

YEAR  
of  
GRACE

- Dr. C. F. W. Walther

Translated by: Donald E. Heck, La Valle, Wisconsin

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## PREFACE

A year's sermons on the Gospels of the church year taken from the legacy of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's writings, who has now entered the church triumphant, is here offered in this book to the kind reader. These are not sermons which were preached the one and the same year; they cover the entire time of the ministry of the author. A choice of his sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays was made from the various years, so that here sermons appear from the earliest, as well as from the last, years of his ministry. Of course, a complete year, which would have sermons on all the Gospel pericopes of the church year, could, sad to say, not be offered, since manuscripts for the last Sundays in Trinity are lacking; however, several sermons on different Gospels for Sunday are given.

The many thousands of Walther's Gospel Postils which are scattered the world over are witnesses for the fact that also this series of sermons from the same author on these same texts already treated in the Gospel Postils which have not previously appeared in print, will find favorable acceptance and wide use. Yet God's little fountain of waters has fullness. Each Sunday's Gospel is a fount of God's Word from which can and should be continually drawn fresh water giving and preserving spiritual life without lessening the supply. It is the Lutheran Church which seeks to lead her members above all into the depths of the understanding of divine truth instead of superficially covering many subjects; therefore, in order to be able to reach this goal the better, unlike the Reformed, the Lutheran Church had retained the Gospels and Epistles selected by the old church for all the Sundays of the church year and, as a rule, are expounded on the Sundays year in year out, instead of letting it up to the preacher to choose texts according to his discretion. Who should not through the hand of Walther constantly draw fresh water from the same fount every time he reads a new sermon by him on the same Gospel, even if he who offers it had often descended into the same fount and proffered it from the same vessel? Which knowledgeable Christian will read these sermons without being even more deeply led into the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? To have to recommend a new series of sermons from Walther on the Gospels and to say of them that every reader can find in them that drink of spiritual water wholesome for him would really be like carrying coals to Newcastle. "Take and read" is everything which can be said.

The title, "Year of Grace," certainly should be strange to none. These sermons are a powerful testimony of the superabundant grace of God in Christ Jesus. In these sermons the testimony emerges most vividly that grace alone works and creates everything -- works and creates it most certainly -- which is necessary for our salvation, a testimony which the sainted author also otherwise so powerfully gave in word and writing as none other in America.

So, may this book be the author of many blessings by God's grace for eternal life.

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St. Louis, Reformation, 1890.

C. L. Janzow

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This is a translation of everything which appeared in the original German volume, except some hymn verses, which the translator could not translate or find a translation extent.

Many of Walther's long paragraphs are divided into smaller sections, shorter paragraphs, so that the various thoughts in these long paragraphs are the more apparent. This was done in the hope that this would make this collection more serviceable. A double space between paragraphs indicates Walther's original paragraphs, a single space the division the translator made.

Since the translator used the material in these sermons for his pulpit program, he also is adding a list of hymns for many of the Sundays. These hymns are taken from The Lutheran Hymnal; hymns quoted in this volume refer to the same hymnal.

May you benefit from the study of these sermons as certainly the translator benefited.

Donald E. Heck  
Advent, 1964

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# 1st SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Matthew 21:1-9

Lord Jesus! In your name we have today begun a new year of struggle and pilgrimage in your Church on earth. With prayer and supplication we therefore appear before you, our only comfort, our only help, our only refuge. But for what shall we pray? Shall we once again ask you not to forsake your Church in the new year but in grace return to her and preserve and protect her? Why do we want this? You come to her without our prayer, for you have promised to come; heaven and earth would sooner crumble before you could break your word and let your Church, which is founded upon you, be overpowered. You are with her, she will therefore stand; you will help her and that right early.

Lord, that is why we beseech you to come also to us in the new year and give us grace, so that we may open our heart when you come. Today we remember our sins; today we think of how often in the past church year you have come to us in Word and Sacrament and we did not open our hearts nor make room for you there; we prevented the blessing which you had meant for us from coming. We know that we have well deserved that you would pass us by in the new year.

Yet, O Savior of all men and also our Savior! it is only because you interceded that we still live; it is only because you interceded that we are not yet snatched away but are given a period of grace; oh, make this also a part of your grace, and come again to us in this new year and complete your work in us so that, when the voice of midnight finally calls us to the wedding feast, we may be prepared to follow you, our Bridegroom, with lamps burning, clothed in our wedding garments. Hear us, oh King of grace, hear us. Amen. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" than the name of Jesus Christ; so says the Apostle Peter. According to these words no person can save himself, nor can one brother redeem another, nor can an angel open heaven to man; Christ alone is the bridge which spans the abyss of death to eternal life; Christ alone is the open gate of paradise; Christ alone is the way into heaven. If anyone wishes to be saved, Peter says he must be saved through Christ, or all his efforts are in vain; and if a person has ever been saved he has been saved through Christ.

In the past, many have been offended at this doctrine because Christ first came into the world 4,000 years after its creation. They argue, If there actually were no salvation for men except in Christ, would he not have appeared immediately after the creation of the world? Would he have waited so long and, until he finally came, have let so many millions be lost without the hope of salvation?

But they err. Christ is a most amazing person. He had been in the world a long time when the holy angels extolled his birth in a heavenly hymn of praise. Christ's coming into the world is a twofold one, a physical and a spiritual one. To be sure, 1800 years ago he came into the world, in a manner he had not previously come, visibly and bodily; but Christ had always been spiritually in the world as long as it had existed. At the beginning of his gospel, John clearly writes, "In him was light; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ...That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Jn 1:4.5.9. Therefore, Christ also says of himself, "Before Abraham

was, I am....Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad."  
Jn 8:58b.56.

In order to understand this correctly, one must know this: When the light of Adam's implanted innocence and righteousness was extinguished by the fall into sin, God immediately said to him, "The woman's seed will crush the head of the serpent;" with this first promise Christ began to appear as the only true light of the world; these words, one might say, were the first rays of a heavenly dawn, which began to penetrate the night of sin which had spread out over the world. When later one God spoke still more clearly to Abraham of Him through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed and who would be born from the nation which descended from him, Christ even then shone brightly in a sinful world lying in darkness and in the shadow of death. And when century after century thereafter a long procession of prophets arose in Israel, all of whom proclaimed that the coming of the Promised One was constantly drawing closer, and when finally Malachi, the last of the prophets, cried loudly to the world, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts," Mal 3:1b, then Christ shone ever more brightly until finally the heavens were rent and the heavenly hosts appeared and the angel of the Lord, surrounded by the glory of the Lord, cried to the astounded 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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Lk 2:10.11. Christ did not first in this moment arise; now he stood as the bright noonday sun over all people.

So, far be it that Christ appeared in the world only after the passing of 4,000 years, because then first he had wished to begin the work of blessing the world; but he appeared at this time because he, as one might say, wanted to stand in the middle of time and stretch his arms backwards and forwards to all the lost. The prophecy concerning Christ, therefore, moves through the dark history of nations as a streak of heavenly light, becoming brighter and brighter. When Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise and they experienced the bitterness of the world and amid sweat and tears had to till the accursed soil, even then he was their comfort. Even then he had been Israel's hope and the desire of all nations; therefore, if anyone was saved before Christ's birth, he was saved through Christ in whom he hoped.

That is why we read in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." We see from this, that as Christ was in the world and continually came into the world before he appeared, so he comes even now after he has already come and is always in the process of coming until he will finally come for the eternal celebration with his own in heaven. And that is the comforting subject of Advent, with which we will busy ourselves now.

The text. Matthew 21:1-9.

From very ancient times, whenever the orthodox church stood at the threshold of a new church year, she took delight in the description of Christ's entry through the gates of Jerusalem as it is found in the Gospel just read; thus she comforted herself in the gracious, invisible coming through the gates of the church, yes, the whole sinful world, which the Lord want to make again. Today we also will imitate our spiritual mother, when we now answer the question:

WHAT DOES CHRIST'S ENTRY THROUGH THE GATES OF JERUSALEM TEACH  
US AS WE BEGIN THE NEW CHURCH YEAR?

Chiefly, two things:

- I. How Christ Can and Wishes to Enter Among Us also, and
- II. How to Act Toward the Savior who is Entering Your Heart.

I.

My friends, when the evangelist says in our text, that Christ made that solemn entry through the gates of Jerusalem "so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, Tell ye the daught of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee", we dare not think that this applied only to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. No, as certainly as Christ had not come to ascend the royal throne at Jerusalem, but to be a King of all men, so certainly does the command concern all preachers of the Gospel, me as well, "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee."

Dare we actually believe that Christ can still enter, that he comes even today, and does so even among us? Has he not left this world long ago? and doesn't that lowly entry into Jerusalem show that Christ was nothing but a poor, weak, ordinary man? Do we not know that a few days later the cries of hosanna were followed by "Crucify him! Crucify him!", the crowning with thorns, and finally the King's disgraceful death on the cross?

So, at the first glance, nothing seems to be more foolish than to believe that today Christ can enter even among us as a King. But my friends, do not be deceived by appearances; though in our Gospel Christ passes by as a poor person, he is great in glory and majesty, which shines forth from his humble entry when we examine it more closely. For what do we hear? Coming from Galilee with his group of disciples and approaching Jerusalem after being absent for a long time, Christ suddenly halted and gave two of his disciples the command, "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 to me." V.2. Tell me, how could Christ know that that what he here so exactly and minutely foretold would actually be so? Christ simply proved that he is all-knowing. Do not argue about drawing a conclusion like that, since the circumstances which he predicted were so trivial! The more trivial they were, the more they prove that nothing, not even the least little thing, is hidden from Christ's eyes.

And still more: Christ ads, "And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them." V.3. I will ask again: How could Christ know that the owner of that beast of burden would be moved to let it go? Thus Christ simply proves that he has the power to direct the hearts of men and do that even from a distance; so, he is almighty.

And still more: amid the cries and jubilation of thousands, Christ afterwards rode through the gates of Jerusalem; the entire city was excited; everyone, young and old, visitor and inhabitant, crowded together and in astonishment exclaimed, "Who is he?" Even the infants miraculously opened their mouths and loudly sang, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Tell me, why did Herod, Pilate, and all the mighty of the land, who were in the city with a great number of armed soldiers, watch everything so calmly? What held these fierce foes of Christ in check so that they did not then and there arrest Christ as a rioter and rebel?

Perceive from this Christ's divine power. By this Christ proved that he could without sword or army subdue a hostile foe, dishearten them, bind their feet in chains, and make their arms lame. Oh, what is an earthly king in comparison with Christ! The power of earthly kings is a fragile sword, Christ's power is his almighty word; their throne is of dust and rests upon dust to which they themselves finally return; Christ's throne is erected in the hearts

of men, which he turns according to his absolute will. In short, Christ is an all-knowing, almighty King of hearts, the eternal true Son of the living God. This he proved when he entered Jerusalem and so convinces us that even now, today, he can enter among us also.

Is he not only able to enter among us but does he also want to? Have not all of us sworn faithfulness to him in Holy Baptism, and have we not all become unfaithful to him? Is he not the Most High and we but dust and ashes? Is he not the Most Holy and we unclean, unholy sinners worthy of damnation? And do we not read in the prophets, "Tell ye the DAUGHTER OF ZION, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee"?

Yes, my friends, that is what we read, but who was the daughter of Zion to whom this happy message was to be brought? Was it the saints, who were worthy of Christ's coming to them? Oh, no! That meant the citizens of Jerusalem; the very ones to whom Christ had so often preached his grace in vain; those who repaid the Lord's goodness with evil, love with hate, blessings with evil deeds; those who even now received the Lord with thoughts of murder and a few days later nailed him to the cross. Yes, it meant the citizens of that murderous city of Jerusalem, this heap of sinners ripe for hell to whom Christ once more came in unflinching patience and love and faithfulness, to visit them with all the riches of his grace and mercy, and to whom God wanted the message, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee meek," a Helper, a Savior, to be proclaimed. Oh, how certain every one can be, that, no matter in what condition he may be, Christ wants to enter in unto him as well!

Or is there anyone of us who dares to think that Christ does not want to nor will he come to him in the new church year? Ah, of a truth! No one, no one dare think this of his faithful Savior, even though he has been most unfaithful to him in the past, yes, even though he had been Christ's most bitter enemy. Take a look at the open gates of Jerusalem; see there the King enter so meek and full of ardent yearning for the salvation of a city engulfed in every abyss of sin; learn from this that nothing, no unworthiness, no sin, no fall no matter how deep can keep him from knocking at the door of one's heart, desiring to be admitted and entering in to him who opens. And that means us as well. Though our sins may be ever so great, though they may be as high as a mountain, his love and grace is even greater. Confidently I can therefore say to everyone here, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee," he comes, he comes!

And if you now ask, How is he coming? If you want to know, then look at Christ's entry into Jerusalem; there we find it depicted in a lovely picture. We see that Christ did not himself mount this beast of burden to make his entry. His disciples lifted him upon the animal; in their company and amid their cries of hosanna he entered. So Christ does to this very day. Wherever his servants preach his Word, wherever they say in his name, Behold you King comes, wherever his disciples are gathered who cry to him and say, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest!" there at all times is Christ in their midst; there Christ at all times follows them on foot; in short, there Christ makes his entry; there salvation is at the door of all hearts.

Oh, happy therefore are all of you who by God's grace today at the beginning of the new church year hear Christ's Word! Though the world may despise it, though it may be foolishness and an offense to it, under the sound of this despised Word there nevertheless takes place the greatest miracle of grace; for with it even today Christ, the prince of salvation, enters in wherever the heart is opened. Oh, happy are all those who open to him! This leads me to the second point which Christ's entry through the gates of Jerusalem teaches us as we stand on the threshold of a new church year.

## II.

Namely, how you are to act toward the Savior who is again entering by Word and Sacrament.

If we cast another glance at that festive procession, we clearly distinguish two separate choruses. The disciples, who had accompanied Jesus on his travels and had just arrived with him from Galilee, compose the first chorus. First of all, what did they do? They did not forsake Christ, even though he had repeatedly predicted that he was now going into suffering and death. On the contrary, they attached themselves the more closely to Christ. And not only this, they were also zealous in doing Christ's will in everything. He sent them to do something, which to human reason seemed extremely foolish; they did not refuse to do it; they went in a hurry.

Not only did they themselves accompany Christ, but they also sought, as much as they were able, to get others to join them; they seated Christ upon the animal which they had brought, put their garments under him, preceded him as his heralds, and, loudly praising and confessing him as the King who should come, they attracted others to recognize and accept Christ.

There you see, my friends, you who have traveled with Christ, what your attitude toward your Savior who today wishes to enter in again should be. The first thing which is asked of you is that in the new year you do not forsake Christ whom you have followed in the past. And why should you do this? Must you not confess that as long as you have remained with Christ, you have received only good from him, experienced only love, enjoyed only peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and that you were better off with him than with the world? Oh, then do not forget all this; do not look with longing eyes back to the world, its treasures, joys, and honor; otherwise you will regret it for time and for eternity; but remain with him, even if after the hour of joy you yet must experience many an hour of sorrow, yes, weeks of pain; remain with him, your faithful Savior, until he has brought you to your eternal homeland.

As the disciples not only remained in faith in Christ but also served him more and more zealously and willingly in constantly growing love, so also you. Promise the Lord today that you want to dedicate yourselves completely to him in the new church year, free yourselves more and more from the old sins which still cling to you and make you lazy Christians, and show greater zeal in the sanctification of the spirit. Promise that today and pray for grace to keep your promise. And as the disciples did not think alone of themselves but also of those who did not know Christ or enjoy his peace, and there did everything they were able to promote Christ's entry into Jerusalem, enliven this dead nation, and draw it into their spiritual joy and rejoicing over Christ and his grace, so also you. Think of how many still live without the knowledge of Christ, not only among the poor heathen but also around and near you, how many fall through temporal death into the abyss of an eternal death and are lost! Let your light therefore shine before men that they may see your good works and join you in glorifying the Father in heaven. Lift up your hands to God for those who still sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and earnestly pray: "Lord, may thy kingdom come;" but then also open your hands generously so that Christ's messengers can go out into the barren wilderness where the erring sheep live and bring them back; then the one flock under the One Shepherd will constantly grow, the exultation of the redeemed host will grow louder, and the name of the Lord will be glorified more and more and all lands; soon the day will come when Christ will end all distress and with his followers triumphantly enter through the gates of the eternal Jerusalem for the eternal royal wedding in the house of his heavenly Father.

However, we find another chorus besides that of the disciples who had been with Christ, a second chorus of those taking part in the festive entry; in the past they had stayed away from Christ.

What do we hear about them? We hear that as the report of the Lord's approach spread throughout Jerusalem, they hurriedly left the city and met Christ; the moment they saw him they immediately swore allegiance to him as their true King, spread their garments on the way, decorated it with palm branches and green boughs, and then loudly joined in the disciples' choir of jubilation.

You, who can not say that your past life and particularly the past church year was a time of traveling with Christ, there you hear how you should act towards the Savior who wishes to enter your heart, you who must rather admit that in the past year you concerned yourselves little or not at all about Christ, served yourselves more than Christ, and sought earthly wealth and joys and honor rather than Christ's grace. Do you actually want to remain in this tragic condition in the new church year as well? Do you really want to remain without grace and without God's good pleasure, without peace of conscience and without the joy of the Holy Spirit, without the hope of eternal life, and without the certainty of salvation? Do you want to neglect to care for your immortal soul in the new church year also and be concerned chiefly for your mortal body, the transient worthless things of this world, the fickle favor of men who are dust and ashes, and finally rot with all their glory? No, no; far be it!

This very hour you have also heard the news, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek!" Oh, let it enter your heart as well. Come, come! your King, who has so often come to you in the past and whom you have always repulsed, behold! again he comes to you today in Word and Sacrament; leave this sinful, restless Jerusalem of this world behind and in spirit hurry out where Christ's disciples are with Christ. Take off the garments of your own righteousness and lay them under Christ's feet; that is, acknowledge that you are naked, poor, lost sinners, cast yourselves down at Jesus' feet, not only prepare a way for him in your hearts with the palm branches of ardent prayer and with the green boughs of sincere sighs and tears, but also accept him in faith as your gracious King, swear allegiance to him, and join his disciples in their ringing hosannas, with which they greet him today. Oh, blessed, blessed are you who follow the advent call still resounding in the New Testament Church! The new church year opens to you like a laughing valley through which you will travel.

Come then, all of you, my dear hearers; let us together begin the beautiful journey and exclaim, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." Mt 21; Lk 19:38. Amen. Amen.

# 2nd SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 21:25-36

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Throughout the entire history of the Christian Church there have been those who believed that the end of the world was near. The world's end has always been proclaimed to the world but never as frequently as now. In America a sect has now arisen which simply preaches that the Lord will soon come in the clouds to judge the living and the dead. This sect, however, is not satisfied with preaching about an early appearance of Christ to judgment; in enthusiastic conceit it has also repeatedly mentioned the day when this great event will take place. These enthusiasts have been put to shame; the stipulated days have gone by and the world continues as before.

And what is the result? The world has become only the more impudent and has sunk only the deeper into the sleep of security. Men everywhere shout for joy that the Bible and Christianity has suffered a new defeat and that reason has carried off a glorious victory. You see, unbelieving preachers and editors cry to their hearers and readers, you see; the prophecies of Scripture, the apostles, and the prophets amount to nothing; the days during which the world was supposed to be annihilated have passed and the world still stands. Don't trust the Bible any more; its prophecies are the dreams of an excited imagination. See into what foolishness and misfortune many have now fallen, because they so confidently expected the predictions of the Bible to be fulfilled!

But my friends, don't let that deceive you. It is not God and his holy Word but only men with their dreams who have become a laughingstock. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is the day and hour mentioned when Christ will return. On the contrary, the Lord says clearly and distinctly, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Mt 24:36. And in another passage he condemns all searching after that day as something un-Christian and says, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power." Acts 1:7.

In vain, therefore, the unbelieving world attributes to the Gospel what is due to the impertinence of foolish men. But that is the way of the world; if sinful men abuse God's Word, if sin, absurdities, and misfortune are the results, it exclaims, See! those are the fruits of your wonderful Christianity!

Just let these lovers of lies continue to fight the Christian Church with such arrows dipped in the poison of lies. All lies will finally be revealed and come to naught, but the Christian truth will and must be victorious. What if the end of this world never does come on that day when according to human figuring it should come; that such a day will dawn is certain. That so many false prophets predicting the end of the world have now arisen is the result of Satan's work; that is how he seeks to make the poor world more and more secure, lull it into the sleep of spiritual death, and convince it that Christ's return is a ridiculous fable. Soon Satan will have reached his goal; then, when after the many unfulfilled predictions all the world merely jokes about the Last Day and says, He will not come; let us eat, drink, and be merry! then he will come, quickly and suddenly, and find no one prepared; in a moment when

he is not expected he will suddenly be there; then Christ will appear, the trumpets will sound, the dead will awake, the whole world will be on fire, all the godless will howl, and the pious, now glorified, will soar high into the air at the right hand of the Son of God. Oh, that this moment may find us all properly prepared!

With God's assistance I will now speak to you on how we should prepare ourselves for this day. Let us therefore call on him, etc.

The text. Luke 21:25-36.

On the basis of the Gospel, permit me to speak to you on:

#### THE CHRISTIAN'S PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF JUDGMENT DAY

According to our text there is a threefold preparation;

- I. He is to Take Diligent Note of the Signs which Precede it,
- II. Watch out that his Heart is not Burdened with Earthly Things, and
- III. Not Become Tired of Watching and Praying.

Lord Jesus, by your word you yourself intend to awaken us, so that we are constantly alert, ready to go to meet you, our Bridegroom, even at the midnight hour. In this hour, extend your gracious hand toward the hearts of all my hearers and unite them with you in order that some day we will be with you forever. Amen.

#### I.

My friends, out of great love God has so arranged things, that no man knows what will happen to him in the future, yes, not even the next hour; if a person knew in advance that he would be successful, it would make him secure and proud; if, on the other hand, he knew all his adversities in advance, he would despair even in happy surroundings. Therefore, although God has revealed to man that he must die some day, he has hidden the hour of his death from his eyes. And yet, God has given us certain signs by which we are constantly reminded of the certainty of our coming death and by which we can recognize its nearness. Every day man becomes older and older; he sees how quickly the time of youth disappears, his powers wane, his cheeks and hair become white, sight and hearing lose their keenness, his back becomes bowed, his hands begin to tremble, sicknesses gradually exhaust the body; and how the fruits of his life constantly become riper and riper for the plucking; all these are continuous signs and messengers of death.

The same is true also of Judgment Day. It is just as certain as the hour of our death; Christ, therefore, asserts in our text, "Verily I say unto you, This generation," namely the Jewish people, "shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." Vv.32,33. But when the day of the world's destruction is, knows no creature; that is written alone in the hidden books of the secret counsels of God. Nevertheless, in his revealed Word God has indicated signs by which the Christian can recognize the nearness of this great day. Christ speaks of that in our Gospel, "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." Vv.25,26. That these remarkable extraordinary phenomenon in the world of nature

and men are the signs pure and simple which the Christian is to take note of as messengers of the Lord's nearness, Christ himself states when he adds, "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." Vv.27.28.

The question now arises, What are we to think of those signs? Have they already taken place, or are they still to be expected? Here Christian exegetes are of different opinions. A few suppose that those signs will first occur shortly before the end of the world, perhaps a year, perhaps only a few days or hours before; the sun, moon, and stars will lose their light, the sea will roar and overflow its shores, the earth will quake, the stars will alter their courses, anguish and despair will prevail among men. It seems as though this exposition does not agree with the analogy of Holy Scripture.

In order to help us understand his words, Christ himself gives us this parable in our text, "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." Vv.29-31. From this we must conclude that the signs of Judgment Day will follow slowly the way spring gradually unfolds; little by little the trees become green and the buds burst and blossom; this does not happen suddenly like a trick of magic.

We, therefore, dare not suppose that the signs described in our Gospel have never occurred and are all still to be expected. To be sure, every year we see new signs, but the majority have already taken place throughout the centuries. Frequently have the sun, moon, and stars become darkened before the very eyes of men; frequently have anxiety and fear seized men; frequently have countless fainted from fear and waiting for the things which are to come; frequently have the seas roared frightfully and the earth trembled as though it was going to burst; frequently, therefore, have all signs cried out to men, Awake, ye sleepers! The end is near.

Oh, yes, it is true, that astronomers and scientists can often point to the natural causes for such striking phenomenon; nevertheless, they are and remain God-given signs of the early overthrow and destruction of this entire universe. For is it not God who rules the world, who guides the moon in front of the sun, so that the latter is hidden from view and its light taken away, and the like? Remember, even though we see the natural causes of our sicknesses, are they not in spite of that the forerunners of our certain death? So also the world has, as it were, been sickly for the past 1800 years; one might say that the sun, the world's eye, has frequently lost its power to see; the world has frequently been convulsed; all this shows us that the world's hour of death is at the door.

Though the unbelievers may ridicule the idea as a superstition that in these striking natural phenomenon Christians believe they understand God's language, do not let that disturb you who believe in God's Holy Word. Rather, daily prepare yourselves for the great imminent change in all creation by earnestly taking note of the signs of the times. Learn to understand God ever better whenever he speaks to us clearly by all sorts of terrible, unusual world events. Believe that these forerunners have already been sent in sufficient frequency; this very day Christ could therefore appear; this very day could be the Last Day, the day of the resurrection, the Day of Judgment. Already in the days of the apostles Christians did not dare to be secure; even then many signs had occurred; yet since before God a thousand years are as one day and

one day as a thousand years, time through God's patience has dragged on for 1800 years. But now that the great universal apostacy which was predicted has taken place and the antichrist is also revealed, we dare not feel safe for one second; even before we leave this church, yea, even in the next moment Christ can come like lightning out of a blue sky; even in the next moment heaven and earth can take fire and God's judgment throne appear.

## II.

Listen, therefore, to the second part of a Christian's preparation; it consists in his earnestly guarding himself against burdening his heart with earthly things. For Christ continues thus in our Gospel, "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." V.34.

A Christian does not prepare himself properly for the Last Day by quitting his job, and only praying, nor in selling all his property and giving it to the poor. Not at all! That is the very reason why God has not revealed the day and hour to us; as long as God himself has not destroyed this world, we are to remain in our calling, continue to fulfill our duty over against our families and especially our neighbor, and, when Christ will come again, let him find us at our posts where he has placed us.

Christ does not forbid eating and drinking nor faithfully providing for those things which belong to the support and wants of our body, but burdening our hearts with these things.

You who seek your heaven on earth in eating and drinking; who would rather refuse to nourish your soul than your body; who would rather dispense with the bread of life, the Word of God, than lack earthly bread; whose object it is to lead a continual peaceful, comfortable, enjoyable life; who, therefore, would gladly let God stay in his heaven if only he would always bestow upon you health, money, and good days on earth; who fill yourselves with the choicest food so that you become incapable of lifting your soul to God or get so intoxicated that your blood is inflamed and your tongue babbles, you are the ones who in God's eyes burden your heart with eating and drinking, even though you perhaps do not think so. And you who have undertaken to become rich, to pile dollar upon dollar, or to constantly expand your business, or to build you a house; and who rise with these thoughts in the morning and go to sleep with them at night; who are so occupied with your material plans; who greedily look into the future and already in spirit joyfully see how all your constantly growing wishes are being fulfilled, you are the one whose heart is burdened with the cares of this life. Alas, how many of us there may be who find in this description the condition of their life, thoughts, and being, and suppose that they are the best of Christians!

Is that the way to prepare for the sudden arrival of the Last Day? Oh, indeed not! Whoever acts that way, certainly does not earnestly believe that that great day is near each and every moment; he certainly thinks in his heart, "My lord delays his coming."

Yes, all of you who now constitute a great portion of our congregation, whose heart is almost always filled with the thoughts and cares of the future, who with your little shops are occupied in your minds with your little speculations just as well as the possessor of huge sums, who burn with a desire for more and more profits and who rejoice more over the briskness of your business before the Christmas festival than over the heavenly gift, for which sake this

this festival is celebrated; oh, you earthly-minded souls, you burdened hearts, how poorly you are prepared for the approaching end of this world! You say, you believe that God will soon consume heaven and earth with fire, and yet you cling ever more firmly to earthly things! You say you believe that Christ could come today for judgment and yet you do not provide only for tomorrow but for years on end! Oh, how you deceive yourselves! If you would hear today, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," Mt 25:6 this would be frightful news for you; between you and the children of the world there would be no difference; you would not lift up your heads with joy because your redemption draws nigh; the destruction of the world would be the destruction of all your hopes and dreams, for you do not place your hope in Christ but in unrighteous Mammon. Do you want to persevere in such a miserable state? Do you want to continue to let your heart be so full of earthly things that heavenly things can find no place there? Do you not want to forsake the world before it forsakes you? Oh, turn around, perceive your error; it leads to damnation even though you may otherwise live honorably; then though the Last Day of the world may come today or tomorrow, you will not be frightened but happy and enter into eternal joy and blessedness.

## II.

That this may happen Christ cries out to us all, "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." V.35,36. Watching and praying is therefore the third part of preparing for the sudden appearance of the Last Day.

Christ tells us that the Last Day will come like a snare upon all who dwell on the earth. A snare is placed where one least expects it; the wild animal thinks it can go its usual way unhindered as always, and lo! all of a sudden it steps upon the trap and is caught. Therefore, wherever you go you should watch and pray, my dear Christian; in all places you should think: Perhaps here lies the snare against which Christ has warned me; perhaps here is the place where Christ will appear to me and take me away into his eternal kingdom.

Christ moreover says that he will come like a flash of lightning; lightning does not come slowly but more quickly than our eye can follow; it flashes from one end of the sky to the other. So quickly will the great change have taken place. There will be no time to cry for grace, no time to be converted, no time for preparation. Therefore, watch and pray now that you will be ready.

Finally, Christ also says, that he will come as a thief in the night; a thief does not announce beforehand that he will come at this or that hour. So Christ will not come when no one thinks he will; the day of his coming will not be different from any other day; the sun will rise just as brightly as in the past; on that great morning a person will get up from his bed as in the past; he will go to work, will eat and drink, will laugh and joke, will curse, rage, and blaspheme, will sin as in the past; everything will go its usual course as in the past; no one will think, Today the Lord will come; he will rather think, Today is like yesterday, and tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow it will be just like it is today. And see, whereas formerly all things turned unceasingly like a wheel, suddenly they will stop; in a moment God's Son will stand before all men, the holy angels will appear in all places and corners, God's trumpet will sound in the ears of all and mountain and valley and sea will open and all the dead will arise. Is it therefore not necessary that we watch

and pray so that we will be worthy every moment to escape all these things and be ready to stand before the Son of man?

Oh, my dear hearers, if we would only really believe the doctrine of the Last Day, how much more watchful; how much more zealous in prayer, how much more earnest in our whole Christian life we would be! Then pray to God that he would make an indelibly deep impression upon you concerning this day; continue your meditations under the guidance of God's Word also at home; in faith commit your soul every second to your merciful Savior, and, though you may wake or sleep, work or rest, laugh or weep, you will be worthy through Christ to stand before him. May he do that to us all for the sake of his love. Amen.

## 3rd SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Matthew 11:2-10

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In our dear Savior, my dear Christian friends!

"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" according to the report of our today's text, this was the question which John the Baptist addressed to Christ; Christ was not to say, whether he was merely a wise man, or merely a prophet, or merely someone sent by God, but whether he really was the Messiah, who according to the prophecies of all the prophets of the Old Covenant should come, and for whom all believing Israel had waited with such longing.

This question, my friends, concerns us also; it was of the greatest importance not only for the Jews at Christ's time, but is likewise for us today. It is not enough that we believe that Jesus was a great benefactor of mankind, the founder of a new wonderful religion, or whether he is also the Savior of the world and the true Son of God; if our faith is to be firmly grounded, we must also know and believe without any doubts whatsoever, that Christ was the very one who had been promised to the patriarchs of the Old Testament, in short, the Messiah or Redeemer of the world who had been expected by all true Jews.

Christianity is founded on Judaism and has grown from its trunk like a tree of many branches producing much fruit; the New Testament rests upon the Old; the latter contains the promises, the former the fulfilment. If, therefore, the old Judaism and the Books of the Old Testament which contains it were false, then also Christianity and the Books of the New Testament would also be false. If the one falls, so does the other. That is why Christ says, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" Jn 5:46.47.

So, if we do not believe that Christ is the very Messiah who was to come, the very Seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, the King of Israel and Deliverer of Mankind who had once been and is even today still expected, we either do not believe in Christ or we believe in a false Christ. In the times of the Old Testament it was sufficient for salvation to believe that God would help man through a Messiah or Redeemer; but in the New Testament time, after Jesus has come into the world, it is absolutely necessary to believe that this Jesus is the Christ was was to come. This truth, that Jesus

is the Messiah, is the dividing wall between the Christians and Jews of today; it is also the foundation of our hope and salvation. Peter, therefore, says of the name of Jesus, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. And so John says in his First Epistle, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." 1 Jn 5:1a.

I have not the least doubt, that all of you who usually come to this church consider as true the doctrine, that Jesus is that very person who should come; but Peter demands still more of Christians than such a conviction; he says, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." 1 Pet 3:15. In order to help you be prepared, permit me to instruct you in that doctrine, briefly but as basically and completely as possible.

The Text. Matthew 11:2-10.

Without a doubt, John the Baptist was firmly convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. He could not doubt that, for God had said to him, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." Jn 1:33. And John saw this when he baptized Jesus and at the same time heard God's voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mt 3:17. He, therefore, also preached, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Mt 3:3. "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not....Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jn 1:26,29. Not for his sake at all did he have Jesus asked this question, but for the sake of his weak disciples, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" This question benefits us today also; for Christ answered it in our Gospel in a way that we can be greatly strengthened in our faith. On the basis of our text I will show you that

#### JESUS REALLY IS THE MESSIAH WHO SHOULD COME

According to our text we see this beyond all doubt

- I. From the WORKS which He did,
- II. From the DOCTRINE which He Preached,
- III. From the RECEPTION Given Him after His Manifestation on Earth,
- IV. From the FAMILY, the PLACE, and the TIME in which He was Born.

Lord Jesus! In your name alone rests our salvation; through you alone we come to the Father. We, therefore pray, strengthen, establish, and confirm our faith in you more and more. Alas, it is a weak little light which can easily be extinguished amid the storms of the temptations of this wretched world so full of enemies, blasphemers, and mockers. You alone can preserve us so that we do not fall away, but remain with you and finally receive the crown. Do this for us all for your own sake. Amen.

#### I.

There is no other way of becoming certain about whether Jesus is actually the Messiah who should come than by searching in the Old Testament. That is why Christ also directed the Jews to it and said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Jn 5:39. All revolves around the question whether that what the prophets predicted of the coming Messiah was really fulfilled in Jesus. If Jesus' nature is such as the prophets describe it, if we really see the prophecies, promises, and hopes expressed about the Messiah actually fulfilled in Jesus, then beyond

doubt, he is also the person who should come, and we are not to look for another.

According to the prophets, the first thing whereby the Messiah would be recognized was his extraordinary miracles. That these were an essential mark of the Messiah was undisputed among all the Jews of Christ's time. That is why not only the people but also the Pharisees and Scribes so often demanded that Christ prove by signs and wonder that he actually was the Messiah. For thus writes the Prophet Isaiah, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance (upon the unrepentant), even God with a recompence; he will come and save you (the repentant). Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." Is 35:4-6a.

All this was literally fulfilled in Jesus. In our text he answered John's question, "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." Vv. 4.5a. With that Christ means to say, I prove who I am; see, I create new eyes; men who from birth on were enveloped in darkness can now because of my power see this world; broken members are knit; at my nod benumbed hands receive new life; crippled feet suddenly begin to leap; deaf ears begin to hear, tied tongues to speak loudly, all sickness leaves, yes, at my command the evil spirits flee, the devil leaves those he has possessed for a long time, and the dead arise from their graves.

God forbid, that Christ should have left the least little thing undone which was predicted that the Messiah was to do; on the contrary, he has far surpassed all prophecies and therefore all that was expected. He alone did more miracles than all the prophets put together and did works which hitherto had been unheard of, so that once an Israelite in amazement exclaimed, "Since the world began it was not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." Jn 9:32.

In this connection we must mention this special thing: not only did Christ himself do miracles but also had the power to let others perform miracles in his name, who in turn received the power to give it to others. In the chapter preceding our text we read, "And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." Mt 10:1. This gift of imparting the power to do miracles no prophet ever had. When Elisha commanded his servant Gehazi to lay his staff upon the face of the dead child, he did not awaken; the prophet himself had to come.

Still less could the apostles and prophets perform miracles in their own names or impart the gift of doing them in their name. No, in holy zeal Peter said to the people, when they all looked him in amazement after he had healed the lame man, "Why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus....His name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know." Acts 3:12,13,16a. You see, only Jesus could perform miracles in his own name, and he thereby revealed that he did them by his own power.

Oh, how confidently we can therefore despise the babbling of the unbelievers, who want to make of Christ merely a wise man, whose wisdom was indeed distinguished for his times, but which must be improved upon by more enlightened men of today! Come on, you wise of this world! Seal your wisdom, as Christ did, with divine miracles! -- But you weakling, you can only speak proudly and

in no way accredit yourselves as preachers of the truth. Christ's sealed word will therefore remain forever and your word will be blown away like the dust of your bodies.

## II.

If Christ had distinguished himself only by miracles, we still could not be completely certain that he actually was the Messiah who should come. We continue, for we see this also in the second place in the doctrine which he taught.

Even the special nature of his doctrine was predicted by the prophets. According to the clear statements of the Old Testament, the Messiah was to teach an entirely different doctrine than that of Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant. According to his doctrine Moses promised salvation only to those who would keep the Law perfectly; but because no man can, his ministry announced death and damnation to all. We therefore read, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." Dt 27:26a. But of Christ it was universally predicted that at his time all the thirsting would be offered refreshment, all the oppressed comfort, all sinners grace. Thus, for example says Isaiah, the evangelist of the Old Testament, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," Is 42:2, that is, he will not scold with the thunder of the Law. "A bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not quench...He shall not fail nor be discouraged." Is 42:3.4a. In another passage the same prophet introduces the Messiah as saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me," that is, made me the Messiah, or the Anointed. "He hath sent me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn." Is 61:1.2. Therefore Zephaniah also says, "For then," at the time of the Messiah, "will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." Zeph 3:9.

Here is the picture which the prophets sketched of the doctrine of the Messiah. Now if we compare the teaching which was preached by Jesus, do we not find in him the true fulfilment? In our text he himself appeals to that when he adds the words, "And the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

But what is the Gospel? It is not a new law, not a new, pure, stern ethics, not a new teaching of works which we should do, not a preaching of damnation for sinners, but it is a preaching of grace, it is the joyful message that Jesus sinners doth receive, that whoever believes in him should be saved, it is the enticing of the miserable and erring, and the comforting and establishing of the fallen and frightened.

Christ, of course, also explained the Law, but that was not his real preaching; this he did as a prophet in order to awaken the secure, to show the blind and self-righteous their sins, to crush and soften hardened hearts, and thus prepare men for the comfort which he wanted to bring them.

His real ministry was the comforting Gospel. His call to men was, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,... and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Mt 11:28.29b. The content of all his teaching he indicates in the words, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jn 3:16.

Christ, therefore, commanded his disciples to preach this same doctrine, when he left the world. He said to 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." Mk 16:15,16. And what do the disciples, the servants and apostles of Jesus, declare is the real content of the they were to preach? They say, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor 5:20.

Accordingly, no one can contradict this: by his doctrine Jesus confirmed that he was the Messiah who was to come. But that this is true, we see in the third place from the way he was received here on earth.

### III.

Christ himself indicates this in our text with the words, "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." V.6. There are in the prophets many descriptions of the Messiah as a King with great majesty; therefore, the Jews looked mostly at this; they do that even now, and because they understand the glory of the messianic kingdom to be a temporal one, they once thought and still think that Jesus could not be the Messiah.

Oh, what terrible, pitiable blindness! That those splendid sketches can not be understood to mean an earthly glory, we see from the fact that the lot of the Messiah on this world is describes as most wretched. That is why Christ calls out, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." For Isaiah had already written of him, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Is 52:14. (cp. the German.)

What do the Scriptures say was in store for the Messiah? David says in Ps 118 that he is the stone which the builders rejected and which became the cornerstone. That is written of the Jews. Ps 41 says that the friend whom he trusted, who did eat of his bread, would lift up his heel against him; that was done by the traitor Judas. Psalms 22 and 69 say that he would be laughed to scorn and would be given gall for his meat and vinegar for his thirst; they would pierce his hands and his feet and cast lots for his clothes; he would be like a worm and not a man, and complain that he was forsaken by God. Isaiah says that he would give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; he would not hide his face from shame and spitting. He would have no form or comeliness; he would be so despised and rejected of men that they would hide their faces from him and esteem him not; he would be reckoned among the evildoers, tormented, wounded, and bruised; he would be silent like a lamb led to the slaughter and finally be buried like a godless person. Zachariah says that he would be sold for 30 pieces of silver and that his side would be pierced; the Lord of hosts would say, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Zach 13:7. Finally, even Daniel says, "Messiah shall be cut off and shall have nothing." Dan 9:26.

But we also find predictions of the victory of the Messiah and the final glorious results of his deep humiliation. Isaiah says that when he will have given his life as an offering for sin, he would see his seed and prolong his life; the 16th Psalm which says that his flesh would rest in hope nor would his soul remain in hell, nor his flesh see corruption confirms this. Here apply David's other prophecies in the 68th and 110th Psalms, that the Messiah would ascend on high and lead captivity captive and would seat himself on the right hand of God. Joel and all the prophets conclude the whole matter with the announcements that the Messiah would then pour out the Holy Spirit from heaven, all nations would be called into his kingdom, and they would cling to him.

Now tell me, was not all this fulfilled word for word in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, so that, as one might say, even a blind man must see it? Do not all the things which happened to him loudly proclaim: This Jesus is truly the Messiah who was to come? Do we not find in Jesus the picture of the Messiah, even there where the prophets have sketched the circumstances of his life to the very smallest and most insignificant details? -- Oh that God would open the eyes of blinded Israel that they might see that this Son of David is that salvation for which they pine! that they might exclaim, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

#### IV.

So now we come to the last mark from which we can perceive that Jesus was the one who should come; we see this in the fourth place in the family, the place, and the time in which he was born. I can be even more brief since you have heard about this in the last mid-week Advent sermon.

In the writings of the Old Testament the family is clearly indicated from which the Messiah would descend. With every passing century God revealed this ever more clearly. At first the Messiah was promised as the son of Adam, then among his sons from the family of Seth, then among the sons of Noah the family of Shem, from among Shem's descendants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and from among the 12 sons of Jacob Judah and his descendants; and when this tribe also grew in number, God finally gave David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem, the promise that his family was chosen and a branch from the root of Jesse would bring forth fruit for all nations and times. Finally, Isaiah added that a virgin of David's royal family was to be the chosen mother of the Savior. That all this was fulfilled in Jesus needs no proof. The genealogical tables which have been preserved for us in the Old as well as in the New Testament prove this beyond all doubt.

And Micah tells us where the Messiah was to see the light of day; he says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2. It is not in vain that the word Ephratah is added to the word Bethlehem, for there was another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulon. Consequently, we can be certain that the little child in Bethlehem and not some one else is the one whom God has sent us, in whom we are to believe, and through whom we are to be saved.

The last thing which is revealed to us about the Messiah is the time when he should appear. Jacob, Haggai, and Daniel indicate this so clearly, that the least doubt must disappear. First of all Jacob says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Gen 49:10. When, therefore, Judah would have lost the scepter or the sovereign authority, then the Promised One would come. Haggai says that the desire of all nations must come while the second temple was still standing, and finally Daniel says from the time the command was given to rebuild Jerusalem until Christ came would be 70 weeks, that is, prophetic-year-weeks or 490 years.

From this it is absolutely certain: the Messiah must have come, for for almost 1800 years the second temple has lain in rubble and ashes, the scepter of Judah is gone, and the 70-year-weeks have long ago passed into the sea of eternity.

So let us rejoice! Our faith in Jesus is no deception; he is like gold; the more keenly it is examined the brighter and clearer it shines. God is faithful in his promises. Oh, let us all simply cling firmly to it and we will not be shamed but after a faithful struggle of faith we will be admitted to see what we believed.

May Jesus Christ, who has come to save that which was lost, help us all!  
Amen.

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## 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT John 1:19-28

Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. Amen.

Dear friends in the Lord Jesus!

Jesus Christ never did need man's witness in order to prove that he actually was God's Son and man's Savior. That he was this, he himself could bear witness with divine certainty; and this he did by his words as well as by his deeds. When he spoke, he spoke with authority and not as the scribes; by his words he revealed not only what still lay in the future, not only the secret counsels of the human heart but also the hidden eternal decree of the invisible and inscrutable God, which had never even entered man's heart nor that of an angel; he speaks of that, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Jn 3:11. Christ did not sit in school at the feet of the wise but grew up in humble quiet and yet preached a wisdom which the wise of all times, even though they do not believe it, have admired and gazed at in astonishment. Christ himself thus proves that he is the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.

His divine miracles also gave a similar irrefutable witness; when he was asked, "Art thou he that should come?" he could without further ado reply, "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." Mt 11:4,5. "I have," he could say, "a greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works bear witness of me." Jn 5:36.

However, the greatest of all witness about Jesus, at which unbelief must blush, yet upon which faith can be immovably founded, is the witness which God himself has given of his Son. The Evangelist Matthew writes, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mt 3:16,17. What further need have we of witness?

Though it is certain that he who received a witness from heaven does not need nor had ever needed such a witness from earth, we would err greatly if we supposed that we would not need a human witness about Jesus and that it is not Christ's will that we confess him. No, my friends, God did not only institute the office of the ministry and entrust it to men that through this office a lasting witness of men should be given about Christ; nor should anyone think that it is enough to have faith in Christ in his heart; those who wish to be Christians must also be "lights in the Lord" who enlighten many; they are to be

cities built upon a high mountain and remain hidden from no one. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom 10:9.10. And Jesus Christ himself says to us, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." Mt 10:32.33

You perceive from this my dear hearers, how necessary it is that everyone of us give a good witness of Jesus Christ, for unless we give it we cannot be his disciples nor inherit eternal life.

Yet not every witness of Christ is correct; it is very easy to be deceived; not everyone who says, "Lord! Lord!" is also a true confessor of the name of Jesus Christ; an earnest examination is necessary. Now since our today's Gospel gives us the opportunity for such an examination, let us in the fear of God institute such an examination concerning witnessing correctly to Christ.

(It is the more natural today to bear witness of my faith to you, the assembled congregation, since as you know I came to this holy place to do that.)

But first let us beseech God for his gracious assistance in silent prayer after we have sung hymn 225, 9 (Dresden hymnal).

The text. John 1:19-28.

My friends, the time had come when, according to the predictions of the prophets, the Messiah was to appear; for a long time the people, groaning under the yoke of the Roman government, had waited for the Promised One with great longing. Then it was that John the Baptist appeared among the Jews in a way most thought very puzzling: clothed in a garment of camel's hair, a leathern girdle about his loins, eating locust and wild honey, he baptized and preached in the wilderness, and often declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" There went out to him "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan;" Mt 3:5; they hear his powerful admonitions to repent, they are baptized of him, and confess their sins. So little by little the people began to muse in their hearts "whether John were the Christ or not."

All this and especially concern about this opinion of the people about John soon caught the attention of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem; they had to pass judgment in matters of religion. It was therefore decided to send a delegation to John, a delegation of preachers and Levites, who belonged to the Pharisees, a sect highly regarded by the people. They were to examine the call and the real office of John and demand that he give a public explanation of himself. That took place; -- and our today's Gospel gives us the result of this meeting. Turning all thoughts away from himself, John in our text bears glorious witness to Jesus Christ; it certainly can serve as an example worthy of our imitation. Permit me under the guidance of our text to present to you

#### THE REAL NATURE OF OUR WITNESS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

We seek

- I. The CONTENT of our Witness, and then,
- II. The MANNER in Which we are to Witness.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are our merciful High Priest and Intercessor for us with your Father, when our sins come to him accusing us; we beseech you, teach us how even we can bear witness of you and thus confess you, so that it may be to your honor and our neighbor's salvation. You must teach us, we do not know how; teach us from your Word and graciously make me today the voice through whom you speak to us, oh great Preacher, and turn all these hearers into living and blessed witnesses of your glory and grace by their words and deeds. Oh, Lord, hear us for your own sake. Amen.

## I.

My friends, if we ask what our witness of Christ must really contain, or for whom we must confess Christ to be, then look at John the Baptist; his example shows us clearly. I call your attention to his words, when he speaks about Christ in our text, "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." V.29. What words, my dear hearers! "Who coming AFTER me is preferred BEFORE me!" Do we not know that John was older than Jesus? How could he say that Jesus was before him? For the same reason that the Lord says of himself, "Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am!" Jn 8:58. See in those words a glorious witness by the Baptist to the fact that Jesus Christ is not merely a creature but is the Word, who was in the beginning, who as God created heaven and earth; that he is the eternal Son of the most high God.

But John confessed further that he was the voice of that preacher in the wilderness about whom Isaiah had prophesied, "Make straight the way of the Lord!" With these words he frankly confessed that Jesus Christ is the promised Lord, or according to the original, Jehovah, who should come in the flesh, the Messiah and Savior of all the world, he "to whom all the prophets give witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43. John bears a glorious two-fold witness of Christ, first, that Christ is the God-man, and secondly, that he is the promised Savior.

That is a beautiful example for all who even today wish to confess Christ. If our witness is to be correct according to its contents, it depends chiefly upon two things: whether we testify correctly about Christ's person, and whether we testify correctly about his office.

My friends, the chief reason why we should confess Christ at all to the world is, as John says concerning the Pharisees, because the world does not know him and denies him, that Christ might be confessed and honored and, where possible, souls might be won for him. Now no one readily denies that Christ was a true man, certainly not that he was a good and wise man, a great prophet of God, who taught so perfect a doctrine that no other man ever equaled it. I say, no one readily denies that. Yet the world is offended that this Jesus, this despised Jesus, who lay in the manger, who did not have a place where to lay his head, and who finally died disgracefully and painfully on the cross, that this man should be "the Lord of glory, the true and eternal life, who is over all, God blessed forever;" that he did not come merely to teach us virtue but to redeem us from temporal and eternal death by his suffering and death; that faith in him, trust in his dearly bought merit, alone can make us righteous and save us. (My friends, Christ the crucified is even today an offense to all self-righteous and foolishness to all worldly wise.) That, that is what the world chiefly denies; it is, therefore, that which a true Christian must confess about Jesus Christ before the world.

We must bear witness that we consider Christ more than merely a man, yes, more than all angels and archangels; we must consider him the Lord, Jehovah,

whose way John had to prepare; we must consider him eternal, existing before all those who were born in this world before he was; as the one before whom all prophets must bow, yes, even John who was more than a prophet and yet did not deem himself worthy of untying his shoestrings; as the only begotten Son of the living God.

Then we must also confess the truth of his miracles, the truth of his victorious resurrection and ascension, the certainty of his sitting at the right hand of the Father and his coming for judgment. We must testify that we heartily believe "that there is no salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) than the precious name of Jesus alone.

Finally, we must testify that Christ really does receive sinners, that in him we really have forgiveness of sins, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the certainty of our salvation, true rest for our souls, yes, that in him we find everything which can give man peace, make him happy, and finally save him here in the world to come, in time, and in eternity.

If this is the content of your confession about Christ, then it is Biblical, then it is the correct one, then we can have the comforting assurance, that, having the power of God's Word, it will lead disciples to Christ and redound to his honor, then we dare also hope that he will some day confess us before his heavenly Father. Oh, what grace it is that one sinner can say to another, Rejoice; God has become a man; he wants to be our Savior, for whoever believes in him will be eternally saved! If a person has great earthly fortune about which he as yet knows nothing, oh, how eagerly everyone wants to be the first to bring him the good news! How happy we ought to be to spread the most joyful news of all wherever we can, that Christ has come to pardon the guilty, to rescue the lost, yes, to save all sinners!

## II.

Up to now we have heard only about the correct content of our testimony about Christ; that our testimony is given in the proper way is also a part of its true nature. Let us try to recognize this from the example of John the Baptist.

"I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not." V.26. "Whom YE know not," he says; he intends to say the opposite, but whom I do know. Yes, he knew him well, and knew him in faith. Not flesh and blood but the Father in heaven revealed to him, that Christ really was his dear Son, in whom he was well pleased, that he was the Lamb of God who carried away the sin of the world. He knew this; he had experienced it; this compelled him to confess that at all times and in all places.

He was also called to do this. He did not do this out of his own choice or because he was forward. In order to prove this John in our text defends his call; he points to the fact that he is that voice in the wilderness, of whom Isaiah has spoken. And when he was asked, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?" v.25, he replied, "I baptize with water." He means to say, "I baptize only because I was commanded to do so, not as the Lord but as the servant and forerunner of Christ; I give only water but Christ alone can by means of this water work with the gifts and grace of his Spirit."

His own experience, his living and heartfelt faith in Jesus Christ, and his definite call to testify about Christ, both worked in him the proper way of confessing Christ. He had experienced the divine majesty of his Master and his own humbleness, he knew that, like all men, even he could stand before God only

because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; this made him, first of all, so humble that he gladly did not want to be more than what he was: merely God's voice in the wilderness who spoke through him His instrument; he did not want to be that Elijah, or that prophet who at that time was expected when Christ appeared, much less Christ himself; yes, he declared, "Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose;" he looked on himself as a person much too low to do for Christ the work of the meanest slave. How little he must have thought of all his other good works! He had also experienced the love of Jesus Christ, and this so filled his heart that he had to confess him, so that all might come to Christ and be saved.

If John's faith in Christ gave him the correct humility and love to confess him, the call gave him such divine courage that he despised the enticements as well as the threats of the world. The nation considered him the Christ and was ready to recognize him as such and set about founding his glorious messianic kingdom; but the leaders hated his witness and plotted his ruin.

What did he do? He despised the favor of the people and bore in mind that God gave him incomparably more than all the world could offer him; as far as the hatred of the mighty was concerned, he relied upon him who had called him and stood at his side amid all persecution; and so he frankly confessed to the people, "I am not the Christ," and fearlessly added in the presence of the Pharisees, "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." V.27.

My dear hearers, if you wish to apply all what you have heard here about John to yourselves, then learn the following points: Above all learn that it does not only depend on confessing Christ correctly, but that one must himself also be a true confessor. We see, that one can say many good and true things about Christ, yes, nothing but good and true things, and yet be worthy of being rejected by God together with his witness. "I believed, therefore have I spoken!" Ps 116:10; one must be able to join John in imitating King David. If anyone wishes to confess Christ before the world he must have a living faith in him. Otherwise he will be like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; they can make a pleasing sound but they are in themselves empty and lifeless. One would commit the folly of wanting to commend something to others which he does not consider worth accepting himself.

But who believes in Christ? He who not only believes the evidence which we find about Christ in God's Word in the Old and New Testaments, but who also knows from experience that he is a helpless sinner who can not redeem himself, that Jesus Christ is his Savior as He is the Savior of all men, that He has carried also his sins and atoned for them on the cross, and that all his sins are forgiven him for Christ's sake. Whoever has come to know this, confessing his guilt before God, turning humbly to God desiring grace and freedom from his sins, he believes in Christ; he and only he is capable of bearing a good witness about Christ.

If we want to do this, we must examine ourselves, whether Christ has become our one and all, whether with the apostles we must actually say to Christ's foes, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" and come to know, Acts 4:20; our love to Christ and our brethren who were redeemed with us compels us to confess how good we have it with Jesus and invite them to believe and find in him that which can save them for time and for eternity. Certainly, we will then, but not from a spirit of quarrelsomeness, confess among the ignorant as well as among the mockers, him who has won us with his blood; in so doing we will not seek out own welfare but the salvation of our neighbor.

And how humble we ought to be since, if we confess Christ the correct way,

we also admit that we have received forgiveness of sins, grace, and mercy in him! We certainly will let people see by our example that we exalt ourselves over no one but would gladly see all of them being saved when we are.

Finally, as his calling made John such a happy and fearless witness for Christ, that, conscious of being in God's service, he gladly renounced the world and was not afraid of its spite, so it must also be with us, when we confess our Lord and Savior to his foes or friends. However, we can do that only if we know: God is with us when he sends us and then the witness we bear is not really ours but God the Holy Spirit's witness in and through us. Bearing witness without being called, no matter what else it seems to be, is always without love, for love comes from him who calls; without humility, for it is given in one's own power; without true courage, for one can not rely upon the Lord of Lords: it is sacrilege. Christ indeed sent his disciples into the world; ah, sheep amongst the wolves! but they could go confidently; Christ went with them; and behold, their witness quickly filled the world and everywhere won the victory over the false gods. But we dare not for that reason out of a false zeal for confession seek out the world and impertinently mingle among the foes of Christ's cross in order to preach to and convert them; doing that we will not rescue them; we would perish amongst and with them.

To confess Christ and confess that we are his disciples with our works, by our association with true believers, by our chasteness, gentleness, humility, love--to do that at all times we all are called; and though the world may even consider it hypocrisy, this is the light we should always and joyfully let shine. Especially should the minister praise Christ to his congregation, and of course every member do that to his fellow members, the teacher to his pupils, the parents to their children, each one to his spouse, the master to his servants, friend to friend. They should all do that in their calling and do it joyfully; yes, everyone who is asked a reason for the hope which is in him or is asked about his faith -- even if the answer should be connected with danger to body and life, honor and property -- here is a call; in that case one should be ready at all times to answer every one; it is God who is having us questioned; he turns hearts like rivers. If it does not mean the salvation of him to whom we confess, our soul is not harmed; but if we are injured in earthly things, if they take body, goods, honor, child, and wife away -- "let these all be gone," Luther calls to us, "they yet have nothing won, the Kingdom our's remaineth."

My dear hearers! The hour is coming when all of us will be gathered before the judgment throne of him of whom it now is merely said, "Behold, your King comes to you meek and humble;" alas, what terror will then seize those who will have to hear the voice of thunder saying to them, "You did not confess me before the world; you denied me; you were ashamed of me; depart from me; I know you not! Oh let us all therefore now in the period of grace exhort our souls that none need be ashamed at his coming."

Oh Jesus, write what we have heard about confessing you in our hearts; by the power of your grace make us able to bear witness about you at all times by our daily life, often with our mouth, and if it should be your will, gladly with our very life, but certainly by our blessed death wherever and however it may come. Amen.

1942  
12-8-18

# CHRISTMAS DAY

Luke 2:1-14

"Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people;" this, Lord Jesus, is what you commanded a heavenly host to tell the frightened shepherds of Bethlehem on the day of your birth. Oh, what exultation! what a sweet message! Not fear, nor sorrow but joy, great joy, should fill the hearts of men when your birth is announced. Oh, therefore, grant that in these days the Christmas message may take all fear and sorrow away and fill our hearts with joy. We do not beg of you a gushing stream, Lord Jesus, but one drop, only a little drop of true Christmas joy. Give that to us and we will be satisfied. Then we also will join in the hymn of praise sung by your holy angels, here today on earth at your manger, there some day in heaven before the steps of your throne from eternity to eternity. Amen.

The text. Luke 2:1-14.

In the new-born Savior, my dear hearers!

If ever there is a time when it seems to be most unnecessary, yes, foolish, to encourage Christians to be happy, then beyond a doubt the joyous Christmas season is that time. Who is he who is not happy? We see all churches filled with great numbers of worshipers clothed in festive garments; all, happy in countenance and clear of voice, join in one carol of joy after the other and with equal joy listen to the songs of their choirs. During this season we see that all dwellings, the poor as well as the rich, have become the homes of pure joy. During the Christmas season even many, who otherwise want to know nothing about Christ, speak to their children of the wonderful Christ-child, who brought them such beautiful things from heaven. So it seems as though the prediction of the Prophet Isaiah of the joy in the whole Christian world on the day of Christ's birth is again actually being fulfilled in the most glorious way even today, the prophecy, "They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Is 9:3b.

Indeed it is true, my friends, today every person has cause for rejoicing. The birth of Christ actually is mankind's, the whole world's great day of joy; it is that for the small as well as the great, for the poor as well as for the rich, for servants as well as for masters, for prisoners as well as for the free, for the sick as well as for the healthy, for the fortunate as well as for the unfortunate, for the greatest sinners as well as for the greatest saints, yes, for the unbelievers as well as for the believers. For thus shouts the first preacher of Christmas, who was sent by God from heaven to earth, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE." Then right after that the heavenly host in full chorus sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will TOWARD MEN." There you see, my dear hearers, the invitation to rejoice is today issued to "all people," yes, to everyone who is a "man," therefore, to everyone of us, to you and to me; no one, not a single one of us here is excluded. Today through his heavenly herald God himself says to everyone of us, "Rejoice, everyone, rejoice!"

Yet, my friends, not every joy during the Christmas festival season is Christmas joy. In order that you not only rejoice but rejoice in the proper way, permit me in this hour to present to you

THE TRUE CHRISTMAS JOY

In so doing I will show you three things:

- I. What the True Christmas Joy is,
- II. How it Enters Man's Heart, and finally,
- III. How Important it is that Every Person Experiences This Joy in his Heart.

I.

My friends, if you want to know whether your joy during the Christmas season is the true Christmas joy then I can say that the answer depends first of all on the object, and secondly, the nature of your joy; in other words, over what, and how you rejoice.

If the object of your joy is chiefly this, that on this day you delight in a table set more richly than usual, or that you give your children all kinds of beautiful gifts and they now joyfully leap and sing around you, or that you give Christmas gifts to your friends and receive some from them, or that you see yourselves surrounded only by happy people and can hold a pleasant conversation with them, or that during these days you hear only happy sermons and sing nothing but happy songs, this is not the real true Christmas joy, even though you may feel ever so happy during the Christmas season. Why not? Because you are not happy at the right thing.

The first Christmas preacher has stated clearly what it is. After the angel of the Lord had said to the shepherds of Bethlehem, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," he immediately adds, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." V.11. There you see that the object of the true Christmas joy is none other than this, that today "the Savior" is born unto us, who is at the same time God, "the Lord" from heaven itself.

Whoever not only gladly hears a sermon at Christmas time, but above all rejoices in the fact that God did not cast fallen man away as he well could have but took pity on us and gave us a Savior, a Deliverer, a Redeemer; whoever rejoices at Christmas time over the fact that out of incomprehensible, deep love to us poor sinners God even commanded his only begotten Son himself to become a child, in order that he might make the sons of men God's own dear children; whoever rejoices during the Christmas season mostly over the fact that the eternal Son of God humbled himself so deeply in order to rescue us from the depths of the misery of our sin, that he let himself be born of a poor maid in a dark dirty stall among the animals, let himself be wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, and, instead of being laid upon a soft couch, was laid in a hard crib of hay and straw; whoever rejoices at Christmas time over the fact that the holy angels, who once prevented fallen man from entering the Garden of Eden, but now after God's Son has become a man have again become man's friends and brought him the joyful message of the birth of his Savior; whoever rejoices at Christmas time over the fact that the heavenly hosts celebrated Christ's birth in song with the words, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," that thus through Christ's birth God has regained the honor of which we men robbed him, earth that peace with heaven which was lost, and men God's good will which was trifled away; whoever rejoices at Christmas time over the fact that Satan, who intended to separate man from God forever and drag him along down into hell, did not win but lose and was forever conquered through the incarnation of the Son of God; whoever rejoices at Christmas time that through Christ's birth all evil which man did was again corrected, all the guilt of man's sin was erased, for all men a righteousness was earned which avails before God, all men again have a dearly bought salvation, and for all men

heaven is again open; I say, whoever rejoices at Christmas time above all over these things, his joy has the correct object, his joy during the Christmas festival is the true Christmas joy.

Perhaps many of you will now say, It is true, God knows it, the Christ-child himself actually knows what my chief joy this Christmas season is; but alas! the nature of my joy is wrong; for when I think of how great God's love is which is revealed in Christ's birth and just how unworthy I am of this love, I feel ashamed at the littleness of my joy in his birth. Ah, my eyes should shed tears of joy today; my heart should be as excited with joy as the sea, my heart should overflow in praise to God, my feet should hop and skip for great joy as David's did before the ark of the covenant; but, sad to say, my joy over the Christ-child is merely like a little spark glowing under the ashes of all kinds of cares and doubt.

Oh my dear friends, if you complain thus, just be consoled! Indeed, it is something precious if at Christmas a Christian can rejoice as Mary did, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." Lk 1:46. 47. It is indeed something precious if at Christmas a Christian can say with Paul, "I am exceeding joyful." 2 Cor 7:4. However, God does not always give men such joy. Only seldom is that the true nature of our Christmas joy. To be sure, the holy pure angels rejoiced thus; but of such boundless joy on man's part on the day of the birth of the Savior we read nothing. The only thing told about the shepherds of Bethlehem is that after they had heard the angel's message; they "came with haste" to Bethlehem, that therefore their joy was simply based on the Christ-child; that and nothing else was the magnet which drew them to Bethlehem.

See my dear hearers, if that and that alone is also your joy, if after you have heard the Christmas message you also in spirit hurry to Bethlehem, if you cannot see enough of the Christ-child nor wonder sufficiently over God's love as it is revealed in him, and if the dark stall in which the incarnate Love of God is lying is more glorious and precious and many thousands of times more dear to you than all the magnificent palaces of the rich of this world, then this little drop of joy is the true Christmas joy and in God's eyes is already a powerful river which finally will empty in the immense sea of the joy of eternal life.

## II.

The important question now arises, How does such a joy enter the human heart? Let this be the second point, which by God's grace I will now show you.

How the true Christmas joy may enter man's heart can best be learned from the shepherds of Bethlehem, who were the first human beings to whom the birth of Christ was announced. What is the first thing which is told us about them in our Gospel? When the angel with the glory of the Lord shining around him appeared to them, we read, "And they were sore afraid." How remarkable! Never in all the world did they think that the angel would bring them a message of joy; they thought that he had come to frighten them. Undoubtedly they thought, Alas, that is a holy angel and we are sinners! He is a messenger of the great God; alas, we have transgressed his holy commandments so many times and insulted and angered him so often! Woe is us! woe is us! whither shall we flee in order to hide from him?

But what did happen? The angel opened his mouth, and lo! not terrifying but the most blessed of all words crossed his lips. He says, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger." Vv.10-12. In speechless astonishment

the shepherds listen to that. The words, "Unto you, unto you is born this day a Savior," enter like heavenly dew into their fear-filled souls; this word enlightens their understanding, moves their will, and even engenders faith in their hearts; and behold! their fear has suddenly all disappeared from their hearts and joy, great inexpressible joy enters in.

There you see, my friends, that, that and no other is the manner in which true Christmas joy comes into a man's heart. It does not consist in trying to put oneself into a happy frame of mind. As one cannot add precious wine to a vessel already overflowing with water, neither can true Christmas joy enter a heart filled with self-made joy. As it was with the shepherds, its constant precursor is fear, fear of God's displeasure because of our sins. If such a fearful heart then hears the Christmas message, "Fear not; for unto you is born this day a Savior," what an impression this makes upon it! Such a heart can do nothing else; it believes this message and then the true Christmas joy sweeps with this faith into his heart like a mighty tidal wave.

Blessed are you, therefore, who perhaps on the morning of the greatest festival of Christendom arose and came with a heavy heart into our little church; yes, I say, happy are you. For do not think that you have been given a joyless sorrowful Christmas season. No, do just this one thing: pay close attention to the Christmas message, "Unto you, yes unto you, is born this day a Savior;" this will by itself kindle faith in it in your heart, make it easy to drive out all fear, and fill it with joy upon joy. And you who already awoke this morning with joy over the new-born Savior and have assembled here in this joy, oh, do not only thank God for this great grace but listen so much the more eagerly to the little word "you, you," and turn it into "me, me;" then the secret glow of your today's Christmas joy will become a bright flame. Oh, blessed, blessed are you who today celebrate Christmas that way!

### III.

My friends, is it really so important for every person, and that means also all of us, to experience the true Christmas joy in our hearts? Yes, indeed. And that is the third point about which you will permit me to add a few words.

My main basis for the importance of the Christmas joy is this one, because joy and not sorrow is the ultimate goal which has been set by God for all men in time and in eternity. Oh, yes, the earth nowadays is not a valley of joy but a vale of tears. That, however, happened not because <sup>of</sup> God, but by his sins man himself has turned this beautiful world into a place of sorrow. If man would not have fallen from God, the world would have been and remained a place of pure joy; after a short period of testing, he would have crossed over into the place of perfect eternal joy, into heaven. For man was not created by God for sorrow but for temporal and eternal joy. And as God, this eternally overflowing fount of all joy, created man alone for temporal and eternal joy, so the Son of God redeemed man so that he could again receive this temporal and eternal joy. That is also why the first messenger who was sent by God to tell men of the birth of their Redeemer had to say to them, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you tidings of great JOY." The purpose of the Christmas festival is not that we are not to forget that Christ was born, but above all that we Christians should be awakened to joy over the Christ-child. Whoever has, therefore, celebrated Christmas without being awakened to rejoice over the Christ-child has celebrated it in vain.

Come, then, my friends, come, rejoice! Or, why do you not want to rejoice? Certainly, not because you are sinners? Oh, you fools! That is the very reason why you should rejoice; Christ was born in Bethlehem for just one reason:

for the sake of sinners. If men had remained in their implanted innocence and not become sinners, God's Son would not have had to come from heaven. Just because you are sinners, you have reason to rejoice.

Or, do you perhaps think and say that you can not rejoice over the Christ-child because you are oppressed by the misery of this life? Oh, you fools! That is the very reason why you should rejoice; you should be able to say, The world indeed holds no joy for me, yet I am happy; in the Christ-child I have a joy which supplies everything I lack, so that I can in all my misery say with that Christian poet,

What should cross and trial grieve me?  
 Christ is near With His cheer;  
 Never will He leave me.  
 Who can rob me of the heaven  
 That God's Son For my own  
 To my faith hath given? (523,1)

Or, perhaps you do not want to know anything of the joy over the Savior, because your heart clings to the joy of this world? you who perhaps this very moment hear the sermon with merely half of your mind, because you, -- I mean especially you young people -- are thinking of the joys of the world to which you will surrender yourselves today? Oh, you fools! The joys of this world are vain; they vanish away in misery and death like colorful illusions and finally change themselves into eternal heartache; but the joy over the Savior remains even in misery and death, at such times shows its blessed power, and finally changes itself into eternal salvation.

Well, then, my dear hearers, take the Child at Bethlehem out of its manger today, in spirit lay it in the arms of your faith, and press it to your heart. What will happen? He will laugh at you in a friendly way. Oh, return that laughter; that is all which this Child asks of you. Then your Christmas joy will not be extinguished with the lights of Christmas but will continue to shine on in your hearts, accompany you through your entire life, turn all its bitterness, yes, even bitter death itself, into something sweet, and will finally lead you into the place where there will be fullness of joy and pleasures at God's right hand forever more. Amen.

## 2nd CHRISTMAS DAY

Luke 2:15-20

Lord Jesus! The only begotten Son of the living God, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; you did not only descend from heaven for our sakes and for our salvation to become a man like we are; but in order that the salvation you brought from heaven might be given to all men, you have also commanded that it be preached to everyone. And during these days we have also heard this amazing, sweet, blessed sermon. Praise and thanks be to you today and in all eternity for your inexpressible love. Lord Jesus, we also beseech you that this preaching may not be in vain for any one of us. Ah, you know very well that we not only did not know by ourselves how we could be saved, but that after you devised the means and revealed them to us, we cannot by our own reason or strength even understand and accept them. Oh, therefore, open our blinded eyes, that we perceive the wisdom of your counsel for our salvation; fill our dead and powerless heart with life and power so that we may also follow your plan. Guard us that we do not belong to those about whom you complain, "Seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not." Mt 13:13. Guard us also against

being satisfied with merely hearing the preaching of your amazing and gracious birth with a passing joyous wonderment only; but help, oh, help us Lord Jesus, that whatever is preached to us these days may fall like light and fire from heaven deep into our heart and kindle there the light of true faith and the fire of ardent love. Ah yes, if yesterday our souls remained dark, desolate, and dead, then let Christmas enter them today, a Christmas full of light, life, and joy. Amen! Amen!

The text. Luke 2:15-20.

My dear hearers, whom God has so highly honored and loved!

What a sermon we heard yesterday! -- Ah, what a sermon! -- Of a truth, when today we recall it, we must say what Christ once said to his disciples, "Blessed are the ears which hear the things that ye hear; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Lk 10:23,24. For what did we hear yesterday? It was a sermon not from the mouth of a man but an angel.

And its content? A miracle of miracles, a joy above all joys. For what was the angel's sermon? It went as follows: God the Lord himself, the eternal almighty Creator of heaven and earth, has descended from heaven, took upon himself your nature, and became a man, a man like you. Oh, what a miracle of miracles! What other miracle can be compared with this one? What is even the miracle of the creation of the universe out of nothing in comparison with the miracle that the infinite Creator of the universe becomes a man?

But even more. According to yesterday's sermon by the angel, God did not only become a man but in becoming a man he also became our Savior. What does that mean? Oh joy above all joy! That means that by his incarnation God himself has become the perfect Redeemer of all men from all their temporal and eternal woes, the Righteousness of all men to cancel their sin, the Life of all men to cancel their death, the Salvation of all men to cancel their damnation.

Yesterday you all heard this heavenly sermon of wonder and joy; but did you also hear it to your salvation? Did it attain its purpose in you? Ah, to hear such a sermon in vain is something frightful. Mightily, with all the power of his love, God had knocked at the door of your heart, but you did not open to him; in free grace God opened the heavens wide but you did not enter through the open door of grace.

However, my dear hearers, no matter what your attitude toward yesterday's Christmas sermon was, even though in the ecstasy of earthly Christmas joy you completely missed hearing it until this very hour, the Christmas season has not gone by; the stream of grace still flows in undiminished strength; a few precious hours of this gracious period are still left; oh, do not let them also fly away without having received the Christmas blessing!

Yesterday's Gospel contained the Christmas sermon itself; in today's Gospel the first true hearers of this sermon are presented to us in the shepherds of Bethlehem. From their example permit me to answer the question

WHAT SHOULD HEARERS DO TO RECEIVE A BLESSING FROM HEARING  
THE GRACIOUS CHRISTMAS SERMON?

I answer: according to the example of the shepherds of Bethlehem they should

- I. Above all BELIEVE it, but also
- II. Seek to EXPERIENCE it in Their Hearts, and finally,
- III. By Its Power also Start Becoming Living PREACHERS OF CHRISTMAS.

## I.

If God would have caused the news to be preached to us that He Himself became a man and our Savior, but if he would not have revealed to us what we must do in order that the greatest deed of his love would not be preached to us in vain, we would indeed have to wonder at the mystery of Christmas; but then we would not be able to have true Christmas joy. For then we would have to think, The greater the gift which God offers us, the more difficult would that certainly be what God would demand of us. But see, in his great love to us God has not only told us what we must do, but he has even shown us by living examples, so that we can see it; they are the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Now what is the first thing which we see in them? Nothing else than a firm, undoubting, childlike faith in that which was preached to them. How did they speak after the angel of the Lord had ended his Christmas sermon, the heavenly hosts had finished singing their hymn of praise, and finally all these heavenly Christmas guests had returned to heaven? According to our text they said, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the LORD hath made known unto us." V.15b.

See, they do not say doubtingly and uncertainly, "Let us see this thing" which is supposed to have happened, but "which IS come to pass." So, in their hearts they are absolutely certain that that which the angel preached to them had taken place.

They also do not say of the things preached to them: Which the angel has made known unto us, but "Which the LORD has made known unto us." They therefore do not consider the sermon of the angel merely the words of the angel, much less the words of men, but the words of the "Lord," hence, the eternal, true, genuine Word of God, and the angel merely as God's messenger and servant.

And still more. The shepherds did not say, Which the Lord has made known unto men or the world, but changing the little word "you" which the angel had used into the little word "us," they say as though in triumph, "Which the Lord hath made known unto US." They appropriate completely the wonderful message of joy which they had heard and mean to say, "Oh, we are blessed people! For unto 'us, us' is announced great joy that 'unto us, unto us' is born the Savior." Oh, what a glorious faith!

Or, if they had wanted to follow their reason, would they not have reason to doubt? Yes, indeed, reason enough! We see from the conclusion which they drew, that even though they were not educated people, they were wise enough to doubt. According to their reason they could have thought, when the glory of heaven disappeared and it suddenly became night about them, Ah, what we thought we heard and saw was just a lovely phantasy, a short sweet dream, from which we have again awakened.

Following their reason they also could have thought, If we are not being deceived, why should not this glorious, heavenly appearance have been made before the great, the rich, the wise, the priests and chief priests at Jerusalem, or to the king and his officials rather than before us poor-simple despised shepherds of Bethlehem? Why should not such great grace and honor have been experienced by a holy prophet rather than by us poor, great, unworthy sinners, who, feeling our sinfulness, became frightened when we saw the angel?

Following their reason, the shepherds could also have thought, What? A child wrapped in wretched swaddling clothes lying in a manger should be the promised Messiah and King of Israel? that should be God the Lord himself? our Savior and the whole world's also!?

Yes, indeed; that is the way the shepherds would have had to think and speak, if they would have followed their reason. But what did they do? They give doubt no room; they believe. Is that not amazing? What is the answer to this mystery? Simply this: whereas the glory of the Lord with which the angel

had been surrounded merely frightened and blinded them, and whereas the celestial melodies of the heavenly host merely delighted their ears, the word of the angel's sermon, on the other hand, had entered their hearts with such power of God that no offence could rise; only a faith which nothing could extinguish began to shine in them like a heavenly light kindled in their souls.

There, my friends, you see the first thing which hearers must do so that they may not have heard the gracious Christmas sermon in vain! Not one's own righteousness and holiness is the prerequisite, nor any merit or worthiness of one's own, nor a great, difficult work, no, not any work whatsoever great or small, easy or difficult, but only -- faith.

Oh my friends, do not through unbelief rob yourselves of the Christmas blessing which God has intended for everyone of us. Oh, do not be satisfied with merely diligently having heard the Christmas sermon, or with becoming filled with a joyful amazement; for we are also expressly told in our text of the unbelieving inhabitants of Bethlehem, "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." No, follow the example of the shepherds. Join them in believing: What the angel of the Lord once preached certainly and really happened. Join them in believing that it is the Lord himself who has made known through the angel the miracle of the ages. And finally join them in believing that the Lord has made that known also unto us.

Oh no, you cannot give yourselves this faith; God alone can do that but he wants to do that, and alas, you can prevent it. Imitate the shepherds in also not listening to the voice of your reason but in hearing only the word of the Christmas sermon; then this word will enter your heart with divine power and without any assistance from you kindle in you the heavenly light of a faith which no world can extinguish; then you will also rejoice with the shepherds,

Oh, what blessed people we are! Oh, what great joy! Unto us, yes, unto us, is born this day the Savior! Hallelujah today, hallelujah in eternity!

## II.

From the example of the shepherds we see that those hearers, who do not want to hear the gracious Christmas sermon in vain, but receive the full blessing of it, must also seek to experience it in their hearts. Permit me secondly to speak to you about this.

Now why did the shepherds go to Bethlehem? Evidently, not to see first and then to believe; they believed before they saw; as we have heard, they expressly said to one another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which IS come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." They do not say, Let us go in order to convince ourselves of the truth of what we heard; let us see whether the thing may have happened; no, in firm faith they say, "The thing which IS come to pass." Neither did the shepherds go to Bethlehem because they had been sternly commanded to do so. For although the angel of the Lord had presupposed that they would do this in that he said, "You shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lyin in a manger," he had not commanded them to do this by a single word. They went of their own free will, and went with ardent longing and tumultuous joy of heart; for we read in our text, "And they came with haste." In the dark of night, over hill and dale they hurried as though in a foot race; not a one wished to remain behind; neither did anyone wish to be the last; everyone wanted to be the first. And why? Our text tells us that when it states, "And when they had SEEN it," that is, the Child, "they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child...And the shepherds returned." They wanted to see the new-born Child in whose gracious and joyous birth they already believed, in order to feast their eyes upon him. This alone and nothing else had driven them to leave their

flocks and hurry to the city of David; for after they had seen the Child and undoubtedly contemplated him with inexpressible joy, they soon returned mightily strengthened in their faith.

That, my friends, that is the second thing which hearers must do in order that they may not have heard the gracious Christmas sermon in vain but share in its full blessings. They must also go to Bethlehem. Not that as the shepherds they must make a pilgrimage to that holy place. Ah, no! The heavenly Child is no longer cradled in a dark manger but is enthroned on high at the right hand of God's omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and majesty. No, what a true hearer must then do after he has accepted the Christmas sermon in faith as the shepherds did is that he must hurry in spirit to Bethlehem; he must try to experience in his heart what he believes.

Yes, it is wrong not to want to believe until one has experienced, felt, and discovered in his heart what one is to believe; Jesus once reprimanded Thomas for doing just that in the words, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Jn 20:29. But it is no less wrong when many suppose, and thus want to justify their dead Christianity, that a true believer is a person who dares never experience, feel, and discover in his heart what he believes; that would be emotional enthusiasm. True Christianity is supposed to be merely a matter of reason. But that is not so. As the Scriptures say, the kingdom of God is first of all righteousness, but then also peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Therefore as a true believer hungers and thirsts after righteousness, so he also hungers and thirsts for this sweet peace and this blessed joy; David, feeling his sins, not only implores, "Renew a right spirit within me," but also, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Ps 51:10.12.

Whoever, therefore, joins the shepherds in hearing the heavenly Christmas sermon and believing it, he cannot stop there; without being commanded to, he must also hasten to Bethlehem in order to see in spirit the little Child Jesus in whom he already believes, to feast his eyes with the blessed sight, in short, to see and taste how good the Lord is. If after the Christmas sermon he feels cold, dark, hard, dead, and empty, he does not doubt that the new-born Child is also his Savior and Pardoner; he says, I believe what Jesus' Word promises, whether I feel it or not; yet it pains him that his heart is so cold and unfeeling. He, therefore, is not satisfied that he has merely heard the preaching of Christ's birth in church; when he has returned home, he also seeks in God's written Word, in joyful songs and devout meditation whether He will let Himself also be felt and found by him; or he looks up a Joseph and a Mary, who have Jesus in their midst and refreshes himself by talking over spiritual matters with them; or, he kneels in his closet and prays, O Jesus, my Savior, in whom I believe, oh come, oh come also into my poor heart! And see, for the most part, although not always, his prayer will finally be granted as he wished; his closet will be changed into a Bethlehem, his heart into the manger in which Christ lies. He then observes such blessed hours that he thinks he is already in heaven; hours in comparison to which he despises all the goods, joys, honor, and glory of the world.

Oh, blessed, blessed are those hearers who have such experiences! They have not heard the Christmas sermon in vain.

### III.

One more thing is part of the complete blessing of Christmas and it is: that you yourselves also begin to be active preachers about Christmas because of

the Christmas sermon. Permit me to add a few words about this.

Scarcely had the angel chorus died away when according to our text the shepherds, who up till then had listened in speechless amazement, opened their mouths. And of what did they speak? Did they talk about the radiant splendor of the archangel which they had seen, or about the heavenly music which they had heard? No, the sermon which they heard is the subject of their conversation. It filled their heart so completely that they even forgot about the heavenly glory they had seen and heard, or they did not consider it very important. The angel became silent and they each shepherd became the preacher of Christmas to each other. Encouraging one another, they shouted, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass."

After they had hurried to Bethlehem, the first thing which they do is that they gaze in silent joy upon the heavenly Child lying in the manger; "and when they had seen it," we read in our text, "they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." V.17. The shepherds, otherwise so bashful and untalkative, became preachers to all Bethlehem, yes, even to Joseph and Mary; through them the little village experienced a mighty awakening; for we read, "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Vv.18.19.

That the shepherds did not now come forward in spiritual pride or with an enthusiastic spirit as the preachers of Christmas among themselves or to others, we see from the concluding verse, "And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." V.20. They gave all honor to God alone, him they praised, and they did not consider themselves so highly honored that they could not remain shepherds any more; no, they returned to their earthly calling in order to preach Christ by their daily work in a new life in faith.

Now why would the Holy Spirit close his description of the hearers of the first Christmas sermon like this? Undoubtedly, first of all, that we Christians who have also heard the gracious Christmas sermon may be shamed when we remain silent about the things which we have heard, because our heart has remained so empty that it just cannot overflow, or because we are ashamed to mention the Savior in the presence of others, particularly the unbelievers. Secondly, the Holy Spirit without a doubt wants to enthuse us by the example of the shepherds to become living, zealous preachers of Christmas in word and deed after we have heard the Christmas sermon.

Oh my dear friends, let us not end our Christmas festival this year without starting to become such heralds of Christmas. Now that the simple shepherds have taken the lead, no person can excuse himself by claiming to be too simple to tell the Christmas story, that he carries this blessing in his heart but does not have the gift of expressing it in words. Ah, if our heart is full of Jesus, our mouth will overflow; yes, just as the shepherds forgot about the heavenly splendor and music in thinking about the Christmas sermon, so we also will forget even more the earthly splendor of this season when we recall the Christmas message. During these holy days all vain talk in our homes will cease, and father and mother, spouse and spouse, master and mistress, brothers and sisters, friends with friends, neighbors with neighbors will talk mainly about that which was preached on this day. Then also, like the shepherds, we will remain active preachers of Christmas even after the Christmas season, when we return to our earthly calling and preach not only in the words but also by the deeds of a new life and thus convert our homes, living rooms, dining rooms,

bedrooms, workshops, and business places into churches and chancels of our spiritual priesthood.

Well, now, my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, only a few hours -- and our beautiful Christmas festival will again be gone, and God alone knows who of us will live to see another Christmas. Therefore at the twilight of this season I cry to you: Praise him with heart and mouth who has granted us both. What a blessed hour it is to think of him. Time during which we spend not thinking of him is wasted here on earth. We are to be saved and live to all eternity. Amen.

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1/11/03

## NEW YEAR'S DAY

Luke 2:21

O Jesus, today in your name we begin another new year of our earthly pilgrimage. In your name, O Jesus! We remember today the spiritual and bodily favors you have permitted us to enjoy in a thousand ways solely by your grace and mercy. Who could number these evidences of your love which we who are so unworthy have come to know! From so many troubles you have delivered us! In so many dangers you have protected us! In so many distresses you have granted us your help! In all our needs you have constantly fed us, given us to drink, clothed, and sheltered us! You have led us back from so many erring detours, and with patience and longsuffering you have borne our many follies and sins. How graciously did you particularly hold your protective hand over this beloved congregation! You have put to naught the counsels of Satan which were bent on destroying your Church. With your power and authority you yourself adopted these dearly purchased souls. It is true, O Jesus, that you have chastised us on account of our sins, but you have not removed your grace from us. For this we thank you with humble hearts in these first hours of a newly-given year, and render to your holy name honor and praise, power and glory!

Yet, O Jesus, as you have been with us in the old year, so accompany us in the new with your grace, patience, and blessing. Above all things, do not permit any of us to enter it impenitently, but rather help that in the new year every one of us may begin a new life, and that henceforth every one may walk the way to heaven undaunted in a God-fearing fellowship of zeal, love, and peace. Dear Lord, whereof should we then be afraid? Out of our weakness we shall then become strong. By your grace, even in poverty, we shall be rich through your blessing. Though our future seems dark and perplexing and no man appears ready to help: we should cast all our care upon you and be at rest; you will guide us by your counsel and afterward receive us to glory -- bring all our affairs to a glorious conclusion. You will put to shame those who would do us harm and nullify the predictions of such as foretell our misfortune. And now, Lord, we trust in you; let us nevermore be confounded. Amen. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus!

Jesus is to be the Alpha and Omega of all things, the beginning and the end. We are baptized in his holy name; we are therefore no longer our own, but we belong to Jesus; by our baptism we were promised and betrothed to him with everything that we are and have, think and desire, speak and do. Thus we desire in his name to begin, continue, and conclude all things. Not only are we, according

to the witness of God's Word, to pray in Jesus' name, and in his name to assemble ourselves together. St. Paul demands more. In this name he includes all things. He says, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Col 3:17. There are no exceptions. In the name of Jesus we are not only to do those things which pertain to eternal life, but also those of the life that now is, not only the works of Christianity and of godliness, but also those of our earthly calling, not only things great and important, but also things small and humble.

But what does it mean: Do everything in the name of Jesus? It means that we are to do nothing according to our own will or opinion, but only those things of which we know for certain that Christ has either commanded or allowed and which are well-pleasing to him. It means furthermore that we are to start nothing in our own strength and wisdom, but rather humbly, without reliance upon ourselves, trusting solely in the support and the blessing of the Lord. For while the tongue declares, God grant it! the heart must also be sure; we must believe confidently that God is in charge of the matter and that he gives success, as St. Peter declares, "If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth." 1 Pet 4:11. To do all in the name of the Lord Jesus means furthermore that the things we do are not to be done for our own advantage or glory, but entirely for the glory of God and the benefit of the neighbor and not at all to gain personal glory, as St. Paul says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor 10:31. To do all in Jesus' name finally implies that we begin whatever we do with sincere, fervent, and believing prayer to Christ, with continuous supplications and pleas for his grace.

Thus, whoever does things that Christ does not command or permit, or trusting in his own strength and wisdom, even in temporal matters; how much more in heavenly things! -- or whoever puts on a performance for his own benefit and glory and not out of genuine love for his fellow man but rather in hatred, bitterness, or enmity, or without prayer to Christ, not standing in his grace, nor being led by his Spirit, -- such a person does everything in his own name. There is nothing good in his deeds; God regards them not; they are an abomination to him, and he rejects them, no matter how good they may appear, no matter how much labor and toil they may have demanded. But whatever is done by Christ's command, in humble dependence on his help, in denial of self, for the glory of Christ and for our neighbor's welfare, undertaken with earnest prayer and supplication -- that will be done in Jesus name, and under his blessing will make good progress, and will be pleasing to God in Christ, -- small, humble, and plain though the undertaking may be.

A tremendous task it is which the Christian has! This touchstone confounds the life and work of many. Very few do all in the name of Jesus. To many it may seem impossible to do this. Yet it is not merely possible; the fact is that those who stand in the grace of Christ, in whom Christ lives, and who in turn live in his love, his humility, his gentleness, and under the guidance of his holy Spirit, do not find this difficult at all; rather, according to the new man he cannot do otherwise. He would first have to reject the grace of Christ, faith in him, and his own good conscience, before declining to do all in the name of Jesus. If it should occur that he is overtaken by a weakness, he quickly returns to his Savior weeping and repentant, knocks at the portals of his grace, and does not rest until his conscience has been cleansed.

If we, my dear friends, are to do all in the name of Jesus, how do you suppose we ought to begin the new year? Not in our own name, but in the name of

Jesus. This is pointed out in today's Gospel.

The text. Luke 2:21.

The Gospel we have just read was undoubtedly designated for this day because it was exactly eight days after his birth when Christ was circumcised. In view of the fact that the name 'Jesus' was here for the first time publicly used for Christ, it is unquestionably right for us to be reminded that a Christian beginning of the new year in the name of Jesus is certainly necessary. Therefore, the theme that shall now occupy our thoughts will endeavor to show:

#### HOW TRUE CHRISTIANS BEGIN THE NEW YEAR IN JESUS' NAME

- I. It is Jesus who is Their Comfort as They Recall the Sins of the Past.
- II. It is Jesus to whom They Commit Themselves in Their Present Resolves.
- III. It is Jesus in whom They Place Their Hopes for the Future.

##### I.

The celebration of the new year festival, my friends, is of comparatively recent origin. It was introduced into Christendom only about six hundred years ago. During the first centuries of the Christian era this day was no festival day, but a day of mourning, a day on which one prayed, fasted, and wept. On that day the pagans brought tremendous sacrifices to their heathen idols and arranged magnificent feasts, lewd dancing, and bloody dramas. St. Augustine wrote, "On this day we Christians fast and pray for the heathen who on the same day rejoice." From this we see what great sincerity and zeal against sin the early Christians demonstrated. Even when others who were passing them close by sinned, these Christians would address God and repentantly cry to him that he would not permit them to become partakers of such sins and would not hold them responsible (for what they had heard). They earnestly sought to take with them into the new year no unforgiven sins, but rather to begin it under divine grace and good will.

If the early Christians demonstrated such sternness against the sins of strangers, how much more necessary is it to be stern against the sins that are one's very own!

Indeed dear hearers, if we wish to begin the new year in the name of Jesus, we must, above all, seek to begin it in a state of grace, so that, as we recall the sins of the past, we shall have Christ as our comfort. The real Christian does not try today to sidestep the remembrance of his former sins. He does not imagine that, because they are the transgressions of former days, they have receded into the past of forgetfulness; he does not fancy that time heals the wounds of conscience; he does not seek to forget them or blot them from memory; he does not think that God will forget just because he has forgotten; he does not try to soothe himself in such matters.

Not at all. His sins are the Christian's first anxious concern in the new year. The settlement of his trespasses is the first settlement he makes. This is a matter which he must clear up at once. He wants to begin in the name of Jesus, and he knows that he can do this only if he has obtained grace through him. Thus the first questions directed by the Christian to himself in the new year are such as these: Are my sins forgiven? Have my old sins disappeared with the old year? Have I taken none across the line? Am I in a state of grace? Am I in the faith? Can I be sure that God looks upon me with favor as his own dear child? Can I be certain that God today says also to me, "Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest;

I shall never leave thee, nor forsake thee, my child; I will be with thee also in the new year?"

To all these questions the Christian will reply with humility and with joy: Yes, I am sure that you are my Jesus, my Savior, my Redeemer, my Lord, and my Righteousness; I called upon you out of the misery of my sins, and you heard me. You have given me the token of my redemption and my reconciliation, namely, the Spirit, to whom I cry: Abba, dear Father! And so today again I reach out for your righteousness, and by faith I wash my conscience in your blood.

Now, my beloved, have you entered thus into the new year? Were your sins your first thought for the new year this morning? Were you able to answer affirmatively those questions concerning your state of grace, and have you in faith laid hold on Christ? Or did you fail even to think of them? Did you try to forget them? Did you try to forgive them yourself, without perceiving the marks of the true Christian faith in your own person? If so, then you did not begin the new year in the name of Jesus, but in your own name. But how shall we be rid of sin, if we carry it over from one year to the next? Or if we continue to postpone the work of our conversion? We know not but that this may already be the last year of our life. Shall death overtake us without Christ?

Well, the first day of the new year is not yet gone; today let us go repentantly to Christ. If you today make the beginning by honestly seeking his grace, you will have begun the new year in his name. His grace will rise up to be your companion throughout the year, indeed, throughout your life, until it will lead you by a blessed death to the land of consummation and glory.

## II.

But true Christians show, secondly, that they begin the new year in Jesus' name by their resolutions of the present.

It is true that a day such as this generally calls forth good resolutions and promises, even among the heterodox and the children of this world. But such resolutions have neither the proper foundation, nor the right sincerity, nor even the correct content. The new year has not been started in Jesus' name merely because such people made resolutions. The motive of their resolutions lies in their hope that their conscience may be quieted by their promises and that God is to be appeased by the same means. They promise, for example, to lead a new life in the new year, and tomorrow they slip back into the old rut. Their motives are nothing but the stirrings of their natural heart, and they vanish quickly. They do not really know what they want to promise God. They know neither themselves nor the demands of genuine Christianity.

It is altogether different in the case of a true Christian. The motive for his promises and vows on this day is the living impulse of divine grace to become increasingly free of sin and to grow in sanctification, the love of Christ and of his Word and will, and for everything that is good and spiritual and heavenly. The Christian is therefore completely in earnest today with his resolve to consecrate himself fully to Jesus in the new year. He is happy that there has begun for him a new year in which he can offer himself to his Savior. He is glad to be alive in this day of grace to be able to prove to God, in spite of detours into sin and spiritual wanderings and repeated unfaithfulness, that he hates sin and is eager to keep his vows of improvement, and sincerely desires to bring God more and better fruits of his grace.

But the important point with a real Christian is the fact that he does not promise God improvement without knowing in what improvement consists. Not only does he know what pertains to genuine Christianity, he also knows himself. He

knows in what respects he must change. He knows his own weaknesses. He knows his own evil inclinations, and can recognize the things that are most dangerous for his soul. In short, he knows what it means to be tempted.

Thus, when the sincere Christian begins the year today in Jesus' name, he regards whatever good he may have done in the past as nothing. He considers himself an unfaithful steward and casts aside his entire former life. Today he declares war on all his weaknesses and favorite lusts. He determines that in the new year he will have room for no spiritual dullness or inertia, that he will reject the desires of his flesh forever, that he will eagerly deny the things that are pleasant to the flesh, before they begin to hinder the Spirit's promptings of grace. Henceforth, he will never again spare himself, he will give himself no rest, he will battle against sin unto the death. He earnestly vows to God: No idle word shall pass my lips. Pride shall be banished from my heart. My self-will shall be suppressed. My trust in flesh shall be abandoned. No earthly pleasures shall turn my heart away from God, and no temporal anxiety shall encumber me.

Rather, in the new year he will seek to adorn the Gospel in every respect. He will resolve that his zeal will never grow cold; that his heart will always be open to the Holy Spirit; that he will guard all the emotions of his heart; that in him the flame of prayer shall constantly burn; that as one of the elect he will cry to God day and night; that the Word of God shall never leave his mouth or his heart; that humility and meekness shall be visible in him at all times; that he will minimize his own importance, and be a companion of the lowly and the despised; that in quietness he will not exalt himself; that he will seek peace with all men so far as possible; that he will be loving and friendly and without guile toward every one. His earthly goods, too, shall not rule over him; he will give liberally of them so that the poor may enjoy them also.

Briefly, the real Christian today makes this vow unto the Lord: I shall offer Jesus my body, my soul, my heart, my strength, my time, my thoughts, words, gestures, and works, yes, everything that I am and have; in his image I shall be glorified more and more each day. I shall put off the old man and put on the new. In the new year it shall be said of me: He is a new creature; in him Christ is all and in all. So he prays:

With my burden I begin:  
Lord, remove this load of sin;  
Let Thy blood, for sinners spilt,  
Set my conscience free from guilt.

Lord, I come to Thee for rest,  
Take possession of my breast;  
There Thy blood-bought right maintain  
And without a rival reign. 459,3.4.\*

It is thus that the Christian begins the new year in the name of Jesus.

Now, my hearers, do you presently have such a living impulse of grace in your hearts? Do you have the impulse to commit yourselves anew to Christ? Are you happy to be approaching a new period of your lives, an area where you can demonstrate greater faithfulness, earnestness, and zeal than heretofore? Or do you feel nothing of such an impulse or of such joy? Nothing of such love to

\* This is not the hymn which Walther used but which fits his thought very closely.

Christ and his Word and his will? Do your resolutions merely float on your lips, or do they come from your hearts? If such should be true, then begin at once to seek the grace of God. If you do this, then the most serious and determined resolutions will soon follow.

### III.

The third item according to which Christians begin the year in Jesus' name is this: It is Jesus in whom they place their hope for the future.

When the unbeliever looks into the future, it does not invariably look hopeless to him, though it may appear ever so bleak. But he builds his hope on something that is false. To trust in nothing but Christ seems impossible to him. He thinks it would be risking far too much to go forward into the dark and unknown future trusting only in him. The person who is possessed of a faith that is actually death seeks to persuade himself that he trusts in Christ alone, when actually he may place his trust in the gold and silver he may still have. Or he may trust his friends to help and support him if the need arises. Or he may express it like this: Why should I worry? I am well and able to work. I have acquired many skills. A thousand ways are open to me with opportunity for earning my bread. He may say: I am smart enough to find ways to help myself.

What miserable people these folks actually are! What mortal and fragile gods in which to trust! How quickly God can destroy such idols! Most earnestly God declares, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Jer 17:5. What a sorry and sandy foundation upon which to build their hopes! With deepest seriousness God says, "The hypocrite's hope shall perish; whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web." Job 8:13.14.

But how different it is when the Christian contemplates the new year that lies before him! He does so in the name of Jesus. He does not attempt to conceal the pitiful present situation. He well knows that we have been stripped of all human help. He does not try to hide the fact that our provisions and means for survival are slender and inadequate. In fact, he expects the new year to bring new sorrows, troubles, deficiencies, poverty, and afflictions. So far as spiritual and ecclesiastical matters are concerned, he expects intensified temptations and testings. Sorrowfully he anticipates new and unfamiliar temptations to apostasy, new offenses, varied disorders and estrangements and perplexed consciences. He knows that wherever the church of Christ has been planted, there a cross has necessarily been planted, too; there Satan takes no vacation. If the Evil Foe cannot conquer by an attack on the right flank, he attacks on the left.

Yet the Christian does not despair even in the face of such dismal prospects. Jesus is his consolation. He knows that "all things must work together for good to them that love God." Rom 8:28. God will not impose greater burdens than his elect can bear; he does not permit them to be tested beyond their capacity to resist. He may tarry, it is true, but not to destroy them; only so that their faith may be purified as gold in the furnace, and in order that he may prove himself a God who is able to help and a Lord who can save even from death. The Christian knows, too, that he who feeds the birds of the air that neither sow nor reap, and who gloriously clothes the lilies of the field that neither labor nor spin, will supply those who are his own with what they need, so that if they have food and raiment they can be therewith content. And why should the Christian be unduly concerned about the dangers that threaten the church of Christ? What can the adversaries' cunning and shrewdness and power accomplish against her? Does she not possess an immovable foundation, a divine

Founder, an almighty Protector who can deliver his own with a mighty hand and maintain the treasure of the Word of God, the unadulterated Sacraments, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the true faith and worship?

At this point Christians are often faced with questions such as these: But are we not sinners? Have we not been unfaithful to our God? In order to punish us for our sins, will not God permit the enemies to plunge us into temporal and eternal misery? Here, too, Jesus is our Consolation; the Christian knows that God punishes no forgiven sins. He says with Paul, "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? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Rom 8:31-34. And if, in spite of all this, the Christian in his weakness is not fully satisfied, he addresses his feeble soul in the words of David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Ps 43:5.

What a confident, divinely-consecrated, and glorious beginning it is to start the new year in Jesus' name! May we all begin it like this! If we do, the year will be a year of divine grace, and if the sunshine of this year should fall on the mound that marks our grave, it would only emphasize the fact that we had been redeemed from all evil and promoted to God's heavenly and eternal kingdom, and that we had entered upon the great new year of the jubilee of the saints elect and perfected.

May this be granted to you by Jesus Christ your Savior. Above all other things, may he bless you with his grace and the forgiveness of your sins, with his Holy Spirit, with his power and his light, with steadfastness and loyalty. May he bless you with comfort in all sorrows and troubles, with peace and joy in all pain and anxiety, with his help in every need, and with restoration from illness. May he bless you with his Word and the Sacraments! May he bless your church and your school! May he bless your children, your widows and orphans! May he grant his blessing to your fields, your means of livelihood, and your business! May he bless you in the hour of your departure, grant you grace in his presence, and bestow upon you the crown of righteousness. Amen. In Jesus' name, amen.

## EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Matthew 2:1-12

No book in the whole world is as difficult to understand as the Bible. It is such a deep and rich mine of the most precious saving truths, that the wisest men on earth have searched in it day and night for 3,000 years without exhausting its riches or completely clarifying all its mysterious expressions. Over no other book have so many books of exegesis been written as over the Holy Scriptures. And yet all the many thousands of volumes are not adequate to explain it fully.

These depths of Holy Scripture are usually adduced in the Roman Church as reasons why not every lay person should read it in his mother tongue. They say

that the Scriptures are dark; they therefore can not be properly understood by the laity if the church does not explain them. But in claiming that they merely hide their knavery. To maintain that the Scriptures are unsearchable mysteries and to maintain that they are dark are two different things. Would you say that the sun is dark because we perceive on its surface sunspots which no scientist has been able to explain? Certainly not. Just as little is Holy Writ dark. To be sure, because it is God's Word, it has many passages for whose meaning we must constantly search but the counsel of God for our salvation is revealed so clearly that even the most simple child can learn it. No, Scripture is not dark; it is the real sun of all people without which they could lie only in night and darkness. David therefore says of it, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Ps 119:105. And Isaiah says, "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail." Is 34:16. And Christ says to the people, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Jn 5:39. The Bereans are chiefly praised because they searched the Scriptures, whether what Paul told was really there. If the Bereans are praised for comparing the teaching of the apostles with the Scriptures, how much more important it therefore is for every layman to examine every teaching of man according to God's Word! If he is to do that, we perceive that the Scriptures must not be dark but clear even for the most simple person. (That is why St. John writes in the last book of Holy Scripture, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." Rev 1:3. For how could God command hearers to examine something on the basis of a text which they themselves would not understand?)

If there is any story in Holy Writ from which we can perceive, that the written Word is not dark but clear, yes, the bright pole-star for all who want to go the way to heaven, it is our today's text about the wise men from the east. First, they were awakened by a miraculous star, but it could not lead them to Christ; it soon disappeared again. It was the Word which did not forsake them but shined on brightly after the star had long since left them. This induces me today to recommend most strongly God's Word as our true guiding star to heaven.

The text. Matthew 2:1-12.

Under the guidance, etc.

#### GOD'S WORD THE ONLY TRUE GUIDING STAR ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN

- I. Only the Word Lets us Find Christ.
- II. Only Through the Word will we be Kept in Him.

##### I.

My friends, the star mentioned in our Gospel could not have been a natural phenomenon. It could not have been in the heavens like the others. For then it would have been impossible for it to have stood directly over the house where the young child was, as Matthew reports. Stars are up so high that when we move from one place to another, we can not perceive that they move in their orbits. In addition, Bethlehem lay south of Jerusalem. Since the star accompanied the wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, it must have gone from north to south. All stars without exception travel to the east. This star was therefore something special. It was especially created by God and not high up in the sky but was placed within the atmosphere of our earth.

Although the wise men from the east most likely were learned men from Arabia, learned chiefly in astronomy and science, for in Greek they are called magi which indicated that they were learned, they could not have known the meaning of that star from their study of nature. God must therefore have revealed it to them directly.

It was not that silent star which showed them the way to Christ. Without the revelation of God's Word it would have remained a riddle even to the wise men. The Word, which they perhaps heard from God in a dream, that was the invisible guiding star which gave significance to the visible star. The Word drove the wise men to go into the land of the Jews and there seek for the new-born King of the Jews.

Since they as yet had no Word of God to show them where he was to be found, they went first of all to the capital of the country; there, where the temple with all its sacred things stood, there a king resided in his royal castle, and its Sanhedrin, the chief priest, and scribes had their headquarters; there, they supposed, and no where else the heir to the throne was to be sought.

However, only their own human thoughts had led the wise men here. In Jerusalem not only was nothing known about a new-born king but the whole city, instead of being filled with rejoicing, became frightened when it heard the news. Herod, however, then commanded all the scribes and chief priests to assemble in order to give an answer from Scripture where, according to the prophets, the expected King would have to be born. The answer was: in Bethlehem. For the Prophet Micah says, "And thou Bethlehem," etc., v.6. This prophetic word was the heavenly guiding star, which, after the earthly one had left them, now arose again. The wise men turned the eye of faith only to this bright star of God's Word; they followed it without asking whether Herod and his officers would go with them. They paid attention to nothing else, not even the world's attitude toward the new-born King. Without delay they hurried to that Bethlehem which had been indicated through the Word. Joy bubbled over in their heart, when they again saw the star, and they were filled with joy and astonishment when they saw it remain standing over a small stall. Quickly they entered in and saw the little Child from whose face beamed an inexpressible mildness coupled with divine majesty.

Who can describe their joy? There they heard from Mary what already had happened to this Child, how the angel announced his birth and given him the name Jesus, how the angel appeared to shepherds and the heavenly host sang their song of praise; when they heard that, they fell on their face and worshiped the wonderful Child.

There we have a wonderful example for those who want to find the true way to heaven and Christ Jesus in his manger. We men are all by nature just like the wise men; first of all, we live on earth in Arabia, that is, we seek our happiness in this world; like the wise men we search through the world and do not find the true treasure; we look up to heaven and do not find the true star; we continue securely on our way and do not know what belongs to our peace; no one seeks the one thing which is necessary, and so our heart clings to the things, joys, cares, and honor of this world.

When we meet great trouble in this world, when God's Law is preached in its sharpness and with its threats, that is done that we learn to understand God's grace: true happiness is not to be found in this world; we perceive that we are poor sinners who do not have a gracious God in heaven and in our present condition we cannot be saved. When we arrive at that point, God will cause his star to shine in the east so that we can no longer find rest in the world, go out with the wise men and call, "Where is he that is born," etc. Oh, happy is

the person who by God's grace has arrived at the point where the world no longer satisfies his heart! Blessed is he whom the gold, frankincense, and myrrh of this earthly Arabia no longer chains! Blessed is he in whom sin finally awakens so that his heart yearns for comfort, forgiveness of sins, and God's grace!

But what do most do in this condition of unrest? They go with the wise men to Jerusalem, try to help themselves, go all sorts of ways by themselves, try to calm themselves, seek to gain God's grace, whose lack they feel, by wrestling for it with their own works. They pray, they sigh, they struggle against sin, they want first to be free of them and pure before they dare come to God and comfort themselves with his grace.

But what happens then? They fall only the deeper into misery, grab hold of a thousand good intentions, and cannot keep them; thus as the wise men they lose also this star which awakened them from sleep and are recaptured by darkness. What is wrong? They do not have the correct guiding star. This is God's Word and particularly the Gospel. Many indeed find it as did the chief priests and scribes and hear it indeed as did Herod, but they do not cling to it with their heart, simply do not believe it, do not rely upon it completely; they sit indeed in the temple of the Lord, where the Gospel is preached, have Bethlehem right at their doors, but do not enter in.

Oh, my dear people, you who want to be saved, do not let Satan deceive you in regard to your salvation! Verily, it is not enough just to begin to leave your sinful life and the world; verily, it is not enough just to engage every day in pious exercises, in prayer and Bible reading; verily, it is not enough just to feel your sinful misery and to complain about it; if you have come no further, if you have not yet arrived in Bethlehem, if you are first with the wise men in Jerusalem, then the most important step still remains. Do you not see the bright star of the Gospel? does not every ray point only to Christ in Bethlehem? See, the most important thing is that you hear the certain and true, the precious and dear Word: Jesus Christ has come into the world!

If you seek in the least little thing another foundation for your soul, if you wish to add the least little thing to make yourselves certain, you go astray, you remain uncertain; you do not find Christ, you are lost. If the wise men had not wanted to go to Bethlehem according to Micah's word and though they had searched all the lands and seas, they would have searched in vain for the new-born King of the Jews, they would not have found him. And so it is to this very day. Though a person could shed all the tears of repentant sinners, though he could discover all the regret of all frightened sinners in the world, do all the holy works of all the saints, he would not come one step closer to eternal life if he would not consider all this as nothing and place his trust alone upon the Word of the Gospel which promises grace to sinners.

Yes, when a sinner has tired himself in running, tired himself doing his own works, tired himself by praying and wrestling, when finally he sees that all things just do not help nor are able to save him, when finally he stops, will no longer work by himself, despairs completely of himself, gives himself up to God's mercy and appeals alone to God's Word, in which grace is preached to all sinners, then the blessed moment comes when the sinner finally arrives in Bethlehem and falls down before the manger of his Jesus, wets the friendly Child with tears of joy, takes him into the arms of faith, and covers him with the kisses of his love.

Oh, how blessed is he who lets the Word be his guiding star; he most certainly finds Christ!

My friends, not only does the Word, the true guiding star on the way to

heaven, let us find Christ, but also by the Word are we kept with him, and may I speak of that now.

## II.

The moment the wise men believed the word of the Prophet Micah, they had already found Christ, even though physically they were not yet in Bethlehem. The moment they found Christ, they also experienced not a few offences by which they could easily have again lost Christ. They had come from afar; they expected to find a happy excitement in Jerusalem and lo! everyone was quiet. No one knew about the King, and when they bring news of him, everyone is dismayed. Indeed, they told them that the promised King of salvation would be born in Bethlehem but no one accompanied them.

What a struggle must have arisen in their hearts! Must not the thought have arisen, Perhaps we are deceived; would it be possible that the promised eternal King of the Jews would be born without his chosen people knowing something about it? above all, without those who are the priests of his temple and learned in the Holy Scriptures and their appointed exegetes having known him long ago and sworn allegiance to him? But how could they have averted these offences? Only by the Word. This was more certain to them than all of man's testimony; they clung to that even though they saw that everything else was fighting against it.

That, however, was not their last offence. Undoubtedly, they expected to see that the heir to the throne was a king's son, surrounded with all the splendor of an oriental prince, and yet they did not see that at all but only poverty and humility. A person could scarcely be found in more miserable, humble circumstances than the Child Jesus. What raised them above all these doubts? what could have moved them to fall down before this poverty-stricken Child and worship it? Verily, nothing else but God's Word which they locked securely in their hearts. Ever since this star had arisen in their hearts, all their wisdom became darkness; in the glory of this star the hut seemed to be the most splendid castle in the world. In its light they perceive in the lowly child the Lord of salvation.

My friends, as the wise men once came face to face with all kinds of offences the moment they found Christ, so even today do all sinners who seize Christ. They hear from God's Word that Christ is the Lord of all lords, the King of kings; yet what do they notice when they look about in the world? Simply that the mightiest, wisest, most important, greatest, and wealthiest of this world despise Christ, and that only a small, despised, and rejected flock of poor sinners confess him to be their Lord and King. Oh, how many have taken offence at the authority of Christ's foes, and thought, If the Gospel were true, the most learned would certainly perceive that and joyfully accept it. But we simple people, who are opposed to the great of this world and contradict all their wisdom, should we be able to say that we alone have the truth?

Now my dear sir, if you do not want these things to shipwreck your faith, then do as the wise men from the east did. Look away from all men for they are nothing before God, full of error and foolishness, and in God's eyes all their wisdom is nothing but folly. Look alone to the true star of heaven, God's precious Word which says to you, "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 naught things that are, that no flesh

should glory in his presence." 1 Cor 1:26-29. Therefore cling to Christ and pay no attention to the fact that you are despised in the world if you confess Christ. Don't pay any attention when you see that the little flock of believers is small; it must be that way that the Scriptures may be fulfilled. Let the chief priests and scribes, yes, all the wise of the world, reject the despised Savior of the world, but you humbly pray to him, throw yourself down before him, offer him the gold of faith, the frankincense of prayer, the bitter but precious myrrh of the tears of repentance; then you will also see him upon the throne of his eternal glory.

However, as with the wise men, so also with us, the greatest offence is not that so many reject Christ. Much greater and more difficult to conquer is the fact that Christ reveals himself to us as being so poor and weak. If we found Christ the first time, if we have arrived at the certainty: we also are his redeemed and chosen people, then in the beginning inexpressible joy streams through our heart which is supported by grace. We think that as long as we have Christ in our hearts, we will also enjoy the sweetest peace and the most active joy in the Holy Ghost.

But that is not so. The longer a person continues in faith in God's Word, the oftener he experiences how Christ, as it were, hides from him and appears to be weak and wretched. Then it often seems to Christians as though they did not stand in a covenant relation with the Lord of glory, as though they like the wise men stood doubtfully before a wretched hut in which lay a poor miserable Child who could not give them conquering power. In short, Christians often lose the feeling of divine grace, feel themselves so dead, weak, and wretched that to describe it is beyond their power.

How do they conquer this temptation? It is by the certain and sure Word, the Word of the God of heaven and earth which promises them salvation. This Word is more certain than all the feelings of their heart; this with its comfort remains unchangeable even though the star of their earthly fortune does change; that is always their light no matter how dark it is in their souls; their faith therefore says, Though it may be dark within me, I look to the shining star of the Word which does not mislead us; though I may think I am weak, yes, dead, I grasp the Word which is alive and powerful; it brings Christ to my heart and no devil will take it away from me.

Oh, then, all of you learn this main skill of true Christians to cling alone to the Word. This is a lamp to our feet and the only true light on our way to heaven. We have a sure prophetic word, etc. Learn to recognize the tricks of the devil, who seeks nothing more than to draw us away from the Word; for he knows that if we leave it he has won, we are lost. If we do not rely entirely upon the Word, our faith does not help us at all, for then it is not a true faith; then all our praying, sighings, and doings do not help in the least; yes, then we are without Christ who lets himself be found only in his Word.

Luther speaks the truth when he says about our Gospel, "Man's nature wants to feel and be certain before it believes; grace wants to believe before it feels." Then, in conclusion say with me, I will trust without feeling until the time comes to see him. Amen.

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# 1st SUNDAY after EPIPHANY

Luke 2:41-52

The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the heavenly Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.  
Beloved in Christ Jesus.

The most beautiful time of our life is without a doubt the time of our childhood and youth. As spring with its fragrant flowers and buds and with the rays of the sun still mild is the loveliest of our seasons, so childhood and youth is the most beautiful of all the stages of life which we enter upon in this world.

Even God's Word testifies clearly to this. When, for example, a most glorious blessing is to be pronounced upon the house of Asher, we read, "Let your old age be as your youth." Dt 33:25 (German) Yes, Solomon says, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Eccl 12:1. According to this passage in comparison with the time of youth, the days and years of adulthood are evil days and years in which we have no pleasure.

Standing at the midday or eventide of life, who of us, convinced by his own experiences, must not say yes in agreement? Where is there a father or mother, a gray head or an elderly woman, all of whom do not cry out from their heart, Oh days of my childhood and youth, you have flown away from me like a clear brook! Golden time of life! Oh, that you would return once more!

And that we all look back with such wistfulness at our childhood which disappeared so swiftly does not in the least rest upon deception. For Christians and nonchristians this life actually does become more earnest with every passing year, and the path which we travel toward eternity actually does become narrower, steeper, and more covered with thorns with every step, until we arrive at the dark gates of death.

How childhood and youth are to be preferred to any other time of life, when one need not drag so many burdensome cares but can look with carefree joy into the future! What an advantage it is that the hearts of children and particularly of the youth are not yet stirred by such great wishes, that they are not yet so insatiable and can also be made happy and content with something small! The greatest advantage, however, which childhood and youth has over adulthood is that it is much easier to serve the Lord in the early than in later years. Young hearts are like a field which has not yet been so firmly packed by evil habits and in which not so many thorns and thistles of sin have taken firm root as in an old heart. Youthful minds are still easily prompted to wholesome fear by threats and to wholesome emotions by wonderful enticements. Children, young men, and young women also have a trustworthy memory which retains what it learned from God's Word, and a lively imagination to grasp that which is taught, whilst adults must only too often complain of the loss of a trustworthy memory and a lively comprehension. In addition, so much time is given us particularly in early youth to be busy in God's Word and to acquire important knowledge for eternity, such as we never again have later on. Moreover, if adults wish to go the narrow way of faith and piety, they immediately bring upon themselves the mockery and hatred of many, yes, even of their own house; on the other hand, a pious child can not be hated so easily even by the godless; it enjoys the favor of God and men. Finally, children and especially young children are not only the special attention of the holy angels who particularly are to serve them, but

Christ himself bears a most tender concern about them as his tender lambs; he therefore not only said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God;" Mk 10:14; but he has also pronounced the most terrible woe especially upon those who offend the youth and poison and seduce their precious souls, which he has made into his temples in Baptism.

Oh, how blessed is therefore he who complies with Solomon's exhortation, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth!" He who has made the best use of his youth has a great treasure for the evil days and is also well supplied for the years which do not please him. He is like a tree planted early by the rivers of water, which brings forth his fruit in his season, and his leaves do not wither, and whatsoever he does prospers. Alas, however, great and irreplaceable is the loss of those who have wasted and lost the most beautiful time of their life. Oh, if only they would at least look back with true regret upon the lost, golden morning hours of their short life, be converted by God's grace, and, what Christ demands of all who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven, again become children! That this may happen in us, let us now cast a glance at Christ's holy youth and use it to compare our own with it.

The text. Luke 2:41-52.

Since the last great festival of Christ's birth we have considered him only in his childhood; the Gospel just read contains that which God caused to be recorded in his Holy Word also about Christ's youth. Upon the basis of this important portion of the holy story let me therefore show you:

#### HOW IMPORTANT THE GLANCE AT CHRIST'S YOUTH IS WHEN WE REMEMBER OUR OWN

It is

- I. A Glance Summoning us to Repentance when we Duly Compare Christ's Pious Youth with our own, and
- II. A Comforting Glance, if in Repentance and Faith we Ponder the Gracious Purpose of Christ's Youth.

Lord Jesus, Son of God! You have also lived through the time of youth in order that we might have in you the picture of a youth truly sanctified by God and also a sympathetic High Priest for the sins of our youth. We therefore beseech you, let us not only in your most holy example truly, shamefully, and remorsefully perceive how far removed we were from our God even in our youth and how reprehensible we were in your eyes because of our most corrupt heart, but if we are bowed and broken over it, oh, then also inscribe into our wretched hearts the comfort that you are a Savior also for our sinful and damnable childhood and youth. Grant us this faith, through this faith grant us peace of heart, through this faith renew us here and make us eternally blessed in heaven. Amen.

#### I.

It is a unique, amazing picture of Christ's pious youth, of which we catch a glance in our today's Gospel.

In general we hear first, that even though the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Christ, he was completely like us men not only by his human birth but also in his entire childhood and youth, with the exception of sin. For at the close of our Gospel we read, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and

stature, and in favor with God and man." V.52. Oh, what a miracle! He who was the Father of eternities, now counts his existence in earthly, transient days and years, and grew in age, went through all the steps of the long human period of growth and development of our nature, learned as we did first to sit, stand, walk, stammer, and speak; he spake as a child, played as a child, was happy as a child, and wept like a child, only without sin. He in whom lay hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge concealed even the divine light which was imparted to his human nature, and therefore daily increased in wisdom and knowledge as we do. He, the Son of God, in whom God had pleasure from eternity, earned for himself also as a human child ever greater favor by the graciousness of all his attitudes, words, and deeds, ever greater favor with God and men.

Beside this general description of Christ's youth, the Evangelist Luke, moved by the Holy Ghost, has preserved a special incident from it in our text. He relates that Christ's parents were according to the Law accustomed to go to Jerusalem every year for the Easter festival. Before Christ has reached his twelfth year, perhaps from fear of King Archelaus the son of Herod, they seem not to have taken him along; however, when the lad was twelve years old, they asked him to go with them into the Holy City to celebrate this great festival. And behold! even though Jerusalem was a good three days' travel time away from Nazareth and led over the steep mountains of Gilboa, Eval, and Ephraim, the heavenly Child willingly made this difficult trip with Mary and Joseph by foot. They arrived at the great city; though the splendor and the huge, colorful crowd of people of this gathering place of all the Jews was so new to the young lad, this could not occupy his heavenly-minded heart; only the temple, where his heavenly Father had promised to be present in grace, and where his holy Word was read and preached, was the place where this divine Child looked for his festival joy.

What happened? The festival ended, and Mary and Joseph began the return to Nazareth without knowing that the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem. When he was not in their company, they thought he had already gone ahead with relatives with whom they intended to gather again at the first inn as agreed. But when they arrived there, no one knew a thing of the child. What a message of terror this must have been for Mary! how painfully her conscience must have reproached her, that she had so indifferently and carelessly let this Child, whose careful preservation had been so earnestly commanded in the flight to Egypt and the return to Judea, out of her sight and care! Oh, she must have thought, perhaps the child has fallen into the hands of his persecutors; perhaps dragged away into a foreign land; perhaps even murdered. And I, I am at fault that the whole world has lost its Savior. Oh, great, terrible guilt and sin! How can I stand before God who will demand this Child from your hands? For her these were days of the bitterest tears, and already during this time the prophecy of old Simeon was partly fulfilled, "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also!"

Finally, after three days of tears and lamentation the parents find the Child in the temple. And what a sight! He sits in the midst of the teachers. He, to whom all men and angels should listen, listens to poor men capable of error; he who is mighty in counsel, whom all the world should ask for wisdom, asks them. However, his questions are only the kind which Wisdom itself could ask, for "all that heard him," we read, "were astonished at his understanding and answers." However, Mary could not contain herself; she had to interrupt this important discussion; in tears she therefore said to Jesus, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought they sorrowing." This was a reproach which Mary dared make in her bewilderment. Jesus was not displeased with this reproach but in holy, earnest friendliness he parried it with the words, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" V.49. Christ means to say: You speak of a

Father who has sought me? Do you not know who my Father is? And do you not know what a day's work he has laid upon me? Have you forgotten what the shepherds, the wise men from the east, Simeon, Anna have testified of me?

But what happened then? We read, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." What this means, "he was subject unto them," we see when later his enemies say, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?" Mt 13:54.55. Hence he whom legions of angels are ready to serve humbles himself until he is obedient to poor humans; he, to whose will all creatures are subject, subjects his will to two sinners; he, who founded the earth and built the firmament, as a humble son of man uses an adze and, building huts for men, ate his bread with us in the sweat of his face!

See, this is only a fleeting glance from Christ's holy youth, and oh, what purity, what innocence, what humility, what obedience toward God and man, what a holy craving for knowledge, what zeal in fulfilling his heavenly calling, what love for his Father's Word, what complete sacrifice in the service of the Lord we find there!

When we honestly compare our own youth with his, should not the glance at Christ's youth be most shaming, reprimanding, and humbling for us all?

Are there not many of us who have grown up in the many known sins of which frivolous youth is capable? in disobedience to one's parents, in contempt of their training and exhortation, in deceitfulness, in fondness of dainties and secret theft, in laziness and loafing, in vanity and shameful fleshly lusts, in stubbornness, quarrelsomeness, bickering, and envy?

Or if God, on the other hand, has preserved others from such gross sins and vices of youth, so that they did not become like the prodigal son upon whose conscience the countless groans and tears of worried parents lay heavily, have they not perhaps grown up anyhow without true fear of God, without true love to Jesus, and without being obedient to the impulse of the Holy Spirit?

Finally, you who indeed have not lived in open godlessness during your youth but your youthful heart was not sacrificed to the Lord, have not lived in God's continual presence, nor loved God's Word and Christ's grace above all things, nor prayed diligently and ardently, have rather lost from your heart the Spirit of grace poured out over you in Holy Baptism and have lived disregarding and forgetting God, have you also not wasted and lost your youth and sacrificed it to the world and the devil instead of to God? And as children, have you not perhaps often detected the feeling and enticements of God's grace in your hearts which caused the intention of seeking the Lord to arise and you nevertheless remained in your youthful frivolity which forgets about God?

My friends, if there actually are some of us who have sought God from their heart even as children, and with Abel, Samuel, Josiah, and others have served him early, who therefore can also say with David, "Thou art my hope, O Lord God; thou art my trust from my youth.... O God, thou hast taught me from my youth," Ps 71:5.17, must you nevertheless not sigh with the same pious David, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions"? Ps 25:7. Who of us can say that what God's Word testifies was not fulfilled in him, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"? Gen 8:21. Who of us has kept his baptismal covenant by which he completely denied the devil together with all his works and all his ways? Who of us can say that he has with true, steadfast faithfulness fulfilled the promise of serving God alone made perhaps with tears at his confirmation? Who of us must not lament, that from his youth his heart was evil and has overflowed as a fount of sin into countless evil

thoughts, words, and deeds? Who of us must not confess that in the conflict with the flesh, the world, and the devil he has not escaped without many and deep wounds to his conscience? Who does not bear in his soul the one or the other secret stain of a youthful sin so that, when great trouble descends, he must indeed think with Job, "Thou dost want to kill me for the sake of the sins of my youth" (Luther)? Job 13:26.

Alas, it is only too plain, that most who now serve the Lord have not sought and found him in their youth but later on and have robbed their Creator of their most beautiful time of life! It is only too certain that today all of us can look at the holy lad Jesus with nothing but deep shame, when in spirit we place ourselves alongside him in the time when we were still children, young men, and young women.

## II.

My friends, this glance at Christ's holy youth is not only a source of shame, but is secondly, also most comforting, if we in remorse and faith ponder the gracious purpose of Christ's youth.

Christ did not come into the world and become a man for his own sake, nor was he a lad and young man for the same reason. Through the youthful holiness and piety which he willingly offered his God he has atoned for the sins of our youth before God; through his willing obedience toward God and men as a lad, especially toward his poor parents, he has also atoned for our youthful disobedience, our stubbornness and childish spite; by his amazing humility as a child he atoned for our childish vanity; by his zeal in hearing God's Word and in the service of the Lord he has atoned for our early, worldly mind and our early reluctance and lukewarmness for spiritual and heavenly things. In short, what none of us was, that the Son of God became, namely a perfectly pure, chaste, holy child and youth, so that in him we would also have one who wipes out the sins of our youth and a Savior also for the time when we as children, young men, and young women either completely or partly turned away from God.

Now for you who are not reminded of the sins of your youth with sorrowing heart, you who either are simply not converted from them or who once were turned by God's grace but have again fallen back and therefore feel no regret over the past; you who are without horror over your former life, without true fear and love of Christ; who even tell wicked stories with laughing and joking of how you disgraced the time of your youth; who frivolously say, Youth has no virtues; who excuse yourselves by claiming that one cannot demand that young people serve God as earnestly as adults; who think that it is self-understood that God forgives that evil which one has done as an unwise child or as a frivolous youth, you naturally find no comfort in Christ's holy youth but as yet it only reprimands and shames you. Conscious of your guilt learn first of all to fall down before this holy picture and perceive what an abomination you were to God in your youth, when in this most beautiful period of your life you did not seek him and served not him but your vain will and the lusts of your flesh; first learn to lament remorsefully to God over your early apostacy and honestly cry to him for forgiveness, otherwise your present sins as well as the sins of your youth lie upon you to your eternal damnation. For if you think frivolously of the sins of your youth you still think frivolously of all sins; then God is not at work in you, then you are not directed by the Holy Spirit, then you still lie secure and dead under the dominion of your sins, and if you are not awakened and truly repent you will certainly be lost as certainly as God's Word is the truth and his threats are no joke. Bear this well in mind: You have now been warned; the responsibility now rests upon you, your blood is now on your own head.

But you who have in spirit bowed before God and said within your heart, whenever you thought of your youth, "Oh, Lord, do not charge my follies to my account! Remember not the sins of my youth! I remember them with sadness, but I want to turn my countenance from them and cast them behind me, and let me hear the sweet word, Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee; you humbled and sorrowing people: Look at the Child Jesus; by the holiness of his youth he has given God what you have denied him, and by the toil of his youth atoned what your youth has become guilty of; therefore, before God appeal to the Father and ask him to forgive your early fall from him for the sake of this innocent youth and accept your late return and love to him; then God will also have mercy on you, forgive also the sins of your youth for the sake of this Child, and graciously accept you as though you had zealously served him from your youth on in pure holiness and innocence as Jesus did.

If you have found comfort in Christ for the sins of your youth, then by his grace seek also to follow him and be more and more transformed into his holy image. Even if you are already a father or mother be converted and become children again; that is, walk constantly after the example of the kind child Jesus in childlike confidence, love, and faithfulness in the presence of your heavenly Father. Even if here on earth you can never become like Christ in holiness, struggle that much the more zealously by his grace against all sin, indolence, and frivolity, and hold him fast in the faith until you will some day see him in person, when he will celebrate with his own the eternal Easter festival in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.

## 2nd SUNDAY after EPIPHANY John 2:1-11

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In this same Savior, dear Christian friends!

Everyone knows by nature that there is a God; the whole world is an open book in which is legibly written: There is a God! And in the conscience of every person this great word re-echoes loudly and clearly. But God's nature, and especially, how he is minded toward us men, neither heaven, nor earth, nor the voice of conscience can accurately tell man. Without God's revelation man continually wavers back and forth from this conception to that.

If a person prospers, if he looks up to the heavens with a happy heart and there sees how the sun, moon, and stars shine with a friendly radiance upon the earth and the clouds pour down blessings, if everywhere he sees nature laughing and bursting with blessings, then even the natural man will exclaim with shouts of joy, Oh, a good, a friendly God must have created this world and, enthroned above the stars, must lovingly preserve and rule it!

If, on the other hand, a person fares badly, and if he looks up to the heavens with a trembling heart and sees it beclouded, if he sees lightning flash out of pitch black clouds to spread death and destruction, if he hears the wrathful thunder roll over his head and sees hail and flood wipe out the hopes of a whole year in a few seconds; or, if he has vainly groaned a long time for help in sickness, pain, hunger, and nakedness; or, if he sees war, famine, and pestilence striding over the earth like evil angels and entire nations in misery under their heel, then the natural man can no longer exclaim,

"God is love!" His angry heart the rather says, God must be an obscure Being, whose heart knows no mercy; he has made a huge altar out of the world upon which he sacrifices the happiness and tears of men. By nature man, therefore, believes either that God is a God of love without wrath, or a God of wrath without love.

The first thought is especially common in our day. The rationalists and apostles of a so-called enlightenment, who have gained the upper hand especially among our German people, nowadays preach from Christian pulpits, that that is the teaching which Christ has brought. During the times of the Old Testament God was viewed as a wrathful Jehovah; that is the way Moses and all the prophets preached about him; but Christ has come and brought the fearful world the message that God is not angry, that he is eternal love itself, that he is the gracious Father of all men, and that without exception all are his beloved children; God can and will do evil to no one nor dare and should anyone fear him.

Of course, he who does not yet know that he is a sinner, or who does not know what sin is, who has not yet discovered its sting in his conscience believes this doctrine of God. But if it becomes clear to a person that he is a creature who has fallen from God, if it becomes clear to him that he has offended the Most High God with his sins and turned Him into an enemy; if his conscience awakens, if his heart says, What have you done? You have not kept God's commandments! Your whole life so far is worthy of being rejected, for you did not serve God but the world, yourself, yes, God's enemy. God will and must now punish you; he has threatened death and damnation for all transgressors; these threats will not be executed upon you; God can and will not accept you, but -- reject, condemn, ah, then all thoughts that God is love wither in man's heart like green leaves in a roaring furnace; he dares not trustfully approach God, but he would flee if he could in order to hide in the most distant corner of creation.

You see, my friends, how necessary it is that God reveals himself to man! And how blessed we are; he has revealed himself to us. Not only in the Old Testament did he have it preached that he is "not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee," Ps 5:5, but even Christ himself says of him, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Mt 10:28b; even Christ's messengers speak of a wrathful God; they say, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom 1:18. But at the same time God has also revealed: the sinner who is terrified at his wrath, who perceives that on account of his sins the holy God is a consuming fire, should only flee to Christ, the only begotten Son of God; in this Person God is manifest in the flesh; but in this man God does not want to be an angry God any more; in this man everyone should find a gracious God; in this man no other fire burns but the fire of the eternal love of God toward all sinners; in him there has not appeared the wrath but the grace, the mercy, the kindness of God.

Oh, happy are they all who, when they seek God, seek him in no one else but in Christ and draw near to God in no one else but in Christ, for in Christ God meets us first as a friendly child, then as a friendly lad, and finally as a kind Helper in all trouble. This is the picture we have of him in our today's Gospel; in this form let us now meditate upon him.

The text. John 2:1 - 11.

My friends, we we wanted actual proof that the Apostle Paul in his Letter to Titus accurately describes Christ's appearance in the words, "But after that

the kindness and love of God our Savior," Tit 3:4 we find it, as one might say, clearly pictured in our today's Gospel. Permit me therefore to speak to you about

THE KINDNESS WHICH CHRIST REVEALED AT THE WEDDING OF CANA.

- I. How and Why Christ Revealed it there, and
- II. How we are to Apply this Revelation.

Lord God our Father! To know you and Jesus Christ whom you have sent is life eternal. We therefore beseech you, open the eyes of our spirit, so that we may not remain blind, as we are by nature but be filled with your knowledge and grow in it until we see you face to face in heaven. Let us particularly during this hour gaze joyfully upon the friendly picture of your only begotten Son in the mirror of your Word and thereby be aroused to faith in and love toward him. Hear us for the sake of our Lord and Savior. Amen.

I.

Our Gospel begins with the words, "And the third day;" these words refer directly to the events preceding our text. There we are told that shortly after Christ's first public appearance in Judea Nathanael, this Israelite in whom there was no guile, came to Christ one day and through a proof of the omniscience of Christ was brought to faith in him. When Nathanael in amazement exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel," Jn 2:49, Jesus replied, "Thou shalt see greater things than these."

So we find Christ three days later in Cana of Galilee. Nathanael, a native of this city, may have asked Christ and the other disciples he had assembled to go with him, and Christ had granted him his request. When it was known in Cana that Christ had arrived in the city with his disciples, and since at this time a wedding was being celebrated as it seems among the poor relatives of the mother of the Lord (for she had arrived here beforehand), "Both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage." And what did Jesus do? He accepted the invitation and actually appeared with his disciples.

If we knew nothing of the other important events which happened at this wedding, tell me, would we not have cause enough to be amazed at the kindness which the Son of God revealed by going to a wedding with his disciples, just when he is entering upon his teaching career? For, for what other reason can this have occurred but to reveal his kindness? Or did Christ come to enjoy himself at this poor wedding? Absolutely not! Was he not the Son of God, who himself is the fount of all joy, with whom is fullness of joy and pleasures at his right hand forever more? If he had wanted to make himself happy, he would not have left heaven, the place of joy. We read expressly about him, "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." 2 Cor 8:9; and in another passage, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." Heb 12:2. This much is certain: Christ went with his disciples to the wedding at Cana not to enjoy himself but to reveal his kindness to men.

But why did Christ chose this means for revealing his kindness? Christ could indeed have thought: What would the Pharisees say? Would not they and all pious Jews be offended that I, who want to be such a holy person, the most holy Messiah who was foretold by the prophets, join in in the temporal joys of a wedding? Christ could also have thought: What will the rich and eminent of the country say when they see me sit at the banquet table of poor people? Will that not arouse disdainful thoughts in them about me? Again, Christ could have

thought, that his disciples were novices; he would not dare to lead them to a place of joy; he must rather train them to practice repentance especially and lay a deep foundation for their Christianity through prayer and wrestlings. And finally, Christ could have thought, since he had just now entered upon his public teaching and had set aside only three short years to carry it out, he would not dare to spend his precious time at a wedding celebration; he had much more important things to do; he would rather hunt up the sorrowing, the miserable, the tempted, the sick and the dying, and the like.

As natural as we find such thoughts, and as certain as Christ himself must also have thought of them, he nevertheless was not deterred by these human thoughts from accepting the invitation. Why? That is not difficult to guess. For, is it not true, that had Christ done only such works which revealed his great holiness; had he busied himself only with spiritual, pious exercises; had he associated only with saints; had he fled from every worldly or merely every happy association and with fasting and prayer had lived day and night only in the temple or in the desert; had he cultivated no other relation with his disciples and other people than preaching God's Word to them and kneeling in prayer with them, who would then have dared to approach him? what sinner would have then trusted him? Would not everyone, whose conscience convicted him of his sinfulness, have been afraid of Christ as of a holy, great Being? And what idea would men have received of the type of Christian faith, the mind, life, and walk which Christ demanded? Would not everyone have thought that whoever would want to become a disciple of Christ, must take the heaviest burden and the most oppressive yoke upon himself and live a life of the spirituality of the angels, a life of continual bitter work, torment, anxiety, and sorrow? that all occupation with earthly things is something unchristian, a stain upon the soul? above all that all earthly joy is something sinful, something which arouses God's anger?

See, by going to celebrate a wedding in such gracious friendliness, Christ revealed himself, first of all, to entice all men, and even the greatest sinner, to come to him, and to show that the yoke which he lays upon his followers is easy, that the burden which he has them bear is light, that the Christian faith is not something sorrowful, nor a bitter service, nor a monastic, surly, hostile life but something easy, lovely, happy, blessed. Oh, what a faithful Savior, who would attend a wedding of a poverty-stricken couple just to encourage sinners to come to him!

However, our Gospel tells us not only that Christ accepted this invitation with his disciples; we also hear, when in a short time they lacked wine because of the number of unexpected guests, that the mother of the Lord noticed the embarrassment of the bridal couple and secretly whispered to Christ, "They have no wine." Mary, who had thought deeply upon all the words which had been uttered about her Son by the angel, the shepherds, the prophets Simeon and Anna, and Christ himself, knew right well that it would require only one word from Christ to supply the lack. Yet in human weakness she prematurely reminded Christ; so he answered her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Here Christ shows that not even his mother has a voice in the execution of his office. Yet Mary in deep humility accepted this rebuff, did not lose her faith that Christ in love would help, and therefore said to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

What happened? There were six big waterpots of stone, so that one could wash before and after the meal according to the Jewish law. Christ commanded that the pots be filled with water; the servants obeyed. He then commanded, "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast." They brought it. In amazement the governor noticed that the contents of the cup is the most tasty wine; he therefore called the bridegroom and said, "Every man AT THE BEGINNING

doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk," that is, when the guests have had their sense of taste blunted, "then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Christ purposely did not do the miracle immediately when the need was felt; first of all, the guests had to clearly notice that the wine was actually all gone. Who therefore can picture the amazement of the guests and particularly the disciples, when they saw and tasted what a glorious miracle Christ did in this hour! That is why we read, "And his disciples believed on him." This is to indicate that although before this the disciples had had a weak faith in Christ, it still was very weak; but now when that was fulfilled what Christ had told Nathanael three days before, "But thou shalt see greater things than these," their faith now first became truly bright and strong in their hearts.

We read that thus Christ manifested his glory. This glory consisted not only in the divine power but also and above all in the wonderful kindness which Christ manifested. For is this not true my dear hearers: What a kind heart Christ must have wanted to disclose to us, that he not only went to the wedding, but that he also crowned it with a miracle, that there he performed the first of his miracles, that he relieved a want with his glorious miracle which is scarcely called a want, and that he did just such a miracle, turning water into wine, by which he refreshed the guests and indeed made so much wine that the young couple could be refreshed by it for a whole year? Who dare doubt that Jesus must be a kind Savior whose heart burns and moves with love toward men, whose desire it is to make us happy here and save us in eternity, who is ready to empty the bitter cup of tears for us and to refresh us with the sweetest wines of joy and salvation? When we hear this today, would we not like to sing as though at the manger of the Christ-child:

He serves that I a lord may be;  
A great exchange indeed!  
Could Jesus' love do more for me  
To help me in my need? (105,7)

## II.

Let us now in the second place therefore ponder how we are to apply this revelation of Christ's kindness.

First of all, the correct application of his revelation consists in not being deterred from going to Christ by the feeling of our sinfulness. For if we consider Christ to be a "hard man," who as that servant says, "takest up that you layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow," Lk 19:21; if we consider Christ to be a foe of sinners who came to judge and condemn sinners; if we believe that Christ could reject a sinner or let him depart heavy laden, we make a false Christ for ourselves; all such thoughts are contradicted by Christ's behavior in Cana and are condemned and rejected as godless thoughts, which our heart has made for itself about Christ or which Satan puts into our head.

Therefore, you who would gladly be saved, who do not trust yourself to go to Christ because of your sins, because of your apostacy, because of your unfaithfulness of which you have made yourself guilty until this hour; you who always think that Christ wants to know nothing about you, look at Christ; see how he sits in the midst of poor sinners; see how he even crowns their wedding with a miracle; see the rays of pure love and kindness which he lets shine; give your heart to this kind Savior, believe in him, confidently join his disciples, yes, just try and you will know: he will most certainly not reject you in an unfriendly manner and he will certainly also give you the sweet wine of his comfort.

There are, however, those sinners who are not detained by fear of Christ but a fear of Christianity from saying farewell to the world and becoming true Christians. They think, whoever is to forsake the world, become Christ's disciple, and enjoy nothing in this world but the joy in the Gospel and the hope of eternal life, must also say farewell to all joy; he must become an unhappy person and pine away his short life in sorrow.

If perhaps such are here who have similar thoughts about Christianity, I ask them, Who has awakened such conceptions of true Christianity in you? Do you want to judge the Christian faith according to those who wilfully turn it into a continuous worry, anxiety, work, and sorrow? You do not find this picture in God's Word. Look at Christ in our today's Gospel; see the friendly way he associates with people; he shows you that he did not come to put mankind into a sorrowful, depressed state but to refresh them and give them a joy and peace of heart which you do not find in the world and its joys and wealth. As long as a person goes his own way, so long he has not actually come to Christ and so long he wishes to divide his heart between Christ and the world, so long the Christian faith is a wretched, dismal thing; he has no rest, no peace, no certainty, no joy, no living hope, no blessed communion with Christ, but continual grief and fretfulness, a running and chasing for an uncertain goal, a constant wrestling and struggling and shadow-boxing.

But if he turns straight to Christ and takes comfort in him, and trusts his Word in spite of his heart, the world, and Satan, he becomes a happy Christian who considers himself more happy in distress than the most happy person can imagine himself to be in his good days. Therefore you who in the past have been afraid of the Christian faith, let Christ's kindness entice you to come to him and you will know what he himself says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Mt 11:30.

Moreover, this also is a part of the correct application of the kindness which Christ manifested in Cana; a Christian is not to despair in any distress even if Christ answers his first prayer for help with a, "Man, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Did you Christians not hear how Christ devised means even in the insignificant difficulty when they lacked wine at the wedding by a glorious miracle? Can you now believe that Christ will not hear your prayer when perhaps in greater distress you cry to him? Oh, do not listen to your heart which wants to doubt Christ's love in the hour of trouble when help does not come right away. Do not immediately think that Christ will forsake you in trouble because of your sins. Verily, he does not do that. He is a friend of sinners. If he delays his help, he want to test your faith, your patience, and your love to him. Therefore follow Mary and you will not go astray in respect to Christ. Even though you must first fill a large measure with tears to the very brim: when Christ's hour strikes, your tears will be turned into the wine of the most blessed joy. He himself explains it thus to his disciples in another passage when he says to them, "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Jn 16:20.

Finally, my friends, since Christ our Lord has manifested himself to be so kind, let us remember that he has in so doing left us an example, that we should follow in his footsteps. If we want to be disciples of this kind Savior, let us therefore also show it by our deeds; let us then walk so that the world sees that we are not the enemies of men and that the Christian faith is not something gloomy and sad; let us walk as it becomes happy and blessed Christians, kind toward everyone in heart, in attitude, and in words and deeds. May the word of the apostle be written over our countenance, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." 2 Cor 6:10. Amen.

## 3rd SUNDAY after EPIPHANY Mt 8:1-13

The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Surely there are few people, who, if they still believe in a heaven and a hell, do not believe that they will some day enter heaven. But if one asks them upon what they base their belief and why they cherish such a hope, most answer the question in such a way that one clearly sees: their faith is without foundation; it is nothing but an empty conceit which will some day deceive them.

How do most answer the question: Why do you believe that you will be saved? The one says: I believe it because God is good; he is a loving heavenly Father who certainly will not be so stern and cruel as to reject and condemn me forever. But whoever hopes to be saved for such a reason builds his faith upon the hope that God has only the attribute of love but not that of righteousness; hence, he builds upon sand; his faith is an empty conceit; but he will awaken too late for God is righteous as well as loving.

Another says, I know very well that God is not merely a loving God but also a righteous and holy God; I believe that I will be saved because he has shown me from my youth on that he loves me and has been gracious to me. I have often prayed to God in trouble and he has heard my prayer; he has blessed me in temporal things; I see how God has caused my affairs to prosper. From this I clearly see: God must love me; why should I doubt my salvation? Whoever hopes to be saved for this reason builds his faith on the idea that God must be pleased with those to whom he has shown many mercies; he also builds upon sand. For God has not only commanded us to do good even to our enemies, but he does that himself. "He is kind," says Christ, "unto the unthankful and to the evil." Lk 6:35c. So, far be it, that evidences of God's goodness always reveal that God takes delight in a man; in the case of most men they are rather simply enticements to repent; for the apostle says this, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Rom 2:4.

Still another says, We indeed know that if a person lives in sin, he does not have God's grace, even though like the rich man in the Gospel he is overwhelmed with divine blessings and supposes he is sitting in God's lap; we therefore believe that we will be saved because, thank God, we are not conscious of gross sins as other godless people are; as much as has been in our weak power to do so, we have lived piously and uprightly from our youth on; no one can speak evil of us; yes, we all are sinners: if God would want to condemn all those who have sins of weakness, as we have, no one would be saved. Whoever hopes to be saved for such reasons builds his faith on the fact that God cannot punish insignificant sins and that God sees no more sins in him than he sees in himself; he also builds upon sand for in God's eyes all sins are great sins, and where we see no sin God's eyes which pierce our heart see a thousand. We therefore read that the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers," and the like, did not go down to his house justified; with all his respectability, uprightness, and piety he was condemned.

Others perceive that one cannot be saved that way. They therefore say, I know right well, that I cannot enter heaven by my own piety, and that God must punish also my failings and weaknesses; but I have already endured so many crosses, troubles, and distresses in this world; my God has already severely punished me here for my sins with much sickness, with pains, with poverty and let me atone for them; alas, I have had few days of joy in this life! and so I think that in the world to come I will be better off. Anyone who hopes to be saved for such reasons also builds his faith upon sand; for even if a person would not have one happy hour in a span of 100 years, he could not atone for a single sin for God has fixed death, temporal and eternal death, as the price for sin. Therefore, whoever builds upon the atonement of his sins cannot atone for them here but must atone for them forever in eternity.

Thank God, my friends, there are those who say that they base their hope of salvation not merely upon God's love, nor upon the blessings they have enjoyed here, nor upon their respectability, nor upon their sufferings here in this world, but they hope to be saved alone through Christ. Now although this answer is better, yet a person cannot suppose that he actually believes in Christ while actually the basis of his faith is something entirely different. If you ask an enthusiast of our days, who definitely has a false faith, how he wants to be saved, he also will tell you, Through Christ. But one must not be deceived; for only he has the true faith in Christ who bases it upon the word. That is the subject, etc.

The text. Matthew 8: 1-13.

On the basis of this Gospel may I present to you that

ONLY THAT IS THE TRUE FAITH WHICH CLINGS ALONE TO THE WORD

for

- I. Only Such a Faith has the Correct Foundation, and
- II. Only Such a Faith Produces the Correct Fruit.

I.

In our today's Gospel we find two examples of a faith which is endorsed by its success, yes, in part admired and praised by Christ himself as an example of faith. In these examples we can therefore learn to know the true faith which definitely will not deceive a person.

Upon what do the two believers in our text base their faith? to what did they cling? First of all, what about the leper? We read that he worshiped Christ and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." At first glance it seems as if the leper had absolutely no faith in Christ but only doubt and mistrust. But it only seems so. We must remember that the leper did not ask for grace, nor for the forgiveness of sins, nor for the salvation of his soul, but for the temporal blessing of health. The leper knew very well that God sent sickness to many to save them; he, therefore, thought that his leprosy was necessary for his salvation. To ask unconditionally for healing he considered presumptuousness; he indeed prayed for help for his body but with the condition if Christ willed it, that is, if it would not be against Christ's gracious will. He wants to say that Christ knew better whether sickness or health was good for him; he left the fulfilment of his petition up to Christ's will; yet the leper was certain that if Christ wanted to, he could cleanse him. My friends, what did the leper want from Christ? upon what did he base his faith, including also

the hope for help? It was Christ's express Word and promise. Until Christ really did say, "I will; be thou clean," the leper did not expect to be healed; first he wanted to hear the word and he would be satisfied.

Now what was the nature of the Centurion's faith? He also prayed for a temporal blessing. What did he wish for in order to be certain of help? As we learn from the report of the Evangelist Luke, he sent someone to ask Christ, "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." When Christ immediately replied, "I will come and heal him," how did he have Christ answered? This way, "Lord, I am not worthy thou thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." V.8 You see, the Centurion did not ask Christ for a sign, perhaps lay his hand upon the sick servant, or something similar as others often did; yes, he did not even expect Christ to come into his house; Christ should speak only one Word; he asked for nothing more; that and nothing else is the foundation upon which he built his faith, and he clung so firmly to this, that nothing, not even Christ being absent, could shake him in his faith.

Yes, he also clearly told Christ why he relied so firmly upon his word and continued, "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." V.9. The centurion means to say, My word is merely the word of a man, and yet it actually accomplishes that what I say to those who are under me; how dare I doubt that it would happen if you utter your omnipotent Word? I am a man, you are God's Son; not only men but also all the powers of heaven and earth are at your command; one can rely upon your Word; you merely have to say one word and sickness, death, and the devil must quickly leave. "You speak, and it is done; you command, and it stands fast." Ps 33:9.

In order that we may not doubt that this was the true faith such as Christ wants it to be, we are told in our Gospel, "When Jesus heard it, he marveled, 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." Vv.1-13.

If on the basis of this we examine the faith of those who say that they also will be saved through faith in Christ, we will, sad to say, soon find that only too many without suspecting it do not have the true faith. For upon what do most, and indeed often those who are in earnest about their Christianity, found their faith? One of them says, I believe that I will be saved by Christ, for I have truly repented, I have come to a living knowledge of my sins and deeply regret them; therefore, I dare certainly believe that my sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

Another says, I believe that because I have experienced it in my heart; once I was greatly worried about my many sins; I did not know where in the whole wide world I could find rest; my transgressions were like mountains before my eyes. Then I fell upon my knees and cried to God from my heart to take pity upon me, and behold! soon I received rich comfort in my heart; it was as though an inner voice said to me, Your sins are forgiven; sweet peace and heavenly rest entered my soul; now I am certain that I am in God's grace.

A third says, Once I also was in great distress of soul; I saw that I could not stand before God in spite of my past honorable life; like the voice of thunder God's Word had shouted in my heart, You are marked for death! I fell into despair. Then I began to pray and to sigh and to struggle and to

wrestle with God and continued doing that day and night until I finally received the testimony of the Holy Spirit in my heart. And lo! finally I also received this testimony; I could now shout for joy, I have finally gained the treasure! My sins are forgiven! I have now found grace! I am now a child of God! I am an heir of heaven! Christ is mine! I am saved! Hallelujah!

And there are those who say, that they believe that they will be saved by Christ because they have become entirely different persons. In the past they had lived like the world in many manifest sins or in many of the vanities of the world, and were unconcerned about God and his Word and their soul's salvation, but at a certain time they were as though changed; they had laid aside the old sins, they no longer joined in the vain pleasures of the world, now they live a quiet life, not a single day passes by in which they do not pray and read something in God's Word, now they go diligently to church and Holy Communion, now they have an entirely different insight in God's Word and all Christian doctrine; they, therefore, suppose that they can certainly believe that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake and that they also will be saved.

Finally, there are also those who believe this because, as they say, after a fervent prayer they once saw Christ himself, felt the Holy Spirit in their own body, or had received other noteworthy appearances and revelations from heaven.

As certain as it is that those who can relate such experiences, how once they had experienced a deep regret over the sinfulness, a sweet peace of heart, the heavenly impulse of the Holy Spirit, a change of life, and the like, I say, that as certain as it is that divine grace has somewhat awakened them, that God has worked in them, knocked at their hearts, and visited them to bring them to the true saving faith, nevertheless all, who build their faith and hope of salvation upon such experiences, have a false, unsteady, precarious foundation. Woe to those who build their faith upon their repentance, for even the most earnest repentance is imperfect and even the deepest regret does not make one worthy before God! Woe to those who rely upon the sweet feeling of peace, which once arose in them, for this feeling is transitory! Woe to those who found their state of grace on having once felt the testimony of the Holy Spirit, for this testimony is by no means always in one's heart! Woe to those who comfort themselves as having received the adoption of God because they live a new life, for even the best life is condemned, if God does not cover it with his grace.

The example of the leper and the centurion in our Gospel shows us the only true foundation which our faith should have: it is the Word! Whoever relies on the promise that God himself gives in his Word, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Mk 16:16; whoever relies upon the Word which Christ himself says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Jn 6:37. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," Jn 3:16; in short, whoever dares to believe that his sins are also forgiven and that he also will be saved simply because God has revealed in his Word that all men, all, even the greatest sinner, are reconciled with him through Christ and will be saved if he believes in him, he has a firm, solid, unchangeable foundation for his faith; for the Word of the Lord is right and all his works are done in truth.

Even though such a believer does not feel any grace but only wrath, he does not despair; he says, My heart speaks only of wrath, but the Word, which cannot lie, speaks only of grace. Even though this believer goes through great distress, so that it seems as though God has completely forgotten about him, he nevertheless does not despair; he says, God is indeed leading me through the dark valley of tribulation, but the Word tells me that he is my Father. And finally, even though the hour of death comes, though Satan may launch his fiery arrows at his heart, though he may accuse him because of his

whole past life, he nevertheless is confident and says, Satan, I will not argue with you about whether I have been a good or a bad Christian, but you are not going to take the Word away from me, which promises to all sinners, who take refuge in Christ, grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation; in faith I am now going to cling to this Word; I will now die relying upon this Word and with this Word I will confidently step before God's judgment; God cannot lie; what he has promised he must do; therefore, he cannot even condemn me; he must save me; he will say also to me, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee; enter into the joy of thy Lord."

## II.

My friends, the faith which clings alone to the Word not only has the correct foundation but it also brings forth the only genuine fruit. Permit me in the second place to say a little about this.

How fruitful that faith is which clings alone to the Word we see mainly in the example of the centurion. Two fruits especially shine forth most gloriously in this man, namely, his great humility and his ardent love. Christ was greatly despised particularly by all the eminent people; most of the distinguished Jews were ashamed of him and supposed that Christ was being greatly honored if they invited him. But what was the opinion of this heathen centurion? He deemed himself so unworthy that he not only did not invite Christ in and, as Luke says, did not even dare to go to him himself but sent the elders of the Jews to him, but, when the Lord said that he was ready to come to him, did not permit it even then but said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." What humility!

We also hear that he sympathized with the sickness and pain of his servant as only a father can with his own child. If we recall that in those times slaves were usually treated in the most heartless manner and were hardly considered human beings, we must be even more amazed at the fatherly heart which this old soldier here revealed toward his sick slave. And we must also add that according to Luke's report this centurion was known and loved among the Jews because of his love to God's people and their religion, a love which he showed by building a synagogue for the Jews at Capernaum with his own money.

These things show us that his faith in Christ and the certainty of his Word was not an idle thought but something living, active, busy, and powerful; his faith had turned him into a new person who was rich in Christian virtues and truly good works.

As that faith which clings firmly to the Word once showed itself in the centurion, so it always shows itself in all who have it in their hearts. In our days not seldom do we hear from the mouth of unbelievers the remonstrance that faith takes away all zeal for good works; yes, even the enthusiasts, who loudly boast of their faith, nowadays not seldom say that a faith which relies merely upon the Word is a dead thing; it produces no change in man's heart. But why do they say that? They have not experienced it.

To be sure, a faith which clings alone to the Word seems to be a very easy and convenient thing to have, but it only seems that way. No person can give himself such a faith. Many indeed think that they have it, but in the hour of temptation when their sins awaken, or in the hour of death when they see the divine judgment nearing, only too often the very opposite is revealed. Then it comes to light that most who boasted of faith in the Word really placed their trust in their own works and so were comfortless in that evil hour.

A person comes to that faith which clings alone to the Word only if he before had learned to know that outside of the Word he has no other foundation

for his faith or anchor for his hope; the Holy Ghost places this faith into the heart of a man when he begins to be afraid of sin, hell, and most of all of God himself. Then the Holy Spirit leads this frightened sinner to the point that, despairing of all his ability, willingness, preparation, works, and piety, he dares to cling completely and only to the Word.

Oh, happy is the person who finally can say, Alas, with my own repentance, with my resolutions, with my improvement, with my holiness I can never stand before God; I will cling to that grace in Christ which God promises to poor sinners who have nothing but sin; he cannot recall his Word; he must take pity upon me! I say, happy is the one who is finally led by the Holy Ghost this far and permits himself to be preserved in this mind and faith until his end! Such a believer will most certainly show very soon the glorious fruits of his faith, just as did the centurion who believed the Word. Such a believer then begins to be truly humble; he does not, as do the spiritually proud enthusiasts, act and speak humbly, but he actually stands before God and men in the deepest poverty of the spirit; he considers himself unworthy of any grace; he does not deem himself more worthy than the greatest of all sinners and daily he appears before God as a naked beggar who deserves not justice but grace.

Is it possible that he should also not be filled with love to God and his brethren, who believes in the truth that nothing but God's daily mercy preserves him body and soul and overwhelms him with countless blessings? Is it possible that the living Word of God should be taken into a heart and it should not be made alive? No! The divine Word which such a believer bears in his heart is like a glowing coal which does not let him remain cold but warms his heart and makes him heavenly-minded. It shows itself in him as the divine incorruptible seed by which he is begotten by God to be a firstfruit of his creatures.

May then the Holy Spirit himself work a living faith in everyone of us, a faith which clings to the Word by which we will not only stand in distress and death but also shine as lights in this world. May he do that to us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Amen.

## 4th SUNDAY after EPIPHANY

Mt. 8:23-27

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

We live in a time when many preachers want to preach a Christianity without Christ and many hearts want to hear such a Christianity without Christ. In our day the principle is, therefore, often stated: To know who Christ is according to his person is not so necessary, and to quarrel much about it is the greatest folly. The main thing is to know Christ's very wise teachings, follow his noble example, and keep his holy commandments. If a person would do that, he may keep on believing what he wants to about Christ; one should not disturb him in his faith; for little or nothing depends upon whether he considers Christ divine or human, the Son of God or merely a pious person.

Is this really true? I think that he who has merely a little knowledge sees clearly what those who express such ideas secretly plan. They are not the least bit earnest; undoubtedly, they do not consider it a matter of indifference, whether one believes that Christ is the Son of God or merely another man; rather, they say that this is of no vital importance only because it is their wish that everyone should think little of Christ and hold him to be a mere man as they do.

Therefore, let no one be deceived by this talk which is current today. It simply is not true that nothing depends upon what one thinks of Christ's person; rather, everything depends upon it. Even our reason teaches us this. In his teachings Christ promises us that he wants to forgive us our sins, rescue us from God's wrath and displeasure, from death and hell, awaken us from the dead on Judgment Day, in death open heaven to us and make us eternally blessed there. Now should it make no difference whether he, who promises us such things is only a man or the true God and eternal Life?

If someone promised us only a thousand dollars, do we think that it makes not difference whether he is rich or poor, the owner of millions or a beggar? Certainly not. And Christ promises us what the almighty God alone can give, and we are to think that it makes no difference whether Christ is the almighty Son of the Most High or a powerless being as we are?

But this also militates against all Holy Scripture. According to Scripture the doctrine of Christ's person is the first, the most important, the main and fundamental doctrine of all Christianity. The apostles call the preaching of Christ, and especially the preaching of the crucified Christ, Christianity and they declare, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor 3:11. According to the Scriptures a Christianity without Christ is therefore a house built in the air without a foundation, a sun without sunshine, a husk without a kernel, a spring without water.

On this very point Christ's teachings are different from those of all other religions; he himself constitutes the chief content of his teachings. All other religions are doctrinal systems hatched in the human mind, which contain a series of assertions and commandments without bearing any relation to those who invented these systems. In Christ's teachings, however, Christ himself is the shining central point from which everything proceeds, around which everything moves, and to which everything points back.

Christ does not merely say as do other teachers: I show you the true way, I teach the truth, I lead to eternal life, but he says point-blank, "I AM the way, I am the truth, I am the life." Moreover, Christ does not merely say, He who believes in my teaching, or believes in God has eternal life but he says plainly, "He that believeth in me hath eternal life." Nor does Christ say only, Turn to God, but he said frankly, "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden." Finally, Christ expressly says that it is not enough to know God the Father; he says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Jn 17:3. So Christ declares that it is just as necessary to know Christ as it is to know God the Father.

No philosopher has ever spoken like that nor could any ever speak so; they could appeal only to their doctrine, but they could never point to themselves. Only Christ has done that.

What should we, therefore, think of those who say: It is not necessary to know the real Christ as long as one knows his doctrine? They are either people misled by others or are themselves seducers who want to erase Christ from

Christianity in order to wipe out Christianity itself and in its place substitute the ethics of the old heathen which naturally is more comfortably to the flesh.

Oh, if only there would not be so many even in the midst of Christendom who want to know nothing about Christ! At such times it is most necessary for one to try to ground and strengthen himself the more firmly in his faith in Christ. Let us, therefore, use our today's Gospel for the purpose of picturing to ourselves most vividly Christ's divine power and glory.

The text. Matthew 8:23-27.

On the basis of this glorious Gospel permit me to speak to you on:

THE DIVINE POWER AND GLORY WHICH CHRIST REVEALED  
ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

Permit me to direct your attention to

- I. How Clearly and Gloriously Christ Revealed it here, and
- II. How Friend and Foe Should Use This Revelation.

I.

The story related in our today's Gospel contains such a glorious revelation of Christ that, should a believer read or hear it, it is surprising that he is not inwardly urged to shout loudly for joy, Oh, how great and powerful Jesus Christ is! Happy am I that I have such a Savior! However, it is just as surprising that not every unbeliever, upon hearing our Gospel, is not terrified at himself and, beseeching Christ for mercy, would fall at his feet.

For what do we hear? One day on the shores of the Sea of Galilee Christ had healed many sick people and had preached the saving truth to the people in many parables until evening had come. In order to avoid the continued press of the crowd, Christ entered into a ship to sail across to the opposite shore of the sea. His disciples followed him and many other ships set sail at the same time. Quietly the ships at the start sailed through the dark waves. Exhausted by the miracles performed during the day and the sermons preached, Christ with a pillow under his head immediately laid down to sleep in the rear part of the ship.

What happened? We read in our text, "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea." V.24a. By the word "behold" should be indicated that the change came quickly and suddenly, contrary to all the expectations of the sailors. And the word "tempest" according to the Greek indicates a shock such as is noticed during an earthquake. When they were out on the sea, there suddenly arose a subterranean convulsion which churned the waters into a most unusual swell; one moment the depths opened as though it wanted to swallow the little ship, the next moment mountains of water towered high which threatened to descend upon the boat. Even that was not enough. According to the report of Luke and Mark a whirlwind or a hurricane also blew, which with a roar descended from the sky to the sea, seized the raging waters like a screw, spun it like a top, and thus dumped wave upon wave into the little ship, so that in a few moments it was covered with waves and completely filled it with water. Luke therefore expressly states, "They were in jeopardy." Lk 8:23.

How terrible the danger must have been we see from the fact that all the disciples now trembled and despaired. There was not a disciple who had not often sailed upon the water; yes, there were several among them who, as we well know, had carried on their trade as fishermen from their youth on and were therefore well acquainted with the dangers and terrors of the sea and were hardened to them. But when all, even a courageous Peter, were seized by fear and terror, we must conclude that now they were living through such a terrible event as they had never lived through in the past. They saw all the elements in rebellion against them; beneath them it seemed as though the quaking depths intended to swallow the sea itself, over them howled the hurricane, and in torrents the water descended upon them; all of man's efforts to fight the dangers were absolutely useless; in addition, it was night. Therefore, the disciples already feared that in the next moment the little ship would be dashed to pieces and sucked down into the shuddering depths.

Yet since the Lord was amongst them, they made their last appeal to him, stepped before the sleeping Savior, awakened him, and cried loudly, "Lord, save us: we perish." And what did Christ do? Awakened from his sleep, he fearlessly looks upon this terrible uproar in nature. First of all he reprimands the despairing disciples and says, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" V.26. Then he arose, threatened the wind and the sea, and said, "Peace, be still!" and behold, in a second it was absolutely still. Here in Greek a word is used which as much as means that the surface was suddenly as smooth as glass and that a smiling serenity came over the entire region.

When the disciples saw this, we read that they were very much afraid, and "marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" V.27. From this event the disciples knew that Christ could not possibly be merely a man, but that he rather must be the one whom the whole world must fear, namely, God the Lord himself.

And, my friends, this is the very thing which we must learn even now from this wonderful story. All of you know by experience that man is helpless during a storm at sea. If ever our absolute helplessness becomes clear to us it is at sea. When the storm roars over the heads of those aboard ship, the sail tears, the mast snaps with a loud crack, and the waves and billows sweep along so that they break like huge mountains upon the weak ship and here one depth and there another opens up like the jaws of the abyss, then one sees that man is nothing. What did Christ do in such a situation? Did he also despair? Yes, did he merely exhort his apostles to cry to God and calmly surrender themselves to anything which would come?

No! He calmly rises, threatens the unbridled elements, and whilst at other times the surging waves slowly subside after the wind has been calm for quite some time, at Christ's word not only was the howling storm silent in a second, but in the same second the waves also suddenly disappeared and as smooth as a lawn the sea again reflected a smiling serenity.

Here you see in Christ the same Lord who once parted the waters of the Red Sea, turned them into a wall at the right hand and at the left for the Children of Israel, and prepared a dry path on the bottom of the sea. Here you see in Christ the same Lord who once commanded the Jordan to stand still and pile up like a mountain, so that his servant Joshua could go through with his entire host on dry foot. Here by this deed Christ proved that he spoke the truth when he said of himself, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.;" here was fulfilled the prophecy spoken concerning Christ in Psalm 8, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." V.6.

Storm and sea no man ever tamed; therefore if God's greatness is to be most clearly pictured in Holy Scripture, his power, especially over these very same mighty, untamed elements, is described. That is why in the Book of Job, God for example asks impertinent men, "Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" Job 38:8.10.12. We therefore also read in Psalms 98 and 93, "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves therefore arise, thou stillest them." Ps 98:8.9. "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters." Ps 93:3.4.

What did Christ once prove on the Sea of Galilee? He proved that he can do what God has reserved unto himself, that he is a Lord not only of the earth but also of the air and the sea, that even the dumb, dead creatures hear his voice and obey it, that he is equal to the Creator who "spake, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood fast;" Ps 33:9; in brief, that he is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Lord of all lords, the true Son of God, and the eternal and almighty God, equally great and glorious with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

## II.

There is no doubt about this; permit me therefore in the second place to point to how friend and foe should use this revelation of divine might and glory.

In the first place, who is Christ's friend? He is Christ's friend who has perceived from God's Law that he is a sinner who cannot save himself, who therefore, oppressed by the burden of his sins, seeks his only refuge in Christ and has accepted him in faith and is now with the disciples prepared to follow Christ and remain with him until death. How should he who is this kind of a friend of Christ apply the revelation of Christ's glory on the Sea of Galilee?

First of all, he is to perceive very clearly the good, firm, and unshakable foundation his faith has in Christ and his Gospel. Oh, you who are a friend of Christ, you see that you do not deceive yourselves when you consider Christ as the Son of God and his Gospel as God's Word; Christ has sealed this by the most wonderful miracle. The thrones of all the kings will fall but this King of all kings will not be hurled from the throne of his power and glory. Heaven and earth will pass away but Christ's words will not pass away. All the kingdoms of the world, all the works of men will be destroyed but Christ's Church and Kingdom not even the gates of hell can overcome, for he is almighty. "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." Ps 45:3-5. Just continue to confess your Savior confidently in words and deeds; you will not nor can you be put to shame.

A friend of Christ should apply this revelation of his glory in another way; he should never despair either in physical or spiritual trouble. You see, because you believe in Christ, he is also constantly with you in grace as with the disciples in the ship. If storms of tribulation arise, if the little ship of your life begins to falter on the surging seas of this world, if it even begins to sink, covered with the waves of distress and danger or inner temptation because of your sins, oh be confident; though it seems as though your Savior is sleeping and is unconcerned about you, when your need is the greatest, Christ's help is the closest. Awaken your Savior and cry to him in firm faith, "Lord,

help me!" He will also rise up in your behalf, and threaten the storm of your misery and the waves of your temptation, give your heart and conscience quiet, rest, and peace, and help you gloriously. For Christ can also help when no man can help in the greatest distresses, in the misery of sin, and in the misery of death.

Finally, how should you apply this revelation of Christ's glory who are still his enemies? who either want to know nothing about Christ or turn him into merely a pious man, and not want to be saved through him but by your own works? You should recognize from this miracle of Christ what you are doing when you turn Christ into a mere man. After Christ has performed that miracle, have you any reason at all for feeling secure? Perhaps because it seems as though Christ is weak, because he has been silent to all your blasphemies of the past and has let himself be despised by thousands without punishing them? Oh, surely not! Think about how Christ revealed himself during the storm on that sea: First he slept, like a man as we are, but as God he never slumbered nor slept but watched; finally, however, he arose and as the God-man threatened the unleashed elements and wind and wave were obedient to him. In the same way Christ sleeps even now, and it seems as though he is a human being as you; but know that there will come a day, the terrible day of the destruction of the world when Christ will awaken and place all his foes at his feet as his footstool. Oh, therefore make peace in time with this King of all kings, so that you will not be violently cut down by him as his foe but be forever and ever exalted as his friend to his right hand.

Do not say that it is contrary to your reason to believe that Christ is true God. Look at how he stands in the ship as the Lord of nature and everything is obedient to him; and you do not want to fall down at his feet who is the All-Powerful? Behold, on Judgment Day the hurricane which became silent at Christ's almighty word will open its mouth and testify against you. Woe to you then! This testimony will hurl all your excuses to the ground and condemn your unbelief. And if you do not want to hear Christ's voice now and follow it, well, you will not be compelled to obey him here; but some day in your grave you will have to hear Christ's voice, when it will call you to the resurrection of the Judgment. Oh, therefore, listen to Christ now; now his voice is a voice of grace even for his foes; but there he will say, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." Lk 19:27.

Now may he, whom all creatures serve, bring all our hearts into subjection by his almighty Word, so that we also may joyfully serve him here; confess and worship him as our God and Savior, joyously trust him in all distress, with his assistance some day happily cross over the abyss of death and joyfully arrive at the shores of that blessed world where the storms of distress no longer roar nor the waves of temptation rage but where the eternal, blessed quiet of peace dwells. Amen.

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5th SUNDAY after EPIPHANY Mat. 13:24-30

Lord God, heavenly Father! From among the lost and condemned human race, you have gathered about yourself an eternal Church composed of your elect saints and according to your amazing grace you have called and received us into this Church. Oh, therefore grant us also the grace not to let the glitter of the

false church blind us and entice us into its fellowship, but remain with your true Church, with the sheep who hear your voice, with those who love you and keep your Word, with your true disciples who continue in your Word and in your disgrace so that as children of your kingdom we will not be rejected but be gathered into the granary of heaven. To that end bless your Word also in this hour for the sake of Jesus Christ, your dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

The so-called Roman Catholic Church has so many and such well known errors that everyone who has studied the Catechism can easily recognize them, yes, one might even say, that a blind man can grasp them.

By praying to the Virgin Mary and other departed saints the Roman Church commits the plainest idolatry, whilst God's Word says, "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Mt 4:10. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Ps 50:15. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man." Jer 17:5.

In the Roman Church the Holy Supper is shamefully mutilated and the communicants are robbed of the cup, whilst Christ clearly says, "Drink ye all of it." In the Roman Church the so-called Mass is offered every day, whilst God's Word says, that in the Old Testament priests often made the same sacrifice, but that in the New Testament Christ "by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Heb 10:14.

In the Roman Church the priests, monks, and nuns are forbidden to marry, whilst in God's Word forbidding marriage is called a doctrine of devils; the Roman Church teaches that by his works, repentance, confession, and satisfaction man can and must merit justification and salvation, whilst God's Word says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom 4:5.

In the Roman Church the priests and bishops with the Pope at the head rule over the people and over their faith, whilst God's Word in warning says to the servants of the Church; "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Pet 5:3. Even the apostles say of themselves, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy." 2 Cor 1:24.

The Roman Church teaches that there is a purgatory in the world to come, in which believers must first be cleansed in order to be able to enter heaven, whilst God's Word says, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." Rev 14:13. "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Lk 23:43. Moreover, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." Heb 9:27.

The Roman Church considers the reading of Holy Scripture a dangerous thing for the ordinary Christian, because the Bible is supposed to be dark and easily misunderstood, whilst in the Prophet Isaiah the whole Jewish nation is commanded, "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read." Is 34:16. Moreover, Peter cries to Christians, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light." 2 Pet 1:19. Again, Christ says, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Jn 5:39.

However, when would I finish today, if I wanted to relate to you merely the grossest errors of the Roman Church?

How is it possible that in spite of its countless manifest errors and abominations the Roman Church has misled so many people?

The chief means for misleading people is its doctrine that it is the true church. It draws the following deceptive conclusion: Because it is the old, the first, the only true Church, it also cannot err, and because it cannot err, nothing which it teaches and which one could regard as error is error but must be the truth. If a person has let himself be deceived by the cry, The Roman Church is the true church, then he has fallen into a trap from which there is no way out. This deceived person is like one who can no longer see the wrong road he is on, because he has let his eyes be blinded.

How is the deception revealed? In this: One dare not consider something as the truth because the supposedly true church teaches it, but rather one can consider only that as the true Church which proves that it teaches the truth; truth does not become the truth because the church says it is the truth, but turned around, a fellowship is the Church because it speaks the truth. An error is not truth because the supposedly true church teaches it, but a church is not the true church because it teaches error; a person cannot prove that he has not stolen because he is honest, but he must prove that he is honest because he has not stolen.

In brief, my friends, a church which teaches error cannot be Christ's true Church but must be a false one. Our today's Gospel also speaks of one such sign of the false church, when Christ forbids his true Church the pulling out of the weeds, that is, persecuting and killing heretics or false teachers.

The text. Matthew 13:24-30.

On the basis of our today's Gospel let me therefore present to you:

A CHURCH WHICH PERSECUTES AND KILLS HERETICS  
CERTAINLY IS NOT CHRIST'S TRUE CHURCH

- I. Because then it Acts Contrary to Christ's Express Word and Command, and
- II. Because then it Acts Contrary to Christ's True Spirit and Mind.

I.

My friends, Christ in our Gospel compares his kingdom of heaven or his Church on earth to a person who sows good seed in his field; by this, according to his own explanation, he wants to indicate that all the children of the kingdom, that is, all true members of his Church are such through the good seed of God's Word and therefore carry it within them. But at the same time Christ also reveals that the devil tries to sow his tares amongst the wheat; by this Christ, secondly, intends to show that by Satan's instigation children of wickedness also arise amongst the children of the kingdom; they arise because of the weed seeds of false doctrine and likewise carry that in their hearts; hence they are heretics and false teachers.

Now what should happen to these tares? In reply to the question of the servants, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" v.28b, the lord says, "Nay; let both grow together until the harvest." v.30a. Christ does not say that the field in which one should let the weeds grow is his Church but he expressly says in the explanation of his parable, "The field is the world," v.38, therefore not the Church. So when Christ forbids the tearing out of the weeds of false teachers and heretics and says, "Let both grow together until the harvest," he very clearly says in these words, that the weeds of false teachers and heretics should be removed from the Church but not from the "world;" they should not be killed.

This teaching that the Church should not use the temporal sword to kill false teachers and heretics is found not only in our Gospel but in all Scripture, the Old as well as the New Testament. It is predicted of this very kingdom of Christ that he should rule in it as a "prinde of peace," and in Isaiah 2 we expressly read that the members of his Church "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Daniel prophecies even of the antichrist, "He shall be broken without hand." Dan 8:25.

If we turn to the New Testament, we find the same teaching. Christ solemnly says before Pilate, "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." Jn 19:36. Therefore, when Peter drew his sword when Christ was arrested and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Christ reprimanded him and said, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Mt 26:52. After the apostles had finally been fully enlightened by the Holy Ghost, they declared, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor 10:4.5.

It is indeed true that in the Old as well as the New Testament Christ's Church is pictured as constantly fighting and struggling against its enemies, never able to live in rest and peace in the presence of her enemies; but the weapons which she uses are according to Scripture only God's Word, faith, love, patience, prayer, and tears. True, in the Old Testament a staff, yes, an iron scepter is ascribed to Christ with which he strikes his foes, but this is explained in Isaiah 11; "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Is 11:4b. But what are the rod of Christ's mouth and the breath of his lips? This simply is his Word.

Although in the New Testament a sword and shield, a helmet, a breastplate, and a girdle, in short, a complete system of weapons, is ascribed to Christians with which they carry on the conflict, yet these are not a sword of iron but the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and not a shield of steel but the shield of faith with which they can extinguish all the fiery darts of the devil, a helmet of salvation, a breastplate of righteousness, a girdle of truth.

Hence there is no doubt: When in our text Christ says that one should not root out the weeds of heretics and false teachers from the field of the world, but expressly commands, "Let both grow together until the harvest," he forbids persecuting false teachers and heretics with physical weapons and punishing them with death.

A church which does this acts contrary to Christ's express Word, therefore cannot possibly be Christ's true Church but must be a false church, a church against Christ, or the church of the antichrist. Christ clearly says that only that is his true Church which is obedient to his Word. He says, "My sheep hear my voice." Jn 10:27. "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." Jn 14:23. "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." Jn 8:31.32. A church which will nevertheless kill heretics contrary to Christ's express words, "Let both grow together until the harvest," is therefore not the flock of Christ's sheep, which hear Christ's voice; it is not the divine dwelling place of those who love Christ and keep his Word, not the fellowship of true disciples of Christ who continue in his Word, hence not the true Church of the children of the kingdom but the false church, the satanic school of the children of wickedness.

## II.

My friends, a church which persecutes and kills heretics certainly is not Christ's true Church not only because it goes against Christ's express Word and command, but also because it acts contrary to Christ's true spirit and mind. And secondly, permit me to speak to you of this.

In our text Christ not only forbids killing heretics but he also indicates the reason when he adds, "Last while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them." V.29.

Christ means to say: As he who wants to root up the tares which are in a wheat field amongst the wheat can do nothing else but root up the good wheat also, so he who kills heretics can do nothing else but also kill children of the Kingdom.

And that is true. First, it can very easily happen that those who consider themselves the true Church kill as heretics the very witnesses of the truth. Or has that not actually happened many times according to the writings of the Old and New Testament? Did not the Jews who considered themselves the true Church persecute all the prophets as heretics and kill most of them? Does not Christ, therefore, call the Jews of his time, "Ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." Mt 23:31. And did not also Stephen cry to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted and slain?" Acts 7:52. And what did the Jews during the very times of Christ and the apostle do? Did they not nail Christ to the cross as a heretical Samaritan and a deceiver of the people simply because he preached the truth? Did they not stone Stephen as a blasphemer of Moses and their temple because he preached their Messiah to them? Did they not hurl the Apostle James from the pinnacle of the temple, stone, and club him to death as a heretic simply because he would not blaspheme Christ but confessed him? You see, they wanted to root up the tares and instead of that rooted up the good wheat.

This is not to be done, secondly, because many a one who is really a heretic can come to the knowledge of the truth later on and still become a blessed witness of the truth. Before his conversion Saul without a doubt was a heretic, for he murderously persecuted the truth and its confessors; what would have happened if Saul during this time would have been killed by the Christians? With the tares the best wheat would have been rooted up, for this same Saul was later converted and became a Paul, the greatest of the apostles, who filled the whole world with the Gospel and through whom hundreds of thousands were brought on the way to salvation.

Before his conversion even the church father Augustine was a member of the infamous sect of the Manichaeans and a fighter against the Christian Church; what would have happened if Augustine would have been killed as a heretic during this time? With the tares the most precious wheat would have been rooted up; for Augustine was later converted and became a light in the Church which shone forth brightly through all the centuries and still shines today through his wonderful writings.

Finally, we read that the Samaritans refused Christ lodging when he wanted to stay with them, because he was on the way to that, as they thought, heretical Jerusalem. Infuriated by this, John and James said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" But what did Christ do? He rebuked them and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Luke 9:55.56. What would have happened if Christ would have let the Samaritans be consumed by fire from heaven? With the tares, wheat would have been rooted up; for in Acts 8 we read that after Christ's ascension

many of these Samaritans were converted by the testimony of the Christians who fled there and by the preaching of Philipp, Peter, and John, and from them was gathered a wonderful Christian congregation.

My friends, this therefore is certain: To kill heretics is not only against Christ's express command and Word but also against Christ's true spirit and mind; for Christ's spirit and mind is not to destroy men's souls but to rescue and save them.

Therefore, a church which persecutes and kills heretics cannot possibly be Christ's true Church. Though such a church in horrible blindness may always think that it serves God, it by this mind reveals that Christ's spirit is far from it; for Christ expressly predicted to the apostles, "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." Jn 16:2.3.

My friends, now compare these things with the Roman Papal Church, which more than others wants to be the true, yes, the only saving church. Under the pretence of having to punish and root out heretics, it has through the ages shed whole rivers of the blood of Christians whenever it had the power. When in the 13th century the so-called Waldensians and Albigensians rose up against the papal errors and abomination, the popes instituted not only the so-called court of inquisition which had to hunt them out, through the use of the most frightful torture had to extort confessions from them which oppressed them, and judge them; but by the threat of the ban they also compelled the princes who had to punish those allegedly sentenced by the church, arrest them, drive them out of house and home, confiscate their property, take all civil liberties from them, or even to kill them; yes, they forced the princes to equip a regular army against them, begin a so-called crusade as against the Turks, and execute all who did not want to recant and swear complete obedience to the pope and his church.

When in the year 1572 a wedding was to be celebrated at the king's court in Paris, the most important Protestants, there called the Huguenots, were invited for the occasion; but in the middle of the night a bell sounded, which as agreed upon was the signal to fall upon and murder all Protestants, men and women, young and old. This was the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve. When Pope Gregory XII heard of it, he ordered that a celebration be held with all the bells ringing and struck a commemorative medal, the one side of which carried his half-length portrait and the other pictured the St. Martholomew Eve's Massacre.

When about this time the bloodthirsty Catholic Duke Alba had in the course of time executed 1800 Protestants in the Netherlands, Pope Pius V. sent a hat and sword consecrated by him as his reward. Only by the greatest tortures did the papal church again suppress the work of the Reformation which began also in Italy and Spain. True, in Protestant countries where they are suffered, the Roman Catholics try to gloss over this, yes, deny it completely, and place the blame on the government; but in this they act like the Jews who also say they had not crucified Christ, even though they were the ones who compelled Pilate to crucify Christ by their "Crucify, crucify him," and by saying, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Jn 19:12.

Therefore, in conclusion, be warned against the bloodthirsty papacy and the church which obeys it. It is the spiritual harlot which the Revelation of St. John has foretold would become drunk from the blood of the saints; whilst Mohammed and his followers, who also spread their religion with fire and sword, are the antichrist of the East outside the Church, the Roman Catholic Church of the West is the real Antichrist within the Church.

Let us therefore remain with our dear Lutheran Church, which not only has

the signs of the true Church, the pure Word and unadulterated Sacrament, but also has never spotted herself with the blood of heretics and whose weapons are only the Word of God, her prayers, and her tears.

Though the weeds may grow ever so high, there will finally come the day of the harvest when they will be tied into bundles and cast into the furnace of hell; the good wheat, on the other hand, will be gathered into the granary of heaven. This grant us Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

## 6th SUNDAY after EPIPHANY

Matthew 17:1-9

Lord Jesus, eternal Son of God! How highly our mortal human nature is honored and exalted in you! You descended from heaven and not only made it your dwelling place, but you have also forever assumed it into your most holy, divine person, imparted to it your entire divine majesty and glory, and seated it upon your throne at the right hand of God. In you, with you, and through you our human nature is even worshiped in heaven and upon earth by angels and men, in time and eternity. Oh, true man, full of divine glory, open our purblind eyes, so that we may perceive you in the glory of your humanity as well, worship you, love you above all things as the most lovely of all the children of men, serve you, and for your sake joyfully give up everything, wealth and honor, body and life; some day permit us to see you in the divine glory of your humanity with our eyes and be and remain forever and ever with you in perfect joy and blessedness. Amen.

The text. Matthew 17:1-9.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

This Gospel which is appointed for a Sunday which seldom comes in the church year, namely the 6th Sunday after Epiphany, I say, this Gospel belongs not only to the most beautiful but also to the richest texts appointed for the Sunday Gospels. May I mention only a few of the most important teachings which are revealed therein in the most beautiful way.

The first is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; for the Gospel tells us first, how God the Father called from heaven, "This is my beloved Son," how secondly God the Son stood there with his human nature transfigured, and thirdly, how God the Holy Ghost overshadowed the witnesses with a bright cloud.

A second important teaching is the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh and eternal life; for we are told that not only Elijah who ascended into heaven in a fiery chariot, but that also Moses who had been buried by God himself returned from the world of the blessed, appeared bodily, and talked with Christ. This was such a glorious prelude of the blessed resurrection and eternal life, that Peter, enchanted by it, immediately exclaimed, "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." V.4.

A third important doctrine clearly presented in this Gospel is the teaching of the nature of Christ's kingdom; that it is not a bodily, earthly, and temporal but a spiritual, heavenly, and eternal kingdom, a Church which has its members in the Old just as well as in the New Covenant; in heaven just as well as on earth; it is in part a suffering and militant Church on earth; and in part a Church already triumphant in heaven, and yet it is one; for we see Moses and Elijah as the representatives of the Old Testament and triumphant Church, and the three apostles, Peter, James, and John, as representatives of the New Testament and militant Church; all gather about Christ their heavenly head in blessed union.

A fourth important doctrine present in this Gospel is the teaching that according to the Father's unalterable counsel Christ is the only Teacher of all men and that, therefore, there is salvation in none other and no other name is given among men whereby they should be saved. For God the Father himself solemnly and majestically calls from the clouds upon Christ, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him!"

However, as clearly as these four important doctrines are presented in our Gospel, these are not the real purpose of this revelation; the real purpose is none other than the teaching that even Christ's human nature has divine glory, for in this wonderful story this teaching outshines the other teachings as the sun outshines the moon. Therefore, on the basis of our Gospel may I present to you:

#### THE GLORY OF CHRIST THE MAN REVEALED

We will consider:

- I. The Miraculous Nature of This Glory, and
- II. What This Revelation Invites us to do.

#### I.

My friends, there can be no doubt among Christians concerning the real meaning of the miraculous event related in our Gospel; Peter himself, who was one of the chosen eye and ear witnesses, tells us plainly. This is the way he writes of this incident, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." 2 Pet 1:16-18. Briefly, the real purpose of Christ's transfiguration even in the state of humiliation was simply to reveal that his sinless human nature possessed divine glory.

Let us then in the first place try to learn a little bit of the miraculous nature of this glory.

Our text begins with the words, "And after six days," namely, after Christ had predicted his suffering, "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." - Vv. 1.2.

What a miraculous event! Many have supposed something is related here which took place only in the spirit of the apostles but did not actually happen.

But the evangelist expressly says that Christ was transfigured "before them," that is, before the apostles. The transfiguration, therefore, was not something which happened in the imagination of the apostles but was something outside of them, something happening before their very eyes.

Others remember that Moses, who was only a prophet, experienced something similar on Mount Sinai; he also descended from the mountain with such a shining face that he had to wear a veil because the people could not bear the brightness of his face. But what the silhouette is in comparison with the real image, that is what Moses' radiance was in comparison with Christ's transfiguration.

Let us merely compare both events with one another. We read that at first Moses did not even know that a blinding radiance emanated from him. On the other hand, that Christ knew in advance, we see from the fact that he had chosen the three apostles to witness it. Moreover, we are expressly told that "the skin of Moses' face shone while he talked with God." Ex 34:29. On the other hand, Christ transfigured himself even before God the father appeared to him in a voice out of the bright cloud. Whereas the radiance of Moses was only, as one might say, a reflection of God's radiance, Christ's brightness, on the other hand, was his own brightness. That is why we read that only Moses' face shone, but Christ's whole body was transfigured. Finally, we read that a veil immediately concealed his brightness from the eyes of the people; on the other hand, we hear that the rays of Christ's majesty shone through the very clothes he wore; while Christ's face "did shine as the sun," his clothes became "white as the light" by the heavenly rays of light streaming from his holy body, or, as Mark and Luke describe it, that they "became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them." Mk 9:3.

My friends, there you see that Christ's transfiguration upon that high mountain, perhaps Mt. Tabor, was a real one, as Peter testifies in his second Epistle; it was a revelation of the divine glory of his holy human nature. There that took place what John says of the eternal Word in the first chapter of his Gospel, "And the Word was made 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." Jn 1:14. In this transfiguration Christ even in the state of humiliation actually revealed to his three disciples what Paul testifies to in his Epistle to the Colossians, "In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," Col 2:9, that is: as man's soul lives in his body, so that both make one human being, so Christ's divine nature dwells in his human so that both make up one divine Being. Whilst in his state of humiliation Christ's divinity hid itself in his humanity like a sun veiled by clouds, in his transfiguration this sun shone irresistibly forth like flashes of lightning, breaking out suddenly like a smoldering fire.

By his transfiguration Christ also revealed: as the soul gives the body with which it is united its spiritual properties, that is, the ability to see, to hear, to experience, to speak, and to move itself, so also Christ's divinity which is personally united with his humanity gives its divine properties, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, in short, divine majesty. Christ's human nature was therefore united with his divine like the fire with glowing iron. For as the glowing iron bathed by the fire has likewise preserved the properties of fire and therefore shines and burns like fire, so upon Tabor Christ's human nature united with the divine and completely permeated by it likewise shone with divine brightness. Of course, God's attributes could and can never become the essential attributes of Christ's human nature; for Christ's human nature is neither mixed with nor changed into the divine; but as the moon shines in the reflected light of the sun, so Christ's human nature shone upon Mt. Tabor and will shine into all eternity in the brightness of the divine which is united with and given to it. This was and is the result of being anointed without

measure of which David has spoken, when in Psalm 45 he says to the Messiah, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Ps 45:7.

My friends, though Christ's transfiguration clearly revealed the divine glory of his human nature, nevertheless that which directly followed his transfiguration first crowned this revelation. We are told in our text, that after Christ was transfigured not only Moses and Elijah appeared from the world of the blessed and, as Luke expressly related, appeared in heavenly glory, but we also read, "And, behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." V.5b. These are most amazing words; for here God the Father says of the man Jesus not only: In this man is or dwells my dear Son; but without any restriction: "This, this is my beloved Son." V.5b. So God the Father calls the man Jesus his very dear Son! Here we are upon the very peak of the revelation of the divine glory of Christ's human nature.

You see, after the Son of God became a man, God is not only a man, but a man is also God; for as in a man the soul has received the body into union with its personality, so, as we have said, God's Son received the human nature into his personality, and as in man the body gives itself peculiarly to the soul and the soul to the body, so in Christ the human nature gave itself peculiarly to the divine and the divine to the human nature.

Therefore whoever believes that God was in the man Jesus but not that the man Jesus really and truly also was God does not believe the great mystery of godliness, "God was manifest in the flesh," 1 Tim 3:16 and, "The Word was made flesh." Jn 1:14. For as Christ according to his divine nature was worthy of adoration from eternity, so after God's Son became a man we also read of this man, "And let all the angels of God worship him." Heb 1:6. As Christ according to his divine nature reigned from eternity upon the throne of God the Father, so God the Father, after God's Son became a man, said also to this man, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Ps 110:1. As Christ according to his divine nature had the name which is above every name, the name of the Lord, Jehovah, God the Most High, from eternity, so also after God's Son became a man God, as Paul writes, "hath highly exalted" this man "and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2:9-11.

## II.

Well, my friends, now that we have cast a glance at the divine glory of Christ's human nature which was revealed upon the mount of transfiguration, let us in the second place ponder what this revelation demands of us.

Undoubtedly, the first thing which it invites us to do is that we recognize the inexpressibly great love of God to men. For bear in mind: God created men holy and righteous in his image for eternal life, assigned paradise to be his home, made him the Lord of the earth and all which is therein, provided him with everything which his heart could wish.

And what happened? Man fell from God, became the slave of sin, and in the place of the gracious Creator of the world made visible, temporal things, himself, yes, the very devil his god, became God's enemy and thus unutterably wretched. How should, how could man be helped? God had pronounced temporal and eternal death upon sin; and what the righteous and true God had established and threatened, must happen even though the whole world would be destroyed. Thus man could not help himself nor could any other creature, for no one in heaven and

on earth could satisfy God's inviolable righteousness. Man stood helpless at the abyss of an eternal ruin, whilst he had made the great God his enemy and himself felt nothing but hatred in his heart against God.

And what did God do? Even before man had fallen, yes, from eternity God had decreed that when man would have become his enemy and thus inexpressibly wretched, to deliver him from this misery which he incurred, that is, he himself would satisfy his own righteousness in order in that way to be able to let his eternal love and mercy rule man.

And how did God carry out this decree? In order to be able to suffer and die for men, God himself became a man, assumed the form of sinful flesh, became a true child of fallen Adam, a member of the family of sinners and God's enemy, a fellow prisoner in prison with criminals who merited eternal death, a servant of all servants who finally, burdened with the guilt of the whole world, died as one accursed amid shame and torment, amid the gleeful laughter of hell and the ridicule of the foul world.

There is more, my dear hearers. Whilst God descended into the depths of shame and pain through his incarnation, that act on the other hand exalted men, foes who hated him, into heaven, yes, seated man's nature up over all heavens upon the throne of majesty. For through the incarnation of God's Son all men became God's brethren and blood relatives, a human virgin the mother of God, yes, a man became an inseparable part of the second person, and thus was received into eternal communion and the counsels of the Holy Trinity itself, a co-regent of heaven and earth, and an object of divine honor and adoration by all creatures created for eternal life.

So, who can measure, express, or think out the length and breadth, the height and depth of God's love toward us men? No man, no angel, no archangel can grasp the greatness of this love; it can only be wondered at in deep humility and will some day be celebrated in song forever and ever by all the angels and elect amid the harmonies of all the heavenly harps.

There is one more thing which the revelation of the divine glory of Christ's human nature invites us to do; it is, that after God has so highly exalted and honored our human nature, we ourselves should honor it in the highest possible degree. Or should we not? Bear in mind: God has valued our human nature so highly that to the eternal amazement of heaven and earth he did the miracle of love to redeem it; what do you do if you consider your soul of little account? God has purchased our soul not with gold and silver but with the immeasurable price of the death of his Son; what do you do who sell your soul for gold and silver, for this gleaming lump of earth? Must we not say to you what Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, "Thy money perish with thee"? Acts 8:20. Through his incarnation God has elevated our human nature to the rank of divine nobility; what do you do who live on as though you were an animal which satisfies its desires by gorging and boozing? or you who live on as though you were created only for this world, to while away the hours with playing and dancing, gathering treasures which rust and moth consume and which thieves dig after, to live lustily with the world, to seek the vapor of human adulation, and then to go into oblivion? Even from eternity God has been intent upon the salvation of our souls, for their sakes decided upon an eternal decree of unfathomable love and carried it out in a most wonderful way, and now pursues our soul everywhere working on it day and night; what do you do who live on as though you had no immortal dearly bought soul, do not provide for it even in the short span of your life, let something be preached to you on Sunday but during the week make the taverns your church, play with sin for which sake God sacrificed himself on the accursed tree, yes, by your sins willingly serve the devil from whose power God himself came from heaven to redeem you? Briefly: God has exalted our nature above all heavens; what do you do who turn it into

the meanest slave and squeeze it down into the dust and dirt of the world and sin?

Oh my friends, since we have today placed ourselves in spirit upon the Mount of Transfiguration and since in spirit we have seen our human nature glorified in Christ, let us also listen to the admonition of the apostle, "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." 1 Cor 6:20. Let us not forget for one moment of our lives that with our human soul we have a treasure which is infinitely more precious than the whole world and therefore carry our souls in our hands with fear and trembling. Let us bear in mind: Only God could deliver us from our sins by his incarnation; but if we despise even this deliverance, not even God himself can help us; for it is only upon the man Jesus that God the Father had called from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Hence, God's pleasure is only in the incarnate Son; outside of him is wrath and the curse eternal.

Oh, let us then pray with that pious poet:

Therefore thou alone, my Savior,  
 Shalt be All in all to me;  
 Search my heart and my behavior,  
 Root out all hypocrisy.  
 Restrain me from wandering on pathways unholy  
 And through all life's pilgrimage keep my heart lowly.  
 This one thing is needful, all others are vain;  
 I count all but loss that I Christ may obtain. Amen.  
 (366,7)

## SEPTUAGESIMA

Matthew 20:1-16

The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

What the Jews once said to the Prophet Malachi, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" Mal 3:14, has been the opinion of countless people of all ages. And this is true: If Christians in serving God could expect no other reward than the one they receive in this world, it would indeed appear that no one has expended more labor in vain than a zealous Christian. For what is the Christian's usual reward in this world? The more he tries to be a friend of God, the more the world hates him; the more faithfully he follows Christ, the less people want to know about him; yes, the more he is despised and persecuted by them; briefly, the more conscientiously he proceeds in all things according to God's Word, the narrower and more miserable his life becomes. To become a Christian and take up his cross; to become a Christian and deny and forsake everything which is pleasing to the flesh; to become a Christian and lose this world's happiness are inseparable things, yes, one and the same.

Therefore, though it may seem as though one serves God in vain, it only seems so. Malachi adds to those words above, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard it" (namely, what they do and suffer) "and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. . . . Then shall ye return" (the Lord says) "and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Mal 3:16.18. You see, it shall not have been in vain to have been in the Lord's service. Some day God will make the difference between his servants and the servants of the world so clear, that the world will see it with terror and the pious with amazement and rejoicing. God's faithful servants will receive a wonderful reward of grace. Not one good thing which a person has done here for God's sake, and though it be but a cup of cold water which he gave someone for Christ's sake, will be forgotten and go unrewarded.

Therefore, if for God's sake he always had to remain poor in earthly things on this world, in heaven eternal riches in heavenly things await him; if for God's sake he was always despised and reviled and he was called a godless person, inexpressible honor and glory before God and all the angels and elect await him there; in short, though here he may have had to sacrifice and leave much for God's sake, all that will be restored more than a thousandfold in heaven. Oh, no eye hath seen nor hath ear heard nor hath it entered into man's heart what God has prepared for those who love him. Where Christ is there shall also his servant be; whoever dies with him shall live with him; whoever endures with him shall rule with him; whoever suffers with him shall at the time of the revelation of his glory also rejoice with him.

Would it not, therefore, be proper for a person to serve God only for the sake of this future reward? would it not be proper for a person to be pious just so he can merit heaven and salvation by his piety? -- No, my friends; such a mercenary piety has no worth in God's eyes; yes, it makes him worthy of being rejected in God's eyes. Christ warns us against that in our today's Gospel. Let us hear it now and be warned.

The text. Matthew 20:1-16.

There is a great difference of opinion over what Christ really intended to say by this parable. However, if we examine the context and the occasion which prompted him to tell it, there can be no doubt as to its real purpose. In the preceding verses we hear that Peter asked him, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" 19:27. Then Christ declares not only that the apostles can expect a wonderful, gracious reward, but he continues by telling the parable of the workers in the vineyard; it is clear that Christ means to warn not only his disciples but all men against asking, "What shall we have therefore?" when they look at their works. Therefore, on the basis of Christ's parable may I speak to you about:

#### MERCENARY PIETY

- I. Its Nature and How it is Revealed, and
- II. Its Worth and How it is Rewarded.

Oh Lord God! From you we have everything which we are and have; therefore, everything, our body, our soul, and our whole life belongs to you. Even though we would do everything which you have commanded us, we would still be unprofitable servants, for we would have done only that which it was our duty to do. Lord, alas that none of us does even this much; in your eyes none of us is innocent, none are righteous. Therefore, protect us from the idea of

wanting to earn something by our works but give us the mind which cries only for free, pure grace and mercy. To that end bless your Word in this hour and we will be helped for time and eternity. Amen. Amen.

## I.

Christ commences this way in our today's Gospel, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." Vv.1.2. Christ says that the householder did the same again in the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour; that is, dividing the day as we do, early at nine o'clock, at twelve noon, and in the afternoon at three. Then we read, "And about the eleventh hour," that is, at the last hour of the day, "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." V.6.7.

"So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 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." Vv.8-12.

In this portion of our parable Christ sketches the picture of mercenary piety in vivid colors. First of all, Christ without a doubt had the Jewish people in mind. The Jews were the first ones whom God caused to be called into the vineyard of his Church through the prophets; he made a covenant with them and gave them the promise of sending them the Messiah to be their Savior. On the other hand, the heathen, as it were, were first called in the eleventh hour, in the last hour of the existence of the world, into the vineyard of the Church; through the apostles the same share in the Messiah and his grace was promised also to them as to the Jews who were the first ones called.

But what happened? The Jews murmured when they saw that the heathen, with whom God had not made an agreement about the reward as he had with them, that is, with whom he established no covenant and to whom he gave no promise, received the same grace and that they, as the chosen people of God, were to have no preference over them. The Jews thought: We should bear the burden and heat of the day, we should observe the burdensome Law of Moses with its feasts and sacrifices and sabbaths and fasts and be subject to circumcision and now these uncircumcised heathen are to be made equal to us? Have we not labored and served more than they?

Although Christ certainly had the self-righteous, murmuring, mercenary Jewish nation first of all in mind when he related his parable, he without a doubt also intended to present in general this mercenary piety in its true form as found amongst all men. By nature we are all so minded that here and there we still do what is good and avoid what is evil, in other words, we want to be pious, only because we expect a reward from God for doing that; therefore, by nature no person would do something good and avoid something evil if he thought that this could neither help nor hinder his chances in this world or in the one to come. If men by nature did not have the fear that there is a hell for the godless and did not have the hope that there is a heaven for the pious, we would

soon see why most do good and avoid many an evil deed; we would see that it is not love to God their Creator which drives them but that only fear of punishment and the hope of reward is the impure source and the rotten reason for their so-called piety.

Yes, is it not now preached publicly by many preachers and accepted by countless numbers and confessed without reserve that a person can and must make himself worthy of God's good will by his own works, by his own virtuous life, and merit for himself a happy lot in the world to come? In our days no one is accounted an enlightened person who does not swear allegiance to this heathenish principle and does not declare that heaven is the reward for one's virtue.

However, the mercenary piety of most is first clearly revealed when the Gospel is preached and when even the gross sinner is converted by the Gospel. When Christ invited all the laboring and heavy laden and when at his invitation even great sinners drew near to him, were converted, believed in him, and were received by Christ, some of whom followed him as his disciples, this greatly offended the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes. Contemptuously they exclaimed, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them;" he is a friend of publicans and sinners; they thought: What kind of a Messiah is that who promises grace and heaven to even the greatest sinners? what? adulterers, publicans, robbers, and murderers should some day enjoy heaven just as well as we? is all the trouble we went to to keep God's Law to be in vain? Away with such a religion!

And as the scribes and Pharisees and especially most of the Jews thought, so even now not a few Christians have the same thoughts. If the Gospel of Christ is preached and if all sinners are called to Christ, and if many a sinner lets this Gospel enter his heart, if they believe in Christ and join the true Christians, and if they are received and accepted by them, then the honorable people of the world rise up and say: A godless person who from his youth has lived in gross, manifest sins, having now become tired of sin, humbling himself before God and believing in Christ, he should be able to be saved just as well as we, who have lived blamelessly from our youth, dedicating our lives to virtue and distinguishing ourselves by so many noble works? Absolutely not!

This mercenary piety, however, does not always reveal itself in such showy garments; there are only too many who say with their mouth that they intend to build only upon Christ and want to be saved only by grace, and yet fundamentally are pious only because of the hope of reward. Why do many associate with Christians and not with the world? why do they go diligently to church? why do they pray every day morning and evening? why do they read the Scriptures and other pious books? why do they make many a sacrifice to maintain divine services and spread the kingdom of God, and the like? Is not the real reason with only too many not that free love to Christ and their neighbors but the hope that God will for those reasons consider them Christians and save them? What else is that but a mercenary piety?

Yes, nothing more! There are Christians who first arrived at the certainty of their state of grace only after many prayers and tears, after experiencing great sorrow and much anxiety, and after long hours of wrestling and struggling. What often is their attitude toward those Christians who did not have to go through such severe struggles, whom God led more gently, easily, and lovingly, and after their first fright over their sins immediately gave them the grace of being able to comfort themselves in a childlike faith in Christ, his grace, and his Word? Not seldom is it that those Christians do not wish to recognize that these are true Christians; they are suspicious of their easy conversion and think, First I had to wrestle much and bear the burden and heat of the day before I found peace, and he should get off so easily? That I can

not believe! What do these Christians betray? Nothing else than that their Christianity is mercenary.

So you see, my friends, that the shapes and forms of this piety are more manifold than one thinks and that even those who seem to be Christians can be taken in and soiled by it. Therefore, everyone must examine himself to see whether perhaps he serves God only for the sake of the reward. Now that we have seen the nature of this piety and how it reveals itself, let us in the second place ponder its value and therefore how it is rewarded.

## II.

Those who were first called to work in the vineyard supposed that they earned a greater reward by their work; they, therefore, expected more than those who had not worked as long as they, and when they did not receive it they murmured against the householder. What did he answer them? He 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?" Vv.13-15. Thus the householder declares that by working just for their pay alone they had not earned more; what he promised them for their labors and what he had agreed with them, that they should consider as right; they had their pay; their work was worth no more.

So we hear just how valuable the piety of those is who are pious only for the sake of the reward; it has absolutely no value. All works which someone does in order to be repaid have only the appearance of good works; but actually, they are anything but that; they are gleaming slugs which bear the same stamp of a gold coin but are worth nothing. For only that work is valuable before God who sees the heart which a person does not out of self-interest, nor with the hope of being repaid, but which is done only out of love to God and his neighbor. If those were good works for which a person hopes to be repaid, then all of man's works would have to be good works, for all works, even manifest sins, are done by men in order to profit by them.

Suppose you tell me, if you would consider it a noble deed, when a person gives his money to merchant in order at least to receive for it goods of the same value? Would you consider him one who helps his poor neighbor, if he would work for him but under the condition that he be paid? And what would you think of him who gives you a small present when you know that he has given it to you only to expect a greater present in return? Would you say that he is generous? Certainly not! You would rather despise such a giver as a hypocrite. You see, as little as any value is attributed to such works among men, so little has mercenary piety value before God; yes, it is nothing but hypocrisy.

What is therefore their reward? Christ shows us in the words of the householder, "Take that thine is, and go thy way." And in the closing words, "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." V.16. That was the pay which the Jews received for their mercenary piety. They were the first and became the last. They were the first to be God's people but they looked askance when they saw that the heathen would also be taken into the covenant of grace; they murmured that they were considered on the same level and supposed that they merited more with their labor under the yoke of the Mosaic Law -- and what happened? They lost God's grace; angrily God said to them, "Take that thine is, and go thy way." God's countenance is now turned away from them; Jerusalem was destroyed, the poor nation, just as Moses predicted, was scattered like a despised rabble among all nations, and the heathen were received in their place.

Their fate is a picture of the fate of all those who want to serve God only for the sake of reward, who do their good works with the hope of being rewarded by God for them. All their works will some day be found to be light upon God's scales. God will say to each of them, "Take that thine is, and go thy way," that is, you have your reward; your life on earth with its good things was the penny which I have already paid you; I owe you nothing; for you have done nothing to me out of pure love; depart from me, you hypocrite; I never knew you, you evildoer! Then the mercenary will be rejected forever; on the other hand, those poor sinners, who had placed their hope alone upon the goodness of the householder will not be sent away with the penny of temporal blessing but will be eternally received into his heavenly mansions.

Take this to heart, my dear hearers! Do not be so foolish as to want to purchase his heaven from God with your wretched works and your miserable virtues and piety. If you wish to handle your piety as a business deal, you will some day find out how worthless all your works were; God will show you that you had received your reward most richly in this world and forever reject you. But you who say that you want to be saved alone by grace, examine yourselves well, whether you really do everything only out of love to him who loved you from eternity and accepted you through Christ; whether you do not consider yourselves better than the greatest sinner; whether God's mercy in Christ is the basis of your hope, and whether out of thankfulness for this grace you seek to become rich in good works; whether you can say with the poet:

I build on this foundation,  
That Jesus and His blood  
Alone are my salvation,  
The true, eternal good.  
Without Him all that pleases  
Is valueless on earth;  
The gifts I owe to Jesus  
Alone my love are worth. (528,3)

Happy are all you who are of such a mind! Your life pleases God well. You look on your works as worthless, but rejoice, rejoice! God for Christ's sake places a high value on them and some day he will graciously reward them beyond measure. Amen.

## SEXAGESIMA

Luke 8:4-15

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In our dear Savior, Christian friends.

Reason itself must perceive and admit that God could not create mankind for this life and for this world. The vast majority of men go through life amid groans; by experience most must say with Sirach, "Every man's life is a wretched thing from his birth until he is buried in the earth, which is the mother of us all. There is always anxiety, fear, hope, and finally--death."

Consequently, who dares to suppose that man was created by a wise, righteous, and gracious God for this fleeting and vain life? Who dares to suppose that God placed men upon this world to let some rejoice, the rest weep, and finally all be again destroyed? No, no, my dear sir, this fleeting life can not satisfy your immortal soul; not for this wretched world but for heaven were you created; this is only to be your preparatory school; here you are to sow your seed in the sweat of your face but there first are you to reap; here you are to be tested and if it will be found that you stand the test, then you will see God face to face; here you are to struggle for the crown and pursue the treasure, but on the other side of the grave you will be crowned and receive the price of victory; your destination is the enjoyment of an eternal blessedness. Oh, that we would only perceive this and above all seek to be saved!

Merely his reason is enough to lead man to this important truth, if he would only examine his heart a bit; but how man can be saved, how he can come to God, how he can receive eternal life, the answer to this question man seeks in vain in his heart or in his reason. The true way to salvation is a secret of divine grace, of which flesh and blood, that is, the natural man, knows nothing; God alone can reveal it to us. God is the Lord of heaven, he alone therefore also has the key of heaven, and he alone can also determine the way we are to find him.

How do most people hope to be saved? They think that if they guard themselves against sin as much as they can, if they injure no person, if they are friendly and obliging toward everyone, if they trust God and were pious, then they would dare to hope that God certainly would not reject them. Clearly, that is the way most people of the world have from the beginning of time till this very day considered the true, sure way to salvation. Why, they think, that is self-understood that he must be saved who has lived piously and uprightly! God cannot hold the godless more dear than the pious and righteous!

Yet my friends, though man may speculate about the way to salvation as intelligently as he is able, this much is certain: as little as a blind man can point out a road on this world, so little can reason show us the way to heaven. As little as we could have told God how he is to create us for this life, so little can we say how we can come to eternal life. God alone can say that. And what does he say? "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." Lk 11:28. There in a few words you have the only true way to salvation; it consists in hearing and keeping God's Word. The Word is the bridge which God has erected for us into eternal life, otherwise there is none; that is the ladder to heaven, outside of that there is none; those are the cords of love and the hand which God extends to us to draw us up to him, outside of that there is no other. It all depends upon hearing God's Word; yet not that we hear it but how we hear it.

Yes, indeed, all of you hear God's Word, for I know that I preach nothing to you but the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ; but alas, if only it would not be revealed so frequently that many of us still are not upon the way to salvation! Who can deny it? Many hear, indeed even hear with joy, but when the hour of testing comes when they are to show their fruits, then we see that they have heard the Word in vain. Oh that God would take pity upon such, that by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit they would recognize what belongs to their peace! For whoever hears God's Word and yet does not produce fruit, he invites a much greater responsibility upon himself than he who never heard it. In order to awaken such from their dangerous sleep and to admonish us all let us therefore now consider how one must hear God's Word in order to be saved.

The text. Luke 8:4-15.

We hear that Christ told the parable of the sower at a time when "much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city," to hear him. This parable therefore contains an admonition to those who hear God's Word and it shows them that merely hearing the Word does not dispose of the matter. Let us therefore answer the question:

#### HOW IS ONE TO HEAR GOD'S WORD TO BE SAVED?

- I. One Must Pay Close Attention to it,
- II. One Must Take it Earnestly to Heart,
- III. One Must not let the Heart be Fascinated by Other Things, and
- IV. One Must also Carefully Guard it.

Gracious and merciful God, in Jesus' name we humbly and earnestly beseech you to let this instruction be a rich blessing to us all, so that whenever we hear your holy Word it may accomplish in us unworthy sinners that to which you sent it, that though we are sinners in ourselves we may in Christ be your righteous people and be saved. Amen.

#### I.

Christ begins his parable with the words, "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," V.5; Christ himself explains it thus, "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." Vv. 11.12. This describes the first class, those who hear God's Word and yet are not saved; they are those who not even once pay close attention to it.

There are a great number who would also gladly be saved, and as one might say, not to spoil their standing with God they therefore diligently go to church, do not readily miss a service, in short, they zealously carry out all the duties of an honest Christian. But they suppose that thus they do God a service and are Christians merely because they appear in the house of the Lord, sit there, thoughtlessly join in singing the hymns, and let the words of the sermon sound in their ears like the babbling of a brook. It seems that only now and then they pay attention to something which is preached; most of the time their soul is sunk in sleep so that the sermon is often like a lullaby which gradually lulls them to sleep.

Those are truly poor, unfortunate, pitiable hearers; God's Word is lost for them; not a single Word enters their heart but Satan takes it away from every one of them, so that they will not believe and be saved. They sit at God's banquet table and merely look at the bread of life; they do not partake of it, they remain in their spiritual death, and finally they die the eternally wretched death.

Notice, therefore, my friends, that to hear God's Word to his salvation one must first of all pay close attention to it. Solomon says, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be ready to hear." Eccl 5:1. Consequently, whenever a Christian wants to go to services, he must first pray silently, Oh, that I today may hear what I should do that I may be saved! Oh, that I today may learn where I still do wrong; oh, that today my sins would be more clear and my faith be awakened and strengthened; oh, that by God's Word my sleepiness would be turned into zeal, or my sorrow and grief into joy and

peace! Oh, that today I may find what my poor soul needs! That is the way the Christian must come armed and prepared with holy prayers. Then if he hears the Word, he must think nothing else than that God himself is talking with him. When a reprimand is voiced, he dare not think of others, but he must enter his own heart; when comfort is given, he must implore God, Oh, that I may receive this comfort and be able to truly refresh myself with it! He must select for himself that which is necessary for his condition; if his sins are touched upon, he dare not become angry but must think, God has directed matters this way to bring me to repentance; if at times it seems as if he can take absolutely nothing for himself out of a sermon, he must the more earnestly beseech God in silence that he would not let him depart empty-handed but bless him with at least a few crumbs of the true bread of life. That is what it means to hear God's Word attentively, to hear it in such a way that one greedily seeks in this Word how to be saved.

My friends, it is indeed true that God's Word often presses with divine power even into the heart of such a hearer who at first had thoughtlessly entered into the house of the Lord; often it becomes very clear to him from a single word that in his present condition he cannot be saved but that he must be changed; his heart is full of grief, his eyes are full of tears, his entire soul is full of prayers for mercy, and he is awakened, changed, and converted so quickly; but those are unusual visitations of grace which God has promised to no one. Therefore, whoever wants to hear God's Word inattentively and wait until God's Spirit comes upon him with almighty power, he can in so doing call upon himself the sentence of obduracy so that he, as Christ says of many hearers in our Gospel, "does not know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." V.10 Yes, it is true that without God no person can understand God's Word; it remains foolishness to him even if he wants to hear, read, and study it most attentively; and yet Christ cries to us all, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!" v.8c.

## II.

Christ now continues, "And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture;" v.6; again he himself explains it with the words, "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." V.13. Here Christ tells us that it is not enough to pay attention to the Word; one must also in the second place take it earnestly to heart, if he wants to hear it to his salvation.

Now there are many who rejoice greatly in God's Word and hear it with great attention and for all that they cannot be saved. Thousands often rejoiced to listen to Christ himself; in order to hear him they followed him for several days' journey and in their great desire to hear him even forgot to eat and drink, and yet the majority did not receive the treasure. Why? Their joy was only a passing emotion; their heart, as it were, was merely shone upon by the light of the Word but its rays did not penetrate deeply; as the Lord says, their heart remained as hard as a rock so that the water of life could not soak down to and enter their heart; the seed of the Gospel sprouted up quickly in the little good land of sudden emotion, but the plant soon withered away again when only a little of the heat of temptation came.

They are a living proof of the fact that taking God's Word earnestly to heart is also a part of hearing it for one's salvation. For God's Word should produce an entirely different effect in us than the words of human skill and wisdom. God's Word should not merely convince our reason of the truths it

contains, but -- oh, may all of you pay attention -- we are to become another person, a new creature, a partaker of the divine nature, that is, we should become heavenly-minded people. Our heart, mind, and soul should be completely turned about or born again. But in order that this may happen, we must first of all become poor sinners; our sinful corruption in which we all by nature lie and our great unworthiness before God must be uncovered to our eyes and be truly perceived by us. Our naturally rock-hard heart must be crushed and softened and filled with an inner concern for the salvation of our soul so that we seek first of all the kingdom of God and his righteousness and seek every hour of the day God's grace in Christ Jesus.

But is not this the very thing lacking in many of us? Are not many of us still like a rock covered with little soil in which the seed of the Word sprouts quickly but withers away again just as quickly? I can say nothing else than that you also listen with greater joy the more God gives me his grace to recommend to you his grace as found in the Gospel. But do not many make this joy and delight in the Gospel teaching the comfort of their souls, their soft pillow, their Savior through which they plan on being saved?

Oh, that they would only bear in mind that every sermon which they hear with joy but without becoming changed in heart is lost as far as they are concerned and will only be accounted before God as guilt!

### III.

But let us continue. Christ says, "And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it;" v.7; Christ's explanation is, "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." V.14. This tells us: if we want to hear God's Word to be saved, we dare not in the third place let our heart be fascinated by other things.

Most who still have some concern for eternal life and therefore hear God's Word make the fatal mistake of thinking they can serve the world also. Most, therefore, want to take a middle course; they want to serve God and also Mammon; they want to seek eternal things and also become rich in worldly things; they want to be concerned for heavenly things and also earthly; they wish to pass for Christians and stand in well with the godless; they want to live according to the Spirit and also the flesh; they wish to do God's will and also their own; they want to be saved in eternity but also not lose the lusts of this life; briefly put, they want to unite Christ and Belial, light and darkness, friendship with God and friendship with the world. That is the union toward which all men are inclined by nature.

Oh, unhappy people! Such pains are entirely in vain. Though they may diligently hear God's Word, it bears no fruit, for God's Word wants to persuade man to do just one thing: surrender completely to God and Christ. Christ says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Lk 14:33. God does not want to take only a half a man but the whole man into heaven; man is therefore to go completely, not part way, on the way to heaven. Elijah already had this to say to the idolatrous nation, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 18:21. If we divide our heart with God, he does not share salvation with us. We can do ever so much, slave ever so much, be ever so zealous, do ever so difficult works, God does not ask about them; if we do not want to belong completely to God, we do not belong to him at all; and

all our labor is lost. A complete change about toward Christ is required.

They, therefore, hear God's Word in vain whose heart is burdened with the cares, riches, or lust of this life; the heavenly plant of true faith can not grow there, and even though it would take root, it will very soon be stifled by the thorns of the worldly mind.

So remember this, you who would gladly travel both ways, the narrow and the broad way, Christ's way and the world's; remember that this way you will not reach your goal; you are merely making this life sour and bitter and also gambling away eternal life; therefore, there is no other advice: surrender completely to God who also has given himself completely to you; then you will be satisfied here in God, full of comfort, peace, and hope, and at some future time you will be saved.

#### IV.

And now we come to the last thing which Christ says belongs to the proper hearing of God's Word. In conclusion he says, "And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold," v.8a; the explanation is, "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." V.15. Therefore, the last thing which belongs to proper hearing is that we also carefully guard God's Word.

Whenever a person hears God's Word devoutly, he receives a treasure of eternal life into his heart. He receives either enlightenment about his condition, his sins, God's grace, a doctrine of salvation, and the like, or he receives a new awakening and encouragement through the power of the Holy Ghost, or sweet comfort, new courage and zeal, a powerful tug to God and heaven, and the like. As precious as this blessing of God's Word is, just so easily and quickly can we lose it again; then God has worked in vain in us.

Therefore, if we want to be saved, it is not enough that we try to hold firmly in our mind only those teachings which are presented to us; indeed, if anyone has a poor memory, he will in spite of all his attentiveness retain only a little bit; but salvation does not at all depend upon that; the main thing is that we keep the divine effects which the Word has produced in our souls. With a prayer on our lips we should enter God's house, with a prayer we should leave it again. We should immediately carry out in our lives what we have heard; if we receive new light, we should also walk in it; if a sin has been revealed, we are to battle against it; if we are encouraged, we are to show new zeal also; if we are comforted, we should the more confidently wait for God's grace; in short, if we have recognized the Lord's will, then we should not for one instant consult with flesh and blood but do the Lord's will.

Ah, my friends, had we heard God's Word that way at all times, how good, how blessed the state of our soul would be! How rich in knowledge of ourselves and our Savior, how rich in experience, how strong in faith, how filled with all good works we would be!

The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and of great goodness. Therefore, if anyone has heard his saving Word in vain in the past, let him cry to God and beg him for grace through Christ his Savior and God will pardon his sins and be gracious. But from now on hear God's Word aright and keep it in honest and good hearts. May he help us all through Jesus Christ our only Savior and Mediator. Amen. Amen.

# QUINQUEGESIMA

Luke 18:31-43

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In this same Savior, dearly beloved hearers!

Christ's bloody suffering is due not only to the special vicissitudes which met Christ during his life on this world, as is the case with other men, but is really the focal point of the entire work which Christ came into this world to complete. If Christ had not suffered, everything else he would have done, his teachings, his holy life, and miracles, would have been completely in vain. If Christ had not suffered, sins would not have been wiped out, God would not be reconciled, and mankind would still be unredeemed. Without Christ's suffering we would all still be without a Savior and therefore without comfort and without hope in sin, distress, and death. That is why we read in the hymn:

All sins Thou borest for us,  
Else had despair reigned o'er us:  
Have mercy on us, O Jesus. (146,1)

In the very first promise of Christ, which God gave fallen mankind, it was revealed that the Savior of man would be a suffering Savior, for we read that the serpent would bruise his heel. If we read the Psalms and the Prophets, in which the Redeemer of the world promised in Paradise was described ever more clearly, we also see him ever more clearly described as a lamb upon which the Lord would cast all our sins and lead to the slaughter. And finally, if we ask how the first 12 and greatest heralds of Christ, who were appointed by Christ himself, preached Christ, we hear them all say, as St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "For I am determined not to know not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," 1 Cor 2:2; or in another passage, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal 6:14.

If we go a little farther into the story of the rise and spread of the Christian Church, what doctrine chiefly was it through which the many millions of heathen and Jews, learned and unlearned, rich and poor, great and humble, mighty rulers and slaves robbed of their freedom, fortunate and unfortunate, I say, what doctrine mainly was it which moved all these to become confessors of Jesus Christ? Not the wonderful example which Christ gave by his life, nor the holiness, perfection, and consoling power of his teaching, nor the greatness of his miracles, but it was above all the message of Christ's suffering and death to reconcile God with the sinful world which so drew heathen and Jews that they were unable to resist, that they had to give up the religion of their fathers and become members of the Christian Church. The innocent Son of God suffered for you, so that you would not have to suffer what you really deserved; God's Son struggled to the very last drop of blood so that you, a sinner, could triumph; God's Son died for you on the cross, so that you might be delivered from eternal death and live forever: this is the teaching which entered into the hearts of millions with divine power and which still prepares the victory for Christianity over heathenism and Judaism.

However, we dare not suppose that the teaching that God's Son suffered for sinners made such a deep impression upon the Jews and heathen only because it was a new and unusual one. No, every time one finds a true believer even among

baptized Christians, who really became a new man and carries an ardent love and a living hope in his heart, and he is asked, how he became a different person, he will reply every time, The teaching that God's Son suffered for all sinners and also for me went to my heart; it was this teaching which became like a fire in me, melting my hard heart and kindling my innermost soul; I live in this doctrine as in the air I breathe; it is food and drink to my soul, my comfort against my sin, my strength in my struggles, my refreshment for my sin.

Now if Christ's suffering really has such great power, how does it happen that it does not show that power in so many? How does it happen that especially in our days it offends even many baptized Christians so greatly? Permit me to speak to you a bit more about that.

The text. Luke 28:31-43.

As you have heard, Christ predicted his suffering and death to his disciples; what was the impression which this announcement made upon them? We read, "And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." V.34. That this is told us of the disciples can not surprise us so much, because Christ's suffering was at that time not completed and its results were only dimly outlined. But is it not surprising that even now Christ's suffering and death is to many like a book sealed with seven seals, now after it has already been preached and revealed to all the world that Christ has gone to glory through his suffering? Certainly. Then may I now show you from God's Word:

WHY SO MANY EVEN NOW DO NOT PERCEIVE THE GLORIOUS AND  
BLESSED POWER OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING

In the main there are three reasons:

- I. Because so Many Reflect upon Christ's Suffering only with the Eyes of their Reason,
- II. Because so Many do not want to Perceive how much they Need it, and finally,
- III. Because so Many do not Attempt to Comfort Themselves by it.

I.

Why did Christ's suffering, which was foretold to the disciples, remain like an obscure mystery? Christ described it to them in such clear, simple, unambiguous words that they just could not have misunderstood. The chief reason was due to the fact that they clung firmly only to what the prophets had spoken about the greatness, power, and glory of the Messiah. When they perceived a few rays of this glory in Christ, they supposed, that it would be impossible for Christ to sink down into such a deep sea of suffering or even die at the hands of murderers. They thought that Christ's words of the bloody suffering and disgraceful death still to come must be understood differently. What did they really do? Here they followed their own reason. Since they could not harmonize what they had learned from the prophets with what Christ told them, they departed from Christ's words and the result was that they remained blind for a time concerning God's most blessed mystery of grace.

This points out the first reason why even now so many do not perceive the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering; so many view Christ's suffering only with the eyes of their reason.

Many think, How is it possible that God would become a man just for the sake of fallen man? how is it possible that without further ado God could not

have forgiven man's sins out of love? how is it possible that God had to give his only Son into suffering and death in order to become reconciled with us again? Away, they exclaim, with such unworthy thoughts! My reason has an entirely different picture of God. I will never accept the fact that God could have been moved to pardon and save us only by the blood of his only Son. The result is that all those considering the suffering of Christ only with the eyes of their reason never learn to know its glorious and blessed power.

Just as wise as such people consider themselves, just so foolish, yes silly they act; and as greatly as they let themselves imagine that they have risen above the alleged prejudices of Christians, just so much are they ensnared in the most unfounded prejudices. Does not one's reason tell him that human reason must have limits beyond which one can not go? Does not a rational reflection upon this world tell every one that there are countless effects in this world whose causes no one can search out? Does not experience teach every one that the very things which many wise people at first considered impossible was later proven possible? And finally, does not reason tell every one, that God must be an infinite and, therefore, an unfathomable and incomprehensible Being as far as man is concerned and that only he can search out God who would be like God? Is it not foolish to reject something as impossible because one can not harmonize it with the thoughts of his reason? Is it not foolish if a person wants to say, God must be this or that way; God must think this or that way; this or that God dare or dare not be? Is it not foolish, is it not silly, yes, insane, for a person to set himself up as a judge of God's will, thoughts, and councils, and make himself equal to God, yes, higher than God?

Oh my friends, do you not be deceived by the doubtful conclusions of your reason about your salvation which has been prepared for you and all men by the suffering of God's Son! Do not listen to the ridicule of the scoffers and the crafty words of the wise of this world by which they intend to move you to reject the suffering of your Savior! Remember: God's mysteries must first be received by us in faith and then they show their divine power and wisdom in us. As Christ says, Jn 7:17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

## II.

The reason why many nowadays do not perceive the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering is not only that so many reflect upon Christ's suffering only with the eyes of their reason which is blind as far as spiritual and heavenly things are concerned, but in the second place, the reason also is to be found in the fact that many do not want to understand how desperately they need this power.

And here in our Gospel we have an outstanding example of these people. It tells us: When Christ on his last journey to Jerusalem neared the city of Jericho accompanied by a large crowd, a blind beggar sat by the wayside; when he heard the large crowd coming, he eagerly inquired, "what it meant." Informed that Christ was approaching, he cried loudly, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." V.38. But those who went on ahead rebuked him that he should be quiet. How does it happen, that the blind man trusted that Christ would help him by a miracle, but that those who accompanied Christ expected the opposite? That was chiefly because the blind man felt his need; when the smallest ray of hope that he could be helped came his way, he immediately attempted to see if his hope would not be fulfilled. On the other hand, those who made the journey with Christ simply did not feel their need and accompanied the Savior out of curiosity. Thus the blind man came to know Christ's grace and glory whereas the rest went away from this experience empty-handed.

Sad to say, Christ's companions are like many so-called Christians of our day. There are countless numbers of Christians who either have never perceived that they are poor sinners who are lost without Christ and must be rejected by God, or who do not know this personally even if they must have perceived it by instruction in God's Word. They perceive their sins are many but that does not scare them; they perceive that their sins are serious and great but they are never heartily sorry over them; they perceive that they have gambled away God's grace and merited his wrath and hell-fire but they are not especially concerned about it. Their sins do not weigh heavily upon them. They have not become an unbearable burden, nor an object of their horror, nor a reason for groans and tears.

What is the result of this condition? They do not experience the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering. They have the same amount of pleasure in it that a satiated person has in food and drink; they have as little joy in it as when a doctor promises a healthy person he will cure him of his sickness and ease his pain. Yes, such name-Christians who have not yet learned to feel the misery of their sins are amazed when other Christians tell what boundless comfort, what blessedness, what a sweet foretaste of eternal life they found in pondering upon the Savior who suffered, bled, and died for them. They hold that such people are either enthusiasts or they think that they must have committed some special, serious, secret sin.

Now pay special attention to this, all of you who indeed do not contradict the mysterious doctrine of Christ's reconciling suffering but who have never come to know its glorious and blessed power. Oh, do not think that if the mouth of other Christians overflows with what they have experienced this is merely imagination, since you had never experienced the likes of it. Rather perceive: that you have never experienced the like is due to the fact that you have never personally perceived how necessary it was for your sake that the Son of God descended into the ocean of the deepest suffering. Pray that God will permit you to know this personally; pray earnestly and heartily for that; when you arrive at the point where you can say from your heart, Alas! I am a sinner! I am a great sinner! I am a lost sinner! I am a damned sinner! then Christ's suffering will also become your Garden of Paradise in which you will refresh your languishing soul.

### III.

I must mention once more reason why so many even now know and experience nothing of the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering; it is because in the third place so many do not attempt to comfort themselves with Christ's suffering.

Our text furnishes us with a noteworthy example in the blind beggar. When he cried to Christ, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me," then those who went ahead threatened him that he should keep silent. Perhaps they reproached him for being so fresh and impudent as to expect that such a great holy man as Jesus would stop long enough just on his account and squander a miracle. He was blind because of his sins; he should, therefore, be silent and bear what he had deserved a thousandfold. But what did the blind beggar do? He was not the least bit silent; rather we read of him, "But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me." V.39b. And what happened? Suddenly Jesus stopped, commanded that the blind man should be brought to him, and asked him, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" And when he answered, "Lord, that I may receive my sight," Christ said, "Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee." And behold! he could see immediately and followed Christ, glorifying

and praising God amid the rejoicing of all the people who had seen this. But what would have happened had the blind man let himself be silenced? His unbelief would have deceived him in regard to the glorious help which Christ was so ready and willing to bring him.

Perceive from this the last reason why so many do not experience the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering. There are not a few Christians who by God's grace have really come to know their sinfulness and unworthiness from God's Word, who really have perceived that without Christ they are lost. They are really prepared to experience Christ's suffering in all its glorious and blessed power. But they experience what that blind beggar did; when they want to appeal to Christ in firm faith for grace and mercy, then their own heart and conscience bids them be silent. The inner voice says to them, What do you want? Grace? You don't deserve grace; first become a different person! Make your repentance better! First show more zeal for your salvation! First cleanse your heart from its evil lusts and desires! The way you are now, you can not possibly hope to receive and have grace!

What do they do who listen to this voice in their innermost soul? Alas, only too many believe their deceitful heart and cease praying in faith for grace; they cease taking comfort in Christ and his suffering and death; they want to know their sins more clearly from Christ's suffering and with Christ first nail their sins to the cross and die. Instead of becoming endearing and comforting, sweet and precious, Christ's suffering becomes a picture full of pure terror, full of wrath and threatenings.

You, therefore, who have found yourself in this description, perceive the deceit of your heart and Satan. Look at the example of the blind beggar and imitate him, for that is why his example was preserved in our text. The more your heart wants to hold you back from comforting yourself in the suffering of your Savior, the more deeply press the comfort which lies in it into your despairing heart. The more your conscience cries to you, Be silent! You are an unworthy sinner! the more confidently say: Just because I am an unworthy sinner, I will comfort myself in the suffering which my Savior endured for the sake of my sins.

Oh, if you do that, Christ will reveal his glory to you. His suffering will become a fountain from which a broad river of comfort will flow into your heart. Your mouth will become full of laughter and your tongue of praise. But then, just like that blind man, you will also follow Christ faithfully and all Christians, who have joined you in leaving the broad way of the world, will join you in praising God.

Now, God grant that during the holy Lenten season which begins this week, all who have not yet experienced the glorious and blessed power of Christ's suffering may come to this salutary experience and that those who already have this experience may have an even deeper and sweeter experience of it and that finally we all may enter through Christ's suffering into eternal joy. Amen. Amen.

# 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

Matthew 4:1-11

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Since man does not become nor remain a Christian and is not saved by good works but only by faith in Christ, many think that there is nothing easier than to become and remain a Christian. And of a truth! it seems to cost only a few pains; yes, it looks as though one could according to this doctrine peacefully lay one's hands in his lap and without a struggle receive the victor's crown.

But that is not at all the case. Indeed, it is true that salvation is not a work to which we can contribute something; it is a pure gift of grace; but whoever is by grace actually brought to that faith by which he has salvation is not only immediately led to the battlefield, but grace also immediately equips him with the desire and the power to struggle for the treasure which his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus holds before him. That old hymn is correct which says that he who does not fight will also not carry away the crown of eternal life.

There was a time when this was most clear; this was the time of the bloody persecutions in the first three centuries A. D. Then few received that incorruptible and undefiled inheritance which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them without a bitter struggle. Then every one who wanted to be a Christian and be saved clearly perceived that it is not enough merely to wish to have faith in his heart in all quietness, but that those who here wanted to receive it with honor had to bear shame and disgrace, that those who wanted some day to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven must here forsake the world and deny all its glory, and that those who wanted to enter into life, must here be ready and willing to give up their earthly life. That was a time when even the weakest had to make up his mind and either become a hero or be lost. Then whoever dared to confess, I am a Christian and believe in the Crucified, to him the government said, Deny him and sacrifice to the heathen idols or lay your head on the block, or give your neck to the sword, or be torn by lions and tigers and gored by wild steers, or be burnt alive at the stake, or be cut in pieces, or let your flesh be torn from your bones, or spring into a cauldron of boiling oil, or lay down upon a glowing grate. When Christians had this fearful choice of either denying Christ or dying slowly amid the most exquisite tortures, then it became clear that faith indeed saves but that there is no victory without the struggle of faith and no crown without faithfulness to this faith. Christ indeed says, "Whosoever believeth in me hath eternal life," but he also says, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." Lk 9:24. "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." Mt 10:33.

Well then, my dear hearers, you who take comfort in your faith, enter into your heart. Do you wish not only to believe in Christ? are you, as the first Christians, also armed and equipped by your faith to be willing to shed your blood amid the most frightful tortures rather than to deny him by merely one word whom you carry in your heart by faith? Are you ready at any hour to go with Christ into death? to die for him as he died for you?

Yet if you should hesitate to answer this question, it would not be a sign

that you have not as yet taken Christ into your heart in true faith, for many of the most heroic martyrs were at first very fainthearted and looked at this hour of great trial with fear and trembling, whereas others who at first were considered unconquerable later fell away. There is, however, one struggle with certain temptations in which Christians must be at all times, and without which they can not receive the crown of life. In order that no one may deceive himself in regard to the salvation of his soul, permit me to present this struggle today which we all must carry on if we wish to receive the crown.

The text. Matthew 4:1-11.

The Gospel lesson can be considered from two viewpoints; first, we can see from it how Christ as our Redeemer, Savior, and Substitute struggled with the tempter for us and conquered him; then, we can view Christ as an example, whom we should follow if we want to be his disciples. Let us this morning consider our Gospel from the last viewpoint; I speak to you on

THE THREE MAIN TEMPTATIONS BECAUSE OF WHICH A CHRISTIAN  
MUST CONTINUALLY STRUGGLE

- I. The Temptation of Want and All Manner of Tribulation,
- II. The Temptation of a False Faith and Spirituality, and finally,
- III. The Temptation of Riches and All Manner of Temporal Advantages.

Lord Jesus Christ! Whoever believes in you from his heart has through you a gracious God, forgiveness of all his sins, righteousness, life, and salvation; you also give him the Holy Ghost who enlightens, enlivens, rules, and equips him with power and strength to struggle against the world, flesh, and Satan, and thus gain the victory through you. But alas, oh Lord, we must confess that we indeed wish to have all your grace and righteousness but do not want to struggle faithfully and earnestly in your power and might. How many have already lost your grace just because of such laziness and unfaithfulness! How many have followed the Gospel light for a time, yet never reached the heavenly Canaan! How many have fallen even before you could give them the eternal prize of victory! Oh, do not let us be among those! Awaken us now through your Word to forsake all feeling of security, work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and fight until we enter through the gates which lead to eternal life. Amen. Amen.

I.

"If any man serve me, let him follow me," says Christ, Jn 12:26; with these words the Savior declares that following Christ is a necessary part of true Christianity, and that they deceive themselves completely who suppose that they can take comfort in the Gospel by faith even if they do not follow Christ.

If we want to be Christians, our life must be similar to the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The experiences he had in this world must also be ours. The temptations which according to our today's Gospel he underwent most certainly also come upon us the moment we enter into communion with him through true faith. Not only do true Christians, as did their Lord and Master, have Satan as their declared enemy, who lays traps especially for them, causes them to lose their faith again, and in that way also lose grace and salvation, but God himself has decreed first to test his children here on earth for a time, to exercise their faith, to cause Satan, the world, and the flesh to be foiled to his honor, and not till after they have fought and conquered, to let them enter into eternal rest and go from believing to seeing.

As easily as one can become a Christian, just so many difficulties must one surmount, if one wants to remain a Christian; as easily as God lets his grace be won from him by faith in his dear Son, just so difficult it is to persevere in that faith and, therefore, in God's grace until the end. The Christian's walk in this life is a journey toward eternity with the little lamp of faith through the dark of night during fierce gales, traveling the narrow way past many abysses and through dark forests in which enemies of his soul wait impatiently for him. Oh, how easily the Christian's little lamp of faith can be extinguished upon such a road! how easily he can fall from the narrow way into the abysses of sin, unbelief, or hypocrisy, fall into the hands of spiritual robbers and thus die spiritually before he has attained his goal! How much it costs a person before he is out of this world and finally bears away his soul as booty out of the grasp of this world's tumultuous battle! Yes, how many have started out as Christ's disciples, have followed him only a shorter or a longer stretch on his way of the cross, have become tired, ceased going forward, and thus finally have been eternally lost! Of a truth, an earnest struggle is necessary.

The first reason why a Christian must continually struggle we find in the first temptation which according to our Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer. It tells us: After Christ had fasted 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness and was hungry, the tempter came to him and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." V.3. With these words the tempter sought to bring about two effects in Christ: first, he was to doubt whether he was God's Son, since he was forsaken and exposed to hunger and misery, or that because of little faith he was to perform a miracle.

This describes the same temptation which Christians repeatedly face as did their Savior. If a Christian has received God's grace through faith, he is then to think that temporal blessings will also come visibly to him; he will have less trouble in this life than the other secure sinners. By showering down upon him many temporal blessings as health, riches, honor, success in business deals, God will show to all the world that he stands in his grace and is his dear child.

But that is not so. From the very time when a person begins to cling to Christ most earnestly and zealously, he must very often follow his Savior into the wilderness; whilst others become rich, he very often becomes or remains poor; whilst others and their families are healthy, sickness and chronic ill health enter his home; whilst others receive honors, he remains a despised little light, yes, the world or even his brothers in the faith shower contempt upon him; whilst others succeed in what they undertake, often no endeavor of his prospers, yes, blow often follows blow, misfortune follows misfortune; if at one time he thinks that he will soon be delivered from his great distress, then an even greater misfortune breaks over him. That is the way it went with Job, thus with David, yes, almost all of God's saints.

That is a severe temptation. Then quite soon the heart says, as Satan said to Christ, either, "If thou be the Son of God," Are you God's child? Does God actually love you, is he gracious to you since he smites you so hard? Why does this have to happen to me? Why not others as well? Oh, let go of your faith; it is clear that God is angry with me; I certainly am not God's child. Or the heart says to the Christian being visited with tribulation, "Command that these stones be made bread," that is, Help yourself in any way I can; I see that in following Christ I don't get a thing; act like the world; be covetous, scrape, and scratch; lie and deceive; I am in trouble; necessity is the mother of invention; necessity knows no law. Why did God forsake me? I am now compelled to forsake him.

You see, that is the way the heart speaks in trouble; that is the way Satan leads the Christian in temptation so that he despairs of God's grace, or tries to help himself out of trouble any way he can, no matter whether it is right or wrong. If he does not put up a fight during such times and does not want to fight earnestly, he will soon be conquered by his evil heart, willingly surrenders to the power of the devil, and is then lost. If anyone does not want to be lost, he must not judge his cross according to his reason but by God's Word; he must consider that God did not send the cross to have him throw his faith away but that when all other comfort is taken away he should learn to know the weakness of his faith, be freed from all false trust in visible things still clinging to him, and become stronger by ever new experiences of how God comforts and helps in distress. As Christ held God's Word up to Satan and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," v.4, so a Christian must also hold this Word before his heart and comfort himself with the fact that bread and temporal things do not preserve man's life but God's Word; for if God would not pronounce his blessing upon the bread, it would nourish us as little as does stone. We see this clearly during sicknesses when the sick often partake of no food and are preserved alone by God's Word and will; and when the hour of death finally comes, no bread or earthly nourishment can again cause the dying tree of life to show life and become green; then it is clear that only the Word can help one to go from death to life. Well, then, a Christian should think, if one lives while rich only by the Word, then one will also live while poor and afflicted and needy by the Word as well. He who wrestles thus with himself, conquers the temptation; if he does not want to do this, then the trouble which had been given him for salvation and life becomes a snare, a fall, and death.

## II.

We continue. We read further in our Gospel that the devil then took Christ to the holy city, placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to 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." V.6.

Here we hear: When Satan noticed that Christ could not be brought to fall by want and trouble, that he clung to God's Word in this temptation and comforted himself with it, Satan thought: if he clings so firmly to God's Word, well, I will also quote God's Word, only leave out a few little words and thus bring him to a false faith, and still move him to act contrary to God's will; if I could not get him to cast away his trust in trouble, then by a false trust I will get him to do that without trouble. Satan commanded Christ, in trust in the promised protection of the angels, not to descend by the steps from the pinnacle of the temple but to jump into the air. He appealed to a verse from the 91st Psalm; but he slyly omitted a few important words from that verse, "in all thy ways," for according to these words God has promised us the protection of the angels if we walk upon the path of duty, but outside of that not; if we wilfully go into danger, we tempt God and perish by our own fault. But Christ did not let himself be trapped by such a sin of tempting God, but parried the attack with the weapon of God's Word when he said, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." V.7.

This also, my friends, was written for doctrine and warning. From Christ's second struggle with Satan we learn to know the second reason why also all Christians must continually and earnestly put up a good fight, if they do not want to lose the treasure again. First of all, we see that a Christian must

guard himself not only against what God's Word rejects completely but also, and much more, against those who appeal to God's Word, repeatedly quote it in their writings and sermons, and thus pretend to be able to prove all their teachings and institutions. He who lets himself be deceived by such bare allegations can be deceived only too easily in a dangerous way. If we read in our Gospel that Satan himself cited God's Word in order to move Christ, God's Son, to a false faith, dare we be surprised that human false teachers misuse God's Word for their purposes? No, St. Paul himself therefore speaks of false teachers at Corinth, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness." 2 Cor 11:13-15a. If we go through the Old and New Testaments, we learn that false prophets have always appealed to God's Word. We read in Jeremiah 23, "Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said." vv.16.17a. Therefore, every time a Christian hears or reads that a teacher quotes God's Word for his doctrine, he must check very closely to see whether the teacher also quotes God's Word correctly, or whether he as Satan in our text mutilates it, leaves something out, or applies it wrongly; if someone presents a new teaching and quotes a dark passage of Holy Scripture with which he wants to palliate his error, if he says, "See, "it is written,"" a Christian must cling to clear Scripture passages with Christ and reply, "It is written again." Be warned, my dear friends, and do not let me be a voice crying in the wilderness; with every day the times become more hazardous, the traps of temptation more slyly camouflaged; it means watching, praying, testing, and struggling; the beautiful crown will be placed only upon the head of the victor.

But in this second attack Satan did not want to bring Christ chiefly to a false faith but to get him to tempt God. The Christian, especially in our day, is tempted to commit this sin more often than we suppose, not so much in temporal as in spiritual things. Yes, what say I? not only are most souls who nowadays want to be the most zealous Christians sick because of this sin, but it has, as we might say, become the heart and soul of the new Christianity.

For what else are the Word and Sacraments but the true ladder to heaven upon which alone we can ascend into heaven? But are Christians now taught how they are to seek no other ladder to heaven but to cling firmly to the Word and Sacraments, take comfort in the promises and pledge of grace contained in them, seize them as God's hands stretched out to us, and found and build their faith upon them? Not at all. Most of those who nowadays preach with great zeal that man must be converted if he wants to be saved, sad to say, do not point their hearers to the Word and Sacraments at all; yes, they condemn trust in them as something fleshly and direct the sorrowful sinner only to the experiences and discoveries of their heart. Alas, they are zealous for God but not with knowledge; they do not consider that they are summoning their hearers to tempt God, that, as it were, they cry out with Satan, "If you are God's children, descend from the pinnacle of the temple, ascend into heaven to God without the solid bridge of his Word, without the secure ladder of his holy Sacraments."

In such a time as ours when so many self-made ways to heaven are shown, it is truly necessary to show great faithfulness, great earnestness, and great zeal to find the truth which saves, preserve it in a clean conscience, and remain with it; and every day and hour to pray:

Lord Jesus, this I ask of Thee,  
 Deny me not this favor;  
 When Satan sorely troubles me,  
 Then do not let me waver.  
 Keep watch and ward, O gracious Lord,  
 Fulfil thy faithful saying:  
 Who doth believe He shall receive  
 An answer to his praying. (517,3)

## III.

Finally, we hear that Satan led Christ to a very high mountain, showed him all the riches of the world and its glory, and said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." V.9

This last temptation of Satan appears to be so clumsy that we might wonder how such a sly spirit could have dared it; however, it is not as clumsy as it seems to be at first glance. Since Christ at that time concealed his divinity, Satan certainly was often doubtful whether he actually was God's Son or merely an outstanding prophet. But Satan knows how the human heart by nature clings to temporal things, to riches, honor, and glory; he knows how weak even the strongest Christian is in himself and how easily he is blinded in the hour of temptation by earthly glory and can be made to fall. Therefore, he attempted this last powerful attack on Christ. To be sure, all his weapons broke on his divine heart, but it is not so with us.

There have been thousands of Christians who have remained faithful to Christ, all the while they were persecuted, who loved Christ's grace and Word above all else all the while they were poor, who remained poor in spirit all the while they were despised, in short, who followed Christ in the faith all the while they were oppressed by trouble, the cross, and tribulation. But what a tragic change took place in them, when the world acted in a friendly manner toward them, when they became rich and well-to-do, when they got ahead and were honored! Alas, countless Christians have weathered all the storms of misfortune like cedars and finally withered away under the sunshine of fortune and good days, finally died without faith, and were cut down in death as unfruitful trees and cast into the fire.

According to this, who will venture to become indolent in prayer, in watching, in reading and hearing God's Word, in the use of the holy Sacraments, and in the struggle against every sin--and still hope to be saved? Oh, may such a fool not be found among us! Whoever hopes to receive the crown without a daily struggle will find that he will be deceived in the end.

Now all this is said of Christians; finally, how will you receive salvation, you who live on securely and carelessly in manifest sins, in anger and irreconcilableness, in unchastity and impurity, in lies and deceit, in drunkenness and gluttony, in contempt of the Word and the holy Sacraments, and the like? "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal 5: 21b. St. Peter cries to you, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" 1 Pet 4:18. "Be not deceived," Paul adds; "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Gal 6:7-9. Amen.

# 2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

Matthew 15:21-28

The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the heavenly Father, and the communion of God the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

To be a true Christian and to pray are so inseparably connected with each other that the one cannot be thought of without the other. As crying is the first sign of life of every newborn child, so is praying the first sign of life in a reborn Christian. The moment Saul the persecutor of Christians had been converted we read, "Behold, he prayeth!" And when those 3,000 let Peter's Pentecostal sermon pierce their hearts, we not only read, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread," but also, "and in prayer." Acts 2:42.

It can be no other way. Through the fall into sin man is in the state where by nature he lives without God. By nature men act as though they need no God; by nature men swear allegiance to the principle oftentimes expressed especially here, "Help yourself." They think that the person is the maker of his own luck, if he were to expect everything from God, he could wait a long time; he who wants something is a fool if he despairs of himself and looks toward heaven; he must rather strain his mind and powers and use his abilities skilfully and "daringly venture his fortune to capture;" that is the right way; thus will everything be found. It is thought that if people would stop being concerned about a heaven and be concerned alone for their life on earth, things would soon be better for everyone and happiness would indeed be found. Hence, most people begin the day without prayer; go to work without prayer; begin even their most important undertakings without prayer; eat and drink without praying; lay down to sleep without praying; in short, go out and come in without praying. That is the state of man by nature.

And now what is conversion? This simply is nothing else but that the person who previously had turned away from God again turns his whole heart and his whole mind to God. Therefore, the moment a person has turned to God he has also entered into a secret, hidden relationship with God. If a person is converted, God is absolutely necessary for all his undertakings; he does not attempt to begin even the smallest thing without God; he not only considers every day without prayer as a day without blessing, but he considers everything, everything without prayer as unblest. Praying to God the converted Christian leaves his bed in the morning, praying he goes to his labors, praying he begins and ends his mealtime, in short, praying he goes out and comes in.

Whilst a natural man regards the command of the Lord that one should pray at all times, and the apostle's admonition, "Pray without ceasing," impractical, on the other hand, the person actually converted to God knows from his own experience and practice how entirely possible this is. Indeed, a converted Christian does not always fold his hands, nor always bend his knees, nor always move his lips to say a prayer, for he knows that in this world he still has the double command: Pray and work! but his heart is always filled with sighs, or with a secret longing for God, for his fellowship, for his grace, his help, his guidance and direction, and that is what it means to pray at all times and without ceasing.

However, my friends, there are people who have not turned to God from their heart and who seem to pray much; it is, therefore, necessary to know what kind

of a prayer is really a proper prayer and the sign of a true Christian. And that we learn to know from our today's Gospel; according to this Gospel it is the prayer of faith. Yes, that, that is the correct prayer, and such a prayer alone is, therefore, the true sign of a converted Christian. So permit me to speak to you in more detail about this.

The text. Matthew 15:21-28.

In the Gospel just read we clearly see a believing woman in prayer, a woman seldom found today. In her wonderful example permit me to show you:

#### THE PRAYER IN FAITH

Hear:

- I. Which Prayer is a Prayer in Faith,
- II. That Only the Prayer in Faith is Pleasing to and Heard by God, and finally,
- III. What Makes it Possible to Pray in Faith.

Oh Lord God! How great is your grace, that you have not only permitted us sinners to pray to you but that you have also so earnestly commanded us to pray and have so lovingly promised to hear! Sad to say, we must complain that most know little of this great grace and use it faithfully even less. We, therefore, beseech you, use the preaching of your Word in this hour as a means by which the Spirit of grace and prayer is poured out over us and that we be kindled to pray unceasingly to you in faith and ardor and thus take grace upon grace from your fullness. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### I.

That the Syro-Phoenecian woman, of whom our text speaks, prayed in faith is beyond doubt, for Christ himself testifies this of her, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." The way in which she prayed is described to us in such detail that we can clearly see from her example what a prayer in faith really is.

What do we hear about her? Matthew tells us, that first she cried after Christ, "O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." V.22. Even though her distress was very great (for which distress can be greater than when one's own child is not only burdened with a serious illness and many pains but is even terribly vexed by the devil?) she is not long-winded. Briefly she presents her great distress to Christ and cries loudly to him for help.

What do we read next? Matthew says, "But he (namely Christ) answered her not a word." V.23a. We can indeed imagine what might have gone through the mind of this poor woman. Undoubtedly Christ's silence fell like a heavy burden upon her mother's heart. Yet what did she do? She did not let that disconcert her. She continued to cry; we see that the disciples who finally interposed, interceding for the wretched woman, said, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." V.23b. And how did Christ respond? He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." V.24. So Christ contemptuously remarks that she does not have the least right to his grace. Yet what did this Canaanite woman do? In spite of this she once more approaches Christ, falls down once more before him and says, "Lord, help me." And as Christ says even to this, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs,"

v.26, therefore, when he scornfully holds up her complete unworthiness of any grace, she admits Christ is right and says, "Truth, Lord;" but she immediately adds, "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

V.27. In spite of her insight into her unworthiness she clings to Christ's word. Christ had reviled her as a dog; well, then, she says, I will be that and nothing more; but if you grant me this, you have at the same time conceded that at least I should share in a few crumbs of your grace; nor do I desire more; grant me this and I am satisfied; for if you give me but a crumb of your grace, my child is helped, I am helped.

According to this, which prayer is a prayer in faith? Is it being able to say many words and speaking with God with such fluency that the words flow from one's lips like a stream? No, the example of the Syro-Phoenecian woman teaches us that a prayer can be a true prayer in faith even though a depressed person may be able to stammer only a few words; yes, from the example of Moses we see that a person can be in a state in which he simply cannot find any words and groans in secret and God accepts his silent groans as a powerful prayer of faith; for Moses had only silently and inwardly longed for help and yet God called to him, "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" Ex 14:15.

Is perhaps having at least the sweet feeling of devotion, of worthiness, and the certainty of having one's prayer heard a part of a prayer in faith? No, neither is this; for certainly no one had less of a sweet feeling in her prayer than this poor deeply depressed woman; first of all, none from the very beginning when she left her daughter being grievously vexed by the devil and hurried to Christ, and then certainly still less when the Lord was silent to her prayer, and finally gave her only a hard, rough, and wrathful answer; she actually felt that she had no claim to God's grace and that she was not worthy of having her prayer heard but deserved nothing but wrath. Hence, it is very well possible that a person could still pray in faith, even though he may feel nothing but his misery and unworthiness, yes, nothing but God's displeasure, wrath, and complete condemnation.

So really, when dare we call a prayer a prayer of faith? According to the example of our Syro-Phoenecian woman, when in spite of the feeling or the consciousness of his unworthiness one simply does not doubt that his prayer pleases God and confidently holds that God will certainly hear it, and also that one firmly basis his prayer on God's Word, that is, on God's command to pray and upon God's promise to hear our prayer. Whoever quashes all hesitation in regard to this divine command and this divine promise; whoever does not let himself doubt that his prayer will be heard, that he does not see how God could hear him, yes, that according to his reason it seems to be completely unreasonable; and finally, whoever does not cast away the faith that God will hear him when in answer to his prayer for help God is not only silent but the distress seems to grow; then whoever, as the Syro-Phoenecian woman did, continues to cry, "Lord, help me!" and thinks: if God does not help me as I think and wish now, he will help me anyhow, yes, certainly better and more gloriously than I think, his prayer is a prayer in faith.

## II.

And only such a prayer in faith is pleasing to and heard by God. Secondly, permit me to speak to you more on this point.

To be sure, expecting the hearing of your prayers seems to many to be a completely vain thing. They say, what is going to happen has been decided on in eternity; who would dare imagine that through prayer he is able to make a change

in the plan of God's government? Who would dare hope of being able to shake the unchangeable God through prayer and move him to change his will? However, they do not take into consideration that God can hear all our prayers without having to act against his eternal decrees; since God is omniscient and all-wise, he not only knew from eternity that and what we would pray, but he has also ordered all things from eternity and woven into the plan of his government that the very thing must happen which we ask of him.

Moreover, it is indeed true: it is something big that a poor mortal person, a sinner, dares to believe that God, the Most High and Most Holy, could be moved by his prayer to do or leave something undone; indeed, faith is the great boldness that that which we ask on earth will, yes, must certainly happen in heaven. Yes, this faith seems to be great arrogance, whereas it seems to be in keeping with humility to have doubts that his prayer will be heard. But no, that is a false humility, for it takes honor away not only from men but also from God himself.

Whoever prays and still does not believe that he will be heard makes God a liar; whenever he prays he says by his disbelief to God: You indeed say in your Word, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me," Ps 50:15; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Mt 7:7; you indeed say, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive," Mt 21:22, however, I cannot accept this as the truth; I cannot believe you. Whoever speaks thus, what else is he doing but turning God's promises into lies and thus making a liar out of God? Should his prayers be pleasing to and heard by God? No, rather, it is certain that whoever prays in doubt completely nullifies his prayer, yes, makes it a sin and an abomination. James, therefore, says of one who prays, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Jas 1:6.7. Oh, how many must there be who will receive nothing for all their prayers! for how seldom is the person found who actually believes that all his prayers are Yea and Amen in God's eyes!

Yet, blessed are all who pray in faith! Their prayers are acceptable to God and are heard at all times. For whoever believes that God does what he asks gives God the honor which is due him; he thus declares that God's Word is the never failing, reliable truth; he thus declares that God's promises are an irrefutable foundation upon which one can safely build and trust; he thus declares that even if all men are liars God is and remains truthful and that he certainly does what he has promised.

Yes, to our reason it seemingly is an insignificant thing to take God firmly and immovably at his word; but as once the state of innocence in Paradise consisted chiefly in this that man had perfect trust in God and in his infinite goodness, and as thereafter the fall of men from God consists in this, that they no longer want to trust God any more, and as a result all men by nature have a slavish fear of and flee from God, so the return to God consists in this that man again begins to trust God. Whoever again trusts God makes God his God again, he again enters into a relationship with God as the child with his father, he again offers God true service and is again renewed to the image of God for which he was once created.

A prayer of faith is, therefore, in God's eyes like lovely incense, which is kindled on the altar of the heart and whose odor ascends to heaven. The prayer in faith is a key with which man can open heaven, yes, God's heart. No misfortune or sorrow is so great that prayer in faith cannot give rich comfort,

or that one cannot receive help and deliverance from it by prayer in faith. As Christ once let himself be conquered by the believing prayer of a poor heathen woman and by the "I will not let thee go," Gen 32:26, of a Jacob, so God will let himself be conquered even now by the prayer in faith of all Christians.

That is why we are also so often encouraged and admonished in God's Word to pray in faith; therefore, Christ also teaches us to begin our daily prayer with the words of faith, "Our Father," and to close with the word of triumph, "Amen."

### III.

Who is he who does not wish he were able to pray thus in faith in a manner pleasing to and heard by God? Finally, let me add something on the point of how one can pray in faith.

It is clear that three things are necessary for being able to pray in faith, first, one must no longer willingly live in sin; second, one must know that he has a gracious God; and third, one must no longer build on himself, on his works, his virtues, piety, and righteousness but alone on grace.

He who wilfully lives in sin, and if it were seemingly only a single one, cannot possibly believe from his heart that God will do what he asks; his conscience will constantly contradict him; his heart will always say: What do you mean by praying to God, you who still wilfully insult him with the one or the other sin! David, therefore, says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Ps 66:18. And the Prophet Isaiah says, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yes, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well....Come now, and let us reason together." Is 1:15-18. The same thing is expressed briefly in the New Testament, "We know that God heareth not sinners." Jn 9:31.

From this it necessarily follows that also he who still does not know that he has a gracious God in heaven cannot possibly believe from his heart that God will let himself be pleased by his prayer and hear it. Whoever does not know that he is in grace before God will constantly think: What do you expect from God? He still is your foe and you are his!

The situation is the same if a person builds upon his works and righteousness. In good days he can indeed think that his prayer is acceptable to and heard by God, but in the time of great distress, in the time when all the storms of anguish and tribulation overwhelm him, in the time when he feels God's silence in his heart, yes, God's wrath, hence in the time when he needs the prayer in faith the most, he who wants to build upon his works must despair; he will then see that he can not stand before God; he will then perceive that his prayer is not worthy to be heard by God.

From this it follows that by nature no person can pray in faith, for first of all, by nature all men live in knowing and wilful sins; secondly, by nature no one knows with certainty whether he has a gracious God; and thirdly, by nature everyone builds on his works, righteousness, and respectability. Therefore, if one is to learn to pray in faith, a great change must take place in him; first he must become an entirely different person who is free from the dominion of sin, who is certain of his state of grace before God, and who relies alone on God's grace.

If you, my dear hearers, want to become such a new person, then this is my brief counsel: Use God's Word to become intimately acquainted with your sins; therefore, fall on your knees and cry to God that he will enlighten you about yourself. If you will do that, you will soon perceive what a great sinner you are in God's eyes, even though in the past men have perhaps considered you pious and upright. The more you will know your sinfulness, the greater will be your anguish and fear before God. But blessed are you when you come to this point! For your sorrow and anguish over sin is the true and only way of attaining true joy.

Then you must turn to Christ your Savior with your shattered and broken heart; that is, you must hear the Gospel which tells how Christ has won grace for all sinners, also for you. Then you must cling in faith to this; in it you must comfort yourself and pray God that he will raise up and refresh your depressed heart through his Holy Spirit and seal the comfort of the Gospel in it.

My dear hearer, if you will go this way, you will experience a great change within you; in this way you will become an entirely new person; you will cease being a slave of your sins; you will become certain that you have found grace with God; and his grace will be your only comfort, your only hope. Then, yes, then you will also be able to pray in faith as did the Syro-Phoenician woman. Then you will be able to say to God from your heart: Abba, my dear Father! And at the close of your prayer you will be able to exclaim confidently: Amen, amen, that is, yea, yea, it shall be so.

Oh, blessed people who can pray thus! Up! you who hitherto still have not been able to take my advice and go the way pointed out. And you who already can speak with God as dear children with their dear Father, know what great mercy has been shown you; do not be lazy in using this grace diligently and above all guard yourself against those things whereby you would again lose this incomparable right as children of God.

Stamp the example of this Canaanite woman deeply on your souls, and in all temptation and trouble quickly take your refuge in believing prayer, as she did, persevere as she did, and you will also with joy win every time. Amen.

## 3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 11:14-28

The grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

In the New Testament, Christians are more often and urgently admonished to remain faithful and are warned more against apostacy than any thing else. And so we read, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Mt 10:22. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev 2:10. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Gal 5:1. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." 2 Jn 8. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned."

2. Tim 3:14. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."  
Rev. 3:11.

Would to God that one could shout all this aloud to present day Christians! But sad to say, the way things stand with most of the baptized of today, one can not admonish them to persevere in the faith until the end; for how can he persevere who has not even begun to believe? How can one admonish him to remain faithful to Christ until death, who does not even side with Christ nor carry on his warfare under the banner of his cross? How can one encourage him not to lose again the things which he has wrought, who has not even sought and found the one thing which is needful? How can one call upon him to hold fast to the crown and not fall from grace, who is not even adorned with the crown of a true Christian nor does not stand under God's grace? One can not cry out to most Christians, Do not fall away! but; Arise from your fall; return to the truth which you have forsaken; return to Christ whom you have left; seek again the grace which you have lost!

If you compare the life of most present-day Christians with the descriptions which God's Word gives of pardoned Christians, you will discover that matters stand far differently with the majority and that most are certainly going the wrong way which never can lead to heaven.

According to God's Word a true Christian seeks his comfort in Christ; a true Christian will never again be ruled by his own spirit but by the Spirit of grace, the Holy Spirit; a true Christian considers the divine truth more precious than gold and pearls, more dear than the whole world, and will struggle for it until death; a true Christian has an inner love for all his fellow-redeemed, even his enemies, but especially for his brethren in the faith; not only does he rejoice with those who do rejoice but he also weeps with those who weep and gladly helps them with all which lies in his powers; a true Christian is, moreover, poor in spirit, humble over against God and men, and, therefore, gladly reckons himself among the lowly; a true Christian is afraid of sin, battles against it, does not excuse himself, and daily cleanses himself of sin in the blood of the reconciliation; a true Christian no longer has any pleasure in the vanity of the world, does not seek for good days for his flesh, and gladly becomes like Christ also in his suffering and humiliation; finally, a true Christian has a deep trust in the care of his heavenly Father and, therefore, in faith casts even all his earthly cares into the lap of his dear Father.

Now tell me, where do we find such Christians? Alas, the Lord must now complain about all Christendom as he did about the congregation at Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Rev 2:4b.5. Yes, my dear friends, though there are many who once were received into God's covenant of grace through Baptism and were reborn, most have nevertheless fallen away, forsaken God's covenant, and lost the grace of the rebirth. Permit me today to speak to you a bit more on how this tragic apostacy generally takes place in order to warn, admonish, and encourage all of you.

The text. Luke 11:14-28.

We hear that when Christ had driven out a devil, a few of the Pharisees made the blasphemous statement, "He casteth our devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils." V.15. Christ then showed them first of all how he destroys the kingdom of the devil in mankind and thus does not become his friend but the devil's mightiest foe and conqueror. Toward the close Christ shows how

it often happens that Satan is driven from a person but returns with seven spirits more wicked than himself, if the person falls away and again makes room for the devil in his heart.

On the basis of the last portion of Christ's words I will speak to you on

### THE TRAGIC FALL FROM FAITH

- I. How that Happens, and
- II. Its Tragic Results.

O Lord Jesus Christ, you have died for all sinners and paid dearly with your blood that they may all be your sheep. You not only pasture those who already know that you are their Shepherd, but diligently and anxiously search also for those who have lost you and are on the wrong road. Oh, go after all your lost sheep among us and let the preaching of the Gospel be your voice which calls out to them, Return! Let this voice penetrate their heart so that it is divinely moved to seek you their Good Shepherd this very hour. And then, then, keep them in your flock until you will have gathered us all in your heavenly fold. Amen.

#### I.

Christ says in our Gospel, "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." V.24. With these words the Lord means to say: When a person is torn from the spiritual power of Satan and is received into Christ's kingdom of grace through faith, Satan does not give up the hope of misleading such a person and deceiving him in regard to his salvation; no, he wanders through dry places, that is, he works in the hearts of unbelievers who are already blinded; but Satan does not find a pleasing dwelling place in these hearts; they are like desert places; he yearns to be back again in the fresh heart of him who has taken Christ into his heart. The evil spirit, as we might say, finds more enjoyment in making only one true Christian fall away from Christ than leading a thousand secure sinners around by the nose. Day and night he, therefore, slinks after the true Christian in all he does and waits for a suitable moment when he can seat himself upon the throne of a Christian's soul and cause him to fall.

When the Lord continues and says, "And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished," v.25, he indicates how it is possible for those who are in grace to fall again into God's disfavor, into blindness and sin; this happens when a believer does not lock his heart any more against Satan, yes, as it were, has swept it and decorated it, that is, prepares it so that the evil spirit again finds the door willingly open to receive it as a desirable guest. So we see: No one can be forcibly removed from grace who has Christ in his heart, for Christ is stronger than anyone; nothing can tear us out of his hand; he makes those who believe in him so powerful that through him they are able to do everything; if they are again conquered, they themselves are at fault.

If you, therefore, ask how then the tragic fall from grace takes place, if you ask: How is it possible that a person who is on the blessed road to heaven can again leave it? and that he who has found salvation can again let go of and lose it? I will answer this question.

There is only one way to come to faith but a thousand by-ways by which one can again leave it. Many lose God's grace by gradually, slowly falling away,

as seems to have happened to the traitor Judas. Others, on the other hand, fall suddenly, as David did through adultery and Peter by his denial. Many do not know that they have fallen as the bishop of Laodicea to whom Christ had to say, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev 3:17. Others, on the other hand, know very well that they have fallen, as Cain; therefore, they often in the end fall into despair. Many fall away openly so that everyone can see it; they not only lose their living faith from their hearts but also desert publicly to the heterodox or as Demas to the world; from orthodox Christians they turn into enthusiasts, from confessors of the pure doctrine to tools of the antichrist or to blasphemers, mockers, and persecutors. Others, on the other hand, fall only inwardly; they remain in outward communion with Christians; they still go to church and the Lord's Table; they always speak of divine things as if they were the best Christians, as the apostle sums it up, they keep the appearance of a godly life but deny the power thereof, as the bishop of Sardis to whom Christ commanded that it be said, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Rev 3:1. Many fall so that they become most light-hearted, yes, wicked, and like the most unclean of animals roll about again in the filth of every sin; others, on the other hand, so fall away that they lose only the willing, joyful heart of doing good, the true evangelical spirit, and fall into a troubled striving to fulfil the Law.

So you see, my friends, that falling from grace occurs in very many different ways; therefore, a most earnest examination is necessary to see whether one is still standing; even though you may not have fallen the way this or that one did, you may have nevertheless fallen but in a different way; if not suddenly, then perhaps gradually? if not consciously, perhaps imperceptibly? if not outwardly, perhaps inwardly? if not in a gross, perhaps in a subtle way? Alas, how many place their hand to the plow and look back again! how many begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh! how many leave the Egypt of this world, go along through the Red Sea of the first temptations and then at last yearn again for the flesh pots of Egypt, perish in the wilderness, and never reach the heavenly Canaan!

How does Satan begin to entice a person, who has found his rest in Christ and his Gospel, out of his fortress and rob him of his crown? In order to achieve this, the tempter employs chiefly two ways; either he tries to get the person to follow wilfully errors dangerous to his soul, or to hurl him into sins against his conscience.

It is, of course, true that not every error into which a Christian falls will immediately subvert his state of grace; but every error is nevertheless a poison for the soul which threatens it with death; whoever knowingly and wantonly perseveres in an error suffers shipwreck of his faith just as well as he who sins wilfully. Faith has indeed no other foundation than God's Word; how can true faith, therefore, remain in a person who knowingly leaves God's Word? How can love to God remain where the love of God's revealed truth or the pure doctrine is lost? The entire Christianity of a person who ceases to be particular about every word of Scripture is no longer built upon the Word but upon his deceitful heart.

The Galatians are a remarkable example of how the best Christians can be brought to fall from grace by false doctrine; after Paul went away, they listened to false teachers and were misled only on the doctrine of justification. Finally, the apostle had to cry out to them, "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal 1:8. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?" Gal 3:1. "Christ is become of no effect unto

you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal 5:4. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" Gal 5:7. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Gal 5:9. "He that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." Gal 5:10.

We see that we can not joke with false doctrine; swerving just a little from the truth can cause us to lose our soul and salvation. That is why Satan often makes the Christians eager to read false books, to hear false preaching, and to fraternize with false brethren; if at first he succeeds in making a person indifferent to the truth, he in the end succeeds in making him uncertain even in the most important teachings and converts his divine faith into a human one; for if faith is no longer founded alone upon God's Word, then faith is only a pretense by which one is lost. That is why we are so often admonished to remain with Christ's words, to hold fast the faithful Word, to be on guard against false prophets and not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits whether they are from God. Why are all these admonitions given if false doctrine were not so ruinous and dangerous to our souls?

Another way by which Satan seeks to hurl Christians from grace is either by suddenly pushing them into great sin or by gradually bringing them under the dominion of sin again; he uses chiefly three sins, either pride, or lust, or greed. Many stop watching over their heart; pride arises, they lose their poverty of spirit and humble mind by which they consider themselves as nothing and exalted over no person; self-righteously they ponder upon what they do; they become puffed up over their knowledge; they forsake their simplicity, they search minutely into high things and in so doing forget the main thing; they lose the knowledge of themselves, they become blind and dogmatic, they do not want to be reprimanded, finally, they excuse all their sins, and thus fall from grace, often without knowing it; they still speak of believing in Christ but their hardened heart knows nothing about it.

Others do not watch over their flesh, they again begin to nourish it and seek good days in this world; they become indolent in prayer, in reading and hearing God's Word; they hit upon the thought: Since man is never able to merit anything by his works, why is it necessary to deny oneself so earnestly? they, therefore, begin again to take part in the pleasures of the world and act like the world and call that Christian freedom; in order to evade the mockery of the world they repeatedly deny Christ and his truth and call this Christian wisdom, and before they can think they have in this way become just like a child of the world who keeps nothing but a few Christian phrases.

Others fall from grace by a love of worldly things and a false trust in them. At first as true Christians they consider all worldly things as nothing but they perhaps are blessed with temporal things; instead of using them only for helping their poor brethren in every possible way and bringing an offering for church and school, they cling to it with their heart; they become constantly more greedy of getting more, their planning grows constantly bigger, they always invest their capital in new undertakings so that they have an excuse, if they are to help a poor person who is in trouble, of no money; the more they scrape together the more stingy and greedy they become instead of more generous, and thus they lose Christ; finally in the depths of their heart they say to that lump of gold, My comfort! On the other hand, others whom God has not blessed with temporal things but to whom he sends worry and want often cast aside all trust in God, sink into the sorrow of this world and thus finally fall into death and damnation.

You see, that is the way one erases his name from the book of life by himself; that is the way one turns from being a child of grace into a child of

wrath and imperceptibly leaves the invisible kingdom of Jesus Christ, the King of grace and becomes a slave of Satan, the prince of darkness.

## II.

Permit me to add a few words concerning the tragic results of such a fall from grace. Christ describes it in our text thus: "Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven more spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." V.26. Christ tells us that whoever falls from grace loses not only the grace he received but also falls into a ruin which is seven times greater than that in which he lay before his conversion.

Of a truth, that is terrible. But daily experience confirms it. If a person has known the truth in the past and falls away, if he lets error deceive him, if he falls from the true orthodox church and goes to a heterodox, enthusiastic sect or even to the antichristian papacy, then such a person is a more bitter foe of the truth than all those who grew up in error. Seven devils enter into the soul of such an apostate, when before, ere he knew the truth, only one evil spirit ruled his soul. There is more hope that the greatest mocker, who was brought up in unbelief from his youth on, will finally come to the knowledge of the truth than that such a denier of what he knew to be the truth should again be enlightened and converted. A sevenfold darkness covers his wretched soul and the evil foe already rejoices that he will never again find grace. History gives us enough frightful examples of how deliberate deniers of the truth finally were awakened but in despair had no comfort. Oh, how necessary it is to watch one's heart, that one is not infected by the pestilence of heresy and unbelief, but remains in the clear knowledge of the saving truth!

The results are the same with those who fall from grace by sinning against their conscience. It is easier for the most godless child of the world to be awakened from his sleep of sin and be converted than for a Christian, who has driven the spirit of grace from himself and become a fallen secret hypocrite or a known despiser of Christ and his Gospel, to return to communion with Christ. Either such a person is in such great blindness that he still considers himself converted, or he despairs completely of receiving help, or finally he maliciously tramples the blood of the reconciliation under foot and reviles the Spirit of grace so that he can longer be renewed. Therefore, such are called in Holy Scripture withered, twice dead trees which will hardly become green and produce fruit but are ready for the eternal fires; and St. Peter utters this important warning, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." 2 Peter 2:20,21.

Who, therefore, is able to describe the misery, the misfortune, the wretchedness into which he hurls himself who casts away the treasure, whether it be through error or through sin, which he once had seized! They deserved to be mourned over! Their fall is the more lamentable the less they know and are concerned about it.

Well, now, my friends, today I have held up before you a clear mirror in which those, if they do not wilfully close their own eyes, certainly will find their picture who either have fallen or have never arisen.

Oh, you that are convinced of your secret or known fall, I ask you: Do you not want to arise again? do you not want to return? Once again Jesus Christ calls out to you through the preaching of his Gospel to return to him; do not delay one second; the danger to your soul grows mightily from hour to hour like the waters of a flood. Do not go farther and farther away until you perhaps no longer hear Christ's call of grace. But do not suppose that it is too late; no, only Satan whispers that to you, after he has hurled you into error or sin; do not let yourselves be bound by the cords of despair; tear them by the grace which is even now being told to you. Christ has received gifts also for those who are rebellious, also for you. Groan with David and weep with Peter and you also will join them in finding grace again. If it is difficult for one who has fallen to rise again, it is nevertheless easy if he merely accepts grace anew and quickly turns around, as the prodigal son, the moment he perceives his misery.

Say not: "My sins are far too great,  
 His mercy I have scorned and slighted,  
 Now my repentance is too late;  
 I came not when his love invited."  
 Oh trembling sinner, have no fear;  
 In penitence to Christ draw near.  
 Come now, though conscience still is chiding;  
 Accept his mercy, e'er abiding.  
 Come; blest are they who this believe:  
 My Savior sinners -- oh all rejoice --  
 My Savior sinners doth receive. (386,4) Amen.

## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT

John 6:1-15

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

By nature every person passionately longs to be happy. Though the things in which men by nature seek their happiness, their peace, their rest are most varied, nevertheless, amongst all natural men they are either the things of this world or temporal things. Here is one who seeks his happiness in an easy, peaceful, and carefree life, another in good eating and drinking every day, a third in a large extensive business, a fourth in gathering treasures and increasing his wealth, a fifth in receiving positions of honor and especially in enjoying great respect among men, another in the common pleasures of the world, in dancing and playing, in theaters and concerts, in riotous eating and drinking, another in fashionable, gorgeous, and striking clothing or in the magnificence of his mansion and rooms and in the splendor of his household, another in the undisturbed indulgence of his pet sins.

As long as a person still seeks his happiness in such things, that shows that he is not a true Christian but at best merely a Christian in name. For when a person is once enlightened and affected by God's Word, and if he begins

to be concerned about the one thing which is needful and asks, What must I do to be saved? then that person perceives that no worldly thing can bring rest and peace to his soul, and that nothing earthly, no earthly wealth no matter how great, no worldly pleasures no matter how enticing to his flesh, and no honor among men no matter how great can make him happy. Therefore, if a person who has been affected by God's Word really decides to care for the salvation of his soul and to become a true Christian, he makes a complete break with the world and all its glory, its treasures, lusts, and honor, separates himself from the world, lives a retired life, and seeks his happiness and joy in God, in his Word, and in his grace. He says from the bottom of his heart,

Hence all earthly treasure!

Jesus is my Pleasure,

Jesus in my Choice,

Hence, all empty glory!

Naught to me thy story

Told with tempting voice,

Pain or loss, Or shame or cross,

Shall not from my Savior move me.

Since He deigns to love me,

Evil world, I leave thee;

Thou canst not deceive me,

Thine appeal is vain.

Sin that once did blind me,

Get thee far behind me,

Come not forth again.

Past thy hour, O price and power;

Sinful life, thy bonds I sever,

Leave thee now forever. (347,4.5)

Oh, blessed is that person who, struck by the lightning of God's Word and thus awakened to a spiritual life, makes this great decision! He has left the broad way on which millions walk securely and entered upon the narrow way to heaven.

Now if a person begins to live such a pious life withdrawn from all the vanities of the world, the children of the world do not only look on him as an eccentric and a fool but also as a truly unhappy and unfortunate person. They think: What does a Christian get out of life? He denies himself everything which makes this life serene and acceptable. The palaces of pleasure which would be open to him he flees and instead reads the Bible, prays, and sings, and worries himself with the thoughts of his death, God, judgment, and eternity. The way of honor would also not be closed to him, but he leaves it and by his overstrained religiousness makes himself the object of contempt and ridicule. The means of becoming rich would also be at his command but he does not use them; he has unnecessary conscience scruples about all the trifles which just cannot be avoided in business deals in which one wants to make a profit. Such a Christian tramples upon his happiness, himself transforms this beautiful world into a vale of tears, and makes himself unhappy.

That is what the worldling thinks of pious Christians. But is this idea based on fact? Does a Christian make himself unhappy at least as far as worldly things are concerned by his Christianity, by severing connections with the world, by his conscientiousness and piety? I answer: No! And all true Christians will join me in saying no. Though Christians may deny themselves many of the things in which a worldling seeks his happiness, yes, his heaven on earth, they win not only heavenly things but are for that very reason the most happy also

in a temporal way. Our today's Gospel teaches us that.

The text. John 6:1-15.

On the basis of this Gospel may I now show you

#### HOW FORTUNATE EVEN CHRISTIANS ARE EVEN IN A TEMPORAL WAY

They are so fortunate because they are

- I. Free from all Anxious CARES about Temporal Things, and
- II. Free from the Tormenting DESIRE for Temporal Things.

#### I.

The story related in our today's Gospel is amazing not only on account of the glorious miracle which Christ did in feeding 5,000 men, not counting women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fishes, and the twelve baskets of bread left; this story is also most amazing because so many thousands followed Christ into a desolate, barren, unpopulated wilderness without providing themselves with food, and because they remained with Christ a whole day until the coming of night and heard his word, unconcerned about how they would appease their hunger. What caused this happy unconcern about temporal things? Not the fact that they had already experienced how Christ could set a table even in the wilderness, for the miraculous feeding related in our Gospel was the first which Christ did. We can find the basis for this amazing phenomenon in nothing else than that Christ by his very presence, by his Word removed all concern for temporal things from the hearts of those people.

And so it is. For even now it is true that as long as a person knows nothing about Christ, or has not yet come to a living faith in Christ and as long as he still clings to the world, so long man can not leave behind his anxious cares about temporal things.

If you but look at the world you will find: Among the children of this world there is a ceaseless worrying and fretting about the future. Not only does the poor person who actually has no prospect of where he will get bread for himself and his family worry himself to death, but even he who at the moment lacks nothing. Anxiously he thinks: Now I would be well provided for; my business provides me with all that I need; but now if I were to become sick, what then? if I were to become old and weak and if I could no longer work for a living, what then? If on top of this hard times come, oh what worries, what cares fill and burden the poor heart! what deep sighs then arise from the oppressed breast! what restless, sleepless nights the head of the family spends thinking he is forsaken by God and men! Yes, and even more! Even the richest are continually worried about temporal things. If they have large investments outstanding, then they are worried about losing it by defaulting debtors or accident; if they own gorgeous homes, they are worried about losing them by fire or other mishaps; if they have a large extensive business, they worry about suddenly losing it by their bold business ventures or through some sort of business merger by their competitors. Oh, if all the children of the world, and even if they would seem to be most happy, would open their hearts to us, we would see that all of them arise in the morning with worries, go about their business with worries, and lay down to sleep with worries, and that these worries even accompany them to the places of pleasure and never give them any rest, no matter where they are.

Worry is a heavy stone which the children of the world of themselves continually add to their burden of misery, so that it becomes unbearable; and worry is the bitter pill which they themselves throw into every cup of joy and which embitters it for them. What is, therefore, all the happiness which the children of this world enjoy? It is a short sweet dream and intoxication from which they always awaken too soon with pain and sorrow.

Now if a person comes to a living faith in Jesus Christ, if he no longer clings to the world but to Christ, oh, what a blessed change takes place in him! Such a person has the firm confidence that all his sins are forgiven, that God is gracious to him, that he pleases God for Christ's sake, that he is God's child, and that God is his Father. All at once this faith takes all his former anxious cares for temporal things from his heart. If he is poor, he thinks: Why should I worry? I serve a rich Lord, who will provide for me; he feeds the birds of the sky and clothes the lilies of the field, how much more will he not do that for me? If in addition to his poverty he has a large family, he thinks: Why should I worry? Not I but God is their true Father; all I have to do is to bring them up in his fear and admonition; as the true Father of my children he will care for them. If my heart is filled with sympathy and mercy toward the children who were entrusted to me, so that I can not forsake them, how much less will their heavenly Father forsake them!

If sickness and other troubles are added to poverty, again he thinks: Why should I worry? God has numbered the hairs of my head, without his will nothing can happen to me, not only happiness but also sorrow comes from him; but he has promised that he will not let his children be tempted above their ability, but with the temptation will also make a way to escape that they are able to bear it; well, then, when his hour will come, he will also say to my misery: So far and no further. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Ps. 42:11.

On the other hand, if a Christian prospers in earthly things, if God blesses him with wealth, he still does not let these anxious cares into his heart. He looks on everything which he has, not as his property, but as a loan of which he is the steward. And so he thinks: Why should I worry? If God takes away what he has entrusted to me, he is taking a burden away which I must now bear.

How happy, therefore, the Christian is even in temporal things! He is like a wanderer who bearing a light load joyfully looks into the future and, certain of his goal, hurries courageously over hill and dale; God's Word is his rod and his staff upon which he leans; God's grace is the sun by day and the stars by night which shine over him; God's Spirit is his Guide who shows him the way; God's omnipotence is his shield which protects him; God's promises are his food and drink with which he daily strengthens, comforts, and refreshes himself.

So my dear hearers, if you wish to be happy as far as temporal things are concerned, then let your heart forsake temporal things and attach your heart to Christ and his eternal wealth; then you will follow Christ without a care wherever he leads you, as once Israel followed Christ in the wilderness; and as once Christ did not put the faith of the people to shame but provided for them, so will he also provide for you. If you join Christ, the world will not become a vale of tears, but Christ will rather convert this vale of tears, which is what the world really is, into a green pasture upon which he will feed you so that you must daily confess, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Nothing, nothing which you need will you ever lack.

## II.

My friends, this much is also true: Christ has not promised his followers

more than food and clothing. Are then all Christians so fortunate with regard to earthly things if they cling to Christ and not to the world? I reply with a confident yes, because they are also free from the painful desire for earthly things. Permit me to speak to you about this.

As long as a person's heart has not yet been changed by a living faith in Christ, so long does not only the worry about what he has but also the desire for what he does not yet have disturb his earthly happiness. Since a man's heart has by nature an intense longing to be perfectly happy, yet since man can not find his happiness in earthly temporal things, the natural man always thinks that he is not happy because he lacks this, that, or the other thing. He is, therefore, never satisfied with what he has. If he is well-off, he wants to become wealthy; if he is wealthy, he wants to become wealthier still. If he has a profitable business and rents his home, he wants to have his own home; if he has a little cottage, he wants to have a mansion; if he has a mansion, he wants to have more of them. If he rents a farm, he wants to have his own little plot of ground; when he finally has it, he wants to have an entire section of land. If he has a position of honor, he wants to climb still higher. If he is a prince, he wants to be a king. In short, by nature man is insatiable. The more he has the greater become his desires, just as he who drinks ocean water becomes the thirstier the more he drinks.

What is the result of this desire? It never gives the wretched child of the world rest and peace; it causes him to run and chase restlessly to seek his happiness yet it always flees further away from them. It makes the richest person more miserable in his heart than a beggar, the highly honored more wretched than the lowest and humblest, the one who chases from one pleasure to the next always without it; even the king's crown becomes a burden; in brief, it is the cause that the one outwardly the most blessed is inwardly the most miserable. Solomon, therefore, writes in his Book of Proverbs, "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches," Prov 13:7; (cp. the German: "Many are poor despite great riches, and many are rich despite great poverty.")

However, who are they who are rich even despite their poverty? They are those who do not cling to the world but to Christ.

The people in our Gospel are an example of this fact. Christ fed them only with barley bread and a few small fish. Yet how joyfully we see them seated upon the green sward under the open sky! How joyfully we see them partaking of their simple meal! After they were satisfied they cried out in joy, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." V.14. Yes, they are so happy that in the simplicity of their heart they draw near to Christ in order to crown him their king.

My friends, you can see from this how happy they are even as far as temporal things are concerned who do not cling to the world but to Christ. They are freed not only from the anxious cares for temporal things, but also from the painful desire for them. Because they have found the one thing needful, God's grace and the certainty of their salvation, they are cured of their natural insatiability for earthly things. Christ gives them only enough but they are satisfied with that. Contentment dwells in their heart.

Oh, how happy all Christians, therefore, are! How much richer than the richest child of the world they consider themselves in their poverty if they have what they need! How much greater is their joy when God gives them a small garment than the richest child of the world who clothes himself in silk and

satin! How much more blessed they are in their humble hut and lowly chambers when they read the Word of their God by lamplight than the richest child of the world in his beautifully decorated and gorgeously lighted rooms! How much happier they feel in their lowliness and privacy than that ambitious person in the circle of those who envy him! How much happier their hearts are amid their little family joys which God sends them than the rich children of the world amid all their brilliant banquets and festivities! Yes, what blessed hours of a foretaste of heaven they often have upon their sickbed and during the days of darkest misfortune, whereas in their happiest days the children of the world must hear the voice within them say, You still are not happy!

Oh my friends, do not seek your happiness in the world; you will find it in the world as little as you would build your home upon the tossing sea. The children of the world get as little happiness from what they possess as the beast of burden can enjoy the valuables it must carry. If you do not find your happiness in your hearts through faith in Jesus Christ, you will find it nowhere else. The more earnestly you say farewell to the world and its vanities and the more faithfully you will follow Christ in faith and love, the happier you will be even as far as earthly things are concerned. Yes, in good and evil days, in honor and disgrace, amid wealth and poverty, in life and in death, you will have to confess:

My soul's best Friend, what joy and blessing  
 My spirit ever finds in Thee!  
 From gloomy depths of doubt distressing  
 Into Thine arms for rest I flee.  
 There will the night of sorrow vanish  
 When from my heart Thy love doth banish  
 All anguish and all pain and fear.  
 Yea, here on earth begins my heaven;  
 Who would not joyful be when given  
 A loving Savior always near! (362,1) Amen. Amen.

## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT

John 8:46-59

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this same Savior, my dear hearers!

Very often the reason why many do not accept the divine truth is that they are offended at the lowliness, the despicableness, or even the sinful failings of those who preach or confess it. Once when Paul, the herald of the Gospel, preached the divine truth in the public market place at Athens in simple words, the philosophers present did not even take the trouble to examine the apostle's doctrine; contemptuously they immediately cried out, "What will this babbling say?" Acts 17:18. That was also the reason why for the past 300 years many, particularly the great and learned, have not accepted the Reformation; they consider it disgraceful to be reformed by a miserable monk.

This idea is born into us men; it is even now noticeable in many. Not a

few, reading of how many and great sins have been committed even by Christians from time immemorial, conclude that the truth is not to be found in the Christian religion. And even now how many are offended when they see in those congregations in which the pure evangelical Gospel is preached so many sinful, dishonest members who deny by their works what they confess with their mouth! How many wish to remain ignorant of the Gospel when they learn more and more that the preachers of the Gospel are also poor, weak men just as others are, yes, that there are hypocrites even among ministers whose evil deeds are often revealed contrary to all expectation and to the insult of all Christians! How many would rather wash their hands of church, of the congregation, of preachers, and of public worship!

As many think they are certainly justified in rejecting a teaching if it is presented and confessed by sinful, defiled persons, just so false and objectionable is the principle by which they make their decision. The truth remains the truth, whether an angel or a man, a saint or a sinner, an experienced adult or an inexperienced child, a wise or a simple person confesses it. God has decreed to have his saving Gospel preached to sinners by sinners, and of a truth, this shows great wisdom; for if only holy angels would preach to us, it would be so easy for us to think: If that angel would know how a sinner feels, he would not preach that way.

Of course, we are not going to say that nothing depends upon whether he who teaches correctly also lives correctly. Absolutely not! Experienced Christians examine the doctrine above all; they are chiefly concerned that this is pure; but weak Christians and even more unbelievers, on the other hand, examine more the life of a preacher; if that is above reproach, then that also prompts unbelievers to trust his doctrine; on the other hand, if the preacher lives an ungodly life, he himself is tearing down what he wants to build by his doctrine; he himself awakens the suspicion that he is a false prophet, who does not point the way to salvation but to ruin. Great is, therefore, the responsibility of all who preach the truth or confess it to the world. They especially are told, "For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" Mt 18:7.

Well, are the unbelievers excused, since so many who confess the divine truth give great offence by their sins? No, my friends, for God has sent men a Teacher from heaven whose holy doctrine most amazingly and perfectly agreed with his life; a Teacher whose life so radiated purity that even the all-seeing eye of God, to say nothing of men's eyes, could find not the least spot or mote of human weakness; and this Teacher is -- Jesus Christ. And how Christ's perfect, holy life publicly shames unbelief, let that, etc.

The text. John 8:46-59.

"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" This is the question Christ at the beginning of our text asked his foes, and added, "And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" Christ maintains two things: first, that no one could accuse him of sin, and secondly, that, therefore, no one can excuse himself if he does not believe in him. On the basis of these two thoughts I will now speak to you on the thought

CHRIST'S PERFECT, HOLY LIFE PUBLICLY SHAMES UNBELIEF

Hear now

- I. That the Holiness of Christ's Life Shines so Brightly, that not even Unbelief can Cast Doubt upon it, and  
 II. That His Life, therefore, Shames All Those who Stubbornly Wish to Persevere in their Unbelief.

## I.

My friends, as little as it is necessary first to prove to a person by many arguments that light is not dark but bright, and that the sun does not spread darkness but light, so little is it necessary to prove painstakingly that Christ was holy. As, when the brilliant sun coming over the horizon into sight shows of itself its light giving power to every seeing eye merely by shining, so one need but present the picture of the life of Christ to a person and he will be compelled of himself to exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is Jesus Christ; the whole earth is full of his glory." Yes, if he wanted to attempt to describe the heavenly purity of the life of Christ, he would have to proceed with fear and trembling. That is a subject which infinitely surpasses the powers not only of men but even of the archangels. No creature can worthily speak of it. Therefore, I admit: since I want to speak of Christ's holy life, I am like a child who wants to draw the glories of the sky with his crayons. Yet I will not presume to speak thus of the Most Holy. See, he was that; I will remind you of only one event from the life of the most Beautiful of the children of men, in order to direct your further silent attention and believing amazement to this most perfect example.

One bright mirror in which is glorious reflected the crown of Christ's holiness is our today's Gospel. Christ there asks his embittered foes the question, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" V.46. No person ever has or ever will speak that way. Even the most loving friend who overlooks much and puts the best construction on much nevertheless sees in the most pious friend many a sinful weakness of which he must remind him if asked such a question. How certain, therefore, Christ must have been that even the sharpest scrutinizing eyes of distrust, suspicion, yes, glowing hate could uncover nothing blamable in his words, nor attitudes, nor works, when in the temple at Jerusalem he publicly called upon his sworn enemies to bear testimony of him!

This purity of conscience, this clear consciousness of his most perfect innocence we constantly find in Christ. Christ prayed much but never for grace, never for forgiveness. Christ humbled himself deeply and portrayed himself as a servant of sinners, but never do we hear from his mouth the confession of one sin or remorse. No matter how deeply he humbled himself he always speaks of his inner honor in the highest and most exalted terms. Even that time when he was 12 years old and wanted to reproach his mother, he answered her with holy earnestness, "How is it that ye have sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Lk 2:49.

How joyfully would Christ's foes have cast his sins into his teeth in answer to the question, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" if only they could have produced one semblance of sin! But what do they do? True, they were not silent, yet their only weapons are insult, blasphemy, and persecution. They answered, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?" V.48. Yes, when Christ testified to them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am," we read, "They took up stones to cast at him." Vv.57.58. The more his foes tried to dishonor him the more gloriously they by their powerless slander itself confirmed Christ's holiness, as the light is accentuated the most by the very shadow. For must not he be blameless who can publicly challenge his foes to point to the least wrong in him when the foe instead of proof sputters insult, and instead of fact must grab stones? This rage into which his foes fell at

that question is a more powerful testimony for Christ's unimpeachable innocence than all the eulogies in his behalf.

What his foes must here admit in veiled manner they also had to state loudly at other times. Even Pilate, who pronounced the sentence of death upon Christ, after the closest examination before all the people had to give this testimony, "I find no fault in him at all; I am innocent of the blood of this just person." Even the malefactor at Christ's side knew and was certain of Christ's innocence; therefore, on the cross he testified, "This man hath done nothing amiss." And when at Christ's crucifixion the sun lost its brightness, and the earth quaked after his innocent death, the rocks split, and the graves of the saints were opened, the centurion in charge of the guard at the cross understood very well that even inanimate nature wanted to testify to the innocence of the Condemned; he, therefore, exclaimed, "Truly, this was a pious man and the Son of God."

One shadow of contempt could be cast upon Christ's innocence; it is the fact that one of his most trusted disciples who had been an ear and eye witness of all of Christ's words and deeds betrayed him; but even this shadow is dispelled when we hear how after he did his deed his betrayer was gripped by the severest pangs of conscience because of which he finally killed himself after he had to confess before his enemies, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." The wretched corpse of this suicide must, therefore, be an eloquent witness to the innocence of him whom he had perfidiously betrayed.

However, the loudest, the most incontestable witness for Christ's innocence is his holy life itself. In the very area where no person is free from sinful weaknesses, Christ stands as the greatest example of the most perfect purity. He not only teaches the most difficult duties of denial and love of one's enemies but he also practises them in the most perfect way. His entire life was the holy imprint and radiant splendor of his holy teaching. If we consider only Christ's behavior as it is described in our text, we see him among his foes as a patient lamb among ravening wolves, as a white delicate rose among prickly thorns. His foes speak with tongues kindled by hell and spue forth hellish flames against him, but that does not call forth any passion from him as it would us men; with earnest gentleness he merely replies, "I have not a devil, but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me." V.49. And when finally Christ kept his heavenly friendliness in spite of all slander and this very thing incited his foes to the utmost rage so that they murderously picked up stones to hurl at him, under the protection of his omnipotence he calmly left and hid himself from the eyes of his persecutors, since the hour of his death determined by his Father had not yet come.

As holy as we see Christ here in words, mien, and action, so holy do we always find him. If Christ does good, we never see him ask about worthiness; wherever there was distress and help was desired, there he helped. He never asked for thanks, and if he was repaid with contemptuous thanklessness, he did not decide to stop doing good but remained a fount of goodness and love which was open to all people. We always see how gentle he is toward all his foes, he never repaid evil with evil, he never reviled in turn when he was reviled, he blessed when he was cursed. Indeed, we often see him angry but never over insults he experienced by over the dishonor of his Father. What a loving, heart-moving glance he gave Peter when he so shamefully denied him before his very eyes! With what gentleness he received Judas when he betrayed him with a hypocritical kiss! With what childlike trust did Christ cling to his heavenly Father when he became cruel to him! With what incomprehensible, pitying love the bleeding Christ while dying cried from the cross to heaven in behalf of his crucifiers and tormentors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

You see, my friends, in Christ the evangelists have described a man who will never again appear on earth. Those uneducated, unlearned, simple men have sketched the picture of a life so heavenly-pure that we can see from it that they could never have invented such a biography; for such a holy picture not even the greatest philosophers of all times could have drawn, to say nothing of being able to show it in their own lives. In Christ we see man as he never is, and never can be in this life in his fallen state but as he should be.

Not only Christ's friends but even his enemies had to recognize this. Among others, Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes the following of him, "At that time lived Jesus, a wise man whom one would more fittingly call someone else than a man." So even this Jew was so deeply gripped by Christ's appearance that he could scarcely call him a mere man. Christ made this impression also upon the unconverted heathen; we read in world history that the heathen Roman Caesar Alexander Severus hung a picture of Christ in his home. Yes, history tells us that the heathen Caesar Hadrian decided shortly before his death to build a temple to Christ's honor next to the other temples of his gods.

Thus the holiness of Christ's life shines so brightly that the greatest unbeliever cannot cast doubt upon it.

And what follows from this? This, that Christ's perfectly holy life shames all those who still stiffneckedly intend to persist in their unbelief.

## II.

I have a few words to say to you on this point.

My friends, the holiness of Christ's life openly shames unbelief because, first of all, it completely cuts off all its false excuses. According to our text, after Christ had asked his foes, whether they could convict him of only one sin, he added, "And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" V.46b. He means to say: What reasons could you have for still rejecting me?

So to this very day one can ask everyone who will not accept the Gospel of Christ: Why do you not believe? How can you be offended that there are so many hypocrites among those who call themselves Christians? How can you take offence at the fact that even among the servants of Christ there are men who preach other things and are themselves reprehensible? who live otherwise than as they teach? who are merely called servants of Christ but who really do not serve Christ but themselves, that is, as the apostle says, who serve their belly, are given to greed, pride, and secret lusts? Who has pointed you to a man? One is our Master, Jesus Christ; we are to look to him, he is the true Shepherd, he is the true, perfect example for his flock, who leads the way and in whose footsteps we are to go. No matter how great the offenses which false Christians give the world by their unchristian life, and no matter how many let themselves be misled by that to reject Christian doctrine completely, they will not be able to excuse themselves in the least in God's judgment; for they should have looked to Christ who confirmed and adorned his true Word by holy deeds.

However, not only are all their false excuses taken from unbelievers, but also the most urgent reasons to recognize Christ as the true Son of God are laid before their eyes and on their hearts. For tell me yourself: does not he who must admit that Christ was more holy than any other person condemn himself when he does not also admit that he was God's Son? If Christ had been born in sin like all other people, if by nature he had had a heart inclined to sin and unrighteousness like we all have, how is this marvel to be explained that all

people always go the wrong way, that Christ, on the other hand, constantly went the holy way? How is the riddle to be solved that Christ shortly before our text had to say, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above." Jn 8:23. Where would we find the solution to the mystery that, born in one of the most insignificant corners of the world, educated among a godless people, and living in a horribly corrupt time, he nevertheless towers so high, so unprecedently far above all the wise and the noble and the best of all times? Who planted this flower, who nourished and cherished it that it stands so unique in the soil of the entire world? Must not an unbeliever, contemplating Christ's holiness the like of which there is no second example among mortal men, of himself exclaim: Truly, Christ must be a different being than we men; he must be of a higher, holier origin than we, he must have descended from a more exalted race than sinners; his father cannot be a sinful person, he must be the holy Father in heaven Himself?

Moreover, we add this point: Christ not only continually speaks the truth but is also so humble that he nowhere seeks honor, does not let himself be served but serves others; and yet this truthful and honestly humble Christ clearly confesses that he is the eternal Son of God and rather dies the painful death on the cross than deny this. He does this, for example, also in our today's Gospel when he says, "Before Abraham was, I am." V.58. What? Is it possible that Christ should have proven himself to be holiness and innocence in all things and that then, contrary to the truth, should still have called himself God's only Son? Accordingly, does not the unbeliever have only this choice, either to confess that Christ is holy and at the same time God's Son, or not as God's Son and, therefore, (something which is horrible to say) the most brazen of all deceivers?

There can be no doubt: If Christ was a good person, he must of necessity also be the true, only begotten Son of the heavenly Father, equally the eternal, infinite God. Since the first point shines forth so clearly that not even an unbeliever can deny it, they must themselves be here on earth ashamed of their unbelief, but some day they will become absolutely pale and silent when they will appear in the presence of Jesus himself, the holy God-man.

Of this hour, let us, my friends, think every hour and, therefore, pray every hour: Oh holy Son of God, preserve us in faith in your name until we see you upon your throne. Hear us, O Jesus! Amen.

## PALM SUNDAY

Genesis 19:17

Oh Jesus, you say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." Mk 10:14. We have done this; upon your command we have let the children come to you in Holy Baptism and did not forbid them to come; you have received them into your kingdom. Behold, today they even come by themselves to you, and before this congregation they want to confess their faith in you and belong to you and eternally surrender themselves to you and swear to serve you.

Lord, Jesus, they knock at the gates of your grace; oh, open to them, oh, welcome them! take these little chicks, who seek refuge in you under the wings of your grace and reply to their oath of faithfulness and speak from heaven to these children: Yes, you shall always and forever be and remain my possession; your sins shall be forgiven you, my righteousness shall be your dress, my omnipotence your protection, my faithfulness your hope, and some day you will be with me forever. For I will also perform upon you what I have sworn to you in the gracious covenant of my Baptism, and I will not repent; I will be your God, your Savior, your Father, and you shall be my sons and daughters. Yes, Lord Jesus, speak that way to these children. Amen. Amen.

My dearly beloved children!

"Escape for thy life; look not behind thee!" this is what an angel cried out to Lot as he delayed in fleeing from Sodom. Sodom was a rich, flourishing city in an area which spread like a garden of the Lord, but in this city not a soul feared God the Lord except the family of Lot. Sins which cried to heaven openly ran riot there; young and old laughed at everything holy and divine. Finally, God decided to destroy this wicked city with all its inhabitants, that in them he might give an example of his wrath and judgment as a warning for all ages.

Because Lot and his family feared God in that godless Sodom, God sent an angel to him to tell him of the judgment hovering over Sodom and to lead him out of the wicked city before its destruction.

With terror Lot heard of the frightful decision; he immediately hurried to his nearest relatives to tell them what was to come; but no one believed it; it was all too ridiculous. No one wanted to flee with Lot. Then Lot was filled with nameless anguish and sorrow. Alas, he thought, is everything going to be lost? And sunk in these thoughts even he delayed in fleeing as quickly as possible as the Lord commanded. Finally, the angels seized him and his family by the hands and led him outside the city; and now with great earnestness he uttered these words, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee!"

My dear children, Sodom is a picture of this world; in Holy Scripture it is used as an example especially for those who live in the last times. Christ says that during the last days it will be as it was in the days of Lot, and he adds, "Remember Lot's wife," who looked back and became a pillar of salt.

The words of the angel, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee," is, therefore, also spoken to us. In the past I have always shown you how you can deliver your souls; and now in this hour, which is so important for you, I will earnestly admonish you and show you from God's Word

WHAT SHOULD MOVE YOU TO MAKE THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOULS  
YOUR CHIEF CONCERN

These are the reasons:

- I. The Soul is Your Greatest Treasure,
- II. The Dangers of Losing Your Soul are so Great, and finally,
- III. If Once the Soul is Lost Nothing Can Win it Back.

## I.

Every reasonable person must recognize the truth of this principle: We should be the most concerned about keeping that which is our greatest treasure. If, when his house is on fire, a father had the choice of saving his household goods or his only child and he would take his furniture and let his child die in the flames, every reasonable person would think that the father must have been crazy. But everyone who is worried more about earthly things than for his soul is guilty of the same folly. For the greatest treasure we have is our soul.

Your soul was created for eternity; it was never to die; at some time it was to come into the perfect eternal fellowship with God; it was destined for an eternal salvation. This whole world, the skies with the sun, the moon, and all the shining stars, the earth with all its wealth, this great house God has built only that you might live here for a time as though in an annex to the invisible world and that here you might prepare your souls for a blessed eternity. Therefore, your soul was not created for this brief time and this fleeting world; everything must disappear, yet your soul should remain and finally pass over into a life of perfection; in death you must leave everything behind, but your soul you take along.

And why did Christ come into the world? To seek and to save that which was lost. What was that? The souls of men. What a high value man's soul must have in God's eyes, that to deliver it he sent his only begotten Son into the world and gave him up to the death on the cross! How precious the soul of man must be in the eyes of the Son of God! Since the soul was lost, he left heaven, descended to earth, sought and purchased the soul with the sacrifice of his life and the shedding of his precious blood! Oh, what a price, what a ransom price God paid for all the souls of men and, therefore, for your souls as well!

Your soul therefore, is your greatest treasure; if a king would give you his kingdom in exchange for it, if a person could purchase it by paying the price of the entire world, that would be a paltry sum for your soul. Your soul is worth a million times more than the entire world, yes, no price can be set. When a person dies, of what value is it that he was rich, honored, praised, and loved by all? of what value was it that he was a king, or that monuments are erected to his honor after his death, if his soul is lost? What was the rich man profited in death that day in, day out, he had lived in joyful splendor and could clothe himself in purple and fine linen? Then he could perceive that all the wealth of this world is nothing, that, sad to say, he had forever gambled away his greatest treasure, his soul.

Now my dear children, from this you can see how foolish most of the people of this world are. For most live as though they had no soul, or as though it were the least of their treasures. Most are filled with great concern for temporal things, but they are completely unconcerned about the eternal salvation of their immortal soul. Most people labor and slave and run themselves to death every day for earthly success or even to become rich, but the precious treasure which they already possess in their soul they despise. Alas, there can be no more sorrowful self-deception than to be concerned about everything but one's soul. That is a horrible blindness: to think of earthly things and forget about the souls's salvation; yes, sacrificing the soul just to have earthly treasure. Such a person does not consider himself better than an animal. They are like the birds which delight in the red berries which are scattered where the snare is set until it snaps shut over them.

Now my dear children, are you perhaps going to be so foolish? as soon as

you are graduated, are you also going to think only of earning money and becoming rich and honored people but not think that you have a soul which was created for eternity, dearly bought by Christ's blood, and in Holy Baptism was sprinkled and cleansed with Christ's blood? Oh, never forget what St. Paul says, "Ye are bought with a price; be not yet the servants of men." 1 Cor 7:23. And what St. Peter says, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear; forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet 1:17c-19. Oh, may that move you not to gamble away so shamefully your precious soul, this precious possession of Jesus Christ, and not to sell it so cheaply for the miserable things of this world. Yes, may that move you always to let the salvation of your soul be your chief concern.

## II.

However, a second fact should move you to do that: the dangers of losing your soul are so many.

My dear children, at all times and in all places there is great danger of losing your soul, for at all times and in all places every Christian has three foes, who fight against him, namely, the flesh, the world, and the devil. These three enemies are at fault that so terribly many for whom Christ died and who already came into God's covenant of grace through Baptism and became God's children do not save their souls. Christ is indeed the Reconciliation for the sins of all the world, and whoever trusts him will be saved, but if he also wants to live according to the lusts of the flesh and the ways of the world, he wilfully shuts himself out from Christ's redemption. For the apostle says, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." Rom 8:13. It is, therefore, necessary at all times and in all places to be chiefly concerned about the salvation of your soul.

And you live in a land and at a time when, as never before, the greatest dangers of losing your souls wait for you. You are not only baptized but you have also been thoroughly instructed in the pure doctrine; you know which is the true way to salvation; but you dare not become secure; you can again easily lose the treasure of your soul. You live in a time when the true church which has the true Gospel, and that is the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, has almost completely disappeared from the earth, and where it still exists it is covered with great offence and is despised and rejected by everyone. You live in a time when the anti-christian kingdom of the papacy is again mightily lifting its head and seeking to sell souls everywhere to Satan. You live in a time when everywhere more and more false churches and sects arise who conceal their false doctrine behind the appearance of great holiness. You live in a time when almost all Christendom has fallen from the Gospel.

Almost all who now write books are the enemies of God's Word and Jesus Christ. In all places they try to mock the saving truth and make it look ridiculous. Everywhere you hear the cry that the world is now enlightened, that nowadays one just does not believe any more what our forefathers had believed; people of today are progressive and wiser. And thus speak and write not only the ordinary and known wicked people but also the great, wise, learned, and as it seems, the very pious and upright people. You are face to face with the great danger of being deceived and misled by such people. If you want to confess God's Word, you will be laughed at, ridiculed, and persecuted; then you can easily become fearful, fainthearted, and disloyal. We must also add that in this country they say that here people are free, here everyone can think, believe, speak, write, and do as he wishes; many then think that here they are also free from God's Word and laws and through this freedom become the slaves of ruin in

time and eternity. Finally, there is here also a great temptation, more than elsewhere, of fastening his heart to money. Here money is the god of almost all people; if anyone can obtain money, he will risk everything for it, good name, conscience, God, God's Word and grace, heaven, and salvation.

Oh my dear children, I look into the future with fear and sadness. My soul is depressed when I think of the many dangers of losing your soul which will arise to meet you. Alas, many at their confirmation have sworn faithfulness to God until death and already they have forsaken Christ and his Word, the way of truth and piety, and now they go the way of all the world.

Oh, then equip yourselves in time for the great dangers to your soul; do not become secure but let the deliverance of your souls be your chief concern. Do not become offended that the true Evangelical Lutheran Church is so small and despised; do not forsake it, for it alone has the pure saving Word of God and the unadulterated sacraments. Bear in mind: the salvation of your soul depends on it. Do not come too close to the antichristian kingdom of the papacy. Think of God's threat, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." Rev 14:9b.10a. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Rev 18:4.5.

Be just as earnestly on guard against all the sects who here in great number and with great show lead souls from the simplicity in Christ. Let nothing deceive you. Whatever does not agree with God's Word is false and leads to ruin, no matter how pious it may seem. Remember the words of Jesus Christ, "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." Mt 7:15.16a. And what Christ says in another place, "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." Jn 8:31.32. Be prepared, therefore, rather to die than to depart from Christ's words. Oh bear in mind: the salvation of your soul depends on it. "Fear not them," etc.

Therefore, do not listen to the cries of those who say that the world is now enlightened, the true light has now come, the Bible is no longer valid. That is the voice of the apostles of Satan in whom this evil spirit works. They cry, "Light! Light!" and they merely try to lead men back again into heathenish darkness and idolatry. Do not read their cursed blasphemies of the most high Triune God; they are wild animals in human form who wish to rend your souls, kill it, and drag it along with them into the abyss of hell. Bear in mind: the salvation of your dearly bought soul depends upon it! Oh, save it, and do not look behind you!

Just as faithfully arm yourselves against the temptation of fastening your heart to money and goods. Seek first of all the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you. Whenever you are tempted to depart from God's Word for the sake of earthly gain, recall the words of your Savior, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mt 16:26.

### III.

This brings us to our third part in which I will briefly show you how this also should move you to make the salvation of your soul your chief concern: if the soul is once lost, nothing can win it back again.

My dear children, if every person had two souls, then the concern about one would not be so important; if he would lose the one, he would still have the other; or, if a person, who has lost his soul here on earth, could redeem it again after death, there would still be hope. But that is not so. Many has only one soul, and if he has not saved it in this world, he can never, never regain it in eternity.

Now ponder a moment, my dear children: Is it not dreadful to gamble away eternal salvation just for the sake of temporal earthly well-being? Is it not terrible to choose eternal misery just to escape the temporal misery of being Christians and be unconcerned about his soul? Ah, even if this life lasts 80 years, how short it is in comparison with eternity! Yes, do not think that the rich, the great of this world, who dress well, eat and drink well, live in magnificent rooms, and can fulfill all possible earthly wishes, that they are for that reason the most happy. If you could look into the heart of these rich people, whom you think so fortunate, you would discover with amazement that nothing but unrest, grief, care, sorrow, and ennui lives in them. Is it not terrible to place your eternity at stake just to become such a rich and respected but also an unhappy person?

And my dear children, what is all the misery which Christians must endure upon earth if they are concerned about their soul, what is all that in comparison with the loss of their soul? No matter how great the suffering and terrible pains which many Christians have had to endure here, nevertheless after a short period of suffering it all ended forever, and eternal joy and glory followed temporal pain and disgrace. But once the soul is lost in death, it is lost forever, and nothing, nothing can again deliver it. For Christ says, as you have heard, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is no deliverance from hell. Now is the day of salvation. In death the door of the time of grace closes forever behind us and no return is then possible.

Oh, therefore, my dear children, remember what belongs to your peace and let the salvation of your soul be your chief concern. Every day recall the word which the angel cried out to Lot, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee!"

Yet my dear children, I have not presented all this in order to awaken in you a slavish fear of being lost; still less that you should try by your own power to deliver your soul. Absolutely not! You know: you can not deliver your soul by yourselves; it has already been saved by Jesus Christ; the Gospel tells you this and in Holy Baptism it has already been given, appropriated, and sealed to you. Only this one thing is demanded of you: you should not cast away the grace which is given you in Christ, you should not forget your Baptism, you should remain with the words of Jesus Christ, let the Word of God be the daily food of your soul, your light, your comfort, and in faith remain faithful to Christ until death. Oh, if you do that, you have delivered your soul; then you will not die in the Sodom of this world, then you will live here in the Zoar of the true Church, and finally bring your soul into the heavenly Jerusalem, where your soul is forever out of danger in the fellowship of God and all his holy angels and the elect.

Therefore, lift up your voices now and confess and promise before these witnesses that you will not gamble away your souls but by God's grace will deliver them. But before doing that, join me in praying the Lord's Prayer.

# MAUNDY THURSDAY

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the, etc! Great is your love which you bore toward us lost sinners in your heart. Not only did you become a man to help us, nor were you ashamed to call us sinners your brethren, but when you desired to end your visible sojourning amongst us, you instituted a most gracious testament in which you named all who long for you the heirs of your body and blood, your complete reconciliation and righteousness, and all the heavenly gifts so dearly won for us. We, therefore, pray, let us come to a right knowledge of your Holy Supper, grant us a living and humble faith in the miracle of your gracious meal, and let us at all times partake of it through you as worthy guests to our comfort, to our strengthening, and to our salvation. Help us that we never lose this precious means of grace but preserve it unto us by your grace until you come again. To that end bless also the preaching of your Word today for the sake of your promise. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

It was today when the Son of God in the last night of his mysterious suffering and a few hours before his death instituted the testament which he left behind for his followers after his return to the Father.

This day, therefore, reminds us of a most important blessing of our Savior.

The Holy Supper has always been esteemed by the true Church as a great, precious, sacred thing.

The first Christians celebrated it almost daily, especially during periods of persecution, in order to be ready every day for death; thus they showed an inner love, rich and poor, great and humble gave each other the kiss of peace as brethren. The Holy Supper was viewed as the most glorious divine arsenal in which invincible weapons were received for the spiritual battle; it was looked on as the best traveling expense money for the journey into the dark valley of death.

One showed it the greatest respect. No unbeliever, no known sinner, was admitted. A respectful silence of this mysterious sacrament was observed over against the heathen. After the sacrament was celebrated they spoke to one another about the suffering of Jesus Christ. Often the Christians had to suffer much because of the Lord's Supper for the heathen persecutors supposed that according to their confession they ate human flesh and drank human blood. That the Lord's Supper was celebrated merely as a memorial to Christ's suffering is something of which one does not find a trace in the ancient church.

Of course, we find that the antichristian papacy soon began to declare that this Supper was sacrificing Christ's body and blood again; from this finally emerged the fearful abomination of the mass, which is still to be found in the papal church.

Through the Reformation the true doctrine and the proper use of the Holy Supper was at last brought to light; but sad to say, this feast of love soon became a cause for a great fearful breach in the Protestant church. The greater number of those who recognized the error of the papal church fell into the opposite error of Scriptural truth. If before supperstition was embraced, now many began to judge the divine truth on the basis of their blind reason.

Therefore, the Lutheran Church has remained the only one which has held firmly to the pure doctrine of the Holy Supper; otherwise, no other denomination in all Christendom has it. Our Church confesses many precious truths which other confessions also embrace, but in the preservation of the unadulterated sacrament she now stands alone in the whole world.

God has chosen our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church in these last times so that she may preserve what according to Christ's will should occur until he comes; our Church is the divinely chosen preserver of the seal of the forgiveness of sins.

This day is, therefore, especially for Lutheran Christians a holy, important day which reminds them partly of great treasures entrusted to them by God, partly of important duties laid upon them. Permit me today to speak to you on this subject.

The text. 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.

"I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." With these words the apostle begins the story of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Now why does the apostle place this assurance at this point? Because it is of utmost importance to have the Holy Supper pure and unadulterated, in its true meaning, and according to the institution of the Lord. This, therefore, induces me to answer the question:

WHY MUST WE BELIEVE THAT THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST  
ARE TRULY PRESENT IN THE HOLY SUPPER?

I answer: because

- I. This Belief Rests upon the Most Certain and Unchangeable Foundation,
- II. Without this Belief all of God's Word must Become Unreliable, and finally,
- III. We would be Robbed of Great and Boundless Comfort if we lost this Belief.

I.

Deciding the question: In the Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of Christ present? has brought untold misery upon all Christendom.

If this were about an obscure point in Christian doctrine, then it certainly would be better to be silent about it and let everyone follow his best convictions in a matter which no one could settle with certainty.

But here something entirely different is at stake. The question is: Shall we follow God's Word or not? is Christ the Truth or not? is Christ almighty or not? is Christ's flesh merely human flesh or not? is his blood powerless human blood or not?

At the institution of his Holy Testament Christ, who sees into the future as well as into the past, who must have known that great discord would arise over his words, as he hands his disciples the consecrated bread and cup, says, "This is," etc. Do we find obscurity here? a difficulty? ambiguity? Is a subtle explanation needed to disclose unclear, hidden words? No, nothing like this at all. Certainly, if we follow Christ's word, we will arrive at no other meaning than this: Christ's body and blood in the consecrated, etc., is offered the communicant; he is truly and essentially present and is, therefore, received by all communicants. No one doubts what I mean when I hand him a container of

water and say, Take and drink, this is water. Will he suppose that I want to say, The container is turned into water, or that it only signifies water? Certainly not. What else is Christ saying when he says, "Take," etc.? There is not the slightest doubt: If we do not want to believe that the body and blood of Jesus Christ is truly and essentially present in the Lord's Supper, we must depart from the simplest and clearest words of Jesus Christ.

It is said: True, it may be that the words of institution indicate that in, with, and under those visible elements lie hidden the invisible, heavenly treasures and are give us, but how is it possible that that one body could be received in one and the same hour in thousands upon thousands of churches by millions of Christians today and perhaps yesterday as well, yes, almost daily for almost the past 2,000 years and in the future also without being used up?

Those who speak thus could be asked: Tell us, how is it possible for the sun to shine brightly these 6,000 years into thousands upon thousands of valleys and caves and rooms and millions of eyes without losing or using up its light? You are silent? You cannot grasp the miracle of nature and yet you do not deny them, but you want to deny that miracle of grace because you likewise cannot grasp it?

You see from this: No one can excuse his unbelief because a thing seems impossible, for with God nothing is impossible; God has revealed this to us in nature.

Is it not terrible for a Christian to depart without rhyme or reason from a clear, lucid, plain, simple word of Jesus Christ because it does not seem possible?

And who is he who spoke these clear and plain words? He is the Truthful, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, the Omnipresent, the Son of the living God, who is God and man in one person; he utters these words in the last hours of his earthly existence; he utters them at the institution of his testament.

He speaks these words, of whom we read, "I am the Way," etc. Should Christ speak the truth everywhere but not here? He speaks these words, of whom Peter says, "Lord, thou knowest all things;" should Christ have known everything except that all Christendom would be split over his last words, or would he not have been so wise as to use other words in order to avoid this misfortune? He speaks these words, who testifies of himself, "Lo, I am with you," etc; should Christ be able to be present everywhere in a special mysterious way except in the Holy Sacrament? He speaks these words, who says of himself, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" should Christ have all power but not the power of being in the Lord's Supper with his body and blood.

With his body Christ passed through locked doors, through the sealed stone of the grave without breaking the seal; should he not be able to enter our body invisibly? Christ ascended bodily to heaven and now as also the Son of man sits at God's right hand; should that body which sits at God's right hand, hence is everywhere with divine majesty, not be able to be present graciously in the Holy Sacrament? With five loaves and two small fish Christ fed 5,000 men and twelve baskets remained; should he find it impossible to feed his Christendom with that body in which dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily, with which the divine nature is intimately united as warmth with hot air and boiling water, more closely than fire with glowing steel? What glorious spiritual characteristics the soul imparts to our body! should the divine nature not have imparted to Christ's human nature no glorious divine characteristics?

Beyond a doubt: If we want to say that we believe in Christ, we must also believe that his body and blood are truly and essentially present in his covenant meal, for this faith is borne by three great unbreakable pillars: The first pillar is Christ's Word, the second his truthfulness, the third his divine power. So the first reason why we should not swerve from the belief that Christ's body and blood are truly and essentially present in the Holy Supper is: We would not be giving up a teaching over which battles are still fought, over which much can be said for and against, but we would have to let go of an unchangeable certain truth of God's Word.

## II.

But, my friends, the question concerns not only this one truth; the certainty of all of God's Word is at stake; this we would immediately have to give up the moment we surrender the belief that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present in the Lord's Supper; that is the second reason: Without this belief all of God's Word must become uncertain:

If we admit that one need not take Christ's word, "This is," etc., as they read but can substitute, It signifies, all certainty in God's Word is gone. Then others can say with the same right: Christ is not God's Son, he merely signifies that; there is no hell, no resurrection, no heaven, no judgment; all these, one could say, are merely pictures, merely signs, merely symbols. For God did not become a man. Baptism is not the washing of regeneration. Then no promise, no comfort is any longer certain, if, oh poor depressed Christian, you could no longer safely and joyfully rely upon every word of your Savior.

Whoever denies the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper must also deny the omnipresence of Christ's human nature, hence the communication of the divine attributes; where then is our redemption and reconciliation? Then it would not be true, when we read in Acts 20:28, that God by his own blood, etc., that the blood of God's Son cleanses us from all sins. Then merely a man died for us, then the ransom paid is not of divine importance, and everything which the Christian believes is a dream.

Beyond a doubt: Through the false doctrine of the Lord's Supper Satan is trying to open merely a small gap in the walls of the Christian Church in order to slip in with a thousand errors. Though the fall from the belief that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present in the Holy Supper does not always bring such terrible results, it is nevertheless the way it comes about; it is the way to cast doubts upon all the clear words of divine revelation. And if those who do not believe in the presence of Christ's body and blood in the supper really wanted to be honest, most would certainly admit that they had never earnestly believed that the Bible in all its words is the Word of the living God.

## III.

The third and final reason why we should never swerve from the belief that the body and blood of Christ is truly and essentially present in the Lord's Supper is this: We would be robbed of great and boundless comfort.

In the fact that Christ gives us his body and blood to eat and to drink in the Holy Supper lies an inexpressible comfort which is more easily experienced than described. What a support for our salvation it is that we are given to eat of his body in whose hand is all blessedness! Can he deny us his grace who causes us miserable worms to share in his nature so that we can say: We are flesh of his flesh? Who has ever hated his own flesh? How can Christ forget us

if he has united himself so intimately with us! How precious he must consider us who gives us his very self! What sin can be so great which the divine flesh does not reconcile! What impurity so great which this blood does not wash away! Which darts of Satan can be so fiery which must not be extinguished in this fountain! Which bonds of death so firm which this living flesh does not untie! The Holy Supper with the body and blood of Jesus Christ is the new tree of life which stood in Paradise, which Christ has again planted in his kingdom of grace.

Oh adorable, comforting mystery! God's holy flesh which the angels worship and archangels adore is food for sinners! The heavens rejoice and the earth is glad, but more so is the believer who partakes of such great gifts!

Even those who do not believe this have their devotion when they celebrate the Holy Sacrament, but it is merely a self-appointed devotion; they are satisfied with the shell without the kernel.

Oh, therefore, on the day of the institution of this Testament of eternal life which died for us, make this covenant, my dear friends: Never, never let us fall from the belief that the body and blood of Jesus Christ is truly and essentially present in the Lord's Supper.

Out of pure grace God has let us come to know this mystery; oh, let us cling to it and faithfully preserve it as a precious treasure. And if we leave nothing else behind for our dear children but this inheritance of our Redeemer, they inherit infinite treasures from us; therefore, let us inculcate it upon our children the moment they can talk. Here this belief is rare, very rare, and it is in great danger; oh, therefore, let us see to it with all our powers that we preserve this belief. I beseech you for the sake of God, for the sake of your salvation.

Or do you want to depart from God's clear words?

Or do you not think that by the false teachings of the Holy Supper all of God's Word, all the promises, truths, comfort, hope, warnings, and threats it contains will become uncertain?

Or do you want to despise the boundless comfort lying in the unadulterated Sacrament?

Oh, Jesus, help us! We confess our former unfaithfulness, blindness, neglect; do not take your Holy Sacrament from us; make us faithful, sanctify our hearts and hands; preserve to our poor congregation this infinite treasure which we have inherited from our fathers; let us be witnesses of this truth also. Oh, let many others still come to this knowledge so that they will be sealed by your grace. Oh, remain with us, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

# GOOD FRIDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:9.10

Yes, Lord Jesus, today we lie before you in the dust, smite our breast and beseech you: Have mercy upon us! Let the bitter pains for us poor sinners of your death not be in vain. Many years ago today you cried out: "I thirst;" oh, appease your thirst for our souls today and deliver them from their misery. Many years ago today you spread your arms out on the cross; oh, enfold us today in your arms of mercy. You allowed your holy hands to be wounded, your holy feet, and your holy side; oh, hide us in your wounds and let us there find a refuge from the wrath of your Father. You shed your holy precious blood in streams; oh, sprinkle our languishing hearts with only a drop and it suffices. Hear us, hear us, oh Love who was crucified for us. Amen. Amen.

In Jesus' death, dear baptized hearers!

A day of deepest sorrow has dawned again today. The most sorrowful in the entire church year. Today we would like to summon heaven and earth and all creatures to weep and lament with us. Today we would like to ask the sun to take off its garment of light and join us in donning the gloomy garments of sorrow; today we would ask the clouds to weep with us. Today we have a mind to be frightened at every sound of joy which would cross our lips, yes, at every thought of joy which would stir in our hearts. If during the past year we have not wept once, today we should shed bitter tears, tears of divine sorrow which works repentance to salvation which is not to be repented of.

For what is it that has caused us to gather today in the house of the Lord? We have gathered here today in order to ascend in spirit the hill of Golgatha. And what do we see there? Between two criminals we see a man hanging on the disgraceful cross, naked. His hands and feet are pierced with nails. A crown of thorns is pressed upon his head. His whole body is torn by the scourge. Blood from a thousand wounds flows to the ground. The sun is high; it is mid-day; but behold! suddenly the sun loses its light and it becomes dark, jetblack night. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" cries the man of pain in the horrible darkness. No one answers him with a word of comfort but with mockery and ridicule they swarm around his cross. Finally, the Crucified cries out, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" Thereupon he bows his head and departs.

And who is he who after nameless pains breathes out his tormented soul? Ah, the Son of God himself, the Savior of all sinners it is who dies there.

There he hangs, the Lord of glory and Prince of our salvation, but he is dead. The holy body in which dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily is a corpse, cold and stiff. The noble head before which hell itself trembled has sunk to earth. The noble countenance which usually shone upon all the unfortunate like the morning sun has turned pale. The voice which in the past called so friendly to all the weary and heavy laden, "Come unto, and I will give you rest," has faded away. The eye which perceived so mildly and lovingly the misery of men has dimmed. The hand which was placed upon the sick and they became well, which lifted the finger and wind and waves became silent and death returned its dead, is stiffened. The faithful heart, alas, the only true heart which beat so warmly and lovingly for the misery of all sinners is still.

Alas, man's only life is dead; man's only salvation has died. And who is it who had killed him? Alas, our sins are the nails which nailed eternal Love to the cross; we ourselves are the ones who have killed our Salvation, our Life, our Blessedness.

Oh day of our greatest sins! Oh day of our grievous guilt! Oh day of misery, lamenting, weeping, and groaning!

You see, that is why the Church has sung from of old:

O darkest woe!  
 Ye tears forth flow!  
 Hath earth so sad a wonder?  
 God the Father's only Son:  
 Now is buried yonder. (167,1)

But blessed are we, my dear brothers and sisters, if such meditations of the death of Jesus becomes alive in our hearts! Blessed are we, if we today do not weep and lament so much over Jesus but rather over ourselves! That is the way in which Jesus' death finally must also become a source of comfort for us, for he, our Salvation, died in order that we might receive salvation; he, our life, sunk into death in order that we might have life. Let us now ponder his death devoutly from this point of view.

The text. 1 Thessalonians 5:9.10.

Since my dear co-laborer in the work of the Lord among you intends to present today the circumstances of Christ's death on the cross, I have chosen the word of the apostle just read as the text of our present Good Friday's meditation. The apostle testifies in the words just read that God has not appointed us to wrath but to salvation, for Christ died for us in order that we may live with him. On the basis of these words let the subject of our present meditation be:

#### CHRIST'S DEATH OUR LIFE

namely,

- I. Our Spiritual Life here in Grace, and
- II. Our Eternal Life there in Glory.

#### I.

"Christ's death our life;" that is to be my theme today. Say! Is there not a contradiction in this sentence? Who can receive life from the dead? Is that not a greater contradiction than that something should come out of nothing? Death is to give life; does that not mean that cold should give warmth, darkness light, emptiness fullness, weakness strength, the end of life should be the germ and beginning of life? Yes! and yet this is so. As the deadly poison becomes medicine and produces health, so we become well through Christ's wounds, so his death becomes our life. And the apostle says in our text, "Christ died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep," that is, though we may still live on earth or already slumber in the grave, "we should live together with him." Christ's death, therefore, gives us true life even here.

When God created man, man was immortal not only physically but the true life, a spiritual, divine, heavenly life was also in him. God himself dwelt in man, enlivened, enlightened, and ruled him and sanctified all his thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. But man was not to remain in this blessed state unless he had first stood a test. God, therefore, led him to a tree and said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen 2:17. And what did man do? He did not stand the test, he sinned, he ate of the forbidden tree,

and alas, thus he lost the true life; God forsook the dedicated temple of his heart; then death entered into his body and all his members, yes, even into his heart and into the depths of his soul; separated from God, lacking his grace, without his light, without his power, without his life, he fell into spiritual, physical, and eternal death and with him the entire human race, also we!

How were we to be helped? We ourselves could not do it. We could not undo the fall into sin upon which death had been staked; and alas, mankind by nature did not even once know that it lay in death. By nature men are spiritually dead, and they think they are alive; by nature they all lie under God's wrath, and they dream of God's grace and love; they stand at the edge of eternal death, and they are of good courage as though there were no danger. Mankind, therefore, could not once ask God for deliverance from their death, to say nothing of tearing the bonds of death themselves and opening their prison of death.

Yet God is a God who does not want the sinner's death, who as our text says, "hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation." He, therefore, decreed to deliver us from death. However, since God is also a righteous God who must punish sin, and since he is a truthful God who must let his threat: "Ye shall die," be fulfilled, how could and should mankind be saved?

This could take place only if one died for all, if a holy person died for the sinner, the innocent for the guilty, and if such a person willingly took death upon himself for them, if his death would be a sacrifice fully valid for the reconciliation of all. There was no such person among all finite and created beings in heaven and on earth, who not only wanted to but also could do this. God himself was the only one who could; and lo, he not only could but as the evidence of his boundless love for sinners he also wanted to do it. From eternity itself God the Father decreed that his Son should be given into death for us, and the eternal Son said he was ready to suffer death for us. Therefore, the moment man had fallen into sin and death, God appeared and gave him the promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." And for 4,000 years this was the chief message of all of God's messengers to mankind: God did not want the death of the sinner but that he should live; he, therefore, appointed a day on which by one offering, which God himself would bring, the entire world dead in sin was to be reconciled with him and be redeemed. Abel's sacrifice which at God's command he brought from the best of his flock was to make him think of this day. The sacrifice, which Abraham at God's command was ready to bring when he offered his only beloved son Isaac, was to make him think of this day. The killing of the passover lamb with whose blood Israel painted on the lintels and door posts of their doors so that the destroying angel of death would pass by was to make them think of this day. All the bloody sacrifices of atonement which according to the Law the priests and Levites were to bring daily was to make them think of this day. Particularly the yearly appearance of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement with the sacrificial blood in the Holy of Holies was to make them think of this day. Isaiah, therefore, says of the coming Redeemer and Reconciler, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper his hand." Is 53:10b. Moreover, Daniel writes, "Seventy weeks are determined to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. . . And Messiah shall be cut off. . . and the sacrifice shall cease." Dan 9:24.26.27. Finally, Zechariah writes, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Zech 3:9b. "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." Zech 9:11.

All this was fulfilled today upon Golgatha by Jesus' death. He there said beforehand, when the disciples became sad at the announcement of his death, "It is good for you that I go away," and in another place, "I lay down my life for the sheep." Jn 10:15. "The Son of man came to give his life for a ransom for many." Mt 20:28. "This is my body which is given for you. This is the blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Therefore, the apostles speak of Christ's death in the very same way. Paul writes, "Christ was delivered for our offences." Rom 4:25. "Christ has loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor." Eph 5:2. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor 5:19. Finally, we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." Heb 9:28. "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb 9:12.

There you see, my friends, the proof of the fact that Christ's death is our life. From eternity God had seen us men lie in the depths of our sins as exposed, rejected children; but when Christ had willingly died for us on the cross, he cried to us all, You shall live! Though the guilt of our sins which we have incurred with God is infinitely great, through Christ's death they are fully and abundantly paid. Though the handwriting of the Law, which testified before God against all men and accused them, was not erasible, through Christ's death it is erased; Christ took them and nailed them to the cross. Though the wall of separation which our sins had erected between us and God was high through Christ's death it is torn down and the fence was broken; by his disgraceful crucifixion heaven and earth are reunited. No matter how terrible the curse was which God laid upon the entire world after it fell from him, through Christ's death on the accursed tree our curse is taken away and turned into salvation and eternal blessing. No matter how great the wrath was to which we had aroused the holy God by our sins, through Christ's death God is now completely reconciled; Christ's reconciling blood crying for us for mercy has extinguished the fire of divine anger and turned it into a bright, glowing, never-dying fire of divine fatherly love. In the earthly paradise we ate death from the forbidden fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; but on the tree of the cross hangs God's very own Son as a fruit from the heavenly paradise which had not been forbidden us, for which every person reaches with the hand of his faith, which he enjoys and from which he should eat life, the true life which is forgiveness of sins, God's grace and righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Oh, blessed are all who in faith become immersed in Christ's death! They awaken from their spiritual death and can then say with Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal 2:20.

## II.

My friends, Christ's death is our life not only insofar as the spiritual life in grace has been regained through it, but secondly, insofar as the eternal life in glory has been reopened.

That mankind has fallen in spiritual death through sin only a few perceive, only those who let it be revealed to them through the Holy Spirit, that by nature they are without light, without power, and without grace, hopeless, helpless, and lost. But that we have fallen into physical death through sin every-

one must perceive who will open his eyes. You must die! This we ministers need not preach at all, this hopeless, frightful word all nature which dies every year, every funeral procession, every casket, every grave, and particularly every sickness and each gray hair cries aloud to all men. Alas, though the form of physical death stands so somberly before everyone, there is yet another death which follows upon temporal death, which is even more frightful; that is the other, or eternal death, that is, eternal separation from God, eternal rejection from his gracious countenance, eternal exclusion from all joy, from all light, from all peace, from all blessedness, in eternal misery, torment, and pain. This death has also come as the result of sin.

Oh, how wretched we would be if there were no deliverance from temporal nor even from eternal death! Then we would have to wish that we were never created, and curse the hour of our birth as the beginning of eternal misery.

But praised and blessed be the holy and gracious, the righteous and merciful God! Christ's death is our life! and through Christ's death we are delivered not only from spiritual but also from temporal and eternal death; he is the source of also our eternal life in glory. For we read in our text, "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has expressed it thus, "Through death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death." Heb 2:14.

Of course, it seems as though even after Christ's death, that death still has the very same power. For does not his insatiable maw still swallow thousands every day? Does not this king of terrors still rule over the whole world with and iron scepter and irresistible power? Are not they who comfort themselves in Christ's death just as well the booty of death as those who reject Christ's death?

It surely seems so. But it only seems so. The sting of temporal death is sin, for death is the wages of sin; because of sin man lost the immortality with which he was created, so that he must now return to the ground from which he was taken; because of sin temporal death leads man before God's judgment and thus becomes the gate of eternal death. Through Christ's death, however, sin has been expiated and erased, for through death Christ has paid the wages of sin for all sinners to the very last penny. Therefore, our death is also conquered by Christ's death. As a bee loses its sting if it jabs vehemently against a rock and kills itself, so also death lost its sting when it stung Christ, the Rock of our salvation, in the heel, yes, the moment it stung, Christ crushed its head. As a poison does not lose its power when it is swallowed but kills the one who swallowed it, so also Christ did not lose his power by being swallowed by death but he swallowed death, killed death. Already through the prophet Hosea Christ, therefore, says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will be thy destruction." Hos 13:14. Looking back at the Crucified, St. Paul also rejoices, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 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, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor 15:54-57.

Oh, who can put into words the riches of the sweet fruits which Christ's death has brought? Paul indicates them in the few words, "If one died for all, then were all dead." 2 Cor 5:14. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, "Christ by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb 2:9. After Christ's death mankind is looked upon as though we already were dead; therefore,

we do not have to pay the debt of our sins with death. We do not have to taste the bitterness of sin, for Christ has drained the bitter cup of death for us, refilled it with his grace, and thus with his grace turned it into a sweet cup of life.

Therefore though he who believes in the power of Christ's death seems to die, he in truth does not die. For believers, death is no longer a poison which destroys his body but a medicine which glorifies his body and turns it into a garment of immortality. For believers, death is no more a messenger who leads him to God's stern judgment but an angel of peace who leads him to the throne of grace and seeing God face to face. For believers, death is no more the shipwreck of all their joys but the key which unlocks the prison of this wicked world and sets them free. For believers, death is no more going into eternal death, to hell and damnation, but a door to eternal life, to heaven and salvation.

Oh blessed day when Jesus died for us! A day of salvation, of blessing and life! His shroud places on us the festive garments of eternal life. For today we not only sing:

O sorrow dread!  
God's Son is dead!

but we must also add:

But by His expiation  
Of our guilt upon the cross  
Gained for us salvation. (167,2)

Oh my dear hearers, let us then completely forsake the world and sin; for in these things is only death, spiritual, temporal, and eternal death. Let us in faith immerse ourselves in Christ's death; for in these things is life, life here in grace and life there in glory.

How much would many a rich person give if he could purchase his freedom from death! Oh, let us then go to Golgatha, for there we find deliverance from death free of charge.

Especially in the hour of our death let us in faith remember Christ's death, then we will never taste death. For as Moses lifted up a serpent in the wilderness, so also must the Son of man be lifted up to that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. Amen.

## EASTER SUNDAY

Mark 16:1-8

Lord Jesus! Today we no longer stand weeping about your cross; with great joy have we gathered about your grave; for behold! your grave is empty! You have arisen! arisen in glory! Burdened with our sins you bled upon Golgatha; three days later released from our sins you burst from your grave in triumph as victor over sin, death, and hell. Oh what joy for all sinners! Yet see, oh Lord, our heart is also a grave: dark, desolate, and cold. Oh, therefore,

arise this day in our heart, so that it also is stirred and becomes full of light, life, and joy. To that end, bless the message of your resurrection this hour for the sake of your glorious Easter victory. Amen.

The text. Mark 16:1-8.

In the Resurrected Christ, my dear hearers!

"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; HE IS RISEN; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him." V.6. That is what an angel said to those pious women of Galilee, who at dawn had hurried to Christ's grave to anoint his corpse. Yes, indeed, they, as Mark reports in our Gospel, "were affrighted;" Matthew, however, reports that their fear was united with "great joy."

And oh, how great their joy must have been! It is impossible to express the greatness of this joy. Human language is entirely inadequate. If before their heart was, as it were, bathed in blood, now it was bathed in heavenly delight. If before they felt as if the sun, moon, and stars were extinguished and the entire world enveloped in a thick, impenetrable night of hopelessness, now they felt as though the darkness had suddenly disappeared and the sun of comfort had arisen in full splendor and smiled upon the entire world. Before their eyes, the earth was now turned into a new paradise, into a heaven full of blessedness. In a word: now, after they had, as it were, wrestled with death for three long days, they received a foretaste of eternal life.

What an entirely different impression the news of Christ's resurrection made upon his enemies, the hardened high priests and leaders! Startled out of their sweet dream that Jesus, who so often reprimanded their hypocrisy, was now dead, what must they have felt when they received the report from some of the watchers at Christ's grave, how on the morning of the third day after Christ's death the foundation of the earth suddenly were shaken and the grave opened by itself, how they were immediately hurled to the ground from fright as though dead, and how after they became conscious again a wonderful voice cried out to the weeping women, "He is risen; he is not here!" They must have felt as though God himself were saying: What have you done, you murderers? Woe to you forever and ever! Then their knees must have knocked together and their heart trembled. Of course, they did not repent with Peter's repentance, but Judas' despair seized them. And they were not even afraid that the Resurrected would appear before them alive, in order to let himself be crucified by them again; but completely despairing of God's grace and giving up God and their salvation, they dreamed up the ridiculous lie (so as not to lose face before men): during the night while the watchmen were asleep his disciples came and had stolen Jesus' body; and they gave the wicked soldiers enough money, that is, as much as they demanded, to spread this lie everywhere.

My friends, all those who in unbelief despise Christ will experience something similar on Judgment Day, when the last trumpet shall sound and Christ, the Resurrected, will appear in his glory in the clouds of heaven and all the holy angels with him, and when he will seat himself in the presence of all upon the throne of his glory to judge the living and the dead. Then, as the Scriptures say, the people of the world will howl and full of despair will cry to the mountains, "Fall on us, and to the hills cover us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Lk 23:30; Rev 6:16.17.

As long as Christ's resurrection is still preached here on earth during the time of grace, this is not its dreadful purpose; rather its gracious purpose is to pour heavenly joy into the heart of every hearer. We see this from the fact that the angel in our text did not only say, "Be not affrighted!" to the pious women after he had told them of Christ's resurrection, but he also gave them the

commission, "But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter." Most amazing! They should bring the joyful message of Christ's resurrection even to the faithless disciples!

On the basis of this thought may I present to you

THE EASTER MESSAGE ONCE DIRECTED TO THE FAITHLESS DISCIPLES IS WON-  
ERFUL EVIDENCE THAT IT IS A MESSAGE OF JOY FOR ALL, EVEN THE GREAT-  
EST SINNER

May I show you two things:

- I. How the Fact that the Easter Message Directed also to the Disloyal Disciples Really is such Glorious Evidence, and
- II. That Therefore Everyone who Hears the Easter Message Should Accept it with True Joy.

I.

"Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." Mt 26:56b. So Matthew writes after he had reported that Christ was taken prisoner. My friends, deserting Christ so disgracefully in his hour of greatest trouble was a great, a most frightful sin. Just recall the following. The disciples believed from their hearts that Christ was God's Son and the Savior of the world; therefore, they did not sin out of ignorance but most clearly against better knowledge and against conscience. Christ's deep humiliation also did not come unexpectedly; Christ had repeatedly told them in advance of his suffering in all its exact circumstances; even a few hours before he had warned his disciples against taking offence; in the temptation now meeting them they, therefore, did not act because they were caught unprepared but in spite of the faithful warning they received; from every point of view their fall was completely inexcusable. We must also add: For three years Christ had instructed them, done countless miracles before their eyes, and even equipped them with the power of performing miracles, mightily protected them, and by his majestic command, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way," Jn 18:8, had even, so to say, provided them with a pass. And yet we read, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." Oh, shameful unbelief! oh heinous unthankfulness!

And how did Peter, who by nature was a brave fearless man, act in this hour of temptation? Just a few hours before he had solemnly assured Christ, "I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." Lk 22:33. Yes, in the greatest self-trust, exalting himself above all his fellow apostles, he had even said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Mt 26:33. Yes, even though Christ had forewarned him of his fall, he still repeated, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." Mt 26:35. And what happened? Peter indeed in blind fleshly zeal drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane as the mob laid hands on Jesus, and he followed his arrested Master from a distance. Alas when in the courtyard of the high priest's palace a maid stepped up to him with the words, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee," Mt 26:69, he denied it and said, "I am not. I know not what thou sayest;" and when later on another maid pointing to Peter said, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth," he denied it and gave the frightful answer, "I do not know the man." Yes, when at last still others recognized him in the light of the fire and cried to him, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee," and when Peter saw himself exposed, "Then," we read, "began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man." Yes, he went out and wept bitterly; but he did not return to die with his Lord.

Oh my friends, what revolting disloyalty it was that all the disciples like cowards forsook their faithful Lord and Savior in his greatest need! And who can describe particularly the greatness of Peter's sin when three times he denied Christ and finally said, "I know not the man!" When we hear this, we must exclaim: You unhappy man, you say "I know not the man"? Were not you the one who cried out with agitated heart, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"? Jn 6:68.69, and you say, "the man"? Yes, while your Savior stood bound next to you, you cursed and swore that you did not know "the man"! Oh Peter! Peter! how deeply you have fallen!

My friends, had not all the disciples, and above all Peter, deserved that Christ would not appear to them after his resurrection, yes, that he would hide his resurrection from them and seek out other disciples? Did not only women and strangers bury Christ and did not only women come to his grave, but no disciple let himself be seen there? they all in fear of the Jews hid themselves behind locked doors! First when the news came to them that the Lord had risen, which they deemed a fable, only a few made their appearance at the grave to investigate the matter. Therefore, had they not all deserved it a thousand times that Christ would have strictly forbidden the angels to say a thing of his resurrection to his disloyal disciples and especially to Peter? Of a truth yes! Yet he had sent angels who had to tell the women who came to his grave not only about his resurrection but also to pass on the message, "Go your way, tell his disciples AND PETER." Oh, what grace, what patience, what a love to sinners, even the greatest of them is revealed here!

You see: that the Easter message was also for the disloyal disciples is really a glorious proof that it is a message of joy for all sinners, even for the greatest of them.

If you, my dear hearers, have been unfaithful to your Savior, if perhaps after your conversion you let yourself be entangled again in the ways of this world; if you have become indolent in prayer, lazy in the use of God's Word, fearful in confession, oh, then do not think: Ah, if I had not been unfaithful, I also could today share in the Easter joy of all true Christians; but now for me Easter is not a day of joy but only a day of repentance and sorrow.

No, think rather of how unfaithful the disciples were; and yet Christ commanded that the Easter message be preached to them and himself even appeared alive to them on the day of his resurrection and thus filled them with the most inexpressible joy. Oh, rejoice then you who are also unfaithful with these unfaithful disciples!

Or, my dear hearer, if you have not only been unfaithful to your Savior, but have perhaps even fallen away from him completely into gross, heinous sins and shame, oh then do not think: Alas, if I had not fallen so deeply I also could this day joyfully join all believers in their holy songs of triumph and mock sin, death, and hell; but now I can do nothing but weep and sigh: Oh, Jesus, thou Lamb of God, have mercy upon me; help me, if I can still be helped!

No, think rather of Peter the great sinner who in denying his Savior three times had even cursed and sworn, and yet the Resurrected Lord called him first by name, so that he would not think that even though Christ would accept all the other disciples, he was not certainly excluded. Oh, you who have fallen, rejoice this day with Peter, the fallen disciple! This Easter Festival is to be the festival of also your rising again.

Or, my dear hearer, have you never till this very day believed in Christ? Have you perhaps been always and only concerned about earthly but never about heavenly things? have you been concerned about your happiness in this world

but never about your soul's salvation? Oh, then do not think: Alas, I have thought of my Savior too late! Alas, that today first I should awaken from my sleep of sin! Oh that I a lost son, a lost daughter, would have been converted from my sinful ways earlier! Then today I also could exult with all Christendom; but Christ's joy-giving resurrection does not concern me.

No, no, do not think that way, but rather let this be your thought: Since the resurrected Christ again sought and received those into his kingdom of grace, who had been with him so long and yet had shamefully deserted him, he will be even more unwilling to reject you who have never tasted his grace; if you today cast yourself at his feet, he will joyfully take you in as a shepherd takes his lost sheep which was again found.

## II.

Well, my friends, we have seen: That the Easter message was addressed also to the deeply fallen disciples and even to Peter is actually a glorious proof that it is a message of joy for all, even the greatest of sinners. Therefore, let me also show you in the second place, that everyone who hears the Easter message should accept it with a truly joyful heart.

Will many a one now say that it is necessary to prove this to us? Is it possible that a sinner could hear the Easter message for all sinners without a joyful heart? I answer: It indeed seems as though this is impossible; but that is not only possible, but, sad to say, it happens only too often. Yes, most listen joyfully as long as the Easter comfort for all sinners, even the greatest, is presented to them; but then what happens? Very often this, as the Lord says, "They receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." Lk 8:13. The Scriptures say that even godless Herod heard John the Baptist, whom he commanded to be killed to please an unchaste dancer, "gladly." Referring to John the Baptist, the Lord said to the blinded Jews, "Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light." Jn 5:35b. Yes, the Book of Acts says that King Agrippa, otherwise so indifferent in matters of religion, was once so gripped by a sermon of Paul that he finally exclaimed, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Acts 26:28.

Yet, my friends, all this is still not the true joy of heart with which every one should receive the Easter message. All this is merely a passing ecstasy, only a fire of straw which flashes up quickly into bright flames but is extinguished just as quickly and leaves nothing behind but smoke and ashes.

The joy with which the disciples finally received the Easter message was one entirely different. It was so great, that as Luke says, they could not believe for joy. The fact of Christ's resurrection, so much against all their expectations, surpassed all their hopes so greatly, was so unimaginably glorious, that they were as those who dreamed; they thought it could be only a sweet dream. Their heart was much too narrow to be able to embrace the flood of joy which wanted to pour into it through this message.

You see, that, that is the true Easter joy of a poor sinner. It is the joy of one who was sentenced to death but is suddenly overwhelmed by the news that he is pardoned. It not only tastes sweet by itself as the joys of heaven, but it also makes the heart sweet over against God and all men. Of course, it does not always manifest itself in loud exultation and rejoicing, but, glowing deep within the heart, it refreshes the person in body and soul.

Is a little bit of this joy also in your hearts? -- Oh, blessed, blessed are you then; then the Easter Season this year has already become the prelude of a blessed eternity awaiting you.

The disciples, however, did not only rejoice during those first days of Easter, but the fires of joy kindled in them continued to burn and glow until their death. This joy had the effect that they despised all the joys, honor, and goods of the world; on the other hand, even in the greatest trouble they confessed, "We are exceeding joyful in all our tribulation," so that Paul joyfully let himself be beheaded and Peter joyfully let himself be crucified.

You see, the true Easter Joy is not only a deeply rooted but also a lasting joy. It accompanies the person throughout his whole life. It fills the entire heart of man, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; it so changes his heart that he becomes another person, one who hates sin and looks on all earthly things as insignificant. This joy causes the rest to view him as a miracle; for it is the cause that he is happy when others are sad, and that he thanks and praises and extols God while others only howl and weep. He sings with Paul Gerhardt:

My heart for joy is springing  
 And can no more be sad,  
 'Tis full of mirth and singing,  
 Sees naught but sunshine glad.  
 The sun that cheers my spirit  
 Is Jesus Christ, my King;  
 That which I shall inherit  
 Makes me rejoice and sing. (528,15)

Oh my dear hearers, God has commanded that today again this blessed Easter message be preached to you in order to fill your heart with true Easter joy! Then open your heart to this true Easter joy! Let neither the joys of this world, nor the cares of the world, neither the greatness of your sins, nor the huge number of your sins hinder you. Then even in this life you will be able with the apostles to make this your motto, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." But in eternity the well of joy which was within you will then really break open and be turned into a deep broad sea of joy, into a sea without bottom and shore. May Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead, praised here in time and there from eternity to eternity, help us all. Amen.

## 2ND EASTER DAY

Acts 10:34-41

In Christ dear Christian friends.

Not only the Christian religion but also other religions teach that there is an eternal life. Hazy ideas and surmises almost all nations have of it. (Hades.) Several pagan philosophers have clearly taught about a happy immortality and in Mohammedanism the doctrine of a heaven of joy to come is a chief teaching. In two ways all the other religions differ on this point from the Christian religion. First, all the other religions can not give a living certainty about eternal life. If they want to point to nature, how everything is rejuvenated, we, on the other hand, also see in it the picture of destruction and annihilation. For from nature many so-called scientists have drawn the conclusion that everything disappears. If one were to rely upon God's righteousness for the hope of eternal life, we dare never forget that the righteous God is not obligated to us; or upon God's goodness, supposing that God would never have

created us if he had not created us for eternal life, this also does not give any certainty. Nothing but the resurrection of Christ from the dead makes us certain in the hope of eternal life. It gives doubt no chance to arise. This is a proof from experience which the universal religions of all men should have, which even the simplest child can comprehend.

The other religions differ in a second way. They point to another way to eternal life than the Christian way. All the religions of the world, all philosophers, all teachings discovered by human wisdom say that one must himself merit a joyful future in the life to come by his wisdom, virtue, piety, by his inner worth, etc. If this were the true teaching, of what avail would even the most lovely ideals of that world be? Then this teaching could never be comforting, lovely, and sweet. For who can believe that he has done so many works that he deserves heaven because of them? Who would dare to offer God his virtues as a fully valid purchase price for an eternal inexpressible blessedness? My friends, if I would have to end my discussion of eternal life with this, you will and would have to end this festival in sorrow, for you would think: the prospect of eternal life is so glorious indeed, but miserable, weak man that I am, I a sinner can never reach this blessed goal. But happy are we! God's Word shows us a way to eternal life which even the weakest can go; it shows us a means by which even the most miserable and deeply fallen sinner can still be delivered and be saved. And this means is faith. Now, my friends, who knows how close eternity is to us! Let us, therefore, try to learn to know the means better by which our eternity will some day be a blessed one.

The text. Acts 10:34-41.

This text induces me for our last festival meditation to present to you:

#### FAITH IN THE RESURRECTED AS THE ONLY MEANS FOR RECEIVING ETERNAL LIFE

- I. That Faith is the only Means,
- II. What This Saving Faith Really is and how One Attains it.

##### I.

Indeed, there are few passages of Holy Scripture which are so often falsely expounded and misused than the opening words of our text. Peter says, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Vv.34.35. These words are usually cited as striking proof by those who want to prove that one can be saved in any religion and with any faith and that in the matter of salvation it really does not depend upon faith but upon works, upon doing what is right. But that this is going contrary to the sense of the apostle is proven first by countless other passages of Holy Writ. For what does Scripture say in other places? With one voice it testifies to us that not works but faith saves. Heb 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is." Mk 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized," etc. The same apostle who speaks in our text says in Acts 4, "Neither is there salvation," etc. And Christ himself says in Jn 14, "I am the Way;" etc., and in Jn 8:24, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins," and Paul in Eph 2:8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Is this evidence not as clear as the sun? In the same sermon from which our text is taken Peter says, "To him give all the prophets witness," etc. Even if we could not arrive at the meaning of the words of our text, we see from thousands of other passages that it could not possibly have the sense which which God's enemies give to it.

However, let us ponder the passage itself more closely. The apostle says, "In every nation;" hence, he does not say: in every religion. Where in general is that stated? Moreover, the apostle says, "He that feareth him." What does that mean? Does that mean the true God or a false one? The true God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And who fears God? He who knows that he has to be afraid of him, who, therefore, does not trust himself to stand before him with his own righteousness. However, the apostle continues, "And worketh righteousness." And who works righteousness? St. Paul says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Rom 14:23c. Faith in Christ must cover those stains with which even our best works are spotted. The sense of our passage will become even more clear when we ponder the circumstances under which the apostle uttered this passage.

Cornelius was a gentile, but he lived among the Jews and feared the true God who was revealed in the Old Testament. He differed from the believing Israelite only in that he still had not received the sacrament of circumcision which at first had been given only to the Jews. He was an upright Israelite in spirit. Only one thing had not yet been revealed to him, namely that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah.

Peter himself had not at that time received the revelation that the heathen also should be invited into the kingdom of Christ. This revelation the apostle now received. One day when Cornelius was praying, an angel appeared to him, commanding him to fetch Peter to give him further instruction. Peter also had a divine vision by which he should be led to perceive that the heathen should also be heirs of the promise. Suddenly he saw, etc. Peter was concerned as to what this vision might mean. And as he reflected upon it, there came a messenger who called him to Cornelius. And, assured by God's Spirit, Peter went along to Cornelius in the firm conviction: the Lord himself was sending him. At Cornelius' Peter found a fair gathering but the entire congregation of hearers was only heathen. When he saw how eagerly they desired to hear God's Word, we read that he opened his mouth, etc. Hence, what does Peter want to say with this? Nothing else than this: That God wants to exclude none from that salvation which Christ has won, for Christ came into the world not only for the Jews but also for the heathen.

Therefore, how greatly they err who want to conclude from Peter's words that faith is not necessary to receive salvation, since, on the contrary, the apostle wants to say that God wants to save everyone through faith! Now what this saying faith is and how one receives it is shown us in the second part of our Epistle.

## II.

Not a few have been greatly astonished that faith alone saves. They ask: Then one can live as he wishes? Just as long as one believes he will be saved? However, they err greatly, because they regard faith as something entirely different from what it really is. A powerless thought in our head is not at all faith. True faith is a divine work in us which changes us and gives us a new birth from God and makes us entirely different persons in heart, mind, spirit, and all powers, as Luther writes in the preface to the Letter to the Romans. True, faith is a living trust in God's grace, such a firm confidence, that one loses his body and life in its behalf, that one is so certain as if God himself had said to us from heaven that we should be saved. This we see in all of those whose faith we read about in God's Word.

The question now arises: How does one attain such a faith? No person can give this faith to himself. That we believe is God's work. However, God gives

it in this way: First, he tries to bring a person to despair of himself, so that he perceives that he must be lost if God would not have mercy on him. If a person arrives at this point, he indeed thinks that he is undone; now, however, he stands before the gates of grace which open to him. He hears the Gospel in an entirely different way than before. He regards it as the most important and most blessed message. It becomes his Paradise, heaven, comfort, light, power.

Now my friends, has that already happened in your hearts? Do you deceive yourself in regard to your salvation? Perhaps many now say: I am afraid of deceiving myself; I indeed know that I am a sinner; I also seek my comfort alone in Christ; but I am so unfaithful. Blessed are you if you perceive this misery; then you should not flee from Christ but cling the more firmly to him.

Oh, may none of us close this festival without having received the confidence: I also believe in the Resurrected. Let us therefore cry to him: We come, oh Jesus, not by our own power . . . You are the Author and Finisher . . . Oh, have mercy on us! Amen.

## 1ST SUN AFTER EASTER

John 20:19-31

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

In this same resurrected Victor, dear hearers!

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," is the way Christ speaks in our today's Gospel. This utterance of our Savior has always been and still is most offensive to all unbelievers. They say that is the very reason why they cannot become reconciled to Christianity; it forbids all rational tests and demands blind faith.

However, two falsehoods lie in this conclusion of unbelievers. First, it is not true that those who want to know nothing of God's Word reject it because they do not want to accept anything without first testing it. Rather, the general mode of procedure of unbelievers undeniably has been and still is that they do not test the Bible and Christianity but reject it without testing, or at least without thoroughly examining and weighing the arguments for and against. If an unbeliever hears that the Bible states that Jesus Christ is true God and man in one person, if he hears that according to Scripture God is Triune, if he hears that the Savior has redeemed us by his life, suffering and death, that all men are lost sinners who can be saved alone by grace through faith for Christ's sake, he does not examine these doctrines, he does not earnestly ponder whether without having suspected it these are doctrines resting upon the irrefutable truth, but without further ado he rejects them as irrational doctrines and the Bible as a book full of contradictions and absurd claims. Where do you find even one person who had remained an unbeliever after he had tried to convince himself that the Bible is God's Word? Can you find one who remained an unbeliever who read a thorough apology of Christianity with the

inner desire to find the eternal truth which stands firm and actually brings rest to the heart? The very opposite is done. Whatever is written against Christianity is eagerly read and accepted in blind faith without testing it; on the other hand, what is written in favor of it is either not read at all and rejected with a disdainful expression or it is read with a biased mind because one in advance takes for granted that everything in it must be false. This neglect of all earnest examination of the Biblical truth will on that day take all excuses of unbelievers away and condemn them.

Yet they say, according to Christ's word, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," blind faith is clearly extolled as the saving faith. But this also is untrue. With these words Christ does not in the least mean to say that man should embrace him and his Gospel without first asking, Why? A blind faith is absolutely no faith, but merely a fancy; faith merits the name of a true faith only if it rests upon a firm, irrefutable foundation. Therefore, even in God's Word blind faith is completely rejected. Even in God's Word the earnest admonition is given in very many passages to accept nothing without first testing it. Does not Christ say, "Beware of false prophets; by their fruits ye shall know them"? Does not St. Paul say, "Prove all things; hold fast that which good"? 1 Thess 5:21. Does not John say, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God"? 1 Jn 4:1. Are not the Bereans expressly praised because they daily searched the Scriptures whether the things which Paul and Silas had preached to them were so? If everyone should accept the teachings of the Bible as divine without any examination whatsoever, how then could the Bible itself call upon us to test it and so urgently admonish us to distinguish the true prophets from the false? There can be no doubt: The Scripture itself rejects blind faith. Whoever, therefore, believes that the Bible is God's Word because he heard this from his parents, his teachers, and from learned men does not yet have the true faith. Men can and should indeed give us evidence of the divinity of Holy Scripture and call our attention to it; but we have a true faith only if from our own firm conviction and the experience of our own heart we can confess that the Gospel truly is God's power which saves all who believe it. That is the way the woman of Samaria led her fellow citizens to Christ; they finally said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." Jn 4:42. In the final analysis, all children should be able to say that to their parents, all pupils to their teachers, all hearers to their ministers, if the true faith dwells in their heart.

The Scriptures do not want to be embraced as God's Word in blind faith; on the contrary, the Scriptures themselves suggest marks by which one can and should test it; these marks are chiefly the miracles and prophecies by which it is sealed before the whole world, and the supernatural, heavenly, divine power which it shows in attentive teachers and hearers, enlightening and convincing the spirit and comforting and quieting the heart and filling it with divine life, divine power, and the living hope of eternal life. Whoever has accepted the Bible as God's Word because of these irrefutable proofs does not have a blind faith but one resting upon clear, eternally certain foundations; but whoever rejects God's Word in spite of those proofs has a blind faith, a blind, unfounded, bottomless unbelief.

But now the question arises, How are we to understand Christ's words, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"? Permit me to speak to you during this hour on that question.

The text... John 20:19-31.

Today we shall consider only the words which the Resurrected spoke to incredulous Thomas, namely

**"BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED"**

On the basis of these words we ponder two points:

- I. That is is an Important Assignment for Christians to Believe What They do not See, and
- II. Yet that They are Truly Blessed People who Manifest such a Faith.

Gracious, faithful, and merciful God! You have given your Son into death and awakened him again for all sinners; you have promised that you want to be gracious to all sinners for the sake of your Son. You desire nothing of us but that we return again to you and believe and trust your precious promise from our whole heart. Therefore, take our heart into your hand and work that faith in it which you desire and preserve us in it until the end. To that end bless also the Word preached in this hour for the sake of your eternal faithfulness and truth. Amen.

## I.

My friends, when Christ in our Gospel cried out to the Apostle Thomas who had not wanted to believe in his resurrection until he had seen and touched, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," Christ does not mean to say that one must embrace him and his Gospel in blind faith, but that Christians, who are already convinced of the truth of the Word and especially of his Gospel, should then also rely upon the mere Word and in childlike and firm confidence build upon the promises given by God even if they see nothing of it, feel nothing, and discover nothing. Thomas and all the disciples should have done this. Why, even in the Old Testament it was foretold by types and prophecies that the Messiah would die and rise again. Thus for example the Messiah speaks in Psalm 16, "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Ps 16:9c.10. Again we read about the Messiah in Isaiah 53, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." V.10b. Therefore, Christ himself had not only declared before friend and foe that the Prophet Jonah was a picture of his burial and resurrection, but he himself had repeatedly told the disciples in advance, even on his last journey to Jerusalem, that according to the Scriptures he must suffer, die, and rise on the third day. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem," he said, "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." Lk 18:31-33. Thomas should have clung to these clear testimonies of God's Word in the prophets and the Word of Christ himself and firmly believed that Christ would arise on the third day, even though he had not seen him; yes, God's Word which he had as proof should have been a thousand times more certain than even the conviction wrought by his senses; for even our senses can deceive us but God's Word is infallible.

The task which Thomas had here Christians of all ages also have. All Christians must believe what they do not see. Peter commends this in his hearers in Pontus and the other places in his first Epistle to them, that they "having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet" they believe in Jesus. 1 Pet 1:8. And St. Paul describes the whole Christian life in this world in the words, "We walk by faith, and not by sight." 2 Cor 5:7.

And so it is. Whoever wishes to be a true Christian must believe that his sins were buried with Christ, and that together with Christ he is justified by God, free from sin, is risen pure and holy, and with him has conquered sin, death, world, the devil, and hell; and yet he sees nothing of this, in fact the very opposite. A Christian sees how sin still lives in his members, defiles him every day, and gives him an evil conscience; and yet he is to believe that with Christ he is righteous and pure before God. A Christian sees only too clearly that he is a sinner; and yet he is to believe that in Christ he is a saint and that if a servant of Christ says to him on earth, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," this absolution is valid also in heaven.

A Christian frequently feels nothing but God's wrath, sees nothing in his entire life but the cross, tribulation, misery, and distress; and yet he is to believe that he is reconciled with God, is acceptable to him in the Beloved, is well-pleasing to him, dear, and esteemed, yes, his precious child of grace. A Christian sees how generally the world, which asks nothing about God's Word and grace, prospers, how it rules over Christians in this life, despises them, and considers them fools; and yet the Christian is to believe that he has long ago conquered the world, and that he is under God's grace and the world is not. Often the Christian sees no way by which he is to support himself and his family, the house is empty, and there is no prospect of work; and yet he is to believe: those who fear the Lord suffer no want.

Often the Christian sees, when he prays, that things become worse rather than better; and yet he is firmly to believe that his prayer is heard, yes, he is to believe the promise of God through the Prophet Isaiah, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Is 65:24. Often the Christian finds nothing but unrest and anxiety in his heart and the loud accusations of his wounded conscience; and yet he is to believe what Christ says, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;" Jn 14:27; and what St. Paul writes, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom 5:1. The Christian constantly feels his poverty of spirit, he always feels more like a wretched beggar, he must beg for every little drop of grace; and yet he is to believe that he is rich in everything; often he feels so miserable and much more unfortunate than a thousand others; and yet he is to believe that he is the most happy person under the sun.

The Christian sees how the Church of Christ totters and staggers like a leaky ship which could sink any second; he sees the church surrounded by powerful foes as though by waves which reach to the heavens; and yet he is to believe that the Church is God's city built upon the eternal Rock against which not even the gates of hell can prevail. He sees the wretched state of the little group of believers, the little flock of Christ's sheep, in this world; and yet he is to believe that the heavenly Shepherd loves and provides for them especially, that these despised Christians are Christ's spiritual body, his chosen and beautifully adorned bride with whom he is forever betrothed in faith and righteousness. The Christian sees how frail every Christian congregation is, and yet he is to believe that every one is sanctified and cleansed by the washing of the water by the Word, that every one is beautiful, not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

The Christian sees how the jaws of death and hell insatiably swallow one sacrifice after the other; and yet he is to believe: Christ has conquered death, hell, and the devil; he sees how death turns his life into dust and brings him with tears to the abode of corruption; and yet he is to believe that there is no death for Christians; death grins frightfully at him and yet he is to consider it a sweet sleep, a messenger of peace. And when finally the Christian himself lies on his deathbed, when he notices its sting, when Satan fills him with the thoughts of hell, when heaven seems as though locked, when the terrors of the judgment fall upon him in the evil hour, he is nevertheless to

believe that as far as he is concerned death is swallowed up in victory, hell is destroyed, the devil lies bound in darkness, he is the lord of sin, death, the devil, and hell, he dare and should now wave the victory banner of faith; though he cannot see it, the gates of heaven are already open; the holy angels are waiting for his soul which is struggling to free itself to carry it into the hands of God; the last tears have been wept, the last sighs uttered, and all heaven is ready to bring him the crown of the victor.

To see sin and yet trust in righteousness; to see misery and yet trust in glory; to see clouds of wrath and yet trust in the Sun of grace; to see weakness and helplessness and yet trust in power and strength; to see defeat and yet trust in victory and triumph; to see death and yet trust in life; to see hell and damnation and yet trust in heaven and salvation: that is the important assignment which Christians have as long as they are in this world. That is indeed difficult, but blessed are they who carry it out for blessed are those who manifest such a faith! That is the second point on which I now speak to you.

## II.

My friends, as long as Thomas did not want to believe in Christ's resurrection until he himself had seen and touched the Resurrected and, as one might say, had the proofs of it in his hands, so long this apostle was in a truly miserable, wretched state, a very sinful but also a very comfortless state.

First of all, it was a great sin that Thomas did not want to believe until he had himself seen the nail prints in Christ's hands and put his finger into the nail prints and his hand into his side. Of course, Thomas did not maliciously call the prophets, yes, Christ himself a liar, as did the unbelieving Pharisees and Scribes but out of weakness, without knowing or wanting to, and declared that one cannot trust the words of Christ and the prophets nor in any way rely upon them. During this time in which Thomas did not want to build his salvation only upon the Word, it was also not possible for him to be certain of the forgiveness of his sins, his state of grace, and his salvation. He did not know whether he had a Redeemer; he had to be afraid that his past faith in Christ was nothing but a deplorable deception. We can, therefore, well imagine by what painful doubts his heart must have been assailed, how restless, how comfortless and hopeless he must have been during this time.

Yet those are always the unhappy results when a person first wants to see, first experience, first feel, first discover, and not until then believe.

And most Christians of our day are such Thomas-Christians. This is the great cancerous sore of most of the present day zealous sects. They certainly preach faith in Christ, but they do not direct the people to the Word and holy Sacraments upon which they must rely and firmly build and trust, but they direct every one to that which they experience, feel, and discover in their hearts. They methodically train them not to believe until they have seen and, as it were, felt the imprint of the wounds and the beating heart of Christ. What is the result? This, that some of the Christians of our day either feign a continual certainty and joyfulness or continually vacillate back and forth, who now believe then doubt, now are confident then despair, now consider themselves children of grace, now children of wrath.

On the other hand, how blessed are those Christians to whom the pure doctrine is preached, who are directed alone to God's Word and promise, and to the seal given by God himself, when they follow this blessed instruction! How

blessed are they who, if they feel sin in their heart, in faith still cling to the Word which promises them Christ's righteousness; who when they feel wrath and death in their conscience in faith still cling to the Word which cries to them: Be confident, you have found grace, you will live! who, when things go so wrong with them that God seems to have forsaken them, nevertheless in faith cling to the Word which says to them: "I will not leave you nor forsake you; those whom I love I chastize and scourge!" Oh, how blessed are they who even at the graves of their loved ones and upon their own deathbed look away from the frightful vision of death, the grave, and decay and in faith cling to the Word: "Death is swallowed up in victory!"

Such believers are in that right relationship with God into which we should be brought again; they give God the honor; they show themselves to be true children who take their heavenly Father at his word; they pass the test which is given them here; they come out of every fire of affliction more and more pure; ever more pure does the gold of faith become, ever brighter their ardor of love, ever firmer their anchor of hope. Though the sunshine may turn into rain, the bright skies into nocturnal storm, the sweet feelings of grace into the feeling of sin and death, their comfort does not change but remains immovable within them. They cry out with Asaph, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Ps 73:26.

Oh, may all of us have such a blessed faith! Yet remember, my friends: No self-righteous person or one living securely in sin has such a faith; no one who seeks to become rich, no lover of the world and its vanities, no earthly-minded heart ever has such a faith; only those, who have perceived their sinfulness and who are anxious for comfort because of it, have such a faith; only those who have lost their taste for the world, who hunger and thirst for better things than those which they can see, namely for God's grace, for righteousness, life, and salvation.

May God open your heart so that all of you not only hear the voice of God in his gracious Word but also understand and follow it in such faith; then all of you will also experience the truth of Christ's Words in yourselves, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Some day you will also actually see and eternally enjoy in perfect joy what you have here clung to so firmly in true faith. For thus says the apostle, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." 1 Cor 13:12. Amen.

## 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 10:11-16

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ.

If a flock of sheep is not to be quickly scattered and destroyed, it needs a shepherd who leads the way, pastures it, protects it, and in the evening brings it back to a secure sheepfold. Sheep by themselves do not know the places where they can find good pasture nor the springs from which they can drink; defenseless

as they are, they would easily be the prey of the wolf and other ravening animals, if they had none to defend them; still less could they of themselves prepare places where they could rest securely.

In Holy Writ the human race is compared to such a flock of sheep. And who can fail to recognize that mankind can not be pictured more fittingly? Yes, we are also such a flock which, if it should not be scattered and destroyed, likewise needs a shepherd who leads the way, pastures it, protects it, and finally brings it into the fold of eternal rest.

By nature we all have an ineradicable hunger and thirst for perfect happiness, but who knows where the true, the perfect happiness is to be found? If we consider a man's actions, we indeed see that every one pursues and vexes himself with, slaves and is very anxious for, happiness; the one seeks it in riches, another in lust, a third in honor; the one seeks it in low, grossly sensual pleasures; another in so-called higher and spiritual things, as art and science, and the like; but do men find the things they are looking for? Though a person may have found the riches, the lust, the honor he looked for, he did not find the happiness for which he was searching. His unsatisfied wishes have become only the greater, his soul-hunger only the more terrible, his soul-thirst only the more burning.

Furthermore, we all by nature have in our souls a deep yearning after the truth. What is truth? This question lives in the hearts of all men without them often knowing it. Everyone would be glad if he could be certain about such questions as whether there is a God, where the world came from, the ultimate purpose of man, his lot after death, etc. In these important matters no one wants to err, no one wants to deceive himself. But which person has found the truth by himself? More than 5,000 years have already gone by since the creation of the world and the wisest are still engaged in seeking the answers; most have given up the hope of ever finding the truth and view men as animals whose soul vanishes with the body like smoke.

Finally, we are also concerned by nature on how we will fare in and after death. We all feel a certain gnawing of conscience; we all feel that many trespasses are burdening us; we all by nature, therefore, secretly fear a future accounting, which we perhaps will have to give and in which we will not be able to stand. Where is the man who can give himself peace in the face of the accusations of his conscience and give himself the absolute hope of a future blessed peace? Of course, for a time a person can succeed in causing his conscience to sleep, but how often does it not awaken only too soon and constantly reminds him of the old unforgiven guilt!

Oh, how unhappy we would, therefore, be if in this world we would have to rely only on ourselves! if God would have banished us from heaven to this world and there were no one who could give us an answer to the question, Where do we come from? where are we going? How unhappy we would be if our mortal body found food here on earth but our immortal soul would have to languish and perish of hunger and thirst! if our physical eye would have light but our spirit would remain in darkness! if we could get through this wretched world but did not know a better way to another, better world of eternal rest and perfect peace!

But happy, happy are we! We are not like a flock which does not have a shepherd and must, therefore, scatter itself and die and be a helpless prey of misery and death. No, we all have a common, great, mighty, gracious, loving Shepherd, who will guide and feed us, protect and defend us, and finally lead.

us into the heavenly fold of eternal rest and perfect security and peace, if only we will accept him as our Shepherd and follow his Shepherd's voice. And this Shepherd is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God and our Savior. Oh, permit me today, since our Gospel gives us this opportunity, to show you why we should accept this Christ as our Shepherd.

The text. John 10:11-16.

"I am the good shepherd;" thus Christ cries out twice in our Gospel text. He means to say that he is the Good Shepherd whom all the prophets have predicted would come to take to himself his flock and seek them. That Christ is this Good Shepherd who has been promised to us, he shows us in all the words of our text. Therefore, let us now ponder:

#### WHY WE SHOULD ACCEPT CHRIST AS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

Our text gives us three main reasons for so doing:

- I. He and Only He is the True Shepherd,
- II. He is so Concerned About His Sheep, and finally,
- III. He is Also Friendly Toward the Lost Sheep.

Lord Jesus Christ, the only Shepherd of all men! Once again you have let your Shepherd's voice resound among us in order to call us all to you. Grant that your voice will penetrate all hearts, that your followers will become more warmed by your love, the weak strengthened, the sick and ill healed, and the lost brought to you. Oh Jesus, I am not the true shepherd of this flock; how can I provide for them, lead, protect, and bring them to heaven? You alone are that and you are able and will to do that through your wretched servant. Oh, then, make me your mouth, so that I speak as you want me to speak and lead all these people to you by your power. Hear me for the sake of your Shepherd's faithfulness. Amen. Amen.

#### I.

To accept Christ as his Shepherd, means, my friends, not only to recognize Christ as his teacher or to follow him as his example in the way of virtue. Today that is what is very often understood when one calls Christ the Good Shepherd of men. However, that is not explaining the words of Christ but diluting and making them trite. No, to accept Christ as one's Shepherd is infinitely more. This is: to seek all that from Christ which sheep have and enjoy from their shepherd, hence, safe guidance through the world, full pasture, protection and defence against all foes, and finally, being brought into the eternal fold of perfect peace.

Now can we really seek all this in Christ? Yes, my friends, for in the first place, he and only he is our true Shepherd. He says in our text, "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 lay down my life for the sheep." Vv.11-13,15.

In order to understand these words correctly, we must know the following. When God created man, God was the Shepherd of all men. God dwelt in their hearts and guided them with his heavenly light; Paradise was the pasture for their body, and God's love and goodness for their soul. God's power was their protection

against sin, misfortune, distress, and death, and heaven was the safe enclosure toward which God led men.

However, what happened? Satan, this fallen angel, this hellish wolf, enviously saw that mankind was well off under God's Shepherd's staff. He thirsted for man's blood and life. What did he therefore do? He crept up to man under a plausible appearance, caused him to become suspicious of his heavenly Shepherd as though his gracious guidance were a harsh dominance, and dazzled him by showing how well off they would be if they would set themselves completely free and were their own guide.

And alas! The plan succeeded. Mankind ceased to listen to God's Shepherd's voice, and withdrew from his gentle rule. The result was that mankind was driven out of the pasture of Paradise into the wilderness of this world; now by nature we all wander about in darkness, sin, and under God's wrath, surrendered into misery and death, without true peace and without the hope of eternal life.

If we were to be helped, we needed a new Shepherd who would kill the hellish wolf, so that sin and God's wrath over sin would be wiped out and again win for us light, grace, righteousness, life, and salvation.

From olden times mankind has indeed tried to help itself and man have set themselves up as shepherds who would deliver their brethren. But could they help themselves and others? No; in vain have men tried to rescue themselves from darkness and kindle the light of truth; in so doing they have wandered only the more deeply into the dark forests of their own perverted thoughts. In vain men have themselves tried to conquer sin and produce a righteousness which availed before God; in so doing they have fallen only the deeper into the abyss of pride and estrangement from the life that is in God. In vain have men tried to reconcile themselves to God and labored to open heaven; in so doing they have fallen into the abomination of sacrifices to men and other idols. All men, especially the wise of this world, who have wanted to lead men through the world to heaven, have proven to be hirelings who could not stand before the hellish wolf, before sin, God's wrath, distress, death, and hell, and could not conquer them but had to flee, leave the human flock in the lurch, and give themselves up as lost.

There was only one who could again wrest the flock of mankind from the hellish wolf, namely, he who had been the Shepherd of mankind from the beginning, Christ himself. And behold! God did this. The moment man had been snatched and scattered by the wolf, God began to gather them again; he gave man the promise that at the right time God himself would appear on earth and crush the head of the serpent; mankind should just take comfort in this. And after 4,000 years had gone by, God's Son appeared in the world, immediately after his birth let himself be heralded by the angels to the poor shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem as the promised Shepherd, took our sins upon himself and let himself be punished for them; however, as a Lamb swallowed and killed by the hellish wolf he immediately descended into hell, bound the wolf of hell, destroyed his dark ambush from which he had lain in wait for the sheep, thereupon arose as a victor from the dead with righteousness, life, and salvation; then he established the holy office of the ministry through which, by means of the shepherd's horn of the Gospel, the entire flock of mankind wandering about in the world should be called to him as their true Shepherd until the end of days.

You see from this my friends: Christ is truthful, and only he is indeed our true Shepherd; all other men are mercenaries. Christ alone has been victorious for us in the great battle with the hellish wolf and conquered him by

letting himself be torn and swallowed by him. Only he had erased our sins and God's displeasure; only he has again brought to our languishing souls the bread and water of life; only he is able to protect us from misery, death, and hell, and lead us through death to life and in spite of hell lead us into heaven as into the mansions of eternal peace. True, preachers of the Gospel are also called shepherds, but only as believers are called Christians; that is, only insofar as the preachers point to Christ who is the only Good Shepherd, and only as Christ, the only Good Shepherd speaks through them; wherever this does not take place, the preachers are all mercenaries and if they would let themselves be burned; Oh, then, let us cast away all trust in everything else; let us cast away our own wisdom and righteousness, and all the teachings and works of all men as mercenaries who can never be victorious in the battle with sin, God's wrath, misery, death, Judgment, hell, and Satan but will have to flee. Christ, only Christ, is our true Good Shepherd; let us accept him, then we have help.

## II.

In order that we may be even more urgently moved to do this, let us hear in the second place how carefully Christ watches over his sheep.

Christ expresses this in our text with the words, "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." Vv.14.15a. If one ponders these words only superficially, he could easily think that in these words Christ does not praise his Shepherd's faithfulness very highly. He merely says that he knows his own and, on the other hand, that his own know him! However, if we ponder the meaning of this word correctly, we discover that more lies in it than could be expressed by any other longer description. For when Christ knows those as his own who accept him as their Shepherd, what more could they desire, what more could they wish? How can they ever lack anything which they need? Of what do they have to fear? Which promise of salvation and glory can there be for which they would not confidently dare to hope?

Oh, blessed people who accept Christ as their Shepherd! Though they are great sinners and, therefore, worthy of no grace, no love, no blessing, Christ knows them as his sheep; he is, therefore, gracious to them; he loves them and overwhelms them with temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings. If they are despised and rejected by the whole world, if they find none who want to be their friend and brother, if no one will acknowledge them to be Christians and God's children, if all men, pious and godless, are ashamed of them, if they accept Christ as their Shepherd, he nevertheless knows them as his sheep, is not ashamed of them but goes after them as their Shepherd, and leads them in and out.

If they themselves are uncertain whether they dare regard themselves as Christians, if their own consciences accuse them, their own heart condemns them, what does it matter if they choose Christ as their Shepherd? He does not accuse them, he does not condemn them but knows them as his own.

Yes, if it seems as if God himself has rejected them, if it seems as if they are already condemned and sentenced through God's Word, if God himself seems to fight against them since God allows a thousand tribulations to come upon them, they still have no reason to despair and doubt; Christ says to them: Be comforted! Just do not be afraid and doubt! My Father knows me as his dear Son, since I hung on the cross as a curse for the world; even as my Father still knew me on the accursed tree, so I also know you, even though all the storms of his wrath burst upon you.

If they are in trouble, in sickness, in poverty, how happy they can be! The Good Shepherd knows them and provides for them and helps them. If they are sore at heart, if they don't know where to turn, if perhaps through their own fault

they have fallen into a deep pit of misery out of which they do not know how to climb, how undismayed they can be! Christ knows them as his own and, therefore, he must counsel them, they dare and can and should cast all their care upon him, for he cares for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

If they come before God with prayers and supplications and their conscience tells them that they are not worthy, God will not hear them, blessed are they! They don't have not pay attention to this; Christ regards them as his own; and for that reason all their prayers are pleasing to him and he certainly hears them even before they call.

If they are dying; if the world world forsakes them; if the sins of their entire life and their unfaithfulness throughout their entire Christian life rise up before their deathbed like accusers, oh, how calm they can be! Then Christ stands at their side and says, Be not afraid, you have accepted me as your Shepherd; I know you even now; you are mine and I am yours, no sin, no death, no hell will separate us.

Finally, when those who have accepted Christ as their Shepherd come before God's judgment: oh, even then they have no reason to tremble and quake; for Christ does not let them come alone before God; he appears with them before his Father and says: Father, this soul is my sheep; I have bought it with my blood and it has accepted me; therefore, open the gates to my heavenly meadows, so that I may now forever pasture it there and lead it to the stream of eternal joy and refreshment.

See, my friends, according to this, who can be more blessed here and in eternity than he who accepts Christ as his Shepherd? Do not think that I have said too much. Listen to David; he speaks from his own experience; and how does he speak? Rapturously he exclaims, "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 restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Ps 23:1-6.

### III.

Now accordingly, who should not be inclined to accept Christ as his Shepherd? Only one thing will perhaps prevent man, the thought that it is not so easy to become Christ's sheep and be able to say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd." In order to remove this hindrance, let us finally ponder Christ's disposition toward erring sheep.

To be sure, one would think that since it is such great happiness to belong to Christ's flock, it would indeed cost much, very much before one would be accepted as one of the flock and have a right to Christ's Shepherd's concern. That, however, is not at all the case. For thus Christ himself speaks at the end of our text, "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." V.16. Christ spoke these words as he stood in the midst of the flock which he had gathered about himself from the Jewish people. He declared, however, that he was not satisfied with this number. He had other sheep who were not of this fold. That is, there were still millions of heathen wandering about in this world; these lost and scattered sheep lay upon his heart; yes, he says bluntly, he must bring them in also. Since at that time mankind was divided into two groups, heathen and Jews, we see from this: there is no person

whom Christ would not gladly accept as one of his flock and whose Shepherd he would not be.

Be you whoever you may be, my dear hearer, whether you are descended from the Jews or heathen, Christ bears also you upon his heart; he seeks also you; he would gladly have also you in his flock; he would gladly be also your Shepherd; he gave his life for all sheep, also for you.

But still more! Christ tells us how he will gather the lost sheep and become their Shepherd; he says, "They shall hear my voice." He intends to say: I am like every shepherd; if a sheep has run away and been lost, the shepherd does not prescribe severe conditions to the poor sheep under which he will again accept it, but he goes after the sheep and calls it in his most friendly voice with his old well-known shepherd's voice: Come back! come back! If the sheep hears the voice of the shepherd and runs back to him, or if it lets itself be found by him, the shepherd takes it joyfully upon his shoulders and rejoicingly carries it back to the flock. So, says Christ, I also call through my Gospel to all lost mankind as a sympathetic friend, Oh, come back, my people, who have gone astray in the world; you who have drunk from the muddy springs of the lust of the world; you who have fallen into the abyss of vice; you who have climbed the steep heights of pride; you who have wandered about in the maze of human wisdom, come back! I, I am your Shepherd; you will find the correct pasture from me; I will lead you to the fresh waters of comfort; I will finally bring you into the heavenly fold where the fullness of joy and pleasures forever more will be your forever and ever.

See from this, my friends, how easily, therefore, everyone of us can become one of Christ's sheep and have Christ as the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. The moment we listen to the Word of the Gospel, which Christ calls out to us, that is, the moment we know that we have erred and no longer resist Christ's Shepherd's voice but forsake the world and sin and return to him and say: You have me, my Shepherd, receive your poor sheep, in that moment we are in Christ's care, we are his sheep and he is our Shepherd.

## 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 16:16-23

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

What is a true Christian? What is the essence of true Christianity? This question is nowadays answered in very different ways and naturally the answer is often false.

As a rule, those think that they are safest who say that the essence of a true Christian does not consist in his being diligent in going to church and Holy Communion and praying and singing much, but in living uprightly, loving his neighbor, and helping him, in short, in doing good works. And it is true: Christianity is not a dead thing; it does not consist in observing certain outward religious acts, ceremonies, and pious practises; for the most diligent

churchgoer can in spite of all his zeal be a hypocrite.

Yet it is just as wrong to suppose that the essence of true Christianity is an honorable life, a civil integrity, a generally useful life. For in spite of all this one can just as easily be a hypocrite who is proud of his supposedly good heart, his noble principles, and his good works.

The essence of true Christianity is true faith in Jesus Christ; if this faith is not the chief thing, the heart, the soul of our entire Christianity, it is fundamentally nothing but heathenism, which is whitewashed, palliated, and adorned with a few Christian truths.

If you search through all the Gospels, you will find: at all times that alone was why Christ comforted souls, why he recognized them as belonging to him, and promised them eternal life: because they believed in him.

Yes, they say, how is it possible for faith alone to do that? The simple reason is this: Since man by nature is a sinner and with his works can not stand before God, Christ, true God and man, redeemed us, by his life, suffering, and death, reconciled us with God again, and satisfied God's righteousness in our place. And whoever wishes to share in it dare not reject this redemption but must accept it; and that is faith.

Faith is the open door of heaven; whoever does not want to enter into it through it is forever and ever excluded from God's kingdom. Of course, it is true: A Christian does good works; but whoever relies upon what he considers good works and wants to be righteous before God and be saved by them is not a Christian and will be lost despite all his seemingly good works.

God alone wishes to have the praise for saving us miserable sinners. Our boast must fall completely to pieces. Not even repentance and improvement can be the basis of our hope. Whoever thinks: since I regret my sins and want to improve my life, God will take pity on me, deceives himself most miserably. If you want to be righteous before God and be saved, you must rely upon pure grace and mercy, for this is that true repentance, that you despair completely of yourself and turn to Christ with all the miserable things which you perceive in yourself. That is the way one becomes a Christian, that is the way one remains a Christian, that is the way one is saved.

A true Christian is earnestly concerned about his soul's salvation; but he does not build upon a mechanical performance of certain good works; rather he lets go of everything and relies alone upon Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world and his sins also; a true Christian can, therefore, truthfully say with the apostle, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Tim 1:15.

You see, my friends, that, yes, that is the only true foundation; all others are of no use; all of one's works, and though they are connected with millions of tears, is work in vain; only faith in Christ conquers God's glowing wrath and extinguishes the flames of hell.

The question now arises: What about the heart of a Christian, when he has laid this basis for his faith? I will now speak to you in detail about that.

The text. John 16:16-23.

In this Gospel Christ predicts two things to his disciples; he says,

"Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." V.20. That is the chief content of our entire Gospel. I will speak to you about that.

TRUE CHRISTIANITY, A CONSTANT CHANGE BETWEEN SORROW AND JOY

- I. We Want to Learn to Know This Change, and
- II. Hear from God's Word How one is to Act.

Oh Lord Jesus Christ, it is your will that those who belong to you do not insult your valid merit by always being uncertain and doubtful but to honor your cross by being firmly convinced of their salvation. Oh, therefore, give us all this precious thing, a firm heart which your grace alone can work. To that end bless also the present preaching of your precious Gospel for your own sake. Amen.

I.

It is true, my friends: true Christianity is something happy, wonderful, blessed; for should he not be a blessed person who knows that through Christ he has a gracious God and through death will certainly enter into the heaven of the blessed? Yet many suppose that the life of faith is a perpetual happiness of heart, and undisturbed peace, constant blessed rest and quiet of soul, and that Christianity is an endless basking of the spirit in a sweet feeling. Many are misled to hold this opinion by false teachers who seek to incite their hearers to true Christianity by first picturing it as something very easy and lovely and most wonderful, as a state of spiritual rapture which at least returns often.

Others, on the other hand, reject all experiences of heavenly refreshment and the taste of the gracious Word of God and the powers of the world to come as enthusiasm; or, they present Christianity as though it were a constant lamentation and groaning without the joyful certainty that one is in grace; as though a Christian must continually tremble, quake, and doubt as to whether he will be accepted or not; as though it would be fleshly security if he were to say with that Christian poet:

My manifold transgression  
Henceforth can harm me none  
Since Jesus' bloody Passion  
For me God's grace hath won.  
His precious blood my debts hath paid;  
Of hell and all its torments  
I am no more afraid. (152,3)

But, my friends, both opinions are false, against God's Word, and against the universal experience of all true Christians. True Christianity is neither an unbroken joyfulness nor perpetual anxiety. What it really is we learn from our Gospel, in which the Lord says to the apostles, "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." V.16. Since the disciples did not understand this veiled talk, Christ explained it to them in the words, "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." V.20. Here Christ predicted not only to the apostles but also to all Christians the ways of their life of faith; it would be a constant change between sorrow and joy.

When the apostles came to Christ and perceived that he was the Savior of the world, they were filled with pure joy. What a good, gracious, friendly, merciful Lord they found in him! How joyfully they forsook everything and followed him! They could well have thought that thus it would continue and when Christ

would finally set up his Messianic kingdom, it would be even better. But lo, since he would soon go away from them to the Father, he told them something which they had least of all expected: Weeping, lamentation, and sorrow; yet he declared that in only a little while their sorrow would again be turned into joy.

And that is the way Christ still does it. When people accept him in faith, oh, how blessed they are in Christ! what new heavenly impulses they discover in their hearts! how blessed they feel they are when they can exclaim:

Now I have found the firm foundation  
Which holds mine anchor ever sure;  
'Twas laid before the world's creation  
In Christ my Savior's wounds secure;  
Foundation which unmoved shall stay  
When heaven and earth will pass away. (385,1)

But it does not always remain that way. As bright as the believers' state of grace often is in the beginning, so that they might cry to all the world and all devils, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ who justifies!" so it often is for only a little while; their heart becomes dark again; doubt arises and that firm confidence begins to waver. At first they often think that sin died out in their hearts through faith, and lo, in a little while it begins again to rule powerfully in them; they are also overcome and spotted now and again by sin; then do the wings of faith and trust collapse. At first believers often think: If the Lord slay me, yet will I trust in him. But then, if many tribulations enter into his life, if one tribulation follows upon another; if their affairs go as though God were against them; if God leads them over such rough ways that it seems as though he does not consider them his children, as though he persecuted them as his foes, and rejected them, then a strong mistrust of God arises in them, and sorrow depresses them.

At times the believers feel such great zeal against sin that they suppose that they would never again let a sinful thought into their heart nor let an idle word cross their lips; and in a little while they feel to exhausted and disinclined to battle against sin. At times the world with its vanities is so vain that believers are almost consumed by the yearning for their heavenly home; and in a little while they sorrowfully perceive in their hearts a secret yearning for the things and joys of the world. At times believers are so courageous in their confession of the truth, that they joyfully go to meet the world and rejoice if they suffer much shame and persecution for Jesus' sake; and in a little while they are in the grips of despondency and fearfulness. At times believers can so pray that they are amazed at themselves, that they themselves do not know whence it comes that the words of ardent devotion spring from their heart like a mighty stream; and in a little while they can but weakly groan and coo like doves. Today they perhaps find pure light and life, inexpressible comfort, power, strength, and the sweet refreshment of God's Word; and in a little while they are as though dead and powerless. At times they have the most blessed experiences when they partake of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Supper; and a little while later they must again depart from the Table of the Lord in a sorrowful frame of mind.

You see, my friends, such alternating between sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, courage and despondency takes place in true Christianity. We find that in the saints about whom we read in God's Word. How David wavered back and forth! He himself speaks of that in the 30th Psalm in the words, "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved....Thou didst hide thy face, and I

was troubled." v.6.7b. Now he rejoices, "By my God have I leaped over a wall," 2 Sam 22:30b, and in a little while he groans, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word." Ps 119:25. Now he rejoices, "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." Ps 103:1-3; and in a little while we again hear him groan thus, "Out of the depth have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord hear my voice....If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?.... My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." Ps 130:1.2a.3.6a. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. I remember the days of old....My soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit faileth." Ps 143:2.3.5a.6b.7a.

## II.

Now that we have learned to know the change between sorrow and joy in true Christianity, let us hear secondly from God's Word how one is to act.

My friends, there are very few who remain absolutely certain of their state of grace. Though there be many who know that they are poor sinners who can not help themselves, who consider Jesus as the only Savior, yet most are never truly certain of their faith. And no doubt the chief reason for this is that they experience how often the voice, the feeling of their heart changes. If they discover joy in their hearts, they think: now God is gracious to me, now he is smiling graciously upon me, now he is giving me the testimony that I am his child; if, on the other hand, they discover sorrow, weakness, feebleness, and impulses of the flesh and their evil lusts, ah, then they think: Jesus has left my heart completely! Alas, I have suffered shipwreck of faith and have fallen from life into death.

Believe me, this is nothing else but a deceit of your heart and the trick of Satan who wants to force us without our noticing it from the eternal Rock, Jesus Christ and his precious Gospel, and lead us upon the sinking sand of our own heart.

Clearly has Christ predicted to all his followers that they will have not only hours of joy but also times of sorrow, when they must weep and lament, when anxiety will come upon them like a woman travailing with child; but the end will be wonderful; their heart will rejoice and their joy no one will take from them.

From this you see that as little as the joyful feeling which we at times have should be the real foundation of our ease of mind, so little should we also let the foundation of our faith be overthrown by the experience of sorrow and weakness. The only foundation upon which we build should be Jesus Christ the Savior of the whole world.

Oh, therefore, be warned of the false spirit which now is poured out over the world and guard yourselves against the many false teachers who have nowadays arisen, who under the best aura of a living Christianity nevertheless place the poor soul upon slippery ways when they teach them not to find the certainty of their salvation in Christ, his Word and Sacraments but in themselves in their heart!

It sounds good when they preach, First you must experience this and this,

first you must feel the testimony of the Holy Spirit, then you can believe and comfort yourself in Christ; but this is nothing else than reversing the order of salvation. God's Word rather tells us: Believe first, and then you will experience. Thus Christ said to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Jn 11:40. Paul says to the Ephesians, "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Eph 1:13. Moreover John says, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God....He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." 1 Jn 5:1a.10a.

It is indeed a precious gift of God if he pours his sweet peace into our heart; not this peace here on this world but that peace which Christ's blood has instituted with God in heaven on the cross when he reconciled God should be the anchor of our hope. But if we think: because it is so and so with me, I will also comfort myself in Christ, we rob Christ of all his honor, our faith is wormy and our eye of faith squints. We must rather think this way: Christ is the Savior of all sinners; since I am a sinner and would be lost without him, I take refuge in him; because by myself I am naked, I will clothe myself in the wedding garment of his righteousness.

Now, as the experiences of peace are not the basis of our peace of mind, neither should the experiences of sorrow and weakness overthrow it.

We live here, as the apostle says, by faith and not by sight. This is not the time of being satisfied but of hunger and thirst after righteousness and of sorrow. Therefore, we should not let ourselves be misled when we, as the disciples, must often weep and lament, when we feel nothing in us but misery, distress, and death. The believer is indeed at peace with God but he still has many disturbers of the peace; he indeed has Christ's righteousness, yet he must often painfully feel his own unrighteousness; he indeed enjoys peace in the Lord, but sin, world, and the devil cast much bitter gall into his cup of joy. Faith is indeed a confident, firm relying upon Christ but although Christ the foundation remains firm, the believer nevertheless often becomes very weak; faith is not always a triumphant certainty, not always the exulting of the conqueror over sin, death, the devil, and hell, but it is often only a hidden spark glowing amid the ashes, a secret prostrate sighing for grace.

You who know your salvation in Christ, do not let your heart and Satan deceive you in regard to your salvation; do not make yourselves uncertain about your salvation; God's Word remains firm, though everything else wavers; as long as you cling to that you will remain standing. Holy Baptism is a covenant which does not fall, which God never regrets; as long as you appeal before God to this covenant, God can not reject you. The Holy Supper is an absolute pledge of your reconciliation; as long as you accept this pledge in faith, God must redeem it with your salvation.

Oh, then guard yourselves against all doubt and claim the right which you have in the face of all the opposition of your reason and heart. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Amen.

# 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER John 16:5-15

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this same beloved Savior, my dear hearers...

The most common reason why from olden times and also in our days it is claimed that no one wants to recognize Holy Scripture as God's Word, and why no one is able to accept it as God's Word is because it clashes so completely with the usual thoughts, views, and judgments of men. People conceive a certain idea, for example, of how God, had he wanted to reveal himself, would have to do it; however, in Scripture one finds the very opposite of their ideas. That which Holy Writ has revealed to us of God's essence, of his will and his decrees, of the nature and destiny of man, of that which God has done for man's salvation, and of the way by which man is to be saved, is at variance with man's thoughts on these subjects. Not only has no studious scientist who knows nothing of the Bible found these truths, but everything is so strange, and all things seem so foolish also to those to whom the revelations contained in the Bible are preached, that one thinks he has the greatest right to reject Biblical doctrine.

However, are these really grounds for refusing to consider Holy Writ as God's revelation? I say no! On the contrary, if man himself could say how God would have to reveal himself, he he wanted to reveal himself, then the miracle of a direct revelation would be unnecessary; man would not need it. Moreover, if Holy Scripture would contain only such doctrines, and if particularly its essential, most important doctrines would be such which would not appear strange to man, and which he himself could find with the help of his reason, then Scripture would contain merely a repetition and confirmation of the revelation of reason and not a special revelation from God; for a revelation is simply the promulgation of things previously unknown. And finally, if the truth of Scripture would not seem contradictory, if we could perceive their mutual connection and agreement with the remaining incontestable truths and with the true conception of God, his essence, will, and works in every respect, then this would be a clear proof that these truths would not have come from a world unknown to us, not from a holy of holies into which the eye of our spirit was allowed not one glance.

Not the correct use of reason but the natural love of self and man's innate hatred of God it is which moves him to deny the divine origin of Holy Scripture because of the doctrines it contains which he regards as strange and incomprehensible. Just that is our sin; that we do not want to accept God as he is and wants to be known to us, but that we want to create a God in our thoughts and God should be as we want him to be.

Even our reason tells us: a divine revelation must uncover areas of knowledge previously unknown to us; that it, it must contain doctrines which we would not have known without it and whose connection we could not perceive here below. Miracles, prophecies, things entirely new to men, mysteries incomprehensible to him, and the exposing of his errors -- these are the very marks which make something a revelation and by which it must prove itself as God's revelation. God himself, therefore, appeals to this in the Prophet Isaiah; he says there in chapter 42, "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." V.9.

Yes, a divine revelation can also serve to confirm and place beyond doubt many things which we already know by nature; however, not these things, but those very teachings which are completely new to us, which we can know only by direct revelation, which supplement and correct our natural knowledge, yes, above all, which uncover to us where we by nature err and which, therefore, oppose our accustomed thoughts, views, and judgments, these are the most important teachings to which we must above all pay attention; and these are the treasure in which above all our salvation lies.

In our today's Gospel Christ mentions three main points in which the revelation of the Holy Spirit opposes our natural judgment. Let us therefore now direct our attention to these.

The text. John 16:5-15.

When Christ had disclosed to the apostles that he would soon leave them and go to the Father, they were all most downhearted. In order to comfort them, he not only told them that unless he would go to the Father the Comforter could not come to them, but he also gave them the promise that, after he had gone to the Father, he would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to them. This induced Christ to show them what the Holy Spirit would do; namely, he would reprimand or convince the world that sin, righteousness, and the judgment is something entirely different from what it thinks they are. Therefore, permit me now to speak to you on:

THE GREAT DIFFERENCE EXISTING BETWEEN THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD AND  
THE JUDGMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I. Over Sin,
- II. Over Righteousness, and
- III. Over the Judgment.

Oh Lord God, Holy Spirit! We have all fallen into sin and thus we have become vain in our thoughts and our foolish heart has become darkened; thinking ourselves to be wise we have become fools; therefore, oh Heavenly Light, shed light into the darkness of our souls, show us our folly, and help us to become wise unto salvation. Give us grace so that we will be subject to your judgments, follow your guidance, and finally reach the goal by your direction. Hear us, oh highest Comforter in all trouble for the sake of your faithfulness. Amen.

I.

In promising the disciples the Holy Ghost, Christ in our Gospel says first of all, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin." V.8. Christ says the first thing which the Holy Spirit will do when he comes into the world will be this, he will reprove the world because of sin. From this we see Christ's religion is not, as is so often taught today, a religion of the virtue of man; it is not a summary of rules of how man should use his innate powers and live virtuously; it is not instruction on how to awaken the good lying and slumbering in man; no, the first salutation with which Christ's teaching greets the world is a general reprimand of all men; it is the earnest declaration: You are all sinners! No one dare excuse himself. Whoever is a human being is also a sinner. No matter what the world may call you, king or beggar, rich or poor, great or humble, old or young, wise or ignorant, slave or free citizen, saint or sinner, virtuous or unvirtuous, your name, your station, your worth before God reads: a sinner.

This very preaching with which the Holy Spirit comes among men is a preaching which the world has not expected. The moment those who must carry out the office of the Holy Spirit come to the world with this declaration, this is enough to make people angry, refuse to admit that all men are sinners, and angrily turn away from it as from a malevolent preaching which degrades and shames mankind.

However, the world often agrees with the verdict of the Holy Spirit that all men have sin; but wherein man's sin really consists, that is the point in which above all the great difference between the verdict of the world and the verdict of the Holy Spirit reveals itself.

Now what does the world call sin? There are people especially in our day who no longer regard even manifest sins as fornication, hatred, vengeance, deceit in business, and the like, as sin. Nevertheless, most people still have this much of a conscience that they regard the outward gross outbreaks of sin, obvious vices, and the crimes which are punished by also the state as sin, such as murder, adultery, and fornication, drunkenness, robbery, theft, lies, perjury, cursing, blaspheming, and the like. But how many other transgressions not so apparent are there even of the Law written in the heart of all men which countless numbers do not regard as sin! How strange it seems to most if their downright sinful or idle words are made sin and even the evil thoughts of their heart are reproved! Immediately most think: Oh, one word is no arrow! Thoughts are tax free!

That the Holy Spirit judges differently over sin than these blind people who regard only the outward gross outburst as sin indeed need not be mentioned.

As you know there are also among the world, that is, among those people who still are not true Christians, those who know and confess that all which is against God's Law is sin, whether it be in deeds, or in words, or in looks and attitudes, or merely in the faintest desires and thoughts of the heart. Now can the judgment of the Holy Spirit over sin be a different one? Should the Holy Spirit not declare all transgressions of the divine Law as sin and punish them? Yes, my friends, even so the judgment of the Holy Ghost over sin is an entirely different one than the judgment of the world. For how does Christ speak in our Gospel? He says, "And when he is come he will reprove the world of sin, because they believe not on me." V.9. A noteworthy judgment! Is unbelief, therefore, according to the judgment of the Holy Spirit the only sin of the world? In a certain sense, yes! True, the Holy Spirit calls every transgression of the Law sin, but the chief sin, the source, mother, root, and the climax of sin, the sin of all sin, he says is unbelief, that is, not believing in Christ.

And, will you ask why? My friends, for this reason: all men are indeed sinners by nature but that is why God's Son became a man, suffered and died on the cross; and thus he atoned for the sins of all men, bore and paid the punishment of sin, and now he invites all men in the Gospel to believe in him; whoever believes in him, not only are his sins forgiven so that God looks at him as though he had never sinned, but through faith such a believer also receives a new heart which hates sin and can forsake it.

Therefore, the judgment of the Holy Spirit now reads thus: Listen, all you people, it was a great sin that in Adam all of you fell from God and lost the image of God after whom you were created; but behold, God's Son came into the world and has atoned for your fall and regained everything which you had lost in Adam; therefore, though all of you are fallen people, this will not be counted against you, if you believe in Christ, but that you now reject even this help by your unbelief; that, that is your real sin.

It is true: you are in a tragic situation the moment you enter the world;

for you are all conceived and born in sin, and you cannot help yourself out of your sinful ruin, you are dead in sin; but that will not harm you, for the moment you believe in Christ who was born as a human child for you, you will be born again, receive a new heart, and the Law will be written in your mind; that you do not want to believe, that, that is the fundamental sin, the source of all your other sins.

Finally, it is horrible indeed that you have lived in opposition to God's Law, that you have despised God's love which he has shown you in your creation, and that to the present time you have gone the way to hell, trifled away heaven, and in God's eyes have heaped sin upon sin and guilt upon guilt; however, God has decreed that you should not be lost on account of your sins; for he has given you his Son to be your Redeemer from sin and through him has built for you a new heaven of grace; you need but believe in him and all your sins are wiped out and heaven is again open to you; that you now do not want to believe, that is your most frightful sin; that by your unbelief you despise even your glorious redemption, even this incomprehensible love and grace of God in Christ, this dearly bought new salvation, even this medicine for your soul-sickness, reject it, and trample it under foot, that now you turn your back on God when he does not want to remember your sins and wants to hurl them into the depths of the sea, even violently push aside the hand which wants to save you, that you have not only sinned against the stern Law but now also against the sweet Gospel which preaches grace, that is too much, that is sinning too greatly, that is your true sin, that is the highest point of wickedness to which you can climb; in short, that is the sin of all sins for which there is no grace and no forgiveness to all eternity.

You see, that is the judgment of the Holy Spirit upon sin, oh, blessed is he who accepts this reproof and forsakes the sin of unbelief, then he has been helped from all his sins; but woe to him who remains in this sin; he will not be saved even from one. For he who believes is not condemned, but he who does not believe is already condemned because he does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

## II.

My friends, as different as is the judgment of the world from that of the Holy Spirit in regard to sin, so different is his judgment also in regard to righteousness. Secondly, permit me to speak to you of this.

That man must have a certain righteousness in order to stand some day before God is denied not even by the world, if it still believes in a God and in a future retribution. For our reason certainly tells us: since God is holy and righteous, he naturally cannot save the unrighteous and cannot possibly give heaven as a reward for sin. But which is that righteousness with which the world hopes to stand before God?

The world judges thus: If a person does those good works which are commanded in the Ten Commandments, and if he forsakes evil works which are forbidden in them; if he does as much good as is within his powers to do; if he refrains from all gross sins and dissipation and does not live in any vice; if he gives everyone his due and is generous to the poor; if he is a good citizen, a faithful spouse, a diligent father of a family, a peaceable neighbor, a scrupulous business man, and indeed also a zealous church-goer, and if he lives in all things in such a way that he cannot be reproved by others but is regarded and praised as an honorable, honest, upright, and virtuous man, he is a righteous man. To put it simply, the world, therefore, regards a blameless civil respectability and righteousness as that righteousness which some day will avail before God.

That this is true is beyond doubt, for thousands and millions comfort themselves with such a righteousness and hope that in this way they will assuredly enter heaven.

But what is the verdict of the Holy Spirit concerning this? Christ says in our Gospel, "He will reprove the world of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more." V.10. A noteworthy judgment!

From these strange sounding words we perceive at least this much, that the Holy Spirit must reveal an entirely different righteousness than that upon which the whole world relies. What? Will the Holy Spirit reprove people living in an honorable, upright, moral, and virtuous life and will he praise people living in manifest sins? Absolutely not! God also wants us to be good citizens, diligent heads of families, scrupulous business people, peaceable neighbors, and the like. But as praiseworthy and profitable as this is for this life and for the social relationships among men, nevertheless, according to the judgment of the Holy Spirit this is not in the least that righteousness which avails before God. Yes, if a person steps before God with his civil respectability and virtues and dares to want to stand with them before God, then the Holy Spirit rejects and condemns such righteousness of the Law as a filthy torn garment in which no person could and dares to appear before the most holy God.

But, you will say, did not God himself give the Law and say, "This do, and thou shalt live"? And did not Christ confirm it when he answered that young man, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"? Mt 19:17. This is true, my friends, but remember: God will indeed give eternal life to him who keeps his Commandments but only to him who really keeps them, who keeps them perfectly. One does not keep God's Commandments when he does this or the other work which is demanded and forsakes one or the other sin forbidden in the Commandments. No, only he keeps God's Commandments whose heart, first of all, is as pure and holy as the Law demands; only he who willingly, without an inner resistance does or forsakes what he does or forsakes according to the Law; only he who in what he does forsake according to the Law has neither the intention of being praised by men nor being rewarded by God for it or escaping his punishment; only he who does not become proud in his heart when he has done everything but before God regards himself as an unprofitable servant; only he who makes no exception in any sin which he is to hate and forsake and in any virtue which he is to love and practise; in short, only he keeps God's Commandments who in truth can say: I am without sin, without shortcomings, without a fault, even without a weakness; I am holy, I am perfect.

Now tell me: Who can speak thus of himself? Who has a perfectly pure heart? who does all good and forsakes all evil without an inner resistance? who never has the purpose of being praised by men and being rewarded by God and escaping his punishment? in whom does no secret pride raise itself when he has done something good or conquered some evil? who makes no exception in any virtue, if to practise it is ever so difficult, and in any sin if to struggle against it is ever so hard? in short, who dare say with Christ: Who of you convinces me of sin? who can say: I am holy, I am perfect?

Alas, no person! If everyone examines himself accordingly, he must join in the confession which even the saints have made, "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Rom 3:22.23. "Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Ps 143:2. "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Is 64:6.

You see, that is why the Holy Spirit reveals a different righteousness; that is, he as we read in our text, reproves the world "of righteousness, because

I go to my Father, and ye see me no more." What does that mean? That means that the Holy Ghost calls to the world: If you want to be righteous before God, do not seek it in your works, not in your life, not in your fulfillment of the Law; all your efforts are still spotted with sin; before men you can indeed stand in them but before God who sees into the heart, never. Oh, therefore, hurl away the rages of your own righteousness and look to Christ; he has traveled a great, difficult, bitter way, that is, he has gone through this world amid suffering and disgrace, then he went to Golgatha and offered himself on the cross, and finally through the death of an eternal reconciliation he has gone out of the world and after his glorious resurrection entered into the house of his Father by his majestic ascension; he traveled this way for your benefit; what Christ did and suffered on this way he did and suffered for you and in your place; therefore, keep to this way in faith, comfort yourself with this way; then you have the true righteousness which avails before God, a righteousness with which no one can find fault, for it is the righteousness of God's Son; then you have a righteousness of which no one can rob you, for it is the righteousness of him who has all power in heaven and on earth; then you have a righteousness which stands firmly forever, even though you may stumble and fall and of which you are certain even though you may see and feel nothing of it, yes, see and feel nothing but unrighteousness, for this righteousness is outside of you, over you, in heaven, before God's throne.

Oh, blessed is the man who rejects his own judgment of righteousness and accepts in its place the judgment of the Holy Spirit! He can be happy in temptation, happy in death, yes, happy in the day of judgment, for he can rejoicingly exclaim with Isaiah, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength!" Is 45: 24, and sing with the little children:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head. (371,1)

### III.

My friends, we hurry to the close.

There is still one more point over which, according to our Gospel, the judgment of the world is different from that of the Holy Spirit, namely, in the third place concerning the judgment.

Many of those who belong to the world, that is, to the non-christian, simply do not believe that there really will be a judgment; especially in these last times in which we have come to the dregs of the entire time-span of the world, the teaching of a Judgment Day is a joke and a butt of mockery to many. They are not ashamed to write openly that no one will be judged, that here everyone already receives what he has deserved, the final judgment of the world is the story of the world, that is, posterity holds the final judgment upon the dead by remembering them either with honor or with disgrace.

Yet, through ever so many may consider the teaching of the terrible final Judgment a fable which was indeed believed in the dark ages of bygone years and by which one lets himself be frightened but which is laughed at in our enlightened times as a child's fairy tale, as long as God's Word is preached--and it will be preached until the end of days--so long will the Holy Spirit also testify: the Day of Judgment is coming when everyone will receive what his

deeds deserve; and through the Word God's Spirit will continually knock at the hearts of even the most impudent mockers and cause them to feel against their will that the truth nevertheless is what they would so gladly deny.

However, my friends, even among the children of this world there are not a few who dare not deny that there will be a judgment of the living and the dead; but which people does the world believe will some day be judged and condemned? It believes this most of all of gross criminals, of thieves, robbers, and murderers who have ended their lives at the place of execution; but that also an honorable child of the world could enter into judgment and be eternally rejected, that it does not believe.

Yet how entirely different is the judgment of the Holy Spirit on this point! Christ says of it in our text, "He will reprove the world of judgment because the prince of this world is judged." Hence, what is the judgment of the Holy Spirit? Since he testifies that the prince of this world is judged, he in so doing testifies that also all who are in his kingdom are judged with him, yes, are also already judged.

A fearful, frightening judgment! From this we see: though a person may walk ever so honorably, ever so uprightly, ever so famously, ever so blamelessly before the world, if he still belongs to the world, if he is still a friend of the world, if he still clings to the world, and if he still lives with the world and in the manner of the world, he is already judged, already rejected with all his wisdom, piety, and righteousness, and with all his highly praised works.

Thus the Holy Spirit confirms the word of Christ, "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." Mt 7:14.13. "For many are called but few chosen."

Oh my dear hearers, let us therefore not be secure! Let us not follow our own false judgment! Let us accept the judgment of the Holy Spirit, for all men and also our own heart are liars, but God's Spirit is a Spirit of truth, his judgment is true and will some day become true before our eyes. Let us, therefore, also forsake the kingdom of this world in which the prince of darkness rules and in order that we can do this pray to God that he would give us his Holy Spirit so that he will not only reveal to us the sin of our unbelief but also show us that righteousness which Christ has earned for us by his bitter going to the Father; then in the deepest knowledge of our sins let us pray for faith, but then also in faith work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Finally, let us never forget the great day of Judgment but keep ourselves in readiness so that when this day will appear suddenly like a snare and fall upon the secure world and the Judge will appear, we will be able to enter in with him in joy.

Ah, Lord Jesus! You do this good thing in us; deliver us from this evil, wicked world and draw us into your blessed communion; preserve us and let nothing, nothing tear us out of your hand. And when the world with its princes will be publicly judged, free us by virtue of your wounds which once were given you for our sakes. Amen. Amen.

## 5TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 16:23-30

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Very many think that there is nothing easier than to believe. Oh, they think, if Christianity depends upon faith, it is a simple matter to be a Christian. People have such thoughts mostly because they have never earnestly tried to believe or have never experienced any temptation of faith. It is first during the time of distress and temptation that one learns how difficult it is to believe. Then is revealed that there is no greater art than to believe from the heart.

One of the occasions which reveals the difficulty of faith is especially prayer, prayer when one really desires something from God which he needs and yet which only God can give him. If one is in great need and man's help is of no avail; if one is oppressed by want and has no prospects of getting bread for himself, for his wife and child; or if the hour of death is about to strike and one can no longer cling to human comfort, and if one is to step into eternity with only a free trust in God's grace in Christ: ah, those are the hours which show how difficult it is to pray in faith! How the poor heart trembles! If only it could hold to something tangible, so that it would not have to be satisfied only with an absolute faith in that which is invisible! Then the thought arises in the soul: Is God also with me? How still, how lonesome it is! Does God hear my sobs as well and see my tears? Is he not far removed from me up in heaven? Will he really turn to me in my chamber? Will the great infinite God, who rules the universe and who dwells amid the hallelujahs of the angels, will he regard me, ask about me, hear my weak crying, clod of dust, little worm that I am? Am I not a sinner? In days of prosperity I have so often forgotten about God, will he incline his ear to me, now that trouble drives me to him? Alas, now I see: I could not escape God; I have at last fallen into his hands! When He called, I often did not hear; now when I call he will also not hear me!

That is what our heart tells us in trouble. Oh, that means a struggle! A thousand doubts then arise! then the heart tosses like a restless ocean; then, as it were, darkness closes in; the storm clouds gather about his head, and instead of a gracious answer, he expects thunder and lightning, God's punishment, abandonment in trouble, death, and ruin. Yes, in trouble when the mere knowledge of having prayed can not ease the soul; when prayer must become earnest; when one knows that something must actually be obtained from God by prayer; when one notices that now is the time when God will actually let his heart be moved -- then it becomes clear how difficult believing is, how the heart does not want to believe.

And yet this believing confidence while one prays is so absolutely necessary! As little as a rowboat can reach the harbor without an oar, as little as incense gives off its odor if it is not scattered upon burning coals, so little is prayer acceptable to God, powerful, and heard without faith. What the kernel in the shell and the soul in the body is, that is what faith during prayer is. In Hebrews 11 we read, "Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Heb 11:6. Yes, James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Jas 1:5-7.

However, the Scriptures assure us that God's children actually pray with believing confidence for we read, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ps 107:17.

Now since everything in prayer depends chiefly upon it being offered in faith, and yet our heart finds it so hard to believe, permit me now to show you what should awaken you not to pray in doubt but in the firm faith that you will be heard.

The text. John 16:23-30.

My friends, this entire Gospel contains an admonition of Christ to the Apostles and all Christians not to doubt that their prayer in his name will be heard.

Let us therefore answer the question:

WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN PRAY FIRMLY CONFIDENT THAT HIS PRAYER WILL BE HEARD?

- I. The Infallible Truthfulness of the Triune God,
- II. The Heavenly Father's Almighty Love,
- III. The Son of God's Continual, Mighty Intercession, and finally,
- IV. The Holy Spirit's Intercessions with Unutterable Sighs.

Oh God, our heart quotes your Word, "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Ex 20:24; fulfil your promise even now to us, since your name is to be remembered, that is, your holy Word is to be preached; come to us and bless us for the sake of your grace and truth. Amen.

I.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." That is the way Christ speaks at the beginning of our Gospel. The first of the four immovable pillars upon which rests the certainty that our prayer will be heard, if it is offered in Jesus' name, that is, trusting in and appealing to his merit and reconciliation, the first reason is therefore: the infallible truthfulness of the Triune God.

If a pious and rich man had a son who to his sorrow was universally despised, and he stated: Whoever turns to my son and will seek his friendship, he will receive from me whatever he asks, who then would still doubt that he would receive from that father whatever he asks for, even if before he had been his enemy, just as long as he had made his son his friend? That could take place only if he had reasons to doubt the truthfulness of the man.

By nature we all were indeed enemies of God, and we, therefore, have no right to come before God with requests; still less could we expect to have our prayers answered. But God also has a Son, Jesus Christ, whom all the world despises and rejects; and he has made a covenant of grace with us: whoever believes in his dear Son, to him should be given everything for which he asks.

In this way our prayer receives a secure, immovable foundation. We do not have to ask ourselves, Am I also holy, worthy enough to be heard by God? but only, Do I believe in God's Son? do I rely upon his merit? do I appear before God not in my own works but in the gracious righteousness of my Savior? If we do this, we can and should not doubt that our praying is acceptable to God and will certainly be heard by him.

The Triune God clearly says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Ps 50:15. Now as David says, "The word of the Lord is right, and all his works are done in truth," Ps 33:4; he is, as Moses testifies, "not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent," Num 23,19a; and Solomon testifies to us, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Prov 19:21. It would be false humility if a person were to think: Will the holy God answer my prayer which arises in an impure heart and is spoken by sinful lips? No; God has promised, that he wants to hear all who pray in Christ's name; that is settled and can not be overthrown by our unworthiness; yes, if we were to doubt, we would commit the terrible sin of denying God's truthfulness; we would declare that God does not keep his promises; he repents having stated that he is so gracious; yes in one word, we call God a liar.

Christ, however, knew the human heart; he knew how difficult it is because of our great corruption to trust God like a child and hope for an answer to our prayers; he therefore even strengthened and confirmed the promise of an answer with an oath and exclaimed, "VERILY, VERILY, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Therefore, if we do not want to believe God when he gives his promise, we should and must still believe him, since he has sworn to this promise with an oath.

Therefore my friends, do not listen to your heart when you pray; do not look upon yourselves; direct all your thoughts to God's promise and his oath; cling to that; rely upon that and do not doubt: God will give you what you pray for so that he may keep the honor of his truthfulness. Speak this way to God: I am indeed a sinner who is not worthy of grace, but I come not in my name but in Christ's name; I therefore firmly believe that you will keep your promise and graciously hear me.

As certainly as God will not descend from his throne and as certainly as he will never lay aside his divine glory but remain God into all eternity, so certainly will he answer even the most miserable groans of a poor sinner who relies upon Christ. For the Scriptures say, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," Rom 11:29. "Shall unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" Rom 3:2; "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." 2 Tim 2:13. David relies upon that and says, "When thou saidst Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Ps 27:8. Here you have the most wonderful example of one who prays so that he will be heard: he relies first of all upon God's promise and his infallible truthfulness.

## II.

I have shown you this main pillar which carries the edifice of our unshakable faith that our prayer will be heard; but now hear how each person of the Triune God especially supports this certainty; I therefore in the second place direct you to the almighty love of the heavenly Father; Christ in his admonition reminds the apostles of this in the words, "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." V.27.

Beyond a doubt, God loves man for he is his creation and God himself has assured us of this fact a thousand times in his Word. One characteristic of true love must of necessity be that it is inclined to do the will of the one who loves him and surrenders itself to him. If man's love to God is poured into his heart through the Holy Ghost, though it may be ever so small and ever so weak,

it reveals itself at all times by the man desiring from his heart to be obedient to God's will in everything. But what is our love in comparison to God's love? Less than a drop in comparison to the ocean, less than a little spark in comparison to a fire which fills heaven and earth. As certain as this is, so certain can we be that God's love burns to answer our prayers, to fulfil all our desires. The Psalmist therefore says, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them." Ps 145:18. When therefore we doubt whether God will answer our prayer, we do nothing else but declare that God loves us less than we love him. Who, then, must not reprimand himself, if he ponder this? We see how mother love hurries to the aid of a petitioning and weeping child, and God's love should not be as tender as that of a sinful mother? Far be it! On the contrary, the Scriptures say, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Is 49:15.16a.

Recall what great things God has already given us even before we could ask him for a thing! Who could ask God to call him into existence out of nothing? Without our prayer he gave us body and soul, yes, oh infinite love! without us asking him he gave us his own dear only-begotten Son; what will he now not give us if we ask him? This greater thing which he has done for us should awaken us to trust him also in lesser things. However everything which we could ask for is infinitely less than the way God has honored us in suffering and dying for us. Thus God shows that his love toward sinners is unending, infinite, boundless. Certainly, if we doubt that our prayers will be heard, the chief cause must be that we either do not yet know this infinite love or have not pondered it. For it is impossible that God, who, gave himself and with this grace the kingdom of heaven to us without us asking him, yes, while we were still his enemies, could refuse us when we have become his friends through faith and come to him in prayer.

Therefore, my dear Christian, whenever you ask for something from your heavenly Father, think of the sacrifice which his eternal love brought when he gave his only-begotten Son for all sinners, hence also for you; all doubt will disappear and you will exclaim with the apostle, "God 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?" Rom 8:32. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Rom 5:8b.9.

Finally, even if man's love, no matter how great it may be, is not enough to grant all our petitions directed to it because man is weak, God's love on the other hand is almighty. No want is so great which it can not help, no danger so great which it can not turn aside, no distress so terrible from which it can not snatch you, no perplexity so great in which it can not provide the way out; in short, for the almighty love of the heavenly Father nothing is difficult, to say nothing about it being impossible.

Cling to this love, my dear Christian, when you pray and do not doubt: it is more willing to give you than you can be eager to take. Do not worry that something which is good for you would be refused you, but be concerned that you come to recognize the answer to your prayer and praise God for hearing it.

### III.

Now we come to the third reason why we believe our prayer will be heard, and this is the Son of God's continual, mighty intercession.

Christ says in our Gospel, "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you." V.26. At first glance this indeed seems to refute the comfort of Christ's intercession, but it only seems so. Christ does not mean to say that he absolutely refuses to pray for us, but that he is not the only one who dares to pray, that his intercession does not annul our prayer, that his is not the only intercession acceptable to God, but that he merely supports our prayer by his intercession, that we should not stop praying our own prayers but should ourselves pray so much the more confidently.

That this is the meaning of Christ's words we see when Christ a few moments after this talk offered his wonderful high priestly prayer to God in which he said, "Father, I pray for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine... Holy Father keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are...Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as Thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Jn 17:9.11.20.21. See here, how ardently our High Priest prays for the apostles and all Christians until the end of the world! Therefore, even St. Paul tells us, "Christ is at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession for us," Rom 8:34; and St. John declares, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 Jn 2:1. And in the letter to the Hebrews we read, "Because Christ continueth ever, he hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Heb 7:24.25.

Herein lies inexpressible comfort. How confidently we can pray since we know that the Son of God is at our side! When we beseech God for something, Christ adds his prayer and says, Yes, Father, do what this sinner asks of you; he is one whom I have redeemed; he belongs to the sheep of my flock; hear him, Father, for my sake; look at my satisfaction for him and be gracious to him.

Oh my dear hearer, if we really believe that Christ supports our prayer in this fashion, how can we still doubt that God will hear us? If the heavenly Father rejects something we pray for, he must at the same time reject his own dear Son; will he do that? Truly not. What should our most gracious Savior not receive from the Father by the power and merit of his availing atonement? In Christ the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is open, he himself brings our wishes, sighs, and prayers into the secret counsel of the Triune God. Him the Father should not hear? refuse something to God himself? for Christ and the Father are one; the Son is in the bosom of the Father, he is in the Father and the Father in him!

Even in the state of humiliation Christ says, "I know that thou hearest me always." Jn 11:42. Should the Father hear him in the days of the flesh when he went about in the form of a servant, and in the state of exaltation, now that he has ascended the throne of glory and given him all power in heaven and on earth, he should not be heard by the Father? Far be it! Therefore, as certainly as God's Son is heard, so certainly are we. Blessed are all they who come before the Father in Christ's name!

#### IV.

One more thing remains which takes away the last doubt that we will be heard when we pray, and that is fourthly the Holy Spirit's pleas with unutterable sighs.

Anyone who believes in God's Word will not deny that true prayer is most certainly heard; yet that is the very thing which unceasingly wants to rob us of our confidence and weaken our faith; we suppose that we do not pray correctly, and so our prayer is vain and weak; we do not doubt so much that God is gracious enough to us but that we are too unskilled for such a great work. But even in the face of this temptation we have a positive, sure comfort. This Christ gives us in our Gospel in the words, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." V.28. Why does Christ repeat this here again where he is speaking of prayer? Because he went to the Father in order to send the comforter, the Holy Ghost. St. Paul explains this to us, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Rom 8:26.

Therefore, though we may feel ever so unskilled for prayer; though we may not often know not only how but also what we should pray for, we are nevertheless to pour our heart out before God to the best of our ability. Our sighs are not in vain; they are a work of the Holy Ghost. Now should God not hear the sighs, the wishes, the desires, the imploring which his Holy Spirit himself works in us? This means that he would disdain and reject his own work. That is impossible. On the contrary, God assures us in the Prophet Isaiah, "And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Is 65:24. The words of our prayer have not even passed our lips when our desires already ascend to heaven, are written into God's book and we can and should be certain of one these two things, either that God will give us what we ask for, or something which is better, for what not we but the Holy Spirit in us prayed to God.

Oh my dearest friends, do not let your flesh and blood deceive you into despising your prayer, because God regards it highly if it is offered in faith; it has great influence if it is offered earnestly. Let us at all times "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb 4:16.

Prayer is a glorious advantage in true Christianity; it is a trusting conversation with God; a precious antidote against despair in all distress; a refreshing drink in the heat of temptation; a strong wall against the temptation of the flesh, the world, and Satan; a chain uniting us with heaven; a key to the treasure house of God, yes, to the heart of the heavenly Father; a cordial in anxiety; a helpful refuge in the anguish of death, a foretaste of eternal life and a participation in the enjoyment of the heavenly manna of the saints and angels.

Pray therefore at all times and rest assured that, even if you prostrate yourselves before God with tears, sighs, yes, can desire something only in great weakness, even this prayer receives, even this seeking finds, even this soft knocking rings in God's ears and it will be opened unto you. Just do not forget these four pillars: God's truthfulness, the Father's love, the Son's intercession, and the Holy Spirit's pleas; rely upon these things; with them drive away all doubt; by them strengthen your faith; then, equipped by prayer, you will be strong, daily receive grace, power, and blessings from above until your prayer will become an eternal song of praise and your joy be perfect before God's throne. Amen.

# SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

John 15:26-  
16:4

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all! Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Today when comparisons are made with by-gone days no point is subject to more boasting than that today we have a much clearer conception of God than in the past. They say, Formerly, especially under heathenism, God was thought of as a wrathful, vengeful Being; but now through the gentle light of enlightenment such dark clouds are driven from the face of the most high Being; finally, after a thousand-year struggle of superstition against the truth, God stands there as the Father of all men, and in every heart which has not shut out the newly risen light, lives the joyful consciousness, "God is love."

Many who can not differentiate the false from the true light are deluded by such talk. And no wonder; the wish is father to the hope. Every person has a conscience which says to him: You are a sinner and therefore you are deserving of punishment. Oh, how the natural man loves the report, that the teaching that God is the wrathful Revenger of all ungodly conduct is a fable, a false Jewish notion, which is now displaced by a deeper investigation into God's essence.

But how can a person deceive himself more bitterly than this way? What kind of a father is he who does not become angry and who looks with pleasure upon his children even if they despise him, laugh at his commands, and go from one act of wickedness to the next? What sort of a judge is he who is not zealous in avenging all evil deeds and without respect of persons pronouncing the punishment threatened in the law and causing it to be executed? Such fathers are called weaklings and such judges biased. Therefore can we propound more unworthy ideas about God than to consider him such a weak, good-natured Father and a biased, unjust Judge? A God who does not become angry at sin nor avenges the transgression of his commandments is a wretched God, yes, is no God. Of course, we should not suppose that God becomes angry the same way a man does, whose anger is always spotted with sin and, as the Scriptures say, does not do what is right before God; we also dare not think that God thirsts for vengeance, that he gloats over man's misfortunes, that is, rejoices in the ruin of his foes. Scripture teaches nothing like that; it says that God's anger and vengeance is holy; if we would deny that we would deny God's holiness. However, a God who is only love and not holy is a miserable idol, a production of man's fancy.

Of a truth, this miserable enlightenment has so blinded men that they deny God's wrath and vengeance. Do not suppose that this is written only in the Bible. This is written in flaming letters in the history of all ages and in the great book of nature. When we hear that whole nations were brutally wiped out, that entire countries were frightfully ravaged, bloodbaths instituted and whole regions depopulated by pestilence and famine; when we hear that the earth often opened its mouth and swallowed thousands, when we hear of cloudbursts and large rivers flooding, flourishing fields being destroyed and property together with man and beast being carried to destruction; when we hear the storms roar and the thunder crack and the peaceful home set on fire by lightning and see people struck down in a second -- when we see this and still believe in a God who rules the world, can we deny any longer that this God is

not only love but must also be angry with the world in which sinners live? Without a doubt.

But as I said before, we dare not be surprised that unbelievers look upon their most unworthy ideas of God as enlightenment and the true knowledge; for it is impossible for him to know the heavenly Father aright who does not believe in his dear Son. Christ speaks of this in our today's Gospel. By its guidance let us ponder this some more.

The text. John 15:26 - 16:4.

A year ago on the basis of this Gospel I presented to you the comfort of the Holy Ghost which Christians have during the persecutions which they suffer from the world for the sake of their faith. This time let us direct our attention to Christ's words, "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." V.3. I speak to you about:

### THE INSEPARABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE FATHER AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST

I order to explain this, listen

- I. What This Means: Know Christ?
- II. To What degree is This Knowledge not to be Separated from the Knowledge of God?

I.

Knowing Christ is the noblest and most blessed knowledge which a mortal can receive. For in Christ lies hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This, however, is not merely knowing the story of his life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, nor does it consist only in having learned the teaching of his person, that he is God and man, nor of his office, that he is High Priest, Prophet, and King of all men, the Savior of all sinners, and can talk about these things and answer questions. Though it is important that a person be thoroughly instructed in these doctrines of Christ from youth up, he can nevertheless in spite of all his head-knowledge be lacking in the true knowledge of Christ. When the Holy Scriptures speak of knowing, they do not mean merely a historical learning received by understanding and memory, but something living, something which the Holy Spirit works in us; Christ therefore says in our Gospel, "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." V.26.

You now perhaps ask, How can this happen? In this way, my friends: By nature no person understands that with all his works, with all his wishing, striving, and ability, his is a lost cause. By nature every person thinks that he must make himself worthy of his salvation by a pious, God-pleasing life. Most say that they hope to enter heaven because they rely upon God's goodness, grace, and mercy; but if they would only earnestly examine themselves, they would find out that they build their heart's trust mainly upon themselves.

As long as a person remains in this delusion of self-righteousness, so long he still does not have the true knowledge of God, even though otherwise he may know much about him. In addition, no person can penetrate this wall of self-righteousness by himself. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. When God's

Word, particularly the Law, is preached: You shall fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and the like, then in man's heart the voice of conscience is stirred up: You have not done this; you don't want to nor can you fear, love, and trust God like that. You therefore do not please God; you are worthy of being rejected.

Sad to say, most resist this voice of God which they perceive in their soul when they read and hear God's Word. Most try to persuade themselves of something else; they think: Oh, it is not as bad as it seems to be in the gloomy hours. Thus they disperse and banish these serious thoughts so that they sink into the cares or lusts of the world.

Blessed is that man who is not reprimanded in vain by God's Spirit; blessed is he who searches further in God's Word and cries out to the Holy Ghost when his sinful corruption is revealed to him, that it would become ever more clear what a great sinner he is! This does not lead to a false sadness and melancholy but to a sorrow which, as the apostle says, works repentance unto salvation which no one will regret. For the Holy Spirit will not let that person who becomes terror-stricken at God's law despair, but then he also reminds him that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that He is a Physician for the sick, the weak, and the wretched, and not for those who think themselves well and strong, that he calls sinners to repentance and not the righteous.

You see, my friends, when a person throws away everything upon which he relied before, in which he comforted himself, wherewith he set his mind at rest; when he begins to hunger and thirst after another righteousness which avails before God and which he does not find in himself; when he begins to look around for Christ with yearning and to think: Oh, that you were also my Savior! Oh, that I also shared in your grace! then, then the sun of righteousness enters with its first rays into the heart of the sinner, then first Christ becomes really necessary, lovely, beautiful, great, and wonderful to that man.

Then such a person also begins to understand the Bible, especially the words of Christ, which he pondered in the past without detecting special power and having special delight in them in a completely different way. That person finally arrives at the point where he wants to know nothing but Christ and nothing tastes but Christ, and he is certain of heaven and salvation. We see this clearly in the Apostle Paul, who at first was captured by a shocking self-righteousness and as a Pharisee supposed he was a blameless man who would certainly enter heaven by his works. How does this man speak later on when the light of the Gospel of Christ had risen upon him? He confesses, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil 3:6-9. See from this: that is what it means to know Christ; it is nothing else than to believe in him, take comfort in him, recognize him as his Savior, and actually find all salvation, all righteousness, all blessedness in him. As one, for example, says that he knows another is his friend, that is, that he has experienced and become aware in deed and in truth that he is our friends, means us well, and will not forsake us in any distress, but remains faithful until death.

Now my friends, have all of you known Christ, known him in this way? Have all of you had such experiences with Christ? He is the Savior of all men; for that reason he is also yours; the only question remaining is that you also recognize him as yours. Oh, blessed are they who have come to this knowledge! then they have the true philosopher's stone, the One Thing which we all need.

## II.

This leads me to the second portion of our meditation, where we will hear in how far this knowledge cannot be separated from the knowledge of God the Father.

Christ indicates this in our Gospel in the words, "These things will they do unto you, because they have not know the Father, nor me." V.3. Christ thus says that the enemies of the Gospel and the persecutors of Christians have not only not known him but they have also not known the Father. Who boasted more that they knew the Father than an Israelite? "We have one Father, even God," Jn 8:41, the Jews once unanimously yelled at Christ. And which nation for the past centuries has boasted more that it alone worships the true God than the Mohammedan? Finally, who these days exalts his pure knowledge of God more than the rationalist of our times? And all of these reject God's Son as their Savior.

Note these points. That there is one God a person can indeed know without knowing the Savior. The heathen have known of his existence from nature and from the forceful testimony of their conscience. But it is an entirely different matter to know that there is a God and to know who and what he is; what his essence is, what his will is, what his counsels are, and how he is minded toward us.

This is the knowledge which Christ denies to all the foes of the Gospel who do not know him. Therefore he says in another place, "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Mt 11:27c. John testifies the same, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the

Father." 1 Jn 2:23. God dwells in a light which none can approach, that is he is so deep that none can find bottom, so high that none can reach him, so great that none can grasp him, so mysterious that none can understand him.

To be sure, he reveals himself clearly in his works, and in him we live, move, and have our being; therefore, we should seek him so that we might find him. However, this natural revelation should arouse us to look around for a true revelation; this should nourish in us the longing: Oh, that I might find God whose existence I detect! Oh, that I might know how I can serve him and come to him!

However, in Christ, his dear Son, God has stepped forth from his unapproachable light. Even in the Old Testament, even then it was the Son of God who appeared to the saints and established a covenant with his people. But in the New Testament God stepped forth even more clearly from that impenetrable darkness. In Christ he, the Invisible, has become visible; in him he has revealed his mysterious essence; in him he has revealed his eternal counsels and his secret will for us men. In Christ the infinite gap between us and God has been filled. Christ is the mirror in which God lets himself be seen, for he is the reflection of his glory and the image of his essence. Also in Christ alone God wants to be known. Christ therefore also says: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Here you see, my friends, the inseparable union between the knowledge of God the Father and his dear Son Jesus Christ. Vainly does man make the keenest studies of the highest Being; without Christ he remains eternally far removed and strange. Vainly have the so-called philosophers undertaken the assignment to find eternal truth through the powers of human reason; whoever does not find it in him who confesses, "I am the Truth!" remains in darkness. Everything which man finds out about God through his own powers remains vague notions without reality. God is a God who does not intend to be known alone by the learned but just as well by children and the simple. If a child and a very

simple person knows Christ, he also has the true knowledge of God such as no wise man of the world can attain, and if he ponders the essence of God a million years.

It is a beautiful thing to be wise in matters relating to this world; however, anyone who seeks true wisdom in that will find it turned into folly in God's eyes. First, he must have grasped the Second Article concerning Christ, then he will understand the First Article of God the Father, almighty Maker of heaven and earth. Therefore all who do not do this reject not only Christ but also the Father. They set up a false God, not as he is but as they think he is; they do not serve the eternal, true, living God but an idea created by their reason. Therefore, all who do not believe that Christ is the true Son of God and yet observe an external divine worship, really observe merely a worship of idols just as those heathen who worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. Their temples in which Christ is not worshiped are heathen temples, no better than the heathen temple of Diana at Ephesus. Christ is God and outside of Christ there is no other God; he who does not seize Christ does not seize God, and if he thinks he is, he is grasping merely a deceit of his heart. That is why John says: He who does not remain in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.

As crushing as this doctrine is for those who deny Christ, for it calls them idolaters and deniers of God, just so comforting is it for believers. We see from this that even the simplest can have the true wisdom, that in this question the learned does not have the least advantage over the unlearned. See from this that you should not tremble slavishly before God's frightening majesty; the way you find Christ to be is the way you should also find God; as Christ is minded toward you, so is God also minded toward you. As Christ is full of grace, full of friendliness, full of patience, full of eternal infinite love toward sinners, so is God. If Christ is your friend, then God is your friend. If you confidently approach Christ, so you need not fear God, for then you have already approached God. If you have Christ, you have God, if you have God you already have heaven, life, and eternal salvation; then you have everything for time and for eternity. Therefore: hymn 366, 2.

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