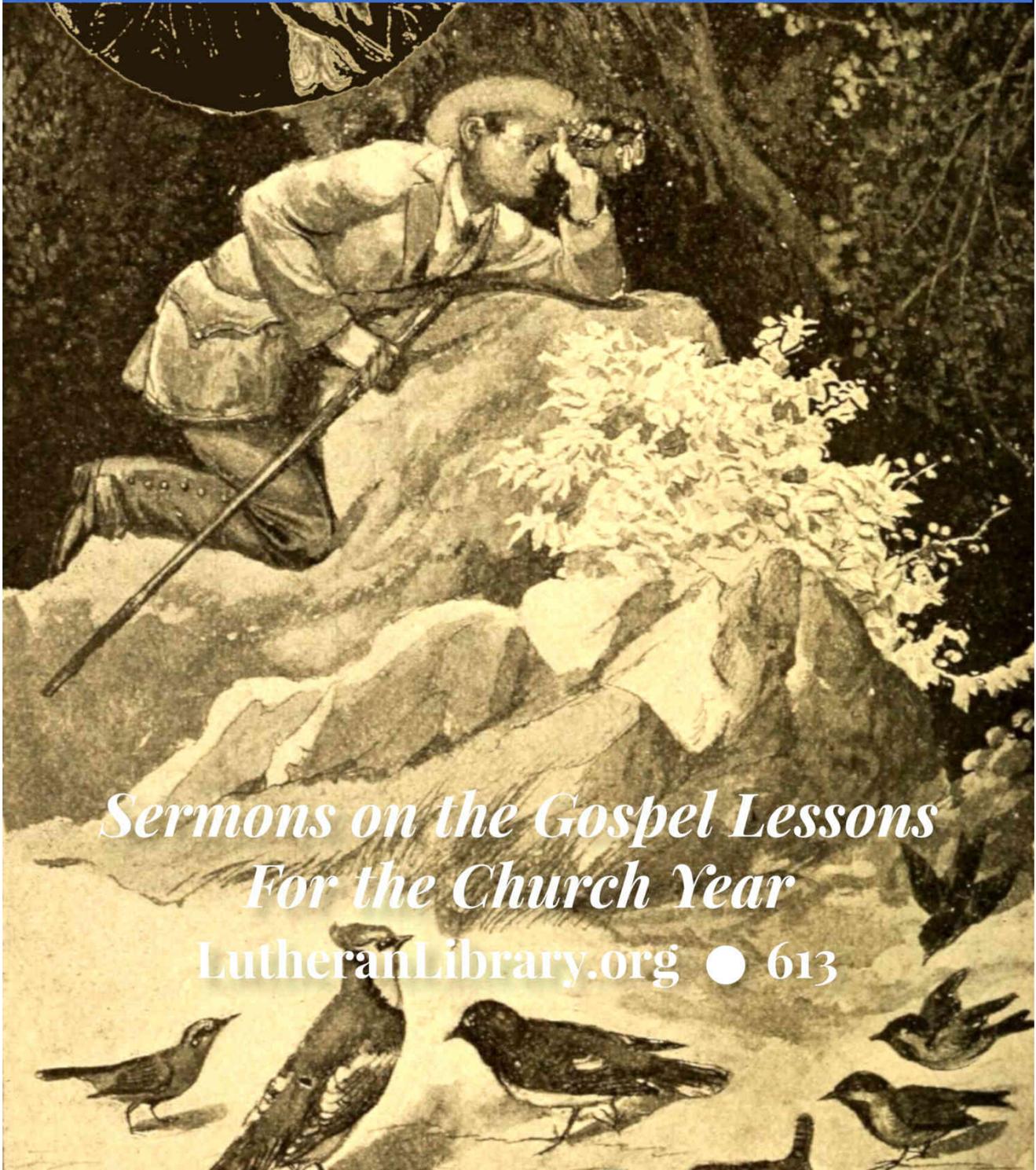


Leander Keyser

In The Redeemer's Footsteps



*Sermons on the Gospel Lessons
For the Church Year*

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In The Redeemer's Footsteps

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In The Redeemer's Footsteps
*Sermons on the Gospel Lessons
for the Church Year*

By Leander S. Keyser, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN HAMMA DIVINITY SCHOOL, WITTENBERG COLLEGE, SPRINGFIELD, OHIO. AUTHOR OF *A SYSTEM OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS*, *THE RATIONAL TEST*, *ELECTION AND CONVERSION*, *A SYSTEM OF NATURAL THEISM*, *A SYSTEM OF GENERAL ETHICS*, ETC.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

LEANDER SYLVESTER KEYSER (1856-1937) was educated at Wittenberg College Seminary, Springfield, Ohio, and served pastorates in Indiana, Kansas and Ohio. In 1911 he became professor of Systematic Theology at Hamma Divinity School, and was considered one of the leading theologians of the General Synod. Prof. Keyser's books include *The Conflict Between Fundamentalism and Modernism*, *The Rational Test*, *A System of Christian Evidence (Apologetics)*, *A System of General Ethics*, *A System of Natural Theism*, and *In The Redeemer's Footsteps*.

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A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]

Please have patience with us when you come across typos. Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

A Brief Explanation.

A FEW WORDS explaining why this book is issued will not be amiss. The Manager of The Lutheran Literary Board became convinced, by numerous requests that came to him, that two volumes of brief and simple sermons on the gospel pericopes of the Church Year would fill a real need at this particular time. He asked the author to prepare them. The author was at first loathe to undertake such a task, as he had much other work on hand for the summer, and was also seeing another book through the press. It seemed to be scarcely modest to issue two books so close together.

However, after much thought, he yielded to the Manager's urgent solicitation. Although the manuscript has been prepared under pressure, the subject-matter has not been hastily gathered and wrought out. It is the result of a life-time of study, thought and experience. The first volume, covering the gospel lessons from Advent to Pentecost, is herewith submitted. The second volume, treating the Trinity season, will probably appear next spring.

The author has not borrowed from others. There are scarcely a half dozen quotations, save from the Bible, in the entire book. Except in one or two cases, he has given his own interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures. He has also used his own homiletical method. There is little exhortation in the volume. A clear statement of the truth is the best exhortation. The writer's object has been to help and edify, not to disclose any learning.

The title expresses the chief purpose of the book — to follow "In the Redeemer's Footsteps." Christ is the Redeemer; by His active and passive obedience He ransomed us from the just consequences of our sins. Therefore it has been the author's purpose to show the vital connection of each gospel lesson with God's great and holy plan of saving grace. Every event in the Redeemer's life and every teaching He uttered must have a real bearing on the central purpose of His incarnation and work: in other words, must be a link, or part of link, in the living chain.

Some unsigned articles, which have appeared from time to time in one of our church periodicals, have been reproduced here, in some cases verba-

tim, in others more or less revised. It is due to the author to say that those articles were all written by himself, at the request of the editor, who believed they would be profitable to his readers. This explanation is necessary to prevent misunderstanding.

The writer prays that these sermons may uplift and enrich the hearts of his readers, be they many or few.

L. S. K.

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Prefatory Note

[Originally *In the Redeemer's Footsteps* was published as two volumes. This "Prefatory Note" was the preface to the second volume. — Ed.]

AT THE REQUEST of the kindly Manager of The Lutheran Literary Board, the author has prepared, and herewith submits, the second volume of sermons on the Gospel Pericopes for the Church Year. The first volume, covering the period from Advent to Whitsunday, was published last autumn, and author and publisher alike are grateful for the reception it has received. The second volume covers all the Trinity Sundays, twenty-eight in number, with added sermons on Harvest Home, Thanksgiving Day, Memory of the Dead, the Reformation, and Luther's Birthday, making thirty-three sermons in all.

Once again the author desires to bear testimony to the inexhaustible riches of God's Word. More than once, in beginning the interpretation of a lesson, it did not seem to be very relevant or promising for sermonic material; but further study always opened up fields of thought so varied and extensive that the chief difficulty was to keep within the prescribed limits. One of our honored professors in theology once said: "Young men, when you feel that you have exhausted the Bible and yourselves, simply plow a little deeper!" During many years of Bible study and of preaching the Divine Word, we have, times without number, found that recommendation sound and practical. Because of the fertility of the Word of God, the author can truly say that the preparation of this book, though sometimes, in the midst of other duties, a somewhat strenuous task, has been a delightful, and even an exhilarating, labor of love.

"Father of mercies, in Thy Word
What endless glory shines!
Forever be Thy name adored
For these celestial lines.

"Here may the wretched sons of want,
Exhaustless riches find;
Riches above what earth can grant,
And lasting as the mind.

"Here the Redeemer's welcome voice
Spreads heavenly peace around;
And life and everlasting joys
Attend the blissful sound.

"Oh, may these heavenly pages be
My ever dear delight!
And still new beauties may I see,
And still increasing light!

"Divine Instructor, gracious Lord!
Be Thou forever near;
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And view my Saviour there."

As was the case in the first volume, a number of unsigned articles which the author wrote by request for a Church periodical, have been more or less revised, and wrought into the fabric of some of these sermons. This explanation seems to be needed to preclude any suspicion of literary purloining.

There is no greater joy than to follow faithfully "In the Redeemer's Footsteps" through His Holy Word. May the readers of this volume experience that joy!

L. S. K.

Springfield, Ohio.
July 23, 1919.

1. How Our Heavenly King Entered An Earthly City. The First Sunday In Advent. Matt. 21:1-9

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 ought 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 strawed 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. (Matthew 21:1-9)

IN THE BEGINNING of the Advent season it is proper for us to dwell in thought on this inspiring theme, “How Our Heavenly King Entered an Earthly City.” In the midst of our trials and the sins of the world, it seems for a little while to bring heaven and earth very near together.

All of us know, or should know, that the Advent season is the period which prepares us for the proper celebration of Christmas, which is the anniversary of our Redeemer’s first advent into the world. The word “Advent” means entrance or coming to or toward. Hence in the Church Year it always means Christ’s coming into this poor world of ours to enlighten and redeem it.

For the first Sunday in Advent this event — our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem — has been selected as our lesson from the gospel. It is in some ways a strange incident in the earthly life of Christ, which was, for the most part, so humble, so utterly without ostentation. Just why did this particular event occur? What is its meaning? It surely must have a deep and vi-

tal significance, or it would not have taken place; for we cannot think that Jesus Christ, who came to the earth for so momentous a purpose as to redeem mankind, would engage in any act that was idle and frivolous. So we must first deal with this subject:

I. The Real Meaning Of This Event.

1. A Connecting Link

It forms a beautiful connecting link between the first and second Advents of our Lord. At the first Advent He was “born King of the Jews;” but not of the Jews only, for the angel over Bethlehem’s plains said to the shepherds: “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 Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” Then a few people acknowledged Him as King. At the triumphal entry many more made this acknowledgment, and at the Second Advent “all people” will hail Him as Lord and King. At the First Advent the angels promised that He would bring “peace on earth, and good will among men.” At the triumphal entry He rides upon an animal which is the symbol of peace, and moves in a peaceful procession. At the Second Advent, He, the Prince of Peace, will come into the world to bring eternal amity and good will, to establish peace in every heart, in every community and among all the nations of the earth. Thus we see that all the events of Christ’s life are truly and organically related.

2. A Foretaste of Christ’s Kingship

This signal even was also a foretaste of that happy time when “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun doth his successive journeys run;” when He shall be King indeed. You know about the three offices of Christ — Prophet, Priest and King. As our Teacher He is Prophet; as our Sacrifice and Intercessor He is Priest; as our Ruler He is King. Was it not meet and right that His poor disciples, who had followed Him through so many trials and persecutions, should have a foretaste of that happy time when their King’s rule would be supreme? Would not such an experience give them heart in the dark times that were to come, and that, as we know, did come into their lives? In such

trying times they would say: “Oh, well, we can bear our afflictions for a little while, for did we not ‘taste of the powers of the world to come’ when we followed our Lord in His triumphal march into Jerusalem? How we forget all our sorrows in the great joy of that occasion!”

And this event may have the same value for us today. We see how Jesus for the time completely swayed the multitude, and won their homage and praise, and silenced all His enemies; and all of it without any appeal to force or to arms; just by the pure winsomeness of love and spiritual power. As it was the fulfillment of a prophecy (Isaiah and Zechariah), so it was a prophecy itself — a prophecy of the time when Christ, our King, shall “have put all enemies under His feet,” and shall reign in peace and righteousness forevermore.

3. A Foretaste of Christ’s Rule over Hearts

This event is also a prediction and foretaste of the character of Christ’s rule over the hearts of men. How free and spontaneous were the actions and praises of the people! There was nothing forced or strained about them. So far as the record indicates, there was the least possible preparation for the occasion; there is no evidence that a definite program was made beforehand. The disciples were simply told to bring the young animal for the Master to ride upon — that was all. Then when the ass and colt were brought, the disciples put their garments on them, and Christ mounted the younger of the two animals, and the procession was started.

Really the procedure was remarkable. There was so little of it, and yet so much; so great a demonstration, and yet so little apparent cause back of it. What made the whole multitude spread their garments in the road, gather palm branches from the wayside, scatter them before the Master, and break into hosannas, as if a great king were having a triumphal march after a notable campaign of victory over his enemies? Christ did not command them to do this. He was the meek and lowly Nazarene; He had never sought public display, and prior to that day had always avoided being regarded as a king. The incident stands out alone and unique even in the life of Christ. It was His first and His last pageant during His earthly career. History records many notable processions, but this is the most remarkable of them all. When you remember how elaborate must be our preparations for every public exercise or demonstration, you cannot help wondering at the purely

spontaneous way in which this pageant arose. How will you account for it? The only adequate explanation is that the Spirit of God moved the hearts of Christ's disciples, and constrained them by the simple propulsion of love to give Him this ovation.

That was one of the great purposes of the event, namely, to show us what heaven will be like; what will be the character of the millennial time; how free and happy will be our worship and praise. There will be no toilsomely prepared programs in heaven, nor in that glad time when there shall be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." All will be free, full, joyous and spontaneous.

II. Some Useful Lessons To Be Derived From This Event.

1. All we are and have belongs to the Lord.

He claimed the little beast and her foal. When He needed them, they were not withheld from Him. The people's garments were given up to Him, and so were the branches that the people plucked from the wayside trees. Then their hosannas belonged to Him. Thus we see that all we have and are belongs to our Master and Lord, and we should withhold nothing from Him. And especially should we give Him ourselves. "My son, give me thy heart," is His gracious and loving plea.

2. The Lord Has Need of Us

Strange as it may seem, the Lord has need of us and our possessions. "If any man shall say aught unto you, ye shall say, 'The Master hath need of them.'" How can that be — that the King of heaven and earth has need of us and of our poor services? Nay, do not question His marvelous ways. He has ordained for our good that we should be His helpers in bringing the world to confess His Kingship. The apostle says, "We are laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). We are His junior partners in the great work of evangelizing the world. He might do all this work Himself, but that is not His way; nor would it be the best way; for then we, His people, would miss

all the discipline, all the blessing and joy of working with and for Him. Do you not believe that afterwards the disciple who owned the ass and her colt often told his fellow-disciples with joy that he had contributed them to that triumphal procession?

3. Obedience is a good thing.

How promptly the disciples went for the little beasts at their Master's request! They did not know why He wanted them. Yet they did not hesitate. Neither did the owner make any demur when he learned that "the Master had need of them." How beautiful is prompt obedience! Said Samuel to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." When the Lord commands, let us do the very thing He commands, and not, like Saul, something else that we would prefer to do.

4. To praise and worship our Lord is good and joy-giving.

On that great day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem the people that went before, and the people that followed, gave great acclaim to Christ, and shouted and sang: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

What beautiful praise it was! It was pure, objective worship; it thought only of Christ and His love and greatness; it sought only to honor Him; it was not mingled with any selfish subjective feelings. The people were so absorbed in singing praises to Jesus that they forgot themselves. They never asked the question, "Do I love my Lord or no? Am I His or am I not?" No! no! they forgot themselves in their worship.

It was the kind of worship which we give to God in our churches when we sing "Gloria Patri" and "Gloria in Excelsis." No one will deny that there should be some subjective elements in our worship; but there should be a great deal more of the purely objective element. We worship best, and we really are the happiest, too, when we forget ourselves in ascribing heartfelt worship to God. Try the experiment on your own heart. When you sing such a hymn as this, "More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee," you cannot help feeling more or less of a strain, and often the more you try to control your feelings, the less you can succeed; but suppose you change

your hymn to this one: “Joy to the world, the Lord has come; Let earth receive her King,” and note what a joy and uplift come into your experience.

5. The children had a part in the blessed service of that triumphant day.

How beautiful and appropriate! The chief priests and scribes were filled with indignation when they heard the children crying “Hosanna” in the temple, and they censured Christ for permitting it; but He replied: “Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?”

The acclamations of the children on that first Palm Sunday were a foretaste and forecast of the time when all God’s children will give Him free and acceptable worship, and confess Him Lord of all. How natural and glad their hearts were! And we do not believe we are going too far when we say that this event was a prophecy of what occurs even today in many Christian churches, especially our Lutheran churches, when on Palm Sunday the children, who have learned to know, trust and love Christ through proper instruction and the witness of the Holy Spirit, come to the altar of the church to worship their Lord and to confirm their solemn baptismal vows. In these happy festivities the prophecy of the first Palm Sunday is partly fulfilled.

Let us all, young and old alike, fulfill it more and more as the years go by, so that we may have a share in the complete fulfillment when Christ, at His Second Advent, shall come as “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

2. When Christ Comes Again. The Second Sunday In Advent. Luke 21:25-36

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)

FEW DOCTRINES are more clearly and more frequently set forth in the New Testament than the doctrine of Christ's Second Coming. Indeed, if there were to be no Second Advent, the First Advent would have had little value and significance; for the purpose of the first must be consummated in the second. God's redeeming plan will not be left like a castle in the air; He will complete it as sure as His Word is true and everlasting.

The gospel for the second Sunday in Advent is somewhat difficult to interpret in every respect. Most students of the Bible think that the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and those of the end of the world are so combined that we cannot always distinguish between them. The Lutheran Commentary contends that the verses preceding the text relate to the former of these events, while the text itself relates to the latter. This

would seem to be correct, for there are evidently some things predicted in the text that have not yet been fulfilled. Here we will not enter into a discussion of these difficulties, but refer the reader to the learned commentaries. Our purpose is more practical. One thing may be said here that we think is relevant: we can never clearly interpret prophecy until it is fulfilled; only then is it perfectly plain. If it could be certainly understood prior to its fulfillment, evil men and evil spirits might seek to circumvent the divine purpose. Let us look at our text and note:

I. The Signs Of Christ's Second Coming.

Some of these signs pertain to the universe itself: "There shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars," and "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." These facts have a wide significance, for they prove that Christ's work of redemption has to do with the whole cosmos. As Paul says (Rom. 8:18-24), the whole creation is groaning and waiting for redemption just as God's people are, and it and they will be delivered from their bondage at the last day. Just as all nature was darkened and convulsed in sympathy with its suffering Lord and King at the time of the crucifixion, so at the last judgment all nature will share in His triumph and glory. God's plan of redeeming grace is not a small one; it includes a cosmical restoration. That is why the planets will be affected, or, as the text phrases it, "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," when Christ comes to glorify the universe and judge the nations.

As that event draws near, there will be premonitions of fear among the people — as the text says, "distress of nations," "perplexity," "men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world." On account of all the portentous signs, there will be a feeling of uneasiness among men. That is one reason why so many people nowadays, in the midst of the great conflict of the nations at war [World War I — ed], have the presentiment that the end is at hand and that the Lord will not delay His coming. However, God's children need not fear, for they may hear the voice of Jesus speaking to them in reassuring tones in this gospel lesson: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh." Then He teaches a beautiful lesson from "the fig tree and all the trees;" when they begin to put forth their leaves, we

may know that the summer is at hand; so we may know that “the kingdom of God is nigh” when we see all these portents in the heavens and upon the earth.

But some troubled soul may say, “There have always been some of these promised signs of the end of the World, and so we can never be sure of the precise time.” Yes; and no doubt it is God’s purpose to have it so, for He wants every age and all people always to be waiting and watching for His coming, so that they will not grow careless. Even some of the apostles expected Christ’s speedy return; and so it has been in every age since their day. The Second Advent is always imminent so that men may always be on the alert. And now we must draw a contrast.

II. How The Second Advent Will Differ From The First Advent.

1. In Fullness of Power

Our blessed Redeemer came the first time in weakness. Though He was God, yet, for the time being, He laid aside the exercise of His power, and became a weak little babe, lying in Bethlehem’s manger. Had not the Father taken care of Him, how easily His little life might have been crushed out! Herod sought to kill Him, and so God had to direct His parents to hurry with their precious babe into Egypt for safety.

But when He comes again, He will come in all the fullness of His divine power, and the wicked nations shall flee from Him, and shall call on the hills to fall on them and hide them from His face. What a contrast that will be! Even while here on earth as an ordinary man apparently, He really had all authority in heaven and on earth; He simply refrained from using them; but at His second coming, He will exercise and assert His omnipotence, and nothing shall be able to withstand Him.

2. With Great Glory

At our Lord’s first coming He appeared in very lowly guise. Born of a humble virgin, laid in a manger for a cradle, His reputed father a common car-

penter, there was no mark of earthly grandeur and royalty about His First Advent. While the angels of heaven heralded Him, and some humble shepherds and a few sages from the east came to do Him homage, the great ones of the earth knew nothing of His nativity. Think of the Potentate, not of an earthly kingdom, but of all earth and all heaven, coming in so lowly a form!

But very different will be His Second Advent. Our text says, “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Another gospel (Matt. 31:32) says: “But when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats.” No longer will His glory be veiled. During His earthly life of humiliation His humanity was like a curtain concealing His divinity, so that poor, weak human eyes could bear to look upon Him; but when He comes again in His state of exaltation, His divinity will have glorified His humanity, and He shall appear in all the radiancy of the Sun of righteousness.

3. To Judge The World

Once more, our Lord’s first coming was for the purpose of saving the world. “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” (See also John 3:16, 17.) But when He comes again, it will be to judge the world. He who was once the world’s Redeemer will then be the world’s Judge. Then only those who have accepted Him as their Saviour will escape the condemnation of the great and eternal Arbiter of men’s destinies. How important it will be to have the Judge in the last great assize as our Friend and Advocate! This thought leads us to our next consideration:

III. Admonitions To Be Ready For Christ’s Second Coming.

How solemn and urgent are Christ’s warnings in this gospel (verses 34-36): “But take heed to yourselves, lest perchance your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; for so shall it come upon all them that dwell upon

the face of the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Here we learn that, while there will be signs of the Parousia — that is, the Second Coming — they will not be so unmistakable as to preclude the need of constant readiness. After all, the hour will strike when we are not expecting it. Jesus Himself said that no man, nor the angels of heaven, nor even the Son of man Himself during His voluntary humiliation, knew just when the end would come. It is best so. Otherwise we might grow negligent. We might become like the wicked servant who said, “My Lord delayeth His coming” (Luke 12:45), and so indulged in all kinds of evil conduct; and then his lord “shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not,” to mete out to him a terrible condign punishment. So our Lord has not told us at which watch He will come, but He has told us plainly and repeatedly to “watch and pray” and always to be ready for His coming. “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or if in the third, and shall find them so, blessed are those servants.”

And now what is the best way to watch and to be ready? It is not to spend a great deal of time in trying to figure out the day or the hour of the Parousia, as the Millerites, Russellites and Second Advent people do. They might spend their time more profitably; for Christ Himself declared that no man knoweth the hour of His coming. Nor is it necessary to remain awake at night to watch; nor should we do as the Millerites did far back in the preceding century — dress ourselves in white robes, and go out upon a high hilltop to watch for Christ’s appearance in the clouds. They were sorely disappointed when He did not come, and many of them lost faith altogether. They should not have tried to be wiser than Christ and the Bible, which have said plainly, “No man knoweth the hour.”

No, this is not the best way to be prepared for the great assize of the world. The best way is, first, to accept Christ by faith as our Saviour, and thus be justified, freed from the condemnation of the law, regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the Word; and then do His will, proving our faith by our works. And how can we best engage in His service? By attending faithfully to our everyday work in His fear, working either with our hands or our

brains in some good, honorable and useful employment, attending faithfully on the means of grace in the Church, giving to the extension of Christ's cause, and telling as many people as we can about Christ and His great love and redemption. That will be true "watching." Then, no matter when Christ comes, He will not take us unawares, nor find us unprepared. Suppose He should come some day when you are working in the field, or in the house, or in the shop, or in the office or the study, or any place to which your duty calls you, do not think He will be offended? Do not think He will condemn you? No, if you are pursuing your rightful calling in His fear when He comes, He will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of thy Lord." Ah! brother, just so you and I trust Him, and Him alone for our salvation, and do His will through His grace, we shall never be found unready. If it should be on the Lord's Day, and we are in His house, well will it be with us. If it should be on any other day, and we are engaged in good and useful employment, then, too, it will be well with us.

And what a comfort and inspiration it is to the Christian soul that there is going to be a general judgment — a time when all wrongs will be made right; when even-handed justice shall be done everywhere; when all the inequalities of the world will be adjusted; when, as the Bible puts it, "there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!" How depleting it would be to faith and endeavor to think that the same unequal way of the present age would continue forever! No, no, the judgment day must come to inaugurate the Golden Age in which love, holiness and joy will prevail throughout the endless cycles!

3. Marks Of The True Messiah.

The Third Sunday In Advent.

Matt. 11:2-10

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. (Matthew 11:2-10)

IT IS RATHER A CURIOUS and interesting question than a profitable one as to whether John the Baptist had fallen into doubt about Christ or not. Many people have a desire to exonerate John from such weakness. After he had baptized Christ and had borne such clear testimony regarding His identity, it is difficult to believe that, when trials came, he would succumb to real serious doubt. Dr. Charles F. Schaeffer, in the Lutheran Commentary, takes the position that John himself did not fall into doubt, but that some of his disciples did, and so the Baptist sent them directly to Christ to have their skepticism cleared away. If that is the true interpretation, it would explain the strong witness that Christ afterward bore to the greatness and firmness of the Baptist. Dr. David Smith, in his commentary on Matthew, assumes that John's doubts were real, because, as he says, "The works of Jesus were such as the Messiah should perform, but they were, in John's judgment, insufficient. He expected that the Messiah would be (1) a Reformer (3:12) and (2) a Sufferer, a Sacrificial Victim (John 1:29). But Jesus was neither. He was

not striving, nor crying aloud, neither did any hear His voice in the streets (12:19); and He was at that stage the hero of the multitude. Could He be the Messiah? Had John been misled when he hailed Him as the Messiah at the Jordan?"

If this is the true view, we may learn from it that even good and strong men will have their seasons of doubt; that willful skeptics are not the only persons who know the testing and distress of doubt; and that the real way to have our doubts removed is to go directly to Christ Himself with them; then, just as in John's case, our faith will be restored.

Even if John himself was not in doubt, but sent his troubled disciples to Christ for their own benefit, we may still learn the above useful lessons from the incident.

However, the state of John's mind and the feelings of his disciples are not the real point in our gospel for the third Sunday in the Advent season. The real question is, What are the marks of the true Messiah? At His first Advent He came as a little child; then He grew up as other human beings do, and at thirty years of age was baptized by John and began His public ministry. Now, did Jesus give sure proof that He was the Redeemer of the world? That is the salient question of our text. Therefore let us consider together:

I. The Marks Of The True Messiah.

In solving this problem we must try to answer the question which John commissioned his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus Himself answered John's question in the most effective way. He said to John's disciples: "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see." Then He gives a list of the true marks of His Messiahship. What are they?

1. The Beneficent Miracles He Wrought.

So far as Christ was concerned, He had no question about the miraculous element in God's dealings with the world. He had no disposition to eliminate the supernatural, and to reduce everything to "the uniform laws of nature." He did not think that God was helpless in the presence of the machine

of His universe, or that He had gotten caught in its cogs and wheels; but He believed and knew that God was the complete master of the creation, was transcendent to it as well as immanent in it, and therefore could at will introduce something new into its operations. Let no one think that a true divine miracle is something “contrary to the laws of nature,” as many superficial and would-be scientific people seem to suppose. No, a true miracle is not anti-natural, but super-natural; not a violation, but a modification, of natural law. Just as a master-mechanic can introduce a new factor into a machine that he has contrived, so God can, when He wills so to do, add a new force or element into the mechanism of the universe which He has created. If He could not do that, He would not be all-powerful. Think of the logic of men who believe that God could create the universe, and then could not perform a miracle in the mechanism of it!

But we cannot here discuss the general subject of miracles. However, in this connection we would like to recommend a great and convincing book on the subject — Dr. Johannes Wendland’s “Miracles and Christianity,” which has been translated into English and can now be bought at a nominal price. This masterly work ought to convince any mind that is receptive of the truth. It is now time to note the miraculous works which Jesus wrought and to which He appealed as the signs of His Messiahship.

“The blind receive their sight.” Jesus had healed a man who was born blind. Could anyone but a Divine Being do that simply by His own power? Sometimes in these latter days very skillful surgeons may cure serious optical defects, but they must use the most painful efforts and the most scientific instruments and must take a long time, and even then they can never be sure of a successful operation. Not so with Jesus, who used no instruments, but who simply spake the word, and it was done. Was not this a mark of a superhuman Being — that is, of the Messiah?

“The lame walk.” Jesus could point the disciples of John to concrete cases of men right before them who had always been lame, and who had never walked in their lives, but who now were walking about completely healed of their infirmities. In those days no surgical skill was known that could perform such a cure. But Jesus simply spoke the word, and the lame and the halt leaped to their feet and walked away rejoicing. Was not that a sign-manual of His Messiahship?

“The deaf hear.” What is sadder than deafness? And no diseases are harder to cure, so delicate and complex is the mechanism of the ear. Today a

surgeon who undertakes an operation on that organ must have gone through the college, the medical university, and then the technical school that specializes on diseases of the ear. He must understand the anatomy and physiology of the ear. Even with all his knowledge and skill as a specialist he often fails. But Jesus never failed to cure any auditory trouble that was brought to Him. When did He study anatomy? When did He learn about the marvelous structure of the ear? We know that He never went to a medical college. Then how did He cure diseases of the auditory organs? Ah! He was the Messiah; He was “that One who should come;” He was the God-man. As God He had made the ear, and therefore knew how to repair it.

But Christ appealed to the greatest of His physical miracles to convince John’s troubled disciples: “The dead are raised up.” Perhaps He referred to the restoration of the son of the widow of Nain. Here is a marvel that has thus far in the world’s history, in spite of all its advancement and expertness, defied the skill of man — to raise the dead. To put life where there is no life is beyond the power of man. All the scientists of the world have never been able to bridge the gulf between the living and the non-living. The law of biogenesis — that is, of life only from antecedent life — prevails everywhere. But Christ raised the dead to life. That is incontestable proof of His divine character, for the God who created life, He alone can restore life. What greater and more convincing evidence could John and his disciples ask? No wonder they never questioned Christ’s Messiahship again! They found that they had no need to “look for another.” But Christ furnished one more proof to his distressed questioners:

2. The spiritual benefaction He brought.

“The poor have the gospel preached unto them.” Crass and earthly people are always wanting physical wonders to convince them. Many unbelievers and liberalists today are crying for miracles in the outer world. They are like the Jews of old, Who said, “What sign showest thou?” It is to be noted that, whenever people in Christ’s earthly days came to Him in that skeptical and challenging frame of mind, He performed no miracles for them. Why not? Because His kingdom is, above all, an ethical and spiritual kingdom, and therefore He would not force conviction on proud and defiant minds by external signs and unspiritual means. No; to them He said, “You must first

become poor” — that is, “poor in spirit” — before you can “see the kingdom of God.”

The greatest, the most cogent and most convincing proof of Christ’s Messianic office and appointment was that those who are poor in both purse and spirit “have the gospel preached to them.” And that is the best proof to us today. As Paul declared, “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” To be converted, to be forgiven of sin, to be cleansed from sin’s defilement, to be delivered from sin’s enthrallment, and to be saved from its penal consequences — ah! that is the crowning miracle, the ultimate and indisputable proof that Christ is the Redeemer. Said the angel of the enunciation to Joseph, “And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” He who has experienced this inner miracle needs no outer miracle to assure Him that Jesus is the Christ of God; that He is Immanuel, God with us; that He is God manifest in the flesh. Outer miracles were intended for a special age and purpose — that is, to prove once for all to the needy world that Christ was He “that should come,” as foretold by prophecy — but the inner miracle of regeneration is to abide forever, the convincing demonstration that Jesus Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God,” and that all men may have life through believing on Him. Even if the Baptist and his disciples needed something more in their day to assure them, we, of today, who are living in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, have need of no more; for the Spirit testifies of Christ and His divine character, and “beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” This leads us logically to our next main point:

II. The Blessedness Of Faith In Christ.

After naming the signs of His Messiahship to John’s disciples, Jesus added the admonition: “And blessed is he, whoever is not offended in me.” The word “Whoever” is put in for emphasis, and means “whoever he may be,” so as to include all doubters in every place and every age. The original word for “offended” is the Greek word from which we derive our English word “scandalize.” So we are never to be scandalized on account of Christ, never to doubt Him, never to stumble over anything He may say, or do, or not do.

You see, it was as if He should say to John and His disciples: “I may not do everything you are expecting of me, and I may do many things that you do not expect; but do not be offended, do not doubt me, for my thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways.” Yes, Jesus wants us to trust Him. If we could understand everything He did during His earthly life, and everything He does now in His state of glorification, we would have no room for faith. Is it not plain that perfect knowledge would do away with the element of trust? Yet Christ wants us to “walk by faith, not by sight.” He inspired His apostle to say that we are “justified by faith.” He never once in all the Bible says that we shall be justified by knowledge. Of salvation His apostle said, “It is by faith that it might be by grace.” In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews — the great faith chapter of the Bible — all the heroes mentioned performed their great works “by faith,” not by their superior knowledge. “Without faith,” says the inspired writer, “it is impossible to please Him.”

Does not reason teach us that it is far better to trust in Christ than to let go our faith in Him because we cannot understand many of His ways? If we lose faith in Him, to whom shall we go? Is there anyone else who has the words of eternal life? Are we going to trust merely in chance, or fate, or the immutable laws of nature, or the blind god of pantheism? How can they help us? They cannot even help themselves. We cannot pray to them, and they can give us no comfort in our distress, no light in our darkness, no solution in our perplexity, no hope in our despondency. But if we continue to trust in the God-man, we may hear Him sweetly saying: “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, and believe in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.” The soldier fighting on the field of battle in what he believes to be a just cause, can put his trust in the Comrade in White, who stands by his side and dwells in his heart; and then, whether he lives or must lay down his life, he knows that all will be well with him.

In the latter part of our gospel for today Christ appeals to the testimony of John the Baptist, who was His divinely appointed forerunner, and who, therefore, fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi, who had written centuries before. Here is another reason for trusting in Christ; He fulfilled prophecy. Since God only can foresee the future, and control for His own purpose contingent events, Christ must have been the one “who was to come” as the Messiah and for whom John prepared the way. So, whether we can under-

stand Him always or not, let us trust Him, believe in Him, and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour, and all will be well.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

4. The Faithful Herald. The Fourth Sunday In Advent. John 1:19-28

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)

IN ANCIENT TIMES, whenever a king desired to visit a province of his dominion, he would send his herald before him to prepare the way. So Christ, our heavenly King, when He decided to come to the earth, sent John the Baptist as His forerunner, to get the people ready for His advent. But John's character and mission differed in many ways from those of the ordinary messengers of the ordinary kings of the earth, just as the principles of Christ's kingdom were different from those of their kingdoms. We want to study this unique herald and his unique mission today.

I. The Character Of The Herald.

God chose wisely when He selected John the Baptist to be the forerunner of His Son. First, John was hardy and rugged, so that he could live in the wilderness, wear coarse clothing and subsist on coarse food. In that way he lived a somewhat austere life and emphasized a somewhat legalistic moral-

ity, and thus was vitally connected with the Old Testament dispensation. At the same time he proclaimed baptism unto repentance for the remission of sins, and then pointed to Christ as “the Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world,” and thus he was livingly related to the New Testament dispensation. So he was just the kind of a man to be the connecting link between the Old and the New. In him there was the union of the law and the gospel.

Then, John was humble. It would have been unfortunate if a man of a proud and ambitious temper had been selected for this special mission. He might have thought too much of his own honor and reputation. He might have become a rival of the King Himself. But, on the contrary, he said, in speaking of Christ, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” He also refused to proclaim himself anything great; he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor even “that prophet;” he was only “a voice in the wilderness.” He was willing that his personality should drop out of public view as soon as the Christ would come. To him it mattered nothing that his fame would be eclipsed. How noble it was in him to declare that he was unworthy to unloose the shoe-latchet of Him who was to come after him! What a lesson of humility and self-forgetfulness we may learn from the character of John the Baptist! It is so easy for men to be proud and ambitious. Some even think more of themselves than they do of Christ. One might almost say that they stand up in front of the cross, and then stretch out their arms, so that even the arms of the cross are hidden by them. Better far to hide ourselves behind the cross than to hide the cross behind us. Yes, we can go to school to John the Baptist.

Another great characteristic of John was his fearlessness. He had both physical and moral courage. How plainly he spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees who came out to him with their hypocritical pretenses! He called them by their right names. He told them that they were not the true children of Abraham; that their boasted descent from Abraham would be of no avail to them unless they mended their motives and lives; that God could raise children to Abraham of the very stones by the wayside and in the field. Such language must have been very stinging to those proud Jews who thought that the blood of Abraham in their veins would give them precedence over all others, even if they were lacking in true righteousness. Nor did John hold back his rebuke of Herod, though it cost the brave accuser his liberty and finally his life.

Thus just such a man as John the Baptist, so upright and austere, so faithful and fearless, and yet so humble and self-effacing, was well adapted to be the herald of the coming of our Lord. God knows how to choose His instruments to accomplish His purposes.

II. The Function Of The Herald.

We may well ask, Just what was the specific office of John the Baptist in the kingdom of God, in His plan of redeeming grace? Was John just arbitrarily chosen to fill up this gap between the Old Testament prophets and the Messiah, or was he a necessary link in a living plan? Why could not Christ have been His own herald, and why did He have to have a forerunner at all?

Let us attend to these questions. It was right and proper for God to choose someone who would be a vital link between His two dispensations. Let us remember that with God's redemptive plan everything is vital and organic; nothing merely arbitrary and mechanical. So the connecting link must be a person — a living, rational, ethical person. But he must be a person so constituted that he would livingly belong to both dispensations. As we have already seen, John was precisely that kind of a character; he had in his makeup the elements of both the Old and the New Covenants, both the Law and the Gospel, the austere righteousness and legalism of the one and the forgiving and atoning love of the other; just as he himself said (1 John 1:17): "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." With one hand this great personage reached over and grasped the Old and with the other he grasped the New, and thus became the living human link between them. How organic is God's way of revelation and redemption! Christ Himself could not appropriately have been this link, for He brought in the New Covenant and was its special minister and administrator.

It was in the nature of the kingdom, too, that the Mediator of the New Covenant should have a forerunner, one who would go before Him and prepare the way for His coming. That plan would call the attention of the multitude to the coming Messiah, so that they would be looking for Him and be ready to consider His claims and His proffer of salvation. Was not that a better way than for Christ to come suddenly among them, without any

warning and preparation? To say nothing more, it would not have been a good pedagogical method for Christ to come among them unannounced and suddenly. If a great man were to arrange to come into your community to deliver an important message to the people, would he come without prior preparation and announcement? Would he spend his valuable time going about first in the community advertising his addresses and asking the people to come out to hear him? What a poor method that would be! So John the Baptist was Christ's divinely chosen advance agent, and when Christ came His audiences were assembled and were ready to hear His message of the gospel. He did not need to go around gathering up a crowd. You see, God always acts in the rational and normal way. He never resorts to artificial and superficial devices as men so often do.

We may learn another valuable lesson in considering John's office in the plan of redemption. God wants human partners in the work of saving the world. True, being all-powerful, He might do everything Himself; but that would not be the best way. It is better to give men something to do; better for them and better for the kingdom. So, while Christ might have been His own herald, He chose the wiser plan of giving that office over into the hands of another, so as to give him a share in the great work of spreading the glad tidings. Christ will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." All along the history of redemption He has been using human agents to help Him in extending and establishing His kingdom in the world. Note some of His "chosen vessels:" Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, the prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the church fathers, the reformers, the ministers of the gospel, the Aarons and Hurs who have upheld their hands. Thus we are all "laborers together with God." In a sense, we are all John the Baptists; we can all help to "prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight." Says Paul right on this line of thought: "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" And again: "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Yes, God's ways are the best ways.

The rite of baptism which John used was admirably adapted to his office of forerunner. It was the sign of cleansing from sin. In the whole Old Testament ritual sprinkling was employed as the symbol of spiritual purification. All the Jews who went out to hear and see John were accustomed to that

method, and therefore would understand what was meant by John's baptism. Therefore they would know that, in order to enter the kingdom which Christ was about to introduce, they must repent of their sins and have them forgiven and washed away. Hence his baptism was called "the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins."

But his preaching or message was no less relevant. He said, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Therefore the people would understand that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be an ethical kingdom, not a worldly one; that they would have to be willing to be cleansed of their sins first of all in order to be members of that kingdom. It was to be a kingdom of righteousness, not one of earthly power and grandeur. But even John, though standing at the threshold of the kingdom, was led by the Holy Spirit to avoid the legalism and self-righteousness of the Pharisees; for, instead of preaching that men could be saved by their own deeds and goodness, he told the people plainly that the coming Messiah was "the Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world." Therefore, He, and He alone, could make atonement for sin, and He alone could "baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire," and thus beget within their hearts the new life of holiness that would fit them for membership in the kingdom. So John even in his day preached the blessed doctrine of justification by faith and salvation by grace. He was indeed a faithful herald.

Yes, he taught that men must "make straight the way of the Lord;" that is, the Lord would not come to them in any crooked or unethical paths. They must be contrite and humble, and they must exercise true faith in the Redeemer, or they could not be saved. When the Messiah saves, He will save righteously. He saves men from their sins, not in their sins. He will not use any crooked devices. He will redeem us only in the frank and open way of repentance and faith; and faith means trust in the atoning Lamb of God who makes real satisfaction for sin and upholds thereby the righteous will and law of God.

Let us always walk in the straight way ourselves, and then be John the Baptists in our degree and place, proclaiming the straight way for all the world. So may the lesson from the gospel for the day have its practical effect on our hearts and lives!

5. Why The Son Of God Game In Human Form. Christmas. Luke 2:1-14

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar 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 Judaea, 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 Saviour, 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)

DURING THE HOLY ADVENT SEASON we have been preparing our thoughts for the proper celebration of the coming of our Lord upon earth in human form. We have been getting ready for the Advent of the blessed Christ-Child. And now we see Joseph and Mary going down to Bethlehem to be enrolled as citizens of the Roman government, according to the civil law. There the Saviour is born, and is cradled in a manger, while the angels proclaim His Advent to the shepherds keeping their flocks by night. When we contemplate this great event, this most epochal event, in the world's history, many thoughts crowd upon us, and we find it difficult to decide which to use. But let us today consider together this theme: Why the Son of God came to the earth in human guise; in other words, why He enfolded Himself in human nature and became man.

It is a crucial question, and we ought to understand the divine reasons as well as we can. The Bible teaches this great doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God (John 1:14): “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Why did the Word become flesh? Why could we not have been redeemed in some other way? Was it the best way? Was it the only way by which sinful man could be brought back to God? Whether it was the only way we may well leave to the wisdom of God; but that it was the eminently fitting way we may see clearly after a little thought. Looking at the little Babe in the manger today, let us try to answer this pregnant question, “Why?”

1. The Fall

When man sinned in the garden of Eden, he fell from God, and bore down with him all his posterity. Having thus fallen from God, and rendered himself morally unable, he could not lift himself up to God, any more than you and I could lift ourselves bodily into the air. But if man could not lift himself up to God, God could come down to man in condescending mercy and love.

And that is what God did in the person of His only begotten Son, who was of the same essence as Himself. He came down and took into His Godhead human nature, and thus reunited divinity and humanity in the person of the Babe of Bethlehem. And now, when you and I are united by regeneration and faith with Christ, the God-man, our humanity is reunited with Deity. Is not that a beautiful way, an organic way, a living way? It is no makeshift, no mere device. Hence the angels could proclaim to the shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” You see in that angelic message the doctrine that Christ was both God and man. This is precisely what the apostle taught when, he wrote (2 Cor. 5:19): “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

2. Concrete Rather Than Simply Abstract

Another reason why the Son of God came as He did is this: We can understand the concrete so much better than the abstract. Such are the limitations of our poor, weak human nature. In all our schools we teach on this principle; as it were, we “concrete” things. We teach children by means of object-lessons; we pass from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract. It is the normal pedagogical method. Even in the college, the university and the technical school we employ this method.

Did not God, our heavenly Father, understand our need? Did He not know what would be the best kind of teaching for His weak and erring children? He surely did. He knew that we could not get a clear conception of Him when He is defined as an Absolute Spirit, uncreated and perfect. Who can get a definite idea of God in His absolute and infinite form? Therefore, in the person of His Son He came to the earth, and took on Him a human form and nature, so that we might clearly apprehend Him. All of us can see Him clearly as a little Babe in the manger, as a youth of twelve in the temple, as a man going about doing good, as the suffering Saviour in Gethsemane, in the judgment hall, on the cross of Calvary. How simple and plain it all is!

So we may ask, Who was Jesus Christ? He was God made plain to us; He was God made concrete for us; He was God come down out of the realm of eternity and infinity into the realm of time and space where we dwell, so that we might get a clear conception of Him. That is precisely what the Scriptures teach with regard to the mission of Christ: “No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18); He was “Immanuel, God with us;” He was “God manifest in the flesh;” “He that hath Seen me hath seen the Father also.” Can anyone tell us in what other Way than by a divine incarnation God could have brought Himself and His redeeming grace so definitely and explicitly to our apprehension?

3. An Example

Again, the human family needed an example, showing them how to live. God’s precepts and commands are all good and useful as divine directions, but they do not appeal to us so strongly as does a concrete example. No merely human being could set before the world such a pattern, because all

men are conceived and born in sin. In His pure Deity the Son of God could not have lived a human life here on earth, and shown us how to live such a life. But by coming to the world and assuming human nature, and becoming truly man, He could live before the world a model human life, thus giving us the inspiration of His example. Thus He showed us how to live a life of true righteousness in the world of temptation and sorrow. And how much we are helped and inspired by looking at Him as our Model! For this reason He said to His disciples and through them to us (John 13:15): “For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.” The apostle enjoins men thus (1 Pet. 2:21): “For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps.”

4. Sympathy

The divine Son of God also became man because He knew our need of sympathy, of comradeship in both joy and sorrow. It was meet that He should assume true human nature that He might enter into all our human experiences and that we might know that He has done so.

If you have a deep affliction, you do not go for sympathy to some giddy person who has never had a real sorrow in all his life. Rather, you seek some one who has had an experience like your own, and then you can console with each other, and have a true fellow-feeling. Such sympathy all of us need betimes.

Do you suppose our heavenly Father did not know our frame; did not know our need of a sympathizing friend? He surely did. Therefore, He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to take upon Himself our very nature, so that He might rejoice and suffer just as we do; might know by actual experience all about our trials, temptations and disappointments. He was born a little child (that is what Christmas means), and grew as a child; so He knows all about the experiences of childhood. He passed through the period of youth and adolescence, and can sympathize with all the peculiar and varied experiences of that period of human life. Then He developed in the experiences of mature years, and so knows all about them. With reverence it may well be said that Christ has a “first-hand” knowledge of all our human joys and sorrows. Thus all classes can go to Him for sympathy. Each of us

may say to Him: "Lord Jesus, thou knowest all about my trials, for thou wert and art human." This makes Jesus not only our divine-human Saviour, but also our sympathetic Friend, the Companion of all our trials.

How could the Son of God have come into such close, vital and real touch with our humanity in any other way than by the incarnation? True enough, He might have sympathized with us even in His pure state of Deity, and of course He did, or He never would have come to share our griefs; but mere divine sympathy could never have been made so real to us as it has been made through His actual partaking of our very life, our human nature and conditions.

Here we have the precise teaching of the divine Word (Heb. 4:15): "For we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

5. Unselfish Sacrifice

Nothing so touches and wins the human heart as unselfish sacrifice. Who is not melted to tears by the love and self-abnegation of a mother? Suppose it is a mother who toils in her lowly home that she may give her son an education. We have known audiences to be comparatively dull and listless until the speaker told a simple, pathetic story of a parent's loving forgetfulness of self.

Henry Ward Beecher used to tell the story of a man who went as a substitute without charge to the Civil War for his neighbor, who was poor and had a family to maintain. In one of the bloody battles on a southern field the young substitute was slain, and was buried in a southern graveyard. Some years afterward the man for whom he gave his life, took some of his earnings, went to the southern cemetery, and placed a humble stone at the head of the grave of his benefactor, with this brief but touching inscription upon it, "He died for me." As the great preacher told the story, the tears would stream down his cheeks, and his auditors could not refrain their emotions.

Did not our Saviour know what would touch and melt the heart of humanity? Ah, surely He did! Therefore He said, "I will go down there to the earth, and take on Me the very nature of those sorrowing people, and I will bear their sins in my own person on the cross. That Will melt their hearts."

And it has. More persons have been won to God through the sweet old story of Christ's unselfish sacrifice on the cross than in any other way. And since He really suffered in our stead, really bore the penalty of our sins, we know He must love us. And, oh, how winsome is His love, expressed in so unselfish a way! This is also part of the Advent message; another reason why the beloved Son of God came in the flesh. In what other way could He have so effectively exhibited His surpassing love?

6. Atonement for Sin

But most important of all, the eternal Son of God had to come to make atonement for sin; to take upon Him our iniquities and the penalty that would otherwise have been visited upon us. How could He have atoned for human sin without taking upon Himself human nature? Could an angel have come down to the earth, kept the law in our stead, and then died for us upon the cross? No, it was not angels who were to be redeemed. Could the Son of God as pure Deity have been "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities?" No; only human nature could really suffer as we would have had to suffer if we had been compelled to bear the penalty of our own sins. But no merely human being could have made expiation for the sins of the whole world. One absolutely pure man, even if he had lived on the earth for a few years, could not have atoned for the sins of even a single human individual.

But when the Son of God, who was in essence God Himself, assumed our human nature into the person of His Godhead, He endued it with infinite worth by virtue of His Deity, and therefore, when He suffered and died on the cross, He could and did make satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. This is just what the Bible teaches — "that He by the grace of God should taste of death for every man" (Heb. 2:29). Paul asserts twice that Christ "died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Now we see why the angels sang their glad Christmas anthem over Bethlehem's plains on the night of Christ's nativity: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men." It was because the only-begotten Son of God had reunited God and man in His own person and so could work out in human conditions a perfect righteousness for man and bear for man the punishment of sin, and thus bring peace on earth. So He is the

Prince of Peace, the great, heavenly Peace Maker. Thus He says to us: “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.” And so Paul keeps up the sweet refrain: “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

6. The Christ Child In The Temple. Sunday After Christmas. Luke 2:33-40

And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary 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; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:33-40)

EIGHT DAYS after our Lord's birth He was taken to the temple for circumcision. This was according to the law of Moses, proving that Christ was "born under the law," and was to be subjected to the law in all things. It was therefore consistent when, at the age of forty days, He was borne to the temple again for the rite of purification, especially in His mother's behalf, for this service was according to the same Old Testament regulation (Lev. 12:2-8; Ex. 13:2-12). While the Christ-Child was in the temple at this time, two aged saints, Simeon and Anna, gave Him their adoration.

Like all other incidents in the life of Christ, this one has a real meaning in God's plan of redeeming grace. In a series of statements we will try to explain its significance. The question before us is, Why was Christ brought to the temple at this time?

I. To Prove His Vital Connection With The Old Testament.

God's plan is a unit. It has not been thrown together in a fragmentary way. With God there are no afterthoughts; He sees the end from the beginning. He chose the Hebrew people to be the bearers of His truth and His redemptive plan; and now that "the fulness of time" has come, He will fit the Redeemer into the preparatory dispensation, which He has carried forward through the centuries.

So Christ was brought to the temple on the eighth and fortieth days, in order that He might be placed completely under the law that God had instituted for the Hebrew people, that He might fulfill all its requirements, and thus "redeem them that were under the law." Thus He became the Saviour of the Jews, and through them of the Gentiles.

Do you not see how He carried out the unity of His purpose through all the ages? By having a unified and coherent plan, He will bind all His redeemed people together in the organism of a spiritual fellowship. Besides, a God who has a well-devised plan, and who carries it out, begets in us confidence that He will not fail to complete the redemption He has promised to His people. Another purpose was:

II. To Show How True Israelites Recognized The Messiah When He Came.

Observe the beautiful tribute paid by the evangelist to Simeon's character: "And this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When Christ was brought to him, he "received Him into his arms, and blessed God, and spoke his great hymn of praise," "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," etc.

A little while afterward Anna, the aged saint, came to the place where the Infant Saviour was. She was at least eighty-four years old, perhaps ninety-one. Of her the text says she "departed not from the temple, worshiping with fastings and supplications night and day." Then the narrative con-

tinues: “And coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks unto God, and spake of Him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Israel.”

Both these aged saints were looking and longing for the coming of Christ. They submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit; they were humble, believing, spiritually-minded persons. That was just the frame of mind to prepare them for the Messiah’s coming; and so, when He came, they recognized Him. You might say they knew Him by spiritual intuition. Perhaps a better way to express it would be, the Holy Spirit, to Whose guidance they submitted themselves, led them to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. The Holy Spirit always opens men’s spiritual eyes, and always leads them to Christ. Even before the Holy Spirit was poured out in pentecostal power, He always testified of Christ.

When appeal is made to history, it will be seen that whenever men and women were looking for the consolation and redemption of Israel, their desires were fulfilled. Note, for example, how the wise men from the east were led to Christ; so also were Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia and Dorcas. Such has been human experience throughout human history; such is men’s experience today. All souls that desire and seek Christ will find Him. “He that seeketh findeth.” If, therefore, you have not yet found Christ, it is because you have not earnestly sought Him. “If anyone is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine,” etc. Christ must have the open mind, the receptive and earnest spirit. Again this appearance of Jesus in the temple was intended —

III. To Indicate The Holy Spirit’s Leading And Inspiration.

No one can read the aged Simeon’s hymn of praise without feeling that it exhibits more than merely human wisdom. It has been adopted by large portions of the Christian Church as a part of its beautiful vesper service, and is known as *Nunc Demittis*, which are the Latin of its first few words, “New lettest thou depart.” This incident is the only one in the Bible that tells us about Simeon. He is mentioned nowhere else. Yet this humble, unknown man spoke words that the Church has been chanting through all the centuries since his day. This surely is proof of a higher than human source for them. They were indited by the Holy Spirit.

Look at the beauty and majesty of these statements: “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.” Not only are there beauty, majesty and poetry here, but there is also great truth that would be beyond the conception of a narrow and provincial Jew. Even the learned Scribes and Pharisees of Christ’s day could not understand God’s worldwide plan in the Messiah. It even required years of training before Christ’s apostles could grasp the thought that the gospel was for “all peoples, a light to lighten the Gentiles.” Where did Simeon, when the Redeemer was still an infant only forty days old, derive such a vision of His mission? How could he foresee that Christ’s commission would be, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation?” At the same time he adds, “And the glory of thy people Israel,” showing that he grasped the truth Christ afterward uttered when He said, “Salvation is of the Jews.” How did this humble Jew thus grasp the whole unified and organic plan of God? He was endued with more than earthly wisdom. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The same fact is verified when we note what Simeon said to Mary, the mother of Christ: “This Child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel.” What prophecy! Remember the falling of the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and finally of the city of Jerusalem. Recall also “the rising” of the apostles and many of the humble Jews who accepted Christ. He shall be “a sign which shall be spoken against.” Had Simeon not been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, how could he have foreseen that this little Child would be defamed by many of the leaders among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans? All through Christian history this prophecy has been literally fulfilled, and is being fulfilled today. “Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul,” the aged seer continued. At Christ’s crucifixion this prediction was literally fulfilled. Another primary purpose of Messiah’s coming was “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed,” in Simeon’s farsighted words. How could he foresee that the Infant in his arms would be the greatest searcher of hearts that the world has ever known! Think of the volumes on volumes of spiritual experiences that have been written since those prophetic utterances of aged Simeon were made! Note what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says: “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and

intents of the heart; and there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” The predictions of Simeon evince the great truth of 2 Pet. 1:21: “No prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.”

The incident of our gospel was also intended to teach us a very practical lesson, namely:

IV. To Exemplify The Beauty Of Aged Piety.

We do not know what Simeon’s age was. No doubt he was far advanced in years. Anna was either eighty-four or ninety-one. Yet they were worshiping the Infant Saviour!

Nothing can be more beautiful and inspiring than piety in the aged. They serve as an example to the young. More than one young person is led to accept Christ by the beautiful lives of aged saints, who prove how good it is to trust in God. When people have been religious throughout a long life, and in old age are cheerful and content, they bear a powerful witness to the upholding grace of the gospel. They prove that the gospel is a real staying power; that the religion of Christ does not wear out through continued use. The writer of these lines is happy to bear testimony to the salutary influence of his saintly grandparents upon his life.

Now let us gather up the helpful lessons of our gospel for Sunday after Christmas: First, God works according to a foreseen and foreordained plan to carry out His purpose of redeeming grace; and thus we may put our whole trust in Him. Second, those who have the spiritual mind will be sure to recognize Christ when He comes to them, and they may be sure He will not overlook them. Third, if the Holy Spirit came to Simeon and inspired his marvelous hymn of praise, *Nunc Demittis*, we may rely on the whole Bible as having come from the same divine source, for Paul declares that “every Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). Fourth, whether we are young or old, or middle-aged, the religion of Christ will be our stay and comfort; for if God does not forsake the aged whose days are almost numbered, neither will He forsake those of us who must still bear the heat and burden of the day. To this end we have a satisfying assurance in the last verse of our text, which says: “And the child grew, and waxed strong, be-

coming filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him.” One who possesses these qualities and whom God thus approves may well command all our trust and allegiance.

7. Christ And The Law. Circumcision Day. Luke 2:21

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)

ON THE EIGHTH DAY after Christ's birth He was brought to the temple for circumcision. At the same time the parents brought their humble offering to be laid upon the altar of the temple. All this was according to the Jewish law. If you will read the lesson for this day and a few verses further in the gospel (Luke 2:21-24), and compare it with the Old Testament law (Lev. 12:2-8; 5:11; Ex. 13:2-12), you will see precisely what the legal requirement was.

What were the meaning and purpose of this incident in the life of Christ? Was the circumcision of Christ a mere form or ceremony, or was it a real, vital and necessary link in the divine plan of redemption? Let us analyze the event, and at the same time learn some useful and inspiring lessons from it.

I. The Obedience And Example Of Christ's Parents.

It was meet that they should carry Him to the temple, and consecrate Him there to God's service in the divinely appointed way. It speaks well for them; it proved their concern for the spiritual welfare of their child. Nor did they delay presenting Him to God; they did not say that they would let Him grow up to years of accountability, and then permit Him to decide for Himself whether He wanted to be circumcised or not, and whether he wanted to live a religious life or a merely worldly one. No, they obeyed God's law as faithful Hebrews, and did not question why. If there was any advantage ac-

cruing to the child and themselves from the rite of circumcision, they were anxious to avail themselves of the benefit.

Their obedience furnishes a good example for parents today. They should take their children early to the house of God, and consecrate them to Him. Happy the man who can say, "My parents carried me to God's temple when I was a babe in arms, and thus I have been a regular attendant at divine service all my life." As baptism is now the divinely appointed ordinance of entrance into the covenant of grace in the place of the circumcision of the Old Testament, parents should not delay the consecration of their children to God in His holy sacrament. Since there is a special grace bestowed in baptism, parents do wrong to deprive their children of its blessing.

II. Christ's Obedience To The Law.

Since circumcision was the rite of initiation into the Jewish covenant relation, Christ's submission to this rite meant that He placed Himself under the ceremonial law. It was fitting that He should do this. As the apostle puts it, "When the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

There were good reasons why He should do this even from His infancy. God Himself has instituted the ceremonial law, not, indeed, for perpetual obligation, but to be observed faithfully until all its beautiful and sacred symbolism had been completely fulfilled in the person and work of the Messiah, who was to be its true archetype. In this way, by keeping the law, He best fulfilled it. He was both divine and human, and therefore could give it perfect fulfillment. Thus He did not separate Himself from God's plan of redemption through His chosen people, but identified Himself livingly with it, giving it a historic and organic completeness.

It was also judicious for God to lead Christ's parents to fulfill the Jewish law. Had they not done so, and had not Jesus Himself afterward observed the Jewish law, His influence on the Jews from the very beginning would have been lost. They would have looked upon Him as erratic, radical and insubordinate. Thus the Messiah came really and historically to the world through the chosen people according to God's plan from the beginning.

Still another reason why Christ had to be placed under the ceremonial law was this: God's chosen people had been placed under that law, and had found it difficult to obey. Now if the Messiah, who must be the Redeemer of the Jews as well as the Gentiles, would pass through the whole gamut of human experience, and thus be the Friend of and Sympathizer with God's chosen people, He must also pass through the experience of keeping their law, as well as through all their other experiences. Thus He could enter into the fullest sympathy with His people. He could "redeem them that were under the law," and thus free them from its condemnation when they had failed, and thus make them the free children of God. Observe that God's organic plan was what Jesus said at one time, "Salvation is of the Jews." It was not for the Jews alone, but it was of them. God does not work without a plan. It was not a mere artificial device that He chose Abraham and his posterity to be the bearers of salvation to all the world, and to receive in trust for the world "the oracles of God." So He was a true Hebrew, and fulfilled the Hebrew law to the letter, so that He could abrogate its ceremonialism, free His people from it, and thus place them in living connection with the universal ethical and spiritual law of God. The ceremonial law was not of perpetual obligation. It was good, very good for its purpose, which was the discipline of God's chosen people. They needed just such special legislation to train them, to make of them a peculiar people, to develop them for their great mission, that of being a blessing to all the families of the earth, and to refine and discipline that special religious quality that was needed to make them the progenitors of the Saviour of the world. When the ceremonial law had been fulfilled perfectly by the God-man and the Jewish Messiah, it had served its purpose and could be laid aside, just as the husk, however useful and necessary for a time, is laid aside when it has served its purpose.

The ceremonial law was one of types and shadows, as is taught in the letter to the Hebrews. All its sacrifices and offerings pointed to Christ. Every lamb "on Jewish altars slain," every pigeon and dove brought to the tabernacle and temple symbolized the divine-human expiation that was made on Calvary. They were the types; Christ was the Archetype. Thus when the Archetype, had come and had absorbed in Himself all the types, there would be no further need of the latter. This does not mean that the ceremonial law has no value to us today. We should still study it devoutly and earnestly in order that we may see how God led and trained His people, made them ready for the advent of the Messiah, and set forth His marvelous

person and redeeming work in expressive types and symbols. While we no longer need to observe the old Jewish law, yet we may learn many a useful lesson from its historical significance and its place in God's redemptive plan. This law is no mere curio; it is still "a schoolmaster," if not to lead us to Christ, at least to teach us many a useful lesson about Him. There is something heavenly about the old tabernacle and temple services. Nothing in God's book is valueless. All history is our pedagogue.

III. Christ's Relation To The Moral Law.

Let it also be borne in mind that the ceremonial law was vitally connected with the moral law. In the Hebrew commonwealth and economy the two were not dissociated. No; they were bound up together. It might be put in this way: The ceremonial law was the moral law applied to the religious ordinances of the Jews. Thus, by keeping the former, they would learn more and more during their period of tutelage about the inner character of the latter. Hence the best of them would be able, when Christ came and the Holy Spirit was outpoured, to understand Christ's profound spiritual interpretation of the Ten Commandments in the great Sermon on the Mount.

Was it not right and fitting, then, for Christ to keep the ceremonial law before the Jewish people in order that He might lead them up to the inner ethical character of the moral law? Yes, He secured the organic connection between them, just as the shell is livingly related to the kernel until the former has served its purpose.

So Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law for the Jews, and upheld and conserved the moral law for them and all the people of the world; for, while the ceremonial law was temporary, the moral law is of perpetual obligation. Christ did not keep the moral law for us in order to abrogate it, but to uphold it before the divine justice for us, who could not fulfill it, and thus to free us from its condemnation and at the same time to beget within us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the disposition and strength to walk according to its requirements. Here Paul must interpret Christ's gracious work in our behalf (Rom. 8:1-4): "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death; for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of

sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

So Christ by His active and passive obedience does not free us from living good lives and doing good works according to the moral law; He frees us from condemnation when we fail, and then repent and accept His righteousness. The law cannot save us, because we do not keep it. Christ saves us, and Christ alone, by grace through faith, and then breathes within us His sanctifying spirit, so that we may be lifted up to the high plane of the law, and bring forth the fruit of good works. Before conversion the office of the law is to convict us of sin and thus lead us to Christ; after conversion, to direct us in the righteous way of life. Christ does not save us in our sins, but from our sins; and not only from our sins, but also unto righteousness.

Our great lesson for the day is, Let us fly to Christ for pardon, salvation and conversion; and let us do that first of all; then let us walk in the highway of holiness before the Lord and all our neighbors. And since Circumcision Day comes on our New Year’s Day, how fitting it would be to come to Christ for conversion, if we have not already done so, or if we are Christians, to consecrate our lives more fully to His service!

8. God's Care For His Own.

Sunday After New Year. Matt.

2:13-23

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 enquired 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 Judaea 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. (Matthew 2:13-23)

THE GOSPEL LESSON for today, Sunday after New Year, illustrates in a historical way how God's providence works and intervenes to carry out His purpose of redeeming grace. Had He not performed miracles and revealed Himself in a supernatural way at this special epoch, His redemptive plan would have been frustrated. We should like pointedly to ask those who reject the supernatural, and try to explain everything by mere natural evolution, how they think God could have decreed and carried out a plan of salvation without the use of miracles. By balking Herod in his cruel wrath, God spared the life of His incarnate Son, and thus made possible the redemption of the world. How else could this have been done?

Let us consider our text under the two main heads that have already been suggested: I. Man's cruel wrath; II. God's over-ruling providence.

I. Man's Cruel Wrath

After the wise men from the east (see the gospel and sermon for Epiphany) had presented their worship and gifts to the Infant Saviour, they were warned of God in a dream not to return to their own country by way of Jerusalem, as Herod had asked them to do, but to turn eastward from Bethlehem in a more direct course. Thus the wicked king's plot was foiled, and hence he was filled with wrath and fear. The wise men had declared that Jesus was to be king of the Jews, and therefore the guilty Herod look upon Him as a rival. Therefore he resolved to slay Jesus. But how should he be able to identify Him? Then he thought out another plot, a foul and cruel one, showing to what wicked lengths he was willing to go in order to get rid of a possible rival to the throne. He ordered all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity to be put to death. He knew that Jesus would be included in the limits of the age designated. And this malicious plan was carried out.

How terrible are the wrath and jealousy of man! Read the history of all the wicked kings and queens and other people of worldly power, and you will find that they have stopped at no crime to gratify their pleasure and ambition. Remember Pharaoh, Ahab, Jezebel, Nero, Galba, Caligula, the Medicis, Napoleon, Louis XIV of France, and many others scarcely less wicked and cruel. Pride, ambition, selfishness led them in their wanton ways; and back of it all and in it all was the malignant spirit of the evil one himself, inducing men even to over-reach themselves in their criminality. What a sad record it is! Wars, persecution and murder. all come from the pride and wrath of men's hearts.

We may think that we are free from such heinous sins. It is true, we may not be guilty of atrocious and overt crimes, but we must also guard against the evil principle of wrath that leads to them. Christ told us we must not be angry with our brother, and St. John says that "he that hateth his brother is a murderer;" which means that hatred in the heart is the seminal principle from which murder comes. If there were no hatred, there would be no murder. Gain, the first murderer, slew his brother because he hated him; he was

jealous because God looked with more favor on his brother's offering than upon his.

Some sincere persons may be troubled over the question why God permitted the slaughter of the innocents by the wicked king, while at the same time He had the power to preserve the life of Jesus. We would not try to silence such an inquiry, if honestly made, in a dogmatic way, by saying it is only a prying and idle question. But let us remember that, if God were to perform a miracle to prevent all such calamities, this would be a perfect world; it would not be a world of trial and probation. If He had saved those innocent children of Bethlehem and its vicinity, He should by the same token save all children whose lives are endangered. No; God performs miracles only when they are necessary to carry out His great and eternal plan of redemption.

We should remember, too, that those little children who were slaughtered by the cruel king were not lost. Only their bodily lives were destroyed, not their soul life. Jesus said of little children, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." The Divine Child, whose life was spared by an over-ruling providence when Herod's murderers came to Bethlehem, afterward died to make possible the salvation of the little ones who were slain; for the blood of the atonement covers the sins of natural depravity as well as those of actual transgression. If we will remember always God's eternal plan for His children, many of our doubts will be resolved, and we will continue to trust in His goodness and power.

This leads us to the investigation of our next point:

II. God's Interposing Providence

After all, Herod's cruel plot was frustrated. God stepped in and over-ruled the wrath of man. Man may propose, but it is God who disposes. Note the various steps of God's intervention in order to carry out His plan of redemption. All these miracles have ample justification when we consider the moral and spiritual ends that were to be subserved. Will the rationalists — those who want to eliminate the supernatural element from the gospels and from God's dealings with the world — tell us how God could have saved the life of His Son, our Redeemer, without miracles at this time? Had He

not intervened in some miraculous way, His whole redemptive purpose would have been thwarted by the wicked devices of man.

1. He led the wise men to provide money for the sojourn of Mary and Joseph and the Child in Egypt. They laid gold at His feet. The frankincense and myrrh, which were precious ointments, were doubtless sold for a goodly sum.
2. He warned the wise men to go to their own country in another way than around by Jerusalem. Thus while Herod waited for them to return, time was given for Christ and His parents to escape into Egypt.
3. He sent an angel to warn Joseph to flee with Mary and the Child into Egypt, because Herod would seek the young Child to destroy Him. How varied are God's ways of exercising His providence! All resources are at His command. He is not limited in His ways. Sometimes He warns by merely impressing the mind by His Spirit; sometimes through an angel; at other times in a dream or a vision.
4. He led Jesus and His parents into Egypt in fulfillment of a prophecy, which said, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." This is a remarkable case of prophecy. Who could have ever interpreted it before its fulfillment took place? Yet, now that our Lord's whole 'life is spread out before us, we can see just how literally it was fulfilled. We can see, too, how necessary the prophecy was, for the flight and sojourn in that distant land were essential in God's purpose to spare the life of His incarnate Son, so that He could carry out the divine plan of redeeming grace. How would the world have been redeemed had Christ been slain in His infancy?
5. When Herod was dead, the angel of the Lord again appeared to Joseph and told him to go back with the Child and Mary into the land of Israel. "For they are dead who sought the young Child's life," said the angel. How history has repeated itself ever since that remarkable deliverance! All who have ever tried to destroy Christ and His religion have died, most of them to be forgotten or consigned to infamy; while Christ is still living today in the hearts of millions of His believing people. Celsus and Porphyry sought to destroy Christianity; but they are dead and almost forgotten. Many of the Roman emperors also sought to blot out the Church of Christ; but all of them are dead. Voltaire boasted that it took twelve men to establish Christianity, but

one man, meaning himself, would eliminate it from the earth; but Voltaire is dead. Thomas Paine declared that he would go through the Bible like an axman through a forest, and when his work was done, the Bible's influence would be cut completely away; but Paine is dead, and the Bible still lives and flourishes. Yes, God knows how to deliver His own. "They are dead who sought the young Child's life."

6. Again God intervened to save His only-begotten Son. It would appear that Joseph intended to go back to Judea; but he was informed that Archelaus was reigning there in the place of his father Herod, and Joseph did not know but that the son would be as cruel and suspicious as his father had been. So the angel of the Lord directed Joseph to turn his steps into Galilee; and thus Joseph and Mary went back to their own home town of Nazareth, where they dwelt in safety with Jesus until He was thirty years of age. What a wonderful series of providences! Yet all were needed to carry out the divine purpose of redemption.
7. Once more a prophecy was to be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene." Note the marvel of these combined prophecies: Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea; He was to be called out of Egypt; He was to be called a Nazarene. How contradictory those predictions must have seemed before their fulfillment! But, since we have the whole life of Christ before us, how easy it is to interpret the prophecies and note their minute fulfillment!

But let us bear in mind that God's providence is also over us. He may not always save us from physical harm. When the time came for His Son to die, He did not intervene to spare Him that ordeal. But we may know that, whatever the ordeal through which we may be called to pass, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Jesus told us that God notes the sparrow's fall, and that we are of more value than many sparrows. God clothes the fields and beautifies the lilies. Will He not also care for us? God has not forsaken His world. It is not an orphan world. We are not orphan children. If we place our hand in His, He will lead us in the path that we should go. He says, "I will guide thee with mine eye;" and He can see in the darkness as well as in the light.

"Hosanna with a cheerful sound
To God's upholding hand!
Ten thousand snares our paths surround,
And yet secure we stand.

"How wondrous is that mighty power
Which formed us with a word!
And every day and every hour
We lean upon the Lord.

"God is our Sun, whose daily light
Our joy and safety brings;
Our feeble frame lies safe at night
Beneath His sheltering wings."

9. Guided By A Star. Epiphany Sunday. Matt. 2:12

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. (Matthew 2:12)

WE ARE NOW entering upon that part of the Church Year which is known as the Epiphany season. The word “Epiphany” means an appearance or a manifestation.¹ In the full sense every manifestation of Christ was an Epiphany, but the Church Year limits the term to a certain season, and there is no reason why we should not conform our practice to a long-established custom.

The first Epiphany was the manifestation of the Infant Saviour to the wise men from the east, who were guided by a star to His home in Bethlehem. No other star is so well known as the Star of Bethlehem, because no other ever guided men on so important a quest. We shall find this event a signal one in the history of redemption. It is fraught with vital doctrine, and contains valuable lessons for the practice of Christian living. Let us note its significance point by point.

I. Who The Wise Men Were.

They were Magi or Magians from the orient, perhaps from Babylonia, Persia or eastern Arabia. It was a name for the learned men of those countries, the men who cultivated science, practiced medicine and studied astronomy. No doubt the men mentioned in the text were familiar with the stars, and for that reason observed the new star that was shining so brightly in their eastern sky. To them it was sign for which they had evidently been looking, else they would not have recognized its significance.

We do not know how many of these wise men there were. The gospel record does not gratify human curiosity on that point, and so it does not

matter about the number or their precise identity. However, tradition has been busy inventing names for them and calling them “the three kings.” Mr. Lew Wallace, in his powerful story, “Ben Hur,” follows this legend, and elaborates it in a remarkable way by his fertile imagination. However, we should learn from the silence of the Scriptures on this point that, had it been important for us to know just who the wise men were, and how many, the information would have been given. No doubt God wants us to learn from the incident the plain and practical lessons, and this we are more likely to do than if too many particulars had been vouchsafed. We read Mr. Wallace’s minute descriptions for their literary beauty; we read the gospels for their religion value. Besides, if God had gratified our curiosity on every point, the Bible would have become too large a book for practical handling and use.

II. God’s Word And The Star.

How did these wise men know that the star was the sign of the advent of the King of the Jews? Surely there was no writing on the star itself or on the blue heavens around to indicate it. To suppose that they knew its significance merely by some inner light or revelation is far-fetched. No; it is much more probable that these men had received some knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies; for it must be remembered that the Jews, centuries before, had been taken captive, and carried to those very countries from which these Magi came; they had taken their Scriptures with them, and it was in these that the wise men read about the time and signs of the coming of the Messiah of the Jews. Thus it was the Word of God that led to the star and the star led to Christ. Luther believed that the pupils of Daniel transmitted to their descendants the knowledge of God which he taught them, and in this way the wise men received their information as to the meaning of the wonderful star. How beautifully God’s Word and His revelations in nature blend together! The knowledge of Christ and His redemption, however, comes first through His inspired Word; then God may employ natural phenomena to abet and impress its teaching.

The same doctrine is taught implicitly in the text itself. The wise men were directed in general by the star to go to Jerusalem; but there they had to stop and inquire, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” Then the

scribes and priests, at King Herod's request, had to look up the prophecies of the Old Testament, and there they found that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Why did not the star guide the men at once and directly to Bethlehem? Because that would have broken the connection with God's Word, and would have given a natural phenomenon a place superior to it. Thus God honors His Word "above all His name." No one was ever converted to Christ except through the medium of God's Word, which is the true means of grace. Says Paul (Rom. 10:14): "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Verse 17: "So belief cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ."

III. The Gospel And The Gentiles.

It is important to observe that these wise men were not Jews, but Gentiles. No doubt the shepherds, to whom the angels appeared on the night of Christ's nativity, were Jews; and so we know that the Jews were welcomed to the manger where the Infant Saviour lay, and God accepted and approved their praises. Indeed, Jesus Himself declared that "salvation is of the Jews." But this incident of the coming of the wise men from the Gentile world so soon after Jesus was born is a foreshadowing of the fact that the Gentiles as well as the Jews were to be included in God's plan of redeeming grace through the incarnate Son of God. So Christ Himself said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." He also bade His disciples to begin at Jerusalem, but not to stop until they reached "the uttermost parts of the earth." Had not the visit of these Gentile sages been acceptable to God, He would not have inspired the gospel writer to tell the story, and thus put the divine stamp of approval upon it. Afterwards Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles, and declared himself debtor to the Jews and the Greeks and the Barbarians. How full of meaning is the visit of the wise men!

IV. The Gospel And Men Of Learning.

Those Magi were what we would call the educated men of their day. We know from our study of archeology and from Greek and Roman science and philosophy at that time and centuries before, that there were many men of great depth of thought and wide culture in those olden times. While of course they knew little of the science with which we are acquainted today, yet in many other ways they were far advanced in knowledge.

The special point of interest is that these erudite men were attracted by Christ, sought for Him, were divinely guided to the place where He was, rendered homage to Him, and offered to Him their gifts. What is the lesson for us? That educated men need Christ, the Saviour, just as other people do. They also are sinners. Their cultivated intellects do not necessarily make them Christians, nor will mere learning be accepted as the basis of salvation. People cannot be saved either by their learning or by their ignorance. Christ alone can save them. "There is no other name," etc. Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

But we must remember that these learned men were welcome to come to Christ. Had they not been, God would not have appointed a star to lead them to Him. Besides, the gospel record implies that their worship of the Christ-Child was acceptable. Thus Christ came to save the learned as well as the unlearned. Some people seem to get the idea that He came especially to save the latter class. They misapply Paul's words (1 Cor. 1:26-31): "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called," etc. But observe, the persons here referred to are those who are "wise after the flesh," those who want to glory in their culture, strength or birth rather than in the Lord. Of course, such persons, so long as they remain in that proud frame of mind, cannot be saved. But that does not mean that they do not need salvation; and so, if they will come in penitence, humility and faith, Christ will prove to them a precious Redeemer. While the untutored are just as welcome as anyone else, let us remember that the educated are not excluded on account of their learning. It is significant that, when Christ's immediate disciples had gone into hiding, probably through fear and despair, two educated men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, went to Pilate, and secured permission to take the Saviour's body down from the cross and give it respectful burial in Joseph's new tomb. Thus God chose them to fulfill one of the prophecies

(Isa. 53:9): “And they made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death.”

How beautiful by very contrast were these early Epiphanies of our holy Redeemer! The shepherds, who were doubtless unlearned men, came to Christ, and were welcome. So likewise the learned men from the east were accepted as true worshippers.

V. The Gifts Of The Wise Men.

A good example is furnished to us by the gifts that the wise men laid at the feet of Jesus — gold and frankincense and myrrh. These were valuable offerings. Evidently these men were wealthy as well as learned. Here we have proof that people of large earthly possessions are also in need of the Saviour, and if they will come to Him in humility and faith, and consecrating their wealth to Him, they are also welcome.

Does not Christ need the gifts of rich people? Of course, they cannot purchase salvation, no matter how great their affluence. Salvation is solely by the grace of God. But wealthy men can, by their gifts, greatly aid the cause of Christ. It is not going too far to believe that the gifts of these wise and wealthy worshippers were of great service to the Infant Saviour and Joseph and Mary when they were compelled to flee into Egypt and remain there for quite a long while.

Whether we are rich or poor, let us lay our gifts on God’s altar as did the wise men, not grudgingly or of necessity, “for God loveth a cheerful giver;” and then we may know that He will use them in many ways to extend His kingdom and bear the gospel to those who need it. Think what would become of the Church of Christ if it were not for the large gifts of the rich and the many smaller gifts of the poor.

Many other good lessons may be drawn from this Epiphany, but time will permit of the mention of only one more.

VI. The Worship Accorded To The Infant Saviour By The Wise Men.

This introduces a great doctrine of our holy religion — the doctrine of the person of Christ. Who was this Babe lying in a manger, or in some other lowly crib, that learned and rich men from the east are divinely directed to come to Him, fall down and worship Him, and lay their valuable gifts at His feet? He was certainly a little human babe, with a human body and a human mind; for His humanity was real, not illusive or phantasmal. But if He was only human, what idolatry it was to worship Him? Then God, who guided the wise men by a star, would have led them to commit a wicked act of idolatrous worship!

But no! this little Child was also God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:1-14). Said the angel to Joseph, “And He shall be called Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Yes, He was “God manifest in the flesh.” Therefore we can trust Him without fear and worship Him without idolatry.

Note On The Word “Epiphany”

The word “Epiphany,” as we have said elsewhere, means an appearance, a manifestation. It is from the Greek words *epi*, meaning forth (really an intensive), and *phanein*, to show; therefore it means to show forth, that is, to make a clear manifestation. In reference to Christ, it means those occasions on which He made a special manifestation of Himself.

In the Church Year Epiphany always occurs on January 6th, being one of the fixed festivals, so designated to distinguish it from the movable festivals, like Easter, Whitsunday, Trinity Sundays, Advent Sundays, etc. The latter class of festivals do not occur on the same day of the month, and some of them, like Easter, not always in the same month; but the fixed festivals always occur on a specific day — Christmas on December 25th, Epiphany on January 6th, Reformation on October 31st.

According to the table of Epistles and Gospels for the Church Year, Epiphany begins with Mat. 2:1-12, which gives an account of the visit of the wise men from the East, when they saw the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, gave Him their adoration, and presented to Him their gifts. The Epistle for this day is Isa. 50:1-6, which is a prophecy of the light that will come into

the world through the manifestation of the Messiah and the honor that the nations shall give to Him. This prophecy was potentially fulfilled in the coming of the Magi, and still awaits its complete fulfillment, just as the first Advent is a forecast of the second.

In connection with these pericopes, the Scripture lessons selected by the Church (see Book of Worship) may also be read, indicating other Epiphanies of our Lord. One is Isa. 49:1-9, which is a beautiful forecast of the gracious visitation of God as the Redeemer of His people. For the same day a suggested Gospel lesson is Mat. 3:13-17, describing the manifestation of Christ when He was baptized by John at the Jordan. A beautiful Epistle for Epiphany is 1 Jno. 3:1-6, containing the comforting assurance that when “He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

In the table of lessons for morning and evening throughout the year we find appropriate Biblical selections for all the days of Epiphany week, beginning with Monday. Those prior to January 6th lead logically up to Epiphany, and those subsequent flow logically from it. By following the order of the Church Year in our reading both in the home and in public worship, the Christian person may keep in the spirit of the holy season. He will find relevant lessons from both the New and the Old Testaments. For example for the mornings of Epiphany week he will read Lu. 2:10-14; 3:15-20; Mk. 1:18; 1:9-11; Lu. 3:21, 22, 23-38; and for evenings, Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-25; 4:1-26; 5:1-32; 6:9-22; and 7:1-24. For all the Sundays after Epiphany other appearances are set forth in the Epistles and Gospels, the Scripture lessons, and the selections for mornings and evenings.

Thus the Lutheran Church makes ample provision for its pastors and people to read and study the Bible not only in the Epiphany season, but also throughout the whole year. There is good reason why our Church is called by way of preeminence “the Church of the Word.”

1. See note at the end of the sermon. ←

10. Jesus In God's House. The First Sunday After Epiphany. Luke 2:41-52.

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 favour with God and man. (Luke 2:41-52)

THE SECOND EPIPHANY was the manifestation of Christ in the temple at the age of twelve. All of us are familiar with this beautiful event, and we need not recite it. It is suggestive of some helpful lessons to us. Let us gather them up.

I. The Devotion Of His Parents.

Again we may go to school to Joseph and Mary. Imperfect though they were, in some respects their example is worthy of our imitation. Once more they have come to Jerusalem to worship, to keep the Passover, as they had been doing year by year, and to lay their gifts on God's altar; and again they have brought their Son with them to the temple. For it must be remembered

that, prior to their losing Him in the crowd, they had gone with Him to that sacred place to offer their sacrifices and gifts.

How beautiful to know that they were so devoted! They went to the temple themselves; that was right and good. They did not merely “send” their son to the temple; they were there with Him in person. They set their child a good example. They also recognized their own spiritual needs, and wanted God’s blessing upon their own lives. They wanted to worship God with their own lips. They could not go to the temple by proxy, even though they might have sent their own child. Let parents remember that their own lives need enrichment through the means of grace, the hearing of the preached word and the reception of the sacraments, so that they may live more uprightly and may set their children and their neighbors a good example of Christian living.

It is a real pleasure to think that Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to the place of worship. How beautiful it is for parents and children to go in company to God’s house, and to sit together in the same pew, and mingle their voices in praises to God! We believe in individual religion, and also in family religion. That is taught in the Bible when it tells us that whole families were baptized, so that all might receive baptismal grace and be brought into covenant relation with God. Nothing binds the members of a household so firmly together as the spirit of true religion. There always comes a day when children will bless the memory of their parents for setting their feet early on the road to everlasting life. When Solomon uttered the injunction, “Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart therefrom,” he proved that he knew human nature, and also the conserving power of early teaching and example.

II. The Trustworthiness Of Christ.

No doubt many people have wondered why it was that His parents, in starting back to Nazareth, on their return journey, permitted their son to be lost from them. Was not that an evidence of carelessness? It might be interpreted in that way; for Joseph and Mary, like all other people, were imperfect and limited, and are nowhere in the Scripture represented as paragons. Yet perhaps the better explanation would be that they had full confidence in their son, and, judging from His filial deportment and rare obedience in the

past, they felt that they could trust Him out of their sight. Besides, they thought He was among their kinsfolk and acquaintances (verse 44). Their confidence in Him was so complete that they even went a day's journey homeward before they became aware that He was not in the company.

The best construction should be put upon this part of the incident; for, as we shall see later on, God permitted these things to happen to teach Christ's parents and all Christian believers a useful lesson. Meanwhile their confidence in Him gives us the key to His character and conduct. It means that He had always been obedient and thoughtful; it means that He was the kind of a child that could be trusted out of their sight. Parents cannot always have their children under their eyes, especially after they have reached the age of twelve or more. While the children are at school, while they are at work or at play in various places, and while they are visiting with friends and neighbors, they must often be out of the immediate sight of their parents. Children should, always deport themselves in such a way that their parents need not be anxious about them. It is not a good omen when parents cannot trust their children. It proves that they are not trustworthy. How good it is when parents can feel that their children will always behave themselves properly, wisely and becomingly, whether they are at home or abroad! It is evident that Christ was such a child, and by that token He set a good example for all children. Then we may ask why He remained behind in Jerusalem without His parents' knowledge, while they began their journey homeward. It was, as we have suggested, God's way of teaching them and us a very useful lesson.

III. Jesus In The Place He Should Have Been.

It is a strange circumstance that Jesus' parents sought for Him everywhere in the city for three days, and then at last looked for Him in the temple. That is where they should have looked for Him first of all. But there they found Him. There He was "sitting in the midst of the teachers" (or doctors). And when His distressed mother rebuked Him, He replied, as if surprised at their anxiety and their long quest, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

What did He mean by that pathetic question? His meaning might be put in this way: "Did you not know me well enough to realize that I must be do-

ing the work my Father has given me to do? When you missed me, why did you go about in the city seeking anxiously for me? Why did you not come to the temple at once? Why did you not take it for granted I would be in my Father's house doing my appointed work?"

What a faithful Son He was! He was in His Father's house; He was doing His Father's will. He was in the right place. This is a good lesson for children and young people. If you were to go to the city, and your parents at the time of divine service would look for you, would they find you in God's house? I hope they would. I hope they would not find you in a place of sin and frivolity. If they were concerned for your moral and spiritual welfare, they would feel happy if they found you engaged in your Father's affairs, in the house of worship.

Now we must try to penetrate a little more deeply into the meaning of this event in the life of our Redeemer.

IV. The Unique Purpose Of This Epiphany In The Temple.

Had Christ been merely an ordinary child, it might simply indicate His early piety. True enough, it teaches that lesson, but it also has a much deeper significance. Let us try to analyze it.

1. Divine During His Whole Life

This incident has been recorded in the inspired Scriptures to prove to us that Jesus was more than merely human; that He was also divine during His whole life; and that even at the tender age of twelve He was conscious of bearing a unique relation to God the Father; for He said reprovably to His parents: "How is that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This shows that He was conscious of His vocation. Then we note, too, that He was sitting in the midst of the doctors, asking and answering questions; "and all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers." Even at the age of twelve He exhibited supernatural wisdom; This fact, taken in connection with all the other facts of His life, affords clear evidence that He was divine.

Now, if this event had not been recorded, if no incident had been given in His life from the visit of the wise men to His baptism, many people might think that in His youth He had no consciousness of His divine character and mission. Such omission would have left too large a blank in His life. But this incident indicates that all through His youth He was preparing Himself consciously for His heaven appointed work.

2. Why No Further Youthful Epiphanies?

Still, we may ask the question, Why is only this one incident of Christ's youth recorded in the gospel? Why did He not continue these Epiphanies throughout all the rest of His youthful years? We may be sure there is a good reason for this. It lies at hand in the narrative. He went with His parents, and "was subject to them." An example to children in their relation to their parents. To teach such a common and much-needed lesson, though seemingly of a humble character, was more important for spiritual culture, than to perform wonders that would have astounded the multitudes. What an accentuation we have here of moral and spiritual values over and above the factitious and marvelous!

And again, the world has never been permanently impressed and benefited by "boy preachers" or by precocious youths. They have usually been only a nine days' wonder. What has become of all of them that have arisen even in our own country within the last twenty-five years? All of them have disappeared and have been forgotten. So Christ waited until He was a mature man before He began His public ministry, and then all alike, both young and old, would have reason to respect the maturity of His judgment and message. We, who are living today, have more respect for Him because He pursued this sensible course, and thus hallowed the quiet years of thorough preparation for life's true work.

Let us not be too impatient to enter our chosen vocation. Let us not enter upon it only partially prepared. If Christ, the world's Redeemer, waited until He was thirty years of age, surely we ought to wait until we have the needed maturity and discipline.

11. Jesus At The Wedding. The Second Sunday After Epiphany. John 2:1-11

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 waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots 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)

A WEDDING is almost always a joyful occasion. Very few people ever refuse to go to a wedding. And when two lives, already joined in the bonds of true conjugal affection, come together in holy wedlock, in accordance with God's institution, why should it not be a time of joy? We are glad that Jesus was invited to this festive occasion, and that he went — he and His mother and His disciples. It is one of His most beautiful Epiphanies.

And His presence there and His deportment are very significant. We must note this morning some of the inferences, doctrines and practical lessons that we may draw and learn from this incident of Jesus at the wedding. Does it have any bearing on the person of our Redeemer and the way of salvation. Of course, the incident is recorded for one main purpose, which we will speak of last in our sermon today; but there are other good and helpful lessons to be learned that are taught rather incidentally. Let us attend to them. We note that this wedding was —

I. A Social Occasion.

The people had gathered together to converse and enjoy fellowship with one another, and no doubt, as is usually the case at weddings, there was a good deal of innocent fun and hilarity. And Jesus was there. And Jesus passed no criticism on the festivities; there is no record that he frowned upon anything that was done. Of course, it must have been a decent occasion, and not one of roistering or sinful indulgence, or He would not have been there; or if He had been, He would have rebuked what was wrong. He never connived at sin; never encouraged it in any way.

How beautiful that He was there to grace that social function and to have a share in the people's gladness! Jesus was no recluse, no ascetic. He did not look upon the right kind of social festivities as wrong. He never objected to people's being happy. In this incident we may learn a valuable lesson about the religion that Jesus established in the earth. It is a social and joyful religion. God loves a smile better than a frown, a laugh better than a groan, joy better than sorrow. When sorrows come in the way of life, we must bear them patiently, but Christ does not want us to be miserable for the sake of being so. There is nothing sanctifying in misery in and of itself. The fact is, the Christian religion hallows all our social pleasures, and makes them pleasing to God. We do not believe that an austere, Puritanic religion is a true expression of the religion which Christ taught. At one time He said, "These things have I said unto you that ye might have joy, and that your joy might be full." The apostle enjoined these inspiring words, "Rejoice, and again I say, Rejoice." The Psalmist prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Let us remember that when our social joys are not mixed up with sinful motives and conduct, they are pleasing to God.

11. It Was A Marriage.

And our Lord's presence there was a sanction of that ordinance. Do you suppose that He would have been there, and would have added to the festivities, if marriage had not been in accordance with the divine will? No; true marriage is a divine institution. It was established at the beginning of human history when God said, "It is not good for man to be alone," and then made woman to be a helpmeet to him. And Jesus Himself referred several

times to that very fact, and then said, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder." So far as we can learn from the gospel records, our Lord named only one sin that would be a sufficient ground for the separation of man and wife; and that sin would in itself be an annulment of the marriage vows on the side of the guilty party. Yes, the marriage relation is a sacred one; it ought not to be entered into carelessly and inconsiderately. It is not merely a civil contract; it is also a religious one. Hence the wedding service among Christian people ought always to be performed by a minister of the gospel and given the sanction of the Church. It is a slighting of the religious part of this sacred obligation for young people to steal away without the knowledge of their friends to be married by a civil officer. No wonder it is so little regarded as binding by people of that kind.

III. It Was An Occasion Of Increasing Joy.

When the wine failed through some miscalculation of the host, Jesus turned the water of a number of vessels into wine, and when it was passed around to the guests, the master of the feast declared that the bridegroom had "kept the best wine for the last," which was contrary to the usual custom. As a rule, on such occasions the poorest wine was kept for the last when people's thirst was quenched and their appetites were more or less satisfied. But this time the order was precisely reversed. We cannot believe that the wine which Jesus made was intoxicating; it had just been made out of pure water, and would be like the pure, fresh juice of the grape. Perhaps that was the very reason why the master of the feast called it "the best wine;" it was pure and sweet, and hence was not like the sour, fermented and inferior wine that had been previously provided. We know full well that unfermented grape juice is wholesome and nutritious, and will not intoxicate, nor can anyone well drink too much of it. Like pure, fresh water, it will quench the thirst, and when the appetite is satisfied, one craves no more of it for the time.

"Thou hast kept the best wine for the last." Is not that always Christ's way? It is a happy occasion when the little child is consecrated to God by Christian parents in holy baptism. Still happier is the time when that child, through religious instruction in the home and in the pastor's catechetical class, is brought to accept Christ consciously by faith, and then stands at the altar of the Church to assume for himself his baptismal vows in the sacred

rite of confirmation. Then as He learns more about Christ and the Bible and the way of salvation by faithful attendance on the means of grace, his Christian experience grows better and better. When he grows older, the grace of God in Christ becomes more precious to him, more of a comfort, richer in hope. And then at the last when he lays aside “this earthly tabernacle,” and enters the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven,” he will exclaim, “O blessed Lord, thou hast kept the best and greatest blessing for the last.” Yes that is God’s way. He inspired one of the Bible writers to put it in this beautiful language: “The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

IV. It Was An Occasion For Christ To Show His True Relation To His Mother.

There is some difficulty in interpreting the conversation that took place between Jesus and His mother. When the wine failed, she came to Him and told Him the situation. Then He said to her (we give it literally as it stands in the original): “What to me and to thee, woman; not yet is mine hour come. His mother says to the servants, Whatever he may say to you, do.”

What is the meaning Of Christ’s language to His mother? And what does He mean when He says, “Mine hour is not yet come?” Was it a rebuke of His mother for interference, as most interpreters seem to think? Why did He say that His hour was not yet come, and then a few moments later perform the miracle for the purpose of manifesting His glory (verse 11)?

We have thought of a very simple explanation providing only one word of the original could be changed. If the Greek word that stands for “not yet” were changed to the word “now,” all would be simple enough. Then the meaning would be this: When Jesus’ mother came to Him and informed Him that the supply of wine was exhausted, He said to her, “What is that to me and thee, woman? Mine hour is now come.” This would imply no rebuke of His mother, but an understanding between Him and her, as much as to say, “What matter it to me and thee, mother, that the wine is exhausted. My hour is come to begin my public ministry and to reveal my power. Have I not often told you that my hour would come?” That would be the reason that Mary spoke to the servants with so much confidence by saying to them,

“Do whatever He commands you,” for she knew that He would show forth His power in some way.

Perhaps this interpretation, simple as it is, would not be possible. It would imply that an error had in some way crept into the original in transcribing the gospel. So far as we know, there is no ancient manuscript that contains the word for “now,” but all have the word for “not yet.” Still we humbly venture this suggestion in order that critical scholars may continue their investigations, and sometime clear up the difficulty. According to the text as it is, we can see no satisfactory explanation of the expression, “Mine hour is not yet come.” [This whole section is not one of Rev. Keyser’s finest hours. Alas, we are all the children of the time in which we live. -Ed]

If our interpretation should ever be established, the lesson would be that of the beautiful mutual love and confidence that existed between Jesus and His mother — a lesson to both parents and children. If the usual interpretation is the correct one, it would teach us an important doctrine, namely, that Jesus, after He reached the time for His public ministry, could no longer permit any interference with His plans on anybody’s part, and His mother especially could not presume on her close relationship to Him to command Him or offer suggestions to Him; He was now and henceforth to be controlled entirely by His Father’s will, not by any human will; just as He said (John 8:28): “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father hath taught me, speak I these things.” Also 5:30: “I can of myself do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.” Before this time Jesus had been subject to His parents (Luke 2:51); but henceforth He was to be subject only to His Father’s will; henceforth, whenever He deemed best, His true divinity was to shine forth in His speech and conduct.

What important truth do we learn from this circumstance? That there is no Biblical basis for the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary. Though greatly honored in being chosen of God to be the mother of Jesus on the human side, yet she is not to be worshipped, nor looked upon as a mediator between God and man or Christ and His people. Says Dr. A. Spaeth, in the Lutheran Commentary: “This is Mary’s last recorded word in Scripture — a word of quiet, humble, implicit obedience and submission to her Lord and Master; a last will and protest on her part against the unscriptural exaltation bestowed upon her by medieval Mariolatry, not only dishonoring her divine Lord, but robbing that humble handmaid of God herself of

her brightest jewel.” Nowhere after this event did Mary ever suggest to Christ what He should do; nowhere did she ever presume to act as a mediator between Him and others.

We must now consider briefly the chief doctrine and lesson of this Epiphany of our Lord.

V. It Afforded Jesus An Occasion To Manifest His Divine Character And Power.

Verse 11 says: “This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.” Here is stated the chief purpose of this miracle, which was the first one He ever performed. How significant! He did not perform any of His wonders prematurely, and thus merely excite notoriety. He waited until He was fully endowed and appointed to enter upon His public ministry. The false or apocryphal lives of Jesus ascribe many miracles to Him even in His childhood, and all of them are puerile and useless. Not so the true and inspired gospels. They are sober. They record only the true miracles of Christ, showing that He performed them in a, sober way, and for the purpose of doing good and manifesting His divinity, and not merely to excite amazement.

It was eminently proper, too, that His first miracle should be one connected with nature; it proved that He was the Sovereign of the natural realm, its Creator. Who could turn water into wine in this sudden and miraculous way but the God who made nature and who is constantly turning water into wine by natural processes. Why, He is the only one who understands those marvelous processes, the only one who is able to command them at will. Hence this miracle proves Christ’s divinity. Afterward He proved, by casting out demons, that He was also complete Master over the spiritual and invisible realm.

Christ’s miracle at the wedding contains the promise and prophecy of the time when nature itself shall be transformed and glorified. Its present imperfect form shall be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-12), but its true essence shall emerge by the power and grace of God, and then there shall be “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). Then, as Paul phrases it, the whole creation shall “be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:18-23).

12. Christ And The Leper. The Third Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 8:1 — 13

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped 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 shouldest 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 selfsame hour. (Matthew 8:1-13)

HOW REplete with suggestion are all these Epiphany lessons from the gospels! Today we have one of the most beautiful and inspiring of these manifestations of Christ's power and grace. At the close of the sermon on the mount Jesus came down to the plain, where work of a practical character was awaiting Him. He did not shrink from it. After the sermon comes pastoral care and practical work. The two ought always to go together. No minister ought to think that his whole duty is done when he has stood in the pulpit and preached the gospel. To preach is very important indeed, but the application and practice of the preaching is no less important. Thus we see that these gospel lessons are suggestive for us ministers as well as for our

people. Yes, the gospel is as varied as are the needs and conditions of human life.

Now let us make this Epiphany Scripture our teacher, and see into what fruitful fields of instruction it will lead us. We will note —

I. The Leper's Part In The Incident.

When Jesus came down from the mountain, the gospel says: "And behold, there came to Him a leper, and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." What humble and submissive faith this request indicates, coupled with earnest desire! The leper did not doubt Jesus' power, but he was not sure it would be according to the Lord's will that he should be healed. One can almost read the poor man's thought: perhaps the Lord would think it better for him to suffer and die from his disease than to be cured.

Here is a lesson for us today. In all cases of sickness we should always add, "If it be thy will." Sometimes God wants us to suffer His will; at other times He knows that it is best to restore us to health. We cannot always tell which is the better. Although Jesus in this case healed the leper, there came a time afterward when this same leper became ill and died, and the Lord did not heal him. This incident ought to cure us of all fanaticism respecting faith healing, and we ought to learn to be submissive to God's will rather than to think that, if we just had enough faith, God would heal all our sicknesses. There is no such promise in the Bible; for we know that all the men and women who were healed, or raised from the dead by our Lord for a special purpose, afterward met with their last fatal sickness or accident or martyrdom.

There is, then, in this lesson an implicit rebuke of those people, like the Faith Healers and Christian Scientists, who think that every sick person can be restored to health, if men only have enough faith or enough power of mental suggestion. But that is not true Christian faith; it is presumption; it refuses to say, as Christ did in Gethsemane, "Thy will, not mine, be done." The Scripture itself declares that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Christ also died, according to the will of God, and so did all His apostles. Was it because they lacked faith? Certainly not, but because it was the divine will for them to die, when God saw that their work on earth was done. Even Mrs. Eddy, with all her pretended power over both life and death, at last had to follow in the inevitable way of all men. The Bible teaches us plainly that death, "the last enemy," will be destroyed by the final resurrection (1 Cor. 15:26), and not by faith cures and

mental manipulations. It is, indeed, right for us to pray for the recovery of the sick (James 5:14), but such supplication must always be qualified by submission to the divine will and wisdom. Because Christ could perform such miracles of healing at will, is no reason for thinking that we poor human beings have been endued with the same power. This leads us to consider next —

II. Christ's Part In This Epiphany.

[1.] Note His calm, sure consciousness of divine power." There was no doubt, no hesitancy, in His act. He simply stretched forth His hand, and touched the leper, and said, "I will; be thou clean." No fear had Christ of the infection of the disease. What consciousness here of divine power, and therefore of immunity from the most deadly contagion? Everything that Christ did proved His consciousness of His divine power. There was no hesitancy, no fear, no doubt, but complete mastery of the situation in every case. Yet there are critics today who try to analyze all consciousness of divinity out of the mind of Christ!

In answer to the man's appeal of humble faith Christ replied, "I will: be thou clean." Immediately the leprosy was cleansed away. What supreme mastery over physical disease our Lord here shows! He had no need to pray, to appeal to any other power than His own. He said: "I will." In all His miracles this same consciousness of having perfect command of the forces of nature and of spirit is vividly shown. He simply commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed Him. The only way to eliminate this consciousness of divinity from the mind of Christ is to deny the historical character of the gospel narratives.

[2.] Worthy of special attention is Christ's instruction to the leper after he was healed. This command may seem strange to some persons who read the narrative hastily. But when we stop to think of it more deeply, we find that it was the only proper word to say to the man under the circumstances. Christ said to him: "See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest," etc. Why this prohibition? Would not the publication of this great miracle be a proof to the people of Christ's divinity and Messiahship?

First, Christ here observed the Levitical law respecting lepers. (See Lev. 13:49 and 14:2 ff.) This proves Christ's deference to the Old Testament dispensation and law. He was no revolutionist. Had He said to the leper: "Go bruit abroad the fact that you have been healed by me; spread it as far as you can; never mind the Levitical law and the authority of the priests," He would have proved Himself irregular, individualistic, disorderly, fanatical. But just observe how sober and calm He is. He was a Jew; He was living and working among the Jews; He knew that the Levitical law, though of a

temporary character, was still divine and in force. How sensible it was to send the leper to the priest in the regular way, and have the proper official pronounce the leprosy perfectly cleansed away! Thus Christ shows His deference to the past, His subjection to the law, and His belief in the divine character of the Old Testament regulations. “Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,” He said to John at His baptism. Christ was no radical.

In another respect Christ proves His sane and well-balanced character. His command, “See thou tell no man,” shows that He did not want to gain too much publicity by mere outward wonders. While His miracles had their place in proving that He was divine, He was chary about causing the people to make too much out of the merely physical and wonder-stirring. He was a true miracle worker, but no miracle monger. At times He tried to divert attention from His miracles, so that He would have time to lay the basis of the gospel plan of redemption in proper instruction. How well He gauged the tendencies of human nature! Had he performed miracles indiscriminately, had He not exercised due economy in such exhibitions, He would not have had time to give proper instructions to His apostles and the people, and that would have been fatal to His cause. But with the proper proportion of the miraculous organically connected with much clear and positive instruction, He laid a deep and solid foundation for faith in Him as the world’s Redeemer. Today we really depend on His teaching more than on His power to do outward wonders.

May all of us know in our hearts, through the witness of the Spirit and the teaching of the Word, that we are God’s redeemed children, even when we see that it is not His will to heal our physical maladies!

13. Master Of Wind And Wave.

The Fourth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 8:23-26

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. (Matthew 8:23-26)

PERHAPS some of you have been in a storm on the sea. If you have, you can sympathize with the disciples of Christ in their experience in the storm on the sea of Galilee, as it is narrated in our gospel lesson for today.

This little sea, only about twelve miles long and five to six miles wide, was especially subject to sudden and violent storms. It lay in the heart of the hills, far below the level of the ocean, and when the sun heated the atmosphere hanging over it, the air would rise, as warm air always does, and then the cold air from the mountain ravines to the north would suddenly rush in to fill the vacated space, and thus the little sheet of water would be tossed and torn. Then woe to a vessel that was caught in its power! These tempests often came so unexpectedly that it was impossible to forecast them.

In such a tempest Christ and His disciples were caught as they were passing in a little ship from the western to the eastern side of the sea. The waves rolled so high that the ship was covered by them. The disciples were sore distressed; but Christ lay sleeping calmly in the hold of the ship. Then they awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, carest thou not that we perish?" He arose, rebuked the disciples for their want of faith, stepped out upon the prow of the vessel, said to the storm, "Peace, be still," and the wind ceased, and the waves lay down as level as glass, and there was a great calm. Thus Christ proved Himself master of the wind and waves. No wonder the disci-

ples marveled, and said, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

Now let us learn what valuable lessons this occurrence teaches us respecting Christ and His saving power.

I. How Human Jesus Was!

His days had been full of toil, and now He was weary. So, like one of us, He lay down on a pillow, and fell fast asleep. So profound was His slumber that even the rising of the tempest and the excitement of His fellow-passengers did not awake Him. So far as we can understand the narrative, He was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, just as all men do when they are worn out by strenuous toil.

How human Jesus was! The ancient confessors had studied the gospels and epistles well when they declared in the creed that He was “very man of very man.” While we would not dare to say that He assumed into the person of His Godhead our weak, imperfect and sinful human nature, yet it is true, that, having assumed a perfect human nature, He was able to take upon Him, in a most real and sympathetic way, our infirmities and the consequences of our sins. That is just what the Scriptures teach (Isa. 53:4): “Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Or, as St. Matthew puts it (8.17): “He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses.” Yes, by virtue of His incarnation and His sympathy with human experiences, Jesus was truly human.

But we must not stop with Jesus asleep in the hold of the ship. If we would understand and appreciate His true character, we must follow Him to the sequel. By doing so we shall also learn another important lesson.

II. How Divine Jesus Was!

In their terror the disciples ran to Him, and awoke Him, and cried, “Lord, save us; we perish!” By this act they proved that they had some faith in Christ and some conception of the kind of being He was. They called Him Lord, and prayed to Him to save them from the destructive power of the storm. But of course they did not have enough faith, else they would not

have been frightened at all, but from the start would have trusted Him to save them.

Now let us note the conduct of Christ. There is no excitement in His action. Calmly He arises, steps forth upon the prow of the tossing vessel, stretches forth His hand, and rebukes the winds and the sea. According to St. Mark's record, He says to the agitated sea, "Peace, be still!" And there is a great calm.¹

What majesty! What composure! What perfect mastery! Did any other being ever display such complete sovereignty over the wind and the waves? What kind of a person alone could speak thus to the elements, and they would obey? We say that only a divine Person could do this; only the Person who made the elements, and therefore, understood their composition. Science teaches us that matter is composed of atoms and molecules. What a tremendous agitation of these constituents there must be in a tempest of wind and wave! What power in the pressure of the howling wind and the lashing sea! Yet Christ stilled the storm in one moment by a simple command.

How could He perform this wonder! It is very simple if you accept the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ. He who made the atoms and molecules, and so understood their constitution and their mutual relations, could very easily speak the word and exert the power that would cause them to slip back liquidly into their normal condition. It would be as easy for Him to do this as for you to stop the trembling of a leaf of clover or the petal of a flower. But do you realize that only One who was divine could so command the wind and the sea into obedience? Therefore Jesus Christ was a divine Being. He was God and man in one person. As man He grew weary and fell asleep; as God He rose and composed the raging storm.

Let us ask this relevant question: Why did Christ perform this miracle? Does it hold a necessary place in God's plan of redeeming power and love? It does. Note: Christ turned water into wine in His first miracle. This proved His mastery over nature in its vegetable form, in the quiet methods of gradual, growing processes. He also multiplied the loaves and the fishes in feeding the thousands, which evinced His power over nature in gathering to itself material from the resources around it. But was He complete master of the forces of nature when they were agitated and wild and thrown into convulsions? The miracle of today's lesson proves the He was. Yes, He is the Lord of nature, for He created the natural realm. Being its Creator and Mas-

ter, He is able to subdue, control, redeem and glorify it, and make it a fit habitation for man when he receives his resurrected and glorified body.

Having now seen that Jesus was truly human and divine, we are ready to reflect on the last division of our theme:

III. How Completely We May Confide In Jesus!

Being a historical narrative, it shows how wonderfully the divine and human were correlated in the person of Christ. How naturally He lies sleeping in the hold of the ship; then awakes and rebukes His disciples; then calms the winds and waves! Could there be anything more simple and at the same time more majestic and wonderful? It is the same person — the one who lay asleep a moment ago and the one who now commands the wind to cease and the waves to be calm. Oh, the wonderful communion of attributes, divine and human, in the person of our Lord! It is perfect union, perfect communion, perfect interplay, but no confusion, no transmutation. Both the human and the divine have their part to perform in every act, so that they act conjointly, harmoniously. There is no schism in this divine-human Person. Now what follows from this doctrine?

[1.] Since He was human, we may be assured of His sympathy. If you met with a great sorrow, you would not go for comfort to some giddy person who had never had a real trial in his life, but rather to one who had suffered as you have; then you could talk your afflictions over and afford mutual consolation. What a fellow feeling it gives us with Jesus to realize that He knows by actual experience all about our human joys and sorrows! That is why we can sing in connection with every experience, “Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

No doubt, Christ as purely divine, could have sympathized with us; indeed, He must have done so, else He would not have come down to the earth, assumed our nature into His Godhead, and atoned for our sins. But we could not have felt Him so near us, so much a part of our very lives, so fully in touch with us, had He never taken our very nature and passed through the whole gamut of human experience. It often happens that when we go to a friend and tell him our troubles, he replies, “Yes, I know just how you feel; I have had the same experience myself.” So it is with the hu-

man Jesus when we go to Him with our trials. This is the meaning of that great and assuaging statement of the inspired writer (Heb. 4:15): "We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

[2.] Assured of His sympathy, we may also be sure of His help, if He has the power to help us. Ah! He has the power, too, for, as we have seen, He is divine as well as human. He proved it by His mastery over the wind and the waves. Sympathy and power! What great words are they! They mean help for us in every time of need. He who stilled the tempest on Galilee can quiet every storm. Whether on sea or land, He is the Master of the elements.

It may be true that He will not calm every material storm, and save us physically from its destructive forces. That might not always be according to His will, nor for our highest good; but we may know from this lesson that He can if it is best for us. Of this we may be sure: though the body might perish in a storm, the soul would still be secure in the sovereign care of our Lord and Redeemer.

A beautiful spiritual application may be made of this miracle; for a miracle in nature is often a parable of what Christ does in the spiritual realm. He said, "Peace, be still," to storm-tossed Galilee, "and there was a great calm." So when a tempest of grief is raging in our hearts, we may hear His reassuring voice, "Peace, be still," and a calm will also come to us. Let us trust Him fully. May it never be necessary for Him to rebuke us by saying, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith!"

"Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by every foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe!

"That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain,
Will lean upon its God, —

"A faith that keeps the narrow way
Till life's last hour is fled,
And with a pure and heavenly ray
Lights up a dying bed.

“Lord, give us such a faith as this,
And then, whate’er may come,
We’ll taste, e’en here, the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.”

1. We take the gospel narrative to be true. We believe it with all heart. No one but an inspired person could write such a narrative and in such a simple, dignified way. Had it been told by a writer of fiction, it would have been distorted, over-decorated; the temptation to enter into detail and to engage in exclamation and elaboration would have been too great for one who was composing fiction. Read the minute descriptions of some of the Biblical miracles in the stories written by the writers of fiction founded on Biblical incidents, like George Ebers, Lew Wallace and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward; and note the difference between fiction and inspired history. ←

14. Wheat And Tares In The Field. The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 13:24-30

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. (Matthew 13:24-30)

WHEREVER YOU FIND THE GOOD, there the evil also appears. An old adage runs thus: “Wherever God erects a church, there Satan builds a chapel alongside.” Sometimes it may even occur that the chapel belongs to God and the church to Satan.

Today we have to interpret the parable of the wheat and the tares, which illustrates the truth just stated, that good and evil are mingled together everywhere in this world. The householder sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came along stealthily by night, and sowed tares in with the good seed. Let us try to find out the inner meaning of this parable by considering the wheat and the tares together. But before we go further we should explain that this is one of the only two parables that Christ Himself ever interpreted for His disciples. Hence we can the more readily find the key to its meaning. The tares were a species of darnel, sometimes called “cheat,” which very closely resembled the wheat until both had developed to some degree of maturity. Let us consider —

I. What The Wheat And The Tares Symbolize.

Our Lord Himself, in His explication of the parable, says that “the field is the world.” Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that the wheat and tares were sown in the Church. Then He said, “The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom; but the tares are the sons of the evil one.” In the parable of the sower the seed represents the Word of God, which is sown in the soil of different kinds of hearts; while in our parable for today the seeds stand for different kinds of people. This diversity in explaining these two parables teaches us that, in interpreting the parables of the Bible, we should always seize upon the main points of comparison, and should not try to make a parable illustrate too many points.

Now let us learn that good and true people, symbolized by the wheat, are God’s children. “Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights.” God is the source of all good and of no evil whatever; therefore every real Christian is a child of God; he belongs to Him; and if he is a child of God, then he is an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. So we may say that if you and I belong to God, then God and all He possesses belong to us. How great and how precious is our heritage! No doubt that is what is meant when Paul said, “All things are yours.” Christ made the same kind of promises: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

On the other hand, the tares represent the children of the evil one. Those who are evil in mind and practice cannot be the children of God, for He is the source of the good only. “He is of purer eyes even than to look upon evil.” While God has created all beings, and originally made them good, yet those who permit the evil one to inject his spirit into them and lead them in the way of sin are virtually children and disciples, not of God, but of the evil one. They bring forth corrupt fruit, which always comes from a corrupt source.

Who would want to be the children of the evil one, who brought all our sins and woes into the world? Who would not want to be the child of God, the author of all good and of every blessing? To which of these two families do you and I belong?

II. Who Sows The Wheat And The Tares.

Who are the sowers in this parable is evident from what has already been said. If the wheat represents the children of the kingdom of God, then the sower must represent God Himself, who is the Creator and Preserver of all who trust Him and do His will. God always sows good seed in His field.

But who sows the bad seed, the tares? When the servants of the householder came to him and said, “Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence, then, hath it tares?” He replied, “An enemy hath done this.” Ah, yes! “An enemy!” It is “an enemy” who sows all the bad seed in the world, an arch enemy, one who hates God and everything good; an enemy who is truculent, filled with revenge, desiring to do all the despite he can to God’s fair creation. His antagonism to God is of the most malignant and vindictive character.

Who is this enemy? Christ Himself tells us later on in this chapter when He gives the interpretation of the parable. He says (verses 38, 39): “But the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil.”

So Jesus taught that there is such an evil being as the devil. He said that the devil is a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. In one place He said to the evil minded Jews, “Ye are of your father, the devil.” Several times He called the evil one Beelzebub and Satan. And Satan means an adversary who is the “enemy” of our text. Whatever else may be said, we may be sure that those liberals who reject the doctrine of the devil do not agree with the Master’s theology; nor, indeed, with that taught in the whole Bible.

Reason and observation corroborate the doctrine that there is a real personal evil spirit in the world, and that he is the source of all evil. The evil in the world is largely moral evil; it is not solely, nor even mainly, physical. Hence unless God created evil — which is a monstrous doctrine — there must have been an evil personal being who originated sin and who is back of its propagation. The evil in the world is too malevolent, too persistent, too fundamental, to be the result of a mere lapse or accident or defective principle. The only adequate explanation of evil, considering its moral character and baleful effects, is a personal evil spirit. Christ’s theology is the correct theology.

If evil were only a misfortune, it would never fill the soul with bitter hatred and a desire for revenge; it would never lead a person to sow bad seed in another person’s field purely out of spite. It would only make us sad and miserable, not wicked.

Let us not be led astray by the speculations of the day which try to minimize sin by denying the existence of a personal devil. This is one of Satan's wiles — to get men to believe that he is not a reality, so that they will not be afraid of him. As a rule, people who deny his reality make light of sin, and therefore, do not feel that they need an atoning and divine Saviour. That is precisely Satan's scheme. He even tried to lead Christ to doubt that He was the Son of God. No wonder he tries to make us believe the same! And, to crown all his seductions, he tries to delude us into believing that he himself is non-existent! Our only safe refuge, when we see or experience evil, is to remember that "an enemy hath done this," and thus be on our guard against his sly and secret wiles.

III. How The Wheat And The Tares Agree And How They Differ.

When they first spring up, the wheat and the tares look practically alike, so that many persons would not be able to distinguish them. So it is among people. You cannot always discern between the good and the bad, the true and the false. Hypocrites may disguise themselves successfully for a time. Christ says that they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Even Satan may put on the guise of "an angel of light." So may his followers. You may go into a church, and may not be able to differentiate between the wheat and cheat.

However, there is a difference between them. Its source is in the seed though it may not be manifest until the fruit appears. After the darnel has come to a head, it can no longer simulate the appearance of wheat; then it reveals its true character.

So it is in human life. Those who are true Christians will be manifest sooner or later, and those who are false will sooner or later expose themselves. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The disguise of the hypocrite will soon drop away, and his real character will stand exposed. The hair and paw of the wolf will show themselves beneath the sheep's fleece. Deceit is a garment that is hard to keep on; it slips off in an unguarded moment. Tare seed can never produce wheat.

IV. Why The Wheat And The Tares Are Permitted To Grow Together.

The servants of the householder proposed to go out into the field at once and gather up the tares; but the householder would not permit this. "Lest, while ye gather up the tares," he said, "ye root up also the wheat with them."

What does this mean? Some interpreters apply it to the Church, in which, they hold, no discipline on false professors of religion should be administered. But that is a wrong explanation. Christ said, "The field is the world," not the Church. In another place He expressly commanded church discipline on a wicked and impenitent member. In the case of an offending brother, who, after a couple of earnest admonitions, will not repent, he is to be brought before the Church; "and if he will not hear the Church, let him be unto you as a publican and a sinner." Christ would not have said something there in direct contradiction to His teaching in the parable before us.

What, then, did Christ mean by saying that the wheat and the tares should grow together? He meant to forestall all persecution; to teach that in His kingdom force should never be used; that His people should never destroy the wicked and heretical, and thus make themselves the determiners of men's eternal destiny. Christian people must not take the lives of people because they will not believe the gospel. They must let the wheat and tares grow together in this world until the time comes when those who are competent shall gather them out of the field.

If only the Christian Church had always remembered the explicit teaching of this parable, how much evil would have been avoided! No martyrs would have even been burned at the stake; never would there have been a Spanish Inquisition, nor a Saint Bartholomew's Day. Think of all the martyrs who have been slain in direct opposition to Christ's teaching! What a pity that the Church has so often forgotten its commission to preach, teach, exhort and persuade, but never to persecute or invoke the arm of force! And how lamentably true it is that, in trying to gather out the tares, persecutors have always rooted up much of the wheat! It is a historical fact that, whenever the Church has resorted to violent methods, she has rooted up more wheat than tares. We are glad that Luther always advised against the use of force to convert people to Christianity. He declared that, if the heretic could

not be converted by preaching and teaching, he should be left in God's hands; he should not be persecuted or driven by force. God alone could adjudicate his case, and administer the merited punishment. This leads to our last point.

V. When The Wheat And Tares Are To Be Separated.

Christ said, "at the end of the world." Yes, some things must be deferred until then, however much we may wish to pronounce and execute judgment. Men are too prone to judge. They seem to want to usurp the place of the Supreme Judge of the world.

But how fortunate it is that we need not bear the responsibility of pronouncing eternal judgment on any man, and need not separate the good from the bad! How many errors we would make! No; instead of doing such work, we shall ourselves be among those who are judged. To the angels, who have a keener vision than we, shall be entrusted the great and responsible task of separating the wheat from the tares.

But then the great assize will come. There will be "a day of the Lord," a great and terrible day. The tares shall be gathered out infallibly from the wheat, and shall be cast into the furnace. On the other hand, the wheat shall be gathered into barns. The good and the bad shall not always grow together. The present economy will one day come to an end. "Then," says our Lord, in interpreting our parable, "shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Ah, but "all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, shall be cast into a furnace; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Shall you and I be wheat or tares on that day? Do you ask whether it is possible for the tares to be changed into wheat? Yes! But only by a miracle of grace — the miracle of conversion. Before the harvest comes, there is hope. "Therefore, turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

15. A Foregleam Of Coming Glory. The Sixth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 17:1-9

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an 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. (Matthew 17:1-9)

THE SCENE ON MOUNT HERMON when our Lord was transfigured contains a whole body of divinity. Almost every Christian doctrine is either set forth directly there, or may be clearly and logically inferred. Let us see how filled with holy doctrine it is.

I. The Holy Doctrines Of The Transfiguration.

1. About God.

It teaches the existence of God, for God spoke from the cloud; also His preservation of the world and His care for individuals, or His general and special providence. Granted such a God, it is easy to reason back to special creation, for a God of pure evolution would not exercise such special and individual oversight. This scene likewise teaches the doctrines of special di-

vine revelation, and thereby leads to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. From it you may also gather the doctrines of God's transcendence and immanence.

2. About Christ and Redemption.

The doctrines of redemption through Christ are all wrapped up in this pregnant incident. The heavenly voice said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." A divine endorsement of Christ carrying with it the incarnation, obedience and sacrifice of Christ — in short, the whole redemptive work of our Lord. In it the central doctrine of the plan of redeeming grace is explicitly set forth, for Christ and Moses and Elijah were talking together about the death of Christ, which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. The atoning sacrifice was the chief topic of conversation between Christ and His heavenly visitants. They did not slight that event; they did not say, "We are not saved by the death of Christ, but by His life." No; Christ's death was shown to be the pivot of all redemptive grace and power. This fact also carries with it the doctrine of man's sinfulness; indeed, his total depravity; for if He could have saved Himself, no atonement on the cross would have been needed. It also teaches that man needs enlightenment in order to be saved, in order to exercise faith: "Hear ye Him." Christ's fulfillment of both the law and the prophets is also clearly shown in this event.

3. About Christ's Person.

Both Christ's divinity and humanity are here indicated. His humanity is plainly shown by His fleshly character, by the clothes He wore, by the human speech He used; His divinity by the glory that shone out of His person so that His face gleamed, and even His raiment became almost too bright to be looked upon by human eyes. For the most part, His divinity was veiled during His humiliation, but here it was permitted to shine forth, to show the disciples that He was more than human. Here is also an earnest and prophecy of the glorified state of Christ, when at His exaltation to the right hand of God, He was filled with all the divine fullness; and as we are to be like Him, we have here also a glimpse of the glory which shall be revealed in us, when we shall see Him as He is.

4. About the State of the Dead.

The present state of the dead is also clearly indicated in this strategic scene. Moses and Elijah appeared. Yet Moses had died over a thousand years before, and Elijah had ascended to heaven centuries prior; but here they are in their own persons, cognizant of the divine plan of redemption, conversing with Jesus about it, acknowledging Christ as the only begotten Son of God, everything showing that they were on the most familiar terms with Christ. This affords most incontestible proof that there is an intermediate state, and that the soul does not sleep between death and the resurrection. Note, again, that Moses had died, leaving his body on the earth, for the Bible says that Jehovah buried him; but Elijah was translated to heaven without death. Yet here both appear in bodily form — a proof that God at the resurrection can give to our disembodied spirits a body that will suit them. There is no distinction made here between the bodily appearance of Moses and Elijah. Glimpses, these, of a most wonderful and blessed eschatology — resurrection and eternal glory both for body and soul.

Then there was mutual recognition. Not only did Christ, Moses and Elijah know one another, but even the disciples recognized the lawgiver and the prophet whom they had never seen. The doctrine of heavenly recognition. More light on the “last things.”

5. About Glorified Material.

We may also learn something about the Biblical doctrine of material substance in its glorified form. While Christ still retained the essence of His corporeal nature, and while that of His garments still remained intact, yet both became too glorious for earthly vision to endure. His face and His clothing shone more brightly than the sun. The transfiguration scene, therefore, foreshadowed the coming state of the glorification of material substance. So we need not stumble over the doctrine of the literal resurrection of our bodies. The event on the holy mount proves that in glorification the essence of the body is not destroyed, but its character and form are simply transfigured with divine beauty and glory.

See the clear hints of the glorified state in the natural world: The coarse and homely lily bulb is changed into a lovely flower by God’s operation through the processes of nature; the charcoal, black and unsightly, becomes,

by the process of crystallization, a brilliant diamond. On the last day what will not God make of this material world and the bodies of His saints? May we be among those who will be glorified, our bodies made “like unto His own glorious body!”

II. The Inspiring Lessons Of The Transfiguration.

1. It Gives Assurance and Hope.

What was one great purpose of this scene? To afford the three disciples a foregleam of the coming glory of our Lord when He should ascend to “the right hand of the Majesty on high.” After the transfiguration, whenever doubt and discouragement came, they would reason in this way: If our Lord appeared so glorious even when He was transfigured for a few moments here on earth, what must be His wonderful estate now that He has “ascended far above all heavens,” and has been filled with all the fullness of the Deity? Would not such a reflection give them reassured confidence in His power, grace and majesty? No wonder, that after they understood it all, they went forth with fearless courage to preach Christ crucified, risen and ascended! With what calm assurance John afterward rehearsed this event: “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father!” Since you and I know that this event took place, it gives to us the same assurance of faith.

2. It Gives Strength for Our Everyday Work.

Peter proposed to build three tabernacles, so that he could keep Christ and the celestial visitors there as long as possible; but this wish was not granted. The dead, therefore, are not to come back often and remain with us, but are for the most part to be left undisturbed in their heavenly bliss. Yet they are interested in our affairs, and know at least in general that God has provided for the salvation of the world. Peter wanted to remain on the mount of transfiguration, in enjoyment of the ecstasy of his feeling. Not so; there was work for him and his fellow-disciples down in the valley. We cannot always

be living in a state of Spiritual transport; it would unfit us for the duties of this work-day world. Now and then we may have such mountain experiences; then we must come down and use our strength and inspiration in doing our common, everyday work for Christ and our fellowmen.

16. Working In Christ's Vineyard. Septuagesima Sunday.

Matt. 20:1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an 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 marketplace, 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 goodman 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. (Matthew 20:1-16)

OUR LESSON for today is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. According to the first verse, Christ intended by this parable to illustrate certain features of the kingdom of heaven. In the preceding chapter we have the narrative of the rich young man who was unwilling to give his possessions to the poor and follow Christ. He was trying to be good in his own way, the legalistic and bargaining way; and so, when the test came demanding him to be good through faith and love, he failed. Then the disciples fell into the same fault. Peter said to Jesus: "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what shall we receive therefor?" You see here again the selfish, bargaining spirit. In view of this mercenary temper, Christ spoke to His disciples the parable

of the laborers in the vineyard. That this is the connection is proved by the preposition “for” at the beginning of the parable.

Many people have had difficulty in interpreting this parable; so the first thing we must do is to explain its true purpose and meaning.

I. The Interpretation Of The Parable.

1. Some people think it teaches justification by works.

The Roman Catholics are apt to make use of it to establish their doctrine. Perhaps a little color is given for this interpretation by the use of the words “hire” and “wages.” But that is the wrong explanation. The parable teaches the very opposite doctrine — that is, it rebukes the bargaining, mercenary spirit, which works only for reward, by showing that the householder had a right to do with his goods as he pleased, and by his giving the same wages to those who began to work late in the day as to those who began early; also by his rebuking those who complained that they had not received more than their fellow-workmen. If salvation were to be earned by men’s good works, surely the householder would have paid his workmen according to the number of hours they toiled. No other method would have been just.

Thus Christ means to teach by this parable that working in His vineyard is not regulated by the same principles as those which prevail when men work for one another in the human world for wages. He rewards according to the principle of grace and not of human merit.

In interpreting Scripture we must observe this rule: that each passage is to be explained in the light of the whole teaching of the Bible. Now note: long before Jesus spoke this parable He had proclaimed, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Therefore, He had told His disciples, no doubt many times, that they must first repent and have faith before they can enter His vineyard at all to labor there. So here in this parable: the very call to go and work in Christ’s vineyard is, first of all, a call to faith; for if men do not first have faith in Him, they will not heed His invitation. It is not a matter of merit, but of grace, to be called into Christ’s vineyard to labor for Him. Did those men standing there idle in the market merit anything from the householder? Were they not only too glad to be employed, so that they might acquire something with which to keep

themselves and their families alive? Then those who came later declared that they stood there idle because no one had come to employ them. Thus the whole parable is put upon the basis of grace, and is breathed through and through with the spirit of grace.

2. What is meant by the “penny” in the parable?

It is better to call it a shilling. The Greek word is denarius, and was worth about seventeen cents. Many interpreters have labored to define the precise point in the plan of salvation that is meant by the shilling. Perhaps it does not mean anything specific, but any blessing that comes to a disciple when he works for Christ. You and I never do any work for Christ, out of the motive of faith and love, but we receive a blessing that is out of all proportion to the amount of service we do.

But note, on the other hand, if our motives are selfish and sordid, even though mingled with some faith, our blessing will be proportionately small, just as the men in the parable who were first employed, and who were thinking chiefly of the wages, received only a shilling for the whole day's work; while those who were engaged at the eleventh hour, who were so glad and grateful to be employed at all, who made no bargain with the householder, but left the reward entirely to his liberality — these received the large reward of a shilling, even though they had worked only one hour of the day. This treatment proves again that the reward was one of grace and not of merit. Taking the motives of those first employed into consideration, they received much more than they deserved; indeed, on that ground, they deserved nothing.

Thus we see that the very purpose of this parable is to rebuke the legalistic temper, the spirit of self-righteousness, which works only for reward and for wages. Thus Peter was sharply and pointedly reproofed for asking the calculating question, “What shall we receive therefor?” Jesus told him, by this trenchant story, that those who are called first into His kingdom may, after all, be last (verse 16), if they seek mere selfish reward; while others, coming later but with a higher motive, may be preferred.

II. The Lessons Of The Parable.

1. Faith

Faith is the first thing. The very fact that these men were called to work in the vineyard, and that they went, implies that the call had begotten some faith within them. Had they had no faith in the householder, they would have disregarded his invitation. Their faith may not have been very strong or very pure; nevertheless it was strong enough to lead them to go into the vineyard and labor through all the day. They did not receive a very large blessing, because their faith was not unmixed, but the householder did unto them according to their faith (cf. Matt. 8:13; 9:29). One of Paul's deep statements will explain the status of these bargaining men (1 Cor. 3:15), where he is speaking of the various kinds of people who build on the true foundation, which is Jesus Christ (verse 11): "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." So faith is the first thing (Acts 16:31): "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Cf. John 3:14-18; Luke 16:15, 16; Heb. 11:6, and many more.)

2. Privilege

To work in Christ's kingdom is a privilege. It is not a matter of human merit. We ought to thank God that He graciously gives us the opportunity to labor for Him. How terrible it would be to be compelled to "stand about all the day idle," and have no chance to accept God's invitation by faith, and thus to be shut out from all the blessings and joys of His kingdom! Let us thank God for His beneficent invitation to enter His service, and esteem it a privilege and not a hardship.

3. Motive

The motive of our faith and service largely determines our status in Christ's kingdom. Those persons who were first employed, and were counting on receiving a superior reward, were disappointed, and came last; whereas, those who came later, but left the reward entirely to the good will of their employer, received more than they expected. Thus the last became first, and the first became last. The parable, no doubt, could be applied to the Jews, who, because they were the children of Abraham, the chosen people and the

first to be called, became selfish, proud and Pharisaical, and thus lost their first place in the kingdom; while the Gentiles, though called later, have been preferred. That is what Christ meant when He said (Matt. 8:11, 12): “And I say unto you, many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth,” etc. So we, too, may miss our salvation if we depend on our merits, and serve God merely for reward, instead of depending on the grace of God and serving Him out of faith and gratitude; or, if we trust in Christ, and yet mix our pure faith with too much of the selfish and legalistic spirit, we will at least greatly reduce our blessing and joy in the world to come, as also in the present life.

4. God’s Right

Another lesson we may learn from this parable is this: God has a right to do as He pleases with His own. Those calculating employees first called thought they had a right to dictate the amount the householder should give them. But the householder said to him: “Is it not lawful to do what I will with mine own? Or is thine eye evil because I am good?”

Here Christ means to teach us that God knows better than we what is right and just. He will not judge anyone arbitrarily, nor bestow His gifts partially and unjustly; but, being all wise, He adjudicates all things according to the law of righteousness, weighing each man’s motives, circumstances and opportunities, as well as his activity and length of service. No, He will forget no man’s labor of love (Heb. 6:10); but let us remember it must be a “labor of love,” and not of selfish calculating for rewards above other people. Those who are ambitious for honor and emolument, who want to have the high seats at the right and left hand of the King when He comes in His glory, will be very likely to miss their goal, and will have to take a humbler place (Matt. 20:20-23). Perhaps the Father will give those positions to some very humble persons who never expected it, but served only out of gratitude and love to God for His grace.

May God cleanse all our hearts from self-righteousness and sordid motives!

17. Seed And Soil. Sexagesima Sunday. Luke 8:4-15

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 an hundredfold. 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)

FOR OUR GOSPEL LESSON today we shall study together the well known parable of the sower who sowed the same kind of seed on different kinds of soil. It is one of the only two parables which Christ Himself interpreted for His disciples. The other one is the parable of the wheat and the tares, which we studied on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Let us first point out the place and meaning of the parable in the plan of redemption. It is intended to teach us that our salvation depends on the attitude of our hearts toward God's Word, especially in its revelation of Christ to us. If we, by faith, receive Christ and His Word into good and honest hearts, we shall be saved and bear abundant fruit in our lives; if we do not thus receive Him, we shall be lost and fruitless.

However, let us remember that our heart attitude toward Christ is not the meriting cause of our salvation, but the divinely prescribed condition. You

may accept a benefaction which you in nowise deserve, and yet your acceptance of it may be a necessary condition of your receiving it; for if you rejected it, you could not have it.

It is worthy of notice that very different results came from the sowing of the seed. In what did the difference consist? We must earnestly think about that question.

I. The Difference Was Not In The Seed.

The farmer went forth scattering everywhere the same kind of seed. No doubt Christ, when He was a youth, often watched the farmers sowing in their fields. Perhaps some of us, in days gone by, have witnessed the same kind of a pastoral scene.

Now Christ explains to us what the seed symbolizes. He says, “The seed is the Word of God.” It is good seed. Every grain has the germ of saving truth and power in it. All of it has come from God, and is living seed, divinely fructified. “Every Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable,” etc. (2 Tim. 3:16). Even those parts of the Scripture which do not seem to be so important have their value. The genealogical tables, which many people think so lacking in interest, have their place in proving the historical character of the plan of redemption. There are the many laws and details of the Mosaic legislation — to many people they seem so pointless and wearisome — yet they indicate God’s interest in the minutest details of our lives, showing that He cares for us, insignificant as we seem to be, and is not preoccupied with the whirling of suns, constellations and immense systems of worlds. Then Christ in some way took up all those laws. into His own life and fulfilled them.

The first few chapters of the Bible are wonderful for their history and seminal truths, even though rationalists regard them as mere myths, legends and folklore. They tell us about origins — the origin of the universe, of man, of sin and of redemption — all of it vitally and historically connected with the coming of Christ, the Redeemer.

And so we might go through the Bible. There is nothing idle between its precious lids. It is all good seed, and especially important are those portions of both the Old and New Testaments which tell us about Christ and His divine-human person and His redeeming work. It is a living and a life-giving

Word. Do you remember how Jesus said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life?”

Now, what should be our attitude toward this divine Word? Ought we not to open our hearts to it, and let it sink deeply into them, like seed falling into deep, rich soil? Says James (1:21): “Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.” Yet how diverse are the results of the sowing of the divine seed! As Paul says, the gospel is a savor of life unto life to some and of death unto death to others. What makes the difference?

II. The Difference Is In The Soil.

1. The Wayside

There was the seed that fell by the wayside. What a pity that such good seed should fall on such poor soil and be wasted! The wayside was trodden down hard by the feet of passing men and beasts, so that the seed remained on top instead of sinking into it. Exposed there on the surface, the birds soon came and picked it up.

Now who are these wayside hearers? According to Christ’s interpretation, they are the careless, indifferent hearers, who may listen to the Word of God, but do not meditate upon it, do not pay earnest heed to it, do not cover it over, and cherish, and give it a chance to germinate and grow in their hearts. Lying there exposed on the top of the careless mind, it is readily seen, and so the evil one soon comes and carries away the good seed of the Word.

How many such hearers there are in the world! Sometimes they are in the church service, but pay so little attention to the preaching of the Word that, as the proverb says, “It goes in one ear and out the other.” They are thinking of something else rather than of God’s Word — of the last or next party or ball, of the latest fashion, of the last morsel of gossip, or perhaps of the last business transaction. Such hearers render the Word of God unfruitful. Lack of attention is the cause of lack of impression.

But not all such hearers are in God’s house; no, nor the majority of them. They are lounging on the streets or in in their homes; they hear the church bells calling them to worship; they see children and their parents going to

the Sunday school and church services; perhaps a Christian invites them to God's house. All these are ways by which God is trying to bring His Word to their attention; but they heed not; or if for a moment their attention is arrested, they brush aside the thought and continue in their indifferentism. But remember, for all this neglect of God's gracious invitations they will some day have to give an account.

2. The Rock

Who are represented by the seed that fell on the rock? Here the soil was very shallow, and under certain circumstances seed would grow up very rapidly; but, having no depth of earth, it would soon wilt down and die in the heat of the sunshine.

What a vivid picture this is of those shallow, emotional people who grow excited for a little while over religion, especially under stirring, sensational preaching or high-pressure revivals! But, alas! they soon lose their fervor by mere reaction or under stress of trial, and grow worse than they were before.

3. Thorns

Some of the seed fell among thorns. The soil was fertile enough, and might have borne much fruit; but the thorns, growing faster than the grain, choked it and made it unfruitful. You and I have often seen wheat, oats and corn thus choked in fields infested by weeds and thistles.

Our Lord explains that the thorns stand for the "cares and riches and pleasures of this life." What a true and graphic picture! There are so many people whose minds would make good soil for God's Word; but alas! they become absorbed in worldly cares, or the accumulation of wealth, or the pursuit of pleasure, and these crowd and choke the Word, so that it can "bring no fruit to perfection." It is not that riches in themselves are wrong, or that we may not enjoy the right kind of pleasure. No; that is not the trouble. The trouble is that men become so engrossed in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure that they lose their interest in God's Word and spiritual things, and thus gradually grow worldly minded and unfruitful in the kingdom of God. "No man can serve two masters," said Christ.

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” No; if you cannot make mammon, which means money or wealth, serve God’s cause, then better let it go; it becomes like thorns to you, smothering your concern in God’s Word.

4. Good Ground

It is a pleasure to know that some of the soil of the parable was good ground, mellow and fertile, into whose tilth the seed sank, hid itself, germinated and grew up unhindered, and brought forth abundantly — Christ says, “a hundred fold.” He describes this kind of ground as representing those who, “in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” How wisely and carefully every word is chosen by our divine Teacher! “Honest” — we must be sincere; “good” — we must be penitent and have faith; “keep it” — that is, the Word; they do not let Satan, or affliction, or worldly cares, riches and pleasures rob them of the sacred seed of the divine Word. They “hold it fast,” as the Revised Version translates here. And they “bring forth fruit with patience.” They do not grow impatient, and give up when fruit does not appear at once. As Paul puts it so beautifully: “Let us not be weary in well doing, knowing that in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

Thank God for the good seed that fell on good ground! It fills our hearts with joy and gratitude to know that God’s kingdom is a success. Which of the four kinds of soil represents your heart and mine?

18. The Divine Prophet And Healer. Quinquagesima Sunday.

Luke 18:31-43

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)

IN OUR GOSPEL LESSONS Christ is set forth in many “living characters.” As our divine Prophet — which means a teacher sent from God — He teaches us many valuable lessons in parables concerning the plan of redemption and the kingdom of God. As One endued with divine power, He performs miracles. We have already seen that He is the sovereign of the natural realm in His turning water into wine and multiplying the loaves and fishes. In today’s lesson His divinity shines forth in two ways, that of prediction and that of physical healing. Both of these parts of our Quinquagesima lesson have an integral place and meaning in the divine plan of saving grace, as we shall see. Let us meditate upon these two phases of Christ’s person and work.

I. The Divine Foreteller.

In the first part of the lesson we read that Jesus took His disciples aside, and forecast in their hearing what would occur to Him within a short time. Here our Lord exercised a part of His prophet office, that of prediction.

It is worth while to note how detailed are His forecasts in this instance. He said that He would “be delivered up to the Gentiles” — a prediction that was literally fulfilled; for, after the Jewish council had condemned Him for blasphemy, they carried Him to Pilate’s judgment hall, and accused Him, not of blasphemy, but of rebellion against the Roman government in proclaiming Himself a king. Thus it was the Gentiles who really slew Him. Then He said that He should “be mocked, shamefully treated, and spit upon.” This was fulfilled to the letter, the last-mentioned insult being a detail that only a divinely inspired person could have taken the risk to foretell. “And they shall scourge and kill Him.” Again these are minutiae that might very well have failed if Christ had not been a true prophet; but they also were fulfilled to the letter.

But strangest of all is this: “And the third day He shall rise again.” Up to that point all is darkness and gloom — betrayal, insult, scourging, death. What a marvelous prophet to add to all the ignoble treatment the prediction about His resurrection! The only explanation is that He was divine and divinely inspired, and therefore knew precisely what would occur. To human ken the most improbable and incongruous thing that could have taken place would be that one who was to be so humiliated, and even put to death, should, after all, come out victorious by a resurrection from the dead. But that is just what afterward occurred, making the prophecy all the more wonderful.

Now one of two things must be true regarding these extraordinary predictions: either the narrative is merely a legend, or else Christ was really the Son of God, as He claimed to be. The first alternative simply destroys and renders nugatory the whole system of the Christian religion, and plunges the world into the darkness of uncertainty, with no hope of deliverance from sin and woe; then the most potent power for good in the world has no foundation in truth; then all history, and that the best accredited, is untrustworthy; then we are left Without a pilot and chart to guide us through life’s voyage. Who would care to accept this alternative?

But if the story is not a legend, but a recital of fact, then Christ must be divine, the Saviour of the world, the Redeemer who has come, and is to come again; then the sun shines clearly from the sky upon life's pathway. Will not every one accept the second alternative?

Another interesting fact is brought out by this prophecy. It relates to the self-consciousness of Jesus, about which so much is being written today. Was Jesus conscious that He was the Messiah of the Old Testament, and that He could make redemption for the sins of the world only by the way of suffering and death? This passage of Scripture teaches that He was; it shows plainly that He knew He was to be delivered to the Gentiles and put to death. If He knew that, He must have known that He would have to die upon a cross, for that was the method of administering capital punishment among the Gentiles, who in this case would be the Romans. Whether Jesus was always conscious of what would come to pass, or gradually came into such a consciousness, need not be discussed here; but it is plain that at this time He clearly foresaw just what would happen, so that He must have been fully conscious that He was the Suffering Servant of Jehovah foretold by Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets.

Some skeptical critics want us to believe that Jesus only foreknew in a general way that the opposition of the Jews to Him was becoming so malignant that it would result in His arrest and execution. But such rationalism does not explain the details of His prediction. How could He know that He would be given over into the hands of the Romans, that He would be spit upon and scourged? And especially how could He know that He would rise again the third day? No; we cannot permit the rationalistic spirit of the age to rob Christ of His supernatural character.

A most important doctrine of our holy religion is brought forward in Christ's wonderful prophecy — the doctrine of atonement through the death of Christ. He said to His disciples, "All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished." A part of the prophecy to which He referred must have been the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, for that passage gives the clearest predictions concerning the vicarious sufferings and death of the Messiah. Jesus Himself at another place (Mark 15:28, Luke 22:37) refers to this chapter when He quotes the sentence, "He shall be numbered with the transgressors." Now in that same chapter the prophet says: "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” (Isa. 53:5). If Jesus referred to that prophecy — and He surely did — He must have meant to teach the doctrine of vicarious atonement through His sufferings and death. He could have meant nothing else in connecting His coming sufferings with the forecasts of the Old Testament prophets.

Let us remember that Christ’s sufferings were endured in our behalf; that He died for us, died that we might live. Without the agony of the cross the moral law of God would have remained unfulfilled and unsatisfied, and therefore God could not have saved us from our sins. Justice would have been ethically bound to visit condign punishment upon us sinners. But thanks be to God, a willing and sufficient Substitute was found who could redeem them that were under the law and reconcile sinners to God! In this prophecy Jesus taught in seminal or potential form the same holy doctrine that Paul afterward, led by the Holy Spirit, taught in the most explicit form (Rom. 4:25), saying of Christ, “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.”

But, according to this gospel, Jesus was not only the Divine Foreteller: He was also —

II. The Divine Healer.

It is beautiful to know that our Lord, while on His way to the cross to suffer untold anguish in atoning for the sins of the whole world, stopped beneficently by the way to heal a blind man. Since Christ was “God manifest in the flesh,” this incident shows that God at the same time sustains the vast universe and also cares for a poor blind beggar. Being all-wise and all-powerful, He watches over both the infinite and the infinitesimal.

Let us briefly note some of the features of Christ’s dealing with poor blind Bartimeus. He was a beggar, but not too poor for Christ to stop and help him. Hearing the multitude moving along, he asked what it meant, and was told that “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.” He improved the opportunity; for He could not be sure that the great Healer would ever pass that way again. So He cried after Him.

Oh, if we today were only so anxious to be cured of our spiritual blindness, which is so much more serious than physical blindness!

The beggar worded his petition correctly, saying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." By calling Him the "Son of David," he recognized Jesus as the Messiah who was to come of the Jews in the way of God's ordainment. When you fall in with God's way, you will be sure of His blessing. The blind man did not say at first, "Lord, restore my sight," but, "Have mercy on me." That was the right way to put it. Mercy is what all men need. They deserve nothing but punishment for their sin. If God bestows mercy on them, that will include every other needed blessing. When some of the people rebuked the blind man for his vigorous calling after Jesus, he was not daunted, but called all the more earnestly. Christ wants us to be earnest in our prayers. Why should He care to answer them unless we really desire what we want and need?

Presently Jesus stopped and commanded the blind suppliant to be brought to Him. Is it not curious that Jesus asked him the question, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Could He not see what the blind man wanted? Yes, but he wanted him to put his desire into definite form, to be clear and specific. Just so we often are too general and vague in our prayers. We hardly know ourselves what we want. This lesson teaches us to think clearly about our specific needs, and then ask God to grant them. Then the blind man told Jesus precisely what he desired: "Lord, that I might receive my sight." That is the kind of a prayer that wins an answer. And an answer it won in this case, for Jesus said: "Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee." Then he received his sight, and followed Jesus, glorifying God.

What a wonderful power there is in faith! How is it that the blind beggar's faith saved him? It was because his faith accepted the healing power of Christ. That is the reason faith is so great a thing; it receives the grace, mercy and strength of God. In itself it may be very feeble; but it lays hold on divine power. That is why Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." That is Paul's meaning when he says, "It is of faith that it might be of grace." The apostle John echoes Christ's teaching when he says: "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Oh! the mighty power of faith! Christ, the prophet, died for thy sins and rose again for thy justification; therefore He can and will save thee, if thou wilt trust Him. Christ, the divine Healer, gave the blind man his sight; so He can give thee spiritual vision, if thou wilt have faith in Him.

19. The Keeping Of Lent. Ash Wednesday. Matt. 6:16-21

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:16-21)

IN OUR OBSERVANCE of the Church Year we have now Come to Ash Wednesday, or the first day of Lent. Many good people are puzzled as to how Lent ought to be kept. At first thought the lesson for the day may not seem to be very germane in suggesting the best method of observing this solemn season. Indeed, a part of it may seem to be contrary to the spirit of the season. However, by thinking more deeply we find the text a very appropriate Scriptural passage.

What in reality is the meaning of Lent? It is that portion of the Christian year which precedes the anniversary of the sufferings and death of our Saviour, culminating in Good Friday. Therefore the season is a solemn one. It reminds us chiefly of our sins, the punishment they deserve, and the agony Christ had to endure in order to free us from them and their dreadful consequences. Do not these facts already suggest the proper frame of mind needed to celebrate the Lenten season? Do they not also indicate the kind of thoughts that ought to engage our attention? Let us now see whether our text will not help to carry out these suggestions. It indicates —

I. How Not To Keep Lent.

1. In the vain show of mere formal piety.

Christ's words are very searching and pertinent: "Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward."

This is good instruction for Lent. Do not make a display of your piety. If you fast, do not advertise it wherever you go. Do not draw up a long, sanctimonious face for the purpose of impressing others with your intense religious feelings. In short, ostentatious piety is no true piety. It is not of the heart; it is not meant for God alone; it is meant for show, to win the applause of men; to cause them to say, "Behold, how good and holy a man he is."

Christ says of such pompous, parading religionists, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." By which he means that they are seeking only the praise of men, and that is all the reward they will ever receive. God will not reward them, for they are not seeking to be good and righteous in His sight. He sees through their hypocrisy, whether their fellowmen do or not. They will be among those to whom Christ will say, at the last day, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!"

Thus we see that a mere formal, outward observance, especially for vain parade, is not the right way to keep Lent. There is no repentance in it; no real sorrow for sin and the grief it inflicts on God; no looking to God in the name of the atoning Christ for pardon and grace. Our text designates another wrong way of Lenten observance.

2. In seeking worldly gain and pleasure.

After giving His instruction about fasting, our Lord spoke these words of warning: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust do corrupt and Where thieves break through and steal." Of course, this advice is good for all occasions and seasons, but it is especially relevant in the time of Lent. Laying up treasures upon earth is perhaps the most fruitful cause of the undoing of souls. So many people desire earthly treasure, either for its own sake or for the sake of the pleasure it brings. Yes, earthly goods and earthly pleasures are the twin gods of many people. Even in Lent they

cannot lay aside their social parties and worldly engagements long enough to think about their sins and the sacrifice Christ made to atone for them.

We should remember that Christ here does not mean to condemn earthly possessions in themselves. He was not fanatical. God permitted Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to become rich, and even restored Job's wealth after he had been sufficiently tested. Christ dined with the rich Pharisee without rebuking him for his accumulations. He also commanded His disciples to "make friends to themselves by means of the unrighteous mammon." He was not that kind of a socialist that condemns all capital and wealth. Just what would become of the world if there were no men who had the ability to accumulate wealth, it is impossible to say. It is doubtful whether any progress would be possible; perhaps the human family itself would not long endure. Very truly did Christ say, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (money), but He never said, "Ye cannot make money serve God and His kingdom." The fact is, that is the only true purpose of earthly possessions.

Then what did He mean when He said in our text, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth?" He meant precisely what He said, to the very letter. If we lay up our money or other earthly goods as "treasures" — that is, things that we value more than all else, which is the meaning of "treasures" — then we are setting our affections on them, and they will eventually prove our undoing. That was Christ's meaning when He said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Let us put it in this way: Whenever your earthly and heavenly treasures come into conflict, then the former and not the latter must be given up.

That is why "laying up treasures on earth" is entirely contrary to the spirit of Lent, which is a season when we ought to think of Christ and His sufferings for us, that we might have enduring heavenly treasures. While you are absorbed in money getting, or the pursuit of worldly pleasure, you cannot give thought to spiritual interests — to Christ and His cross.

How true it is, too, that earthly treasures are not enduring! Again and again it occurs that "thieves break through and steal" and that "moth doth corrupt." We certainly hold our worldly possessions by an uncertain tenure. Have you ever laid away some valuable clothes, thinking you were putting them in a place of real safety, and, behold, when you came to look at them again, they were all moth-eaten? That is what often happens to our earthly treasures. No; earthly possessions should never be turned into earthly "treasures."

tures.” They should always remain only possessions — held in trust for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

It is time now to think about the positive side of the observance of this sacred season.

II. How To Keep Lent.

1. By true inward fasting.

Our great Teacher said in the text: “But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

This may be taken quite literally. There is no merit in bodily fasting in Lent, because we can do nothing to merit God’s saving favor, just as the Bible teaches and the Augsburg Confession confirms. We are saved solely on account of what Jesus Christ has done for us by His active and passive obedience. However, bodily fasting may be a good discipline; it may bring us into closer touch with God and spiritual truth and grace.

Of course, to fast until one grows weak and ill would not be conducive to spiritual growth, for no one could give his thought to spiritual truths if he were suffering from physical discomfort and debility. In this fact lies the fallacy of that extreme asceticism which afflicts and enervates the body, in order that men may be pious. What would God care about such physical flagellations, anyway? How could He feel any pleasure in His people’s making themselves miserable for the sake of being so? Would He not find much more delight in their being happy? Surely He would. Christ made no ascetic out of Himself. He says of Himself,

“The Son of man came eating and drinking.” He also said, “These things have I said unto you that ye might have joy, and that your joy might be full.”

Then what kind of bodily fasting is beneficial to us and pleasing to God? The proper kind of moderation. To eat plain food and drink pure liquids, avoiding excess as to quantity, and also avoiding dainties and condiments that merely flatter the appetite, and thus lead to overloading the digestive organs — such abstemiousness is the best kind of fasting, and helps to

make for spirituality, because it preserves the body in the best health. No one can think lucidly and wholesomely on spiritual themes whose body is made sluggish by the coarse habit of gormandizing. The reason some people become drowsy in the church service as soon as they are quiet for a few minutes is that they have overloaded their stomachs; all the blood is taken from the brain to digest their relay of food and drink. We are convinced that Lent would be much more of a spiritual season for many people if they would do more fasting of the kind we have indicated.

But even this kind of fasting should not be carried on with outward show. Christ said, "When thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face." In His day the custom prevailed of leaving the hair unkempt and the face unwashed when one desired to make a show of great sorrow or piety. Such parading is not pleasing to God, because it is done for the praise of men rather than for the divine approval. So do not wear a long face in Lent. Do not act as if you were going to the funeral of a relative. If you fast, better keep it to yourself, for God will know it, and He will reward you with real spiritual growth and joy.

But there may be another kind of fasting. In the season of Lent it is better not to have too many social engagements. Some of them may not be wrong in themselves, but too many of them will divert attention from the sacred themes of thought suggested by the season. Much fun and hilarity are not consistent with sober thoughts about our sins and Christ's atoning sacrifice for our salvation. People who keep very late hours on Saturday night in roistering and hilarity will not be in a good spiritual frame of mind to worship in God's house on Sunday morning. There are many things that might not be wrong in themselves, but they become wrong by virtue of the fact that they crowd out of the mind the desire for the higher and more important matters. More social fasting in Lent would keep people in a better spirit for observing it in spirit and in truth.

In still another way Lent may be properly observed:

2. By cherishing heavenly desires.

Christ's language is beautiful here, almost poetical: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Instead of making earthly things our “treasures,” we should make the true and holy things our treasures. We need not be sentimental or tearful in thinking about the present world and all it offers us; but a sensible and honest view will show us they are not enduring. Sometimes both wealth and pleasure take wings and fly away. Then if we have nothing else, we are poor indeed. Our all is lost and gone. Not so if we have cherished the heavenly treasures, for they are eternal.

Now what has Lent to suggest relative to the true treasures? If we reflect on our sins, we will desire to have them forgiven and their defilement and thralldom removed; but we know that this is possible only if we repent of them and accept Christ as our atoning Saviour. On the cross He made “propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” Thus this holy season leads us to the foot of the cross. By remaining there in spirit and thought we may best observe the Lenten season to the glory of Christ and the advancement of our spiritual life.

20. The True Lenten Idea. The Beginning Of Lent. Rom. 5:8

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

THE TIME OF LENT is so important and so suggestive of thought that we add another brief sermon. Our text is Rom. 5:8: "But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This text suggests the real basic idea that ought to dominate our observance of Lent; hence we consider

I. The Inner Spirit of the Season

Outward acts, bodily and social abstentions have their value in the observance of the Lenten season. While a particular attitude in worship is not essential, yet a devotional posture surely is helpful to the mind in maintaining the devotional spirit; just so in Lent. If during the Lenten time we surfeit ourselves with social banquets and parties, they will absorb our thoughts, so that we will not have much time or disposition to think of the meaning of the sacred season. Just as men cannot serve God and mammon, so they cannot be thinking on several subjects intently at the same time.

Yet outward observances may also be abused. We may rest in them. We may think Lent consists chiefly in doing without certain harmless pleasures, remaining away from social occasions, and doing without certain kinds or quantities of food. Such an idea would make a merit of outward observance, and that would be utterly contrary to the doctrine of salvation through the merits of Christ alone. More than that, it would be merely formal, and thus would not please God.

The real matter in observing Lent is to read the relevant portions of God's Word, and meditate on the great and blessed facts of Christ's work and sacrifice for us. During this time we should reflect upon our sins, how heinous and destructive they are, and how offensive to a good and holy God. But we should not stop there. We should also consider that we could not have saved ourselves from our sins, but were helpless under the sentence of divine and eternal justice. Then what was done to deliver us? God sent His Son into the world to redeem us from the curse of the law, to die for us, to take upon Himself in His own person our sins and their terrible penalty, in order that we might be freed from their condemnation, cleansed from their pollution, and delivered from their enslavement. Thus He was our heavenly Substitute, our vicarious Redeemer. We could have been saved in no other way. Love desired to save us, but could not operate unethically; it could not brush justice aside. That would have caused a schism in God Himself and in His moral economy. But thanks be to God, Christ came into the world, assumed our nature, bore our sins on the cross, satisfied for us the righteous demands of justice, and so divine mercy has been able to reach down freely and ethically and save us from our sins.

These are the subjects that should engage our thought during Lent: our sins, how great they are; God's love, how kind it is; Christ's sacrifice, how gracious it was. In all these meditations there will be an element of sadness. When we think of what our sins cost our God and Saviour, we will surely mourn for ourselves and for Him. We cannot help thinking of the awful sorrow our sins laid upon our Redeemer; how He agonized in the garden and on the cross. His bloody sweat and expiring anguish ought to wring tears from our eyes. On the cross He even had to be forsaken of the Father, in order to take our place and prevent our being left without the mercy and consolation of God's presence. Yes, we must mourn for our sins because of the anguish they imposed upon our Redeemer.

But our thoughts need not be wholly sad. There are rifts in the cloud, many of them, through which the sun shines radiantly. And so we turn to —

II. The Sacred Joy Of The Season.

Lent has its bright aspect. We may look through the gloom of sin and the pathos of our Lord's sufferings in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and see the

victory He won by His death, resurrection and ascension. Our state is not like that of the disciples when they stood awe-stricken and benumbed, near the cross, and saw all their hopes perish in the death of their Master. They could not foresee the victory of Easter morning; they could not even interpret the profound meaning of their Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

Not so with us, who are living after the wonderful plan of redeeming love has been completed. We can look back to a finished atonement, to a completed transaction. And in this retrospect we see Good Friday through the light that blazes from the resurrection and ascension of our divine Lord. What an advantage we have!

In the joy and blessing that come to us through the atonement, the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit we even find it difficult to feel as sad as we ought during the Lenten season. It is as if we had passed through a season of great sorrow; but now the affliction is over, and we see that it has effected for us a greater joy than would have otherwise been possible; we can hardly put ourselves back into the sad state of mind we were before. So we find it almost impossible to enter into the gloom of Good Friday, on account of the radiant light that shines from atoning and victorious grace.

So Paul must have felt, for he wrote (Rom. 5:20): "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." He meant to make no apology for sin, but to teach that God is able to bring good out of evil, and to make the wrath of man to praise Him. How God can do this we may not know. It belongs to His omniscience and omnipotence. But we may offer a few reflections.

If grace did not abound more greatly than sin, grace could not overcome sin, could not expiate sin. The lesser cannot overcome the greater; the weaker cannot conquer the stronger. The strong man armed outside of the human heart must be stronger than he that keeps it, or else the former could not dispossess and eject the latter.

Moreover, the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross was an infinite sacrifice, because our Lord was divine as well as human; His divinity gave infinite value and suffering to His atoning sacrifice. The propitiation was therefore greater than the sins of mankind, for you never can add enough finities to reach infinity. We do not believe in the doctrine of a "limited atonement." The gift of life in Christ far transcends the loss incurred by Adam's sin. Thus, "where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

Had man never sinned, he would never know the joy of redeeming grace and love. Even if the Son of God had become incarnate to perfect and de-

velop the human family, He never would have become the Redeemer, had not sin come into the world. Thus we never could have realized the sacrificial love of the Father and the Son, had no ethical calamity overtaken the race. In heaven we never could have sung of the Lamb “who hath redeemed us and washed us in His own precious blood.” We never would have known the sweet story of the cross. Such a song as, “In the cross of Christ I glory,” never could have been written or sung. “Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.”

In the heavenly life our joy will be all the more accentuated on account of the contrast between the state of redemption and the state of sin. The darkness makes the light all the brighter and all the more welcome. Health is all the more appreciated after a season of sickness and suffering. “Our light affliction, which is but for the moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.”

Therefore, to sum up, let us first feel the sadness of the Lenten season as expressed in this part of our text, “in that while we were yet sinners,” and let us heartily repent of our sins which put our Saviour to such a painful and shameful death; then let us feel the joy of the season, expressed in the other parts of the text: “But God commendeth His love toward us” and “Christ died for us;” and let us rely solely on God’s love and Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation.

21. Christ The Victor. The First Sunday In Lent. Matt. 4:1-11

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 afterward an hungred. 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 sheweth 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. (Matthew 4:1-11)

THE GOSPEL for the first Sunday in Lent tells the graphic story of our Lord's conflict with Satan in the wilderness, on the pinnacle of the temple and on the summit of a high mountain. The places in which the threefold temptation occurred are themselves significant. According to the account the Holy Spirit chose the first place, and Satan the second and third places. For the purpose of this ordeal the localities were most strategic. Let us now try to discover what was the significance of this experience of our Lord in the divine plan of redemption.

I. Christ Was Capable Of Temptation.

The account says that He was led up into the wilderness "to be tempted of the devil." The Greek word for tempted is *peimsthenai*, from *peimzo* (this is as near the spelling as we can represent it with the English letters), which

means a real temptation or test, not merely the semblance of one. The same word is used in Heb. 2:18, and almost the same root in Heb. 4:15.

This proves that, while Christ was free from sin, pure and undefiled, the Lamb without blemish, yet He was not impeccable — that is, immune from temptation. He was like our first parents in their state of integrity — without sin, but subject to temptation; that is, His will was set at equilibrium, so that He could choose between good and evil; yet His nature was pure, as theirs was. Pure snow is perfectly white in its nature, yet it may be soiled from without.

How near to our experiences does this bring our divine-human Saviour! If He could not have been tempted, we could not feel that He has a real sympathy with us in our temptations, a sympathy that grows out of His own real experience. Just such a sympathizing Friend we need in our Redeemer — one who can enter into a real fellow-feeling with us in our every trial and sorrow and disappointment. Perhaps Christ for Himself could have thus sympathized with us even if He had not become incarnate, because of His omnipotence; but it would not be so real to us. “For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.” No; “we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling (Greek, *sumpathesai*, sympathize) of our infirmities, but one who has been tempted in all things according to our likeness, apart from sin.”

It is a deep question — this one whether Christ could be tempted to do wrong; whether He could have yielded to the solicitation of Satan or not. Those who deny that He was peccable must admit that then this threefold temptation was useless; was, in fact, merely a spectacular play, destroying Christ’s true humanity, which is the old error of Docetism; for, if Christ was incapable of sinning, then His human nature was not true human nature, because the human nature of our first parents, while it was pure and holy by creation, was not impeccable, else they never would have fallen into sin.

We know that the question will rise in the mind, What would have been the result if Christ had yielded to the temptation? Perhaps it is not idle nor irreverent to ask that question. We cannot imagine the dire consequences; perhaps we dare not try. Doubtless it would have frustrated the whole plan of redemption, and, for all we know, it might have destroyed God’s universe and God Himself. But do you know we really need not speculate or worry over the problem? For Christ did not yield to the temptation, but won a complete victory for Himself, and therefore for us, over His Satanic enemy.

No doubt God foresaw from eternity what would be the result of His plan of redemption through His only begotten and incarnated Son, and so He made the adventure to carry it into effect.

II. Why Christ Was Tempted.

But why was Christ led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted? Apparently this was part of the divine plan. Why? Because Christ was really and truly to take sinful man's place, to be His real Substitute. But man is tempted. Must not his Substitute also be tempted, if He is really to take his place, and endure temptation and overcome it in his stead? That would be a strange kind of substitution which would shield the Substitute from temptation.

More than that, Christ was a new order of moral agent. In some respects He was unique, unlike either angels or men. And every moral agent must be tested, or there would be no true moral agency, no actual freedom of the will. How thankful we should be that the Second Adam did not fail us as did the first Adam, but resisted every assault of the evil one, and thus became the victorious "Captain of our salvation!"

"Led up of the Spirit to be tempted." How well that agrees with the sentence in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation!" Christ here was giving us a petition which grew out of His own experience. He had been led into temptation, and now nothing could be more appropriate than for Him to teach His people to pray that they might not be subjected to a like trial.

After all, it was not the Spirit who tempted Christ. No; God never tempts anyone to do evil, just as James tells us (Jas. 1:3, 4). He simply brings about the conditions at times that are necessary to test moral agency, and give moral agents an opportunity to incorporate righteousness into their wills, so that it may become their real personal possession and not merely a conferred quality. This is the very constitution of moral agency and also of righteousness; a conferred moral quality must be freely chosen by an act of the will, in order that it may become the free agent's actual personal possession. Thus God did not act arbitrarily in ordaining any of His tests in the history of the moral universe, but according to the very nature of moral reality. It will be of practical value to us to analyze —

III. The Inner Character Of The Threefold Temptation.

1. The First Temptation

Satan's first temptation came after Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness and had grown weak with hunger. Here the evil one deftly fitted his temptation to the situation. Pointing to some stones, which no doubt closely resembled small loaves of bread, he said to Christ, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Notice that fatal "If." Had Christ yielded to Satan's proposition, He would have admitted the doubt suggested by that "if" into His own mind, and that would have been a sin. If He was to fulfill His mission as God's incarnate Son, He must never doubt His relation to the Father, nor the nature of His great vocation. Afterward He said, "I do always the Will of my Father." To be free from sin, He had to be free from doubt. Besides, Christ must perform no miracles merely for His own sake; and He never did. Think of all the wonders He performed; they were all for others, all for the good of the people He came to bless and save. If He bore sin and suffering and wrought marvels, all must be vicarious. He Himself declared: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The verse Christ quoted, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," is from Deuteronomy; therefore He gave His approval to that book as a part of the divinely inspired canon of the Old Testament. His citation was extremely apt. When it is wrong to eat bread, men should live on the Word of God — that is, they must care for their souls, even though the body — "the outward man" — may perish. Christ Himself said, "Fear not them who destroy the body, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." How many people today are willing to endanger their souls for the sake of bread and other earthly things! They say, "We must live." But no! it is not essential that men should live, especially by doing wrong. The essential thing is to preserve the life of the soul in its integrity. There is such a thing, as Christ taught, as saving the lower kind of life by losing the higher (Matt. 10:39; 16:35).

This first temptation stands for all those ordeals in human life when we are tempted to do wrong to secure some physical good or advantage. It corresponds to that part of the original temptation in the garden of Eden when our first parents “saw that the tree was good for food.” Satan was simply using one of his old wiles. In such matters let us follow the Second Adam, not the first.

2. The Second Temptation

In the second temptation Satan took Christ to the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down,” etc.

Here was another Satanic “If.” Satan is an adept at using “ifs.” It is part of his business to create doubt. Just as he tried to lead our Lord away from perfect faith in the Father, so He tries to win us away from God by infusing doubt into our minds. That was part of his stratagem in Paradise — to stir doubt in the woman’s mind (Gen. 3:1-5).

Why did Satan tempt Christ in this way? He wanted to lead Him to presume upon His Father’s goodness and care. What a useless and unbecoming spectacle it would have been for Christ, the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, to perform the gymnastic feat of hurling Himself down from the high pinnacle of the temple, simply to prove whether His Father would take care of Him or not! That would “indeed have been” tempting God." So Jesus answered His tempter in the best possible way: “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

How do people today tempt God? By going into needless danger, expecting Him to take care of them. The young man who tampers with strong drink is tempting God. Any one who goes into a place of unnecessary moral peril, thinking God will keep him safely, is tempting God. Here Christ is a good example to us.

We learn, too, from this temptation that Satan can make use of the Scriptures. In this case he quoted with verbal accuracy, but he misapplied the Word. When God in the passage quoted by Satan (Ps. 91:11, 12) promised to give His angels charge over His people, He did not guarantee their safety if they ran into foolish and needless danger. Let us watch Satan when he quotes the Bible, and let us be careful ourselves not to misapply its teaching, lest we fall into one of his many snares.

3. The Third Temptation

Satan's last attempt to foil God's redeeming plan was to take Christ to the summit of a high mountain, and show Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." This was Satan's bold stroke. And it was clever enough in its way. There is a sense in which the kingdoms of this world are largely under his control. There would not be war today among the most highly civilized nations, if this were not true. None could have been more keenly aware of that fact than was Jesus Himself. To have followed Satan's suggestion would have been a "short cut" to power and dominion. God had promised to His Son all the kingdoms of the earth. Why should He not simply step in and take possession of what was rightfully His own?

But no! Christ would not "do evil that good might come." He was neither a Jesuit nor an opportunist. With Him the means must be as holy as the end to be attained. To bow down and worship Satan, the prince of this world, would have been paying too high a price for the possession of worldly power, whether for a long or a short time. No; Christ chose rather the way of toil, humility, teaching, and vicarious sacrifice on the cross to win the kingdoms of the world to Himself. Sin must first be done away; righteousness must first be established. "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Christ knew that His Father's will was a holy will, and therefore the kingdoms of the earth could not be won to Him in their sins, but only by being cleansed from their sins.

This last temptation is a very fundamental one — one to which many persons are liable; the temptation to gratify ambition for dominion and power by doing wrong, by yielding to Satan's crooked devices.

Christ really bruised Satan's head by defeating him in this threefold assault. If we put our trust in the victorious Christ, who is the Captain of our salvation, Satan can have no power over us. We can also use the same true and tried weapon that Jesus used to conquer Satan — the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Satan knows better than to come into contact with that keen, double-edged Jerusalem blade.

“Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you
Some other to”win.”

22. The Marks Of True Faith.

The Second Sunday In Lent.

Matt. 15:21-28

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 to 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. (Matthew 15:21-28)

WHY DID JESUS, as our text tells us, go outside of the Jewish country, and depart for a time “into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon?” These great cities were situated on the Mediterranean Sea in the land of Phoenicia, which lay just west of Galilee. Hence they were Gentile cities. Jesus had two reasons, no doubt, for His visit to that country. One of them was a prudential reason; He wished to avoid an open conflict with the Pharisees and other Jewish rulers, who might have seized Him and put Him to death before His teaching of the way of salvation was complete. Thus it is right to avoid danger when we can do so without compromise or cowardice.

However, the chief purpose of this visit was to show at this time that Christ's mission was not to be provincial, not to be confined to the Jews, but, in God's own time, was to be extended to the Gentiles and all the world. Here we have a foreshadowing of Christ's great commission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” In carrying out that world-wide commanding order, the apostles could appeal to this incident in the life of their Lord, when He gave help to a non-Jewish woman.

It is a beautiful lesson of faith, and also gives us a deep insight into some of God's dealings with people.

I. The Woman's Faith.

She was not a Jew, but a Canaanitish or Syro-Phoenician woman — a fact that evinces her strong faith; for Christ was a Jew, and she must have known that many of the Jews were very exclusive, and thought that God's blessings were confined to them. But in some way her faith passed through that barrier. She must have had some previous knowledge of Christ's goodness and power, and therefore she believed that He would be willing to help even a poor Gentile woman, however unworthy she might be.

So we learn that our feeling of unworthiness ought not to keep us from Christ. Indeed, the more unworthy we feel, the more reason to come to Him; because then we need Him most. If we feel worthy in ourselves, we are most unfitted to come to Him, for then our hearts will be filled with pride and self-righteousness, and that will prevent our trusting His grace alone for our salvation. Some people want to wait until they make themselves worthy before they come to Christ. That is wrong. If you wait until you are worthy, you will never come at all.

Let us go further into our text to learn the lesson of faith from this afflicted woman. She came to Christ, and cried out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." The very wording of her prayer proves her faith. She called Christ "Lord," thereby recognizing His divine power. What the self-righteous Pharisees could not recognize in Christ, this poor Gentile woman, on account of her humble faith, was able to see in His character and person. What insight real faith has! "Now faith is the substance of things hoped, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

In the next place, we note that "He answered her not a word." That was strange conduct on the part of Christ. Just think of it for a moment: He who declared that He "came to seek and to save that which was lost," and that He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many," now refuses to answer the woman's request. He actually closes His lips, almost as if in sullen silence. Why He did this we shall see later. Just now we are interested in analyzing this woman's wonderful faith.

Christ's silence did not daunt her. She kept on with her earnest appeal. It requires real faith to keep on praying and serving when God seems to be unresponsive.

But this woman met with another obstacle. When Christ's disciples saw that she persisted in following them and crying aloud, they no doubt lost their patience, and felt ashamed of the attention she was attracting. Some of the people standing around perhaps began to deride Jesus and His followers. She was making the company ridiculous. But the rebuke of the disciples did not discourage her.

Then Christ said another word that seemed harsh, "I am not come but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" which she could not help interpreting as meaning: that she was not included in the range of His help; she was only a Gentile. Nevertheless, the narrative says that, even after this apparent rebuff, she "came and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me." Her faith would not be denied.

And now Christ says to her the sternest word of all. How strange it sounds in our ears! He says: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs." In order to understand this severe saying, we must remember the Jews were in the habit of calling the Gentiles "dogs," and so the woman understood Christ's metaphor. Perhaps in that day and in the circumstances the words did not sound quite so humiliating to her ears as it does to us in our day. Yet it was enough to disconcert and dishearten her. But she would not permit herself to be turned aside even by a remark that seemed to be insulting. Before this she pleaded; now she argues. And her wit is sharpened by her need and her desperate faith. So she said: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." What humility and what faith! As much as to say, "Yes, Lord, but even if I am only worthy to be compared to a dog, yet I ought to have a few crumbs. I ought to have at least a dog's share. Give me only the crumbs."

The woman had given the finishing stroke to her argument. Her faith would not be denied. She had proved both her humility and her faith. No wonder Jesus was won by her (as, of course, He meant to be all the while), and said to her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee as thou wilt." Then the record says: "And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Faith had won. Afterward an apostle said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Another inspired writer (Heb. 11)

calls the long roll of the heroes of faith, saying in every case “By faith” each achieved his great success.

Some people would have been gravely insulted had Christ said to them, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and cast it to the dogs.” They would have walked away indignantly and would have refused to speak to Christ again. Suppose this woman would have been so Sensitive and proud. Her daughter would not have been healed. She would have missed her great blessing.

Today many people go unblessed because of their pride; because they take umbrage at the least thing that seems to reflect on their “honor.” God cannot give great blessings to people who think more of their poor little dignity and tender feelings than of moral and spiritual good.

Instructive as it is to consider the woman’s faith, it will be just helpful for us to reflect now upon —

II. Christ’s Testing Of The Woman’s Faith.

When she followed Christ, and cried after Him, He did not answer her for a while, and when she persisted He seemingly put her off. Why did Jesus treat her in this way? He even seemed somewhat cold and harsh. But He had His reasons. He wanted to teach the woman a lesson, and by so doing teach all the rest of us a lesson. He desired to strengthen and discipline her faith. A faith that will not endure a test is not worthy of the name. What is the use of faith if we must always see every foot of the way? There are some people who lose their faith whenever they cannot understand God’s dealings; lose faith in the Bible when they cannot clear up every difficulty with a logical process; in Christianity itself when it does not always work like magic. All this proves that their faith is a very weak affair; therefore they ought to go to school to the Canaanitish woman, and learn the a b c of true faith.

In this incident we learn something of God’s ways. Jesus did not at once grant the woman’s request, but we can easily see between the lines that all the while He was ready and anxious to help her; for when her faith had overcome every objection, He exclaimed: “O woman, great is thy faith; be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.” No doubt God brought about this incident, not only for the woman’s sake, but also for the sake of all who would

ever read the story, so that they would not think Him indifferent when He does not answer prayer at once, but that He simply withholds His answer for some wise purpose of His own. It is good for us to desire His blessings intensely enough to ask for them more than once. The same lesson is taught by Christ in His parable about the importunate woman and the unjust judge. Sometimes it is better for us to have the discipline of waiting, patience and faith than to have our petitions granted at once. God may “move in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;” but we may rely upon Him; He always moves wisely and well.

Let us not misinterpret God’s silences. Sometimes they are the best answers to our prayers, as well as the necessary discipline of our faith. An old English couplet, not very poetical but suggestive, runs as follows:

“Why win we not at once what we in prayer require?
That we may learn great things as greatly to desire.”

23. The Master Of The Spiritual Realm. The Third Sunday In Lent. Luke 11:14-28

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)

IN PREVIOUS LESSONS we have seen that Jesus was complete master of the natural realm. This was exemplified in the miracles of water turned into wine, of the multiplied loaves and fishes, and of the stilling of the storm on the Galilean Sea. But there is another sphere which is still more difficult to master — that of the spiritual realm. Did Jesus likewise prove Himself a victor here? Our lessons for last Sunday and today prove that He did. He cast the demons out of the daughter of the Syro-Phenecian woman in last Sunday's lesson and out of the dumb man in today's.

We can pause here just a moment to explain what were these demoniacal possessions of which we read so often in the gospels. Some of the liberal

theologians and critics try to explain away their supernatural character by saying that they were merely violent or distressing forms of physical disease, which the Jews and other people of those crude times attributed to evil spirits. But that is treating Christ and the gospels rationalistically. They distinguish clearly between sickness and such possessions by devils. Christ never pretended to cast a devil out of a leper or a paralytic or a blind or deaf man. But He spoke directly to the demons as if they were personalities; and if they were not, He was either deceived or a deceiver. In either case He could not have been the world's Redeemer. But the work of Jesus, the Christ, is always capable of a reasonable explanation, if we are willing to look for one, and even if the rationalists cannot find it.

This is the true exposition: When the eternal Son of God assumed human nature, and thereby came out into the visible realm, God also permitted the evil spirits to become, in a manner, incarnated, and thus come out also into the visible realm, so that men could see the contest between Him and them. How else could He have proved His complete power over them? Then when He moved back into the invisible sphere, they did the same. So, while there are demoniacs today, just as really as there were then, they do not appear now in so palpable a form, just as the Redeemer Himself does not appear now in an outward, visible way. The contest now is waging in the spiritual domain. This age is the dispensation of the Spirit.

As briefly as possible we must now unfold the great lessons of the text, which we shall consider under two heads: I. Christ the master of demons; II. Demons the masters of men.

I. Christ The Master Of Demons.

Just as easily as He multiplied the loaves, stilled the waves, Cured diseases, and raised the dead, so He cast out evil spirits. He commanded, and they obeyed. The demon mentioned in our text made the man dumb; but when Christ cast him out, "the dumb spake." The devils recognized Jesus. Once one of them said to Him: "We know thee who thou art: the Holy One of God." Another time some of them said, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" How did they know Him? If we believe in the pre-existence of the Son of God and also of the evil spirit, who are fallen angels, the mutual recognition is readily explained. How did Jesus cast out demons? The

wicked Pharisees said He cast them out by the power of Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. But Jesus showed them how absurd it would be for Satan to turn against himself. In that way he would destroy his own kingdom. “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” was Christ’s apt epigram. How easy it is to refute the arguments of wicked people! True reasoning or logic is not on their side. They are always falling into fallacies. That is why rationalists are often so irrational; their unregenerate reasoning leads them into all kinds of sophistries.

Then Jesus pointed out the secret of His power in dealing with evil spirits: “But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, you may be sure the kingdom of God is come upon you.” It is by “the finger of God” that He cast out demons. Powerful as they were, it required only God’s finger to put them to rout. So we may know what is the true source of our strength in the contest with the powers of darkness.

Our Lord then speaks a most relevant parable: “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 armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.” The point of this parable is this: The first strong man armed is Satan entrenched in a human heart. He rules there in security for awhile, able to keep away all his enemies. But Christ is the one who is “stronger than he.” When Christ, the Son of God, comes to a soul desirous of being delivered from sin’s bondage, He overcomes Satan, binds him, casts him out, and takes up His abode there Himself. There, my brother, you know the secret of liberation from Satan’s toils — it is Christ, the one who is “stronger than he!” If you, would be the victor, you must call on “the Captain of your salvation.” “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

And now we must turn. to the second part of our lesson which is sad with the tragedy of spiritual defeat.

II. Demons The Master Of Men.

We have here one of the most searching of Christ’s parables. It tells the sad story of a soul once delivered from Satan’s thralldom, and then repossessed. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest.” What an insight into the disposition of evil spirits that

vivid touch evinces! An evil spirit can never be contented unless he is doing harm. So outside of a human heart is “dry places” for him. He wanders about seeking rest, but finding none. Somewhere the Bible speaks of people who “weary themselves to do evil.” How malignant are the demons!

It would seem that evil spirits sometimes form resolutions. After roaming about restlessly for awhile, this one said, “I will return to my house whence I came out.” You may depend upon it, when an evil spirit has been ejected from a human heart, he will come back sooner or later, and try to regain possession. So the converted and confirmed must ever be on their guard against his wiles.

And now he comes back to his former habitat, and what does he find? He finds it all “swept and garnished,” and Matthew says “empty.” Ah! that is the fatal trouble — “empty.” It is not occupied by Christ and His Word. Were it inhabited by Him, the One who is stronger than Satan, the evil spirit could never gain entrance.

Here we note the worthlessness of mere self-reformation; it may for a time eject the unclean spirit, and get the house fairly well “swept and garnished;” but, alas! it is “empty.” No Christ is there; no one who is able to cope with Satan, the strong man armed. He likes it all the better that the place is “swept and garnished,” for that gives him a chance to befoul it again, blotch the walls and hack to pieces the beautiful furnishings and pictures. But that is not the extent of his fell purpose; he finds seven other spirits, more debased than himself, and they take possession of the dwelling, and hold high carnival there. No wonder Christ adds, “And the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Let a man once try to reform himself, and fail, and he will always make matters worse for himself. Unaided human nature is no match for the powers and principalities of evil. Every time it will go down in defeat. Demons are stronger than men.

This, then, is the great lesson to be derived from our gospel for the day: We must let Christ eject Satan from our hearts, occupy them Himself, and keep Satan out.

"Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And gird your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son.

“Strong is the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty power,
The man who in the Saviour trusts
Is more than conqueror.”

24. Christ And The Hungry Multitude. The Fourth Sunday In Lent. John 6:1-15

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 pennyworth 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)

A MOST GRAPHIC NARRATIVE is the gospel for the fourth Sunday in Lent — the story of the multiplied loaves and the feeding of the five thousand. The incident, told with so much literary beauty and simplicity, teems with suggestive lessons.

As we shall see, this incident has an integral place in the divine plan of redeeming grace, and also conveys some useful suggestions as to the observance of Lent. A number of characters figure in the incident, and we gather our thoughts about them.

I. Christ The Chief Character.

In the center of the picture moved Christ Himself. Let us go to school to Him, the great Teacher both by word and act.

1. His interest in the bread question.

Christ cares for bread; He has an interest in the bread and butter problem. Some of the critics would say that He did not come to tell us anything about such material things, just as they say the Bible was not intended to teach science and history; He simply came to reveal and furnish the way of redemption; but the Bible does not present such a one-sided Christ. His feeding of the hungry multitude with the loaves and fishes, performing a miracle to do so, agrees with His introduction of the sentence, "Give us this day our daily bread," into the very midst of the model prayer which He gave the world. The kingdom of God has its vital relation to bread. Christ was practical; He knew that His disciples, while here on earth, would need temporal blessings; hence he included such needs in His scheme of beneficence and grace. Christ's teaching and example, though they point mainly to eternal things, had no flavor of false spiritualism, which would despise earthly goods and bodily comforts and necessities.

2. His lordship over nature

This incident proves Christ's complete mastery over the natural realm. Just as the "conscious water saw its Lord and blushed" at the wedding; just as all manner of physical diseases left human bodies at His word; just as the wind and waves obeyed His will; so here He makes bread by an accelerated process with perfect ease, just as if He knew all about the resources of nature. Where did He get the extra material for increasing the loaves and fishes? If He was God, it is all explained, for God is making loaves and fishes by natural processes all the time, and also gives man the power and skill to prepare them in such a way as to make them palatable and wholesome. Christ was no less master in the physical realm than in the spiritual.

3. His orderly method.

Why did the writer of the gospel include that little realistic touch, “Make the people sit down;” then add that there was much grass in the place? To show that this was a real event, not fable, not myth; that it occurred at a definite place and under natural circumstances. There is no fanciful or fantastic decoration here, as there would have been had the incident been a piece of fiction. The people were bidden to sit down on the grass in companies or divisions, so that they could be fed more easily, and so none could move from one place to another, and thus claim more than their share. All of it has an air of verisimilitude, of naturalness and reality that compel belief in its historical character. It was a great miracle, but there is about it no evidence that anything that could be done by natural means was done miraculously. Even the disciples were employed to distribute the food to the people.

4. His example of frugality.

And what a strange command it was to gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost! Why, one who could perform such a miracle surely would not need to economize in respect to the fragments. Yet here He thought it worth while to teach the lesson of frugality. Here is no fanatical teacher who has become so “spiritual” that He disregards the common but necessary virtues. Does not the present wasteful age need this lesson? The fact is, economy is a spiritual virtue; While the person who is wasteful of food and other temporal necessities simply lacks that much of being truly spiritual. More than that, the fact that nothing was to be wasted indicates that Christ did not intend to continue to perform such miracles merely on request, making it unnecessary for people to be frugal. and foresighted; and thus, through the natural bread, He sought to lead the minds of the people to the true spiritual bread for the soul, the bread that perisheth not.

5. His unworldly spirit.

When the multitude saw the wonderful miracle that Jesus did, they were convinced that He was “the Prophet that should come into the world,” and so they wanted to take Him by force and make Him king. However, He knew that such a procedure would not be according to the divine plan of saving the world; therefore He escaped from them, and went up into a mountain to be alone. Had Christ come to establish an earthly kingdom, He

might have yielded to the people's desires more than once. But He had not come into the world to win the honors of worldly ambition. As He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," so now, long before, He carried out the same principle. This fact proves that those liberal critics are wrong who teach that Jesus was disappointed in His early ambitions, and gave up the idea of establishing an earthly kingdom only when He saw that the Jews rejected Him.

No; Jesus knew all the time what the divine purpose was. While He came to establish a kingdom, it was a spiritual kingdom pure and simple. In order to establish such a kingdom, He knew He had to go by the way of the cross. The first thing to do was to atone for sin, and thus make it possible for God righteously to forgive sin, save the sinner, and confer upon him a new and holy life-principle. What would have been the profit of establishing a kingdom of earthly glory while sin remained? Such a kingdom would soon have perished, just as so many great nations have been destroyed by their own wickedness. A kingdom of righteousness must be based on righteous principles. So Christ again and again refused «to be made an earthly king, but chose the humble way of spiritual teaching and the bitter way of the atoning cross.

We may learn an important lesson from Him. No success is worth achieving which is not according to the principles of true righteousness. It will soon pass away, and leave its possessor poor and desolate indeed.

Thus we have considered Christ as the chief character in this thrilling event. But He was not the only actor. In all His good works He always associated others with Him. We have already learned that Christ does those things that other agents cannot do, such as multiplying the loaves and fishes; but He does not do those works that men themselves can do.

II. Other Characters.

1. Philip.

To him Christ said, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But Christ said this "to prove him, for He Himself knew what He would do." Note the sublime consciousness that Jesus had of His divine power. But Philip had no suggestion to make. He saw the difficulty, but could find no

way out of it. How like human nature! How much easier it is to suggest problems than to solve them! The Bible always portrays our weak human nature as it is. Never does it flatter it.

2. Andrew.

This disciple came with a partial suggestion, but, so far as he could see, it was of no avail. He said, "There is a lad here who hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" There we have the same story. How easily our poor human wisdom reaches the end of its tether! However, note that Christ turned the suggestion, insufficient though it seemed, into good use. No doubt He knew well enough that the lad was present with his small supply, but it was good for Andrew also to have his eyes open and add his feeble mite to help out of the emergency. It is better for people to think and plan, even if they are not very effective, than for them to be utterly listless. But note how Christ saw that the five barley loaves and two small fishes were the key to the situation. How true it is that God often chooses the weak things to confound the mighty!

3. The lad.

It would seem that the only provident person in the great throng was a lad, who had brought with him five barley loaves and two small fishes, which he no doubt expected to sell. The boy had some foresight; "an eye to business," as we would say. Whatever may have been his motive, he little thought of the important part he would have in one of the most signal events of history. But Christ made use of his humble contribution. With it He fed the great multitude. So a little lad can often help along a good and great cause. He can be like the lad who exclaimed, "I can push a pound;" but it was the last pound needed to move the heavy object to its place. This is a good lesson for children, who never ought to think that they amount to nothing. A little child has often led grown people to Christ. Do you not think this lad of the miracle was glad when he saw what Christ had done with his few loaves and fishes? Perhaps he often spoke it afterward. Would it not be interesting to know what became of the little contributor?

4. The disciples.

Christ's method of making use of others is very attractive. He multiplied the food, making use of the nucleus on hand, rather than creating from nothing, for He alone could perform such a marvel; but He did not distribute the provision to the multitude directly. He handed it to the disciples, and they carried it to the people, who were seated about in companies on the grass.

How suggestive is His conduct! How much better it was to give His disciples a part in the work than to do everything Himself! He might have extended His miracle by feeding the multitude directly, but that was not His way nor the best way. It was good for the disciples to have a share in the work.

This is part of God's plan for the extension of His kingdom — to make use of men as agents. While He may not positively need our services, yet He knows that we need the discipline of work. He makes us His witnesses, ambassadors and workmen. We are His junior partners. "So then we are workers together with God." Thus God honors and disciplines us by putting responsibility into our hands. He has given each of us some useful talent, and He says to us, "Occupy till I come." May all of us be workmen who "need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

"Ye servants of the Lord,
Each in his office wait,
Observant of His heavenly Word,
And watchful at His gate."

25. Christ The Fundamental Reasoner. The Fifth Sunday In Lent. John 7:46-53

The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house. (John 7:46-53)

THE GOSPEL FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT gives an example of our Lord's method of reasoning. It is not the logical method, the praxis that makes use of syllogisms. That method is a human device, one by which the finite mind, through premises and conclusions and their relations, laboriously reaches its rationalized results. If Jesus had used that method, He would have proved by that very token that He was limited like the rest of us.

No; Christ used the intuitional method, which might be defined as an appeal to pure truth and experience as they make their impingement on the spiritual consciousness.

In previous lessons we have followed in our Redeemer's footsteps as He has proved Himself master of the natural and spiritual realms. Is He also master of the realm of thought and reason? In order to be our perfect Redeemer, He must be sovereign in all spheres. Let us study this lesson to learn what a profound and fundamental reasoner He was; more than human — also divine.

I. Respecting His Own Sinlessness.

First, our Lord makes this challenge to His accusers: “Which of you convicteth Me of sin?” They had accused Him of falsehood because He bore witness of Himself; they also sought to kill Him because of the trenchant things He had been saying to them. Note His mode of reasoning. He challenges them to convict Him of a single sin. It was a direct appeal to their consciousness, knowledge, consciences. As if He had said: “I have been living among you, doing my miracles to all classes, and living without moral fault among you. Are these the marks of one who bears a false message, of one who means to deceive? Can perfect moral purity go with such deception as you attribute to me? If I were actuated by such motives, would not my acts and words betray me somewhere? How can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?”

But you will at once discern the labored process of reasoning by which we, a mere human speaker, must work out these conclusions. Not so with Jesus. He simply appealed to the intuitions and consciences of His auditors and permitted them spontaneously to draw the proper conclusion.

And we appeal to reason and conscience today along the same line: Is not the sinlessness of Christ irrefutable proof that He was more than human? If He was naturally engendered, as all other men have been, why did He not inherit a carnal nature like all other men, and hence become a sinner? Why was He the only exception among all the sons of Adam in all history? There is no adequate way to account for His life of perfect righteousness, except on the ground that He was “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,” and therefore was divine as well as human.

In the same fundamental way He reasoned —

II. In Regard To Truth.

“If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?” He said. Another direct appeal to conscience, as if He were to say: “Just lay aside all prejudice, and listen to me sincerely, and see whether my truth will not convince you.” In verses 31 and 32 of this same chapter Jesus said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” In verse 45 He makes this accusation against the Jews: “And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.”

Here the rationalist would say that Jesus “begs the question,” because the very point at issue between him and His opponents was whether Jesus was the true Messiah or not. And in mere human logic that would be true — it was a *petitio principii*. But in reality the reasoning was sound because we know from experience, and millions have known it in all the centuries of Christian history, that, when men listen to Christ and come to Him in simple faith, they do receive the assurance of truth and of pardon and peace; they do discover that He is “the way, and the truth, and the life;” they do find that “the truth makes them free.” It is proved, not by logical praxis, but by experience. Therefore Jesus reasoned correctly with the Jews; had they been susceptible to the truth, they would have believed on Him.

His reasoning was also sound —

III. In Regard To God.

Let us note some of Christ’s categorical statements respecting the relation of those stubborn Jews to God. In verse 42 He says: “If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me.” According to the canons of mere human logic, what a begging of the question it is! But according to the facts of Christian experience, how true and precious is Christ’s statement! Verse 47 is of the same character: “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” Likewise verses 54 and 55: “If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth 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 should be a liar like unto you; but I know Him and keep His sayings.”

What would a man trained in discursive methods of reasoning think of all these oracular statements? He would say they were a mere “begging of the question.” The very premise to be proven is taken for granted.

Yes, such would be true in mere human logic; but that was not our divine Lord’s method, which was the method of stating the pure truth from the truth’s viewpoint. When men are full of prejudice and anger, as the Jews were at that time, the logical method would be of no avail, but the appeal to intuition might be. This is the method of Christ: “I am from God and speak His words; this must be true because you cannot convict me of a single

moral fault. Then surely, if you were of God, if you had God's Spirit within you, you would gladly receive my testimony." It was the appeal to conscience, not merely to the dialectical faculty. It was just what the Lord had said to Nicodemus: "Except anyone be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Or what Paul afterward declared: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." It would be as if today some skeptic would want to thrash you by an argument, a purely logical process, and you were to say to him: "My brother, a man must be regenerated in order to know and appreciate spiritual truth." That would be the fundamental way to put the matter. As a human reasoner, you might use the logical process upon him, and might do him some good, though the danger is that He might soon ask you a number of questions which you could not answer. However, if you were to go to the root of the matter at once, you would not argue, but would make your appeal to the need of a spiritual experience. Christ, being divine, mostly used the fundamental method, not the indirect and labored process of human reasoning; and thus He proved that He was divine.

Iv. In Respect To His Own Person And Power.

Here we note again the Great Teacher's experiential, rather than discursive, mode of reasoning. The Jews accused Him of being a Samaritan and having a devil. He answered, "I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth." The very fact that He sought not to exalt Himself, but submitted wholly to the Father's will, proved that He was no pretender, and therefore could not be actuated by a demon. But it would also prove what He added in verse 51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." Do you see the force of His reasoning? If He was from God, and always spoke only the things that God gave Him to say, then the keeping of His words would surely save men from spiritual and eternal death. That was clear reasoning again, and Christian experience everywhere corroborates it; for you and I, if we are true Christians, know that "whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ hath eternal life."

But of course the prejudiced Jews did not comprehend His reasoning, because they rejected the only way by which an experience is wrought in the soul. They retorted: "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, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom makest thou thyself?" Then He made His statements, already quoted, about His knowing and honoring God and keeping His sayings. If He thus knew God, and was sent by Him into the world to redeem it, then He must have existed eternally with God (John 1:11), and so what He added must be true: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and He saw it, and was glad." When the Jews angrily protested, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" it was inevitable for Jesus to reply: "Before Abraham was I am."

Christ's reasoning is most closely packed together, with no drop-stitches to break the connection: He knew God, He was sent of God, He honored God, He always did God's will and said God's words; therefore He must have existed with the Father from eternity; hence He lived in Abraham's day, and Abraham rejoiced in believing on Him. So He could say, "Before Abraham was, I am." That is, "I have always existed." The fundamental reasoning of it is this: The person who has experienced salvation through faith in Christ knows that all Christ's statements are true. They were spoken originally for the benefit of the Jews; they were recorded in the gospel, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for our profit.

Let us make the application: Christ does not want us to know Him and His saving truth by mere logical demonstration; that would make us rationalistic; He wants us to know Him by a higher kind of logic, the logic of spiritual experience; so that we can say with no shadow of doubt: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." May our experience find its echo in the impressive words of the hymn:

"Thou art the Way: to Thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek
Must seek Him, Lord, by Thee.

"Thou art the Truth: Thy Word alone
True wisdom can impart;
Thou only canst inform the mind,
And purify the heart.

"Thou art the Life: the rending tomb
Proclaims Thy conq'uring arm;
And those who put their trust in Thee,
Nor death nor hell shall harm.

"Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Grant us that Way to know;
That Truth to keep, that Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow."

26. The Beauty Of Children's Praise And Service. Palm Sunday. Matt. 21:1-9

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 ought 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 strawed 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. (Matthew 21:1-9)

THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY records Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That is why the day is called Palm Sunday; for the disciples spread palm branches before our Lord, and with them decorated the little animal on which He rode; and, as we know, the palm is a symbol of victory.

On the First Sunday in Advent we had the same lesson, and in our sermon for that day we pointed out the sacred significance of Christ's triumphal entry in the plan of salvation. Since Palm Sunday is confirmation day in many of our churches, we desire to show today how appropriate it is for the children and young people who have been instructed in the doctrine and practice of Biblical religion to come to the altar, and ratify the baptismal covenant which their parents and sponsors made for them when they were infants. We shall see that the Church chose well when she selected Palm Sunday as confirmation day. In verses 15 and 16 of the chapter from which our gospel lesson is taken, we read: "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children that were

crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were moved with indignation, and said unto Him, Hearest thou what these are saying? And Jesus said unto them, Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise?”

Thus we see that Jesus’ triumphal season continued for some time after He had entered Jerusalem. The children were praising Him in the temple. And what did He say of their adoration? He indicated that it was most acceptable to God, and quoted from the eighth Psalm to prove it.

It is a delight to see so many of our young people here today for confirmation. It is right and good that they should be here. Youth is the time to begin to serve God; for the Bible expressly says: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” I felicitate you and your parents that you are taking this step, which is a step upward and forward in the Christian life. The pastor has found rare pleasure in instructing you in the doctrines and practice of the Bible, as they are outlined and set forth in the catechism. Indeed, catechization has been an increasing joy to him as the years have come and gone. He has never wearied of it. He knows the benefit that comes from proper instruction in the principles of our holy religion in youth. Having received the grace of regeneration in child baptism, the child’s heart is open to admit the “engrafted Word, which is able to save the soul,” through the Holy Spirit’s operation. Under proper Biblical instruction the seed principles of the new life implanted in baptism germinate and develop into the rich fruitage of a truly Christian character. There is no undue excitement about it, no emotionalism; but there is true, joyous and abiding spiritual feeling, while at the same time the intellect is instructed, the will reinforced, and the life directed. Let no one think it is a mere form, and therefore of little value, to indoctrinate the youth of the Church.

Let us note, now, how fitting it is to assume your confirmation vows on Palm Sunday.¹

I. Palm Sunday Means That Christ Is King.

The multitude that went before and after Christ, cried aloud: “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.” What could be more pertinent and profitable than for you, young friends, to acknowledge Christ as your King. You have learned in your catechism of the three offices of Christ — Prophet, Priest

and King. In following the teaching of Christ you confessed Him as your Prophet or Teacher. On Good Friday, as you looked upon Him hanging upon the cross, giving Himself up as an offering for sin, you avowed Him as your Priest; and now, on Palm Sunday, the day of His triumphal procession, you acclaim Him as your King.

This means that you are willing to let Him rule over you and control your lives. “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.” For a young person, or any other person, for that matter, to want to be his own sovereign, and do just as he pleases, would be most unfortunate, because his knowledge is so limited that he would make many serious, and perhaps fatal, mistakes; besides, untamed human nature is so prone to sin that he would be sure to go into ruinous ways. But if you accept Christ as your Ruler, and let Him guide you by His Word and Spirit, you will always be directed in “the highway of holiness,” and your life will be a moral and spiritual success. As your King, Christ will rule your bodies, so that they will be fit temples for the Holy Ghost; your intellects, so that you will think correctly and purely; your feelings, so that they will be loving and holy; and your wills, so that they will be empowered always to choose the right way of life.

II. Palm Sunday Gives Praise And Worship To Christ.

How the multitudes on that day shouted their hosannas: “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Afterward in the temple, as has been said, the children cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” That word “Hosanna” — what a beautiful word it is! How euphoniously it works itself into our church hymns, anthems and chants! The Holy Spirit must have directed the multitude and the children to use that word.

It is a good thing for children to learn early in life to worship God. How happy we ought to be that Christ taught us that their praises are acceptable to Him! By beginning in our youth to praise Him your whole life becomes attuned to the service of worship. It becomes “second nature;” it will break forth spontaneously. It is so much better to learn the hymns and *Glorias* and *Kyries* of the Church when you are young than to wait until you grow old,

when it is always harder to learn. Think how much people miss by living forty and fifty years without knowing the pure joy of worship!

My young friends, never sit idle in God's house. Own a Book of Worship, and take part in the services, and know the true joy of worshiping God "in the beauty of holiness."

III. Palm Sunday Also Means Victory.

That processional on Palm Sunday is called "Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem." The palm branches in those days were a symbol of victory.

This thought is also appropriate for our class of confirmants. If they have been truly taught, and have truly accepted the teaching of God's Word, and have in their hearts acknowledged Christ as their King, they have already won a victory through the grace of God; victory over the carnal heart, which is prone to do evil rather than good; victory over Satan, who perhaps more than once tempted them to neglect or disobey the instruction of God's Word; victory over spiritual indifference, which causes many people to be utterly inert in spiritual matters; and victory, too, over sinful pleasure, which tried more than once to lure them from the place of religious instruction. Yes, I can see that this is already a real Palm Sunday for our class of catechumens.

What was the significance of Christ's triumphal march into Jerusalem? It was a prophecy of the time when He shall be King over every realm; or, as we often sing, "When Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run." So may this day, your confirmation day, be an earnest forecast of future victories! When temptations come, as they are sure to come to all of us, may you never go down in defeat! May the Palm be your emblem, and victory your motto. Then when Christ shall come in His glory, and shall be clothed with all power and authority, you will have a share in His triumph. Remember the divine promise: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Once more let us Observe —

IV. Palm Sunday Means Continued Service.

Service is clearly implied in the gospel lesson. Two of the disciples had to go some distance to get the colt and its mother; that meant work and service for the Master. The owner of the animals had to permit them to be used, because, as the disciples told him, “the Lord had need of them.” This was also service. When the multitude gathered branches from the trees, and took some of their garments and spread them in the way before Christ, that was also service; it required activity. After the processional reached the city, which was greatly stirred, and inquired excitedly, “Who is this?” the multitude of disciples had to bear their testimony; which they did by saying, “This is the Prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” That, too, was service; it was doing something for Christ.

So your celebration of Palm Sunday today as confirmants of the Church spells service. You are not to be idlers; you are to be busy in the Lord’s vineyard. You do not serve to be saved, but you are saved to serve. A sick man cannot do much work, and if he is seriously sick, he can do none, but is rather a burden upon others. So when you are sick with the fatal malady of sin, you cannot work for Christ and His Church; but when you are cured, when you are made well and strong by His saving and regenerating grace, then you are in condition to work, and to work effectively for His cause. If you do not care to work for Him, it will be a sure sign that you have not been cured of your deadly disease of sin.

I fear that some young people — probably some of their elders, too — look upon confirmation as graduation — that is, as graduation from any vital connection with and active service in the Church. Sometimes it actually occurs that, after confirmation, young people are seldom seen in the house of God, and seldom make use of the means of grace. But such conduct defeats the very purpose of catechetical instruction, and mistakes the primary object of confirmation. In one sense, confirmation day might be called graduation day; not graduation from the activities of the Church, but into full and active communicant membership therein.

So it will be expected of you, not so much by your pastor as by your Lord and Master, to be more active than ever in the Sunday school, to join the Luther League and take part in its important work, and to attend faithfully the services of the Church. It has been for these very purposes that you have been instructed in the doctrines and duties of the Christian life. Let me assure you, there is a place for you in the work of the Church. You may or may not become officers; but you can be soul-winners; you can invite peo-

ple to come to God's house to hear the gospel message; you can read the Bible and other good books; you can pray for the Church and her pastor; you can be present in your place whenever duty calls.

The officers and pastor bid you welcome into the communicant membership of the Church. The future of Christ's cause depends upon the young people. Learn the fine Christian art of serving well while you are young, so that when greater responsibilities are placed upon your shoulders, you will not fail to discharge your duty effectively. When those of us who are older shall be called from this sphere of action, you will have to carry on the Church and her institutions, and make them a blessing to the world. Can your Master and Lord depend on you? Let me exhort you, as Paul exhorted Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." Remember, too, those other inspiring words of the same apostle: "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith."

My young friends, may your confirmation day, combined with the Palm Sunday lesson, mean these four great fundamental truths for you through all your future — that Christ is your King, and should have the rule over you; that to praise Him in worship is comely and profitable; that through Christ you can win the victory over every temptation; and that you shall remain faithful unto death, and receive the crown of life. First to accept Christ by faith as your Prophet, Priest and King, and then to serve Him with fidelity to the end — that is the sum and substance of the Christian life. Amen.

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1. Of course, other days, like Whitsunday and Trinity Sunday, are also appropriate.↩

27. The Doctrine Of The Eucharist. Holy Thursday. 1 Cor. 11:23-31; John 13:1-15

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:23-31)

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; 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. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 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. (John 13:1-15)

MANY OF OUR CHURCHES celebrate the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday. It is fitting to do so, for very probably this sacrament was instituted on that evening. The gospel lesson is the narrative of the washing of the disciples' feet by their Lord and Master — an example of condescending love and gracious humility. However, the text is not relevant to the subject of our reflections tonight, namely, the Holy Eucharist, especially in view of the fact that we have come together for the purpose of partaking in that ordinance. Therefore we turn to the epistle which contains Paul's graphic account of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

We shall not, however, follow the epistle textually, but shall take the general fact of the Holy Supper as set forth in the Scriptures, and point out some of its main features and doctrines. We shall call our sermon "The Three C's of the Holy Communion."¹ Our purpose in using the alliterative method is to fix the thoughts more firmly in your memory. Let us note these three capital C's.

I. The Holy Communion Is A Confession.

You will remember that Paul says in the epistle: "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." The Revised Version says, "Ye do proclaim." Thus, whenever you and I come to the Lord's table, we preach a sermon; we make a confession. And what do we confess? Two things:

1. That we are sinners.

We do not make a "loud profession" in coming to the sacrament of the altar. We do not profess to be good. Many people outside of the Church mistake our motive and spirit; they think that, when we come to the Lord's table, we profess to be very good, and even better than other people. But that is an error. If we come in the right spirit, we come very humbly and contritely, renouncing all self-righteousness, and confessing that we are deep-dyed sinners.

No, we make no "profession" of goodness; we make a humble confession of sinfulness and unworthiness. It is rather the people who remain away from the Lord's table who make the "loud profession." By their acts,

if not by their words, they proclaim that they are good enough without repentance; that they can get along very well without Christ and His atoning blood; that they do not need the help and saving power of Christ in the Communion. But we who come to the table confess that we are sinners.

Does anyone feel that he is good enough to come to the Lord's Supper? Then he is in the most perilous condition — that of self-righteousness. But do you feel unworthy? Then you are the most worthy, for then you renounce your own worthiness, and rely solely on the merits of Christ and the grace of God. None of us are worthy in and of ourselves to come to the Holy Sacrament; our sufficiency is entirely of God through Christ Jesus, our Redeemer. In coming to the Lord's table we also confess:

2. That Christ alone can save us.

This means that we are not only sinners, but such helpless and heinous sinners that we can do nothing to save ourselves; that Christ, the Son of God, had to die to make satisfaction for our sins, and thus redeem us from the curse and condemnation of the law. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly," and to that class we belong; and that is what we say every time we celebrate this sacrament. The Lord said in instituting the Holy Supper: "This is my body, which was given for you; this is my blood, which was shed for the remission of your sins." In the absolution service we make this humble confession. Flinging away all thought of our own righteousness, we declare in utmost humility, and yet with sacred joy:

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name;

On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

II. The Blessed Eucharist Is A Commemoration.

This is the second capital C of the sacrament. In it we commemorate something. We know what that means. On the fourth of July we commemorate the declaration of the independence of our country. On Thanksgiving Day we commemorate the goodness of God in providence and grace for the year. At Christmas we commemorate the birth of Christ. In the Lord's Supper, as the apostle declares, we "show forth the Lord's death till He come." At the institution of the Holy Supper Christ said to His disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."

So we are here this evening to recall what Christ has done for us and for our salvation. We might ask why Christ wanted to be remembered by His disciples. Perhaps His human nature was like our own in this respect. We want to be remembered; we do not want to be forgotten, especially by our loved ones. How often we say: "Remember me to such and such a friend!" Perhaps you once had a loved one who was lying on a dying bed. Before his spirit was called away, he gave you a token or souvenir, and said: "My dear one, whenever you look at this, remember me." I wonder whether Jesus, the loving Friend of sinners, did not cherish such a tender, longing feeling toward His disciples.

But that was not the chief reason why He wanted to be remembered. He knew it would be for the good of His people for them to remember Him. You and I cannot think of some good and pure person, a sainted father or mother, for example, without being made better; we cannot think of them in their robes of white, and at the same time indulge in impure thoughts. So our Saviour knew it would have a wholesome, salutary, purifying effect to remember Him, the White Christ, the Holy and Spotless One; the One who always went about doing good; who blessed the little children; who drank the cup of our woes in Gethsemane; Who died for our sins on Calvary. Who is not made better by such reflections? Yes, Jesus had our welfare in mind when He said, "This do in remembrance of me." So, in instituting the Holy Supper, He used the elements of bread and wine, to make it all the easier for us to remember Him and His dying agony on the cross.

"According to thy gracious Word,
In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord,
I will remember Thee.

"Thy body, broken for my sake,
My bread from heaven shall be;
Thy testamental cup I take,
And thus remember Thee.

"Gethsemane can I forget?
Or there Thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?

"When to the cross I turn mine eyes,
And rest on Calvary,
O Lamb of God, my Sacrifice!
I must remember Thee."

And now we will reflect on the third and last C of the Holy Eucharist.

III. The Lord's Supper Is A Communion.

We have seen that it is a Confession and a Commemoration; it is also a Communion. That is what it is often called — the Holy Communion. With whom do we have communion when we come to the Lord's table?

1. With Christ Himself.

He is present at this feast — really and truly present.

In our Lutheran theology we call His presence here "the real presence." We mean that He is not personally absent somewhere in heaven and only present by substitution or proxy — that is, through or by the Holy Spirit. In other sermons of this series² we have cited the many Biblical texts which speak about Christ Himself being present with us, as, for example: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This must mean Christ Himself, the God-man, the Incarnate Son of God; not merely the pre-incarnated Logos; not merely the Deity of Christ, as if Christ could be divided, His glorified human nature in one place and His divine person in another. No! no! "He ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things." Then He must be present in His whole theanthropic person in His Holy Supper.

Why, in the very institution of the sacrament He said of the bread, “This is my body;” and of the fruit of the vine, “This is my blood.” Paul taught the same precious doctrine: “The cup which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” So Christ must be present in His glorified human nature, or He could not impart His body and His blood. The meaning is, that He is present in His glorified, though invisible, form, and comes into our hearts to hold precious communion with us.

It is the Lord’s feast. Would He be absent from the banquet which He Himself has spread? He is our host; we His guests. What would you think of a host who would invite you to a feast, and then would absent himself from it? So our Master is here with us in His own ordinance. Do not think of Him tonight as far off somewhere in the heavens, bound like a slave, as it were, to a throne, from which He cannot break away; no! but rather think of Him as right here, communicating Himself to you and holding sweet spiritual fellowship with your soul.

"Here at Thy table, Lord, we meet
To feed on food divine:
Thy body is the bread we eat,
Thy precious blood the wine.

“He that prepares this rich repast
Himself comes down and dies;
And then invites us thus to feast
Upon the sacrifice.”

Much more might be said on this holy doctrine; but time warns us to conclude. In the Holy Supper Christians also have —

2. Communion with one another.

The Apostles’ Creed calls the Church “the communion of saints.” There is no place where God’s people come closer together than in the blessed Communion. Here “saint holds fellowship with saint.” Here we can say and sing: “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” This sacrament has had a most potent influence in the whole history of the Church in binding God’s people together and to their Lord. Indeed, it is doubtful

whether the Church would not long ago have perished by her inner dissensions, had it not been for the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, when church members had to lay aside their quarrels and grudges, and come together in the fellowship of forgiving love at His table.

How often the communion of God's people at this season is most precious! How often we truly feel that "the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above!" At this feast of love we may say:

"Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

"We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

May this be a season of real heart-to-heart communion both with our Lord and Master and with our fellow Christians!

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1. While the author was pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Atchison, Kansas, a friend gave him the outline of the three C's used in this sermon. The development of the several parts of the sermon is the author's own; but his friend should have the credit of the suggestive alliterative outline.↵
 2. Sermon 33, Div. I; 35, Div. IV; 37, Div. I.↵

**28. The Divine Reason Of The
Cross. Good Friday. John 18:1
— 19:42**

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew. Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To

this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. (John 18:1-40)

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! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. (John 19:1-42)

WE HAVE NOW come to the most solemn time in following in the Redeemer's footsteps through the Christian Year. It is Good Friday. Sad as the day is when we contemplate the sufferings of our Saviour, yet it is appropriately named — Good Friday. However bitter was His anguish at the time, it was truly Good Friday for this poor, sin-cursed world. On that day sin was

atoned for; on that day love flowed freely from the divine Father heart upon us miserable offenders; on that day the condemnation of the law of justice was lifted from every believer; on that day mercy and truth met on the cross and kissed each other; on that day “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” Sad day! Happy day!

“See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

Our gospel selection for today comprises a large part of the passion history. The Old Testament lesson (Isa. 52:13-53:12) agrees with the gospel, giving the same recital in prophetic form. It would be impossible to follow these selections in detail in a single sermon; therefore we glean from them the theme, “The Divine Reason of the Cross,” and desire to speak to you on the subject of the Vicarious atonement which Christ wrought for the world in His sacrifice and suffering. Before dealing with the true doctrine, we must mention some inadequate views that are current today.¹

I. Erroneous Theories Of The Atonement.

1. The Placating Theory

There is what we may call the placating theory. This is a view that is often wrongly fastened upon the orthodox party by the liberalists. You know how men will often set up “a man of straw” and then take keen delight in proceeding to annihilate him. This view is that Christ died to placate the wrath or resentful feelings of God, the Father, who was very angry on account of men’s sins, and therefore had to wreak His vengeance on some one. So Christ stepped in, and in man’s stead became the victim of His wrath. This theory represents Christ as beneficent and kind, but the Father as most unloving and vindictive.

The Bible does not teach this view, nor does orthodoxy hold it. It is a travesty on the evangelical view. While God is often represented in the Bible as angry at sin, yet it is not the anger of resentment or petty spite, but

that of righteous indignation; in other words, it is the reaction of God's holiness against sin. What would you think of a God who was not indignant at moral evil? Could you respect Him?

But the Bible represents God as loving sinners; as exceedingly desirous of saving them. The coming of Christ into the world was the result and outflow of God's love. Note the classical passage (John 3:16): "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," etc. Then this follows: "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Note what Paul says (Rom. 5:8): "For God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And again (Rom. 8:31, 32): "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Read also verses 38 and 39 of the same chapter. Christ Himself taught us that God loves us and is our Father. Christ died, not to make God love us, but because God loved us. Those who misunderstand and misrepresent the evangelical doctrine of the atonement ought to read some of the hymns of the orthodox Church, to learn just what doctrine she holds:

"Sing we then eternal love,
Such as did the Father move;
He beheld the world undone,
Loved the world, and gave His Son.

"Sing the Son's amazing love;
How He left the realms above,
Took our nature and our place,
Lived and died to save our race.

"Sing we, too, the Spirit's love;
With our stubborn hearts He strove,
Filled our mind with grief and fear,
Brought the precious Saviour near."

2. The Moral Influence Theory

Next we must examine the moral influence theory. This view, held by Horace Bushnell and others, is a popular theory among the liberal thinkers. It

is this: Christ did not die to make expiation for sin, for God can simply forgive the penitent sinner with requiring satisfaction to the law of justice. Christ came into the world, lived a self-sacrificing life, and died a martyr's death on the cross, to show how much He and the Father loved us.

But this theory is un-Biblical, superficial and unmoral, if not immoral, even though it is called the "moral" influence theory. Why? Because the Bible teaches plainly that Christ's death was a propitiation for sin (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10); that Christ gave His life "a ransom for many;" that He "died for the remission of sins;" that He "tasted death for every man." Later we shall quote other relevant passages.

Ethically the "moral influence" view is far astray. It says that God could forgive sin by a simple act of His will without requiring satisfaction to the principle of justice; that is, God's omnipotent love could simply wave aside His justice. What kind of a God would that be — one who would set up one eternal divine attribute against another! Is God actuated by the principle that "might makes right?" For God to set aside justice by His mercy would create a moral schism in Himself and in His whole moral economy. Such a disreputation in God's being would destroy Him. Besides, if God does not respect His moral law, would His creatures be likely to respect it?

A fatal objection to the moral influence theory is that it would make Christ's display of love on the cross spectacular. It was not really necessary for Him to suffer there; He did it only to make an exhibition of His love.

Who would want such a theatrical and ostentatious display as that? Suppose a husband should some day come home with his face terribly bruised and lacerated. When his wife in great concern inquired the cause of his ghastly wounds, suppose he should say, "I did this myself to show you how much I love you!" What do you suppose she would think of such a procedure? Would she appreciate it? Or would she not, rather, doubt his sanity? But suppose, on the other hand, that she should become seriously ill, and then he would watch by her bedside by day and by night, making every possible sacrifice for her, and thus should win her safely back to health again. Ah! then she would not need to ask why he had done all that for her sake; his actions would speak for themselves.

And so with Christ; if He suffered and died merely to make an exhibition of His love, we do not care for such histrionic display; but if He really took our place, really suffered for us, really bore the penalty of our sins to

save us, ah, then how Winsome, how appealing, how touching was His exhibition of pity and love!

3. The Governmental Theory

Then there is the governmental theory. This theory was advocated by Hugo Grotius. It is better than the foregoing theories, but is also inadequate. It holds that God might have remitted sin by merely forgiving it, without requiring satisfaction to the moral law; but, lest men should lose their respect for the law, He devised the plan of sending His Son to suffer somewhat, just to show that His law could not be trampled upon with impunity.

Do you not see at once the fundamental weakness of this theory? It makes the death of Christ only a makeshift, an expedient. God might have saved the world in some other way. It was not absolutely necessary in the very nature of a moral economy for Him to suffer and die. Do you want to be saved by a makeshift? I do not. This view is open also to the objection that it makes Christ's suffering spectacular; He suffered only to show that God's law cannot be despised. We turn sadly away from such parade, and feel that it is unreal; it displays affectation rather than holy affection.

4. The Penitential Theory

A few moments only can be given to what is known as the penitential theory. A number of English liberalists have recently advanced this view. It is that Christ repented for us. In some way He took our sins upon Him, and then became penitent, and thus, in some obscure way, put away our iniquities and saved us from them.

How utterly unethical is this hypothesis! If Christ repented in any real sense, He must have sinned in a real sense. That would make our Lord a sinner. But the Scriptures teach that He was sinless: "without sin;" "separate from sinners;" "the spotless Lamb of God;" "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

Moreover, if Christ repented for us, then we not need repent. But Christ said: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel;" "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

No! no! Christ did not repent for us, because the Bible everywhere enjoins repentance upon us. Christ suffered and died for a vastly different pur-

pose, a real one, a fundamental and necessary one. Let us now see what it was.

II. The True View Of The Atonement.

Why did Christ hang there on the rugged cross of Calvary on the first Good Friday in the world's history? Not for a show; not for a spectacle; not for an expedient; not for a hazy, obscure purpose. What is the true Biblical doctrine of the atonement? It is this: Christ was our Substitute; His sufferings and death were vicarious; He took our place; He endured the penalties of the law in our stead to spare us from enduring them.

To put it in another way, from what did Christ save us by His piacular sufferings? Not from repentance, for we must repent; not from our guilt, for even in eternity we shall acknowledge that we were the guilty ones; but from the penalty of our transgressions. The only way to punish sin is by imposing suffering. Where there is no suffering for sin, there is no punishment. We appeal to the whole criminal docket of our civil courts in proof of the assertion.

Now this blessed doctrine of substitution is taught in many Biblical passages, and, moreover, corresponds with the whole analogy of faith. All the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, from the Passover lamb to every beast and bird "on Jewish altars slain," points to the doctrine of atonement by substitution, and thus finds its archetype in Christ, the "Lamb of God that beareth away the sins of the world." There can be no doubt that Isaiah fifty-three is a Messianic prophecy. If it is not, it has no meaning; it is only idle raving. See how the doctrine of substitution runs all through its throbbing lines: "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. All we like sheep have gone astray; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Christ Himself said that He came "to give His life a ransom for many." And all of us know what a "ransom" is. Observe Paul's mode of reasoning (Rom. 3:23-26): "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past,

through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” No less explicit is another apostle (1 John 2:1, 2): “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” And Peter agrees with his fellow-apostles (1 Pet. 2:24): “Who His own self bare our sins in His body on the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.”

Many, many more proof texts might be cited; but these are ample to prove the Biblical doctrine of the atonement to be that Christ endured our punishment as our self-sacrificing and loving Substitute.

And now we may ask, Why was such vicarious endurance necessary in God’s plan of redeeming grace and love? The answer is: For profound ethical reasons. God’s economy is a moral economy. That is its highest quality and glory. A merely mechanical universe would have been worth little, and would have shown only God’s power. But holiness, righteousness and love are higher attributes. Man’s moral and rational qualities are what lift him above the mere mechanism of the cosmos and the animal creation. Moral and spiritual excellence is the highest kind of excellence. When the Bible says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne,” it assigns to God the noblest and most exalted attributes.

Now when man sinned, He at once came under the condemnation of eternal justice, which must punish the offender. We see this principle in life everywhere. The law of justice must never be set aside. In some ethical way its demands must be met. But that meant the eternal punishment of man, the sinner. However, God is a God of love as well as of justice; and so He desired to save man. But how could man, the sinner, be saved without derogation to, or violation of, the eternal principle of righteousness? Ah! divine love and wisdom found the way. God, Himself the foundation of the moral law, saw that He could Himself, out of love for man, take upon Himself, in the person of His eternally begotten Son, the penalty of man’s offenses. It was out of love that He made the sacrifice, and it was to uphold His moral government that the sacrifice had to be made. Had God merely waved aside the principle of justice by an act of omnipotence, He would have created an antinomy in His own being, and would have violated His own moral law, and so would have brought ruin upon Himself and His creation. But thanks

be to God! He knew how to show mercy and uphold justice at the same time.

So He gave His only begotten Son, who came to earth, assumed our humanity, endued it with infinite value and capacity for suffering, by virtue of the union of His divine person with it, and thus became our Daysman, our atoning Saviour, taking the penalty of our sins upon Himself. This He could do for the whole world because He was both God and man — man, that He might suffer as humanity would have had to suffer; God, that His suffering might be an equivalent before the principle of righteousness. Thus God “could be just, and yet the justifier of every one that believes on Jesus Christ.”

How else could God’s moral economy have been upheld? It is profoundly ethical, this marvelous plan of redemption. At the same time it reveals the infinite love of the Triune God. Why should we not accept our gracious Redeemer who thus suffered and died for us? Why find fault with His plan? Are we not the beneficiaries of it? If Christ paid our debt, let us accept the payment with grateful hearts; and, because we are saved solely by His free and fraternal grace, let us devote to Him the service of our lives.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute for too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

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1. The doctrine of the atonement is so vital, so central in Christianity that we give references to some important books on the subject.

Among Lutheran authors we name the following:

Schmid's "Doctrinal Theology of the Lutheran Church," translated by Jacobs and Hay (there is nothing better, even if it does give the discussions of the old Lutheran theologians, like Gerhard, Quenstedt, Koenig, Hutterus, Hollazius, etc.);

Jacobs' "Elements of the Christian Religion" and "A Summary of the Christian Faith" (in loco);

Remensnyder's "The Atonement and Modern Thought;"

Graebner's "Outline of Doctrinal Theology;"

Voigt's "Biblical Dogmatics" (in loco);

The author's "The Rational Test," Chapter VIII (a succinct statement) and "A System of Christian Ethics" (in loco).

Among non-Lutheran authors we recommend

Hodge's "The Atonement" (Calvinistic, but sound on satisfaction and the quid pro quo doctrine);

Stalker's "The Atonement;"

Mabie's "The Divine Reason of the Cross;"

Mozley's "The Doctrine of the Atonement;"

Denney's "The Death of Christ;" "The Atonement and the Modern Mind;"

"The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation."↵

29. The Redeemer's Triumph. Easter. Mark 16:1-8

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 saith 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)

AFTER RECOUNTING our Redeemer's foretaste of triumph on Palm Sunday, and His apparent defeat on Good Friday, we may now celebrate His victory on Easter, when He broke the bands of death, led captivity captive, and came forth from the tomb in the plenitude of life. Well may the whole Christian Church today sing its *Jubilate!* Every Christian heart may join in the Easter hymn:

“All hail the glorious morn
That-saw the Saviour rise,
With victory bright adorned,
And triumph in His eyes!
Ye saints, extol your risen Lord,
And sing His praise with one accord.”

The Easter gospel recites briefly but vividly the account of the visit of the women to Christ's tomb on the morning of His resurrection. Let us first notice their sincere devotion and simple faith, and then pass on to consider the

meaning and purpose of Christ's resurrection in the divine plan of redemption.

I. The Devotion And Faith Of The Women.

They came early in the morning — that is, just as soon as possible after the Jewish Sabbath. This implies that they had waited longingly through the hours of the Sabbath, and then rose early to perform their loving task. They came with their spices to anoint the body of Christ. They did not mind the expense or the trouble because of the love they felt for their dead friend. Even though His death was a severe shock to them and a keen disappointment, they did not lose their love for Him. In their simple, natural way they proved their confidence in His goodness, sincerity and friendship, whatever they may have thought of the authority of His claims to be the Messiah.

We cannot help commending the simple, unquestioning devotion of these women. If there were more such faith today, the world would be better, and the kingdom of faith would be more surely advanced. Nowadays we must stop and see a reason for everything we do. We are so afraid of being credulous and fanatical that we often fail to have any faith at all. In these rationalistic days we forget that we are to walk by faith and not by sight. It would be worth while to give genuine, unquestioning faith the right of way at times, and see whether we would not make more progress in Christian experience and power, and walk less falteringly in the way of life. We have not yet really" tried the power of faith to see how many moral and spiritual victories it would win for us.

Notice, next, that mingled with their childlike faith there was much lack of comprehension. There is what would be called a real naivete in both their faith and their unfaith, as well as in their blindness. We cannot help wondering how they could believe so much without believing more. Had not Christ told them He must be put to death, and that He would rise again? Yet they come with spices on Easter morn to anoint His dead body, and wonder innocently who shall roll the stone away from the opening of the tomb! Had their faith been rugged and thoroughgoing, they would have come expecting to see their risen Lord. They certainly deserved the gentle rebuke more" than once on Christ's lips, "Oh, ye of little faith!"

Yet observe that Christ did not cast them off because of their lack of comprehending faith. He rewarded them later with a vision of Himself. May we not learn from this incident that our gentle, loving Lord is pleased even with a little faith, if it is sincere and simple, and that from such a seed principle He is able to build a strong and conquering faith? Still more, does it not prove His divinity that He is able to take such a weak and faltering faith as the women and the disciples had at this time, and convert it into the faith that brought thousands to their knees on Pentecost, and that in less than three centuries conquered the Roman empire?

Their great devotion and simple faith were still further rewarded. The stone was rolled away — one of the other gospels tells how this was done, thus supplementing and corroborating St. Mark's account — an angel appeared in the sepulchre, assured them Christ was risen, and then entrusted them with a blessed and important mission: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter," etc. Thus Christ, through the angel, made use of the faith they had. He did not ask them to do some great thing far beyond their faith, but they could run quickly and tell the disciples to repair to Galilee, where their risen Lord would meet them. Other gospels inform us that they carried out their commission. So we may learn that Christ blesses even weak faith, and gives it something to do in order that it may be strengthened, and so qualified for greater tasks. So, as the Augsburg Confession teaches, it is not great and erudite faith that is needed to qualify us to come to the Holy Supper, but even weak faith, providing it is directed to Christ.

We will next analyze the fact recited so vividly in our text in a more general way. What is the blessed doctrine of the resurrection? That it was a resurrection of Christ's real body there can be no doubt, for afterward He requested His disciples to touch and handle Him, saying (Luke 24:39): "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me having." Now, the question is, Why would not a mere spiritual resurrection have been enough? Why must Christ rise bodily from the tomb? Is this also a part of God's redemptive plan?

II. The Meaning And Purpose Of The Resurrection.

1. It is a beautiful symbol.

Almost every miracle is also a parable; it may be used to illustrate facts and experiences in the spiritual realm. So the resurrection of Christ is an expressive symbol of our resurrection from the death of sin in this life; for Paul says that, as we are buried with Christ in baptism, so we are to rise with Him into newness of life. This means spiritual resurrection. There is a sense, therefore, in which we may make every day an Easter Day — that is, we may daily rise from a lower state of grace and spiritual life to a higher.

2. It destroyed the last enemy.

Our Lord came to “destroy all the works of the devil.” But Satan, by inveigling our first parents into sin, caused the death of the body, and thus the separation of soul and body in death. If Christ had come to redeem the soul only, the evil one would have gained at least a partial victory, and the Scriptures would not be absolutely true. But when the “last enemy, which is death,” shall be destroyed, Christ’s victory over Satan will be complete.

3. It affords convincing proof of Christ’s messiahship and divinity.

The resurrection has great apologetic value. Without it, so far as we can see, the mission of Christ would have ended in failure. But by His rising from the dead He proved to His disciples that He was the Messiah. Look at their daunted faith right after His death. They had trusted that it was He who would restore Israel. Now their hopes were blasted, their faith almost eclipsed. Listen to Peter as he says hopelessly: “I go a-fishing.” Now look at the same Peter and his fellow-apostles on the day of Pentecost preaching a risen Lord and Saviour! How account for the change? They had seen the risen Lord. So when we know it to be an actual, historic fact that Christ conquered death, we also have an invulnerable basis for our faith in the messiahship and divinity of Christ the Lord.

4. It proved the doctrine of the soul’s immortality.

In fact, by His resurrection Christ proved that man is all immortal. But how would His bodily resurrection prove the immortality of the soul? Because if His body came forth alive from the tomb, that would mean that His soul

must also be alive and active. Suppose He had not risen; suppose His body had remained dead in the grave, and His soul had merely gone to God, how could the disciples have been assured that His soul was still living? But when they saw His living body, they knew it must be animated by the soul. When subsequently they saw Him ascend bodily, they knew that both soul and body were destined to immortality. So when we know by historical evidence that Christ really arose from the dead on the first Easter morning, we have indubitable assurance of the immortality of both the soul and the body. What a living hope the Easter season gives us!

5. It is the guarantee and effective cause of our bodily resurrection.

This is the clear teaching of God's Word. A large part of the fifteenth Chapter of First Corinthians is occupied in proving that, because our Lord rose from the dead, we shall also rise. Says Paul: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." Christ also said: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

But some one may ask, "Why must we have resurrected and glorified bodies? Why should we not live forever as pure disembodied spirits?"

We answer, Because man was originally created a dual being, with a body and a soul. If Satan by his temptation procured the separation of the body and soul, Christ must secure their reunion, or Satan's plan would be partially successful.

More than that, the soul was created to fit into the organism of the body. Therefore it would be defective without its companion-piece. And lastly, according to the Bible (Isa. 11:6-9; Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Pet. 3:8-13), the time will come when the natural realm shall be redeemed from its present imperfect state, and shall be glorified; then we ourselves shall need a proper organ — that is, a glorified body — with which to have a vital and organic relation with it. God's redemptive plan is universal, it is cosmic. And this springs another most important and interesting question:

What about the resurrection body that we shall have when the last Easter morning shall break in glory over the world? The Bible teaches plainly that we shall have such a body, and that it will be glorious like unto Christ's glorified body, and that is enough to satisfy our faith. But how wonderfully science illumines the truths of the Bible! Science teaches that there is a univer-

sal ether, so refined and exalted that it is perfectly mobile, elastic and pliant; so refined, indeed, that the heavenly bodies can swing through it with inconceivable velocity without friction; yet in its totality it is so strong that it holds the stars and planets in their paths as they swing through space.

This is the elemental substance from which all palpable and ponderable substances are formed. It occupies all the space not occupied by stars, planets, comets, meteors, and other solids, liquids and fluids. It carries the light on its buoyant wings; it is the bearer of electricity and heat, and the basis of gravitation.

Now, what if our resurrected and glorified bodies should be made of this beautiful primordial substance which God originally created, would it not be perfectly pliant to the soul's every volition, and at the same time form a real medium through which the soul could communicate with the palpable material of the universe? It is not mind, remember that; it is matter, real material substance; but it is so refined and sublimated as to be the perfect instrument of the redeemed and purified soul. Perhaps that is what Paul meant when he said: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body." That is, a body perfectly adapted to the spirit about which it is organized. So the inductions of science, even of speculative science, are coming closer and closer to Biblical teaching.

Now, it is when death, the last enemy, has been overcome, and our whole being, body and soul, shall be completely restored, that we shall be able to exclaim with Paul: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

"My flesh shall slumber in the ground
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound;
Then burst the chains with glad surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise."

Let us listen to the apostle's rapt recital (Phil 3:20, 21): "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

30. Christ Allaying Doubt. The First Sunday After Easter. John 20:19-31

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. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:19-31)

WE ARE NOW ENTERING upon these forty wonderful days in Christ's career which intervened between His resurrection and His ascension. What is their significance in God's redemptive plan? During those days Jesus was able to do two essential things for His apostles, and hence for the world: First, to afford them indubitable evidence that He had risen from the dead, and therefore was the Messiah, thus allaying in their minds the last vestige of doubt; second, to complete His instruction to them, and thus send them forth fully equipped to carry out His great commission to "go into all the

world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” These two purposes come out very clearly in our impressive gospel lesson for today, describing the first of those wonderful days. There are two great features of the pericope to which we shall call attention.

I. Christ Allaying The Doubts Of His Disciples.

It is most interesting to observe His method of doing this. He did not treat their doubts with lofty scorn or dogmatic contempt. He did not say, “There are no honest doubters.” No; He sought to allay their doubts, and reestablish their faith, by real and palpable evidence. On this notable day all the apostles (except Thomas) were assembled in a certain room, and for fear of the Jews, they had closed all the doors. Then suddenly Jesus came and stood before them, and said, “Peace be unto you.” “And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”

Here are many interesting subjects for thought, but we cannot tarry. The point is, He gave them tangible evidence that He was alive. He accommodated Himself to their need and weakness. Remember, not to their sins and errors. He never did that. But to their limitations. He gave these proofs to their physical senses, because at that point in their spiritual development they needed that kind of evidence.¹ The last verse of our text (which is also the last verse of the gospel according to St. John) indicates precisely why Christ appeared so often to His disciples: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name.”

The sequel proves that He was right. After those appearances, the apostles had no more doubt of His Messiahship. Before that they were full of doubts and misgivings, and that made them moral and physical cowards; after that, they never lost faith or courage; they stood before their fiercest persecutors and preached Christ and the resurrection. This proves that Christ’s pedagogical method was the right one. We would ask the skeptic how else the Christian religion could have ever been established in the world, and yet retain its purely ethical and spiritual character.

A week later, Thomas now being present, they are again assembled within closed doors, and Christ again comes to give them physical assurance that He has risen from the dead. This was necessary, for had He appeared only once, they might have fallen into doubt again. He, therefore, appeared often enough to give them absolute assurance. Here He convinces Thomas, and He does it in a tender and pathetic way that is perfectly Winsome. "Thomas, reach hither thy hand... and be not faithless, but believing." Whether Thomas really reached forth his hand or not, we do not know, but he did exclaim, "My Lord and my God!" The confession was, as it were, wrung from him, but he was doubting Thomas nevermore.

Even after that memorable evening Christ performed many other signs (verse 30), and John recorded some of them to establish faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Giver of life. Thus we see Christ's method. He used miracle as long as it was needed to plant the mustard seed of the kingdom of God in the earth.

But now notice our Lord's wonderful intimation of a higher basis for faith in Him. After Thomas' ejaculation, Christ said to him: "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed they that have not seen, and have believed." The "are" and the "yet" are not in the original; the saying is more emphatic without them.

What does Christ mean by that? Ah! He refers to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit; to the higher kind of spiritual experience; that of the inner consciousness; the kind of assurance that Paul had after he had grown in spiritual grace and knowledge: "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God;" "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Yes, the inner witness of the Spirit is better, clearer, surer, more spiritual evidence than that of the senses. Hence today we do not need outer miracles to give us assurance; it is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, when Christ is saying to us, "Blessed are ye who believe, and have not seen." Our God knows what are the supremest spiritual values.

II. Christ Conferring Power On His Disciples.

First our Lord reinstated His disciples' faith; then He conferred power upon them, and gave them a part of their commission. He said to them again:

“Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” This is the logical order: first they must have peace in their own souls; then, and only then, can they go forth preaching with assurance and authority. After that, He endued them with the necessary power. He breathed on them, and said: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

These words require brief exposition. What is their meaning? We must remember that the apostles bore a special relation to Christ and His Church. In speaking of the various gifts of the Spirit, Paul says (1 Cor. 12:28): “And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers,” etc. Now in this place He conferred on His apostles the special gift of speaking and writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. At another place (John 16:13, 14) Christ made this promise: “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 show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.” A similar promise is given in Luke 12:11, 12: “And when they shall bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, be not anxious how or what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say.” (Compare also Matt. 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14, 15.)

Thus the apostles were to be infallibly inspired when they spoke and wrote. This promise was fulfilled especially when they wrote the New Testament. If the rationalistic critics object to this interpretation, we would ask them, Then when was Christ’s promise of the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit fulfilled? If it was not fulfilled in writing the New Testament, it was never fulfilled at all; and that would destroy Christ’s Messiahship and Divinity. But we do not so regard our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if Christ conferred on His apostles the inspiration to declare in the New Testament the gospel and the terms of salvation, did He not, in a most vital sense, give them the keys of the kingdom of heaven? In declaring those terms, it was literally true that the apostles had the power to remit and retain sins. When the Holy Spirit led St. Mark (under the direction of Paul) to write (16:15, 16) Christ’s last commission, he (Mark) was opening and closing God’s kingdom with the keys of the gospel. So Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) declared the remission and retention of sins through the infallible power of the Holy Spirit; for he said: “Repent, and be baptized

every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” So Paul and Silas handled the keys of the kingdom of heaven when they said to the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31): “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” In many other cases the inspired apostles declared the precise terms of pardon and salvation. They did not handle the keys by their own authority, but by virtue of their divine endowment according to Christ’s promise.

What, now, is the relation of the Church today toward the keys — the power to remit and retain sins. She has them in the New Testament, which sets forth infallibly the gospel and the terms of salvation. Whenever she in any way announces the gospel, she administers the keys; she opens and closes the door of salvation. Here are several simple instances. When a minister or a layman says, “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish,” he administers the keys. When he says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; He that believeth not shall be condemned,” he opens and closes the door of salvation. Therefore the minister pronounces absolution when he says, in the preparatory service of the Lutheran Church: “And upon this humble confession which you have made, I, as a minister of His Church and by His authority, declare unto you who do repent and believe in Him, the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

This is what is meant in our Church by confession and absolution. When a minister meets an individual and declares to him the gospel terms of pardon and salvation, not on his own authority, but on the authority of God’s Word, we call it private confession and absolution. This must be carefully distinguished from the auricular confession and priestly absolution of the Roman Catholic Church, which we totally reject both as a doctrine and a practice. But to declare to troubled souls, on the authority of God’s Word, that, if they truly repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God will and does pardon and save them, is a most important and precious service.

What a solemn responsibility rests upon the Church, and especially upon her ministers! They are entrusted with the gospel of salvation. On their preaching and teaching devolves the eternal well-being of souls. They ought to be faithful in declaring “the whole counsel of God.” They should be “apt to teach.” It is their duty to cheer, persuade, and warn with all long-suffering and diligence. They should preach to the edification of believers and to

the admonition and conversion of sinners. They are God's watchmen upon the walls of Zion, and should never fail to sound the trumpet.

"Let Zion's watchmen all awake,
And take th' alarm they give;
Now let them from the mouth of God
Their solemn charge receive.

"Tis not a cause of small import
The pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And filled a Saviour's hands.

"They watch for souls, for which the Lord
Did heavenly bliss forego;
For souls which must forever live
In rapture or in woe.

"May they that Jesus, whom they preach,
Their own Redeemer see;
And watch Thou daily o'er their souls,
That they may watch for thee."

NOTE — Were the author preaching to some audiences, especially before hearers who were interested in the science of the day, and who might entertain doubts regarding the supernatural, he would not hesitate to introduce, at this or some other relevant point in the sermon, the modern scientific theory of matter, to throw light on the Epiphanies of Christ during those marvelous forty days between His resurrection and ascension. How was it that He appeared and disappeared so suddenly? Where was He in the meantime? In what form did He exist? Science here greatly illumines the problem.

The "universal ether" of science is the primordial material which God created in the beginning of time. Its extremely subtle and mobile quality is described in the latter part of the Easter sermon. It is the source and substratum of all the palpable material of the universe. According to science, how was tangible material formed from the universal ether?

In this way: The ether, which was doubtless quiescent at first, was set in motion either in many places, or in one immense space in the universe. This

motion took the form of innumerable whorls or vortices, which formed ions; from these electrons were produced; these again combined into atoms; and the atoms in turn formed molecules, which, variously combined, constitute all the diverse palpable substances of the cosmos.

Now, how was the original motion in the subliminal ether started? Matter is inert; it cannot move itself. Mind is the only entity that has the power of self-movement, and of originating motion in material substance. Every person can prove, by an effort of his will, that mind has this wonderful capacity. Therefore God, who is the eternal Mind or Spirit, must have set the vortices in motion, and must also have directed the subsequent process, else there would have been no order and purpose in the result.

But how does this theory help to explain the sudden appearances and disappearances of Christ during those forty days? Our reply is: At His resurrection His body was transformed into the original glorious form of matter, namely, the subliminal ether. Therefore it was invisible and intangible to human senses. In order to bring about an Epiphany which the disciples could behold with their fleshly eyes, God could easily change Christ's subliminal body into a palpable body, just He produced the ponderable material of the universe from the ethereal substance which He originally created. Then, when the manifestation had served its purpose, Christ's body would again be translated into its exalted ethereal state. Hence He was present with them all the time in this heavenly way, but only at divinely chosen intervals in tangible form.

This may be called speculation, and it is. But it is the theory of the best scientific thought of the day, and is the best working hypothesis yet adopted. He who laughs it to scorn laughs at the best and most serious modern science, and has no theory of his own to put in its stead. Science has certainly proved by actual experiment that there are forms of matter so extremely rare and refined that they are almost like mental substance itself. Paul says of the resurrection body of the saints: "It is raised a *pneumatikon* (spiritual) body." Who knows but that these subtle forms of matter may be the mediating element between mind and palpable material?

Let it be understood, however, that these matters of science should be taken into the pulpit only when the minister is convinced that a good service can be done by such presentation. "Let every man be persuaded in his own mind."

1. See note at the end of the sermon.↩

31. The Shepherd And The Hireling. The Second Sunday After Easter. John 10:11-16

I am the good shepherd: 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. 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)

ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL METAPHORS under which Christ represents Himself is that of a shepherd. No doubt He had often watched the good and faithful shepherds of Galilee caring for their sheep, for that country was a land of flocks and herds. In that way He saw the parallelism between a good shepherd and Himself.

Besides, He was deeply versed in the Old Testament, where He often found Jehovah compared to a shepherd. He must often have pondered such passages as these: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters;" "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom;" "Woe unto the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock!"

In the gospel for the day Christ calls Himself "the Good Shepherd." He also shows the difference between the true shepherd and the hireling. So we will follow His own order in the parable, and show, first, the character of the hireling, and, second, the character of the true shepherd.

I. The Character Of The Hireling.

The hireling has no real interest in the sheep. He cares only for his pay. So when the wolf comes to forage, the hireling flees, and saves his own precious life, and leaves the sheep to their fate. "The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep," says Christ in His vivid way.

Of whom is the hireling a picture? Of the minister or layman whose sole interest in the Church and spiritual things is wrapped up in the salary he draws; who must be paid handsomely for every service he renders; who loses his interest in the Church and her needs as soon as the money is not forthcoming. Perhaps you have known persons who sang for pay in church choirs, but as soon as the pay stopped, they were never seen again in the church service. They had no interest in worship; all they cared for was their salary. Is it any wonder that God "cannot away with" the pretense made by such singers?

There are ministers, too, here and there, who care only for the fleece and not for the sheep. As soon as they have sheared one flock, they are ready to desert it, and seek another flock that still wears its coat of wool. Such were the Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked in His day. There were also the scribes, of whom Jesus said: "Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feast; who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers; these shall receive greater condemnation." Paul warns against men who suppose "that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5). After saying that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," and declaring that some "have been led astray from the faith by it," the apostle gives this admonition to Timothy: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called, and didst confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:9-12). Paul also said that a bishop should be "no lover of money" (1 Tim. 4:3).

But here we will cease to criticize; nothing is easier than finding fault. We believe that there are few mere hirelings in the Church, seeking to make merchandise of the gospel. So we shall turn to the second main teaching of the text:

II. The Character Of The True Shepherd.

It is much pleasanter to think about the true Shepherd, who is Jesus Himself, in whom alone we have the perfect example. He says twice in this passage, "I am the Good Shepherd." While Jesus is the true pattern for all under-shepherds, in whatever capacity they may serve the Church, yet the main purpose of the parable is not to set before us an example, but to portray the character and love of Jesus Himself and the place He holds in the redemptive plan. There are several points worthy of consideration.

1. Lays Down His Life

Twice our Lord said that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. In this He proved that He was the true Shepherd. When the danger came, when the justice of God threatened, when demons and evil men sought the destruction of the flock, He did not flee away, and desert His sheep, but stood between them and peril, and Himself laid down His life and shed His blood that they might be saved.

Here we have the precious doctrine of the atonement set forth. It might be said that Christ simply put Himself in the way of the danger, while His people were permitted to escape. But that would be a very superficial interpretation of the parable. The question still would not be touched how Christ's death could effect the salvation of His people. When we remember what it was that threatened sinful men, we will readily see in what way Christ became a substitute for us. It was not only that Satan desired to compass the ruin of the flock. Of course, Satan was bent on destroying both the flock and the "Shepherd; but if that had been all, Christ, who was God as well as man, could very easily have overmatched him in the contest. In that case Christ would better have lived, and put Satan to complete rout, rather than to have died on an ignominious cross. No; to overcome Satan, or merely to prove His loyalty to His vocation, is not an adequate explanation of the death of Christ. But when we remember that eternal justice had been outraged by man's sin, and, therefore, had to be satisfied and maintained, because the universe is a moral economy, then we see why the Good Shepherd took the very place of the sheep, and bore the penalty that was due them. That was what balked Satan's plan — atonement for sin was made by the divine-human Sufferer, and thereby all God's infinite attributes — love, justice, holiness, omniscience and omnipotence — could be enlisted and

combined in the overthrow of all the enemies that sought to destroy the flock.

2. The Shepherd Knows His Sheep

Another valuable and comforting truth of this lesson is that the Shepherd knows His sheep. The greatest seal and assurance we have is this: “The Lord knoweth them that are His.” If He did not, how easily Satan and other evil powers might compass their ruin! Here is the value of God’s eternal decree, based on His eternal foreknowledge and executed by His wisdom and omnipotence. None who are truly His can ever be wrested from His all-powerful hand. He is able to keep that which they have committed to Him unto the great day.

It is a great comfort to know that the Good Shepherd knows all His sheep individually. In another verse (3) of this chapter Jesus says of the Good Shepherd: “The sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” To think that the Great Shepherd — who is also the Ruler of the universe — knows your name and mine! Is not that an inspiring thought? We may not be very proud of our names. They may not have a very euphonious sound. But when the last day shall come, and all the nations shall be gathered before the great tribunal for judgment, then, if the recording angel, reading down the long roll of the redeemed, shall at length announce your name and mine, it will be the sweetest music that ever fell upon our ears. How gladly will we then respond, “Present!”

There are some scientific men today who think that the universe is so vast, consisting of innumerable stars, planets, constellations and systems of worlds, and that the earth is so small, almost like a grain of sand on the seashore or a mote in the air, and, most of all, one person is so insignificant among all the millions of people on the earth, that God cannot know and watch over each individual, each man, woman and child. God, they say, is occupied with swinging stars and planets through the immensities; He cannot stop to take care of a poor insect or a man. Even the Psalmist felt almost daunted by this thought, for he exclaimed: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou are mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?”

But we need not trouble our faith with these reflections. God is not too busy with the immensities and eternities to notice each person, however small and inconspicuous he may be. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. The God who controls perfectly all the vast universe must also know and control all its parts. If He did not know its parts perfectly, He could not control it perfectly in its entirety. Sometime one part would run out of gear, and that would hurl the whole cosmos to ruin.

Note again, God must have created the universe of matter; but matter is made up of atoms, ions and electrons; then He must have separately created each individual particle, however small. How else could it have come into existence? Yes, God must create, preserve, and therefore know each atom. He knows and cares for the infinitesimal as well as the infinite. Therefore let us rejoice in His tender and sovereign care, for if He cares for an atom, He cares for you and me. An immortal, rational soul is of infinitely more concern to Him than is an atom; yea, than are all the atoms ever created. Indeed, the atoms and all their marvelous combinations were made for man, not man for them. Rejoice, therefore, ye children of God. The Good Shepherd knoweth His sheep, and He calleth them by name. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." The poor penitent sinner may not be popular on earth, but He is popular in heaven. God and His angels watch and rejoice over him.

3. His Sheep Know Him

As a corollary to the blessed truth that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep, the text informs us that His sheep also know Him.

They recognize His voice, just as the sheep of an oriental flock know the voice of their shepherd, and respond to his call. Yes, there is something in the heart of the evangelical believer, who has been begotten by the Holy Spirit through the divine Word, that always answers to the call of the Good Shepherd. True believers also quickly detect a false note in any calling voice. They may not always be able to tell why such and such a voice is not the voice of the Good Shepherd, but somehow they detect the difference. Do you ask why? Because the soul within them has been attuned to the gospel by the same Holy Spirit that inspired the gospel; therefore their heart-harp will respond only to the true sound of the gospel. Those who are truly born again cannot be deceived by the voice of a pretender.

May all of us know our Good Shepherd so well that we will also recognize His heavenly voice, and always respond to His call!

“The Lord our Shepherd is,
He knows our every need;
And since we now are
His, His care our souls will feed;
In vain do sin and death oppose,
For God is stronger than His foes.”

32. Christ's "A Little While".

The Third Sunday After Easter.

John 16:16-23

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 enquire 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. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. (John 16:16-23)

THIS IS a beautiful and comforting gospel lesson — the one for the third Sunday after Easter. Jesus said to His disciples: “A little while, and ye shall see me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me.”

That seems to be enigmatical language, and it sorely puzzled His disciples for the time. But that was Christ's way of speaking of the future, and it is God's way in all the prophecies of the Bible. Why? Let us see whether we cannot see a good reason, and, as Milton says, “vindicate the ways of God to man,” in this respect, as well as in all others. What was His purpose, then?

I. To Protect His Redeeming Plan And Purpose.

Remember that He did not speak in an indefinite or ambiguous way about His, “A little while,” for all His words are simple and His sentences perfectly clear; but He did speak in a way to excite inquiry, and put the mind on the alert, yet without absolutely setting forth the future in clear outlines. Did He have a wise pedagogical purpose in this? Surely so. Had He foretold coming events with absolute clearness, men and demons would have tried to thwart the divine purpose. They either would have frustrated His plans, or He would have had to overcome their free moral agency. So in His infinite wisdom He conserved man’s freedom and also His own designs, making the one the instrument of the other. God never acts arbitrarily.

How clearly this principle is brought out in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament! Now that they have been so literally fulfilled, we can understand and apply them, and appreciate their great evidential value. But how puzzling they must have been to the people who lived before the advent of the Messiah! For example, there is the prophecy that “a virgin should conceive and bear a son.” How could that be? No one could understand it. But now that it has been fulfilled in the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Christ, all is perfectly clear. “And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 97:6), said the prophet in the old time; but who could interpret it then? Apply all those terms to Christ in the light of His full revelation, and how radiant they are with meaning! Even the name, “The Everlasting Father,” is plain, for Christ said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also,” and, “I and the Father are one.” There were also the prophecies in Isaiah 53 regarding His passion and death — none of them could be understood before Christ came; all of them can be understood now that He has come and fulfilled them.

But suppose they could have been perfectly interpreted prior to their fulfillment, would not demons and wicked men have tried to foil the divine purpose? God is all-wise; He knows when and how to keep His counsels; He knows how to carry out His plans without interfering with the freedom of His rational creatures. He knew how to leave Judas free, and still carry

out His sovereign will, and eternal decree of redemption. Let us praise Him for His omniscience, His power and His grace.

"Nature and time all open lie
To Thine immense survey,
From the formation of the sky
To the last awful day.

"Eternity, with all its years,
Stands present to Thy view;
To Thee there's nothing old appears,
To Thee there's nothing new.

"Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares;
While Thine eternal thoughts move on
Thine undisturbed affairs."

God also often hides His wise designs — His “little whiles” — from men for another purpose, which we shall now consider:

II. To Discipline His People.

See the wisdom Christ showed in promising that He would depart for a little while, and then show Himself to His disciples again. He referred, no doubt, to His death and resurrection. Yet He did not make His meaning entirely plain to their comprehension. He said, though, that they would be extremely sorrowful at His departure; then He added the assurance that their “sorrow would be turned into joy.” If He had made everything perfectly clear to them at that time, how could they have experienced that discipline of sorrow? They needed that. The sequel shows how wisely Jesus dealt with His beloved disciples. Without that discipline of sorrow and disappointment, subsequently turned into joy, they would not have been as brave and strong as they should have been, to become the world-wide heralds of the good news, in the midst of bitter prosecution.

How radiant these prophecies appear in the light of what followed! When the disciples saw their Master perishing on the cross, they were exceedingly sorrowful. All their hopes were blasted. Peter became so disheart-

ened that he said, “I go a-fishing!” But now note, when Jesus appeared to His disciples in His resurrection body, their sorrow was turned into joy. “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” They received such an uplift, and their waning faith was so revived, that they never again lost courage, but became the world’s greatest heroes, and proclaimed Christ and His resurrection and Messiahship wherever they went, in the face of the bitterest persecution.

When Christ uttered His strange prophecy, the disciples were utterly nonplussed; but when the prophecies were so literally and wonderfully fulfilled by the Lord’s resurrection and the outpouring the Holy Spirit on Pentecost — ah, then they understood! How their hearts must have leaped with joy, as they exclaimed to one another: “We see now just what the Lord meant by saying, ‘A little while!’”

Oh, the wonderful “little whiles” of the Christ! How fraught they are with meaning! We may depend upon it that every time our Master says to us in our hard experiences, “I will see you again in a little while,” He will fulfill His promise to the letter — but in the most unexpected way. It will, however, be the best way. With us sometimes the Lord’s “a little while” may seem to be a long while, but when the blessed fulfillment comes, whether in time or eternity, the period of trial will seem, after all, to be only “a little while.” “For our light affliction, which is but for the time being, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

“How happy are the saints above,
Who once went sorrowing here!
But now they taste unmingled love,
And joys without a tear.”

33. Going Away And Sending The Spirit. The Fourth Sunday After Easter. John 16:5-15

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)

OUR LESSON FOR TODAY teaches us some very important doctrines and practical truths. Some things in it have often been misunderstood. In order to get the most help from the text, let us ask a few questions, and answer them as best we can.

I. What Is Meant By Christ's "Going Away"?

The importance of the question will appear if we ask another question: Does not Christ often promise us His own personal presence? In one place He says: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." At another place He says of the Father and Himself: "We will come unto Him, and make our abode with him." Still elsewhere He gives this assurance: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." And again: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Paul also says: "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and, "I live, yet not I, but

Christ liveth in me.” And yet, in apparent opposition to all these passages, Christ speaks in the text and in other places about “going away” and “departing,” and about “sending another Comforter.”

Is the teaching of the Bible full of confusion, of contradictory statements? No, it is not! It is a beautiful and logical unity, if we will only collate its whole teaching and penetrate into its deep inner meaning. There is a sense in which Christ went away, and yet another sense in which He is personally present with every one of us. We must not think He means that the Holy Spirit came to take His place, so that Christ is present only by proxy; that He is absent somewhere in heaven, while the Holy Spirit mediates His presence here on earth and in His substitute. Many people seem to think in that way, but it is not good theology nor correct Biblical interpretation. The passages we have quoted, and others that might be given, teach plainly that Christ is personally present everywhere with His people. He also taught no less explicitly that the Holy Spirit is personally present with us, for He said of the Spirit: “He shall abide with you forever.” Christ also taught, with the same positiveness, that the Father is present (John 14:23). Thus all three persons of the blessed Trinity are present with us, each performing His proper function. We are not poor; we are rich indeed; we are the heirs: of the Triune God!

But what is meant by Christ’s “going away”? Let us explain: When the Son of God became incarnate, He — that is, His person or Ego — came out of the transcendent and infinite realm down here into the realm of time and space, as John 1:14 teaches: “And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us.” He assumed human nature, and lived here for thirty-three years in the state of humiliation. “He humbled Himself, and made Himself of no reputation, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

But now observe: when His atoning work was accomplished (He said on the cross, “It is finished”), He ascended again to the right hand of the Majesty on high, taking His human nature with Him and glorifying it with all the fulness of the Godhead. That is, He “went away” or “departed” from the realm of time and space, and ascended to the realm of Infinity and Eternity where He was before, as He taught in John 17:1-5. Now, so far as time and space are concerned, there are always a “coming,” a “going” and a “sending.” That which is under these limitations comes and goes. In time and space there is always a movement. But when Christ went into the tran-

scendent realm and was completely glorified with the infinite God, He became ubiquitous or omnipresent, as the Infinite One Himself is and must be. Whatever is transcendent must also be immanent — that is, whatever is greater than time and space must fill and pervade time and space. Thus you see that Christ “went away” to be glorified that He might be present with us in another way, the divine, ubiquitous way, in all His power and grace and in His whole divine-human person. While He was here under limitation (of course, by His own will and condescending love), He could be present only at one place at a time; but now that He is transcendent, He is everywhere present. That is precisely the teaching of Paul (Eph. 4:10): “He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things.” And this agrees with Christ’s own wonderful promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Here we have established the precious doctrine and fact of Christ’s real presence. It is Christ who is present with us — the Incarnate Son of God, not merely His divinity. If only His Deity were present, that would not be Christ, it would be only the Logos, the same as He was before the incarnation; but it is Jesus Himself who is with us, the divine-human Redeemer who lived on earth and died on the cross; only now in glorified form, clothed with all authority both in heaven and on earth. Dear friends, do not think of Christ as only up yonder in heaven; true, He is there; but He is also here and everywhere, shedding His Spirit upon us, and comforting us in our sorrows because He also had sorrow and temptation (Heb. 4:15). And when you come to the Holy Communion, remember that, since Christ in His whole divine-human person is everywhere present, it is very easy for Him to impart His glorified body and blood to you as the pledge of the forgiveness of your sins. It means that Christ is fully present, and holds personal communion with you.¹

But having spent so much time on our first question, we must treat the rest of the text more briefly.

II. Why Did Jesus Have To Go Away Before He Would Send The Holy Spirit?

Observe that He says: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come; but if I depart, I will send Him unto

you.” In their sorrow over His prospective departure, He assures them that it was best for them that He go away. Why must He ascend to the right hand of God before the Spirit would come?

It is not so difficult to understand. Had He sent the Holy Spirit while He was still in the state of humiliation, the Spirit would have brought only a meager blessing and baptism; no more, at least, than the visitation of the Spirit in the Old Testament dispensation; but after He was highly exalted, and fully glorified with all His original and eternal divine glory, His human nature partaking, then He would pour out the Holy Spirit in all the plenitude of His power; then the Holy Spirit would take of the things of the exalted Christ, and would shed them upon His Church. That is the meaning of Pentecost and its great baptism of fire. It was not then the poor Suffering Servant of Jehovah who was blessing His disciples and Church; no! it was the Christ who had received “all authority both in heaven and on earth.”

Is it not a beautiful doctrine, so consistent and rational, and so rich for Christian experience? True, indeed, is the apostle’s teaching (1 Cor. 2:9, 10): “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” How wonderful, how consistent, how exhilarating is the teaching of God’s Word!

III. What Are The Offices Of The Holy Spirit?

We know how beautifully they are set forth in the catechism: “to call, to enlighten, to sanctify, and to preserve us in the true faith.” But here we will follow our text.

1. He will reprove.

“He will reprove the world of sin,” says Christ, “because they believe not on me.” And why? Because, since Christ is the only means of salvation from sin, to reject Christ is the crowning sin of the world. “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him” (John 3:36).

He shall also reprove the world “of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more.” The Revised Version makes the passage plainer: “He shall convict the world in respect to righteousness.” This, no doubt, means that, when Christ has gone back into the invisible realm, the world will grow bolder, and will persecute His disciples and commit all kinds of wickedness; but the Holy Spirit will convict them all the more, and reveal all the more the heinousness of their sins, because they reject Him, the Holy Spirit, as well as the ascended Christ.

The Holy Ghost will also convict the world “in respect to judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” The “prince of this world is Satan,” and when the Holy Spirit shall judge him, the people of the world who follow him will also be judged. Thus if we would escape the judgment that will come upon Satan, we must renounce his leadership.

2. The Holy Spirit will guide into all truth.

The reason He will do this is that He regenerates the heart and enlightens the mind, so that men can understand spiritual things. How dark were the minds of the apostles before Pentecost! But how clearly they understood the things of Christ then! That is Christ’s meaning when He says in the text: “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now;” then He adds: “Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth shall come, He shall guide you into all truth.” With this agrees what Christ said elsewhere: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” And the apostle: “Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” Many people stumble over the Bible, because they are unspiritual, while it is a spiritual book.

Another reason why the Spirit guides into truth is that He speaks what He hears, and takes the things of Christ, which are also the things of the Father (verse 15), and shows them to us. The Holy Spirit does not speak from Himself, for He is only one person of the Godhead, but He speaks from the fulness of the whole blessed Trinity and from the fulness of the glorified Christ; therefore He is able to guide into all truth. How meager is the spiritual wisdom of mere human reason in comparison with that of the Holy Ghost who searches the deep things of God!. The Holy Spirit, according to the text, performs another well-defined function:

3. He glorifies Christ.

He does not glorify Himself, for He works inwardly, invisibly, in the heart; but He glorifies Christ because He receives of Christ's fulness, and manifests it to His people. How well this agrees with Christian experience! Whenever a person is converted by the Holy Spirit, he gives the praise and the glory to Christ. He ascribes worship to Him as the divine Saviour. He attributes no merit to man or his work. He knows that he has been saved by divine grace bestowed through Jesus Christ. Therefore the rationalist, who robs Christ of His divinity and glory, proves by that very token that He has not been truly converted, enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit. It would hardly be consistent for him to join in the hymn:

“Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that shall kindle ours.”

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1. In order to prove that this is the true Lutheran doctrine of the real presence and of the Lord's Supper, we refer the reader to the Formula of Concord (Jacob's edition of “The Book of Concord”), pages 518 (sections 10, 11, 12), 629, 630.↩

34. “In That Day”. The Fifth Sunday After Easter. John 16:23-30

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. 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 OUR LESSON FOR TODAY the phrase, “in that day,” or its equivalent, is used a number of times. No doubt the phrase refers to the day of Pentecost, when Christ gave to His disciples the complete spiritual revelation and insight which they needed, and which cured them of all their doubt and hesitancy. Let us note some of the things which were to occur “in that day.”

I. Learning To Pray “In That Day.”

First Jesus says, “In that day ye shall ask nothing of Me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give you.” What is the meaning of this? Is it a contradiction? Not at all. It is a rubric on the method of true prayer in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Before this the disciples had been going directly to Christ with their questions because He was with them in fleshly form. They had been depending

on Him as if He were a mere teacher or prophet, though a very wise one. They had not realized His oneness with the Father (John 14:8) and so had not recognized His true Godhead. But “in that day,” the day when He would pour out His Spirit upon them, they would know and experience His oneness with the Father, and therefore their prayers would be offered to the Father in the name of the Son, always recognizing the latter’s divinity as well as His humanity.

May we not say that here we have a very profound teaching as to the proper form and spirit of Christian prayer. It should never be directed merely to Jesus as if He were only a man or a human prophet, for that would be idolatry. If Christ had not cautioned His disciples in this way, they might have prayed to Him as if He were a kind of demi-god, or as some people today pray to the Virgin Mary or to the saints. They might have regarded Him as the Arians afterwards did — as a created being, but not as true God. Therefore He was careful to instruct them to offer their petitions to the Father in His name, so that they would always identify the Father and the Son as one in essence, and not regard them as two gods, or look upon the one as subordinate to or independent of the other. This agrees with His teaching when He said, “I and the Father are one.”

Ought we never, then, to offer our prayers directly to Jesus? Never unless in our thought we pray to Him in full recognition of His perfect Godhood and complete identity in essence with the other persons of the Holy Trinity. According to this teaching, the model form of prayer would be that which is addressed to the Father in the name of Christ. When this is meant, even though not expressed in that particular form, God understands its intent, and of course hears and answers. Yet, as Christ is the one and only Mediator between the Father and man, the perfect Christian prayer is the one that is directed to the Father in the name of the Son. This is the meaning of the added verse (24): “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

II. Interpreting Christ’s Word “In That Day.”

There is something beautiful and profound in verse 25: “These things have I spoken to you in allegories: the hour cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in allegories, but shall tell you plainly of the Father.” The phrase,

“the hour cometh” means the same as “in that day.” We do not think the translation, “dark sayings,” a good one. The Greek word (*paroimia*) means parables or allegories. These are not necessarily “dark sayings,” but they need interpretation, and thus there is always danger that the wrong meaning may be drawn from them. For this reason Christ sometimes gave the interpretation of His parables, so that His disciples might better understand their application. However, “in that day” — the day of the Holy Spirit’s visitation — the disciples would understand clearly, directly and literally that Christ came out from the Father and that He was one with Him in the unity of essence and love.

It is interesting to notice how much theology the apostles learned through the baptism of the Spirit. “That day” was a great teacher to them, a great time of revelation and spiritual insight. They soon learned the holy doctrines of Christology and Soteriology — the doctrines of the person and work of Christ. They proclaimed that Christ was the Son of God, and therefore divine; that He made vicarious atonement for sin by His death on the cross; that He rose from the dead to prove His Messiahship and to be a living, ever-present and all-powerful Saviour; and that He was glorified at the right hand of God, so that He could pour out the Holy Spirit upon His people from all the fulness of His glorified Person. Yes, there is no better teacher of theology than the Holy Spirit; no better interpreter of the sayings of Christ and the doctrines of His Word. No one who is baptized by the Holy Spirit will despise theology.

III. Christ’s Intercession “In That Day.”

“In that day” occurs again in verse 26, and that and the succeeding verses are full of deep divine meanings. Here He again encouraged prayer in His name, but He added what at first may seem a strange statement: “And I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you,” etc. Is not this statement in Opposition to Christ’s intercessory prayer in the next chapter and to the doctrine of His intercession at God’s right hand? Not in the least when we understand our Lord’s full and profound spiritual teaching. Remember the preceding part of the verse says, “In that day ye shall ask in my name.” That is, when the Holy Spirit teaches you the true doctrine and spirit of prayer, and you fully accept me as the

only Mediator and as one with the Father, then you will be brought into perfect harmony with the plan of redemption, and thus will be completely reconciled with the Father, and so there will then be no need for me to continue to plead with Him for you. The reason is clearly given in the next statement: “For the Father Himself loveth you.” Why? “Because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from the Father.” There was no need to make request of the Father that His disciples should be reconciled to God; for, as they had accepted Christ, they were already reconciled, and were embraced in His saving and redeeming love. He might continue to intercede for them to be kept in the faith, according to John 17:9 and 15, but it would be “vain repetition” to pray for them to be saved and reconciled after they had accepted Christ and were praying in His name. There is even a divine economy in Christ’s intercession for men.

All we need to do is to study Christ’s profound spiritual teaching in its fulness, reality and depth, to see how beautifully harmonious it is.

IV. Peace, Good Cheer And Victory “In That Day.”

It is wonderful how much emphasis Jesus put upon “that day;” indeed, He seemed to be almost jealous of “that day.” He seemed to discourage any over-confidence before “that day,” as if it were ill-considered and premature. Every time the disciples boasted of any knowledge or stability, He curbed them, and warned them that they would fail. When Peter vaunted himself, and declared that, though all men forsook Him, he never would, Christ rebuked his boastfulness, and told him he would deny Him thrice.

So here we have an incident of the same kind. His disciples said: “Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb (or parable). Now we are 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.”

Was not that a noble confession? Was it not exactly in accord with what He had said a little while before, when He told them that the time would come when He would no longer speak to them in proverbs, but would show them plainly of the Father? Yet He dampened their ardent spirits by saying: “Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every one to his own, and shall leave me alone.”

What is the meaning of all this apparent fencing? Some men, especially the liberal critics, simply decide offhand that there is no logical connection, but that in some way Christ's Partially remembered sayings were jumbled together here by the apostles without relevancy. But that is a superficial way of regarding God's Word, as the liberalist's way usually is. Let us see whether we cannot get the inner meaning and logical connection in this dialogue between the Master and His disciples.

Christ had been saying "in that day" or "the time cometh," referring to the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit at and after Pentecost, when, not in their own wisdom, but by divine enduement, they would be able to pray aright and understand His teaching. But at once His disciples became presuming, as men are prone to be in every age and in every place. They thought they understood Christ then and there, in their own wisdom, and without waiting for the illumination of the Holy Spirit; so they said (verse 29, 30): "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now we are sure that thou," etc. You see, they were premature and unspiritual in their claim to understand. Therefore Christ rebuked them (verse 31, 32), and told them that the time would come very soon when they, spite of their boasting, would be scattered and would leave Him alone. They were not willing to wait until "that day," until they were endued and enlightened by heavenly wisdom. How truly was Christ's promise fulfilled! Only a few days afterward "they all forsook Him and fled," and one of them betrayed and another denied Him. What a rebuke was that of all vain, boastful, worldly wisdom! In every age men have found that the unregenerate reason leads to error and rationalism, and "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Afterward the disciples obeyed Christ when He commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise of the Father which they had heard of Him. "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4, 5). He also said (verse 8): "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me," etc. And we know full well, in the light of history, that, when "that day" came, they understood their Master's parables, and were clothed with spiritual efficiency. Even on one day — the day of Pentecost — three thousand persons were converted, and after that there were "daily added to the Church such as were being saved."

Now we are able to comprehend and apply what Jesus said in the last two verses of our gospel for today. After saying that His disciples would be scattered and would leave Him alone, he added: “And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” He meant by that that He alone, by the sustaining power of the Father, must make atonement for the sins of the world; no human being could help Him. He must “tread the wine-press of wrath alone.”

And then He adds a significant statement: “These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Are these more enigmas? Not at all, when we interpret the statements in the light of “that day.” When the Holy Spirit enlightened them, they remembered Christ’s words, as He promised (John 14:26), and then they had peace in Him; then, too, they could bear their tribulations, and be of good cheer, for they knew that, by His atoning death and His victorious resurrection and ascension, He had “overcome the world.”

We, today, are living in “that day” — the dispensation of the Spirit. May He so enlighten and empower us that we shall understand Christ’s teachings and bear unequivocal witness to His truth!

35. The Ascended Lord At Work. Ascension Day. Mark 16:14-20

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)

TIME HAS BROUGHT US again to Ascension Day. It is not an unimportant day in the Christian Calendar. The ascension of our Lord to the right hand of God was a necessary event in the plan of saving grace; it was an essential link in the golden chain rebinding heaven and earth. In the course of our reflections this morning we shall try to set forth its significance in God's redemptive purpose. There are several truths in the text that lead up to this main thought, and these we must speak of first.

It is strange how full of skepticism the apostles were. Therefore it became necessary for Jesus to rebuke them.

I. Jesus Upbraided His Disciples.

This was on account of their "unbelief and hardness of heart." He had wrought many wonderful works before their eyes; He had given them most

wonderful teaching; His life had been pure and good, so that they had every reason to believe in His integrity; and He had also told them plainly that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Yet when the women and others came and reported that they had seen Him alive, the eleven apostles could not believe their testimony. It would seem that His cruel and ignominious death on the cross had given so great a shock to their faith and hope that they could not be revived. So they had to be aroused by His stern upbraiding.

While their lack of faith is not to be excused, yet, in the providence of God, it has been turned to good service. Sometimes unbelievers assert that the disciples were a credulous company, ready to believe anything. But the gospel history proves the direct opposite. They were slow to believe and hard to convince. So much so that Jesus had to censure them severely. They must, therefore, have had indubitable proof of Christ's resurrection to overcome their unbelief, and convert them into bold preachers, willing even to die for their faith. Thus their very unfaith becomes a strong weapon for defending the gospel.

Some skeptics have held that the disciples were fondly expecting the resurrection of Christ; therefore their imaginations were fired, so that they thought they saw Him alive, when they really did not. But the gospel history teaches the direct opposite. They had practically given up all hope. Peter even said, "I go a-fishing;" as much as to say, "We followed Jesus in vain; we were mistaken and deluded; so I am going back to my old trade. I can make a living at that, anyway."

Now, what brought these men out of their faithless and hopeless state of mind, and made them heroic preachers of Christ and the resurrection? Nothing but absolutely convincing evidence that their Master had come back from the dead. Thus, in theological language, we say that the doubts of the disciples are of great apologetic value. They may be turned into a proof of the Christian religion.

But now we come to a remarkable and sudden change in Christ's tone. In spite of their weakness and unbelief —

II. Jesus Gives His Disciples Their Great Commission.

One moment He upbraids them for their unbelief and hard-heartedness; the next He entrusts them with the greatest commission ever put into the hands of mortal men. If that is not an evidence of divine foreknowledge and power, we do not know where such evidence can be found. Here were these poor, disheartened disciples, weak in faith, with little learning and no prestige or wealth, so hopeless that Jesus Himself had just upbraided them; yet the next moment He bids these very men to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation I” To make the case still stronger, they were to preach that the man who had been crucified a few weeks prior, had risen from the dead and was the Redeemer of the world! From a worldly point of view there never was a forlorn hope. What could give success to such a movement? Nothing but divine power. Then Jesus must have known that He would endue His disciples with such power, and that they and their successors would be able to carry forward His world-wide commission to victorious achievement.

And the great fact is, they did succeed. In three centuries Christ captured the proud, idolatrous, world-dominating Roman empire, and in all succeeding centuries, until the present day, He has gone forward conquering and to conquer. Today Christianity is the greatest moral and spiritual force in the world.

How shall we account for these marvelous achievements? We know that every effect must have an adequate cause. That is the fundamental principle of causality which the universal human mind intuitively recognizes. But that little band of daunted and unlearned disciples were certainly far from being an adequate cause for the triumph and success of Christ’s mission. The only adequate cause that can be assigned is that given in the Holy Scriptures, namely, that the disciples and the Church they founded were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God.

The latter part of our text also teaches this fact, only it puts it in a different form: “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.” That explains it all. Their ascended Lord, now clothed with all might and authority, was at work with His Church, giving them the needed efficiency. Paul explains it too: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:5). And again he says: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the

power may be of God, and not from ourselves” (2 Cor. 4:7). Just so the apostle explains in another place (1 Cor. 1:27-31): “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong,” etc. All of this teaching agrees precisely with the promises of Christ (Matt. 28:20): “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,” and (Acts 1:8): “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” Yes! let us take the explications of the Word of God, and we shall find an adequate cause for the influence of Christ and His religion in the world. “The Lord working with them” — that accounts for all. When Christ ascended to the right hand of God, He did not become an idler; for, clothed with all divine power, He wrought mightily with His people. It is He, the living, exalted Christ, who is our strength and shield today.

III. Jesus Makes His Disciples’ Preaching’ Decisive Of Human Destiny.

In charging the disciples with His world-embracing commission, Jesus virtually put the keys of the kingdom of heaven into their hands; for, after saying, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation,” He added these remarkable words: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” Was not that entrusting those poor disciples with a tremendous responsibility? But He did it, and the results prove that He did not misjudge their power. He endued them with the Holy Spirit, who inspired them infallibly in preaching the gospel and in writing the New Testament.

Remember, however, that they were to preach “the gospel;” not their own wisdom or speculations or devices; and when they did that, their word was to be received as the Word of God, and therefore would decide human destiny. As the means of grace, everything depends on the gospel; as the human condition, everything depends on faith. God has foreordained that plan, and it is the righteous one, the ethical one. Is it not true that the gospel divides men for time and eternity into two classes? Said Jesus at another time: “He that believeth on Him (the Son of God) is not condemned; he that be-

lieveth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Listen to Paul teaching the same doctrine: “For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). And note again: “For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish; to the one a savor of death unto death; to the other a savor of life unto life.” Thus the whole Bible teaches one and the same doctrine respecting the power of the keys. Oh, the beautiful unity of Biblical teaching!

“A glory gilds the Sacred Page,
Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age;
It gives, but borrows none.”

IV. Jesus Ascends To The Right Hand Of God.

This is the great thought of Ascension Day. Let us note its sacred meaning. During the time of His humiliation the divine Son of God had voluntarily and condescendingly put human limitations upon Himself, and had placed Himself under the limitations of time and space. The Scriptures are filled with this precious doctrine. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us;” “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son;” “The Father sent the Son into the world;” “I speak not from myself;” “My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me;” “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do;” “The Father is greater than I;” “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done;” “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” The apostolic doctrine is the same (Phil. 2:5-8): “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, existing in the form of God, counted not being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” The *Te Deum* expresses the same

thought: “Thou didst humble thyself to be born of a virgin.” Yes, “though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich.”

It was for our sakes and our salvation that He thus emptied and humbled Himself. He did it that He might be one of us, our Elder Brother, our sympathizing Friend and Companion, tasting all our joys and sorrow; also that He might, as the divine-human Saviour, keep the law for us and suffer its penalty on the cross in our stead. Of course, it was not the divine nature that was put under *kenosis*, for that the Son had in common with the Father and the Spirit; but it was the Person or Ego of the Son, which He had in distinction from the other Persons of the Trinity.

Now, it is evident that in this state of voluntary humiliation, He did not exercise all His divine powers: for the time being He had relinquished the exercise of them, so that He might tabernacle with man as man, and suffer and die for him. But having accomplished His atoning work, He must once more resume the exercise of His divine power, majesty and glory in order to be our omnipotent Saviour. He must “ascend far above all heavens that He might fill all things.” He must become transcendent that He might become immanent — that is, everywhere present in time and space; so that He could fulfill His gracious promise: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” And this must be true of His human nature as well as of His divine Person, or else it would not be Christ, but only His Deity, who would be present with us. According to His human nature, Christ had to ascend to heaven and be glorified before He could be ubiquitous. Since He is filled with all the fulness of God, He is everywhere as our divine-human Comrade and Friend as well as our Redeemer.

Moreover, He had to ascend and be glorified in order that the baptism by the Holy Spirit might be divinely efficacious. Had the Spirit come only from Him in His state of humiliation, His power would have been greatly limited; but after He had ascended to God’s right hand and received all the fulness of God, His human nature partaking, then, when He poured the Spirit upon His Church, He came with all the plenitude of divine power and efficacy. He took the things of Christ and brought them to His Church. Just as Jesus promised (John 16:14, 15) relative to the Holy Spirit: “He shall glorify me: for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father-hath are mine: therefore said I, He taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” You see, having been glorified with all

the fulness of God, Christ could send forth the Holy Spirit charged and potentialized with all that fulness. Hence His promise: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." That is the reason three thousand persons were converted and baptized under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

So we see that the ascension of Christ was really the crowning of His saving work. It clothed Him with Sovereign power and kingly glory. Is not Ascension Day an important day in the Church Year? Is it not worth while to celebrate it by coming together in God's house to worship Him?

"Hail the day that sees Him rise
To His throne above the skies!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given,
Enters now the highest heaven.
There for Him high triumph waits;
Lift your heads, eternal gates!
Wide unfold the radiant scene;
Take the King of glory in!

"Lo! the heaven its Lord receives;
Yet He loves the earth He leaves; Though returning to His throne,
Still He calls mankind His own.
See, He lifts His hands above!
See, He shows the prints of love!
Hark, His gracious lips bestow
Blessings on His Church below!"

36. The Office Of The Holy Spirit. Sunday After Ascension.

John 15:26 — 16:4

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. (John 15:26-27)

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 16:1-4)

THOSE PERSONS who think that the Lutheran Church neglects the doctrine and function of the Holy Spirit are surely not familiar with the lessons of the Christian Year which are used so largely by our ministers. Between the resurrection and Pentecost all our gospels deal with the Holy Spirit, as does also the lesson for Sunday after the ascension. We have a fundamental lesson on the witness of the Spirit.

How deeply spiritual is our Lord's teaching here! It requires the spiritual mind to interpret it with any degree of adequacy. This is perhaps the reason for so much merely naturalistic teaching regarding the Bible today — the lack of the spiritual mind. In this lesson Christ says: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, He shall bear witness of Me." What does such language plainly teach?

I. The Holy Spirit Is A Person.

Every expression in this sentence connotes personality. “When the Comforter is come” — implying freedom of action, not merely coerced action. Also, “who proceedeth from the Father” — indicating the Spirit’s own personal action, not mere mechanical motion. “He shall bear witness of Me.” How could a mere divine power, as Sabellians have taught in the past and teach today, bear such witness? The very phraseology employed connotes that the Spirit is a person, one who can bear testimony in the hearts of believers, and bear such testimony as He chooses. He is also called the Paraclete, which means an advocate or helper, and these terms also carry the idea of intelligence and freedom, and hence of personality.

It behooves us today to stand firmly for the blessed doctrine of the Holy Trinity, of which the Holy Spirit is the Third Person. We need a person to bear clear testimony in our hearts that Christ is the Saviour, that our sins are forgiven through faith in Him, and that we are the children of God. A mere power from God, as the Sabellians teach, would not bear a distinct and positive testimony with our spirits. We want nothing obscure and ambiguous in Christian experience. The Holy Spirit, being a person of the Godhead, tells us clearly that we are God’s children through redemption and by regeneration.

II. He Is The Spirit Of Truth.

The believer’s heart is made to rejoice that Christ calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth.” That is just what the real Christian wants — truth. He desires comfort and joy, if it is God’s will; but, first of all, he wants truth. He wants no comfort, peace or joy that is based on falsehood. It is the assurance of truth only that can give true and lasting experience. Believers want no false hopes and comforts foisted upon them. Better sorrow and heaviness of heart than error. Hence it is that Christ first of all gives assurances of truth. He says: “I am the way, the life and the truth;” “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;” “I will send you the Spirit of truth.” So when the Holy Spirit comes into one’s consciousness, and impinges His evidence there, the initial impression He makes is that His witness is of the truth. Then the believer knows that He stands on the rock of truth. When he has the truth, he has everything that is needed, for that is the foundation on which all else in the Christian system and in Christian experi-

ence is built. No; in spite of all the taunts of the worldly wise and the rationalistic, the evangelical believer has knowledge of truth first of all in his experience, which is wrought within him by the Spirit of truth proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Let no one imagine that a Christian experience, wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, is a mere conviction of the head, or a delusion of the imagination, or a subjective impression of the heart. No! no! it is an absolute assurance of the truth impinged upon the consciousness. No other experience is clearer, surer, more distinct, or more precious.

III. He Is A Witnessing Spirit.

The peculiar subject of the Spirit's witness is vital. The text says: "He shall bear witness of Me" — that is of Christ. This is very precious. The Holy Spirit does not primarily bear witness of Himself. He is the most inner, psychological, and therefore inconspicuous person of the Godhead. While He has an objective existence, just as the Father and the Son have, His work is mostly subjective — that is, in the innermost consciousness of believers. He does not glorify Himself; He glorifies Christ, and bears testimony to Christ's person and work in the plan of redeeming grace. Hence the person of the Holy Spirit does not come out so conspicuously in the representations of the Scriptures, nor are there many passages which clearly teach that He is to be worshipped and supplicated. He does not bear witness of Himself, but of Christ.

Does this doctrine agree with Christian experience? It does. Note the worship of the newly converted person: he does not give much praise to the Holy Spirit, but he does glorify Christ; he dwells lovingly and gratefully on what Jesus has done for him both in His life and in His atoning death. Afterward he will get clearer ideas of the Holy Spirit's office and personality; but that will be more discursive, and not the first spontaneous assurance that comes in a Christian experience.

IV. He Causes Believers To Bear Witness.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit within the believer will have its natural effect: it will lead him to bear witness in the world. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. The Spirit-born Christian will not keep silent. He will not be a dumb man. He will confess Christ before men. He will want others to know the truth and have a share in the joy. Nothing is more unselfish than Christian assurance. To share it with others will not lessen its amount, clearness and preciousness, but rather will heighten all these qualities. The gospel has been disseminated by testimony from the beginning, and thus it goes from person to person, from generation to generation, from age to age, bringing all believers into the apostolic succession, and making them all spiritual kin.

Paul looked upon Timothy as his spiritual son. He said he had begotten him in the Lord. It was because Timothy had been brought to Christ through Paul’s preaching and teaching. It is a blessed way of propagating the gospel — through testimony. In heaven we shall no doubt find great joy in tracing all the various threads of influence by which we have been helped by one another. And such holy testimony never ends, but like a ripple in the sea, it spreads farther and farther till it reaches the remotest shore. That is what the Bible means when it says of righteous Abel, “He, being dead, yet speaketh.” The angel also told John, the revelator, to write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

May we all bear such testimony to Christ with our lives and lips that the same may be said of us after we have been called from time into eternity!

"So let our lips and lives express
The holy gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divine.

“Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God,
When the salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin.”

V. He Is A Sustaining Spirit.

In the remaining verses of the text (16:1-4) Jesus tells His disciples of the trials that should come upon them. Their opponents would disgrace them by putting them out of the synagogues, and some of them they would slay, thinking they were doing God's service. "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor Me," Jesus adds. But He tells them not to stumble or be offended, but remember what He had told them. He had not told them about these trials before, because He was with them, and could keep them encouraged. But now He would depart, and so He tells them about the Spirit, the Comforter, who would sustain them in all their trials. He would reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; but the disciples He would "guide into all truth."

Thus it is that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter in all sorrow. He always bears witness in our hearts of the veracity, nearness, power and saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us not be afraid of the Holy Ghost. He is no apparition, but a loving, consoling, sustaining personality, who will abide with us forever; so that we can sing joyfully:

"Come, Holy Comforter,
Thy sacred witness bear
In this glad hour;
Thou, who almighty art,
Now rule in every heart,
And ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power."

37. Christ And The Comforter. Whitsunday Or Pentecost. John 14:23-31

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)

THE GOSPEL for Whitsunday or Pentecost agrees entirely with the lesson from the Acts (2:1-13), which contains the account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. At the same time the gospel complements the story in Acts by adding some needed data. Here are some very comforting and stimulating doctrines.

I. The Real Presence Of Christ And The Holy Spirit.

The gospel teaches that the presence of the Holy Spirit does not exclude the real presence of Christ Himself. Let us see how this is.

In verse 23 of the gospel Jesus said: “If a man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” This shows that both the Father and the Son will dwell with the true disciple. The word for “abode” does not mean a transient visit, but a continual presence. With this agrees verse 28: “Ye have heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you.” Other gospel testimony corroborates this teaching, especially where Christ says: “And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

Now collate with this what Peter said on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:23: “Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He (Christ) hath poured forth this which ye see and hear.” That is (Eph. 4-10), having “ascended far above all heavens that He’ might fill all things,” the glorified Christ is present everywhere, and therefore was present on the day of Pentecost to baptize the Church directly with the Holy Spirit whom He had promised to His followers. It makes the doctrine and the experience all the more precious to know that Christ Himself is really present with His people, bestowing directly upon them the Holy Spirit. It is so much better than to think of Christ as far away, making the Holy Spirit, as it were, His deputy.

II. The Holy Spirit’s Guidance.

Next we note Christ’s promise of what the Comforter will do for His apostles when He shall come in the fulness of His redemptive and revealing power and grace: “He shall teach you all things.” The Comforter would lead the apostles into all truth — into further truth than even Christ had brought them. There are liberalists today who cry, “Back to Christ,” meaning thereby that we cannot trust the testimony of the apostles, but must accept only what is attributed to Christ in the gospels. Here we have the Lord’s distinct promise that the Holy Spirit would reveal all necessary truth to His disciples. Why should not the inspiration of the exalted and glorified Christ through the Holy Spirit be just as authoritative as His teaching in the days of His humiliation? The fact is, during Christ’s mundane life the disciples

were very dull and full of doubt and timidity; but when, after He was glorified, He poured His Spirit upon them, they were endued with spiritual power, and all their doubts and fears were swept away. Thus the Acts and the Epistles are just as authoritative as the Gospels.

III. The Holy Spirit Refreshes The Memory.

Christ said He would “bring to their remembrance” all that He had taught them. Before the Spirit’s baptism they were extremely forgetful. How soon they forgot His foretelling of His death and resurrection! How different after Pentecost! How vividly they recalled everything that Jesus had said to them! Did you ever find Peter quoting from the Old Testament before that day? Now He seems to have the whole Messianic teaching of the Old Testament at the end of his tongue. There are modern instances of men who could never remember spiritual truth, however often called to their attention, until they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is a great reminder. Sometimes children who have been brought up in godly homes depart for a while from their early teaching; but in after years the Holy Spirit comes to them through the Word, perhaps in some providence, and pours His light into their souls; then the teaching of their parents and pastors revives, and they are won back to Christ; then perhaps the valuable lessons they learned in the catechetical class are recalled, and give them great help and comfort. We do not believe that such early instruction is ever in vain.

IV. Christ And The Holy Spirit Bring Peace.

Strange as it may seem, Christ next changes His speech from the Holy Spirit to Himself. Note His words: “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 I come unto you.” Christ, therefore, brings peace to the converted soul; it is His own peace — that divine composure which knows no disturbance, because Christ is all-wise and all-powerful. He knows the end from the beginning. He may be sorry because men sin, but it does not disconcert

or embarrass Him, because He knows that sin and Satan cannot overcome Him or destroy His sovereignty. He knows that some day “the last enemy shall be overcome,” and “He shall reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.” You see, that is why He can confer such a deep peace upon the penitent and believing soul — a peace that “passeth all understanding,” and that “flows like a river.”

"Prince of peace, control my will;
Bid this struggling heart be still;
Bid my fears and doubtings cease;
Hush my spirit into peace.

"Thou hast bought me with thy blood,
Opened wide the gate of God;
Peace I ask — but peace must be,
Lord, in being one with thee.

"May thy will, not mine, be done;
May thy will and mine be one:
Chase these doubtings from my heart:
Now thy perfect peace impart."

V. Christ's Departure No Loss, But Gain.

There is another great thought in our text that needs to be interpreted. Christ's disciples were greatly troubled on account of what He said about His "departure." They found it hard to be satisfied with the promise of "another Comforter," whom as yet they knew not. Now notice how Christ assured them that His departure would be no loss to them, but, rather, great gain. He said: "If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I."

Is there any doctrinal difficulty here? None whatever. In the days of His humiliation the Son submitted entirely to the Father. He even declared that He taught only what the Father taught Him, and that He did not "speak from Himself." Now, however, the days of His voluntary humiliation would soon be over. He would go back to the Father to be glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Hence, during the time of His humiliation, the Father was greater than He; but now He would be exalted

to His pristine glory and eternal position, and would again be filled with all the fulness of God, all the power, authority and glory of the Father. As He always was in reality co-equal with God, now He would again exercise His co-equal power and majesty, bearing with Him His human nature to partake of His complete glorification. Paul teaches the same doctrine when he says that in the exalted Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” His human nature was glorified by the divine nature. Says Paul again, after He has described Christ’s state of humiliation (Phil. 3:9-11): “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name,” etc.

Thus we see why His disciples should have rejoiced at their Master’s coming exaltation; for only by His being fully glorified by Deity could He confer upon them true and conquering divine power in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then He — the Spirit — would take of the things of the exalted, heavenly Christ, and would bring them to His disciples.

May the Holy Spirit, poured out once for all upon the Church at Pentecost, abide in every heart, and guide every one into all needed truth!

"The Spirit, by His heavenly breath,
New life creates within;
He quickens sinners from the death
Of trespasses and sin.

The things of Christ the Spirit takes,
And to our heart reveals;
Our bodies He His temple makes,
And our redemption seals.

“Come, Holy Spirit, from above,
With thy celestial fire;
Come, and with flames of zeal and love,
Our hearts and tongues inspire.”

The End Of Volume 1

38. The Doctrine Of The New Birth. The Festival Of The Holy Trinity. John 3:1-15

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:1-15)

OUR GOSPEL LESSON for Trinity Sunday gives an account of one of the most remarkable dialogues recorded in history — that between Christ and Nicodemus. Hundreds of sermons might be preached on this suggestive conversation. No doubt the eternal destiny of multitudes of people has been decided by the words of Jesus here recorded relative to the nature and necessity of the new birth. It is doubtful whether any other conference in the annals of time has been fraught with more epoch-making importance both for individuals and nations. There is nothing like it in all the other religions of the world; for the doctrine of regeneration is distinctive of the Christian religion; none other teaches it, and none other can confer it.

Why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night we do not know. Perhaps it was on account of shame and fear; perhaps because he thought he could speak to Him more confidentially if he could be alone with Him. We do not need to know his motive. But why he came at all to Jesus is quite plain; he certainly wanted to know more about Christ, His claims and His doctrines. He admitted that He was “a teacher come from God.” From the subsequent conduct of Nicodemus (see John 7:50 and 19:39-42) we may rightly infer that he came that night to Jesus, not out of mere curiosity, but with a serious purpose.

On Trinity Sunday the doctrine of the Holy Trinity might appropriately be discussed; for it is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion; but the Gospel for the day does not set forth this doctrine except in a remote way. It deals with the doctrine of the new birth, or regeneration, and therefore that shall be the theme of our sermon this morning. As a matter of interpretation, it makes little difference whether we translate Christ’s phrase in verse 3 “born again,” or “born anew,” or “born from above.” Perhaps the last is the most literal translation. It surely emphasizes most strongly the heavenly and supernatural character of regeneration, showing that it is not a development or evolution of the natural man, but a new life that is divinely conferred. This leads us to consider:

I. The Definition Of The New Birth.

Sometimes it is better to give the definition at the close of the discussion of a theme, but in this case it will be better to have a clear idea of the meaning of the new birth at the beginning. The very words of Jesus in this great discourse will give us the best conception of what the new birth is; he uses the phrases, “born from above” and “born of the Spirit.” Therefore, the new birth must be the imparting of new spiritual life. Man’s first birth gives to him his natural life. Now, if man is to become a spiritual being, and yet by nature has no spiritual life, how can he be made spiritual except by a birth from above — that is, from God? There is nothing difficult to understand in this conception. Surely it is very easy for God to breathe into man’s soul a new life.

II. The Necessity Of The New Birth.

Must all persons be born from above? According to this Gospel Lesson, they must. King James' translation is not quite accurate in verse 3; the original says, "Except anyone be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God; it does not say," "Except a man be born from above." The same is true of verse 5: "Except anyone be born of water and the Spirit," etc. So all persons — infants, children and adults alike — must have the new birth in order to see and enter into the kingdom of God.

Why must all persons be born from above? We might answer concisely, because they must. Why must we eat food, drink water and breathe the air in order to live physically? Because we must. It is according to the very constitution of things.

So with the spiritual life. Since we are conceived and born in sin through our natural birth, how can we ever become spiritually minded without the impartation of spiritual life from without us — that is, from God, who is the only source of spiritual life? One of the great laws of science is called biogenesis, which means that there can be no life save from antecedent life. This same law must hold in all realms; therefore, the natural man, who is dead in trespasses and sins, cannot evolve spiritual life from his own resources, but must receive it "from above."

Christ is very emphatic in His declarations about the absolute need of the new birth: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except anyone be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (verse 3); verses 5 and 6 are no less emphatic; and verse 7 says: "Ye must be born from above."

A number of years ago a noted free-thinker was wont to say: "These Christian people, with all their preachers and theologians, are a very crass and unscientific lot of people, for they think a man is not born right the first time, and so must be born over again!" And then he would laugh broadly, and his audiences would laugh with him. Is not that a superficial criticism? Cannot anyone see with half an eye that there is something radically wrong with human nature? If it does not need to be re-made and re-born, why and whence all the wickedness of the world? If men are "all right" just as they are by nature, one would think human society would be universally good and happy, and the world would be a Paradise. But instead, sin and sorrow reign everywhere, and even the most highly civilized and cultured nations make bloody war upon one another. Ah, yes! there is something inherently wrong with human nature, something radically wrong; something that grips men like a vice and drags them down to all kinds of selfishness and de-

bauchery. This universality of wickedness cannot be laid to circumstances and environment. What is it that makes them so corrupting the world over? No; we must go deeper. The trouble lies in the sinfulness of the natural heart. The Psalmist was a deeper student of human nature than was the notorious infidel of a generation ago; for he said: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The apostle Paul was a better analyst of human pathology than was the infidel, for Paul said: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The same profound writer said: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God." But Christ Himself in our lesson inculcated the same profound truth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Yes, the new "birth is necessary. Mere development of the natural powers is not enough." Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above."

III. The Agent Of The New Birth.

The phrase, "born of the Spirit," is used three times in our text (verses 5, 6 and 8); it is also used in other places in the Holy Scriptures. So it is the special function of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity to beget the new spiritual life within men's souls. It is meet that this should be so. God, the Father, creates and sustains and sends the Son to redeem the world; the Son comes into the world, assumes human nature, and accomplishes redemption for mankind by His active and passive obedience; now the function of the Holy Spirit is to call, enlighten and regenerate the hearts of men, so that they can appreciate and accept the redemption wrought out for man by Jesus Christ. Thus each person of the Holy Trinity performs His proper office in the plan of salvation, and man is blessed indeed. A threefold blessing is a complete blessing.

It may well be asked why it is the special function of the Third Person of the Trinity to perform the work of regeneration. It is because the Holy Spirit is that inmost, most deeply psychical Person who completes and perfects the eternal self-consciousness of the Triune God; therefore, it is fitting that

He should perform the innermost work of grace in the psychical depth of man. It is "the Spirit who searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." So if you and I would know the "deep things of God," we must be "born of the Spirit."

IV. The Means Used By The Holy Spirit In The New Birth.

How does the Holy Spirit bring about the heavenly birth? Does He come down in a haphazard fashion out of the blue sky? Or does He come in an orderly way? Does He come in a divinely appointed manner? Our text and the general teaching of the Scriptures evince a divine order; that the Holy Spirit uses means to accomplish His gracious work in the hearts of men. What are those means? The Word of God and Holy Baptism. Note our text, verse 5: "Except anyone be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." If the phrase, "born of water," does not refer to baptism, its meaning is obscure; if it does mean baptism, it is perfectly clear, and agrees with the rest of the Biblical teaching.

The best way to establish a doctrine is to compare Scripture with Scripture. Recall the conversions described in the New Testament; in every case they were accomplished through the Word of God and baptism. Note the conversion of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost: first, the apostles preached the Word to them, Peter being especially prominent and potent in his presentation of the Scriptures. When the listeners were convicted through the preaching of the Word, and cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter (no doubt remembering his Master's teaching to Nicodemus and in His last commission) replied: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." After a few more words of instruction, the people assented, and the record says: "They then that received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Read the accounts of the conversion of Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, and the Philippian jailor, and observe that, in every case, the preaching or teaching of the divine Word and the administration of baptism were connected therewith as the divinely appointed means. No wonder the apostles and evangelists always followed this order, for Christ had not only spo-

ken to Nicodemus about the Word and baptism, but He had also said to His followers: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15, 16); and also: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20). Note how the Word and baptism are related directly to faith and conversion. Paul’s teaching is the same (Rom. 10:14-17): “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ...So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Note also Peter’s analogous doctrine (1 Pet. 1:23): “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.” Paul is just as clear and positive respecting the connection of baptism with the new birth (Titus 3:5): “Not by works of righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

Yes, God works in an orderly way, namely, through the means of grace which He has ordained; He does not come down out of the blue in a haphazard way. “For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.” In harmony with this teaching is Paul’s injunction, “Let all things be done decently and in order;” also: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” The Bible inculcates no false mysticism, no fanaticism, no undue emotion and excitement, no wild raving of Zwickau Prophets and Holy Rollers. Every true experience of conversion is a Biblically begotten experience, and hence it always speaks “words of truth and soberness.” Says Paul in another place (2 Tim. 1:7): “For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness, but of sober-mindedness.”

V. The Mystery Of The New Birth.

Greatly was Nicodemus puzzled over Christ’s teaching about the new birth. “How can a man be born when he is old?” he exclaimed. And again: “How can these things be?” Although an educated man, a master in Israel, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, he could not understand Christ’s spiritual

teaching. Yes, a man may be learned in all the secular wisdom of the schools, a very savant in the eyes of the world, and yet only an abecedarian in spiritual lore. Mere intellectual culture will never make a man a Christian; indeed, it may only make him “wise in his own conceit,” and thus unfit him to be a learner in the school of Christ. “Except any one, whether learned or unlearned, be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God;” cannot even see, much less enter into it.

But when Nicodemus could not understand, Christ did not explain to him the mystery of the new birth, but simply said: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” As much as to say: “Do not stumble over the doctrine of this heavenly birth. Do not reject it because you cannot comprehend it. You do not even understand the commonest phenomena of the natural world around you. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit. You cannot understand it, but you can experience it; and thus you can know that it is a reality.”

Was not Christ a wise teacher? Who can understand the ways of the wind? How can the wind blow? How can it consist of atoms and yet be so light and ductile? Why does it not crush us to the ground by its very weight? You say, like all gaseous substances, it presses equally in all directions, and hence we do not feel its weight. But how can it press equally in all directions? What is there about it that makes it behave in that way? What is the atmosphere, anyway? You reply, it is composed of atoms and molecules. But what are they? Oh! they are made up of ions and electrons. But what are ions and electrons? Well, they are formed from the “universal ether” by means of whorls or vortices. But of what is the “universal ether” composed? No one knows. We cannot tell what matter is in its essence. And: if we do not know what matter is, why should we stumble over the question as to what mind or spirit is? And if we cannot understand the ways of the wind, why should we expect to understand the ways of God?

No, we do not need to understand the atmosphere; we need only to inhale it. We do not need to understand the mystery of food and its assimilation by the body; we need only to eat it. So we do not need to understand the mystery of the new birth; we need only to experience it; then we shall know that it is a reality.

VI. The Conditions Of The Birth.

How can I secure this heavenly experience? That is the paramount issue just now. The text indicates very clearly the method by which the experience is wrought: Nicodemus, an unregenerate man, came to Jesus for a conference. Jesus gave him the very instruction he needed; in other words, he preached the Word to him. In this way He sought to awaken in him the sense of sin and need, his spiritual poverty, so that he would be led to the right source for help and salvation. This Christ did throughout the first twelve verses of the gospel for the day. Then, in the 13th, 14th and 15th verses, He pointed out to His interlocutor the only way by which one can realize the spiritual or heavenly birth. Let us read these great verses: "And no man hath ascended into heaven but He that descended out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven." That means that Christ, who is from heaven, and who is therefore divine, is the only one who can bestow upon men the heavenly birth. But how? The next two verses clarify the gracious plan: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted, that whosoever believeth in Him may have eternal life."

And now is it clear? All you need to do to experience the heavenly birth is to believe on Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross to make atonement for your sins and the sins of the whole world; who was also lifted up to the right hand of God and clothed with all power, so that He might pour the Spirit upon you, breathe into your soul the new life, and make you a new creature in Christ Jesus. Do not ask about the how of this process. Simply accept it by faith. "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have eternal life; for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Yes, your only hope is in Christ. He cries to all men, "Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved." May your response be: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." Amen. '

39. How Two Men's Conditions Were Reversed. The First Sunday After Trinity. Luke 16:19-31

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. (Luke 16:19-31)

WE ARE NOW ENTERING upon the Trinity season of the Church Year. During this time we shall be led to consider the practical principles of the Christian religion, those that grow out of faith in the person and work of Christ and the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit — the great doctrines that we have been studying in the pericopes from Advent to Trinity Sunday. However, we must remember that, just as there was much practical teaching in the first half of the Church Year, so there is also much doctrinal teaching in the second half. Indeed, in all parts of the Holy Scriptures we find doctrine and practice beautifully blended. Doctrine is the basis of practice, and practice is the fruitage of doctrine. In our lesson for today, the first

Sunday after Trinity, we shall see that the mutual relationship of doctrine and practice is clearly brought out.

We are to reflect upon Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Our theme shall be: "How the Conditions of Two Men Were Reversed." Let us note:

I. The Condition Of The Poor Man.

A beggar — not a very attractive character, to begin with. Who cares for a poor, ragged beggar? How much of an ovation would he receive if he were to come into your neighborhood? Would not most people regret, not to say resent, rather than welcome his coming?

And yet Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, made the poor, sore-ridden beggar, Lazarus, the hero of His story, and thus immortalized the name of a mean and despised mendicant.

Why? Was it not a great literary risk? Would He not in this way mar His story and doom it to failure? Yet the venture has been a success; men have everywhere approved the story, and have regarded it as a model in its way. Jesus must have had a great purpose in choosing a-beggar as the hero of His story. What was it? It was to show that the salvation He came to bring to the world is available to the poorest, humblest and most despised person in the world, and that, for that very reason, none are beyond the power of His redeeming grace and mercy. If His redemption can reach and save the most lowly, it can reach all others.

This parable was very pertinent to the situation in which it was spoken. In a preceding verse we read: "And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they scoffed at Him." How this parable of the beggar going to Abraham's bosom, and the rich man going to torment in Hades, must have stung the avaricious lot to the quick! Jesus was a master at directing a shaft.

However, we must not make a mistake at this point. Was Lazarus saved simply because he was poor and miserable? By no means. That would not agree with what Christ taught elsewhere and many times. Long before He spoke the parable of our lesson, He had said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel;" "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" "Blessed are they that hunger and

thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” All these teachings must be taken in connection with the doctrines of this parable. Thus He meant that we must take it for granted that Lazarus, though a beggar, was also a true believer, one who had been “born from above,” or he could not have been saved. The special point Christ wished to make was that the rich and worldly Pharisees before him, who lived in selfish luxury, would be likely, in the next world, to exchange conditions even with the poor beggars at their gates who had Christian faith and character. They were “lovers of money;” they tried to “serve God and mammon” (verse 13). Unless they repented, they would be paupers in the next world, while the faithful poor would be comforted. So we learn from this part of the parable that, while poverty in itself will be no passport into eternal life, neither will it preclude any person from its joys.

Note, then, how the poor man’s condition was reversed in the next world. No longer did he need to beg for crumbs from the rich man’s table; no longer was he surrounded by snarling dogs; he was “carried away by angels into Abraham’s bosom,” where he “received good things,” and was “comforted.” His lot was reversed. And now he was glad that, in spite of all his trials, he had not lost faith in God, but had trusted in His grace to the end.

What is meant by “Abraham’s bosom?” It was the Jewish name for Paradise, the upper and happy part of “the place of departed spirits.” It meant, in the language of the times, the home of the blessed. It was the place to which Christ afterward referred when He said to the penitent thief, “This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” So we know that Christ taught plainly that Lazarus was in a state of blessedness and felicity which was very different from his earthly condition.

In contrast with the foregoing, let us next note:

II. The State Of The Rich Man.

How different was his earthly condition from that of the poor beggar! “Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.” In his luxurious ease and selfishness what cared he for Lazarus and his suffering? He would not lift a finger to help him, to feed him or to cure him of his painful disease. Let the poor take

care of themselves; he had plenty. And so he abandoned himself to voluptuous living. What a vivid picture of many a wealthy man today! Dives is a very modern character.

How deep and fundamental was Christ's implicit teaching in this parable! He drove his shaft right home to the heart of sinful human nature, for "He knew what was in man." In this world there is much selfishness, which is the root sin; it is a disposition that is wholly wrong, and that will therefore bar men out of Paradise. God cannot admit it into the heavenly realm, where it would at once introduce discord and sin. And where is this sin of selfishness most apt to prevail? Precisely where our Lord located it. Among the rich and well-to-do, the very ones who are most tempted to indulge their own pleasure without thinking of the misery of the world. Hence Christ was striking at a vital and strategic point in sinful human nature when he represented the egoist in this parable as a man of large earthly possessions. For the same reason, too, he showed in another place how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ah! Christ recognized "the deceitfulness of riches." He knew the danger of opulence and luxury.

But did Christ mean to condemn riches in themselves? Evidently He did not. He dined with a rich Pharisee, and accepted the hospitality of Zacchaeus who was wealthy; but He did not condemn them on account of their possessions. He must have known, too, that the wise men from the east, who were rich, had brought acceptable gifts and worship to Him when He was a babe in Bethlehem. Nor did He pass criticism on any of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job, on account of their earthly accumulations. No, the point at which Christ aimed was the rich man's selfishness, his unconcern for the sufferings of the poor. It was this that brought the sad reversal of his condition.

Note that "the rich man also died." Yes, his wealth could not bribe the messenger of death. Rich and poor alike must obey the summons. "There is no discharge in that war." All persons are conscripts there. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment."

"And was buried." Why is this detail inserted? Nothing is said of the burial of Lazarus. Perhaps the rich man had an ostentatious funeral service, with a long retinue of carriages and banks of flowers and many hired mourners. Who knows but that some one pronounced a fulsome oration over him? But poor Lazarus — he was carried off to the potter's field, and nobody knew and nobody cared. But what about the sequel? Ah! here was a

marvelous reversal of fortunes. Lazarus was borne by an angelic cortege to Paradise, while the poor rich man sank by the law of spiritual gravitation into the place of torment. What availed the funeral pageant of the rich man in such circumstances? What a travesty it was! While his friends were be-lauding him on earth, he was in Hades begging for a drop of water to cool his tongue! What a reversal! The poor beggar had been “down,” now he went up; the rich man had been “up,” now he went down. Thus God’s estimate of values differs from men’s. No wonder the inspired writer put it all in a great and trenchant sentence: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts.” In the divine judgment you and I are estimated according to what we are, not according to what we possess.

It will be instructive to draw from this suggestive parable —

III. Some Doctrinal Inductions.

There are some people who think that doctrines cannot properly be deduced from a parable. What was the purpose of Christ’s parables? It surely was to teach truth. Well, truth is doctrine crystallized into verbal expression. This parable is full of doctrine.

[1] It teaches that there is a future life. The beggar died, and was carried to Abraham’s bosom or Paradise, and was “comforted.” After the death of the rich man, it is said, “In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.” With these two men “death did not end all.” This is the very point that Christ meant to teach — that the earthly condition of men in this life is apt to be reversed in the next life; that the sorrowing will be comforted, while the rich and luxurious will be punished. If the parable does not teach this doctrine, it teaches nothing; it is pointless and inane. But, no, it plainly teaches that “it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die.”

[2] Our parable also inculcates the doctrine of personal consciousness in the next life. Lazarus and the rich man did not sink into eternal forgetfulness; they did not become absorbed in the All, as the pantheists would have us believe, and as Hinduism teaches. If Lazarus was “comforted,” he must have been conscious of it. And Dives was only too conscious of his anguish in the world of torment. More than that, he spoke to Abraham across the intervening gulf, and the details of his conversation prove that he was keenly aware of his distressful condition. If our parable teaches anything clearly, it

teaches that men's personal identity and consciousness endure in the next life — that you will be you and I will be I.

[3] Another doctrine fairly deduced from this parable is that there is an intermediate state. By this is not meant a place of purgatory, as the Catholics hold — a doctrine for which there is no Scriptural basis — but, as Lutheran theology teaches, “the place of departed spirits,” where the disembodied soul dwells in a conscious state of bliss or woe until the resurrection and final judgment. Note that, when Lazarus died, he was carried immediately to Abraham's bosom or Paradise, and was comforted. There is not the slightest hint that his soul slept for even a minute after the death of the body. So the body of the rich man was buried, and yet “in Hades he lifted up his eyes,” and was conscious of “being in torment.” That this portrayal cannot refer to the post-resurrection state is proved by the fact that the rich man wanted Lazarus to be sent back to the earth to warn his brothers who were still in the body. No, my friends, be assured that there is not the slightest Biblical proof for the doctrine of “soul-sleeping.” The soul is disembodied at death without losing consciousness, and as a pure spirit exists until it is reunited with the body in the resurrection.

[4] Another vital doctrinal deduction from this parable is this: each person's destiny for weal or woe is decided at death. Lazarus went to Paradise; the rich man to the lower part of Hades, the place of torment. Between the two localities there was “a great gulf fixed,” a gulf that was impassable. There is not a word or a hint of a second chance, of a state of probation after death. Moreover, there are only two places delineated, and no suggestion of a state of purgatory. Had Christ meant to teach this doctrine, this would have been the place to make it clear — but He gave no hint of such a doctrine. It would be better, therefore, to heed His stern teaching, and prepare for eternity while we are sure there is still an opportunity; and that is in this life.

"Life is the time to serve the Lord,
The time to insure the great reward;
And while the Spirit gives concern,
The vilest sinner may return.

“Life is the hour that God has given
To 'scape from hell and fly to heaven;
The day of grace when mortals may
Secure the blessings of the day.”

[5] It is patent also that memory, like all other forms or parts of consciousness, perdures in the next life. If Lazarus was now comforted, he must have remembered his previous suffering. When the rich man asked for Lazarus to come to his relief, Abraham answered, “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things.” Perhaps part of the joy of the redeemed in the next life will be the recollection of their trials and disappointments in their earthly life, contrasted with the bliss they enjoy in Paradise. So Paul says: “Our light afflictions, which are but for the time being, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

And perhaps — terrible is the thought! — the remembrance of the luxuries and hilarities of the life of the impenitent here on earth will be part of the flame of anguish in the world of the lost. God grant that you and I shall never have that sad and dreadful experience!

[6] Another important doctrine to be derived from this parable is this: Having the Bible to guide us surely in the way of salvation, we need no one to rise from the dead, or to come back from the Spirit world, to give us assurance. Whether our friends, who have gone before, ever revisit the earth, we do not know, but our text rather teaches the opposite. In the Old Testament all necromancy, divination, magic, and dealing with familiar spirits was severely condemned. Therefore, those people are on the wrong track who want to consult spiritualistic mediums and secure messages from the dead. Their sin consists in the fact that they will not accept the plain teaching of the Bible, which gives positive assurance of the reality of the next life; they also reject the Holy Spirit who, operating through the Bible, causes us to “taste of the powers of the world to come,” and thus gives us positive knowledge that such a world exists. Did not Christ Himself tell us that “in our Father’s house are many mansions?” What more do we need? So Lazarus was not permitted to come back to the earth to warn the rich man’s brothers, because they had Moses and the prophets. How much more certitude have we who have in the New Testament the teaching of Christ Himself and His inspired evangelists and apostles?

For our part, we decline to go into a dark room, where there is every chance for deception and trickery, and for strange psychic phenomena, to meet any of our loved ones who have departed to the heavenly country. If they wish to meet us, and talk to us, and tell us about their celestial experiences, and are able to do so, let them come in broad daylight, and talk in

plain, intelligible speech, just as they used to do when they dwelt here upon earth.

What is the vital lesson to be learned from our study of this pericope? It is this: Our immortal destiny will depend on our faith, character and conduct in this life. Poverty will not keep us out of heaven; riches will not take us to heaven. As we sow in this life, we shall reap in the next. May God grant us grace to sow in this life the seed that will bear the fruitage of eternal life! Amen.

40. The Gospel Feast. The Second Sunday After Trinity. Luke 14:16-24

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. (Luke 14:16-24)

HOW WONDERFUL, how deep, and how original are the parables of our Lord! We can never exhaust them. Today the Gospel Lesson presents the instructive and searching parable of the “man who made a great supper, and bade many.” When the feast was ready, and he sent out the information, the previously invited guests, strange to say, “all with one consent began to make excuse.” This conduct was as absurd as it was hypocritical; for sensible people do not decline to attend a banquet, especially when it is furnished without cost to them. And this is the chief point of the parable: it is a case of *reductio ad absurdum* — reduction to absurdity.

We believe that the proper theme of this portion of Scripture is, “The Gospel Feast,” prepared, free, bountiful, joy-giving, gladly accepted by some, however unworthy; but, sad to say, basely and rudely rejected by others. Let us divide the text in this way: First, the interpretation of the parable; second, the application of the parable.

I. The Interpretation Of The Parable

1. The Gospel Feast Ready.

The generous man first sent out an announcement that he meant to make a great supper, and invited many persons; then when the banquet was spread, he commissioned his servant to give the gracious invitation: “Come, for all things are now ready.” The very sound of the word is full of heartiness and good will. It also implies that the invited guests would need to do nothing but come; the preparations were lavish and complete.

Now what did our Lord mean to represent by this “great supper?” He meant to show that the gospel, or the abundant salvation that God has provided in His plan of redeeming grace, is like a feast — like a feast in several ways. First, it has all been made ready. We do not need to provide or prepare the viands of this spiritual banquet. Indeed, we have nothing to contribute. Spiritually we are helpless and poverty-stricken — “dead in trespasses and sins” — born in iniquity and conceived in sin. It would have been an insult to the benefactor who made this great supper, if one of his guests had brought along a poor, stale and moldy piece of bread to add to the feast of good things. So the Triune God has provided salvation for us; the Father sent the Son into the world, the Son wrought a perfect righteousness for sinners and made perfect satisfaction for their sins, thus opening the way for the bestowment of the bread of life and salvation; and now the Holy Spirit calls to us, “Come, for all things are now ready,” and then gives us the ability to come and partake of the feast. How gracious it all is! What excuse can poor, helpless sinners offer for declining to accept the gracious invitation? No valid excuse whatever.

And yet there were persons in this parable who treated the good man’s overtures with contempt, and asked to be excused from attending the feast. Therefore we must next take into account this pitiful fact:

2. The Gospel Feast Despised.

When the good man sent out the announcement, “Come, for all things are now ready,” the previously invited guests “all began with one consent to

make excuse.” The phrase translated “with one consent” means that there was a collusion among them to decline the invitation.

This was remarkable conduct. Why should these men refuse to go to a bounteous supper? Ah! that is the point of the parable — a point as sharp and an edge as keen as a Damascus blade. Christ purposely depicted their conduct as preposterous, for He constructed the parable to show the utter folly of refusing to come to their heavenly Father’s banqueting table. Just as it was absurd to the last degree for those invited guests to excuse themselves from their benefactor’s supper, so it is utterly vain and foolish and fatuous to decline to come to God’s feast of salvation. No person in the right state of mind would act that way in worldly matters; yet how many people treat God’s invitation with scorn and neglect! And this they do, though they know that they will finally be the losers; that it is against their own interests. Think of a man saying, “I pray thee have me excused,” when God invites him to come to the feast of eternal salvation, joy and peace! Yet myriads of people do that very thing every day. And the case is all the more serious when we remember at what cost God prepared salvation for mankind, the sacrifice of His only begotten Son on the cross. Will some person tell me what God can do with people who are so callous and ungrateful?

However, it is comforting to know that not everybody is so unwise; and this leads us to our next division:

3. The Gospel Feast Attended.

When the master of the house saw how rudely his invitation had been treated by the guests who were first invited, he sent his servants out into the streets and lanes of the city, the highways and the hedges, to urge the poor, the halt, the maimed and the blind to come to his banquet table. “Constrain them to come in, that my house may be full,” he said.

What is the meaning of this part of the parable? It applies especially to the Jews, and no doubt Jesus intended it to be like a sharp shaft aimed at them. They refused Him, their Messiah, and made all kinds of excuses for their conduct. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” He invited them to the banquet of salvation, but they scornfully declined His offer. What would He do then? He would turn to the Gentiles, whom the Jews so much despised, and would make them the same proffer. That is

what afterward occurred. When the stubborn Jews rejected Paul's gospel message, he turned to the Gentiles. And ever since then by far the greater number of the guests at the feast of salvation through Christ have come from the streets, lanes, highways and hedges of the Gentile world.

Bear in mind that God's house will be filled; all the seats of His banqueting table will be occupied. If those first invited fail to accept, He will turn to others. No matter how long it takes, His house shall be full, His heaven shall be inhabited. If you and I are not there, others will be there. Christ "shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied;" satisfied with both the number and the character of those who shall be saved by the gospel. His sacrifice on the cross was not made in vain. If the rich and learned and haughty will not accept His overtures of mercy, He will fill His house with the humble and the lowly, who will gladly and gratefully "enter into the joy of their Lord," and sit down at His festal board.

Thus we see what is the interpretation of the parable. Let us now learn some very practical lessons as we attend to —

II. The Application Of The Parable

1. Pretexts Are Not Excuses.

While the men in the text offered excuses for declining the good man's invitation, they were not real excuses; they were mere pretexts. Had they been honest, they would have declared openly that they did not want to go to the supper; they had no disposition or desire to be in their benefactor's company. Their excuses were merely "framed up," as the saying goes.

So when men today give excuses for rejecting the invitation to the gospel feast, they should look into their motives, and see whether their excuses are genuine. All kinds of excuses are offered today, as they were then. Here are some of them: The Church has too many hypocrites; there are too many things about the Bible that we cannot understand; we have too much business on hand just now; there is still plenty of time; when we get settled in life, we will unite with the Church; we do not feel like becoming religious just now. But are they real excuses? Is not the real reason for not coming to Christ this? You do not want to repent of your sins, nor forsake them, nor leave the festal gaieties of the world for the pure and wholesome

table of the Lord; you do not want to take up your cross and follow Christ. Is it not “the pleasures of sin for a season” that make too great a counter-attraction?

We suggest a test for every excuse that the impenitent sinner offers: Are you willing to carry your excuses to the judgment bar of God, and submit them there, and abide by God’s verdict? If you have any excuse that will endure that ordeal, then hold fast to it. But if it will not stand that last and sure test, then it is worthless and should be renounced at once.

2. The Sinner’s Excuses Are Vain.

Look closely at the excuses named in the text. The first man said, “I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused.” On the face of it, that was a shabby excuse. He surely must have seen the piece of ground before he bought it. If he did not, he must have been a poor business man. And if he had seen it before, why must he go and see it now? So his excuse was invalid.

The second man answered, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused.” Here is another lame excuse, for if the man had not proved his oxen before he purchased them, it was surely not necessary for him to go immediately for that purpose.

As to the third man, his excuse was the poorest of all, and his answer was the curtest and most ill-mannered. “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” Why, a feast would have been the most appropriate place to take his new wife, if he cared for her, and wanted to make her happy, and show her to his friends and neighbors.

So it is with all excuses for not coming to the feast of salvation. In many years of pastoral work, we have heard all the excuses that can be offered, but none of them will stand the test of the Bible and of right reasoning. In most cases the mere mention of the excuse is its own refutation. There can be no possible reason for refusing the salvation that Christ purchased with “His own precious blood,” and that the Father offers to us so freely and graciously.

We have reached the last thought, and the most solemn of all:

3. The Tragedy Of Being Finally Excused.

Observe that, in the parable of our text, the Lord said, "None of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper." They had asked to be excused; he had excused them. Henceforth they could look for no favors from him.

Christ meant to teach by this part of His parable this solemn and terrible truth: If you and I ask to be excused from the feast of salvation, and shall come at the last day to plead for entrance into His banquet hall, He will reply: "You asked to be excused, and I have excused you! You cannot enter here." And the door will be closed. Oh, may that never be our fate!

A great preacher of the past generation once illustrated the solemn lesson of this parable in the following way, which we will adapt to our own use. Let us assume that we are holding an unsigned message in our hand; it reads thus: "To the King of Heaven and Earth: On the morning of June 29, 1919, I received an urgent invitation to be present at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. I pray thee have me excused." Is there anyone here who will sign his name to that message, and let it be sent to heaven? I cannot believe it. But let us change the message, and give it a better form: "To the King of Heaven and Earth: On the morning of June 29, 1919, I received an urgent invitation to be present at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. By the grace of God I will be there!"

Will you put your signature to that message, and permit it to be sent to heaven to cause the angels and saints to rejoice? Oh! I pray that you will sign it with your heart's assent just now! Amen.

41. Heaven's Interest In One Sinner. The Third Sunday After Trinity. Luke 15:1-10

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:1-10)

“IS THE UNIVERSE FRIENDLY?”

This is a question that many speculative philosophers are discussing just now, and in one form or another have been debating through the centuries. Some of their arguments are extremely labored, extending into long articles and large tomes. The pessimist tries to prove that the universe is either indifferent or inimical to human welfare, and that this is the worst world possible. On the other hand, the optimist produces a winding and laborious argument to prove that the world is good, and therefore congenial with the happiness of the race.

However, the Bible decides the question very simply, just as it solves all problems that are of vital concern. It teaches that the universe is friendly, because the God back of the universe is friendly. It tells us that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” for its redemption. And everywhere the Bible teaches that God, the great Power in and back of

the universe, takes a real interest in us and works for our well-being. So what the speculatists labor over with mental travail, that the Bible solves in the clearest and simplest way.

Our gospel lesson for the third Sunday after Trinity sets forth this truth in a most gracious way. The lesson comprises Jesus' parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. In each case he points the moral of the parable by saying that "there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Thus we know that the denizens of heaven are concerned in our affairs.

The occasion of these two beautiful parables, and also that of the prodigal son, which is also recorded in this chapter, was this: When the Pharisees and Scribes saw that the publicans and sinners were attracted to Jesus, and flocked to hear Him, they murmured and found fault, saying: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." They, the religious teachers and leaders of the people, were obsessed with proud aloofness, and, instead of trying to win sinners to the right way, looked upon them with disdain, and thought that any kind of contact with them was contaminating and disgraceful. In reply to their petty criticism Jesus told them the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

Let us ask ourselves this question, and answer it in the light of the text: What are the things that make Heaven glad; that cause the angels of God to rejoice?

1. A Repenting Sinner.

Just now we desire to lay the emphasis on the word repenting. The parable does not say that, when a man comes into possession of a great worldly inheritance or great renown, or when a president is inaugurated or a monarch is crowned, the angels rejoice. No doubt they feel an interest in such events, but Christ did not think them of sufficient importance to be mentioned. But, ah! when a sinner repents, then the heavenly hosts break into glad hosannas.

What is there about repentance that causes them these transports of joy? Why did not Christ use some other word than the word "repent?" Did He have the true conception of values when He employed that word and no other?

Ah! it is all clear when we know what repentance is. Repentance is a change of mind regarding sin: sorrow for sin; confessing sin; forsaking sin; begging for the pardon of sin; accepting by faith the sinner's Redeemer. Sin is the only thing that prevents salvation; sin is the only thing that keeps men out of heaven. So when a sinner repents of his sin, the only obstacle to his salvation is removed, for then, through faith in the Redeemer, God will pardon his sin and write his name in the Lamb's Book of Life. So when a sinner repents, the angels know that he has become a subject of heaven and is entitled to heavenly citizenship, and that is what causes them to rejoice. What a profound ethical and spiritual teacher Jesus was! If He had said that the angels rejoice over anything but the repenting of the sinner, He would not have gone to the root of ethical reality, and therefore would have been as superficial as are most human teachers.

What a beautiful thing is repentance! What a noble frame of mind! Some proud and worldly people do not like the word. They think it connotes sentimentality, weakness, unnecessary humility. Some men even seem to think it a sign of unmanliness to repent of and confess one's sins. But that is a mistake. Why should it be regarded as weak and unmanly to confess one's sins, to have them forgiven, and to be set upon the way of rectitude? Is it not much rather a sign of weakness to cling to evil and to walk in the way of wrong-doing? Yes, indeed! Every person who lives in sin simply advertises himself as a moral weakling. He only is the truly manly man who repents of sin, and thus gets rid of it, and then walks in the way of righteousness. What a great thing is repentance!

A legend which runs something like this is told somewhere: Once God sent a great archangel to the earth to find the most precious thing that it could afford, and bring it back to Him. The angel came on his errand. First he found a great bag of yellow, glittering gold. Gathering it up in his arms, he winged his way through the stellar spaces to the throne of God, and laid his gift down at His feet. But God declined his offering, and bade him return to the earth. The second time the angel found the most valuable diamond the earth could afford, a real Kohinoor, and bore it to the foot of God's throne; but again God told him he had failed. Again and again the angel repeated his visit to the earth in vain, until he became almost disheartened.

At length, one day as he was wandering over the earth, he saw a poor man lying prone on the ground, sobbing as if his heart were broken. The an-

gel went to him, turned his face toward him, and said compassionately, “What aileth thee, my poor man? What is thy trouble?” The man replied, amid his sobs and tears, “My sins! oh, my sins! Would God He would forgive my sins!” The angel caught sight of a tear of penitence rolling down the man’s cheek; he reached out his hand quickly, and caught up the tear, and again spreading his broad wings, he bore his gift to the throne of God, and laid it at His feet; and God accepted it with a glad smile, saying, “Yes, my angel messenger, a tear of repentance is the most precious thing that earth can afford. It means sins forgiven and a title to heavenly residence.”

Ah! what a great thing is repentance! Do you not see, therefore, just why Christ said, “There is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth?” Let us ask again: What makes heaven glad? And the reply is, heaven rejoices over —

2. One Repenting Sinner.

Let us now put the emphasis on the word one. Note the rhythmic language and gracious assurance of our Lord: “I say unto you, likewise, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.” According to Christ’s estimate, one individual is of unspeakable value.

Is that really God’s thought about us human beings, so sinful and unworthy? Among so many millions on millions does He really care for every one of us? or is He so busy with the eternities and immensities that He overlooks individuals and details? Not so the Bible teaching. He notes every sparrow’s fall, and counts the hairs of the head. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. In view of the vastness of the universe, how comforting this truth is! God is not a mere “collectivist” God. He does not herd people *en masse*. He takes a personal interest in each one. Have you ever thought about it, that God must have created each atom separately, and now must sustain each one and keep it in its place? How else could an atom ever have come into existence? How else could each atom be kept where it belongs? Well, if He cares for atoms, how much more does He care for you and me who are rational and immortal beings!

Some would-be scientists try to daunt us with our littleness and insignificance in view of the vastness of the universe. Herbert Spencer once scoffed

at the idea of the God of the infinite universe coming down to speak to a Syrian shepherd, meaning Abraham. But the Christian soul, which has been created in God's image and redeemed by the blood of His Son, refuses to be cowed by the vastness of the material cosmos! It well knows that a self-conscious mind, capable of thought, feeling and volition, and of communion with the Infinite God, is worth more than all the unconscious, unfeeling material worlds, suns, stars and systems piled on top of one another. Oh, immortal soul, be not affrighted by mere bulk, mere quantitative bigness! Thou art thyself the greatest entity God hath ever formed.

Perhaps you have wondered why God made so vast a universe. The most powerful telescopes, when trained upon the sky, reveal worlds on worlds, systems on systems, while the earth itself, so far as bulk is concerned, is only like a grain of sand on the seashore or a mote in the air. And then man himself, measured as to bulk, is so small and insignificant. But wonder no longer. When God created the universe, He made it in view of the fact that he meant to create man in His own image, and make him an immortal being, the crown of all His works. And since eternity is never ending, He made for this immortal being an inexhaustible universe for his residence and delectation. And so God's spiritual and material universes will never grow old, will never become monotonous, will never lose their newness, interest and charm for immortal man. What a destiny God has prepared for them that repent of their sins and trust in His grace!

God's special interest in each one of us is vividly portrayed in these two parables of our text. Note how the shepherd sought for his lost sheep, we know not how long, until he found it; then he laid it on his shoulders, and carried it home rejoicing. Nor was that all; he called his neighbors together, and said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Observe that he said "my sheep." So the woman who had lost her precious piece of silver swept the whole house, and went to much trouble, until she found it; and she, too, had a neighborhood rejoicing over the recovered treasure. In all this graphic portrayal, in every word and every sentence, we can feel vibrating God's intense interest in one sinner. Let no one despair. The universe is friendly, because God Himself is friendly.

Have we time for a few words of gentle admonition?

[1] If God and His angels place so high an estimate upon each one of us, ought we not to try to get the same estimate of ourselves? Ought such beings ever to degrade themselves by wrong-doing, or sell their heritage for a

mess of pottage, as Esau did? Oh! let us get heaven's evaluation of our souls.

[2] Again, our text points out the only way of social transformation and uplift, namely, through the repentance and salvation of each individual. You cannot save men *en masse*. You can save them only one by one. And society can never be made what it should be without repentance, leading to regeneration and the restoration of man's right relation to God. Men must be right with God in order to be right with one another.

[3] I cannot help thinking this morning of something that touches the feelings. If the angels of God know when a sinner repents, and if they rejoice over his reclamation, may there not be other denizens of heaven who will also hear the glad news? Why should not the angels inform our loved ones, who have gone before to the better world, that you and I have repented and returned to God? Would it not be wonderful if some persons here this morning should permit the glad tidings of their conversion to be borne to heaven to fill the hearts of angels and saints with rapturous rejoicing? God grant that it may be so! Amen.

42. The Divine Quality Of Mercy. The Fourth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 6:36-42

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. (Luke 6:36-42)

“BE YE MERCIFUL even as your Father in heaven is merciful.” Such is the injunction of Christ in the opening verse of the gospel for today. This verse is immediately connected with the verse that precedes, which sets forth the character of our heavenly Father's mercy: “But love your enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the sons of the Most High: for He is kind toward the unthankful and evil.” Thus the goodness and mercy of God are to be the norm of our feelings and conduct.

However, there is one quality about divine mercy that we should always remember. It is mercy inwrought with justice. It is not mere sentiment, which, in gushing over human sin, calls it only weakness, and apologizes for it and minimizes its heinous character. While it is wonderfully kind, it does not call good evil, nor put light for darkness, nor darkness for light.

With this distinction in view, we can see how this beautiful divine quality of mercy is applied by our Lord in this lesson.

I. In Regard To Judging.

Says our divine Teacher in the text: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive (or release), and ye shall be forgiven (or released.)”

True mercy always displays a generous spirit as over against a censorious spirit. Have you ever known persons who invariably judged people by the lowest and basest standards; always read into their actions the worst ulterior motives? The speaker once had a fellow-student of this kind. One day we asked him why he was always so uncharitable in his judgment of others. He replied that all people were actuated by selfish motives. Then we asked him, “Well, are you yourself always impelled by selfish motives?” “Well, yes,” he replied, “all people are.” “That explains your temper of mind then,” we said; “you are measuring other people by your own yardstick. But it is a very poor, defective yardstick.”

Now that is what Christ meant when He said: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; and condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.” The person who is harsh in his judgment of others, always attributing to them the most unworthy motives, surely is preparing for himself a severe judgment day. How can God receive a person of such a disposition into heaven? Would it not introduce censoriousness and fault-finding there? And would not that destroy its heavenly character? Therefore he that judges will also be judged, and by the same measure he meted to others. Judgment comes upon the ungenerous soul in another way, one that does not wait for the tribunal of the last day. It destroys the happiness of the fault-finder. Have you ever seen a censorious person whose face did not reveal the misery that dwelt in his soul? Note the corners of his mouth, how they are drawn down! His heart is consumed with ill-will, resentment and envy. He sits and broods over the “evil that men do,” and believes that all of them do evil, or else do good for an evil purpose. What a poor, sour, embittered life such a man lives! On the other hand, the man who thinks kindly of his fellowmen, even of the unworthy, and seeks to do them good at every opportunity — what a buoyant existence is his!

Even in the case of wicked people, we ought to be as generous toward them as we can be, without conniving at, apologizing for, and endorsing their evil ways. It is our duty to try to win them from sin to Christ, and to do them good in every way we can, just as our heavenly Father “is kind toward the unthankful and evil.”

The beautiful quality of mercifulness also displays itself in another way:

II. In Regard To Measuring.

How strong and yet how smooth and flowing are Christ’s, words in our text! “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

When a man gives a heaped up measure of grain or fruit, we say that he is giving “gospel measure.” This expression comes from our lesson. We believe that Christ, laid down here a good general rule. If we give good measure to others, they will be likely to treat us also in a generous way. True, there will be exceptions, for some men are especially depraved. On the other hand, if we scrimp our measures, and scarcely fill them up to the brim, our fellowmen will be very apt to give us just as scant measure in return. This is true, not only in trading, but in other ways: if we gossip about our neighbors, impute to them mean motives, and judge them harshly, such treatment will lead them to look upon us with suspicion, because they will reason that we are “measuring others with our short bushel or yardstick.” The sordid motives that we assign to others they will be likely to assign to us. Thus “with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” The text, in the next place, has something to say —

III. In Regard To Guiding.

It says: “Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?” This saying is so apt that it has become a popular proverb.

But what has this brief parable to do with “the divine quality of mercy?” Perhaps Christ did not mean to keep up a strict logical sequence in all His discourses, but aimed to say incisive things that would stand out like

cameos in clear and distinct relief, so that they could be easily remembered. However, this may be the connecting thought. If we judge others harshly, and measure out to them scantily, that very fact will prove that we are not truly enlightened spiritual leaders, and therefore, when we undertake to lead others, we will ourselves fall into the ditch, and our blind followers will come tumbling after us and upon us. This will also explain what is added by our Lord: "The disciple is not above his master; but every one when he is perfected shall be as his master." That is, if the teacher is blind, so will the disciple be, and the more nearly he perfects himself in false teaching, the more his pupils will be like him. The great lesson we learn here is this: If we will be kind and gentle like our heavenly Father, we shall be His children, and therefore shall be truly enlightened; whereas if we are blinded by envy, suspicion, uncharitableness, we shall never become competent spiritual teachers, but will lead others in the same wrong and dangerous ways we ourselves follow. Are we blind teachers? Are we blind followers? May God by His Word and Spirit open our eyes that we may see the way of truth clearly and walk in it!

We come now to our last thought concerning the noble quality of mercy:

IV. In Regard To Criticizing And Fault-finding.

Our Lord had a trenchant and pointed way of teaching spiritual truth. In enforcing His great lesson on mercy, He used the illustration about wanting to pluck the mote out of a brother's eye when there is a beam in one's own eye. That is certainly a common fault. And it is always the ungenerous person, the person who 'judges others unkindly,' who has the largest beam in his own eye. The reason is not far to seek. The big beam in his own eye obscures and distorts his vision, so that the tiny mote in the brother's eye becomes magnified into a beam.

This acute simile penetrates to the heart of the ungenerous temper of mind, for it is always the ungenerous person who has the greatest faults himself. Notice that everywhere around you. The person who is comparatively free from faults is never a fault-finder; whereas the extremely faulty person almost always, perhaps always, cavils at the faults of his fellowmen and the general order of the world.

Our Lord also showed his acumen in the closing sentence of His parable. He did not say we should overlook entirely the mote in a brother's eye. No; that would be to connive at imperfection. But Christ teaches the proper order of procedure: first, cast the beam out of your own eye; then you can see clearly to ask your brother to correct his fault. The old adage, "Sweep your own doorstep," is a good one, and would spare the world much carping at others. However, if our own doorstep is swept clean, and our neighbor keeps his in a way that is hurtful to himself and his neighbors, it becomes our duty to tell him about his fault, and ask him to correct it. Then he cannot retort that you would better look after your own doorstep.

Having dealt with our subject somewhat negatively, let us put our application in a more positive form. Let us cultivate the divine quality of mercy toward our fellowmen; let us cherish a kindly, appreciative and generous feeling toward them, always putting the best possible construction, on their conduct; let us deal gently with their faults, and carefully watch our own. Let us do all this because it is right to do so; then we shall ourselves receive kindly judgment from our fellowmen, and at the last day our Lord will, say to us: "During your life time you cultivated the heavenly spirit; enter into the joy of your Lord, and receive your heavenly inheritance."

43. The Rewards Of Faith. The Fifth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 5:1-11

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11)

WHAT A GREAT THING is Christian faith! How it overcomes all obstacles! We need not wonder that the apostle wrote these throbbing lines: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." In our suggestive gospel lesson for today, the holy and triumphant character of faith is illustrated in a most striking way: first, in the fact that Jesus took special pains to teach the gospel to the people who "pressed upon Him to hear the word of God;" second, in the obedience of Peter and his fellow-apostles in launching out into the deep and letting down their nets after a fruitless night of fishing. So let us gather the suggestions of our text under the theme, "The Rewards of Christian Faith." Then we shall see how utterly in error are those infidels and rationalists who try to belittle faith, and scoff at it as mere blind credulity. Our text teaches clearly that —

I. Faith Is Rewarded By Divine Instruction.

The people fairly crowded around Christ, so anxious were they “to hear the Word of God.” Did Christ disappoint them, or did He reward their faith and desire? The latter, as we might expect. The people thronged about Him so closely that He could not speak to them on the shore of the lake of Genesaret; so He looked about and saw two unoccupied boats near at hand. Entering into one of them, which was Peter’s, He commanded its owner to push it out a few yards from the land; and then, converting the little vessel into a pulpit, He preached to the people the Word of God. Thus their desire for God’s Word, which connoted some degree of faith, was gratified.

It is most suggestive — Jesus sitting in that small boat, and preaching to the multitude ranged on the ascending slope of the shore. It was a real house of God, a real place of worship. Jesus seemed to find a pulpit almost everywhere from which to preach the gospel. He did not think that His pulpit ministrations were to be confined to a regulation pulpit in a church, with all the appurtenances of formal worship. To His mind, judging by His conduct, it did not mean a “cheapening” of the gospel to proclaim it on the street, on a boat, in the open air, on the hillside, and in many other places besides the temple and the synagogues. May we not look upon Him as our example, that we, too, as His ministers, should improve every favorable opportunity to preach the gospel?

A sane and sensible gospel, such as the true gospel is, if proclaimed earnestly in public places, on the streets, in the parks and elsewhere, would do much to win the non-churched masses to Christ and the Church. Many people want the Word of God, but they do not realize definitely what they want, because they have never had the real gospel preached to them. It is the duty and commission of the evangelical ministers of the Church to give them that gospel of grace and salvation which will satisfy the longing in their weary hearts. Will we convert boats, sea-shores, market places, street plazas, and public parks into pulpits? Will we have faith that God will bless such earnest efforts? He will reward our faith if we do, and if, at the same time, we are “as wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

II. The Venture Of Faith Is Rewarded By Success.

When Jesus had finished His sermon to the people, He said to Peter, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." For a moment Peter (here called by his first name, Simon) was skeptical; but the next moment his faith revived, and he said: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." You know the result: the net was dropped into the sea, and enclosed so great a multitude of fishes that the net began to break, and they had to call for help from the other boats.

What a volume of suggestion in Peter's "nevertheless, at thy word I will!" Though he and his fellow-fishermen had toiled in vain all night, yet at Christ's command he was willing to try again. Faith led to obedience, and obedience brought success. So it is always in the Christian's experience. It is the venture of faith that wins. Dubeity and wavering never accomplish anything worth while. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." While he fears and hesitates, the hero of faith enters the battle and achieves the victory.

How good it is to walk by faith! All people have to walk that way to a great extent whether they will or not, for no man knoweth what the morrow may bring forth; but if one can walk trustingly, believing that all things work together for good to them that love God, life is so much more buoyant. There is no chafing, no rebellion. And why should we not trust Christ as Peter did? Did not the Lord of the fishes know where the fishes were? So does not our Lord know just how we should walk, and what will be our destination, if we go in the way of His commandments?

Our lesson teaches that Christ is the Sovereign of nature. How else did He know that a school of fishes would come along just as Peter let down the net? It was not by a sort of clairvoyance or divination, that Christ knew such things. He had actual knowledge of all creatures. If so, we can also trust Him in the midst of the elements, and obey His commands in performing out natural, everyday duties. How often it has happened in our lives that He put a sense of duty into our minds, but we thought the task a hopeless

one! However, when we obeyed His will, we caught our fishes, as Peter did: our undertaking was successful.

To prove concretely the bracing and stimulating power of faith, we will cite a prominent example of the opposite frame of mind. The late Professor Clifford, who lost his faith, moaned that “the Great Companion was dead.” By this he meant that he no longer knew God as his friend and companion. This is the inevitable consequence of the loss of faith. It leads to agnosticism, pessimism and despondency. One may well ask, if such is the result of all this boasted freedom of thought, and the wonders it will accomplish, what is the use of it all? Deism and rationalism in a former day had liberty of thought, plenty of it. How much real truth have they given to the world? How much better have they made the race? Very little. No; doubt of the great verities of religion is always depleting; it drowns hope, saps courage, cuts the nerve of moral and spiritual striving. But faith, faith in God, in the Bible, in Jesus Christ — how it braces the heart and cures endeavor of all its faltering! “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

III. Faith Is Rewarded By A Clear Vision of Oneself.

When Peter saw the miracle that His master had performed, he cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Do you say that was no reward? Oh! yes, it was. Nothing is better for us than to see ourselves just as we are. There is nothing gained by having a wrong idea of ourselves, especially too high an opinion. That is a loss to us. To realize our sinful condition — Why, that is the very first step upward! It is the first truly ethical glimpse we get of our condition. And it means that pardon, cleansing, regeneration and justification are not far away. Nowadays men are always “patting themselves on the back.” Some of them are really going to be saved “by character.” The age is losing the sense of sin. Look at Peter — was there any hope for him before he saw himself as a sinner? Very little. But as soon as he cried, “I am sinful man,” he began his upward career, and by and by he became the great preacher at Pentecost and one of the great spiritual leaders of his age. Today his name is known in all Christendom and his influence is felt. Why? Because he saw his sins and repented of them.

Indeed, faith is a great eye-opener. Do you ask why? Because it leads us into the presence of the Sun of righteousness, whose bright rays flash into our souls, and enable us to see ourselves as we really are, helpless sinners in God's sight. That leads to repentance, and repentance to more faith, and faith brings-pardon, and pardon involves regeneration or the new life, and the new life carries with it peace, love and power. All of it a beautiful unity, is it not? All ethically organized and unified. No wonder Christian faith gives rhythm, poise and courage to the soul.

IV. Faith Is Rewarded By The Call To Service.

Service is a charmed word today; a great and a needed word. The Church cannot sit still in smug piety and comfort, and let the world drift to moral and spiritual ruin. If there ever was a clamant call for service, it comes to us today.

But let us not forget the divine order. Faith, reconciliation, and salvation go before service. "Tarry ye at Jerusalem until ye have received power;" then bear witness everywhere. The order is, "Saved to serve," not, "Serve to be saved." "How shall they preach except they be called?" And that is one of the most beautiful and comforting lessons of our gospel text for today. Let us note:

Though Peter begged of Christ to depart from him because he was a sinful man, Christ did not forsake him; He did the very opposite; He remained with him, and spoke to him a most gracious word of assurance: "Fear not; henceforth thou shalt catch men." And then the record adds that, when the men had brought the ship to land, "they forsook all and followed Him."

Do you see how faith always leads to discipleship and service, which shall be crowned with success. Jesus said to Peter, "Henceforth thou shalt catch men." Was this promise fulfilled? It was. Think of Peter's great sermon on the day of Pentecost! No other sermon, so far as history records, ever brought three thousand persons to their knees in humble repentance. Why did Peter become a great soul-winner? The secret is out; it is an open secret. For two reasons: First, "nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net," proving his faith; second, "I am a sinful man, O Lord," proving his repentance. This is the lesson: No man can find salvation and consequent

qualification for service by any other path. May we all learn this vital truth!
Here is faith:

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour divine; Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
Oh, may I from this day
Be wholly Thine!”

Here is repentance:

“With broken heart and contrite sigh,
A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free:
O God, be merciful to me.”

Here is service:

“To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill;
Oh, may it all my powers engage
To do my Master’s will!”

44. The Righteousness That Ex- cels. The Sixth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 5:20-26

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. (Matthew 5:20-26)

The Collect for the day is most germane to the gospel, epistle and theme:

"Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This prayer sets forth both the source and the spirit of true Christian righteousness; its source is God, "the Author and Giver of all good things," and its spirit is true religion divinely grafted into the heart. This is the righteousness that our Lord, in the text, sets in contrast with the spurious kind of righteousness: "For I say unto you, Except your righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The trouble with the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was, it was devoid of true faith, love and humility. It was religiosity, but not religion. It was, in fact, a perversion. It was the kind that “plumes itself,” that “pats itself on the back,” and says, “Behold, how good you are!” Therefore it was self-regarding and self-centered, merely conventional, formal and respectable, and so did not spring from true love to God and man and intrinsic worth.

Our divine Teacher shows in the text at least three respects in which the righteousness of His followers must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. We will note these points. True Christian righteousness excels the Scribal and Pharisaic type —

I. In Respect To Love.

This is shown in verses 21 and 22, where Christ says: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, whosoever is angry with his brother,” etc.

The Scribes and Pharisees declared, “We keep the law, for we do not kill.” That was all; they were mere literalists and legalists. What more could be asked of them?

But Christ showed that true righteousness must go deeper. It is well enough to do no murder, and that commandment is needed today almost as much as it was in the olden times; but, after all, a man might not be a literal murderer, and yet might despise and hate his brother. So he could not claim to be truly righteous merely because he did not shed human blood.

So Christ goes on to probe the thought of righteousness to the very core. Even if a man is angry with his brother, he is in danger of the judgment. Christ here made the penalty for anger as severe as the Pharisees made that for murder. This refers to the anger that is kept in the heart, and does not become violent enough to break out into speech of any kind. Is not that a high standard of righteousness?

But if the anger burns in the heart so strongly that it bursts out into contemptuous speech, saying to a brother, “Raca,” the danger is greater; it brings the offender before a higher court, namely, “the council.” Then if the anger flames still higher, and leads to the angry expression, “Thou fool!”

the “Gehenna of fire” is imminent. The Hebrew word “fool” is *moreh*, and is an expression of condemnation. It is more than mere contempt; it means to pronounce sentence upon a brother. Today men often call one another “fools,” by which they mean only to express a feeling of contempt, the same as “Raca,” and not the same as “Moreh.” But even that is bad enough, for it imperils the soul; and of course “Raca” may in time lead to “Moreh.” The righteousness that Christ meant to inculcate was that no anger at all should dwell in the heart, and no expressions of contumely and condemnation should ever rise to the lips. The ethics of Christ were thorough-going, deep and inner. Mere conventional morality or righteousness was not enough.

In the next few verses of our gospel lesson the contrast between Christian and Pharisaic righteousness is still further shown —

II. In Respect To Humility.

We believe that verses 23 and 24 are often misunderstood: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Many people think this means, if you know of anyone who bears you any ill-will, you must go to him before you can go to the Lord’s Supper. If that were the meaning, very few persons would ever go to the holy communion, for few men of force but realize that there are some people who do not love them. By the time such a man would get around to see every pickayunish fault-finder, the communion season would be gone. No; that is not the meaning, but it is this: If you know that you have wronged your brother, so that he “has aught against you,” then you should go to him, and make the wrong right before you approach the altar. The real righteousness, in opposition to the Pharisaic species, is true love in the heart for all one’s fellowmen, whether they have wronged us or not.

This is the real point that Jesus was making against the outward and showy piety of the Scribes and Pharisees: They were proud and haughty; no matter how much they had wronged a fellowman, they would never humble themselves by going to him to confess their fault and to be reconciled to him, but, holding their heads in high disdain, they would bring their gifts to

God's altar, and make a great show of sanctity. One would think that, when they appeared before God to perform a religious service, their consciences would have been especially sensitive, and would not have permitted them to proceed until they had made their wrongs right; but; no! they closed their eyes to their own faults; they thought only of ostentatious piety, not of the kind that God would approve. They wanted the praise of men rather than the approval of God.

Yes, we must be right with our fellowmen, if we would be right with God. We have known persons who could not find peace with God until they had gone to one they had wronged, had confessed their fault, and received assurance of forgiveness. So there have been many men in Christian history who, like Zacchaeus, had to make all, possible restitution to their neighbors whom they had defrauded, before they could be accepted of God.

In one more respect must our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees and Scribes:

III. In Respect To Discretion.

The text says: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest he deliver thee to the judge," etc. This is a parable. What is its interpretation? Simply this: It is far wiser to come to an understanding with the man who has a case at law with you, especially when you are guilty, than for you to go into court with him, and then be sent to prison, where you will have to remain until you have "paid the uttermost farthing." Surely such discretion would be the better part of valor. Christ gave His disciples most sensible advice, proving Himself no fanatical idealist.

But the Pharisees lacked just this sense of prudence. They were too proud and obstinate to acknowledge any fault. Instead of agreeing with an adversary, and trying to right the wrong, they permitted themselves to be dragged into court; then, when proven guilty, they had to go to prison, all of it simply because they were too proud to confess their offense. Christ meant to teach His disciples that they should be more sensible and judicious than that; they should never be too proud and stubborn to confess a fault, and even when they were not in the wrong, they should make every reasonable effort to arbitrate matters in an amicable way rather than to go to law. We

leave it to the judgment of all whether such a policy is not better than the proud and unbending temper of the Pharisees.

However, we believe that Christ's teaching here is capable of further application. When, on account of our sins, we have a controversy with God, we ought at once to confess our faults, and come to an agreement with Him, rather than proudly refuse, and then be brought before His judgment bar, and receive sentence of eternal condemnation. Then divine justice will demand the uttermost farthing — but that a poor, sinful man can never pay.

A few words of practical application will be apropos:

[1] There are some people who do not have as much righteousness as the Scribes and Pharisees. Those men were punctilious about keeping the moral law, at least according to its letter. But some people keep neither the letter nor the spirit of the law. The Pharisees prayed at least twice a day; but some people do not pray at all. The Pharisees fasted twice a week; there are some people who never fast, but gormandize at every meal, and make themselves too stupid for either mental or spiritual activity. The Pharisees paid tithes of all they had; some people never pay even a penny to help God's cause. Yet these very people often try to justify themselves because they are not Pharisees! But if the Pharisaic kind of righteousness will exclude people from the kingdom of heaven, how do you suppose that people whose righteousness falls below that of the Pharisees shall be able to gain an entrance there?

[2] But how shall we attain the true righteousness which exceeds the Scribal and Pharisaic type? The natural man cannot attain it. In order to attain true righteousness, that of the inner spirit, we must be converted, changed into new creatures, must receive the Spirit of God into our hearts. The Collect for the day points out the only way: "O Lord, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." Here is also a beautiful hymn on the contrast of sin and grace:

"All that I was, my sin, my guilt,
My death, was all my own;
All that I am I owe to Thee,
My gracious God alone.

“The evil of my former state
Was mine, and only mine;
The good in which I now rejoice
Is Thine, and only Thine.”

45. The Divine Provider. The Seventh Sunday After Trinity.

Mark 8:1-9

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away. (Mark 8:1-9)

INTERNAL EVIDENCE proves that there were two occasions on which our Lord multiplied the loaves and fishes, and fed the multitude. The gospel for today relates one of these incidents. The other is told in Mark 6:32-44. Matthew also describes the two occasions, and in the same order, with substantially the same details. Both evangelists tell that in the first miracle there were five loaves and two fishes and five thousand men, while in the second there were seven loaves and a few fishes and four thousand men. This is one of those “duplicates” that give the critics so much trouble. Following their usual penchant for finding contradictions, they say that there was only one incident of this kind, and that the two recitals are “variant” accounts.

But such is not the case. If these incidents were the result of a desire on the part of the early Christians to multiply miracles, surely the second miracle would have been made greater than the first. Instead of that, both Matthew and Mark say that five thousand were fed the first time and only four thousand the second time; also that in the first miracle only five loaves

were used, and in the second seven. All this proves that the incident is not the work of a writer of fiction or a miracle monger, who surely would have reversed the order.

We are glad to note that this view is held and advocated by the following Biblical interpreters: J. A. W. Haas, in “The Lutheran Commentary,” Matthew B. Riddle, in “The International Revision Commentary,” and J. R. Dummelow, in “The One Volume Bible Commentary.” The same opinion was held by Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Bengel, Ohlshausen, Lange, Stier, Kiel, Meyer, and many others.

But critical questions aside, we may derive from our text a suggestive and comforting theme, “The Divine Provider.” Let us note some of His characteristics.

I. His Tender Compassion And Concern.

Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said: “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for some of them are come from afar.” What deep compassion and love throb through the words of Jesus! It is the same compassion that we read of in one of the Psalms: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.”

Our blessed Lord’s action in feeding the hungry multitude proves that He is interested in the “bread problem.” He cares for people’s physical hunger. He was moved with compassion for the multitude, and therefore He fed them. Here is the same Lord who indicted, “Give us this day our daily bread,” in the Model Prayer. He is the same Lord of whom the Psalmist spoke: “The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.” Only one God is revealed in the Bible from beginning to end — one in love, mercy and righteousness. “He feedeth the young ravens when they cry.” “He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”

So we may know that there is not a modern social, economic and industrial problem that does not enlist the interest and compassion of our Divine Provider; and when people trust Him, and listen to His Word, and follow Him for spiritual food, as the multitudes of the text did, we may depend upon it that He will find some way to satisfy their physical needs. The trou-

ble is, so many people come to want, not through any solicitude for spiritual bread, but simply through their wicked carelessness and improvidence; then they blame God because He does not at once come to their relief. It would be better to note the conditions on which Christ performed this miracle: the multitudes had followed Him three days, intent on hearing the gospel from His lips. It was in these circumstances that He multiplied the loaves and fishes. He performed no miracle in all His earthly career for people who were going in the way of sin — unless they repented and came to Him in faith. The same conditions on which God helps people are set forth by the Psalmist: “Once” I was young, but now I am old; yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” Note that it is the righteous, not the wicked, who have the promise of divine care.

If the people of the world would care more for God’s Word, would feed more on spiritual bread, they would have more-daily bread for their bodily hunger. Nearly all the physical suffering in the world comes from sin — largely from the selfishness of the rich, and sometimes from the unthriftiness of the poor. Let the world get right with God and His program of righteousness, and the bread problem and all other economic problems will soon be solved. Nobody will have too much; nobody will have too little. And what is the Divine Provider’s program? Listen to it: “I have compassion on the multitude, for they have been with me for three days, and have nothing to eat.” He teaches the same truth in another connection: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

II. The Divine Provider’s Method.

1. He used the meager supplies on hand.

Taking the seven loaves and few fishes, He made them the basis for the increased provision. This proves the soberness of His method. A writer of fiction would have depicted Him as ignoring these meager supplies; not so the gospel writer who was describing an actual event in the life of the historical Redeemer.

What an important lesson we may learn from Christ’s method! He takes the little we have and multiplies it. You have a little money; He wants you

to use it judiciously, not to spend it foolishly, and He will make it the nucleus of more to supply your need as the days come and go. You have a little seed; do not throw it away, but plant it carefully and cultivate it faithfully, and God will make it fruitful. You have a little talent for service, consecrate it to Christ and His cause, and He will vastly increase your usefulness. You have received some grace through regeneration; make use of it through the means of grace, and you will grow in sanctification of the Spirit. It is all a beautiful plan, organic, unfolding, inspiring.

2. He did not forget to give thanks.

When He took the loaves, He gave thanks; when He took the fishes, He blessed them. In both cases He “said grace before meals.” He had no doubt that God was in the physical world as well as in the spiritual. He knew that God was in and back of all “the laws of nature,” and was able to control them according to His will. In this matter our Lord set us a good example. Do we always “say grace” before we partake of God’s bounties? I fear many people do not. Three times a day they sit down to a plentifully spread board, and yet they never even say, “Thank you,” to the Giver of all good things. Is that good manners? Is that treating God politely? Why, people thank one another for even the slightest favors. If they do not, we think them rude, ill-bred and ungrateful. But how do many people treat their Heavenly Father? Let careless people think soberly over their ways, and try to amend them.

3. He acted in an orderly way.

He did not permit the people to ramble around like a rabble while they were being fed, but commanded them to sit down on the ground, no doubt in companies, so that they could be fed expeditiously, so that none would be overlooked, and so that ill-mannered people would not get more than their share. You may look at every detail of Christ’s life, and you will find no place where He acted in a disorderly manner.

Let us make Him our model; let us have order in our homes, in our churches, in our services, in our studies, in our class-rooms, in our business and work in life. In our giving to the Lord’s cause we ought to have order and system. Says the apostle, “Let everything be done decently and in or-

der;” “God is not the author of confusion, but of order.” If order is not “heaven’s first law,” still it is one of heaven’s laws. Orderly in all our ways, we shall be the children of “Him who ordereth all things sweetly.”

4. He gave the people only plain, wholesome food.

This fact is very practical and suggestive. Christ will not perform miracles to furnish people with luxuries. Perhaps some people now-a-days would find fault with the plain and simple fare; would complain because no ice-cream and cake and pastries were furnished. But what clear proof of foolish human invention would the story have shown if it had said that Christ supplied dainties and luxuries in a miraculous way for the hungry multitude! No; the miracles of the Bible ever remain within the limits of sanity.

If people want to live sumptuously, they will have to supply the provisions by their own efforts, and not look to God for miracles and special providences to furnish them. Christ bade us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” but He said nothing about extravagant and sumptuous fare. If the world were satisfied with plainer and wholesomer food, it would be better off. If there were plainer living, there would be higher thinking. There would be less sensuality and more spirituality.

Another characteristic of the Divine Provider’s method was that —

5. He gave His disciples something to do.

It is significant that Jesus did not do everything Himself on this occasion. He did what no one else could do, performed the miracle; but the distribution of the food He gave over into the hands of the disciples. They could do that, and thus they had a share in the beneficent work. This fact suggests God’s method in both the natural and the spiritual realms. He does His part, but He does not do what men can do. Even in the evangelization of the world, He does not carry the gospel immediately, but mediately, to the nations. He multiplies the bread of life, but the churches must be His distributing agents. May all of us do our part well, and then we shall have a right to depend on Christ to do His part.

Having now considered the Divine Provider’s compassion and methods, let us consider —

III. The Divine Provider's Power.

This wonderful miracle proves the great doctrine that Christ was the Lord of nature. In many of His miracles He displayed the same kind of sovereignty, such as the stilling of the wind and waves, the turning of water into wine, and the healing of physical diseases. He who makes bread every day through both natural processes and the skill He gives to man found no difficulty in multiplying the food supply on this occasion. He performed a few miracles like this to prove that He was nature's Lord, and yet not enough to cause men to depend on miracles for their food supply. There is in the Bible a wise economy of the miraculous element; just enough to prove its divine source and power.

Since Christ proved Himself nature's King, and has so clearly displayed His compassion and concern for men in regard to their physical needs, we may trust Him for our daily bread as well as for our spiritual sustenance. "In some way the Lord will provide; it may not, be my way, it may not be your way; but in His own way the Lord will provide." All we need is to know His interest in our welfare and His power to supply our necessities. True, we cannot idle and lounge, and still expect Him to provide for us; but when we do our part by being industrious and faithful, as He has commanded us, we can rely on Him to do His part. Therefore He said, "Be not anxious for the morrow."

He knows every sparrow's fall, and says that we are of more value than many sparrows. He cares for the lilies of the field, and clothes them with more than regal beauty; how much more will He clothe you and me! Therefore "cast your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

In this particular age — this scientific age — it is extremely important and relevant to study our Lord's attitude toward the natural world and its relation to the spiritual realm. Read all His teaching, recall all His miracles, and you will discover that He never indicated that there was any contradiction or impassable gulf between nature and God, between science and religion, between the empirical and the metaphysical, between the natural and the supernatural. With Him all realms belonged to one cosmos, all were under the rulership of the Divine Sovereign, all were coordinated into one unified system. In the Model Prayer which He gave us, He begins with, "Our Father, who art in heaven," comes down to the earth with, "Give us this day

our daily bread,” and then connects heaven and earth again with, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

If we can get Christ’s world-view, we can look up to God and exclaim with the Psalmist, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” And we can echo the words of St. John, “All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” Yes, His Word teaches us the true religion and the all-sphered philosophy. All other world-views are fragmentary and unsatisfying. With the Divine Creator and Provider back of the universe, everything is explained; faith has an immovable basis, and hope an anchor that penetrates beyond the veil.

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word;
What more can he say than to you He has said,
Who unto the Saviour for refuge have fled?

“In every condition, in sickness, in health,
In poverty’s vale, or abounding in wealth,
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,
As thy days may demand, so thy succor shall be.”

46. The Test Of The False. The Eighth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 7:15-23

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:15-23)

IN A WORLD LIKE THIS, a world in which there are so much deception and hypocrisy, there ought to be some way by which we may test the false and discover the true. Can we find a test that will be infallible, or so nearly infallible that we need not be permanently deceived? We believe that such a test is given in our text. Here we are given warning against two classes of persons, false prophets and false professors of Christ's name. Now, in both cases what is the test which Christ gives us by which we may know the true character of these false people? In the first case we are to "know them by their fruits." In the second case they do not the will of God, but "work iniquity."

Here, then, is the acid test of Christianity: Does one live a godly life? What is the whole purpose of redemption through Christ? It is to save people from their sins and bring to them the righteousness of God. Christ came to "save His people from their sins." "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." The fruits of the Spirit are every Christian

grace and virtue; the fruits of the flesh are every sin. God said through His prophet, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” We cannot look into men’s hearts, it is true, but we can see their lives, and we may know that, if they do not bring forth the real fruits of righteousness, but live in sin and selfishness, they are not Christians, no matter how loud may be their professions.

Now let us apply this test to the two kinds of characters depicted in our text.

I. The False Prophets.

In our text Christ said: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Since there have been some mistaken interpretations of this passage, plain as it seems to be, we ought first to decide this question:

1. Who the false prophets are.

We shall be helped if we will note the precise term used in the text to designate these prophets. It is pseudo-prophets. And the Greek word *pseudos* means a lie; therefore the exact translation would be, “Beware of lying prophets.” Thus we see that these men are liars. They prophesy lies, and they know that they are lies. Hence they must be men who purposely deceive. The word “lying” indicates their corrupt and deceitful character, while the word “prophets” denotes that they are teachers. Hence false prophets must be men who purposely teach false doctrine, their design being to lead people away from the true doctrines of Christ.

Their mendacious character is further brought out in what Christ says about them in the rest of the verse: “Who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” The picture set before is this: Here are some wolves which desire to pounce upon the flock and devour it; but if they approach their intended victims in their real garb, they will at once be detected, and the sheep will flee to a place of safety. So the ferocious beasts first find some sheep’s fleeces, and place them upon themselves, thus hiding their real character until they can get in among the unsuspecting sheep, when they attack and devour them. So the lying prophets put on an innocent outer garb in order to deceive the unwary and do them fatal injury. False

prophets are intentional deceivers, corrupt in heart, putting on a garb of goodness and even of piety in order to ingratiate themselves into the confidence of the people; and when they have done that, they can readily lead them to accept their false teaching.

It is thought by some persons that the term “false prophets” may be applied to those who teach erroneous doctrines through a mistaken judgment, while they themselves are sincere, and even live good and upright lives. But the inspired words of the text will not bear such an interpretation. A pseudo or lying prophet cannot be a sincere man; he must be one whose heart is deceitful and whose message is false. More than that, it would be an ethical impossibility for a sincere person to be like a wolf wearing sheep’s clothing for the very purpose of disguising his true character. No; our Lord here had reference to impostors, whose motives were as corrupt as their teaching was untrue.

And here we ought to learn, for our own spiritual good, a lesson of applying the Holy Scriptures properly. It is important that we be “workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth.” If we misuse the Word of God, we will do ourselves spiritual harm, and will also do harm to the cause of true religion. The truth can be furthered only by making a correct use of God’s holy Word. This is especially vital in a Church that calls itself the “Church of the Word,” which ought to be particularly careful to set a good example of the most careful and scrupulous exegesis and application of that Word.

So in the case of our text we should be extremely careful to apply it to the proper persons, and not to apply it to the wrong persons. For example, it would be wrong to apply the term “false prophets” (that is, according to the original, pseudo prophets) to any of our fellow-Christians who may teach what we believe to be error, and yet who give every evidence, by their good lives and characters, that they are sincere and earnest. Some of them make great sacrifices for Christ and His kingdom; pay liberally to the cause of Christ, and send missionaries to the ends of the earth. They may bear more of the fruits of the Spirit in their lives than some of their critics do. It would be ungenerous to employ the drastic terms of our text in describing their characters. Whatever else may be said of them, they surely cannot be wolves in sheep’s clothing, for they teach openly and frankly what they believe, and do not come to people under a deceptive disguise. It would be very harsh to say that “inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

What should be our attitudes, therefore, to the people who accept the Scriptures and believe in Jesus Christ and the other main evangelical doctrines, but who hold and teach what we believe to be erroneous doctrines? We should not call them by such epithets as “false prophets and ravening wolves,” for that does not describe their characters; for if we thus condemn them, we may be guilty of sinning against the charity of the gospel. Christ expressly condemns an uncharitable judgment, for He says: “Judge not that ye be not judged, and condemn not that ye be not condemned.” So let that point be settled: we are not to sin against the law of Christian charity by applying the drastic terms of the Bible to people whom Christ and the inspired writers did not have in mind.

On the other hand, we should frankly express our belief that they are in error, that they misunderstand the Word of God respecting certain doctrines, and at the proper times we should point out their mistakes and bear unequivocal testimony to the truth. All this can be done in a frank and manly way, and with positiveness of conviction, without bandying epithets, or calling in question the sincerity of those who differ from us. It is proper to apply the term “false prophets” only to those people who, by their speech and conduct, give incontestable proof that they are prompted by intentional deceit and use the disguise of truth for a time to lead the unwary astray. Where we have such indubitable evidence, it is right to call these people by the right name — that of “false prophets” and “ravening wolves.” In the absence of such evidence, we are guilty of “judging” and “condemning” in using drastic terms. In case of doubt it will be better to err, if err we must, on the side of charity.

2. How to test the false prophets.

Our Lord Himself indicates clearly the test. He says: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit,” etc.

Did Christ here point out the decisive test of false teachers and their false doctrines? He surely did: it is the un failing test. The kind of fruit a tree bears is most certainly the final and sure index of the tree’s character. If it brings forth worthless and bitter fruit, it must be a worthless tree; if it brings forth good fruit, it must be a good tree. How could anything be plainer?

Now what is the real fruit of true Christian character and doctrine? We have already shown that it is a pure and godly life. The whole plan of redemption through Christ was to accomplish for man an ethical restoration — that is, to save him from sin and lead him to righteousness. This is so evident that we need to refer to only one of many classical proof texts (Gal. 5:22-24): “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control; against such there is no law. And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.” This agrees perfectly with Christ’s teaching in the text: “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit,” and indicates precisely what the character of the fruit is that grows on the good tree of Christian truth. Every teacher and every teaching must submit to this test — does it bring forth the fruit of purity of life? Does it produce upright Christian character? That is the final and decisive test, because the production of a truly righteous life, both inner and outer, is the foundational purpose of the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

It is important now to see how this ordeal will apply to the false prophets spoken of in our text. Christ plainly calls them pseudo or lying prophets, showing that they are corrupt both in heart and in doctrine. But He also gives warning that they will come under a disguise: while inwardly they are wolves, they will assume sheep’s clothing. Thus they will try to hide their ulterior purpose. This means that for the time being they behave themselves very innocently by putting on an outward appearance of piety and veracity, in order to ingratiate themselves into the confidence of their intended victims. That is the ruse employed by every impostor the world over. He never appears in his real character: if he did, he never would succeed in his purpose.

So Christ says, “Beware.” That is, if a man who is a stranger comes and professes to be a prophet, be on your guard; do not follow him blindly and immediately; wait and see what kind of a life he lives. He may be a false prophet; his outward guise of innocence may be only a sheep’s fleece which hides the wolf underneath. So wait and apply the test, which is this: “You shall know him by his fruits.” If he is a true prophet, a real follower and teacher of the religion of Christ, he will live a truly holy life, not only for a short time, but from month to month and from year to year. But — note this carefully — if he is a wolf clad in sheep’s clothing, he will soon betray himself; he cannot keep up his false disguise very long; the fleece will slip off

at some point and uncover the wolf's hair underneath; if you look sharply, you will see that his feet have claws instead of hoofs; sometime, too, he will forget himself and will give vent to a howl instead of a bloat; then you will know that he is a ravenous wolf and not an innocent sheep.

This is the meaning of Christ when He changes the figure from the sheep and the wolf to the tree and its fruit, and says of the false prophets, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Here we may interpret the new simile. A tree may put on very profuse foliage, and make a fine show of flowers; but do not judge it prematurely; wait till the fruiting time comes, and see what kind of fruit it will bear; for the fruit is the decisive test of a tree. So watch your professed prophets. If they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in their lives, and teach the true doctrines of Christ, you may give them your confidence; but if they are corrupt in heart, they will presently show it in their lives; they cannot long keep up their deception and hypocrisy. Their fell designs will soon become evident. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit; neither can a wicked heart bring forth a truly Christlike life.

Here, then, we have the unfailing test of teachers and their doctrines. Just as impostors cannot for a long time live good lives, but will soon betray themselves (for "out of the heart the mouth speaketh"), so corrupt doctrines cannot bring forth salutary results. Let us put the test. Will a teaching that undermines faith in the Bible and in Christ bear good fruit in godly lives? Suppose a young man who has been a Christian, and has been true in practice to his principles, should be led astray by infidel teaching, so that he would renounce Christ and the Church, what would be the effect on his character and life? Why, he certainly would deteriorate even in common morality, to say nothing of the higher Christian graces and virtues. Everybody knows that the infidels and agnostics of a community are not its moral glory. On the other hand, suppose that a bad man is truly converted by the genuine teaching of Christian faith, would not the effect on his life be salutary? Would he not be a transformed man ethically as well as spiritually? Everybody knows he would. Note the remarkable changes for the better in the lives of Paul, Justin Martyr, Augustine, John Newton, John Bunyan, Rowland Hill, Jerry McAulley, and millions of others who were converted through faith in Jesus Christ. Yes, my friends, our Saviour's acid test holds good for doctrines as well as prophets, "By their fruits ye shall know them." We state it again and again for emphasis: the great purpose of the Christian

religion is to save people from sin and make them Godlike, Christlike, and any doctrine that fails to produce that effect cannot be the true Christian doctrine.

The rest of our text must be dealt with more briefly. Christ turns to another class of persons and applies to them the same ultimate test. They are —

II. False Professors Of His Name.

Evidently the false prophets were those who taught doctrines contrary to the teaching and principles of Christ. But there is another class of deceivers — those who profess to be followers of Christ, and are not.

1. First

He says, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Here again the same test is applied to those who simply make an outward profession of Christian faith. They glibly repeat the name, “Lord, Lord,” but their faith is not so fixed on Him that they do the will of God, which is to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. Their lives are self-centered, not centered on God.

We learn from this part of the text how vain is mere outward profession, while the heart is far from God and the life remains unregenerate, untouched by the sanctifying and spiritualizing power of true faith.

2. Second

Strange as it may seem, there will be people who, at the last day, will set forth the claim before Christ that they have prophesied, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in His name, and yet He will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

And who are these persons? They are those who, by various devices and deceptions, and even by the holy name of Christ, have pretended to do marvelous things, and perhaps have thereby led many people astray, but all the time they have been untrue to His ethical and spiritual principles. The text

does not say that they really performed the wonders they recited, but only that they professed to do so. Their claim was a false claim. They may have deceived a good many people, but they could not deceive Christ, who was all the while scrutinizing their motives and their lives. So when they appear before His judgment bar, He unveils their duplicity and exposes their real character. What is the acid test in this case? It is the same as it was with the false prophets and the people who cried, "Lord, Lord." It is brought out in the last sentence: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." How searching, how fundamental is the alembic that Christ applies! Their fruit is again the test. While these deceivers were pretending to do marvelous things in the name of Christ, they were all the time working iniquity; they were living impure lives. Yes, at the last day, if not before, the test holds good, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

The application of our text is therefore quite evident:

[1] Let us beware of false teachers and their doctrines, so that we may not be led away from true faith in Christ and His holy Word. As Paul exhorts, "Be not tossed about with every wind of doctrine."

[2] Let us have true faith in Christ, not merely a nominal faith which says, "Lord, Lord," without meaning it, and which cannot purge us from our sins, and so cannot bring forth "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." True faith in the holy Redeemer must eventuate in a Christlike, life.

"Thou strong Defense, thou holy Light,
Teach us to know our God aright,
And call Him Father from the heart;
The Word of life and truth impart.

"That we may not love doctrines strange,
Nor e'er to other teachers range,
But Jesus for our Master own,
And put our trust in Him alone."

Note: For the closing prayers at this service we would suggest the use of Collects 38, 43 and 49 on pages 176 and 177 of the "Common Service Book with Hymnal." In the old "Book of Worship" these Collects are numbered 10, 16 and 20, pages 118-120.

47. The Right Use Of Earthly Possessions. The Ninth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 16:1-9

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. (Luke 16:1-9)

THE PARABLE of the gospel for today, usually known as the parable of "The Unjust Steward," is regarded as very difficult of interpretation. However, in explaining any metaphor, simile, parable, or other figure of speech, we must always try to find the point of comparison or contrast. For instance, when Christ called Herod a "fox," He meant that the king was like a fox only in slyness. In our parable for today we must be sure to find just what our Lord meant to illustrate; then we shall have no difficulty; provided, further, that we try to understand just how He used a certain idiom of speech that was current in His day.

This lesson teaches "The Right Use of Earthly Possessions," which will be our theme. The chief idea in Christ's mind was that worldly people are much wiser and shrewder in using money for their purposes than Christian people are in using money for the true, divinely intended purpose. So let us

first attend to the interpretation of the parable, and then make a practical application of it for our spiritual profit.

I. The Interpretation Of The Parable.

This will appear as we follow the narrative. A rich man had a steward who was the overseer of his possessions. But the steward became wasteful of his master's property, and this fact was reported to the master, who then called his employee to an account, and told him he would be dismissed from his lucrative position. Then the factor was in a sore strait for a while. What was he to do? He had lived softly and luxuriously so long that he was not able to dig, that is, to work for a living, and he was too proud to beg. Having been used to living by his wits, he now set them to work to extricate himself from his new difficulty. Presently he concocted a shrewd scheme. The employees under him — could he not make use of them? If he could in some way put them under obligation to him, then, when he was dismissed from his position, they would be willing to befriend him and receive him into their houses. So the scheme he fell upon was this: He went from one of his master's debtors to another, and asked them what they owed the master, and when the sum was named, he reduced it in every case. The business methods of that day enabled him to do this, because his master had made him complete overseer over his property. Today such a device would hardly be feasible, but remember that Jesus was drawing His illustration from the conditions of His own time. In this way the steward won the good will of a number of his neighbors, and put them under obligation to help him in his extremity. He could then go on the principle that "one good turn deserves another." When his employer learned of his artifice, he complimented him on his shrewd and foresighted scheme, as much as to say, "Well, while you are a rogue, you are a clever one; you know how to look out for number one." He did not commend his dishonesty or selfishness, but only his worldly sagacity.

What lesson, now, does our Lord draw from His parable? It is clearly contained in this sentence: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." By this He meant that worldly people use more thought, wit and ingenuity to attain their unworthy ends than Christian people do to attain their high and noble purposes. Worldly people

are wonderfully resourceful in the use of wealth. How often God's people are stupid, slow and half-hearted in the employment of earthly possessions in order to make friends of God and the angels, who will do them real and eternal good! There are some things that We Christian people can even learn from Satan. He is very busy and resourceful; so should we be. So we may learn the lesson of sagacity and industry from worldly people, even though we disapprove of their motives and methods.

That is precisely what Christ teaches in the next verse of our gospel: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting abodes." But some people say that the meaning here is difficult, if not obscure. Not at all, when you remember the idiom which Christ used, and which was perfectly understood by His hearers. The term, "mammon of unrighteousness," should be put in quotation-marks to indicate its colloquial use. It was the current term for money, just as today we often call money "filthy lucre," not because it is evil in itself, but because it is so often put to a bad use. So the expression, "the mammon of unrighteousness," was current in Christ's day. Christ's teaching, put into modern idiom, would be like this: "Make the right use of 'filthy lucre,' and it will do you great good."

Now let us make our Lord's meaning perfectly explicit by paraphrasing it: "Use your money in such a way as to win the approval of God and the angels, and then, when your money fails you in death, they will welcome you into the eternal home." Could anything be clearer? Could any lesson be more needed today than that very lesson? Oh, that all people, whether rich or poor, would so use their earthly possessions as to promote their spiritual life, extend God's kingdom, and thus win His approval in heaven forever! That this is the correct exposition of the text is proved by the verses that follow the gospel selection: "He that is faithful in little is also faithful in much; and he that is unrighteous in little is also unrighteous in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the 'unrighteous mammon' (money), who will commit to your trust the real riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No man can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

All this is explicable in this way: If you have not used your earthly goods faithfully for God and His kingdom, how can He entrust to you the infinitely higher riches of heaven and eternity? But you must use money; you must make it your servant in God's cause; you must not let it become

your master; for then God will not be your master; you cannot serve two masters; you cannot serve God and money; you must therefore make money your servant and God your master. How beautiful, sensible and well-balanced is the teaching of Christ! It stays as far from fanaticism as it does from worldliness. He does not want money to enslave us, but wants us to make money our servant to extend His cause and promote our spiritual welfare. Logically we are now brought to consider —

##II. The Application Of The Parable.

Most people like to have a sermon definite and specific. They do not want the preacher to deal too much in glittering generalities. It is well enough to enunciate great fundamental principles, but most of us want to be shown concretely just how to apply them to real life — that is, to make them practical. Therefore you may properly ask the question, In what ways may we use our money so that God will be pleased and our spiritual and eternal welfare promoted?

I must warn you, though, that you can neither earn nor buy salvation with your money. Our text is speaking to “the children of light,” and that means people who have already repented and accepted the salvation freely offered to them by grace. Being saved by grace, they desire out of gratitude and love to serve God in every way that is pleasing to Him and promotive of His kingdom. If there are any persons here today who have not yet accepted salvation, they should do that first, and then the rest of the sermon can be applied to them. Now we are ready to point out some of the practical ways in which Christians should be diligent and sagacious in using their money.

[1] In providing a livelihood for themselves and those dependent upon them.

Surely this is a Christian duty. Paul says pointedly (1 Tim. 5:8): “But if any provideth not for his own, and especially for his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.” Note also his plain advice in another connection (1 Thess. 4:10-12): “But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound more and more; and study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, even as we charged you; that ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing.” Consider also this good counsel (Eph. 4:28): “Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands that which is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath

need.” No less apt are these, words (2 Thess. 3:10-12): “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, If any man will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear of some who walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” There is a passage in the Old Testament that is extremely relevant (Prov. 22:29): “Seest thou a man diligent in business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.”

All these citations from Holy Writ indicate plainly one of the ways in which we may serve God and please Him with our earthly possessions, namely, by being diligent, thrifty, forehanded and frugal, so that we may earn our livelihood, keep our families in comfort, and so need not be dependent upon others or upon public charity. There is, indeed, an important sense in which “charity begins at home,” though it ought never to end there. This teaching of Scripture, that we should provide for our own needs as families, so that we can live in a fair degree of comfort, is, however, something far different from rolling in selfish luxury, while the poor are ground down by our hardhearted dealings, and cry for the necessaries of life. No; that is the wrong way to use money, and is therefore displeasing to God, who will say to such people at the last day: “I was hungry, and ye fed me not; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink.”

[2] Another proper use of money, especially among those who have much of it, is to invest it in an honorable business or industry that will give as many people as possible honest wages for honest labor.

Such a capitalist is in duty bound to protect his business in such way as not to ruin it, and thus throw his employees and himself out of the means of livelihood. That would not be charity. Therefore, even if he should not think of himself, he must pay only such wages as he can afford and keep his institution in a safe and prosperous financial condition. However, if he grinds down his workmen to starvation wages in order that he may pile up a fancy profit and roll in wealth, his use of money will not be pleasing to God, and so will never win him a welcome to God’s eternal habitation. Our Lord so identified Himself with people of all kinds that He said, whatever was done to the least of His brethren, was done to Him. Therefore a sin against a fellowman is a sin against Christ Himself.

[3] For wealthy people to establish and endow Christian institutions, educational, beneficent, or missionary, is a noble use of money, and is pleas-

ing to God.

We are thinking of a man and his wife who had considerable wealth. They gave enough of their possessions — in fact, by far the greater part of it — to erect two excellent buildings for a theological seminary, and to endow it quite munificently. Both of them have now passed to their home in heaven. But they, being dead, are yet speaking. They rest from their labors, but “their works do follow them.” That institution stands as an enduring monument to their memory, and reflects many times more luster upon them than the proudest Parian shaft or most ornate mausoleum.

Year by year young men graduate from that school, and go out into the Church to preach the gospel, and win souls for Christ. Is not that a right use of earthly possessions?

Do you not believe that, when those benefactors came to the gate of heaven, God and the angels welcomed them into everlasting habitations, and bestowed upon them the plaudit, “Well done, good and faithful servants.” For our part, we do not see why many more rich people do not erect monuments to their memory and perpetuate their Christian influence by founding, endowing or helping beneficent institutions that will continue to bless mankind from generation to generation.

In contrast with the instance given, we recall a prominent man who died some years ago worth a million dollars. During his life he made a good deal of loud profession about doing good and helping the poor; but, when his will was probated, not one cent was bequeathed to the cause of philanthropy; all of it went to keep a selfish relative in luxury and style all her life. Nowhere has a worthy monument been erected to his name. Such a life, such a death, such a memory — how pathetic to contemplate!

[4] But what can people of small means do with their money that will please God and the heavenly inhabitants? They can do more than they think they can, at least in many cases. As has already been said, they can be as wise as worldly people in making a living for themselves, so that they do not need to be dependent on the toil and sacrifice of others. That is worth while, and is pleasing to God. But such people can also give to God’s cause. They should not think that, if they give cheerfully and as God has prospered them, even though they cannot give large sums, their offerings are not acceptable to God. Let it be remembered that God looks upon the heart more than upon mere dollars and cents. Christ commended the poor widow who gave her mite, because she gave so much in proportion to the amount of

'her income and possessions. A pure motive makes a big offering; a selfish motive makes a small offering. It is not the size of the gift so much as the spirit of the giver that counts with God.

Nor should we think that our small gifts simply please God; they also help to promote His gospel in the world.

After all, it is not the large donations that constitute the millions of dollars that support the Church and disseminate the gospel. Most of the money that goes into the coffers of the Church is made up of the many, many comparatively small gifts of comparatively poor people. All of us can give something to God's cause; and whatever we give, let us give it in the spirit commanded by Paul (2 Cor. 9:6, 7): "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." We should also remember the wise man's admonition (Prov. 11:2,4): "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Yes, let us consecrate all our possessions to God. We are His stewards, and should display much more wisdom than the children of the world in the use we make of our entrusted gifts and goods, knowing that we shall some day have to give an account to Him.

"Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold."

48. Jesus Both Tender And Stern. The Tenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 19:41-48

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him. (Luke 19:41-48)

THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY naturally divides itself into two parts, for it contains the narratives of two incidents in the life of Christ: His weeping over Jerusalem and His casting the desecrators out of the temple. These two incidents indicate two different phases in the character and conduct of Christ; the first shows His tenderness, the second His sternness. These, as we shall see later, are not two contradictory traits of character, but rather two balancing phases or sides of the same holy and consistent person. We will deal with the two sections of the text in their chronological order.

I. The Tenderness Of Jesus.

The first incident is really a vital part of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, which we tried to elucidate and apply in the sermons on the First Sunday in Advent and on Palm Sunday. Those lessons were selected from

the gospel according to Matthew, while our lesson today is found in Luke, who gives some details that Matthew omits.

As the processional on that beautiful Palm Sunday ascended the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, they suddenly came to an elevation from which the city of Jerusalem appeared before them, located on the hills opposite the intervening valley of Kedron. It was like a panorama spread out before the gaze of the Saviour and His joyful followers. There was Mount Moriah crowned with the temple, whose roofs and parapets were resplendent in the morning sun; while farther away was Mount Zion ornate with towers and palaces. Perhaps many persons, less earnest and penetrating than Jesus, would have been simply impressed with the beauty of the scene, and would have exclaimed, in a kind of rapture, "How glorious!" He might have caught up the Psalmist's exclamation, "Beautiful for situation is Mount Zion!"

But Jesus saw deeper and further. Some one has suggested that on this day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem there were many persons who rejoiced; there were others who were filled with wrath; there was only one who wept; and that was Jesus. The word used here for "wept" is a strong word, meaning that He wept aloud, that He was really overcome with grief.

This affecting incident proves the tender love of Christ for the world, yes, for the sinful world. I wish you would notice this fact: Jesus wept for others, for sin-cursed and fated Jerusalem on that day as He rode in triumphal procession into the city; but in the days that followed, when Jerusalem seized, maligned and abused Him, condemned Him as a blasphemer and traitor, and put Him to the ignominious death on the cross, He never shed a tear for Himself. He saved others; Himself He could not save. He wept for others; for Himself He did not weep. Was there ever another who was so unselfish?

We fondly contemplate this tender side of Christ's character. It was one of His most conspicuous attributes. All through His life He was always affectionate and considerate toward those in distress. How many incidents might be cited! The healing of the sick, restoring sight to the blind, blessing the little children, feeding the hungry multitudes, raising from the dead the only son of a widow, and many more. No less tender were His words, as He said: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden;" also as He spoke comfortingly to His disciples: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid; believe in God and believe in Me." This is why people in

trouble of any kind go to Christ; they know that He is tender, kind and sympathetic, ever ready to give joy for sorrow and the oil of gladness for mourning. More people have been sustained by Christ's tender and affectionate promises than by anything else in all the world's checkered history. Your pastor has himself been able to comfort many a sorrowing one by quoting the blessed promises of our Lord, who never, like so many of the people of this world, turns people away empty who come to Him for consolation. One of the greatest and most inspiring things for mankind to know is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, weeps over a sinning and a sorrowing world. Oh! people of the world, stop and think for a moment of the tears of the incarnate God! If His sternness will not win you from your sins and evil fate, let His tears melt you to emotions of repentance and faith.

And why did Jesus shed those bitter tears over Jerusalem? Simply because of their sin and unbelief, and the consequent doom which He foresaw impending over them. And oh! the sadness of it! The tragedy of it! It was utterly unnecessary for them to bring upon them so dire a fate. He would have been only too glad to avert it. In one of the other gospels it is said that He exclaimed: "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under wings, and ye would not!" That is one of the most pathetic complaints ever uttered. And remember Christ did not give vent to it for Himself, but for the Jerusalem that was wickedly rejecting Him.

Yes, His prophetic soul foresaw the doom that was soon to be visited upon the city, and that intensified His grief. In the text He says: "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the day of thy opportunity, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes; for the days shall come when thine enemies shall cast up a wall about thee, and compass thee around, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

All this was fulfilled in the year 70 A. D., when Titus, the Roman general, surrounded the city with his legions. Instead of destroying it at once, he besieged it, determined to starve the inhabitants into submission. First he built a palisade around it, but this the Jews were able to set on fire and burn to the ground. Then he built a wall around the city. The sufferings of the im-

mured people is beyond description. Starving, fighting among themselves, driven to desperation, they perished by the thousands. And when finally their numbers were so reduced, and those who were still alive were too weak any longer to resist, Titus and his army entered the city, demolished all the buildings, including the temple, and actually plowed up the ground, so that they literally left scarcely one stone upon another. All this disaster Christ foreknew, and would gladly have averted it, had the Jews repented of their sins and put their trust in Him for their salvation. But they flung away their chance; they knew not the day of their visitation. How Christ would have saved them from this calamity we do not know; but we do know that sin is the source of all the sorrows that overtake the world; so that, if people would turn from their sins, the world would know no more war nor destruction by the sword. No doubt, too, even the natural casualties that befall the human family would be prevented by God's power and grace, if all men would repent and turn to Him.

Yes, my friends, this is the saddest word of tongue or pen: all the evils and sufferings that come upon the world might be avoided; they do not come upon us by blind necessity or malign fate, but by the willful sins of the people. That is what causes God to weep.

Now, since Christ has exhibited this tender affection, and has assured us of His willingness to take us under the wings of His love and protection, let us fly to Him, trust Him, Serve Him, and thus permit Him to save us from the disaster land doom of sin. He is ready and willing. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked may turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

But suppose we will not heed Christ's call; will not repent, and accept His tender overtures of mercy and salvation, what then? Then we shall discover another and a different attribute of His character. Christ is not only merciful; He is also just. He can be just as stern as He is tender. Therefore we must consider the second part of the text, which exhibits:

II. The Sternness Of Jesus.

Continuing the journey, the Palm Sunday procession marched down the western slope of the Mount of Olives, across the valley of the Kedron, up the opposite slope of Mounts Zion and Moriah, and entered the city; then Jesus “went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought, saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

Now note — this is the same Jesus who, a little while before, had wept over Jerusalem. Can He be the same person? Can such tenderness and such severity dwell in the same heart? Is the character of Christ drawn consistently here?

We answer these questions affirmatively. The attributes mentioned are not contradictory, variant as they seem to be. Men may be very compassionate over the sufferings of others and at the same time very severe toward their sins. And that is the way that in Jesus all the moral qualities were inherent and were harmonized. When he stood on the brow of Mount Olivet, and was moved to tears over Jerusalem, he thought of the coming anguish of the people; when He reached the city and witnessed the wickedness of the traders who were defiling the holy temple, his indignation flashed out against their iniquity. If He had not been compassionate, He would not have come to save the world; if He had not been angry at sin, He would not have been an ethical Saviour. The speaker has known some of the kindest and gentlest men, who would weep with those who wept; who were sympathetic with all kinds of suffering; and yet he has seen those same men filled with righteous indignation against some gross act of wickedness or injustice; and he respected them all the more because they exhibited both qualities. A man who is not merciful is hard and cruel; a man who is only merciful is wishy-washy and sentimental. Mercy and justice met and were harmonized in the character of the Son of God. Suppose for a moment that Christ had seen in the temple all that worldly trading, exploiting and defrauding of the people who had come there to worship, and had said nothing about it, what would we today think of Him? We would say He lacked either in the prime qualities of righteousness, or in courage to rebuke outbreaking sin.

With Christ’s teaching agrees that of His inspired apostle, Paul (Rom. 11:22): “Behold, then, the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God’s goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” That is the kind of a God the world needs, whether it wants Him or not — One who is tender and

merciful to all who suffer and sin, but whose holiness always reacts against all forms of evil.

There is another reason, and a strong one, why it was right for Him to show His indignation at this time, and purify the temple. The temple was God's house, His sanctuary; the place above all that should have been pure, that should have stood for everything sacred. It was the place where His people were to "worship Him in the beauty of holiness." It was the place "where prayer was wont to be made." Therefore, if the temple itself was profaned, there could be moral purity and true spirituality nowhere in all the realm. The very fountain-head of religion would be corrupted. Let us suppose that the churches of today would be given over to secular business, mendacity in trade, ungodly amusements of all kinds, and even to drunken orgies and libidinous actions, would not such a state of affairs be an index of the general corruption of the whole country? It surely would. As long as people regard God's temples with some degree of reverence, it means that there is still some sense of spiritual righteousness left in their hearts.

So it was in Christ's day. When He saw that the very temple itself was converted into "a den of robbers," He knew that the very center of the religious life of the nation was being defiled. No wonder, therefore, He flamed forth with righteous indignation, and drove the profaners of the temple out with His whip of small cords.

In these days we sometimes see frivolity and lack of respect in God's house. A disposition to gawk about, to whisper and laugh, to sit idly during the time of worship — all this is contrary to the very conception of the sanctuary. Our prayer ought always to be: "Let the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer."

Now, in view of Christ's positive saying, "My house is the house of prayer," we want to make our application very direct and practical. Just how ought we to deport ourselves when we come within these sacred courts? We should come in ample time to the service, so as not to disturb the worship after it has begun. We should enter the door soberly, walk quietly to our pew, and, being seated, bow our heads in silent prayer. When all attendants are in the habit of doing this, it cannot be regarded as Pharisaical; it is not done for parade, but for prayer. For what should we pray at this time? That God would bless the message of the day to our spiritual good; that He would bless the minister in the delivery of His message; that He would help

us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Then, instead of whispering and laughing, we should sit quietly and meditatively, and wait for the service to begin. The organ prelude, being a selection of sacred music, is part of the worship. During this time the worshiper should secure his hymn-book, and find the place of the first hymn and the liturgical part of the service, so that, when the moment comes, he can take part from the first word. And he should take part in the service. He should take part in all of it. It is both irreverent and disrespectful to be looking around at the people while others are engaged in worship. That is the chief reason for liturgical forms in our churches — to give everybody an opportunity to worship God. “Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee.” When the sermon begins, the hymn-books should be put away quietly in the racks or on the pews, or should be held in the hands, but the proper place should always be so marked that the worshippers can immediately find the offertory, and take part in it after the votum has been pronounced by the minister. The reception of the offering is part of the worship; that is, we worship God in and through our offerings. It is not fitting, while the offering is being taken, to engage in frivolous conduct or talking. Let the worshiper take part in every response, and be attentive to every other articulation of the service. At the end of the last verse of the concluding hymn quietly close the hymn-book, and hold it reverently in your hands during the benediction. There will be plenty of time to put the book in the rack after the silent prayer following the benediction and Amen.

Why do we give these specific directions? Because they are needed. Many people do not think as much about these matters as they should; they are careless rather than intentionally irreverent. But if we follow these directions, we will be orderly in God’s house; we will show respect to things that are sacred; we will have greater joy in the services; we will set a good example to others; we will honor God; we will always receive a divine blessing. Let us pray.

Jesus, we thank Thee that by Thy righteous indignation toward the vendors and by Thy cleansing of the temple, Thou didst teach us to look upon Thy house as the house of prayer and worship. May this house always be to us the house of God and the gate of heaven! Send Thou us help from Thy sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion.

"While Thy Word is heard with awe,
While we tremble at Thy law,
Let Thy gospel's wondrous love
Every doubt and fear remove.

"From Thy house when we return,
Let our hearts within us burn;
That at evening we may say:
'We have walked with God today.'

AMEN.

THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND
MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.

49. Two Kinds Of Prayer. The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 18:9-14

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

NOTHING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE is more necessary than prayer. Jesus often prayed. He lived what is known today as “the prayer life.” He was always in communion with the Father. In the passage just prior to our gospel lesson for today, the eleventh Sunday after Trinity, He spoke the impressive parable of the importunate widow for the express purpose of teaching his hearers that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Most urgently He said: “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” The apostle Paul says, “Pray without ceasing,” which evidently means that men should constantly live in the atmosphere of prayer. One edition of Luther’s Small Catechism defines prayer in this way: “Prayer is the conversation of the heart with God, uttered or unexpressed.” Isaac Watts set forth the essence of true prayer in this way:

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.”

And yet, deep and spiritual a thing as prayer is, it may be perverted. There is a right way to pray; there is a wrong way to pray. In His searching speech our Lord, in the lesson for today, probes to the heart and inner motive of this exercise, and points out in a concrete and most pointed way by means of two examples the two kinds of prayer. The first person whose prayer is analyzed is the Pharisee; the second is the Publican. So we will follow the order of our text.

I. The Pharisaic Kind Of Prayer.

There is no fault to be found in the fact that the Pharisee “stood” in prayer. That was the customary attitude at that time. Jesus often stood while He prayed. There was only one instance, so far as we can discover, when Jesus kneeled in prayer, and that was in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41). However, the Bible records the kneeling of others during their supplications, as, for example, Solomon (2 Chron. 6:13), Daniel (6:10), Stephen (Acts 7:60), Peter (9:40), and Paul (20:36, 21:5). This attitude is especially appropriate in the confession of sin in deep humility, and therefore it is right to kneel when, in our absolution or preparatory service, we make confession of our sins. However, no one has a right to insist on a special attitude in prayer.

Thus no criticism need be offered because the Pharisee stood in prayer; but the spirit and motive of his devotions were most offensive. The parable was spoken to rebuke certain persons “who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and set all others at naught.” The parable condemns the self-righteous and “holier-than-thou” spirit. This is the negative side of the text. The positive teaching is that men are saved, not by their own goodness or good works, but solely by the grace of God. Thus Christ’s teaching is the same as that of Paul, who, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, elaborated the doctrine, and vindicated it by argument.

Note now the self-centered spirit of the Pharisee. Christ says that he “prayed thus with himself.” His prayer was a soliloquy, not a colloquy. While with his words he addressed God, he really was thinking only of himself and his superb virtues. As we would say today, the Pharisee was wonderfully “well satisfied with himself.” That is not prayer which thinks only of self. A conversation with oneself is not conversation with God. We

wonder whether there are people today whose so-called prayers are not monologues rather than dialogues.

How often it occurs that men may have, in part at least, the right form of prayer, when the temper is wrong. The first part of the Pharisee's prayer was correct in form: he said, "God, I thank thee." It is right, under most circumstances, to begin prayer with thanksgiving, as is usually done among Christian people who are conscious of God's goodness; but we ought to thank God for His grace, mercy and kind providence, for the Bible, His inspired Book, and the revelation of His love in Jesus Christ. There is no pride, but only humility, in such thanksgiving. But note the egotism and self-righteousness of the Pharisee, who said: "I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this publican." Comparisons are both invidious and odious. For him to plume himself on his great virtue, because he was not like the reprobates whom he names, proved that he did not know what the inner essence of sin is, namely, a matter of the heart, of the motive. Had he been like the men over whom he was vaunting himself, he would not even have been a decent citizen, to say nothing of being a man who was inwardly pure.

And yet you find men today outside of the Church who pride themselves because they are not toppers, thieves and murderers, forsooth! And so they say, "Why, we do not need to repent; we do not do anything wrong; we do not need to have any Saviour to atone for our sins; we do not need to belong to the Church, or go to the church services, or to the Holy Communion for help and strength; we do not see how we could make any improvement in ourselves; why, we are better folk than some of your church members." These are the Pharisees outside of the Church; and there are many of them! The writer of these lines has many times had people say to him, when he asked them to become Christians: "Why, we don't do anything wrong; we treat everybody right." Yes, Pharisaism keeps thousands and thousands of people from coming to Christ and into His Church.

Then we church people ought never to exhibit the self-righteous spirit, nor make odious comparisons. For us to thank God in our prayers that we are better than others, even wicked people outside of the Church, is ungracious, self-laudatory, and Pharisaical. Let us always confess that we are sinners, even though we may rejoice that, We are "sinners saved. by grace." If there is any difference between our ethical and spiritual state and that of others, it is not something for us to boast about, but to attribute entirely to

the grace of God. Once a minister was kneeling beside a penitent sinner. The minister began his prayer thus: "O Lord, be merciful to this poor sinner." Then the thought came that his prayer was Pharisaical; that it sounded as "if he were putting himself above the enquirer by his side. So he quickly corrected his prayer by saying: "No, no, Lord, have mercy upon us two sinners kneeling here before Thee!" That was better; that made the penitent feel that his minister did not feel himself superior to him.

There are some professedly Christian people here and there who have the "holier-than-thou" disposition. We once were present in a tent meeting of the so-called "holiness" people, and heard one of their preachers make this declaration: "In religious attainment we holiness people are so far ahead of ordinary Christians that we can see them no longer with a spy-glass!" That sounded very much to us like the Pharisee's self-laudation: "Lord, I thank thee that I am not like other men." It is needless to say that there is today, many years later, no church of those "holiness" people in that city, while the churches of the "ordinary" Christians are still there, and nearly all of them in a prosperous condition.

The Pharisee's reference to the publican proves the superficiality, as well as the self-righteousness, of his spirit. Had he been really in earnest about his prayer, he either would not have noticed the publican, or, if he had, he would have prayed for him, seeing his great distress on account of his sins. But observe, the Pharisee thought himself even better than the publican who was bitterly bemoaning and deeply repenting of his sins. What a superficial idea of religion!

But notice, next, the virtues of which the Pharisee boasted. He mentioned two things that any man could practice without having a spark of true religion. He said, "I fast twice a week." There is nothing wonderful or meritorious about that. If a man has plenty to eat the rest of the week, it is comparatively easy to be abstemious two times during the seven days. In fact, it would be good for many people's health if they would fast all the time more than they do. Then this braggart did a work of "supererogation," for the Mosaic law required fasting only once a week; but he thought he was laying up special merit for himself by doing more than the law demanded. That was the old Pharisaic way of filling up the "treasury of grace," and so winning a great reward. That cannot be done. If one does more than God's law commands, he commits a sin in that very act, for he is adding something to the divine requirement, and thus amending the law by his own puny wis-

dom. Christ said that, after we have done everything we can, we are still “unprofitable servants,” and therefore do not deserve anything. If we think we can earn salvation, we sin by that very thought, and therefore nullify the very essence of true righteousness before God. “The gift of God is eternal life.” “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

Then the Pharisee declared: “I give tithes of all I possess.” That was good as far as it went. He even gave more tithes than the law required. But he gave in the wrong spirit. The very fact that he bragged about it proves that. Good a thing as giving is, it may be done for pride and show. Nor can it be made a substitute for humility, repentance and faith. The spirit of self-glorying kills the very root of piety.

So we see that the Pharisee was not justified before God, who looked into his heart. There was no true faith there, and no sorrow for sin, but pride and boasting. His prayer was not true prayer. It was merely the form of prayer.

Let us now turn to the publican, whose prayer is commended by our Lord.

II. The Sincere Kind Of Prayer.

[1] The very conduct of the publican suggests the proper spirit of a sinful man. He stood “afar off, and would not lift so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast.” Perhaps after God had cleansed and forgiven him, he went farther up into the temple to praise God for His goodness, but just now, while he was so conscious of his defilement, he felt that it would be sacrilege for him to go near the holy place. That was true humility; it was true repentance, true sense of and sorrow for sin.

[2] The prayer of the publican has the chief elements of true prayer, some of which we will take a few moments to comment upon.

It was brief. This does not mean that all prayers must be as concise as this one was, for some of the prayers recorded in the Bible as acceptable to God are a good deal longer — the prayers of David in the Psalms, the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, some of the prayers of Christ and His apostles. However, let it be noted that none of these prayers were very long. This is a lesson worth learning. The publican’s prayer was

very brief, yet it brought God's answer of forgiving love. Sometimes our prayers today are over lengthy. One minister, at a somewhat otherwise protracted service, prayed for fifteen minutes. We have been authoritatively informed of one preacher who prayed for twenty-nine minutes, keeping the people standing all that time. These are extremes, it is true, but extremes ought to be avoided. A prayer ceases to be a prayer for the people when they wish every moment that it would come to a close. It is not necessary to pray all around the universe at every public service. We recommend the use of two or three brief collects at the close of the sermon, the choir and congregation singing the Amen. The best kind of a prayer is that which says much in little.

The publican's prayer was direct, right to the point. He had a definite idea of what he needed, and prayed for that. There was no round-aboutness in this prayer. This characteristic we may well imitate in our devotions. The trouble is, we pray for so many things that we really do not care much for, just because the time has come for prayer. If God would answer us, we would be greatly surprised. Let us not multiply words. We are "not heard for our much speaking." We should think what we need and want, and go directly to the point.

Another element of the publican's prayer was its simplicity. Every word is perfectly plain. From a rhetorical viewpoint it is a model; it is perfect, and yet the petitioner was too earnest to seek for literary display. It is sacrilegious to be oratorical toward God. Prayers that are ornate in style are addressed to the audience, not to God. It was once said of a minister's prayer that "it was the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience." Yes, that was the trouble; it was offered to the audience, not to God! The collects and prayers in our "Common Service Book" are models of a pure, smooth, simple, direct and reverent style, and should frequently be used in the church services.

The elements of the publican's prayer thus far mentioned pertain chiefly to the form, which, though important, is not the primary matter. The spirit is more important than the form. This prayer was characterized by humility. No one who was not truly humble would call for mercy and acknowledge himself as sinner. What a beautiful trait is humility! The apostle enjoins, "Be ye clothed with humility." Is not humility a becoming garment? If all people were humble in spirit, instead of proud and conceited and self-inflated, as so many are, what a different world this would be! In the latter

part of the text our Lord calls special attention to this trait of character and its opposite, as depicted in the publican and the Pharisee at prayer, when He said: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Thus we know that the way to be great in God's sight is to be "meek and lowly in spirit."

Then the publican's prayer was marked by sincerity. No man would Confess himself "the sinful one," without that beautiful grace. The Pharisee, who "prayed with himself" and flattered himself, could easily be hypocritical; but not the publican who cried out for mercy and pardon. Oh! we ought to be absolutely sincere when we come to God in prayer; for He looks upon the heart, and we cannot deceive Him. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

In the last place, the essence and content of the publican's prayer were just what they should have been. Translated literally, it was, "God, be merciful to me, the sinful one." It is a good prayer for all of us at times, and it is the very first prayer that the unregenerate person should utter. The very first thing to be gotten rid of is sin; for it is sin, and sin only, that alienates us from the good and holy God; so this primary obstacle must be removed first of all. Jesus began His ministry with this text: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of God is at hand." At another time he said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." When, on the day of Pentecost the convicted people cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter's first word was, "Repent."

God will force no one to renounce his sins, but if sinners will repent, and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their atoning Saviour, they will be justified and saved. And, my friend, God is very anxious to forgive. He sent His only begotten Son into the world to make forgiveness possible, and to lead men to contrition. So nothing will bring Him more promptly and effectively to your relief than for you to cry to Him; "God, be merciful to me, the sinful one."

"With broken heart and contrite sigh,
A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free:
O God, be merciful to me!

"I smite upon my troubled breast,
With deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea:
O God, be merciful to me."

Oh, my friends! the proud, self-centered prayer of the Pharisee will bring no answer from a holy God; but the simple, sincere and humble prayer of the publican, the prayer of contrition and faith, will win from Him the glad and gracious response, “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

50. Jesus And The Deaf Mute. The Twelfth Sunday After Trin- ity. Mark 7:31-37

And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. (Mark 7:31-37)

HOW VARIED were Christ's miracles! And how diverse the manner in which He performed them! It is this constant change that affords so much interest in the study of His career. If you had never read the story, you would constantly be on the alert to discover what the Lord would say and do next. All this diversity proves "the varied characters he bears."

Jesus had cast the demon out of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman over in the region of Tyre. We treated of that incident in the sermon on the gospel for the second Sunday in Lent, when we indicated "The Marks of True Faith," as they were exhibited in the conduct of the woman whose daughter was grievously afflicted with an evil spirit. From the region of Tyre Jesus and His disciples went northward toward Sidon, also on the Mediterranean coast; then they turned westward, and journeyed around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to its eastern side into the section known as Decapolis, the country of the ten cities.

"And they brought unto Him one who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him." So says the narrative, proving that in some way the people had confidence in Christ's

miraculous power. There are some interesting and instructive features about this miracle. Let us notice —

I. The Significance Of The Miracle.

It was a miracle on both the mind and body. Jesus had cast the demon out of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, proving thereby that He had complete power over the spiritual realm. He had also performed miracles that proved His mastery over the physical sphere, and had healed many kinds of infirmities.

But here was a peculiar kind of disease, one that affected both the organs of hearing and those of speech. Thus far the gospels record no instance in which Jesus came in contact with this special kind of physical affection. Will He be able to master a dual infirmity of this species? Is He complete master over the bodily organism? Does He understand all about anatomy, physiology and pathology? Can it truly be said of Him that “He hath borne all our diseases?”

The auditory organs — the organs of hearing — are very complicated and delicate. Even in these days of progress in medical science, specialists find diseases of the ear among the most difficult to treat successfully. The mechanism is not only complicated, but is located so far in the head and is so difficult of access that instruments can scarcely be used with success. It is true that today we seldom hear of people whose hearing is seriously impaired being cured.

Now, if Christ is going to perform a miracle on the auditory organs, and effect a real and permanent cure, He must understand all about the mechanism, structure and functions of those organs. How else could He restore them to their normal condition? This effect He surely produced, for the record says that the people declared after the miracle, “He maketh the deaf to hear.” Do not think that this interpretation is forced or far-fetched, for if the deaf man heard clearly after that, every part of his auditory apparatus must have been restored to its normal functioning. This proves that Christ was divine; that, as the Son of God by whom the ear was made, He was able to repair any injury done to it.

The poor man was also otherwise afflicted. He had an impediment in his speech. Perhaps he was “tongue-tied,” as we say. Some of the tendons and

muscles were impaired. Perhaps, being deaf, he could hardly have talked, any way; but in addition he could not have articulated his words, even though he could have heard. Here was another anatomical defect, and of a different kind from that we have thus far met with in the gospels. Would Jesus prove Himself equal to the emergency? Or would He be like some modern “faith-healers” and would-be “science” people, who seem to be able to cure certain kinds of diseases, but must admit that others are beyond their power to remedy. Even Mrs. Eddy said that Christian Science healers would better leave surgical cases to the regular practitioners — an admission which proved, on the face of it, that her power, Whatever it was, did not come from God, who would not find any case too difficult. The case before Jesus was a surgical one. He removed the man’s impediment, thereby proving that He understood the mechanism and functioning powers of the vocal organs, and knew just how they were adjusted. Just as He understood the ear, so He understood the tongue. No wonder the multitude exclaimed: “He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf hear, and the dumb speak.”

The significance of this miracle, then, is that, as Christ was divine as well as human, He proved that no trouble of any kind, either of the body or the soul, is too hard for Him to cure. Let us go further into our text, and give attention to another interesting theme:

II. The Method Of The Miracle.

[1] He took the deaf man aside from the multitude. What was His purpose in this? In many other instances He performed His miracles before His disciples and in the presence of the multitude. No doubt in this case He wished to avoid too much publicity, for the people were determined to make Him king, and that would have frustrated His purpose. He did not come to establish an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one.

Another reason why Jesus took the deaf mute aside was that his was a case requiring individual treatment, or what we might call private absolution. Christ understood the man’s frame of mind, and in order to stir faith within him, He drew him away from the rest of the people who were distracting his attention, so that he could fix his mind on Christ alone and as his healer.

[2] In the next place, Christ put His fingers into the man's ears. Why was this done? Because it was his ears that were diseased, and with deaf people a language of signs must be used. By this act Jesus would fix the man's attention on the affected organ, and so stir his faith. Moreover, after the healing, he would never doubt that it was Jesus who had performed the marvelous cure. The man's mind needed treatment as well as his body; his doubts needed to be removed, and his faith stirred and established.

[3] Next He moistened His finger with His own saliva and touched the man's tongue. This showed the man just what He intended to do — moisten and loose his tongue, which was parched, stiff and bound. What effect would this act have upon the mute's mind? It would beget confidence in Christ's precise knowledge of his infirmities and His power to heal him. You may depend upon it, the man needed just such treatment to stir his faith, or Christ would not have used the method He did. In other cases, when faith was already alert and strong, as, for example, with the Syro-Phoenician woman and the centurion, He performed the healing even at a distance. Jesus was a wise teacher and physician; He adapted Himself to the varied circumstances of the people with whom He dealt.

[4] Notice, next, that He looked up to heaven and sighed. Was there any reason for doing that? Yes, He wanted the deaf man to realize that the healing he was about to receive was from God, and not merely an achievement of human skill. Jesus always kept Himself in touch with the Father. He also sighed in the prayer He offered, showing His sympathy with human suffering in general and with this poor mute in particular.

It may be properly asked why Jesus prayed in this case, while in so many other cases He performed His miracles in His own name. For example, when He stilled the tempest, He simply commanded, "Peace, be still," and the calm followed. At another time He said: "I will; be thou clean." He even said one time: "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Then why did He, in this case, look up to heaven, and pray to the Father? We think a satisfactory answer can be given. Jesus wanted to teach the people two great truths: one was that He was Himself divine, and therefore could perform wonders by His own power and in His own name; the other was that He kept in constant connection with the Father, and did not perform His works without, or in opposition to, the Father's holy will. Thus He could say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also; I and the Father are one;" also: "I do always the Will of my Father who is in heaven." In this

way He would act and teach the doctrines that He wanted His Church subsequently to develop, the distinction of the persons in the holy Trinity and at the same time the unity of the Godhead. And is it not true that this blessed and satisfying doctrine was afterward drawn from the whole teaching of the Christ and His apostles, collated and coordinated? The Nicene and Athanasian creeds were built up in just that way. All heresies come from a narrow and partial use of the Scriptures; the orthodox doctrines rest upon the whole harmonized teaching of the Bible.

[5] It is interesting, too, to note that Christ used a word, or, as it were, gave a command to the man's deaf ears; He said, "Ephphatha," which, Mark tells us, means, "Be opened." Jesus used the Aramaic word, and the evangelist translated it into the Greek for his readers. Why did Christ utter this command? No doubt it was to impress the deaf man who could see the movement of the Master's lips, and therefore knew that the healing was effected directly by His command. Do you suppose that the man could ever after that doubt the power and divinity of Christ? Perhaps, too, the very words of the creative Master of the human body carried power with them through the man's entire auditory organism, and restored each part to its normal condition. Thus Christ used scientific principles in His method of performing this miracle. And His method was immediately effective, for straightway the man's ears were opened, the tendon of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

III. The Strange Charge He Gave Concerning The Miracle.

When the people saw that the man was healed, and heard him speaking plainly and intelligently, naturally they were greatly astonished. But Jesus "charged them that they should tell no man." What was His purpose in giving such a command? He did not want to arouse undue excitement among those mountaineers. He had special reason at this period in His history for more or less seclusion. There was constant danger that, if excitement rose to fever heat, the people would do something rash and unseemly, especially that they might want to make him king. That would have been most unfortunate for His cause, which was not one of earthly grandeur, but of spiritual healing and cleansing. He could very properly go among those needy peo-

ple of the Decapolis, minister to their physical and spiritual wants, and thus lead them to trust Him as their Saviour; but how would it have appeared if they had tried to make Him king, and had borne Him about through the cities in a rabble-like pageant? That would have made Him and His cause ridiculous in the eyes of many people, and would have aroused the Jewish leaders and Roman rulers into violent hostility against Him.

Therefore at this time He desired to go about His work quietly, doing good wherever He went, teaching the people the true spiritual principles of His kingdom. He did not desire to be a great earthly ruler. He knew that such rule would be only temporary. He might establish a kingdom on earth, and rule over it during His earthly life time; then He would have to die, and leave it to other hands. such a course would have made His work as evanescent as is the work of most earthly potentates. But Jesus, by laying down eternal doctrines and principles and by making atonement for sin, established a kingdom in the hearts of men that will go on forever from generation to generation.

Thus we see the divine insight and foresight of our Lord. Do you not see that we today, who have the experience of salvation through His grace, are enjoying the blessings of His imperishable kingdom? Where would that kingdom be today had He yielded to the temptations of Satan and the solicitations of fanatical people to establish a kingdom of mere worldly power and glory? Christ's ways were always best.

Some useful, practical lessons may be brought out of our study for today.

[1] One of them is this: While Christ will not always perform a miracle to heal people of physical deafness, for this is the dispensation of the Spirit, not of outward wonders, He will always, if we are willing, unstop the ears of our souls, so that we may hear and understand His Word, His blessed Good News. You say it is very sad for a person to be physically deaf. Indeed, it is; no one will deny that. But there is something far more pathetic; and that is to be deaf spiritually, so that we cannot hear God's voice calling us to repent, to have faith in Christ, and to come to Him for salvation. If any of us here today have deaf spiritual ears, I pray that Christ may say to us, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

[2] The tongue is also a very useful member of the body. It is sad not to be able to speak at all or to speak articulately. But it is also sad beyond expression to be spiritually tongue-tied, unable to bear witness for Christ and His grace and salvation. Many people are thus afflicted. You talk to them on

worldly themes, and they will speak glibly enough; but introduce a religious theme, and how quickly they become dumb! They do not know the language of the Holy Spirit; and if they do not know that, they do not know the language of heaven, and so would not be fitted for the society of God and angels and saints in that blessed abode.

But we thank God that Christ was able to unloose the hardened and contracted tendons of the dumb man's tongue, so that "he spake plainly." That is what Christ can do for the soul's tongue today; unloose it, and make it speak plainly and effectively for Him. He says, "Ye are my witnesses." He also enjoined upon us to confess Him before men, and to let our light shine.

"Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages for Thee."

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Oh, may our ears be opened that we may hear the voice of God, and our tongues be unloosed that we may speak forth His praises!

"And didst Thou, Jesus, condescend,
When veiled in human clay,
To heal the sick, the lame, the blind,
And drive disease away?"

"Didst Thou regard the beggar's cry,
And cause the blind to see?
Jesus, Thou Son of David, hear,
Have mercy, too, on me."

"And didst Thou pity mortal woe,
And sight and health restore?
Oh, pity, Lord, and save my soul,
Which needs Thy mercy more."

51. A Neighbor Indeed And In Truth. The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 10:23-37

And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:23-37)

TODAY it will be our privilege to consider together the familiar, beautiful and impressive parable of the Good Samaritan. Of all Christ's parables this one perhaps holds the place next to that of the prodigal son in popular favor.

Briefly we must outline the incident that led to the speaking of the parable. In the midst of Christ's teaching a lawyer interrupted Him. The record says he "tempted Him." No doubt he meant to ask Christ a question that would confuse Him. So He said, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal

life?” I am glad that Christ answered him kindly and patiently. He asked him what was written in the law, and how he read it. How pertinently Christ always adapted His teaching to those with whom He came in contact! As His questioner was a lawyer, He asked him a question which pertained to his own profession. The lawyer answered from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy and Leviticus: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... and thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus replied: “Thou hast answered rightly: do this, and thou shalt live.”

At this point the lawyer revealed his real motive. What would he have said had he been utterly humble and sincere? He would have answered with deep emotion, “Lord, I have tried to obey the law, but I have failed. Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” But, alas! he was not contrite. He was self-righteous and smart. Willing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” This question is an index to his character. He was a higgler over definitions. In this respect he was a lawyer, not of the noble kind, but of the caviling. With his fellow scribes and lawyers, he was trying to evade the spirit of the law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” by defining the word “neighbor” in his own way. The Jewish interpreters of that day had made many refinements on the definition of neighbor, just as they had on all other parts of the law. The fact is, they practically whittled away the value of the law by their foolish refinements. They had only an academic interest in the law, not a real and practical interest.

Then, in order to show this lawyer and the rest of His hearers who one’s neighbor is, our Lord spoke this keen and searching parable. Let us deal with the characters in the order depicted in the story.

I. The Men Who Passed By On The Other Side — The Non-Neighbors.

A man was going, so the parable runs, on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some robbers waylaid him, stripped and wounded him, and left him lying there half dead. The story is well located. The road down to Jericho, after it passed Bethany and began to descend the eastern side of Mount Olivet, was very lonely, and was infested with robbers, known as bands of Bedouins. Recent travelers tell us that even today it is scarcely safe to journey along that road without a sufficient armed guide. What a direct appeal

therefore the locality of this scene would make to Christ's hearers! Would that all of us whose duty it is to instruct and lead people were so "apt to teach," so wise in our choice of illustrations as Jesus was!

Notice, further, what a diamond point Christ gave to His parable. He said: "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side." Let it be remembered that a parable is a story invented for the purpose of teaching a special lesson. Then why did our Lord introduce a priest into the story, and cause him to act as he did? Because He wanted to teach that professionalism in religion is not enough. A priest's function was to offer sacrifice in the temple, and this priest from Jericho had been up to Jerusalem doing his turn, and now he was going back to his home. No doubt, in the temple he had worn his priestly robe, burned incense on the altar, and performed the other rites of his office. All of this was perfectly proper. But the performance of such religious ceremonies could not be accepted as a substitute for love and mercy toward a fellowman in need. The same may said of the Levite who came along and also "passed by on the other side." Not all Levites were priests, but all priests were Levites. Only the descendants of Aaron were priests, while the other members of the tribe of Levi were simply called Levites. But he, too, had been at Jerusalem, performing certain duties about the temple. So the lesson is practically the same respecting these two "passers-by on the other side."

While it is fresh in our minds, let us learn the lesson that this incident teaches us. For the preacher the lesson is this: He cannot make his preaching and conducting of religious services take the place of acts of neighborly love and duty. To say that he has done his whole duty when he performs these functions, and so excuse himself for "passing by on the other side," when a fellowman is in need of bodily help, is to act the part of the Priest and the Levite, not the part of the Good Samaritan. He must do his whole duty, not merely a part of it.

The same is true of all professing Christians. Going to church services and engaging in Christian worship are essential to the Christian life, and should never be neglected; but they should not be made a substitute for loving and neighborly service to our fellowmen. After all, love is the fulfilling of the whole law. It is also called the greatest of the Christian virtues. Suppose a person had gone to the church service, had taken part in the worship, had listened attentively to the sermon, and then, on the way home, should

find some one in sore trouble, but should say, “Well, I have been at the church service, and so have done my religious duty,” and would “pass by on the other side,” would he be fulfilling the requirements of the Christian religion? No, he would be doing only part of it; and, moreover, the part omitted would be so essential that its omission would mean that all the rest had been merely formal. Religiosity is not religion. We cannot be good Christians without being good neighbors. Neighbor love and love for God are essential and balancing parts of the Christian life. The apostle John puts the matter trenchantly in this way (1 John 4:20, 21): “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.” We must see the Christian life in its entirety. We must omit no part.

Are we not all more or less disposed to “pass by on the other side,” when certain kinds of duty call? We know we ought to meet some one who needs our help or sympathy, but we find it convenient to “pass by on the other side.” We ought to speak to some one about coming to the church and Sunday school services, but we “pass by on the other side.” It is our duty to persuade our neighbor to become a Christian — but we “pass by on the other side.” We know that the Church needs our gifts of speech, or music, or money — but we look the other way, and “pass by on the other side.” Thus we go on in life compromising our consciences, because we so often “pass by on the other side.” All of us have a good deal of the priest and the Levite in us.

Let us turn now to the pleasanter part of our text. Here we find a man who was different from the priest and the Levite —

II. The Man Who Stopped And Showed Mercy — The True Neighbor.

How cutting it must have been to the quibbling lawyer, who was a rigid, self-righteous Jew, when Jesus made the hero of his parable a Samaritan! We know how the Jews despised the Samaritans, who, the Jews thought, did not have the pure blood of Abraham running in their veins. Oh! this racial pride, this pride of ancestry, what a harmful thing it is and has been in the world! This parable is a fundamental one. Jesus taught in it that “a man’s a

man for a' that;" — that the man who has true neighborly love and does a neighborly service is acceptable to God, no matter what his antecedents or social position may be. What a man is — that is the thing that counts in Christianity.

You know the beautiful story of the Good Samaritan's helpful service to the man who had fallen among robbers. He assuaged his wounds, put him on his horse, walked by his side, took him to an inn, and paid the landlord for the further service that would be needed. All the details, simple as they are, are described with the most exquisite literary art. We may easily imagine the effect upon our Lord's hearers.

But Christ did not forget to make the application. Turning to the lawyer, He asked, "Which of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?" What homiletic art! What pointed interrogation! The lawyer could give but one answer: "He that showed mercy on him." Concise and straight to the mark was the Saviour's application: "Go thou and do likewise."

This parable answers the lawyer's question, and ours as well: "Who is my neighbor?"

The matter of neighborhood involves two parties — the one who needs help and the one who gives help. The lawyer wanted to know who his neighbor was whom he should love as himself. Christ did not permit him to think of that side of neighborliness alone, but appealed directly to his own heart to show him that it must belong to himself more than to the other party. Do you see how Christ turned the lawyer's point against himself? Much as if He had said, "First get true neighbor love in your own heart, and then you will never need to ask the question, 'Who is my neighbor?' Your own love will tell you instinctively who is your neighbor. The man who is himself a true neighbor, who has within him the true neighbor heart, will recognize his neighbor in every person who needs his help."

Thus we learn that our neighbors are everywhere: among our kindred; those who live in proximity to us; those who live in faraway lands; those who love us and those who do not; those who belong to our social set or nation or race, and those who do not. Every human creature in need of material or spiritual aid, or both, is our neighbor, and we are to be neighbor to him. Let us draw no false and specious lines of distinction. We should not "hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons." Said the great apostle: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the

Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” My friends, let us remember the kindly helpfulness of the Good Samaritan, and heed Christ’s command: “Go thou and do likewise.”

I wish to point you to Jesus Christ Himself, the author of this impressive parable, as the real Good Samaritan to this poor, lost and wounded world, ravished by sin, which is the worst of all robbers. When He saw our woe, He did not turn away, pretend that He did not see, and “pass by on the other side.” He came to us in our need, came with the heavenly medicine of His grace, came into direct contact with us in His incarnation, sacrificed Himself for us, and paid the price of our redemption. Yes, Jesus was the Good Samaritan par excellence. Will we permit Him to bandage all our wounds, heal all our diseases, and deliver us from the robbers who infest the Jericho road of our earthly pilgrimage? Do you know, my brethren, that, if we will do this, He will save us from our sin and selfishness, will put His own Spirit into our hearts, and thus breathe into us true love for our neighbors? Then we shall be neighbors indeed and in truth, who will never “pass by on the other side.”

"My dear Redeemer and my Lord!
I read my duty in Thy Word;
But in Thy life the law appears
Drawn out in living characters.

“Such was Thy truth and such Thy zeal,
Such deference to Thy Father’s will,
Thy love and meekness so divine,
I would transcribe and make them mine.”

52. Jesus And The Ten Lepers. The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 17:11-19

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole. (Luke 17:11-19)

A COUPLE OF SUNDAYS AGO we saw how easily Jesus cured a deaf mute. That was a wonderful miracle. In it Jesus proved that He understood the anatomy of the auditory and vocal organs, and was able to repair them. But there are other kinds of bodily afflictions. One of the worst physical diseases is leprosy. It is incurable by merely human skill. Not only is it a horrible malady in itself, but it is contagious, so that the person so afflicted must be separated from other people, or, in other words, quarantined.

Now the question is, Was Jesus so divine that He also understood the real physiological character of this fatal disease, and so could cure it by His miraculous power? Our lesson today is the answer. It proves Him complete master of this otherwise incurable disease. How could He perform this cure? There is only one answer — the answer of realism, not of fancy or of mere indefinite surmise. The trouble with many comments on the miracles of our Saviour is that the scientific principles involved in them are not considered. Today certain very serious diseases are cured by means of antitoxins. So far as we know, no remedy of this kind, or any other, has as yet been discovered for leprosy. But Jesus, who was divine as well as human, must

have known precisely what kind of remedy to apply to purify the blood and drive out the disease of leprosy. What medical science may yet discover by painstaking and long-continued research and experimentation Jesus must have known by divine omniscience, or He could not have effected the cures He did. For us to assume that He blindly exercised His divine power, and yet accomplished the specific result He desired in every case, is to make His miracles absurd instead of rational.

Let us give our attention to this graphic story of the healing of the ten lepers. Note:

I. How Jesus Treated The Lepers.

He was passing through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. As He drew near to a certain village, ten lepers appeared before Him, standing afar off. The reason they did not come near was that they were forbidden to associate with other people, on account of the contagious character of the disease. The lepers had to remain in companies by themselves, and while they were not always completely separated from other people, they had to cover their mouths with their hands, and cry out, "Unclean! unclean!" as they passed along the streets and roads to give warning.

When the lepers saw Jesus, "they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

It may be well to notice here, in passing, the expression they used, as it may give us a clue to what followed. They said, "Jesus, Master." In the title they applied to Christ, they indicated their faith in His goodness; for the term "Master" was a title of affection, such as a teacher has for his pupils. You can almost hear the confidence they felt in His kindness and sympathy in the expression, "Jesus, Master." Not only did it express affection, but it also involved confidence in His power; they called Him Master, which means that they believed He had mastery over their terrible disease. So, you will observe, that the title they gave to Jesus indicates some degree of faith.

Then they added, "Have mercy on us." This appeal also indicates that they believed Him to be compassionate. No doubt they had heard that "He went about doing good," that He was always moved with pity by human suffering. Therefore if they believed Him to be both willing and able to heal

them, they proved that they had at least a fair degree of ' faith, which will help to explain what occurred afterward.

Jesus heard their cry of distress, and called back to them, "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." It must be confessed that Jesus often did the unexpected. Really we would have expected Him to call the men to Him, and cure them before the multitude as a witness to His power and divinity. In another case He touched a leper and healed him.

Then why did Jesus bid these ten lepers go and show themselves to the priests? Because that was according to the law of Moses (see Lev. 13:2; 14:2). We quote here from Dr. H. L. Baugher's notes in the Lutheran Commentary: "Though leprosy was incurable by any known means, yet sometimes the afflicted recovered. Every such cure had to be attested by the priest, whose certification therefore restored the person to society, and relieved him of the strictures put by the law upon the leprous. Jesus' command, therefore, was equivalent to an assurance of their healing, but it tested their faith and required obedience to His word." So here we see that Christ conformed to the Mosaic law, which was a wise procedure on His part. There could be no doubt that the men were lepers. Everybody in the community must have known that. Now if they went to the priests, and underwent a thorough examination, and received a certificate that they were healed, there could be no doubt of Christ's miraculous power; the priests themselves though usually opposed to Christ, would have to bear testimony to that fact. Was it not therefore a politic procedure on the part of our Lord? At the same time it proved His love for the lepers, for, with the priests' certificates in their hands, they could again mingle freely with their friends and neighbors, and were no longer under a ban. Christ's work always goes as far as human need.

Christ's command was also a test of their faith. Had they possessed no faith, they would not have obeyed; they might have argued that it was useless, and even absurd, for them to go to the priests before they were healed. Here we learn the lesson that faith must always evidence itself by obedience. "Faith without works is dead," said James; while Paul declared that faith works by love.

It is marvelous to remember that, as these ten lepers turned to obey Christ's command, they were cleansed. What divine grace and power are here exhibited! That Jesus Christ understood all about every pathological case He treated must be evident on both common-sense and scientific

grounds, as we have said before. All the remedial resources of nature must have been at His command. He must have inoculated those lepers with precisely the right germicide that would instantly drive out the disease microbes, and restore the normal functioning power to every bodily part and organ.

What important lesson we may learn from this wonder-working mastery that Jesus possessed! He does not exert His power to heal every disease, for that is not according to His will, and if He did people would never die; but we know that He can rebuke the disease and bid it depart, when He knows that it is best to do so. Therefore we may pray for the sick with confidence, knowing that He is the Great Physician; "He can cure, and none can hinder."

But mere physical healing is not the most important matter. A man might have leprosy of the body, and yet might be a child of God, an heir of eternal destiny. Leprosy of the soul is worse than leprosy of the body. In many respects the two are alike — inner, vital, insidious, corrupting, contagious and fatal. But He who bade the malady of the lepers depart, surely can also cleanse the leprosy of the soul. If He understood the body so perfectly, He must also understand the constitution of the soul. If He can cure the one, He can cure the other. He who knew how to unite the body and the soul in the original creation in an organic and living way, surely must understand the inmost nature of both. So these physical cures which our Lord effected with such consummate skill are only proofs of his power over the psychical realm.

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us
From the accursed load.

I bring my guilt to Jesus
To wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious,
Till not a stain remains."

We have now seen how Jesus treated the lepers. Let us consider —

II. How The Lepers Treated Jesus.

It is pitiful to have to note that nine of them went their way, rejoicing in the soundness that had come back to their bodies, but forgot to go to their benefactor and thank Him for His mercy. What rude and crude ingratitude! Perhaps it was largely due to thoughtfulness, but that will not excuse it. Christ's words are really pathetic: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There were none found to give glory to God save this stranger." This is almost a plaint. It proves to us how Christ feels on account of man's ingratitude.

But how shall we interpret the fact that Christ healed those nine ungrateful men? We must not glide over difficulties in the Scripture, as too many commentators do. Did He heal those men without faith? No; the very fact that they obeyed when He told them to go to the priests, proves that they had some faith — faith enough to lead Christ to heal their bodies, even though their souls were not healed entirely of the leprosy of ingratitude. This would prove that He always rewards people according to their faith; that He respects faith even though it may be far from perfect. One of the apostles speaks about our going from faith to faith. Thus there are degrees of faith. Who knows but that sometime these nine lepers came to reflect on the great boon that Jesus had bestowed upon them, and then gave glory to God? Sometimes the new convert is so full of joy that he really is selfish for the time being, and forgets to give full praise and thanksgiving to God; but afterward, as sanctification progresses, he becomes more and more grateful to God for His goodness. How kind Christ is to reward even weak faith, and bring it by degrees to perfection! How infinite and tender is His patience with His pupils who learn their lessons so slowly!

“Ever patient, gentle meek,
Holy Saviour, was Thy mind;
Vainly in myself I seek
Likeness to my Lord to find;
Yet that mind which was in Thee
May be, must be formed in me.”

Let us turn to the brighter part of the picture — to the tenth leper, who, when he found that he was healed, turned back, and came to Jesus, and fell down at His feet, and gave Him thanks. The faith of this man had gone deeper than the faith of his nine companions; it had gone down into the springs of his being; it had melted his heart. We may well believe that his

soul, as well as his body, was healed. Though a despised Samaritan, he proved that he had the true heart, the heart of gratitude.

Then the Lord commended him doubly, saying, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." We cannot help thinking that Jesus must have meant that both his body and soul were healed; the leprosy of both was eradicated. When a man praises God in Christ, it is a sure sign of genuine conversion. When a man accepts God's gifts, but never gives Him thanks and praise, we have good reason to doubt the reality of his conversion.

What a grievous thing is ingratitude! You can scarcely say a worse thing about a person than to call him an ingrate. Said poor King Lear: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have an thankless child!" Think for a moment how you would feel if you were to do a favor to a needy person, and he would turn away without even saying, "Thank you." It would be a sign of a coarse and selfish nature.

But wait. Before we condemn such a person, let us think how too many people treat their heavenly Benefactor. Three times a day they sit down to a well-spread table, bearing God's good temporal favors, and eat them with avidity, but never once do they say, "Thank you," to God. Why, that is not even polite to God; it is not treating Him with good manners and civility! Let us not act so. It is wrong; it is grievously sinful. How must our heavenly Father feel as He watches over us with such constant care, and provides so many gifts, and then we turn away without a word of thanksgiving?

We may go further. There are people who live in Christian lands, enjoy the benefits of the Christian Church, the advantages of a Christian civilization, and yet they never in a lifetime give thanks to God for sending the Redeemer into the world. Is that right? Is it civil? Is it manly and womanly? I do not see how people can go on year after year living in this ungrateful way. I would feel a sense of shame not to acknowledge my Benefactor's goodness in providence and His grace in redemption. Why, that poor despised alien, the Samaritan leper, whom Jesus healed, showed a better spirit and a more cultivated heart.

Let the incense of gratitude ascend from the altar of every heart. Says Paul most beautifully: "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ to you-ward." And especially let us give thanks to "God for His unspeakable gift," the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

53. Devotion To One Master. The Fifteenth Sunday After Trin- ity. Matt. 6:24-34

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:24-34)

THE TROUBLE with far too many people is, they want to do the impossible — serve two masters. In our lesson for today Christ teaches us, not only that such an exploit is impossible, but also that devotion to one master — that is, to God — will simplify all life, and solve all our vexing problems. It might be explained in this way: Suppose you were trying to serve two persons whose wills were contradictory, you would soon find your task a very difficult one, and by and by impossible; but suppose that you decided to put yourself under the service of the better and stronger one of the two, and the right one, would not that simplify your tasks?

This is the organizing thought that runs through this whole passage of Scripture: Have just one Master, namely God, and that will unravel all the tangles of life. Let us classify the several parts of the text in the order in which we find them. We note, then, that devotion to one Master, God, is —

I. The Remedy For Worldliness.

Our great Teacher said: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

What is meant by mammon? Some people think it means Satan. No, it does not mean something that is evil in itself. Mammon means money; and of course money stands for all earthly possessions. Perhaps you will remember that Jesus said, in the lesson for the ninth Sunday after Trinity: “Make unto yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness,” etc. In our sermon on that text we explained that, if money is used in the right way, it may be of great service to man and the kingdom of Christ. But in the text for today our Lord shows the wrong use of money: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” This means that, if you make God your Master, you cannot have money as your master too; nor the reverse.

It should be remembered that money in itself is not an evil thing. Really money is very useful; it is even needful. What would the world of trade do without this convenient medium of exchange and the values for which it stands? Indeed, money is a very good servant. If you and I keep it in that place, the place of servant, we can do much good with it. But money makes a very hard master; indeed, as a master it is so exacting and absorbing that there is no chance for God to be ruler. So it is with the world in general. The world is all very well as long as you stay on top of it; but when you let it get on top of you, it will not only crush out all your spiritual life, but push you on and on until it shoves you into eternal perdition.

We take a good quotation from the Lutheran Commentary: “The sense is: You cannot give your hearts to the service of the true God, and at the same time regard earthly advantage as the sovereign good. A clear distinction between the mere possession of riches and a predominating thirst for them is thus made... The divine rule is given in Ps. 62:10: ‘If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.’” Then a good excerpt from Luther is

given: "It is not a sin to possess property and a family; but thou art forbidden to convert these possessions into thy masters; thou must remain their master, and cause them to serve thee."

However, our text is a warning against the danger of money. Good in itself and most useful, that is the very reason why it becomes so perilous. People say, "How shall we live without money?" and then make that the excuse for devotion to getting it; and thus they forget that it enslaves them, and robs God of His right to rule their lives. God has no harder rival to overcome than avarice. It is also a most insidious bondsman. Some people are slaves to money when they do not realize it. If you find that you do not care to do anything for God and the Church unless you receive material payment for your service, you may depend upon it that the love of money has crept surreptitiously into your soul, and robbed God of His sovereignty there. There is no spirit that is more prevalent than the mercenary spirit, nor one that is more apt to steal into the soul and destroy all spirituality of motive. Some men preach for money, and care more for a livelihood than for souls. Is it any wonder that business men find it hard to keep mammon from getting the regnant place in their hearts? Think of it. We are bidden to come to God's house purely and solely to worship, and fit ourselves for eternal habitation in the pure and holy home He has prepared for us. Yet often the pews of the church are unfilled. If some one would offer each person five dollars for attendance at the church service on Sunday, do you not believe that all the seats would be occupied?

Yes, it is very, very hard to keep money in its place; it ever wants to usurp the throne in our hearts. We need not wonder that Jesus told us so earnestly how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; that it is even easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into that kingdom. He said that simply because He knew how difficult it is for a man who has large earthly possessions to keep from making them his master. It is true, He said, "With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." By which He meant that the rich man may enter the kingdom of heaven, but only by the grace and power of God. Is it not only too true that comparatively few rich people are really devoted Christians? Their interest in their wealth is too absorbing.

Now what is the cure for worldliness? Our answer is: Devotion to one Master. If we will make God our Master, and put our earthly possessions in the place of servants to Him, our problem will be solved. Wise is the man

who can keep a single heart and motive, devoted only to God and His cause.

Devotion to one Master, God, is also —

II. The Cure Of Anxiety.

The next part of the text is directly connected, with the part discussed by a “therefore.” It says: “Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, What ye shall eat,” etc. This means that Christ is continuing His discourse in logical order, so that anxiety about the things of this earthly life is connected with serving only one master.

And let me ask, Would not entire devotion to God cure men of all worry and anxiety? What is worse than worry? Some one has said, “Worry kills more people than work.” In a certain city some of the people organized a “Don’t Worry Club.” The trouble with many people is, they worry over many things that never happen. The story is told of a couple who were going on their way to the market town after a heavy rain, which had swollen the streams. In one of the valleys they knew there was a bridge. All along the way, before they reached it, they worried about the probability of its having been swept away by the flood. On and on they went, growing more worried every moment. What would they do if the bridge had been swept away? But when they reached the place, there was the bridge as safe and strong as ever! They had had all their worry for nothing. Perhaps from some story like this arose the adage, “Do not cross the bridge before you get to it.”

It is just this matter of needless anxiety that Christ warns us against in this text, when He says, “Take no thought for the morrow.”

However, there are some people who find this passage difficult to understand. They declare that it would be impossible to live in this world if we would “take no thought for the future.” And that is true; therefore we must find out the true interpretation of the text. Christ, who was so wise and good, would not have commanded or required an impossibility. All will be clear when we find the meaning of the phrase, “take thought.” In King James’ translation of our English Bible we find this phrase, because at that time (1611) “to take thought” meant to be anxious. Today we do not attach that meaning to it. Therefore our modern translators use the expression, “Be

not anxious.” The original word is really quite a strong word, and may be translated, “to be distracted.” Now let us translate literally, “Be not distracted about the morrow,” or, “Be not anxious or fearful or solicitous or worried about the morrow.”

That is surely sensible and much-needed advice. It does not say that we should be careless, neglectful or improvident. The fact is, other passages of Scripture teach us to be provident and forehanded. Again and again the book of Proverbs commends prudence, foresight, diligence and all the kindred virtues. Paul says, “He that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own household, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” He also says, “If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.”

So, while our Lord does not encourage shiftlessness and false trust, He does bid us to do away with anxiety. We might put the matter in this way: Do your part in getting food, raiment and the other necessities of life, and then do not worry; trust God for the rest. Christ enforces this principle, “Be not anxious,” by means of three apt illustrations.

First, He cites the birds of the air: “They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” And what about the birds? Well, they are industrious creatures. Much of their time is spent in hunting for food. But they do not worry about it. In some creature-like way they trust nature to supply them with food as they need it. At eventide they find their perches in the trees, bushes and grass, pillow their heads under their wings, and sleep without worrying about the morrow.

Then the Lord illustrates again by saying, “Which of you by worrying is able to add one cubit to his stature?” Whether it means adding a cubit to your height or to your life, worrying will do no good. The fact is, you are more likely to decrease your height and shorten your life by worry. Go into a cemetery, and you will find no epitaphs reading like this: “He died from overwork.” But, if the truth were told, you might find many with this legend, “He died from worry.” Oh! if we were truly devoted to one Master, our heavenly Father, we would do our part, and then trust Him to do His part; and that would cure our anxiety.

Jesus taught us the same lesson from the flowers: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, will not God clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, be not

anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? After all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

This is as beautiful as it is comforting. If God thus cares for the flowers of the field, and arrays them in rare beauty, we may be sure that we, who are rational and immortal souls, will be under His watchful care. Therefore we should trust Him and cease our anxiety. Let us remember the enjoinder of the apostle: “Cast your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” If we should give ourselves more devotedly to one Master, Jesus Christ, and not look upon earthly comforts as the chief good, it would cure us of all our fretting and murmuring and anxiety. Oh! this matter of worrying about tomorrow, of fretting about something to eat and to wear, is utterly wrong; it puts us into the same class as the heathen; it means distrust of the good providence of God. He knows we have need of these earthly things. Would He have put us into the world and told us to trust and serve Him, without making provision for our temporal lives? Then let us do our share, as He has commanded us, and trust Him to keep His promises. The Psalmist says: “Once I was young, and now I am old; yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”

Devotion to one Master, Jesus Christ, also imparts —

III. The Ability To Estimate All Things In The Order Of Their Importance.

This fact is shown in the command of the text which says: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

It is a great art; indeed, it is the highest Christian art, to be able to put first things first and second things second. That is the test of vital Christianity. Where does a man put the chief emphasis? Does he put it on “these things” — the things of the world — or on the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

I fear many of us reverse Christ’s earnest enjoinder. We put the sentence in this order: “Seek ye first these things, and the kingdom of God and His righteousness will be added unto you.” Is it not only too true that our chief concern is about things to eat, to wear and enjoy? And somehow we think

that God's kingdom will be added to us as an adjunct of more or less value. We do not take religion seriously. We give it a secondary place; yes, and many people give it the third, fourth, tenth, fiftieth place. Oh, how poorly we appraise the most important things! Our whole scale and conception of values is wrong. We are anxious and assiduous in getting the wherewithal to live, but we let religion take care of itself. Some parents do this with their children. They fret and worry over their clothing, over their manners, over their education, over their place in society, over their success during the few short years of life, but about their souls' welfare they never have a moment of anxious thought. Then there are people who think they can put off the day of repentance until they come to their dying beds. However, they never postpone earning a dollar when a chance comes. They can get up early on every day in the week to go to their worldly employment, but to get up on Sunday morning in time for the Bible school and church service — that is too strenuous a task.

People often say they have no other day for pleasure and recreation and fun than the Lord's Day; so they never go to God's house. When are they going to find time to attend to their souls' salvation, to cultivate their spiritual life and to worship God, if they do not do so on the Lord's Day? Is it more important to have fun than to seek salvation? I sympathize with people who must work hard every day to keep body and soul together, and wish that economic and industrial matters could be so arranged as to give them time for rest and recreation; but I believe, if they would seek God and His salvation instead of spending the Lord's Day in pursuit of mere worldly pleasure, they would have much more joy and satisfaction, and would suffer nothing in the necessities of life. In some way God will provide for those who trust and serve Him faithfully. But when people reverse the order, and seek the world first, and let God's kingdom take care of itself, they get neither true pleasure nor Christian life and hope.

“Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below;
May I its great importance learn,
Its sovereign virtue know!”

And do not think for a moment, my friends, that this divinely arranged program would mean thriftlessness regarding the temporal things of life. A part of seeking God's kingdom is to do our work well and faithfully and in the

fear of God. The idler is not the man who seeks God's kingdom. A Christian is industrious, frugal and forehanded without worry. But here is the difference between him and the worldling. He does his work in the fear of God, so that he may live as long as possible to serve God and His kingdom, and may have something with which to help to spread the cause of Christ; whereas the worldling simply lives for himself and for this world, without thinking of God and the demands of His kingdom. He is of the earth, earthy; as Shakespeare would put it, he is a "groundling." It is said that at the bottom of the sea there is a creature which seems to be half vegetable and half animal. It grows fast to the sea's bottom, and if you pull it loose from the ground, you kill it. I have often thought that some people are like that creature; they have grown fast to the world; if something would pull them loose, it would kill them.

There is a better way to live; a higher and nobler way; a happier way. Let us have only one Master, and let Him be the highest Being, our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer; then we will be cured of our worldliness, our worry, and our foolish emphasis on merely temporal things.

54. Christ's Pity And Power. The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 7:11-17

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about. (Luke 7:11-17)

THE LESSONS for the Sundays after Trinity present great diversity. We cannot expect them to follow one another in the order of logical sequence, for they were not selected with that purpose in view; rather, with the idea of presenting the rich variety that is found in the life and teaching of our Lord. A few Sundays ago we saw how Jesus was able to cause a deaf mute both to hear and to speak; a Sunday or two later we noted His ability to cure the ten lepers. In both cases the miracles were real wonders, and displayed a marvelous knowledge of the human body and a marvelous power to heal its infirmities. Other miracles which our Lord performed showed that He was able to heal all kinds of otherwise incurable diseases.

There was something else for Him to do, or men might think that His knowledge and power were limited; and that was to prove His ability to restore life. Had He all power over both the body and the soul? If He had, then no doubt remained that He was the Messiah and the divine Son of God. In today's lesson we learn that His power is not limited, for He raised the deceased son of the widow of Nain to life. However, our text brings to view another trait of His character — the one that seemed to move Him most to

perform the miracle — His compassion for the bereft widow. Suppose, then, in studying this miracle, we assemble our thoughts about these three divisions: The pity of Jesus, the power of Jesus, and the beautiful and effective combination of His pity and His power.

I. Our Lord's Pity.

The narrative is a sweet and touching one. If you read it sympathetically, you can scarcely restrain the tears.

The miracle occurred near the gate of the little town of Nain, located on the northern slope of Little Mt. Hermon, on the southern border of the Plain of Esdraelon. Of course in those days, as in these, the dead were buried outside of the towns and cities. As Jesus and His disciples were approaching the town, they met the funeral procession, which had emerged from the gate. Observe how touchingly Luke describes the Scene: "Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and many people of the city were with her." There you have the whole sad scene pictured in one simple, graphic sentence. It was an especially sorrowful occasion, such as you and I have often known ourselves. The young man whom the pallbearers carried so silently was the only stay and support of his widowed mother.

"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." It was His pity that moved Him. He was touched by the woman's heart-broken sorrow. Then He spoke the words that restored the young man to life. His sympathy and kindness did not stop there. Jesus must have drawn the young man from the coffin or the bier, and then, as the record says, "He delivered him to his mother." This proves that His sympathy led Him to do just what was needed — to give back her son to the widowed mother to continue to be her comfort and stay. He might have said, "Now that I have raised this young man from the dead, I will ask him to follow me as one of my apostles or immediate disciples, for his testimony will be of great value to me wherever I go." But no! "He delivered him to his mother." He thought of her, of her sorrow, of her loneliness, of her need of her son's support. That was a most beautiful and unselfish way.

I like to think how pure and unmingled His compassion was on this occasion. He was not asked to come to the poor woman's relief. Perhaps she

did not even know of His presence. It was just her pitiful grief that touched Him, and moved Him to restore her dead to her alive and well.

But this was like Jesus. He was always unselfish, always accessible, always sympathetic. No case of grief ever went unassuaged in His presence. Whether He was asked to do a kindness or not, He always did it in cases of affliction. "He went about doing good." "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." In the Old Testament prophecies He is called "The Suffering Servant of Jehovah." Then we know that He not only showed and felt pity for suffering mankind while He Was here on earth in" the state of humiliation, but it was His pity that moved Him to come from heaven to help and save us. He could not remain in a state of glory while men were in so evil and sorrowful a condition down here on earth. So He came to bear our infirmities and carry our diseases.

"How condescending and how kind
Was God's eternal Son!
Our misery reached His heavenly mind,
And pity brought Him down.

"This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

But some one may say: "Oh! it is a platitude to talk about the compassion of Christ." Ah, but, my friends, it should never become a platitude to us. It should always be a matter of real and vital and joy-giving experience, so that we would feel in our hearts that Christ is our sympathizing Friend, and that His pity is always as deep as our sorrow. If we can have that experience, it will be a comfort to us in every trial, and we can be like Paul, who even declared that he gloried in his tribulations. But it is especially important that we remember who Jesus was, in order that we may most truly and profoundly value His compassion. He was "God manifest in the flesh;" He came to reveal God's character to us; therefore through His revelation we know that the God of the universe pities us in our sorrow, and is willing to help us. Is not that a most vital and inspiring truth of revelation — that God,

great and mighty as He is, is also our compassionate Friend and Redeemer? Yes, heaven is kind, sympathetic, loving.

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.
There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord."

How good and comforting, therefore, is the pity of Jesus! However, mere pity could help us very little. Sometimes our friends come to us, and console us in our affliction; that gives us some consolation; but, after, all, it does not help us out of our difficulty. So pity must be coupled with something else in order to be effective; it must be coupled with power. So this leads us to reflect on —

II. Our Lord's Power.

His power, like His pity, is displayed in this miracle at the gate of the little city of Nain. The words of the evangelist are so simple that they are sublime. He says, after bidding the widowed mother to cease her weeping: "And He came and touched the bier; and they that bare it stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus delivered him to his mother."

No uninspired writer would have ever told this marvelous story in that simple, majestic way. He would have marred it by over-decoration. It bears its own evidence of divinity.

What a great miracle — that of raising a dead man to life! On other Sundays we have seen that Jesus, in order to cure bodily diseases, must have understood all about the mechanism of the human body. He must have known more than all the anatomists, physiologists, physicians and surgeons, or He never could have cured otherwise incurable diseases. But here is a different situation. That mysterious bond which binds soul and body together had been severed in the case of the dead man now before Christ. Did Jesus understand the mysterious relation of the mind to the brain, which has ever been one of the outstanding and unsolved problems of psychology and philosophy? When that union has been dissolved by the mystery of death, is He able to reinstate it? Even if He could cure all diseases, but should fail here, His knowledge and power would be limited, and He would not be Lord of all; He would not be fully divine. But note: He raised this young man from death's embrace with the same ease and quickness that He opened the ears of the deaf, gave sight to the blind, healed the palsied and the leprous, multiplied the loaves and fishes, and stilled the tumultuous winds and waves. Power! power! power! How great was His power! How perfect His knowledge!

“Oh!” some one exclaims, “I cannot believe this story; I cannot believe that Christ ever raised people from the dead.” Do you believe, then, that the disciples made up this story, and were willing to die for what they know to be a falsehood? Do you believe that, if they were impostors, they could have written such books as the gospels and epistles? Do you believe that they could have invented such a character as Christ, put into His lips the holiest and sweetest teaching the world has ever known, drawn the picture of a perfect life such as is ascribed to Him, imposed it upon the world, and made the world believe the fiction, so that hundreds of thousands have been willing to sacrifice all worldly honor and life itself for the sake of Christ? Do you believe that men who were impostors or fanatics could have composed a gospel and set forth a Christ that could regenerate men and save them from lives of sin even today nineteen centuries afterward? If you can believe that, you can believe a greater miracle than any that Christ ever performed, and one, too, that is as preposterous as it is Inexplicable! No; Jesus proved Himself historically the Master of death, and therefore we can have the utmost confidence in Him.

“But Jesus does not raise people from the dead in these days,” says some puzzled soul. No, that is true. It would not have been according to His pur-

pose to continue to perform such miracles, for then everybody who lost a friend would want to have Him restored to life, and so people would never die. Even this young man of Nain, though raised from the dead once by the power of Christ, afterward died. So did Lazarus, and the daughter of Jairus. Then why did Jesus perform this special miracle, and raise a few other people from the dead? To prove that He has power over physical death, and is able to bring soul and body together again, even though they have been separated. Having this power, we may know that, when the time comes, He will be able to raise our bodies from their graves, glorify them, and reunite them with our redeemed souls, so as to make our redemption complete. "He that believeth on Me," He says, "though he were dead, yet shall he live." And Paul teaches in the plainest terms that, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised, and shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall be forever with the Lord. Thus the raising of the widow's son is a prophecy and promise of what will occur at the last day, when "all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth."

We must notice briefly the third point of the text:

III. The Beautiful And Effective Combination Of Pity And Power In Our Lord.

As has been said, mere pity could effect very little, because it would lack power to help us. On the other hand, mere power would profit little; indeed, it might simply beget terror Within us. There is nothing more frightful than great power unmodified by pity and love. But when you have them coupled together, fear takes wings, and confidence is begotten.

That is the reason our text combines these two qualities so beautifully in the conduct of Christ in the incident at Nain. Thus we can have undaunted faith in Christ, for His pity will move the hand of His power to help us. He may not raise our dead to life, but He will strengthen us to bear the anguish of our bereavement. When our last moment comes, He will not heal our bodily ailments, but He will bring up our souls from the valley of death, and take them to Himself in Paradise. Thus we can say today, as the people did when they beheld the son of the widow of Nain brought back from the mystery of death: "A great prophet is risen among us, and God hath visited His

people.” Thanks be to God that the pity of Christ moves His power in our behalf, and His power makes His pity effective! Amen.

55. Christ's Instructive Table Talk. The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 14:1-11

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 14:1-11)

SEVERAL WRITERS have given to the world books of "table talk" that have become classical. Luther's little book by that title is a gem, and contains many of his most valuable sayings. The poet, William Cowper, also issued a book full of wise maxims under the title of "Table Talk." One of our versatile American writers, Oliver Wendell Holmes, while he did not choose the same title, has given the world a book entitled "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," that scintillates with the brightness of his literary genius.

Our great Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ, preceded all these brilliant conversers at table, and gave us some talks that are of superlative value. His table talks were all serious and important. He indulged in no lightness, no frivolity, no gossip, as do many people today when gathered around the festal

board. In our gospel lesson we have one of His most suggestive and helpful table talks.

Observe that He “went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath Day.” Even this sentence is suggestive, for it shows us two things: First, Jesus would not refuse to be a guest for a meal on the Sabbath. He was not so Puritanic as to think that such a visit was wrong, when the motive and purpose were good and holy. But, second, it is not said that this was a feast, but simply that He went “to eat bread.” It was evidently a simple meal. Thus we may learn that the Sabbath Day was not to be made a day of hilarious festivity.

Christ’s table talk on this day, so far as our lesson is concerned, divides itself into two. themes which may not be closely related logically, but which were relevant to the occasion, showing how well Christ improved every opportunity. May we be imitators of Him in this respect, so that we waste no chance to do good! Christ first spoke to the assembled guests about doing good on the Sabbath Day; second, about people whose pride led them to choose the chief seats at a wedding. Let us consider these themes in the order named.

I. Our Lord’s Speech Respecting The Sabbath Day.

When Christ came to the Pharisee’s house to partake of his hospitality, some of His fellow-guests watched Him. That was neither courteous nor kind, but it was in accord with the hypocritical and self-righteous spirit of the Pharisees. Yet Christ did not remain away nor retire from the meal, because there were critics there. He knew He was right, and had no reason to fear criticism.

A man who had the dropsy appeared before Christ. We have seen in other lessons that Christ understood all about the constitution of the human body, and therefore could effectually cure diseases. Here was a different kind of malady from any that we have thus far considered. It was not like palsy or leprosy or blindness or deafness, but affected the body in quite a different way. Yet Christ understood the pathology in this case, as in the others, and healed the man simply by an act of His divine power. It is marvelous what a physician He was — the only physician who never lost a

case. Nothing could more clearly prove the divinity of our Lord than the successful way in which He treated all manner of otherwise incurable diseases. Today a man must study for many years in the best schools before he can become a successful diagnostician. and practitioner; and even then he will meet with many cases that he cannot cure. Christ never failed to cure a case brought to Him, no matter how acute or chronic it may have been.

However, in other discourses we have dwelt at sufficient length on Christ's marvelous healing power. Let us now give attention to His teaching on the law of the Sabbath. When the dropsical man appeared before Him, He first turned to the "lawyers and Pharisees" at the table with Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day?" And they held their peace; they would not say a word. They had come there to watch and entrap Him, and now, when He put to them a simple and straightforward question, they played the hypocrite by their complete silence. They knew well enough that they could not answer His question either yea or nay, without committing themselves to one side of the question or the other, and in neither case could they defend themselves. They were in the dilemma of the prejudiced and insincere, and therefore evasion was their best policy.

Now, it is interesting to note the course that Christ pursued in the presence of His critics. He did the right and open thing. He took the man, healed him, and let him go. Then, turning to His critics, He pierced them with one of His questions which always went to the heart of the matter with arrow-like precision, saying: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath Day?" "And," says the record, "they could not answer Him again to these things."

Thus, with all their lawyer-like shrewdness, they were put into a corner. They had set a trap for Him, and were caught in it themselves.

But we must note the meaning and implications of Christ's teaching on the Sabbath. Did He mean to teach a low view of this sacred day? No; He surely did not, for He Himself observed the day in the right way and spirit. It was "His custom" to go into the synagogue on the Sabbath, to read God's Word, and to engage in worship. He loved to be in His Father's house on the Sabbath. So far as we can analyze His conduct, He had the same idea of the Sabbath as we Christians have of the Lord's Day at the present time — that is, it should be a day when we gladly lay aside our everyday tasks, and repair to God's house to listen to the reading and preaching of God's Word. It is not so much a day of legal restraint, as the Pharisees taught, hedged

about with small laws and prohibitions, as a day of joyful privilege in the worship of God and attendance on the means of grace.

Elsewhere and under almost similar circumstances, Christ said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." By this He meant that the Sabbath was not intended to be an iron chain on man's neck to gall him and crush him, but was ordained for his good, his comfort and his joy. It was to be a blessing for man, not a hardship. It was for man's highest welfare to have one day in seven for rest and worship; he would be a better man for so observing the day. On the other hand, the Pharisees had burdened the day with so many artificial refinements that it had become a hardship to man; so that many regarded it as the most gloomy and wearisome day of the week, and were glad when it was over. Just so do extremists always pervert the good gifts of a kind and beneficent God.

In one place Christ also declared that He Himself, the Son of man, "is Lord also of the Sabbath." What does this mean? It means His divinity again. He was the God who originally ordained the old' Jewish Sabbath, and therefore He had a right to interpret the commandment respecting it. He may have also meant that, if He should see fit through His apostles to abrogate it, and lead His Church to observe another day that would celebrate an event in the history of redemption instead of creation, and a day that would not be so likely to be perverted by ultra Sabbatarians, He, the original Lord of the Sabbath, would have a right to do so. That was what afterward occurred in the history of His Church. The old Jewish Sabbath, though observed for a while by a part of the Christian Church, soon was replaced by the better day, the first day of the week, which celebrated the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Does not this prove that "the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath?" Would anyone else have dared to set aside a day that had been ordained by the Almighty from the creation as a day of rest?

But note that Jesus did certain kinds of works even on the Sabbath of the Jews. However, they were not idle works, or useless works, or the ordinary works that belonged to the regular workdays of the week. Here was a special case of sickness, and perhaps in Jesus' busy life, it was His only opportunity to meet the man afflicted with the fatal disease of dropsy. So He healed him, and bade him go his way. So we may well attend to cases of serious sickness on the Lord's day without fear that God will think us neglectful of worship in His house. Indeed, it would be wrong to neglect the sick, that is, those who need nursing and care, even for going to a church service.

Sometimes it is people's duty to stay at home to take care of their sick on the Lord's day. Sometimes it may even be wicked for people to go to the church service, because a greater duty may call them elsewhere. God will never permit us to trade off one duty against another.

Christ's illustration about the ox which has fallen into a ditch on the Sabbath Day is a very apt one. Who would not release a suffering animal on any day of the week, Sabbath, Lord's Day, or any other? Suppose a man would say, "I must go to church to worship God," and so would permit a poor animal to suffer and perhaps perish, do you suppose that God would accept his worship? He surely would not. Even if the man did not care for the money loss, he should first do a deed of mercy to a helpless beast. Then, if he can go to church, let him do so by all means. There is always a right and sensible way of doing things that God will approve. He does not want us to become extremists and radicals in serving Him. He serves God best who does the plain duty that comes next, let it be what it will.

Out on the prairies of Kansas, in the midst of the great wheat-belt, we heard this incident recited: One Sunday the minister was preaching an earnest sermon. Suddenly a member of the congregation sprang to his feet, and announced that a neighbor's wheat-stack was on fire. The minister ceased his sermon at once, and bade the people go and save the wheat, which they did promptly; thus they prevented the fire from spreading to the rest of the man's wheat-stacks, which would otherwise all have been consumed, and his whole crop lost. Everybody knows what that would have meant in that region where wheat is almost the sole crop that is raised. Every sensible Christian will approve of the conduct of the minister and his congregation. If they had done otherwise, they would have acted contrary to God's will.

But such works of necessity and mercy should not lead us to abuse the Lord's day by doing unnecessary work, or by frittering away the time. While the old legalism of the Jewish Sabbath should not be incorporated in our present Christian Lord Day, yet we may well invest the latter with the principle of rest and holiness that is of perpetual obligation. Surely, if God in the creation set aside one day in seven for rest, it must mean that one day in seven is useful to man for that purpose. So here, without a direct command about the Lord's day, we still find a fundamental principle — that one day in seven is good for man as a day of rest and worship. If the Jews needed a sacred day for their spiritual culture, it is evident that Christians

do also. What would have been the fate of Christianity had not the early Christians, perhaps the apostles themselves, set aside the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, for the preaching of the gospel, the worship of God, spiritual culture, and rest from the strenuous work of the week-days? It is easy to see that, in the leading of God's Spirit and providence, one day in seven for sacred purposes was necessary. Therefore the day should not be profaned. Luther pointed out its special value by saying that we should rest on that day, and especially should not neglect or despise the preaching of the gospel. This makes it a glad holy day, not a day of legalistic constraint, nor a roistering holiday.

And now since the day is to be set aside for rest, worship and spiritual culture, it is plain what should not be done on this day. Anything that will interfere with its purpose must be wrong. Can you attend a boisterous excursion on the Lord's Day, or go to a foolish picture-show, or attend a vociferous ball-game, and still retain a worshipful frame of mind? To ask the question is to answer it in the negative. We have never known people who did such things on the Lord's Day to be devout worshippers in God's house. The wrong is not that one will break an old Jewish law, but that one neglects God and His service. Sport wants to rob the world of all the days that have been set aside for good and noble purposes. See how Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, Decoration Day, Christmas and Easter, are diverted from their real and original purposes by the sporting crowd. The pleasure-loving world knows nothing so sacred but it will lay its desecrating hand upon it.

If we get back to Christ's interpretation of the Sabbath, we shall find that He has laid down the fundamental principle for the proper observance of the sacred days of the Church. Works of mercy and necessity may, and even should be, done on them; so also healthful Christian recreation may be taken, like quiet walking and driving and innocent conversation; but the chief purpose of the day is reading God's Word, prayer and worship, all done in a glad and thankful spirit.

When Christ had silenced His critics on the subject of the Sabbath, He turned the conversation in another channel. As He sat at the table, He saw something in the conduct of the guests that suggested a wholesome subject of discourse, namely:

II. Choosing The Highest Seats At A Feast.

This part of His discourse proves that He was a close observer, and that He also read deeply into the motives of men. Conduct is a clue to character. The man who deliberately places himself in the chief seat, whether it was intended for him or not, advertises his pride and self-seeking ambition. There is no need to “judge” him to know that; his “actions speak louder than words.”

Well, that is what Jesus noted at the feast. He marked how some men selected for themselves, Without an invitation from the host, the most conspicuous seats. You can see the spectacle for yourself. Here comes in a man with a big, imperious air; he looks around to see where he shall sit; he walks over and takes the most honorable seat. Why does he do so? Simply because he is ambitious for place and position. Unable to win distinction by merit, he grasps it in that small and artificial way. You can almost hear him saying to himself, “If I take the chief seat, these people will think I am a great man, and everybody will be agog, and will ask, ‘Who is it? Who is it?’” Some people will do almost anything to win a little cheap notoriety. This weakness, this morbid thirst for fame, Jesus rebuked most pointedly in His table-talk.

Marking this ambition in His fellow-guests, He said: “When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have honor of all them that sit at meat with thee.” Then He adds an important reflection: “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” From this teaching we may draw some valuable lessons.

[1] When a conspicuous place belongs to you, you have a right to occupy it. What Jesus criticized in the conduct of some of the guests was that they usurped the honorable seats that were not intended for them and that they had no right to occupy. The host had not assigned them to them. Had they modestly waited until the host or his servants came and conducted them to their proper seats, Jesus would not have reproved them. So if you are a minister, and you have been properly selected by a congregation or synod to preach the sermon for the day, and the proper party conducts you to the central chair in the pulpit, you have a right to sit there, and it is no

sign of pride for you to do so. It is yours by regular appointment. Indeed, you may sit there, and may feel more humble and unworthy than many a man who is sitting down in the pews. The man who does not push himself forward, but is selected by others for a conspicuous position because of real merit, may be in duty bound to occupy the place; it may be God's call through the people. Such elevation ought not to make him proud, but should fill him with a sense of responsibility, and drive him to his knees for divine guidance and wisdom.

What has been said here about the minister may also be said about the godly layman in the Church. Some people may be troubled with excessive timidity; they may feel that, if they accept a somewhat prominent position in the Church, they will be looked upon as seeking the highest seats at the feast or in the synagogue. That all depends on how you get into the position, and what your motives are. Of course, if a man secures a position through ambition and worldly politics, he is seeking his own glory, and would be condemned by Christ in this lesson. On the other hand, if he is modest and humble, and his pastor and fellow members have elected him to a place of usefulness, because they sincerely believe him to be competent and consecrated, then he can take the place with good grace, and need not feel that he is pushing himself forward.

This fact is worth noting: While some men have too high an opinion of themselves, and hence may be ambitious for place and position, others of more commanding ability may have too low an estimate of themselves, and hence, unless their friends recognize their merits, they may never do what they ought to do for God's kingdom. The ambitious man seeks for a position for himself, and may secure it by political trickery, but the true Christian disciple permits the position rather to seek him, and when he is convinced that the call of the people is also the call of God, he ought to accept the responsibility, and perform his duty faithfully. The apostle Paul gave judicious counsel along this line (Rom. 12:3): "For I say, through the grace that was given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man the measure of faith." The first part of the text warns against an over-estimate of oneself, and such admonition is greatly needed; but the second part indicates that a man should think soberly of his capabilities, should think of them as they really are, and therefore should avoid too low as well as too high an estimate of himself. If this principle

were carried out, all the responsible positions would be filled by the right parties, and there would be no misunderstandings and no wranglings. Note that Christ, in the text, says plainly that, when the master of the wedding feast comes to a person in a lowly place, and says to him, "Friend, go up higher," the guest thus bidden has a right to take the higher seat proffered him, and receives proper recognition from his fellow-guests when he does so. He humbled himself, and now he is exalted, and that is the proper order.

[2] The second and opposite lesson to be learned from our text is that people should not scramble 'for the high positions in the Church. How immodest it was for the men at the wedding to presume to sit down, without being bidden, in the highest seats! They knew that those seats were reserved for others. But that made no difference; their over-weening desire for show, for self-parade, led them to this immodest assumption of the most conspicuous places. You can see the pride and self-glorying exuding from their Very appearance and conduct; and nothing is more nauseating than such exhibitions of worldly pride. No wonder Jesus introduced into His teaching what might be called "poetic justice," by saying that the master of the feast comes along by and by, and tells those proud guests to take lower seats, and thus they are humiliated before the whole assembly.

Now, whether such poetic justice is always done in this world or not, we know that it is the correct principle; those who exalt themselves should be humbled, while those who humble themselves should be exalted. And this is the principle that will prevail at the last day, when strict justice and equity will be administered. Then every man shall be rewarded according to his deeds and the motives that actuated them. No doubt some people, who always managed to put themselves, as it were, "in the limelight" in this world, will then be relegated to a very humble position; while others, who were unknown, but who did their work with no desire to be "seen of men," will be advanced to an exalted place.

The mother of James and John once asked Christ to bestow upon them the choice positions, the one on His right hand, the other on His left, when He came in His kingdom. But Jesus' answer was significant. He said: "To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give; but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared of my Father."

So no one but God knows who shall have the most conspicuous places. He alone will be able to bring every secret thing to light, and weigh the motives back of every deed. The awarding of positions at the last day will, no

doubt, cause many great surprises. But we know that God's judgments will be just and final. Then those who exalted themselves will be abased, and those who humbled themselves will be exalted.

We are persuaded that ambition for place and power in the Church leads to more wrangling than anything else. Men become obsessed with the desire to be leaders, whether they are the real choice of the great body of believers or not, and then they set machinery at work to bring about their purposes, and soon have captured position after position. The very fact that they secure so many positions, while there are others just as competent to fill them, proves their worldly ambition. The truly modest man will often decline positions when others desire to heap them upon him by saying: "There are others just as competent as I to fill certain places; let us divide up the work and the responsibility, and give as many men as possible a direct interest in the work of the Lord." After all, the Biblical way is the best: "To every man his work;" "But all these worketh the one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will." If the people of the Church could eliminate the spirit of ambition from their hearts, and put there the spirit of devotion, the prosperity of Zion would know no end and brook no hindrance. Christ taught this principle in one of His most searching statements: "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you; but whosoever would be great among you shall be your servant, and whosoever would be first among you shall be your bond-servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." That is a great principle. It ought forever to elide worldly ambition from the minds of the disciples of Christ. The desire to be an "ecclesiastical boss" can have no place in Christ's program for His kingdom. The contrary spirit should prevail — the spirit of humble and willing service, "in honor preferring one another." Oh, that such a temper might obtain everywhere in Zion! Let there be no unseemly strife about places of honor. How petty such strife for worldly honor seems in view of the great work to be done for Christ's cause and kingdom!

"Ye servants of the Lord,
Each in his office wait,
Observant of His heavenly Word,
And watchful at His gate.

"Let all your lamps be bright,
And trim the golden frame,
Gird up your loins as in His sight,
For awful is His name.

"Watch! 'tis our Lord's command;
And while we speak, He's near;
Mark the first signal of His hand,
And ready all appear.

"Oh, happy servant he
In such a posture found!
He shall his Lord with rapture see,
And be with honor crowned."

56. Christ, The Acute Reasoner. The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:34-46

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:34-46)

OUR LORD had more than one logical contest with His opponents. True, He did not always stop to debate with them; but on occasion He gave them logic for logic, and in every case proved Himself the superior reasoner. In the sections preceding our lesson for today, He met the Sadducees concerning a difficulty they had framed up about the resurrection, and put them to rout. This pleased the Pharisees, who were the rivals of the Sadducees, and so they gathered about Jesus, and for the time were rather friendly to Him.

But while the Sadducees made artificial difficulties about the resurrection, the Pharisees framed many difficulties relative to the law. Like some theologians today, they had speculated about the law, making one refinement and useless distinction after another, until they could not think normally about anything; they carried everything up into the region of abstraction; which is a very poor way of dealing with religion or with anything else that is of practical value to the human family.

Now our lesson today divides itself into two parts. When the Pharisees gathered together before Christ, one of their number, a lawyer, asked Him a question. He answered it. Then He turned upon them with a question. But they could not answer it. Notice Christ's superiority; He could always answer the questions put to Him, but how often His opponents could not answer His questions! Here we see the difference between divine and human wisdom. Now we will consider Christ's astute reasoning in this lesson: first, in regard to the first and great commandment; second, in regard to His own person. The first deals with the lawyer's question; the second with our Lord's own question.

I. Christ's Reasoning About The First And Great Commandment.

Evidently the lawyer meant to haggle about the relative value of the commandments. Perhaps he had engaged in more than one forensic contest on this question. However, even when a question was put to Christ in a caviling spirit, He answered it, if it was a fundamental question. So here He replied that the first and great commandment was this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

This response is vital and needs to be stressed today. Let us remember that Christ, our divine Lord Himself, put the first emphasis on love to God.

Is that where men put the emphasis today? Is there not rather far too much forgetfulness of God? Do not men love almost everything else first; then, if they have any place left in their hearts, they give it to Him? And often it is the smallest niche. It may be said of many persons today, "God is not in all their thoughts." The practical wisdom of the world ignores God. Men seem to think they can dispense with Him. They are like the rich man whose barns were bursting with abundance; so he resolved to build larger ones; then take his ease, and eat, drink, and make merry. But he had left God out of the account; and so God came to him, and said, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall all these goods be?" How often that happens! Men will toil and struggle for a large share of this world, and then, when they have reached the goal of their ambition, the

angel of death comes, and they must leave all their accumulations. So are all they that forget God; that neglect His first and greatest commandment.

How different with the man who puts God first in faith and affection! Then, whether he has accumulated much or little of this world's goods, he still is "rich toward God," and can easily give up the poor, earthly home for "an inheritance which is incorrupt, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him."

Is not Christ's reasoning fundamental when He says that men should place God first in their affections? Who is God? He is the Creator. Is it not reasonable that men should love the Creator more than the creature? The Creator is a person, divine, holy, almighty. What a reversal it is to love the impersonal more than the personal, the world more than its Maker! Then God is also our Preserver. His providence is over us, negotiating the laws of the cosmos in such a way as keep us in safety, afford us the blessings of life, and give us a chance to work out a great destiny for time and eternity. Would it not be a preposterous reversal for us to love mere things more than our heavenly Father and Provider? Nothing could be more selfish, yes, blindly selfish, than to accept all God's favors and ignore the divine Benefactor Himself. So it is reasonable that loving God is the first and greatest commandment.

But God is not only our Creator and Preserver; He is also our Redeemer. He saw us sunken in sin and misery, and sent His only begotten Son to endure in our stead the penalties of our transgressions, and so rescue and deliver us. Since He did all this for us, it is reasonable that our best affections should be given to Him. To refuse to love Him is to trample upon the very principle of love. To despise the blood of the cross is to contemn the deepest and holiest thing in the universe, the self-sacrificing love of God. All reason points to the fact that love to God is the first and greatest of all the commandments.

Christ mentions the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and says it "is like unto" the first. Then He adds: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

This is extremely significant for modern times. Of course, the Pharisees needed this addition, for they actually tried to break the force of the second commandment by refining it away in the interest of the first commandment. But Christ taught them that this was impossible; for, while love to God was the first commandment, love to man was second and like unto it, so that

both had to be kept together in their integrity; one could not be played off against the other. The first implied and included the second, and the second was dependent on and a part of the first.

Here we have a rebuke of the principles of the divisive Biblical critics, who reconstruct the Biblical history by placing the laws long after some of the prophecies, and giving them an inferior place. Our Lord puts them in the proper historical and logical order: first, came the law, the first and second commandments recorded in Deuteronomy and Leviticus; then, upon these hang all the law and the prophets. This great law does not depend on the prophets who came later, and who built their whole super-structure of religion on them. Christ was the fundamental reasoner, and His reasoning is therefore better than that of the rationalists who, not having the spiritual mind, fail to “put first things first.” Note this: the rationalistic mind always reverses the divine order.

There are also other sophists who differ from Christ. One present-day writer advises us “first to get right with men, then we will get right with God.” Is that true? Is that according to Christ’s teaching? Does He say, “The first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and then the other, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, is like unto it?” Oh, no! That is the human way of teaching, the way of the unregenerate reason. Christ puts love for God first; then love for man. And is not that the proper logical and chronological order? We read in John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” In one of John’s epistles we read, “God is love.” This being true, is it not logical that, if we have the love of God in our hearts, “shed abroad by the Holy Spirit whom He hath given unto us,” we will love men, who are the objects of God’s love? On the contrary, if we do not love Him, can we truly love His creatures? No, true love for mankind rests on true love for the God and Father of mankind. The doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man flows from the doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God.

And this order, first the love of God, then the love of man, is verified by experience in the whole history of the Church. Paul never became a philanthropist until He experienced the surpassing love of God in Christ Jesus. Before that experience he hated many of his fellowmen, especially those who did not share His views of religion. After that experience, he declared himself debtor to all men, to the Jew and to the Greek, to the bond and the free. The same is true of Justin, the Martyr, Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther,

Knox, Latimer, Spurgeon, and all the rest of the truly converted. The Biblical order is always the best, always the most logical. If we love God with all our heart, mind and soul, we shall surely love His rational creatures as we love ourselves, because they are our brothers and fellow-heirs in the Lord.

Having silenced the quizzical lawyer about the relative value of the commandments, Christ turned the conversation into a somewhat different channel. The Pharisees had come to Him for His interpretation of the law. It was therefore important to know what were their conceptions of the Messiah. Knowing Himself to be the Messiah, this was a matter of special importance. Upon their conception of the Messiah would depend their own salvation, and also that of many who would follow their teaching. Therefore we must consider —

II. His Reasoning Concerning His Own Person.

He turned to the Pharisees and said: “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?” They answered Him, “The son of David.” Their answer was glib enough. They had learned their piece by heart. The Messiah was to be the descendant of David. So their Old Testament told them.

But now Christ must find out whether their ideas of the Messiah are deep or only superficial. Have they studied the Scriptures so carefully and fully as to recognize the complete character of the Messiah? Or have they attained only a one-sided conception? Do they know about His human parentage without knowing more? That is the thought that He desires to bring out in His next question; so He asks them: “If David is His Father, how, then, doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David, then, called Him Lord, how is He his son?”

That certainly was a hard question for the Pharisees, with their crude, unspiritual conceptions of the Messiah. Hence the narrative says: “And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.” Whenever they sought to entangle Him by queries, He was sure to turn upon them with a question that proved their own poverty of thought and revealed His own mysterious wisdom. After

that they had to use more politic methods to overcome Him, and put an end to His teaching and His life.

But is our Lord's question an enigma to us today? On one condition it is not. That condition is that we accept the New Testament (and the Old as well) as the true and inspired Word of God. In the light of the New Testament, collated with the teaching of the Old, we have no difficulty whatever in answering Christ's question: "If David, then, called Him Lord, how is He his son?" Look at the gospel story and see. There we have in Matthew and Luke the narrative of the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Jesus Christ. According to the flesh, therefore, He was the son of David, the ancestor of the Virgin Mary; according to His divine nature He is the eternal Son of God. Now compare John's teaching in the gospel: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God... And the Logos became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

How clear it is! Jesus Christ, according to His human nature, was the real and true son of David; according to His divine nature He was the eternal Son of God. Therefore David, speaking "in the Spirit," not in his own wisdom, could call Him Lord. He was both David's Lord and David's Son. Through faith in Him David, like all others, had to be saved. The incarnation of the Son of God explains simply and clearly the insoluble puzzle of the Pharisees. Because they could not answer the question as to the person of Christ, the Old Testament was largely a sealed book to them.

We must be careful today that we do not ourselves lose the key to the Scriptures. If we accept the doctrine of Christ's person in its evangelical sense, we can go through the Scriptures and understand all its redemptive and Messianic teaching. We can understand the proto-gospel, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." We can grasp the meaning of the sublime passage: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace." We will have no difficulty in interpreting Isaiah 53, which tells us of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, and says, "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." All is plain enough; all beautiful; all inspiring; all redeeming and saving. The key to the Scriptures is the person of the divine-human Saviour, David's Son and David's Lord; the Son of humanity; the Lord and Re-

deemer of humanity. Those who lose or reject the key make sad havoc of the Scriptures. Those who sacredly keep and cherish the key find them an inexhaustible treatise on divine and saving truth.

What do you and I think of Christ? Is He both the Son of man and the Son of God for us? If He is, we may commit to Him our destiny both for time and for eternity. God help us to do so! Amen.

57. One Who Can Forgive Sin. The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 9:1-8

And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. (Matthew 9:1-8)

ALL OUR LORD'S MIRACLES were proofs of His divinity. No one could, in His own name, do such wonders without having in Himself the essence of the divine nature. When prophets and apostles performed wonders, they never did them in their own name, but always in the name of God or of Christ; but Christ did them in His own name and by virtue of His own innate power.

The miracle recorded in our lesson for today is especially adapted to impress upon us the superhuman personality of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here He took special pains to show that He was more than a mere man. No one but God can forgive sins'; that is a self-evident proposition; yet Christ in this incident did profess to forgive sins; therefore He claimed to be divine, to be God.

Let us notice —

I. The Proof Of His Ability To Forgive Sins.

We read the gospel lesson in the opening part of our service, and so you will remember the narrative. When Jesus came to His own city, Capernaum, some men brought a paralytic to Him on a bed, desiring to have him healed. Seeing their faith, He made this significant statement to the palsied man: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.” Why did He say that? He must have had a special purpose in mind. Perhaps He had two reasons:

[1] The man’s sickness was doubtless the result of his sins. Of this he was conscious, and was no doubt troubled by it when he appeared in Christ’s presence. You can easily imagine him saying to himself: “I wonder whether He will heal a sinner like me — one who has brought his infirmity upon himself and who is alone to blame for his pitiful condition. I fear I am unworthy to appear in His holy presence. Yet I hope and pray that He will forgive my sins and heal my suffering body.”

Can you not almost hear Jesus making reply to these thoughts of the man’s mind as he lay there before the Master looking up into His eyes? For Jesus said: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.” What a comfort must have come to the poor man’s soul when he heard those kindly words! So Jesus spoke them for the man’s benefit. It was good for him to know that Jesus knew His moral as well as his physical state, and so would go to the root of the difficulty. Had the man’s physical malady alone been healed, Jesus would have done an imperfect work; would have failed, indeed, to go to the root of his trouble. If people are to be really helped, the cause of their difficulties must be removed.

[2] But Jesus had a second reason for declaring to the man that his sins were forgiven. There were scribes standing by, watching Him, and ready to criticize any faulty word or act. So He spoke the words for their benefit. The time had come when they should know who He was. Here He had an opportunity to prove to them His divinity, and that in a way that could not be logically refuted. So when Jesus said, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee,” the scribes said in their hearts, “This man blasphemeth.” They meant that He assumed divine gifts and prerogatives, for no one but God could forgive sins. This was Jesus’ purpose. He read their thoughts; so He said: “Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal a palsied man? Will not both require divine power? Can anyone but God cure an incurable disease merely by a word of command. Now if I can heal this man here and now by my own power, will not that prove my Godhood, and so prove that I have the power to forgive sins? Therefore watch and see what will occur.” So He

said to the sick man: "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." And he arose at once, and walked away as he was hidden.

Thus He proved His divinity by the wonderful miracle; that carried with it the indubitable proof that "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." He performed a miracle in the visible realm that the objectors might believe in His power in the invisible realm. No proof could have been more convincing. Dr. Smith, though not always reliable, says very pertinently in regard to this miracle:

"The forgiving of sins, the scribes reasoned, was a divine prerogative, and by claiming it Jesus put Himself on an equality with God." Then He quotes the following argument from Chrysostom: "Did He remove the suspicion? Had He not been equal to God, it was His duty to say: 'Why do ye impute to me an unmeet assumption? I am far from having this power.' But in fact He said nothing of the kind." Then Dr. Smith continues: "He proceeded to vindicate His title to that divine prerogative. It was an article of rabbinical theology that 'no sick man was healed of his disease until his sins had all been forgiven him.' Thus Jesus had but to heal the man to prove that He had actually forgiven him; and," if He had forgiven him, He had, *ex hypothesi*, done what only God could do. The miracle was more than a claim to Deity; it was a claim and a demonstration of it."

Thus Christ proved that He was divine and had authority to pardon men's transgressions. This is a great and salutary benediction; therefore let us next consider:

II. The Blessing Of Having Our Sins Forgiven.

[1] It is better to have our sins forgiven than to have our bodily diseases healed, if we cannot have both. In the case of the paralytic, he experienced the double blessing. But he still would have been a happy man if only his sins had been forgiven. Let us remember that spiritual blessings are greater than temporal ones. It is better to have the soul healed than the body. God in His wisdom does not always see fit to heal the body; but when our sins are forgiven, we are healed of the root trouble, and our temporal and eternal welfare is secure. Let us estimate more highly the things that are unseen and eternal, and not over-estimate the things that are seen and temporal. The for-

giveness of our sins is the choicest blessing that God can bestow upon us, for, as Luther says in his Small Catechism, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation."

[2] A great blessing of forgiveness is that it removes all enmity and difference between us and God. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing is better than peace with God. It means no alienation between us and the infinite Sovereign of the universe. If we are at peace with Him, we shall have true peace, for then we shall be at peace with all His laws and all His creatures. However, when we are at enmity with the Ruler of the universe, we are at universal enmity. We can have no peace anywhere. Everything will be against us. That is the reason why believers so often become pessimists and cynics. Opposed to God, they get out of tune with all His works. They can have no peace wherever they go. They declare that "Fate is against them."

The trouble is, they are not in accord with the Power that rules the world. How, then, can they be in harmony with the world itself? If we would know the universe to be friendly, we must know the God back of and in the universe to be friendly. The only way to know that is to hear Him say: "Thy sins, which separate between Me and thee, are all forgiven. Go in peace." It is a blessed experience. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins." "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared."

Even if we have wronged a parent or a neighbor, how glad we feel when we have the assurance that he forgives us! How much more when God pardons our delinquencies, and makes peace between Him and us through His Son Jesus Christ!

[3] When God forgives, He forgives thoroughly. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Note the through and thoroughness with which God forgives our sins, according to the Scriptures. He says He will blot them out of the book of His remembrance. It is most comforting to know that He will remember them against us no more forever. Then He says He will cast them behind His back, which means that with Him once forgiven is to be always forgiven. Again He asserts that He will bury our sins in the depths of the sea. He will

also, He declares, remove them from us as far as the east is from the west, which we know can never come together. Thus our heavenly Father forgives us thoroughly. Sometimes people say that they “will forgive, but cannot forget.” We fear they mean that they will still continue to cherish some ill-will, and if that is their meaning, they do not really forgive. Not so with God, who declares that He will blot out our transgressions from the book of His remembrance, by which He means that He will no longer hold any ill-will against us, but will ever regard us with love and kindness. God is no “Indian giver;” He does not give, and then take back.

[4] Another blessing contained in divine pardon is, it includes cleansing from the defilement of sin. If God simply pronounced us forgiven, we would still be in the corruption of evil. But renovation goes with pardon. How beautiful is the Scripture which says: “There is a fountain opened in the house of David for all sin and uncleanness!” Jesus Christ has opened that fountain, and we may plunge therein, and be washed “whiter than the snow.” The apostle says: “If we confess our sins, He is willing and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God said through His prophet: “Wash you; make you clean.” Yes, sin is moral corruption; it is spiritual defilement; and if we were not renovated, we would never be fit to stand in God’s presence. So when God pardons, He purifies. Thank God for that. He says of His people, “They shall walk with me in white,” and also, “They shall be clothed in white raiment.” John, in his apocalyptic vision, saw the saints of the Holy City robed in white, and he explains that the white robes mean “the righteousness of the saints.” Note the beauty of the revelator’s language and thought: “These are they that Came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” No wonder he could add: “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” Christ in the sermon on the mount taught the same doctrine: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

[5] Divine pardon includes everything that is necessary to free us from sin; therefore deliverance from the bondage of sin, from the thrall of evil habit. Nothing is more enslaving than sin. The sinner may think himself a free man, but he is not; he is a slave. He cannot rightly call himself his own master. As long as a man lives in wrong being and doing, he is a bondsman. Even when he wants to do right, he cannot, because the chains of natural

depravity and evil habit hold him in thrall, and he cannot deliver himself. When a sinful person says, "I want to do as I please," he really means that he pleases only to gratify his evil propensities. This is one of Satan's master-strokes, that he makes his slaves and subalterns believe that they are free men.

It is Christ alone who can deliver us from "the body of this death." "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." If we will come to Him who is the truth, the way and the life, we "shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free." He also says: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Only those who have had the shackles of sinful habit broken by the power of God know what true emancipation is; they only are God's freedmen.

And what is needed on our part in order to receive forgiveness? Our text indicates the precise need. "And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy: Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee."

So it is faith in Christ that is needed. But faith always implies something else — that we feel our sinfulness; that we desire to be delivered from our sins; that is, that we repent. Christ looked down into the sick man's heart, and saw that he was contrite; hence he said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

You see, it is this way, my friend. If you and I do not realize that we are sinners, and do not feel godly sorrow for sin, we will not desire forgiveness, and so we will not go to Christ for pardon. Therefore saving faith must be preceded by a knowledge of sin and a felt need of salvation. The law of God gives us the former; the gospel offers us the grace of God in Christ Jesus. And thus when we feel how sinful we are, and how helpless in our sins, we will look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who will pardon and deliver us.

"Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high;
Lives that I might never die.

... "Jesus only can impart
Balm to heal the smitten heart,
Peace that flows from sins forgiven,
Joys that lift the soul to heaven.

“Chief of sinners though I be,
Christ is all in all to me;
All my wants to Him are known,
All my sorrows are His own.”

58. A Wedding Feast And A Wedding Garment. The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:1-14

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:1-14)

THE PARABLE of our lesson today is one of the most striking of our Lord's parabolic teachings. It was primarily intended for the Jews, and especially the chief priests and Pharisees, to whom Jesus was speaking in the preceding chapter; for there He said (verse 43): "The kingdom of heaven shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." But, while the parable was originally intended as a rebuke and prophecy of the Jews, it has many useful lessons for us today.

As we found in the parable of the great supper, which we considered on the second Sunday after Trinity, so here the blessings of the gospel are rep-

resented under the figure of a feast. This time we have the added feature of a wedding feast, a banquet which a king made in honor of his son's marriage. Let us reflect on the different parts of the text in the order of the narrative.

I. The Marriage Feast.

Out of pure good will to his subjects, the king made a great feast in celebration of the marriage of his son. He sent out the news beforehand to his guests, so that when the banquet was ready, they could lay aside every other engagement and attend to it. When the feast was ready, he sent out the invitation to the people who had been previously bidden. Strangely enough, they refused to come. A second time he sent out a more urgent invitation, saying, "Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." From these vivid lines we can readily understand the character of the kingdom of heaven under the simile of a marriage feast. Let us note:

1. It was free.

The king had made all the preparations. He did not ask his subjects to contribute anything to the provisions. He even furnished them free the wedding garments necessary to appear in proper form at the festivities. No charge was to be made. The feast was to be a pure gratuity. No matter how unworthy the subject, he was to be treated with royal favor simply on the terms of acceptance.

That is precisely what God did for the Jews, and has done for us, in providing the gospel feast. When man sinned, He promised at once a Saviour who should bruise the serpent's head. All through the Old Testament dispensation, He was preparing for the acceptable time with great toil and patience. In the fullness of time He sent His Son, who won for us by His holy life and sacrificial death all the blessings of redemption. All of it "without money and without price." Even while we were His enemies, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. With infinite toil and sacrifice God prepared the way of salvation. The table is spread; the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Church of Christ extend the invitation, "Come, for all things are now

ready.” You do not need to pay anything; you do not need to put on other garments; indeed, you have none that are fit for such a royal banquet; for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God’s sight.” There is only one thing you need to do, and that is to accept the invitation and come to the feast. Surely the offer is free enough. To decline such an invitation, therefore, is the height of folly and the quintessence of sin.

2. The feast was also ample.

We can only conjecture how abundant and how varied the viands were. A king, making a marriage dinner for his son, would spread a royal table. All this lavishness corresponds with the feast which God has prepared for His people in the plan of redemption. Do you know that there is something in that plan to meet every need of the soul? There is a viand, as it were, for every right human desire. Do you want to know that God is? Then come to Him through Christ, and you will have the assurance of His existence. Do you want to know whether He is a God of love and mercy? Accept Christ by faith, and you will know. Do you desire to know whether God will forgive your sins? In Christ the world receives pardon abundantly. Is your doubt still deeper down, so that you want to be convinced whether you really have a soul or not? Then go to Jesus Christ, and He will so revive the dead soul within you that you will know that you have a soul and that it is the chief and paramount part of your being. If you have a soul, perhaps you would like to know whether it can be cleansed from defilement, so as to be fitted to dwell in the presence of the pure and holy God. Well, go to Christ who has “opened a fountain in the house of David for all sins and uncleanness.” Then it may be that you would like to be assured that, having a soul, it will survive the death of the body. Then let Christ instruct thee, and thou wilt see that He “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Are you concerned as to the character of the destiny that God has prepared for them that love Him? It is all made clear in the gospel: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”

Nay, I assure you on the authority of Christ and His Word that there is not an appetency of the soul which is not satisfied by some rich viand

spread on the marriage table of the Lamb. What are some of the choice viands? Pardon, Purity, Peace, Assurance, Joy, Strength, Rest, Contentment, Hope, Love, Patience, Fellowship with God, Adoption, Salvation Now, Eternal Blessedness at God's right Hand. Is it not a tempting feast? Is not the invitation a gracious one? How can anyone decline it? See the rich provisions we have in Christ and the gospel:

"Jesus gives us true repentance
By His Spirit sent from heaven;
Whispers this transporting sentence, 'Son, thy sins are all forgiven.'
Faith He grants us to believe it,
Grateful hearts to love and prize:
Want we wisdom? He must give it;
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.

"Jesus gives us pure affections,
Wills to do what He requires;
Makes us follow His directions,
And what He commands, inspires.
All our prayers and all our praises,
Rightly offered in His name:
He that dictates them is Jesus;
He that answers is the same."

I feel sad to have to declare that, in spite of all the lavish preparations that the king made for his people, many of them were wanton and ungrateful. So we must notice —

II. Those Who Declined The Invitation To The Wedding Feast.

Our text says of those who were first bidden, "And they would not come." Then, after he had sent out another invitation, it says: "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them."

This was certainly strange conduct! Why did Jesus, who composed this parable, represent them as acting so wantonly and unreasonably? Because He wanted to show the Jews their wickedness in declining to come to the

gospel feast which God was spreading for them in the gift of His Son? They were acting not only wickedly, but most unreasonably; for if they would come to the banquet of salvation, they themselves would be the beneficiaries. Thus the Jews were just as irrational in rejecting Christ as the king's subjects were in refusing to attend the festivities which he had prepared for them.

And the same is true of us today, if we decline the great salvation. Christ means by this parable to teach us the natural man's utter depravity in rejecting redeeming grace. Nothing but blindness to his own interest and welfare could lead a man to decline an invitation to the gospel feast; nothing but obduracy could make him so blind. Why, all the benefit would come to him. God wants to bless and save him, to make him good and happy in this life and in the life to come. It is no hardship that God wants to impose on sinful men. On the other hand, He spreads a banquet for them, and sends forth the gratuitous invitation, "Come, for all things are now ready." Who will be benefited if you accept this regal invitation? Why, you yourself. God did not spread the feast for His own benefit. He does not need it. He really made an infinite sacrifice in preparing the plan of redeeming grace. And yet so many decline the heavenly overture.

Now, will God's justice endure such slight and insult? Not according to our text, for Jesus adds: "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." Whatever this means or does not mean, it surely points to the fact that those who reject the overtures of salvation cannot have salvation, but will be punished for their obstinacy.

The Jews, who rejected their Messiah, did afterward suffer very much in the way depicted in the parable, for an army was sent against them, and their city was burned and otherwise destroyed, until scarcely one stone was left upon another. This should be a warning to us today. Neither shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation. We never should flatter ourselves that our sins will go unpunished. If they did, this would not be a world of justice.

III. Those Who Accepted The Invitation To The Marriage Feast.

When the unworthy guests, who declined the invitation, were duly dealt with, the king sent his servants out into the highways and hedges to bid all whom they met to the wedding. “So the servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests.”

This may sound somewhat strange at first; but, on second thought, we find it to be according to the gospel. Not only the good, but also the bad, are invited to the feast of salvation. Indeed, it has been especially provided for sinners — not sinners who wish to remain in their sins, but those who wish to be saved from them. You see, if the sinner comes to the feast, it means that he wants to be saved; he desires to be fed on pure food, not the poisonous food of sinful indulgence. The expression, “good and bad,” must mean here various kinds of sinners, those who keep themselves respectable and those who fall into gross sins. Both are invited, on condition that they desire to be saved and nourished on the good things of God. The Son of man did “not come to save the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance. He” came to seek and to save that which was lost.” “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” What a gracious saying that is! So all of us are invited.

Now let us be sure, not only that we come to the gospel feast, but that we come in the right way — that is, in the proper spirit and according to the king’s plan and purpose. For we find in the conclusion of the parable a strange and unexpected occurrence, with which we must now deal:

IV. The Guest Who Refused The Wedding Garment.

Much speculation has been lavished on the interpretation of this part of the parable, but perhaps the simplest explanation is the best. All are invited in this life to come to the feast of the gospel. Those who accept come into the Christian Church, the visible assembly of God’s people here on earth. When people profess to accept the gospel, and then unite with the Church, they are expected to conform to God’s provisions — that is, to repent of their sins, lay aside their own garments of unrighteousness, and put on the garment of Christ’s righteousness, which is known as “the wedding garment.” But there

are always some pretenders — always some who profess, but do not possess. They want to enjoy the blessings of the Church, of a Christian civilization, and even of salvation, but do not want to comply with the moral and spiritual conditions of the feast. Since piety may be simulated, their fellow-men cannot always detect their hypocrisy. They may have on a garment of their own which outwardly resembles the real garment. So in the Church people may sit at the banqueting table, and may seem to be what they are not.

Now comes the searching part of our text. The king comes in to see and greet his guests. A rule of the feast was that each man, on entering the royal palace, had to take off his own garments, no matter whether they were seemingly good garments or not, had to be washed and cleaned by the servants, and then put on the special garment provided for him by the king. This was a beautiful arrangement. In this way no distinction would be made among the guests; all would be dressed equally well; one would appear as honorable as the rest. So in the gospel there is no distinction of persons. All persons, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, must by repentance cast off their old garments of sin, and by faith put on the new garment of Christ's righteousness.

But when the king scrutinized his guests, he discovered one who had, in some way, eluded the vigilance of the servants, and had slipped into the assembly without having changed his raiment. Perhaps his own garment was so close a duplicate of the wedding garment provided by the king that neither the servants nor the other guests were able to detect the difference. Perhaps, too, the man was one of the conceited kind who thought that his own garment was just as good as the one furnished by the king, and so he could see no use in making the exchange. He wanted to partake of the feast, but he wanted to be there on his own conditions and notions. However, though he seemed to succeed in deceiving the servants and his fellow-guests, he could not deceive the king, who could distinguish the real garment from a simulation. So he came to the man and challenged him with the stern rebuke: "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" Then the record says, "And he was speechless." And why? Because he was detected in his deception. He knew the condition of the feast, that no guest should be there without the wedding garment; yet he thought he could escape detection. Now he was exposed before all the guests, and had no ex-

cuse for his attempt to impose on his generous host. So “he was speechless.”

What, now, is the significance of this part of the parable in the kingdom of God or in the plan of redemption? It is this: There may be people who will come into the Church for selfish purposes, without true repentance and faith; or, to put it as plainly as possible, without putting off the old garments of sin and putting on the new garment of Christ’s righteousness. They may closely imitate the real garment; may seem to be religious. Thus they may want to secure some of the worldly benefits of church membership, and they may for a time deceive their fellowmen. But their efforts will all be futile; God will know them, will detect their hypocrisy, will expose them, and at last cast them out into the outer darkness. No matter how showy a man’s piety may be, no matter how closely he may counterfeit true religion, God knows the heart. There is at least One whom he cannot deceive.

The parable may have still a wider application. There may be people outside of the Christian Church who claim to be just as good as the church members, even better than some of them, and in some ways they may, indeed, be outwardly much like Christian people, and so may partake of the emoluments and advantages of a Christian civilization; and yet, if they will not repent of their sins and accept Christ as their Saviour by faith, and confess Him in His Church before men, God will detect their assumed and unreal piety, and will some day inquire: “Friends, how came ye in hither desiring to partake of my feast of salvation, without putting on the wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness?” And they will be speechless.

The great and paramount lesson, then, of the wedding garment is, that nothing at last will avail but the righteousness of Christ given to men gratuitously on condition of repentance and faith. No other garment is unspotted and unsoiled by sin. One of our churchly hymns sets forth the marvelous beauty and characteristics of this heavenly garment:

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
'Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

"Bold shall I stand in Thy great Day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully through these absolved I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

"This spotless robe the same appears
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its constant hue;
Thy blood preserves it ever new.

"O, let the dead now hear Thy voice;
Now let Thy banished ones rejoice;
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness."

A bold American unbeliever some years ago was wont to say that, if at the last day he found himself mistaken, he would "stand up and plead his case like a man!" This proud and defiant frame of mind is the exact opposite of Christ's representation, for He said: "And he was speechless." It is not well to boast of what we shall say when we Come to stand before God's judgment-bar. It is much more humble and rational to put on the true wedding garment, and let that speak for itself; that will be our most eloquent advocate.

59. The Lord, Thy Healer. The Twenty-First Sunday After Trin- ity. John 4:46-54

So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee. (John 4:46-54)

IN EX. 15:25 we read, "I am the Lord, that healeth thee." How often this Scripture was fulfilled in the life of Christ here on earth! A large part of His beneficent work was to heal the diseases of the people. Our lesson today recites another of these cases of divine healing. It has about it some circumstances that lend it peculiar interest.

Jesus has turned into Galilee. He has come again to Cana, the town in which He wrought His first miracle. Here He receives a visit from a man of Capernaum who has serious illness in his home. Let us observe that this man was —

I. A Nobleman.

He may not have been a relative of Herod, but he was an officer of the king's court; therefore a man of official position. His son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come into Galilee, he went as far as

Cana to see Him, and “besought Him that He would come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.”

We note the fact that this person was a nobleman, a man of position and rank. Thus all classes came to Jesus for help. Sometimes it was the poor; sometimes the rich; sometimes the humble and unknown; sometimes the well known and popular; sometimes the young and sometimes the old. All classes came, and He treated them all alike. All who needed his help were received, and none were ever turned away empty. Trouble comes into the homes of noblemen as well as into other homes. They need help as do others. Sometimes people think that Christ ministers only to the poor and unknown and unlettered. It is true He does give them aid whenever they come to Him. Their lack of money or fame or learning will be no bar to His goodness and love. But we should remember that the rich and famous, too, are sinners, and have need of saving grace. Sometimes the rich have even more temptations than many others, and it is harder for them to become Christians and live Christian lives than for those who are not surrounded with so much luxury and worldly temptation. Jesus even said that it was very hard indeed for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; yet He said it was not impossible with God. So their very circumstances make divine grace necessary in order that they may be saved from the snares of the world. But our text today proves that a man in high position may come to Jesus, and receive help from Him. It is just as much our duty to preach Christ and His saving power and grace to those in high places as to those in more lowly positions. And when we think they do not need Christ as much as others do, we are ourselves acting on the assumption that worldly position and possession are a satisfying portion. But we know well enough that wealth and fame will never take the place of true faith and piety in the sight of God.

II. The Nobleman’s Faith Criticized.

Our text teaches that Christ always recognizes faith; but He knows, too, when faith has in it some wrong elements. The nobleman’s spiritual condition furnishes a case in point. He certainly had some faith in Christ, or He would not have come to Him in behalf of his son. But Christ must have also seen something defective in his faith. So He proceeded to correct it. What a psychologist Jesus was! How He could look down into the heart and ana-

lyze every motive! He wanted to heal the nobleman's son, but not on the wrong basis, on a misconception of His person. When Christ helps and saves men, He is particular about the ethics involved and the truth to be conserved. If He should connive at error and wrong, His kingdom would soon be a hodge-podge of good and evil.

So now He says to the man: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." No doubt this was a criticism of the defective faith of other people in the company, as well as of that of the nobleman, for Jesus used the plural pronoun "ye." But it must have referred more especially to the nobleman's spiritual conceptions, inasmuch as Christ meant to heal his son. What did Jesus' criticism mean? It meant that the nobleman's faith was based too much on Christ's mere power to perform wonders. That is, Christ must have seen this thought down in the man's heart: "If He can heal my son, I will believe in Him; otherwise I will not." You see, his faith lacked the spiritual element; it lacked an appreciation of what Christ was in Himself and what His real mission in the world was. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," said Jesus; and then He might have continued to explain: "But I want you to have a spiritual faith; to believe in Me, even if I do not perform the wonders you expect of me. I am the Redeemer of the world, and my mission is much wider and deeper than merely the healing of physical diseases. I have come to save men in their totality, their souls as well as their bodies, to give them immortal as well as temporal life, to impart to them spiritual health as well as physical. Down in Samaria, where I performed no wonders, the people believed on me purely on account of my spiritual teaching. So I would have people believe here in Galilee. I want you to believe in Me, to trust Me as your Messiah, whether I perform the miracles you require or not. Will you trust Me in this way, or do you still base your faith only on the condition of my performing physical signs?"

In this way Jesus helped the man to put his own motives and faith into the crucible. Then the nobleman's faith must have undergone the proper change. He did not say much, but he acted, and thereby proved to Christ, who could see into his heart, that he was now looking upon Christ as more than a mere miracle-worker. So we may consider the next thought of our text:

III. The Nobleman's Faith Purified.

After Christ had passed His criticism on the man's faith, the man besought Him humbly and earnestly, saying: "Sir, come down ere my child die." We might expect him to say more, and thus give us more insight into the change that had been wrought in his mind and heart; but the gospel writer leaves us to read between the lines and make our own inductions. The nobleman's reply, brief as it is, implies utter self-surrender, a complete giving up, as if he had said: "Yes, I believe in Thee without the miracle, for Thy word is a word of power, and Thou art the world's Messiah; but I love my son, and he is nigh unto death; in Thy mercy and grace come down ere he die." His faith had passed through the alembic, and had been purified.

We are not left to mere conjecture on this point. The sequel proves the real character of the nobleman's faith. The gospel account says: "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way." You will perceive that this statement indicates the access of faith which he had received. Before this he insisted that Christ should go with him down to Capernaum to see his son and come in actual contact with him. He believed that Jesus 'was a miracle-worker, but he did not believe that He was Lord, and could do all things. Now, however, he believed- Jesus' word that his son would live, even if He did not go near him — that is, he believed that Jesus was all-powerful, and could heal diseases at a distance just as easily as in close contact. So he believed thoroughly, so thoroughly, indeed, that he went his way without further question or hesitancy.

How graciously his faith was rewarded! As he was going toward his home, his servants came to meet him, and told him that his son was living and was well. To settle every doubt, the nobleman inquired about the precise time when his son began to amend. The servants replied: "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that the cure had been effected at the precise time when Jesus had said to him, "Thy son liveth." Then the record says, "And himself believed, and his whole house."

And now what important lesson may we learn from this incident? This:

IV. Christ, The Lord, Is Our Healer.

[1] We may note the divinity and power of Christ in this miracle, as we have noted them in other miracles.

Here was a case of fever. Not all fevers prove fatal; yet when a fever has reached a certain stage, it has so burned out the living tissues that it becomes incurable by any human medicament yet devised. This is true of typhoid fever and pneumonia, which are especially virulent. Here again Christ proved His complete knowledge of human pathology; therefore He must have known just what forces to set to work to counteract the fire that was burning up the young man's tissues. Even those curative powers and agencies that human medical knowledge has not yet discovered must have been known to Him, for Jesus could not have exerted His power in a blind way to bring about the cure of a specific disease; He must have understood all the facts and laws involved, and therefore must have knowingly employed precisely the right forces.

The miracle becomes all the more wonderful from the fact that it was performed at a distance. Therefore Jesus must have understood just how to send His divine power through the currents of air over the intervening miles to effect the cure. This surely implies marvelous technical knowledge of many kinds, knowledge of both mind and matter. To us it must remain an insoluble mystery how He performed this cure.

[2] But the fact that He did heal the young man, and that with perfect ease and certainty, gives us confidence that He can heal all our diseases.

Are they diseases of the body? Let us remember that, whenever it was His will, He never failed to effect a cure, no matter what was the nature of the malady. So today we need not doubt His power, nor need we for a moment doubt His willingness, provided always that it is best for us and His cause for Him to heal us. So we may pray with confidence for ourselves and our friends in time of sickness. Of course, we must always qualify our prayers by saying, "If it be Thy will;" but we need not doubt, for Jesus has the same power and the same loving sympathy today that swayed His heart while He was here in the state of humiliation. No doubt many a sickness has been healed by Christ's power when otherwise no medical or surgical skill could have brought about a cure. Sometimes He may have wrought directly by His divine power; sometimes through the medicine administered, giving it special virtue; sometimes through suggestion to the mind of the physician, directing him to prescribe the effective remedy. Christ may work in many ways His wonders to perform. Here is the Biblical ground for prayer for the sick (Jas. 5:14, 15): "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in

the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sin, it shall be forgiven him.” That is a direct promise, and should be believed.

[3] However, we know from the Scriptures and from experience that it is not always the Lord’s will to heal men’s physical diseases. Perhaps He did not heal all the sick people whom He met While He was here in this earthly tabernacle. Of course, He healed all whom He promised and undertook to heal, but perhaps others were not healed. So it is now. Some are healed, some are not. If He healed all people at their request, no one would ever die, and that would be contrary to His purpose; “for it is given unto men once to die, and after death the judgment.”

But of one blessed fact we may rest assured. Christ will heal our spiritual diseases, if we desire Him to do so, and have faith in His goodness and power. When we ask God to forgive our sins for Christ’s sake, we need not add, “If it be Thy will,” for we know that it is His will. He wants to pardon us; He sent His Son into the world for that very purpose; and He only waits for us to repent of our sins and believe in Christ. No matter what may be our spiritual malady, even though our sins be as scarlet, He is able to cure us. “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth thee from all sin.” Even when God does not heal the body, but permits it to go down to death, yet he heals the soul, and makes it live more strongly and beautifully than ever, so that it may mount on buoyant wings to the throne of God. Praise the Lord, thy Healer.

[4] But I desire to go a step further. I have said that God does not always heal the body. That is true for the time being; so the body sinks into death, is buried, and molders back to dust, its kindred element. But, after all, before God’s purpose with His people is complete, He will even heal them of all their physical diseases and infirmities. He will at last raise the bodies of His people from the dead, and will endue them with immortal life, health and beauty, so that they will be like unto Christ’s glorious body. Thus, in the widest sense, we may say with the Psalmist:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

60. Forgiving And Being Forgiven. The Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 18:23-35

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:23-35)

OUR GOSPEL FOR TODAY impresses a blessed fact and a somewhat hard duty. The blessed fact is that God can and will forgive our sins, however great and numerous they may be; the somewhat hard duty is that we must forgive these who wrong us. The apostle Peter was following his usual vocation of asking questions. By the way, Peter's inquiring mind brought out a good many truths that might otherwise not have been revealed. This is an encouragement for us to ask questions, even though others may sometimes laugh at the ignorance we display.

But now let us attend to Peter's question. It precedes the lesson for the day. He came to the Master, and said, "Master, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?" But Jesus' answer

must have surprised him, as it may surprise people today who have not the forgiving spirit of Christianity. He said: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven." What did Peter mean, and what did Christ mean? Peter meant that there should be a limit to the number of times we should forgive another. That was according to human nature, but it was wrong. Jesus taught when He said, "Until seventy times seven," that there should be no limit to the forgiving spirit. The expression means an indefinite, and therefore an unending, number. In expanding His answer, our Lord spoke the parable which forms the gospel lesson for today. It might be called the parable of the servant who was forgiven, but who would not forgive. The first part of the lesson teaches most clearly and impressively —

I. Our Need Of Divine Forgiveness.

Let us attend to the narrative: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king who would take account of his servants." He means to say the conduct of this king and his subjects illustrates some of the principles that obtain in the kingdom which He Himself, our Lord, is seeking to establish. One of these principles is indicated in the sentence quoted — that we are the servants of Christ, our King, and that He will require an account of us and our stewardship. It is well enough for you and me to be reminded of that fact again and again, for we are only too prone to forget that we will finally be held responsible to Jesus Christ. Sometimes we feel that our responsibility is ended when we do the best we can for ourselves and treat our fellowmen with equity and justice; but that is a defective view of life; we are God's subjects, and the last account we will have to give will be to Him. "So then every one shall give an account of himself unto God." If we will bear that fact in mind, it will have a tendency to make us more careful. Nor will it make our lives the more burdensome, as some persons might think, for the true child of God is really glad that he will be finally judged by His Redeemer, who is all-wise, rather than by fallible human or even angelic judgments. We know that "the Judge of all the earth will do right."

In calling his servants to account, one of them presently appeared who owed him ten thousand talents. Christ formulated the parable in accordance with the customs of His times in order to make it the more vivid to His hearers. So He says: "But forasmuch as the man had nothing with which to

pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him the debt.”

Here we have a vivid story illustrating the free forgiveness of God. The local coloring makes the picture all the more graphic. There was a sacred purpose in placing the servant’s debt at ten thousand talents, which has been variously estimated to be between ten and fifteen million dollars. It would have been impossible for the debtor ever to pay this sum. This represents our relation to God, our heavenly Father. So often and so grievously have we sinned against Him that the debt is immense, even beyond calculation, so that we can never pay it.

How natural, however, was the promise of the poor debtor: “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all!” Just so the sinner thinks at first that he can pay his debt. He can amend his ways, and make up the debt in some way, forgetting that all his time and strength belong to the Lord, so that he can never, never make up for any time or strength that has been misspent. More than that, he continues to fail every day, even with his best endeavors, and so he simply adds to his indebtedness. Thus he who tries to earn salvation by his own good works soon realizes his failure, his constant getting deeper and deeper into debt, until soon he grows discouraged, and gives up in despair, as Luther did in the monastery. If he has no person to direct him aright, according to the Word of God, he will be likely to give up all effort to please God and win salvation, and will sink into reckless sin.

No; we can never pay our debt; we can never merit salvation; our only hope is in the free forgiving love of God manifested to us through Jesus Christ. While the parable says nothing about atonement, other parts of the Bible supplement the teaching here, showing that Christ has already, by His active and passive obedience in our behalf, canceled our debt; and thus God can gratuitously, graciously and ethically forgive all our debts, if we accept the payment made for us by our Daysman, Jesus Christ. It comes back to the old doctrine of Paul and Luther and all evangelical teachers, that we are justified by faith alone and saved by grace alone. Pardon is the gift of God.

Is it not a blessed thing that God will cancel our sins freely, and give us a chance to begin over again. If He did not, we would always be under the condemnation of the law and of conscience, which would hang over us like

a Damocles Sword. If we should constantly strive to pay our debt, and yet know that we could never get it paid, but, on the contrary, became more deeply enmeshed in obligation, how disheartening our lives would be! Indeed, hope would soon vanish. "But there is forgiveness with God," and thus the burden of our despondency is gone, and hope and buoyancy spring up afresh in our souls, and we go on our way rejoicing, because the past has been forgiven, and the slate has been wiped clean of the whole long account reckoned against us. I fear we do not half appreciate the great blessing of divine forgiveness. It is benediction enough to fill our lives with joy, even if there were no other blessings flowing from the inexhaustible urn of divine grace. I remember a conscientious little boy, brought up in a Christian home, who did a wrong. He felt very much conscience-smitten. It was pitiful to see how sad he was for a while. Then he cried, "Mother, will you forgive me?" She replied, "Yes, my dear, I will freely forgive you." "And will Jesus forgive me too?" he asked anxious. "Yes," she answered, "He will forgive you too, if you tell Him you are sorry, and will believe He loves you." It was beautiful to see the joy that illumined the lad's face. I sometimes think that children appreciate forgiveness more than we older persons do.

A somewhat noted unbeliever was wont to say that God cannot forgive any one's sins, and ought not to do so even if He could. He declared that every man would have to suffer the penalty of his own transgressions, and ought to do so. Knowing something of the man's life, we felt that it would take a long time for him to pay off all his debts; and while he was trying to do that, how could he earn anything to be put down to his credit? No, the gospel way is better, far better; God pardons our sins, and lets us begin life again with a clean slate; and that is the only plan that can give us any hope of being right with God.

II. The Condition Of Divine Forgiveness.

Let us follow the story. When the servant's immense debt had been forgiven, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him the paltry sum of one hundred pence. This was about fourteen dollars in our currency. Remember his own debt had been over ten million dollars. Now, instead of showing mercy to his fellow-servant, he seized him, cast him into prison,

and demanded that the whole debt be paid. This harsh conduct became known to the other servants, who reported it to the king. He at once called the offending servant to him, and gave him a stern rebuke: "O, thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me. Shouldest thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Then he delivered the offender over to his due punishment; whereupon Christ makes the pointed and solemn application of the parable. "So likewise," He says, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother his trespasses." It is an extension and reinforcement of the sentence in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

We need to reflect seriously on this part of our lesson. It teaches the duty of forgiving others in order that we may be forgiven. Let us remember this distinction: Our forgiving others is not the meriting cause of divine forgiveness, but one of the necessary conditions. There is a deep difference. If an undeserving beggar comes to your door, and you hand him a parcel of food, his stretching out his hand and taking the gift is not the meriting cause of his getting it; but it is a necessary condition. He may deserve nothing from you; he may even have been your enemy in the past. Therefore what you give him is a pure gratuity, but he must accept it, or he cannot have it. So our forgiving others is no meriting cause, but a divinely prescribed condition, of God's forgiveness.

But why is it so? This is the reason: The kingdom of heaven is a pure place, a place of mutual kindness and good will. It would not be heaven if it were not infused and governed by these principles. However, when a man who has himself been forgiven, shows a hard and unloving spirit, that fact at once disqualifies him for God's kingdom. His temper of mind is utterly at variance with its heavenly order. Suppose for the moment that God would permit harsh and unforgiving people to enter heaven, what kind of a place would it soon become? Surely as bad as the earth, and perhaps much worse. Thus the very structure of the kingdom of "God must exclude people who are ungentle and vindictive.

It is useless to try to be Christians without the forgiving spirit. The person who will wait his chance to "get even," to wreak out his spite on another, cannot be a Christian, cannot have divine forgiveness, cannot enter heaven. That would be contrary to the law of love, which is the fundamental law of the kingdom of God.

Is it very hard to forgive an offender? Some people think it is. There are people who even declare that it is utterly opposed to human nature, cannot be done, and so they will not try. Thus they cling to their ill-will, and cherish the desire for revenge.

Truly enough, to forgive a wrong is not in accord with unregenerate human nature. But that simply proves that human nature is sinful. Now the gospel has been given expressly to correct human nature, to convert the natural man into a new creature. If human nature were in a normal state, there would be no need for redemption and salvation. So if our hearts are unforgiving, there is all the more need for us to pray to God to “create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us.”

Perhaps some one who feels bitter may still say: “My enemy wronged me! I cannot forgive him!” But, my brother, reflect. How often have you sinned against God? Do you want Him to retain your sins against you? Is not your debt to Him much greater than your enemy’s debt to you? If He is willing to forgive your debt of ten thousand talents, you surely ought to be willing to forgive a fellowbeing’s debt of one hundred pence.

Besides, let me assure you, life is too short to spend any part of it in cherishing a grudge. There are too many important and noble things to do to waste time in brooding over petty slights and insults. Forget and forgive them, and hurry on to matters that are worth while. Suppose we do not receive all the plaudits we think we deserve, what boots it? Are we working for the praises of men? Are we not rather seeking for God’s approval and the approval of a good conscience? Worldly ambition is the most fruitful cause of wrangling in the Church, and does more than anything else to retard the progress of God’s kingdom. Then let us fling it away, and let our prayer be that of the Psalmist: “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory.”

What, then, is the positive lesson of the gospel for today? It is this: If we have a forgiving spirit toward our fellowmen, it proves that God’s forgiving love has been shed abroad in our hearts, and that will be the right disposition of mind and heart to admit us into His eternal kingdom, whose fundamental principle is love.

61. Man's Civil And Religious Obligations. The Twenty-Third Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:15-22

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. (Matthew 22:15-22)

THE CHIEF THOUGHT of our text is found in the statement of Christ, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." However, there are some important circumstances leading up to the main thought. We will attend to these first, and then we will consider the main thought itself.

I. The Circumstances Leading Up To The Main Thought.

Jesus had just spoken the trenchant parable about the king who had made a marriage supper for his son, and whose invitations had been treated so scornfully by his subjects. The Pharisees saw that the parable was aimed at them. It stung them to the quick; but it also made them angry and spiteful.

So they conspired to entangle Him in His talk. Their scheme was to get Him embroiled with the Roman government. Unable to convict Him of any moral wrong, they sought to induce Him to say something that was indiscreet.

Here I wish to make a reflection. This thing of plotting against others is not only wicked; it is also dangerous. It is like playing with fire. People who set traps for others are apt to get caught in them themselves. "Whoso causeth the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall himself fall into his own pit." So runs an apt Proverb. More than once in history has Haman been hanged on the very gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. Just so, in the incident of our text, the scheming Pharisees were most deftly caught in their own net.

And what was their plot? Instead of going to Christ themselves, they sent some of their young disciples to ask Him a delicate question. Thus they thought they would catch Him off His guard, and so He would not suspect their trickery.

Another part of their machinations was to join their disciples with the Herodians. Who were the Herodians? They were the Jews who were the political partisans and adherents of Herod Antipas, who was now the Roman ruler. They supported the alliance with Rome, hence they were the political opponents of the Pharisees, who were bitterly hostile to the Roman government. "These hostile parties... combine, as on a former occasion... for the purpose of destroying Him whose holy doctrine condemned the vices of both" (Lutheran Commentary). How often it occurs that enemies become friends for a time, in order to join their forces against a common object of dislike. Hence the saying, "Politics makes strange bed-felloWs." This has often been seen in the politics of the country, and, sadder yet, in the politics of the Church. So it always is with people who devise schemes to bring about their ends. They do not unite and form their cabals on the ground of fundamental principle, but will go into collusion with any persons who, for the time being, are willing to abet and aid them in their maneuvers. It is needless to say that these methods are contrary to that sterling honesty which belongs to the Christian religion.

Schemers are also notable for their flattering ways. In this case the emissaries of the Pharisees, carrying out their instruction, greeted Jesus with complimentary speech, saying: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one; for thou re-

gardest not the person of men.” This was arch flattery, coming from Phari-
saic lips. By saying to Jesus that they knew He was sincere and brave and
fearless, they thought He would be all the more ready to fall into their trap,
to express Himself on the political situation without reserve, and even to
speak out with reckless courage. Always be on the alert for people who ap-
proach you with fawning, complimentary speech; usually they are only pre-
paring the way to get a favor from you or obtain some ulterior advantage. It
is better to go on the principle, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

And what was the plan of these schemers? They desired to involve
Christ in political difficulty. So they asked Him these questions: “Tell us
therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or
not?” Let us remember that the Pharisees and stricter Jews held that it was
wrong and disloyal to the Hebrew nation and religion to pay such tribute, or
at least to say that it was lawful. On the other hand, for a public teacher to
declare openly that it was unlawful to pay tribute to Caesar would involve
him with the Roman government; it would be regarded as an act of sedition
and treason. That was why the Pharisees contrived to have two parties
present, the Jewish party and the Herodians. If Jesus answered in one way,
He would offend the Jewish faction, and become unpopular with them. If
He answered in the other way, the Herodians would at once accuse Him to
Herod, and have Him put to death as a traitor. Thus they cleverly laid their
trap, and thought that Jesus could not escape. He was, as the saying goes,
“between two fires.”

This leads us up to the main thought of our text. We have merely dwelt
for some time on the first part of the lesson to show the dishonesty and un-
Christian character of all petty political scheming, whether it be in Church
or State. Any plan that cannot be carried on openly and frankly may well
come under suspicion, because it is likely to be too much colored with hu-
man ambition.

II. The Main Thought Of The Text.

The vital thought is, man’s civil and religious obligations. First, Jesus fer-
reted out their dishonest motives.

Perceiving their wicked purposes, He said, “Why tempt ye me, ye hyp-
ocrites?” It really was a most clever thing to do — to expose their ulterior

designs at once, as much as to say, “You know in your hearts that you are not really interested in the merits of the question; you are merely using it as ruse to entrap me. So do not think I do not see into your hearts and discern your fell purposes. But, instead of using evasion and craft, as you have done, I will answer the question on its merits, and give you a fundamental rule of conduct.”

So He said to them, “Show me the tribute money.” That meant the money that the Roman government had put in circulation and in which the tribute or poll-tax was to be paid. They brought Him a coin, called a penny, or, in their language, a denarius, worth about fourteen cents. This was a concrete and dramatic way to impress His lesson, proving Him an adept teacher. He no doubt took the coin in His hand, and turned it from one side to the other, while the crowd stood watching Him with breathless interest. What would this wonderful teacher do and say now? He proved Himself master of the situation. He asked: “Whose is this image and superscription?” On one side was represented the head of the Roman emperor, Tiberius; on the reverse side were his name and title. Of course, they could but answer His question correctly, “Caesar’s.” Then He uttered those momentous words: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” No wonder the story ends with victory for Christ. “And when they heard it, they marveled, and left Him, and went their way.” He had given the incident so unexpected a turn, and had uttered so vital and self-evident a truth; that they were caught in their own trap, and had to slip away, beaten and humbled.

But we must analyze the great principle that Jesus laid down on this occasion. It divides itself into two parts.

1. It teaches our civic duties.

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” May we accept this as a general Christian principle for our guidance in all time? We may. Our great Teacher spoke fundamentally. Take the case of the Jews. Through their disobedience they had forfeited their right to separate national existence, and were, therefore, by divine punishment subject to the Roman empire. In that condition they should have been subject to government. If they were taxed, it was their duty to pay the tax, and not become insurrectionists. It was both right and prudent for them to be obedient to the law. If God should ever see

fit to release them from earthly and political bondage, He would make the way clear to them. That Christ's conception was the right one was proved in the year 70 A. D., when the Jews rebelled against the Roman rule, and were so completely crushed that they have never since been a nation, but have been scattered among all other nations.

And Christ laid down here a general rule for the guidance of Christians today. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." This simply means, be loyal to your government; pay your taxes honestly, because no country can be well governed and its citizens properly protected in their rights without money. Christ performed a miracle, to secure money with which to pay His taxes, an incident which shows that He did not want subjects of a nation to be dishonest, to be slackers or rebels. The person who refuses to make honest returns of his money and property to the assessor will cheat his fellowmen in other ways, if he thinks he can do so without detection; for defrauding your government is defrauding the people who compose it.

This matter of loyalty to one's country at all times is a somewhat complicated problem, and there may be situations in which the Christian is sorely puzzled. But every one will be helped if he will remember that Christ laid down a general rule in our text, and if there ever are exceptions, Christians should be absolutely sure they are exceptions. A mere difference of opinion with one's government on matters of worldly policy is not sufficient ground for opposition to or rebellion against that government.

Others have a right, too, to their opinions, and they may be right. Thus we must be "subject to the powers that be." Christian people are not to stir up sedition and rebellion. They are to be loyal and patriotic. This is a plain Biblical principle. Not only did Christ teach it, but His inspired apostles inculcated the same doctrine. Note Paul (Rom. 13:1-7): "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power withstandeth the ordinance of God, and so on through the whole passage. This is very clear. What would have become of Christianity in those early days had its adherents been seditionists, stirring rebellion on every hand? It would have been crushed. But the followers of Christ approved themselves as good citizens by their quiet behavior and their submission to the laws of the empire; the exceptions only being when rulers commanded them to deny Christ; then, however, instead of resisting with armed force, they suf-

ferred martyrdom; and that was really the last act of surrender and subjection to the governing powers. Peter's counsel is no less clear and positive (1 Pet. 2:13, 14): "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king as supreme; or unto governors as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well."

No; Christian people are not to foment rebellion and revolution, even though they may have to suffer wrongs. And more than that, they should stand by their country in time of peril. How wonderfully this principle was exemplified within the last few years in the United States! Before war was declared against Germany, many good Christian people were in doubt as to what was right and wise. Even the statesmen and diplomats were debating the question pro and con. But observe that, when once war was declared, the people of the Church laid aside their preconceived notions, and declared their loyalty to their government. They remembered Jesus' words in the text and the admonitions of Paul and Peter above recited. The government itself made frequent and direct appeals to the ministers and churches for aid in many ways, and always met with a cheerful and loyal response. Thus our government cannot complain of any lack of sympathy and support on the part of the Christian people of the nation.

In other ways Christians prove their devotion to their country. They are always in favor of the enactment of good and just laws, are obedient to them, and also insist that all citizens ought to obey them. This conception does not arise from an unkindly spirit, but from a patriotic temper. Christian people know very well that no good government can be maintained in the interest of the whole people when the laws are disregarded and unenforced. Their principles are laid down for them in the Book to which they adhere, which says: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." They also desire the election and appointment of wise and just legislators, because they know the Biblical principle to be sound which says: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people sigh."

In a self-governing country like ours Christian citizens must take an interest in governmental affairs. If they believe in being subject to the laws of the country in which they live, then they must perform their duties as citizens of a free country. Since they have the right of franchise, how will they know how to cast their votes if they do not inform themselves regarding public men and public policies? Yes, the Christian citizen of a republic must

be as intelligent as possible in order that he may perform his duties in the fear of God and for the best interests of his country.

In still another way will Christian citizens prove their patriotic love for their country by protesting kindly and firmly against any policies that are positively wrong, against the abuse of properly constituted authority, against dishonesty of all kinds in politics, and against any unjust evasion of, or any violent disobedience to, the law. Remember, however, such uplifting of the voice against public wrongs is not for the purpose of inciting riot or rebellion, but solely for the purpose of correcting the wrongs by persuasive and rational means.

In this free country, too, Christian citizens prove their fealty by standing firmly for the constitutional principle of the separation of Church and State. If we are good Americans, we will ever proclaim and insist on this doctrine. While the Church may advise in governmental policies, so far as right and wrong are concerned, she should never seek to further the cause of religion by appealing to civil power and authority. On the other hand, the State should never seek to force any establishment of religion on the Church. Religion should be free. Christianity always produces the best results in the atmosphere of freedom. No person can be made a Christian by coercion or by legal enactment.

In all these ways, and others that might be mentioned, we may today apply the fundamental principle of the text: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." But Christ taught another great principle in this connection:

2. Our religious duty.

"And unto God the things that are God's," He added. That was most significant. With Christ, religion was the chief concern. He was not like many one-sided people today, who think that, when they have performed their civic and social duties, they have done all that is necessary. No; He recognized that man is also a religious being, owing obligations to God.

Let it be remembered that our duties to God do not conflict with our other duties. In the decalogue there are two tables, the first containing our duties to God, the second our duties to man; and since God gave both tables for our guidance, they must be in harmony. Indeed, the Bible plainly teaches that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the

life that now is, and of that which is to come.” We also have Christ’s promise that, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all other necessary things will be added unto us.

It may be asked, however, by some thoughtful person: “Do not God and Caesar sometimes come into conflict?” It must be frankly admitted that in this sinful world they sometimes do. For example, if a government should command us to deny Christ, it would be our duty, as Peter and John did on one occasion, to “obey God rather than men.” On this point Luther gives good advice: “But what shall we do if Caesar commands us to give God’s things to him, that is, if the government oppresses the conscience? Then it is our duty to endure persecution, but in all cases ‘to obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29).”

And what are some of the things that we should render unto God? Let us be clear and specific. Here Luther says again: “God’s things are the following: love to God and man, faith in Christ, and devout obedience to the gospel.” These particulars include all our obligations to God, but we may specify still more. What is one of the first things we should render to God? Repentance. We are sinners; we should repent, and seek pardon and deliverance from sin, so that we may be acceptable to God, and live in loving communion with Him. This fellowship cannot exist as long as we cling to our sins. Then what should we do? Have faith in Christ — that is, heartily and truly accept God’s method of saving us from our sins. True faith should always follow repentance. This is most pleasing to God, “for without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6). Nothing so delights God as our acceptance of His holy and eternal plan of salvation. “And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

Then faith will be followed by love, love to God and love to man, and love will lead to obedience and service. One of the special things that we should render to God is faithful attendance on the means of grace. He is especially pleased when we come together in His house to worship Him, and to listen to the proclamation of His Word, and partake of His holy sacraments. And why do these services please Him? Because He knows that they heighten the spiritual life; they cause men to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; they help men to go from faith to faith; they cause men to become more and more like Christ, and thus fit them more and more for eternal and blessed fellowship with God and His angels. It is not a self-

ish motive that prompts God to invite us to assemble ourselves together to engage in praise and worship; He knows it is for our good.

Let me urge another motive upon you. It is especially important for us to “render unto God the things that are God’s,” because finally we shall have to stand, not before Caesar’s tribunal, but before God’s. Is it not vital, therefore, that we shall treat God according to His due?

And I wish to plead this motive also: To whom are we chiefly indebted for all our temporal and spiritual blessings? To God, surely. However much good we may receive from Caesar — that is, from the government under which we live — we receive more from God. Even the blessings of civil freedom which we enjoy come ultimately from the dispensations of His providence. How befitting it is, therefore, to recognize our obligations to God as our very first duty and then all other obligations will fall into their proper places and have their relative values! May all of us be wise enough and spiritually minded enough to attend to the most vital matters first.

“Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below;
May I its importance learn,
Its sovereign virtue know!”

62. Two Miracles And Two Examples Of Faith. The Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 9:18-26.

While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. (Matthew 9:18-26)

OUR LESSON FOR TODAY contains a unique circumstance: While Jesus was on His way to perform one miracle, He had to stop to perform another. How busy was His life! Every hour seemed to be thronged. And every act was an act of beneficence. Read the lives of all other men, and note how many things they did for themselves. Of course ,being limited, they could not help this. But read the life of Jesus: He did nothing merely for Himself; He always went about doing good to others. He was the one real and perfect altruist of the world's history.

In order to treat the material of the text in an orderly way, We will classify it as follows: First, the miracles in the order of their occurrence, then the two examples of faith as the condition of the miracles.

I. The Two Miracles.

In order to have the incident clearly before our minds, we must sketch it briefly. Jesus was in or near “His own city,” which was Capernaum, on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. While He was teaching the multitude, a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus by name, came to Him, and told Him that his little daughter was dead; yet he besought Jesus to go with him, and bring her back to life. Jesus at once ceased His discourse, and followed the man, accompanied by His disciples. Now, it was while Jesus was on the way to the ruler’s house that the intermediate miracle occurred. It was the healing of a diseased woman. Let us consider it.

1. The woman with an issue of blood.

This is the woman who touched the hem or border of Christ’s garment, believing that this was all that was necessary to accomplish her healing. Later we will consider her beautiful but timid faith. At present we desire to show Christ’s marvelous knowledge and power in performing such a wonder. We do not know the nature of the disease, but we do know that Christ was able to effect its cure. What wonderful therapeutic power He possessed! We have been considering many of His miracles of healing: on the deaf, the blind, the palsied, the leprous, the fever-stricken, and others; but here is a different case. However, He is again equal to the emergency, and speaks the simple word of power that brings the cure.

From other gospels we learn that this was a most difficult case, one of long standing. The woman had consulted many physicians, and had spent much money in seeking a cure; but she had become worse rather than better. Thus it was a stubborn chronic case, and was considered incurable in that day. No doubt it was more than a mere functional malady, but was organic. Yet Jesus understood it thoroughly, for as soon as the woman touched Him, He turned, and saw her, and said, without a moment’s hesitation: “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole.” And the woman was healed that very moment.

It is this constant preparedness for every emergency that surprises us in the career of Christ; never surprised, never thrown off his guard, never disconcerted. It is a wonderful narrative. Who could have ever imagined such a person? Who could have ever drawn such a portrait? We are persuaded that the only adequate explanation is that Jesus truly lived, that His disciples saw Him perform His wonders, and that they were divinely inspired in

telling the story. Surely a mere tax-gatherer like Matthew, so ordinary otherwise, never could have invented so marvelous a narrative. No! the only explanation of Jesus is Jesus Himself. And the best proof that we have now of His reality and divine power is that He saves us today from our sins, just as He saved people from their physical maladies while He was here in the earthly state. This miracle is only an addition to the cumulative proofs already adduced of the true divinity of our Lord. How else could He have understood in an instant the pathology of this woman's case? How else could He have commanded the sanative forces necessary to cure a chronic organic disease that had baffled all the best physicians of the day? Here we are in the presence of Deity.

The other miracle of the text was —

2. The raising of the ruler's daughter from the dead.

To this marvel we must now give our attention. So far as the evangelical record informs us, this is the second person whom Jesus brought back from the realm of the dead. The first was the son of the widow of Nain. The gospels by Mark and Luke also relate this incident, so that we know that the name of the ruler of the synagogue was Jairus, and that his daughter was about twelve years old. Jairus had left home before the death of his daughter, but while the company were on the way to the house, some persons came to him and told him that death had come to the young girl, and therefore it was not necessary for him to trouble the Master any further. But Jesus turned to the ruler, and reassured him with these words, "Fear not; only believe." on reaching the house, Jesus saw the hired mourners, and heard their loud tumult. Then He said to them: "Why make ye tumult and weep? The child is not dead, but sleepeth."

We might stop to inquire what Jesus meant by that speech, since He knew that the maiden was dead. Knowing that He would restore her, He meant to teach that her death was only temporary, and thus more like a sleep than real death. Her spirit would soon come back to her, awakened from its transient slumber. It was beautiful to call death a sleep. That takes away much of its gloom and terror. Perhaps body and soul fall to sleep together at death, since they are such intimate companions in this life; but immediately after death God awakens the soul, and endows it with the power of self-conscious existence in heaven in the disembodied state, just as

Christ said to the penitent thief on the cross, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," and just as He represented Lazarus in the parable as passing immediately after death to Abraham's bosom, which was the same place as Paradise. Thus Jesus has made death almost attractive to the Christian by likening it to a peaceful slumber. He was so good and kind! On this thought is based one of our most touching hymns:

"Asleep in Jesus! blessed sleep,
From which none ever wakes to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes."

Beautifully does Chrysostom put it: "Before the advent of Christ death was called death... But since Christ came and died for the life of the world, death is no longer called death, but slumber and falling asleep."

"Then Jesus hushed the wailing, took the parents of the child and three of His disciples into the room where the dead girl lay." Let the inspired writer tell the story in his own terse way: "And taking the child by the hand, He saith unto her, *Talitha cumi*, which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise. And straightway the damsel rose up and walked; for she was twelve years old." Luke adds another vivid touch: "And her spirit returned, and she rose up immediately; and He commanded that something be given her to eat."

What marvelous self-possession and what power! Nothing was too difficult for our Lord and Master. Winds and waves obeyed His will, diseases were instantly healed, demons fled, and death itself was annulled. So He must have understood precisely What the death of the body was; how its spark of life could be brought back; the mysterious relation of the body and the soul; and where the spirit went after it left the body. Both knowledge and power must have been combined, or the result never could have been effected. Again we are in the presence of Deity. Again we feel that no mere human brain could have invented such a character, and no mere human hand could have drawn such a life. Since Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh," all these marvels are easily accounted for. Otherwise how can they be explained?

And now what important lesson do we learn from the raising of the young girl from the dead? That Jesus has power over life and death; that, though the body will some time die, the same Christ who raised the dead

maiden, will be able to restore it to life at the last day, when the last trump shall sound. Just as the spirit of the damsel returned to its body, so will our redeemed spirits, on the glad resurrection day, return to their bodies, only then our bodies will be glorified, and made fit temples forever for our spirits.

We have in Luke's account a clear teaching on the independent existence of the soul: "And her spirit returned." The doctrine must be that the spirit at death departs to be with God. This teaching agrees with other teaching of the Word of God. "The body returns to the dust from whence it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Paul said that he would prefer to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. In John's Revelation we read of the souls of the saints before the throne of God. The spirit of Lazarus at once went to Abraham's bosom. Thus the various writers of the Bible agree on the destiny of the soul and its disembodied existence after death until the resurrection.

We have dwelt so long on these two great miracles that we must be brief in treating the second part of our theme:

II. Two Examples Of Faith.

1. The woman's faith.

It was very simple; it was also accompanied with much womanly timidity. Evidently the woman did not wish to come into public notice. Perhaps she was ashamed of her disease; perhaps she was just naturally reserved and shrinking. I do not think she was ashamed of Jesus; if she had been, He would not have commended her as He did. No; her very timidity proved that her faith was so much the more implicit. She said to herself, "If I shall but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole." That meant that her faith in His goodness and power was so great that she believed He would heal her without attracting public notice, perhaps without even attracting notice from Himself. Yes, her faith was true and strong, and so Christ turned to her, and said: "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."

This proves that there was no weakness in her faith. Then why did Christ speak to her at all, and especially draw public attention to her? No doubt for

two reasons. First, He wanted to disabuse her mind of all superstition. She might have thought that there was some kind of magical power even in His garments, or else in Himself, so that mere physical contact would effect miraculous results. So while He commended her strong and simple faith, He corrected her understanding, teaching her that it was not magic that healed her, but divine power, laid hold on by faith. Second, He wanted to cure her of her unnecessary timidity. It was better for her to come out and be a witness-bearing disciple. To be a secret disciple was not best for her, and afterward no doubt she helped to extend His kingdom by testifying of His grace and power. We must not hide our light under a bushel, but set it out on candlestick to give illumination to our fellowmen. The gospel from the beginning has won its triumphs through the courageous testimony of the disciples of our Lord. We must not fear men. If we confess Christ before men, He will confess us before His Father in heaven. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” We must never be ashamed of Jesus.

“Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
No; when I blush, be this my shame
That I no more revere His name!”

2. The Ruler’s Faith.

His faith was especially simple and undaunted. When he learned that his daughter had passed away, He said to Jesus: “My daughter is even now dead; but come, and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.” Then Jesus went with him, and rewarded his faith by restoring his daughter to life, as we have seen.

Thus we learn again, as we have learned so often, that Christ always requires faith, and always rewards it. Why is this? Because Christ will not perform His work without the proper moral and spiritual conditions. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” If He should save people without faith, He would save them without the ethical condition of trust in His goodness and grace and power, and that would be arbitrary and wrong. Suppose for one moment that a man did not believe in Christ at all, but rather believed that He was a deceiver, or that

some one else had imposed Him upon the credulity of the world, and yet suppose that Christ under such conditions would save the man — would that be an ethical, spiritual and rational method? No; if Christ is to save people from their sins and woes, they must feel their sins, repent of them, and willingly accept the salvation He has-provided. So we see that Christ is right when He demands faith, not as a meriting cause of salvation, but as an ethical condition. That soul is in a proper status which can say:

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour divine!
Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
Oh, let me from this day
Be wholly Thine.”

Yes, true faith only can bring salvation from sin, and eternal gratitude to Christ. May our faith always be strong and unwavering! For faith spells courage and inspiration. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Thomas Carlyle once said: “If you have anything that you believe with all your heart, tell me what it is. If you have any doubts, keep them to yourself; I have enough of my own.” Yes, the soul rests on a rock only when it trusts in Jesus Christ.

63. Flee! Pray! Beware! The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Trin- ity. Matt. 24:15-28

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. (Matthew 24:15-28)

IN THE CHAPTER from which our gospel lesson for today is taken “Jesus discourses of two tremendous crises,” as Dr. David Smith says in his commentary: “(1) the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70 (verses 4-28); (2) His second advent (verses 29-51).” According to this interpretation, most of our lesson for today belongs to the predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and so, for the most part, we will treat it. However, we think there are glimpses even in this section which look forward to the second coming of our Lord on the day of judgment. In either case there will be some practical reflections of value to us today, even though we may not be passing through so great an epoch. Every age is more or less of a crisis, and every life has its crucial junctures.

The first part of our text may be gathered around an urgent word:

I. Flee!

Said our Lord, in His impressive way: “When ye therefore see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.”

On this passage we cannot do better than to quote from the Lutheran Commentary: “The prophet Daniel, who lived six hundred years before the Christian era, was permitted to see many future events in his visions. Josephus says: ‘Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by it’ (Ant. 10, 11, 7).” As to precisely what is meant by the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, there is a good deal of doubt among Biblical scholars. The most likely opinion seems to be this: When you see the Roman army, with its pagan ensigns and banners, and its abominable incense to idols rising in the air, trampling over the holy land and approaching Jerusalem to lay it waste, then lose no time, but flee to the mountains for refuge. It is significant that the eagle was the ensign of the Roman power, and on all its standards were flaming pictures of Roman eagles. This is perhaps what Christ meant in the last verse of our lesson: “For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together,” meaning that the poor Jewish nation would be the carcass and the conquering Roman army the eagles, as indicated by their ensigns.

At all events, the disciples of Christ, who would be living in the year 70 A.D., were to understand that the Roman army coming toward Jerusalem, or encompassing it, was to be the token for their flight from the city.

According to Eusebius, the Church historian, there was an interim when Titus, the Roman general, withdrew a part of his army which had been beleaguering the city, and the Christians, in obedience to this command of Christ, improved the opportunity to escape from the walls into the mountains to the north and north-east, and found refuge in the city of Pella beyond the Jordan River in the land of Perwa. Even Josephus, in several places in his history, refers to the flight of many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

It was a good providence that led Christ to give His people this prophetic warning. Had they remained in the city, they would have perished miser-

ably, as did the Jews who remained, thinking they could resist and endure the siege of the Roman legions. Had they perished, it would have greatly reduced the number of Christians, and thus would have greatly retarded the spread of the gospel. So God often cares for His people in a physical way, especially when His cause depends upon it.

To impress upon His disciples the need of haste in making their flight from Jerusalem just when the hour struck, He said to them: "Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes." It would be a strategic moment, the time when they must at once improve the opportunity to escape, or they would perish with those who tarried. If a man on the housetop would stop long enough to run into the house to get some of his goods, or if the man in the field, working without his usual mantle, would go to the house to get it, the chance to escape might be passed. The time would be so precious that women with children might be special sufferers, if they did not make all haste, and were not aided by their friends and relatives. There is no doubt that Christ meant to give His disciples the most urgent warning. He knew that the city was doomed, for He had already prophesied to that effect; therefore it would be unfortunate for His disciples to perish in the destruction of the Jews who obstinately resisted the Roman power.

What lesson may we learn from Christ's urgent admonition to flee from the devoted city? Certainly, if He was so profoundly interested in their physical escape from Jerusalem, in order that their earthly lives might be spared for a few years, it must be a picture and illustration of His solicitude for us to flee from the greater misfortune of judgment on account of sin. Hence the Holy Spirit inspired John the Baptist to make the ringing, appeal to "flee from the wrath to come." Just as in the awful days of the siege of Jerusalem, God in some way caused Titus partly to withdraw his army for a short time, thus giving the disciples of Christ a chance to escape into the mountains, so He has provided for all of us a way of escape from the condemnation of sin; and He bids men today to "flee to the mountains" of His saving love and grace. Christ beats back the hosts of the evil one, so that now is our chance to make good our escape.

And what good reason has anyone for delay? Will you have a better opportunity by and by? Remember Felix, who said to Paul, "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" but, so far as we know, the postpon-

ing king's "convenient season" never came. Indeed, a "convenient season" to become a Christian never comes to any one. It is always more or less of a test, and always requires something of a struggle with the old carnal nature to make a start in the Christian life. What would you think of a Christian disciple who, when he saw that the time had come to make his escape from the beleaguered city, had said: "I do not feel like going just now; I will wait for a convenient season!"

In one place the Psalmist said: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." That was the right frame of mind: when something was to be done, he would do it promptly. An old adage is, "Delays are dangerous." Another is: "Procrastination is the thief of time." All the invitations and warnings of the Bible are in the present tense: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." "How long halt ye between two opinions?" "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near." "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." "Today if ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts." The fact is, there is not one word in the Bible to encourage the sinner to postpone the day of his return to God; there are hundreds of passages that urge him to accept the overtures of mercy now, this very day. I pray you, "flee to the mountains."

Our text contains another important and urgent word:

II. Pray!

"Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day; for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." This is significant. If these calamities should come upon them in the winter, how would they escape into the mountains? They would simply perish there from the cold instead of remaining in the city to perish by the sword. Jesus knew, too, that if they would have to make their flight on the Jewish Sabbath, they would be greatly hindered by the superstitious reverence that many of the Jews had for that day. Perhaps then, instead of making a quick and thorough escape, they would delay or walk only a short journey, and the army of Titus would return, and make them prisoners, and punish and torture them all the more because they had tried to escape. Many of the Jews would hold back their friends who were Christians, if their flight had to be made on the Sabbath.

Whatever might be the circumstances, Jesus earnestly enjoined upon them to pray for a providential time to make their flight.

Here we learn that we are to pray for the protection and ordering of providence; pray about the times and the seasons; pray about the weather. Christ did not seem to be troubled about the relation of natural law to the will of God and the rule of prayer, for He who knew nature so well, and so often proved Himself its Sovereign, also knew how to order it for the good of His people in answer to their prayers. He who ruleth high and wise has taken all things into His calculations, even the effects of saintly petition on the laws of the natural cosmos.

Thus we are encouraged to live lives of prayer. If we are to pray for physical blessings, how much more for spiritual things! Indeed, it is always God's good will to bestow upon us His Holy Spirit and His pardoning grace; and these can be had only in answer to prayer.

Sometimes people wonder why we should pray at all, especially when God knows our needs. The reason is evident. We never care much for things until we feel enough interest in them to ask for them. If your neighbor never once hints that he wants an article that you can spare him, you are likely to take it for granted that he does not care for it or feel his need of it, and that is very probably the truth about the matter. So why should God bestow upon us His blessings when we do not care for them, when we have no interest in them, not even enough to ask Him for them? But when we give enough thought to our temporal and spiritual needs to pray earnestly about them, then He has ordained to answer our prayers. One of the poets — Hartly Coleridge — puts it well in the lines:

“Be not afraid to pray — to pray is right;
Pray, if thou canst, with hope; but ever pray,
Though hope be weak or sick with long delay;
Pray in the darkness if there be no light.
Far is the time, remote from human sight,
When war and discord on the earth shall cease;
Yet every prayer for universal peace
Avails the blessed time to expedite.
Whate'er is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see.
Pray to be perfect, though material leaven
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be.
But if for any wish thou darest not pray,
Then pray to God to cast that wish away.”

We think that the command to pray extends to the next verse, which says: “And except those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

There need be no theological difficulty here. Who were the elect? They were the true believers. Jesus Himself said plainly, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Therefore the elect must be those who perseveringly believe on Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They do not believe because they are elect, but they are the elect on the condition of their faith in Christ and His gospel. “Whom He did foreknow, them He foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Peter addressed his first epistle “to the elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Thus we see that God elects those who He foresees will accept Jesus Christ by faith. If He did not elect them, and then use His omnipotence and grace to insure their salvation, Satan might even prevent the final salvation of believers. That can never be, because God has decreed their redemption, and He will never permit His eternal decree to fail.

This text of Scripture teaches clearly how God secures the salvation of His elect people, His true, believing people. Had He permitted those terrible days to continue too long, it would have given Satan too great an advantage, and the trials of the saints would have been too great for them to endure; but God knows just how far to let Satan go; He will never permit him to force His believing children into apostasy. Herein lie the great comfort and security of God’s electing grace and power. While it is not arbitrary, it gives His people assurance. The same doctrine is taught by Paul when he exclaims: “I know on Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” We see here plainly that God’s keeping grace is conditioned on faith (“on Whom I have believed”), but when that condition is present, God will guard against every foe. In another place Paul gives the same confident assurance: “There hath no temptation overtaken you but such as man can bear; for God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also a way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.” This is a beautiful commentary on the text: “But for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” Thus all God’s elect escaped at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and were not tried beyond their strength. So it will be with us. All we need to do is to abide by faith in Christ; then no power

will be able to wrench us out of His hand and that of the Father (John 10:28, 29).

And now we have come to the third and last admonition of our text:

III. Beware!

Note our Lord's solemn and earnest warning: "Then if any man shall say unto you, lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, inso-much as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand." That is, I have given you due warning, and forewarned is fore-armed. Then He continues: "If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness, go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh from the east, and is seen even unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man."

It is marvelous how these prophecies were fulfilled during those terrible days when the Roman army besieged and conquered Jerusalem. False Messiahs and false prophets did arise, and deceived many. Says one learned commentator: "It was, as Josephus shows, the turbulence of Messianic aspiration that brought on the fatal conflict." Among these, according to Milman ("History of the Jews"), were John of Gischala and Simon son of Gioras. "Simon raised the standard of revolt in the wilderness of Judea; John hatched sedition in Jerusalem" (David Smith). Says the same author: "The horror of the siege is unparalleled in history. The citizens were crucified around the walls until 'space was wanting for the crosses and crosses for the bodies.'"

Now let us note an important fact: It was because Christ had given His disciples warning to beware of these false Messiahs and prophets, and because they heeded His warning, that they were able to escape. Had they believed on those pretenders, they would have followed them, and would have perished miserably with their adherents. In this fact we have a most important historical proof that Christ is the true Messiah, and hence a rational ground for obedience to His admonition to "beware of false prophets." If Christ spoke truly in the case of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, thus proving Himself divine, why should we seek for other voices and other teachers? Since that day the very triumph and permanence of His truth, in

spite of all persecution and trial, vindicate His claim to be the world's Redeemer. The experience of His people through all the centuries also verifies His right to our trust and homage. Even today, after so many years, we receive His Spirit into our hearts, "bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." He proves Himself to be the living Christ today. The risen and ascended Christ is still working with His people by the Holy Spirit through the Word and sacraments and by means of His Church. In cases of temporary doubt we may well say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

So we today must "beware of false Christs and false prophets." When anyone says to us, "Lo, here He is, or there," we need not believe it. Why? Because Christ Himself gives us the infallible test and token for knowing Him when He shall come again. And what is that test? He says: "As the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Here, my Christian friends, we have the sure sign of our Lord's second coming. We need have no doubt. There is no need to be deceived by pretenders. If a professed messiah comes along, we need not for one moment suspect that he might be the true Messiah. Christ has forestalled all such mistakes. He has told us that, when He comes, He can be plainly seen from the east to the west, for He will come in the clouds, with great glory and with the holy angels with Him. So do not worry about who Christ is or when He shall come. You will recognize Him when He appears. Thank God that He told us how we may be sure. His second advent will not be obscure or in the least doubtful. May all of us be ready to meet Him in His glory!

64. Before The Judgment Seat Of Christ. The Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 25:31-46

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:31-46)

IF THE TEXT for last Sunday portrayed the scenes of that epoch in human history, the destruction of Jerusalem, the text for today plainly depicts some of the scenes of the last judgment, the assize at the end of the world. This event is known as the Second Advent of our Lord. In the sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent we had occasion to draw some contrasts between Christ's first and second coming, and also to give some admonitions as to the necessity of being ready for His second advent. We also suggested the

best method of watching for that great and climactic event. Today we must consider some other phases of the last judgment. There is a general truth to be inferred from the text which ought to have a few minutes' attention:

I. The Fact Of A General Judgment.

Our text is simply one of many passages of Scripture which depict the great general assize at the end of the world. Says Paul: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

But many people wonder why there must be a general judgment, especially since each man's destiny is determined at death. Many reasons may be given why a mere private judgment would not be according to God's plan. First, the many people who will be living at the end of the world, must be brought before the tribunal of Christ for judgment. If so, those who died before that event should also be there to receive judgment on the same terms and according to the same standard. Moreover, in a public assize, all people and all angels will know the precise grounds of the divine adjudication in each case; then all will be forever satisfied, because they will see that the Judge of all the earth has done right. A mere private or secret judgment would not suffice. In civil affairs in this country no man can be condemned and punished by a "star chamber" judgment. A public trial must be held so that the citizens may know that the verdict is just. Moreover, there ought to be a specific time when the present epoch or dispensation will be concluded. Now suffering and inequality so largely prevail; now truth is often on the scaffold and error on the throne. There must surely be a time when the era of righteousness, truth and equity will be inaugurated. No better time and occasion for such an event could be chosen than a public assize. Then, as the Bible promises, "there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Yes, there is abundant reason for the Biblical doctrine of a general judgment. Instead of doubting it and debating about it, the wiser way is to be ready for it when it comes.

II. Who Will Be The Judge On That Day?

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.”

And why the “Son of man?” It is befitting that He who took upon Himself man’s nature, passed through the whole gamut of human experience, suffered, died, rose again from the dead, ascended to the right hand of God, and was glorified with all the fullness of God — it surely is befitting that He should be man’s Judge at the last day. By His own experience He knows all about the joys, weaknesses, sorrows, disappointments and temptations of mankind, and therefore can judge them from a direct experiential viewpoint. So we know that His adjudications will be as lenient as they can be; they will never be over-stern, never unjust, always tempered with mercy. Thus we may be glad that it is the Son of man who will be the arbiter of our destinies.

However, we must remember always that the Son of man is also the Son of God. “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God... And the Logos became man, and dwelt among us.” He was divine as well as human. How appropriate that He should sit upon the judgment throne at the last day! By virtue of His humanity He knows and sympathizes with humanity by actual experience; by virtue of His divinity His knowledge and power are infinite, perfect and absolute; thus no errors will be made; the plummet of righteousness will measure to the line. No one will be condemned who should not be condemned; no one will be saved who ought not to be saved. Thank God that Christ shall be our Judge! Thank God that we need not judge ourselves or our neighbors!

III. Who Will Be The Subjects Of Judgment On That Day?

“And before Him shall be gathered all nations.” One commentator of the “liberal” kind declares that this means only the heathen nations, those who have never heard of Christ. But this is manifestly wrong. The Lutheran Commentary puts the matter correctly: “This language is so comprehensive and emphatic, and so carefully excludes all limitations as to generations or countries, that the words, ‘all nations,’ are clearly to be understood literally — all human beings who ever lived on the earth, irrespective of their Jewish or Gentile origin.” Paul says plainly: “We shall all stand before the judg-

ment seat of Christ.” And also: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself unto God.” Many of the parables — those of the wheat and the tares, the talents, the pounds, the fish-net, the five wise and five foolish virgins — teach that all men must at last stand before God and give an account of the deeds done in the body.

So none of us must think that we shall escape. We cannot claim exemption. There is nothing exceptional about our individual cases. The small and great will be there; the old and young; the learned and unlearned; the rich and poor; the believing and unbelieving; people of caste, and the downcast and the outcast. It will be a motley assembly. Let us not dispute the fact; let us, rather, be ready for it.

IV. What Separations Will Take Place On That Day?

It will be a solemn time. The nations and tribes and kindred are all gathered before His throne, and you and I are among them. Then “He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” After that He shall pronounce the judgment on each class, according to their standing, and the separation will be made eternal.

Somewhere Jesus says that two men shall be working in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Also two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left. The line of separation will, doubtless, often run between members of the same household. It will be very sad for some members of a family to be on the right hand of the King and others on the left. The only way to avoid such a calamity is for all the members of our families to accept Christ and His salvation and do His holy will. God help all to do this!

V. What Will Be The Norm Of Judgment On That Day?

We must outline it briefly. First, Christ will say to those on His right: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink,” etc. The persons thus addressed, being humble, and feeling poor in spirit, ask the King when these things occurred; and He replies: “Inasmuch as ye. did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto Me.”

Then the King turns to those on the left, and says: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink,” etc. When these people, in astonishment, inquire when they so grossly neglected Him, He says: “Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto Me.”

And now what is to be the standard of judgment according to this sublime, solemn and heart-searching passage. It is that faith in Christ which leads to good deeds to other people; “faith,” as the apostle puts it, “which worketh by love.” Another apostle says: “Faith without works is dead;” and so faith which is not living and does not bear the fruit of good and unselfish works is unavailing, and will not save at the last day. Helping the poor and distressed, giving them real food and drink and also spiritual comfort and help — that is the fruit of a living faith in Jesus Christ; for He sacrificed Himself; He went about doing good; He lived unselfishly; and if we accept Him as our Saviour, He will breathe His own Spirit into our hearts, and lead us to the same kind of works.

How encouraging it is to the Christian worker, who seeks to do good to his fellowmen, to know that Christ so identifies Himself with people that, when he gives them help and uplift, he really does a good deed to Christ. It might be illustrated in this way: If some one were to rescue your little child from great peril, and bring him to you alive and well, you would say: “What you did for my dear child, you did for me!” Oh! Jesus may be found in every poor and unhappy person. All are in a sense His people.

Do not think that this lesson teaches justification by good works, for it is plain that the good deeds commended by our Lord are the result of a kindly, Christlike spirit, which we can receive only by faith in Him. Christ is here speaking Of the fruit of true faith, and since we know a tree by its fruit, so we know that these kindly deeds are the fruit of a living, justifying faith in His love and power. Let us remember this: A true, unselfish Christian life,

which is the fruit of faith in Christ, will put us on the right side of the King on that great day of the Lord, while a close, selfish life will put us on the left side.

VI. What Will Be The Awards Of The Great Assize?

To those on 'the right Christ will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." In the last verse of the text He says, "But the righteous shall go into eternal life." Observe that God had the salvation of believers in His plan from eternity; even when He laid the foundation of the world, He carried out His eternal decree, and prepared a kingdom for His people. With God there are no afterthoughts. Foreknowing all things, He has made provision for every need and exigency. Looked at in this light, what a comfort it is to think of God's eternal decrees, His eternal election of true believers! His plans and purposes of grace can never be foiled. I hope each of us will hear His welcome plaudit: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

On the other hand — and this part of the text ought to make us tremble — the King will say to those on the left: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels." Also in the last verse are these pathetic words: "And these shall go away into eternal punishment." Observe that the place of retribution was not originally prepared for men, but for the devil and his angels. This proves that the fallen angels were the first moral agents to sin; therefore the place of perdition was originally prepared for them. Now, only those human beings who permit themselves to be led into sin and to become like Satan will share his terrible abode with him. If anyone does not like this doctrine, we would simply ask what God could do with people who are selfish and corrupt, and who will not allow Christ to save and cleanse them from their sins? Can He admit them into heaven? That would defile heaven, and destroy all its joy. Might He annihilate them? He might, but there is no evidence in the Bible, in nature or in reason that God will ever destroy a self-conscious, moral personality whom He brings into existence. We do not know that He will ever annihilate even an atom of matter. How much less a person!

All questionings and doubts aside, Jesus Christ taught that the punishment of the wicked and the life of the righteous are of the same duration, for, in the last verse of the text, He used the same word — the word for “eternal” — to qualify both states. We need not meet with the terrible fate of the wicked. God in His Word has pointed out a plain and gracious way of escape, on the easy terms of the gospel — faith in Christ, followed by obedience to His will. In conclusion, let me appeal to all to look “unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.” For “He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come to God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

65. Wise Ways Versus Foolish Ways. The Twenty-Seventh Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 25:1-13

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 25:1-13)

OUR LESSON FOR LAST SUNDAY dealt with the last judgment, and viewed certain aspects of that event. This point was made especially prominent — that faith in Christ must be a living faith, which brings forth the fruits of good and kindly works, in order to endure the crucible of that tribunal. Today our lesson also deals with the last judgment, but it brings out another aspect of that day, namely, the absolute need of divine grace in addition to our natural powers, in order to win for us admission into the kingdom of heaven. Let us note the lessons and doctrines to be drawn from this graphic parable of the ten virgins.

I. The Two Classes — The Wise And The Foolish.

Jesus here gives a comprehensive classification. Some people who want to be wise above that which is written may think that it is not clear-cut and fundamental. Are there not more than two classes of persons in the world? Are there not the wise and the foolish and several grades between? We shall find, however, on closer examination, that Christ's division is the correct one. In relation to the kingdom of heaven there are only two classes — those who conform to the conditions and those who do not. This agrees with Christ's teaching in the sermon on the mount (Matt. 7:13, 14), where he points out only two ways, the narrow way and the broad way. There is no hint of an intermediate way; no indication of a kind of "Midway Plaisance," which is fairly safe and pleasant, and is meant for people who are neither very good nor very bad.

So here in the parable only two classes are portrayed, the wise and the foolish. Let us see whether this is not correct. The plan of salvation through Jesus Christ is plainly set forth in the Holy Scriptures. Now we wish to ask this pointed question: Are not those who accept divine saving grace wise persons? Are they not wise both for time and eternity? Salvation is something that begins in this life. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life." This means a salvation of the present tense, which reaches out into the everlasting future. When a man has enough foresight and aspiration to secure so valuable a blessing, one that makes him safe for the present and the future, surely he is wise, prudent and ethical. On the other hand, what shall be said of people who either reject or neglect so great salvation? It surely is not too harsh to say that they are foolish. In worldly matters the man who throws away a good chance is regarded as unwise, and usually people do not hesitate to call him so. But here is a chance to obtain both a temporal and an eternal boon. Is a person less foolish if he carelessly or purposely turns aside from it? Would you not think? that everybody would be anxious to secure so great a destiny? Would not that be a natural and rational conclusion? Even if it were necessary to make some temporary sacrifice of secular pleasure, one would think it would be wise to make one's eternal calling and election sure. Thus, you observe, that Jesus was right — there are only two classes in the world, the wise and the foolish. Let me appeal to

all to join the former class; for the Bible says: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.” And what is true wisdom? “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Or, in the terms of the text, it is wisdom to take the oil of saving grace with you as you go out to meet the heavenly Bridegroom.

II. The Provisions The Two Classes Made.

The narrative is terse and graphic: “They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil with them in their vessels with their lamps.”

We must leave it to your judgment whether it was not inexcusably foolish for the first five to go without a supply of oil. What were they thinking about? But let us not condemn them too hastily, lest some of us condemn ourselves. Are not far too many people today going forth through life, not knowing when the Bridegroom may come, without the oil of divine grace, depending on getting that grace somehow or other when the emergency arises? If that is wisdom, then we ought to have a new definition of wisdom.

We have already given a hint as to what we think is the proper interpretation of the lamps and the oil spoken of in the parable. What does Christ mean to illustrate when He says that some of the virgins took their lamps, but failed to take oil with them, while the rest took both their lamps and a supply of oil? In order to understand it we must remember that this parable was intended to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. But what is necessary in order to enter into that kingdom. The Bible everywhere teaches that mere natural capacity is not enough; that man must be saved by divine grace; he must have pardon, cleansing, mercy and regeneration. The lamps, therefore, mean merely man’s natural powers or capacities. But these are not sufficient to fit men to meet the heavenly Bridegroom. Lamps without oil are of no use. They are as dark as the surrounding darkness. Hence the Bible teaches that in the natural state men are “dead in trespasses and sins.” Also that the “carnal mind is enmity against God.”

So the virgins needed more than their dead lamps. They needed oil and fire. So men cannot save themselves, or render themselves fit for God’s

kingdom. They must have the oil of divine mercy and the fire of the Holy Spirit, or their condition is hopeless.

Far too many people today reject salvation by grace, thinking all they need to do is to develop their natural powers. They are going to be saved by “character,” and do not need to repent and fly to God for mercy and grace. How unwise! As well might the foolish virgins have expected to “develop” light out of the dry, unoiled wicks in their empty lamps. No; let us not be deceived by this popular doctrine of natural evolution. The trouble is, it crowds out the supernatural; it omits God; it rejects Christ, who said plainly, “Without me ye can do nothing.” It scorns Paul’s great doctrine, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Let us repeat it over and over till the foolish become wise: “Salvation is not a human achievement, but a divine bestowment.” My friends, do not make the fatal mistake of simply taking your lamps with you to meet the Bridegroom; take with you, above all, the oil of divine grace.

III. The Status Of The Two Classes When The Bridegroom Came.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” This was in strict accordance with the customs of the times in Jesus’ day.

And now appears in sharp contrast the difference between the wise and foolish virgins. Prior to that, you could not have told them apart, unless you had taken the pains to examine their lamps. But now this variance comes out. “All the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.” But, behold, the five foolish virgins found that they could not light their lamps; they had no oil. This was indeed a dilemma. In their desperation they appealed to their companions, and said: “Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.”

We may tarry here to remark that this is the proverbial way with unwise and improvident people: they always want their wiser neighbors to help them out of the trouble into which their own faults have plunged them. While they have ample opportunity to make provision for every emergency, they go on in their careless way; then, when want comes, they want others to help them. That is more than foolish; it is selfish.

But the wise virgins replied: “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.” This teaches an important lesson. In the natural realm people may share their possessions; but in the realm of divine grace it is different; and remember here Christ is illustrating the conditions of the kingdom of heaven. In salvation each one must receive grace for himself. It is a personal matter. You can help and advise your neighbor in some ways; but you cannot impart grace to him from the supply that God has given you. Each one must repent for himself; each one must exercise faith for himself; each one must come individually to Christ. Just as one man cannot eat or drink for another, so no one can have saving grace for another. On this fact is founded that great saying of Paul: “So then each one of us must give account of himself to God.”

There are people who seem to think that they will be able to get into heaven on some one else’s religion — that of a godly father or mother or a pious wife. But other people’s religion will not help you; indeed, the fact that your relatives were pious, set you a good example, and often entreated you to accept saving mercy, will only heighten your condemnation before God, if you appear there without grace. Sometimes on a railway ticket is printed or written, “Not transferable.” So it is with the ticket of admission into the kingdom of God — “Not transferable!”

This reminds us of an incident related by Mr. Spurgeon. He once spoke to a man about religion. The man replied jocularly that his wife had religion for the whole family. Mr. Spurgeon answered: “Then some day you may see your wife entering heaven for the whole family!” It was a deserved rebuke.

IV. The Reception Of The Two Classes At The Marriage.

The five wise virgins, being ready, followed the bridal procession, and went in with the happy throng to the wedding festivities. “And the door was shut.” Jesus must have spoken that very solemnly: “And the door was shut.” Meanwhile the foolish virgins had been vainly casting about to find oil. In some way they found their way to the door of the bridegroom, and cried piteously: “Lord, Lord, open to us.” This appeal is characteristic. People who neglect their opportunities for a little superficial and temporary pleasure or convenience are always the ones to make the most pitiful appeal

when they get into trouble. No matter what their ill deserts, they always want the best; always want equal privileges with those who are careful, provident and self-sacrificing. There actually are people in the world who are so selfish and sordid as to go along their own way without regard to God all their lives, and then at the last moment want to go to heaven just like those who have served God all their lives. How selfish and presumptuous their conduct is!

But a grievous disappointment awaited the foolish virgins who stood at the door crying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." The lord of the marriage feast replied: "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." What did he mean? That those selfish virgins did not care enough for him to comply with the condition of the feast, which was to be ready when he came. All they cared for was to enjoy the banquet he had prepared for his guests. Therefore they were aliens in spirit, careless, selfish and presuming. He could not admit such gluttons and egotists to his supper. He did not know them, but he knew from their conduct that they were not qualified to sit at his table and share the joy and fellowship of the feast.

So it will be, sad, to say, when the heavenly Bridegroom comes. There will be alien spirits, unprepared by repentance, faith and grace, who will want to push their way presumptuously, belated as they are, into the place of pure felicity; but Christ will exclude them by saying: "I know you not! You never came to me for the oil of grace and salvation." It will be sad, unspeakably sad; but what else can Jesus do with them but exclude them from the kingdom for which they would make no preparation?

The separation of the five wise and five foolish virgins reminds the speaker of an incident in his own life, when he was young. He had not yet accepted Christ and come into His fold. One summer Sunday morning, after he had come home from college, he went to the church Service. His mother was there, and also his brother, who was a couple of years younger than he. Both of them were members of the church. We three were the only ones left of the family. It was the time of the Communion Service. When the invitation to go forward to the Lord's table was given, the mother arose and went up the aisle to the table; then the brother left the speaker's side, and went up and stood beside his mother. Your speaker was the only one left of the little family. He seemed to be excluded. It was an affecting moment for us. Full of doubt and rebellion as we were in those days, our emotions overcame us, and we bent our head on the pew in front of us, and wept tears of deep an-

guish. The thought would not be repressed that sometime we might see our loved ones entering the heavenly kingdom, while we were shut out. That incident made an abiding impression on our mind. It was not many months afterward that our little family, trio all stood side by side at the communion table, and received the heavenly gifts of God's grace.

This is the last Sunday in the Trinity season. There have been twenty-eight Sundays in all. The lessons we have learned have been many and varied. May all of them abide with us, and make us rich in the grace of God and in service to our fellowmen! And especially may all of us seek that preparation through repentance and faith that will fit us for eternal residence at God's right hand! In conclusion, let me say, it is the part of true wisdom to watch and be ready, "for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." On the other hand, it is most unwise to let another day pass without taking the oil of divine grace with you on your journey to meet the Heavenly Bridegroom.

66. Full Barns: What Of The Soul? The Festival Of Harvest.

Luke 12:15-21

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:15-21)

AT FIRST THOUGHT the gospel selected by the Church for the day may not seem to be in accord with a joyful Harvest Festival. It is a warning against covetousness, which is enforced by the trenchant parable about the rich man who, after accumulating much wealth and thinking that he needed nothing more, was informed that on that selfsame night his soul would be required of him. That may seem a little stern for this festive occasion. Still, taking it in connection with the Introit, the Epistle and the Gradual for the day, we will find that the lessons from the Bible contain the right proportion of joyful celebration and solemn warning. The first will fill our hearts with gratitude; the second will prevent our becoming careless and worldly. Do we not need both?

Suppose we first dwell on some of the reasons for joy and gratitude as derived from the Introit and Gradual, and then consider the admonition of the gospel text. This will give us our theme, "Full Barns: What of the Soul?"

I. Reasons For Joy And Gratitude.

Note the truth and beauty of the Introit: “O Lord, Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness. Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; Thou blessest the springing thereof. Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion; and unto Thee shall the vow be performed.” What do we learn from this poetical representation?

1. We learn that GOD is the source of all temporal good.

God is here directly addressed, and pronouns referring to Him are found in every sentence. The Psalmist was neither a deist nor an atheist. Believing firmly in God, he also believed that God cherishes an interest in the world and exercises loving care over it. As the epistle for the day teaches, He “supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food,” and will “supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness.” God has not forgotten the children of men. It is He that brings about the seed-time and harvest, so that we may be fed. Let us never think that mere natural law does all this. No law ever can enact or execute itself. So there must be a person to operate through the laws of nature, or they would be only “a dead letter” on the statute books of the universe. Let us acknowledge our indebtedness to Him for all our temporal gifts, as well as for those that are spiritual, and then our lives Will be filled with joy. People who do not recognize the beneficent hand of a personal God in the affairs of life are not good and happy people. They live ungrateful lives, and so they are robbed of much joy. So let us join with the Psalmist today in his song of praise: “O Lord, Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness.” ’

2. Let us also learn from the Introit to appreciate, "beautiful forms of expression in giving praises to God.

This is real poetry: “O Lord, Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness.” Mere common prose might have been used; all figures and embellishments of speech might have been omitted; but our hearts never would have leaped with joy as they do when the Psalmist ex-

presses the exalted state of his feelings in poetic forms of speech. When he says, "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness," what a beautiful picture is set before our imagination! We can, as it were, see the whole year standing before us, bearing a crown upon its head, composed of all the bounty and beauty of the fruitful seasons. Praise and gratitude always seek to express themselves in poetic forms of speech. All the Psalms are written in Hebrew poetry. The sayings of Christ that refer to the goodness of God in providing for our temporal wants are wreathed with enchanting imagery, even though He made no attempt at rhyme. Take only one example: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." That is lyrical poetry of the highest type.

Atheism, materialism, and infidelity produce no poetry — that is, no poetry that can rightly be so called. The reason is they have no gratitude, no praise, no joy. The spirit of Christian praise always seeks to express itself in rhythm and rhyme. Recall all the sweet and majestic hymns of the Christian Church. Coronation is real poetry; so is Paul Gerhardt's "Jesus, Thy boundless love to me;" so also Luther's "Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord."

Not only has the Bible inspired much song and poetry, but much of the Holy Book can itself be sung. Think of all the great oratorios that are taken from the Bible, its exact language being set to the highest class of music — "The Creation," "Moses," "The Exodus," "Saul," "Ruth," "Esther," "The Messiah," "The Nativity," "Lazarus," "The Resurrection." No other book is capable of being employed in this inspiring way. All these facts prove that Christianity gives rise to the highest art, because it is full of joy, gratitude and inspiration.

3. Another truth taught in the Introit is that the abundance of nature's productions come from God's goodness.

"Thy paths drop fatness; Thou visitest the earth and waterest it; Thou blestest the springing thereof." The same truth is taught in the Gradual: "The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Thus the abundance of our crops this year, as well as all other years, is due to God's good providence in giving the early and the latter rains, in temper-

ing the weather to the growing grain and fruit, in providing the light and warmth of the sunshine, in making the breezes bland and persuasive, and in imparting productiveness to the soil. How much we owe to God for His beneficent care over us! Christ Himself taught us that we have need of these things, and so if our Heavenly Father cares for the sparrows and the grass and flowers of the field, much more will He feed and clothe us. So, on account of this display of divine favor, we may well break out with the Psalmist in both the Introit and Gradual selected for this festival: "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God, in Zion;" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." How crass and ill-mannered are those people who never lift their hearts in grateful praise to God who bestows upon them so many mercies! How they can accept the benefactions without acknowledging the Benefactor is more than I can understand. Let not you and I be like them, ungrateful and unkind. Let us rather join our hearts and voices with the hymn-writer who sings:

"Come, ye thankful people, come;
Raise the song of harvest-home.
All is safely garnered in
Ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come, to God's own temple come,
Raise the song of harvest-home.

"All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be."

Another poet acknowledges God's providence in the bounties of harvest in these expressive lines:

"For the blessings of the field,
For the stores the gardens yield;
Flocks that whiten all the plain;
Yellow sheaves of ripened grain:

"All that spring, with bounteous hand,
Scatters o'er the smiling land;
All that liberal autumn pours
From her overflowing 'stores:

"These to Thee, our God, we owe,
Source whence all our blessings flow!
And for these our souls shall raise
Grateful vows and solemn praise."

4. There is another thought that I wish to bring to you.

God's children who trust, love and serve Him, have a right to the fruits of the earth, if they use them properly. Says Paul wisely and sensibly (2 Tim. 2:6): "The husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits." This means that the farmer, the gardener and the orchardist must first secure his living from the products of his toil, before he can give or sell to others. The Bible nowhere teaches that men can make themselves acceptable to God by practicing asceticism. There is no virtue in starving oneself in the midst of plenty. The Bible teaches self-sacrifice, but never self-effacement. Jesus Himself attended weddings and feasts, and said that "He came eating and drinking." Of course, we should be moderate in all things: we should neither over-eat nor drink to excess; but that is very different from making a virtue out of unnecessary self-denial. You who have toiled in the fear of God, and have acknowledged His hand in the good things of life, have a right to partake of them, and continue to give thanks. Would it not be absurd if the Bible would bid us thank God for the abundance of the harvests, and then command us to starve ourselves in the midst of plenty. No; God likes to see His children happy. He is much more gratified with a smile than a frown, with a laugh than a groan. That is a poor kind of religion which makes us miserable in this life in order that we may be happy in the next. We believe that the religion of the Bible is adapted to make us happy in both worlds. In this life there are enough natural trials without imposing on ourselves any factitious and unnecessary ones.

And now, having shown that we should rejoice in the blessings and abundance of the Harvest Home festival, we will turn our attention to the gospel for the day:

II. The Solemn Admonition To Be Heeded At This Season.

I hope this part of our discourse will not mar the joy and gratitude of these festivities. We Christian people can, by the grace of God, keep in mind more than one thought at the same time. While we rejoice in God's goodness, we can also heed His serious warning. It is only too true that, in the midst of our material plenty, there is danger of forgetting spiritual things, and becoming absorbed in worldly gain and pleasure. That is the reason our Church feels it right, proper and necessary to call our attention, even in the midst of our festivities, to serious thoughts about God and eternal destiny. It would be sad if some of us should have full barns and empty souls.

In the gospel for today we read: "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." How true it is that "the life is more than meat!" A man may be rich in purse and poor in soul; he may also be the reverse — poor in purse, but rich in soul.

Then our Lord spoke the parable about the rich man whose grounds brought forth plentifully, so that he had not sufficient barn-room for his crops. Then he resolved to pull down his old barns, and build much larger ones. Thus far there was nothing inherently wrong in his acts; or there would not have been, had his motives been good. It was a wise precaution to provide enough room in which to store his produce. But the trouble was, his heart was wrong. He soliloquized thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, be merry."

Ah! yes, there we see into the state of his heart. Instead of thanking God for His benefactions, and resolving that he would do good with his wealth by selling and giving away what he did not need, he determined to give himself up to mere worldly and sensuous pleasure. That was his sin. It is the same lesson that we learned from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The sin is not in riches, but in the selfish use of them. Suppose this rich man had said: "I am thankful to God for His goodness in blessing my crops, so

that my barns are too small, and I must build larger. My wealth shall be devoted to His cause. I can do so much more good in the world because of God's blessings upon my efforts." Would not the sequel of the story be very different? But instead of that he spoke and acted like an Epicurean. He said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take think ease; eat, drink, be merry." What selfishness! Do you wonder that Christ gave so bad an ending to the parable? He adds that God said to the man: "Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" Then Jesus adds the moral to the story: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Note carefully: Christ did not condemn the man's success in raising good crops; He condemned his selfishness and his forgetfulness of God. The man's barns were full, but his soul was empty. He had raised large material crops, but no spiritual harvest. He was a rich pauper. Now his soul was required of him; all his material wealth had to be left behind, and he had to appear before God in absolute spiritual poverty. He was, indeed, a poor rich man.

De we need so stern a warning at our Harvest Home festival today? Does it not, rather, inject a jarring note into our joy and our sense of the fitness of things? I think not. There is always danger of our drifting into selfishness, and especially in times of plenty. Like this poor rich man of the parable, we may think that all our accumulations are to be used merely for ourselves. And, while wealth in itself, as we have often told you, is not wrong, it must be admitted that the wealthy have the greatest temptation to settle down into a life of mere ease and selfish enjoyment. So today let us heed the admonition of our text, and become rich toward God; then it will be well with us, whether our harvests are abundant or scant, whether our barns are full or empty. It is much better to be rich in soul than to be rich in lands and barns.

One of the most pitiful pictures I know is this: A man whose heart is set on acquiring mere worldly goods, while he forgets the higher needs of his soul. He toils and plans, and at last succeeds in getting much wealth; then, just as he thinks himself ready to enjoy life, God calls his poor naked soul before His judgment bar, and all his affluence must be left behind; not one penny can he take with him farther than the bottom of the grave. Could there be a more pathetic sight than that? Better a thousand times to be a beggar like Lazarus, and be rich toward God.

Do you ask what is the proper religious use of the blessings of harvest? It is very simple: You are to use enough of them for yourselves and your families to keep you from poverty and dependence on others; for the Bible teaches plainly that every man is to provide for his own household, if he can. Then you are to help God's poor as much as you can and as much as will be for their temporal and spiritual good. It is also right for you to sell a portion of your goods at the current prices, for people should buy their necessities if they can and should not depend on charity. Besides, the distribution of goods from the farm, garden and orchard is necessary to provision the world. Do not think you are not serving God when you dispose of your produce for its value in the marts; for the commodities which you supply are absolutely needed by the world. The farmer is a most useful man. He is necessary to the very life of the people of the earth. All of us, whether we live in the country or the city, are dependent on the people who till the soil. The farmer ought to thank God for calling him to so useful and honorable a vocation. It is, indeed, a divine vocation. It ought to be pursued in the fear of God and with hearts of gratitude to Him.

Another right use of the abundant harvest which God has given us is to devote as much of it as we can to the promotion of the gospel in the world. When you give to the support of the Church and her institutions and enterprises, you are helping Christ's kingdom in the most effective way; for, remember, the Church is God's organization for preaching the gospel and carrying it to the ends of the earth. Suppose you give something to the cause of foreign missions; then, as you go about your everyday employment, you can reflect gratefully on the fact that some poor, benighted soul in Africa, or India, or China, or elsewhere in the heathen world, is receiving the light and joy of salvation through your gift. The same glad feeling comes to you when you give to any other good and worthy cause.

In this way, my friends, we can express our gratitude to God with our lips and our actions for the bounties and blessings of the Harvest Home.

“Praise to God, immortal praise
For the love that crowns our days!
Bounteous Source of every joy,
Let Thy praise our tongues employ!”

We will close by praying the beautiful Collect for the Harvest Festival:

“Almighty God, most merciful Father, who openest Thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing: We give Thee most humble and hearty thanks that Thou hast crowned the fields with Thy blessings, and hast permitted us once more to gather in the fruits of the earth; and we beseech Thee to bless and protect the living seed of Thy Word sown in our hearts, that, in the plenteous fruits of righteousness, we may always present to Thee an acceptable thank-offering; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”

67. A Revival Of True Biblical Conceptions. The Festival Of The Reformation. John 8:31-46

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?
(John 8:31-46)

THE ANNIVERSARY of the Reformation occurs today because, on October 31, 1517, Luther performed the heroic act of nailing his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the old Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This event is usually regarded as the beginning of the Reformation. True enough, Luther had little conception of the world-wide influence his noble act would have;

but we today, when we look back and measure the decisive incidents of those times, can readily see what an epoch-making event this particular act was. So important is it in the opinion of the world that the whole Protestant Church celebrated this event in 1917 as the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Reformation.

Our theme for today shall be, “A Revival of True Biblical Conceptions.” It is based on the gospel lesson which we find in the new “Common Service Book” for the Festival of the Reformation. It is a most fitting selection, and gives us naturally the three chief thoughts to which we desire to call attention. The influence of the Revival of Learning, or the Renaissance, as it is often called, has so frequently been described that we need not dwell upon it at any length. It need only be said that the new knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and philosophy that came from the east at this time was of incalculable service to the cause of the Reformation, particularly because it enabled scholars to study the Bible in the original languages. Thus they gained a better knowledge of its teaching, and were led to study it more deeply, and, best of all, to translate it into the common language of the people, so that all who desired to do so could drink directly from the pure fountains of divine inspiration. If Luther, Melancthon and other scholars could not have read the Greek and the Hebrew, they could not have given to the world their translation of the Bible in the German vernacular. Similarly the several English translations of the Bible, up to and including King James’ version of 1611, would have been impossible had it not been for the Revival of Learning.

However, let it be remembered that the Renaissance was not the Reformation; nor could it alone have brought about the Reformation. The fact is, the Reformation proper was a religious awakening, and came primarily from the study of God’s Word, through which the Holy Spirit operated on the hearts of men. The educational revival was simply an instrumentality divinely employed to further the religious revival, just as God used many other instrumentalities of the time.

With these prefatory remarks held in mind, let us see how relevant is the gospel lesson for this anniversary. The Reformation was simply a revival of conceptions taught by Christ and clearly stated in the New Testament Scriptures. In reality the Reformation was simply a going back to the doctrines of the Bible. At least three of these great conceptions are plainly set forth in our text. The Reformation was a revival of —

I. The Right Conception Of The Word Of God.

We shall see this by reading the first part of the text: “Jesus therefore said to those Jews that believed Him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Of course, a liberalist may raise the question as to what Christ’s Word is. Do we have it in the New Testament? He will say that the New Testament was not then written. Our reply is, If we do not have Christ’s Word in the New Testament, we do not have it anywhere; therefore we have no Word of our Lord and Saviour, no teaching of His on which we can rely. He left no written records Himself, and if He provided for none, and failed to secure the making of any, then His teaching has perished from the earth. In that case the promise of the text, that His disciples should know the truth, and the truth should make them free, was mere idle talk. We are worse off than if no New Testament had ever been written.

But, thanks be to God, we are not left in so forlorn a condition. Christ taught His disciples directly as much as they could bear at the time; then He promised that, after His ascent to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit, who would lead them into all truth, and would bring to their remembrance all the things that He had taught them. More than that, He promised that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the further truths that they were not yet prepared to hear while He — Christ — was with them in the flesh. When were these promises fulfilled? If they were fulfilled in the giving of the New Testament, all is plain; then we have the direct teaching of Christ clearly recorded in the gospels, and the further teaching of the Holy Spirit in the Acts, Epistles and Revelation. If the Son of God came to the earth to teach men the way of salvation, and then left His teaching hanging in the air, left it to the uncertainty of mere tradition and memory, then He did not exercise common foresight and care; but if He saw to it, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that His revelations were recorded in a book, and thus preserved for the use of all subsequent generations, then, indeed, He acted rationally and in accordance with the supreme importance of the message He brought. This is the only adequate view. So we have Christ’s Word in the New Testament. And, since He endorsed the Old Testament and also led His inspired penmen to do the same, it is legitimate and correct to say that

the Old Testament is also the Word of Christ. The Word of Christ is also the Word of God, for He was “God manifest in the flesh.”

Now this is precisely what Luther did in the time of the Reformation — brought the people back to God’s Word. Every true revival in the history of the Church is a return to the pure Fountains of Israel. Liberalism never brought about a true spiritual revival. Every departure from the Word of God has been accompanied by a corresponding decadence of spiritual religion. How necessary it was for a return to God’s Word in the dark period of the sixteenth century! Every one who is at all familiar with the conditions under Roman Catholic dominance knows that. The Catholic Church had largely set aside the authority of the Bible. She no longer appealed to it as the ultimate authority. The teaching of tradition and the decisions of the Church were placed on a par with the Bible. The people were not permitted to read the Bible for themselves, but had to submit to the interpretations put upon it by the dominant hierarchy; and in many, many cases that interpretation was a misinterpretation. Note, too, that the Catholic Church taught many doctrines that were both extra-Biblical and anti-Biblical. There was Mariolatry — their adoration of the Virgin Mary, making her a mediary between Christ and the people. We know that there is no basis for such a doctrine in the Bible, which says, on the contrary, that there is only one Mediator between God and man, and that is Christ Himself. The doctrine of purgatory is also in opposition to the Word of God, for Christ Himself spoke of only two places for the dead. See His parable of the rich man and Lazarus; also His teaching about the two ways, the one leading to destruction, the other to life. No less anti-Biblical was the Roman Catholic system of work-righteousness, penance and monastic vows. The practice of auricular confession, priestly absolution and extreme unction has no basis in the Word of God: neither is there any Biblical authority for vows of poverty, the celibacy of the priests, the worship of the saints, the treasury of grace, works of supererogation, prelatical orders in the Church, and the authority of the pope.

Do not these facts prove the crying need of a Reformation? When Luther found a copy of the Bible in the library of the University of Erfurt, and began to study it, he found that many doctrines and practices of Roman Catholicism were contrary to God’s Word. It took him some time to discover all the errors and to find the true way of salvation; but by earnest study of the Bible he by and by learned the true nature of repentance; that,

instead of doing penance, it was real sorrow for sin; then he presently discovered that the only way of escape from sin was through faith in Jesus Christ; thus he was led to the doctrine and experience of justification by faith alone, involving salvation by grace alone. It was by going directly to the Bible that Luther became convinced of the truth as it is in Christ. He could have learned this in no other way. Thus Christ's promise was fulfilled in Luther's happy experience: "If ye abide in my Word, then are ye my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Every one knows that Luther's study and acceptance of the Word gave him the experience of true discipleship, and that he never knew true freedom from the pangs of conscience for sin until the Word of Christ liberated him. Is it any wonder that ever afterward he clung to the Bible, and made it the standard by which all doctrines and teachers were to be judged? When he went to Wittenberg to teach theology, he did not follow the usual method of teaching the scholastic theology, nor the philosophy of Aristotle, but lectured on portions of the Scripture, thus deriving his doctrinal system from the original fountains of truth. At Worms, at Marburg, and everywhere he always took his stand on the impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. Even ecclesiastical councils, the pope and the Church itself had to abide by that test, the Word of God.

It is true, indeed, that individuals and churches can win real liberty only through the truth of God's Word. The appeal to the Scriptures as the final and infallible standard was one of the cardinal principles of the Reformation. Without that principle there would have been no such epoch in the world's history. The old ways of bondage to sin and human devices and ordinances would have continued. It is the truth that makes men free; and the most potent truth is that which is found in the Holy Bible. At the present time, a time of uncertainty in many quarters, a time of rationalism toward the Bible, it is most gratifying that the Church in America which bears Luther's name stands firmly on the formal principle of Luther and the reformation — the Bible the truly and fully inspired Word of God.

II. The Right Conception Of Sin.

Most appropriate is the second part of the text to this experience in the history of the Reformation. When Jesus said to His hearers: "The truth shall

make you free,” they seemed to resent the implication; so they said: “We are Abraham’s seed, and have never been in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” Then Jesus told them what he meant by real bondage and true freedom. He declared, “Every one that committeth sin is the slave of sin.” By this He meant that all other kinds of bondage are unimportant in comparison with the slavery that sin imposes. A man may be subject to a human bondsman, and yet in Christ He may be a free man and an heir of God; but if a man is living in sin, he is really a slave, no matter of how much mere political and social freedom he may boast.

This is what Luther learned from his study of the Bible — that sin is the enslaving and degrading thing, and that therefore Christ’s chief mission was to save men from their sins. Deeper study convinced him, too, that sin is an inner thing, a thing of the heart and motive, not merely the omission of certain forms and ceremonies and penances. Thus the heart itself, the life at its inner springs, must be purified, if man would be truly saved from his sins. In brief, he must be made a new creature. A profounder view of sin gave Luther a deeper conception of repentance. Under the Catholic regime he had been taught that repentance meant doing penance, practicing some kind of asceticism, and so, as he tells us, he came to fear and hate the word, for he never could tell when he had done enough penance to merit divine pardon. But when he saw that sin was something of the heart, he saw that repentance must also be of the heart — a real inner sorrow for sin against a good and holy God. No; sin was not some factitious wrong that could be canceled by the performance of mere outward services and rites.

With this deep view of “the exceeding sinfulness of sin,” as Paul puts it, Luther soon saw that man could himself do nothing to expiate his transgressions and merit God’s pardon. For a while he tried this method; he entered the Augustinian monastery, flagellated and starved his body, and performed many other kinds of penance, only to find that his sense of sin was just as acute as before and that no peace came to his soul. At last, through the study of the Bible, he learned the true teaching of the gospel, namely, that sin could not be pardoned and uprooted by any human device, and that, therefore, Christ Himself, the Son of God, had become incarnate, had kept the law for sinful man, and had died upon the cross to expiate sin in man’s place, so that all man could do to be saved was to accept the atonement that his divine-human Substitute had made for him. Then it was that he grasped the precious doctrine of justification by faith alone, and peace came to his

soul. This great and precious experience in Luther's heart was the real birthday of the Reformation. We shall say more about it later.

Just now we note the supreme importance of the right view of sin. You and I cannot have too keen a perception of the evil of sin. Today many people "make a mock of sin." They call it by euphonious names. It is only "weakness," "an accident," "a lapse," "a slight error," "a mistake of the mortal mind," "the remains of primitive animalism," "a necessary step in the evolution of the race." Is it any wonder that, with these superficial conceptions of sin, there is so little real repentance today? How many people have you met recently who have felt genuine sorrow for sin, and have cried out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinful one!" Moreover, our views of sin will affect our views of Christ and His atoning work. If sin is not what the Bible represents it to be, if, as Christ teaches, it does not make bond-slaves of its victims, then, of course, it was not necessary for the eternal Son of God to become incarnate and suffer and die to make atonement for sin. Hence to become "liberal" regarding sin, is to become liberal in regard to Christ as a logical consequence. That is one reason why so many men today deny His deity, declaring that He was only a man, a very good man who set us an example of beautiful living and of a self-denying spirit, so that all we need to do to be saved is to follow His example. Certainly if sin is no serious matter, it was not necessary for a God-man to suffer and die to make satisfaction for it. If it is no terrible violation of the divine and eternal law of God, no atonement was needed to repair and uphold that law. Yes, my friends, if a man becomes loose and liberal on one fundamental doctrine, like that of the heinousness of sin, he will become loose and liberal on all the other fundamental doctrines. Let us remember that Luther's discovery of the real nature of sin has helped to save the evangelical faith for the world. To appreciate the person and work of Christ We must know the awful bondage from which He came to deliver us.

This leads us to our next consideration. The Reformation was a revival of—

III. The Right Conception Of Christ.

Here again we see how pertinently the gospel lesson for the Festival of the Reformation has been selected. After Jesus had said, "Every one that com-

mitteth sin is the bond-servant of sin,” He added: “And the bond-servant abideth not in the house forever: the son abideth forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

The teaching here is that Christ alone can free men from their sins. Nothing else can do this — no amount of penance, no pilgrimages, no payment of money for indulgences or for release from purgatory, no lacerations of the flesh, no bodily fasting, no works of any kind. The sinner must go to Christ alone to be made free from the awful chains of sin, and he must go to Him in sincere and humble faith, as the Bible so often enjoins. “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” When Christ declares that “the Son shall make you free, and ye shall be free indeed,” He means that all other attempts to free the sinner are failures, but that He gives real, true and perfect emancipation.

Now, Luther discovered this doctrine by his study of God’s Word. The Catholic Church had invented a factitious, and therefore ineffective, way of securing liberation from sin; but Luther’s study of the Bible convinced him that this plan was a terrible mistake; and this led him to the discovery of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

This is what is known as “the material principle of the Reformation.” Next to the “formal principle,” which is that the Word of God is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principle of justifying faith did more than anything else to bring about the great Reformation to which we today owe so much. And how did it come about that Luther made this great discovery? In this way: In his study of the Holy Scriptures he became convinced that there was one ruling and central principle in the teaching of the Bible. He did not find it in the divine decrees, as the Calvinists did, nor in good works, as the Romanists did, but in faith in Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who died to liberate men from sin. You must remember that Luther’s crucial problem was, “How can a man become just before God?” Man is a sinner, and he constantly violates God’s holy law. A man who is constantly sinning cannot perform any works that will secure his justification, for even his works are pervaded and corrupted by sin. Then, in reading Paul’s epistles, he found it clearly stated that a man cannot be justified by the deeds of the law; that the law was not intended as a means of man’s salvation, but only to convict him of his sin and helplessness. However, what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, that Christ could

and would do for sinful man; and that He did by taking man's nature into His Godhood and assuming man's moral and spiritual task which man himself could not bear. Some of Luther's great texts were the following: "The just shall live by faith." "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast;" "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" "For by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin;" "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." In this way Luther was able to distinguish clearly between the function of the law and that of the gospel: the law is for conviction and direction; the gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation. A great discovery was this indeed. It did away with all hierarchical pretensions, all priestly interference, and brought the individual soul into direct personal contact with Jesus Christ by faith. It is upon this foundation of the gospel that the Protestant Church is built. Just as soon as men today put their confidence in work-righteousness of any kind, and expect to be saved "by character," meaning their own character, just so soon are they getting upon Roman Catholic ground, and are departing from the fundamental principles of Protestantism.

What important lessons may we learn from the three basic conceptions that were brought to the fore in the Reformation?

[1] It is a great comfort to the soul to know that the way of salvation has been plainly revealed to us in God's Word. People who do not receive that Word by a hearty faith can never be at rest; they may reason and speculate; they may also make great claims of advancement and scholarship; but they can never feel assured in their hearts that their sins are pardoned and their names written in the Lamb's book of life. With the true believer in God's Word the matter of personal salvation is settled, and he can go on to higher spiritual attainment. He is not like those who "are ever learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth."

[2] The same kind of comfort comes to the soul which knows that it is justified by faith in Jesus Christ. He knows that Christ wrought out a perfect righteousness for man — the only kind that is acceptable to a good and holy God. He also knows that Christ, who was the God-man, made a perfect

atonement for all his sins. Thus, so far as his standing before God is concerned, the man who accepts Christ by faith need have no anxiety.

[3] Much comfort and inspiration also arise from the consciousness that, being justified by faith, true believers have a true basis for good works. Their motives have been purified by divine grace, so that now they work for Christ, not to be saved, but because they are saved; not to earn salvation, but out of love and gratitude to Christ, their Redeemer. He only is the happy and contented Christian who can say:

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

68. Good That Came Out Of Eisleben. Luther's Birthday. John 1:46

And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. (John 1:46)

NO BIBLE TEXT should ever be used merely as a pretext. That is frivolous treatment of God's Word. However, we believe that the text announced affords so close a parallel to the circumstances of Luther's humble birth that it can be legitimately employed by way of accommodation.

Perhaps all of us have known little towns which did not have a good name. They either were almost unknown, or else their reputation was bad; and when some man of unusual talent came from such a place, and made his mark in the world, you felt like saying what Nathanael said to Philip in the text: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Of course, more good came out of Nazareth than out of Eisleben, which was Luther's birth-place. Out of the former came the Redeemer of the world; hence, if there had been no Christ of Nazareth, there would have been no Luther of Eisleben. Luther himself ascribed all that he was and did for the world's betterment to the power and grace of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene. Yet we know from history that much good has emanated from obscure little Eisleben in Germany when Luther was born there on the tenth of November, 1483. If anyone should dispute the statement by exclaiming, with Nathanael, "Can any good thing come out of Eisleben?" we would reply, with Philip, "Come and see." Let us consider some of the good things that have come to the world and the kingdom of God through the birth of Martin Luther. We observe:

I. Good Can Come From A Very Humble Source.

So it was with Jesus Himself. Born of humble, unknown parents who came from a despised little Galilean village, cradled in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem, and brought up amid lowly surroundings, yet He became the world's Redeemer. One might wonder why the world's Saviour was not born of royal parents, in a royal city and in a royal palace. But, no! He was a carpenter's foster-son, and His mother was a humble maiden of Galilee.

So with Luther. If wise people at that time had been expecting the birth of a child who would powerfully influence the world and turn the currents of history, perhaps the last place they would have looked would have been in little old Eisleben and the home of two humble German peasants. Yet here the great reformer had his nativity, and his marvelous career has shed the luster of his own fame upon his natal place. Had Luther not been born there, Eisleben would be unknown today; now it is more renowned than thousands of cities many times its size and commercial importance.

It would seem to be one of God's favorite ways — to raise up His greatest servants from obscure and unpromising surroundings. Call the roll of the world's truly great and good men and women, and you will find that very few of them were born and reared in "the lap of luxury." In our own country we may mention Webster, Lincoln, Grant and McKinley. Why does Providence so often choose this way? One reason undoubtedly is to prove that God Himself, and not worldly power and prestige, is the source and cause of all true greatness. Paul analyzes God's purpose when, referring to his own weakness and insufficiency, he says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency might be of God and not of men." A well-known writer and lecturer of our own country has declared again and again that God is the only explanation of Abraham Lincoln. He has looked into all of Lincoln's antecedents, and has tried to discover some natural way of accounting for his remarkable genius; but no adequate cause can be found but God.

And how shall we account for Luther of Eisleben? The only sufficient explanation is, God raised him up; like Paul, he was "a chosen vessel." Just as God called Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Peter and Paul, so He

called Luther for his specific place in the progress of His kingdom; and He called him from humble and untoward surroundings that his divine call might be all the more distinct and unmistakable.

God may have another reason for bringing men out of unpromising environments into places of usefulness. Perhaps He wants no boy or girl, however humbly born, to despair of being able to achieve something worth while in the world. The careers of such men as Luther and others of like lowly origin have spurred many a boy and young man to do his utmost. Even if all cannot become great and renowned, they can do their best, and that is always true achievement. With God's help and grace, and with the inspiration of so many noble examples — "so great a cloud of witnesses" — there is no excuse for anyone to live an inane and ineffective life.

From little Eisleben there comes also —

II. The True Conception Of Individual Worth.

Every man is of infinite value in God's sight, whether he be rich or poor, born in a cottage or a palace. In the midst of many aristocratic youths, Luther was singled out by Providence simply on the ground of his real worth, not because of some merely superficial and factitious circumstance. A man is a man for what he is and for what he does, not for what he happens to have or inherit. All Germany, and all the Christian world as well, had to acknowledge Luther's manhood, superiority and courage, even though some of them may have scoffed at what they called his plebeian origin.

In his teaching, too, he laid emphasis on the worth of the individual. His doctrine, derived from the Scriptures, of the universal priesthood of believers carried with it this conception. Every individual can come in his own person directly into God's presence through faith in Jesus Christ, and needs no priest or hierarchy as mediary. What a dignity and worth that confers upon each person, no matter how humble! Man as a distinct and responsible personality is the great and inspiring element of this doctrine. The great truth of the right of private judgment, so powerfully proclaimed by Luther, connotes the same high conception of the individual. The like may be claimed for that great cardinal principle of Luther's teaching, justification by faith, which means that each person must come to Christ for himself; no

prelatical class or ecclesiastical hierarchy can do that for him. All this agrees with Christ's doctrine of the value of the individual; for He said: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

And to what great world-movements does this conception of the value of the individual lead? It leads to true democracy. With this idea fully accepted and held, no monarch would ever oppress his people; no class would ever tyrannize over another class; there would be no castes among men, no artificial and factitious social distinctions; there would be liberty, equality and fraternity everywhere. Therefore these principles of Luther and the Reformation were the forerunners of the Declaration of American Independence. Is it not true that good has come out of Eisleben?

From the same lowly source comes the great doctrine of —

III. The Freedom Of The Individual Conscience.

In many ways Luther illustrated this principle. Even in his youth he followed his conscience. When he came to maturer years, he would not permit a corrupt hierarchy to decide for him, however powerful and menacing it might be. His conscience could not be coerced, nor could he be bribed to do wrong or teach error by fear or flattery or favor. Even aside from differences of opinion, he was governed by the dictates of his own conscience. His motto was, "Prove all things; cleave to that which is good."

This principle, if generally practiced, would also do away with all oppression; also with all persecution on account of religious convictions. It paved the way for the civil and religious liberty which we regard today as one of our greatest blessings. Let us remember that freedom of conscience is part of our heritage from Luther and the Reformation.

We may trace one more good thing back to Luther of Eisleben:

IV. A Lesson Of Lofty Heroism.

A brave lad came out of the lowly German village. No doubt his sturdy and hardworking parents inculcated in his mind lessons of thrift, patience and

courage. It was a school of virile ethics in which he learned his early lessons, and he carried his instruction as his guiding principle throughout his career.

Many times in his life he had a chance to play the part of the hero. So far as we know, he never turned coward. Even when he went into the monastery, the step required courage. His father was strongly opposed to his entering upon the monastic life, and it took courage to go against the wishes of so sturdy a parent. Some of his friends, teachers and fellow-students called it a foolish act. But Luther heard the call of duty, and no fear of criticism or ridicule diverted him from his pre-determined course. No doubt it was according to God's will and purpose, for his experiences in the monastery cured him of the folly of trying to win God's favor by human works, and led him to experience the power and joy of justifying faith and redeeming grace.

When, after leaving the monastery, he went to Wittenberg, it required heroism to lay aside the scholastic theologians and the dominance of Aristotle, and seek his doctrinal teaching in the Word of God alone. In the face of derision he began to lecture on various books of the Bible, and glean from them directly his doctrinal system. He did not waver. 'Hence today the Lutheran Church is most loyal to Holy Writ, and will not permit herself to be tossed about by every Wind of doctrine and every scheme of men's devising.

Luther at Worms, standing before the emperor and political and ecclesiastical dignitaries, with his Bible in his hand, and refusing to recant unless he was convinced by the Word of God, affords a most inspiring example of both physical and moral heroism. No wonder Carlyle regarded this scene as one of the most epochal events of all time, and declared that the Whole history of the world would be different, if the monk of Wittenberg had not stood undaunted before that tribunal.

I cannot help thinking that Luther was as much of a hero at the Marburg colloquy as at any other time of his life. At other times he was in the midst of foes who were violently opposed to his doctrines and principles; hence there was no temptation to yield or compromise for the sake of peace; indeed, no peace was possible. It meant to play either the hero or the arrant coward. In these circumstances there was a strong appeal to all that was intrepid within him. But at Marburg the conditions were different. There was a strong sentiment that the reformers should be agreed, should lay aside

controversy for the sake of presenting a united front to the common enemy, which was the Roman Catholic Church. Many persons believed, too, that the controverted points between the Lutherans and Zwinglians were of no vital importance. It was harder to stand firm here than at Worms, especially for a man like Luther. More physical courage was needed at Worms, but at Marburg bravery of a finer character was demanded.

Many of Luther's friends and admirers wanted him to yield, and appealed to him to do so for the sake of the Reformation. But he was unwilling to sacrifice what he believed to be a principle, even for the sake of a much desired peace and the success of a cause that lay very near his heart. It was not prejudice or obstinacy that controlled him; it was conscience.

What application can be made of these reflections on the good things that came out of Eisleben?

[1] We should not despise the day of small things. We should never think that no good thing can come out of Nazareth, or Eisleben, or any other lowly town, community or home. Let us look for God to bring good out of every place and every life. A peasant's son may become a reformer; a rail-splitter may be good timber for a president; a lisping, halting speaker in college may become a Phillips Brooks; a profane man may become a John Bunyan, and write an immortal allegory; a poor toper may, by God's saving grace, become a John Newton, and preach the gospel to vast throngs; in short, God's transfiguring power may convert a great sinner into a great saint.

[2] If one individual is of so much value in God's sight, what estimate ought we to put upon every man, woman and child? And, indeed, what appraisal ought each of us to place upon himself? Surely we ought not to sell ourselves to Satan for naught, nor part with our birthright for a mess of pottage.

[3] Desiring freedom of conscience for ourselves, we should accord the same right to our fellowmen, and should contend for it in these days for all peoples.

Sometimes, even in this life, God rewards, in a marvelous way, those who follow the dictates of the inner voice. An instance of this kind is given in a recent number of "The Augsburg Sunday School Teacher:"

"When Gerhardt was exiled from Brandenburg by the Elector because he was true to his conscience, he went forth, poor and homeless, accompanied by his weeping wife and children. At night they sought refuge in a wayside

inn. Gerhardt, unable to comfort them, went out into the wood to pray. As he prayed, the text, ‘Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust in Him and He shall bring it to pass,’ pressed itself upon him, and comforted him. Then, pacing to and fro in the forest, he composed the hymn, ‘Give to the wind thy fears.’ With this text and hymn on his return he comforted his wife, and they retired for the night in trustful confidence that God would care for them. They had hardly retired before a thunderous knock at the door aroused them all. It was a mounted messenger from Duke Christian of Merseburg, riding in hot haste to deliver a sealed packet to Dr. Gerhardt. Opening it, he found an invitation from the duke offering him ‘church, people, home and livelihood, and liberty to preach the Gospel as your heart may prompt.’”

[4] Luther gave us an example of hardihood and courage. Let us also be brave and true. No coward ever wrought any good thing for God’s kingdom. May every one of us “be a hero in the strife.” In order to make a vigorous quatrain relevant to our theme, we will change one word — Daniel to Luther:

“Dare to be a Luther,
Dare to stand alone! Dare to have a purpose firm,
And dare to make it known!”

69. The Privilege And Joy Of Gratitude. Thanksgiving Day [A Day Of General Or Special Thanksgiving]. Psalm 107:1

O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. (Psalms 107:1)

THE TEXT FOR TODAY, our National Thanksgiving Day, is written in Psalm 107:1: “O, give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.”

It is well, indeed, for the President of our great and free country [Woodrow Wilson] and the Governor of a prosperous commonwealth to set apart a day of special thanksgiving. We are only too prone, being so intensely human, to felicitate ourselves on our success and prosperity, to overestimate our own part in securing our blessings, and to forget the Source of every good and perfect gift. To divert our thought from ourselves to God is most salutary for us, both ethically and spiritually, and gives us a more appreciative spirit. Our forefathers were wise to set aside a day of national thanksgiving. We are debtors to them for this boon, as well as for other privileges and benefits, and we should never forget how they toiled and sacrificed and planned in order to lay broad and deep the foundations of a free republic, thinking not only of their own well-being, but also of that of their posterity.

Now, taking our text as the basis for our observations, we note:

I. The Idea Or Thanksgiving Itself.

“O, give thanks!” the Psalmist exclaims; and we can feel the throb of joy in his exclamation. What a beautiful virtue is gratitude! What an excellent and happy frame of mind it indicates! It is ethical and exalted; it means that people are unselfish and appreciative. When God looks down upon the children of men, and sees their hearts filled with grateful recognition of His favors, He surely must be pleased, because He knows that such a state of mind is right and good. If you should hear a person say heartily, “I am so thankful for all the many blessings I enjoy,” you could not help feeling that such a person was good and upright, and that you would like to associate with a person of that kind of a disposition.

On the other hand, what is so unbeautiful as ingratitude! Call a man an ingrate, and you have applied to him almost the most opprobrious term that can be used. We feel that an ungrateful person might be capable of almost any crime that he thought he might safely commit. Almost the only consideration that restrains him is his selfish fear. One of the most pitiful complaints ever uttered was that of poor neglected King Lear: “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth is an ungrateful child!” There is no frame of mind that is more unethical than ingratitude.

Not only is the grateful life an ethical life, but it is the only happy life. Gratitude is a wellspring of joy in the heart. The person who looks around him, and “counts his many blessings,” lives in perpetual sunshine. He is always bright and smiling. Even in the midst of affliction he does not murmur and complain, but remembers how greatly his mercies exceed his sorrows.

But the man who goes around saying and feeling, “I have nothing to be thankful for,” is of all men most miserable, and his sullenness is likely to make him a disagreeable companion.

We fear there are far too many people in our land who will neglect to give thanks today, in utter disregard of the faithful messages and proclamations of our President. Instead of coming to the house of God, they will spend the day in hilarity and sport. As was said in one of our previous sermons, the sporting world seems to be determined to rob us of all our good holidays and anniversaries, converting them into days of roistering, instead of celebrating them in remembrance of the sacred purpose for which they have been appointed. We wish to ask whether this is right; whether it is patriotic; whether it is the way to treat these days that should thrill us with sentiments of a high and holy kind? Can we expect the blessing of God to rest upon our land if we so shamefully neglect to recognize His providence

in giving us so goodly a heritage of freedom and privilege? By these thoughts we are naturally led to our next consideration:

II. The Being To Whom We Should Be Grateful.

The text says: "O, give thanks unto the Lord." The original means Jehovah, the care-taking and covenant-keeping God. Thus the text points out the proper object of our gratitude — a Person, a divine Person. We are Christian theists; we believe, not only in the existence of a personal God, but in one who cares for the sparrows and the lilies, and takes a deep and paternal interest in His rational creatures. This gives definiteness to our thanksgiving. The human heart longs for personality. There can be no real and satisfactory communion with a vague, indeterminate something that has no conscious life and intelligence. You and I cannot consistently feel grateful to mere law, nor to the impersonal universe, nor to the pantheistic All, whatever that may mean. But when we look up to the God in and above the universe as a personal Being, who created us, who preserves and cares for us, and who feels for us in our joys and sorrows, then we can give Him hearty praises for His goodness, for then we know that He is conscious of our worship.

The materialist cannot engage in a service of thanksgiving. No man can feel grateful to "the uniform laws of nature," nor to "blind fate," nor to mere chance or fortuity, nor to his "lucky stars." Neither can such praise emanate from the agnostic, who declares that he cannot know whether there is a God or not. What kind of gratitude would that be which would express itself in this way: "O God, if Thou dost exist, we thank Thee for Thy favors?" No; the Psalmist was right when He said: "O, give thanks unto the Lord!" And also: "O, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Now this is the specific purpose of our National Thanksgiving Day — to give thanks to Almighty God "for His many blessings and mercies to us as a nation." Let not the American people miss this specific purpose. The design of the day is not feasting, though some people seem to make that the main object; and, above all, it is not to be a day of roistering and revelry and sport of the loud and frivolous kind. What a perversion it is to spend the

day in that way! Think of the utter incongruity of it — the President, the Chief Magistrate of our great and free country, sets apart a day for special thanksgiving to God, and invites the people to praise Him in their homes and several places of worship, and then men and women convert it into a day of mere frivolous sport and amusement, and, far too often, of drunken carousal! Could there be a more wicked perversion of a holy day? To our mind, such a celebration of the day is not patriotic. Do you ask why? Because the President of our country and the Governor of our state, the highest civil authorities we know and acknowledge, have bidden us to observe the day in praise and thanksgiving to God. If we ignore their request, simply because it is not a command, are we true lovers of our country? Are we patriots in the real and fundamental sense of the term? No; for when it suits us, we give heed; when it does not suit us, we do not. And that proves that we would do anything else against our country's welfare if it happened to serve our selfish ends.

Surely gratitude to the Giver of all good is one of the cornerstones of national security and continued existence. If we ignore Him, He will abandon us to our own devices; then our country will share the fate of the nations of the past which arose, prospered for a while, and then, because of internal decadence, were destroyed. I tremble for the consequences of national ingratitude. The Bible says pointedly: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." The indictment that Paul brings against the peoples upon whom so many dire calamities fell was this: "Because that, knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened." The genuine patriot is the one who can join heartily in the impressive hymn:

"God bless our native land!
Firm may she ever stand,
Through storm and night;
While the wild tempests rave,
Ruler of wind and wave,
Do Thou our country save
By Thy great might.

“For her our prayers shall rise
To God above the skies;
On Him we wait:
Thou, who art ever nigh,
Guarding with watchful eye,
To Thee aloud we cry,
God save the State!”

We must also note that our text clearly announces —

##III. The Reason Why We Should Give Thanks Unto The Lord.

“For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.” Surely we can say today that God’s goodness and mercy have been extended to us as a nation in many ways. In recounting the blessings which God has heaped upon us in our history, and that He now bestows upon us, we feel constrained to say, with one of old: “He hath not dealt so with any nation.” The United States has been God’s modern Israel, which He has led through the wilderness into the promised land of present-day prosperity and influence. Our history from the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers to the present moment is too familiar to need recital here. It is known to every school-boy. But in it all who cannot see the hand of Providence? God has seen to it that our great Republic should not perish from the earth. How thankful we should be for our preservation and advancement! Especially should we thank God for the dominant influence for good in the whole world that our country has been able to exert in the past, and is exerting in these most crucial times — this “age on ages telling.” And not merely nor chiefly have we won this world-wide sway by the force of our arms, but even more by the moral power of our ideals, whose great words are “liberty, equality and fraternity.”

I cannot refrain from mentioning a few things which belong to the mercies of God for which we ought to be especially grateful in this free country.

1. The Open Bible

One of them is the open Bible. The greatest book in the world is this holy Book. Without it we would be groping in spiritual darkness. We would not know whence we have come, nor why we are here, nor whither we are going. We would have no sure knowledge of our origin, our purpose, or our destiny. With the Bible in our hands, all is made clear: We have been created in the image of God; we are here to serve God and our fellowmen and

develop a pure spiritual character; then, when this life ends, we shall enter upon a life of eternal felicity in fellowship with God and all the sanctified. Ought we not to praise God for revealing these great and essential truths in His Word?

2. The Central Revelation.

While all the doctrines of the Bible are exceedingly precious, there is also a central revelation in that sacred Book; and that is Christ, the Redeemer of mankind and the Revealer of God. Paul exclaims, "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." In Christ we have every needed blessing. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?"

In Christ we have the true God revealed to us — His personality, His love, His desire to redeem mankind, His holiness; in short, all His glorious attributes. Said Christ: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also." St. John teaches the same doctrine: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Paul calls Christ "God manifest in the flesh." How true it is that only those who accept Jesus Christ ever really find God in an experiential way! Others "feel after God, if haply they may find Him;" but the believer in Christ really finds Him. This may be illustrated by an incident.

A number of years ago it was our privilege to visit Constantinople. One day we went into the Mosque of St. Sophia at the hour of prayer, to witness the Mohammedan method of worship. There was evident sincerity in the hearts of many of the worshippers. But the scene was pitiful. The air was rent with the most pathetic wailing, crying and screaming; the worshippers besought and implored in the most earnest way, bowing themselves down to the ground, and then rising and wringing their hands and stretching forth their arms toward the heavens. But in it all there was no note of victory; no evidence that they had found God, or realized His presence, or experienced His gracious forgiveness of their sins. As we sat there, and watched and listened, we longed to tell those benighted Moslems how they might find God in a real experience by accepting Christ as the Revealer of God; for He said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me." If that Mohammedan congregation, we reflected, could only enter a truly Christian Church, and hear the congregation singing, "Joy to the

world, the Lord has come; let earth receive her King,” what a difference they would perceive and feel! In this land of civil and religious freedom we may find the true God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Blessings Upon Us As a People

And this leads me merely to mention a few of the many blessings that God has bestowed upon us as a people. We should thank God for civil liberty, of which, indeed, we have more than some people know how to use rightly; yet what a boon it is to live in a country from which all kinds of tyranny and oppression are absent, especially when we compare our happy condition with that of many other nations of the earth! Then what a blessing is religious liberty! Though often abused and perverted, it affords an opportunity for the highest type of Christian life, because true religion thrives best in the soil and atmosphere of freedom. From its very nature it should be free; a religion that is imposed by force is not worthy of the name. To be able to worship God without fear of molestation, according to the dictates of one's own conscience, is the sweetest fruit growing on the tree of American liberty.

Let us not forget our material prosperity. God is interested in every economic and social problem that engages the thoughts of men; hence He is interested in the bread-and-butter question. So when our fields yield plentiful harvests, and our orchards blossom and bear fruit in abundance, we should remember that it all comes from the beneficent hand of God, who does not want His people to go hungry. True, want and suffering exist in the land; yet it cannot be said to be due to failure of crops, but rather to the selfishness and mismanagement of men. God has surely done His share in giving to our people balmy breezes, pleasant sunshine, and gracious showers, which with fertile fields bring forth plenty for all our people, if it is wisely and effectively distributed. Our country is so extensive, our climate and soil are so diversified, that it is almost impossible to have a general failure of crops. In a limited section there may be a drought or frost that will injure one kind of product, but another kind is likely to flourish; and even if there should be a total failure of all crops in one section, the lack can easily be supplied from other regions that have an abundant yield. Thus there can be in this country only a local shortage, causing a temporary inconvenience for that particular section. So our country is greatly blessed in its general wealth of field, garden and orchard, while our mineral resources are practically inexhaustible.

Let us therefore “give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.”

“For morning sun and evening dew,
For every bud that April knew,
For storm and silence, gloom and light,
And for the solemn stars at night;
For fallow field and burdened byre,
For roof-tree and the hearthside fire;
For everything that shines and sings,
For dear, familiar daily things —
The friendly trees, and in the sky
The white cloud-squadrons sailing by;
For hope that waits, for faith that dares,
For patience that still smiles and bears,
For love that fails not, nor withstands;
For healing touch of children’s hands;
For happy labor, high intent,
For all life’s blessed sacrament,
O Comrade of our nights and days,
Thou givest all things; take our praise!”

70. The Fact And Assurance Of Immortality. In Memory Of The Dead. John 14:2

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)

THE TEXT from which we desire to deduce a few reflections on this occasion is written in the fourteenth chapter of the gospel according to St. John and the second verse: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." On an occasion like this which calls us together today, when the angel of death has invaded one of the homes of our church and community, our thoughts are naturally directed to the future life. At other times we are busy with our everyday duties, and our minds are occupied very largely with earthly concerns. And this, in the very nature of things, must be so. But now and then death comes, and bears away one of our loved ones. Then we cannot help it — our minds are projected into the mysterious future, and we ask, "Whither has the soul gone which has departed from the body? And what is the character of its existence?" There are few people, if any, who do not sometimes raise these questions. As we stand today by this coffin, containing the earthly remains of our departed friend, we have a right to seek comfort for our deep anguish of bereavement. It is natural that we Christians should go to the teachings of Jesus to see whether we cannot find some assuring word regarding the future. Thanks be to God, we are not disappointed. He speaks these sweet, rhythmic and solacing words: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, and believe in me. In my Father's house are many mansions," etc. Evidently He means to teach all distressed and grief-stricken persons that faith in God and faith in Him is the panacea for life's troubles. Then He wants them to trust Him when He says, "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.” This assurance, then, is the comfort to all of us, relatives, neighbors and friends alike, who feel so sorely bereft today. Let us try to see how deep and abiding this consolation is.

When we read our text attentively, and note its emphatic words, we find in it a general truth of much value; and this we shall consider first.

I. The Assurance Of A Future Life

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.” As much as to say, “Do not doubt; there is such a happy place.”

The Bible leaves us in no uncertainty regarding the fact of a future state of existence. Besides the text, there are many other accordant proof texts: “The righteous shall go into eternal life;” “Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of my Father;” “Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel;” “For we know that, 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;” “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” In the book of Revelation there are many beautiful pictures of the heavenly life in which the most impressive imagery is used. All the Biblical passages that speak of the resurrection of the dead also inculcate the doctrine of the immortal destiny of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we also have abundant assurance that the soul immediately after death enters upon a condition of a blissful life with God in the disembodied state. In His great parable Jesus taught that Lazarus, the poor beggar at the rich man’s gate, was immediately after death carried to Abraham’s bosom, which was the Jewish term for Paradise, or the abode of the blessed dead. The circumstances make it impossible to believe that Jesus meant that the soul of Lazarus slept in the grave until the resurrection. Jesus knew what the Jews believed respecting the immediate transmission of the soul to Paradise, and He endorsed that doctrine. He also said, when hanging on the

cross, to the penitent thief by His side: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Under such circumstances Jesus would not have used ambiguous terms. Then Paul declares that "to depart from the body and be with Christ" would be "far better." Why would that be so if the soul does not live consciously and happily with Christ after it leaves the body? In the book of Revelation John saw the souls of the martyrs and saints before the throne, and they were praising God. This could not have been after the resurrection.

Thus we may conclude from the teaching of the Word of God that the soul of our loved one, who died in the faith, has gone to be with God, in that realm where sorrow and sin and disappointment can never enter. According to the Bible, "it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die." Eternal extinction will not be the lot of man. His final destiny is not a winding sheet and a grave. You cannot thus bar and confine the soul; in spite of all, it will spread its wings and fly to its home on high. Longfellow truly says:

"Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."

Let it never enter your mind that there is something weak and unmanly in the desire for a life of future blessedness. Here and there you will find a person who entertains that mistaken idea. No; it is a noble and manly desire to live forever. We cannot see what there is about the desire for eternal annihilation that should make it a mark of strength of character and manliness of soul. Let us draw a contrast. Here is a man, let us suppose, who says he would be willing to be annihilated, to sink into eternal non-existence, to be nothing forever and ever; he thinks that would be just about as desirable an end to this earthly life as any he can imagine. Would you regard him as a man of peculiar nobility of soul? Would you think of him as the manliest man in the community? You would not. On the other hand, here is a man who says positively: "It is a great thing to live; even in this life of toil and sacrifice and temptation, it is so exhilarating to be alive and conscious, to struggle and conquer, that I want to live forever, so that all my highest aspirations may sometime be realized." Would you not intuitively look up to

such a man with admiration, and expect him to be a man of strong, manly and aspiring character? The desire for immortality is simply the innate desire to live, and to live consciously, extended into the eternal future; than that no nobler aspiration can take possession of the human soul. The men who have sighed, and wished they were dead, and declared that they would just as soon be extinguished forever, have never been the moral glory of the world. On the other hand, the men who have been strong and brave, who have won moral and spiritual conquests, and have turned the currents of human history upward, all have believed that the soul is endued with immortality.

The text gives us some conceptions of the nature of the future life that are well worthy of our thought at this time. We note:

II. There Are Mansions In The Father's House

1. Spacious and Elegant Residences

The English word means spacious and elegant residences. No doubt the original word that Christ used connoted that idea. Perhaps you have never cared greatly to live in an earthly mansion; and yet there are few people who would not be willing to accept such a residence, if they knew that its possession would not deprive any of their fellowmen of blessings they might need. However, in the spiritual sense we may well apply the term "mansions" to our celestial habitations. In this life we reside mostly in spiritual huts and hovels. We cannot attain the grace and righteousness for which we aspire. "When we would do good, evil is present with us." We are penned in, restrained, like birds in a cage. We feel the greatness of our souls through the goodness and grace of God, but the wires of our incarceration prevent our spreading our wings and flying away to larger realms and spaces.

Shall it always be so? No; our Lord assures us that we shall inherit mansions by and by in our Father's realm. Whatever else that means, it certainly indicates that we shall have large dwelling places in which all our God-given powers can expand without hindrance and handicap. Oh! I am glad that we shall all have palatial residences in our Father's house.

2. Abiding Places

But there is still a deeper meaning in the word that has been translated “mansions” in our common version of the Bible. The word means abiding places. And what are abiding places? They are homes. The place where you abide is your home. Now let us give a literal translation of our Saviour’s blessed promise: “In my Father’s domain are many homes.” Could anything be more cheering than that promise? What better can be said of heaven than that it is home? Even in this world we often say, “There is no place like home.” No doubt all of us have had the experience of home-sickness. There is no worse kind of sickness than that.

In this world there is something wrong with all of us. We are all afflicted with that “unsatisfied longing” of which the poets speak. No matter where we are, there is always something lacking to complete our joy. How often we think that if we had such and such a possession, we would be completely happy! But when we have secured it, we are not satisfied after all. Now what is wrong with all of us that we are so discontented? I think I know. We are homesick. And whence came this universal and incurable malady? Let us go to the Bible to see if we cannot discover its cause. When our first parents lived in the beautiful garden of Paradise, they were perfectly good, happy and contented. Then came the fatal day when they yielded to the voice of the tempter, and fell into sin. So God had to eject them from the garden, their beautiful home, because sinful beings could not be permitted to dwell in a sinless place. They were cast out into the world, which was difficult, and rough, and brought forth thorns and thistles instead of flowers and fruit, and they had to earn their bread by the sweat of their face. Do you not think they were often homesick for their beautiful garden, their lovely pristine home? I do. And we are their posterity, and have inherited from them the same soreness and discontent of soul. We are homesick, and do not know what ails us.

And now Jesus comes to us, dwells among us, analyzes our sickness, and says to us: “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, and believe in me: in my Father’s realm are many homes.” That is precisely what we need; it is the kind of heaven our souls crave. And when we reach heaven, and come into possession of our habitation, we shall exclaim, “Home at last!” We shall be cured of our homesickness forever.

"We are but strangers here,
Heaven is our home;
Earth is a desert drear,
Heaven is our home.

Danger and sorrow stand
Round us on every hand;
Heaven is our father-land,
Heaven is our home."

We may truly say with another writer: "Earth has no sorrow which heaven cannot heal."

Even as we stand here in the presence of our dead, we feel a sacred comfort and a holy joy. Our loved one has gone home. We need not "sorrow as those who have no hope."

While many thoughts crowd upon us, time will permit of only one more reflection:

III. Who Will Prepare Our Eternal Home For Us?

Jesus replies: "I go to prepare a place for you." Then He adds: "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."

If you had your choice, my friends, whom would select to prepare your celestial mansion for you? I believe your choice would be our Lord Jesus Christ. You may have many friends in whom you have confidence; but I doubt whether you would want to entrust the preparation of your eternal abode to any of them. They do not know you well enough. There are depths of feeling and heights of aspiration within your soul of which none of your friends, even the most intimate, are aware. Nor would you yourself feel competent to prepare your eternal habitation. You feel that you do not even know yourself well enough to be sure that you could erect a residence in eternity that would suit you when you moved into it, and would satisfy you perfectly forever. Some of us have built earthly houses. We planned long and painstakingly, and built carefully; and then, when the building was done, behold, there was something that we wished we had made otherwise! Then how could we expect to erect the right kind of a house in the infinite realm? We know so little. We do not know even what matter is. Then how

could we erect a spiritual mansion? We do not know what time is. Then how could we erect a palace in eternity? No; neither we nor our friends could be entrusted with so great a task and responsibility.

But Jesus — ah, that is different! He has special qualification for getting our eternal home ready for us. First, He is man, the Universal Man, so that He has sounded all the depth and length and height of human need and aspiration, and therefore knows just what kind of a home will be adapted to our wants. Second, He is God, and therefore by His omniscience knows all about us and our requirements, and all about eternity and its resources. So He will be able to prepare for each one of us a home in which there will never be a lack, but eternal and boundless perfection. Perhaps that was the meaning of the Psalmist when he said: “I shall be satisfied when I awake With Thy likeness.”

The same truth is expressed by John: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” Jesus, our divine-human Lord and Saviour, has gone to prepare an abiding place for us.

A closing word of application. If Christ is preparing a place for us, we will have to be prepared for that place. As some one has said, “It is a prepared place for prepared people.” We shall have to have the spirit of the heavenly home, or we cannot inherit it. Would a wicked person fit into a holy place? Would a corrupt person be congenial with pure environments?

Do you ask how to be prepared for that holy and happy residence? It is very simple. The same Being who prepares the place for us must prepare us for the place. Then, and then only, will the correspondence be exact. So we must repent of our sins, and accept Christ as our atoning and living Saviour, in order to be forgiven, purified, and freed from bondage, and receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts that He may beget within us that holiness of disposition which coincides with the holy nature of the celestial home. Will we do this? Will we permit Christ to prepare us for the place which He is preparing for us?

We rejoice today that our friend, whose mortal elements we shall soon deposit in the grave, looked “unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith,” and thus was fitted by His grace and Spirit for the heavenly home. While the cloud of a sore bereavement overshadows our sky, a bright silver lining encircles the cloud, and we know that above it shines the sun with

eternal radiance. We can therefore join with the hymn-writer who penned the comforting lines:

"It is not death to die —
To leave this weary road,
And, 'midst the brotherhood on high,
To be at home with God.

"It is not death to close
The eye long dimmed with tears,
And wake with glorious repose
To spend eternal years.

"It is not death to fling
Aside this sinful dust,
And rise on strong, exulting wing
To live among the just.

"Jesus, Thou Prince of Life,
Thy chosen cannot die;
Like Thee, they conquer in the strife,
To reign with Thee on high."

Let us Sing hymn 518:

"There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain."

After the hymn — let us pray:

"Almighty God, with Whom do live the spirits of those who depart hence in the Lord, and with Whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, dwell in joy and felicity: We give Thee hearty thanks for Thy grace bestowed upon Thy servants, who, having finished their course in faith, do now rest from their labors; and we beseech Thee that we, with all who have departed in the true faith of Thy holy

Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Thy eternal glory; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord.” Amen.

The End.

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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