the kingdom, the Jews, cast out and many Gentiles from the east and from the west have obtained the kingdom? The Jews are cast out, because they would not believe the Word of the Gospel, but required a sign, and many that were afar off sit in the kingdom having like faith with the centurion. Those sit down in the kingdom who have one faith with the patriarchs. But of Abraham St. Paul says: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Paul does not say: Abraham did great works, or Abraham saw and felt the work of God, he says: Abraham believed God, believed the Word which God had spoken unto him, and this faith was counted unto him for righteousness, through this faith he was justified and saved. If the simple Word of Christ is not sufficient unto us, if we want something above and beside the Word before we will believe, that implies that we do not believe, but doubt His Word; and if we do not believe the Word of Christ we are lost; for He says: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Let us see that we build our faith and hope on the right foundation, the unchangeable Word of the unchangeable God. The foundation of the apostles and prophets, the inspired Word, alone is the foundation which can never give way, and which can not deceive. Our works are as nothing, our feelings and experiences more changeable than the moon, and though with our eyes we would see an hundred signs from heaven and with our ears would hear the

voices of the angels, all this could not be so sure and certain unto us as the Word. To this Peter testifies when writing: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." Here Peter testifies that he and the other apostles did not obtain the Gospel by hearsay, but that they themselves saw and heard the Lord's glory, but that the word of prophecy is more sure than their seeing and hearing. The Word is more sure than the observations of our senses. Our eyes and ears may deceive us that we imagine to see or hear a thing when it is only fancy, but the Word can not deceive, because the "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." This Word is not a human, not an angelic word, it is God's own Word proceeding forth from the Holy Ghost. Now if, as the adage runs, my heart believes what my eyes see, much more shall my soul believe what the Word says.

Surely, those that are not ready in all simplicity to believe the Word, but want other surety beside it, shall not see the kingdom of God; for they "make him a liar." But blessed is he that receives it as God's Word; for truly, God's Word must be a life-giving and saving Word, as the Lord says: "I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting." He came from the bosom of the Father and spake what the Father had given Him to speak, and "I know," He says, "that His commandment is life everlasting." Every one, therefore, that has and holds the Word of Christ, has life everlasting and shall not come into condemnation.

Do you want to believe the Word, but your faith is weak and you are troubled with doubts, and do you fear you might be cast out? Learn here that a weak faith is also a true faith. When the Lord says: "*I have not found so great faith,*" His words imply that there are degrees in faith. A weak faith is also a faith and it saves as well as a strong faith. It is the merit of Christ which

justifies before God, and that is saving faith which grasps and holds Christ's merits. The treasure remains the same, whether the vessel holding it is strong or weak. Christ remains the same Savior, whether He is held with a strong or a weak hand.

But a weak vessel is more easily broken than the strong. Therefore we should not rest satisfied to remain children in faith, but we should strive for a faith like that of the centurion. And to grow in faith we should diligently occupy ourselves with the Word of God; for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." And here is a word peculiarly adapted to draw us unto faith. This centurion was a Gentile from a far country, and the Lord says, "*that many shall come from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.*" We too are descendants of a people which went to worship dumb idols, and we dwell in a far western land. But that shall be no hindrance to our entering the kingdom. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," says the Lord. From whatsoever place we come, if we do but continue in His Word, the door shall not be shut against us, we shall surely inherit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Amen.

#### IV. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea: and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! Matth. 8, 23-27.

In His last discourse with His disciples, in the night in which He was betrayed, the Lord said unto them: "The world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful." The world lives in mirth and gladness, the Christians are sorrowful. When the ungodly are prosperous, the Christians are plagued. So it has been ever since the fall of the first man. Cain exulted to shed the blood of his brother: Abel had to yield up his soul under the blows of Cain. Jacob had to depart from home and to flee for his life with nothing but a staff: Esau was prosperous and became a mighty chieftain. Joseph languished in a pit and was sold into slavery: his wicked brothers sat down to eat and to drink. The Egyptians reveled in luxury: the children of Israel had to serve. That rich man clothed himself in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day: Lazarus lay at his door starving and full of sores. Caiaphas and the Pharisees were successful in accomplishing their design: Christ was nailed to the cross. So it is unto this day. The wicked rejoice; they walk in pride, in highmindedness; they gratify their desires, they live in the enjoyment of sin: the pious are plagued every morning, if not outwardly, yet spiritually.

This fact that the wicked are prosperous while the pious are plagued, often becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense

both to the world and to the Christians. It is a stone of stumbling to the world; for seeing the afflictions of the pious, the wicked exult over them and say in their hearts: Behold, they imagined to possess the favor of God, but how are they plagued! If they be the beloved of God, why does not God make them great in the world, prosperous and happy? And the wicked will conclude that the pious are deluded people. When the Christian is afflicted and sees the wicked fare prosperously he too is tempted to think as Asaph says in the 73d Psalm: "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." When a Christian in his troubles and afflictions sees the wicked successful and prosperous, he is tempted to question, whether God be a just God and truly his Father. To natural reason it does frequently appear as though the wicked were the favorites of God, because they are prosperous, and as though the pious were accursed of God, because they are afflicted. When the high priests and Pharisees succeeded in putting Jesus to death, it certainly did appear, as though they were the sons of God and Christ the rejected.

But we should always remember two things: In the first place, that in the very nature of things it can not be otherwise than as the Lord says: "The world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful." The wicked do not care what is right and what wrong before God, they live after the desires of their own heart; they aim to make as much of life and the world as possible, and when their wishes are realized and their desires gratified, they rejoice; but the Christian sets himself against all that is against God, and because the flesh, the devil and the world are against God, no one can be a Christian without oppositions to meet and self-denials to undergo. In the second place we should always consider the end. To Asaph the prosperity of the wicked was "painful, until," he says, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." The children of the world travel in a broad way, and the prince of this world provides them pleasures to keep them in that way, but it ends in destruction: the pious travel in a narrow way, but it ends in eternal life. It is as Abraham said to that rich man in hell: "Son, remember that

thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." When the wicked enjoy pleasures and heap up treasures the evil one is only securing their souls in his net; but to His Christians the Lord sends afflictions and trials to keep them in the narrow way of faith. It is better to meditate on the usefulness of affliction than to be offended at the prosperity of the wicked. Let me yet speak of:

THE GREAT BENEFITS WHICH AFFLICTION  
BRINGS THE CHRISTIAN.

I. Affliction uncovers to the Christian his weaknesses and the dangers besetting him;

II. It draws him closer to the right Helper.

I.

A few verses before this Gospel we read of a scribe who said unto the Lord: "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." The words of this man sound well enough, but his heart was not right. When Jesus began to preach and to perform miracles His fame was sounded abroad, and this man thought, if he would associate himself with Christ, he might win honors and great advantages. But the Lord knew that his heart was set on worldly things and He answered accordingly: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The Lord tells him, in this world he could not expect an easy life, honors and emoluments by following him, he must rather be prepared to endure hardships and privations. On another occasion the Lord expressed the same in clear words saying: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Why is it that Christians can not be carried to heaven on beds of ease? Why can we not enter the kingdom except "through much tribulation"? Why does God not turn all affliction, temptation, misfortune and whatever may cause distress, away from His children on earth? Why does God lead His children so that they must

say with Asaph: "All the day long have I been plained, and chastened every morning"? I answer: Because we must be saved through faith. Every one that would be saved must be saved through faith in Christ alone. Christ alone is the Savior, and only that man is in Christ who looks to Christ alone, who depends on Christ for everything pertaining to his salvation. Hence a false faith, or a trust on any thing besides Christ, does not only not save, it tends to destroy the true faith in Christ. Therefore the Lord leads those believing in Him through many tribulations, that they may learn the more to know their weaknesses and to look to nothing else than to Him alone. This is one great benefit of affliction, it manifests to the Christian, whether there is any false trust in him, and it teaches him the right trust. This is here exemplified in the disciples.

First we read of them: "*And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.*" Unlike the scribe spoken of before, the disciples made no mental reservations. They followed the Lord, and that was right. If they had not followed Him, they could not have been His disciples at all; but they did not regard their following the Lord altogether in the right manner. They laid too much store by what they were doing; for later they once said unto the Lord: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" The disciples thought they had earned a reward by forsaking all and following Christ. The Lord, indeed, loving and kind as He is, on that occasion answered them: "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," but that was promising a reward of grace and not a reward of merit; for how should they have earned this high honor in heaven by following Him on earth? And on another occasion He said to them: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Laying too much store by what they were doing in following the Lord, the disciples stepped into that ship; but now this storm arose, and not a common storm, but such a whirlwind against which all their experience in boating could help them nothing. Despairing of escape by their own skill, they appealed to the Lord, and when He had calmed the wind

and the waves, what could be more plain than this that they were not doing Him a favor, but He was doing them a favor.

If we have followed the Lord, if we have made sacrifices for Christ and, perhaps for years, have served Him faithfully and zealously, then the thought is apt to arise that we are worthy of and deserve the Lord's blessings, and that we should be spared afflictions. Such thoughts are darts which Satan stily shoots into the mind, and they are dangerous thoughts. So soon as we think that we deserve good at the hands of God, because we have so faithfully served Him, then our trust stands no more on Christ alone, but on our merit and worthiness. The man who thinks himself worthy of God's blessings, because of something which he has done, or is doing, has already fallen from grace; for such an one does no more regard his good works as "filthy rags," he counts them something valuable before God. Now this alone is the right and saving faith, that nothing is of value before God save only the blood and death of Jesus Christ. And what shall God do to preserve His children in this humble faith when they are in danger of becoming proud of their many good works? Why God must humble them and show them what they deserve, namely chastisement alone. Yes, the heart is so apt to think, because we serve Him so diligently God ought to crown us with blessings, and great mercy it is, if God teaches us by afflictions that of ourselves we have no worthiness before Him, but must seek our worthiness in Jesus alone.

Yet another weakness, or fault of the disciples' faith was manifested by their temptation on the sea. On that day the Lord had performed many miracles and if one would have asked the disciples, when in the evening they entered the ship, whether they believed in the Lord, they doubtless would have answered: How could we otherwise than believe after witnessing so many wonderful works this very day. They, doubtless, thought their faith great, their confidence strong, yet when the test came they wavered and were terrified, and the Lord says to them: "*O ye of little faith.*" How shall we account for this? O! when they started from the shore the air was quiet, the water smooth, the ship good. Then it was easy to be confident; for what danger could there be in crossing

that little lake? But their confidence stood more in the weather than in the Lord, and when the weather changed their confidence changed; it was gone in a moment. If their confidence had stood so fully, freely, firmly in the Lord as it ought to have, that tempest could not have overthrown it; they would have stood up boldly thinking: This ship can not sink; let the wind, the waves and all the evil spirits under heaven try their utmost; for in this ship is the Lord and it must and will float.

When everything goes on smoothly, then it is easy for the Christian to be confident. And yet good days are the most dangerous time for the Christian. When he fares well in worldly things, when Satan is not threatening him with the law and divine justice, when he has peace and is not called on to stand in controversy for the truth, then the heart which is "deceitful above all things" will lead him to think, that all is well with him, that the Lord's favor is resting upon him and he is in no danger. And why does he think so? If not exclusively yet largely because of the peace and welfare which he is enjoying. But that is a false trust; for our trust is not to be in the welfare which we enjoy, but in the living God. So the heart is. When God blesses us the heart is quick to trust in those blessings and to be lifted up because of them. King David also experienced this for in the 30th Psalm he says: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." - David's prosperity made him confident, but his trust was not altogether right; it stood too much in his prosperity; therefore the Lord sent him tribulations to teach him this; for in the following verse he adds: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." In good days without affliction we are in strong temptation to think that all is well with us, and that is an evil and a dangerous thought. If the watchman on a ship thinks all is well, there is no danger, he will relax his watchfulness, he will sit down and by and by he will go to sleep, and before he is fully aware of it the ship may be wrecked or taken by pirates. So it was with the bishop of Laodicea. When he enjoyed peace and quietude he said within himself: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." In good days he began to put his trust in himself and thereby he lost the true faith

before knowing it; for the Lord counsels him: "Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayst see." There is not a more dangerous thought for the Christian than this that all is well with him, and this is one great benefit which affliction brings that it awakens the soul out of this dream of security. When temporal misfortune comes, or that Roaring Lion seeks to drag our souls to despair by holding up to us our sins and the curses of the law; when we must go down to our knees seeking light and comfort, yes, that is a remedy for spiritual sleepiness, security and pride. This great benefit of affliction was well known to Paul and beautifully does he speak of it in 2 Cor. chap. 12.: "Lest I should be exalted above measure there was given to me a thorn in the flesh," and when Paul prayed that this thorn in the flesh be taken from him the Lord answered: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Affliction teaches us to know how helpless we are, it humbles us and *draws us to look to the Lord for help and strength.*

## II.

By uncovering to him his weaknesses, dangers and helplessness, affliction draws the Christian to the only one true fountain of help and comfort, the living God. It causes us to say: "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," and it teaches us to pray "in spirit and in truth." When the waves began to cover the ship the disciples hurried to the Lord "*and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us; we perish.*" At other times the disciples also prayed, but in all the Gospels we do not read that they uttered another prayer like this. The prayer is not long, it is very short; and why? Why, because they were in too much earnest about it to make it long. It was the cry of men in the jaws of death. In this prayer was no hypocrisy, no babbling, no empty repetition of words; it was a wholesouled prayer; their heart cried unto the Lord as the only One from whom they could yet hope deliverance.

We Christians pray daily, but how are our prayers when there is nothing special oppressing or distressing us? Is it not so, when

we see or feel nothing special to pray for, that our prayers are often cold, lukewarm, lifeless, without the right spirit and fervency? But when the cross bears hard on our shoulders then there is life in our praying, then the heart and soul is in it. That storm taught the disciples to pray, and so the prophet Isaiah says in general of affliction: "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them," and by Hosea the Lord says of Israel: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

When the disciples had awakened Jesus He sharply rebuked them for their anxiety saying: "*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" This their littleness of faith the Lord put to shame thoroughly; for "*He arose, and rebuked the wind and the sea; and there was a great calm.*" It does sometimes occur that there is a sudden lull in the storm, but the waves will roll on and subside very gradually. At the command of Jesus both the wind and the sea suddenly became calm as though they had not been disturbed. Such a miracle the disciples had not yet witnessed and filled with amazement they exclaimed: "*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him.*" On that ship He stood among the disciples as a man in the form of a servant, and if the elements obeyed Him then in His state of humiliation, how much rather are all creatures at His command now, since He is exalted to the right hand of the Father and all things are put under His feet? Should we not confide in Him at whose command the winds stop blowing and the waves cease rolling? All creatures obey God, doing that for which He has made them; man only is so perverse that he will neither trust nor obey his Maker. Of this the Lord makes bitter complaint by the prophet Jeremiah saying: "Fear ye not me? will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart." The sands of the seashore and the waves of the ocean obey His decree, but where is the obedi-

ence of man? All creatures do that for which God intended them. Us He created that we should honor Him with our heart's trust and confidence, and why do we not confide in Him? Is He not worthy of our confidence? Is He not able to deliver and to save? However weather-beaten and tempest-tossed our bark may be, if the Lord says, it shall float it must float. He is at all times able to make good His word which He spake by the prophet saying: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Did He never bring you light and comfort at the time when the waters of affliction came in unto your soul and threatened to overwhelm you? Nestle to His bosom and He will be your helper again.

But bide His time. On the ship He waited until the storm was at its height and hope seemed lost. If He had helped sooner the disciples would not have reaped half the benefit from it. Affliction has its time and the help must come in the nick of time, if it is to be fully appreciated. The Lord knows, how high the storm must rise and how long it must last to purify the atmosphere. To the church at Smyrna the Lord commanded John to write: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." God knows your ailing and He also knows how long the distress must last. Let Him number the days and if they multiply strike up the tune

God liveth still!  
 Soul, despair not, fear no ill!  
 Be thy life, until its ending,  
 Full of thorns, of grief or need,  
 God, in love the trial sending,  
 Thus His child would heavenward lead.  
 For this life's long night of sadness  
 He will give thee peace and gladness.  
 Wherefore, then, my soul, despair?  
 God still lives, who heareth prayer.

This life is, indeed, like unto a sea over which we are sailing. What therefore should be our first care? Why certainly, that we have the right man at the helm. What matters it, though we see others sailing along in smooth waters, with towering masts and wide-spread sails, but with the evil one at the helm, steering them to the whirlpool of destruction! What matters it, if our craft be small, rickety, storm-beaten and wave-tossed, if Jesus is at the helm! If He is at the helm no storm will destroy, no rock will wreck our craft, but He will steer it safely to the haven of rest. Let us make Him our helmsman, and content our souls with His steering. Amen.

## V. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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TEXT: Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. Matth. 13, 24-30.

In the third article of the Apostles' Creed we confess: "I believe a Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." The church of Jesus Christ upon earth is the communion of saints, the whole number of those who are justified from sin through faith in Jesus Christ, whose transgressions are no more imputed unto them and who, dressed in the robe of Christ, are saints in the sight of God, as though they had never sinned. So Paul describes the church when he writes to the Ephesians: "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The church is the company of those who are born again of water and of the Spirit and who, cleansed by the blood of Christ, are clean in the sight of God. The church of Jesus Christ therefore is invisible. The grace of God is invisible, faith is invisible, the forgiveness of sin is invisible, invisible is the righteousness of Christ with which the church is adorned.

While the true believers alone are the church in the sight of God, in the sight of men such also are comprised in the community of the church who are not Christians at heart. Hence we are accustomed to distinguish between the visible and the invisible church. To the visible church all those belong who are church members as distinguished only from those who make no profession of religion, but who frankly say that they belong to the "big church," that is, to the world. Christ once compared the church with a net, enclosing fishes good and bad. Now the invisible church comprises only the good fishes to the exclusion of the bad, but the visible church comprises every thing that is in the net, good and bad. To the visible church belong also hypocrites and wicked persons, all who have their names on some church roll.

This fact that the net of the church encloses also bad fishes many make a stumbling block unto themselves. In all ages the enemies of the Gospel have made it an occasion to decry the church. If a professing Christian becomes guilty of a crime many reporters of newspapers will be sure to make a parade of the fact that he was a church member, and generally this is intended to be a fling at the church, as much as to say that church members are no better than others. The same fact is often used by men of the world to argue, they could not see that it would make much difference, whether a person belonged to the church or not, because there were some good people outside of the church and some bad people inside of it. People who argue in this way do not know or do not consider that the essence of Christianity is not in being good. It is a fundamental tenet of the Christian doctrine that no man can be saved by his own goodness. It is not enough to be a good man or a virtuous woman, but in order to be saved a man must be born again of water and of the Spirit. He must be a Christian confessing Christ before men; for of those who do not confess Him the Lord declares that He will also not confess them. Neither should we overlook the fact that it was not at all the intention of Jesus Christ to establish such a church which would comprise no hypocrites in its outward community. Of His own twelve disciples He said: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" And in many

parables did He represent His church as a mixed community. One of these is contained in the text read. Let us accordingly consider :

### THE PARABLE OF TARES AMONG THE WHEAT.

The parable sets before us :

- I. The mixture of wheat and tares ;
- II. The treatment to be given the tares ;
- III. The separation of wheat and tares.

#### I.

This highly instructive parable follows immediately after that of the sower who while sowing his seed found fourfold soil. In the parable of the sower the seed is the Word of God, and it exhorts unto the right hearing of God's Word, but this parable treats of the nature of Christ's church as it appears visibly on earth. Here therefore the seed does not mean the Word of God, but the good seed are those who are born again of that incorruptible seed, the Word of truth. We read : "*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field : but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*" Here it might seem to us, that the good seed meant the Word of God, but we must not explain the Scriptures according to our own understanding, or we will often err. We must always bear in mind the principle which the apostle lays down, when he says : "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation," and we must always let the Scriptures explain themselves. Now when the multitudes had departed the disciples asked Jesus for an explanation of this parable and He gave it to them saying : "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man ; the field is the world ; the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one ; the enemy that sowed them is the devil." The good seed in this parable are the true Christians, the tares are the hypocrites and sham Christians in the church, all who bear the Christian name, but at heart are not believers.

By His Spirit Jesus Christ gathers a church on earth and those whom Christ gathers are all a good seed, Christians indeed. Finding this excellent wheatfield in the midst of his own domains the devil hates the very sight of it and he calculates, if he will let that seed grow unmolested it will not only bring abundant grain, but it will also spread and will encroach mightily on his kingdom. Therefore he tries to prevent the enlarging of that wheatfield by hindering missions and striving to keep people away from the church. But the enemy has a slyer device in aiming to spoil the wheatfield itself, and he goes about it artfully. He is on the sly watching till the Christians fall to slumbering, then he sows his tares managing to get such into the community of the church who are his dupes or his willing servants. Christ sows only good seed, but the field becomes mixed in this way that the enemy brings in his tares, and not infrequently he also succeeds in corrupting a good stalk of wheat that it degenerates into a noxious plant. The tares are not of Christ, they are of the devil, neither are they wheat, although they are among the wheat.

Sly as he is the enemy has his good reasons for laboring to get his tares into Christ's field. He knows full well that tares in the woodland or at the roadside will not be half as harmful as in among the wheat. The devil does foster his weeds in the waste places of heathendom and the world, but he is eager to get them into the wheatfield of the church and how does he exult, if here and there he succeeds in getting so many weeds in that they crowd the wheat, choke much of it and spoil the crop. If a general besieging a city can manage to get some of his men into the citadel, or can corrupt some of the garrison to turn traitors, that brings him greater advantage than planting up batteries. There have been those who claimed that the church must be pure, so that no hypocrites or wicked persons could be found in its community, but such a church is nowhere on earth; for where Christ gathers a church Satan will be sure to scatter tares among the wheat. The visible church always was a mixed community. In Noah's church was the mocker Ham, in Abraham's church the scoffer Ishmael, in Isaac's church the despiser Esau, in Jacob's church the ten wicked brothers. Under the

Old Covenant the people of Israel were the visible church, but often the idolaters and the wicked predominated and the true worshipers were a mere remnant like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. In the church of the apostles was Simon Magus and many others of whom John complains writing: "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." If even in the days of the apostles the church was a mixed body we may not wonder that it is now so full of weeds. And it will always remain a mixed body. The notions of Millenarians that the saints, separated from the wicked, should yet rule on earth for a thousand years, are only dreams; for here the Lord says that both wheat and tares should grow together until the harvest. Surely, no man has reason to be offended, when he sees some tares in the wheatfield of Christ; for Christ Himself said, so it would be.

## II.

What is to be done with the tares among the wheat? When the householder had told the servants, whence the tares came, "*the servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.*" The householder forbade the servants to root up the tares. Should then the tares be allowed to grow unhindered and should nothing be done to keep them down or to rid the wheatfield of them? These words are sometimes quoted to justify laxity of church practice, but that this is a wrong application of the words is very evident. To Titus Paul wrote: "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," and concerning the man guilty of incest the same apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

The church is commanded to exercise discipline both in doctrine and practice, and this duty of the church is established by this parable. It says: "*While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.*" That farmer is not a wise man who will be sleep-

ing while the servants are gathering up the seed wheat. Choosing the seed is a work of such far reaching consequences that a prudent planter will be wide awake and will exercise care that no weeds are mixed with the wheat. The church is not to slumber, it is to watch that the enemy may not be granted an opportunity to sow weeds among the wheat. If the church carelessly receives those into its community who are not Christians and do not actually want to be Christians, it is like a planter who knowingly takes a handful of cheat and throws it into the wheat. The doors of the church are of course to be open to all men. A person's standing or past life is to be no bar to his reception into the church. Christ did not reject, He received the malefactor on the cross who had been a robber. But the church is to be careful to receive only those who repent of sin and who want to follow Christ. The church heartily desires that all men should repent and should come to the saving knowledge of the truth, but into its own fellowship the church should receive only those of whom it is to be assumed according to charity that they do repent of their sins and truly want to be Christians. The Church is to receive all penitent, but no impenitent sinners.

O that the church of to-day would awaken to realize this duty! The tendency of the age is to laxity. Everywhere those preachers are most in demand who will draw the masses and will increase the membership two or threefold. With many the foremost object is to gain numbers, and whether they are wheat or weeds is with them a secondary consideration. That is a zeal for the church "but not according to knowledge," and it does much harm to the cause of Christ. The more weeds in a wheatfield, the worse for the field. The more hypocrites and non-Christians in a church, the worse for that church. Better a two acre field with few weeds, than a ten acre field with only one fourth wheat, and that crowded by the thorns and prevented from bringing grain in so prolific a measure as it otherwise would.

If the church is to watch that the enemy bring not his tares in it is also not to be unconcerned about those tares which are found in the wheat. The parable says: "*When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of*

*the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?"* And again they say: "*Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?"* Seeing the tares in the wheatfield of their master those servants did not pass it by paying no attention to it, neither did they say: It makes no difference, just let it go so, and make no disturbance about it; they hated to see those weeds crowding the wheat of their master and they were so solicitous about it as to come and take counsel with their master, how to remedy this evil. The church, and first of all its ministers and officers, are not to be unconcerned lookers-on, if sins increase and the wicked are multiplied in the church, they are to be solicitous about it and are to take counsel with their Master what to do. And in this case the instructions of the Master are very clear; for thus He says, Matth. 18: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The church is to rebuke sin and manifest sinners who will not repent are to be cut off from its fellowship. There are those who regard church discipline harmful, because it would diminish the membership, and they consider not that cutting out weeds is not diminishing the wheat. A prudent farmer will tell his servants: We must by all means save every stalk of wheat, for it will make noble grain, but what we can do to get out those thorns and thistles without damaging the wheat we must do, because they are doing harm there. Weeds there will always be while the world stands, but better they are at the roadside than among the wheat.

What then does it mean that the Lord here forebade the servants to root up the tares? On this the Lord has not left us in the dark. In His explanation of the parable He says: "The field is the world." If the Lord had said: The field is the church, then it would mean that the tares should be allowed to thrive in the

community of the church, but the master prohibits the servants only from rooting the tares out of the field of the world. The Christian church has the authority to exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from its communion, but it has no authority to put them to death. The church has the power of the Word, but not the power of the sword. The church can refuse fellowship to impenitent sinners; it can tell them that they are under the wrath of God and forever lost unless they repent, and to do this is the sacred duty of the church; but the church has no authority and no right to impose any kind of worldly punishment on impenitent sinners. Mohammed commanded that his religion should be spread by the power of the sword, but Jesus Christ forbade His church the use of the sword.

His reason for forbidding the rooting up of the tares the householder assigns in these words: "*Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*" Whenever and wherever the church resorted to force to promote its object it did only harm to the wheat. The Montanists of ancient times and the Anabaptists of Reformation times undertook to exterminate the wicked with the sword and their undertaking ended in blood. Rome instituted the Inquisition to convert heretics and to preserve unity of the faith, but the Inquisition soon went to rooting up the wheat and by it many thousand true Christians were burned at the stake or otherwise put to death. So history abundantly shows that it was by no means a needless thing for the Lord to forbid His church attempting to root up the wicked from the acre of the world. All the church can do is to remove briars from her own field and set them by the wayside.

### III.

But there is a time when a complete separation of wheat and tares will take place. Of that time the text says: "*Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*" Of this part of the parable the Lord says in His explanation: "The harvest

is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Hear it, ye wild woodland briars and ye tares in the field! Ye shall be gathered in bundles and cast into everlasting fire, while the wheat is garnered in the granaries of God. O what a separation that will be! When the Lord will begin to stir the mixed heap with the shovel of His righteous judgment, how many a shovelful will show a quantity of tares and a paltry handful of wheat! If we consider the worldliness which is flooding the church and imagine the Lord suddenly coming to separate wheat and chaff, what a pile of chaff there would be!

Let us take warning from this text and let us not flatter ourselves that the world is condemned, but we are church members and all right. The world is indeed condemned; for Christ will not confess those in the judgment who do not confess Him on earth, but the tares among the wheat are of the same spirit with the world and they will share its condemnation. It is not enough to belong only to the outward community of the visible church; we must be wheat; the chaff and the tares are not gathered into the everlasting barns.

O, a glorious day, that great day of the harvest! Here in this world the wheat must content itself to be mixed with the weeds. Here in this life the Christian must dwell together with the children of Belial, yea, must perhaps call them father, mother, sister, brother. Here in this world the Christian, while wearily wending his way to heaven, must often see his own bodily offspring walk in the way of destruction. In this life the true believer must frequently approach the Lord's table with those of whom he is convinced that they are not Christians, or must kneel with those of whom he knows that their prayers are abomination to the Lord. But the day is coming when the weeds will be separated and the

pure wheat will be stored in the house with many mansions. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

O happy day, and yet far happier hour,  
When wilt thou come at last?  
When fearless to my Father's love and power,  
Whose promise standeth fast,  
My soul I gladly render,  
For surely will His hand  
Lead her, with guidance tender,  
To heaven, her fatherland. Amen.

## VI. SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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TEXT: And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. Matth. 17, 1-9.

The object for which the Son of God was made flesh and dwelt on this earth in the form of a servant, patiently enduring mockeries, bonds, stripes, wounds and death, the object of all this was, to restore again to us what we had lost by the envy of Satan and by the sin of our first parents. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested," writes St. John, "that he might destroy the works of the devil." He came to take away sin and to destroy all the evil which the devil has brought into the world. Therefore He before said by the prophet Jeremiah: "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." The wounds which Satan inflicted on us, the running sores of sin which bring death to soul and body, all these the Son of God came to heal. He came to take away the evils which beset and oppress us, and to restore unto

us in body and soul that pristine health which man had when he was formed by the hand of his Maker. This healing the Lord begins in us in this life by forgiving us our sins, by burdening us with the cross that the old Adam may be mortified in us together with all evil lusts and by prompting us through His Word and Spirit unto a holy life, and He will finish our healing on the day of our resurrection, when He will call our bodies from the dust of the earth purified from sin, that we, healed in soul and body, may "live under Him in His kingdom, in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

This healing which costs us nothing cost the Son of God dearly. He had to purchase it for us in a hard servitude, by lowliness, meekness, suffering, bleeding and dying. He verily had to become what the prophet had foretold of Him, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Yet even in the days of His flesh it was already manifested in many ways, that His servitude could not be in vain, but it would bring forth for man the fruit of everlasting salvation and blessedness. When He cast out devils He betokened that He was come to break the fetters with which Satan had bound us. When He healed the sick He gave evidence that He is come to heal our sicknesses. When He quieted the raging winds and calmed the surging waves He indicated, that He quiets the billows of an uneasy conscience and gives peace to the heart. When He raised up dead He exemplified that He was come to abolish death and to bring life and immortality to light. But it was on the Mount of His transfiguration where the Lord gave to three of His disciples the highest and brightest sample or figure of the salvation and glory which we obtain by His servitude. As He was transfigured so that no more the form of a servant, but only the glory of divine majesty was seen in Him, so shall we be transformed from sin, that no more wounds and bruises, weaknesses and death will be found in us, but all will be health, strength and beauty: for He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Therefore in our labors, trials, struggles and weaknesses, in the death of this present life, the Lord's transfiguration should be to

us a shining star of hope. To awaken and refresh our hope let us to-day in the spirit of our mind joyfully witness :

THE LORD'S TRANSFIGURATION ON THE MOUNT.

Let me attempt to set forth :

- I. How it transpired ;
- II. What effect it had on the disciples ; and
- III. How we are made partakers of His glory.

I.

The transfiguration of Christ took place a week after He first told His disciples that He must suffer and die at Jerusalem. This prediction of His suffering and death was very offensive to the disciples, so much so that Peter took Him aside and said unto Him : "Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be unto thee." Peter, not yet rightly understanding the Lord's mission, thought He should be spared such shame and suffering, but Jesus replied : "Get thee behind me, Satan ; thou art an offense unto me ; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." His transfiguration so soon after this occurrence was to show the disciples that His suffering and death were not against His glory, but rather through dishonor He would obtain the highest honor : for from that same body, which was to be spitted on, striped and nailed to the cross, divine glory shone forth.

"And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart." Matthew says "after six days," Luke says : "And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings." There are different ways of computing time. From Sunday to Sunday, the Sundays excluded, is six days : from Sunday to Sunday, the Sundays included, is eight days. To say "after six days," and again "about an eight days after" is not a contradiction.

For witnesses of His transfiguration Jesus chose the three most prominent of His disciples, Peter, James and John. Peter had taken special exception to the Lord's saying that He must die at Jerusalem. James was to become the first martyr among the apostles

being put to death by Herod at Jerusalem and John was to become the principal defender of Christ's divinity. With these three the Lord went up into a high mountain. This mountain is not named by the Evangelists, but the earliest church fathers agree in saying, and it is generally accepted, that it was mount Tabor, the highest mountain in Galilee and a secluded place. When they had arrived on the mountain Jesus betook Himself to prayer and while He prayed He "*was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*"

The apostles compare the glory shining forth from the Lord with the brightest visible creatures. We mortals know of nothing and can imagine nothing brighter than the sun or more shining than the light. Human language lacks the words fully to express the glory of the invisible God and the Scriptures speak to us by way of comparison to convey to our minds some idea of what it is. Yet we must not think that the Lord's countenance shone with a glaring light which would have blinded the eyes like the noonday light of the sun. It was a lovely, beatifying light; for ravished with delight did the disciples look upon the Lord. But you will not expect me to describe to you the glory of Christ transfigured. To such a request I could only reply: Let us see that we die in the Lord; then we will know His glory, when we shall see Him face to face. Coming down the mountain the Lord charged the disciples saying: "*Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*" His transfiguration was not yet to be made public, because it was something which belonged to His state of exaltation. So we should content ourselves to walk by faith until the day of our exaltation, when we shall "meet the Lord in the air."

But this we may ask: Whence came the glory visible in Him? It came not from without, but from within. In the Old Testament there was one man of whom, in a certain sense, we may say that he was transfigured. It was Moses. When he came down from the mount, where he had conversed with God, his face shone that the children of Israel could not bear to look on him. That light shining in the countenance of Moses was impressed on him by his inter-

course with God. It was from without and not from within. But it was not so with Jesus Christ. He was God. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. In His state of humiliation He ordinarily kept His divine majesty hid that the eye of man could not discern it, but there on the mount it shone forth in Him. Therefore His very garments were made white as the light. The light in Moses' countenance, being only communicated from without, was hid when he covered his face with a veil, but the garments of Jesus were no obstruction to the brightness streaming from His body. It was the brightness of His divinity made visible to the bodily eye of the disciples and to that brightness His vesture could be no obstruction. For this we have the testimony of both Peter and John. Peter writes: "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty, when we were with him in the holy mount," and John says: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

Mark well this wonderful occurrence on mount Tabor and learn from it that divine glory is in very deed communicated to the humanity. It was the same body which shone in divine glory and which was raised on the cross covered with shame, even as Peter accused the Jews that they "crucified the Lord of glory." When the body of Jesus Christ was raised on the cross the Lord of glory was being crucified, and because a body possessing divine glory was made the ransom for us we may not doubt that our sins are atoned for and we shall surely come to dwell in that city which John saw and of which he says: "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

From that city two men appeared on the mount of transfiguration: "*And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*" Elias had not died, he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Moses died on mount Nebo and was buried by God Himself. Here Moses appeared together with Elijah, so his body had been raised again from the grave. There is another life after this present life. Moses and Elias were not dead, they lived and were in communion with God, otherwise they could not have conversed with the Lord. When man departs this life he enters on another

and an altogether different life; for this present is a bodily and that other a spiritual life. This is here exemplified; for those two men had long since departed out of this life, yet they lived and their bodies were now in such a condition that they could appear and disappear. Of that spiritual, heavenly life we know nothing certain save only what the Scriptures tell us. That we ourselves may enter that life and learn all about it we must give heed to the subject on which those two men conversed with Jesus.

On what did they speak? Did they talk on monkery, or fasting, or church ceremonies, or the mourners bench, or holiness meetings, or doing right? Here were two men from the celestial city speaking with the Son of God. Certainly they did not engage in flimsy talk, but chose a subject of vast and vital importance, and the conversation taking place on earth we may surmise that it concerned the weal and woe of us earth-born mortals, and so it did. Matthew does not name the subject, but Luke does. He says: "They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." That was the great subject, that the burden of their conversation, the Lord's capture, trial, death, burial and resurrection. Do you think: O is that the outcome? That tedious old story, heard a hundred times! Had they not something more interesting, the glories of heaven or the mysteries of the spirit world, to talk about? Friend, if you find the history of Christ's death a tedious old story, you are certainly of a different mind than Moses and Elias. To them the death of Christ at Jerusalem was the great, the all-absorbing subject, and the same is the case with all the saints standing before the throne of God; for their song to the Lamb runs thus: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests." The Lamb's blood and death is the admiration of the saints in heaven, their song and their happiness. If to you, all this is a tedious old story you are not fitted for the company of the saints; neither will you be found there, unless you put away your carnal mind and crawl to the cross. The cross of Christ is your salvation. O, make it the talk of your soul, commune on it in your heart.

## II.

From that heavenly conversation the disciples might or ought to have learned the true meaning of Christ's suffering and death, but they were so much filled with amazement that they could scarcely realize what they were thinking or doing. This is evident from the words of Peter; for he said: "*Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*" Peter was so enthused that he forgot every thing. His wife, his friends, his property were all forgotten. He wanted to stay on that mountain and never to come down again. Peter forgot even himself; for he spake only of three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elias, but none for himself. His soul was so ravished with joy that all his desire was so to behold the Lord always. Peter was indeed talking foolishly when he spake of building huts there. Just from the Lord's conversation with Moses and Elias he ought to have understood that Jesus must come down from that mountain to die a shameful death at Jerusalem, but "he wist not what to say."

From the effect of the Lord's transfiguration on the disciples we may learn a few things concerning the life in the new heaven and the new earth. The disciples at once knew Moses and Elias, not by pictures which they had seen,—there were no photographs of those men—, they knew them by intuition. The saints in heaven will recognize one another, and what joy it will be to meet the martyrs and all those who loved and confessed Christ on the earth! It is joy to meet with those whom we dearly love after a protracted separation. But this earthly joy is a mere shadow of what will be in those realms where love is perfect.—Fascinated by the sight of the Lord's glory Peter forgot every thing else. When we shall see the Lord face to face all will be forgotten which could disturb our happiness. The former things will then have passed away. Earthly loves, earthly affections and aspirations, earthly cares and afflictions will be past and will trouble the heart no more. The seeing of the Lord's glory will afford full satisfaction.—Heaven is the place where tabernacles are built and not taken down; taber-

nacles which will remain, when the mountain on which Peter proposed to build, will be no more. "We know," says St. Paul, "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." From those tabernacles none will wish to remove; they will all say: "*It is good for us to be here.*"

Is it your desire to be there? Does your heart consent to Paul, when he says: "In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"? Does your soul agree with David, when he says: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord"? Do you with fullness of heart join in the song:

Jerusalem, my happy home,  
 Name ever dear to me.  
 When shall my labors have an end  
 In joy, and peace, and Thee?  
 When shall these eyes Thy heaven-built walls  
 And pearly gates behold?  
 Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,  
 And streets of shining gold?

The lover of Jesus is indeed resigned to the Lord's will, whether to live or die, but his longing is to depart and to be with Jesus, and his soul says: The sooner the better.

### III.

Does your heart tremblingly say: Ah indeed! Who would not desire to see the glories of heaven? But how shall I be found worthy to enter there? I have sinned and my garments are spotted. Let me direct you to a circumstance in this text which will teach you where to seek your worthiness.

The garments of Jesus were of earthly fabric and though He wore good garments so that the soldiers crucifying Him thought it worth while to cast lots for His coat, yet Jesus did not possess many changes of raiment, and it is safe to conclude that by much travel His garments were more or less soiled and dusty. Yet by the glory flowing from His body "his raiment became shining, exceeding

white as snow ; so as no fuller on earth can white them." If we are to be found "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," our souls must be dressed in white. But to make the soul pure and white earthly powers and human skill are all in vain. Unto Judah the prophet Jeremiah said : "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord." There is only One who can make the soul white. It is He of whom the prophet Malachi said : "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver : and he shall purify the sons of Levi ; and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." This refiner and purifier is Jesus, who made His own earthly garments white as the light, and shining as His raiment was, it is but an emblem of the "garments of salvation" which he has earned for us. Dressed in His righteousness, the robe of His merits, our souls are gloriously arrayed in the sight of His Father ; for of Him the Father bears this testimony : "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Well pleased with His Son the Father must be well pleased with those that are in Christ.

O you who have walked in sin, you who have soiled your soul and loaded your conscience, you who have made your members weapons of unrighteousness, turn to Jesus Christ. He can make white and pure. Be the spots in your soul never so dark, your deeds never so black, Christ's glory will ever overcome them. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Turn to Jesus beseeching Him to make white your garments, and doubt it not that His blood cleanses you from all sin.

The publican and dying thief  
Applied to Christ and found relief ;  
Nor need you entertain a doubt :  
He will in no wise cast you out.

This is the Father's command that you come to Jesus ; for He says : "*Hear ye him.*" Hear Jesus Christ. What has He to say ? He says : "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Acknowledge that you are sick, sick unto death and hear Him saying : "The son of

man is come to save that which was lost." "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Turn to Jesus Christ; incline unto Him the ears of your heart and hear Him speaking to you in many words of great promise, and you will soon learn to say :

I heard the voice of Jesus say :  
    "I am this dark world's light ;  
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,  
    And all thy day be bright !"  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
    In Him my Star, my Sun ;  
And in that Light of life I'll walk  
    Till traveling days are done.     Amen.

## SEPTUAGESIMAE, SUNDAY.

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TEXT: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. Matth 20, 1-16.

The kingdom of heaven, the visible church of Christ on earth, is like unto a field in which wheat and tares are mixed together. The wheat are the true Christians, the tares are those who are in the outward community of the church, but are not Christians at heart. To these tares belong also the drones and idlers, who are in the church of Christ, but do nothing for it. In the parable before us, the kingdom of Christ is compared with a vineyard, and those called to it with laborers in the vineyard. Now a vineyard is a

place where there is much and some hard work to do. Herein is a similarity between the kingdoms of Christ and the kingdom of the world. Man is not placed on this earth to idle away his life-time, but to labor in some useful employment. Many, indeed, count laboring a disgrace, and there are not a few who will rather beg than dig, rather steal than work; but in fact it is idleness and not work which is a disgrace to man; for to the Thessalonians St. Paul writes: "We hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies." To idle away the days and not to work, that is a disgrace to an able bodied man, and it is walking disorderly, for God's order is that every man should be occupied in some useful employment. God has not only commanded this, to industrious labor He has also given great promises. Thus the 128 Psalm says: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." The man who labors industriously in the fear of God has the promise that God will supply him what he needs for himself and family; but the idler has no promise, save that poverty shall overtake him as an armed man. Let the drone be rich or poor, he is a nuisance in the community; an evil example, harmful and of no good.

Similar in the church. If a church has five hundred members, but drones, do-nothings, how shall that church thrive? Certainly, if three earnest workers join together they will accomplish more than a hundred drones. This householder goes out to hire laborers into his vineyard. Those called to the kingdom of Christ are also called to labor in it. Here the word is: All hands to work; drones are not wanted; they are only a hindrance and a drawback. Of that unfruitful tree in His vineyard the Lord said: "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The drone in the church is nothing but an encumbrance. He himself will do nothing, and he is a hindrance to those who want to work and who do work. Drones are tares, an encumbrance to the wheat. Be not an idler in the vineyard, but lend your hand that the kingdom may thrive and grow and be spread abroad.

Yet from this fact that drones are only an encumbrance, it does not follow that those who do work are all pleasing to the housefather. If a laborer works hard and does it all wrong, his industry will occasion so much more harm to his employer. It must be the right kind of work performed in the right spirit. Hence selecting only the main thought in this text let me set forth :

THE PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD A PROOF  
THAT WE ARE SAVED ALONE BY GRACE; showing

- I. How the parable proves this; and
- II. What warning and comfort is contained in it.

I.

From this parable, which is so exceedingly rich in doctrine, I desire to-day, in the most simple manner possible, to exhibit only the chief and main point of doctrine which the Lord here intended to inculcate. Given in a few words it is this: In the kingdom of Christ an altogether different rule obtains than in worldly transactions. In this world the rule is: As the labor, so the wages. That is equity and justice. But in the kingdom of Christ there is neither earning nor paying of wages. Whatever a man receives of spiritual gifts, is all alone by the grace of God, and never because that man earned it or in any way deserved it. In Christ's kingdom all is grace, and nothing but grace.

How does the parable prove this?

The connection is this: Peter, speaking also for the other apostles, asked the Lord: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Peter did indeed not follow Jesus for the sake of reward, he walked with Jesus because he believed Him to be the promised Savior. But aside from this faith Peter had the idea, because they had forsaken all and followed the Lord, they deserved and ought to have some reward. When Peter appealed to their forsaking all and inquired about the reward, it was as much as saying: Lord, we have done this much for Thee,

now what in return wilt Thou do for us? Peter argued from the rule which obtains here on earth among men. It is this: One favor is deserving of another; honest work, honest pay; I do you a good turn, so in equity you ought to regard yourself under obligation to do me a good turn; I work for you, so you owe me wages. That is the principle underlying Peter's question. It is the principle on which dealings among men are, or, at least, ought to be, invariably carried on. The workman ought to do an honest day's work, and the employer ought to pay him an honest day's wages. That is right and equitable here on earth among men.

This rule of mutual right and equity among men, Peter applied to the kingdom of Christ and wanted to learn of the Lord, what He would give them for what they had done for Him. The Lord answered Peter, they would verily not remain unrewarded, they would be rewarded a hundred fold, and they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, but He added: "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." This was a word of warning to Peter, and it implied: by looking and asking for reward he was stepping on dangerous ground, and he must quit doing so, or out of a first one he would become a last one and would lose both inheritance and reward. To this warning the Lord annexed this parable, and hence it is very evidently the Lord's direct and chief object to teach that in His kingdom an entirely different rule applies than in dealings among men. What is that rule?

The parable is this: In the morning the householder hires laborers for his vineyard and contracts with them for a penny a day, the penny standing for the common day's wages. During the day, and even towards night, he engages other laborers and contracts with them on the same principle; for he says: "*Whatsoever is right, I will give you.*" So all these laborers go to the vineyard to work in it, and at sunset they come for their wages. All this is very simple, according to right and contract.

But now comes the remarkable part of the parable. "*So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto*

the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more: and they likewise received every man a penny." Some had labored twelve hours, some six, some only one hour, yet the householder pays those who had worked only one hour the same amount as the first with whom he had contracted in the morning. Now those hired first thought, this thing was wrong and they spoke up against the householder saying: "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." Were they not justified in murmuring? Was it right and according to equity what this householder did? Those dissatisfied ones calculated in this way: We get a day's wages for twelve hours work, so those who labored only one hour ought to get one-twelfth of a day's wages; or if those hired last are paid more, we too ought to get proportionately more. Those hired first are indeed not cheated, they get what they contracted for, but what they object to is that the last are paid the same amount.

Well, could not the householder make a present to those hired last? So he could, and if he had given it as a present then none of the others would have had any show of right to say a word against it; for when it comes to making presents then I have the choice, to whom I want to present a gift and what I will give him. But here there was nothing said of making presents, neither was the penny given as a present; for the householder commanded his steward: "Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first." To all the penny was given as wages. So there can be no question about it, this householder does not act according to the rule of equity among men. You hire six men: three labor a day, three half a day, and at night you pay them all, each seventy-five cents. Against this the three first would have reason to grumble and all the neighboring farmers would say: That will never do, because it tends to raise the wages.

That this householder acted according to a different rule than that of merit and reward, labor and pay, he himself declares saying to one of those grumblers: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not

*thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is and go thy way : I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? is thine eye evil, because I am good?"* He says : The pittance for which thou didst contract with me, thou hast received, and now go. But as to my goods they are mine own ; I owe them to no man and I will divide them as I see proper according to mine own goodness and benevolence. So those grumblers, who thought they ought to get more, were sent away in displeasure, whereas those who received the penny as not earned and not deserved, as coming from the goodness of the householder, retained his good pleasure.

Christ does not deal with those called into His kingdom according to the rule of what is right and fair. If He did, His kingdom would cease to be a kingdom of salvation for sinners, and we would all be lost ; for all have sinned, and if He would deal with us according to right, the sentence could be none other than this : "The wages of sin is death." Christ observes a rule which is the very opposite of justice. Jesus Christ is not come to condemn the world, but to save the world ; not to punish sin, but to forgive sin ; not to consign the sinner to eternal death, but to bring him eternal life. Jesus Christ is not come to pay us according to our work, but freely to bestow on us the gifts of His grace and mercy. He deals with us according to His goodness, and not according to what we have earned and deserve. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In Christ's kingdom all is grace, nothing pay, nothing wages. He indeed promised a reward even for giving a cup of cold water, but what reward? A hundred fold reward. That is also not according to what is deserved, it is the abounding of His mercy and loving kindness.

## II.

There are also other doctrines which may be set forth from this parable, but this is clearly *the point* which the Lord aimed to impress on the minds of His disciples. In the kingdom of this

world and in the kingdom of Christ two entirely different rules obtain. As the labor, so the pay—that is right among men; but in the kingdom of Christ all is grace, and though a Christian has labored ever so long and ever so industriously, all that he receives, is purely by the goodness of the householder, and not because he has earned and deserved it. Paul labored more than any of the other apostles, yet the Lord said unto him: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Therefore mark these two rules well and do not exchange or mix them together; for neither of them will apply in the other kingdom. The rule of Christ’s kingdom will not apply in earthly affairs. Suppose you would offer me my year’s salary with the remark that it is a gift and present, I would answer: Friends, in that way I shall not take it; for I have spent my time and labor in your service and it is my wages and not a present. But on the other hand, if I have labored in the service of Christ for a year, can I then come before Him and say: Lord, I have labored a twelvemonth for Thee, where are my wages? Would He not answer: Thou ungrateful servant! Have not I done good unto thee from the days of thy childhood, when thou deservedst it not? “*Take that thine is, and go thy way.*” Therefore I repeat it, mark these two rules well and apply each in its proper place, and do this not only in theory, but practically in your own heart and mind, and it will spare you much trouble and anguish of heart.

Remember, there are in the visible Church two kinds of workers. Some work with an eye to the reward, some from gratitude towards God and from the love of that which is good. Those who labor with an eye to the reward do, as a rule, labor hard, but they are always ready to complain that God does not bless and prosper them as He ought, and they are envious of those who have not labored as long and as much as they, and yet are made equal with them. What do such wage-workers get? They generally do get the pittance of advantages which an outwardly pious and moral life brings in this world, as the Lord says of the Pharisees with respect to their praying at street corners and their giving alms in the market places: “They have their reward.” Their reward was honor before men, that was their penny, and it was all they got. Be

warned, therefore, and be not a wage-worker in the Lord's vineyard, or you are found a servant and not a son, and the servant remains not in the house. And even the most advanced Christian should never regard this warning as needless for him. The old Adam is so easily tickled with the idea of being deserving and the devil is sly enough to tempt unto trust in works under the very name of grace. He can argue: Oh! it is all grace, but see, you do what so many will not do, you go to church, you read, you do good, therefore you have obtained and possess grace. That is making the very gift of grace a kind of reward obtained by man's work. We must never lose sight of this fact: every man that is saved, is saved in no other way, than the malefactor on the cross, simply by the mercy of God.

Before Him none can boasting stand,  
But all must fear his strict demand,  
And live alone by mercy.

But this parable has also comfort for down-cast hearts, such as say: "I long to work in the Lord's vineyard, but I am not so situated as to do much in any way, and when I try to do some good, something is sure to come up and to spoil it. Shall I then be excluded as an unprofitable servant and of no benefit to the vineyard?" Indeed, we do little, and what we do is all nothing but patchwork. There is not one in this house who can show up one hour of thoroughly good and faultless labor in the Lord's vineyard. The Christian does good, but as long as he is not rid of the flesh, he cannot do one work which is not tainted and imperfect in some way. Instead of taking pride and putting trust in our good works, we have rather reason to be ashamed of them before God, because, measured by the standard of holiness, not one of them could pass muster.

O what a precious thing that the householder deals with us according to His own mercy. "*I will give unto this last even as unto thee.*" The gifts of grace were set before those grumblers, but they did not want gifts, they wanted wages, whereas those who knew

that they had earned nothing, were glad to receive the gift. If you feel your unworthiness, despair not! It is not a gift of reward which is for the worthy, it is grace, and because it is grace, therefore it is for those who have not earned it and are not worthy of it. Are you unworthy? God is gracious.

By grace! Our works are all rejected,  
All claims of merit pass for naught;  
The mighty Savior, long expected,  
To us this blissful truth has brought,  
That He by death redeems our race,  
And we are saved alone by grace. Amen.

## SEXAGESIMAE SUNDAY

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TEXT: And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundred-fold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8, 4-15

Great are the exertions which are now made to refine and ennoble the human race. Progress is the watchword of the age, not only in material improvements, but also in the culture of the mind; and it is certainly true, education was never so widespread, never so general a thing as it is now. By education, men say, the human race is becoming nobler, better; its moral standard more elevated. And the theory is advanced, the more widespread and thorough education would become, the more would vice be subdued, the more would the nobler qualities of our race be developed.

Now the Christian church has never been an opponent of education and learning; in all ages the church has proved herself the foster-mother also of worldly learning, sciences and the fine arts. Where the Bible is introduced barbarism must vanish, civilization follows in its wake. The Christian nations are the civilized, the educated, the enlightened ones. But in our times education is greatly overestimated that many count it the help of the world. If we ask, what is the need of the world? men will answer: Education. We Christians know that education is not the true help of the world. Education is good, it is praiseworthy, but when men think education *the one thing needful*, when they say, that education would elevate the human race from the pool of depravity into which it has fallen, that is a fatal error. When education is made to supplant the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is put to an evil and harmful use. The heart of man is evil and remains evil, though you educate him a thousand years in all the sciences of this world. Does not history tell us, and does not our own observation prove to us that frequently the most educated are the most vicious of men? I am of course not speaking against education. From a worldly point of view the best fortune which parents can provide for their children is to give them a good education. That is better than to leave them a pile of money. I am speaking against education being regarded as the savior of mankind, and I say: Education can make a man a gentleman, but it cannot make him a Christian.

There is but one thing in the world which can, in the true and full meaning of the word, HELP man, and that is the Word of the cross. It alone is the incorruptible seed by which men are born again to become new creatures. Education gives to man outward polish, but the Word of the cross makes him a new creature from heart and soul. The true help of man is to hear the Word of God, and that is his only help. All those who would become new creatures, who would be born again to an imperishable hope, must hear the Word of God. Human wisdom and human contrivances may change and polish the manners, but the heart they can not change; this only that Word can do which is "the power of God."

The Gospel of Christ is now scattered broadcast throughout the world, and it is a good and powerful seed which brings fruit wherever it is sown. It blesses a heart here and saves a soul there; "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Yet not in all does the seed bring fruit to perfection. The Lord distinguishes four kinds of hearers.

Hence let me speak on :

THE FOURFOLD HEARING OF GOD'S WORD.

I.

Of the first class of hearers the Lord says: "*A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*" This He explains thus: "*Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*" This class are persons who do hear the Word, but they are not renewed, not converted, not saved by it. Their hearts are hard like unto a hard-trodden pathway. The seed falls on the surface and it remains on the surface, and in a very short time it has disappeared again. They do not take the Word to heart, they do not understand it and soon they have forgotten it. To preach the Gospel to this class of hearers is like beating the air. You may beat the air an hundred strokes with a switch, you will hear a whistling sound and you will gradually feel your arm tiring, but that is all; not a vestige of the strokes will remain in the air. This class of hearers may hear the Gospel for years, yet they understand and know nothing or very little about it. If you will look around among your acquaintances you will, no doubt, find such who go to preaching, and as for the law they know well enough what is right and wrong among men, but when it comes to the Gospel they do not understand the first principles of it, although they have heard it perhaps an hundred times.

Where is the fault? Is it in the seed? O no! it is not the fault of the seed; the seed is good. Indeed, it is exactly the same seed whether it falls "*by the wayside*" or "*on good ground.*" One

and the same Gospel is preached to all, and of it Christ says: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Where is the fault? Is it in the quality of the soil, because it is hard? This the text does also not say; it only says: "*Some fell by the wayside,*" but it does not say that this was the reason why it could not grow. Originally the hearts of all are like the wayside soil. By nature all have a stony heart, and this is a divine seed with divine power to make the hardest soil soft and fertile. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" That which can break rocks can also break wayside soil.

The text says of the seed: "*It was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devourd it.*" That is the reason. The seed is trodden down. Those by the wayside themselves tread down the seed. When they hear the Word they put it from them, as Paul said to the Jews of Antioch: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." The wayside hearers put the Word from them, saying within themselves that they do not want it.

Others, when they hear the Word, are struck by it, but they argue: If I would let this seed grow in my heart what would my acquaintances say? how would my companions regard me? would they not call me a fool, and would I not lose their friendship? They think they could not afford to risk losing the friendship of men and so they put down the Word.

The seed by the wayside is not only trodden down, it is also devoured by the fowls of the air: "*Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.*" The devil knows that it is the Word which does the harm to his kingdom and therefore, if he can not keep people from going to hear he will be busy to take the Word from their hearts even while the pastor is preaching. If he can make the mind drowsy, or fill it with thoughts of pleasure or business or sinful and filthy imaginings the Word can not enter the heart. And with many who did give attendance to the Word the enemy yet succeeds in taking it from them by a chat at the church

door, or a diversion in the evening. If you go to church every Sunday, but each time allow the enemy to take the Word from you it is labor lost and your last estate will be worse than the first.

Does not the text exculpate those by the wayside? Does not the Lord plainly say to the disciples: "*Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*" Must we not conclude from these words that it was not the will of the Lord that those people should understand His doctrine, believe it and be saved? And if it was not His intention that they should understand, how could any guilt fall on them? These conclusions appear very reasonable, but they are not founded in the text and do not follow from it. If the Lord said, He spoke to the people in parables for *this* reason, because He did not *want* them to understand it and be saved, then He would have contradicted many passages of the Scripture which so distinctly declare, that He will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. The text is clear in itself if we only examine it right. The reason why the seed by the wayside does not grow and bring fruit is, because it is trodden down and devoured. The Sower sows the seed with the intent that it should grow, He sows good seed, and it would grow and bring fruit if it were not trodden down and devoured. To this the devil himself gives testimony; for he "*cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*" The devil knows for what purpose the seed is sown, he knows that it is good seed and if left there will bring forth faith and salvation; therefore he says: I must be at hand, I must take that seed away, or the eyes of those people will be opened, they will believe and be saved. So the devil himself bears testimony that it is the will of the Sower, that those people should believe and be saved.

But since this is the Lord's will what can we make of the words: "*To others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*" We must here not forget to what kind of people the Lord was speaking. He had preached to the people before, and He had not spoken to them in dark sayings, but in childlike words; for in his first chapter Mark informs us:

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,” but they received not His Word. Now He spake to them in parables which they could see and yet not see, which they could understand and yet not understand. They could understand the words seed, sowing, wayside, etc., but the parabolic, the hidden meaning thereof they could not understand. And the Lord spake to them in this manner to induce them to seek after the hidden meaning of His words, as the disciples did who came asking an explanation. If the multitude would have come asking further instruction they would have received it just as well as the disciples; for Jesus never rejected any one who came unto Him.

## II.

If Satan cannot hinder the seed from taking root and beginning to grow in the heart his aim will next be to cause it to wither again. Of the second class of hearers the parable says: “*Some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*” In explanation the Lord says: “*They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*” On a rock with but a thin layer of soil seed will spring up very quickly, but hot sunshine and dry winds cause it to wither quickly. This class of hearers do truly believe for a while, but seeing a young and promising faith spring up is hateful to the enemy and he will do his best to cause the young Christian to fall into sin or to be offended at the cross of Christ. Many are the instances of awakenings which seemed to promise great things, but soon died away like young wheat on a rock is sined.

Why do many become backsliders so quickly? “*And these have no root.*” A shallow surface only was cultivated in them, and underneath the rock remained unbroken. They repent, but not thoroughly. Hosea says of them: “They return, but not to the Most High: they are like a deceitful bow.” Many are carried away by momentary emotions. The Word does lay hold on them and for a while it seems that they would become zealous and exemplary Christians, but it is all only superficial. In the depth of the heart,

in the background of the soul the rocky soil remained unbroken, and when a heat, a temptation, an affliction comes they fall away. Therefore the prophet Joel exhorts: "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." Let the ploughshare of the law penetrate deeply and turn up the soil thoroughly that the seed of the Gospel can strike firm root and can endure the drouth when it comes.

## III.

There is another danger to the growing seed, beside being consumed by the drouth. "*And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.*" Of these the Lord says in His explanation: "*That which fell among thorns, are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*" Seed sown among thorns will not die so quickly as that on the rock, it may grow very luxuriantly for a while, but when the thorns begin to crowd it, then it turns yellow, becomes sickly and gradually dies. Therefore the Lord does not say of those among thorns that they bring no fruit at all, but they "*bring no fruit to perfection.*" They are true Christians, spiritually alive, and they begin to bring the fruits of the Spirit by walking in good works, but the thorns come up and they gain ground until they infest the whole heart. So the spiritual life is choked and the fruit unto salvation does not follow.

The thorns are all sins and evil lusts, of which the Lord specifies three: "*Cares and riches, and pleasures of this life.*" Indeed, three most dangerous thorns. Many turn to the Lord in all earnestness, and especially do many in their youth vow allegiance unto the Lord, in uprightness of heart pledging themselves to walk in the ways of the Lord to the end of their lives, but in after years they become entangled and choked in the cares of this life. They enter business, have much to occupy their mind, a household to care for, and the care for the soul becomes less until other cares have crowded it out; and though they remain church members and preserve the outward form of godliness, yet the spiritual life in them which was once so fresh and green, has died out, and it must

be said of them as of the church at Sardis: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."—With others the desire to gain a competence awakes, and they know, to be saving and to gather up the fragments is not wrong, but by and by their deceitful heart leads them beyond the line, their saving money is turned into craving money and so the love of money gradually takes possession of their heart and the love of Christ is choked.—Others are lured by sensual lusts or worldly pleasures, and they say, it is allowable enjoyment, but they suffer it to draw them away from the care for the soul, and by and by fornication, intemperance or some other carnal vice fixes its hold on them, or the love of the world chokes the love of God in their hearts. This is the history of many thousands who once were the children of God, but who, like Solomon and Demas, suffered the thorns to grow up and to choke the spiritual life within them.

Because this is so we should in turning to the Lord be careful to root up all the thorns and to leave none remaining in the heart, as the prophet Jeremiah exhorts; "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." Turning unto the Lord, see that you bid farewell to every sin and then watch day after day that not rank thorns or vicious weeds grow up again. If you allow a place to the brier of intemperance, or the hawthorn of avarice, or the nightshade of carnal pleasure it will surely bring death to the inner man. Make it your practice frequently to scan the field of the heart with the eye-glass of the law and when you discover a weed let there be no temporizing with it, that your heart may remain like to that ground of which the parable says:

## IV.

*"And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold."* Explaining this the Lord says: *"That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."* These are they who hear the Word, understand it, believe it, bring fruit to perfection and are saved. They are those who reach the end of faith, the salvation of the soul.

How can the Lord here say : “ *And other fell on GOOD GROUND,*” when the Scriptures testify that Adam “ *begat a son in his own likeness,*” and : “ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh ?*” The Lord compares the hearts of these with good ground, not because they are good in themselves before the seed comes to them, or even because they are one whit better, than the hearts of those by the wayside, but because the seed falls into them, makes them good ground and grows and brings fruit in them. That this is the meaning is unquestionable from the Lord’s words to the disciples : “ *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.*” That the hearts of the disciples were a good soil was not of themselves, it was the gift of God.

It is the seed that makes the ground good and produces the fruit. Without the seed neither good ground, nor any fruit. If we would be good ground and bring fruit we must occupy ourselves continually with the Word. “ *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*” We must hear the Word, read it, keep it and ponder it in our heart, and, surely, the soil will not be too hard for that seed, it will strike root and grow. Then when the seed has sprung up we are to bring forth fruit with patience. Where that seed is growing the weather will not always be fair, tempests will come, heat will fall upon it, tares will strive to choke it, but we should “ *bring forth fruit with patience,*” knowing that the harvest will come, when they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and they that went forth weeping shall bring their sheaves with rejoicing. Amen.

## QUINQUAGESIMAE SUNDAY.

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TEXT: Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God. Luke 18, 31-43.

We again stand at the threshold of that period of the year which our forefathers set apart for the special consideration of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and which was regarded by them as a sacred time. Surely, a good and laudable ordinance of the church; for the suffering, death and rising again of the Lord is the very center of the whole work of our redemption and salvation. Any one who does not understand this part of Christ's work; any one who does not know wherefore Christ suffered, why He died and for what purpose He rose again, can nevermore understand the plan of salvation. Whosoever, therefore, would come to a living knowledge of God and the Savior whom He has sent; who-

soever would know the will of the Father and understand the work of the Son, let him study the meaning of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. So long as the disciples did not understand these things the Scriptures were a sealed book to them and their eyes were holden that they could not see the true glory of Jesus; for when He spake to them of His suffering and death "*this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*" This is Christ's true glory, that through suffering and death He redeemed us from sin and death. For this the perfected saints ascribe unto Him everlasting glory, saying: "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," and the epistle to the Hebrews says: "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Without Christ's suffering, without the shedding of His blood and His death we would not be redeemed, because Divine justice required that the guilt of sin must be punished, the wages of sin must be paid, before mercy could be extended to sinners. Therefore when Peter in Gethsamane drew his sword to defend his Master, the Lord said unto him: "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Without the shedding of His blood there could be no forgiveness of sin; for the epistle to the Hebrews says: "Without shedding of blood is no remission," and of His blood alone does the Lord say: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Without His death we would yet be in the power of death, as the epistle to the Hebrews says: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Only because He died can we triumph over death saying: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

If we would be Christians indeed, we must know and we must believe that Christ's sufferings, blood and death are the ransom with which we are bought from sin and death, the price with which life

and salvation are purchased for us. This knowledge, certainty and faith should be written in our hearts with indelible letters that we would never lose sight of it, and especially that time of the year in which the Lord's death took place, we should improve to make ourselves acquainted with these things. Let me therefore to-day in a general way speak of :

THE SUFFERING OF JESUS CHRIST.

Let me remind that it is :

- I. A free-will suffering ;
- II. A mirror of God's wrath against sin ;
- III. That "by His stripes we are healed."

1.

Descriptions of the life and death of Christ are now a very common thing. One often meets with traveling agents peddling such books, and it is almost become fashionable for every family to possess a life of Christ. Frequently people pay large prices for such books, and many of them are not worth the paper they are printed on. Some of the modern descriptions of the life of Christ are written by Infidels, some by Rationalists, and some by Christians. On an average the latter class may be recommended in a general way, but the two first classes are worth less than nothing, they are extremely dangerous. Although they may call Him the world's savior, yet they represent Christ not as the true God incarnated for the redemption of man, but only as a pious and wise teacher of morals. Of His sufferings and shameful death they say, that the Jews hated Him on account of His doctrine, and because He would not deny the truth, He became a victim of His enemies. Were it true that Christ had not died of His own free will, but because He was overpowered by His enemies, then He could, of course, not be our Savior. But Jesus Christ did not die because He was overpowered by His enemies. He died according to the eternal counsel of God, as Peter plainly tells us in his Pentecost sermon: "Jesus of Nazareth, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-

knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." The suffering of Christ was foreordained by the triune God, and He Himself was the almighty God. He did not become a victim of His enemies, He suffered of His own free will.

The Lord's willingness to suffer is very evident in our text; for He says: "*Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished*" These words the Lord spake to His disciples when on His last journey to Jerusalem. He knew what the prophets had foretold of Him; He was well aware of all that was to befall Him at Jerusalem; He told His disciples beforehand, saying: "*He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death.*" Knowing this, why did He not turn back on His journey and go to Tyre or Damascus, and so avoid suffering and death? Why went he straightway to Jerusalem? He wanted to suffer and die; He went to Jerusalem to accomplish what the prophets had said of Him. Even when His enemies had come with staves and swords to take Him, it was yet in His power to escape their hands; for when Peter drew the sword He said: "Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" If it had not been His will to suffer and die, all the armies of Rome could not have overpowered Him, no steel nail on earth could have transfixed Him to the cross.

Oh, a comforting fact that Christ suffered of His own free will! If He had suffered because He became a victim of His enemies, if He had been powerless to help Himself, then His suffering would have been no manifestation of love; for what is done unwillingly does not proceed from love; but because He willingly laid down His life, we know that He has a heart full of love for us. Knowing what cup of bitterness He must drink at Jerusalem, He, nevertheless, hastened to that city. Willingly, heartily, joyfully did He suffer, as he testifies by the Psalmist: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." He delighted in suffering.

## II.

Because Christ suffered of His own free will, because He went to Jerusalem there to suffer and to die, He must certainly have had some great object in view. For nothing and to no purpose no one will voluntarily subject himself to suffering and death. Why did Christ suffer? what means His anguish, grief and torment? wherefore His struggle with death? These are the questions which we must know how to answer, otherwise we are yet like the disciples who "*understood none of these things.*"

What did the disciples not understand? They, indeed, knew the meaning of the words to be mocked, spitted on, scourged and put to death, but they did not understand why Christ must suffer these things. They thought the kingdom of Christ would be a kingdom of military power, worldly honors and riches. By Him they expected to be made lords of the earth, and blinded by this error it was to them an incomprehensible saying that He must suffer and be put to death in so shameful a manner.

As the disciples at that time, so in our time many, that are called Christians, do not understand the object of Christ's suffering. Reading the history of His passion they know what the words mean, they can tell, how cruelly He was treated, but the cause and object of His suffering is to them a hidden thing, and even though they are told that He suffered for the sins of the world, they have no true knowledge of what sin is, or what it is to suffer for sin. Some consider the sufferings of Christ so that they become exasperated at His tormenters. Now the rejection of Christ by the Jews and His crucifixion by the Gentiles was certainly an abominable act; but persons who so consider the Lord's sufferings that they become angry at the Jews show, that they do not understand the counsel of God and, in fact, are of kindred mind with the Jews; for they think, *they* would never have been capable of doing so wicked an act. They are of the same mind with the Pharisees who also said: "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." Those do not consider the sufferings of Christ right who say in their

hearts, they could not have acted so wickedly as the Jews did; for they know not the depravity of their own hearts. Others consider the suffering of Christ so as to pity Him. They feel compassion for Him and perhaps are moved to tears, because He was so shamefully treated. These only look upon the Lord's sufferings, forgetting that He did it willingly. Christ does not need our compassion, nor does He want to be pitied by us. To those women weeping over Him on the way to Calvary He said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" We are not to pity Christ as we pity others in distress.

To look upon the sufferings of Christ rightly and fruitfully we must remember what it was that caused Him suffering, and for what purpose He suffered. Why was He smitten and afflicted? Suffering is the consequence of sin. Had not sin come into the world there would be no suffering. Where suffering, there sin. Was then Christ so great a sinner, because He suffered so much?

He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth; yet He had sins, not of His own, but the sins of others. He had more sins than you and I together; for He took upon Himself the sins of the world. He was so loaded and covered with sin, that St. Paul directly pronounces Him sin saying: "God hath made him to be sin for us." He was "holy, undefiled, separate from sinners," but "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Our sins were the cause of His suffering and knowing this we should well consider how He suffered. So heavily did the load of sin press upon Him that in the garden His sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground, and an angel came to strengthen Him; and on the cross, enveloped in darkness, from sheer anguish of spirit He screamed: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The capacity of our mind is far too limited to even imagine the vastness, the height and the depth of that suffering which extorted a scream of agony from the soul of Him who suffered willingly and who possessed almighty power to support Him. Must not sin be an abomination in the sight of God? Must not His anger against un-

righteousness burn like a fiery oven, since He punishes sin so terribly in His only begotten Son? Would you learn how heavy a burden sin is? Go to Gethsemane; there your sins bow down to the ground the Creator of all things. Do you want to know whether God is angry at sin and will punish it? Ascend Mount Calvary; there the Father delivered His own Son into the bonds of death for the punishment of sin. Would you know what it cost the Son of God to make atonement for sin? Picture His sufferings to your mind, as the Lord Himself describes them in the 40th Psalm, lamenting: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; therefore my heart faileth me." Behold, how heavily your sins lay on the shoulders of Christ and learn here, what sin deserves in the sight of God, and what dire judgment will fall upon you, if you repent not of sin and turn to Christ.

This is the first lesson we are to learn from the sufferings of Christ: the knowledge of sin and God's wrath against sin. There are many who do confess that they are sinners, but they do so, as it were, with a toss of the head. They do not count it so very great an evil to be a sinner. They do not look on sin as something odious before God, such a violation of divine justice which brings infinite guilt and deserves unending punishment; they rather count sin only a fault and defect of nature which man could not help and which God would overlook. But whosoever thinks thus lightly of sin is yet blind and does not understand the sufferings of Christ and the justice of God. To make light of sin is itself one of the most dreadful sins; for to regard sin an insignificant and trivial thing is imputing great foolishness to the Son of God for suffering innumerable evils only to make satisfaction for a mere defect of nature; it is accusing God the Father of injustice for inflicting excessive punishment on His Son for a small matter. Surely, sin is not merely a defect, it is a reality. God does verily not regard sin a trivial thing, or He would not have humbled His own Son, who had agreed to suffer the punishment of sin, so low that He must die so painful and shameful a death at the hands of the executioner. Whenever we consider the sufferings of Christ we should do so praying with

that blind man by the wayside : “ *Lord, that I may receive my sight,*” with seeing eyes to see the depth of my depravity, the heinousness of my transgressions and the wrath in store for me if I do not hate and forsake sin.

So the passion of Christ pictures sin and God’s wrath against sin in vivid and fiery characters, and considering the history of His passion we should lay to heart what dire poison the seed of the Serpent is, since it cost God’s own Son His life’s blood to atone for it.

### III.

But when we have come to a lively knowledge of our sins, we must not despair in them, as did Judas Iscariot, but we should further consider the object of Christ’s passion, that He suffered and died in our sins, that He bare our transgressions that we might go free. He suffered as our Representative. “The chastisement of our peace was upon him;” He was chastened that we might have peace; He suffered that we should be free from suffering. That is the foundation and pillar of our faith and hope. Permit me to show this in a few sentences.

Christ did not suffer in His own sins, He had no sins of His own, He suffered in the sins of the world, that is of the whole human race. Unto Him, as the second Adam, the sins of the whole human family were reckoned. “As by the offense of one,” says Paul, “judgment came upon all men to condemnation : even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” As Adam brought suffering upon all, so Christ suffered for all; as in Adam’s sin the sentence of death was passed on all, so in Christ’s suffering the justification of life is acquired for all. Therefore Christ so frequently calls Himself the “Son of man,” because in Him the whole race of men is represented. From this it incontrovertibly follows, firstly, that there is not a single individual on the whole face of the earth, for whom Christ did not suffer, because He suffered for Adam and his children. If Satan would sift you and say : Yea, how do you know that Christ has suffered for you ? you may boldly answer : Get thee hence, Satan ; or canst thou bring proof that I am not a descendant of Adam ? In

the sufferings of the second Adam the children of the first Adam have equally part. Christ suffered for me just as well as He did for St. Peter; for I am a descendant of Adam as well as Peter was. From Christ's being the second Adam it, secondly, follows, that He suffered for all sins of all men, hence for all sins of each one individually; for as from the one sin of the first Adam all sins originated, so the one passion of the second Adam is for all sins. Do not permit Satan to torment you with scruples like this: Christ indeed suffered for sins, but how can you know, if He suffered for that sin which you committed then and there. There is no sin for which Christ did not suffer; for as all sins originated from the first Adam, so all sins centred on the shoulders of the second Adam. From Christ's being the second Adam it, thirdly, follows, that His atonement is valid in heaven and on earth; for as by the sin of the first Adam death comes, so by the suffering of the second Adam life is obtained. To deny the former, that by the first Adam death came into the world, would be outright madness. Now as true as the first is, even so true is the latter, that by the passion of the second Adam life is acquired.

Therefore I conclude, and God grant that my words may find a place in your hearts: Jesus Christ was your Substitute; He stood in your stead; He suffered the punishment of your sins; for the sake of His suffering there is life in store for you. You ought to have suffered for your sins, but God accounted them to Christ, and punished them in Him, so you shall be free from suffering. Hold to this Jesus Christ and in eternity you will know no suffering; "for God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Amen.

## I. SUNDAY IN LENT.

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TEXT: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards a hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him. Matth. 4, 1-11.

This Gospel, treating of the fasting and temptation of Christ, is read in the church on this Sunday, because it is the first Sunday in Lent, which season the ancient church set apart for the special contemplation of Christ's suffering and death. But as so many other good and edifying customs of antiquity this too was perverted under popery. Under the plea that Christians ought to follow Christ, a forty days' fasting was introduced as something meritorious before God and so the hearts of the people were led away from the sufferings of Christ, and were directed to their own works for righteousness. From Ash Wednesday to Easter the pope has forbidden the eating of meat, and he says that whosoever would eat meat during this time were guilty of a sin unto death. Though this fasting of the Papists has an appearance of piety, yet in fact

and reality it is a vain and wicked thing. By their fasting they hope to earn the favor of God, but the Scriptures declare that man is justified by grace through faith alone, without the deeds of the law. Though a man would fast himself to death, he could not thereby merit the forgiveness of one single sin; and because by the Papistic fasting the central truth of the Gospel is denied, it is not strange that St. Paul pronounces the command "to abstain from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving" a "doctrine of devils." And the fasting of the Romanists is nothing but hypocrisy. To abstain from meat, but to fill the body with fish and all manner of delicacies, is no fasting at all.

When the pope, to justify his command, appeals to the fasting of Christ, he does so without any reason whatever. Christ did fast forty days and forty nights, but He did not say we should do so likewise. And He really fasted, that is, for forty days and forty nights He neither ate nor drank, and herein no one can imitate Him. Neither does He want it imitated. He did many things which we are not to do and can not do. Christ's fasting was a part of His work of redemption. He fasted to atone for the lustfulness of our first parents, and in general to make satisfaction for all sins of intemperance in eating and drinking. He shed His blood for the remission of sins, and this we can not imitate; He fasted to atone for the sins of gluttony and drunkenness and this too we can not imitate.

Yet fasting, if performed in the right sentiment, is a good and wholesome practice. Scripture mentions three kinds of fasting. The first is the spiritual fasting, which consists in abstaining from sins and crucifying the lusts of the flesh; and without this spiritual fasting all bodily fasting is nothing but hypocrisy, as God said unto Israel by the prophet Isaiah: "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens; and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" The other kind of fasting is,

when a Christian for a certain time, either takes no nourishment, or very little, not with the intention of performing a meritorious work, but in order to be better prepared for the subduing of carnal lusts and for prayer. This kind of fasting must not be commanded, it must be voluntary, if it is to be right; for Scripture leaves it to the free choice of each one, whether, when and how he chooses to fast. A third kind of fasting is that which God imposes, when He afflicts a Christian with poverty that from lack of food he must fast, or when God prostrates him on a sick-bed, so that food becomes repugnant to him; and in this kind of fasting patience is required that with resignation we receive what God sees fit to send. These are the three kinds of fasting which the Scriptures mention, but of fasting as a meritorious work the Bible knows nothing, save alone the fasting of Jesus Christ. To Him belongs the honor that His fasting alone is meritorious, yea, of infinite value before God the Father. His fasting, therefore, we should not seek to imitate, but we should appropriate it through faith, believing that, because He fasted our souls are spared eternal starvation.

But there in the wilderness Christ not only suffered bodily starvation, at the same time He was tormented by the tempter. Let us therefore yet consider:

#### THE TEMPTING OF CHRIST BY SATAN.

He suffered the temptings of Satan:

- I. For our redemption;
- II. For our instruction.

#### I.

This text narrates unto us a wonderful occurrence, which may well awaken our astonishment: Satan tempting the Son of God to sin. Satan, the chief of those fallen angels of whom St. Jude writes that they are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day," Satan dares draw nigh unto Jesus Christ "who is over all, God blessed forever," to tempt Him to sin! And not only does Satan undertake to tempt Christ, but he goes about it in a bold, overbearing, arrogant manner, as though he were

Christ's equal, or even His superior. "If," he says, "if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." With what boldness he pronounces it an uncertain thing if Jesus be the Son of God or not! With what presumption does he undertake to teach Christ ways and means how to help Himself out of His distress! With still greater impudence he takes Christ and leads Him about; for plainly does the text say: "*Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*" The devil quotes the Scriptures, but in a mutilated form, just as though Christ was so ignorant that He would not notice it; and finally the devil crowns his arrogance by showing Christ the glory of the world and saying: "*All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" Surely, an amazing thing that Satan dare presume to ask the Son of God to fall down and to worship him.

How could this thing be? While an absolute monarch is sitting on his throne no lawyer can undertake to indict him; for the monarch is sovereign and is not subject to the law, but when that monarch voluntarily steps down from his throne and takes the place of a criminal, then a lawyer can indict him as being subject to the law. And because that monarch has agreed to become the substitute of a criminal, he is no more entitled to employ his absolute power to set aside the law, but having placed himself under the law he has bound himself to use only legal means in his defense. Even so here. Satan could not ascend up to heaven to tempt the Son of God there, but when the Son of God had come down from heaven and had become the substitute of sinners, then Satan could approach Him with his temptings, and Satan did not fail to make use of his opportunity.

Why did the Son of God suffer Himself to be assailed by Satan, to be led about and contemptuously and mockingly treated by him? Must He not have had some great object in view, some great end to attain, because He submitted to this indignity? Truly had He a

great object in view, a great prize to contend for. We must not regard the Lord's battle with Satan as a matter of minor importance; for without this conflict the Lord could not have redeemed us. Wherefore He suffered the temptings of Satan is indicated in the first verse of our text: "*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*" When was this? Why, immediately after His baptism. At His baptism He was visibly anointed with the Holy Ghost unto the public performance of His office of redeeming the human race, and His first performance was, that He went to the wilderness, there to begin the struggle with the chief enemy. He was come to destroy the works of the devil, to take from him his armor, and to deliver us who were the captives of Satan; and so soon as He was anointed unto this office with the Holy Ghost by God the Father, He went to meet the enemy, and there in the wilderness the devil made his first great onset upon Him. He, therefore, contended with Satan in His capacity as the Son of man, the Representative of the race, as the second Adam. This same we learn from the Lord's answers to the tempting offers of the devil. He did not employ His divine power against the devil, but to withstand his assaults He used only that weapon which is given to men, the Word of God. This shows conclusively that He contended with Satan as our Representative and Redeemer.

Using His divine power Christ could in a single moment have banished Satan with all his host of evil spirits from this earth, but then man would not have been redeemed from sin and guilt. Man's redemption, if it was to be accomplished at all, had to be accomplished agreeably to the word recorded in the 1st chapter of Isaiah: "*Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.*" Redemption had to be accomplished in a legal way and not by violence. This point is easily illustrated. If a man has been sentenced to prison by due process of law, it will not do to free him by violence. Though a mob break the jail and set the man at liberty, yet he is not *legally* free. He is at large, but the law still holds its claim on him. To make the man legally free another process of law must be inaugurated and he must be pronounced free by the proper authorities according to the statutes of the common-

wealth. The redemption of man had to be accomplished with judgment and righteousness according to law and justice, and not by force. The legal claim which Satan had on man had to be taken from him. Therefore Jesus did not use His divine power against Satan, but only the written Word of God; for the first Adam had fallen into the power of the devil, because by unbelief he set aside this weapon, God's Word and command; therefore the second Adam had to cope with Satan with this weapon only to overcome him.

And by the Word He did overcome repelling every assault of the tempter. First he sought to instill doubt of the Father's Word into the mind of Jesus saying: "*If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread.*" According to the connection Satan meant to say: Some time ago on the banks of Jordan a voice from heaven was heard saying of thee: "This is my beloved Son." But it seems doubtful, whether that voice spake the truth; for here thou art in the wilderness forsaken and starving, and how canst thou be the Son of God. Try it and see, if thou really dost possess divine power; for if so, then it will cost thee but a word and these stones will be turned into bread. Under these circumstances trying would have implied doubt, but Jesus answered: "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" Instead of giving place to doubt Jesus said, He could, if need be, live by the Word of His Father without bread. When he failed to seduce Jesus to doubt the Father's Word, Satan sought to lead Him to presumptuous trust, to rely on the protection of God where it was not promised, but Jesus replied: "*It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" There was a stairway by which to come down from the temple and jumping down was a way which God had commanded no one to go. Even so that greatest and grandest offer of Satan, to give Him the dominion of the world did Jesus meet with the Word saying: "*It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"

Here was a battle on the result of which depended the weal or woe not of a city or nation only, but of the human race; and Satan, surely, exerted all his power, cunning and craftiness to seduce

the second Adam also, and so to keep his spoil forever. As the evangelist Luke informs us he tempted the Lord during all the forty days of His fasting, and at the end of those days he made another great onslaught, but he was met at every point, and, as a vanquished general, he had to quit the field. He, indeed, left the Lord only for a season; he returned again to renewed attempts; but if with the first Adam his victory had been easy, in the second Adam Satan found his Master. Particularly of one more instance do we read that Satan came to act against the Lord. In his 15th chapter St. John writes: "When Jesus had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly." Then Judas went to contract with the high priests. It was Satan who incited Judas to betray the Lord, but after Judas had gone out Jesus said: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." It appears, when Satan found that he could not seduce Jesus, he at last in blind rage resolved to incite Judas and his helpers to put Jesus to death, and in this the devil was successful, but thereby his own kingdom was destroyed.

Behold here the fulfillment of the word which God had spoken four thousand years before to the serpent in paradise concerning the woman's Seed: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The devil tormented Christ with his temptings, he incited men to persecute and to put Him to death, but the third day it suddenly became manifest who was the victor, that Christ through the very bruises which He suffered had truly redeemed our race and had crushed the head of the old Serpent. What consternation must have seized on Satan and his angles, when Christ suddenly appeared in their infernal abode, triumphantly to proclaim His victory to all the hosts of hell! Whose is the victory? It is Jesus Christ's. And who is Christ? He is the Son of man in whom was represented the human race, who stood in the battle in our place, as our Substitute. So the victory is ours, as Paul exults: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Because the victory is ours, let us arise, let us grasp this Jesus Christ with the hand of faith, and holding Him up to the

enemy, let us say : The field is mine ; behold here my Substitute ; for when Christ is held up to him Satan must flee.

## II.

But a vanquished general, though the decisive battle be lost, will not immediately surrender every thing ; he will strive to hold what territory he can and will seek to regain lost ground. Such are Satan's tactics after Christ has taken from him his right and power over the human race. He strives to hold what territory he can, and, indeed, he holds the great majority of men in his service ; not because he has power to do so—that power Christ has taken from him— ; but because men love darkness rather than light. Those, too, who through faith in Christ have escaped his kingdom, the devil seeks to win back again, and he has many ways and means to fascinate and to ensnare the souls of men. The Lord tells us that when the evil spirit is cast out of a house, he soon returns to see, if he might not gain entrance again ; and Peter admonishes : “ Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” We who believe in Jesus Christ must remember that the devil is our adversary and is continually on the watch for an opportunity to regain us for his kingdom. Therefore we should study to know his practices, how he is accustomed to assail the heart, and we should hold ourselves equipped with the right weapons to ward him off.

But where could we have a better pattern for our instruction than in Christ Himself ? He indeed suffered the temptations of Satan for our redemption, and this we are to believe that His struggle with and His victory over Satan is our salvation ; yet at the same time His temptations are an ensample for us. From Him we may learn how to resist the devil and to triumph over him. Hebrews fourth chapter, it is said of our High Priest : “ He was in all points tempted like as we are.” If He was tempted like as we, then we are tempted like as He ; and being tempted like as He, we must also meet the temptations and overcome the tempter in like manner as He did.

But there is one point here in which we are not to imitate Christ, because He has commanded us the contrary. Jesus went to the wilderness “*to be tempted of the devil.*” He was come into the world to overcome the enemy and He courted temptation, but we are taught to pray: “Lead us not into temptation,” and if we so pray we must certainly not expose ourselves to temptation, but must avoid being tempted as much as possible. The sly old Serpent is like an angler. An expert angler knows what kind of bait is enticing to certain kinds of fish. With that bait the angler throws out his hook, calculating that the fish’s lust after that bait will cause him to take the hook. Now the fish keeping at a distance from the bait are safe, but the one that eyes it and keeps encircling it is enticed closer and closer and is finally caught. Satan knows the propensities of the human heart and he lays out his bait counting on that lust of which St. James writes: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.” Places and occasions where the tempter lays out his bait we should avoid as much as we can, remembering that those who expose themselves to temptation are apt to fall in it. Stand not at the show windows in front of theatres, lest the carnal lust awake in your heart and overcome you. Keep not eyeing the attractions of the saloon, lest you be fascinated, but remember there is a hook in the glass which, when it has once fastened itself upon you, will draw you into deep waters and will drown you. “Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh, about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Rise, my soul, to watch and pray,  
 From thy slumber wake thee,  
 Lest at last the evil day  
 Suddenly o’ertake thee;  
 For the Foe, Well we know,  
 Oft his harvest reapeth,  
 While the Christian sleepeth.

Learn here also with what weapon to resist the devil. “*It is written,*” that is the only effectual weapon, and with it we should be ready to meet the tempter at every point. If the devil would

make it appear to you as though God was not your gracious father, abide in this: "*It is written.*" "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If the devil would persuade you to accept that as divine truth, which is not the Word of God, remember: "*It is written.*" "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." If the devil would make this world, its honors, treasures and pleasures very attractive to you, answer: "*It is written.*" "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Whatever the temptation may be, ward it off with the sword of the Word. The Word is the weapon which the Lord used, and it is the only one infallible weapon which we have. If we let go the Word our protection is gone, but whosoever holds and uses the Word, will always find it the power of God.

One thing more, and something very comforting, do we learn from our text. The devil can proceed no further with his temptings than the Lord suffers him to go. When the devil had fulfilled the measure of his temptations the Lord said unto him: "*Get thee hence, Satan.*" The devil is like a chained watch-dog, which can go to the length of his chain, but no further. Concerning Job Satan complained before the Lord saying: "Hast not thou made a hedge about him on every side?" God had made a hedge around Job that Satan could not do one thing against him; and when God moved that hedge, drawing the circle narrower, yet the devil could not do one thing more to Job than God permitted him. That same Lord who in hot battle affray took our souls from Satan is yet our defense against the enemy, and under the shadow of His protection let us trust; for we have His Word and promise by the holy apostle, saying: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Amen.

## II. SUNDAY IN LENT.

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TEXT: Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Matth. 15, 21-28.

In the Gospel of the preceding Sunday our hearts were delighted to see our Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, battle with the Prince of darkness in the wilderness and triumph over this mighty foe. This text tells us of another contest of the Lord, but a contest of a very different nature, a contest in which the Lord Himself is overcome. Comparing these two debates we cannot but find a strong contrast in them. In the contest with Satan, that cunning and mighty prince, the Lord overcomes; in the contest with this poor Gentile woman the Lord is overcome. The solution of this seemingly strange thing is not hard to find, and it is highly instructive and wonderfully comforting. With Satan, the Lord battled to destroy his works and to deliver us from his power, and He was victorious and has redeemed us from the power of the devil; but against this woman the Lord did not contend as against an enemy whom He wanted to destroy, He debated with her from love and mercy toward her, for her own benefit to promote her in the saving knowledge and in faith. The Lord was not against this woman, He only behaved so in order to try her faith, and when she stood the test He gave in and so acknowledged Himself overcome.

By what did this woman overcome the Lord? Not by greater wisdom or more skilful argumentation; for the Lord is wiser than men. The Lord Himself names the weapon to us with which she prevailed, when He says: "*O woman, great is thy faith.*" The Lord was trying her faith; through faith she wrestled with Him, and by faith she overcame Him and wrung from Him the answer: "*Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*" Through faith the Christian contends with God and overcomes. This was represented by the patriarch Jacob's bodily wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant; although Jacob's hip was disjointed he did not let the Lord go and when the Lord said: "Let me go" Jacob yet holding Him fast answered: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Then the Lord acknowledged Himself overcome and He blessed him saying: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." As Jacob did not let the Lord go until he had obtained what he asked, so faith holds fast the Lord and will not let Him go until He give ear and answer its petition. That it was faith by which Jacob prevailed with God we know from the epistle to the Hebrews, which says of the fathers: "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong," and the Lord declares concerning faith: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." By faith the Lord is overcome. Faith is the victory which prevails with God, triumphs over all enemies, overcomes afflictions and death and saves the soul.

What is that faith which does such great things? This is pictured to us by a plain example in our text. Let me, therefore, speak of:

THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN A SAMPLE  
OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

Let us consider

- I. What her faith was; and
- II. How it was approved.

## I.

If we examine, what the faith of this woman was, we may define it in these few words: She received the Word which she heard of Him in a believing heart and she claimed for herself what Jesus had come to do for the afflicted. This was her trust, her confidence that Jesus would help her also.

In this text we again find the Lord journeying; for it says: "*Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*" The occasion for this distant journey was a debate which Jesus had with the Pharisees who taught, to eat with unwashed hands would defile a man, and they accused Him of breaking the traditions of the elders by allowing His disciples to eat without washing. But He replied: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" That is certainly wickedness to supplant the Word and command of God by the traditions of men, and against this dreadful sin the Lord solemnly warned the Pharisees and all the people saying: "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." But the Pharisees would not discard the traditions of their elders, and where the traditions of men prevail Jesus departs. When the Jews would not receive His teaching He turned toward the boundaries of the Gentiles, indicating to the disciples, they should first preach the Gospel to the Jews and finding no faith with them they should shake the dust from off their feet and should turn to the Gentiles.

Those who do not want Christ and His Word can soon be rid of Him. Dr. Luther very aptly compares the true Gospel with a summer shower which falls now at one place, then at another, but which nowhere stays long, because the ingratitude of men will not let the Word remain. We now have the right Gospel abundantly; let us appreciate it while we have it, or it surely will be taken from us and will be given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof.

God demands Eyes and hands  
Open for the offers  
He so richly proffers.

God has His Word preached that people should turn from darkness to light, but if they will love the darkness more than the light He

takes His Word and goes to others. The countries of Asia once had the Word, they now have the Turk. Rome had it, now it has the pope. We have it, so let us buy while the market is at the door. The Lord will have a church upon earth at all times, and if one nation refuses to be His people He turns to another. When the Galileans would not hear Him the Lord turned Himself about and wended His way toward the coasts of Tyre and Sidon; for there He knew a soul that did want Him. As surely as He turns from those who do not want Him, so surely does He come unto those who do desire Him. This Canaanite woman did crave His help and He dreaded not the long journey to go to her neighborhood.

Living near the Jewish boundary this woman had, doubtlessly, long since been acquainted with the religion of the Jews. She knew the promises which were given this people, that they were looking for a Savior to come from the lineage of David; a Savior in whom the Gentiles also would have part. Whether she formerly had believed in the God of Israel we are not told, but that she was acquainted with the promises of the prophets is evident from her words when crying after the Lord: "*Have mercy on me O Lord, thou son of David.*" So this Gentile woman could not have spoken, if she had not known the promises of the prophets.

But the Father was minded to draw this woman to the Son, or nearer unto His Son, and for this purpose He suffered a great affliction to come upon her. Her daughter was bodily possessed of a devil, that is, an evil spirit had power over the maiden's members to use them as he pleased. We can well understand that this mother's longing was to be delivered from this dire affliction, but where should help be found? The idols, the priests, the doctors could not help her; but the rumor came to her that Jesus of Nazareth was going about in Judea and Galilee casting out devils and healing all manner of sick, and through this rumor the faith was kindled in her heart that this Jesus was the promised Savior and with Him she would find help. So the Word begets faith and faith trusts to find that in Jesus Christ which the Word promises. The Word, faith, and Christ belong together and can not be separated. The Word kindles faith, faith grasps Christ, and Christ brings help

and salvation: that is the golden chain. When we receive the Word of the cross in faith Jesus cannot remain distant, He comes and makes His abode with us.

To obtain help from the Lord this woman came out of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. The text does not say that the Lord crossed the line, but the woman came into the land of Israel. To find Christ you must come out of the coasts of the heathen. So long as you continue to live in sin and wickedness you are within the coasts of the heathen and there you will not find Christ; for He will not dwell in heathenish hearts. To have the Lord with you, you must depart from the way of the heathen, you must purge out the leaven of malice and wickedness and must walk no more after the lusts of the flesh. You must do with sin as Abraham did with Lot when there was strife between their herdmen; for Abraham said to Lot: "Separate thyself from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." The Christian faith and a heathenish life will not go together. Ye servants of sin, awake, and come out of the coasts of the heathen.

So this woman believed that Jesus was the helper come from God; she believed that He was truly a helper who did and would help the afflicted, and she believed that He was *her helper who would help her* out of her affliction. What Jesus was come to do for all and what He did do for others, this woman claimed for herself, and she had no doubt that He would help her also, as He had helped so many others.

Behold here what the right, justifying and saving faith is, that faith which secures the help for the soul. As the fame of Jesus came to that woman, so the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed to us, and what does the Gospel tell us? It tells us that the Son of God came into the world to save sinners; it tells us that Christ made full atonement for all sins of all men, that He has earned righteousness before God for all, and "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now what must I believe in order that I may be justified from sin and possess righteousness and life? Why, I must in the first place believe what the Gospel says

concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ: that He is the Father's own Son, the true God, that this everlasting Son of the Father became the Son of man and offered up Himself a sacrifice for all the children of men, and that He is a Savior who truly does save from sin and eternal death. He that does not believe these things can not have the Christian faith; for the Lord says: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." He that does not believe what the Son testifies of Himself and His work can not have justifying faith. Yet to believe only in general that it is true what the Gospel proclaims, is not yet sufficient unto my personal justification. To believe in general that the Son of God became man and suffered and died for the salvation of men will not yet bring *me* into the possession of the forgiveness of sins. If this woman had only believed that Christ was the helper of the afflicted, and there her faith would have stopped, she would never have procured help for her daughter. Faith must go a step farther, and must appropriate Christ as its own. I must believe that He is *my* Savior who saves *me*. What He did for all I must appropriate as done for me individually. The conclusion which faith makes is this: Christ gave Himself a ransom for all, so He gave Himself a ransom for me; Christ came to seek and to save those lost in sin; I am lost in sin; so Christ is come to seek and to save me; Christ as the Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world; now I am part of the world; so Christ taketh away my sins; Christ is come to be the righteousness of the unrighteous; I am unrighteous; so Christ is come to be my righteousness. In this manner faith appropriates all to itself, as Luther so beautifully expresses it in the catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil." Faith says: Me He has redeemed, me He has purchased, and so faith speaks in all simplicity. "Except ye be converted," says the Lord, "and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The Christian's faith is similar to a child's faith. Now when a father is dividing gifts, what will a little child say? Why it will

hold out its hand and will say: "*Me too.*" *Me too*, that is what faith says; *me too* Christ loves, *me too* He saves. This *me too* comprises the very substance of faith. For this we have a most striking example in David, who says: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;" and again he charges his soul: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." The same child-like simplicity appears in the words of Paul saying: "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Of this *me too* faith is confident; it has no doubts or scruples about it. If some one, when this woman was on the way to the Lord, would have said to her, Jesus would help others, but not her, she would have sped on exclaiming: *Me too*. Faith is the certainty: I, even I am an heir of God through my Lord Jesus Christ. As God in the sacraments individualizes His grace and promise, as it were, saying: Thou that art now baptized with water shalt be my child; thou that now eatest and drinkest, thy sins be forgiven thee; as God by the sacraments certifies His promise to the individual, as though saying: Thou that receivest the sacrament, even thou shalt be certain and not doubt that I am thy gracious Father; so faith accepts it as all its own, it claims for itself Christ with all His merits. Faith is the assurance: My Savior is mine and I am His, and of this faith is fully persuaded saying: He has said it, and He has certified it to me. The man who so claims for himself and appropriates to himself the universal redemption and the salvation prepared for all, whose heart insists on it that it is his, he has the right, justifying and saving faith.

## II.

So soon as this certain persuasion is in the heart, though it be like only to a glimmering spark, it possesses all grace and all salvation. But if faith begins small, as it usually does, it is not to remain small, it is to grow and become great, in order to withstand temptations without which it can not remain. And how otherwise does faith become approved than by trials and temptations? The

Christian's faith is indeed like unto a spark of fire. If no draft strikes it, it glimmers for a little while and then dies, but if a current of air falls upon it, it brightens up and may become a great fire. Because faith to grow and to become approved must be exercised in trials, therefore God suffers all His Christians to be tempted by the enemies: the flesh, the world and the devil; yea, often God Himself tries His children, not to destroy them, or to torment them, but to lead them on from faith to faith. For this we here have a very plain example. This woman comes to Christ in the cheerful confidence that He will help her; for she knows from the prophets and has heard from reports that He is a ready helper to all that call upon Him. In this confidence she calls after Him, but He walks on as though He had no ears to hear. This woman had flesh and blood as we all have, and her reason, doubtless, argued that she had been mistaken in her confidence; for now she could see that this man was not a merciful helper, but a hard man who would not even listen to the cries of the unfortunate. But strongly as her own heart may have tempted her to turn back, she kept on in her cries, and the disciples came to her aid saying: "*Send her away; for she crieth after us.*" But this intercession of the disciples appeared only to make bad worse; for the Lord answered: "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Most likely these words were spoken in the hearing of the woman, and they sounded as though He meant to say, with this Gentile woman He would have nothing to do. If she heard these words she must have been tempted to say: Is that the way? To the Jews He is a merciful helper, but not to me, because I am a Gentile woman. But even by this rebuff her confidence was not broken. She came and kneeling before the Lord she said: "*Lord, help me.*" But now came the unkindest thrust of all; for He answered: "*It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*" This was as much as to say, the Jews were the children, the Gentiles were dogs, and He must first give the children bread before He could pay any attention to the dogs. Might we not expect this woman to have retorted with flashing eyes, if He would not help her He need at least not insult her? But even this severest thrust she bore bravely, yea

caught the Lord in His own words, saying: "*Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*" She wanted only dogs-right, to pick up a stray crumb. And now the Lord was overcome and He had to yield.

Indeed, this woman's faith was great, and we may well ask, wherein lies the secret of her strength and perseverance? Several circumstances serve to make this plain. We observe in the text that the Lord never directly denied her request. At first He said neither yea, nor nay, and that looked hard. Then He said that He was only sent to the house of Israel, but He did not say that this woman should have no part with Israel: and finally He compared her with a dog, but did not say that she should not have a dog's right, and this still left her room to claim the right of a dog. The Lord's behavior looked unkind and His words sounded hard, but they always left room for hope, and this woman always put the best construction on them. How could she put a good construction on things which looked so much the other way, when naturally the human heart is so much inclined and so quick to put the worst construction on everything? She could do this, because she had something more certain to go by than appearances. She had the Word of the prophets that Christ would be a merciful helper to all and this was established by His former acts, the fame of which she had heard. This Word she believed. She doubted not, this Word must be true and the Lord would and must have mercy upon her. Therefore when His behavior appeared to be at variance with the Word she trusted the Word more than appearances.

Thanks be to God that the history of the Lord's behavior towards this woman is transcribed for us. Here is a strong staff for all those to lean on whom God suffers to be tried in high, spiritual temptations of the soul. These severest of all trials come upon the Christian when God behaves towards him as the Lord did toward this woman. A Christian cries unto God for help, but there is no response; he continues his cries, but his prayers seem to vanish away in thin air. Then he perhaps remembers that the Lord said: "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in

heaven," and relying on this Word he goes to other pious Christians asking them to unite their prayers with his, yet there is no answer. Then it begins to appear to him as though God had forsaken him, as though the Lord had turned against him, and instead of finding peace and rest he finds only greater unrest. Perhaps he even begins to be tormented with the thought that he is none of God's elect, but a castaway; or he might have committed that unpardonable sin which can not be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come and therefore God would not hear his prayers. Those are high and fiery trials which not all Christians experience or not all in the same measure, but they that have passed through them know that the greatest bodily afflictions are light as compared with the agony which these high siftings of the soul bring the believing Christian. Job speaks of them in the 30th chapter saying: "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me."

Now if God sees fit to permit our faith to be proved in such fiery trials we may learn from this woman what to do. According to the Word which she had heard of Him she firmly believed that Jesus was a merciful helper and to this Word she steadfastly held, though He acted and spoke like a hard man, yea even called her a dog as though He greatly despised her.

"This," says Luther, "is written for our comfort that we should learn to know, that God often secretes His grace from us, and that we are not to judge of Him by our feeling and thinking, but straight according to His Word. For here you behold, though Christ pretends to be unwilling, yet there is here not an absolute denial. All His answers sound like no, but they are not no, they hang in the balance. He does not say: I will not hear her, but is silent saying neither yes nor no. Neither does He say that she is not of the house of Israel, but that He is sent alone to the house of Israel, leaving His answer in the balance between no and yes. Neither does He say: Thou art a dog and shalt have nothing of the children's bread, but: it is not meet etc., leaving it undecided, whether she be a dog or not. Yet all three sound more like no

than yes, and nevertheless it is more yes than no. Indeed it is all yes, but secret and hidden, and it seems all no.

Here the condition of our heart in the time of temptation is pictured to us. As the heart feels, so Christ here behaves. The heart thinks, it is all no, and yet it is not so. Therefore the heart must turn away from its own feeling, and with firm faith must lay hold on the Yes which is hidden deeply under the No, and must hold it according to God's Word, as this woman did." So Martin Luther a man of large experience in many spiritual temptations.

Let appearances be as they may, let our feelings be ever so bad, we should hold and believe of God, not according to appearances, not according to our feelings, but purely according to His Word. What the Word says of God that He also is and does, and though our experiences would seem to contradict the Word, it nevertheless remains true. Appearances may deceive, our feelings may mislead, but the Word of the Lord can neither lie nor deceive. Now the Word tells us that God is love, and whosoever shall call upon His name shall be saved. If now it appears as though God were turned against us and hated us, we should hold by the Word that He is love, and if our heart would persuade us that God is cruel and has cast us away, yet we should believe the Word more than our own heart. Abiding by the Word we should always be ready to say :

I hold the Word my Savior taught  
And trust it, whether felt or not.      Amen.

### III. SUNDAY IN LENT.

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TEXT: And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it. Luke 11, 14-28.

“Enter ye in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because straight is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Two gates by which men enter; two ways in which men walk; and two places to which men go. Every man is walking either in the broad way, which is the way of the world, or in the narrow way, which is the way of Christ; and at the end of the way every man will find himself either in the place of torments, or in the place of pleasures

for evermore ; and to whichever place man goes, there shall he be and shall depart from it no more. Neither are these two ways to eternity so nigh together, or so kindred to each other, that a man could walk in them both at the same time ; for the one leads upwards and the other downwards, and no man can go both ways at the same time. A man may leave the one way and go to the other, but at one and the same time he can walk only in one way. Judas Iscariot first left the broad way and went to the narrow, when he forsook all and followed Christ ; thereafter he again left the narrow and went back to the broad way, and his last estate was worse than his first ; for when he had returned again to the broad way he rushed on headlong to destruction. Peter left the broad and went to the narrow way ; then he left the narrow and went back to the broad way ; for when he was denying Christ in the palace-yard of the high priest he was surely not on the narrow, but on the broad way, because those on the narrow way do not deny Christ. Yet Peter again returned to the narrow way and was saved.

Now as there are only two ways in which men may walk, and only two places to which the souls of men go, so there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world : the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. Between these two kingdoms the race of man is divided ; a third there is not. Hence the most important question for us is not whether we are rich or poor, beloved of men or hated, honored by the world or despised by men, healthy or sick ; the most important question for every one of us is, whether we are yet subjects in Satan's kingdom of sin and death, or whether we have been translated into Christ's kingdom of truth and life. On this question hangs soul and salvation, life and death. Let me to-day speak of :

THE IMPORTANT TRUTH THAT EVERY MAN IS EITHER A CITIZEN  
OF CHRIST'S OR A SUBJECT OF SATAN'S KINGDOM.

Let me set forth :

- I. The certainty of this truth ;
- II. By what marks we may know where we belong ; and
- III. What we must do to be and to abide in Christ's kingdom.

## I.

The fact that there are only two spiritual kingdoms is proved by this whole Gospel, especially the latter part of it, and most clearly does the Lord express it in the words: "*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" There are two positions only which men can occupy; the one for Christ, the other against Christ. A third is not possible. There are only two kinds of works which men can do: the one is gathering with Christ, the other is scattering with Satan. These are the two kingdoms: the kingdom of Christ, and those in the kingdom of Christ gather with Him, and the kingdom of Satan, and those in that kingdom scatter. The Scriptures do also speak of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world; but you know these are only other names for the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan.

Now these two kingdoms are against one another, as light is against darkness and darkness against light. These two can not exist together peaceably; for light destroys darkness, and darkness is the enemy of light. That light and darkness should agree and dwell together harmoniously is out of the question. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to establish a kingdom aside from that of Satan, so that they would peaceably rule each in his domain, like the kings of Holland and Belgium are at peace with each other, each ruling in his own kingdom; but Christ came to conquer Satan's kingdom, to destroy it and on its ruins to establish His kingdom. There is no agreement between Christ and Belial to the effect that they would rule together peaceably over the same territory, or that each should rule in his own territory: between Christ and Belial there can be no peace, but only the most determined warfare, war to the knife. There can be no agreement between Christ and Satan that each should have a part of man's heart to rule over. When Christ moves into the heart Satan must go out, and if Belial rules in a heart Christ is not there. "*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest: and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then*

goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there." When Christ moves into a heart, the evil spirit must move out and may walk where he can; but where Christ rules he can not remain, as Paul writes to the Colossians: "God hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." If thereafter the evil spirit finds a house from which he had been cast out ready to receive him again, then Christ does not remain there, but such a man has fallen out of the kingdom of Christ back again into the kingdom of Satan and he is no more Christ's; for the Lord says: "*The last state of that man is worse than the first.*" No one can hold citizenship in both kingdoms, neither can the heart of any man be divided between them half and half, but everyone is either in Christ's or in Satan's kingdom.

But this is frequently the case that people are mistaken, or deceive themselves as to the kingdom into which they belong. Sometimes such as truly are in the kingdom of Christ may imagine themselves cast out of the kingdom and forsaken of God. These are true Christians who fall so deeply into spiritual temptation that they can see no more any comfort, and think themselves forsaken and rejected of God, when in fact they have in no way cast away faith and their innermost soul is crying unto God. So David confesses of himself in the 31st Psalm: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee." At a time when he was greatly downcast and could find no comfort David imagined that he was cut off from God and His kingdom, and yet at the same time his soul was crying unto God and the Lord was inclining a gracious ear unto his cries. If a Christian seeks light and comfort and for a time can find none and for this reason it appears to him that he must be cut off from the kingdom of God he should never give way to such thoughts. Just this is Satan's object to bring him to despair, and so to win him for his kingdom of despair. In this temptation a Christian should keep on asking, seeking, knocking, becoming the longer the more instant, and in due time light and comfort will come to him again.

But unnumbered is the multitude of those who imagine themselves in the kingdom of Christ, or claim citizenship in it, whilst, in fact, Satan has them very securely in his kingdom. For this there are numerous examples in the Scriptures. Saul, thereafter called Paul, thought he was doing God high service when he persecuted the disciples, whilst the devil had only blindfolded him through prejudices and false doctrines, as he himself confesses: "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." That Pharisee in the temple imagined himself one of the first in the kingdom of heaven, but Christ says of him that he did not go down to his house justified. This is one of Satan's most cunning and most successful devices that he persuades people on deceptive grounds to imagine themselves the children of God, to think themselves on the way to heaven, when it is by no means so, and when he has so persuaded them, he has them doubly secure in his kingdom. Some he blindfolds with the delusion that they must be the favorites of God, because they are successful in their undertakings and enjoy worldly prosperity; others he persuades to think, they ought to find favor with God, because they live an externally moral life; some he makes believe they were surely converted and had become heirs to the kingdom of heaven, because they experienced a change of feeling, a sensation of sweetness, when in fact their imaginary conversion was nothing but momentary emotion or the delusion of nervous excitement; others he persuades they must be the children of God because they go to church regularly and give for its support liberally, although in their every-day life they continue to do things which they know to be wrong. In short, Satan is a master in deluding people to imagine themselves in the kingdom of Christ when they are not, and by this artifice he greatly increases and mightily strengthens his kingdom.

Vast is the kingdom of Satan, because into it belongs all that is born flesh of the flesh. In clear and strong words St. Paul write to the Ephesians: "You hath he quickened, who were dead in tresspasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;

and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." In consequence of Adam's sin man is born into this world with a corrupt nature and hence he belongs into the kingdom of evil in which Satan is prince and ruler. He is therefore rightly called "the prince of this world," because into his kingdom belong all who are not born again and implanted into Christ.

Hearing this sympathetic people of a so-called wide and liberal heart will exclaim: 'What! should all the world belong into Satan's kingdom, except only those in Christ? Are there not many millions of good men and virtuous women, who do not believe in Christ, and should they all belong into Satan's kingdom? And there are the innocent little infants! Would you relegate them to the kingdom of darkness only because they were born flesh of the flesh which they could not help?'—Sympathy is good as far as it goes and it is always to be commended in its proper sphere, but our sympathetic ideas can never alter facts. We may sympathetically say: Why should that poor little infant be born black simply because its parents are black, which it could not help? We may sympathize with that infant, but our sympathy will not change the color of its skin. All talk of morality, virtue, innocence, not being able to help it and the like, amounts to nothing. The fact remains,—a sad fact indeed, but none the less a fact—, by seducing the first man and woman Satan added the human race to his dominion. The whole race as it is descended from Adam belongs into his kingdom, and though you complain ever so bitterly about it that neither you nor your infant could help its being born with an evil nature, that will not alter the fact. Let your sympathy prevail on you, early to bring your infant to baptism that it may be delivered out of Satan's kingdom and may be implanted into Christ, then your sympathy with it will amount to something. It is better in all simplicity to use the means of deliverance out of Satan's kingdom, than to follow after philosophy falsely so called; for by it Satan has led many from darkness to darkness, while they numbered themselves among the wise and the enlightened of the earth, or even imagined themselves the children of God.

To walk truly wise we must be careful not to be deceived by the devil's cunning, and we must be diligent to examine ourselves, if we be truly in Christ's kingdom, unto which Paul so faithfully admonishes writing to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."

Let me, therefore,

## II.

set forth: By what we may know whether we are in the kingdom of Christ, or not.

In judging of ourselves in this matter we must keep in mind that the devil deludes people to imagine themselves in Christ's kingdom on false grounds, by deceptive arguments, which are not established in the Word of God. Therefore, that we be not deceived by him, we must see that we remain on solid ground which can in no way be deceptive. That by which we judge ourselves, whether we are in the kingdom of Christ, or yet in the kingdom of Satan, must be an infallibly certain criterion so that it cannot deceive. Let me briefly mention three such marks, these being indicated in our text.

The first mark we find in these words of the Lord: "*He that is not with me is against me.*" To be in Christ's kingdom we must be with Christ. What is it to be with Christ? It is to be with Him and for Him in heart, soul, mind and all our powers. We are with Christ, if He is the crown of our heart, the love of our soul, the most precious prize of our highest affections. We are with Christ if He is to us the dearest, the sweetest, the most precious which we know and have. We Christians are to love and we do love many persons and things, but among them all Christ must be to us like a diamond among copper cents; for He has said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." We are with Christ if He is so dear to our hearts that we are willing, if need be, to forsake all and to follow Him, and we must be so minded from heart and soul. We must not be like unto that rich young man who declared himself ready to follow Christ, but when he was placed before the alternative to choose between his pos-

sessions and Christ, he went away sorrowful, because his heart was more with his possessions than with Christ. Neither must we be like unto those chief rulers of the Jews who believed on Christ, who were convinced that He was the promised One, but who would not confess Him before men from fear of the Pharisees; for they could have no part in the kingdom of Christ, because "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." But we must be truly like that "merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." We are with Christ if He is to us that one pearl of great price for which we are ready to sell all else. We are with Christ, if our heart is so decided for Him that we would rather cut off our right hand and pluck out our right eye and cast it from us, than to forsake or deny Him. Now, if we are so with Christ, we know that Christ, and not Satan, is ruling in our heart.

The second mark by which we may know to which kingdom we belong, we find in the words: "*And he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" He that does truly Christian works, gathers with Christ; but he that does un-Christian works, whether the world counts them good or evil, scatters. But outwardly the works of the Christian and those of the hypocrite are alike. Therefore we must here look for the governing principle from which our actions flow. "The flesh," says St. Paul, "lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." The flesh, a part of the kingdom of Satan, is yet remaining in the Christian and is striving against the kingdom of Christ, but where Christ's kingdom is there it is victorious over the kingdom of Satan. We are not to imagine that we must be altogether without sin in order to be in the kingdom of Christ; because of the flesh the Christian daily commits much sin; but we must look and see, if the flesh rules in us so that, led by the lusts of the flesh, we walk in the works of the flesh; for if we willingly walk in sin, then we are in the kingdom of Satan; but if we are led by the Spirit of Christ which resists, breaks and hinders in us the will of the devil, the world and our flesh,

then is the kingdom of God come unto us. If the Spirit of Christ is the ruling principle from which our works flow, then we are gathering with Christ, and if gathering with Him we are surely in His kingdom.

The third mark by which we may know where we belong, into Christ's or Satan's kingdom, we find in the last two verses of our text reading: "*And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*" This woman pronounced the mother of Jesus blessed, because she had given birth to Him, and had nursed Him. In this the virgin Mary was certainly favored of God above all women, but she was not saved by it. Not because she gave birth to the Son of God was Mary saved, but because she heard His Word and kept it, as we read of her: "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart." Mary kept the Word of Jesus, she believed on Him, embraced Him not only as her son, but as her Savior, through faith she appropriated to herself His righteousness and thereby she was saved. Jesus' blood and righteousness are the foundation on which our heart's faith must stand according to His Word; for His merit alone saves. If, therefore, our trust stands on our works, our integrity, our experiences, our sensations, or whatever other such uncertain things there may be, then let our trust be ever so sincere and ever so strong, we cannot be saved thereby. Though Christ would appear unto us bodily, though we would see Him with our eyes and touch Him with our hands as the disciples and Judas Iscariot also did, and we would put our trust for salvation in such sensible seeing and feeling Him we would, nevertheless, not be in the kingdom of Christ; for all the plea of those truly in His kingdom is that Jesus' blood washes them from sin and His righteousness covers their unrighteousness. They say:

Christ's crimson blood and righteousness  
 My glory are and spotless dress;  
 In this before my God I'll stand  
 And enter heaven, my fatherland.

This is the foundation of all those in Christ's kingdom, and if this is our heart's trust we know that we are in His kingdom, and if in His kingdom we are joint heirs with Him.

But where else is the blood and righteousness of Christ exhibited unto us than in His Word? Therefore the Lord corrects this woman saying: "*Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*" In the Word we are to seek, find and hold fast the righteousness of Christ. This brings us to the last part of our discourse, on which allow me a few sentences only.

### III.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to deliver the souls of men from the kingdom of the devil, and in token of this He cast out devils, delivering those from the power of Satan who were bodily possessed of evil spirits, as we read in the beginning of this Gospel: "*And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.*" Justly did the people wonder at this deed of the Lord; for to cast out devils bodily is a divine work. Yet Christ is come for something greater: to deliver our souls from the power of Satan. His casting out devils bodily is to teach us that He is come for the deliverance of our souls, which He purchased from the power of Satan by suffering and death. And when Christ had overcome that strong man armed, He left on earth the power to deliver the souls of men from Satan's kingdom through the Word and the Sacraments. Through the means of grace He still casts out devils out of the hearts of men. If I preach the Word of the Gospel to a sinner and he receives the Word in faith Satan is driven from his heart and soul, of course not by me as a man, or by my power which I have of myself, but by the power of the Word. The means of grace, therefore, we should diligently use that the evil spirit may be cast out of our own hearts and the hearts of others. Every child born on earth is born into the kingdom of the devil, but suffer it to come to Jesus and to be baptized into His death and it is delivered from the kingdom of Satan. If your sins trouble you, if

the hand of faith with which you hold the righteousness of Christ trembles, hear His Word, come and have absolution pronounced to you, receive the Lord's supper, that by these things you may be confirmed and strengthened in the faith that Jesus Christ is truly your King, the Lord of your salvation. The means of grace we must use as weapons with which to resist Satan and his angels, until it pleases the Lord to translate us out of strife into the enjoyment of the inheritance of the saints in light, through Jesus Christ who is the Captain of our salvation. Amen.

#### IV. SUNDAY IN LENT.

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TEXT : After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ? (And this he said to prove him : for he himself knew what he would do.) Philip answered him, Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley-loaves, and two small fishes : but what are they among so many ? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. (Now there was much grass in the place.) So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves ; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down ; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley-loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. John 6, 1-15.

Our present Gospel, simple as it appears, is nevertheless one of the most important, because it contains so strong an inducement unto faith and trust toward God. Though the word faith does not occur in it, yet it is nothing else than faith and confidence in the goodness and mercy of God which the Lord intends to teach by this miracle. We have here a truly striking illustration of that truth which the Lord in the sermon on the mount expresses in plain words saying : " Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteous-

ness; and all these things shall be added unto you." This is to be our faith, this our trust, if we seek the things which are above, the necessities of this temporal life will not be denied us. But with many, cheerful dependence on the goodness and faithfulness of God is small indeed. Even with true children of God it is something very frequent that they will count, not so much on that which God gives, as rather on that which they calculate to make by their own industry, wisdom and skill. Every Christian knows that also in temporal things all is dependent on God's blessing, yet when Christian parents meditate on their own and their family's support, they are very apt to think first of their own ability, and secondly of God's blessing. But this way of thinking is surely not a fruit of faith, it manifests the self-dependence which is in the flesh.

We are indeed fallen creatures. The Word of God tells us and our own conscience attests it that the visible things are perishable, and only the invisible are abiding. Yet we will ten times sooner put our trust in that which we see, than in that which we do not see. So it is with the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith. The righteousness of works we see and the righteousness of faith we can not see, but who can step forth and say that his heart is not far more inclined to exclaim: Behold, how many and how excellent are my works of piety and my deeds of charity! than to say: Behold, how many and great are the deeds of the Son of God, my Righteousness. We know, before God only the righteousness of faith is acceptable, whilst the righteousness of works is before Him as filthy rags; yet the perverse heart will look to the righteousness of works rather than to the righteousness of faith.

Similar with food and raiment. So long as we see the barrel of meal and the cruise of oil full it is easy for us to avoid fretting about the morrow; but when these vessels threaten to give out, then anxious cares soon begin to knock at our door. When the harvest is promising we are confident concerning our daily bread; but when it threatens to be a failure, then we are quickly at hand with the questions: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Where-withal shall we be clothed?" When we are surrounded with plenty, confidence is great, but when the abundance threatens to become

indigence, then the heart begins to flutter. Now when we experience that in plenty our heart is confident, in scarcity despondent, we should know thereby that there is something in our hearts which is not as it ought to be. And if we search for that something, we soon find it indicated in the Lord's words: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." The abundance which we have is so apt to be a stay for our confidence, when in reality, we ought to rest assured of receiving daily bread just as cheerfully when we see nothing, as when we see plenty. This is the faith and trust which this Gospel teaches. Accordingly let us briefly consider:

#### THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND.

Allow me to speak:

- I. Of some things which preceded the miracle;
- II. Of the miracle itself and what followed it.

#### I.

How extremely difficult it is for man without seeing yet to believe, is here illustrated in the disciples. But to see this clearly it is necessary to know what preceded the transaction narrated here.

Jesus had sent the disciples two by two to preach the Gospel throughout Judea and Galilee, and had given them power over the unclean spirits commanding them, they should take nothing for their journey, no scrip, no bread, no money in their purses, but should be shod with sandals, and should not put on two coats. So the disciples had gone forth supplied with nothing, had preached the Gospel and performed miracles in all the bounds of Israel and then they gathered around their Master again on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, and to the Lord's question: "Lacked ye any thing?" they answered: "Nothing." They had been provided with nothing, yet confessed that they had lacked nothing. Now when the disciples were again with Jesus the people flocked to them in such multitudes that not even time to eat was left to Jesus and the disciples. Therefore the Lord said to the disciples: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." To find a little rest they entered a ship and steered for an uninhabited region where only grass grew. But

the people saw them depart and knowing where they were going followed them. The location is not described, but in all cases this was a pretty long journey. But so eager were the people to follow Jesus that they started forthwith without first providing themselves with victuals.

Whence this eagerness? By the Scribes and Pharisees those people had been taught that the time for the Messiah to come was at hand, and when He would come He would liberate His people from the yoke of the Romans and would establish a worldly empire at Jerusalem. Believing, therefore, that the Messiah would be a worldly benefactor and convinced by His miracles they began to think that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah, and they were eager to see more of His deeds, and to do Him homage. Many, perhaps, cherished the hope that His first and most zealous adherents would obtain the first honors in His kingdom. Therefore it is said of them in the text that they "*followed him because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased,*" and when they had eaten of the five barley loaves and were satisfied they exclaimed: "*This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world,*" and they proposed to "*take him by force, to make him a king.*" They followed Him eagerly, but from a wrong motive. Doubtless there were some among them who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but the majority hoped for worldly gain. Therefore there was no perseverance in them, but the very next day when Jesus preached: "I am the bread of life," they took exception and walked no more with Him. But the more those people were in error, the more was the Lord moved to compassion toward them.

"*When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him.*" He is that Keeper of Israel whose eyelids are not heavy with slumber, of whom David sang in the 33d Psalm: "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." He has a sharp and watchful eye. Beholding that company He at once knew that they had brought no bread with them, and that He must provide for them. He sees the desolate field and the empty pantry and the purse without scrip, and though

He may suffer poverty to come on His children, yet does He watch over them to keep them alive in famine. Look unto Him in the day of thy need; for He is both rich and merciful.

At the same time the Lord's eye detected an evil trait in the hearts of His disciples and moved by the same compassion He set about to heal it. Therefore He "*saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*" He intimated to the disciples that it was their duty to give those people a meal, because they had traveled so far to come to them in the wilderness and had remained with them until now; and now the night was drawing on and it would not be right to send them away hungry. Therefore He wanted to learn of Philip, where to buy bread for the people. This question might well startle Philip; for there were present five thousand men, women and children not counted. To feed such a multitude was not a small matter, especially as they had eaten nothing during the day. Philip's predicament is shown by his answer: "*Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*" The amount which Philip named makes about thirty dollars, and that would certainly not have been sufficient to provide a meal for five thousand men. Likely it was all they had, and Philip meant to say, though they would spend all their money it would be of no avail. Philip's answer shows that he saw no other way than to let the people go away hungry, that he was at a loss where to look for help in this emergency, and just this the Lord wanted to teach him, where to look for help in such needs; for it is explicitly stated: "*This he said to prove him.*"

Why did the Lord want to prove or try Philip and in him all the disciples? Was it to find out where Philip's trust stood, or how strong his faith was? Or did He mean to lay a stumbling block into Philip's way, to lead him into anxiety and doubt? Nay, surely not! Neither the one nor the other. The Lord knew beforehand what Philip's faith was and what its ailings were; for rightly did Peter, when the Lord asked him: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" answer: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Much less did the Lord prove Philip to cause him to fall into doubt; for no evil can proceed from the

Lord, as St. James writes: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." God is not a tempter unto evil, but He is a tempter unto good. As a father examines his children in the things which they have learned, not because He is ignorant as to how much they know, nor to bewilder them, but to establish them in what they already know and to advance them in knowledge: so the Father in heaven frequently proves His children in their faith, hope and love to establish them therein and to teach them what their ailings are and wherein they are yet lacking. Therefore the Lord says unto the bishop of Laodicea: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." To His beloved children God sends tribulations, crosses and afflictions, not as though He took pleasure in plaguing them, much less to drive them from Him, but to establish and advance them that they may grow in faith, hope and love. So the Lord proved the disciples, making it very plain to them that they had neither food nor the means to obtain it; and yet they had a multitude of guests who were hungry and must have some nourishment. And it quickly became manifest, how exceedingly weak and little established the faith of the disciples was, because they saw no other way than to send the people away hungry. They had so often seen the Lord do marvelous things; yes, they themselves had already in His name and power performed miracles, and but recently on their journey they had experienced that they lacked nothing, though they were provided with nothing. Yet none of them stepped forward to say: Lord, why askest Thou advice from us? If Thou wilt Thou canst turn these rocks into bread, or bring down manna from heaven. Nay, but they fell into extreme anxiety. And why? Why, because their eyes beheld no food, but only a desolate waste.

Now the Lord likely sent the disciples to make inquiry, if any food could be found with the multitude, and there were found "*five barley loaves,*"—one loaf for every thousand—, "*and two small fishes.*" Of the size of the loaves we may judge by the fact that they were carried by a lad. That, of course, could not comfort the disciples, it only served to make the lack of food so much more apparent. "*What!*" says Andrew, "*what are they among so many?*"

The provision is small, the family is large; the pennies are few, the mouths to be filled are many. How shall ends meet?

A speech proceeding from common sense calculation, but not from faith in the omnipotence of the Lord. This was what the Lord wanted to bring home to the minds of the disciples that their trust stood too much on what they could see with their eyes and handle with their hands. This fault He wanted to set before them in order that seeing the miracle which followed they might be ashamed of their littleness of faith. And by setting the present need before them so clearly He intended to prepare their minds so that the miracle which He was about to do would make a deeper and more lasting impression upon them; for the more deeply we feel the need in which we are, the more are we capable of appreciating the deliverance.

## II.

When the Lord had so prepared the minds of the disciples, He commanded the multitude to be seated on the grass, and then He took the five barley loaves with His hands, those hands into which the Father has laid "all power in heaven and in earth;" those hands of which the Psalmist says: "Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." When He had taken the loaves He looked up to heaven whence all good gifts come. Neither did He forget the table-prayer, but gave thanks blessing the bread and fishes and thereby creating in them the quality to multiply. Then He began to distribute, and He distributed, not *as much as there was* but "*as much as they would.*" Whether the bread multiplied in the hands of Jesus alone, or also in the hands of the disciples we are not told, but those five thousand men together with the women and children ate and were satiated, and when they gathered up the fragments, there were twelve baskets full, a much larger quantity than the original five loaves had been.

By this miracle the Lord proved Himself the almighty God who alone can multiply or diminish His creatures, and He teaches by it that He will give daily bread to those seeking His kingdom. On this we should depend without doubts and without scruples.

Instead of inquiring anxiously: "What shall we eat?" we should trust the faithfulness and power of Him who with five loaves satiated five thousand. Yea, what He did there in the wilderness, multiply bread which was already baked, is not a greater miracle than that which He annually does, making the earth bring forth food for men and beasts on the whole face of the globe. This miracle we see every year, therefore we do not regard it. But the royal singer David took note of it and he sang: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness." God has promised to give food to all flesh, and He keeps promise long as the world stands, and it is surely a marvelous thing, if we did but consider it. Men, beasts, birds, fishes, insects, everything that lives and moves on earth, daily finds its nourishment. How is it possible that since thousands of years the earth produces enough for so many myriads of creatures? But when God adds His divine blessing it suffices and an abundance is left over, as when the prophet Elisha set twenty barley cakes before a hundred men. God is a host who, if He chooses, can satiate many with a morsel. On the other hand, if God takes away the nutritive qualities of bread, then a great quantity is not sufficient for a few. People may eat, but are not strengthened. God is the Lord of bread. If it is His will one loaf will nourish an hundred men, and if it is not His will an hundred loaves cannot nourish one man. God is almighty; He can do whatsoever He pleases. Why, then, do we act so foolishly as to put our confidence in the abundance we have in store rather than in Him who gave it, who alone can preserve it and who can also take it away? It is written: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live."

Now God gives daily bread to all men, also to the wicked; nevertheless God makes a difference between the unbelieving and

the believers, and this we should well consider. God does give daily bread to the wicked, frequently in great abundance, but to them He has nowhere promised that they should not starve to death. He rather threatens them hunger, starvation and all manner of plagues, as we find many such threats in the book of Deuteronomy. If an unbeliever perishes by hunger that is nothing strange. But the Christian who seeks the kingdom of God and relies upon it that God will give him daily bread has the promise that "these things," not riches, but "bread and fishes," the necessities of life, "shall be added unto him." That man will not perish in hunger who in unwavering faith holds God by His promise; for God will not be made a liar. Rightly does Luther say on this text: "God will give us enough to eat even though one fish must become ten thousand and one loaf an hundred thousand. Therefore, in poverty we should be unterrified and await His compassion. If any one starves to death his unbelief is the fault; but sooner must the whole world perish in hunger, than that a man who believes should die of starvation." Luther does of course not mean to say that under extraordinary conditions the Christian must not also suffer starvation with others. When Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans the prophet Jeremiah felt the pangs of hunger as well as others. But the promises of God cannot be broken, and it is, therefore, not possible that he should ever be forsaken of God who adheres to His promises.

Trust in the goodness of God requires also that we honor His gifts, and do not destroy them. "*When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*" The promise is to the industrious and the saving, not to the idle and wasteful. In every gift of God there is a blessing. If you waste the gift you waste the blessing, and the curse will cling to you and will spoil all your goods. When God gives abundantly do not waste it in rioting and drunkenness, or the day will come when you will be as poor as that rich man in the place of torments. Honor the penny and God will count you worthy the dollar. The disciples went to gather up the fragments and each brought his basket full. There is many a poor Lazarus who does not know, whence

the year's support is to come, but he walks in the fear of the Lord, is content with his portion of bread and fishes, and day by day God grants him to eat the labor of his hands and at the end of the year he has a little basket full left over. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous." Gather up the fragments, and though you need them not for yourself save them for the church and the poor. They will bring you compound interest.

Yet we must not follow Christ for the hope of reaping earthly benefits; for then we would be doing the same which that multitude did. They thought, with such a man they could always enjoy plenty and therefore they sought to make Him a king. If we would be Christ's only because it is He that gives daily bread, we would be giving Him the smaller honor and denying Him the greater. Though He has a care for our bodies, yet that was not the purpose for which He came into the world. He came down from heaven to be that bread which nourishes the soul unto eternal life. As the bread of life we must seek Him that our souls may not starve eternally. Only if we seek Christ as that bread which, if a soul eat thereof, it can never die, then only are we truly seeking "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and then only does the promise apply to us that temporal necessities shall be added unto us. Lord! evermore grant us that bread which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Amen.

## V. SUNDAY IN LENT.

### I. SERMON.

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TEXT: Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. John 8, 46-51.

Jesus Christ "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." These two facts, the Lord's death and resurrection, are the chief pillars on which our Christian faith rests. If Christ had not died our sins would not be atoned for and there could be no forgiveness of sin; and if He had not risen again there would be no righteousness for us in which we could stand before God and no resurrection unto eternal glory. But the Son of God did die, as He had prophesied by David in the 22d Psalm, complaining: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." For what purpose the Lord of glory suffered the pangs of death in all their bitterness, He foretold by Hosea, the prophet, in the 13th chapter, saying: "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." He died in order to be the death of death, the destruction of the power of the grave, as the prophet Isaiah said of Him: "He will swallow up death in victory." And that He through His death did truly destroy the power of death St. Paul testifies, writing to Timothy: "He hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light."

For whom did He bring life and immortality to light? Was it for Himself? Did He stand in need of it? O no, not for Himself. He needed it not. He had life and immortality in Himself from eternity. For Himself He needed not to overcome death; He was the Lord of death; but for whom He obtained victory over death He tells us by the prophet Hosea, saying: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." Who these "them" are whom the Lord through death ransomed from the power of death the Psalmist tells us, addressing the Lord in these words: "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Men, and not the pious only, but the rebellious also, He through death ransomed from the power of death. This was the purpose for which He died that He might divide gifts unto men, among which gifts one of the greatest and most precious is this, that men in death might triumph over death. Therefore He through death destroyed the power of death that unto us mortal sinners this gift be given that in the very face of death we might triumphantly say: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Because by His death Christ has gained for us victory over death, how then are we made partakers of His victory over death? When do we possess this gift to overcome death, and by what may we in death triumph over death? The Lord tells us in this Gospel, when He says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*" Agreeably to these words let me set forth:

#### THE KEEPING OF CHRIST'S SAYING OUR VICTORY OVER DEATH.

Three things must here come into consideration:

- I. What saying we must keep;
- II. What it is to keep Christ's saying; and
- III. How death is overcome by the Christian.

## I.

When it was said of Christ by the prophet that He would "swallow up death in victory," the meaning was not that He would put away death, destroying it utterly, or that He would not die; but the meaning was that in and through death He would destroy the power of death. Likewise, when the Lord here says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death,*" the meaning is not that such an one would not die bodily, or that he would be received into heaven without bodily death, like Enoch and Elias, but that in death he would not see death and destruction, but only life and salvation; for that man truly passes through death as a victor over death, who sees in death not a destroyer, but only a janitor into true life. Now what must a man do in order to so pass through death as a victor over death? The Lord says: "*If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*" To overcome death we must keep a saying. What saying? "*My saying,*" says the Lord. So He distinguishes His saying from all other sayings, His Word from all other words, and this we must be careful to remember. We must distinguish Christ's saying from all other sayings, for *only to His saying* does He ascribe this great thing that, if a man keep it, he shall never see death.

Now Christ's saying is not Moses' saying, but His saying is the very contrary of Moses' saying. Both Christ's and Moses' sayings are contained in the Bible, and both these sayings are of God, but the Scripture distinguishes them as standing in opposition to each other. Thus John writes in chapter 1st of his Gospel: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" and Paul writes to the Galatians: "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Christ's saying, therefore, is an altogether different saying than that of Moses. Moses says: 'This do, and if thou do it thou shalt live and shalt be blessed, but if thou do it not thou shalt die and shalt be damned; but Christ's saying runs in this wise, that we shall be free from the curse and shall live, notwithstanding that we have sinned. 'By Moses' saying

we can therefore not overcome death. Moses' saying can only multiply unto us the horrors of death. Even though a man had kept the whole law, and had failed in one point only, yet Moses delivers him into the power of death as the wages of his sin, even though it be one sin only. All those who think they must be able to meet death cheerfully, because they have walked in the law given by Moses and have lived innocently and piously, will find themselves sadly mistaken; for when death comes, then the law proves itself "the strength of sin," accusing man of sin and convincing him that his doom is sealed, because he must now appear before a holy God, before whom only those can stand who possess perfect and spotless holiness. Because of sin Moses' saying consigns us to the power of death and can only serve to increase the bitterness of death, and, therefore, if in death we would triumph over death we must accustom ourselves not to look to the saying of Moses, with its conditional promises and its curses, but must turn to the saying of Jesus Christ.

Therefore we must also remember that when the Lord here says "*My saying*," He does not mean all sayings, or every word which He uttered when on earth. On a mount He once preached a long and powerful sermon, recorded by Matthew in the 5th, 6th and 7th chapters, but in that sermon He spoke as in the person of Moses, exercising the office of Moses and expounding the law, and so on many occasions he proclaimed and explained the law. These explanations of the law, to which belongs also the example of a holy life which He left for us to imitate, though spoken with His own lips, are not properly His saying, not that saying which He here means, not that saying by which we may overcome death. By Him grace came; therefore that only is properly His saying which tells of grace for sinners, that He is the propitiation for our sins, that by His death He won for us eternal life, that His resurrection is our justification. The Word of grace and reconciliation, the Gospel, that is properly His saying, of which He is here speaking.

If from the saying of Moses, which is also God's inspired Word, much more must we distinguish Christ's saying from the sayings of men. When the pope commands fastings and pilgrimages, when

he directs the dying to be anointed with oil, a crucifix to be laid on their bosom, and the like; when Moralists say to do right is the way to heaven; when some Revivalists teach people to rely on a sensation of sweetness: those are all vain things which, when death comes, afford no foundation, but melt away before the terrors of the grave like snow in the heat of the noon-day sun. So it is with all human doctrines, all teachings not in agreement with the saying of Christ, as Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." Every man's doctrine is tried in the day of affliction as by fire and it either approves itself in the fire or is burned up. Such a fiery trial of all doctrine is the approach of death. Then will all doctrines, which are not established by the saying of Christ, be consumed like stubble in the fire, and will afford no stay and comfort to the heart. "*My saying,*" says the Lord. His saying alone will be a staff in the valley of the shadow of death. Therefore we should not rest satisfied simply to believe what the multitude believes, neither should we blindly follow the lead of any man; but we should prove all things and make sure that the word which we have is truly the Word of Christ; for of it alone He says: "*If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*"

## II.

When we are certain that we have the right and true saying of Christ, how is it kept? What is it to "*keep*" His saying? Here we must again distinguish well and must bear in mind that the saying of Christ is not and cannot be kept like the saying of Moses. Different sayings must be kept in different ways. If a farmer tells his laborers what to do they can keep that saying in no other way than by going and doing the work. But if a man tells his family a piece of good news, they can keep that saying in no other way than by accepting it as true, by believing it and rejoicing over it. Moses' saying consists in commands, and can be kept in no other

way than by going and doing the works commanded. But Christ's saying is of an altogether different nature. Christ's saying is a message of good news which comes to us from heaven and which tells us that the Son of God became man and suffered and died in our sins, that He broke the bonds of death, rose again and ascended up to heaven to intercede for us with the Father and to prepare a place for us, and that, when we come to die, we shall not go into everlasting darkness, but shall come to Christ and shall be with Him in everlasting blessedness. How can we keep this saying? Can we keep it by giving alms to the poor, or by practicing honesty in our dealings? This we are of course to do, but that is doing something which Moses has commanded, and it is not keeping the word: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This saying we can only keep in the same way as we read of Mary, the mother of Jesus: "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." Christ's saying we can keep in no other way than by keeping it in the heart, by resting our faith, trust and confidence in it. There is the word: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". That word I can keep in no other way than by believing it, by holding it as a faithful saying. There is the word: "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." That word I can keep in no other way than by believing it and rejoicing over it: for it requires nothing of me, it only tells me that Christ is the propitiation for my sins. So it is with the whole Gospel. It can be kept only by receiving it as a word of divine truth, and resting the heart's trust and confidence in it.

How is it that the Lord to so simple a thing as keeping His saying in faith, ascribes this great benefit of never seeing death? It is because Christ will not be separated from His Word. A man may go back on his word, but Christ not. Hold Christ's Word and you have Christ Himself. On this Dr. Luther very appropriately says: "Because the Word proclaims Christ to us, it proclaims unto us Him who overcame death, sin, and the devil. Hence he that grasps and holds it, grasps and holds Christ, and, therefore,

obtains through the Word that he is delivered from death forever. Therefore it is a Word of life, and it is certain, whosoever keeps it, shall never see death."

### III.

And now, what does the Lord promise to him that keeps His saying? "*He shall never see death.*" And this the Lord affirms with the double affirmation, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you.*" The Lord does not promise that he shall not die, but that he shall not *see* death. On another occasion He, indeed, said: "I am the resurrection, and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" but there He was speaking of death in a different manner than here, as the words show: "Though he were dead, yet shall he live," live in me. But here the Lord makes a distinction between *dying* and *seeing* death. He that keeps Christ's saying shall indeed die, but he shall not *see* death. Dying and seeing death is not one and the same thing; there is a great difference between them. It is one thing to die, and quite another thing to *see* death. Death is the separation of soul and body, but seeing death is to see it as death in all its horridness. To the first we are all subject; we must all die, the Christian as well as the un-Christian; but in the latter, the seeing death, there is no such equality; for he that keeps Christ's saying does not see death in its hideousness. And why not? Especially because of two things. In the first place, he that keeps Christ's saying has in that saying a sure and infallible weapon to ward off those things which make death so awful to man. What are those things? They are: Sin, the curse of the law, and the just judgment of God. Those are the things which make death so terrible to sinful and mortal man, but against these things the saying of Christ furnishes a sure and effective weapon. If sin would trouble him, he that holds Christ's saying wards it off with the appeal that Christ, the Lamb of God, has taken away his sins. If the law would accuse him, he answers that the Son of God was put under the law to redeem him from the curse of the law. If the judgment of God presents itself, he ap-

peals to the word: "He that believeth on the Son, is not condemned." So he that keeps Christ's saying has in that saying a weapon to ward off those things which torment the conscience in death, and which make death so bitter to man.

Another reason, why he that keeps Christ's saying does not see death although he dies is, because by that saying he knows where his soul is journeying to. He that does not keep Christ's saying must, at the very best, die in uncertainty. He has nothing infallible to hold to, no positively reliable guide, and, therefore, does not know where his soul will go, but he is tormented with the evil foreboding that it will not fare well. He that does not keep Christ's saying, that does not believe His promises, may, at the approach of death, say that he *must* go, but he can nevermore sincerely say that he *wants* to go; for only with terror can he think of entering upon so uncertain a journey. One not keeping Christ's saying can nevermore uprightly say, as Paul does: "I have a desire to depart." But he that keeps Christ's saying knows where his soul is going; for he has the Word of the Lord: "Where I am there shall also my servant be." He that keeps Christ's saying knows, when the hour of death is come, that now he is going to Jesus, the Beloved of his soul, and he anticipates the journey with joy. So the believer overcomes death. He does not see it in all its hideousness, nor taste its pangs in all their sharpness, but holding the Lord's Word and Promise he regards death as the entrance into eternal glory. He is like one standing at a river bank, whose eye, riveted by the beauties of the shore beyond, does not see the rushing current of the waters. That this is the death of the believer the Lord solemnly affirms saying: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you.*"

Blessed, blessed is every one that keeps the saying of Christ in his heart, so keeps it that it becomes rooted in him and that death itself can not uproot it; for verily, "*he shall never see death.*" Amen.

## V. SUNDAY IN LENT.

### II. SERMON.

TEXT: Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. John 8, 52-59.

Abraham, because of his faith and obedience toward God called "the father of the faithful," obtained the promise that he should be "a father of many nations"; for when he once on a time in sadness of heart complained: "I go childless," the Lord answered him: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be." Numberless as the stars of the firmament the seed of Abraham was to become and not a letter of this promise has fallen to the ground.

But the seed of Abraham is of four kinds. In the first place, the Seed of Abraham is He in whom Abraham himself and all the families of the earth are blessed: Jesus Christ, who, as concerning the flesh, came from the seed of Abraham. This is that Seed in whom all the promises given to Abraham centred, through whom all the children of Abraham were to become the blessed of the Lord; for of Him Paul writes Galatians 3d: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many;

but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Jesus Christ is *THE Seed* of Abraham, the Source and Author of the blessing.

In the second place, the seed of Abraham are his bodily descendants: the Jews, the Ishmaelites and all those nations that descended from the six sons of Keturah, Abraham's second wife. This bodily seed of Abraham is of two kinds: those who are descendants of Abraham, but have not Abraham's faith, as the Arabs and the unbelieving Jews; and those who both are descendants of Abraham and have Abraham's faith, as the believers of the Old Testament and all Jews who have been converted to Christ.

Finally, Abraham has a seed as being the "father of the faithful." "Know ye therefore," says St. Paul, "that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Christ is *the Seed* of Abraham, and hence all those are the children of Abraham who believe on Christ and through faith are one with Him. These, the community of saints, are, in the sense of the Scriptures, the true seed of Abraham; for so St. Paul writes to the Romans: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children. They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Before God those are not the children of Abraham who have not the faith of Abraham, although they be his bodily descendants, but those are the children of Abraham who walk in the faith in which Abraham walked, although they be descendants of Japhet or Ham. Therefore Christ said to the Jews: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Those only are Abraham's true children who believe on the promised Seed and who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Before God the Jews are no longer the children of Abraham, but a countless multitude of those who are not his bodily descendants, have been adopted as the children of Abraham and have come into the inheritance. We of the house of Japhet have become the children of Abraham through faith in the promised Seed; for those are his children who see the day of Christ as he did. Let me briefly speak of:

## SEEING THE DAY OF CHRIST.

Let me show

- I. How Abraham saw the day of Christ; and
- II. How we may attain the same seeing.

## I.

This chapter contains one of the many debates which Jesus had with the Pharisees. The great issue between them was this: The Pharisees trusted in their works for righteousness before God, but Jesus taught: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Now the Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been taken in the act of adultery and they said: "Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" They calculated, if Jesus would say, the woman should not be stoned they could accuse Him of speaking against Moses, and if He would say, she should be stoned, they could accuse Him of inconsistency and could ask: How then canst Thou preach forgiveness to publicans and sinners? But Jesus replied: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He did not say that crime should not be punished by the government, He let the law of Moses stand, but He accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy; for His reply involved this argument: You condemn this woman for her works, and count yourselves righteous in your works; therefore which one of you knows for a certainty that he is without sin, let him throw the first stone. Crime is to be punished, and we are to live right, but when it comes to the question, how we are justified before God? and we then want to appeal to our works, then we must be found without sin; for if there is the least spot in us, we are under the condemnation of the law just as well as murderers, thieves and adulterers. Now the Pharisees could not say that they were without sin, and smitten by their own conscience they slunk away.

If we could live without sin, then we could stand in our own righteousness, but because no one can be without sin, therefore the only way for us to be saved is by grace, that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. The word will ever stand: "There is no differ-

ence; for all have sinned." Those Pharisees were sinners just as well as that adulteress, although they had not committed so flagrant a transgression as she had. Of this the Lord convicted them by His reply and when they nevertheless would not yield, but brought up the argument that they were the children of Abraham, the Lord disputed this and said: "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*" Abraham saw his salvation in the promised Seed. He was therefore of an altogether different mind than the Pharisees, who thought to see their salvation in their works.

What is the day of Christ, and how did Abraham see it? The day of Christ is the time from His birth to His ascension, the time during which He performed the work of redemption including the time of the preaching of the Gospel. The prophet Hosea said in his 1st chapter: "Great shall be the day of Jezreel," that is, the day of the promised Seed, and Peter in the 3d chapter of Acts says: "All the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have foretold of these days." This day of Christ is the day of the preaching of grace and salvation, and this day, the time when the Son of God walked on earth, preached the Gospel and has it preached in all the world, this blessed time Abraham rejoiced to see. The salvation in the promised Seed of woman was what Abraham desired above all things and when the promise came to him that the Deliverer would come out of his seed his heart was glad. The salvation in this Seed was dearer to him than home, friends and relations; it was more precious to him than good days and earthly prosperity; for having received the promise he cheerfully emigrated from the land of his nativity to become a restless wanderer in strange lands. Yea, when God commanded him to sacrifice his only son Isaac he hesitated not. How precious must the promised salvation have been to Abraham, seeing he was so ready to sacrifice all and to do whatever God required of him!

How could Abraham be so sure and certain of this salvation as to rejoice over it so greatly? O the Lord says: "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it.*" Abraham saw the day of Christ. On account of these words some have thought that God showed to

Abraham in a vision, what Christ would do and suffer on earth, and how He would triumph over sin, death and hell. Such a vision might indeed have been granted him, but the Scriptures say nothing about it, and it is only supposition. Neither do these words imply any thing of the kind, that Abraham should have seen the day of Christ in a picture of the mind, or with his bodily eyes. How Abraham saw Christ's day the Scriptures tell us very clearly even by calling him "the father of the faithful." By faith he saw the salvation of Jezreel, the Seed of God. Speaking of the patriarchs the epistle to the Hebrews says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." They saw the promises, that is, the things promised, afar off, and they saw them so that they were persuaded of them and embraced them. Through faith in the Word of promise they saw the things promised for the far future, and they were so positive, so certain of those things as though they were already present before their eyes.

So Abraham saw the day of Christ in the promise and in types, especially the offering up of Isaac. Abraham understood, as he offered up his only son, so God would not spare His only begotten Son, but would deliver Him up for the sins of the world. He saw, as Isaac did not resist, but willingly suffered himself to be bound and laid on the altar, so the Son of God would willingly give Himself a sacrifice for men. So Abraham saw the day of Christ in the Word of promise and in manifold typical acts which he performed by the command or under the guidance of God.

And now let us mark well this little word *saw*: "Abraham saw my day." A strong testimony for Abraham's great faith. He was not only of the opinion that these things were so; he did not only think they would come to pass; he did not only hope it would be so, with the doubt lurking in the background of his heart that it might fail; he *saw* them, he was positive of them as of the things which he discerned with his natural eye; he was certain of his salvation in the promised Seed; he was so fully persuaded of it that he rejoiced over it and was glad. Therefore Paul writes: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

From all this it is very clear, to be true children of Abraham, to be counted righteous as Abraham was, to have part in "the blessing of Abraham," and finally to be carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, we must see the day of Christ, or in other words, we must see the salvation of our souls in the promised Seed of Abraham. What must we do to see in Jesus Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God" unto our salvation?

## II.

In order to see an object we must look in the right direction and at the right place. Though a man look for a treasure ever so eagerly, unless he looks at the right place, he will never find it. The man that looks for the polar star, but has his eye continually turned to the south or east will never see it. If we would see the day of Christ we must not have our eye turned to our own works of piety, as the Pharisees did. They saw Christ with their bodily eyes, but the eyes of their heart and mind remained fixed on their own piety and good works and looking to these for their righteousness they could not see their salvation in Jesus Christ. To see the day of Christ we must not look to the works which we do, we must look to the works which Jesus Christ has done. Our salvation stands in the work of Christ, not in our works. To see the day of Christ we must look to Christ.

Where Christ is it is day. "*Abraham saw my day.*" Jesus Christ is a bright and shining light. This is His testimony concerning Himself, when He says: "I am the light of the world," and the prophet calls Him "the Sun of righteousness." Where does the light of Christ shine? In the fourth chapter, 2d Corinthians Paul writes: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." In the Gospel the light of the day of Christ shines. There we must look for it. In systems of philosophy and earthly science this light is not found. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." To see the day of Christ we must look to the Gospel of Christ and

not to the teachings of any man, save only in so far as he brings the Gospel.

Looking to the Word of revelation we must not so look as to bring light to the Gospel, but so as to receive light from it. We must not want to carry light to the sun. The natural eye does not give light to the sun, it receives its light from the sun. We must look to the Gospel as such who of themselves are without light and we must receive light from it. This is a point of great importance. Frequently we can hear people say: It says so in the Bible, but I understand it to mean this or that. Though such words may proceed from a desire of searching for the right meaning, yet in most cases it is carrying the light of human understanding to the Gospel. When we read the Bible we must not put on the spectacles of our own ideas and opinions to read them into it and to make the Word suit to our own preconceived notions. To so do is to make our opinions the true and greater light. We must so look that the light comes from the Gospel to us, and not from us to the Gospel. We must not want to correct the Word according to our understanding, but the Word is to correct our opinions. We must never alter or pervert the Word, as the Jews here did. Christ said: "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it.*" They retorted: "*Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*" They turned the words right around. Christ shines in the Word of the cross, and this Word we must not pervert, or we render the light itself darkness and then all is darkness. We must look to the Word, not as we would construe it, but as the Holy Ghost has construed it.

Looking to the Gospel our chief object must be to see Christ and His salvation. Now we see Christ and His salvation, if we receive the things which the Word promises as realities and appropriate them unto ourselves. When the Word says: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," our heart should respond: He saves me a sinner. When we read: "I am the Lord that healeth thee," we should rejoice and say: My soul is sick, but my Lord Jesus Christ healeth all my diseases. When the Lord says: "I go to prepare a place for you," we should joyously conclude: When I

move out of my earthly dwelling I will find a mansion ready prepared in the house of the Father. To so appropriate the Gospel promises is seeing the day of Christ; for where this faith is, this dependence on the things which eye can not see, nor the senses perceive, there the day-star arises in the heart and hope fills the soul. Allow me a limping comparison. I see that the object before me is a book. This I discern with the natural eye, and I am positive of it. Now in this book One is speaking to me and He says: "I am the resurrection and the life." This I can not see with the natural eye, yet by the grace of God my heart is positive of it, that it is a fact, a reality, Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: He will raise me up again from the dead and will bring me into a new life in which I will live with Him forever. That is seeing with the eye of faith, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

O I look and I know that the Gospel of Christ alone is the light of my soul, and sometimes I discern clearly that Jesus Christ is in very deed the way, the truth and the life, but alas! it is not always so. At other times I look and see but dimly, and even total darkness will fall upon me that I can see no hope and can realize no salvation. If this is your experience you are making the experience of all the children of God. Therefore we should know and we should well remember that the possession of grace and salvation is not dependent on the clearness of our seeing, or the strength of our faith, but on our looking. There is a difference between looking and seeing. In a thick fog you may look toward the mountain, but you will not see it. The looking to Christ is indispensably necessary, but not so the seeing. If you do not look to Christ you are not a child of Abraham; for Abraham looked to the promised Seed for his salvation. But if you look to Christ and can not see, or think you can not see, you need not despair. They that look to Christ are His. It is a high praise of Abraham's faith that he is called "the father of the faithful," yet even he did not see alike clearly at all times. When he complained that the son of his servant would be his heir he saw but very dimly. "Now we see through a glass darkly," says Paul. The Lord desires the looking; for by

the prophet Isaiah He has promised and said : " Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." The looking has the promise of salvation. Your looking to Christ is conclusive evidence that the Holy Ghost is in you and has His work in your heart, otherwise you would be looking elsewhere and not to Christ. Keep on looking and He will grant you to see. If on a foggy morning you keep on looking to the mountain the fog will by and by clear away, the spurs and peaks become visible and in the tints of the morning light the mountain seems more lovely than ever before. If fog obstructs the vision of your spiritual eye, keep on looking. The Hill from which our salvation comes, will become visible to your faith again, and your soul will be filled with new delight.

Come, Thou Lamb for sinners slain,  
Come, and ease me of my pain ;  
Evermore I cry to Thee :  
Jesus, Jesus, come to me.     Amen.

## VI. SUNDAY IN LENT. PALM SUNDAY.

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### CONFIRMATION.

TEXT: That which ye have already, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give the morning-star. Rev. 2, 25-28.

In the second chapter of Acts St. Luke informs us that the first Christian church at Jerusalem continued steadfast in the worship of the Lord with one accord, and then he adds: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." In those days of the youthful vigor of the church, when the Spirit was poured out so abundantly both upon teachers and hearers, the growth of the church was rapid. Daily were souls added to the community of the disciples, and so from a small beginning the number of believers soon became a great multitude. The cause of this rapid growth was the abundance of the Spirit given; for it was the time when the Lord planted His church of the New Covenant. Yet also the godly walk of those first Christians contributed not a little to the increase of the church. So strong was their faith that many of them sold their worldly possessions and gave the proceeds for the common benefit of the church. They were of one heart and one soul, and were perfectly joined together in the same mind and faith. Because this was the mind of the first company of believers at Jerusalem, therefore also persecution, which early came upon them, could not prevent the increase of the church, but the persecutors had to experience that the blood of the martyrs only served to draw others unto the Lord. And as in the beginning so through all ages the Lord has upheld His church against the ravings of Satan and the persecution of the wicked, and unto this day the gracious Lord continues to add unto His church.

At this place also the Lord planted a church, endowing it with the fulness of the Gospel. A century ago, in the year 1794, God gave it into the hearts of a few men, four in number, to build a house of worship at this place, and small as their number was, hard as the struggle must have been for them, the Lord prospered the work of their hands. And what your forefathers began in poverty and under many difficulties, God has preserved unto this day. The church which your fathers founded at this place has, of course, not been spared opposition and enmity, but though at times the prospects were gloomy, yet the Lord always awakened men in singleness of heart to stand for truth and right, and the prophecy of those who said, if the fathers were fallen asleep this church too would soon fall in line with the liberalism of the times, has been put to shame. So the Lord preserved the vine He planted, yea, prospered it and caused it to spread forth its branches, from time to time adding new branches unto it.

How many a time has the overthrow of the Christian church been prophesied! The infidels of the preceding century foretold the early abolition of Christianity, but they were false prophets. Their bones have decayed, but the church remains. The truth of the Gospel will endure till the moon will wax and wane no more. As long as men will live upon earth there will be hearts which sing with the 100th Psalm: "The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth to all generations."

Again a company of youthful Christians have appeared here in public to vow allegiance unto the Lord and His church. Let us remind them of their duties and consecrate them to God with the laying on of hands and prayer. Hence allow me a few words on:

#### THE KEEPING OF THE LORD'S WORKS.

Let me show

- I. What the works of the Lord are; and
- II. What it will require of you to keep His works.

#### I.

Our text is taken from the missive of the Lord by John to the church of Thyatira, but these words were not only intended for

that church in Asia, they are written for the admonition of every individual Christian. The Lord is here speaking to you, my young friends, as well as to those Christians at Thyatira. To you, too, He says: "*That which ye have already, hold fast till I come.*" That which you have already, the Lord bids you not to cast away, not to lose, but to hold it fast until He comes, comes by a peaceable death to take you from this world of strife, or comes in the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead. What you have already you are to hold fast. What have you already? You have been instructed in the knowledge of God and your Savior. You have not been led to connect yourselves with the church without understanding God's plan of salvation. You have been taught the counsel of God for the salvation of sinners. You have learned sufficient to know what to believe, how to live and how to die in order to be saved. You have learned that even by nature you are altogether corrupt and have not kept one command of God, and this you to-day acknowledge; but you have also learned that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the propitiation for your sins, that through faith in Him His righteousness is accounted unto you and you are made children and heirs of the Father in heaven, and that this is your heart's faith and trust you to-day confess. If then you have the knowledge of sin and believe that for Christ's sake your sins are forgiven, then you are children of adoption possessing the grace of God; for the Word of the Lord declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized in His name, salvation is yours and you need nothing more to possess the grace of God, but you are the children of God. And I am persuaded, that you to-day do not make a deceitful confession, but what your lips confess is the faith of your heart. Now the Scripture saith: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

But now the Lord says unto you: "*That which ye have already, hold fast till I come.*" The faith that you now have you are bidden

to hold fast until the Lord comes. The same he repeats: "*And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end.*" His works you are to keep unto the end. What are His works? All creatures are the works of God, but of the works of creation He is here not speaking. He that is here speaking is Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man. He says: "*My works.*" What are His works? His work is that He became poor on earth to make you heirs of heaven; His work is that He bare your sins in His own body on the tree, that sin be accounted unto you no more, and the curse be removed from you; His work is that He tasted all the bitterness of death that the second death should not touch you; His work is that He descended into hell triumphantly, that your souls might be delivered from the power of darkness; His work is that He rose from the dead to justify you and to adorn you with His righteousness; His work is that He ascended on high to prepare a mansion for you; His work is that He sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession and pleading for you; His work is that He grants you His Spirit and, as the good shepherd, leads you to green pastures, and will all your lifetime so guide and govern you that you may reach the mansion prepared for you in heaven. Behold, these are His works as you have learned them from the second article of the Creed, and you to-day publicly testify before God and man that these His works are your salvation.

And now the Lord says unto you: "*He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end.*" These His works you must keep unto the end. How can you keep His works? Certainly in no other way than by holding them fast. The works of Jesus Christ you keep when you hold them fast as the comfort of your heart, the foundation of your hope; for His works are kept by faith. You keep His works, if you keep the faith, and to this the Lord earnestly and solemnly admonishes you: "*Hold fast that ye have; keep my works.*" O! that I could engrave these words on your hearts with indelible letters that you could never forget them. What would you be benefitted, if to-day you believe, but hereafter would throw away faith again? "When the righteous," says the Lord, "turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, all

his righteousness shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Not those who once believed and fell away again, only those who keep His works unto the end will be found worthy to stand before the Son of man. So long as you keep the door-posts of your heart marked with the blood of Jesus the destroyer must pass you by. Keep, therefore, keep His blood in your hearts as the price with which your souls are purchased that at your latter end you may be able to commend your souls into His hands saying: Lord Jesus, Thou hast redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature; Thou hast purchased and won me from all sin, from death and the power of the devil by Thy holy and precious blood; Thine I am, and Thou shalt keep my soul.

## II.

But think it not an easy matter to keep the Lord's works. If your life is prolonged on earth, you will experience that, where there is a treasure, there are also thieves who would steal it. In our text the Lord says: *Hold fast; overcome; keep.* *Hold fast;* for there are those who would take the treasure from you. *Overcome;* for there are those who will fight against you. *Keep;* for there is a possibility of losing the treasure. You can not remain untried; temptations will come to you, and often they will come in a way, shape and form in which you would never have expected it. The time may come when you will be tempted to turn your back on the Lutheran church, which is in all disrepute with the world, because it adheres so closely to the Word, and to go to some other church which makes more show before men and is more in favor with the world. God grant that you may then remember that, after being instructed in the true doctrine of the Gospel, you vowed faithfulness to this doctrine even unto death, and that if you break this vow you deny the truth of that Lord who has said: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." You know that that alone is the truly orthodox church which is ashamed of none of the Lord's words, which in her

teachings abides in every word that proceeded from the mouth of the Lord. Let this mind abide in you that, whatever word the Lord has spoken, you are ready to receive it and to bow to it, be it never so hateful to the flesh, or offensive to men. You have learned that all the teachings of our Evangelical Lutheran church are founded on the clear, plain Word of the Lord. Do, therefore, what Paul commands Timothy: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of."

The time will come, when you will be tempted by the lust of sin, the glitter of gold, the honor of the world; but remember always that sin, however tempting and innocent it may appear, is that deadly poison which brought woe on all our race; that you brought nothing into the world and can carry nothing out, and that they who love the praise of men rather than the praise of God can not be the children of God.

What particular trials are in store for you, what temptations will come upon you, I do not and can not know. We live in the last times of the world when offenses multiply, and sore trials may come to you. You may be called on for the Lord's sake to pluck out your right eye and to cast it from you; you may be obliged to prove it that you love the Lord more than father or mother, son or daughter, yea, more than life itself; for the powers of darkness are at work and they are waxing stronger. Satan seems to be preparing for his last and greatest struggle. But be ye not dismayed. Be faithful unto the Lord, and you will always find Him a very present help in every need. "Greater," writes the apostle John to all Christians, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The Lord to whom you to-day consecrate yourselves is greater than all the powers of darkness. Whatever may betide, look to Him and He will uphold you with the right hand of His righteousness. Only remember what Paul writes of Him: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Live unto Him who died for you, and help and strength, light and comfort shall never be lacking you; for He rose again and sits on the throne of the Father, a Lord over all.

brance. To them the institution of the Lord's supper appears of little importance. But when we lay aside the spectacles of our own corrupt reason and with an unbiassed mind examine what the Lord's supper is according to the Scriptures we must conclude that the institution of this sacrament is well worthy to be held in thankful remembrance by all Christians in all lands and of all denominations.

In proof of this it is sufficient to mention this one single fact that the Lord calls this supper His testament saying: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." The Lord's supper is the Lord's testament. Now we all know, a testament is an instrument by, in and through which the possessions of him who makes the testament are conveyed to his heirs. A testament is an instrument by which the testator makes his heirs the possessors of his property. By a testament we do not,—and certainly no court will—, understand such an instrument by which the testator conveys a figure, picture or emblem of his property to his heirs. A testament conveys the property itself. Who ever heard of a wealthy man making a testament in which he conveyed only a picture and emblem of his property to his children and not the property itself? Such a testament would certainly be counted a mockery.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ is a rich man. In the days of His flesh He acquired great riches, not to keep them for Himself, but to bestow them on men. In His incarnation He assumed a human body and received human blood, so that they became the body and the blood of the Son of God. With these He went to work to purchase our souls from the claims of Satan and the demands of eternal justice, and He did purchase our liberty by giving His body and blood a ransom for us. That the price of our liberty has been paid in full God the Father acknowledged by raising up Jesus from the dead. This rich Lord Jesus Christ has made a rich testament. In it He gives us the price of our liberty, His body and blood; for these are the words of His testament: "Eat; this is my body. Drink; this is my blood." Giving us the price of our redemption He assures us that we are free indeed. Surely, a valuable testament conveying valuable goods. If pious children esteem the testament of their father a precious document when it conveys only earthly

goods, with how much greater veneration should we receive the testament of our Lord!

The better we learn to understand what the Lord's supper is and what it brings, the more will we appreciate it, the oftener will we desire it, and the more will we learn to partake of it with joy and thanksgiving, and not with doubt and misgiving. How to receive the Lord's testament worthily we may learn from the text before us. Let me briefly show :

HOW THE LORD'S EXAMPLE IN WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET  
TEACHES US TO COMMUNE WORTHILY.

It teaches us

- I. Humility;
- II. Faith; and
- III. Godliness.

I.

Although the institution of the Lord's supper is not mentioned in our text, it narrates an occurrence which took place in connection with it and which in a very simple manner teaches us what to do and how to conduct ourselves before, during and after communing. From the Lord's own behavior we are to learn humility. St. John writes: "*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.*" While the mind of Jesus was occupied with the thoughts of His divinity and the glory which was given Him of His Father He arose and prepared to do the work of a menial. Here is illustrated what Paul writes to the Philippians: "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." We can imagine no greater example of humility than that the Lord over all things kneels to wash the feet of sinful mortals. His intention of teaching them humility the Lord clearly expressed saying: "*Ye call me Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye*

*also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."* As the Son of God humbled Himself and came to minister, despising not to perform the meanest service to His disciples, so should we be of an humble mind and ready to serve one another.

When we come to the Lord's supper we should come meek and lowly in heart. Haughty and overbearing behavior is never becoming a Christian, and least of all at the communion table. Let not your dress and behavior be such that you will be numbered with the proud. We should be particularly careful to guard against spiritual pride. Say not in your heart: 'I am as good as any in this congregation; I have lived right and have given liberally to the church and the poor, neither am I behind others in following sanctification.' That is the language of spiritual pride, and the apostle commands the contrary saying: "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." To be so minded every one of us has abundant reason. For instance, I myself have passed through a course of theological studies and obtained a fair knowledge of the Christian doctrine. I have also an inner eye to see spiritual things spiritually. Have I reason to pride myself in these things? Indeed not. When I was a poor, shy boy God took me and made me a minister of the Gospel and that inner eye is purely the gift of the Holy Ghost. To take pride therein would be an extremely foolish thing; for an unlettered laborer may possess a brighter spiritual eye and a heart more settled in the love of God, even as the Lord says in the 11th chapter of Matthew: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." In a sermon on these words Dr. Luther very pertinently says: "It may be a learned doctor whom He calls a babe; and likewise it may be a peasant whom He calls wise and prudent; for the Lord here calls those people babes who lay no store by their own doings, ascribe nothing unto their own power and count themselves nothing, and who account God alone wise and prudent. Therefore they are quiet and submit themselves wholly to God, and are taught by Him. The others are wise in their own conceit, and

are not willing to learn of God ; yea, even presume to master God's Word and work." When we come to the Lord's table it is of the highest importance that we do not exalt ourselves, but remembering our weakness we should be ready to bow to the least of God's children ; for the Lord instituted this sacrament to strengthen our faith and to brighten the eye of our hope, and if we think ourselves strong and wise we can derive no benefit from it.

And we all have great reason to be humble before our God, because we have broken His commandments and have soiled our souls. Though we strive to cleanse our hearts and to wash our hands in innocency, like Asaph did, yet we must all bear witness to the truth of the Lord's words when He says : " Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies : these are the things which defile a man." Sinful by nature we have defiled ourselves from year to year. Instead of being lifted up we should look for a fountain in which to wash and be clean. Thanks be to our God who has prepared such a fountain in Jesus Christ.

## II.

When the Lord with basin and towel came to Peter to wash his feet Peter refused saying : "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*" He meant to say : Thou art my Lord, and shouldst thou wash my feet ? To wash the feet of their masters and of guests was the work of slaves. When Abraham entertained those three angels he did not himself wash their feet. he had water brought and had it done by his servants. Therefore when the Lord kneeled before Peter to do this menial work for him Peter refused. He did not want his Master to abase Himself so far.

The Lord argued with Peter and said : "*What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter.*" The Lord argued, though this must appear strange to Peter, yet he should suffer it, in aftertime he would learn to understand it. But Peter thought this so unworthy a thing that he had no ear for arguments ; he flatly refused declaring : "*Thou shalt never wash my feet.*" Peter had seen the Lord perform so many and great miracles, he had seen

His glory on the mount of transfiguration, he had confessed Him the Son of the living God and the promised King of Israel, and now he was to stretch out his feet for the Lord to wash them? Peter thought, he understood very well what footwashing meant, and he counted it such a disgrace that he could not permit it. But the Lord quickly broke Peter's resistance declaring unto him: "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*" His literal footwashing was to remind the disciples of the spiritual washing, the cleansing of the soul from sin, the same washing of which He speaks in the words of institution saying: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Jesus Christ is come to wash the soul from sin, and in Him is the only single one fountain which can cleanse the soul. If Jesus had not washed Peter from his sins he never would have become rid of them and they would have dragged his soul down to the pit of destruction. If Jesus Christ does not wash our souls they will remain filthy to all eternity. Of His day the prophet Zechariah had said: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." There is only this one fountain, but it is an open fountain, free to all and it does in very deed what the poet says:

There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

If you would be cleansed from sin you must apply to Jesus Christ, and for this purpose He has instituted His testament, ever anew to assure us of the cleansing from sin by His blood. As often as we receive the sacrament of His body and blood we should say unto our soul: Because the Lord has bequeathed unto me the price with which He purchased me there can be no doubt that He washes me from my sins.

Hence we should never suffer ourselves to be debarred from the Lord's table by a mistaken humility. It was a mistaken humility when Peter thought it an unworthy thing for the Lord to

wash his feet; and it is a mistaken humility, when some think and say, they could never approach the Lord's table to receive that sacred sacrament with their sinful and unclean lips. They know themselves unworthy sinners and they fear they might profane the Lord's sacred body and blood. Now it is indeed a great and wonderful thing that the Lord together with the bread gives His body to be received orally by sinners, but this very fact shows that those cannot be unwelcome or unworthy guests who deplore their sins and desire to be rid of them. Did Jesus Christ come into the world to stand aloof from sinners? Did He say to sinners: Stand ye at a distance and approach me not? Did He withdraw His holy feet from that woman who kissed them with her lips, when Simon, the Pharisee, muttered that she was an harlot? Surely the Lord must have a strong desire for familiar and intimate intercourse with sinners, because He could not wait for an invitation, but invited Himself to the house of Zaccheus. He is come to save sinners, to make the unholy holy, the unclean clean, and therefore He invites sinners to come to Him, and therefore He instituted His testament to make the penitent sinners His heirs. The fact that we are sinners can not make us unworthy guests at the Lord's table, because for this very purpose the Lord instituted this sacrament to certify penitent sinners of the forgiveness of their sins.

### III.

But from this fact that the Lord's supper is for sinners we must in no way conclude that after receiving it we might go on in sin. We must not do like Peter who fell from the one extreme into the other. When the Lord told him: "*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me,*" he at once said: "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*" This was only an outburst of Peter's impetuous character, but the flesh will make a similar conclusion, that one might receive the Lord's supper unto forgiveness and then continue his former sinful life. Many commune time and again and never amend their lives. How we should do is indicated in the Lord's answer to Peter saying: "*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.*"

This is a remarkable word showing the relation between justification and sanctification. To understand the word fully we must remember that the ancients had public baths in every city and wore only sandals. After taking a bath a man would soil his feet more or less on the way home and so he still needed to wash his feet. In justification the soul is made white and clean before God. Sin is canceled and Christ's righteousness is imputed, and therefore the church, the company of justified ones, is holy and without blemish. Justification makes "*clean every whit*" in the sight of God. But then the justified sinner is to go and to cleanse his way, and following sanctification, while we are yet in the flesh and this world so full of wickedness, is like walking along a dusty street. However much you try to keep free from dust it will settle on you and you cannot keep it off. The justified sinner is clean before God, but he cannot walk in this world without becoming soiled and so he needs daily to wash his feet. As the ancient in going from the public bath to his home aimed to avoid all dust and filth, so must we Christians walk circumspectly and must aim to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. From one communion to another we should be diligent to cleanse our way.

Have you been doing this since your last communion? Has it been your object to keep your feet clean avoiding dust and filth? You promised to do this and how have you kept your promise? Did you perhaps argue: In the Gospel there is an ever- and an overflowing fountain of grace, and you might make free to indulge in sin; for you could wash again? If this has been your sentiment, I tell you the wily enemy has caught you in a snare. It is a precious truth, and God forbid that I should in any way abridge that truth, there is grace, abundance of grace with our God; but a man who makes that abundance of grace an excuse and a pretext to walk in sin, that man is a lover of sin and a dupe of Satan. What! make the abundance of water a pretext for wallowing in the mire! Is that a dutiful child which says: Father and mother are so very good; therefore I will go and do what they have forbidden? That is logic invented in the kingdom of darkness, and if you have been guilty of this dreadful insult against God you have great reason to

kneel before your Maker and to implore pardon for so shamefully abusing His mercy.

Or did you perhaps argue: No man could keep altogether clear from sin any way, and it would do no harm to yield a little? Did you say: What of it, though a man did get drunk off and on, or take advantage in trade, or tell an untruth? for none could be without sin. If your thoughts have been on this line, let me ask you: Is that keeping the promise to amend your sinful life? Is that keeping the commandment to break it a little here and a little there? Did the Holy Ghost teach you to argue after this fashion? or is it the wisdom of the prince of darkness? Surely, you have reason to repent and to recover yourself out of the snare of the devil, whose captive you have been.

But if you can candidly say, that it has been your endeavor to keep your feet clean, yet make no boast about it, or you might deceive yourself. The Scriptures testify: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." In every one's heart are nooks and crooks, of which he is himself not aware, and instead of saying much about our honesty we should rather pray: Search my heart, O my God, and try my reins, and lead me in the land of uprightness. Wash me in the fountain of Israel, the blood of Thy Son, and deny me not grace unto godliness, but:

Grant that, according to Thy Word,  
I henceforth godly live, O Lord.  
And let me, after time is o'er,  
Inherit life forevermore. Amen.

## GOOD FRIDAY.

---

TEXT: Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! John 19, 1-5.

We have gathered together to-day for a service of sorrow and mourning. Every heart loving the Lord Jesus Christ and knowing the signification of this day is downcast and sad, and yet at the same time filled with exceeding great joy. We to-day remember the death of our Redeemer, the one true Friend of our souls; therefore are our hearts sad. But His death awakens in us the hope of eternal life; therefore are our souls glad. On the Jewish preparation day for the festival of Easter in the 33d or 34th year of the Christian era, Jesus of Nazareth died the shameful death of crucifixion on the top of Mt. Calvary, but He died willingly giving His life for the life of the world. How could a Christian heart be able to pass by this day unnoticed? Should we not observe it with great solemnity and sadness? There are fanatics who say that there is nothing in the day and that it is wrong for Christians to keep days which God has not instituted. We are aware that Good Friday is a day like other days, and we seek nothing in the day, but we do think that the dying-day of our Lord is worthy of commemoration. We remember the dying-day of our parents, should we not also remember the dying-day of Jesus who is more to us than father or mother, sister or brother? What! pass by unnoticed that day of the year on which my Lord died for me? I could not, though I would. As often as it recurs sadness possesses my heart and I am constrained

to say : Bridegroom of my soul, my love, my hope, my all, art Thou dead? Rose of Sharon, how art Thou torn by the fangs of the whirlwind? Lily of the Valley, how art Thou trampled down? "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?" Alas! my blood has stained Thy beauty; my sins have pierced Thee through with many sorrows.

Why such sadness? Is not His death our life and, therefore, a cause of rejoicing? His death is truly the source and the only source of our hope for a blessed life beyond the grave, but let me remind you of the fact that I and you are amongst the number of His crucifiers. True, four Roman soldiers did the work; they nailed Him to the cross; but if man had not sinned, those nails would never have pierced His members. It is this which comes home to us forcibly when we earnestly ponder His suffering and death. We should to-day consider both that His works are our salvation, and our works His torment. To assist you in this permit me to speak to you on the words of Pilate:

"BEHOLD THE MAN."

- I. Behold the Man of suffering;
- II. Behold the man that caused Him suffering.

I.

In front of the judgment hall at Jerusalem was a wide, paved place called Gabbatha, that is, the Pavement. It will compare with our American courthouse square. On this public square the citizens assembled at stated times to hear the decrees of the governor and the publication of the laws. Very early in the morning of the day already mentioned, the high priests, the members of the high council, a large number of scribes and Pharisees and a multitude of people had flocked together on the Pavement. They stood there demanding of Pilate the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and awaiting his decision; but Pilate finding no fault in Jesus and knowing Him innocent of the charges brought against Him was loath to yield to their demands. But the longer he hesitated the more clamorous did their cries become. Then Pilate thought, perhaps,

if he would chastise Jesus and then show Him to the multitude, they would be moved to compassion and would consent to let Him go. Therefore, when Jesus had been scourged, the governor brought Him out of the judgment hall and presented Him to the people with the words: "*Behold the man.*" He meant to say: Behold the miserable, the plighted, the tormented, the pitiable man! Look and see Him made like unto a crushed worm. Behold His woeful condition and demand no more, but let your hearts be softened towards Him. Pilate thought that the aspect of the Lord's woeful condition would soften the hearts of His enemies and, verily, in human calculation Pilate might justly expect that the sight of Him must move the Jews to compassion.

What a woeful, pitiable spectacle the Lord presented, standing on the steps of the judgment hall, we can to some extent picture to our minds by remembering what He had already suffered. Since the eating of the passover neither meat nor drink had passed His lips, nor had sleep rested on His eyelids. Bound and watched by slaves He had spent the night in the palace of the high priest. At and after His trial before the high council He had been struck in the face with fists by the servants; He had been spitted on and maltreated in other ways. Hungry, thirsty, weary He was brought to the judgment hall. From there He was sent to king Herod, where He was mocked, and clad in a white garment, the costume of fools and charlatans. When He was brought back again Pilate delivered Him into the hands of the barbarian soldiers to be scourged. Of that dreadful instrument of torture, the scourge, we know nothing in our time and country. What a fearful instrument of torture it was, we understand, when we read that many a strong man breathed his last under the strokes of the Roman scourge. The scourge consisted of a number of leather thongs or whipcord fastened to the end of a cane or strong stick, and for severe torture little lumps of lead or small hooks were matted into the thongs. To strike a Roman citizen with the scourge was strictly forbidden by law, because every one who was struck with the scourge was disgraced and branded with infamy. It was used only for the punishment of slaves and criminals, and it was applied on the bare body.

As a matter of course such an instrument lacerated the skin at the first stroke and swung by a strong man it laid bare the bones in a very short time. No wonder that many expired under the torture of the scourge.

So Jesus was scourged, and that it was done in the severest manner is evident from the circumstances. It was Pilate's object to have Him brought into such a dreadful plight that the sight of Him would move even the flinty hearts of the scribes and Pharisees to pity. He was delivered into the hands of Roman soldiers, and the Roman army at that time was mainly composed of hirelings from barbarian tribes. Those men who were accustomed to scenes of carnage and knew nothing of mercy took Jesus, and did their work as it was customary with the Romans. Taking Jesus into the inner court they undressed Him baring His back and breast till to the hips. Then they most likely bound His hands to a low post or stake, so that He had to stand in a stooping posture. And now, behold how the sinewy arm of a soldier swings the scourge. The strokes clash on the holy body of the Lord; every sinew and nerve quivers; His flesh is torn and lacerated; His Divine blood springs from the wounds and trickles to the earth; particles of red are splashed into the face of him who is swinging the scourge. It is a bloody piece of work. Who could picture that frightful transaction to his mind without a shudder? Yet not a groan was heard and bending low to look into the face of Jesus you would have found it perfectly calm, perhaps contorted with pain, but without a trace of anger.

After this Jesus was mocked and taunted by the unfeeling soldiery. Because He had said: "I am a king," they dressed Him in a purple robe, in antiquity the badge of sovereignty, platted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, put a reed into His right hand to serve for a scepter and bent the knee unto Him, greeting Him: "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" They spat on Him, smote Him with their hands and took the reed and struck on the crown of thorns on His head. In this condition Pilate presented Him to the people saying: "*Behold the man.*" Behold this pitiable object of commiseration on whom barbarians have spent all their cruelty.

His whole body covered with wounds, His head lacerated with thorns, His face swollen from strokes of the fist and disfigured with clotted blood, spittle and filth, thus stood "the King of the Jews" on the steps of the judgment hall at Jerusalem, the city of the Jews.

"I am a worm," He says in the 22d Psalm, "and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." "He hath no form nor comeliness," says Isaiah, "and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him." Yea, who could have looked upon Him without being horrified? Must not every one, having a bit of human feeling in his heart, have turned his face away from Him?

To the torments of the body was added the anguish of the soul. Standing in front of the judgment hall He hears the cries of the multitude: "Away with Him. Crucify Him." Delivered by His own people into the hands of a heathen tyrant, and hearing their clamors for His crucifixion His soul must surely have been pierced through with sorrow as with a dart, and had He spoken the bitter complaint must have dropped from His lips: My people, my people, whereby have I wronged thee? Did I not choose thee before all nations for mine own inheritance? Did I not deliver thee from all thine enemies and crown thee with blessings since olden time? And now thou thirstest for my blood and condemnest me to death, even the death of the cross!

O! "*Behold the man!*" Deserted by His disciples; betrayed by His own people into the hands of an unjust judge; tortured by the heathen; every fiber of His body quivering with pain; the wrath of the Father bearing in upon Him, and His soul struggling with eternal death. If this can not move our hearts they are harder than flint and more unfeeling than adamant. Go forth, go forth, all ye lovers of the Lord, with sorrow and mourning! Your King, the Bridegroom of your soul, is the Man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He has no more the appearance of a man; He is like unto a worm trodden and crushed. O, that the woeful figure which the Lord presented, standing on the steps of the judgment hall at Jeru-

salem, were imprinted on our hearts indelibly, so that we could never for a moment forget what it cost the Lord to redeem us, as Luther so beautifully says in the Catechism: "Who hath redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." I know it, it is a shocking, an appalling picture which I have been delineating this morning, but this is the purpose for which I ascended the pulpit to-day, to show what it cost the Lord to atone for sin; and if this does not make it plain to you that sin is not an insignificant thing, not a small matter before God, then I know not, how to make it plainer.

But if we find that we can look upon the woeful figure of the Lord with a heart unmoved and cold, we should put our hand into our bosom to see if we have yet flesh and bone; for to behold the sufferings of the Son of God with a heart unmoved and impassive is something satanic and not human. Only a heart more than petrified, harder than granite, can do so. To look upon the sufferings of Christ unmoved is a plain proof that He does not dwell in the heart, and that Satan holds possession of it. Must not the members droop when the head suffers? How could that man be a temple of Christ who can jest when the Lord suffers? O, let us greet Him and say:

O bleeding Head, and wounded,  
 And full of pain and scorn,  
 In mockery surrounded  
 With cruel crown of thorn!  
 O Head! once crowned with glory  
 And heavenly majesty,  
 But now despised and gory:  
 To-day I welcome Thee.

## II.

But, although it is true that no one can be a member of Christ who can look upon His sufferings unmoved, yet we must be on our guard that not a false kind of sorrow possess our hearts. If we would bemoan and pity Him simply because He had to suffer so

dreadfully; if we would weep over Him as we weep over those in great affliction, that would be a great offense against Him. It would be robbing Him of His highest honor and placing Him upon a level with other sufferers upon earth. That He became the lowest of the low, the greatest of all sufferers is His highest honor, the deed for which He will be praised to all eternity, for which the Father gave Him the promise: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sins of many." He was scourged to save us from the place of torment. He suffered Himself to be mockingly arrayed and greeted as a king to atone for the sins of pride, ambition and arrogance. Our first parents were not content with their blessed condition in the garden of Eden; they aspired to become gods, and by their ambition they brought sin and every evil on their posterity. What causes more enmity, strife bloodshed and warfare than pride and ambition? When that red robe, the sign of royalty, was put on His shoulders He doubtless remembered with anguish of soul the streams of blood which the ambition of proud men has caused the earth to drink in. He humbled Himself to endure the scourge and to be made a mock-monarch to deliver us from the power of darkness. We must therefore not sorrow over His sufferings; for these are our redemption; we must sorrow over that which caused Him suffering. We must not lament Him in us, we must lament us in Him. That woeful figure on the steps of the judgment hall is to remind us of our own misery and should constrain us to exclaim: Behold the man! Behold the lost, the sinful, the wicked, the pervert, the degenerate child of wrath, for which the Son of God had to be brought to such a woeful condition!

The bodily condition of Christ when standing in front of the judgment hall pictures the condition of our souls. In Him was nothing unhurt. His whole body was covered with wounds. So are we. From the sole of the foot even unto the crown of the head there is no soundness in us, but bruises of unrighteousness and putrifying sores of sin.

His countenance was covered with blood, filth and spittle; because our souls are deformed with evil desires and filthy lusts. He had to be brought to such a condition that men hid their faces from Him, because the soul of man was so deformed by the poison of the Old Serpent that the holy angels turned away their countenances in disgust. Nowhere can we obtain a better and more thorough knowledge of ourselves, than in the sufferings of Christ, our Substitute. In Him is our appalling misery, our unsearchable depravity pictured in vivid and living colors.

Calculate yourselves: As we could not be redeemed from our misery save alone by the suffering of such a high, great and incomparable person, the only begotten Son of God; as to heal our sickness and to remove our depravity the Infinite and Eternal One Himself had to be brought to such a woeful condition: must not our hearts tremble and our knees quake, because our depravity is so appallingly deep and great, namely infinite and eternal? We must not forget that the miserable One whom the Jews beheld from the Pavement, is the Lord of glory, and say yourselves, is the guilt of those for whose sake the Lord of glory had to undergo such shame and pain, great or small? Our guilt must be infinite, because only the Infinite One could atone for it; it must be eternal, because the Eternal One had to be sacrificed in order to make satisfaction for it; it must be appalling, because His sufferings are so appalling.

Would you attempt to shift the guilt from off your shoulders? Would you say: I did not cry out: Crucify Him! I did not swing the scourge. Do what you will; acknowledge it, or acknowledge it not; I tell you, you are the man; and you must and you will acknowledge it, if not here on this earth, you will acknowledge it when your soul will be enveloped in the flames of torment, as John writes Revelations, chapter 1st: "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." We are the people. Our sins caused His suffering. Our transgressions were entwined in the thongs of the scourge; our iniquities were platted into His crown and poisoned its thorns. If we had not sinned the Son of God would not have needed to suffer. Let us sorrow over His sufferings, but let us always say: Thine the

pain, mine the guilt; Thine the fetters, mine the crime; Thine the shame, mine the blame.

In conclusion permit me to say: Let us sorrow over the sufferings of our Lord with rejoicing. Let us sorrow over them; for they were caused by our sins. Not for Himself, for us did He suffer. Let us confess and not deny that our iniquity is His pain, anguish, torment and shame. Let us confess and not deny: I am that wicked servant who brought death upon the Son of God; I am that vessel full of uncleanness whose guilt filled His cup of bitterness full to the brim.

On the other hand, let us not doubt, but believe what the Lutheran poet John Heermann says:

The pious dies who walked so true and faithful,  
The wicked lives who 'gainst God sinned so dreadful;  
Guilty of death, man punishment is spared,  
God is ensnared.

And here in this text we have a peculiarly proper illustration of the fact that Jesus Christ bare the curse which was pronounced on the earth because of sin. Unto Adam God said: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." Behold here the Son of God crowned with a crown of thorns. On Him fell the curse with which this earth was cursed. He was made a curse for us that the blessing of Abraham might come upon us. Would you escape the curse? Hold to Him who was crowned with the curse of the earth, and it will remove from you, and your's shall be a crown of glory.

This is what our faith must grasp: He emptied the cup of wrath, and we are spared it. God spared not His own Son, but when He had once taken our punishment upon Himself, the Father made Him drink the cup of bitterness to the very dregs. *But by Him the cup has been emptied.* Make this your hope, cling to it that He drank the cup for you, and when you come to die, you will find it empty. Amen.

## EASTER.

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TEXT: And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? (And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away:) for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he said unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Mark 16, 1-8.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” thus glories the apostle Peter in the beginning of his first epistle. Fitly may we with the apostle lift up our hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving unto God on this day in which we remember the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Of all that our Lord and Savior did, of all that transpired from the day of His birth to the day of His ascension to heaven, of all His works, His resurrection from the dead is the most important and the most comforting for us poor sinners. Christ’s resurrection proves His victory over death and all the powers of darkness to an evidence, and it brings to our view that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled and which fadeth not away.

Easter was the first festival introduced in the Christian church, and it is the chief festival in the whole church-year. That the primitive church, even at the time of the apostles, regarded the resurrection of Christ the most important of all His works, is evident from the fact that it chose and appointed the day of His resurrection the weekly day for public worship and called it the Lord's day. Of the great importance, or rather the absolute necessity of Christ's resurrection for the perfection of our redemption and salvation, St. Paul treats in the 15th chapter of I. Corinthians, where he distinctly declares: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." On the resurrection of Christ from the dead depends all our faith, hope and salvation. If He had not risen again no one could have any certain assurance of eternal life. When He said on the cross: "It is finished," the work of atonement was, indeed, finished; He had done what the law required, He had suffered what divine justice demanded; but without His resurrection we would have no declaration on the part of the Father that His work is accepted in heaven. Then we could only conclude that His work was rejected in heaven, because He was left in the power of death. Then we could, in fact, hope in Him only in this life and in death there would not be a ray of hope for us. Then no one could cheerfully close his eyes in death commending his soul into the hands of Jesus and saying: My Redeemer lives and I shall live with Him. Then no one could hope for life in Christ, because a dead tree can not bring forth the fruit of life.

But Christ is risen from the dead and, therefore, faith in Him is the victory which overcometh the world, the light which guides through the valley of the shadow of death. "Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" we can boast with Paul against the last enemy saying: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Rightly to understand the meaning of Christ's resurrection is of vital necessity; yea, it is the key to the right understanding of His whole work upon earth. Permit me, therefore, to-day to choose

only the central words of this Gospel and to speak on the message of the angel :

### HE IS RISEN.

I would set forth :

- I. What His resurrection proves ; and
- II. How we should appropriate it unto ourselves.

#### I.

The history of those women going to the sepulchre early in the morning of the day after the Sabbath and the appearance of the angel unto them is well known to you, and I hope for your indulgence in not tarrying to repeat it. If we understand the main point the history will explain itself. As I said formerly concerning Christ's suffering, that it is not enough if we only know the history, we must also know the end and object of His suffering, the same must be said with regard to His resurrection ; it is not enough to know how it occurred, the main point is that we know what it means, what it signifies, what it proves, otherwise we can derive no benefit from it.

Now if we would thoroughly understand the meaning of Christ's resurrection we must above all things keep in mind that He was raised from the dead as the "Son of man," the representative and substitute of all men ; that He rose again not for His sake, but for our sake. Had He arisen for His sake He might have done so without making it public, without communicating it to men. This is the point from which we must set out, the foundation on which we must build our faith concerning the resurrection of Christ ; for if we do not believe that He arose from the dead for our sake and for our benefit we could have "neither part nor lot" in His resurrection. But to this end was He born and for this cause came He into the world, to be the representative and substitute of the whole human family and what He did in the days of His flesh He did for us, in our stead, and therefore, He also arose from the dead for our sake, as our substitute and representative. Paul establishes this with plain words when writing to the Corinthians : "He died for

all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." As Christ in His suffering and death was the representative and substitute of all men; for He suffered and died in the sins of the world; so also in His resurrection. Let me attempt to illustrate by an example, what this means, reminding however that comparisons do not compare in all respects.

When peace was concluded between France and Germany after the late Franco-Prussian war, it was stipulated that France must pay so many millions war indemnity, and to secure the payment of this money Germany left an army stationed in France. After some time Germany recalled that army. What did the homeward march of these troops prove? Why it certainly proved that France had paid the stipulated sum of money and had paid it in full, otherwise Germany would have left its troops on French soil and would not have called them home. Similar with the resurrection of Christ. All the world was indebted to God and so long under the curse of God until its debt would be paid; and as the world was bankrupt and had not wherewithal to pay even the first farthing, it must have remained under the curse of God forever. But in the eternal council of the Holy Trinity the Son became security for the debt of the world promising its payment, and this gracious counsel of God was graciously revealed to man on the selfsame day in which he had fallen into debt towards God, when a coming Deliverer was promised to Adam. Now the Father demanding payment and the world not being able to pay, the Son having once become surety for the world, came into the world as its substitute to pay the debt. He came to pay what He had not robbed, but He assumed the debt of the world, regarded and bare it as His own, as He declares in the 40th Psalm saying: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me." He calls the debt, which He had assumed to pay, His own; for it is the iniquity of the world of which He says: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me;" and this His complaint at the same time shows how the Father exacted payment from Him, namely so that His heart failed Him, although

He was the almighty God. The strictness of divine justice demanded of Him the last farthing. He was stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, and finally cast into the bonds of death; but, although it cost Him His lifeblood, He did pay farthing for farthing, and could at last bowing His head say: "It is finished."

But now if the Father had left our bondsman in the prison of the grave whither our debt had brought Him, how could we then know, what proof would we then have that our debt is really and fully paid? In that case we would have no proof, we could show no receipt for the payment of our debt. We would be left in doubt; yea we would be obliged to think the debt not paid, or at least not yet paid in full, because our substitute would yet be held in durance. If Christ were yet in the grave we could nevermore believe that we are accounted free from all debt before God. But He is no more in the grave. When those three women came to the sepulchre they found it empty, and a heavenly messenger proclaimed to them: "*He is risen.*" That heavenly messenger could not have been there, neither could He have spoken to the women, if he had not been sent by the Father. His words were the message of God the Father to the world. Even this alone would be sufficient and conclusive proof that God the Father had accepted the ransom of the Son as payment in full for the world's debt. But besides this the Scriptures in many places declare that God raised up Christ from the dead; yea, this is ascribed particularly to the Father, the first person of the Godhead. Thus Peter says speaking of Christ: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death;" and again he says: "Ye killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." Still more distinctly does Paul write: "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Not only of the Godhead in general, but of God the Father in particular is it said that He raised up Jesus from the dead. Now what does God declare by this act of recalling our security man from the bonds of death into which our debt had brought Him? Why, He declares that the debt is paid, and He most emphatically declares by this act that the debt of the world is paid in full; for if one

single farthing had remained unpaid the just God according to His strict justice would not have dismissed Christ from the debt-prison of death.

So in the resurrection of Christ we have the plain and unmistakable declaration of God the Father Himself,—for He it was that raised up Christ from the dead—, that the debt of the world is paid, paid in full; that there is not a single person on earth whose sins are not atoned for; that there is not a single sin for which not a full ransom has been given. By raising up Christ from the dead God the Father declared that He has no more any charges against the world, that its debt is cancelled, that He has received that which was due Him. So we are to look upon the resurrection of Christ as the receipt for the payment of our debt signed and sealed by the Father, as the declaration of our Creditor Himself that He has received payment and is satisfied. By raising up Christ from the dead God the Father, as it were, proclaims to all the world: Give ear and hear, ye dwellers on the earth! Ye owed me ten thousand talents, and because ye were not able to pay I made your bondsman, Mine only begotten Son, pay in your stead. See, now, how gloriously I bring Him forth from the tomb, and know thereby that He has paid the debt, and that ye owe Me nothing. That is the Easter message, the resurrection of Christ is the receipt of the Father that He has received payment to His satisfaction.

That this is the meaning of Christ's resurrection is certainly very clear, and Scripture testifies to it in plain words. Thus the prophet Isaiah in the 53d chapter says: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." It was God who laid on or reckoned to Him the sins of all. Again the prophet says: "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." So it was God who punished in Christ the sins which He had laid on Him; for "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed." Behold, God laid on Christ and punished in Him the sins of man in order that man might have peace, and now that God raises Him up so gloriously from the dead what does, what can it mean other than that the punishment of sin is

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ended, that by God there is no more any punishment held in reserve for man. By this act God declared that He is at peace with man, wherefore Paul says: "Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." In the resurrection of Christ we and all men are declared free, free from sin, its curse and its punishment.

The ban is broken, we are free!  
 Our help is ever, Lord, in Thee,  
 The Victor over Satan.

A beautiful illustration of this the Lord gave when after His resurrection He spake of the disciples as His brethren, saying to Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God." Why is it that He now pronounces them His brethren and calls His Father their Father, and His God their God? He does so because by His resurrection it is made manifest that sin, that which separated God and man, is removed. For this His resurrection is undeniable and unmistakable proof. In the resurrection of Christ we are declared free from sin, guilt and wrath, in it we are pronounced sons and daughters of God.

## II.

I have attempted to say a little of what the words mean: "*He is risen.*" I know it is only stammering and not speaking. To portray it fully and worthily is beyond my ability. Allow me a few words only on appropriating the fruit of Christ's resurrection unto ourselves, on reaping the benefits thereof. What great thing must we do to bring the fruits of His rising again from the dead into our possession? What can we do? Nothing. What I have told you is historic fact which transpired eighteen and one-half centuries ago. How can historical facts be appropriated? Only and alone by believing them, by receiving them as facts. There is no other way; and though we would cut ourselves with knives and burn our bodies, that could not change history. That God raised up Christ from the dead and thereby declared that the guilt of man is atoned for and, hence, that the punishment of sin, having once been suffered, shall be inflicted no more, that is a finished fact

which no works or doings of ours can alter. We are to believe it, we are to depend upon it; this is to be our trust, our hope, our confidence that in Christ Jesus we are free from sin and it shall be reckoned unto us no more to all eternity. When a king proclaims amnesty to rebellious subjects what else have they to do to possess the advantages of that amnesty than to believe it.

Ah yes! to believe it, that is the difficulty with men. Reason has so many objections to offer. It will ask: How is sin removed? Is it not yet in the world? How can God be reconciled to the world? Are not the majority of men still under judgment and sink down to perdition? True, sin is yet in the world, but by raising up Christ God did not declare that sin should be banished from the earth, He declared that it is atoned for. Many still go down to destruction, but that is no proof that God did not proclaim a general amnesty to all, it is only a proof that these despise the amnesty and "bring upon themselves swift destruction," but those who do accept it are the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

Do, therefore, not stop long to ask: What must we, we on our part do to be justified from sin? I tell you, that Jesus Christ did die in your sins to make atonement for them, and God raised Him up again and by this act declared that He did make atonement for your sins and, hence, that your sins shall no more be accounted unto you, but that you shall go free. I am to-day not preaching to you the law of Moses, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I have nothing to ask of you, neither works, nor sacrifices. All works necessary to be done Christ has done long ago, and by raising Him again God the Father declared and testified that He has accepted the work of our substitute. It is all finished. There is a highway to heaven; a plain way, a safe way, a way free to every child of Adam, a way on which no toll is asked. Jesus Christ is the way. For this the empty sepulchre in Joseph's garden is evidence; for He that had lain there is raised again for our justification and He, now sitting on the throne of the Father, declares: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto Him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Amen.

# EASTER.

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## II. SERMON.

TEXT: And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honey-comb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24, 36-47.

“The Lord is risen;” “He is risen indeed,” this was the word which went from mouth to mouth in Jerusalem on the morning of the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and wherever this word went it created wonder and astonishment. Those days had been days full of the most marvelous events. Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, who had raised up Lazarus from the dead, had been going in and out and vast multitudes gathered in the temple to hear Him. But the elders, the chief priests and the Pharisees hated Him, because He preached repentance, and because so many followed Him. Suddenly Jesus was apprehended in the darkness of the night and was brought before the high council, and the next morning the news spread over the city that He was sentenced

to death for blasphemy, because He had confessed Himself the Son of God. Now His friends were intimidated and His enemies became extremely bold. In the early morning He was conducted through the streets by a noisy multitude and by clamors and threats they prevailed on the Roman governor to sentence Jesus to the shameful death of crucifixion. At noon a darkness set in the like of which had never been known in the annals of man and at the end of the darkness an earthquake occurred which shook the city, rent the rocks and laid open the tombs of many of the sleeping saints. When these disturbances of nature were over the day ended like other days, and the body of Jesus was gently laid in the sepulchre.

On the following day also a strange and unusual scene was witnessed. The chief of the priests and Pharisees were seen going to Pilate and then out to Joseph's garden to seal the sepulchre and to set a watch. Must not many have wondered greatly, seeing those holy men break the Sabbath so flagrantly?

But the most wonderful of all was yet to come. Early the next morning when the light began to shine from the east another great earthquake occurred. The rock rolled from the door of the sepulchre and an angel whose countenance shone like lightning and whose raiment was white as snow sat upon it. At the sight of the angel the keepers fainted from fear, and when they recovered again they fled to the city and were seen entering the palace of the high priest. Soon they came out again and went to their barracks, and when asked about their night's watch they said, His disciples had come and had stolen the body of Jesus in the night while they slept. A fine story indeed for Roman soldiers to tell on themselves that they had slept at their post of duty! Did they not know if this story would reach the ears of the governor it might cost them their heads? They knew it well, but their well filled pockets betrayed a secret.

In the mean time women came to the disciples bringing the news: "He is risen," but they found no faith. Yet Peter and John ran to the sepulchre and found it empty, and the report was repeated over and again, until it could no more be discredited. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? When the dis-

ciples were obliged to believe it by the testimony of their own senses they did at first yet not understand the meaning of it, until the Lord Himself opened their understanding. In a wonderfully short summary does St. Paul comprise the whole meaning, when he writes : "Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The same who died to make atonement for sin is risen again bringing righteousness, life and immortality out of the grave, not for Himself, but for us and for all that believe in His name. To kindle in our hearts the right Easter joy let us consider :

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST THE IMMUTABLE FOUNDATION  
OF OUR FAITH AND SALVATION.

Let me speak :

- I. Of the certainty of His resurrection ; and
- II. Of the certainty of our salvation.

I.

Never were the disciples slower to believe than when the message of the Lord's resurrection came to them. They ought indeed to have been prepared for this message, because the Lord had told them, the third day He would rise again, but they had not understood Him. They perhaps thought, that His words must not be taken in a literal meaning and so the news brought by those women was a surprise to them. Yet on that first day the Lord appeared so often, at so many places and to so many different persons that they began to be convinced, it must be so, and in the evening they greeted those disciples returning from Emmaus with the words : "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Nevertheless faith and unbelief were yet struggling within them, and when Jesus, while the doors were locked, suddenly stood among them and said : "*Peace be unto you,*" "*they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.*"

That such thoughts came to the minds of the disciples is not surprising ; for Jesus now acted and behaved very differently than He did formerly. They were accustomed to see Him walk and behave like other men, but now He appeared and disappeared, He was

seen now at one, then at another place, and at last He even came to them through locked doors. Could this be their Master who had been bound with bonds and was transfixed to the cross? He had entered on a very different state, quite another mode of existence, and this He distinctly told the disciples saying: "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you.*" He was now with them and was speaking to them, but He was no more with them after the manner of man with man. He was now in a glorified state and His body had obtained very different qualities than it had before. No man can undertake to say that Jesus only appeared to be dead and on the morning of the third day He revived again. In that case He would have returned into this earthly and physical life, but He arose from the sepulchre to enter another and an altogether different life.

To convince the disciples that they were not seeing the apparition of a ghost the Lord showed them His hands and His feet and said: "*Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*" They saw the nailprints in His hands and feet, and the scar in His side which the spear had penetrated. They handled Him and found Him composed of solid substance, flesh and bone. This could not be a spirit; for a spirit can assume the semblance of a body, but never a true and real body. And yet further to convince the disciples He asked them: "*Have ye here any meat?*" and He ate before them. They could doubt no longer. This was not a spirit, it was a man. It was the same man who had been their teacher for three years, who was crucified and was laid in the tomb. He was alive again; He walked, He ate, He spake. Here was a dead man returned into life again, yet not into this earthly life. He had entered into another life, another mode of existence. He had the same body composed of the same flesh and bones, but it had obtained very different qualities. With His glorified body He appeared and vanished; with it He passed through locked doors; with it He went through solid walls as through thin air. What could hinder Him from being in His supper with His body and blood? Why

should we doubt His being invisibly with us every day according to His promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Be a John and not a Thomas; be believing and not unbelieving.

When Jesus had proved His identity to the disciples He proceeded to create divine certainty of His resurrection in them. But divine certainty is not obtained by the observations of the senses. The faith or conviction which is obtained by sight and feeling is only human certainty, and it is not infallible. If the Lord had done nothing more than to convince the disciples of His identity by their sight and feeling, then they might thereafter very easily have fallen into doubt, thinking their senses might have deceived them. Therefore to create in' their hearts divine and infallible certainty which can in no way deceive Jesus led the disciples back to the Scriptures and said: "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*" He reminded them of the prophecies concerning His suffering and resurrection, that His hands and His feet would be digged through, that His garments would be parted and lots would be cast over His vesture, that He would be cut off out of the land of the living; but that the Lord would not suffer His Holy One to see corruption, and that He would be taken from prison and from judgment. From the Scriptures Jesus showed the disciples that He was to suffer and die to make atonement for sin, and was to rise again; for He said: "*Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.*" After Christ had been put to death and buried according to the Scriptures it was self-evident that He must also rise again according to the Scriptures. So it was written and so it had to be, because the Scriptures cannot be broken. The disciples ought to have known this and ought to have been looking for His resurrection, but their eyes were held, until the Lord "*opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*" Now the disciples did no more believe only because they saw Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands, but because it was written. Now their faith stood upon a

rock which could not give way; for the Word which had proceeded from the mouth of the Lord could not fail.

Study the Scriptures. They bear their own testimony of themselves, and their testimony is sufficient unto us. Yet in studying the Scriptures we should also not forget, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is such a fact of history which affords ample facilities for the most critical investigation. It did not take place in a remote quarter of the globe, but at Jerusalem, one of the most renowned cities of antiquity and situated almost in the very centre of the civilized world. Neither were the things which occurred in those days done in secret and obscurity. The trial of Jesus was as public as it possibly could be. It occurred just at Easter, when the city was crowded with people from all parts of the known world and His crucifixion took place right at one of the main thoroughfares of a most populous country. After His resurrection He indeed appeared only to His disciples, but every body at Jerusalem knew it to be a fact. The high priests feared that He would rise again, or they would not have set a watch. The guards were witnesses of what had transpired, and though they said that the body had been stolen by the disciples, yet neither they nor the chief priests made a move to recover it. If a corpse would be stolen from our cemetery and we would know who committed the theft, would we not at once employ the officers of the law to have those thieves arrested and to compel them to return the corpse? The disciples were defenceless men. Why then did those Roman soldiers who said the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, not force them to surrender it again? O! the body of Jesus, composed of flesh and bone, was indeed with the disciples that evening, but not because they had carried Him away.

Neither did the resurrection of Jesus Christ take place in an obscure age when ignorance and superstition ruled. Excepting our own that was the most enlightened age which the world has known since the days of Noah. About that time the civilization of antiquity was at its height. Books were plenty and learning was widespread. In short, the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred at such a place, at such a time and in such a manner that there is no possibility

of denying it. The more men have attempted to disprove it, the more has the evidence for it been strengthened. It is an immutable fact: The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed.

What is the fruit of Christ's resurrection? It demonstrates that there is a state of bliss for man to enter after death.

## II.

From Christ's resurrection we derive this positive knowledge that there is another life after this earthly life, another mode of existence, into which not only the soul, as a spirit, will enter, the body of man will rise again and will also enter into that other mode of existence. As Christ had the same body, so we also shall have the same bodies, but they will have other qualities. Of this St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." Here the body must have a solid substratum on which to rest its weight, but in the resurrection the saints of God "shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." To the Philippians the same apostle writes: "Jesus Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." This body must decay, but it will rise again and will be so changed as to be fitted for that other mode of existence, the life in the new heaven and the new earth.

In that other mode of existence there are two conditions: a condition of happiness and a condition of misery. When man lent his ear to the voice of the Old Serpent and sinned against God he was sentenced to die and to enter that state of misery, but for this purpose did Jesus Christ come into the world that He might open a way for man to enter that state of happiness, and He accomplished His mission; for He Himself arose from the dead and entered that glorious state. And He entered into glory not actually for His sake, but rather to open the way for us that we too might enter there. To this He bare testimony both before and after His resurrection. Coming to the disciples He said: "*Peace be unto you,*"

that is saying : I have now made peace for you. The Father is reconciled and there are mansions of peace for you in His house ; and though you must yet die bodily, yet you shall no more enter that unhappy state of torment and misery, but you shall come to the habitations of peace where I am. There is a haven of peace, a rest in store for man, and into it all those shall enter who hold to this Jesus Christ ; for He is risen from the dead and is entered into that glorious estate, and He has said : " Where I am, there shall also my servant be."

Because He has made peace with God the resurrection of Jesus Christ brings the assurance of the forgiveness of sin : for He connects both these things together when he says : "*Thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" By the resurrection of Christ we are certified that there is a remission of sin, because it proves that full atonement has been made for the world's sin. Footing on His resurrection we can cheerfully come before the court of heaven and say unto the Father : Thy Son became surety for my sins and He died in them. Him hast Thou raised from the dead and hast thereby declared that Thou art reconciled unto me. For His sake Thou wilt forgive me my sins. Since Christ is risen we know for a certainty that the gate of paradise is opened wide for sinners to return and to rest again under the tree of life. Therefore Peter proved his Pentecost sermon with the simple words : " This Jesus hath God raised up," and he added : " Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Throughout the book of Acts you will find that the apostles proved the remission of sin and the truth of their message by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because our Surety is raised again and seated on the right hand of Majesty it is certain that there is forgiveness of sin.

The preaching of this glad tidings, forgiveness for sinners, is the fruit of Christ's resurrection. Without it there would be no remission of sin, no preaching of the Gospel, no Christian church.

The nations would sit in darkness and the world would be without hope. Even if Christ had done all other things that are written of Him, but had not risen from the dead we could not hope in Him, because it must then be said that He had not kept His promise. But now since He is risen from the dead we must conclude and say, that all His promises are and must be divine, unalterable truth. And He can do what He promised. What could be impossible to Him who could take His life again after He had laid it down? And this is the promise which He has left us: "If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

The signs are multiplying that He will soon come to fulfill this promise. It admits of no controversy that His words have been fulfilled that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. At Jerusalem the preaching of the Gospel began and it spread farther and farther until it has come also to this Valley. What is it that I preach unto you other than the forgiveness of your sins in Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead? Let my words enter into your ears. Believe it that in Jesus Christ you have the forgiveness of the Father, and go then and show yourselves grateful for the Easter message in that you purge out the old leaven of sin and do "not henceforth live unto yourselves, but unto him which died for you and rose again."

Christians draw away your heart

Now from pleasure base and hollow:

Would ye there with Christ have part,

Here His rising ye must follow;

Fix your hearts beyond the skies,

Whither ye yourselves would rise. Amen.

## I. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. John 20, 19-23.

The greatest and best treasure which a man can possess upon earth is the forgiveness of sins. As sin is the most harmful of evils, the forgiveness of sin is the most useful of treasures. Whatever else a man may possess without the forgiveness of sin it is all only of subordinate and temporary value. Though a man possess all riches, the diamonds of Africa and the mines of Peru, and have not the forgiveness of sin he will in death lose all that he has and will be forever poor. Though a man possess the highest honors which this world can give so that all men must bow unto him and have not the forgiveness of sin, he is despised before God and the holy angels and his part will be everlasting shame and contempt. Though a man possess all learning and all knowledge and could tell all the secrets and powers of nature, and would not know, how to obtain the forgiveness of sin, all his knowledge would at last help him nothing, because he lacks that knowledge by which alone everlasting life and salvation is obtained. Without the forgiveness of sin there can be no communion with God; for the prophet says: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Where there is not the forgiveness of sin there can be nothing

but wrath, death and destruction; for "the wages of sin is death." But where there is the forgiveness of sin there is all blessedness, as the 32d Psalm says: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Where there is the forgiveness of sin there is no more condemnation, but there is grace, there is righteousness, there is the victory over death, there is salvation. Indeed, of all treasures the forgiveness of sin is the greatest and best.

But it is not enough for me to know of a treasure, it must be brought into my possession, if I am to be benefitted by it. If I know of a treasure, but I am not in possession of it and do not know how to obtain it, it is only the worse for me, because I am then situated like the rich man in torments, who could see Lazarus enjoying the glories of heaven and himself was debarred from them. The man who would tell me of a treasure and would not also show me ways and means how to obtain it would only be tantalizing me, and would not be doing me a favor.

Has God provided ways and means for us sinful mortals to come into the possession of this heavenly treasure, the forgiveness of sins? Most assuredly has God provided such ways and means. Jesus Christ did not take the forgiveness of sin which He had earned with bitter pains and a bloody death away from the earth to store it up in the graneries of heaven, where it could be of no benefit to man on this nether earth, as Paul writes Romans 10th chapter: "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Jesus Christ left the forgiveness of sins upon earth where He earned it and where it is needed, and he provided all the ways and means necessary for its distribution among men. This provision He made by instituting the ministration of the Gospel, which is essentially nothing else than bringing the forgiveness of sins unto men. The institution of this

office is recorded in the text before us. Hence indulge me to-day in a few words on :

ABSOLUTION, OR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

Stating :

- I. What absolution is ;
- II. Why it is so necessary to retain it ; and
- III. How it should be applied in practice.

I.

Absolution, as practiced in our Evangelical Lutheran church, is regarded with suspicion by many, and frequently it is a stumbling block also to such who are called Lutherans, because they do not know what it is. To them the pronouncing of absolution is and must be offensive rather than edifying and comforting ; for as long as a person does not understand, how it comes that the church through its minister can pronounce absolution, he cannot obtain the right benefit of it. We should therefore carefully study this text that we may understand, why and how it is that there is power on earth to remit and to retain sins.

What is absolution ? We may speak of absolution in a general way as comprising all the means of grace, as virtually it indeed does. In this way Luther speaks of absolution when he says :

“Preaching the forgiveness of sin is nothing else than to absolve or to pronounce loose from sin. This is also done in baptism and the sacrament, which are likewise ordained to exhibit this forgiveness of sin and to certify of it. To be baptized or to receive the sacrament is also absolution, because in these forgiveness is promised and announced to each one individually in the name and by the command of Christ. This hear as often as thou art in need, and receive and believe it, as heard of Christ Himself. For because it is not our absolution, but Christ’s command and word, therefore it is just as good and just as valid, as if heard out of His own mouth.”

When we baptize a child we absolve it from sin. When we preach the Gospel we preach the forgiveness of sin. Absolution is in all the Gospel ordinances.

Speaking of absolution in the ordinary way we may call it the formal announcing of the remission of sin, and it is most essentially performing the office of Christ unto which He was sent by the Father. Coming to the disciples He said: "*Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*" He commissioned the disciples to go and to perform His office. Yet not of His whole office was He here speaking. He was sent both to earn forgiveness for man and to bring forgiveness to men. He was sent to give Himself a ransom for all, to atone for sin and so to earn forgiveness for men. Of this part of His office He is here not speaking. Neither the apostles nor any one else did He ever send to bring a sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ Himself alone perfected the work of redemption, as He says by the prophet: "I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me." By His sacrifice all sins are atoned for and there is no more any sacrifice for sin necessary.

But Christ was not only sent to pay down the ransom by which the forgiveness of sin is purchased, He was also sent actually to forgive sins, and this part of His office He exercised in general whenever He preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and in particular by forgiving the sins of individual persons, as when He said to that man sick of the palsy: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Of this part of His office the Lord is here speaking; for after He had paid the wages of sin and returned to the disciples from the grave He said: "*Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*" He Himself brought the disciples the peace which He had earned and He commissioned them to go and to bring it to others. For what He sends them He expresses in still more clear and unmistakable words; for the text goes on: "*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*"

True to this commission the apostles went forth preaching repentance and the remission of sins among all nations. And we have very clear examples which show that they did not only preach

the Gospel in common to all, but also announced the forgiveness of their sins to individual persons. Thus St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "If I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ." At Corinth Paul as the minister of the church and in the stead of Christ forgave the sins of particular individuals. This is clearly a description of absolution as it is practiced in our church unto this day.

This power to remit sins was not given to the apostles only; for then there would be no more forgiveness on earth since their death. To whom this power is given is plainly indicated in our text. The Lord "*breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" He first gives them the Holy Ghost, and then declares that they have power to forgive sins. So the apostles had this power not because they were the Lord's chosen witnesses, nor because they were inspired men, but because they had the Holy Ghost. Those that have the Holy Ghost, all believing souls, the whole church has the power and command to remit sins, and this its office each local church performs by calling and ordaining ministers publicly in its midst to preach the Word of reconciliation and to pronounce absolution.

But because absolution is so frequently a stumbling block to people let me mention a few of the objections which are commonly advanced.

The most common objection is that God alone can forgive sins and it is called bigotry to believe that preachers can forgive sin. Now it is self-evident, by His own authority God alone can forgive sin, but can He not also delegate this power to others? To deny this would be denying His sovereignty. The only question is: Did God give this power to men? The Lord answers: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,*" and unto Peter He said: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Could Peter forgive sins? Was he not himself a sinner? Can one man forgive the sins of another? It is manifest that Peter as a man could not do this; for of himself and by his own authority

no man can forgive sins. The power was not vested in the persons of the apostles, but in the commission of the Lord. The Lord committed unto them the Word of forgiveness and by that Word they forgave sins. When the governor of our commonwealth issues a pardon and sends it by a messenger it is rightly and properly said that the messenger brings liberty to the prisoner, but the pardon itself is not of the messenger, it is of the governor and is vested in the message of pardon. The power to forgive sin was not of Peter, but of the Lord, and the forgiveness was not Peter's forgiveness it was the Lord's forgiveness.

Another erroneous idea is that absolution is not real forgiveness, but only a form of announcing that there is forgiveness. Were this so then the Lord must have said: To whomsoever ye announce remission to them it is announced. To interpret the text in this way results in perverting it to senseless talk. The church in absolution really, actually, effectually forgives sins; for clear and strong are the words of the Lord: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" When the church forgives sins they are forgiven. Not only do these words say it as distinctly as words can say it, it is also evident from the mission of Christ. He was not sent only to make announcement that there is forgiveness, but to forgive sins, as He also really and actually did forgive sin. Now as He was sent, so He sends His disciples. To say that the church can not really forgive sin would be saying that Christ could not really forgive sin. The words of absolution do really and actually contain, convey and give what they say, the forgiveness of sin.

Two other things there are which to some might appear to render absolution invalid and void: the hypocrisy of the preacher who pronounces, and the unbelief of him to whom absolution is pronounced. If a preacher is a hypocrite will that render the absolution which he pronounces invalid, seeing that only those have the power of the keys who have the Holy Ghost? Here we must remember that a preacher does not pronounce absolution by virtue of his personally possessing the grace of God, but by virtue of his call. As the servant of the church he performs the office of the

church, and that is always valid and effectual, let the preacher be pious or impious. A preacher who is a hypocrite is, of course, a castaway; but the validity of absolution is not dependent on the preacher's personal piety or impiety, it is the Word of Christ, and that is always true. Man's hypocrisy does not and can not make it void.

But will not the unbelief of him to whom it is pronounced make the absolution unreal and ineffectual? Because the unbeliever does not possess the forgiveness one might very aptly think that his sins were not really and actually forgiven in absolution. This idea is owing only to a mistake in thinking. From your not possessing a thing it does not follow that I have not really and actually given it to you. I may really and actually have given you a gold piece, and you may still not be in possession of it, because you may have thrown it away, or dropped it, or lost it. If an unbeliever is absolved, he is truly absolved on the part of God; for in our text the Lord does not except hypocrites, but says: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" In absolution the sins of the unbeliever have been remitted unto him, although he does not possess and enjoy the forgiveness. The relation between the unbeliever and absolution is this: he is released, but he is not loose; he is freed, but he is not free. Such a person is like unto a prisoner whose cell is thrown open and who is pronounced a free man, but who nevertheless remains in his cell. That man is freed, and that is a reality; yet he is not free, because he makes no use of his liberty, but his remaining in his cell can not make his liberation untrue, or unreal. Just so with the unbeliever. In absolution he is really and truly released from sin, and the fact that he does not use his liberty, but remains in his sins does not make the remission unreal. Therefore I say, he is freed, but he is not free; he is loosed, but he is not loose; and that he is not loose is not because he had not been loosed, but because he declines to be loose.

Behold, what a glorious thing absolution is. Shall it be retained in the church? Of the many reasons, why absolution can not be dropped in order to please men, but must be retained, let me mention only a few.

## II.

Absolution is taught and commanded in the Scriptures plain as plain can be. There are no plainer words in the Bible than these: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" Equally clear are other passages. If any thing is taught in the Bible with direct, plain and unmistakable words it is absolution. To drop absolution is to drop a part of the Bible.

Moreover, with the doctrine of absolution must stand or fall the right and true doctrine of the Word of the Gospel as a means of grace. The formula of absolution is nothing else than the Gospel comprised in a short summary. To say that the Word of absolution does not bring forgiveness, is the same as saying that the Word of the Gospel does not bring forgiveness. But just here is the trouble with many. They do not believe that the Word is a means of grace which brings grace and forgiveness. Many regard the Word of the Gospel as nothing more than a mere proclamation which does not bring the thing itself, but only makes it known that there is grace and forgiveness, and outside of, or separate from that Word people must then see, how to get forgiveness. That is regarding the Word of Christ an empty word which brings nothing. It is virtually making the Word of the Gospel a human word. So it is with a man's word of promise. If a friend promises you ten dollars that word does not yet convey the money to you. But God's Word contains and brings what it expresses; it effects what it says. When God said: "Let there be light," that word itself produced the light. When Christ called into the sepulchre of Lazarus: "Come forth," we must not think that outside of this word He employed other means to bring Lazarus out. When Christ said to that sick man: "Thy sins be forgiven thee," that man needed not to look around for ways and means to procure forgiveness; for that word brought him forgiveness. Christ's Word is not an empty word, it brings the thing itself. This the Lord distinctly asserts when saying, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." The preaching in His name brings and effects the remission of sins. There-

fore Paul calls the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation" and writes: "He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." It is a word of reconciliation because it brings reconciliation, making men reconciled to God. When a man has once come to this faith that the Word of the Gospel is a divine Word which contains and gives what it expresses, he finds no difficulty in believing that in absolution sin is really and truly forgiven; for this is the very substance of the Gospel that to penitent sinners who believe in Christ their sins shall be forgiven. But so long as men regard the Word of the Gospel like a human word they can see nothing in it and it appears to them like superstition to believe that the Word of absolution brings the forgiveness of sin. But if we would surrender this doctrine, what foundation would be left us to stand on? Nothing but uncertain feelings, or experiences. But here we can say: This is the Lord's Word; it does what it says; therefore it must be truly so and can not be otherwise, my sins are forgiven.

This brings us

### III.

to the practical application of absolution.

From the words of this text it is very clear that absolution is either to be granted or refused, as the case may be. "*Whose soever sins ye remit; whose soever sins ye retain.*" Some are to be absolved; to some sin is to be retained. Can a minister do in this as he pleases? No indeed. The office of the keys is not the minister's, it is Christ's. The minister is only the steward and the steward is bound down to the instructions of his Master. It is with absolution as with the Lord's supper. If the communion table were mine then I could do with it what I pleased and could invite whom I pleased, but because it is the Lord's table I must administer it according to the Lord's instructions and cannot do about it as I please. In absolution a minister is bound down to this rule: To the penitent sin is to be forgiven, to the impenitent it is to be retained. To this rule a minister is pledged and it is his sacred duty to carry it out without any respect of person. God forgives the penitent and does not forgive the impenitent. If therefore a minis-

ter refuses absolution to a penitent, and pronounces absolution to an impenitent sinner, both is abomination before God. As he can not see into the heart a minister is easily deceived by hypocrites, but any minister who will knowingly absolve a manifestly impenitent sinner abuses his office and will be found guilty of justifying the wicked. But to a penitent sinner, no matter what he has been guilty of, absolution must never be denied.

By those to whom absolution is pronounced it is to be received in faith without doubting. Consider the words what they are: "I, a called minister of the Gospel, in the name of Christ, announce to you who repent and believe in Christ, the forgiveness of all your sins." Is it a fact that to the penitent and believing their sins are forgiven? If that is not a fact then we must lay away the Bible as a delusive book; for this is the teaching of the whole New Testament that those who repent of sin and believe in Christ shall have the forgiveness of sin. When the minister says: To you who repent and believe sin is forgiven, that is simply saying what the whole Gospel says, and these words are spoken in a formal and solemn manner for the reassurance and strengthening of the penitent.

This is also a reason, why absolution must be retained, because it affords unspeakable comfort to a troubled heart. It is true, we Christians have the assurance of forgiveness already in our baptism, in the general preaching of the Gospel and in the Lord's supper; but that does by no means make absolution superfluous. As many of us as stand in the faith, as many as are battling against flesh and blood, know how sadly we need ever again to be assured that God is gracious and sin is forgiven. Now here is absolution in which the called minister in the name of God pronounces the forgiveness of sin, and of His stewards, as servants of the church, the Lord declares: "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" As often, therefore, as absolution is pronounced unto us, we should believe and in no way doubt, that our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Amen.

## II. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. John 10, 11-16.

The connection of our Lord Jesus Christ with His church upon earth is a very intimate one. Of His union with the believers He speaks much in His prayer for the church, in which He addresses the Father: "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." The believing soul is one with Christ, as also St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." This union of the believing soul with Christ is something spiritual and, therefore, incomprehensible to him who is yet carnal. Even the believer himself will comprehend it fully only in the life to come. But to make it intelligible to us, as far as it is possible in this life, how closely the Lord is united to His church, the Holy Ghost uses manifold comparisons in the Scriptures. So the Scriptures represent Christ as the Bridegroom and the church His bride. This beautiful comparison is pictured masterly in the Song of Solomon, and by the prophet Hosea the Lord says unto the church: "I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." The church is the Lord's chosen one whom He has be-

trothed unto Himself for time and eternity, and the believing soul has so wholly rendered itself unto Him that it says: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Again, Christ is called the head, the church His body, as Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body." The head gives life to the body and governs it, and without the head the body is dead. Jesus Christ is the life of His people. He lives in them and they in Him, and He is ever with them to guide and protect them, as He addressés His own by the prophet Isaiah saying: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Another example the Lord takes from the grapevine, saying to the disciples: "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The vine is all to the branches. It supports them and replenishes them with sap to grow and to bring fruit. Christ is all in all to the believing soul, nourishing it with heavenly bread, and refreshing it with living water that it rejoices in Him and brings fruit pleasing to the angels and beneficial to men. Of such lovely comparisons we find many more in the Scriptures, and they are written that we should not imagine some partition wall between us and the Lord, some barrier difficult to surmount, but that with all cheerfulness and confidence we should draw nigh unto Him as a bride to her groom; that we should resign ourselves to be guided and governed by Him like a member by its head; that we should hope and expect all from Him like a branch from the vine. Such a lovely comparison is also contained in this text. In accordance with it let us meditate on:

#### THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.

I would speak:

- I. Of the Shepherd;
- II. Of His flock.

#### I.

The occupation of shepherds is one of the oldest in the world. Abel, the second son of Adam, was a shepherd, and some of the

greatest heroes of faith were shepherds, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David. That the patriarchs were nomadic shepherds was not something accidental. They were to wander from place to place, from country to country, in order that the knowledge of the promise given unto them might be spread far and wide, and in order that they might be a figure of the promised spiritual Shepherd. They were keepers of sheep to prefigure Him who is the keeper of our souls. When this promised keeper of our souls had come He very frequently called Himself, or compared Himself with a shepherd, as we find in many passages of the New Testament. He is the one true Shepherd who cares far more for the soul, than the most faithful shepherd can for his flock. He is in deed and in truth what He calls Himself in our text "*the good shepherd,*" to whom we can cheerfully and confidently entrust our souls.

Already by the mouth of the prophets did God call Him a shepherd. Thus He said by Ezekiel: "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." By Isaiah He said: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." David sang of Him: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." This good Shepherd of whom the prophets spake, to whom David trusted so confidently and of whom he sang so rejoicingly is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Father sent into the world when the appointed time was come; for in the chapter before us He says unto the Jews: "Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest?"

He is the shepherd who was promised of old and was sent by the Father. Hence we may not doubt His word when He here says: "*I am the good shepherd.*" An evil shepherd the God of love could not have promised to the fathers; an unfaithful shepherd the God of mercy and truth could not have sent into the world. He that was promised of old and sent by the Father can not lie. He speaks the truth when He says: "*I am the good shepherd.*" The facts demonstrate that His words are not vain boasting. What He says He

has proved by His deeds long ago. Indisputably has He evidenced it that He is not a hireling: "*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*"

Here the Lord points out the difference between a good shepherd and a hireling. By hirelings we must not understand false prophets. False prophets are, indeed, generally also hirelings, yet properly speaking false prophets are only such as preach false doctrine. Hirelings are those who care more for the hire than the flock, although they may perhaps preach the true doctrine. The good shepherd looks to the flock, the hireling to the hire. A good shepherd regards the flock a most precious treasure entrusted to his care, for which he will be held accountable, if any one is lost by his fault. Therefore the true welfare of the flock is his foremost care, and his own personal well being is to him a thing of secondary importance. He is ready to sacrifice worldly gain, personal ease, name and fame, yea, if need be, life itself in providing for the flock. But the hireling regards the flock only as a means to gain his own personal ends. Not the flock's good, his own gain is his solicitude. If he only gets his hire, if he can only obtain what he desires he cares little or nothing for the flock, and because he cares more for himself than for the flock, therefore seeing the wolf coming he does not face him to defend the flock, but flees. This fleeing of the hireling is not only a bodily fleeing, when he, in times of danger, deserts his flock to secure his own safety; it is chiefly a spiritual fleeing when he avoids attacking fashionable errors, or rebuking prevalent vices, because it would render him unpopular and would impair his personal gain. Isaiah thus graphically describes hirelings: "They are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." The good shepherd seeks the honor of the Lord and the

welfare of the flock; the hireling seeks his own honor and his own gain.

From this it is very plain that our Lord Jesus Christ is not a hireling, but in deed and in truth a good shepherd. He did not seek His own honor and ease, or He would have remained on the throne of glory in the bosom of the Father. He longed for the souls of men, therefore He humbled Himself and was born lowly in a stable, a helpless infant. He did not dread the fangs of the wolf, but taught the way of God in truth, fearlessly opposing the wise and the powerful of the people. He did not flee when danger approached, but readily stretched forth His own hands to be bound that the disciples might go free. He spared not His own life, He cheerfully laid it down for the flock. Were He not a good shepherd, the Jews would not have taken Him prisoner, the cursed tree would not have carried Him, the grave would not have received Him. Yea surely, Christ and He alone is the one good shepherd; for besides Him none other ever undertook the warfare against the enemies of our souls, none other laid down his life for us, none other can lead us to the evergreen pastures of eternal salvation. He is the shepherd who purchased and won His flock, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that it might be His own; and He has done what He here promised: "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" He sent forth His messengers to call those afar off from the east and from the west and has made out of Jews and Gentiles one flock of Christians, as He yet does unto this present day.

Not only by delivering His flock from the power of the enemies and gathering it unto Himself does Christ prove that He is the good shepherd, He in particular proves His love and His faithfulness in providing and caring for those which belong to Him. Read this whole chapter and you must surely see, how lovingly and faithfully He treats every single one of His flock. One peculiar evidence of His loving kindness towards His own is yet comprised in our text. He says: "*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep*

*and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father."*

A shepherd marks his sheep to know them : Christ marks His own with the seal of the Holy Ghost and the mark of the cross. He knows His own, not externally only, but also internally ; for He knows them as He is known of the Father. Now the Father so knows the Son that about and in Him there is nothing hidden from the Father's knowledge. So Christ knows His own. He sees their weaknesses, He knows their wants, He is acquainted with their sicknesses, their secret longings and their hidden desires are patent before Him. He need not be told of their ailings, He knows them perfectly ; for "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." The tears which water your pillow in the darkness of the night, the good shepherd counts them all ; the sighs which are pressed from your heart by the anguish of your soul, not one of them escapes His ear ; hidden grief, secret distress which you dare not disclose to any living soul on earth, the good shepherd sees it gnawing at your heart. Shepherds of this world know their sheep only externally, internal injuries and diseases their eye can not reach ; but this shepherd has eyes like flames of fire. He sees the frailties of the soul, the wounds of the heart, the ailings of the spirit.

Now every faithful shepherd when he sees a lamb sick or wounded will not carelessly suffer it to perish, he will seek to cure it as best he may. Christ, the good shepherd, has compassion on His sheep. He knows His own and He makes Himself known unto them as their Savior and helper. He makes them to know His love, His help, His consolation, so that they learn rejoicingly to say of Him : "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." He is, indeed, according to the nature of His kingdom, not a shepherd of the body only, but chiefly of the soul. Therefore He very frequently does and must do things which are bitter to the flesh, because He seeks the health and the salvation of the soul. Nevertheless you who seek in Him the shepherd of your soul, if you will call to remembrance your former days and consider how He guided you, oft,

indeed, loading you with a heavy burden and leading you over rough roads, yet always refreshing your heart with consolation and hope under the cross ; how He preserved you in many temptations and defended you against your spiritual enemies : when pondering all this you will surely be obliged to confess that He made Himself known to you as your Savior and helper, and you will be constrained to say with David : “Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.” The good shepherd makes Himself known to His own, and more they do not need than to know Him ; for he that knows Christ and seeks daily to become better acquainted with Him, experiences more and more that all is vanity what the world offers, but that Christ gives sweet pasture. The more intimately Christ’s own become acquainted with Him, the more they learn wholly to resign themselves unto Him saying in their hearts : “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

## II.

Having so merciful and faithful a shepherd who has delivered us from the pits in which there is no water and leads us to the green pastures of the Gospel, the duty of gratitude demands that we behave ourselves towards Him as our shepherd. Indeed, if we would be members of His flock we must conduct ourselves towards Him in a similar manner as sheep do towards their shepherd. The Lord does not compare His Christians to adders which do not hear, nor to serpents which are full of poison, nor to swine which love the mire. He compares them to sheep because from the disposition and the qualities of that animal we may learn how we ought to be in heart and soul. Now a quality of the sheep is that it quickly learns to know its shepherd’s voice. Though a dozen call it from different directions it will know the voice of its shepherd, and though it catch but a glimpse of him in the distance, yet it knows him. We are to know Jesus as our Savior and to distinguish His voice from the voice of others. “To know the love of Christ passeth knowledge,” says St. Paul. The ancient heathen were wont to say : Learn to know thyself ; but of far greater importance is it, to learn

to know Jesus. If you know Jesus it is sufficient, though you should know nothing else, and if you do not know Jesus it is a vain thing, though you would possess all the wisdom of the ancients.

If you would know Jesus you must hear His voice. Let a sheep be ever so distant so soon as it hears its shepherd's voice, it will lift its head and will incline its ear. If Jesus is to be your shepherd you must incline your ear to hear his voice. Now His voice is His Word. If you do not hear and heed His Word, you are none of His. To a sheep there is no sound so sweet as the voice of its shepherd. If you are of Christ's flock there is nothing so sweet to you as the voice of His Gospel. If you have no love and no longing for His Word, if it is an unpleasant task to you to go to the place where His voice is heard, then you are none of His. The children of the world find their greatest delight in hearing that which is of the world. Christ's flock knows nothing sweeter than His voice. Which is the case with you? Can you say: "The judgments of the Lord are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb." Sheep do not only listen to the voice of their shepherd, they are quick to follow his call. As soon as the shepherd's voice resounds the whole flock starts to run to him. If you would be of Christ's flock you must follow His calling, otherwise if you do listen to His Word, but will neither believe it nor live agreeably to it, you can be none of His; for of His sheep He says: "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If you do not follow His voice you deny Him to be your shepherd, and you can have no hope of eternal life; but if you do hear His voice and follow Him no one shall pluck you out of His hand; for He, your shepherd, will stand for you.

Sheep do not follow the voice of a stranger. We must not follow after every voice which we hear, as fickle hearts do; we must "try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." We must apply diligence to learn to distinguish the voice of Jesus from all other voices, and His voice alone we must follow. The sheep is a useful animal. It literally does what John the Baptist says; "He that hath two coats,

let him impart to him that hath none." Learn to be useful unto others. "To do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The sheep is a cleanly animal; it avoids mire wherever it can. Do likewise. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." The sheep is an humble animal, and at sheepfolds the entrance is low. He that would enter must stoop. "Be not highminded," or you can not enter Christ's fold. He Himself is the door, and if you would enter by Him, you must be minded as He was; you must humble yourself, as He humbled Himself. Sheep are content with scanty pasture. Too luxurient pasture is not wholesome for them, and is apt to cause diseases. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content." Crave not worldly prosperity and ease, and murmur not under the cross, but let the shepherd choose the pasture for you. Sheep, when in terror, commence to bleat. "Pray without ceasing." In distress and anguish forget not to make known your requests to the shepherd. The sheep is a gentle animal. It harms no one, and when it is injured it does not seek to retaliate. "Recompense to no man evil for evil," and if evil is done unto you, do not seek to avenge yourselves, but give place unto wrath; the shepherd will repay in due time. Sheep follow wherever their shepherd leads, be the road smooth or rough. Let yourselves be guided by the hand of the Lord according to His will, and know that He makes all things to work together for your good and at last leads you to the proud rest of the saints above.

Let us rejoice because we have so loving and faithful a shepherd who bought us so dearly and who cares for us so diligently. To Him let us cheerfully entrust our souls, daily striving to become more intimately acquainted with Him and more like unto Him, that on the day of judgment we may be numbered among the sheep at His right hand and none may be missing there. Amen.

### III. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. John 16, 16-23.

The children of the world, who live only for this world, think it their greatest gain to live after their heart's desire, to do what the flesh lusts after. If they can have what they crave in this world, they count themselves happy, and they regard the Christians as acting foolishly in denying themselves and following Christ. If a man of the world can only practice those sins and vices in which he delights; if he can only obtain what he covets, he has his heaven on earth and he cares nothing for another heaven. Given the choice, if they would rather be on earth or in heaven, the worldly minded would not be slow to choose the earth before heaven. This is the chiefest reason, why men refuse to become Christians and to walk with Christ, because they do not want to forego the pleasures and the enjoyments of sin. They love sin and are not willing to for-

sake it. They do not want to crucify the flesh, they want to live in the world as it suits them, indulging in the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Their principle is, to enjoy life while it lasts; to make out of the world what they can. Thus Isaiah describes the mind and doings of the ungodly in the 21st chapter, saying: "Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die," and in the 56th chapter he writes: "They all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Even so the Lord, in the 12th chapter of Luke, introduces a man who had filled his granaries and who said unto his soul: "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." That is all the desire of the world, to gather riches, to have easy days, to eat, drink and make merry. These things are the heaven of the natural man.

But what do people gain by forgetting God and walking in sinful pleasures? "*A little while*" and their joy is turned into sorrow. The wicked fare like the people before the flood; like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. After speaking of the prosperity of the wicked, Asaph, in the 73d Psalm, says of them: "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." The way of the ungodly appears to him a pleasant way; he finds it garnished with flowers; the pleasure of sin tastes to him sweet as honey; but this flowery way ends in sorrow and misery. When he comes to die, terrors lay hold upon him, in death his joy is turned into sorrow, and his sorrow no man taketh from him. With the wicked there is first joy, then sorrow. A little while he rejoices, then his joy is turned into never-ending sorrow.

O, the blindness and perverseness of man is beyond comprehension! How many thousands know full well that the way in which they are walking will lead them to destruction? But they like that way, they love it, it is their heart's delight to walk in it,

and they will not depart from it. For the short pleasure of sin which flits away like a shadow, men will barter their soul's salvation, and although they know it, they nevertheless will do it. "Whose damnation is just."

But with the children of God the reverse is the case. The children of the world first joy, then must sorrow forever; but the children of God first sorrow, then rejoice forever. Of this the Lord speaks plainly in this day's text. Let us therefore briefly consider:

#### THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE IN SORROW.

I would set forth,

- I. That the Christian can not be spared sorrow; and
- II. That his sorrow is followed by joy.

#### I.

During His long conversation with the disciples in the night before His crucifixion, the Lord frequently mentioned His going to the Father. So here: "*A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.*" What is His going to the Father? What does He mean by it? His going to the Father was not only His ascension to heaven, it comprises His suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. All this is comprised in His going to the Father; for through much suffering He had to enter in to His glory. That all this is comprised in His going to the Father is evident from His words, He says, because He was going to the Father, therefore the disciples in a little while would not see Him, and again in a little while, they would see Him. These words the Lord spake when eating the last passover in the paved hall, and then it was indeed only "*a little while,*" only a few hours until He was betrayed in the garden and led away by the band of men who had come to capture Him. Then the disciples fled, and hence, being separated from Him they did not see Him. So the words were fulfilled: "*A little while, and ye shall not see me.*" But it did not last long until the others were also fulfilled: "*And again, a little while, and ye shall see me.*" When He arose the third day the disciples saw Him again.

This is the literal meaning and fulfillment of these words, and after they have been so fulfilled we easily understand them; but the disciples did not understand them. They inquired among themselves: "*What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.*" To the disciples these words must indeed have appeared dark; for prophecies are never so plain before as after their fulfillment, and the disciples were yet in error as to the nature of Christ's work and kingdom; but though they understood them not, they preserved the words unchanged as the Lord had spoken them and inquired after their meaning. If there is a word of the Scripture of which we do not know what it means, we must not reject it or put our own construction upon it, we must preserve it as God has given it, and should pray the Lord to open our eyes that we may behold the wondrous things of His law. And if we so faithfully preserve His Word and pray for His light, He will surely enlighten us more and more, as He did the disciples. Unto them He said: "*Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" It is remarkable that the same words are three times in this text, and yet the Lord adds a double affirmation in explaining them. He evidently attaches great importance to the words and, indeed, we should keep them in mind all the days of our lives, that we would never give place to sorrowfulness and despondency, but would be joyous in the Lord always.

In this explanation the Lord does not stop at the first and literal meaning of the words. He draws from those short words the most beautiful, instructive and consoling doctrines. The "*little while*" He interprets as the time of sorrow and lamentation, and the *seeing him again* as the time of joy and exultation. Without this explanation we might have thought the first words of our text had only been intended for the disciples, who saw Him again when He

was risen from the dead, but here we learn that they concern all His followers, far and near. In the disciples this was, of course, first fulfilled. They had a time of sorrow when the Lord lay dead in the grave. Surely, in that time their hearts must have bled when they considered how the Lord was taken from them; how faithless they had been and how their enemies triumphed and exulted. But their sorrow was of short duration. When the Lord rose again, it was turned into joy. Even so the joy of the enemies was also of short duration. Quickly it was turned into sorrow and consternation. The chief priests and Pharisees rejoiced to see Jesus of Nazareth, whom they hated so intensely and feared so greatly, was raised on the cross. But their joy lasted a little while only. It was cut short by the soldiers announcing His resurrection. Even as it was with the sorrow of the disciples, so it was also with the joy of the Jews.

Now that which befell the disciples is the lot of all true followers of Christ. What the Lord predicted to the disciples, that they must first lament, but after a little while their lamentation would be converted into rejoicing, so He says to all that follow Him: First sorrow, then joy.

Here we are distinctly told what every one must expect who would be a follower of Christ, that he must pass through sorrows before he can taste of the joy of the Lord. Indeed, no one can become a follower of Christ, no one can become a Christian, without first passing through sorrow, the sorrow over sin. Any one who has never yet experienced the sorrow of repentance, only deceives himself, if he imagines himself to be Christ's. No man can really and truly joy over the forgiveness of sin who has never yet sorrowed over sin. This can not be otherwise, because conversion is the turning away of the heart from sin unto Christ. Now the natural heart loves sin, and it will not turn from sin, neither can it abhor sin, if it is not first crushed with the hammer of the law. The heart must first feel the terrors of the law, it must tremble at the wrath of God, it must labor and sigh under the burden of its guilt, before it will receive Christ as its Savior. To become a Christian, man must experience what Jeremiah says: "Know and

see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Before a man can rejoicingly say with David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases," before a man can heartily speak thus, he must first experience something of that sorrow of which David in the 38th Psalm says: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." If you have never yet experienced the burden of sin, if you can yet make light of sin, or regard it a light thing, then surely, you are yet in your sins; for the Lord said: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." That man alone will pronounce Christ welcome as his physician who knows something of the pangs of conscience caused by the disease of sin.

But here at this place the Lord is not speaking of the sorrow of repentance; for the disciples were already His followers, but of sorrows which the Christian must bear in his pilgrimage to his everlasting home. No one can pilgrim to heaven without bearing the toils and hardships of the pilgrimage. So long as the Christian is yet in this world, he must experience sorrow for sorrow; yea, he cannot be altogether without sorrow, even because he is in the world which is Satan's kingdom. Of the multitude of sorrows which befall the Christians let me mention only one which the Lord indicates in our text when He says: "*Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice.*" He evidently places the sorrow of the Christians and the joy of the world in a certain connection. He does, therefore, not only mean to say, after He would have gone to the Father the world would go on rejoicing as before; He refers to a particular joy of the world, a joy which causes or increases the sorrows of the Christian, as though He would say: Ye shall be sorrowful and the world will rejoice over your sorrows. The world rejoices over the misfortunes and afflictions of the Christians. So it was in the time of Christ. How did the high priests, scribes and Pharisees rejoice, seeing the Lord nailed to the cross! With mocking words the Jews expressed their satanic joy at His death, wagging their heads and saying: "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple and build-

est it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross." How did the heathen rejoice when murdering the Christians, and with what exultation did they erect monuments bearing boastful inscriptions in memory of the imaginary extirpation of that hated sect! With what malicious joy did Papists gather faggots to burn evangelical Christians! In this respect the world has not changed its sentiments and will never change them. The ungodly hate the Christian secretly in their hearts and when calamities befall him they rejoice and say: 'Behold, he pretended to be so pious; why does not his God help him and make him prosperous in the world?' And if a Christian is overtaken by ever so small a fault, the world will say maliciously: There, you can see his hypocrisy. When the Christian must weep, the world rejoices; and if the Christian does not only behold the prosperity of the wicked, but must also see their malignity towards him, he is apt to take offence and to become exceeding sorrowful; for Satan will dart thoughts like these into his mind: Can it be true that God is gracious unto thee, seeing the wicked are prosperous and thou afflicted?

This is one of the many sorrows which the Christian must bear; for everything causes him sorrow which tends to hide the Lord from him that he can not see Him. But there is hope in the Christian's sorrow.

## II.

The Christian's sorrow is not something eternal. It does not last forever. The Christian's sorrow is not like the sorrow which the wicked must suffer. To the sorrow of the wicked there will be no end, but to the sorrow of the Christian there is an end. "*A little while,*" says the Lord, "*and ye shall see me.*" The Christian's sorrow lasts "*a little while.*" Glorious words! They breathe the hope of coming deliverance and joy. Already on this earth the Christian is not left altogether without joy; he is often granted to taste the joy of the Lord. He rejoices in as far as he sees the Lord with the eye of faith. He rejoices over the grace of God, the forgiveness of his sins, the promises of the Gospel. And this is not a hollow boisterous joy like the merry making of the world, it is an inex-

pressible, secret, still, sweet joy of the soul, like unto the still, small voice which the prophet Elijah heard and at which he covered his face. If the Christian, so long as he sojourns on this earth, is plagued every morning, he also enjoys moments of light and gladness. Again and again is fulfilled in him what the Lord here says : “ *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*” Ever and anon does the Lord turn the sorrow of His children into joy. He has said : “ Call upon me in the day of trouble,” and He has promised : “ I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” He keeps His word, delivering His children and causing them to glorify Him. God makes His children to confess with David : “ He hath delivered me out of all trouble.” God permits troubles to beset His children, but He also refreshes them. He grants them times of respite when the heart is still and the soul joyous, and you will agree with me that such moments of the secret joy of the Spirit are far more precious than the highest pleasures which this world can offer. Yes, already in this life there are to the Christian hours of light, when sorrow is forgotten and the soul is lifted up that it triumphantly says :

O Friend of souls, how blest am I  
 Whene'er Thy love my spirit calms !  
 From sorrow's dungeon forth I fly,  
 And hide me in Thy shelt'ring arms.  
 The night of weeping flies away  
 Before the heart-reviving ray  
 Of love, that beams from out thy breast ;  
 Here is my heaven on earth begun ;  
 Who is not joyful, that has won  
 In Thee, O Lord, his joy and rest ?

But the Lord is here not speaking only of days of deliverance and hours of joy, He fully means what His words express : “ *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*” The time is, when all sorrows of the Christians are turned into joy, joy everlasting, and that is the time of which Simeon said : “ Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ;” the time of which the 116th Psalm declares : “ Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” In death the gate to the Eden of perfect joy is opened to the Christian. When the

soul departs from this cumbrous clay, that is the precious time when all sorrow is turned into joy. Of that joy the Lord here tells us three things which the Christian in part enjoys already in this life. He says: "*Ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.*" The joy of this world is never unalloyed, there is always something lurking in the background which spoils it, and makes it but a half-hearted joy, as it is written: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The wicked have no peace of heart and conscience, and how could they have true and genuine joy?

In heaven the heart rejoices with full, free, unalloyed joy: There is nothing to trouble, nothing to fear, nothing to mar the joy; "for the former things are passed away." The Lord continues: "*And your joy no man taketh from you.*" On this earth we must always apprehend that the time of joy might quickly end, and clouds of trouble arise, but in heaven we shall joy without fear that the joy might pass away. There will be no one to take it away. It is not a temporary, but an abiding joy. Finally, the Lord says: "*And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.*" In this life our knowledge is piecemeal. We know only in part, and often it smarts us that we see so dimly, and what joy will it be when we shall see into the depths of God's counsel of grace, when we shall behold the connection of the manifold events of our life and shall understand how all things worked together for our good.

Let not Satan blind you to seek your joy in this world, for the Lord has said: "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." And king Solomon says: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting. Sorrow is better than laughter. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools." These words Solomon wrote in his old age, after he had tested the joys of this world and had found them vanity.

Ye children of God! be not offended, if you must experience many sorrows. The time is coming when you shall see the Lord

and your heart shall rejoice, and the sorrows and trials of this life shall be forgotten. Then shall all your sorrows appear unto you like a dream that flitted by and disappeared. O, the sweetness, the ecstasy, the bliss of entering the mansions above with the thought: "*A little while*" of sorrow behind, and now an eternity of joy before, joy which no man shall disturb. Then we shall no more ask the Lord: Why was it necessary for me to endure this and to suffer that, then we shall know all, and taking the harps of praise we shall give honor to the Lamb which brought us out of sorrow through tribulation to the inheritance of the saints in light. O, ye who are called to that joy, lift up your heads, if by afflictions you are made like unto your Lord for "*a little while.*" Know that, if ye be like unto Him in sorrow, you shall also be like unto Him in glory. Glory in tribulation, rejoice in hope. Amen.

#### IV. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: But now I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. John 16, 5-15.

Jesus Christ is the One of whom all Scripture treats. He is the sum and summary, the sun and centre of the whole Bible. The Word which the Spirit of God has given speaks to us of the Savior whom God has sent, and this is the object for which the Word is given, to lead men to Jesus Christ. All that we read in the Bible from beginning to end, either directly or indirectly, refers to Jesus Christ, and he, therefore, alone reads the Bible right who so reads it as to find Christ in it. That Christ is the sun and centre of the Scriptures of the Old Testament is evident from His words when He says: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." Immediately after the fall of man God gave the promise of the woman's Seed, the Savior, who would restore man again, and this was the religion of the fathers before the flood that they looked for salvation in this promised Seed of woman. Of this same One God spake to Abra-

ham promising out of his seed He should come and in Him all families of the earth should be blessed, and this was the religion of the patriarchs that they looked for salvation in this promised Seed of Abraham. Of this same One God spake by Moses and prefigured Him to Israel in the paschal lamb, in offerings, sacrifices and manifold types and figures, and this was the religion of every true Israelite that he looked for salvation, not in the works of the law, nor in the sacrificing of beasts and birds, but in Him of whom Moses and the prophets spake, to whom all offerings pointed as to the one true and acceptable offering for sin. That Christ is the sun and centre of the New Testament, is needless to show. It tells us how the long promised Savior came from the house of Judah, and that He not only accomplished the work of redemption assigned to Him from eternity, but also gave the Spirit whose office it is to glorify Christ in the hearts of men until the end of days.

So the whole Scriptures from end to end testify of Christ, and in all ages ever since man was driven from paradise this alone was and is the true religion which leads men to Christ; this alone the right and saving faith which looks to this One Savior of mankind for life and salvation. Those alone have the light of life who look to Christ, the Light of the world, whilst all looking to anything else have walked and do walk in darkness and do not see the light of life. The Bible, indeed, also contains the law which in itself knows and says nothing of Jesus Christ, but only tells us what is right and what wrong before God; yet this does by no means overthrow the fact that Christ is the sun and centre of the whole Scriptures; for the Scriptures themselves inform us as to what the office of the law is, namely, not that man should obtain salvation by it, but, says Paul: "By the law is the knowledge of sin." The office of the law is to reveal sin, to humble the proud heart and so to prepare it to receive salvation as the free gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus, as Paul distinctly declares: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Even the law with its commandments, threats and curses subserves this one great end that men be led unto Jesus, and he only studies the law right who learns from it to know his sins and the curse resting upon him-

and who is thereby persuaded ever anew to seek shelter under the cross of Christ by Him to escape the wrath to come. Christ is in very deed the Alpha and Omega of the Scriptures; for as in the Greek alphabet Alpha is the first and Omega the last letter, so all Scripture from the first to the last treats of Christ. He is the one and all of the Scriptures.

From this it follows, that only then we are truly Christians when Christ is become one and all unto us; when He is become the star of our hope, the sun of salvation shining in our hearts. Permit me, agreeably to the latter part of this text, yet to speak of :

CHRIST OUR ONE AND ALL.

- I. He is made all unto us of God the Father;
- II. He is all the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

I.

In the last part of this text the doctrine of the mystery of the holy Trinity is contained for the Lord says: "*All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*" The Son has all things that the Father has; so He has the Divine nature and is equally God with the Father. The Holy Ghost partakes of what the Son has; so the Holy Ghost also has the Divine nature and is equally God with the Father and the Son. Yet it was not the object of the Lord at this place to teach us the mystery of the Trinity, or to speak of the relation which the three persons in the Godhead sustain toward one another; but He is speaking of the position which He occupies as the mediator between God and man. In His whole discourse delivered in the night in which He was betrayed the Lord sought to comfort the disciples concerning His departing and going to the Father, by showing them that He would not so separate from them as to leave them orphans and to be with them no more in any manner; but by going to the Father He would truly become all things unto them; for thereby He would finish the work which the Father had given Him to do, and the Holy Ghost would come and teach them that He, Jesus Christ, is truly their all, their redemption,

their righteousness, their life and their salvation. In other words: The Father has given all things pertaining to the restoration of man into the hands of Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Ghost is sent to teach men that this Jesus Christ is all unto them, their one and only Savior, but a Savior indeed, who saves from all evil.

Christ is in deed and in truth all unto us in all things pertaining to our salvation. He and He alone is our prophet who has revealed unto us the will of the Father. The prophets and apostles did also reveal the will of God, but without Christ no prophet would have prophesied and no apostle would have preached; for John the Baptist declares: "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;" and John the apostle, writes: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Without Christ we would indeed know by the testimony of our conscience and we could learn from the works of creation that there is a God, but of the Father's gracious will toward us we could know nothing. Only in Christ is His grace made known unto us. Yea, without Christ there would be no grace for sinners; for Christ alone fulfilled the law in our stead and won for us justification from sin and righteousness before God; He alone is the propitiation for our sins, and besides Him there is no offering for sin. Christ alone pleads our cause with the Father. Neither the virgin Mary nor our sainted forefathers can bring our petitions before God. He is our one and only advocate.

That Christ is made all unto us of God the Father is not only unquestionable from our text, the Scriptures bear witness unto it in many passages and in manifold ways. Thus Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He is our wisdom; for in Him alone we have the true and saving knowledge of God. He is our righteousness; for alone in His merits are we found righteous. He is our sanctification, because alone through Him we can be made holy. He is our redemption; for it is He who will finally deliver us from all evil and receive us into His everlasting kingdom, as He says John 6th: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

That He is made all unto us the Lord most emphatically affirms Luke 10th, saying: "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." At His ascension He declared: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and after His ascension He said unto John: "I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I live forevermore; and have the keys of hell and of death." That Christ having the keys of hell and of death, is made ruler over all things Paul distinctly attests Philippians 2d, writing: "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Christ is made of the Father ruler over all things, and why the Father exalted Him so highly Christ tells us in the 5th chapter of John saying: "The Father hath given the Son authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man." Because the Son became man and shed His blood for the children of men, therefore the Father ordained Him judge over the quick and the dead.

Here is comprised more than human tongue can describe, when the Lord says: "*All things that the Father hath are mine.*" These words make Jesus Christ equal with God the Father in all things. The Father has nothing more than the Son, and the Son nothing less than the Father; for they are one. But *unto us* this Jesus Christ is made all of God the Father. Only in Christ will the Father treat with men; only in Christ will He be approached by men. The Father will receive no worship except through Jesus Christ; He will hear no prayers unless offered in the name and faith of Christ. Christ is set forth unto us as the door-way to the Father, and there is no way to the Father save through this door-way, Christ, as He says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." All service of God not rendered in and through Jesus Christ is idolatry before the Father. If we would worship God acceptably we must worship Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To call

upon the Architect of the universe, or the God of nature, without Jesus Christ is all in vain.

But if Christ is our all, because in Him *alone* we have access to the Father, He is again our all, because in Him we *surely* have access to the Father. Thus Paul writes Romans 5th: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand," and to the Ephesians he writes: "Through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father." Christ is the throne of grace, He is the door to the Father, and He is an open door. At this door no man is refused entrance: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" and He urges all to come saying: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." At this door no one was ever refused entrance, and whoso enters by it shall not fail of coming to the Father; for it was the Father who made Christ the door-way unto Himself, and how then could He reject even one of the least of those coming to Him by this door-way? Surely, the Father can not deny the word of the Son who has said: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." Neither need we dread to approach, because the Father is perfect and we sinful and faulty. In whatsoever we come short Christ supplies it; for He is our all.

I do not invite you to approach that God of holiness who caused His thunders to be heard from Mount Horeb, and who is a consuming fire against every thing unholy; before that God neither you nor I could stand without a mediator. But here is Jesus Christ. He was not sent into the world to erect a throne of justice to judge and to condemn sinners, He is set forth a throne of grace, to relieve them of sin, to dress them in His righteousness and so to present them to the Father holy and without blemish. To this Jesus Christ I ask you to come. Surely, Him you need not dread. Did He not go about in Judea and Galilee, healing all the sick that came to Him; yea, seeking them in order to help them? Did He not so kindly receive sinners that the Pharisees mockingly said: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them"? To Him who ate

and drank with sinners, you can cheerfully come to lay your burdens at His feet and to trouble your mind about nothing; for He is made all unto you of God and the Father.

## II.

Because Christ is made all unto us and we are to embrace Him as our one and all, how shall we come to Him? How shall we come to a living knowledge that He is indeed our all? Or can we at all come to Him? Does not Paul declare: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness"? What can we do to come to the knowledge that Christ is not foolishness, but "the power of God, and the wisdom of God"? We, indeed, can do nothing to come to a living knowledge of Christ; for the carnal mind is enmity against God and of himself the natural man can only despise Christ and turn elsewhere for comfort. If therefore we can not come unto Him what can it benefit us that He is made all unto us of God the Father? O, if He is made *all* unto us He is, certainly, also made this unto us that we come to Him. If Christ had otherwise won all salvation for us, but not this grace that we might come to Him, then His work would help us nothing; for of ourselves we could and would only run farther away from Him. But He has prepared all for us, hence also this grace that we come to Him.

What provision Christ has made to draw and persuade men to come to Him He tells us very plainly saying: "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.*" Christ has won for us the gift of the Holy Ghost and it is He that sends Him from the Father, as Peter testified in his Pentecost sermon: "This Jesus, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Without Christ's suffering, death and resurrection the Holy Ghost could not have come to sinners, but since He has gone to the Father He sends the Spirit to open the hearts of men and to teach them to understand things which otherwise would remain foolishness unto them and so

to guide men into all truth. The sum and summary, therefore, of the Holy Ghost's work is that He guides men to know Christ as their one and all. That this is the work of the Holy Ghost St. Paul affirms, writing to the Corinthians: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Without the Holy Ghost we could nevermore come to and know Christ as our Savior, but the Holy Ghost is given to guide us to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. He is the Spirit of truth who guides only into the truth and who can make no concession to untruth and falsehood. Any spirit which teaches men to say, it would make no difference though the doctrine were not exactly in agreement with God's revealed truth, cannot be the Holy Ghost; for He guides into the truth and nothing but the truth. Where He dwells He creates the love of the truth and makes the heart bold to confess the truth.

How the Holy Ghost guides into all truth the Lord also tells us: "*He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*" The Holy Ghost is not sent to make an addition to the work of Christ, nor to perform a work of His own apart and separate from the work of Christ. It is remarkable that the Lord adds the words: "*He shall not speak of himself.*" The Lord well foresaw that in the last times men would come who would separate the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. We must not imagine that the Holy Ghost was sent to do something which Christ had left undone. O no! The Spirit is not sent to speak of Himself, but to speak what He hears. What does He hear? This the Lord tells us at another place saying: "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." So the Holy Ghost hears the Word of Christ and this Word He speaks to the hearts of men, and by this Word He dispels the darkness and enlightens the understanding that man begins to see that the Gospel of Christ is not foolishness, but indeed "the power of God, and the wisdom of God," as the Lord here continues: "*He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.*" This is the mission of the Holy Ghost, not to perform another work of salvation different or distinct from that of Christ, but to glorify

Christ, to teach men to see and believe that Jesus Christ is in deed and in truth their one and all.

Behold here an infallible criterion whereby to do what St. John commands in his 1st Epistle, saying: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God." Every spirit which does not speak of Christ and glorify Him as our one and all, is not of God; for of the Spirit of God the Lord says: "*He shall glorify me.*" The Holy Ghost glorifies Christ, teaching the heart what Christ is made unto us of God the Father, and enlightening it with hope.

Jesus Christ is our one and all. God the Father has given all things into His hands, and God the Holy Ghost testifies and teaches that He is all unto us. To Him we must look for all things and whatever we desire we should not doubt in Him it is yea and amen. Permit me, therefore, to conclude with the words of St. Ambrose who most beautifully says: "We have all in Christ, and Christ is all in us. Wouldst thou be healed of wounds, He is the physiciau; dost thou suffer from heat, He is the fountain; art thou laden with iniquity, He is righteousness; dost thou need help, He is the power; dost thou fear death, He is the life; wouldst thou escape darkness, He is the light; dost thou desire heaven, He is the way; dost thou seek nourishment, He is the bread."

Here rests my heart, and holds it fast:

The Lord I love is First and Last,

The End and the Beginning.

I welcome death; for I shall rise

Through Him to His own Paradise

Above all tears and sinning. Amen.

## V. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. John 16, 23-30.

In the introductory to a sermon on this text Luther says: "This day's Gospel is a persuasive exhortation unto prayer; for next to the Gospel-ministration this is the highest service of God which Christians perform, that they pray." Next to the preaching and hearing of God's Word, Luther pronounces prayer the most important thing in Christian worship, and it is indeed so. The Word of God is the seed by which man is regenerated, as Peter says: "Ye are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God," and Paul testifies: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," and in and through prayer the regenerated soul communes with God. Prayer is the fruit of faith. If faith dwells in the heart it urges man unto prayer, and if a man does not pray he is undoubtedly not in the grace of God. Any one

holding no communion with God in prayer can not possibly be a temple of the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost is "the Spirit of grace and of supplications." So important and necessary is prayer that where it is lacking the communion with God is also lacking. Praying with the lips is of course by no means a convincing proof that faith dwells in the heart. The Pharisees of old prayed much, yet they were the enemies of Christ; self-righteous monks and nuns in cloisters strictly observe their vigils praying often night and day, yet they despise the merits of Christ, preferring their own righteousness before the righteousness of God; but though many who pray with the lips are not the children of God, yet it remains true, one who does not pray at all can not be a Christian, because every Christian will pray, and where there is no prayer there is no faith.

Of course prayer can not be called a means of grace in the proper sense of the word. Faith and conversion are not the fruit of prayer, but on the contrary, prayer must proceed from faith. Of the doubter it is written: "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." The prayer of the wicked is so far from being a means of grace that it is rather an abomination to God. Faith must first be kindled in the heart before man can truly pray; but when faith is kindled in the heart man must and will pray, and whenever the Christian ceases to send his petitions up to God seeking from Him the preservation and strengthening of faith his faith will quickly decrease and will soon die. Experience teaches it and every believing Christian knows that he must continue in prayer if he would remain in the grace of God.

Now as in other exercises of godliness, so also in prayer the Christian meets with obstacles which must be overcome. There is Satan, a bitter enemy of prayer, constantly seeking to hinder it. There is the old Adam, our own perverted heart, continually striving against diligent and fervent prayer and making us indolent and cold in praying. Therefore it is so essentially necessary for us, often to remind ourselves of the high dignity, excellency, and necessity of prayer, so that lukewarmness may not take possession of our hearts. Unto this end let me to-day in accordance with our text speak to you on the subject

## OF PRAYER,

Presenting :

- I. What prayer is ;
- II. Why and how we should pray ; and
- III. The certainty of being heard.

## I.

When we inquire, what prayer is, it is self-evident that we are speaking only of true and genuine prayer, directed to the true and living God ; for if prayer is directed to idols, as with the heathen, or to a false god, as with the Mohammedans and the present Jews, or to the great spirit, or a supreme being as with the Indians and in secret societies, that is not prayer at all, but a dreadful denial of the true God and a profanation of His holy name. The living God says : "I am the Lord ; that is my name : and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." If man turns in prayer to another than the one true God, that is in reality not prayer, but robbing the true God of His glory, and it is an abomination to Him. We do self-evidently not regard all those connected with secret societies un-Christians ; we know that there are upright children of God amongst them "which have not known the depths of Satan ;" nevertheless prayers offered in the meetings of secret orders remain idolatrous, because they are not, or, at least, according to the rules of those orders, are not to be offered to the Triune God, in the name of Jesus Christ. But all prayer not offered to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ is not accepted of the Father ; for Christ is the only mediator between God and man and no one cometh unto the Father, but by Him. We Christians should always and at all places be jealous for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, and should never and in no way take part in any worship where His name is not allowed, or where the use of it may be forbidden at any time.

True prayer may properly be defined as the conversation of a believing soul with God. Prayer is the familiar intercourse of the Christian with God, when he opens his heart unto God, disclosing

to Him his desires, needs and distresses and commending them to God's fatherly kindness, or when he gives thanks and praise to God for blessings received. This familiar intercourse with God may be exercised in a twofold manner, either so that the tongue gives expression to the thoughts and emotions of the heart in words, which is commonly called praying, or so that the Christian without making any words lifts up his heart to God with inward sighings and longings of the soul. Both kinds of prayer, that expressed in words, as well as the internal sighing of the heart, are acceptable to God; both kinds are commanded and sanctioned by God. Of a praying heart it is said in the 10th Psalm: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear," and to pray with words Christ Himself taught His disciples. David combines both kinds of prayer in the 19th Psalm saying: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength: and my redeemer." Whether the heart only prays or the tongue expresses the desires of the heart in words, prayer is always a familiar conversation with God in which the supplicator confidently expects the answer Yes to his petitions. Hence let no one think a prayer with words need not be a prayer of the heart. If only the lips pray, whilst heart and soul are otherwise occupied, that is not praying, but idle babbling, hateful to God.

We must therefore distinguish between going through with the formality of prayer, and between praying in spirit and in truth. Heathen and hypocrites may go through with the formality of praying, but they can not pray in spirit and in truth. If a man who is a professing Christian is given to intemperance he may say his prayers, but there is no confidence, life and spirit in his prayer, because there is this consciousness in him that the sin which he fosters is a barrier between him and God. The church member whose heart is given to the love of money may be loud and long in his prayers, but spirit and truth will not be in them, because his affections are set on earthly things and he is not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Hence St. Paul writes to Timothy: "I will that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands,

without wrath and doubting." No one who is yet living in the love of sin and the world, no unconverted man can lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. An unconverted man may be vociferous in his praying, but he can not call upon God as a dear child on its dear father. That man alone can cry: "Abba, Father," from heart and soul in whom the Holy Ghost has kindled this trust and confidence that God is truly his Father through Jesus Christ. Praying without this confidence is nothing but babbling which God has earnestly threatened to punish, saying by the prophet Isaiah: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people." Tongue and heart must correspond, otherwise it is mere prattle and not prayer. Why and how to pray let us learn from the Lord's words in our text.

## II.

In the first place, we learn here that the command and promise of God are to be the foundation of our prayers. The Lord says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,*" and again He says: "*Ask, and ye shall receive.*" Scripture is full of such commands and promises of God that we are commanded to pray and that He will hear us. We are not to look upon prayer as something self-chosen which we might do or omit as we pleased. We are to pray, not because we are so disposed, or because it suits us to do so, but because God has bidden us, by His command. Neither is the hope of meriting any thing to incite us to prayer. Very often people think they deserve God's favor for the very reason, because they pray, but asking is not earning. When we pray we should always remember that it is doing nothing more than God requires of us. The Word and command of God is to be the foundation of our prayer. That gives assurance and confidence to the heart, if we say unto God: Not after my own thoughts, but for the sake of Thy command, because Thou hast bidden me, do I present my requests before Thee. So David

prays in the 27th Psalm, saying: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face: my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Resting on God's command our prayers stand on a good foundation.

Together with the command of God we must also diligently consider His promise that He has promised to hear prayer. The Lord does not only say: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,*" He also adds the double affirmation: "*Verily, verily.*" Our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the truth. His Word is the Word of unalterable truth and it needs no confirmation, but to His truthful Word He adds a double affirmation to take away from us all doubt of His promise. Christ here speaks of the hearing of prayer in the same manner as God in the Old Testament repeatedly spake of the coming of the Messiah, whereof we read Hebrews 6th: "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation." In like manner Christ here not only promises the hearing of prayer, but also confirms His promise by an oath that by these two immutable things which cannot be broken, His promise and His oath, we might have the strong consolation that our prayers penetrate through the clouds into the ears of the Lord of hosts. We are to pray as building our heart's trust on the Word and Oath of the Lord and not doubting that our prayers are heard.

If prayer is to be pleasing and acceptable to God, it must proceed from faith. God can surely not graciously receive prayer which is offered to Him with the heart full of doubt; for doubting the truth of God's promise must provoke Him to anger, because doubt would make Him a liar. As oft as you pray, see that you doubt not the promise and pledged Word of the Lord, but let your heart ascribe to Him the honor that He is a God of faithfulness and truth. And why should we ever give room to doubt in our prayers? Can God be unfaithful? He has said and He has sworn that He hears prayer and, surely, we should always be ready cheerfully to say with St. John: "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know

that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." That is a heart rightly prepared and fitted for prayer which trusts that its petition is already heard.

Whence shall we obtain such bold confidence in prayer? How are we miserable sinners to know that our feeble sighing and stammering is agreeable to the holy and righteous God? Does not the Scripture say that God heareth not sinners? Certainly it does, and because God without mediation will not and can not hear sinners, for this reason we must pray in the name of Jesus, as He here says, "*In my name ;*" and this name is what makes us so certain that God will hear us. In himself no one is worthy to appear before God in prayer, much less is any worthy that God should hear him, but even the best and most pious must confess with Daniel: "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces." The prophet Daniel was surely a just and pious man, but he, too, was of himself not worthy to stand before God; for he says: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies." Of himself none is worthy to appear before God's seat of holiness and, therefore, the feeling of unworthiness which we so frequently experience, should not deter us from prayer; for our worthiness must come from another source than our own selves.

Who is it that makes us worthy? It is He that says in our text: "*I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*" He came into the world to make us His brothers and sisters, children of God, joint heirs with Himself, and when He had finished this work He ascended again to His Father and to our Father. Who could doubt that God, the Father, accounts His Son who bare our sins, worthy to appear before Him since the Father has exalted Him to His own right hand? Now if we come to the Father with our petitions in the name of Christ must we then not be worthy that He incline His ear to us to hear our prayers? This worthiness is, of course, not of us, it is of Christ, but it is for us, it belongs to us, and that it is acceptable in the sight of God we know from Christ's going to the Father.

What great delight the Father takes in our coming to Him in the name of His Son we most clearly see from words which the Lord here addressed to the disciples saying: "*I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*" Was Christ not minded to make intercession for us? He is truly our advocate who brings our prayers before the Father, pleading for us, but because we love Christ and believe that He is our Lord and Savior who came from the bosom of the Father, therefore the Father counts us His own beloved children and is heartily ready to hear our prayers even before the intercession of His Son. This, therefore, is praying in the name of Christ, if we acknowledge that we ourselves are unworthy to stand before God, but that the righteousness of Christ is our robe of honor before the Father, not doubting that for the sake of Christ's blood and righteousness our petitions are heard and accepted in heaven.

### III.

That no prayer of a believer perishes unheard, but that God hears each and every prayer, is plainly declared in our text; for here Christ says: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you,*" and "*Ask, and ye shall receive.*" In several other passages He speaks still more distinctly and positively. Matthew 18th He says: "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven;" and Mark 11th: "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Those are clear and strong words and direct promises. But how shall we bring these unmistakable promises of the Lord into agreement with experience? Is it not a very frequent occurrence that something is asked in prayer and is yet not received? This is indeed something very frequent, and there are people who are quick to question the Lord's promises, yea, to reject the whole Bible, if God does not immediately answer their prayers in the manner in which they desire it. But what shall we say here? Christ so distinctly declares: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask,*" and yet

many ask and receive nothing? First of all we must mark well that Christ does here not speak absolutely, or in an unlimited manner, but conditionally; for He clearly means to say: Ask in faith, as in Mark He adds the words: "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Many hundreds pray without faith, or in doubt. To them God has promised nothing and gives nothing. Whosoever is ready to question the truth of the Bible, because God will not instantly do what he has prayed for, thereby only reveals the unbelief of his heart.

Moreover, the Lord here adds the limitation: "*In my name.*" Whatever is not asked with reliance on the merits of Christ God has also not promised to give. But how many pray relying not on the merits of Christ, but trusting in their own worthiness, piety and virtues? Praying in the name of Christ we can also ask nothing against the honor of Christ. If a miser prompted by avarice prays for worldly prosperity that is an evil prayer which God can not graciously hear. We must also well consider what Solomon says: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." God will not hear the prayer of those who are not minded to depart from wickedness. But how many live in sin and yet demand that God should hear their prayers. God will not hear the prayers of unbelievers and hypocrites, but that does surely not overthrow the Lord's promises; for He means: Ask in the faith of Christ as the children of God, and not as un-Christians.

But does it not also occur that Christians ask something in sincere faith and yet do not receive it? It must be conceded that this, too, is nothing uncommon. Paul thrice besought the Lord to relieve him of the thorn in the flesh and the Lord did not do it; but it must not be forgotten that God did indeed hear Paul's supplications and did help him, although in a different manner than Paul thought. God does hear every prayer of a believing Christian and He does help, but not always according to our will; for our ways are very often not His ways. Hence, in all our prayers we should conform our will to the will of God, that in all things His will may be done. What is God's will? His will is our salvation. Consequently, all things pertaining to our salvation we should ask of

Him unconditionally as they are promised. In other things which are not absolutely necessary for our salvation God's will is to guide us according to His wise counsel, and these things we should always commit to His wisdom. For instance, that I may die in faith, I can, so to say, directly demand of God, because in this point I can hold Him by His own declaration that He wants all men saved: but *when* He is to take my soul to paradise, whether to-day or twenty years hence, for that I have no special word of God, and I should commend it to His wisdom. So we should set aside self-will in all our prayers and should submit ourselves to the will of God that our will be not against, but uniform with His will. And in such prayer we should daily exercise ourselves with great diligence, not only because faith must decrease when the fervency of prayer abates, but also because the Lord here says: "*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*" He that prays much has much joy of heart. He that prays often for the forgiveness of sins becomes sure and surer thereof, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the grace of God continually grows in grace, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the gift of the Holy Ghost will receive Him the more abundantly, and that makes the heart joyous. He that prays often for the crown of life becomes the more rooted and grounded in hope, and that makes the heart joyous. "*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* Amen.

## ASCENSION DAY.

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TEXT: Afterward he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16, 14-20.

Ascension is the last of the festivals instituted by the ancient church in commemoration of Christ's works. Good Friday pictures Him standing in the battle against our enemies; Easter speaks to us of His victory over death, and Ascension is the day of His coronation, when God the Father crowned Him with honor and majesty for the war and victory which He waged and won against and over our enemies; for because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name.

After His resurrection the Lord yet walked on earth forty days, during which time He frequently appeared to the disciples, spake and even ate with them. But when the time had come that He was to return to His Father and to our Father, to His God and to our God, He gathered His disciples together and led them to that mount where His last sufferings had commenced and where He had

sustained the severest struggle with the powers of darkness, to the mount of Olives. After giving His last instructions to the disciples He lifted up His hands to bless them and thus with uplifted hands blessing His own He was lifted up from the earth higher and higher until a cloud hid Him from the view of the disciples. There they stood gazing at the cloud in which He had disappeared; and well may their hearts have been filled with sadness, because their eyes were to behold their beloved Lord and Master no more upon this earth.

Is, then, the ascension of the Lord a sorrowful, or is it a joyful event? Should we be sad or glad when we remember His ascension? In the Lord's ascension there is surely no occasion for sadness. Where is a faithful subject who would not rejoice over the coronation of his beloved sovereign? David already sang with exultation of the Lord's ascension; for in the 47th Psalm he says: "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises." So David exulted, foreseeing in the spirit the Lord's ascension. How much more should we exult over His ascension, we, to whom is revealed the full import of that glorious event? How could we other than rejoice, if we but remember the words which He spake while upon earth saying: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." He has gone to prepare mansions for us, and this is not a reason to be sorrowful. Permit me therefore to speak of:

#### THE COMFORT WHICH THE LORD'S ASCENSION AFFORDS.

- I. It serves to strengthen our faith in Him;
- II. It assures us of His gracious presence with us.

#### I.

In the 68th Psalm David says of the Lord's ascension: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast

received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." David, foreseeing the Lord's ascension, comforted his heart with it; for after the words quoted, which unquestionably treat of the Lord's ascension, he says: "Our God is the God of salvation ; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Contemplating the Lord's ascension, David was cheerful and bold against death and all afflictions ; for he said : The Lord will ascend and will lead my captivity captive and will make me free. And yet David had only the promise, the fulfillment of which was yet far distant in the future. This was what made David the man after the heart of God, his faith that he depended freely on what he could not see, yea, which had not yet come to pass, which was as yet only promised for the future.

It was different with the disciples of Christ. These were not willing to believe except they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears and touch with their hands, so that even at the very last the Lord "*upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*" Long as the Lord had walked with them, much as He had instructed them, their hearts were slow to believe. Especially at the resurrection of the Lord did their unbelief become manifest. The testimony of those women unto whom the Lord had appeared, they would not believe ; yea, Thomas would not believe the testimony of all the disciples unless he would see the Lord with his eyes and touch Him with his hands. In short, the disciples did not want to believe, they wanted to see and feel, and for this the Lord upbraided them. The Lord had told them beforehand, the third day He would rise again. On that self-same day His resurrection was proclaimed to them by such persons of whom they knew that they loved the truth and detested falsehood ; yea, the Lord sent them a kind message by Mary Magdalene. Yet they would not believe. This was surely hardness of heart.

Why was this so very reprehensible in the disciples ? Should they not rather be lauded for desiring to make certain before they would believe ? Is it not always wise to make certain of a thing before adopting it for a fact ? It is certainly a true and sound prin-

ciple, to receive only that as a fact which is positively certain. If a man depends on that which is uncertain, he is acting very foolishly. What for then did the Lord upbraid the disciples? He upbraided them, because they had the divine certainty of His resurrection, but set that certainty aside and would not believe. What is more certain than the Word of the Lord? What the Lord says, is certain. If any thing in heaven or on earth is certain, the Lord's Word is certain. What He says can not fail, or deceive, or be doubtful. His Word is infallible. Now the disciples had the Lord's Word that He would rise again the third day. Was it then not infallibly certain? When He had said He would rise again, was there any possibility of His remaining in death? After the Lord had said He would rise again, it was unquestionably certain that He would and must rise again, because His Word could not be broken. But this certainty which the Word gives did not satisfy the disciples. They wanted a different kind of certainty. They wanted the certainty of sight and sense, of feeling and touching, and this the Lord here calls "*unbelief and hardness of heart.*" They wanted to depend on the perception of their senses, rather than on the Word of the Lord.

Behold here the awful wickedness of unbelief. Those who will not believe the Word of the Lord, commit the most terrible sin, a sin greater than murder or adultery. Here the Lord connects these two: "*Unbelief and hardness of heart.*" It is hardness of heart not to believe what the Lord says. Indeed, all who disbelieve or doubt the Word of the Lord, render God a liar, and that is a dreadful thing. Surely, upon those who believe not the Word of God and so pronounce His Word a falsehood, a dire judgment will fall; for when about to take His seat at the right hand of the Father the Lord upbraided the disciples for this very sin, and He distinctly declares: "*He that believeth not shall be damned.*"

Learn here that the Word of the Lord is to be sufficient unto us, and we are to seek nothing else besides the Word on which to rest our faith. That the disciples wanted to see and feel before they would believe, the Lord pronounces "*unbelief and hardness of heart.*" Why so hard a judgment? Because neither the report of

those who had seen Him after He was risen, nor the words which the Lord Himself had spoken to them before His death could convince them, but they wanted the evidence of their own seeing and feeling, and what was that other than unbelief, distrusting and doubting the Lord's Word? If you promise to give a man a dollar, but he declares that he must first see the dollar, or must feel it in his hand before he will be convinced that you will give it to him, you will say: That man does not trust my word. The same verdict God will pass on all who want to see and feel before they will accept His Word as infallibly true and certain.

This is saving faith, if we rely on those things which we do not and cannot perceive with the senses, but which God has told us in His Word, as the Lord says to Thomas: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." We should cling to the Word which the Lord has spoken, let the devil, the world, our flesh, our understanding, our feeling say what they please. Though we can see nothing in us but unrighteousness, and feel nothing save only the accusation of conscience and the condemnation of the law, yet we should cling to the Word: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" If our own heart condemn us, as it truly does and must because we are sinners, yet we should believe what the Word says, that Jesus Christ is our righteousness and our salvation. This is the faith which the Epistle to the Hebrews describes as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Word of the Lord must be sufficient unto us. What the Word says we should steadfastly believe though we see it not, feel it not understand it not.

This faith the Lord's ascension to heaven should teach us; for He spake to the disciples of these things at His ascension that, when they would see Him no more, they should cleave so much the more firmly to His Word. He has withdrawn His visible presence from the earth. We can not see Him, we can not touch Him, we can not lay our fingers into the nail-prints within His hands; but He has left us His Word, this we have with us, and this Word we are to believe, and through this faith we shall be saved; for He says: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" Therefore

this should be the language of our heart: I am baptized, I believe His Word, I shall be saved; and who is he that shall hinder it, seeing my Lord has ascended on high and has led my captivity captive? Because He has withdrawn His visible presence from the earth it is evident that we can have part with Him only through faith in His Word. Therefore we should not be unbelieving, neither should we desire any thing besides His Word, but we should say with David: "O Lord, I trust in thy word."

To believe the Word we should likewise learn from the Lord's last command to the disciples: "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;*" for to this command He immediately adds the promise: "*He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*" What must we believe in order to be saved? Why that which He commands the apostles to preach, that is, the Gospel. What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the message that the gates of paradise are re-opened, that sin which separated God and man from each other is put away, and that everlasting righteousness is regained. This blessed message the Lord bids the apostles preach to the world, and that it is a message faithful and true He establishes by His ascension to heaven. His ascension is the final evidence that His work of redemption is finished. Behold, He had come down from heaven to redeem the world and to prepare salvation for all men; therefore His visible return to heaven is the public evidence that He has finished His work upon earth to the satisfaction of the Father and that all things are now ready, otherwise He could not have appeared before the Father; for if He had not finished His work, if He had left the very least undone, the Father would not have exalted Him to His right hand. But the Father did exalt Him and thereby He acknowledged that the Son has performed His mission faithfully and perfectly.

Because He had finished the work and the Father had accepted it, therefore He could command the disciples to go and preach the Gospel, that is, to tell men: Heaven is open for you sinners; come ye and enter in. What must we do to obey this message? Why, there is nothing else to be done, and there is no other way to obey it, than simply and only to accept it in faith. The

Gospel is such a message which makes no demands at all on us, it simply tells us that the Son of God died in our sins and gained everlasting salvation for us. This message asks nothing of us, it simply tells us what the Son of God has done for us. If we believe it, if we make it our comfort and plea we have the benefit of it; and the Lord's ascension to heaven is certainly something which should draw us unto faith, which should persuade us to believe the message of the Gospel. The Gospel can not be untrue, it must be true, because the Lord who commanded it to be preached in the world immediately thereafter ascended up to heaven. One who commands a lie to be preached can, certainly, not ascend up to heaven, he can only descend down to hell. But that Lord who commanded the Gospel to be preached directly thereafter ascended up to heaven. Therefore the Gospel must be God's truth, the Lord's ascension demonstrates it to an evidence. It's a reality, it's a fact, there is salvation for us sinners, and we should be believing and not unbelieving.

## II.

But the Lord's ascension to heaven does not only teach us firmly to believe in Him whom we do not see, it also assures us that He, the Lord Himself, is present with us continually; for thus it is said of the disciples: "*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*" This is something which reason cannot comprehend, how the Lord, having ascended up to heaven, can yet be with His disciples on earth. Therefore many, following the dictates of reason, deny His presence on earth and teach that the Divinity only is present every where and His humanity limited to a certain locality in heaven. But it is very evident that we must judge of the Lord and His works by His own revealed Word and not by the principles of our reason. And what does the Word say? It says that the Lord worked with the disciples confirming the Word. So the Lord was present with them. What Lord? Certainly the same Lord of whom the foregoing verse speaks: "*So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right*"

*hand of God."* That same Lord who was received up into heaven, thereafter worked with them as present with them and confirmed the Word wherever they preached. But the Lord was received up according to His humanity; for the disciples saw Him ascending up; so the text plainly says that in His humanity He was present with the apostles. Christ did not so ascend up to heaven like Enoch and Elijah who were taken away from the earth, but St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."

We must not think so unworthily of Jesus Christ as to imagine Him sitting on a grand throne limited to one certain locality similar as a Chinese idol sits in a temple. He did not only ascend up into heaven, He went up "far above all heavens," and how high this is He Himself tells us in the 6th chapter of John saying: "Ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before." Where was He before? John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He was when there was no time and no locality, and because He ascended up where He was before, it follows of necessity that He ascended up above time, space, locality and every created thing. So high did Jesus Christ, the Son of man, ascend up that He sits where He sat before the creation, that He sits on the throne of God and is where God is, present with all creatures. The Lord indeed so departed from the earth that He is no more visibly at a certain place as He was with the disciples, but withdrawing His visible presence from the earth He remained invisibly present everywhere. By His ascension the Lord did not go away so as to be now far distant from us, on the contrary His ascension proves that He is very nigh unto us, because, as Paul says, He ascended up "that He might fill all things."

O verily, a comforting truth! Our Savior, the Friend of our souls, is not far distant from us enclosed at some certain place beyond the stars, He is nigh unto us, and with Him is His grace, His righteousness, His power and His strength. The Shepherd is not far distant from His fold, He is in the midst of His flock. Cheerfully, therefore, should we spend our days on this earth. If we see

and feel our sinfulness we have no reason to despair. The same who was sacrificed for sin on the cross is with us, "and He is the propitiation for our sins." If the law accuses us we can soothe our conscience with the truth that He is with us who was made under the law and fulfilled all righteousness for us. If we see our weakness and the power of the enemies we need not be terrified, because that very Lord is with us into whose hands all power is given in heaven and on earth. When disappointments and trials come upon us and we are tempted to murmur, because we see not what they are for, we should put away discontent, knowing that the Lord is with us who sees into our innermost heart and soul; who knows what is dangerous and knows what is good for us, and who daily so guides and governs our steps that we may reach the mansions which He has prepared for us.

And if the Lord is with us He is certainly not idle, He also works with us. He does, indeed, no more work miracles so manifest to the eyes of men as He did with the apostles, but He nevertheless works miracles. He makes us new creatures from heart and soul, and that is a miracle; He makes us who are by nature the enemies of God, to love God, and that is a miracle; He makes us who know that we deserve only everlasting death confidently to hope for everlasting life, and that is a miracle; He makes us sinners the beloved sons and daughters of God, and that is a miracle. Yes, He works with us and if we drive Him not away from us He will work our souls to heaven.

Since Christ has gone to heaven, His home,  
I, too, that home one day must share,  
And in this hope I overcome  
All doubt, all anguish, and despair:  
For where the Head is, well we know,  
The members He has left below  
In time He surely gathers. Amen.

## VI. SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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TEXT: But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended; They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning because I was with you. John 15. 26 to 16, 4.

In the 28th chapter of his Proverbs Solomon says: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." If a man knows what the law of God commands or forbids in any particular point and notwithstanding this knowledge he will nevertheless intentionally not do what is commanded, or will deliberately do what is forbidden: that man can not pray acceptably, can not be a follower of Christ and can not possess the grace of God. Whosoever does intentionally what he knows to be sin, is not a Christian. Every Christian is, indeed, often overtaken by sin; because of the weakness of the flesh he daily commits much sin; but the Christian does not sin willingly and intentionally, as St. John writes: "We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself." The Christian hates sin and he does not want to sin. His aim is to keep himself from sin, and when he sins it occurs without and against his intention and will. Every one, therefore, who intentionally and willingly surrenders himself to sin, has not the Spirit of God dwelling in him. Men, of course, have scores of excuses for

committing sin. A man will persuade himself that he could not avoid doing a certain thing which he knows to be wrong, or he would lose too much by not doing it, or it would serve a good end and purpose, and the like; but all such excuses are nothing but subterfuges to pacify conscience. It remains a fact, if a man refuses to do what he knows is commanded, or consents to do what he knows is forbidden, and so knowingly and intentionally acts in violation of the law of God that man is not a Christian and unless he repents he cannot be saved.

This same principle obtains not only in actions commanded or forbidden in the law, but also in matters of faith and doctrine. If a man knows that the Bible teaches a certain doctrine, but he nevertheless refuses to accept and confess that doctrine; and if a man knows that a certain doctrine is against the Bible, but he nevertheless adheres to and sanctions that doctrine, he cannot be a son of God, but to him applies what Samuel said to Saul: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee." Any one who rejects any teaching which he knows to be founded in the Bible, and any one who by word or deed sanctions any teaching which he knows to be against the Bible, knowingly sets himself in opposition to the Word of God and he is, therefore, not a follower, but an opponent of God. Of himself and all true Christians St. Paul writes: "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." Both those who refuse to do what the law commands, and those who refuse to accept and confess what the Gospel teaches, they both set themselves against God and cannot be God's children and heirs. It is a plain truth, whosoever acts against his own better knowledge in violation of the Word of God, be it in whatsoever matter it will, is not a Christian.

But suppose a man was never instructed in the Law and Gospel, and therefore does what is against the law, or opposes the truth of the Gospel from ignorance, yet with an honest and upright heart; or, if a man has an erring conscience so that he regards wrong what is right, or accounts that falsehood which is God's truth, and so from a sense of duty opposes the truth and promotes error, shall that man be condemned? That is a question touched on in this text and it is

well worthy that we should thoroughly examine it. The common answer given in our times is : It would make no difference what a man believed, if he were only sincere in his faith. There is probably not another opinion which is so widespread in our times and which exercises such a vast influence on the religious life of our country than this which would make man's sincerity primary and the belief of the truth secondary. It is easy to see that this opinion is a root of indifferentism and a powerful factor to promote irreligion. It is one of the errors of the times and is of such a seductive character that all lovers of the truth should warn against it. Accordingly permit me to set forth :

WHY WE SHOULD BEWARE OF RESTING CONTENT WITH  
BEING SINCERE IN OUR FAITH?

I answer,

I. Because the Word of God alone is to be the foundation and rule of our faith ;

II. Because sincerity in their own opinions may lead men to the greatest crimes ; and

III. Because not every belief, but only the belief of the truth can save.

I.

The question before us is not, whether a man should be sincere in his faith ; for it is something self-evident that no man is to be a hypocrite. No man should profess to believe what in fact he does not believe. Every man, be he Christian, Jew or Gentile, is to be sincere in his faith. Hypocrites who with the mouth profess to believe what at heart they do not believe, shall find no favor with God. "The hypocrite's hope shall perish," says Job. Neither is it a question, whether a man who sincerely believes the substance of the Gospel truth unto salvation, yet from ignorance errs in some points of doctrine, can be saved ; for we know that a man may err in many points of doctrine and may yet possess saving faith in Christ. The question is, whether it is right and true when it is said, it would make no difference what a man believed, if he were only sincere in

that faith? The short answer is, that this is an entirely wrong and an extremely harmful opinion.

The first argument by which it is proved wrong is this: Because by it the Bible would be set aside as the only rule and standard of our faith. If sincerity were sufficient and it would make no difference what a man believes provided he is sincere, then it would be an indifferent thing, whether he believes what the Bible says or something else. Then the Mormon and Mohammedan might fare as well with his faith as the Christian with his. If sincerity in one's faith were all required then it would be all the same, whether a man believed the Bible or the Book of Mormon, or the Koran of the Mohammedan, or the Vedas of the Brahmin. This opinion, therefore, would make all religions alike and a man might choose whatever he pleased for the foundation and standard of his faith.

From our text it is very evident that there is only one rule and standard of faith; for here the Lord says of the Holy Ghost: "*He shall testify of me.*" How the Holy Ghost would testify of Him the Lord had told the disciples before already saying: "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Because this was to be a work of the Holy Ghost the Lord goes on: "*And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*" Because the disciples had been with the Lord, had seen His deeds and heard His words, therefore they were to go into all the world and to testify unto men, not their own views and opinions, but what they had seen and heard when with the Lord. Again the Lord says: "*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.*" In their own faith and belief the disciples were to be guided by the words which their Master had spoken unto them; by His words they were to judge of all things which would happen unto them. Again: "*But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.*" They were to remember His words. His words were to preserve them from being offended in afflictions and persecutions. So far is the Lord from allowing His disciples liberty to believe what they pleased that He distinctly binds them down to His words; these they were to remember, these were to be the foundation and rule of

their faith. On another occasion the Lord said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;" and by the prophet Isaiah in the 8th chapter the Lord says: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Those only who follow the Word, the law and the testimony, have the light, and they who do not abide in the Word, walk in darkness; for the inspired Word of God alone is the true light.

And though a man would argue, the idols of the heathen could, of course, not save, but within the pale of Christendom it would make no difference what a man believed, this would still not better the matter, because it would nevertheless be setting aside the Bible as the only rule of faith; for this saying certainly implies, even if a man believed what the Bible does not teach it would not matter, provided he was sincere. The Bible speaks otherwise. Jeremiah chapter 23d we read: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." Should it really make no difference, whether a man's creed is chaff or wheat? Isaiah 65th chapter the Lord says: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in the way that was not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick." The liberal and progressive of those days in Israel no doubt argued, it would make no difference whether a man sacrificed on an altar of unhewn stone or of burned brick, only so he sacrificed unto the Lord, but the Lord did not regard it indifferent. He called them a rebellious people. In the 22d chapter of Revelations the Lord says: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." God has given His Word that men should hear, accept and believe it without adding to, or taking from it, and to say it would make no difference what a man

believed, is certainly speaking against God and is setting aside His Word as the one and only rule of faith. We should, therefore, take warning and should beware of a principle by which the supreme authority of the Bible would be destroyed.

Delusive as is the first part of that common saying, even so deceptive is the latter part concerning man's sincerity. Let us briefly examine it.

## II.

Here again we must distinguish well. We have already heard that no man is to be a hypocrite. Every one is to be sincere in his profession and faith. The question here is, whether it is sufficient unto true godliness in this world and salvation in the world to come, if a man is sincere in what he believes, even when it is not the truth of God? This question also we must answer most emphatically in the negative.

To what sincerity in their own opinions, or sincerity in believing the doctrines of men, will lead the Lord here distinctly declares foretelling the disciples what men would do to them: "*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*" Here the Lord tells the disciples, men would do evil unto them, even to putting them to death; and these things men would do, not knowing they were doing evil, but from zeal for God, in all sincerity thinking they were doing God service. A few examples will illustrate this. Against Stephen, the first martyr of Christ, the accusation was brought: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." On the strength of this accusation the Jews thrust him out of the city and stoned him to death. They killed him from zeal for the temple and the law of Moses, sincerely believing that they were doing God service. When Stephen was stoned Saul, thereafter called Paul, looked on with great satisfaction and from that time on he exerted

all his energies to wipe out the name of Jesus from the earth, and in what sentiment he did this he states in his defense before king Agrippa saying: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Saul persecuted the disciples without any compunctions of conscience in all sincerity believing that he could do no greater service to God, than to extirpate this sect from the face of the earth. And as it was in the time of the apostles so it remained thereafter even unto this day. When John Huss was burned, he, seeing a poor peasant bring a bundle of faggots, exclaimed: "O sacred simplicity." That peasant thought it a great service of God to help burn this servant of Christ, in all sincerity regarding him an abominable heretic. At the time of the Reformation the Roman Catholics put the Protestants to death "unto the greater glory of God," in all sincerity believing that they were doing God service. Some time ago the papers reported several instances in our own country of parents murdering their own children, because they believed to have command from God to do so. A man must certainly be very sincere in his faith, if for his faith's sake he can kill his own child.

Behold, where sincerity in their faith will lead men if their faith is wrong. I confine myself to mentioning only a few of the most flagrant examples, because these are abundantly sufficient conclusively to show that sincerity in one's faith is by no means enough to keep men from doing evil. The more sincere a man is in believing an error, the more fanatical will he be in upholding that error, the more determined in opposing the truth with which that error conflicts. It is a sad fact, but nevertheless a fact, if a false faith possesses the heart, men will be so blinded by it as to regard the truth of God abominable heresy; as to condemn what they have never read or examined. Yea, sincerity in a false faith will make men so unfeeling and cruel that without compassion they can persecute the witnesses of God's truth and can put them to death. When Paul spoke at Jerusalem in his defense, the Jews raised the cry: "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." Even so the Mohammedan exults to shed the blood of Christians, yea, the more Christians he can kill the more he rejoices,

because he sincerely believes that his place in paradise will be so much the higher. Simply to be sincere in one's faith, whatever that faith may be, is, therefore, by no means sufficient unto a truly pious and godly life in this world, because sincerity in and zeal for a false faith can only lead men into blindness and sin.

## III.

Now if sincerity in a false faith can only lead farther away from the truth and may lead to the perpetration of the most dreadful crimes, should, then, sincerity be sufficient unto salvation? This is the actual idea connected with that saying: if only a man were sincere in his faith, he would be saved no matter what his religion might be. Put in this form it certainly bears the stamp of delusion on its very face. If it were true that a man's sincere profession of his religion would save him, why then should the Son of God have come to reveal unto us the will of His Father? Why would the Gospel be preached? Why send missionaries to the heathen if by sincerely believing their religion they could be saved? It is not sincerity in any faith, but sincerity in the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus that is required unto salvation. In our text the Lord says: "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*" The Holy Ghost is "*the Spirit of truth.*" Where He dwells He creates the love of the truth, and where there is not the love of the truth the Holy Ghost does not dwell, and where He does not dwell there is no salvation. This is evident from the words of the Lord in the 12th chapter of John saying: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The judgment of the last day will not be held so that every one would be judged according to his sincerity in believing his religion, so that the Catholic would be saved because he sincerely believed in the pope, the Rationalist because he sincerely believed common sense the light to be guided by, etc., but the Lord says: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Those who received not the Word of Christ

will be brought into judgment, and that Word will condemn them, though they had ever so sincerely believed other things which are not the Word of Jesus. But those will be heirs of the kingdom who receive the words of Christ and in all sincerity of heart and soul believe them, those who are sincere in the belief of the truth.

Likewise, the knowledge and belief of the truth is the only true safeguard against treading on the paths of intolerance and persecution. "*These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*" Intolerance toward others is only the fruit of ignorance and error. Where the truth of the Gospel is known intolerance is banished. The truly orthodox church bears witness to the truth of the Gospel and she rebukes errors with the Word of God, but she never becomes intolerant, she never uses any other than the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. When James and John once proposed to cause fire from heaven to fall on a village that would not receive them Jesus rebuked them saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." With sharp and stinging words did Jesus reprimand the hypocrisy and the false doctrines of the Pharisees, and He foretold the destruction which would fall on them, if they received Him not, but force and violence Jesus distinctly forbade His followers. He never did any thing by which any one even of His bitterest enemies suffered the least harm. The Spirit of Christ is not the spirit of intolerance. Where the truth of Christ prevails all persecutions stop. The apostolic Christians had the truth of the Gospel and they were persecuted, but they persecuted no man, but when the truth was lost and error prevailed then intolerance reared its head and persecutions among Christians began. Therefore we should learn from this text to watch with great diligence that we have and preserve the pure teaching of the Gospel, and that we strive to live up to it. If infidels and liberalists ridicule us and call us bigots for holding so closely to the Bible this should be a strong comfort unto us, because the Lord foretold, so His disciples would fare, and because He has promised us great reward saying: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is

your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

As a householder is to "bring forth out of his treasure things new and old," I thought it not amiss to-day to speak of this opinion which sounds so well to the carnal ear and is peddled under the garb of liberality or even charity. It would indeed be a very convenient kind of religion allowing every man to make his own creed and to use it for a soft pillow persuading himself that he is sincere in his faith and nothing more would be required of him. That would leave the Bible pretty much out in the cold, and we should beware of so convenient a kind of religion. Where it prevails it will certainly cause the churches to be deserted, at least those in which the Gospel of Christ is preached right.

God has given us His Word in which He tells us who our Savior is and what we must believe in order to be saved, and He has commanded us to search the Scriptures, because in them we have eternal life. This Word and it alone is to be the guide and rule of our faith. Let us not be so foolish as blindly and carelessly to adopt what everybody believes, or what this and that man says. In all that we believe we should make sure that this Book says it, and whatever it says we should believe in all sincerity of heart and soul. Then shall we know the Father and the Son and have eternal life, even as the Son says unto the Father: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Amen.

## PENTECOST.

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TEXT: Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. John 14, 23-31.

Pentecost marks the finishing act of God's counsel for the redemption and salvation of man. When dying on the cross Christ had already finished His work. He had made full satisfaction to Divine justice for the Children of Adam; by His suffering and death sin was atoned for: and by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to glory at His own right hand, God the Father acknowledged that the work of redemption was performed to His satisfaction. When the Father crowned the Son of man with glory and majesty, this act demonstrated that the Father is reconciled to man, whose substitute and representative Christ was. But, though God was reconciled to the world, men were not yet reconciled to God. Exalting Christ to glory God had declared that He on His part was reconciled to man, but in order that men might enjoy the

fruits of this reconciliation it was yet necessary that men on their part be reconciled to God. It was necessary that the reconciliation effected in Jesus Christ should be brought to the knowledge of men, and they should be induced to accept, appropriate and appreciate this reconciliation. In other words: After the work of redemption was completed, it yet remained that the Word of reconciliation be preached to the world, and that men be persuaded to accept this reconciliation and to reap its everlasting blessings. And to effect this the Holy Ghost was sent.

When the supper was prepared it yet remained for the Housefather to send messengers to communicate the fact, to invite the guests and to persuade them to come to His supper. Without the Holy Ghost this would not have been effected. Would the Gospel have been preached among all nations? Nay; for before they were filled with the Holy Ghost the disciples did not preach in the name of Christ crucified, they hid behind locked doors and in public places, most likely, did not dare to speak the name of Jesus above a whisper. And even if the apostles would have preached the Gospel, if not the Holy Ghost had come to bear witness in and through their word, no man would have received it. This Paul plainly testifies, writing in the 2d chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." If the Holy Ghost had not come to work on and in the hearts of men through the Word preached by the apostles, no man would have received their word. The Jew would have spurned it as blasphemy, and the Greek would have held it in derision as foolishness. But now the Holy Ghost works through the Word of the cross. By the law He breaks the hardness of the natural heart, and by the Gospel He teaches men and persuades them to believe in Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Therefore St. Paul writes in the 3d chapter of I. Corinthians, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Paul commenced preaching the Gospel at Corinth, Apollos continued it, but neither Paul nor Apollos converted the

Corinthians; it was the Holy Ghost who made the Word effectual in their hearts and converted them from the worship of dumb idols to the living God. Therefore Paul, in the same connection, tells the Corinthians, "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."

Beautifully does the church-father Gregory speak of it in this language: "Preachers are external teachers, the Holy Spirit is the internal teacher. Without this internal teacher preachers may cry out, but they cannot convert men to God, the Holy Spirit must impress the Word on the hearts." In vain were all preaching, if the Holy Ghost did not teach the heart of the hearers to know and to appropriate the salvation of God. If you see in the Gospel of Christ the wisdom of God unto salvation, if your heart finds peace and comfort in it, you shall know that it is not of the preacher, neither of yourselves, but it is the work of the Holy Ghost in you; for He it is alone who kindles faith and creates the love of Christ in the heart, teaches it to know spiritual things spiritually, and bringing to remembrance the words of Jesus, fills the soul with peace and comfort. After God has been reconciled to men by the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Ghost is sent to reconcile men to God, making them partakers of salvation in Christ. And this He accomplishes by means of the Word and the Sacraments, as the Lord here declares, saying: "*He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*" Therefore we should be grateful unto the Lord, because after going to the Father He sent the Holy Ghost, and whenever we occupy ourselves with the Word our prayer should be that this heavenly teacher be granted us. Under His guidance let us yet briefly consider the latter part of this Gospel, in which the Lord presents:

TWO REASONS, WHY THE DISCIPLES SHOULD NOT SORROW,  
BUT REJOICE OVER HIS GOING TO THE FATHER,

namely:

- I. Because "My Father is greater than I"; and
- II. Because "the prince of this world hath nothing in Me."

## I.

The four last verses of this text do not treat directly of the sending and the office of the Holy Ghost, for which reason they are generally not so fully explained in Pentecost sermons. They are however an important part of that Word which the Holy Ghost is sent to bring to remembrance and, therefore, they are justly included in this text. Besides this, there are several things in these words which to many appear hard to understand, but which, when rightly understood, are highly comforting. For this reason I thought it not unjustifiable, to-day to speak of them in particular.

The chief object of the Lord's conversation with the disciples in the night in which He was betrayed, was, to secure them against taking offence at His great humiliation in His suffering and death, and to strengthen their faith; and, indeed, there is no other extract of the Scriptures which could afford stronger comfort against offence in the cross of Christ, than this last sermon of the Lord. The subject of which He speaks is His going to the Father, comprising His suffering, death, resurrection and all His great deeds for our redemption and justification. Now when the disciples heard that He was going away their hearts were filled with sorrow, and to comfort them, the Lord sought to teach them the true meaning of His going to the Father. In the first part of this Gospel He tells them, if they would continue in His Word, He and the Father would come and would make their abode with them, and He would send them the Holy Ghost who would teach them rightly to understand His words and His works and who would fill their hearts with the peace of God. Then He continues: "*Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you.*" These words indicated that He was about to tell them of yet other benefits which His going to the Father would bring them.

Now the first which the Lord tells them is this: "*If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.*" Did the disciples not love the Lord? Certainly they did; but their love was not pure as it ought to have been, it was tarnished with great defects. Their love was not the right godly, but rather a carnal love. A great factor in their love was

the opinion that Christ would make the Jews a great and glorious nation in the world and that they, His disciples, would be great lords on earth. They did not yet love Him solely, because by suffering and death He redeemed their souls from sin; this they did not yet fully understand; they loved Him hoping temporal advantages from Him. Therefore the Lord spake as though they did not love Him at all, because in a great measure their love was yet carnal and selfish. Of charity Paul says: "Charity seeketh not her own." True love does not seek one's own advantage, but the advantage of the loved one, whereas carnal love seeks its own gain. If I truly love a person I will rejoice over that person's prosperity and happiness, although to me it brings no gain whatever; but if I love a person because I hope to gain advantage from that person, that is only a selfish love. Therefore the Lord here means to tell the disciples, if they loved Him as they ought, they would not regard their own gain or loss, but would rejoice, because He was now to be glorified with the Father, and glorified with the Father He would send them the Comforter and taught by the Comforter, they would love Him with a pure love, and His going away over which they now sorrowed would then be their rejoicing.

"*If ye loved me,*" the Lord would be constrained to say to many in our day, who profess to love Him, but are prompted by selfish motives. The love which has an eye to temporal blessings is a carnal, selfish love, of which the Lord says: "*If ye loved me.*" We should love Christ for His own sake, because He is so good, kind, gracious a Lord who gave Himself for us when there was neither merit nor worthiness in us. Our love for Christ is to be of such a nature that, considering His sacrifice, we are constrained to say with the poet:

"Then why, O blessed Savior, Christ,  
Should I not love Thee well?  
Not for the hope of winning heav'n,  
Nor of escaping hell;  
Nor with the hope of gaining aught,  
Not seeking a reward;  
But solely for Thy love to me,  
My ever-loving Lord."

This love no man can have of Himself. Even the noblest love of the natural man is always adulterated with selfishness, the Holy Ghost must create this love in the heart. Therefore we should diligently consider the great deeds comprised in Christ's going to the Father; for through the remembrance of these the Holy Ghost draws us to love Christ for His own sake, thus purifying our love and enabling us to rejoice over Christ's going to the Father, for the reason which He assigns: "*For my Father is greater than I.*"

How is the Father greater than Christ? Does He not say: "I and the Father are one?" And again: "All things that the Father hath are mine?" Do we not also confess in the Athanasian Symbol: "And in this Trinity none is afore, or after the other; none is greater or less than another!" Yes, truly, so we believe; but in the same Symbol we also confess of Christ: "Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His humanity." Even if the Lord had spoken these words in reference to His person, yet the Antitrinitarians could by no means prove their doctrine from them, because according to His humanity Christ was certainly inferior to the Father. But it is plain that He spake these words not in reference to His person, but in reference to His estate and office; for He is here speaking of His going to the Father, hence of the exercising of His office. From this connection it is clear that He means to say: My Father, with whom I am One in Divine nature, is greater than ye, now in my estate of humiliation, see in me; for now I walk in the form of a servant, despised and mocked, but I shall not remain in this lowly estate; I am going to the Father, and He will glorify me with the glory which I had before the world began, and I will sit in majesty to govern my church and to rule in the midst of mine enemies.

Luther says of these words: "The Father was greater than He, not according to the nature of the two persons, but according to government and majesty." This explanation preserves the words in their connection and that it faithfully expresses the Lord's meaning is established by the prayer with which He concluded that memorable conversation in which He addressing the Father says: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou

gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Not with another, but with the same glory was He glorified which He had with the Father before the creation. The Son was made flesh and in it He humbled Himself, becoming the lowliest of the low; but when He had finished His work the Father glorified Him also in His humanity with the Divine glory which He had from eternity co-equal with the Father. Very soon was this demonstrated to the disciples; for that night He went away bound, and after His resurrection He returned glorified. But especially at Pentecost did the Holy Ghost glorify Him in their hearts, enlightening their eyes to see both the majesty of His power and the greatness of His work.

Similarly He behaves Himself yet. Sometimes He appears to depart from us, leaving us as it were, comfortless; but He stays not away. He comes again, as He promised by Isaiah: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee," and when He returns He returns glorified. Therefore in the day of affliction we should believe, as He here bids us: "*And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it has come to pass, ye might believe.*" The faith of the disciples had to undergo a hard probation, but by it their faith was purified and increased. When the Lord appears to depart from us with His comfortings, we should not faint; He can not stay away, He comes again and causes His glory to shine more brightly in the heart than before.

## II.

Cheerfully, indeed, should we endure temptations, considering the words of the Lord: "*Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*" These words sound strange, but they are glorious words. He says, this would be their last conversation, the time was at hand when they must part, because the prince of this world was coming upon Him. The prince of this world is Satan, whose kingdom is sin and whom the world serves. This prince, says Christ, was coming upon Him;

therefore He could no more talk much with the disciples. Satan was the chief enemy of Christ and at various times already had he come, seeking to destroy the Lord; but he had failed, because Christ's hour had not yet come. But now the time was at hand when the Lord was to say to His enemies: "This is your hour and the power of darkness." Now Satan had found a willing tool in one of the disciples, in Judas. Through him he was to succeed and yet not succeed, but succeeding in his design, he was to succeed only in overthrowing his own kingdom. Satan entered into Judas, and by Judas the Lord fell into the hands of His enemies who by the instigation of Satan delivered Him to be crucified. In the capture, trial and execution of Christ men, indeed, were the actors, but Satan was the mover and instigator.

How, then, can the Lord here say of Satan: "*The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,*" when Satan succeeded in bringing the Lord into a shameful and painful death? This, indeed, Satan did have in the Lord, in this he succeeded, but only to his own overthrow; for the result showed that he gained nothing, but lost all by the Lord's death.

What did Satan seek in Christ? Why, he sought sin, which he loves and always seeks. Now Satan did find sin in Christ; and on account of that sin he had a claim on Christ, because according to law and justice the wages of sin is death. Had there been no sin in Christ, Satan would have had no claim on Him, but because there was sin in Christ, the devil did not rest until he had brought Him into death. So far all looked well for Satan's side, but he made a mistake and this mistake proved fatal to him. The sin which was in Christ was not sin which He had committed, but sin which I and you committed, which Christ, our security-man, had taken upon Himself. Yet in so far it made no difference where this sin came from, it was there in Christ and deserved death and Satan through his agents brought about death. But because those sins for which Satan brought Christ into death were not committed by Christ Himself, therefore the outcome was: in the first place, that Satan could not hold Christ in death, and in the second place, that he had forfeited his claim on those for whose sins he had

brought Christ into the grave. Now the devil has no more right and power to claim my soul for death, because he inflicted the wages for my sins on Christ. So the prince of this world came upon Christ with great eagerness to make a prey of Him, but He found nothing in Christ save only great loss and injury to himself and his kingdom. This is the sublime and yet so simple counsel of God for our deliverance from the power of Satan.

Yet the disciples might have said to Christ: How canst Thou say that Satan will have nothing in Thee, when he will bring Thee into death? Therefore the Lord immediately adds: "*But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.*" As though He would say: I die, not because I must, but I give myself into the power of the devil from love to sinners and obedience towards my Father whose will it is that thus I should bruise the head of the Old Serpent and should redeem the human race.

And now, let us arise and depart from the regions of unbelief and go hence into the domain of faith. This thing has come to pass: Satan did drag Christ into death for our sins and thereby he forfeited his right to drag us into death for our sins. He that believes this must, indeed, also die, but his death is no more a punishment for his sins, it is rather a means to free him altogether from sin. Do not say: If I could only believe this, but mark the Word which I have spoken. It is the Word of Divine truth, and pray the Lord to grant you the heavenly Comforter, knowing that your prayer can not be in vain, because the Lord has promised to send Him and has said: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Amen.

## PENTECOST.

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### SECOND SERMON.

TEXT: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3, 16-21.

In the 72d Psalm it was prophesied of Christ: "In his days shall the righteous flourish: and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

The Psalmist foresaw the kingdom of Christ spread over all lands and the isles of the sea. And this kingdom was to know no overthrow, but to endure through all generations as long as the moon would last. There was a time when it appeared as though this prophecy should fail. It was the time when Jesus Christ had finished His work on earth and had returned to the Father, but had not yet sent the Comforter. Then there were, in the calculation of men, certainly very slender prospects that His kingdom would endure and would be spread abroad over the whole earth. His people had rejected Him and nothing was left Him save a dozen or so of timid men full of fear and trembling. Jesus had been shamefully put to death, and His disciples, though they still believed in Him, hastened along the streets of Jerusalem with hurried and cautious

steps and when they met together, they kept the doors locked. What prospect was there that these timid men would perpetuate and spread abroad the kingdom of Christ? Surely in the judgment of reason there was an end of Christ and no hope for His kingdom.

But it does not follow that what is weak in the sight of men, is rejected of God, but, rather, God chooses that which the proud despise. It was with the kingdom of Christ as the Psalm already quoted says: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon." This handful of corn denoted the disciples. Now you know, corn which is to grow must first be hid out of sight in the ground, but sunshine and rain will draw it forth and soon it will form large stalks with spreading leaves and many grains. After the Lord's crucifixion the disciples were, so to say, buried; they were forgotten. That mighty city, Jerusalem, was busy making money and seeking pleasure, and who thought of those poor fishermen, who had followed Jesus of Nazareth? But as a warm shower will cause a newly planted cornfield to become green, so, when the day of Pentecost was come, the heavenly shower of the Spirit of light and zeal and life falling upon the disciples caused them to step forth out of their seclusion to the amazement of Jerusalem, and now the fruit of this handful of corn began to shake like Lebanon and the shock beginning at Jerusalem spread to the surrounding countries, extended over the face of the earth and endures to this day; for the disciples spake with fiery tongues that their words penetrated the hearts of men like sparks of fire, and they spake in all languages, because the kingdom of Christ was to spread among all nations. Yes, the rejected, the despised Jesus of Nazareth had a handful of corn in the earth, and He sent His Spirit to make it swell and grow, and the handful of corn became a living seed which has turned the earth into an abundant harvest field. At this day there is golden corn ripening even at the uttermost sea.

Thus is described the gift bestowed on the day of Pentecost: the Spirit of Christ, who has founded, enlarged and preserved the Christian church, and who will continue to enlarge and preserve

Christ's kingdom until the stars drop from the firmament and the sun shall lose his glory. By what means the Spirit accomplishes this we learn from the effect of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. The multitude wonderingly exclaimed: "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." That is the work of the Spirit. He causes the wonderful works of God in Jesus Christ to be preached on earth and through the preaching of Christ He calls men, gathers a church and sanctifies and preserves it in the true faith. Therefore this Gospel is a very proper Pentecost text, although the Holy Ghost is not mentioned in it. In beautiful language does it speak of the love of God which the Holy Ghost is sent to shed abroad in the hearts of men. Agreeably to the text let us consider :

THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE  
SENDING OF JESUS CHRIST ;

remembering

- I. The greatness of that love ; and
- II. Unto what it should persuade us.

I.

*"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."* Here we hear, whence our redemption springs : from the heart of God. Before the foundation of the world, in His eternal counsel, the Triune God resolved to redeem our fallen race. What persuaded God to form this glorious resolution ? Was it our great worth and merit ? Why, before the foundations of the world were laid, when there were no mountains and no hills, when the firmament was not spanned, when time was not and no seraph chanted Allelujah before Jehovah's throne, then it was that God resolved to redeem us. Were we worthy thereof ? Had we merited His favor ? Why, we were not in existence. And when God had created man, when He had given Him a wonderfully formed body and had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; when He had made him lord over the earth and all that therein is, and man repaid His goodness with disobedience and deserted to the enemy, what hindered God from

instantly hurling man down to the bottomless pit and erasing his remembrance from the heavens? What moved Him to have compassion on us? Was He in need of us? Would He, banishing man, perhaps not have had enough creatures to honor and praise Him and to do His commands? Is He not the Almighty One who can do whatsoever He pleases? Was it not He that said: "Let there be light; and there was light?" of whom David sings: "He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"? Has He not ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels who cry unto Him: "Holy, holy, holy," and who do His commands? Is He not the Sovereign One who stands in need of nothing, who is indebted to none, who alone grants and preserves life and being to all? And what is man? Dust and ashes, a fading flower, a fleeting shadow! "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Surely, not because He stood in need of us, or because He could otherwise not have filled heaven with holy creatures, did God resolve to restore our fallen race. What, then, moved God to redeem us? Was it, perhaps, because God Himself had been the cause of man's falling into sin? He is "not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness," neither can evil dwell with Him. Or had He not solemnly warned man against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? And did not man nevertheless do it against the will and command of God? God is good. He had no part in the fall of man. In our text the Lord tells us what persuaded God to redeem man: "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD." O, a sweet, a glorious word! God is not a spiteful tyrant; He has no pleasure in afflicting and destroying; from eternity *love* dwells in His heart.

What does God love? Does He love His Son who is the brightness of His glory? Does He love the angels who exalt Him and do His commands? Truly God does love these. But more: "*God so loved the world.*" We love our relatives and friends who love us and show kindness unto us: God loves His enemies who hate and insult Him. Men render Him evil for good, yet He loves them. He is holy, they are unholy and sinners; He loves them still. But mark well: God does not love sin which is in man, He hates sin,

He loves man who is still His creature, though deprived of his original glory by the wiles of Satan. This love of God is something incomprehensible to us. God creates man, but he despises his Creator and making unto himself an idol of wood or stone kneels to worship it; yet God loves this miserable traitor. Comprehend it who can. "God first loved us," says St. John; He who is so great loved us who are so altogether nothing and so perverse.

How does God love the world? What is the measure of His love? is it great or small? Does God so love the world as to support it in His hand like a ball that it may not sink and perish? so, as to adorn it with flowery shrubs and manifold plants? so, as to moisten it with rain, to warm it with sunshine and to make it to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater? God does all this. He preserves, refreshes, gladdens all His creatures, also those that are evil; but His love goes much farther, it is far greater: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*" So God loved the world that He gave His Son for it, not one of many, but the only one He had. And how did He give Him? Did He make Him a great Lord in this world, to enjoy its treasures and pleasures? Not even so much of this world did the Father give Him that He had where to lay His head. So God gave His Son that He was born in a stable and bedded in a manger, that He hungered and thirsted and wandered about in poverty and misery, that slaves spat Him in the face and He died the death of an outlaw in the company of outlaws. And is this love? "God," says St. Paul, "commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." That is the measure of God's love. Where was ever such a thing heard of, that a father of his own free will relinquished his only son to a painful death in order to save his enemies from death? The world was God's enemy; all the imagination of man's heart tended only to insult God and to dishonor His name; yet God gave His Son for these His enemies, although He knew that they would take Him and would hang Him on the shameful tree. When Moses considered what God had done for Israel he exclaimed: "Yea, He loved the people." If we consider what God did for the world notwithstanding its wickedness, we must much rather exclaim: Yea, He loved the world.

And what end had the love of God in view? For what purpose did God give His Son? "*That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" This is the object of God's love, to save us; unto this end was the Son of God given, that we should not perish. We are not to languish in hell, we are to become inhabitants of heaven.

But how many does this love of God comprise? Who are those whom God so loves that He would make them inhabitants of heaven? Is it the great men of the earth, the rich, the honorable, the pious? Is it only the wise, the polished, the civilized? Is it a select few and are the rest excluded? It is the rich and the poor, the wise and the unwise, the polished and the barbarian. With God there is no respect of person that He should have sent His Son for the genteel European, but not for the deformed Australian. "*God so loved THE WORLD.*" And again: "*God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that THE WORLD through him might be saved.*" His love encompasses the world, and not in one generation only, but in all generations. What does the word *world* mean? It does here not mean the universe. God did not give His Son for rocks and rills, plants and animals. The Son of God became man to save men, and when He says *world* He means to comprise all men. He uses a figure of speech saying *world* for *men*, in order to emphasize it that all are comprised. If He had said, *God so loved men*, then one might say, that it could not include those who live in the world like beasts and not like men; He says *world*, so that there can be no question about its comprising the whole human race without exceptions, every one in or on the world. Now the cannibals are also in the world. The word *world* comprises every creature having an immortal soul that ever was, or is, or will be on earth. He who numbers the hairs of our head, saw every one who ever would be on earth, and He said: For these will I give my Son.

This is a comforting word for you and for me. If we were outside of the world then this glorious fact that God loved the world would not concern us; but we are in the world, and there can be no question, God loves us and gave His Son that we should not be condemned, but should obtain everlasting life. This we are

to believe and not to doubt, and to believe it this same love of God should persuade us. This let me yet briefly demonstrate.

## II.

The love of God, as this text shows, is also to persuade us to depart from the darkness and to walk in the light, but it is to persuade us unto faith first.

Because God so loved us that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us, He is surely a Lord in whom we should confide, whom we should trust. He loves us, and we should never doubt His love, but rest assured that in all things He desires to seek our good.

Moreover, the very object of Christ's mission is faith. "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM.*" God sent His Son for this end and object that we should believe in Him. That Jesus Christ came for this purpose all His words and all His works testify unto us. What He did and what He spake was for this purpose that all people should believe on Him. This He distinctly testifies to the Jews in John chapter 10th, saying: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." This is the object both of His words and of His works, that we should believe on Him. Even so all the sermons of the apostles were for this object: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and for this same purpose were the Gospels written; as John testifies: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This is the object of the coming of Christ; this is the object of His whole work; this is the object for which the Scriptures are given that we should believe. O, a sweet and precious fact! Jesus Christ is come in order that we should believe in Him. Sometimes we are faint-hearted and say: Dare I claim Christ as my own? will He be mine who am so unworthy? will He dwell in a soiled heart? So we often despondingly think, but those are wrong thoughts of the perverse old Adam; for Jesus Christ is come that we sinful mortals should believe in Him. So, then, we

are not only *allowed* to believe, it is His will that we should believe in Him. The more closely we press Him to our heart, the more firmly we hold Him, the more determined we say: "I will not let Thee go," the more are we doing that for which He is come.

Likewise, the final object of Christ's coming should draw us unto faith: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.*" Through faith in Christ we are to escape death and to have life. We were lost; the sentence of death had long since been passed on us in the words: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And that no one might think, that this sentence concerned Adam alone and not his posterity, Moses repeated the same threat in other words, saying: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." Thereby the sentence was passed on us that, after a short stay on this earth, we must go to the place of destruction. But before this sentence was executed, the Son of God intervened. He became a curse for us and so delivered us from the curse of the law, and now in the Gospel comes the message to us: "*Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Should we not believe this message? Should not a condemned criminal believe the message of pardon sent by the governor? Why are we so slow to believe? Alas! it is our own perverse heart that retards us. Our heart knows it; our conscience convinces us; we cannot deny, but must acknowledge it, that we deserve damnation. There is not one in this house who does not deserve banishment from the countenance of the Lord; for every one of us has "come short of the glory of God." According to right and justice we all belong to the place of destruction. Nevertheless we are not to go there. The Son of God is come in order that we should not perish. Believe it, believe it, and doubt ye not; "*for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*"

O, those are lovely words! Surely, every one should know them by heart, to have them ready for use at all times. Satan is ever busy and our own perverse heart is always inclined to picture Christ

unto us as a stern judge whom we must in some way reconcile unto ourselves; and that is utterly false. Christ is not come as a judge to judge us, but as a Savior to save us. At the end of days He will indeed judge the world, as the Father has ordained Him the judge, but now He is our Savior and not our judge. If your own heart would picture Christ to you as a judge who is angry with you, remember these words: "GOD SENT NOT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD." On another occasion Christ said: "I judge no man." In John chapter 12th, He even declares unto the Jews: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I am not come to judge the world, but to save the world." So then even those who do not believe His Word, He does not judge, because He is not come to judge, but to save. How could He express it in stronger terms that He does not want to be judge over us? He judges no one, not even His enemies; for He is not a judge come to condemn, He is a Savior come to save.

Shall then the unbelieving not be judged? Surely they shall be, or rather are judged and condemned already, but Christ does not judge them. He is the good shepherd who seeks their souls, the advocate who pleads with the Father for all men. By whom the unbelieving are judged Christ tells the Jews in John, chapter 5th, saying: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses." The unbelieving have their accuser and judge, but that judge is not Christ. Christ is no accuser, He accuses and judges no one. We must never picture Christ to ourselves as demanding that we must be so and so holy, or must have done many good works before we could have part in Him. He does not accuse us, He demands nothing of us, He is come as our Savior to save us. O, what a blessed thing to have the right knowledge of Jesus Christ! He is come into the world for no other purpose at all than to be a Savior. He died for you when you were yet His enemies; He prepared salvation for you before you were born; He demands nothing of you; He does not even ask what you are and what you have done; He wants to save you. O banish doubt and believe it. It is a saying true and faithful. Here it is black on white, plain as plain can be: He is come into

the world, "*not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*"

What has been said is also an explanation of the words following: "*He that believeth on him, is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" They that believe in Christ are not judged or condemned, neither in this world nor in the world to come. For the believers there is no judgment. Because they appropriate Christ's righteousness, therefore in the resurrection they will come forth clothed with righteousness, and they will not be brought into judgment, but together with Christ they will sit in judgment over the world. But they that believe not in Christ are judged already. Christ does, indeed, not sit in judgment over them. O, no; He seeks to draw them unto Himself and to save them; but because they have not the righteousness of Christ they are yet under Moses who has long since pronounced the sentence of death on them, and the judgment of the last day will only be the manifestation of the fact that they are yet in their sins.

These two—Judge and Savior—we must by all means distinguish well. Moses in his law is a judge. He says, we must keep the law, or we must be damned. Moses accuses, judges and condemns us, and he does so justly, because we have not kept the law. Therefore Moses is right when he says that we are condemned. But Jesus Christ is not come to accuse and to judge, but to deliver and to save us from the sentence of Moses. His name is the shield which averts the curse of Moses from our heads. Therefore whenever the law accuses us, we should run from Moses to Christ, seeking shelter under His name, and this we should do with boldness, because Christ is come for this very same purpose to save us from the curse. Blessed be His Name now and forever. Amen.

Abide, O faithful Savior,  
Among us with Thy love.  
Grant steadfastness, and help us  
To reach our home above.







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