

YEAR of GRACE

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Part II

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PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-13

Oh God, who once gave the promise, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground," Is 44:3, we extol and praise you that today you so gloriously fulfilled this promise in your 12 messengers and poured your Holy Spirit in floods upon them. We ask you, during these days give also our thirsty souls to drink of that heavenly water and so make the desert land of our hearts fruitful. Ah, without your Spirit we are dead, cold, and incapable of any good; oh, therefore, send him down upon us so that we will become alive in the faith, ardent in love, and strong and happy in all good works. Lord, grant us just one little drop, only one little drop and it will satisfy us. Then we will also ever extol and praise you forever and ever there above before your throne. Amen! In Jesus name, amen!

The text. Acts 2:1-13.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

We Christians believe in a triune God, in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. To honor this Triune God we celebrate every year three great festivals. Christmas is the festival of the Father, Easter the festival of the Son, and Pentecost the festival of the Holy Spirit. On each of these great festivals we celebrate a great deed of God for our salvation: at Christmas, the love of the Father who sent his only begotten Son into the world to be our Redeemer; at Easter, the grace of the Son who completed the work of our redemption; at Pentecost, the communion of the Holy Spirit who brings us to the knowledge and enjoyment of the Father's love and the Son's grace and wishes to make us partakers of redemption.

The real reason why we celebrate Pentecost is, therefore, not the miracle which the Holy Spirit did in the apostles. This, of course, is a great and glorious miracle, having most important results for the entire sinful world. For only by the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost were the apostles enlightened, sanctified, and strengthened in the faith so that they could go out into all the world as infallible and steadfast teachers of mankind and preach the Gospel of Christ to all creatures in the languages of all people, found the Christian church, and spread it throughout the entire world. Only by the miraculous out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles were they also equipped to write the New Testament at the impulse and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and thus in their writings preach the Gospel of Christ to all men, even after their death, until the end of days.

However, the pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on that first Pentecost had an even greater meaning. It was, as it were, the opening of a spring which had been sealed up, from which a mighty stream gushed forth, which gradually poured itself out over all mankind, which still flows today, and will flow until Judgment Day. The out-pouring of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles was only the beginning of that which from that time on should happen to all men, a signal, as it were, of that event given from heaven. Of course, the gift of performing miracles which was connected with the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, which was necessary to found the church, ceased in the course of time; but the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost himself has continued throughout all the centuries and will continue until heaven and earth will disappear. As we read immediately after our text, Peter therefore says in his Pentecost sermon to those who in amazement saw what happened, "This is that which was

spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." Acts 2:16.17a.

And has this prophecy perhaps remain unfulfilled? Not at all, my friends! it has been fulfilled in the past and goes into fulfilment even now. Wherever and whenever the Gospel of Christ is preached, there the Holy Spirit pours himself out in all places and times upon those who hear it, and fills all those who accept it in faith, and thus seals it as the divine truth. Therefore, let this be the subject of our Pentecost devotion:

THE GIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, AN INCONTESTABLE
PROOF OF ITS DIVINITY AND ITS TRUTH

- I. For the Believers who Experience this Giving of the Spirit in their Hearts, and
- II. For the Unbelievers who Perceive this Giving of the Spirit to Believers.

I.

My friends, all those who have been true Christians have become that when the Holy Spirit was given them through God's Word. And the Holy Spirit has at all times worked three things in each one.

The first thing which all those have experienced who have become true Christians is this, that through the working of the Holy Spirit they have either suddenly or gradually come to the living knowledge that they are lost sinners who can never be saved in their natural condition. When on that first Pentecost Peter had first preached the Law to many thousands, we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37. This anxious, heartfelt question about the true way to salvation was nothing else but the working of the Holy Ghost, who was connected with the Word preached by Peter; like a two-edged sword the Spirit pierced the souls of the hearers.

There is a second thing which the Holy Ghost does so that a person becomes a true Christian. When a person, who is frightened over his sins and is concerned about his salvation, hears the Gospel of Christ, the Savior of sinners, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit enters his heart. There then arises in such a person the divine certainty that God is gracious to him and has forgiven him all his sins, that he has become a child of God justified by grace through faith and an heir of eternal life. This also we see in Peter's frightened hearers on that first Pentecost; when the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins was presented to them, we read, "With gladness and singleness of heart they praised God." Acts 2:46.47. This joyful praise of God in confident faith was nothing else but a working of the Holy Spirit who shone through the preaching of the Gospel like a heavenly fire and had kindled the heavenly light of faith in the hearers.

A third work must always be added to these two works mentioned so far: man's fright over his lost condition and the joy at the grace he received; it is that a hearer of the Gospel then becomes an entirely new man. The sins which he formerly loved he now begins to hate. The sins which he in the past despised as trifles now seem great and serious. Even if he sins in weakness, he is filled with unrest until he has confessed his sin of weakness to God with a stricken heart and sought and found forgiveness of it in Christ's reconciliation. His daily life is a daily struggle against sin, even against the most secret sinful thoughts, lusts, and desires. He tears his heart more and more free from the vanities, goods, and honor of this world in which he before sought

his happiness. He loves God and his Word more than anything else; he would rather give up all his worldly possessions, yes even his life, than surrender God and his Word. Love to his brethren, yes to all men, even to those who offend him burns in his heart; he loves them as he loves himself. In short, he becomes an entirely different person in heart, spirit, mind, and all his powers.

Of course, a true Christian must also confess with Paul, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," Phil 3:12a; but he can without lying immediately add, "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." This amazing inner and outward change is nothing else but the work of the Holy Spirit who is concealed in the Word of the Gospel like a heavenly, fruitful seed.

Or is that not so, my friends? I ask you, you Christians: Have you not experienced all this in your hearts? Was there not a time in your life when God's Word pierced your innermost soul like an arrow, when you were restless because of your sins and the question escaped from your heart, "What must I do to be saved?" After a longer or shorter time was there not also that time in your life when the Gospel of Christ made you certain of your pardon from God and certain of your salvation? And finally, did not the point arrive from which time on you became the foe of all sin and began to pursue the Christian life?

See, all this the Holy Ghost worked in you and in this almighty giving of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel you have absolute proof of its truth and divinity. For one of the first teachings which reveal to man the hidden depths of his sinful corruption must be the doctrine of the Omniscient who can examine the very heart; no human teaching can do that. A doctrine which brings the peace of God into man's soul which the whole world can not give a man must be the doctrine of the Omnipresent God who alone can turn man to be his dwelling place; no human teaching can do that. A doctrine which creates a new heart in man must be the doctrine of the Creator of all things who also has created man's heart and therefore who alone can transform, cleanse, and sanctify it; no human doctrine can do that.

Oh my dear Christians, do not let yourselves be deceived in your faith by the talk of unbelievers who want to prove sometimes out of the laws of a reason blind in spiritual things, sometimes from the course of the stars, sometimes from the bowels of the earth that the Bible and especially the Gospel of Christ can not be God's Word. Within you you carry the proof of the truth and divinity of the Gospel which the wisdom of this world can not overthrow. And this proof is the giving of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Eternal thanks be to God that he has not organized things in such a way that it takes great learning to become certain whether the Gospel is true and divine. No, since God wants to save all men, God has arranged things in such a way that even the most simple can become certain of that. The Holy Spirit himself bears witness in the hearts of believers for his Gospel puts an end among Christians to all strife about the truth and divinity of the Gospel. Though ever so many witnesses against the Gospel may arise here on earth, before the one great Witness who is enthroned above in heaven and testifies in the hearts of believers, all such are revealed as false witnesses before God and men. The Christian can answer to the most ingenious arguments of mockers: Though I can not oppose your arguments from reason with even stronger arguments from reason, you are still to know this: the Gospel of Christ is the divine truth, God the Holy Ghost himself has enscribed it in my heart with flaming letters and nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, nothing in hell can erase this writing. The truth and divine origin of the Gospel is as certain to a Christian as his own life. A Christian can more easily tear his heart out of his body than the certainty of his faith from his soul. As little as a rational person lets himself be convinced that a sweet fruit

whose sweetness he has tasted daily is bitter, so little does a Christian let himself be convinced that the Gospel whose divine power he has experienced every day in his heart is a powerless teaching of man.

II.

My friends, according to this it seems as though the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel is indeed an incontestable proof of its truth and divine origin for believers because they have experienced this in their hearts but no proof for unbelievers. That is not at all the case. For even though those who still do not have the true faith have not themselves experienced the giving of the Holy Spirit and with him the truth and divine origin of the Gospel in their hearts, they nevertheless perceive clearly enough the imparting of the Holy Spirit to believers. Secondly, permit me to speak to you of this.

It is true, my friends: in our today's festival text we hear that when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, some unbelievers mockingly said, "These men are full of new wine." But why did they say this? Solely because they knowingly resisted the Holy Spirit. For was it not contrary to sound reason to call the apostles drunk because they were suddenly so changed? that they who previously were so fearful now suddenly had become heroes with lion-like courage? that they who were uneducated Galilean fishermen had now suddenly become the most powerful orators who ever lived? that they who formerly could scarcely speak their own language correctly had now suddenly become capable of preaching the great deeds of God in all the languages of the world? Woe to those mockers! What they saw and heard on that first Pentecost Day will some day testify against them before God's tribunal.

The same thing is true of all unbelievers of all ages, also of our own day.

Bear in mind: every day unbelievers see with their own eyes that those who are earnest about the Gospel have become entirely different people than they through it. They see: true Christians are not only zealous in church attendance, they are also faithful and diligent in their earthly calling, conscientious in their business in general, give everyone his due, steer clear of dishonest profits, do not seek to become rich, are peaceable, gentle, and reconcilable, unassuming over against everyone, friendly and obliging, chaste and decent in their works, words, and attitudes, moderate in eating and drinking, truthful and reliable in words and promises, generous to the poor, willing to lend to him who would like to borrow of them in his difficulty; they are faithful, loving husbands and faithful obedient wives, faithful neighbors, good citizens who are concerned about the welfare of the country, willing to submit to the laws of the state and to help bear its burdens; they do not join rioters; they are faithful servants and workers who serve their masters and employers as though they served Christ; all this they do not only because their faith demands this of them but because it makes them capable and willing to do it. Must not even the unbelievers conclude that a teaching which brings such fruit must be from God?

Bear also in mind: even though the Gospel goes completely and entirely counter to the natural mind of man, unbelievers know that through the simple preaching of the apostles it has spread with tremendous rapidity over the entire world. There is no people so barbarous and deeply fallen, nor is there any people so well educated or at home in all the arts and sciences among whom the Gospel is preached from whom large hosts have not been convinced of the truth and have become converted through it; great learned men as well as simple souls, rich as well as poor, slaves of vice as well as honorable, great people, even princes, kings, and emperors as well as beggars, the fortunate of this world

as well as the unfortunate. Must not even unbelievers conclude that a teaching which has such a divine power to convince and converts must be from God?

Finally, bear in mind: unbelievers read in the most trustworthy histories how in all ages the Gospel has been perverted, in part by heretical doctrines, in part disgraced by the godless lives of many confessors; in order to remove it from the world it has been in part assailed by the mighty as well as by the wise of this world, sometimes by sly cunning, sometimes by bloody violence. And what has happened? No heretic, be they ever so many, no offence be they ever so numerous, no storms of persecution be they ever so fearful, have been able to smother the heavenly fire of the Gospel on earth. Even delicate children and weak women have proven themselves to be invincible heroes of the faith in the severest persecutions; no torment be it ever so frightful could move them to fall away. The more murderously they church was persecuted the more have joined it. The blood of the martyrs has at all times been a seed from which have grown up only so many more confessors of the Gospel. How often have the foes of the Gospel already cried, "Victory!" because they supposed that the Gospel was finished, and behold! the Gospel once thought dead has always celebrated the Easter of its resurrection. Only 50 years ago it seemed as though rationalism would in the end certainly triumph over the Gospel; but what has happened? In these last terrible times the Gospel has again begun to grow green and blossom. If they did not want to tolerate it any more in one country, it took up its dwelling in another. If Christian nations rejected it, then the heathen accepted it. Must not even unbelievers conclude from this that a doctrine which has such an indestructible life must be from God himself?

If by God's direction unbelievers should have found their way here today, I cry to you: You think that Christians are fools for still believing the old Gospel; you consider yourself too enlightened to do that; but of a truth! you live in fearful blindness. You are the fools! The imparting of the Holy Spirit who is connected with the preaching of the Gospel refutes as with one blow all your counter-arguments as empty hollow phrases. Indeed, you still may have experienced nothing of the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, but do you not perceive this working in true Christians? You can not deny that. And if you do not let yourselves be convinced, some day this will testify against you before God's judgment throne.

Oh, that you would not wilfully close your heart! Oh, that you would still be captured by the power of the truth! Of a truth, then you would also experience the imparting of the Holy Spirit in your heart. For Christ himself says, "If any man will do his will," that is, if anyone will believe in me, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Jn 7: 17. Oh, do not fight any longer against God but today fall down with unbelieving Thomas before Christ and say, sighing for faith, "My Lord and my God!" Finally, you will also like Paul, who from a persecutor became the greatest herald of the Gospel, joyfully confess, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Rom 1:16.

And you, my friends, who already truly believe and have therefore experienced the miracle of Pentecost, oh, rejoice today on this triumphal festival of the Gospel; for the Lord has done great things in you. Oh, persevere in your faith until the end also in this age of apostacy; when finally the night of your hour of death will come upon you, the heavenly light of the Gospel will then also shed its light upon you, you will depart in peace, there receive the crown of the conqueror from Christ's pierced hands, and you will then rejoice with inexpressible eternal joy.

May our gracious God through the imparting of his Holy Spirit grant that to us all for the sake of Jesus Christ our exalted and ascended Lord and Savior. Amen.

PENTECOST MONDAY

John 3:16-21

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.

Christians were not the first to celebrate a Pentecost. In yesterday's Epistle we heard that during these days the Jews celebrated a festival by this name. At that time it was one of the three great festivals of the year during which all men had to appear before the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem.

The Pentecost of the Jews was observed to remember the important event that on the fiftieth day after the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt God had given them the Law upon two tables of stone on Mt. Sinai.

As important as this work of God was, it was in no way a comforting or happy one, whether we examine the circumstances under which God had given the Law, or the contents of the Law itself. God himself appeared on Mt. Sinai amid nothing but revelations of his wrath. Moses had to erect a fence around the mountain with the threat that he who would touch merely the foot of the mountain would be dashed to pieces by God himself and die. Only Moses dared to ascend the mountain. When the day of the revelation dawned, a fearful lightning and thundering sprang up early in the morning on the mountain; a thick cloud covered its peak; and the sound of a very loud trumpet was heard. The people who had set up camp a distance away heard this with terror and horror. Thereupon Moses led them out of the camp to meet God at the foot of the mountain, and behold! the entire mountain smoked like a huge furnace and its foundations trembled. Then God spoke to Moses and God answered him loudly so that all the hundreds of thousands assembled could hear. But terror-stricken, everyone fled away and cried to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Ex 20:19.

However, these frightening outward circumstances were nothing else but the expression of the content of the doctrine which was revealed at that time. For the Law is a teaching which can do nothing else but frighten, alarm, and kill sinners. The Law indeed reveals our sickness but does not heal it; it shows us our failings but does not correct them; it says, "Thou shalt, thou shalt," but it gives no power so that we wish and are able to do it; the more the sternness of the Law is revealed to us, the more we hate God in our hearts.

Ah, my friends, if we would still have no other Pentecost than the Jewish one, our Pentecost would not be a day of joy but of sorrow. But praised be the name of our Lord! the Pentecost of the New Testament reminds us of the revelation of an entirely different teaching, and this teaching is the gracious Gospel of Christ; that is the preaching which the Holy Spirit glorified in the souls of the apostles and placed into their mouth and through which he founded the Church of the New Testament. Therefore the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says to the Christians, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet. But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Heb 12:18.19a.

22-24. Oh, let us now hear this preaching which resounds in the new city of God; let us hear how on the Pentecostal Feast of the New Testament Sinai's thunder has died away, how as the thick clouds have moved away the heavens brighten and Christ has appeared as the bright Morning Star of the church of the new covenant.

The text. John 3:16-21.

The subject of our meditation during these festival days is: The building of the Church of the new covenant as a work of the Holy Spirit. Now that yesterday we considered the miraculous equipping of the workers for this work, let us today on the basis of the Gospel just read ponder:

WHICH IS THE PREACHING THROUGH WHICH THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WILL BE BUILT?

It is the preaching:

- I. Of God's Inexpressible Love Toward the World, and
- II. Of the Salvation of Man by Grace Through Faith.

God, you say in your Word: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Oh, help me now to be such a good messenger to these my hearers. Let my mouth speak of your love, so that it may press into their hearts with sweet power and we all become and remain your possession. Do this for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I.

My dearly beloved, as we heard yesterday, during these days the apostles spoke of the great deeds of God. This very fact tells us that the Gospel revealed and preached at Pentecost does not concern itself with our works which we should do but only with God's great works. If we ask which these are, we hear of them in our today's Gospel from Christ's own mouth. He says, "God so loved the world."

That is it which God's Holy Spirit has revealed through the apostles! Oh great, blessed mystery! For who is "God"? who is the "world"? and what does "love" mean?

God is the Creator of all things, the Most High, the Almighty, the Omnipresent, the Righteous, the Holy, the eternal Light, and in him is no darkness. The world is mankind, dust, the sinner, the born enemies and haters of God, the transgressors of his Law, the rebels in his holy kingdom, the dwellers of the earth who have fallen from God. And to love means: to regard something as precious, to cherish, to value highly, to wish someone every good, to desire his temporal welfare and eternal salvation, to be sympathetic toward his trouble and to yearn eagerly to be eternally associated with him.

These three points Christ now united and says, "God loved the world!" -- Oh heavenly sweet doctrine! God indeed hates sin but he loves the sinner so much? He wants to erase sin, but he wants to preserve the sinner? He wants to kill hatred in men's hearts, but he wants to be united with his very enemy and give him life, eternal life? Oh precious message! Wherever the preachers of Pentecost go, and though they preach in all the world, there they should loudly announce the message of Pentecost: God loves you! -- Ah, today as well, yes, also to you I should announce: God loves us! Oh precious word: God loves us!

But still more. Christ says, "God LOVED the world." He does not say, God loves it, or, he will love it, but, he has loved it long ago. Oh tell me: when did God begin to love the world? When we talk about the past as far as God is concerned, this points into eternity. God therefore loved the world from eternity. From eternity itself God saw all men; they all stood therefore before his eyes as though they were created; there he also saw all of us who are gathered here. But God hated no one, none had he destined to damnation, none had he wanted to reject, but he loved them all from eternity; all who were to be created he regarded as precious, desired the temporal welfare and eternal salvation of all, had pity on their misery which he foresaw, yearned to be united eternally with them. Oh divine, fatherly heart, how sweet you are! You embraced also our souls from eternity, loved also us from eternity.

But how, how did God love the world? God's Son answered in our text, "So, that he gave his only begotten Son." He therefore does not say: God loved the world very much, he loved it dearly, from his heart; no, all this would have said much too little; the greatness of this love can not be expressed in such words; he merely says, "So." Thus God's Son wishes to express his own astonishment and surprise with which even he was filled. He means to say: Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: "So, so!" Hear it, oh man, notice, oh sinner and fall down in adoration in the dust; for at these words all the angels strike their harps and sing throughout all the heaven of heavens in holy harmonies even to the throne of the Father, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Is 6:3. "Hallelujah, hallelujah, forever and ever." For "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

If our heart is not made of stone, then our heart must laugh just to hear that God loved the world and therefore loved also us from eternity; for if we actually believe this, what else can we expect but good things from God? If he loves us, he can not give us anything bad, but he must be only of a friendly mind toward us. However, the doctrine of the Gospel, whereby the Christian Church should be built and which was glorified in the disciples on that first Pentecost through the Holy Spirit, reads still differently, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Ah, my dearly beloved hearers, what a picture of God this is! If we see how the earth is full of his goodness, how he has adorned the heavens for us men and made the earth fruitful, we must exclaim: God, how great is your love! If in trouble we experience unexpected help from God, we truly say with tears of joy: Oh, how good God is! Now when we hear that God so loved the world that he gives his only begotten Son, what should we say to that?

The whole world has fallen into sin, has become God's enemy, and has joined Satan, hates, despises, and flees from God. Instead of burning with wrath, God burns with love and eternal pity and gives his dear, only begotten Son into the death of the cross just to redeem, deliver, and save the fallen world. Therefore, though a person may now have all the sins of the world upon his conscience, he still would not for that reason be lost, for this is the extent of God's love, that he sacrificed his Son for the sake of the sins of the entire world.

This love is infinite. If I would say: it is as great as an entire ocean, I would have described only one drop of this love; if I would say: it is as intense as a fire-storm which reaches from earth to the skies, I would have shown you only a little spark of this love; if I would have said: it is as vast as heaven and earth, I would have pictured to you only one little ray of this love. For as God himself is much greater than all creatures, so is his love also much greater than anything else, for out of love to the sinful world God's gift was not the earth, nor the sun, moon, and stars, nor the entire world, nor merely heaven, but his own dear Son himself.

Oh, what a glorious, wonderful, adorable, and loving God is pictured to us in this doctrine! If this doctrine does not awaken trust in God, which doctrine should? If this doctrine does not incite us to go confidently to God, which should incite us? If this doctrine should not remove all fear and terror of God, which should remove it? God gives us his dear Son as a gift; how many million times greater than our sin must God's love be? God gives us his dear Son; who still wants to be afraid of death? Christ is death's master; who still wants to be afraid of hell and damnation? Christ has the keys of hell, who wants to doubt his salvation, who wants to doubt that heaven stands open to him? If the Lord of heaven has been given us as a gift, then heaven itself has been given as a gift with all its treasures and with all its eternal eternal pleasures, delights, and glory.

Behold, this is the Pentecostal sermon of the New Testament with which Christ publicly begins his kingdom in the world; this is the preaching with which the Holy Spirit reveals himself in the world by which the Christian Church is to be built and all men be helped. It does not speak of our works but of God's great deeds; it does not hold before us our duties but the treasures which God offers us; it does not tell us that we must give something to God but what God has given us. It draws away the veil by which God's countenance is hidden from us and cries to us: Behold, God is love! It pulls away the veil hanging before heaven and says: Behold, this blessed place is prepared also for you, for God has so loved you that he gave his only begotten Son.

Oh, what an entirely different Pentecost we therefore have who live in the times of the New Covenant than the Church of the Old Covenant had! In those days the damning Law was revealed; under the New Covenant the gracious Gospel; then the mountain trembled and quaked before God's frightening majesty, under the New Covenant all mountains and hills skip for joy; then God appeared as a consuming fire, under the New Covenant God appears as a boundless fire of love; then everyone had to flee from God, under the New Covenant, on the other hand, we read: Come, come to God, be not afraid, he loves you, he has loved you from eternity; God's Son is yours; sin, death, and hell have been swallowed up. Therefore rejoice, sing praises, and be joyful all the earth!

II.

My friends, though God's love would be presented to us in all its greatness in the pentecostal sermon of the New Testament, this preaching still would not comfort us if we were not immediately told how we can seize God's love, gifts, riches, and treasures which he offers to us.

What would it profit us if a person described the greatest treasure to us which should be ours, if at the close he would say: this treasure lies in the depths of the sea? or in the center of the earth? If God's love in Christ Jesus is preached to us, our soul asks: But how should I get this love? God dwells in a light which no one can approach, but I lie here in the darkness of my sins. Christ has ascended above the heaven of heavens, but I am here upon earth. How can I press forward into that unapproachable light? how can I ascend into heaven and grasp him who has loved me unto death? Where would I find wings to ascend to the throne of eternal Love? where would I find the ladder on which I a sinner can climb to the eternal fount of mercy and grace?

But be confident, be confident! my dear hearers; the Pentecostal sermon of the New Covenant does not leave this question unanswered. Permit me in the second place to speak to you of this.

My friends, as great as God's love is which is revealed during these days, so near to us is it also; as near to us as the Word is, so near is also everything which is promised in it. For Christ continues in our Gospel, "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Faith, faith, therefore, gives us the wings with which we can rise over sin and the world and death and hell and damnation to the bosom of eternal Love; faith is the ladder which God himself has set up for us into heaven; faith is the hand which grasps the Son of God as a precious unutterable gift of the heavenly Father and with him righteousness, life, and salvation.

The treasure has already been given to us; it lies in the Gospel; by means of the Gospel it is presented to all; so whoever believes it, as the Word promises, has it; though heaven and earth may disappear, the Word does not disappear; so also salvation remains for him who clings to the Word. St. John therefore says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 Jn 5:4.

If anyone wants to merit God's love through works, in the eyes of the world this has indeed an aura of holiness but in God's eyes it is a horrible sacrilege which must finally hurl one to hell. Christ therefore says in our text, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." V.18b. This means: He who does not believe in Christ need not first be judged and condemned. Moses, the Law, has already condemned him; he wants to be judged by the Law, and so he will be.

On the other hand, faith appears to be something insignificant. Oh, people think judging by their reason, how can faith do this! But for the sake of God and our salvation let us not follow the perverted judgment of our blinded reason. If faith would not have God's Word and promise, naturally it would help us as little as would picking up a straw from the ground and desire heaven as the gift for doing that. But because God in his Word has promised us grace, forgiveness, life, and salvation for Christ's sake, that is why faith is not an empty thing but it is a hand which grasps God and with him all his divine heavenly treasures.

However, faith is the very mountain over which the blessings of Pentecost are unable to climb. The Gospel is preached; oh that it would also be believed by all! Of course, we dare not be surprised that those who do not believe, who still regard their sins as trifles, who are least of all concerned about their sins, who think: Oh, what is grace! if I would have money, if I would have beautiful clothing, if I would have the smiling pleasures of the world! To be sure, in their case one preaches into deaf ears. First they must learn to become frightened at the thunder upon Sinai; when they begin to wither before the consuming fire of divine righteousness, then they will also search in faith for the refreshing breezes of the Holy Spirit from the Gospel.

However, faith is an offence not only to these but also to many who are already smitten by the Law, who would gladly be pious and be saved. Unbelief, mistrust of God is born in us all. True, many therefore do not want to contradict God's Word, but they think: Yes, if I would truly believe, I would really have eternal life through faith; however, how can I really believe since I so completely lack its fruits? since I feel so little in my heart? Sin clings so closely to me, I am so indolent! My faith will not help me at all. Alas, no one can state the countless numbers of those who let themselves be held back from faith because they thought they could not believe correctly.

I fear and certainly not without reason that therefore many also among us have this fear, that therefore they also never in all their life attain a lasting peace and a lasting certainty of their salvation. But what is really that faith

which saves? The true faith is nothing else but firmly regarding as certain and true that Christ is ours with all his grace. This does not make faith genuine so that he is powerful and fruitful but that it sees the true Christ and clings to him. Not my earnestness, zeal, and devotion but the true Christ whom I seize makes up faith. Where that is, there is true faith. If a person could regard as true: Christ died also for me, God has given him also for me, from eternity God loves also me in Christ, I say, if a person could regard this as certain and true, he could lie ever so deep in sin, this faith would make him righteous before God and save him; yes, though such a person were already in the abyss of hell, hell would have to give him up. For Christ who cannot lie says, "That whosoever believeth in him," oh hear this! "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now my dear hearers, people beloved by God in Christ! I have a heartfelt longing that none of us be lost but that everyone of you might receive eternal life. Therefore I can do nothing else, I must now in closing on the occasion of our today's glorious text turn to each of you particularly.

First, I turn to you who simply do not seek nor are concerned about being saved. You still have not pondered the fact that God is a righteous God who has threatened to punish the sinner. You live on securely and regard the Gospel as the most trifling treasure in the world; you seek money and goods, you want only to be physically healthy and have good days, be honored, praised, and loved by everyone. These things comprise your planning, seeking. You regard salvation as a secondary matter. I must admit to you: my heart weeps when I think of the tragic situation in which you are. You are wretched and you do not know it. You are on the way to ruin and you do not think so. Oh, that my tongue could not utter words of thunder! oh that I could now transform my words into spears and nails in order to wound your sleeping conscience!

Well, now, before God the Judge of the living and the dead you now receive this testimony: You still lies in your sins! Because you still despise God's Law and his threats, God's wrath rests upon you. Oh, wake up, wake up, you who sleep and rise from the dead and Christ will give you light. Oh, be frightened at yourself; you still despise Christ; perceive your sins and cry: Lord, what shall I do? Oh, that you would let these words pierce your heart! Christ stretches forth his hands to you lost sheep! Oh, let yourselves be rescued! Oh, let yourselves be saved!

But I say to you: if you will continue to despise all this and continue to sin against grace, some day today's text, which is so comforting, will accuse you before God and cry vengeance upon you forever and ever.

Now let me turn to you who do not despise God's Law and threats but fear them and would gladly be pious, righteous, and be saved, but because you see that you are so wicked, because you stumble so often, because you feel yourselves so powerless, so often lazy and lukewarm, you do not want to lay hold of any true, certain, and firm confidence in your Savior and in your salvation. You see: you lack power, you are wretched and frail; now tell me: By what means do you think that you can finally be helped? Do you imagine that you will become better by your own power? Do you think that some day you will fight your way out yourself by your weakness?

I tell you: In this way your situation will become worse and worse; I tell you: hurry to deliver your soul, hurry to Jesus Christ! Begin to hurl all your sins upon him and to recognize and seize him in firm confidence as your Savior. Believe me: Everything which wants to hinder you from doing this is of the devil! You have now heard: God gave his dear Son for the world, also for you; you need but accept this, believe this, daily exercise yourself in this faith and persevere in this faith until the end and you will not be lost

but be saved, yes, saved eternally. Oh, don't hold back any longer! You could die today! Accept the great love of your God, for eternal life is to be found in it alone.

Finally, you my dear brethren and sisters in the faith, who have a taste only for Jesus and his righteousness, listen to the voice of your comrade in salvation by grace: Let us make a covenant to let no creature either in heaven or on earth separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Let us hold fast to our crown which Jesus' blood has won for us and which was given to us through faith in our Holy Baptism. Let us gladly take up our cross and follow Jesus in this world, bravely fighting against flesh, world, and devil; through Jesus we must gain the victory.

To be sure, here on earth we will never be able to be as thankful to our Savior as we would gladly wish to be, but some day, some day, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and when this mortal shall have put on immortality, then we will give praise to the Lamb who was slain for us, and to the Father and the Spirit of these two from eternity to eternity. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY

John 3:1-15

Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! We have all been baptized into you; your holy name was placed upon us; at that time you became our dear Father and we your dear children; you forgave us all our sins, washed our souls, made us your temple, caused us to be born again to eternal life, and received us into a new kingdom of grace and salvation. Therefore, oh faithful Covenant-God, look upon us all again today in grace; show those of us who have so far despised your Holy Baptism what a matchless and incomparable good they have despised, and so rule them that with shame and sorrow they return again to the fount of salvation which you have opened for them. Through the word concerning your gracious sacraments you wish to awaken in the rest of us a thirst of soul and a courageous faith to approach daily from now on the free, open fountain against sin and uncleanness, which you have promised and given all citizens of the New Testament Jerusalem. Hear us, oh Triune God. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

As you know, for the past 300 years the chief cause for the separation between the orthodox Evangelical Lutheran Church and the so-called Protestant churches has been the difference in the doctrine of the Sacraments. Many who now are quite indifferent to the truth look at this point of difference as being of such little importance, that they advise giving up entirely the battle on the differences concerning the Sacraments, disregard them completely, let each one believe what seems best to him, and, since the Protestant churches agree in many other important points, unite in one great "evangelical" church.

If this division would rest upon certain human differences of opinion, who would not accept with a thousand joys the resolution to unite? But, my friends, the doctrine of the Sacraments does not concern human opinions nor even non-fundamental doctrines but the chief points of the Christian faith. The points of difference are therefore of greatest importance.

From God's Word we Lutherans know, and therefore also believe, teach, and confess that the Sacraments, Baptism and Communion, are means of grace through which God actually offers and gives to us who use it in faith that which God has promised in them. On the other hand, other so-called Protestant churches in part expressly, in part in effect, teach that the Sacraments are merely signs and seals of grace whereby a person does not receive the benefits of grace but only makes him certain and seals to him that what he already might have. That briefly is the real subject matter; that is what really separates us from the heterodox churches.

Perhaps many who lack a clear knowledge of the connection between the various doctrines will ask: Is it so important whether the Sacraments actually are means of grace or whether one considers them merely signs of grace? I must answer: Definitely! This schism concerns the very heart of the true Gospel or the doctrine of the way of salvation. It has to do with the teaching of how a person becomes righteous before God, whether through his works or by God's works; whether man can lay the first stone in the edifice of his salvation by himself, or whether God must lay it; whether a person is able to soar to God of himself, or whether God must stoop down in order to help him; whether God gives us everything freely, or whether God merely sets his seal of approval upon what we have gotten by ourselves.

That this is true of Holy Baptism we clearly see from what St. Paul says. He has this to say, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:5-7. You see, that in this passage the apostle contrasts receiving salvation by our works and by the washing of regeneration, that is, through Holy Baptism. Here you have incontestable proof that whoever denies the saving power of Baptism bases salvation upon man's work and thus undermines the main pillars of Christianity, our justification alone by grace through faith. Is such an error perhaps an insignificant one which we Christians can easily overlook? Of a truth, not; it would mean considering the very foundation of our salvation as a trifling matter.

Now since our today's Gospel leads us to the important article of Holy Baptism, permit me to speak to you about that in greater detail.

The text. John 3:1-15.

The most important verse in the Gospel just read, around which everything revolves like a circle about its center is this, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." V.5. This verse today on the festival of the Holy Trinity leads us to consider the Baptism which we have already received in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, or how we were born again in Baptism. On the basis of this verse I present to you:

BAPTISM, THE POWERFUL MEANS OF REGENERATION

Hear,

- I. How It is That at All Times, and
- II. How It Becomes That also in Us.

Nicodemus, who is mentioned in our Gospel, was a Pharisee, but he favorably distinguishes himself in many respects from the other members of his sect. Even though Christ treated the Pharisees roughly, Nicodemus showed himself upright, did not hate Christ for doing that, did not reject him without first testing him; rather, he sought him out by night, even though he had a high station and was learned, while Christ, on the other hand, was humble and despised, to discuss religion with him, and admitted to him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." V.2. Clearly he was an honest, honorable, blameless man.

And yet he thought that Christ was merely a teacher of the Law, that he needed only such a teacher and that God could and must be pleased by a strict observance of the Old Testament Law. Beyond a doubt he was one of those of whom we read, "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of John," Luke 7:30; for John baptized unto repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

And how did Christ return his greeting? He said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." V.3. Stiff, very stiff words indeed! Here Christ not only denies him all salvation in his former state, but he also assures him that he is not saved by the works of the Law; they do not help in the least; there must be a change not only in his life but also in his entire person, in a word, he be born again.

That was an answer which Nicodemus certainly had never expected from Christ. He thought that he had not heard correctly; very astonished he exclaimed, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" V.4. So, since Nicodemus knew of no other birth than the natural one, the Savior explained it to him more carefully and said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." V.5. Thus the Savior says that Baptism works the miracle of regeneration; that means nothing else than that man is turned from a natural to a spiritual man by Baptism, from a child of wrath to a child of grace, from a child of darkness, sin, death, hell, damnation, and the devil to a child of light, righteousness, life, heaven, salvation, and God; that it is the door into God's kingdom; that it transplants him from this earthly life into the heavenly, eternal life.

"How can these things be?" is what Nicodemus exclaimed in amazement, and that is even now the exclamation of thousands upon thousands when they hear this teaching. "How can water do such great things?" everyone cries out as though with one voice.

We can give no better answer than Luther's in the Fourth Chief part of his Small Catechism, "It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water." To be sure, if God had not commanded it and added his precious promise, we could sprinkle a person a thousand times with water, calling upon the name of the triune God, it would all be in vain; but as certainly as God's Word and promise is in Baptism, so certainly does it produce the great, inexpressible results of working forgiveness of sin, delivering from death and the devil, and giving eternal salvation to all who believe, as the words and promises of God declare. God's Word which is connected with the water makes the water so powerful, gives it such divine power, turns it into a medicine for the soul, a heavenly stream which flows from the sea of divine grace and mercy.

Christ therefore also says to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the

sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." Vv.7.8. Christ means to say: as one can not understand the workings of the wind as it blows, so also in Holy Baptism nothing will be perceived with the senses except the water and the Word; this is what we can perceive, but the moving of the Holy Spirit who accompanies it is above our natural senses.

But, they say, how can I believe that this physical water can wash my soul? no earthly thing has this power. But, my friends, here we can not ask advice from our reason; it must be offended at God's mysteries; here God's Word alone can decide. It clearly tells us, "The water in Baptism saves us ("not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.") 1 Pet 3:21. Therefore, this water will not cleanse our flesh but our souls, and place us into a covenant relation with God. Therefore Ananias says to Saul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." Acts 22:15. Yes, it is true: mere water can not do that, but that is why Christ says in our Gospel, "of water and of the SPIRIT;" through the Word the Holy Spirit is connected with the water, as he was connected with the fiery tongues which hovered visibly over the heads of the apostles on Pentecost; that is why Luther calls it a "God-wrought" water.

If we find this impossible to believe, then let us merely turn to the realm of nature; we will find something similar here. Why does bread strengthen and increase our power of life? Only because God has through his Word placed this blessing in bread; for when according to God's counsel the hour of death has come, bread no longer helps to keep the blood circulating. Again, why is the ground so fertile, that without our command it produces bread and all kinds of precious fruits? This happens only because God says, "Let the earth bring forth grass and herbs and fruitful tress." The sun would send its life-giving rays in vain upon the earth if the only fruit-producing sun of divine blessing had not first risen upon our earth.

As God's Word, "Let the earth bring forth," still works and enlivens and creates in this very moment in the kingdom of nature, so Baptism is even now in the kingdom of grace a living and powerful water of regeneration and renewing by virtue of Christ's words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Mt 28:19. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mk 16:16. Therefore when a servant of the church says, "I baptize you in the name of the Triune God," this means: what I now do, I do only as an instrument; it is not really I who do this work of grace; God it is who does it through me and who in this way tears you free from sin, death, and hell, and carries you into his kingdom of grace.

Therefore, my dear friends, do not let yourselves be misled by those who say: all these things are not worked by Baptism but Baptism is merely a sign and a seal. They say: Does not Scripture clearly say that God gave Abraham the Sacrament of circumcision as a sign of his covenant and the seal of the righteousness of faith? But I ask you: what kind of a conclusion is this: Scripture calls a Sacrament a sign and a seal of the covenant, and therefore it must be only a sign and a seal? Can there be a more unreasonable conclusion? It would be as if I concluded: In Holy Scripture man is called dust and ashes, hence he must be dust and ashes and therefore has no reason, no soul, and is not immortal. Would you not consider such reasoning most ridiculous, whose incorrectness even a school boy can demonstrate? But you see, false teachers must present such proofs in order to base their errors at least on the appearance of agreement with Scripture.

But is it not a sacrilege to say: because the Scriptures call the Sacraments a sign and a seal, it means nothing when they call Baptism a washing of

regeneration, a washing from sin, a baptism unto salvation? What miserable men! They want to use God's Word to battle against God's Word!

Of course, it is true that the sacraments are also signs and seals but they are not for that reason empty husks without kernel, nor empty ceremonies without gifts of grace; God does not joke with us by arranging outward ceremonies which are of absolutely no help. God does things which no man can do; when men found a society they also can give signs by which they make themselves known. Therefore, do not let yourselves be deceived but remember: the ark of Noah was also a sign of divine grace, but not that alone, but it helped to deliver from the universal flood and this was also a prototype of Baptism. Thus also the burning bush was a sign of God's presence, but not merely that: God was in truth present in this fire. Thus the pillar of cloud and fire was for Israel a sign of God's gracious guiding hand yet not merely that: God was in that pillar. Finally, thus the dove over Christ was a sign of the Holy Spirit yet not only that, but the Holy Spirit was truly present in the dove.

"Marvel not" Christ says to Nicodemus and thus also to every one of us. Of course, Baptism seems to be much too insignificant to do the great works it is supposed to do; however, we dare not look upon what we should do but upon who has commanded us to do this and has connected such wonderful promises to it. God alone wants to have the praise and honor that we are saved, that is why he has prescribed just such means to use that we can not boast of a thing. If God would have commanded us to do great, difficult works, we would much more easily believe in what it does; but since he says, Be washed with water in my name and you shall be saved, that is too humiliating to us; then we self-righteously cry out, What should all this be which God demands of us? This should do such great things? If we persist in this proud contempt, we will certainly be lost.

We find a wonderful example which fits here in the fifth chapter of 2 Kings. There we are told that Naaman, the Syrian general, came to Elisha the prophet in order to be healed of his incurable leprosy. Elisha commanded him to bathe himself seven times in the Jordan. When Naaman heard this, he became angry and said, "Behold, are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean?" V.12. And thinking that he had received useless advice, he wanted to return home. But then his servants said to him, "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" V.12. And Naaman washed himself, and behold! suddenly he was cleansed and, awakened to faith, cried out, "There is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." V.15. You see, at first Naaman thought: Water is water; yes, he thought if it should depend upon water, the waters of Syria would be more healthy than those in Israel; but finally he learned what a difference there is between water with which the Lord's Word is connected and that which has no promise.

The same is true of the water of Baptism. If they say, "How can water do such great things?" the answer is: "Without the Word of God the water is simple water, and no Baptism; but with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost;" it is that at all times.

II.

Let us now in the second place briefly hear how it should become that also for us.

Christ speak of this at the close of the Gospel when he adds, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." V.13. Here the Lord tells us first of all whence Holy

Baptism, this ladder to heaven, has its blessed power; it comes not from men but from him; he descended from heaven and only by his life, suffering, and death is heaven again earned and opened for us; and from that all the treasures of grace have flowed out and were placed into Holy Baptism; hence, this spring of salvation was really dug on Golgatha.

Now when Christ continued, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so much the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life," vv.14.15, he explains how faith makes Baptism a washing of regeneration.

Faith has the same relation to Baptism as to God's Word. The Scriptures clearly say that the Word without faith becomes a savor of death unto death; the Letter to the Hebrews says of many Israelites, "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Heb 4:2b. Again we read, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Rom 10:17. That is also true of Baptism; it is a powerful means of regeneration, and yet without faith we receive no benefit from this blessing.

This also gives you information, my friends, about the objection which is so often raised, If Baptism saves, then faith alone does not save. This is nothing else than as if someone were to say: if the sword killed this or that person, the soldier did not do it! The sword is nothing but the tool with which the soldier does his work; so it is Baptism with its treasures which faith seizes and why it saves; for faith must have God's promises upon which it can rely.

This at the same time rejects another reproach so repeatedly raised against those who state that according to the clear words of Christ and the apostles Baptism is the means for the rebirth. They say, Do you claim that every person is born again who receives Baptism? are therefore all the baptized God's children, no matter how godlessly they may live? Oh, what a soft pillow Baptism is for the most impudent slave of sin!

But that is the way they pervert the pure teaching in order to make it hateful; for the orthodox church has never taught that. Of course, it is true that every child is born again when it is baptized, for children do not yet resist in wilful malice; therefore God can also work faith and the rebirth in their heart in Baptism without doubt arising. But it is something else again in the case of adults; if they resist and do not let themselves be brought to faith, they are not reborn through Baptism. But as certainly as the Word of God remains the powerful seed of the rebirth even though many hearers are not reborn, so also Baptism, even if it takes a rogue in his unbelief and malice.

How does it happen that children give such little evidence that through Baptism they are born again? This happens because the rebirth can be lost again. How many are converted as adults and yet fall away again! Thus many more as children are placed into God's kingdom through Baptism who very soon lose again what they have received. What else can be possible since most children do not learn what glorious things Baptism has given them? Of what profit is it for a child to be brought to Baptism by their parents if they do not teach them God's Word early in life in order to preserve and strengthen their faith? for where faith in the benefits of Baptism dies out, there these treasures are again lost. For Christ says, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Jn 15:6.

Yet, my friends, Baptism itself is not lost for that reason. As far as God is concerned this covenant of grace stands firm; "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." 2 Tim 2:13. Therefore if the person awakens from his lost condition, if through God's Word he comes to the knowledge of his misery and stretches forth his hand of faith for those treasures which he received in Baptism, then Baptism again becomes the powerful means of the rebirth of his soul. Repentance is not, as the Romans say, the life boat after the ship of Baptism has suffered shipwreck. No, it is rather the ladder upon which the person climbs back into the ship of Baptism which never was wrecked.

Oh that everyone of us would let himself be brought to that faith in these promises which once were given him by God in his Baptism! You, who do not believe and yet are baptized, what riches of grace and blessedness God has already given you and you pay no attention to them nor do you want them! You belong in God's kingdom and yet you wilfully want to remain in the kingdom of darkness! The dove of the Holy Spirit has born you like an olive branch of peace into the ark of the Christian Church, but you would rather dry up and wither. Oh, open your eyes and return to your baptism, and God is again your God and Father, your sins are again buried in the sea of grace and some day your Baptism will be your door into heaven.

And you who believe, even though in great weakness, know this: in your Baptism you have the most amazing means of becoming strong. Bear in mind: even though everything else may become doubtful and uncertain, your Baptism stands firm; once it has been given, God does not take his Word back. God, as we might say, has made himself your prisoner. Just don't let go of him; do not let go of this covenant of grace; he can not forsake you. Amen.

1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 16:19-31

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

In this same Savior, dear Christian hearers!

Each person has every reason in the world to think of his death every day, yes, every hour, for in this world nothing is more certain than death, and nothing is more uncertain than the time of his death, and nothing is more important than the results of his death.

That we will all die in an established fact. Though most consider our hopes for this life empty hopes which are not fulfilled; though they may consider our apprehensions for the future empty fears which never come, that we will die is beyond any doubt. Though in trying to predict the future a person can become a false prophet, this I can predict without any danger of erring, or the anxiety of becoming a liar: the day and the hour is coming when none of us will walk upon the earth, because everyone of us will be taken from this world and others will take our places here. Of all the countless millions of people who have been born into the world in the past 6,000 years, one generation after the other, after a short stay here, has left the stage of this world; no one has been left behind; death has forgotten none. Our turn has now come, and how long will it last? Soon they will say of us, They are dead.

As certainly as death will come for us, so uncertain, on the other hand, is the time of our death. No one knows whether he will live to see the next morning, yes, we have no claim upon the next hour. No one can guarantee that we will not die today or this year but only after many years have gone by. If you are already advanced in years, if the time of your pilgrimage has already passed the 50-year mark, then it is evident that you stand with one foot in the grave, and nothing is more likely than the nearness of your death. If you are still young, then look about; you will notice how death very often snatches the infant in his crib, the suckling from its mother's lap, yes, that death's sickle constantly mows down more tender flowers than trees bearing fruit. Are you a young man or woman in the full strength of your age? You dare not consider yourselves safe from death; the ax of death has already been laid at the root of many a young tree; not even does the bridal veil scare death away; often it suddenly and unexpectedly snatches its prey from the very midst of laughing companions. Nor does death ask whether your life is so necessary and indispensable for your family or the general welfare of the Church and state; whether thousands are praying for your life; whether a poor wife with a number of orphans weeps at your sickbed; if your hour has come, resistance is of no avail; death pitilessly takes you along out of the land of the living. Though you may be ever so rich, your money can not bribe death; though you may have all the arts at your command which otherwise cure sickness and strengthen the powers of life, no herb to cure death has ever been grown.

As certain as death is and as uncertain the time of death, just so important are its results. Death is either the gate of heaven or the gate of hell, either the entrance into eternal blessedness, or the entrance into eternal damnation; for the Scriptures say, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," Heb 9:27; "where the tree falleth, there it shall be," Eccl 12:3c; that is, as death finds us, whether it is in a blessed or sinful state, in God's grace or under his wrath, in sin or in righteousness, in the peace of Christ or in the restlessness of the world, there shall we remain forever and ever.

So, do we not therefore have every reason in the world to think of our death every day, yes, every hour? Since our death is so certain, the time of our death so uncertain, and its results so infinitely important, what can be more foolish than to live on securely and thoughtlessly and not even want to think of the fact that, stricken by the invisible arrow of death, we can collapse perhaps within the next hour? And what can be more terrible than to be surprised by death without being prepared for it, yes, without having thought of it? Oh my friends, learn to look into the hollow eyes of death before he looks into your dimming eyes. Let us now ponder how important it is to think of death.

The text. Luke 16:19-31.

My friends, in the Gospel just read Christ describes a man whose life the world considered a wise and happy one, and then a man whom the world considered foolish and unhappy; then he lifts the veil from eternity and shows us the eternal fate of both after their death. We see from this: those whom the world called wise and happy are the fools and the most unhappy, and those whom the world despised as fools and unhappy are the truly wise and happy, and it is death which makes this clear. Therefore, permit me to show you that

DEATH CONTRADICTS THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD CONCERNING
WISDOM AND FOLLY, HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS

- I. It Contradicts the Judgment of the World About Who is Wise and Happy, and
 II. It Contradicts the Judgment of the World About Who is Foolish and Unhappy.

I.

In the eyes of the world who is the wise man? He who seeks to enjoy life as much as possible, who understands how to become rich and win the respect of his fellows, who knows how to live in peace and friendship with all men, and who dismisses all concern for the future and especially eternity from his mind, him the world considers a wise man. And whom does the world regard as happy? He who can enjoy the joys and glory of the world, who is rich, who is healthy, who is greatly honored, who has many friends, who can dress fashionably and live well, who lives in a splendid palace, has no need to work, and is waited on by a host of servants, he passes for being happy in the eyes of the world.

Such a man was the rich man of whom Christ speaks in our Gospel, "He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." V.19. Beyond all doubt: while he still lived, all the world would have praised him highly as a wise man who knew how to live, as a happy man who was a favorite of heaven; many thousands would have wished to be able to change places with him.

Of a truth, my friends, if there were no death and no judgment after death before which all men must appear, so that every one may receive as he has done in his body, whether it be good or bad, who would contradict the judgment of the world? Then no one could find fault with the children of the world when they, as we read in the book of The Wisdom of Solomin, "Come now, and let us be merry while we have the chance, and use our body while it is young. We will fill ourselves with the best of wine and ointment; let us not waste the blooms of May; let us wear wreaths of young roses before the wither. Let none of us fail to radiate happiness that every one may know how happy we have been. We will have no more than this to enjoy." (2:1ff)

But that is not so; man must die, and then he must appear before God's judgment throne and give account of how he used the life given him to prepare for eternity; he must give account of the thoughts he had, the words he spoke, the deeds he has done; if he does not stand in this judgment, his eternal fate is worse than words can express; it would have been better for him if he had never been born; thus his seeming wisdom proves to be folly, his seeming happiness as the greatest unhappiness and ruin.

An example of this we find in the rich man in our Gospel. We read of him, "The rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Vv.22b-26.

On the basis of our text, tell me my dear hearers: what must we say of the wisdom and happiness of the rich man, when we see to what place his wisdom and supposed happiness has brought him? Tell me what did his wisdom amount to which finally brought him into eternal ruin? What did his riches amount to which he not only lost, but which also hurled him into eternal poverty? What did the glory of his purple and fine linen amount to of which he finally was stripped

and in its place must now don the flames of hell as his eternal garb? What did the brief joy amount to, the brief laughing and joking, his brief life of daily pleasure which he had enjoyed here upon earth, after which followed eternal pain, eternal lamentation and howling, eternal misery and sorrow? What did the carousing in sumptuous eating and drinking which made up his life amount to, after which followed eternal hungering and thirsting, an eternal unappeased languishing and pining in unutterable heat? What did the gay parties amount to which he could enjoy every day after which followed eternal separation from all the joyful and eternal fellowship with all the damned? What did all the pleasures amount to which he had enjoyed upon earth, after which he had to hear the voice, "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;" the cup of joy which God had given you has been drained to the very last drops; others have had hell upon earth; they are now comforted; you have had your heaven upon earth: now "thou art tormented?" Do you supposed that the rich man would still claim that his earthly life was a happy one? Oh, of a truth, no! In his heart he will rather have said, Miserable wretch! I thought that I was wise; alas, I see now that I was a fool; I have made a mistake about the true way, and the light has never risen upon me; I thought that I was happy; but alas, I see that I was unhappy; my purple was merely the blinding gloss of my misery; my money and goods were merely cords which drew me into ruin; my earthly joys were merely a sweet poison which killed my soul; the honor I received from men was merely the noose of death; my whole life was merely a broad way to hell. Alas, all the days of my life were dark days, days of curse, birthdays of eternal misery. Oh that I had never been born! sheer misery is now my portion forever and ever.

See, there is the unanswerable judgment of death upon those whom the world calls wise and happy.

Whoever seeks to enjoy life and is unconcerned about eternity, him the world calls wise; but death shows: whoever seeks to enjoy life and is not concerned about eternity squanders his life, the precious time of grace, and tramples it under foot, he is idle during the seedtime and on the day of harvest will reap eternal ruin. Whoever serves the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, him the world declares happy; but death shows: that person's life is a dream; as little as he who merely dreams of riches is rich for all is gone with the dream, so little is he rich who is rich merely in this life, for in death he awakens from his dream and his riches are turned into eternal poverty.

Death shows: this world is merely a stage upon which all people appear not in their true but disguised form; as little as he truly is a king who in a play is merely dressed as a king and plays the role of a king, so little is all earthly greatness true greatness; in death everyone has acted out his role; after death the only question remains: Were you a true Christian?

Death shows: man's life is a walk to the throne of the divine Judge; as little as he is happy who is led to the place of execution, even if all kinds of tidbits which he desires are given to him on his last walk, so little is he happy who, as the rich man, can pass all his days in splendor and joy; they are merely the tidbits before the execution.

You who still seek those things which the world calls happiness, open your eyes and see that up until now you have not sought happiness but unhappiness without knowing and wanting it. Or are there not many among us who wish to be the rich man in this life? Are there not many among us who seek riches and think that if they would become rich they would be happy? Are there not many among us who, though they may not wish to clothe themselves in purple and fine linen, still wish they were able to dress themselves in the latest fashions?

yes, do not many bedeck themselves above their station and means and therein seek their happiness? Are there not many of us who think, that there is a no more happy life than being able to live splendidly and joyously every day, sharing in the pleasures of the world, and enjoying its lusts? Are there not many among us who, if they did not hear that the rich man in our text died most wretchedly and after his death awoke in the flames of hell, would with a thousand joys exchange the lot which God has given them with that of the rich man, exchange their slim savings for his pile of gold and treasures, their hut for his palace, their common clothing for his purple, their simple meals for his brilliant banquets? Oh my friends, do not join the world in its judgment concerning happiness and wisdom; form your opinion on the life of man after he has died; this sets aside the judgment of the world and shows that of a truth the world's riches is poverty, the world's honor is shame, the world's joy is misery, the world's wisdom is folly, the world's happiness is unhappiness.

My friends, death also sets aside the judgment of the world as to who is foolish and unhappy; permit me in the second place to speak of this.

II.

Whom does the world consider a fool? He who denies the joys and lusts of this world, does not seek good days, nor riches, nor honor before men but first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, nor seeks to obtain the friendship of the world but would rather have all men as his foes than God, gladly lets himself be ridiculed and persecuted for the sake of his faith and the truth, and would rather suffer everything, yes, death itself than consent to the smallest sin, him the world considers a simpleton, a fool. Whom does it, therefore, also regard as unhappy? He who is poor, sick, forsaken, and rejected, he passes for an unhappy person in the eyes of the world.

Such a man was Lazarus, of whom Christ relates the following in our text, "And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Vv.20.21. Beyond a doubt: while he still lived, the world would despise and revile him as a simple, foolish man who did not know how to get on in the world, a miserable, unhappy wretch about whom God was unconcerned; many thousands would have esteemed themselves happy when comparing their life with his and blessed themselves in their hearts when they saw him; no one would have wanted to change places with him.

And it is true, my friends, that if there were no death and no eternal life after death, no salvation by grace, no mansions of peace for the tired pilgrim, no crown of life for the faithful warrior of the faith, no glorification of those who were reviled and dishonored by the world for the sake of God and his Word, the judgment which the world passes upon the suffering children of God would naturally be a true one; they would of all men be the most miserable.

But that verdict is not true. As the delights and glory of the world disappear, so does also the suffering, tribulation, sickness, pain, and misery of the world; yes, in death all this leads to joy and glory. For the Scriptures say, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Rom 8:18. "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh." Lk 6:21b. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Ps 126:5. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Lk 14:11. "The last shall be first." Mt 20:16a. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." 2 Tim 2:11.12a. "If we suffer with him, we shall be also glorified together." Rom 8:17b.

We find an expressive example of this in Lazarus; we read of him, "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." V.22a.

On the basis of this verse, tell me, my dear hearers: what must we say of the supposed folly and unhappiness of Lazarus, when we see the place to which his folly and unhappiness finally brought him? What did his earthly poverty amount to which led him to heavenly riches? What did his homelessness in this world amount to, which led him into the eternal mansions of righteousness? What did his brief illness amount to which brought him to eternal health? What did his brief pains amount to, which guided him to eternal joy and blessedness? What did his hungering and thirsting in this world amount to, which brought him to the eternal marriage feast in the halls of heaven? What did all the disgrace, contempt, and shame amount to, which he here experienced and which finally led him into unspeakable honor, to heavenly glory? What did his brief loneliness and forsakenness by all men amount to, which called for the angels in his death who led him into eternal fellowship with all the saints and angels and the Triune God himself? What did all the tears amount to which he here shed, all the sighs which he uttered, all the sufferings which he endured, because he at the last heard the voice, "Lazarus received evil things, now he is comforted"?

He has shed the last tear and uttered the last groan; he shall now forever drink of pleasures as from a stream; he shall drink of the riches of God's house; he shall have the fulness of joy and pleasure at God's right hand forever more. Do you think that Lazarus will now claim that his earthly life was a miserable and unhappy one? Truly, no! His heart will the rather say: Oh God, the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, I have received a beautiful inheritance. What the world called poverty in me was a treasure from God's hand, which outweighed all the treasures of the world; what the world called shame in me was a crown of honor which God himself placed upon my brow which shines with infinitely greater glory than all the crowns of gold and diamonds of kings and emperors; what the world called my sickness and misery was the fount of health and eternal glory which God caused to flow upon my way of life. Oh, golden way of the cross upon which God has led me! Oh blessed guidance! Oh unspeakable grace! To him be honor and praise and thanks and glory and adoration from eternity to eternity.

There you have the unanswerable judgment of death upon those whom the world calls fools and unfortunate.

Whoever forsakes the world and follows Christ and above all seeks to save his soul, him the world considers a fool, but death refutes the world and shows that it was true wisdom to lose the passing and to win treasures eternal. Whoever goes the narrow way of the cross and tears and sighs, amid watching and praying, amid struggles and warfare, him the world considers unhappy, but death refutes the world and shows: the tears of the Christian are pearls in their crown in eternity, a seed from which they there on the day of the harvest gather sheaves of eternal joy into their granaries; here their cross is the ladder to heaven and there it is a throne of eternal honor; here their bitter sighs are a key to God's heart and there they will be turned into sweet harmonies in the eternal temple of him who has mercy upon them.

You therefore who have forsaken the world and chosen the one thing which is needful, who are pitied and despised by the world as unhappy fools, do not be deceived by the judgment of the world. Look ahead to your last hour in this world; that is the hour of decision; then the world will quake and tremble but you will be comforted and rejoice; then the world will weep and howl but

you will laugh and skip for joy; then the world will curse its life with all its riches, honor, and lust of the world, but you will bless your life of poverty, disgrace, and tribulation. All the glory of the world will then come to an end and their endless woe will begin, but your endless joy and glory will then begin and all your misery will cease forever. Amen.

2ND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 14:16-24

In Christ Jesus, dear hearers!

In general, people have absolutely false ideas about the Christian life, or the life lived according to the Gospel. Many think that the Christian life is something most sorrowful, for which one must deny himself even the most innocent things, renounce all joys in the world, and live in continual fear of hell, in restlessness and pains of conscience. Therefore, those who wish to live a life committed completely to the Gospel are usually looked on as miserable, unhappy people, and because countless are of the opinion that Christians are like that because of their own doings they never want to become Christians, or they postpone their conversion from day to day.

Nevertheless, there are not a few who think the very opposite. Many suppose that because the Gospel teaches that man is saved by grace through faith and not by good works nor by his own righteousness and holiness, it is unnecessary and foolish to be so earnest and strict in regard to his life. Christ has already won everything by his life, suffering, and death, and, therefore, a Christian need not especially exert himself; one sin more or less would scarcely count; and to exercise oneself in good works is up to the Christian's discretion.

However, if we search in Holy Scripture, we find that the first as well as the second opinion of the Christian life is totally false. The life of a Christian is neither a life of slavish fear and constant anxiety nor a life in false, fleshly security. In God's Word the Christian life is presented as a life in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, a walk before God in hearty, childlike confidence, a life full of comfort and hope; at the same time, we are also shown how narrow the way is which a Christian must go, that he is in a continual battle with flesh, world, and Satan; in fear and trembling he must work out his salvation, pursue sanctification, not live to himself but to God and his neighbor, and daily bring God the sacrifice of a contrite and repentant heart. The apostle places both points in juxtaposition when he says of the Christian, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." 2 Cor 6:10.

My friends, the first error is as dangerous as the second. Salvation is missed, though one may swerve one way or the other on the way to heaven. It is, therefore, necessary to know both things: Christian freedom and its bounds, the Christian's glory and his assured victory and his conflicts and struggles, the Christian's rest and security in Christ and the dangers in which he still is on earth; the comfort as well as the warning and admonition which is given him. We find both in the Gospel of today. Let us, therefore, ponder both in the fear of the Lord.

The text. Luke 14:16-24.

The Gospel just read is as rich in doctrine and comfort as it is in warning and reprimand. In the parable of the Great Supper which it contains God's infinite love toward men is portrayed as well as man's unthankfulness over the riches of divine grace. Let us therefore now ponder:

CHRIST'S PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

as it shows us,

- I. God's Love and Earnest Will that All Men be Saved, and
- II. Discloses the Reasons why so Many are Nevertheless Lost.

I.

There can be no doubt concerning the subject matter of the parable in our text: the nature of the kingdom which Christ had come into the world to found. And with what does he compare it? With a great supper. This immediately tells us that Christ himself wants us to have only the most lovely and wonderful ideas about his kingdom and the purpose of his coming into the world. Tell me yourself: could Christ have spoken to us in a more friendly and enticing manner than in the way he tells us why the heavenly Father sent him, in the words, "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many"? V.16.

Should Christ without any purpose at all have compared his entire work on earth to a great supper? No, Christ in this way really tells us how we should view it. So, Christ did not come into the world to preach God's wrath to us, as Moses did, but as a person who invites guests to a supper does all this in order to show his love, so God also wanted to reveal through sending his dear Son his inexpressible love toward sinful men. Christ did not come to tell us, as Moses did, what God demands of us, but as the invitation to his supper demands no work of us but only prepares us to enjoy it, so Christ did not come to tell us what we must merit in God's eyes by our works but what God wants to give us and have us enjoy in time and in eternity. Christ did not come into the world to judge the world and foretell its death, but, as a costly supper is arranged only to refresh a person and to give strength to his life, so Christ came into the world only that the world might be saved through him, that he might redeem all from sin and death and earn for them eternal life.

The Gospel is an entirely different teaching than the moral teachings of the heathen or the Law. The ethics of the heathen show us how a person should live in order to be a useful member of society; the Law of Moses demands of all men a perfect holiness of heart and life and, therefore, reveals to all men their sins and announces the curse, death, and eternal damnation to them. The Gospel of Christ, on the other hand, is the blessed message to men, "Come, for all things are now ready." V.17. Hence, the Gospel does not show us how we should help ourselves, but how God has had mercy upon us and helped us; how God out of love and grace let his dear Son become a man and suffer and die for our sins, that he has redeemed us from sin, death, and hell, reconciled us with God and again prepared the way of salvation which was lost. Briefly, the Gospel is nothing else but the invitation to the great heavenly feast at which God, the heavenly householder, gives us to eat and to drink with the best that he has, namely his grace, forgiveness of sins, adoption as children, eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal joy and blessedness, yes, Christ his very own dear Son.

Oh, what a dear sweet teaching the Gospel is! If God would demand merely a little bit by which we were to merit our own salvation, no one could be really

certain, whether he has done that little bit, whether he would be saved or lost. But no, the Gospel says nothing, absolutely nothing of our works, but rather excludes them completely and merely says, "Come, come; for ALL things are now ready!" When any person on this world hears such a teaching, where is the person who could not trust God and could still doubt that he also could be saved? For the moment a person asks, What must I do? today's Gospel answers: You can and should do nothing of yourself; for what had to be done for your salvation Jesus Christ has already done. Do you want God's grace? Here it is. Do you want divine righteousness? Here it is all ready. Do you want heaven? It is open. Only come and believe; just accept it.

Yes, the Gospel accuses all those who want to slave and labor and run and chase for themselves in order to gain some merit by themselves and says, Cease all your strivings; that is not the way to receive what has already been dearly won and bought for you through the blood of God's Son; it does not depend upon your wishing or chasing. We find this sweet Gospel even in the Old Covenant, for thus we read, Is 55:1-3, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

And Christ explains his parable of the great supper in still greater detail in our Gospel. He says not only that God's grace has already prepared everything, but that God also invited all men without exception, that he is not ashamed of a single person and has caused the poor, the lame, the halt, the blind, and those on the highways and byways to be invited to his table, yes, that God becomes angry if people do not want to come, and that he has commanded his servants even to compel the miserable to come in, so that his house would be full.

See, that is the Gospel; it pictures God as burning with great inexpressible love to all sinners, his whole heart being moved with longing, no person remaining outside so that even the most wretched and greatest of sinners should come and accept and enjoy what he has prepared for them.

My friends, tell me yourself, is that not a blessed doctrine? Is that not a doctrine which poor, fallen, helpless mankind needs, that he merely has to accept God's help? Could one not say: Oh, blessed, eternally blessed are all men who hear this Gospel, for why should such a person not be saved, since nothing, absolutely nothing is demanded of him?

Alas! many thousands and millions of people who hear this teaching, have heard it often and still are eternally lost. Whence does that come? How can a person ever die of hunger if every day he is urgently invited to a wonderful meal? Can a person be damned whom God has commanded to be admonished, besought, and begged through his messengers: Accept salvation; come, come; all things are now ready!? Who would ever think that? And yet it happens. The reasons are disclosed in our today's Gospel.

II.

My friends, the reason is not that many have sinned too greatly, so that there is no grace and salvation for them; this we see clearly from our Gospel. It tells us that there is room for all, even for the lame, even for the greatest and most wretched sinner. The only reason why so many do not come to the supper

of God's kingdom is indicated in our Gospel; it is despising the love of him who commanded that they be invited. Of none we are told that they should not be called and, therefore, excluded, but of all we are told: they were invited but they did not want to come nor accept the invitation. This is nothing else than: they did not want to believe.

Of course, it might appear as though entirely different reasons were given in our Gospel; the one had bought a field, another five yoke of oxen, and the third had just married a wife; but all this is not given as the reason why they were excluded from the meal but as the reason they themselves despised the precious meal. To buy a field or a yoke of oxen or to take a wife is not a sin; but Christ means to say that most let these things hinder them from accepting the precious Gospel.

Yes, it is and remains true, that faith in Christ makes us most certainly righteous and saves us, but my friends, faith is not the idle, empty thought that there is a heaven and a Reconciler; it is nothing else than a real eating and drinking and enjoying Jesus Christ the gracious; it is a coming to the supper of his kingdom of grace. One does not believe when one praises Christ's works or the table of grace which he has prepared, but one believes when he sits down at that table and refreshes and strengthens himself.

You see, as little as the guests in our Gospel could come to the great supper when they, after receiving the invitation, went to see their fields, their oxen, and celebrate their marriage, so little can they in faith enjoy Christ's grace with their heart whose heart still clings to something else. Every one whose heart still clings to some temporal thing says to Christ's messengers who preach the Gospel, if not in words yet in deeds: I pray thee have me excused; I must be busy with other things, that is why I cannot come. They deceive themselves greatly when they suppose that because they praise the preaching of the Gospel, they still are secure in the true, saving faith, whilst their heart clings to honor, temporal things, or the lust of the world. Of a truth, that is no faith. Those things by which one satisfies his soul, wherein he finds his only pleasure and joy, his honor and his comfort, those are the things he believes in. If he satisfies his heart with the husks of this world, he has clearly declined Christ's heavenly invitation to his supper and excludes himself by his unbelief.

Where there is true faith, there the heart lets go of field, oxen, and wife, that is, of honor, worldly things, and the lust of the world, and eats Christ as his precious food. As long as a person still hungers after the world, he has no faith, for faith is seating oneself in hunger at Jesus Christ's heavenly table furnished with grace, righteousness, and all the blessings of heaven.

Yes, Christ intentionally speaks not only of a meal but of a supper, indicating: Christ feeds those who were wounded by the day's burden and heat and seek strength and refreshment. Tired, exhausted consciences, frightened at God's wrath, at sin, death, and hell are the soil in which alone true faith takes root.

Of what value to you is the sweet teaching of the Gospel which cries out: Come to the great supper; all things are now ready! if you who hunger and thirst for something altogether different? Oh my dear hearers, do not wilfully lose your soul's salvation; tear your heart free from the miserable things of this world and come to Christ's meal. You build homes, you expand your business, you marry and are given in marriage, and all that is not sin; but if you cling to these things with your heart, if your thinking and seeking consists of

such things, if you seek your joy, honor, and delight in these things, you still are among those who ask to be excused because they could not come to Christ.

Christ clearly explains his parable to his disciples when he says immediately after our text, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple," v.26; that is, whoever does not tear his heart free even from those things he regards most dear and does not seek his rest and salvation alone in Christ's blessings is not fit for God's kingdom.

Alas, it is a common experience: wherever the pure Gospel of grace in Christ is preached to men, there very many at first rejoice in this lovely teaching, but soon a satiety, a contempt, a nausea arises amongst the hearers. They again begin to give themselves up the more to temporal things and to pursue greed, the vanities and the lusts of the world. Because they hear that the way to salvation is so easy, they think that no harm will come to them if they do not go the easy, wonderful way.

Oh that this were not the case also among us! But is it not so? Have not many of us again come to love the world? Do not the hearts of very many cling to temporal things? Do not very many think that because they hear the gracious Gospel every Sunday and praise it, they have also most certainly accepted it in faith, whilst their heart still clings to entirely different things?

Oh, hear you earthly minded people, hear your condemnation in our today's Gospel and be afraid! Christ says that the man who had caused the invitation to be extended became angry and finally exclaimed, "For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." V.24.

If you do not want to have this terrible threat be fulfilled in you, then tear your heart free from the love of earthly things; perceive your danger, learn to be frightened over your sins and God's great wrath. Come to the supper of the Lord here in time. Let Christ's grace be your riches, your honor, and your pleasure, and you will also some day seat yourselves at the heavenly banquet table; there you will have fullness of joy and pleasures at God's right hand forever more. Amen.

Mark 8/24/02

3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 15:1-10

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!

When David wanted to praise God's love properly and awaken a heartfelt trust in him in the readers of his Psalms, he cries out, "The Lord shall rejoice in his works." Ps 104:31. David means to say: Whatever God has created he loves; he cannot hate it. It is his pleasure to do good to his creatures; he is delighted when everything which he has called into existence is joyful and lives happily and moves and has its being in him.

How could it be otherwise! Would God have created anything if he would not rejoice in it? No one could have compelled him to create it nor even besought

him to do it; a man makes much of what he makes because he needs it and means to use it for his benefit, but God needs nothing of what he made; he is the All-Sufficient and he alone has salvation. Therefore, what he called forth from nothing he must have created only that there might be other beings who were to taste his life, his goodness, and his sweetness and share in his salvation.

That this is so God proves by the way he rules the world in which God's love and kindness is reflected.

How beautiful this world is! But did God create it for himself? did he not make it for his creatures? In love God has given the immense expanse of the atmosphere to the birds in which they can happily fly up and down; in love God has allotted the clear, cool waters of the seas and streams to the fish in which they can merrily play; in love God has given the dry ground to the other animals upon which they can walk at their pleasure; and he feeds them all daily at his huge table from his gentle hand satisfying every living thing.

But above all God reveals his pleasure in his dealings with men. For us God has so wonderfully, so marvelously beautified heaven and earth. For us particularly is the sky crimson at dawn and dusk and the mountain peaks are gilded; for us especially the sun shines by day and in the quiet of night the moon with the twinkling host of countless stars in the firmament. Over us arches the blue sky and before us spreads the smiling inhabited world with its mountains and valleys, with its seas and fountains and streams, with its meadows and fields, and with yearning we look up into the clouds, with rapture into this delightful, pulsing creation. For us the rain and the dew moistens the earth and makes it fruitful, and with every meadow, with every tree, with every rippling spring, with every bush and blade of grass it upon God's command stretches out its hands overflowing with gifts to give us. For us the birds of the sky must be a happy choir constantly singing; the animals must serve us; for us the glittering ore lies in the bosom of the earth. And still more! God has led us together here, has given us an understanding mind, a feeling heart and a speaking mouth, and has tied the tender bond between husband and wife, between parents and children, and friend and friend, so that together we can here rejoice among ourselves in his love and in our love.

However, who is able to tally up all the proofs that God rejoices in man, that, as the prophet says, he does not willingly afflict and grieve us; that it is his delight to do good to us and cause us to rejoice even here! And all this God has done for well nigh 6,000 years, even though mankind has unceasingly opposed him and hated his holy will and continually insulted and grieved him. God's patience has not for that reason ended. His sun shines as graciously as ever upon the evil and the good and his fructifying rain falls as bountifully as ever upon all their fields just as if man had never forfeited God's love at all. Must we not cry out, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Ps 8:5. How great must be your love to us! Yes, you rejoice in all your works. Praise be to thee forever and ever.

My friends, though God has wonderfully revealed his pleasure in us, we find it most difficult to believe this when we consider that we are sinners. If this thought is once driven home, man then thinks that the whole world with all its beauty cannot move him to rejoice nor assure him of God's love, for he is indeed unworthy of one ray of light, to say nothing of the gracious beatific vision of God. However, there is comfort in God's Word to calm even this apprehension, for it shows us that God loves even the sinner, that Jesus is the gracious friend of sinners. Permit me, etc.

In the Gospel just read we catch a glimpse of a most beautiful portrait of Christ, yes, really the true picture of Christ as he is amongst sinners whom he pursues and graciously receives. Therefore, the subject of our meditation is:

JESUS, THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

- I. How He Mercifully Pursues the Lost and Erring Sinners, and,
- II. How He Graciously Receives Those Who Come to Him as Sinners.

Oh Jesus, dear Friend of sinners, who is not angry on account of our sins but looks sympathetically upon sinners and would gladly deliver us all from them and save us, grant that now as your infinite love of sinners is to be preached to us, our hearts will be opened to receive you. For when we yearn to be with you, you are already with us and in us and refresh us with grace, righteousness, peace, and joy. Oh, let none of us hear this gracious word in vain; draw us all into your arms of grace and then let nothing tear us out of your hand again until we stand at your right hand and live and rule with you from eternity to eternity. Amen.

I.

A friend of sinners is not, my friends, an honorable name in the eyes of the world. In our Gospel we are, therefore, told: Once when "all the publicans and sinners drew near" to Christ "for to hear him," then "the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Vv. 1.2. Other passages of the Gospels relate the same thing. When Christ once permitted the great sinner, Mary Magdalena, to anoint his feet, wet them with her tears, and dry them with the hairs of her head, a certain Pharisee thought to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner." Lk 7:39. We also hear that to insult Christ they called him a friend of publicans and sinners.

But far be it that Christ should have refused the title of a friend of sinners; he did not want to let this name (so insulting in the eyes of the world) be taken from him; according to our text and in other places he defended himself and gave reasons why he was and wanted to remain above all a friend of sinners. He related several parables; he says, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" Vv. 4.8. Christ means to say: You do the very same; if a shepherd has only 100 sheep, and if he loses one of them, he is for the moment more concerned about the one which is lost than for all the others; he acts as if the one lost sheep were more important than the 99 which were not lost; these he leaves and goes after that one. So also a wife; if she loses one of her ten coins, she acts as if the one she lost was worth more than all the coins which were left; she forgets what she has and diligently searches for the one which was lost. Why then are you surprised, Christ means to say, that I so zealously seek lost sinners and so zealously pursue them? All sinners are my sheep; they are all my possession; I have dearly bought them with my own blood; if a sinner is lost, I have lost a sheep from my flock; my shepherd's heart urges me to go out quickly and seek it upon all mountains, in all the abysses and woods and bogs of the sinful world.

Oh, what a tender heart Christ, therefore, has for lost sinners! He is not minded like man. If man sees another fall deeply into sin, he immediately thinks: This person is not worthy of being received by anyone; he deserves no

love but hate and contempt; all admonitions are lost and all love is wasted as far as he is concerned; there is no hope that he would ever be converted. Jesus has an entirely different thought. If he sees a person fall deeply into sin, his loving heart is filled with mercy and sympathy; he thinks: I have dearly bought this man's soul with suffering and death; it is also a precious treasure which belongs to me. Moreover, Jesus thinks: This poor sinner has not deserved hatred but sympathy, for there can be no greater misfortune for a person than to fall into sin, become God's enemy, forfeit salvation. Finally Jesus thinks: If I would not accept this fallen sinner, there would be no hope for him; I will block his path of sin with my grace; I will entice him with my mercy, and if that does not bear fruit, I will threaten him, I will frighten him with my wrath so that I can gain him. Thus Christ sometimes uses suffering, sometimes joy to move the sinner to a blessed conversion.

If a person is bitterly and grievously insulted by others and if he for that reason also falls into other great and serious sins, the natural man interests himself even less in his fallen foe; yes, he is happy to see him rush from sin to sin to his ruin and thinks that if he fares badly it serves him right; he is reaping the results of his evil deeds. However, of what a different mind Christ is! Yes, he it is who is insulted with every sin, even if we, as it seems, merely sin against our neighbor; yet even if a person despises Christ completely, rejects his Gospel, reviles or abuses his grace, and constantly increases his enmity, Christ does not lose his love to such a poor, erring, and lost person.

We see this in several examples. When Christ, probably at the close of day, approached a little village in Samaria and sent the disciples hither to arrange for lodging, the inhabitants of the village defiantly refused him lodging. Angrily the disciples accompanying Christ immediately exclaimed, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" But what did Jesus do? He turned to the enraged disciples 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." Lk 9:54-56. Recall also how hostile Jerusalem was toward Christ! And yet we do not see Christ become angry, but he stands weeping over the sinful city and bemoans the evil with which it wantonly was cursing itself.

Oh, what a loving friend of sinners Christ is! Though a sinner may have insulted him ever so shamefully, ever so unthankfully, ever so grievously, Christ does not give him up; he does not give him up to his ruin; he still goes after him, is the first graciously to offer his most worthless enemy and insulter the hand of reconciliation and to beseech him to become his friend.

Jesus has more than a fatherly heart toward all sinners. Just as a father and mother can not deny their heart even if a child is ever so godless; as their heart breaks over the lost son who has defiantly run away when he has hurled himself into shame and trouble, into misery of body and soul by his sins and malice; as parents groan day and night for such a wretched person whom the world despises and abominates and in secret bewail his unhappiness with bitter tears, so is Jesus minded toward the sinner who has become an object of horror to men; his heart, burning with love toward sinners, yearns also for their deliverance; he seeks to win them also, he goes after them also; he would gladly heal also them who are like sick sheep covered with loathsome sores; yes, it is his greatest joy to tear such completely lost sinners, who seem to have surrendered themselves to Satan, from his jaws, entice them to return to him, refresh them with his grace, clothe them with his righteousness, and finally in triumph carry them into heaven.

Ah, 'tis vain for me to search for words which describe the greatness of the love of Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners. Our parental love toward our erring children is only a tiny spark in comparison, whereas Jesus' love is greater than heaven and earth.

Therefore, my dear hearer, whoever you may be, though also your sins may be ever so great; though you may have sinned much and long; though you may have insulted Christ ever so greatly and inexcusably; though everyone may regard you as a sinner who is no longer worthy of any love; though everyone may have given up the hope that there still may be help and grace for you; though by your sins you may have fallen into such contempt and shame that you have no friend among men who will accept you, you still have one Friend; even as you sinned he remained faithful to you; and he is -- Jesus the Friend of sinners. Perhaps you have an evil conscience which damns you; you experience many misfortunes in this world; you, therefore, think that Christ is angry with you, he is now punishing you for your sins, he is letting you suffer for them now and has forsaken you forever; but that is not true. Since you are so concerned about your sins and since you in your misery plead guilty, then know this, in this very fact you have the proof that the Good Shepherd still follows after you, seeks, you, and calls you back. The anxiety of your heart, your pain that you are so forsaken and have wandered so far are nothing else but evidences of the grace of the Friend of sinners; because Christ has caused the Word of his grace, friendliness, and love to be preached to you, he himself now stands before you and above all among all lost sinners here and says: Just return, just come to me; I will receive you. For what the enemy says in our Gospel is certain and true, "Jesus receiveth sinners."

II.

This leads me to the second portion of my sermon in which I will now show you how graciously and in what a friendly way he receives those who come to him as sinners.

Perhaps many could think: if Christ were such a great friend of sinners, it would be impossible for one sinner to be lost. This does not follow at all. Jesus does indeed accept sinners but only sinners. The failing of most people is that they do not want to consider themselves sinners and particularly great lost sinners. Most people want to go to Christ as pious, virtuous, upright, holy people who at the most have only a few weaknesses and only seldom had fallen into a somewhat greater sin. A friend of such false holy, pious, virtuous, and upright people Christ is not. He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; he is a Physician not of the strong or healthy but of the weak and the sick. The self-righteous Pharisees, therefore, remained away from Christ, but the poor publicans, burdened with great sins, and other great sinners gathered around him and found comfort and salvation in him.

How gladly Christ receives the sheep he himself testifies in our Gospel when first of all he continues speaking of the shepherd with the lost sheep to whom he refers, "And when he hath found it, he layeth on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Vv.5-7. And then he says of the woman who searched for her lost coin, "And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Vv.9.10.

See from this with what joy Christ receives all those who come to him as sinners. He is not ashamed of them as people are ashamed of the deeply fallen but in their very fall he seeks his honor and glory by being able to deliver, pardon, and save even the greatest sinner. He, God's Son, came into the world for no other reason than to seek all sinners and to save that which was lost; that is his office; that is, so to say, his daily work; as a physician is happy when the sick come to him and seek his help for that is his calling, so also Christ when sinners come to him and seek deliverance from him, for he wants to be the physician of sinners.

But perhaps many will think that Christ will indeed accept sinners after they have bettered themselves; but for that very reason I do not dare to go to Christ until I have been able to free myself from my sins. If that is your lament, you are to know: Christ receives sinners as they are; as long as the person has become a sinner only in his heart; as long as he has perceived that he is also a wretched publican who must be lost and condemned without grace; as long as he has come to the point where he knows of absolutely no other counsel for his soul than going to Christ, he is unable to convert and improve himself, Christ must have mercy on him else he would have to despair,

then such a despairing person always is graciously received by Christ. Indeed, if first we wanted to improve ourselves, cleanse ourselves, make ourselves pious and worthy, we would go further and further from Christ; but when we perceive that our wishing, our good purposes, our good intentions, and all our abilities and strivings are lost, Christ must help us, oh, Christ does not let the hopes of such be put to shame; such he must help and save as truly as he is Jesus (Savior), as truly as he is a friend of sinners.

Therefore, if there is anyone here who laments over himself from the bottom of his heart; who is angry with himself; who feels himself bound and helpless to improve himself; who perhaps is ashamed to reveal to any person the whole wretchedness of his sins because he thinks that then no one would comfort him -- let him know: he can go to Jesus; he can freely tell him his ruin; he is a Physician who can heal even the most helpless illnesses; he is a merciful as well as an almighty friend of sinners; the greater our sin is the greater is his grace; the greater our misery the greater his mercy. That so many are not saved does not lie in Christ's willingness to be gracious to all sinners but in man's unwillingness to be a sinner and to believe in Christ's grace.

Sad to say, there are even among those who actually regard themselves as great sinners not a few who unceasingly go about with doubt as to whether they also are under God's grace, whether they also would be saved if death should unexpectedly overtake them perhaps in an unguarded moment. They think, since they are not completely free of sin, since they must daily appear in shame before God as stumbling sinners, this could not be the true state in which they dare comfort themselves in Christ's grace. Then if they must discover the condemnations of their own heart, they become increasingly anxious and desperate. Such people let the comfort of the Gospel be spoiled by their own heart; and that they can no more joyfully battle flesh, world, and Satan is due alone to the fact that they do not with confidence every day and hour receive grace upon grace from the fullness of Jesus Christ. Yes, you concerned, anxious, and desperate souls, learn to go the more confidently to your Savior; learn to know him even better than before; he did not come to lay burdens upon you but to remove them; he is not a stern judge but a merciful High Priest who knows how we feel, who knows our weakness, who was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin. He is truly a friend of sinners; he sympathetically hears your laments and daily and hourly forgives you all your sins; cling to him firmly in faith. All depends on faith and on nothing else; faith receives forgiveness, faith receives comfort, faith gains the victory, faith saves.

In Scripture we read how full of comfort, full of peace, full of blessedness pious Christians were; they did not work this by their own power; as we, they had to discover their misery. But they came through with faith, as the publicans and sinners in our Gospel they drew near to Christ, they pressed upon him, they did not leave them until he had looked upon them in grace; thus they conquered and finally departed in peace and were saved by grace.

4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 6:36-42

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 Christ Jesus!

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." Vv.36.37. That is the way Christ speaks in our today's Gospel.

In our days these words are repeatedly understood to mean that Christ intended to say that absolutely all judging and condemning on the part of man is sinful and unchristian. However, that this is not so is so clear that it seems almost superfluous to offer proof.

I ask you: when Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not," did he deny the government the power to judge its citizens and, if found guilty, to pronounce the sentence of condemnation upon them? Absolutely not! God says to earthly judges in his Word, "Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment." 2 Chr 19:6. And as far as condemning is concerned, the holy apostle says of the government, "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Rom 13:4. Yes, even the 9th chapter of Genesis has this to say, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." V.6.

Again I ask you: When Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not," did he intend to deny to parents and teachers the power to judge the children entrusted to them and to take the rod of punishment from their hand? If the parents or teachers want to punish them, dare the son or daughter say to them, Do you not know that Christ has commanded you to be merciful and to forgive? How dare you judge and condemn me? Absolutely not!

Judging and condemning by parents and teachers is not only permitted but is commanded at the risk of God's displeasure and is laid upon them as a holy duty. Solomon says, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Prov 13:24. "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from death." Prov 23:13.14. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." Prov 22:15.

How earnest God is in commanding this we see in the example of the high

priest Eli. Because he did not judge and condemn his godless sons, God commanded that he be told: because he knew that his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not, that God has sworn that this iniquity shall not be purged. And what happened? His sons died miserably in war and when Eli received the news, he by God's judgment broke his neck. A powerful warning example for all parents who do not exercise that needed earnest discipline upon their children.

Once again I ask you: When Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not," did he deny to Christians the right to judge a single word or deed of man? did he command them to praise every word, to call all blessed, and to reprimand no sin? Absolutely not!

On the contrary, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things," 2:15; and Christ expressly says in the well-known passage of Matthew 18, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone....But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more....And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican," vv.15-17, that is, consider him a heathen, who is excluded from the kingdom and God's grace.

So it simply is not true that the judging and condemning of sin is denied Christians; really, they are earnestly commanded to exercise this power. And Christians are to do this not only amongst themselves but also over against the children of the world, for Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Eph 5:11. And that no one may think that such a reprimand is against love and is a sign of hate, Moses writes, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." Lev 19:17.

My friends, from all this you clearly see: when Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not," he could not possibly have forbidden every judgement and sentence of condemnation expressed by man. Well, what does Christ really then forbid? It is most important to learn to know the true meaning of these words, because they are very often misunderstood and therefore also are very often misapplied. Permit me now to show you the misunderstanding and misuse, and the true understanding and the true use of those words.

The text. Luke 6:36-42.

As already mentioned we will now consider the words of Christ:

"JUDGE NOT! CONDEMN NOT!"

- I. How These Words are Misunderstood, and
- II. How They are to be Understood Correctly.

I.

Christ's words, "Judge not, condemn not," are especially in our days repeatedly perverted in a truly blasphemous way; one can express it in no other way.

This is the first perversion of these words: if a minister preaches that all who do not believe in Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners, will certainly be eternally lost, or if a Christian layman testifies this to the world, not seldom are they told: Have you not read what Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not"? With these words they suppose that they have clearly proven that no one dares to deny salvation to another. They say: Christ came into

the world, in order to teach men that God is a Father of all men and that all men are his dear children, that God is patient with our failings, weaknesses, and sins, and that he can eternally reject and condemn no person. This, however, is a frightful misunderstanding of those words of Christ.

Christ has indeed revealed that God loves all men and that he wants the death and damnation of no person, that, on the other hand, it is his earnest will that all men be saved; but Christ has at the same time revealed that he himself is the only way and the only door to heaven, that, therefore, all who do not believe in him must be lost. Christ says, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Jn 3:18b. Again he says, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Jn 8:24. Again he says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mk 16:16.

Anyone who confesses this to the world, in no way does he go against Christ's prohibition, "Judge not, condemn not," for he does not judge and condemn of himself but merely pronounces the judgment and damnation which God has already clearly pronounced. As little as he sets himself up as a despotic, officious judge who says to a murderer, that according to the laws of his land a murderer forfeits his life and has deserved death, so little is he a judge without an inward call who says to an unbeliever, that according to the laws of God's kingdom he has forfeited eternal life and deserved eternal death, that is, eternal damnation, and will certainly go into it if he is not converted. Not only can every Christian layman tell this to the world, but he also should; for since every Christian is obligated in his calling to assist in the conversion and salvation of others, so is he also obligated to tell every unbeliever to his face without pulling any punches that all who do not truly believe in Christ will be lost as certainly as there is a God in heaven and his Word is the truth.

And ministers especially have the duty to tell all those who are not yet converted, who still live in their sins and do not yet truly believe, that they do not stand in God's grace, that they are under God's wrath and curse, and that they are traveling the broad way which inevitably leads to eternal ruin if they are not converted. The Prophet Ezekiel has a clear proof passage to show this, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." Ezek 3:17,18. We see from this that they are not real evangelical preachers who preach judgment and damnation to no one; they are the rather murderers of souls. Scripture cries out to such, "Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls!...Ye strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way." Ezek 13:18,22.

If, therefore, a minister preaches that all unbelievers and wilful sinners are excluded from salvation, or if he says that to an individual sinners who either admits his unbelief or will not forsake his sin: You are marked for death! it is a godless perversion to say that such a preacher has acted contrary to the passage, "Judge not, condemn not."

All who still believe in the Holy Scriptures will certainly admit that from their heart; but there are not a few who consider the Bible as God's Word and who when not merely sins but also errors are earnestly rebuked and rejected, and manifest, stiff-necked, false teachers are severely attacked, yes, are finally cursed, who then complain about lovelessness and harshness and exclaim: How does

our gentle Savior speak? Does he not say, "Judge not, condemn not"? They say a preacher should preach God's Word, but that it is against Christian love to reprimand others who do not explain the Word as he does; a preacher can indeed try to prove his faith and religion but it is loveless to despise and reject the belief and religion of others. A preacher of the Gospel must be a messenger of peace; it is therefore improper when he calls those heterodox, errorists, and heretics who believe differently, and when he reproaches other confessions as being false churches and sects; those who confess that the Bible is God's Word and that Christ is God's Son, who in the main are agreed in the chief teachings of the Scripture, they should also in fairness extend the hand of brotherhood to each other. Even if several depart from one or the other teaching, one dare not break the bond of peace with them; one dare not be that strict; certainly God will not be so particular about a little departure from his Word. In a warning voice Christ says, "Judge not, condemn not."

Though, my friends, nowadays many understand Christ's words as though he intended to forbid judging and pronouncing the sentence of damnation upon such false teachings and teachers, this also is a gross misunderstanding. In God's Word not only sin but also the departure from the Bible is called something worthy of damnation. Thus we read at the close of Scripture, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Rev 22:18b.19.

Can there be a more frightful threat than this one for all who either add something to God's Word or who take away something from it? Must not, therefore, every Christian be very exact about it? and is it not, therefore, every Christian's duty to reprimand not only sin but just as earnestly every departure from the Bible? And have not Christ and his apostles given many admonitions to examine the spirits and to be on guard against false prophets? If this were forbidden Christians, how could they judge such teachings and teachers? Does not St. Paul say, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject"? Tit 3:10; how could Christians do that if they would not dare call a single errorist a heretic?

Now if every Christian is to do this, then a minister of the Gospel is doubly called to do it. A minister is to be a shepherd of Christ's sheep; he, therefore, does his duty only when he not only feeds the sheep with the pure Gospel but also warns them against the wolves. A minister should be like those workers on the temple at Jerusalem; in the one hand they held the trowel and in the other the sword; they not only built but also battled against those who wanted to prevent their building. Therefore, St. Paul says, "A bishop must be blameless,...holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For," he adds, "there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not." Tit 1:7.9-11.

Ministers who do not do this, who are not zealous for the pure doctrine and do not rebuke false doctrine, who consider all religions of equal merit and, therefore, accept all heterodox into their brotherhood, they are called lukewarm in God's Word, who are neither hot nor cold, and whom the Lord will spue out of his mouth. We read of them, "The prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar....They seduce my people saying, Peace; and there was no peace," Ezek 22:28; 13:10; yes, the Prophet Isaiah says of them, "They are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber." Is 56:10.

My friends, do not let yourselves be deceived by the spirit of false love.

which today is poured out upon so many. Recall: that shows love to one's neighbor if he does not let him peacefully continue in his error but shows him the danger in which he error hurls him. Remember: Christ was love personified, and yet he pitilessly exposed their false teachings to the hypocritical Pharisees, pronounced woe upon them, and called them children of the devil, hypocrites, and deceivers. Recall: even Paul certainly had a heart full of true Christian love, and yet he cursed all who would preach another Gospel than he preached. Remember: David was also a man who proved his love of his enemies by his deeds and yet he says, "I hated them that regard lying vanities." Ps 31:7. "I hate vain thoughts." Ps 119:113. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?...I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies." Ps 139:21,22.

This much is certain: neither the judging and condemning of manifest sins, nor manifest unbelief, nor manifest errors has Christ forbidden with the words, "Judge not, condemn not." But, you will say, what does Christ then forbid? The correct understanding of these words is the second point which we shall ponder.

II.

My friends, if we always take the words of Christ as they read, we can never go wrong nor will we ever get the wrong ideas, for no one speaks more clearly, distinctly, and intelligibly than Christ. However, if we take the words, "Judge not, condemn not," simply as they read, they just can have no other meaning than this: You men have no right to set yourselves up as the judge of someone else; God alone is the Judge and will not surrender this honor to any creature; every judgment on man's part is, therefore, sinful, unchristian, and a usurpation of God's judgeship when it is something else than God's own judgment.

You see from this: with these words Christ intends, first of all, to rebuke all those who judge and condemn others not according to God's Word but according to their own thoughts. There are men who judge the hearts of others; they see that another person does something which would indeed be wicked if he had evil intentions, but which would be good if he had good intentions; but they assume that their neighbor had evil intentions and explain his action in the worst possible way. Or they see that their neighbor's deed has the appearance of evil; of course, they do not know definitely whether it is more than an evil appearance or not, and yet they believe the worst. Or they hear an evil report of their neighbor; they do not try to find out first whether the report has any basis of fact; they lend a ready ear to the scandalmonger; they immediately assume that the rumor is an established truth and judge him of whom evil is spoken as though they themselves had seen it. You see, to such Christ cries out in our Gospel, "Judge not, condemn not!" that is, cherish no mistrust, no suspicion against your neighbor in your heart; believe no evil of him until you are compelled to do so because of God's sentence of condemnation in his Word because of some manifest sin; defend your neighbor as long as you can and put the best construction on everything.

It is not unintentional that Christ precedes that warning with, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." V.36. Here Christ shows that a person sins in judging even if he does so according to God's Word but does not do so in mercy and love. There are people who sternly rebuke sin, unbelief, and error according to God's Word, yet they do not do it out of hatred over against these ungodly things and not out of love to the souls of sinners, to guide the erring back to the true way, and to warn others; but they derive satisfaction from talking about the sins of others; to speak of the failings of others is something sweet; they feel a malicious joy; if the fallen were

their enemies they permit themselves to be guided by jealousy and rage; it does them good to shame these sinners and cause them to be disgraced in the eyes of others. They rebuke in anger; in their reprimand they presume that the sinner will not let himself be guided; they not only deny the fallen the state of grace but also call his entire previous Christian life one of hypocrisy and pretence and do not hope that he will arise again, that he will come to his senses and repent. To such Christ exclaims, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned," Vv.36.37, that is, let your judging be not only as God's Word has decided but also in love which bears everything, believes everything, hopes everything, endures everything.

At the close of our Gospel Christ gives us a third hint of which judging and condemning he is speaking. He says, "Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master." Vv.39.40. Here Christ indicates that God is displeased with the judgment of even those who, while they wish to lead others, are themselves blind, who, while they judge the sins of others, forget their own, and while they rebuke others, do not rebuke themselves. Christ therefore continues, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Vv.41.42. Here Christ wants to say: whoever, while condemning another, exalts himself, thinks himself better, and thus says in his heart as did the Pharisee: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, thieves, robbers, adulterers, fornicators, unrighteous" and the like; to such a person Christ exclaims, "Judge not, condemn not," for while you condemn others and justify yourself, your sin of pride becomes so great that in God's eyes the sin of your neighbor looks only like a mote and yours like a beam.

Would to God that now everyone of us would examine his heart and life; everyone would discover that by nature he is only too much inclined to sinful judging and condemning; would to God that everyone would be moved to humble himself most deeply before God because of this inclination!

Examine yourselves carefully whether this sin has not ruled you in the past. Let each one ask himself: Am I accustomed to judge my neighbor according to my thoughts and not according to God's Word? Do I follow my suspicious heart and always think the worst of him, or is it my way to defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything? And if I judge as God wants me to, do I judge in heart-felt love and with a truly merciful heart? do I do this in the deepest humility, in the knowledge of my own sinfulness and reprimanding myself before God also? Or do I judge mercilessly, deeming myself better than the fallen?

At the close of our Gospel Christ cries out to you, "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye," v.42b, that is, perceive that you are a much greater sinner than those whom you have judged heretofore, confess this to God with a broken heart; beg him for forgiveness and a change of your evil heart; God will have mercy upon you; he will take the beam out of your eye; he will pardon you; he will give you his Holy Spirit and change your heart, and then you will no longer judge of yourself but let God judge in his Word; you will no more judge your neighbor lovelessly in self-exaltation but in love and humility try to help him straighten out, and thus you will follow Christ and finally find mercy there in his presence.

Oh that none whom God's Spirit has now reminded of his sin through the Word will resist him, try to forgive his own sin, and thus remain in sin! Oh that everyone would let the words, "Judge not, condemn not," be written into his heart and think, speak, and act accordingly; they will guard him against committing a thousand serious sins here on this world, and then in eternity he will hear the voice: You have not judged, therefore, you also will not be judged; you have not condemned, so you also will not be condemned; where I am there shall also my servant be; enter into the joy of your Lord. Amen.

5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 5:1-11

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

In this same Savior, dearly beloved hearers..

The chief difference between a true Christian and a non-Christian or a false Christian is, according to God's Word, not so much the outward works as in the heavenly mind which all true Christians have. This we see in the admonitions we Christians are given in God's Word as well as in the descriptions and confessions found in God's Word.

Thus Christ himself admonishes his Christians, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;" Mt 6:33; once when someone wanted to follow Christ but first bury his father, Christ cried to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Mt 8:22. Similarly Paul admonishes Christians, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth," Col 3:2; and in another place, "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Rom 12:2. Likewise Peter says to Christians, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." 1 Pet 2:11; and finally St. John admonishes, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love, the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 Jn 2:15.

As we said, the descriptions and confessions of true Christians which we find in God's Word agrees with this. For example, Christ describes his Christians thus, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Jn 17:16. St. Paul expresses the same thing so, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Phil 3:20. "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal 6:14. "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Heb 13:14.

From all this we see: true Christians are those kind of people who are still in the world only according to their body, but their spirit, their heart, soul, and mind is in heaven. They have already died to this world. This life upon earth they regard only as a journey through a strange land to heaven, their true homeland and fatherland. Their thoughts, wishes, and desires are directed to that blessed eternity. Everywhere they see God's finger and his secret guidance, working, and rule. Everything which they experience, and everything which happens in the church and in the realm of civil affairs they judge on the basis of the relation which all this has with their own salvation and with the salvation

of the whole world. It requires no special struggle to withdraw and keep away from the world and its vanities; on the contrary, they have lost their taste for these things; therefore, if they are drawn into the world against their will, they are ill at ease; everytime they are again lost in the world and amused by it, a painful homesickness soon seizes them; they behave, as David says, like a child weaned of his mother. As Asaph says, their joy is that they cling to God and put their trust in the Lord God so that they declare all his works. Their happy fellowship is their fellowship with God in prayer and with their brethren in the faith in holy conversations and lovely spiritual songs. To hear, read, and study God's Word they do not regard a burden but a joy, as eating and drinking is for the hungry and thirsty. They do not flee from the thoughts of death; rather, they are a pleasant occupation. "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work," Job 7:2 so their soul yearns for the end of this earthly life.

Well now, my friends, should not true Christians accordingly be most impractical people for this life and for this world? Should not their mind, directed only toward heavenly things, necessarily result in their being negligent and unfaithful in their earthly calling? Many would indeed believe this, and many enemies of Christianity, among others Emperor Julian the Apostate, have also actually raised this objection against Christianity: it cannot be the true religion because it makes people incapable of promoting the welfare of the world in temporal and earthly matters. But that is not true. The difference between an earthly minded man of the world and a heavenly minded Christian simply is not shown in outward works but only in the inner attitude.

Therefore, it simply is not true that heavenly minded Christians are unfaithful in their earthly calling; in fact, they alone show true faithfulness. This we see from our today's Gospel in Peter's example. Therefore, let the study of his example in this story be the subject of our today's devotion.

The text. Luke 5:1-11.

In this glorious Gospel, which is more lovely than others, we are told of a miracle the which, if Christ would have done no others but this one alone, would be sufficient to refute unbelief and incontestably prove that Christ could not possibly be a mere man but truly must have been the almighty Son of God whom he claimed to be; for no one can do such a miracle unless God is with him, and, therefore, everything which he says is the divine irrefutable truth. However, today we want to direct our attention chiefly to Peter with whom Christ is dealing. On the basis of Peter's example permit me now to present to you:

THE HEAVENLY MINDED CHRISTIAN IN HIS EARTHLY CALLING

and I will present two points:

- I. How He Acts in His Earthly Calling,
- II. How One Becomes Such a Christian.

Lord Jesus! You have said, "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much," Lk 16:10. Thus you testify to us that you wish to know from our attitude in our earthly calling whether we have accepted the heavenly calling. Oh help us so that we do not refuse to listen when you hold up to us the mirror of your Word. If your Word condemns us, oh preserve us so that we will not renounce you! It is your will that we judge ourselves so that some day you will not have to judge us. It is your will that here we lament over our misery so that some day we can rejoice in eternity; that here we humble ourselves so

that some day we will be exalted; that here we weep so that there we can laugh. Oh, therefore, cause your Word to be in us all a savor of life unto life, a medicine for the sick, strength for the weak, and a seal for the strong. Hear us, oh Jesus, for the sake of your holy saving name. Amen.

I.

My friends, the first thing which we see in our Gospel about Peter is that he worked diligently in his earthly calling. At that time he was already converted to Christ for almost a year, but since Christ had not yet called him into the office of the ministry, he not only remained in his calling as a fisherman to which his father Jonas, who also was a fisherman, had dedicated him from a child, but after his conversion he also proved himself to be only the more zealous in his calling. Therefore, according to our Gospel he was not only found by Christ busy at diligently washing his nets, but he could also say to Christ about himself and his companions, "Master, we have toiled all the night," v.5; yes, when Christ commanded him to sail out to deep water in broad daylight and let down his nets, he did not excuse himself by saying that he had already worked the whole night and now deeded the day for rest, but he followed the call for new labors without delay.

See from this: a converted Christian reveals his heavenly mind not by despising and being derelict in his earthly calling, or by only praying and concerning himself with God's Word instead of working, nor by going from house to house and trying to convert others. Much less will he be idle and live on the benevolence of others, or even by usury or all kinds of speculations earn his money and goods in order to be able to live on the labors of others without himself laboring.

No, his heavenly mind shows itself in the very fact that he is so much the more diligent in his earthly calling. At times he indeed allows himself to relax but this he does not because he is lazy or loves pleasure but to become so much the more fit and alert for new labors in this way. Time has now become most precious; every hour in which he is unnecessarily idle he regards as a great loss and he begs God for forgiveness for this. Moreover, if a heavenly minded Christian is working for others, his boss can rely on him. Not only is there no better church-goer than a heavenly minded Christian, but there is also no better servant and no better maid, in short, no more diligent, careful, and faithful worker than such a Christian. The more heavenly minded he is, the less he is ashamed of the humblest earthly work, and if it is the washing of dirty fishing nets.

However, my friends, not only does our Gospel tell us that converted Peter labored diligently but also the reason for his diligent labors. When Christ commanded him to set sail for the high seas in broad daylight and throw out his net, this was something completely contrary to his reason and experience. As an experienced fisherman he knew that if one wanted to be a successful fisherman, he must work in the night and near the shores. But what did he do? He says, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." V.5. This lets us cast a glance into the kind of heart and mind with which Peter was generally accustomed to do his work. He labored so diligently because he knew that this was God's Word and will; hence only in obedience to and trust in God.

There you see another characteristic which a heavenly minded Christian shows in his earthly calling; it consists in this, that the reason why he works is that God has thus commanded it, and because in doing his work he hopes for God's assistance and blessing. In matters concerning the flesh the non-Christians are

often like the Christians, yes, even surpass them; however, in matters concerning their reason for working, earthly minded people and heavenly minded Christians are as different from each other as heaven is different from the earth.

If an earthly minded person works diligently, he does this either from a natural pleasure in work, or out of necessity, or to become rich or honored by his work, and in trust in his own diligence and cleverness. But a heavenly minded Christian works because God has said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," Gen 3:19, and "Thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands." Ps 128:2. A heavenly minded Christian also finds a natural joy in work and thus he also earns his daily bread, but that is not the real reason why he works. Much less is his reason that he wants to become rich or honored. Rather, he works because it is God's ordinance that everyone should eat his own bread and do something which is profitable to his neighbor.

Earthly minded people always choose that calling in which they have the least trouble and the greatest pay; in our times and especially in this country most would rather be merchants because they think that in this way they can the most easily earn great treasures and quickly become "big shots." A heavenly minded Christian chooses that calling in which he believes he can become useful to the world according to his gifts and inclinations. If he is a merchant, he regards himself in this calling as in any other only as a servant of his neighbor and thus turns his earthly calling into a holy worship. Therefore, he will not stock mostly those wares which bring him the most returns but which his neighbor needs. However, whilst he wants to serve only God and neighbor in his work, he expects blessings on it only from God. He carries on his calling in faith. If he earns much by his work, he does not ascribe this to himself but only to God's goodness and, therefore, does not become proud; on the other hand, if with Peter he must labor even the whole night in vain, he does not despair, does not immediately change his calling but regards this as a divine test of his faith, his love, and his hope and patience, and continues in faith.

There is one more thing which we must admire in Peter in our today's Gospel. He had worked the whole night and had caught nothing, had only wearied himself and ruined his nets, hence had suffered only harm; then Jesus comes along and demands that he loan him his ship for a chancel and for this purpose row a bit from the land. Now Peter did not think: I have already lost so much time and can not possibly let myself be uselessly disturbed in my work; I have to make up what I lost; no, he immediately laid aside his nets, did what Christ commanded him, and devoutly listens to his sermon. Yes, after he at Christ's word had taken a miraculous catch of fish and Christ told him, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men," that is, now called him into the office of the ministry, Peter did not think for a moment, immediately left everything, and from now on followed Christ and remained his servant until his bloody martyr's death.

There you see the third sign of a heavenly minded Christian in his earthly calling! It consists in this, that no matter how faithful a Christian is in his earthly calling, he not only does not neglect his heavenly calling in preference to his earthly calling, but he always prefers the heavenly to the earthly. Whilst earthly minded people ignore their heavenly in preference to their earthly calling and, if they are admonished to be zealous in prayer, in public services and family devotions, and in matters of God's kingdom, they often use their earthly calling to excuse themselves and thus abuse the proverb: Serving people precedes divine services, heavenly minded Christians rather reverse this and follow the principle: Church services come before serving men.

First of all, therefore, such Christians do not unnecessarily accept such

earthly callings which hinder them in their divine services and is dangerous to their souls; if they thoughtlessly become involved in such a situation, they again try to free themselves from it even at loss to themselves. They wish to enter no field of business, and if thus they could earn all the treasures of the world, concerning which they could not pray every morning to God for his blessing and say: Lord, "at thy word I will let down the net." And then they think: as necessary as my earthly calling may be, the work and concern for my soul is still infinitely more important. They think that there must be time for hearing and pondering God's Word and for prayer. They think: if God would let me become sick, I would have to let my work and my earnings go; why shouldn't I do this joyfully and willingly for the sake of God and my soul? If they must suffer harm in earthly things in order to hear and ponder upon God's Word, they do not regard this as a loss at all but as gain. They figure this way: first I am a Christian and a member of the church, then I am a father of a family and a citizen of this world; first comes the soul, then the body, first the life to come and eternity, then this temporal life; first salvation in the world to come, then my progress in this world. Therefore, if a heavenly minded Christian can convince himself that God calls him into the preaching or teaching ministry, he joins Peter in forsaking his most profitable earthly calling and his most brilliant position without consulting with flesh and blood and joyfully becomes a poor, despised worker in Christ's vineyard.

II.

Nevertheless, my friends, where does one find such heavenly minded Christians? Alas, sad to say, they are only all too few! Countless call themselves Christians and in the first place are not once diligent and faithful in their earthly calling, or they are so but not for the proper reasons, or they trifle away their heavenly calling in favor on their earthly. And yet only heavenly minded Christians are true Christians and only they are on the way to heaven! Therefore, permit me in the second place to show you how one can become such a heavenly minded Christian.

Of course, Peter's conversion is not described in our Gospel but none the less it is clearly enough indicated how he became the heavenly minded Christian he was. We are told: when contrary to all expectation and contrary to the course of nature he made a miraculously rich catch of fish, a shivering and shaking fell upon him; he "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord." V.8. Thus we are given the key to the mystery of the heavenly mind which Peter clearly had. It is plain that this mind had its basis in this, that Peter had arrived at a living, deep knowledge of his natural sinfulness and unworthiness and the great grace and friendliness of Christ. Ever since Peter had arrived at this knowledge, ever since he cared no more for this world but only for his soul; ever since he had come to regard all earthly things as matters of secondary importance and the heavenly as the main thing; ever since he was afraid of every sin as of hell and there dwelt in his heart the inner yearning to live completely to his God who has forgiven him so much; ever since then he had no greater wish than this of not losing God's grace, in short, ever since then he was a heavenly minded Christian.

And my friends, that and no other is the way upon which also every other person alone can become a heavenly minded Christian.

If by God's grace a person notices that he still has an earthly mind and that, therefore, in this condition he could never please God and be saved, if he has the longing to become a heavenly minded Christian, it does not help him at all if he ever so firmly resolves to lay aside all earthly attitudes from now on

and become heavenly minded. Such good intentions help as little as a dead person can make himself alive by good intentions, a blind person can make himself see, a deaf-mute can make himself hear and talk, a lame walk. Nor is it enough for a person to beseech God for a heavenly mind. If this fruit should grow upon the tree of a human heart, the entire tree must be refashioned and improved, receive a different sap, another nature, another essence. However, this miraculous change does not take place in a person until he learns to fall at Jesus' feet with Peter and cry out from the depths of his heart, "I am a sinful man."

Therefore, my dear hearer, if you wish to become a heavenly minded Christian as Peter was, you must not only read and hear God's Word diligently but also and above all seek to know from it what a great sinner you are and how gracious and friendly Christ is toward you. If you wish to know this, you must not read God's Word only superficially but with the inner desire for enlightened eyes of understanding and with the constant prayer: Oh, Lord Jesus, open my eyes that I may know myself and you aright. And you must be in earnest. In your heart you must say as did Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Gen 32:26.

If a person is sincere, God will grant him his prayer, giving him a heart which keenly knows its sinfulness, a heart sorrowful and broken because of it, and the blessed certainty that Jesus the Savior of sinners is also his Savior. And blessed is that person who really and truly experiences this! For if this has taken place, the person is then also free from the dominion of his natural earthly attitude and a truly heavenly mind enters into his soul.

Such a person no longer wishes to seek that which is on earth, for delight in vanities has disappeared in him; his soul thirsts for heavenly things, for in the grace of Jesus God has given him a foretaste of eternal life; he who enjoys this foretaste, for him all the sweet vanities of the world is as bitter as gall and he flees from them, whilst wretched worldly hearts flit like butterflies from one flower of joy to the next until bitter death ends their fleeting brief joys forever.

Ah, my friends, do not deceive yourselves! Remember: those who once were Christians are the very ones who can the most easily deceive themselves, because they still know how Christians behave, speak, act, and walk outwardly; remember however: the kingdom of God does not come, as Christ says, with outward observations and does not consist, as Paul writes, of words but in power, that is, in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Therefore, a person can do and omit everything which true Christians do and omit, he can be zealous in God's Word and prayer, and live in greater retirement from the world -- and yet not be a true Christian. For as was said, not outward behavior, not Christian speech, no work, no walk, in short, nothing outward makes one a Christian but only his new heavenly mind with which he not only goes to church but which he applies even to his earthly calling. His treasure, Christ, is in heaven, therefore, his heart is also there.

May God then grant us all here such a heavenly mind and some day through the grace of Jesus the glory of heaven itself. Amen.

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6TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 5:20-26

The text. Matthew 5:20-26.

In Christ my dear hearers.

The Gospel of Christ is still, as in the days of the apostles, an offence to all self-righteous and foolishness to all the wise. In our days no doctrine is heard with greater unwillingness than the doctrine that man is righteous before God and will be saved only by grace through faith in Christ, the Savior of sinners. The sermons and books which show this way to salvation provide a nourishment which now satisfies only a few; most are filled with a loathing and contempt over against it.

The doctrine which now pleases the majority even of those who still call themselves Christians is that man must merit heaven by his virtue, by his good works. Wherever this is preached, there the churches are filled; there they give the herald an attentive ear; there they boast of receiving the proper food for their soul. The old devotional books in which Christ is extolled as the only way, the truth, and the life gather dust and most are ashamed of the faith of their forefathers who sought a gracious God and Father in heaven through Christ's reconciliation; on the other hand, the thousands upon thousands of new devotional books, in which man is shown how he must please God by his own piety and righteousness and become worthy of a better life in eternity, these are purchased, read, and praised.

Is not this a good sign that nowadays the doctrine of virtue and good works is esteemed so highly? Yes, one should think that; but if we consider how the world is, we must certainly admit that at no time is virtue practised less, good works done less seldom, and God's commands transgressed with less hesitation than now. Yes, we see that the very ones who recommend ethics most highly and hate the Gospel of grace the most, live the most unbridled life after the evil lusts of their heart. We find that the very ones who can speak with great enthusiasm on morality and on the great worth and nobility of man walk immorally, shamefully, and ignobly. We notice that now many loudly say that man is free and can not only desire the good but also perform it fully and by nature has great powers to live as the image of God; all he needs is a good education; and the very ones who laud this great strong will in man are the very ones we repeatedly see walking as the slaves of their passions and sins.

Tell me, my friends, whence this contradiction that most want to be saved by keeping God's commandments, whereas no one despises God's commandments more than they? The reason is this: the false teachers of our day do not preach God's Law as it is; sometimes they add to it, sometimes they take something away; they preach such a wretched set of morals that everyone hopes to attain it even if neither fear nor love nor trust in God nor true love toward his neighbor lives in his heart; they comfort the people if merely outwardly they fulfill the commandments and conceal from them that God is holy and his Law is spiritual and that even the smallest sin is enough to merit God's curse and death. Thus millions are misled, they consider themselves good people, despise Christ's reconciliation, and thus are eternally lost with their prophets of virtue.

Guard yourselves against this poison of the new false moralists; why even the Pharisees and scribes showed this false way to their hearers; Christ therefore met them and thoroughly refuted them. We find this in our Gospel. Let us,

therefore, sit at his feet and hear this important subject:

THE VIRTUE OF NATURAL MAN IS ABSOLUTELY INADEQUATE

- I. To Fulfil God's Commandments, and
- II. To Receive Salvation.

I.

Of what value is faith, if man is not virtuous? God has given the commandments for us to keep; keeping them is the true way to eternal life, and this way we go, is the way the Pharisees and scribes once talked, and that is even now the talk of the unbelievers of our day. That sounds so beautiful, for who can deny that we are obligated to keep what God has commanded us? Who can deny that it must please God when a person fulfills his commandments, and that God would gloriously reward such good obedient subjects of his kingdom? Did not God himself say, "Do this, and thou shalt live;" "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments"?

Though it would really be something wonderful if there were people who faithfully went this way of virtue prescribed by God, Christ in our text foils the boast of all those who brag of such piety and he does this by expounding to us just one commandment according to its true content and understanding, namely, the fifth. For of all the commandments, by this one it is especially easy to show that all the virtue of a natural man, no matter how beautiful it may shine in men's eyes, is absolutely inadequate to actually fulfil the Law.

Christ says, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment." V.21. Here Christ means to say: Your fathers who preached the Law have explained the Fifth Commandment this way: Only he who shed his neighbor's blood has transgressed the Fifth Commandment; he has committed a terrible sin, falls under judgment, and has deserved death; therefore whoever wishes to pass for a true Israelite and not fall into this terrible guilt and punishment should guard himself against lifting up his hand in murder against his neighbor and he will please God and man.

This teaching which the scribes and Pharisees had received from their teachers is even now rampant in many quarters. If a person knows that he has not purposely and violently take the life of any man, he "thanks his lucky stars" that he has faithfully kept the Fifth Commandment. If they read or hear the words, "Thou shalt not kill," they think: May God guard me against transgressing this important commandment. No, as I considered my neighbor's life something holy and precious in the past, so will I also in the future. When they hear the Fifth Commandment preached, all the rigid moralists of our day wash their hands with Pilate and say: Thanks be to God! We are guiltless of all the blood which ever was shed.

But in thinking that they err greatly. Anyone who can boast of nothing more than having never shed man's blood boasts in vain of having fulfilled the Fifth Commandment. This very Commandment contains in itself such great and profound demands, that all self-righteous must blush for shame. For no person is in a position to fulfil it according to its true meaning.

Christ continues speaking in our Gospel, "But I say unto you. That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the

council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

V.22. So Christ declares that one can transgress the Fifth Commandment even with his heart, and that everyone who is angry with his brother is in God's eyes a murder who is sentenced to the gallows.

Here Christ as though with a powerful clap of thunder silences all who say, We also hope to be saved because we have kept God's commandments. According to the explanation of the divine Lawgiver himself, can they stand up who can confess that they have thus fulfilled the Fifth Commandment? Who is the person who can say: I have never become angry with a single person? There is none. For by nature our heart can do nothing else; the moment it is insulted, hatred and anger arise within it. Anyone who wants to deny that deceives himself and others; daily experience positively contradicts this boast.

As long as a person, who is proud of the fact that he is a moral person, is not irritated, so long he indeed seems to be absolutely blameless. Many a one perhaps shows a great hatred of all deceitful and unchristian acts; he, therefore, openly attacks the secret scoundrel, reveals his crookedness, and publicly exposes him; he is most active for the good of all; he does good to all, helpful and generous toward the poor and unfortunate. Everyone often admires him as a man of outstanding character; they wish that all would be as good as he is; then, they suppose, righteousness, love, and happiness would bloom amongst mankind.

But if we watch such seemingly exemplary people when they are insulted and provoked, they very soon lose their holy air with which they were at first surrounded. Those who at first were so gentle quickly become angry; the degree of uprightness which they displayed becomes the degree of wrong with which they act over against those who become their enemy. Yes, if we regard the rigid moralists of our day who boast that they do not want to receive grace from God but righteousness: can they endure insults? Can they conquer their wrath at their enemies? Yes, are they ashamed of their anger? No, they display it openly to the whole world and show that if they are attacked they thirst for revenge; they say that they owe this to themselves and call their thirst for vengeance manliness and noble pride.

They betray themselves the most clearly when a Christian says to them, that with their natural righteousness they do not count in God's eyes, that they have not kept the commandments, that with all their virtue they still are not true Christians; then first that which lies concealed in their heart comes to the light of day, then their anger, their hatred, their hostility knows no bounds.

The Pharisees and scribes were an example of this. They boasted not only of having fulfilled the Law but most of them also lived in such a way that no one could speak ill of them. Everyone considered them as the holiest of the nation. However, Christ, the Lord, saw into their heart and saw through their guile. He, therefore reprimanded them and called them hypocrites. And the moment Christ had risen against them, they revealed of what spirit they were; for with a burning hatred they persecuted him who had spoken the truth to them.

Now can a person still cherish the delusion that he does what God demands of him in his commandments, when he does not actually kill someone, but is nevertheless angry with his neighbor, yes is hateful and vindictive in his heart over against him? Men can be deceived but not the omniscient God who searches the heart. He says, "Thou shalt not kill," he does not say: with your hand, your dagger, but: you, oh man, with heart, mouth, and hand.

Therefore, believe this, my dear friends: all who think that they actually fulfil God's commands are smitten with a terrible blindness, the which, if they remain in it, will cause them to lose their soul's salvation. You say: I am not a murderer, and you are that because of your anger. You say: I am not an adulterer, and you are that because of your unchaste thoughts and desires. You say: I am not a thief, and you are that because of your grasping after riches. You say: I am not an idolater, and you are that for God is not your greatest good. You say, I am not one who curses, and you are that for you still abuse God's name.

So, my friends, anyone who wishes can indeed perceive that the virtues of a natural man are absolutely inadequate for fulfilling the Law; therefore, hear in the second place how they can not help one receive salvation.

II.

Christ states this clearly in our Gospel, "For I say unto you, he cries aloud in it, 'That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'" V.20.

Oh yes, it is true that in many places Holy Scripture promises salvation to those who keep the Law, but only to those who keep it perfectly to the letter in thoughts, words, and deeds. You see from this, how craftily the false teachers of our times act. They preach: It is not clearly written in Scripture: He that acts upright is upright? Does not Christ himself say: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments?" Mt 19:17b. You see, they say, it all depends upon doing and keeping the commandments, not upon faith. But they are liars who use the Holy Scriptures as a cloak for their false doctrine, for they fear that if they flatly repudiate the Scriptures no one will give them money for their preaching; for it is that alone which they seek. And so they are silent about the fact that according to the Scriptures the promise of the kingdom of heaven is given only to those who perfectly fulfil the Law. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Mt 5:48. And James says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." James 2:10.11. Of that the false prophets of virtue are silent. They dull the sharp two-edged sword of the Law when they add, Of course, you are a weak person and you will fail often, but God overlooks that. Just do as much as you can and you will be saved. But where is that written? God does not say: man should do as much as he can but as much as He, God, has commanded him. And God commands a perfect holiness. Therefore, any one who wants to be saved by his works, must also be absolutely holy and pure in his heart or he can not inherit eternal life.

My friends, do the false prophets expound the Law as Christ does? Does Christ say, as do the false prophets of our day, God is gracious and will overlook the weaknesses of men, he is satisfied if we just guard ourselves against the gross transgressions of the Law?

No, he tells us that anyone whose heart is minded otherwise than God's Law demands, and anyone who transgresses it if only with one word, is confronted with the threats of the Law; he is condemned as a rebel in God's kingdom; he has lost his claim to God's grace, to heaven, and to eternal life; he is a fruit ripe for hell where he must pay his debt to the last farthing.

According to Christ's declaration you have condemned yourself, if you ad-

mit that you are not without sin. Though your sins may be great or small, they are great, for they offend the great God. Therefore, except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The Most High has uttered these words; his verdict is irreversible; with these words the staff is broken upon all who want to be saved by their works; they are excluded from the kingdom of God.

And now will many exclaim, who then can be saved? Since all men are sinners, are they not lost without a chance of ever being saved? Yes, as long as they want to save themselves they are beyond help. Yet there is a way to escape the curse of the Law which strikes us all. The apostles describe this way thus: "As many as are under the works of the law are under the curse." Gal 3:10. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal 3:13. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Rom 10:4.

That is the only way of salvation. If we are frightened at the voice of thunder in the Law; if we own that the highest Lawgiver of all creatures is right; if we humble ourselves at his feet as sinners and cry to him for mercy, he cries out to us in the Gospel, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him," Mt 17:5; in him you should believe for he that believes in him should not be lost but have eternal life.

Oh, then, all of you travel this way. Do not wish to establish your own righteousness, virtue, and piety, for it avails before God as less than nothing. Only Christ's intercession can deliver you on the last day in God's strict judgment from being eternally rejected; only he can adorn you in his true righteousness which avails before God. Therefore, believe in him, embrace him, never, never let him go, and all will be well with you. Then in your death, when the comfort of this world disappears, you will nevertheless sing full of peace and comfort:

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.
Amen.

7TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Mark 8:1-9

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.

He who believes that God only idly watches the course of the world, who therefore lacks the confidence that there is a divinely wise, righteous, and gracious Providence who rules and regulates everything in the world, who therefore supposes that animate and inanimate creatures and hence he himself also are the playthings of a blind chance, such a faithless person is certainly most unfortunate.

Countless indeed are the evils which beset man's life and unceasingly threaten our welfare, yes, our life. Our body is actually the seat of a thousand sicknesses, wherever he goes he carries the seed of death with him, "in the midst of life we are in death," as we read in the old hymn. Wherever we turn, we see the arrows of death aimed straight at us. We board a ship, and here we are scarcely a step removed from death; we climb into a wagon or mount a horse and we are endangering our life if we make so much as one false step. A weapon in our own or a friend's hand can against our own and our friend's will bring death because of a small oversight. We walk down the streets of the city, and as many tiles as there are on the roofs just so many dangers to life and body threaten. Our house is constantly in danger and threatens to collapse and crush us or burn us to death. We plant our field with toil and sweat but hail, flood, drought, and vermin can quickly nullify our labor and send us failure of harvest and with it famine. Every stone in the way, every cool breeze, every rotten tree which we pass by can deliver us into the hands of death. Every storm with its flashing lightning speaks to us in tones of thunder of the last moment of our existence which could easily come then. In short, man walks upon this earth as though under a thousand naked swords which hover over his head suspended by a hair. Oh, how miserable is, therefore, that person who supposes that his life is subject to the control of chance! Everywhere he sees the jaws of destruction opened for him and he does not feel safe for one moment from being swallowed up by them. Anxiously he ponders the present and full of worry, doubt, and mistrust he looks into the dark future which he sees striding toward him as though armed with misery and death.

On the other hand, how confidently, how calmly, how full of blessed hope he can walk through all the threatening dangers of this world who knows and believes from his heart that nothing, not even the least thing, happens or can happen by chance, that his gracious God and Father in Christ directs everything, that without his will not one sparrow falls from the roof, yes, not a hair falls from his head, that they are all counted by God, that God provides for everything, that everything, great and small, has been determined by God, sin alone excluded! Oh, blessed is the man who can say with David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Ps 27:1. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousands at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Ps 91:3-7. "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Vv. 10-12.

Oh you believing children of God, you who through faith sit in the lap of your heavenly Father, how blessed you are not only in prosperity but also in misfortune, not only in days of joy and abundance but also in days of pain and want! You know: All things must work together for your good, for a gracious God and Father directs your entire destiny according to his wise merciful counsel for your salvation. Oh that we all would have such a childlike faith! How many burdens of care which often want to press us almost to the ground would then be removed, how many tears which we weep fruitlessly would be dried, how many groans we utter would be stilled, in a word, how much more happy and satisfied we would be! For a childlike faith in God's fatherly providence makes us happy even here. This present hour was appointed to awaken you to

The text. Mark 8:1-9.

The section of the Gospel of Mark just read, in which we are told how Christ turned little into much, has most wisely been selected for a Sunday of this year, when all the fields are yielding a bumper crop and are ready for the harvest. Our Gospel should remind us that in this very summer we are experiencing the very same miracle which the people in the wilderness once experience, if only we would look on our fields with the eyes of faith. Therefore, I will now speak to you on:

HOW GOD YEAR AFTER YEAR PERFORMS THE MIRACLE OF MAKING MUCH OUT OF LITTLE

Permit me

- I. To Try to Clarify the Truth of This Statement, and
- II. Show You How Important This Truth is for Christians and Nonchristians.

Lord, you are not a God who is far off but is near at hand, for in You we live, move, and have our being; bless now the preaching of your revealed Word to the end that we truly know how you watch over us like a father, provide for us, and graciously receive us in all misery. Oh, use this to pour a childlike faith in your eternal foresight into our heart, so that by foolish concern for earthly things we do not lose that which is eternal, but seek only that one thing which is necessary for our soul and let you worry about temporal things. Work this in us all through your Holy Spirit for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I.

That this was a great miracle worthy of our admiration, that Christ, as we hear in our today's Gospel, completely satisfied four thousand men, not counting women and children all of whom were fainting greatly, using seven loaves of bread and a few fish, this every reasonable person indeed perceives. In so doing Christ showed that he was the Lord of nature, the Creator and Preserver of mankind, in a word, the true Son of the living God, showed this beyond a doubt. Certainly everyone of us wishes that he would have been a witness of this miracle. My friends, if we would but open our eyes, we could still be witnesses of such a glorious miracle, for this same thing is still repeated year after year before our eyes. The very same Man who once provided a rich repast for four thousand men from seven loaves and a few fish even now changes the small amount of seed which we scatter into a bumper crop which fills our granaries in rich supply for the entire year and for millions of hungry. What is the earth especially during every winter but a desolate empty wilderness?

But what happens? After a few months God performs the astounding miracle: the naked trees which seem to have died during the winter begin to bud, put on leaves, and bloom until finally in the summer they stretch out their branches to us like hands full of sweet refreshing fruit. So we also plant the seed hopefully in the dying ground of the fall, and behold! unnoticed the kernel germinates in the bosom of the earth and toward the end of the summer we in amazement see that the one kernel has become an ear of one hundred kernels, bread for few into bread for many. Is that not the very same miracle on a large scale which Christ once did in the wilderness on a small scale?

Unbelievers and the unenlightened reason of every person says: No, this is no special miracle, for this occurs according to the eternal, unchangeable, inevitable laws of nature. What is so miraculous that the earth is fruitful? It was made that way. However, my friends, we regard the yearly harvest for no miracle only because it has become something ordinary, something which no longer

makes an impression. But should something no longer be a miracle because it happens so often? No, what only God can do is a miracle; as the creation, so is also the preservation and continual fruitfulness of the earth God's work alone; therefore, if we consider this in the right way, we catch a glimpse in this also a praiseworthy miracle of divine omnipotence and goodness.

After he created the world, God does not stand idly by in the least to watch how this ingenious mechanism moves on of itself; no, God himself is the power which continually keeps it in motion. God does not allow the ship of our world be tossed to and fro on the ocean of space by a blind fate, but he, God himself, it is who controls the rudder of this great ship.

If we would just observe the intertwining and life of nature, we would have to perceive even with the eyes of our reason that no unyielding law of nature rules of it. The powers of the earth, as we see, do not in the least set the great machinery of nature into such a fixed movement as would the winding of an ingenious clock. Rather we see how everything in nature proceeds so irregularly, so indefinitely, so arbitrarily in its way that we could not understand how everything could continue, if we did not know that a wise Ruler invisibly guides and directs everything in nature and brings coherence into this universal confusion. That today we have sunshine, tomorrow rain, day after tomorrow wind definitely does not come in that order; rather we observe an unexplainable change. We see how here and there the seed spoils, the blossoms on the trees wither from the last frost of spring, and the plants languish under the heat of the sun. How does it happen that this does not at times happen over the entire world and thus a universal famine arise which would depopulate the entire world? Or, there we see the clouds moving away so freely; why do they not remain many a year over a single country which they would drown, whilst other countries would have ground like iron, whose hard crust the tender seed could not pierce? You see, here we catch sight of God's hand which works and moves invisibly in nature, which leads the army of clouds sometimes here, sometimes there, and lets the gentle rays of the sun break forth sometimes here, sometimes there. Oh, if God would not direct the drift of the vagrant clouds which wander about without will or rule, the world would very soon close its storeroom to mankind and it would be turned into an eternally lifeless, unfruitful wilderness.

Moreover, remember how necessary the sun is not only in general, but how it must work on the earth just right, how it works so that the miracle of the fruitful earth occurs through it. For if the sun would not hold just that position which it has held for almost six thousand years, and if it would not have just that orbit which it has, it would destroy more than it gives life to. If the sun would have been closer to us, it would have in a short time burned the earth into a huge brick; on the other hand, if it orbit would be further away, the earth would soon freeze solid in an eternal winter.

Now how does it happen that for the past six thousand years the sun has never wandered away from its boundless path? how does it happen that sometimes it rises higher, sometimes goes lower, but at a definite point regularly turns about, so that the necessary change of seasons takes place upon our earth? How does it happen that this lamp of heaven has not been extinguished even though no one gives it new material to burn. This torch of God must shed light upon an immense vault in which an infinite number of terrestrial globes must find room; how does it happen that this torch has not yet burned up? How does it happen that this huge mass of flames is thus contained in invisible boundaries like the sea in its shores? Since according to the laws of nature the clouds from time to time become laden with rain, how does it happen that the fiery sea of the sun does not according to the same laws pour out its streams of flame to incinerate the world? In vain do we seek the reason for this in the laws

of nature; we must rather go back to God, who, as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, constantly upholds everything by the word of his power.

Finally, do we not see that in nature the law of aging, destruction, and death domineers everything? We see everything from a blade of grass to mankind implacably subjected to this law. How does it happen that the earth, this universal mother of everything perishable, itself never grows old, even though everything on its surface gradually decays? How does it happen that this fruitful mother after a time takes everything back which came forth from her bosom, but returns it again in a better, rejuvenated form as she changes decayed plants and bodies into nourishment for new products? Who replaces those power to the bosom of the earth which have been used up in the past six thousand years? God himself is the fount of life from which the necessary powers flow unceasingly into all creatures. God himself is the pendulum in the great clock of the world; if he would remove his hand, it would suddenly stop and collapse.

There is no power within the earth itself to make something new, to give the flowers their fragrance, the fruit its sweet juice, the cedar its crown reaching into the clouds, and the grain the flour which strengthens life and health; however, as Christ blessed those seven loaves and the fish and thus they multiplied, so God still speaks his words of blessing every year upon the table of the fields and gardens of the earth and thus he converts little into much and gives food to countless millions of people and animals at his richly laden table. That is why we read in the 104th Psalm, "God, these wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth." Ps 104:27-30.

So I hope that I have now clarified the truth of the statement how God year after year performs the miracle of turning little into much; permit me now in the second place to show you how important this truth is for Christians and nonchristians.

II.

My dear hearer, if you are a Christian, then first of all, see from this that it is God's way to lead his Christians of all people often into the wilderness where it seems as though there is so little that they must languish. Therefore, you dare not think: Others are hypocrites, and yet they always prosper, they are lucky in everything, and always do well! on the other hand, I have honest intentions toward Christ and his Word; why am I the one for whom everything must go wrong? why do I receive almost nothing of blessing and well wishes? why do I remain poor and needy?

You should not be at all surprised, my dear Christian, that you have such a hard time in this world. If you follow Christ to hear his Word, then do not expect that he will lead you already in this life into a paradise of joys and abundance. No, whoever states that he wants to enter in Christ's service registers for battle under the banner of the cross, he should immediately prepare himself in advance for many anxious hours. All that Christ promises his servants is no more than food and clothing. He who looks for more, who wants to become rich must give up being a Christian. For the more faithful a Christian wants to be to his Savior, the more he must expect to become like him in poverty and humility in this life.

However, the truth that God still continues to make much out of little not

only causes Christians to be resigned to their lot, if God here grants them only few earthly goods and instead feeds them often with the bread of tears; this truth should instil in them even in the days of want the firm childlike confidence that God can also for them turn little into much and help them out better than they think. Remember my dear Christians: not only do you have a God who wants to take your soul to himself but who also carefully supervises your poor body and its needs; you have a God who is not only infinitely rich and omnipotent, so that he could in a second deliver you from every trouble, but who also, as you see from our Gospel, has heartfelt compassion even when you are merely in some earthly trouble; you have a God who not only performed miracles at one time in order to satisfy his hungry hearers in the wilderness, but who still repeats this miracle year after year so that he may give all, even the evil and the thankless, their food at their time.

What? If you believe this from your heart, dare you still be faint-hearted if at some time you find yourself in difficulty and trouble? During such days imagine that you are once again with Christ in the wilderness; then don't fret yourself to death as to where you will get food and clothing; in faith simply look to Christ's hands of blessing, he will, he can not forget you, and he will, he must give you what you need, and if he has to turn stones into bread. However much you may be forsaken and forgotten by people, you still have an all-knowing rich Father and Friend in Christ in heaven who thinks of you in your trouble, is near you in tribulation and when his hour has come will certainly and gloriously help you. Go out upon the fields and see the waving grain; see how God here does that miracle before your eyes, making much from little and learn to be ashamed of your little faith. Should a rich man have more comfort and hope when he possesses a great amount of earthly goods of which he could be robbed tomorrow? should this man have more comfort than you who have Christ, the great Miracle-Worker and Provider as your friend? Absolutely not! God's blessing is worth more than all the gold and silver on earth.

Perhaps in distress you Christians will think: Yes, if we were not such great sinners, we would indeed hope that our God would miraculously provide also for us and turn little into much, yes, make everything out of nothing; but we have been unfaithful to God and have often forsaken him; therefore, we are afraid that God will punish us because of them, forsake us again, and be unconcerned about us in our troubles.

But where is it written, that God will deal with us according to our worthiness? No, no, my dear Christians, if your sins fall heavily upon your heart in trouble, then confess them to God; for if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins and to cleanse us from all our iniquities. Therefore, do not throw away your trust in God's help; he has truly promised you in Holy Baptism that for Christ's sake he wants to be your Father and God, your Preserver and Provider; this promise God does not take back. In faith simply cling to this, just say in faith to God: Oh my God, I am now in want and distress, keep your promise and give me what I need; God will not be proven to be a liar by failing to help you. Heaven and earth will pass away but Jesus' word will not pass away but will be true to all who in faith grasp it. The greater your misery is the more glorious will your deliverance also be.

Finally, what do you have to notice in this who do not follow Christ into the wilderness but still want to cling to the world? who simply do not want to know anything of God's Word, or who still halt between two opinions, not wanting to spoil things either with God or with the world? who still do not have true faith in Christ and, therefore, still do not know for certain whether you have a gracious or ungracious God in heaven? When you hear how well off a Christian is, how confidently he can cast all his cares upon the Lord, and how

calmly he can meet the future, should you not long to have such a blessed relationship with God also?

How wretched you are since you do not know how you stand with God! You cannot trust God to provide for you in all misery and want, and to help you out; for can you like a child trust him who because of your sins is still your enemy? Oh, then you also go as poor sinners to Christ and from now on follow him in faith; then you will also become happy people who can say with David, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." Ps 4:7.8.

Oh that mankind would not be such great fools and so blind as to their true happiness! Here God wants to remove all our worries so gladly and in eternity make us forever and perfectly blessed, and yet we go on and seek our peace in other things and do not find it; with tears and groans, with worry and unrest we go through the world, despise the greatest treasure, namely God's grace, and finally enter into eternal misery.

Oh, may none of us here, therefore, let himself be deceived by his corrupt heart! Let us all give our entire heart to God; then we will be well off in time and in eternity, for everything else is shame and deceit, but God and his grace is our true, our greatest treasure. If he leads us here on earth through all kinds of trouble and tribulation, he does this only to show that he is a God who helps in trouble, and as a Lord's Lord who delivers even from death. And oh! how we will rejoice when some day in death we see the narrow way behind us and that shining heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city of rest, the dwelling place of eternal peace, before us! Then comes the moment when God will not only turn little into much for us but suffering into glory, cross into blessedness, weeping into eternal laughter. May God grant this to us all for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

8TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 7:15-23

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

The main reason for the lamentable condition of religion and Christianity in our country lies without a doubt in the preachers themselves. Wicked shepherds, wicked flock! Indeed, at no time and in no country is the office of the ministry so despised as now in our new homeland, nor has it ever or in any place made itself so contemptible. Things have come to such a pass that, if a minister does not want to be considered and treated with suspicion and contempt, he would rather not mention the fact any place that he is a minister.

But who can be surprised at that? What kind of men are they who here seek and accept the holy office which preaches the reconciliation? Sad to say, only too little is done to educate qualified ministers for our German people in this

land, whilst every year a great host of new congregations are formed who feel the need for a pastor. What happens? Unbelieving and ignorant men come who could not advance in Germany; here they set themselves up as preachers, let themselves be hired by the people for money for one year, and preach to the people what they gladly hear just to keep on their good side and earn their daily bread. What else can such blind leaders of the blind do but that they both fall into the ditch, I mean, that they lead their congregations with them into hell? These unbelieving and ignorant preachers who creep in everywhere are truly a curse of the German people today.

There is another class of ministers in this land which are better than those mentioned. Many are not ministers merely to earn a living by preaching; they would gladly preach the Gospel; many of them not only lack the true knowledge of the true, pure doctrine of the Gospel, but they often knowingly depart from it, either because they would rather follow their own reason and heart, or because they are afraid of repelling their hearers. So here and there they somewhat dull the sharpness of God's Word; they would like to preach it to their hearers, so that all would gladly hear it, and so they are silent about that which could offend and anger their hearers; they do not earnestly reprimand sins which are rampant; they do not teach how every person who wants to be saved must repent and honestly turn to God. So what do they also do? They merely mislead themselves and the souls entrusted to them; securely and without a care their hearers remain in their sins; they never rightly learn to be frightened nor to apply to themselves lasting comfort; they never rightly learn either their corruption or God's grace and thus are certainly lost mostly because of the fault of their lukewarm, "half-lost" ministers who are afraid of men. For if a minister leaves that out of God's Word which attacks man and clearly presents his misery, then the minister uses the sword of the Spirit only for show; he himself breaks off the point and all his preaching is actually shadow boxing, completely in vain.

A third class of preachers in our new homeland are the enthusiastic sectarian preachers. They pretend to preach nothing but God's Word; yes, they pretend to be true Lutherans as long as possible in order to entice the inexperienced German people into their sectarian net; they also have the appearance of being concerned only about the salvation of their hearers, but they, as all false prophets, come running though they were not called, as Jeremiah says, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran," Jer 23:21; first they try to bring only anxiety and terror upon their hearers and then they mislead them into spiritual pride and enthusiasm and, sad to say, by all their enthusiastic efforts they load upon themselves the great guilt of causing the unbelievers to think that they are right when they view all religion and piety as enthusiasm and hypocrisy pure and simple.

In the midst of these false prophets there are very few who preach the saving Word of God in its purity, so that everyone can know how he can receive God's grace, live a Christian life, suffer in a God-pleasing way, and die a blessed death. In this country there is, therefore, great danger of being misled and being lost. If ever anyone had need of Christ's warning, "Beware of false prophets!" we certainly are the ones. In our today's Gospel we hear Christ speaking that way; let us, therefore, ponder this warning somewhat more closely.

The text. Matthew 7:15-23.

CHRIST'S WARNING AGAINST FALSE PROPHETS

Christ shows us three things:

- I. That False Teachers are Extremely Dangerous and Harmful,
- II. That We Dare not let Ourselves be Deceived by the Good APPEARANCE Which False Prophets have, and finally,
- III. That We Should Know Them by Their FRUITS.

I.

Nothing gives an enemy more power over us, and nothing makes him more dangerous to us than when we feel secure, pay no attention to him, and believe that he cannot harm us. This is also true of false prophets; they would never gain admittance so repeatedly and cause such great harm, if one were not so indifferent toward matters of religion, if one would not think that not much depends upon whether a teacher teaches the pure doctrine or not.

This indifference is nowadays almost universal. We Germans particularly divide ourselves into two great groups; the first consists of those who have fallen away completely from the old faith, who live on in contempt of God and his holy Word, consider all divine revelations as fables, often deny even the existence of God and the hope of a future resurrection, and, therefore, also depart at last like animals.

The other consists of those who still consider the Bible as true, recognize religion and divine worship as being necessary, and do not want to fall from the faith, but who suppose that one must not be so particular about doctrine; just as long as a teacher considers the Bible as God's Word, Christ as the Son of God, and faith in Christ as the way of salvation, that is enough; one must then be satisfied; one must then not fight over other points in which one does not agree but let everyone live his faith.

This indifference toward the pure doctrine in our old fatherland resulted in a union, that is, a church union between the orthodox, heterodox, and unbelievers, which was given the beautiful name of the Evangelical Church. The name is good and wonderful, but of what value is the name without the deed? Is that an evangelical church when a confusion greater than the Babylonian confusion is the rule, when everyone believes what he wants to, when one member of this church accepts the Bible and the other rejects it? Does not the apostle say, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all"? Eph 4:5.6a. That should be the form of the evangelical church.

With this indifference toward matters of religion which we Germans, I would like to say, have drunk in with our mother's milk, we come over to America; most then become out and out despisers of all divine worship because of the freedom here, or they are soon the booty of a false teacher. Just as long as a preacher reads the text from the Bible, though he may not preach the Biblical truth, if he has a little eloquence, if he has the gift of entertaining his hearers, he is not examined on the basis of his Bible and catechism, but one immediately hears, My, he is really a preacher! It was all God's Word. And if a hundred false doctrines are presented, that is not known or even considered.

But I ask you, my dear hearers, what does Jesus Christ say? He says, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." V.15. That is Christ's judgment upon all false teachers; he calls them ravening wolves; he calls them the most dangerous and harmful of men before whom we should flee as from ravening animals, because they tear and murder not our body but our soul and lead it into eternal ruin.

And so it is. False doctrine indeed seems to be something exceedingly

small, weak, and harmless, yet it is a poison which kills the soul. False doctrine is a false signpost on the way to heaven; anyone who guides his ways by such a signpost will travel the wrong way and finally will fall into the abyss of eternal death. It does not depend upon whether a preacher has very much false doctrine; one is enough to overthrow the whole foundation. Who would eat a loaf of bread which has only one little dram of arsenic? "A little leaven," says St. Paul, "leaveneth the whole lump." Gal 5:9. The apostle means to say to the Galatians who had accepted one false teacher: Just that one false teacher whom you have accepted is enough to cause you to lose your soul and salvation; that is why he adds, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal 5:4.

False doctrine is no joking matter; each false doctrine is dangerous to the soul. If a minister gives his hearers false comfort, they become secure and thus are lost; if, on the other hand, a minister withdraws all comfort, if he tries to keep them only in fear and does not direct them to Christ and his Word of grace, his hearers never have any rest nor the true faith and thus are lost.

So you see: it is extremely foolish to say: One must let love rule, not be so strict, and not immediately repudiate a teacher because of one false doctrine and not end fellowship with him. But I ask you: Would you out of love purchase and eat bread which you know is poisoned? Certainly not. Therefore, a Christian should not listen to a teacher who distributes the poison of false doctrine with the bread of life. A Christian should indeed always show love toward all men, even toward heretics, unbelievers, and heterodox, help them in all trouble whenever he can, and try to help them from their error in a friendly way; however, he should not have church and altar fellowship with them but rather die than let his soul be torn by one of such wolves.

The great danger in our former homeland simply comes from the false teachers who gradually instilled false doctrine in school and church in the hearts of young and old. In Germany anyone who let himself be compelled knowingly to hear and accept a false teacher committed the sin of denial and hurled himself and his children into great danger of soul; but if anyone should even choose a false teacher here where we are free, he doubles, yes, increases ten-fold the greatness of this sin.

Had Luther permitted love and not the truth to rule in matters of doctrine, we would indeed all still be papists and would still let ourselves be led to hell by the pope and his hypocritical priests with their false doctrine.

II.

And now many will perhaps say: Yes, it is true we must guard ourselves against such godless seducers, but are we to avoid those as false prophets who have much good in themselves, but who waver here and there in doctrine? Yes, my dear hearers, if a teacher persists in his teaching, even though he is convinced of his error, if he does not acknowledge the truth of the clear Word of God, if he perseveres in his adding to and subtracting from, he is a false prophet whom you must avoid. For Christ says, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." In the second place we hear clearly from Christ's own mouth that we are not to let ourselves be deceived by holy airs which the false teachers have.

Really, false prophets are only those who pretend to be the prophets of God and of Christ and are not; those who do not once wear this sheep's cloth-

ing, who do not want to be Christ's apostles are plainly the messengers of the devil and the prophets of the unbelieving world. There are many such in our new homeland. Many use their freedom to revile all holy things publicly and ridicule God's Word, the holy sacraments, Christ, and all his institutions of grace. Those unfortunate people are sold by hell to serve it; their tongue is enflamed by hell to speak for it; their pen is guided by the evil spirit to write for his kingdom. Anyone who likes such wicked blasphemers of the Most High God is not first seduced, he is already seduced; only he who has renounced God will listen to such apostles so that they can lull their slumbering conscience into a sleep from which it should not awaken even in the hour of death.

Our today's Gospel does not speak of such. It rather says, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in SHEEP'S CLOTHING." This, my friends, is what we must take to heart especially in our times. Sad to say, we are accustomed from our former homeland to hear such preachers who seek their office just to have a good income, who as much as possible seek good days, faithlessly carry out the duties of their office, on every hand show greed, vanity, and love of the world, act proud toward the lowly and poor, speak and act as respecters of one's person, who scarcely preach the semblance of God's Word but only the dry teaching of ethics. Sad to say, we are accustomed to such preachers because they were forced upon us. Now if a German comes over, if he sees and hears preachers who pretend that nothing but love toward souls moves them, who also show great earnestness and zeal in their office, who are friendly toward everyone, are not greedy for money, at the same time preach powerfully, much of which is from God's Word, admonishes the people to repent, and frightens and moves their heart--if a German hears such a preacher in this country, Yes, he immediately thinks, I have never heard that; he is really a preacher; he is a teacher of the pure Gospel.

Yet my friends, all the good things which one sees in a minister is not enough in asking whether he is a true prophet, whether he teaches the pure truth. A preacher can have a wonderful air, he can preach a powerful sermon, he can awaken many souls from their sleep of sin, and still be a false prophet whom one must avoid. For how does Christ speak at the close of our Gospel? He says, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Vv.22.23.

What an earnest warning this is! According to these words, though a preacher may have prophesied in Christ's name, yes, in this name have driven out devils and done many great deeds, so that everyone would have thought him Christ's worker, we still should not let ourselves be deceived by that; he can still be a false prophet who under the best of appearances leads his hearers upon false ways on which he will miss his heavenly goal.

Oh, how foolishly those congregations act who accept the first best person as their minister just as long as he looks good on the outside! How foolish to think: If only we had a preacher! Ah, in no other matter is such great foresight, such earnest examination necessary as in the selection of a minister. If he teaches us falsely, if he guides us upon a false way, it does not result in temporal but eternal harm; he does not ruin our body but our dearly bought immortal soul; he does not cause us to lose temporal things but heaven.

What a great inexpressible blessing it is when a congregation hears the pure saving Word of God, even though it is from the most humble, least gifted, and weakest minister; we will not be able to thank God enough for this in all eternity; what a great calamity it is for a congregation if they have a minister who

does not clearly show the true way to salvation, even if he can preach with the tongue of an angel. For the more ostensible the gifts of a false teacher are, the more dangerous he is, and the more all his work tends toward ruin.

III.

And this leads us to our third and chief question: How can one recognize the false as well as the true prophets? Christ answers this in his warning and says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Vv.16-20.

Christ means to say: if a person finds corrupt fruit on a tree, he should never let himself be persuaded that it is a good tree; if instead of grapes and figs he finds thorns and thistles, he would never consider the plant a vine or a fig tree; on the other hand, if he finds good fruit on a tree, he knows definitely that it must be a good tree, for a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit. We are to test prophets or preachers according to the same principles; if they produce good fruits, then they certainly are good prophets; if they produce evil fruit, then they certainly are false prophets.

Now which are these fruits? Are they perhaps works which outwardly seem good? Is it the appearance of a holy, pious life? are they great deeds and works? No, Christ says: even a false prophet can do all this; this can be his sheep's clothing, whereby he deceives himself and others. Which are the fruits whereby true and false prophets are to be recognized? Above all, they are the fruits of doctrine. If the doctrine is true and pure, then the prophet is also true and pure; if the doctrine is false and impure, then the prophet is also false. To be sure, a Christian minister should be pious, an example to his flock in words and deeds; a godless minister with his pure doctrine always tears down by his life what he has built up in his hearers with his doctrine; for the hearers think: if the minister's doctrine were true, he himself would live accordingly. Yet my friends, though it is true that a true preacher should also be pious and that a godless preacher will also soon lose the pure doctrine again, this is also certain that the pious life of a preacher cannot save his hearers; the chief fruits which one seeks in a minister are the fruits of doctrine. Even the Prophet Malachi says this, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." Mal 2:7.

And if you will ask, Which is the true, pure doctrine? I will answer as follows: It is that which one takes only from God's Word, from the writings of the apostles and prophets, changes nothing in it, subtracts nothing from it nor adds anything to it; for thus says St. Paul to the Galatians, "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.

I have repeatedly told you: in all of Christian doctrine there is one basic doctrine which enlightens every other one like the sun, and without which all other doctrines become dark and useless, upon which every other one depends: that is the doctrine of Christ, or the doctrine of the justification of a poor sinner before God through faith. Where this doctrine is pure, wherever a minister preaches the pure Christ, shows them how they can be righteous before God only through faith and be saved, if he adds nothing to that and sub-

tracts nothing from it, so that all terrified sinners have a lasting comfort in all trouble, in temptation, and even in death, that is certainly the true pure doctrine; for the pure doctrine of justification permits no error, and if error should arise, it will soon be recognized; where this sun shines everything must be light; for that is the real content, the heart and center of the Gospel.

On the other hand, wherever the teaching about Christ is not pure, wherever additions to this teaching are made, Christ with his righteousness obscured, his help and grace placed into a shadow, there the doctrine is false, no matter how holy and spiritual and heavenly it seems to be so that it would seem to bring all hearers into the spirituality of the angels.

Well now, on this basis examine all doctrine and you will not be misled by false prophets. If you notice that he has left the letter of God's Word when he, for example, does not believe Christ who says, "This is my body, this is my blood;" if you see especially that the Gospel is preached in such a way that Christ is obscured by it, that works, practises, and the like are laid upon men if they are to be saved, if not all poor sinners are immediately directed to Christ and his righteousness, if frightened souls are still kept from Christ, then the preacher is a false prophet and not a faithful servant of Christ and the Gospel; and woe to him who knows this and listens to him!

On the other hand, if you hear that God's Word is preached without additions or subtractions, if Christ particularly is preached in truth and purity and your souls are led upon the sweet pasture of his Gospel, then also perceive how great the grace is which you enjoy. Bear in mind, that God will some day demand a strict accounting for his precious Word. Therefore, do not disdain it, do not despise it, listen to it with diligence and heartfelt devotion, not with sleeping ears and hearts, receive it rather with a whole heart and bring forth fruit in patience. For where God's Word is preached in its truth and purity Christ says, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Lk 10:16. May our dear heavenly Father preserve you from that for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

9TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 16:1-9

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

Dear friends in our beloved Savior.

In God's Word prudence is not only commanded as a duty but is highly exalted as a wonderful virtue. Christ says to his disciples, "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves," Mt 10:16; and in his Proverbs Solomon speaks to his readers in the words, "Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister," Prov 7:4 and adds to its praise, "Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it." Prov 16:22. Walking prudently, not only meaning well, not only having a good purpose in what one does and says but also using the correct means to reach his goal, not only not acting from malice and against the love of God and his neigh-

bor, but also not acting foolishly and against the rules of wisdom, is necessarily also a part of a God-pleasing walk of a Christian. A Christian, who wants to do good but proceeds thoughtlessly, does not choose a fitting time, nor takes the place and circumstances into consideration, nor ponders whether in spite of his good intentions his project does more harm than good, still lacks a most important part belonging to the adornment and the proper form of a true Christian. Such an unwise Christian without wanting to does much harm and must often as bitterly regret his deeds done with the best of intentions as his sins. But where the wisdom of a serpent is combined with the harmlessness of a dove, there we have the Christian's true picture.

Though one must often complain that Christians of all people still lack true wisdom, most of the children of this world seem to have far outdistanced the Christian in fulfilling Christ's command, "Be ye wise as serpents." The children of the world not only know that wisdom is worth more than riches and power, they also understand how to take all the circumstances into consideration in their transactions and to choose the surest means, the most fitting time and the best place to attain their goal, so that they far surpass and shame even Christians. While, on the other hand, Christians are indeed often harmless as doves but not wise as serpents, the children of the world, on the other hand, are often as wise as serpents but not harmless as doves. The children of the world always seek their own advantage and to attain their greatest aims do not disdain to use even sinful means just as long as it leads them to their goal; they do not ask whether they sin against God or their neighbor by their deeds.

The world considers him a wise Christian who, as they suppose, sides with God and with the world as well; who, as they call it, takes the middle road in his Christianity, being not too pious but also not too godless; who is pious with the pious yet also, as they express it, who howls with the wolves; who confesses his faith where it will bring him honor, but who is silent when it could mean harm, shame, and hatred. The world looks on that preacher as wise who can preach so that everyone gladly listens to him, who out of love of peace is not too particular with the truth and changes the presentation of religion to suit the times and circumstances. The world calls that businessman wise who, in order to become rich in the easiest possible way, can purchase good products below their value and sell poor products for more than they are worth; in short, who knows how to deceive in such a way, that he still does not loose the reputation of an honorable, respectable, solid man.

Though the world thinks highly of its wisdom, and though it greatly despises Christians and looks on them as fools because they also do not deal as wisely, do not wish to besmirch their conscience nor offend God and their neighbor and for that reason in general are less prosperous than the worlding and let themselves be deceived by them, yet the wisdom of the world is not the true but a false wisdom; it is nothing but the most deceitful cunning of which a true Christian must be ashamed; yes, if a Christian does not want to be a fool in the eyes of the world any more, if he looks enviously upon the wise children of the world, and if he begins to covet their wisdom and embrace it, he ceases to be a Christian. The wisdom of the world is that light which from that moment on shone in the soul of man when the first people ate of the forbidden tree which they beheld with the thought: it is a "tree to be desired to make one wise."

As much as a person has to guard himself against being wise in the way the world is and following its evil example, nevertheless, we can learn from the world's wisdom in dealing with earthly things, how we should be even more wise

in dealing with heavenly matters. In this sense the wisdom of an unjust steward is presented in our today's Gospel to the children of light as an example worthy of our imitation. Let us direct our devotion to that though:

The text. Luke 16:1-9.

This Gospel just read has already caused many Christian exegetes great difficulty. Many could not reconcile themselves to the fact that here Christ says: the unjust steward who had dealt so deceitfully and consciencelessly was praised. Emperor Julian the Apostate who fell away from the Christian faith and became a great enemy of Christ even reproached Christians that in this Gospel their exalted Savior even praised unrighteousness. But he erred. Christ in no way praises the dealings of the steward in our Gospel; rather, he clearly calls him an "UNJUST steward;" is that praise? His wisdom is praised but he is also plainly rebuked for using his wisdom in an unrighteous way. Through his example Christ wants to encourage his hearers to be just as wise in good things as the unjust steward was in wicked things, even letting evil things serve for a good purpose and thus in a certain sense even gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles.

So permit me to present to you:

THE TRUE WISDOM TO WHICH EVEN THE MISGUIDED WISDOM
OF THE WORLDING ENCOURAGES US

Their example shows us that true wisdom

- I. Consists not in Living on Securely and Unconcerned About the Eternal Future, and
- II. In Being Earnest and Zealous in Doing Everything to Reach Eternal Salvation.

Gracious and merciful God! We must all complain and confess that by nature we are without true wisdom, that by nature our understanding has been darkened, and that we do not know what belongs to our peace, to our true salvation, yes, that in general your counsels, your way, your leading seems to be foolish to us. Through your Word and Holy Spirit you alone can work true wisdom within us. We, therefore, beseech you, enlighten us so that we become wise, that we do not choose the false way which leads to ruin but the true way which brings us to eternal life. Oh do that for everyone of us so that none, none of us will be lost. Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

I.

At the close of our Gospel we read, "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." V.8a. Now wherein did his wisdom really consist? First of all, that he had provided for the future.

He had made away with the property of his lord. The gracious lord whose property he administered had peacefully let him go on without seeing through his calculations. But finally when the report of his wicked dealings had come to the ears of the lord, he suddenly demanded an accounting in the words, "How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." V.2. If the steward had paid no more attention to this warning and threat; had he lightheartedly thought: time brings wisdom; had he thought: if things are going well with me now, why do I want to be concerned about the future? If he had not reflected that his accounts would show

how unfaithful he had been in his office; had he tried to hide the evil circumstances into which his affairs had come because of his poor management and to convince himself that all was well, would this not be the greatest folly? If he had now remained secure and unconcerned, if without thinking about the future he had now even joked and laughed, would not everyone hold him for a fool, yes, for insane? Most certainly.

But what did he do? He let himself be aroused from his feeling of security and said, concerned about the future, "within himself: What shall I do?" He earnestly reflected that his position absolutely would not continue as they had in the past. The thought that something would happen, that things would be different with him, filled his entire soul. He did not conceal from himself the fact that he was face to face with a desperate situation. He, therefore, added, "My lord taketh away from me the stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." V.3b. So he believed that he would lose his office and would soon fall into the deepest shame and bitterest poverty. He finally came to a decision and said, "I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." V.4.

By the example of the misguided wisdom of a worldling we learn the first point which is a part of true wisdom; it consists chiefly in not living on securely and unconcerned about the future, but in thinking of eternity and not hiding from onself the fact that he could not stand an accounting before God.

We also are all stewards, stewards of God, the richest lord of all the world. All that we have in possessions of body and soul, our money, our homes, our time, our mind, our understanding, our powers, all this is not our property with which we can do as we please but possessions which belong to God, which we merely administer, and over whose management we must some day give God a strict accounting.

Is it not a terrible folly that most live as if they were lords of all which they have? Is it not terrible folly that most so live as if they would remain here forever? as though there were no death? as though they would never have to die? as though God would never call them to account for their earthly life? as though God would never ask them how they used the possession loaned them? Is it not terrible folly that most always try to hide from themselves what a poor accounting they would give? that they could not stand before God and answer him one in a thousand?

That the unjust steward would have acted unwisely if he would not have provided for the future in time, everyone sees; is it not amazing that the very ones who pass for the wisest in the eyes of the world and also really reveal the greatest wisdom in worldly affairs, that these are the very ones who live on so securely and unconcerned about the eternal future, never earnestly thinking that they must some day die and appear before God's judgment? that they never earnestly ask: What will happen to my soul? What must I do to be saved? Can a reasonable person act more foolishly, yes, more insanely? Do they act any different than those who stand at the edge of a fearful, horrible, abyss and yet unconcerned about the danger lie down and go peacefully to sleep?

Yes, my friends, though they who dismiss earnest thoughts of death, of the judgment, and eternity from their minds and think only of how they want to live in happiness, gather riches, and attain great honor before men, may think themselves wise, they in spite of all their earthly wisdom are still the greatest fools. Only he acts as a truly wise person who provides for the future, who lets himself be awakened from his spiritual sleep and, therefore, thinks: I must die some day; but when I must die, whether after many years, or tomorrow,

or even today, is uncertain and known only to God; I will, therefore, provide in time for my soul so that death will not overtake me; I will join the unjust steward in asking in time, "What shall I do?" and not rest until I know how I also can find God's grace and be saved. Though they, who try to convince themselves that they are not such great sinners as God's Word describes men, may consider themselves wise, they would nevertheless stand in God's judgment; God as a dear Father would not immediately punish them because of their sins, God would also see the many good things which they had done: all who think thus are not wise but blind fools.

But he acts as a truly wise person who does not wilfully close his eyes to his great sinfulness; who admits his evil condition; who confesses that he is a wicked steward and who, therefore, joins the unjust but wise steward of our Gospel in admitting this and says, Yes, yes, that is true; my God and Lord will some day take my office from me; I would not stand before him; I would be found too light; I must think of delivering my lost soul and again win my forfeited salvation.

My friends, do you belong to the wise? or do you still belong to the fools? Do you still think that you are the lords of your possessions, for the management of which you are not obligated to give account to any person? Do you still think: I can do what I wish to with what I have? Are you still secure? Have you still not begun to go through your accounts in God's presence? Perhaps God has often knocked in sicknesses, in distresses and tribulations, or even through great blessings and miraculous deliverances and said to you, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." Does your conscience say that to you quite often?

Have you also listened to this warning voice of God? Have you begun to provide for your eternal future? Be not deceived! Do not say: why, of course, I am providing for the future for I come to church, I pray every morning and evening, I read God's Word.

This in no way proves that you truly provide for eternity. Examine yourselves earnestly: what kind of a concern does really dwell in your heart? is it the concern for temporal or for eternal things? In what are you most deeply interested: a healthy body in this world or that your soul will be saved in eternity? About what are you more interested: gathering earthly or heavenly possessions? remaining on good terms with men or in God's grace? having a happy life or being able to die a blessed death when your hour comes? I ask you -- your salvation depends upon it about which you dare not joke -- : Have you actually taken the question of the wise steward, "What shall I do?" into your heart? Or, if you want to be honest, must you admit that the concern for the salvation of your soul is really a matter of secondary importance as far as you are concerned, that you really are much more interested in temporal things? Well, then, know that there is no greater fool in the world than you, for you are concerned about worthless things, and you are unconcerned about the most important things of all upon which your happiness and salvation depend for all eternity. Though otherwise you may be wise, you are nevertheless blind concerning your true happiness; true wisdom does not yet dwell within you, for that consists above all in this, that one does not live on securely and unconcerned about your future salvation.

II.

Secondly, that one is also earnest and zealous in doing everything in order to attain eternal life is also a part of this.

This also is something we learn from the unjust steward in our Gospel. To be sure, he would have acted most foolishly when he recognized and deplored his

his wretched state and had pondered upon what he must do to save himself, if he had not also without delay used every means and done everything possible to take himself out of his dangerous situation. The steward, however, was not so foolish. The moment he had thought of a way he could be helped, he without delay went to work. He did not rely upon himself; he did not make the vain attempt of convincing his lord of his innocence, since he knew very well that this would be impossible; neither did he flatter himself with the hope that his lord would overlook his unfaithfulness in his office and his great wastefulness because of his past efforts; no, he chose the certain in place of the uncertain; he earnestly prepared himself for the time when he would be convicted of his unfaithfulness and be displaced from office; since this was not even to be avoided, he at least tried to make friends who would accept him in the time of trouble. He, therefore, hurriedly called all the debtors of his lord around him and commanded every one to deduct a specified amount from the debt owed his master. Thus he was actually provided for in the time of trouble.

As shamefully and deceitfully as the unjust steward dealt with his lord in order to help himself, and as godless as it would be if anyone would want to imitate the steward in his manner of helping himself, nevertheless his example encourages us to be just as wise in spiritual matters and in the proper way as he was in earthly matters and in the wrong way.

We would all call the steward a fool if he would have hoped to convince his lord that he was faithful, after he himself was convinced of his unfaithfulness: are not they, therefore, greater fools who hope to convince God that they are righteous, pious, blameless people, when they must condemn themselves as sinners?

We would all call the steward a fool if he would have hoped that his lord would forgive him for having so shamefully administered the office entrusted to him, even though he had had much trouble in the past: are they not, therefore, greater fools who hope that God will forgive them their transgressions of his commandments, even though they had labored and endured much in their life?

We would consider the steward a great fool, if he would have thought that he could have helped himself, since he as a penniless man could never have replaced the wasted property: are they not, therefore, greater fools who wish to help themselves in spiritual matters and not accept Christ's help and his grace, even though they have lost their soul's salvation?

We would consider the steward a great fool, if he would not have used the means available for his deliverance and yet would have hoped that things would go well: are they not, therefore, much greater fools, who know from God's Word what they must do to be saved, but who fail to do it and yet hope to be saved?

God's Word says that everyone who wants to be saved must repent: is it not folly to hope for salvation and not be converted and repent? God's Word says that everyone who wants to be saved must believe in Christ from his heart: is it not great folly to hope for salvation and merely hear about Christ and not believe in him from one's heart? God's Word says that anyone who turns to Christ in faith, if he does not wish to lose the treasure again, must daily read God's Word, pray without ceasing, struggle against flesh, world, and Satan, not seek to become rich, but consider all earthly things as insignificant, permit no sin, not even the very least, to rule over him, pursue sanctification in all things, be humble, gentle, generous, reconcilable, chaste, and unselfish and renounce everything one has, fasten his heart to nothing in this world, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: God's Word shows us this narrow way to heaven and no other; but who travels this way? Most never even set foot upon it; and many, after they had chosen it for a time, leave it and are again more concerned about temporal than eternal things, have the form of

godliness but deny the power thereof -- and yet they hope to be saved! Is that not the folly of follies?

Ah, my friends, let us become wise from the example of the unjust steward. As he used every means in order to make friends for himself with whom he found a refuge in the time of trouble, so let us use the means indicated in God's Word to make God our Friend so that when we die, he will receive us in the eternal mansions. Let us accept the known for the unknown. Let us sacrifice earthly for heavenly treasures, sacrifice temporal to win eternal treasures. Let us not hope to reach the heavenly goal by traveling the broad way of the world. Let us not hope to receive the crown without having struggled for it. Let us not hope to see the Lord without first living the sanctified life. If we have merely a historical faith, let us not hope to seize Christ and his grace, righteousness, and salvation with that. Let us not hope that it is enough once to have been a Christian, so that in eternity we do not see ourselves wretchedly deceived and must exclaim: We fools have failed to travel the correct way, the light of righteousness has not shone upon us, and the sun has not risen upon us.

Only he is truly wise who knows the true goal of his life and has it always in view, namely, that he will be saved and that he has faithfully used the means to attain it. Only he is truly wise who swears allegiance to the principle, "What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mt 16:26, and acts accordingly. God grant this to us through Jesus Christ. Amen.

10TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 19:41-48

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

There is such a thing as divine providence; there is a God who not only created the whole world with its inhabitants but who also preserves and rules it; who directs all that happens to us and leads all his creatures, if they let themselves be guided by him, to their goal, to perfection. Our very reason points this out to us. A being who can not create himself cannot preserve himself either. Therefore, if God would have refused to do any more in the world after he had created it, it would immediately have fallen back into that oblivion from which it was created. And if God would not rule the world, if God would not turn everything which man does into good, what would happen to man with his great, natural, universal weakness and sinfulness? Individuals would have destroyed each other, and nations would have destroyed entire peoples, and the earth would have become the arena of complete misery and distress, yes, a hell on earth.

But now there is God's providence which either hinders the evil, or turns it into good, which protects the one, holds back the other, and after war sends peace to the nations, who has his hands everywhere, works everywhere, and without whom nothing which happens takes place. God's Word tells us, "In God we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17:28. "From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their

hearts alike; he considereth all their works" Ps 33:14.15.

Even many Christians suppose that everything in the world is a part of nature and the result of their efforts; God lets things go the way they want to go; the world is a world of chance; this befalls the one, that befalls the other depending on the way the dice fall. Others say: everything is foreordained; the world is a machine which God has built but which he sets in motion and lets run down without being concerned about it. Finally, still others say, that God is at least not concerned about the individual nor about trivialities; whether it rains today or the sun shines, whether a child is sick or healthy, whether a poor person finds work today or not does not interest God; he lets that up to the wisdom and concern of man himself. To think of all these trivialities in human life is either impossible or not worthy of the great God.

However, my friends, no matter how enlightened such doubters think they are, they nevertheless show by such principles how greatly unbelief has blinded them. What can be more unreasonable than to ascribe an organized world to chance? Or what can be more foolish than to believe that God could indeed have created the world as a machine, but then, as it were, become ashamed of his work and left it? And finally, what can be more senseless than to believe that God is indeed concerned about the great things but is unconcerned about the little things in the world? If God is not concerned about the small, insignificant, the individual things, how can he provide for all the great things? does not the whole consist of little parts? Or, is such concern unworthy of God? It is not really the clearest proof of God's infinite greatness, power, wisdom, and goodness? What more wonderful thing can we think of God than this, that the fatherly eye of the Creator looks upon everything? that his love embraces everything? that his hand guides all?

Oh foolish unbelief! No, my friends, let us remain with that belief which God's Word reveals, that without God's will not a single sparrow falls from the roof nor a single hair from our head; that the eyes of all creation wait upon him, the great Lord, that he gives them their meat in due season; that he opens his gentle hands and satisfies every living thing; that he provides for the birds of the heavens and clothes the lillies and the grass in the field. True Christians have the duty of seeking out God's footprints wherever they are; therefore, scarcely a day passes for a Christian at the close of which he does not recognize and must praise the traces of divine providence.

My friends, as necessary as it is for a Christian to pay attention to God's government in the realm of nature, just so necessary and even more necessary is it in the kingdom of grace; yes, our salvation depends upon our carefully noticing the visitations of grace which God vouchsafes to us. The inhabitants of Jerusalem did not want to recognize them and the result was temporal and eternal ruin. Our today's text reminds us of that.

The text. Luke 19:41-48.

The Gospel just read contains a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem which took place 36 years later. Here Christ tells us that this destruction would be a punishment because this city did not recognize the time in which they were visited by God. With tears he warns all who would not hear and let themselves be saved. May our devotion be now engaged with

CHRIST'S HEARTFELT AND LOVING WARNING NOT TO
DESPISE GOD'S VISITATIONS OF GRACE

We ponder:

- I. God's Visitations of Grace, and
 II. Christ's Loving and Heartfelt Warning not to Despise Them.

Oh great, holy God! What are we that you descend and visit us who are dust and ashes and sinners, who forsake and deny you! Oh how great is your love and condescension! Alas, we must confess to you that, oh infinite God, you often, yes often, come to us and visit us, and we will not let you remain with us. Alas, Lord, forgive us this serious, inexpressibly great sin against your divine majesty. Come again to us, for without you we are and remain unhappy; come into our heart, dwell therein until we are inseparably united with you there in eternity. Hear us, most faithful God for the sake of Jesus Christ, your dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

I.

My friends, God has indeed left not himself without witness to any man, but has done much good to all so that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him. Yes, he is not far from everyone of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. But at special times God gives men special grace and opportunity to see what belongs to their peace; then, as it were, God comes closer to man than usual; he, as it were, himself comes to the door of man and urges upon him all the riches of his grace; in Holy Scripture this is called a visitation of grace.

Of all the nations the Jews had such visitations and the citizens of Jerusalem experienced them the most. Whilst the heathen world sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, in the country of the Jews, on the other hand, the sun of divine revelation shone at all times. Whereas the heathen were misled by soothsaying priests and kept in the most horrible superstition, God, on the other hand, sent to the Israelites from one age to the next holy prophets who, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, preached to all the saving truth. Whilst the heathen knew absolutely nothing of the fact that a Redeemer of the world would come, on the other hand, all prophets preached clearly to the Jews that a descendant of Abraham and David was to be born in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. These were visitations of grace pure and simple which the Jewish nation experienced above all others.

Without a doubt the most wonderful and the greatest was the one when God's Son himself walked and lived in the flesh among the people. This was a time of grace such as had never been nor ever will be, a time of grace no nation on earth except Israel experienced nor will experience. So many and such amazing miracles were never done at any time and in the presence of no other nation than at that time before the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They heard the richest, the most convincing, the most deeply moving, the most comforting sermons that anyone ever heard; they were the most powerfully, the most urgently, the most enticingly invited and called into God's kingdom. Heaven descended to earth in order to entice the inhabitants of Jerusalem into heaven. Not only was Zacharias moved to exclaim in the spirit of prophecy during this time of grace, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people; the dayspring from on high hath visited us" Lk 1:68.78b, even the people had to recognize such a visitation from God when they saw the blind receive their sight, the deaf and dumb receive their hearing and the ability to speak, the dead arise; they, therefore cried out, praising God, "A great prophet is risen up among us; and, God hath visited his people" Lk 7:16.

This visitation took place not only in the church by the preaching of the Gospel and in the homes through spiritual blessings, but also in the heart by extraordinary, powerful awakenings by the Holy Spirit. Through the preaching of Christ and his disciples there arose a great agitation in the hearts of all;

consciences were awakened; even the most hostile hearts could not completely resist the truth which was preached; even the conscience of the scribes and Pharisees said that Christ preached the truth, the way he showed was the only way to salvation. Even the roughest soldier had to confess, "Never man spake like this man" Jn 7:46; and in amazement the whole nation had to confess, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" Mt 7:29. It, therefore, often became clear that the whole nation clung to Christ, and when he entered Jerusalem the last time it cried out, "Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest" Mt 21:9.

My friends, every time God lets his Word be richly and powerfully preached to a nation or to a city or to a congregation and thus brings many to the conviction of the divine truth, this according to Scripture is: God has visited them. Particularly has our beloved Germany experienced many such visitations. When at the beginning of the 16th century the whole world was covered with the darkness of the papacy, God visited particularly Germany in grace, for there he awakened his glorious instrument Dr. M. Luther. This man once again blew the dust off the Bible and brought the truth of the Gospel and the whole pure doctrine to the light of day. Then the first apostolic times returned; entire hosts of evangelists arose; millions of souls came to the knowledge of the truth, and even the enemies of the truth became uneasy in their conscience and often had to confess that Luther preached the truth. However, pride did not allow many of the great bishops and learned to let themselves be reformed by a despised monk.

My friends, not only whole nations experience such visitations but also every individual soul. In the life of man there are times when God knocks especially loud on the door of his heart, when he receives more opportunities than at other times to know and seize God's grace. God is always visiting every person not only whenever the pure Word of God is preached, whenever he goes to communion, whenever he opens the Bible, whenever he reads a good edifying book, whenever true Christians speak with him about divine matters, there are also times of special divine visitations of grace. We often hear sermons which make little impression upon our souls, but now and then it happens that our innermost being is seized by a certain sermon, all at once our sins are uncovered by it which we never saw before, and we become frightened at God's wrath; or all at once a wealth of God's grace is revealed to us which we had never known before, and our heart melts for joy and feels, as it seldom feels, the sweetness of God's comfort; that is nothing else but a gracious visitation by God.

Moreover, we often go to Holy Communion and seldom have special experiences; but it also happens at times that before, at, or after we go to the Table of the Lord we discover and taste our great misery of soul or the great friendliness of God with special force; we are mightily moved and forced in our soul to promise God that we will deny everything and devote ourselves only to him; that also is nothing else but a divine visitation of grace.

Again, we often read in Holy Writ, but we may read many chapters experiencing only little of its power; but it also happens at times that a verse, a story, a promise, a threat, a teaching, a warning, and the like which we have perhaps often read without pondering upon it now makes a special impression on our soul; perhaps we are forced to wet our beloved Bible with our tears; we exclaim in our heart: Yes, of a truth, that is God's Word! we are filled with holy decisions; we are thus either disturbed in our false rest or after waiting confidently for a long time suddenly rest and peace and joy enter into our heart through a verse; that also is nothing else but a gracious visitation of our God.

Again, we often read edifying books, and it seems to us as though we could appropriate little from them; at times, however, it happens that we come to a

place which seems to be written alone for our situation; we find our innermost thoughts revealed and described; we are awakened and say: Oh, I must become a different person; yes, today, this hour I will begin a new life; I will become faithful in my Christianity; I will not become lukewarm and indifferent again; away sin, away vanity, away world, I will seize Christ, seek my salvation in him, and follow him. Oh blessed is he who has such experiences in the reading of edifying books! these are simply visitations of God.

Often we pray daily for a longer time without noticing any special awakening; however, it also happens at times that when we have begun to pray, truly feeling for the first time our misery, we suddenly are filled with a most ardent longing for God; our devotion increases, the words which we first had to search for suddenly flow forth of themselves, we might not even stop praying, we forget completely what surrounds us, it seems as though God were very close to us, we discover: God hears us; he utters his yea and amen to our prayers; we are then also compelled to pray most urgently for our brothers and sisters and close our prayer with praise and laud to God. Also such experiences in prayer are nothing else but precious visitations of grace on the part of God in our souls by which he wants to draw us steadily away from the world and closer to himself.

Again, we are often alone; we do not read, we do not pray, we let our thoughts roam; then it happens not seldom that all at once we detect an unexplainable restlessness arising within us; many passages of Scripture flash into our mind which reprimand us and many of our sins; an inner groan arises within us; we hear a voice which says: pray! pray! God's Spirit is knocking at our heart; all these are times when God particularly visits us and works in our souls either to convert us and bring us to Christ or to keep us with Christ, to strengthen us in the face of temptations nearing us, and to warn us against dangers which are coming. Trouble and tribulation, sickness, poverty, disgrace, and all manner of physical and spiritual distress which God sends us are some of these gracious visitations. Yes, if the cross enters a home or among a family, God also enters in; that is why Christians have coined the saying: The greater the cross, the nearer heaven; the greater the distress, the nearer God. During just those times when the spiritual Zion, the poor Christian laments in his temptations: The Lord has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me, then God is closest of all; then he remembers him in greatest love; then God shows that he has graven us upon the palms of his hands. To be sure, we come to recognize this after the distress has ended; "now to chastening for the present," we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, "seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" Heb 12:11.

My friends, we have seen from all this what are gracious visitations from God; let us now secondly ponder Christ's loving and sincere warning not to despise them.

II.

My friends, Christ utters his warning more with tears than with words; and where is there a verse which could admonish and warn us more beseechingly than the tears of the Son of God? With weeping eyes he stands before unfortunate Jerusalem shortly before his suffering and death; he, however, does not weep over himself but says, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" Vv. 42-44. So, there are two things which Christ wants to say with his tears: first, how great that love is which Jerusalem despises, but also secondly, how great

and terrible that misfortune is which would follow this contempt.

With his tears Christ says: Oh you citizens of Jerusalem, though your sins are great, all, all of you could still have been saved; for behold my tears; I love all of you; for all of you I came into the world; for all of you will I die; I have come as a Shepherd in order to see you lost sheep; I have come as a heavenly physician in order to heal all your sick souls; I have come as a heavenly Bridegroom in order to invite all of you to the eternal wedding; oh, how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her little chicks under her wings, but you would not. Remember, O Israel: not the host nor the greatness of your sins is at fault that you are lost, for I have redeemed you, I have sought you, I have called you to myself; the only reason why you are lost is because you despise my love, my grace which I offer you. But know: since I have called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid any attention to it, you set at naught all my counsel and did not want any of my reproof, then also howl over yourself some day when the day of punishment and revenge will dawn.

And alas, it did appear; thirty-six years later everything literally went into fulfilment against Jerusalem which Christ had predicted of this city. At the same place on the Mt. of Olives and at the same time, namely at Easter when Christ with tears lamented over Jerusalem's coming misery, there the Romans pitched their main camp. During this siege more than a million Jews died, partly by famine and pestilence so that the corpses, heaped up on the streets of Jerusalem, decayed unburied, partly they died in the flames and by the sword of the Romans, or they were nailed by them to the cross. Gladly would Titus, the Roman general, have spared the city and the temple, but the Jews had been surrendered by God into such twisted notions that they were not moved to any proposals of peace and thus incited the Romans to level the city and the temple to the ground. Let everyone where possible use this day to read the story of the destruction of Jerusalem and to ponder the horrible judgment which God let fall upon a people which did not want to know his gracious visitations.

My friends, Christ did not weep over Jerusalem alone but over all who ever despise his gracious visitations in the world. No one is ever lost because of his sins, for there is forgiveness for all, but only because they despise his grace. Herod was not lost because he murdered the children, for even this could have been forgiven but because he despised Christ; Judas was not lost because of his stealing, for even for this he could have found grace but because he rejected Christ's grace; Ananias and Sapphira were not lost because of their hypocrisy and lies, for even for this Christ died but because they resisted the Holy Spirit who wanted to lead them to Christ. There is only one sin which damns man, that is unbelief, or despising the Word and God's grace.

If a person falls, though it may be ever so deeply, Christ is ready to receive him again everytime he returns with remorse and repentance to him; but if he does not want to listen to his Word, if he disdains the precious Gospel, what is to help him? If a person loves the Word, he also loves Christ, but if he despises his Word, he despises Christ himself.

The love and grace which Christ once personally offered Jerusalem by his preaching, these he offers us now through the written and spoken Word; if we now despise this, we do the same thing today which Jerusalem once did to Christ. If we are reprimanded by God's Word, Christ is reprimanding us; if we are awakened by God's Word, Christ awakens us; if we are comforted by God's Word, Christ comforts us; if we do not accept the reprimand, the awakening, the comforting of God's Word we push Christ away from us, we close the door of our heart to Christ, his tears apply also to us.

Therefore, my dear friends, play close attention when you are convinced of

your sins from God's Word, when you are moved, when your conscience is smitten, when you are drawn and enticed by the Holy Spirit; then Christ is visiting you as he visited Jerusalem; then know what belongs to your peace; do not then cast divine sorrow out of your mind, then do not try to give false comfort to your conscience, then do not reject his punishment, otherwise you do not know the time in which you are visited and Christ's love is lost for you.

Then let Christ's tears move you and regard his Word as your greatest treasure in this world; then if you accept the Word, you also accept Christ, if you accept Christ, this will give you eternal life.

However, my friends, Christ warns us against despising God's visitations not only because otherwise we reject his love and grace, but also because temporal and eternal misfortune must follow upon such contempt. As a perpetual warning example God turned the glorious city of Jerusalem with its magnificent temple into a heap of rubbish, and its inhabitants in part died a terrible death, in part were scattered over the whole earth. Why did God do this? Because he visited this city with his Word, but they did not accept the Word and did not want to know what belonged to their peace. God would gladly save all; that is why he gives his Word; whoever rejects this, him God in turn rejects. God has proven this not only in the Jewish city of Jerusalem but also in all Christian congregations who have lost the love of his Word. As richly as God once visited Asia, so poor is it now; as gloriously as congregations once bloomed in Africa, so desolate is it now spiritually; as highly as God once pardoned Europe, so ravaged is it now.

Oh how I can therefore rejoice, my dear friends, that I can give you the testimony that you do not reject the precious Word of God, that you gladly want to hear it in its truth and purity and submit yourselves to it. But remember, my dearly beloved friends: the best, the most blessed congregations have nevertheless finally fallen. Where are the zealous Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Thessalonians to whom St. Paul wrote? Where are the faithful Philadelphians to whom St. John wrote? Where are the glorious German congregations of whom Luther once wrote to his prince, that they were like a paradise in which young and old were provided with God's Word, and from whom we have received our precious confessional writings and all the glorious treasures of our church? Once they were full of earnestness and zeal for God's Word but now that is gone.

As they could fall, so can we also fall; our flesh and blood very easily becomes sated with God's Word; therefore, let us never be secure; let us watch where the foe wants to take the treasure from us, let us incite and admonish one another so that everyone may remain with God's Word and regard it as the greatest treasure in this world. Above all, let us not give up in calling to God to preserve his Word and sacraments in their purity for us and our children, and that he would rule our hearts through his Holy Spirit so that we will hold firmly to it against all error, awaken us with it in weakness and indolence, prepare us with it against all apostacy, comfort us with it in all anguish and distress, steadfastly confess it before the whole world, believe according to it, and live by it so that finally we can die happy in it.

Abide, O dearest Jesus,
Among us with Thy grace
That Satan may not harm us
Nor we to sin give place.

Abide, O dear Redeemer,
Among us with Thy Word
And thus now and hereafter
True peace and joy afford. Amen.

(53, 1.2)

11TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 1

Luke 18:9-14

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

In this same cherished Savior, dearly beloved hearers.

No person can seriously deny that he also is a sinner. If he will not let himself be convinced of this through God's Law revealed in Holy Scripture, then whether he wishes it or not, his own inner judge, his conscience, will convince him of this. Most people, therefore, admit that they are sinners. However, in the face of the guilt which they have over against God, their Creator and Lord, most take comfort in themselves. They suppose that the testimony of no one sent by God, no Bible, no special revelation is first necessary to do this. They think that reason tells everyone what he has to do in order to receive forgiveness of sins from God. Some comfort themselves with the thought that God is too gracious, that without further ado he will forgive all their missteps; others hope to be reconciled through their remorse; still others believe that by their improvement in later life or through all kinds of good works they will be able to atone for their former life spotted with sin.

Without mentioning that reason is sufficient to teach a person that in regard to the points mentioned his own ideas are at least very doubtful, what insolence it is particularly when we men want to determine the very conditions under which God will and must forgive the insults which have been caused by us! Who without a special revelation can state with certainty God's thoughts? "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" Rom 11:34. Who has climbed into God's secret courtroom, who has already read in his book, in the book of forgiveness, or who has been witness of how God is accustomed to judge the sins of men? Or dare we perhaps conclude: Our reason regards this as an established cause for the forgiveness of our sins, hence, God must also accept it? Should not God's thoughts be different, be higher than the thoughts of men?

However, if we do not want to challenge this, I then ask you: If we have insulted only one human being, would we then as the offender dare to prescribe to the offended the conditions of the reconciliation? Rather, would we not expect that he would tell us what he demands of us for satisfaction? If it is regarded as inexcusable impudence if the offender of man wants to dictate to the offended the terms of reconciliation, and if the offended would be moved by just such conduct to refuse to be reconciled with the offender, how much less dare we intend to propose to the most high God, whom we have insulted, the conditions of the reconciliation and how much more would God be moved by such conduct to refuse us forgiveness and reconciliation!

Beyond a doubt, my dear hearers, those who themselves want to decide how God must forgive them their sins, who in order to become certain of this do not want to consult God himself and as they think need no special revelation from God, who, therefore, want to hear or know nothing of the Gospel of the Bible, they are very impudent and foolish. Their comfort is self-made and, therefore, a false, vain comfort; on the day of judgment they will with terror see themselves deceived.

Alas! If only the comfort of those would be a false, vain comfort who, building upon their reason, want to know nothing of any special revelation of God, and, therefore, expressly reject the Bible with its comfort! Sad to say, depressing daily experience teaches that thousands upon thousands regard highly the Bible and the Gospel it contains and have taken from this nothing but a

false, vain comfort. As spiders suck poison from the same flowers from which the bees draw sweet honey, so many take spiritual death for themselves from the comfort of the Gospel which awakens others to life. As the bitter salty ocean water does not become sweet from all the sweet water of all the rivers but turns all this into bitter, salty water, so the sin-loving heart of man is not cleansed by the teaching about Christ but rather they turn Christ with his grace into a servant of sin and a cover for malice. It is terrible to say it and it is only too true: Many have only the appearance of Christianity, remain hypocrites their whole life, are never converted from their whole heart because they believe that God's Word demands no more of them, that according to God's Word they need be no different, that God's Word comforts them in their present state. Unhappy people! The preaching of the Gospel is lost to them, yes, the Scripture says that it will become a savor of death unto death, and Christ, who is preached to them for their rising again becomes the occasion of their fall and damnation. Today we again have a glorious Gospel from which many have drawn a false comfort ruinous to their souls. Permit me, therefore, to show you this false comfort today and warn you against it.

The text. Luke 18:9-14.

Great is the comfort, my friends, which lies in the precious Gospel just read; there is, nevertheless, a comfort which many suppose they find in it but which is only an imagined, self-righteous, false, empty comfort. Permit me to speak to you today on:

THE FALSE COMFORT MANY FIND IN THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

It is a false comfort if one would conclude from it

- I. That not so Much Depends Upon Whether one Lives a Pious or a Godless Life, Since Everything is Grace, and
- II. That Conversion is an Easy and Minor Matter, Since Only the Sigh, "God be Merciful to Me a Sinner" is Required.

I.

My friends, two people are presented in our today's Gospel, first a Pharisee who certainly could boast of being pious and righteous, and second a publican who could speak of no good works which he had done and of no pious life which he had led; he had to admit before God and man that he was a sinner, and a great abominable sinner at that. What is Christ's opinion of both? Of the first, of the honorable Pharisee he says that he was not accepted by God but was rejected; on the other hand, of the second, the godless publican, he says that he went justified, that is, declared righteous by God, down to his house rather than the other.

And all of Holy Writ has the very same conception in word and example. In another place Christ says to the Pharisees, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" Mt 21:31; and Paul testifies, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" Rom 4:5. Therefore whilst Christ immediately denied heaven and salvation to that honorable Nicodemus when he came to him, he, on the other hand, says to the woman who was a great sinner, "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" Lk 7:48.50.

What conclusion do many draw from this? Many conclude: the Pharisee was

very careful in regard to his piety, he was not guilty of robbery, unrighteousness, adultery, and other gross sins, he also prayed diligently, even fasted twice a week, and gave the tenth of everything which he had; what good did all this do him? God paid no attention to it; God did not ask about his piety and his good works; yet God rejected him.

On the other hand, the publican was not so careful; yes, he had robbed where he could do it with a show of right; his only thoughts day and night were how he would acquire money; so he took no time to pray and fast; but what happened to him? The moment he begged for grace God still accepted him, still declared him righteous. It is clear from this, they conclude: a pious life is not so necessary; evidently sin does not make such a great difference as is usually thought; God asks little about the works of men; no person ever becomes perfect; and though in this weakness one cannot free himself of this or that sin, God evidently is not so exact. Everything depends on grace; Christ alone has done everything for us and must do everything for us.

See, that is the comfort which only too many draw from our parable of the Pharisee and publican. And oh! if only those would comfort themselves thus who had never experienced a bit of the power of Christ, his Gospel, and his grace! Alas, it happens not seldom, that a person who was converted to God from his heart does this; he awakens from his sleep of sin and was greatly concerned and worried about his soul's salvation, and finally he found not only comfort, peace, and rest in Christ, but he also received the joy and power to resist sin, to deny the world, and to walk in a new, truly holy life; but he did not earnestly watch, he did not pray diligently nor use God's Word faithfully and thus he lost his first love again; the fire of his first zeal is extinguished; he becomes more and more indolent, powerless, and weak; he makes room for sin again; he again acts like the world. At first his conscience often reprimanded him; at first his apostasy gave him much concern; at times he indeed bemoaned the misery into which he had again fallen with many tears. But finally this restlessness was lost, and what happened? Now he began to comfort himself falsely from the Gospel; his heart said: Why do you want to worry yourself so much? what would be the purpose of Christ's merit if one would have to be so careful about piety? Why has God revealed his forgiveness in Christ if one must be so worried about his sins? No, I will not be a self-righteous Pharisee, I will remain a publican, a poor sinner; I will not do good works; everything is grace anyhow; I will comfort myself with that.

My friends, does Christ with his parable of the Pharisee and the publican actually want to give such a comfort? Absolutely not! Christ did not come to give mankind thru his work and his Gospel the permission to sin and to reassure them, if they do not want to live a holy life; rather Christ has come in order to help all men from their sins, to convert them into new, holy people, and lead them back again into communion with God. It is true: Christ rejects the Pharisee in spite of a life blameless in the eyes of the world, in spite of his praying, fasting, and giving; however, Christ does not do this because a pious life was not necessary but because the piety of the Pharisee was merely an external one, having an aura of holiness, a hypocritical piety. By the example of the Pharisee Christ does not want to give those comfort who do not follow sanctification but rather frighten those who rely merely upon an external honorableness of which the world approves. Moreover it is true: Christ declares that the publican was justified before God even though he had been a great sinner and prefers him to the Pharisee. However, Christ does this not because a sinful like makes little difference but because the publican repented from his heart and honestly turned to God. Therefore, Christ does not prefer the publican to the Pharisee because of his sins. Christ does not intend to comfort those who remain in sin but only to give courage to those who want to turn from their heart.

Therefore, all of you who in the past have not regarded an upright pious life as necessary, and viewed your life in this or that sin as not so damnable, and have comforted yourselves with the story of the Pharisee and the publican, or mainly with the doctrine of the Gospel of grace, know from this: your comfort is a false, a vain comfort. Oh, therefore, reject this comfort quickly as you would a glittering serpent. Indeed, it gives you a little comfort now, but at the last it will lead you into eternal unrest; true, it gives you some hope of grace and salvation, but at the last it will of necessity hurl you into hell and damnation. Do not think that some day you will be able to appeal before God to his Word; this very Word of God in which you falsely comfort yourselves will some day accuse and condemn you. God will say to you: If you heard that even the Pharisee with all his righteousness was rejected, why did you not seek a better righteousness? And if you heard that even a sinful publican was righteous and blessed when he repented, why were not you also converted from all your sins?

Ah, let no one deceive himself! True, no person is saved through his pious life but only by faith in Christ; however, this pious life must show whether a person has the saving faith. "Follow holiness," therefore says the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews; "without which no man shall see the Lord" Heb 12:14.

Moreover, no one should be lost because of his sins; the gates of grace stand open for even the most deeply fallen publican; however, his conversion must at some time show whether a sinner has sought and found grace. Therefore, do not comfort yourselves only with the word, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," but also think of the verse, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" 2 Cor 5:10. Do not comfort yourselves only with the word, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" Eph 2:8.9, but remember also that verse, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" Jn 5:28.29.

You see that false, vain, yes, harmful and ruinous is, therefore, the comfort that not so much depends on whether one lives a pious or godless life, since everything is grace.

Now there is another false comfort which many draw from the story of the Pharisee and the publican, and it is this: conversion is an easy and insignificant matter, since it consist only of the sigh of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Permit me, secondly, to speak to you about this.

II.

That every person who wants to be saved must be heartily pious and absolutely dare not remain under the dominion of sin, in a word, that every person must be converted, this many still admit; and yet they do not prepare for their conversion but postpone from one time to the next this work, recognized even by them as absolutely necessary. And why? They find comfort in the example of the publican in our Gospel. They think that they clearly see in the publican the "how" of conversion. That is, if a person perceives that he is a poor sinner, all he need do is sigh to God, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" and this important work is accomplished. God is so gracious that he will immediately hear such a brief prayer. Consequently, many then suppose that there clearly is no hurry with such a conversion; one could be converted and be saved at any time, and if it were, in one's last hour. They think that the publican is not the only example; one

can indeed discover this in many other poor sinners; when the prodigal son called, "Father, I have sinned," the father immediately embraced him; when that great sinner came merely weeping to Jesus, he immediately assured her of the forgiveness of also her sins; when David, the adulterer and murderer, cried out, "I have sinned against the Lord," the prophet immediately replied, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" 2 Sam 12:13.

There you have it; many comfort themselves in this way by the example of the publican and other sinners who received grace. Is this indeed the real, true comfort? Absolutely not! When Christ describes the repentance and conversion of the publican in our Gospel in those few words, he does not want to awaken in us the thought that conversion is such an easy insignificant matter, and that it is concluded with a few gestures of humility and the sigh, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Oh no! Everyone will admit that Christ did not describe the gestures of the publican in order to indicate that he was a hypocrite; everyone will admit that his gestures were the true expressions of his attitude, of the state of his heart, and as such they should be regarded by us.

First of all, we read of him, "The publican, standing afar off;" why did this poor sinner do that? why did he remain, as is most likely, in the court of the gentiles? He did not consider himself worthy of using the privilege of a believing Israelite; he regarded himself as a covenant-breaker and, therefore, did not think himself better than a heathen who could lay no claim to the very least grace from God.

We read further, "Would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven;" why did he not want to? He was ashamed before God and men. He knew that he had angered God, and he felt how God's just wrath lay upon him.

We read further, "But smote upon his breast;" by this gesture he wanted to show how deeply he felt that not only his entire life and all his works were abominable in God's eyes, but that also his whole heart was corrupt, that this was a foul spring from which nothing good could come.

When he therefore said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" his anguish, the feeling of his sin and God's wrath had reached its highest degree; he felt like a criminal who had already arrived at the place of execution, who merely waited for the execution of the verdict of condemnation pronounced upon him, but who, convinced of the goodness of his judge, hurled himself once more in the greatest anguish at his feet and begged for pardon.

Now tell me: should it be something easy to place oneself into such a state in which we see the publican in our text? Yes, to copy his words, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and to imitate his gestures is, of course, an easy matter; but such a deep knowledge of his sins, such a living feeling of God's wrath, such an intense longing and sighing for grace from the very depths of his heart, that no man can work in himself; that reveals a state which only the Holy Spirit can produce in a person with the thundering hammerblows of the Law and with the dew of the Gospel.

Oh, how false and vain that comfort, therefore, is which you make for yourselves who think that the whole of conversion consists only in that sigh; who, therefore, suppose that if you now should sin you would quickly pray your sins away again. Ah, know: and if you should repeat the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," even thousands and thousands of time, you could not with that prayer pray away even the most insignificant of sins, if you also would not have a heart which the publican had which is crushed, bruised by remorse, repentant, and believing.

Now then, be admonished, all of you who either with a prayer from a pair of cold lips, with devout gestures, and with your miserable intentions think you have already completed your conversion, or have hitherto postponed it because you think that there is always still time for that, be admonished and

warned! Do not misuse the precious Word of God any longer for such a false comfort, and bear in mind: the work of conversion is a great, difficult work produced alone by God. Therefore, do not wait a moment longer to turn to God so that he can complete it in you. Above all, use God's Word from which to recognize your sins and receive the true heart of a publican. Do not say that you have no time for this, but remember: your conversion is the most important and most necessary act which you must do in this world; remember: one of these days it must take place if you do not wish to lose your soul forever; one of these days you must go through these narrow gates if you do not want to meet your eternal ruin upon the broad way; one of these days you must learn to cry out with fear and trembling not alone with your lips but from the bottom of your heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" otherwise you will some day call woe upon yourself forever.

However, if you will travel the way which has been shown, oh blessed are you! Then it will be said also of you: Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you; you have found grace; you are justified; go in peace. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." V.14.

If you have already squeezed through the narrow gate of repentance and conversion, then remember: you still have not reached the goal; you are first on the narrow way to heaven from which you can turn off unnoticed by you, if you halt between two opinions, want to serve God and the world, yes, which you could quickly and suddenly leave again by one false step, namely by one sin. Therefore guard yourself against security and false comfort, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and do not rest until you have arrived at the beautiful goal. Oh blessed, yes, forever blessed are you then when you have arrived! For "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Amen.

11TH S. A. T. - 2

Luke 18:9-14

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

In this same Savior, dearly beloved hearers.

Every person who is to be saved must first become righteous before God. That is an undeniable truth. To be righteous before God is to have such a nature that God's law cannot accuse and condemn us, but that in the eyes of this law we are guiltless and as we should be before God. However, God is holy and righteous. According to his holiness he loves only the good; on the other hand; he hates all evil, and according to his righteousness he can reward only the good and he must punish everything evil. As little as the holy and righteous God can love and reward the evil, so little can he save, bestow eternal life, and receive him after death into the heaven of glory who is not first righteous before him.

Why, even reason perceives this truth. The heathen who otherwise are so blind have, therefore, known it very well. Else why have even the heathen pictured vice as something horrible and virtue as something so necessary and lovely? Why have so many heathen most earnestly shunned vice and so painstakingly tried

to pursue virtue? And finally, when the heathen had fallen into sin and vice, why have they often brought so many great sacrifices as atonement? All this was done because even among the heathen the truth was a positive fact that he whom the gods were to save must first be righteous before them. That one could receive eternal rewards for sin and unrighteousness is a principle which has never been established in any religion on the whole world.

My friends, if the proposition is true that whoever wants to be saved must first be righteous before God, there certainly can be nothing more important and necessary for any person than to be righteous before God. That is really the one thing which is necessary for all men. What does it profit a person if he is indeed rich, happy, and honored in this world, but if he is not righteous before God? Such a person is like a criminal to whom one still gives all kinds of refreshment before his execution. Moreover, what does it profit a man if he is perhaps righteous and blameless before men, but if he is not righteous before God? Such a person is like a criminal whom his comrades in guilt absolve, but upon whom the judge upon whose sentence alone all depends announces the verdict of guilty. Oh, woe, woe to that person who has taken care of everything else needful, only has not seen to it that he is righteous before God!

As important and necessary as it is for every person to be righteous before God, just so blessed and glorious a thing is it when a person can truly say: I am righteous before God. He can join St. Paul in adding, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom 8:31. Though the entire world may condemn and reject him, he pays no attention and says:

If Christ, my Head and Master,
Befriend me from above,
What foe or what disaster
Can drive me from His love? (528,1)

Though all misfortune may constantly overwhelm such a person, that cannot cause him to go astray, that cannot destroy his happiness; he knows that, since he is righteous before God, God can never mean to do him evil, and that, therefore, everything which comes to him are nothing but signs of grace, nothing but blessing. Yes, even death cannot frighten him, for since he is righteous before God, death can only be a gate to heaven. Therefore when our Luther, after long and fruitless search for the certainty that he was righteous before God, finally received this certainty, he said, "Here I immediately felt that I was completely born anew and as it were had found a wide open door to enter paradise itself."

My friends, if being righteous before God is something important and necessary as well as blessed and glorious, who of us, yes, who in the whole world could not wish to possess this most important indispensable and precious of all treasures? Who would not wish that he were able to say: I am as God wants me to be? His Law cannot accuse and condemn me? God is my Friend? I live under his grace? In short, I am righteous before God?

Certainly all of you carry the wish in your heart of being able to say this truly. But perhaps you say: Is it actually possible to progress this far? Is there a way by which one can attain this most wished-for goal? How and by what means is one righteous before God? To God be praise! With great joy and confidence I can answer you: Yes, my friends, every person can be righteous before God. Even he who has lived on for a long time in sin and godlessness and who therefore has perhaps already begun to doubt his salvation can still be so righteous before God, that the Lord considers him as though he had never sinned. How and by what means this takes place, let me show you from

God's Word. God grant us all open ears and eager hearts to hear this sweetest of all teachings.

The text. Luke 18:9-14.

This precious Gospel, rich in doctrine and comfort, deals with the greatest and most important article of the entire Christian faith, that is, with the justification of a person before God. On the basis of this Gospel permit me to answer the question:

HOW AND BY WHAT MEANS DOES A PERSON BECOME RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD?

The answer of our text is twofold:

- I. Not by One's Own Work, but by God's Grace, and
- II. Not by God's Grace Mainly, but Through God's Grace in Christ Seized in Faith.

Holy and righteous God! In your eyes no living person is righteous; all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; who can bring a clean thing from an unclean? Behold among your saints none are without blame, among your angels you find folly, and the heavens are not pure before you; how much more a man who is an abomination and contemptible, who drinks unrighteousness like water! Oh, have mercy on all the blind among us who want to establish their own righteousness before you. Anoint their eyes with eye salve that they may recognize the vanity of all their own works and ways, with crushed heart take their refuge in your grace in Christ Jesus as lost sinners, seize him in firm faith, persevere in it until the end and thus be righteous before you and are saved. Hear us, oh gracious, merciful God for the sake of your grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. Amen! Amen!

I.

My friends, the usual meaning of justification is that a person must seek to become righteous before God by his good works. It is thought and said: How else could man become acceptable to God than by keeping God's commandments, being pious, and doing good works? It is also entirely natural that men think thus. Man's reason left to itself simply cannot think otherwise. For without God's Word and revelation man knows of no other way.

But now, what does God's Word say of this? Let us consult our today's Gospel on this point. In it two men are presented. The one is a Pharisee, the other a publican. Of the last man we read at the close of the Gospel, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Hence the publican was righteous before God, the Pharisee not. In the example of both we can and should recognize how and by what means one becomes righteous before God and how and by what means not.

First of all, how is the Pharisee described who was not righteous before God? Does Christ perhaps picture him as a godless, dissolute man in the eyes of men? Anything but this. Rather, Christ presents him as a most pious, righteous, blameless, and virtuous man in the eyes of the world. According to Christ's presentation he was a friend of God's house where God's Word was preached; he did not go there, as many, merely from habit but in order to pray there. Nor does he pray until a special need forces prayers and groans from him, but he prays to God even if he had no special petition lying heavily upon him. And what did he pray? He said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" Vv.11.12. His prayer did not consist only of

petitions, but contained also thanks and praise to God, yes, he thanked God even for the good which he himself had done and saw in himself. He was "not as other men are," who ask nothing about conscience, about God, about God's commands, about religion, about heaven and hell. He excelled thousands by his respectability and integrity. He was not an "extortioner" or "unjust" but conscientiously gave and allowed to each his due; he was not an "adulterer" in or outside of marriage but remained chaste. He even did more than God had commanded. God had commanded fasting only once a week and paying the tenth only of part of his income; but he fasted "twice" a week and gave the tithe "of all" that he had. Clearly he was no ordinary hypocrite as many other Pharisees were but was greatly in earnest about his piety. See, thus is that man pictured of whom Christ says that he left the temple not justified.

On the other hand, what is told us of the publican who according to our text went down to his house justified? Is perhaps his life praised still more? Again, anything but this. Of his early life Christ tells us absolutely nothing; everything which Christ wants to let us know about this he indicates by calling him a "publican," that is, a person who had lived his entire life in lies and deceit without asking about God and his conscience; all that Christ says about him outside of this is that finally after a long life of sin and shame his conscience awakened, that he finally perceived that he was worthy of damnation, and that he, therefore, full of the fear of hell and damnation, also entered into the temple, had smote upon his breast and sighed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

See, my friends, Christ presents the one as a man who excelled through all kinds of good works and a blameless life before men, and who still was not righteous before God; on the other hand, he pictures the other as a person who had made himself an abomination before God and men by an entire life full of unrighteousness and yet the moment he prayed for grace he was righteous before God. According to Christ's teaching, how and by what means does such a person become righteous before God? More clearly than the rays of the noonday sun it is written in our Gospel: not by his own works but by God's grace.

Yes, it may seem to be unbelievable to many that according to Christ's teaching a virtuous person could displease God, whilst a godless person could be acceptable to God and be righteous before him. However, if one studies the matter somewhat more closely, astonishment and surprise must soon disappear.

It is indeed true: when God created man, he was so made that he not only should be righteous before God by his own works but he also could be righteous. But we men have fallen and now all by birth bring an evil heart into the world, a mind displeasing to God. If after the fall of the human race there were now no other way by which one could be righteous before God than by our own works, not one person could become righteous before God.

Before God graciously takes pity on a person he can do nothing, absolutely nothing truly good. The natural man can indeed so live that no person can find any fault in him, that every person must praise him as an honest, upright, righteous man; however, before God who sees into the heart all shining good works of one who still has not been changed by his grace are nothing but fruits beautiful on the outside yet worm-eaten inside, hence nothing but glittering vices.

Just examine the good works of the Pharisee somewhat more closely and you will soon notice this. It is true: in the eyes of men the Pharisee with his outward piety presented a truly virtuous picture; however, what lived in his heart and what was the source of all his so-called good works? Nothing else but

abominable pride. True, he thanked God for the good which he thought he saw in himself; however, his thanks was nothing but hypocrisy, for he does not say, "God, I thank thee," that you have made me pious, but: "that I am not as other men are;" he exalts himself above all other people; yes, pointing to the publican he says later on, "or even as this publican;" hence, he is filled by the spirit of judging; he regards all other people as unworthy and himself as worthy.

Not the good works of only that Pharisees were of this nature; all the seemingly good works which those do on whom God has not yet taken pity and whom he could not graciously give a changed, new heart are of like nature. Before God only that is good which the person does out of pure love to God and to his honor and what he does out of pure love to his neighbor and for his benefit. By nature, that is, from his birth on, every person has a heart full of selfishness and love of self, full of ambition and boasting. From this poisonous spring flows forth everything which the natural man thinks, speaks, and does. Though the natural man may like the Pharisee go into the temple and there zealously hear God's Word and zealously pray and sing, the more zealous he is in his worship, so much the more will he please himself in doing this and exalt himself over others in his heart and thus in spite of all his worship be an abomination to God. The natural man cannot give any poor person a gift without sinning; either he does it out of shame because before other people he is ashamed of greed and hardheartedness, or out of ambition because he wants to be respected by the people, or out of impatience because he wants to be rid of the beggar who is pressing him, or finally out of hope of reward because he hopes that God will reward his kindness tenfold with eternal treasures.

Usually the natural man does not suspect this malice, deceit, and impurity with which all his good works are corrupted; and though he may notice this deceit and malice in his seemingly good works and have the ever so good intention of becoming better, more upright, purer, all these good intentions remain unexecuted if God does not take pity on him. Yes, though the natural man may labor and toil ever so greatly to conquer the dishonesty of his heart and to do good only from the pure motives of love of God and his neighbor, all his efforts are fruitless. The natural man can indeed choke off the poisonous spring of his heart so that it does not overflow in manifestly evil works, but he cannot cleanse the fountain of his heart; it remains poisonous, full of love of self and boasting, and corrupts everything which the natural man thinks, desires, speaks and does.

As long as the natural man disregards his false, impure heart, so long he can indeed think that he can keep God's commandments by his own powers and, therefore, become righteous before God by his own works; however, if the eyes of a person regarding his heart, his inner being, his secret drives finally open, he sees with terror that by his own powers he can do nothing really good, nothing which was good also in God's eyes. Therefore, whoever wants to be acceptable to God by his own works and be righteous before him is like a person who wants to pay small old debts with new greater debts, like a person who, having fallen into a swamp, wants to pull himself out by his own hair but in spite of his labors sinks only the deeper. Usually, those who think of becoming righteous before God by their own works are not in earnest; but when a person comes to the point where he really wants to be earnest, he must of necessity fall into despair, and in the end instead of receiving the perfect love of God in his heart, hatred and enmity arise in it against God who demands of man what he cannot produce, as happened, for example, to many under the papacy and among others to Luther in the cloister. Luther, therefore, also sings:

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,
Death brooded darkly o'er me,
Sin was my torment night and day,

In sin my mother bore me;
Yea, deep and deeper still I fell,
Life had become a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught,
No merit they attaining;
Free will against God's judgment fought,
Dead to all good remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left naught but death to be my share;
The pangs of hell I suffered. (387,2.3)

So there is no doubt: man will not be righteous before God by his own works, but if he will become righteous, it must happen by God's grace, not by God's grace chiefly but through God's grace in Christ Jesus seized in faith. And in the second place, let me speak to you of this.

II.

My friends, as great as is the number of those who are deluded into thinking that they could become righteous before God by their own works, there nevertheless are also not a small number of those who are not so blinded; who perceive that their own righteousness is too imperfect, too spotted to stand in them before the holy God who sees the heart; but who rely on the general love, forbearance, and grace of God. They think: If God would want to deal with me according to his stern righteousness, he must indeed reject me, for in spite of all of my striving for virtue and piety I still remain weak, full of fail-ures, blemishes, and frailties. Therefore, I will have to rely on the fact that God is much too good; he will overlook some things and let grace pass for right as long as I do as much as my weak powers let me. Many who think thus often comfort themselves with the example of the publican who also slipped many a time and yet was received by God because he said from his heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

But, my friends, all who think thus meet eternity on a false way, have a false comfort, and nourish a false hope, and if they remain on this foundation of sand, they at death plunge into eternal death and damnation.

No, no, my dear hearers, God is not as most people imagine him to be. He is not like a weak old father who overlooks the wicked deeds of his wicked children and out of weak love does not punish them. God is righteousness and holiness itself; of that which his holiness and righteousness demands in his Law he cannot omit one letter, not one iota; yes, he is and remains a consuming fire of wrath against sin which burns into the deepest abyss of hell. Therefore, if a person cannot show a completely perfect righteousness in which there is not the least spot, God must certainly eternally reject that man and condemn him as certainly as he is God. As great as God's love is, it cannot abolish his holiness and righteousness.

But if you will perhaps say, if that were really true, how could anyone become righteous before God? Where is the one who could perfectly satisfy the strict righteousness and holiness of God? Where is the person who would not need grace, forgiveness? Have you not just proven, you will tell me, that man could not be righteous before God by his own works but alone by grace? Is it not a contradiction to maintain that God could relinquish nothing of his righteousness and that everyone must bring a perfect righteousness before God if he wants to be righteous in his eyes?

Indeed, this seems to be a contradiction. But know this, my dear friends, that God in his infinite wisdom has found a way by which he can receive and declare even the greatest sinner righteous without relinquishing even the very least of the demands of his righteousness and holiness. God has, oh wonder of divine wisdom and love! commanded his only begotten Son to become a man, and he as God and man has not only suffered all the punishment we deserve and paid all our debts, but also subjected himself to God's Law, even though for himself he was not obligated to it, fulfilled it perfectly, and thus earned a righteousness which he himself does not need. Whoever believes in this God-man, that is, whoever accepts, appropriates, and relies on the payment made by this man for the guilt of all men and the righteousness earned by him for all mankind, him God regards as though he himself had paid, suffered, and done what his dear Son paid, suffered, and did; all his sins are forgiven and his faith is charged to him for righteousness. To be sure, it is grace, grace alone through which man can and should become righteous before God, but this is simply the grace of God in Christ Jesus, seized in faith, for only by virtue of this grace can God regard and declare a sinner righteous and himself still remain righteous and holy.

Nor should you think that the publican in our Gospel became righteous in a different way; for what Luther translated in the word, "God be MERCIFUL to me a sinner!" is literally according to the original text, "God be RECONCILED to me a sinner!" So it was not chiefly the love and grace of God in which the publican took his refuge, for the consciousness that also God is and must remain holy and righteous prevented him from doing that, but that grace from which he desired help and upon which he relied was that which according to the witness of the prophets the Messiah was to earn by his work of reconciliation.

Well, my dear hearers, you who have the longing in your hearts for being righteous before God, here you have the way by which you can obtain this most precious of all treasures. Know that you are lost and condemned sinners and then believe in Jesus Christ who makes the godless righteous, and the matter is settled. Then you do not have to be afraid of the threats of the Law against those who transgress it, but you can say: what I had to do has been fulfilled. Then you have nothing to fear from God's righteousness and holiness, but you can say: what you demand of me has been fulfilled. Then you do not have to fear death and the judgment which follows, but you can rejoice: God the Judge has not only absolved me from all my sins; he has also declared me holy and righteous in his eyes.

Ah, my friends, this teaching of the gracious justification of a poor sinner before God through faith in Christ is so simple that a child can grasp it, yet it is at the same time the greatest wisdom a person can receive which was hidden from eternity in God's heart but is revealed through the Holy Spirit in his holy prophets and apostles. This teaching is the true philosopher's stone, a mystery which no philosopher could conceive, no wise man of this world could search out. This teaching is the foundation upon which the whole Christian Church rests and by which it stands or falls, and at the same time the greatest treasure which she possesses and which cannot be found outside the Church. This teaching is quickly learned but never mastered, rather it must be studied, cultivated, and practised daily, if the person does not again want to forget it and keep the empty shell instead of the sweet kernel. Without this teaching nothing but hellish darkness is in the soul of every person; but to whomever this teaching becomes clear, the sun of truth arises in his soul which drives away the darkness of every ruinous error. This teaching that man is righteous before God not by his own works but by God's grace in Christ, grasped in faith indeed seems to make people lazy in doing good works but that is not so; he who lets this teaching really penetrate his heart is filled with the fire of love to God and his

neighbor and makes him willing, yes, eager and happy to sacrifice himself completely for God and his neighbor in a new holy life and walk.

Therefore, let none of us tire himself trying to earn a righteousness which avails before God by his own works and ways; let everyone go the way of the publican and he will come in and go out justified before God even though he is in himself a sinner.

Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
A Mediator have in Thee;
Our works cannot salvation gain;
They merit but endless pain.

Have mercy Lord! (287,12)

Amen.

12TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Mark 7:31-37

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus!

Christ founded a church on earth in which there is to be the most perfect equality. Absolutely no part of it is to be organized after the pattern of a worldly state. In the Church no one is to be the greatest, no one the lord, no one the first, no one the ruler or master. This is a fundamental teaching of Christianity. Anyone who is a true member of the true Church is equal to all others. Everyone has had the same baptism, the same faith, the same Christ, the same righteousness, the same hope of eternal life, the same eternal and heavenly blessings of salvation in Christ Jesus.

As long as the world will stand, the outward differences among men will, of course, remain; one is rich, another poor; one is respected by the world, another is despised; one has a high station in life, another a humble one; one is wise, another simple; but in the kingdom of God, in the Church, this makes no difference; though the gifts, duties, and offices may be different, before God all members remain equal, all have the same power, no one is subject to another.

If a government exists alongside the Church, it can command obedience from the Church; but then Christians obey, not as members of the Church or God's kingdom but as subjects of the state.

One cannot argue about what Jesus Christ said and confessed before Pontius 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 18:36.

The greatest harm has always resulted when a few have wanted to rule in the Church. In apostolic times there was the most complete equality and also the most wonderful unity and the most glorious blessing; at that time all Christians

were considered spiritual priests and no one was despised and oppressed. But later on the more the clerics exalted themselves over the other Christians, the more the Church degenerated, and the more it took on the form of a worldly kingdom; the shepherds became tyrants who did not pasture the sheep with the gentle shepherd's staff but ruled them with an iron scepter and finally led them to the slaughter. The father confessors became tormentors, the spiritual advisers became torturers of souls, the adviser of consciences became the ruler of consciences. Finally, at the time of the Reformation, a glorious light penetrated the dark of night; God's Word came to light; God's children cast away the disgraceful yoke of men and enjoyed sweet Christian freedom.

Now if Christian congregations do not want to fall under human bondage again, under ungodly human guardianship, they must hold fast to the precious privilege of their spiritual priesthood which all Christians have; this is the right to bring their own sacrifices, offer their own prayers, search for themselves in the Scriptures, examine and judge all doctrine for themselves, to teach, admonish, reprimand, comfort each other. Wherever this privilege and this duty is not known or exercised, there God's Word cannot long remain, there there is no blessing, there there is no zeal, there finally all fall into a sleep, into indolence, into indifference, there they want only to be led and born and not themselves lead and carry, merely guided and not judge for themselves; at last contempt and rejection of the truth must necessarily follow. It is, therefore, my duty diligently and repeatedly to instruct you, my dear friends, in this privilege and duty; so permit me to speak to you about one part of this privilege, namely on the duty of all Christians to lead souls to Christ. However, before we, etc.

The text. Mark 7:31-37.

It is a wonderful example, my dear friends, which is urged upon us in the Gospel just read! In the region about the Sea of Galilee there was a man who was both deaf and dumb; that was a tragic condition; not only could he not hear the precious Gospel of Christ, but he could not even speak in order to call upon Christ for help. Others took pity on him, took him, and brought him to Christ, and prayed on his behalf for His help; and Christ heard their intercession and miraculously helped that miserable man. Of course, nowadays Christ no longer walks visibly among us, yet he still helps us invisibly in body and soul; therefore, we also can still show others the blessing of bringing those who are spiritually deaf-mutes to Christ. I, therefore, show you:

THE HOLY DELIGHT AND DUTY OF ALL CHRISTIANS OF LEADING SOULS TO CHRIST

We will hear two things:

- I. That All Christians Have This Holy Pleasure and Duty, and
- II. How They are to Exercise This Duty.

Lord Jesus Christ, only true High Priest, who has sacrificed yourself on the tree of the cross in order to win for us sinners the royal priesthood, grant that we may learn to know this aright from your holy Word; help us also by your grace blessedly to fulfil our holy priestly duties to your honor and our own and the salvation of many souls. To that end guide and awaken us in this hour for your own sake. Amen.

I.

My friends, the most important thing for every person is that he himself

first knows Jesus aright and believes in him from his heart; it would be foolish to want to lead others to Christ when he himself was still far from him. A blind man would then be showing the way to another blind man, and both would fall into the ditch. As godless as it is to take care of oneself first in temporal things, in spiritual matters that is completely proper; in this case everyone should be his own neighbor. No person can redeem another; therefore, everyone should take care of his own soul first, see to the safety of his own soul, and then he should see about bringing others to grace. First one must learn to know and enjoy the treasures of Christ for himself before one can sell them to others.

However, anyone who by God's grace has recognized that the Bible is God's eternal Word; everyone who has experienced that the Gospel is a power of God unto salvation to all who believe; anyone who can say, I know in whom I believe, I have the Rock which secures my anchor forever, he will then certainly detect an urge in his heart to bring others to possess this grace in which he is so blessed. Such a Christian sees with pain and sadness that so many thousands in the world are still spiritually deaf-mutes, that they still do not know Christ, do not yet believe in him, do not yet love him, and are not yet blessed in him; his heart is pierced by the wretched condition of the world which for a brief time is sometimes happy, sometimes sad, and despising Christ is lost without Him; sorrowfully the Christian regards his neighbor whom he perhaps knows that he does not accept the Gospel; with sighs he sees his former friends from whom he must separate because they do not want to walk with him the way of grace and piety; with a sad heart the Christian husband sees his unchristian wife, the Christian wife her unchristian husband, the parents such children, the children such parents, the brothers such sisters, the sisters such brothers who do not believe in the Gospel. A Christian wishes that he could convince the whole world to let go of sin and vanity and accept Christ. The holy desire to lead souls to Christ arises the moment the light of the true faith and the fire of true love comes into a Christian's soul; this holy desire is inseparable from the true faith.

Anyone who does not have the desire to bring other people to the knowledge of the saving Gospel certainly has not yet experienced its heavenly power. The moment David had obtained forgiveness and comfort from God through prayer, he said in Psalm 51, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." v.13. The moment Andrew had come to know Christ, he hurried to his brother Simon and joyfully called to him, "We have found the Messiah" Jn 1:41, and led him to Jesus, and Philip did the same; when he met his friend Nathanael he said, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Jn 1:45. We hear a similar thing of the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well; scarcely had she recognized that he who was speaking to her was the Messiah, when she let the pitcher stand, hurried into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" Jn 4:29.

Therefore Luther speaks most beautifully, "When a Christian begins to recognize Christ as his Lord and Savior, through whom he is redeemed from death, his heart is so filled with God that he would gladly help all to be filled the same way; for he has no greater joy than in the treasure that he knows Christ. And so he goes out, teaching and admonishing others, praising and confessing that to others, praying and sighing that they also might come to such grace. That is the restless spirit in the greatest rest, that is, in God's grace and peace, so that he cannot be still or idle but always strives and struggles with all his powers as one who lives alone to bring God's praise and honor to other people." So far Luther.

My friends, through his faith a Christian receives not only such a holy

joy of leading souls to Christ, he also has the holy duty to do that. No one should say, I am not a pastor, a teacher, a preacher; he may teach, admonish, comfort, and lead to Christ; but I will stick to my job. No, my dear Christian, you are baptized and through holy baptism you have already been anointed and called to be a priest of God. Through baptism every Christian is dedicated, ordained, and installed into the office of teaching, admonishing, comforting, and reprimanding his neighbor; through baptism every Christian has not only the power, the full authority, and the privilege, but he also has received the great holy duty at the risk of losing God's grace to join in watching and caring and helping, that others are also enlightened and brought to Christ, the Bishop of their souls. For thus says James, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Jas 1:18. Moreover, John says, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." Rev 1:6. And finally, Peter says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Pet 2:9.

Go through all the chief parts of the Catechism and you will find in every one the statement that a Christian should also provide for the salvation of his neighbor's soul. The Ten Commandments demand that we love our neighbor as ourselves; how can we do this if we see that his soul is lost and we would not venture to help him? In the second chief part we confess the communion of saints; how could this spiritual communion be truly maintained if we would not serve each other in spiritual things as well? In the third chief part Christians are taught to pray to God as to their common Father; how could they do this if they would not recognize each other as brothers and in brotherly love teach, admonish, and set each other right? How could they pray, "Thy kingdom come" if they were unwilling to do something to spread abroad God's kingdom? In the fourth chief part we are instructed that in Baptism we all become members of the body of Jesus Christ; and if we are all members of this spiritual body, must not one member serve the others if the body is not to be torn? As in our body the eye must serve the foot, the hand the mouth, so must also the congregation members serve each other if the whole is not to be dissolved. According to the sixth chief part we are all given to eat of that one bread and given to drink of that one cup as a seal of our innermost unity; does not Holy Communion, therefore, demand that everyone be concerned about the soul of his neighbor just as for his own soul? Beyond a doubt: since God demands that we all love everyone else, so he also makes everyone the spiritual adviser of his neighbor according to the call of Christian love.

Yes, it is true: not everyone is a pastor or bishop in the Christian congregation; God is a God of order; for the sake of order only one or a few of the congregation are chosen to exercise publicly in the name of all the duty of the spiritual priesthood. As during the erecting of a church building not only are the architects who organize and guide the whole work busy, as they must also have many helpers, so is also the invisible Church an edifice at which not only the called servants of Christ work but all Christians must give a hand.

Christ says to his heavenly Father, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Jn 17:15. So it is not Christ's will that his Christians should outwardly leave the world and hide away in monasteries; no, the true Church is to be in the midst of the world and its members shine as lights and enlighten the world; Christians should be the salt with which the whole world is seasoned in order to preserve it from complete spiritual corruption. The Christian Church is a great mission society; every Christian within it is a missionary, sent out by God to convert other people within the circle of his acquaintance to Christ, to invite them to the heavenly marriage, to call them to God's kingdom, and everywhere

to recruit soldiers to win the eternal treasure and warriors for Christ's army.

God gives his spiritual gifts not merely to preachers and teachers; laymen who are not in the office of the ministry often have the most wonderful gifts, a wonderful knowledge of Christian doctrine, a superior gift of understanding and explaining the Scriptures, a wonderful gift of examining teachers and opposing the erring, the wonderful gift of guiding, comforting, admonishing, praying, and the like. Has God given these gifts to ordinary Christians also to no purpose at all? Does not God clearly show that every Christian should be a co-worker in his vineyard? Yes, not only to Peter but to all Christians the Lord says, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Lk 22:32. Of all Christians James says, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Jas 5:19,20.

My friends, if we would meet someone lying helpless, wounded, and smitten, in physical misery, we consider it our duty to give him a hand and not wait first for the regular doctor; we bind his wounds and take him to a place where he can be taken care of; we consider ourselves called to do that by the call of Christian love. Therefore, if a Christian finds a person wounded in his soul and he can help him in some way, he is not to think: How does that concern me? the spiritual physician, the minister, can come and help him. No, my dear Christian, here you have the call of love which has also been extended to you; yes, even if the priest and levite pass by that wretched person on the other side, you as a merciful Samaritan should continue to show yourself just as zealous.

Of course, without a doubt a minister above all others has the duty of bringing souls to Christ; first of all, he must show them how necessary it is for them to have Christ, how much Christ has done for them, and finally, how they can receive Christ and remain with him; in doing that he should not cease praying, admonishing, and beseeching, "Be ye reconciled to God."

Moreover, it is true that parents have the special duty of leading their children to Christ and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Though parents may provide ever so well for the needs of their body, spend ever so much in the training of their mind by a good education, the chief thing yet remains; they are to make their children acquainted early in life with their Savior; while the child is in the cradle they must dedicate it to the Savior, and above all things teach it first of all to say, "Abba, dear Father"! God will demand the souls of the children from the hands of parents and sponsors; they are entrusted to them, so that they might be brought to the saving knowledge of their Savior through their parents, be protected against being misled by the world, and guided on the way to heaven. In the home father and mother are the spiritual advisers ordained by God.

Above all, the husband has the holy duty of leading his wife to Christ and remaining with Him; she is intimately united with him; if he wants to be her head, he must also carry her in his heart and be her spiritual father. The teacher has a special duty toward his pupils, the master of the house toward those dwelling in the home, the superior toward his subjects, the elders toward the younger; God has not without reason conferred certain powers over others to certain people; everyone should use it to help souls, to preach Christ to them, and to promote his honor. Yes, even a friend has a special duty over against his old friend, if he is perhaps going a different way; not without reason has God brought you into association with others, not without reason has he awakened love and trust in you in others; you are to use this to lead souls to him who has allowed your soul to find grace.

Though everyone has a special obligation, no Christian is excluded from it;

here there is no difference; St. Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal 3:28. Not only the men but also the wives, not only the adults but also the children are spiritual priests and teachers of the world. Joel predicted this of the New Testament times when he says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out of my spirit." Joel 2:28.29. Therefore, even though the apostle has commanded that the wives should be silent in the public worship in order that they do not forget that they should be subject to their husbands, we find many wonderful examples that even women have taught in private with blessing and won many souls for Christ. Priscilla explained God's way more and more diligently to Apollos; the Evangelist Philip had four daughters who together prophesied, that is, explained the Scriptures in their homes with divine enlightenment. The Apostle Paul especially demands that the aged women be good teachers; he speaks words of praise for Pheobe, Tryphena, and Tryphosa, Euodias and Syntyche because they labored much in the Lord and have labored with him in the cause of the Gospel.

You see from this, my friends, that the office of minister and adviser of souls was not instituted so that no one would have to teach any more and assume the responsibility for souls; no, the entire congregation should be a holy nation, a royal priesthood; every Christian is to be concerned about the soul's misery of his neighbor and help along that the saving Gospel win constantly more victories over men, that Satan's kingdom in the world be destroyed, and Christ's kingdom promoted. Oh, how much different the outlook would be, how much greater and more wonderful the blessing of God's Word would be, if every Christian would recognize his holy calling and discharge his office of royal priesthood! Therefore, the apostle cries out to his Corinthians, "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." 1 Cor 14:1.

Among Christians everything should proceed orderly and honestly; permit me, therefore, to show you secondly, in what way Christians should carry out their holy duty of leading souls to Christ.

II.

There certainly is no doubt among us that outside of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians God has for the sake of order instituted especially the office of the ministry to teach the Gospel publicly, to administer the sacraments, and to administer the keys of the kingdom of heaven. There are called public servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. From this it follows that no one, just because he is a spiritual priest, dare despise and neglect the office of the public ministry; for a Christian adheres to David's expression, "His word is honorable and glorious." Ps 111:3. Moreover, no one dare think: I am a spiritual priest; therefore, I am also called to preach in public; no, you must have a special, proper call to do that; for what takes place in the name of all must first of all be also commissioned in the name of all. We, therefore read, "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as Aaron." Heb 5:4. And James says, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." Jas 3:1. Therefore, whoever sets himself up and thrusts himself upon people as a public teacher acts contrary to God, and no one should listen to him as the risk of God's displeasure.

Nevertheless, there are occasions, that is, there are times, when the exercise of the office is necessary and yet no called servant is available; that

is the first instance when every Christian can step forward as a spiritual priest and do that work in Christ's name. If in an emergency a woman baptizes, if a layman absolves someone in an emergency, then the baptism and absolution is proper, divine, and valid, as though it were done by St. Peter, yes, by Christ himself. Yes, if a Christian comes to a place where there are no Christians, he again can confidently come forward and preach the Gospel of Christ; if his hearers accept God's Word, then a true Church arises through such a preacher which has all the spiritual blessings of the Church; and he who is chosen in such a Church is a true servant of Jesus Christ, a bishop ordained by the Holy Ghost and a follower of the apostle. Thus we read in the history of the Christian Church that all Ethiopia came to the knowledge of Christ through two Christian young men by the name of Aedesius and Frumentius who were driven off their course while on a voyage, and that Spain was brought to accept the Gospel through the instruction of a Christian woman captured in a war.

These are but exceptional instances where every Christian as a spiritual priest can lead souls to Christ; his office has a much greater parish. Anyone who is a Christian father should exercise his spiritual priesthood continually in his home, prove that he is a true bishop over against his wife and child, daily, particularly in the morning and evening convert his home into a church; he should pray with his family and teach them to pray; he should read God's Word with them and explain it to them; he should reprimand his family's sins from God's Word, exhort them to walk a pious life, entice them to Christ, comfort them in all the anxieties of their conscience, show them which means they should use to live the truly Christian life, and against which dangers to their soul they should guard themselves. Oh my friends, if every home were such a church, how mightily knowledge, faith, and piety would grow in our whole congregation.

However, the practise of the spiritual priesthood is possible not only for father and mothers, but all Christians in their station and calling. If someone is not yet a father, he perhaps has a brother or sister, acquaintances, relatives, or friends. When he associates with them, oh, may he bear in mind, that through holy baptism he became a spiritual priest, that then he made a covenant with God to enter into his service. Then a Christian should grasp every opportunity to speak something good; he should tell what God has done for him; he should convince the erring, admonish the frivolous and indifferent, reprimand the sinning, comfort and establish the sorrowing and depressed. Ah, my friends, of what value is it if we extol the spiritual priesthood most highly as a privilege but do not want to fulfil its duties? Of what value is it if we call ourselves spiritual priests yet when we assemble do not carry out the office of the priesthood but forsake it? Of what value is the name without the deed?

Yes, should not a Christian be afraid if he has been in a gathering and he did not speak the good word? if he saw sin but did not reprimand it? if he indeed had the opportunity to edify others but did not use it? Are they priestly Christians? do they recognize their high calling? True, social gatherings are delighted when we also laugh and joke, but how will our friends some day speak to us before God's throne? They will say: You saw me going astray and sinning, but you did not reprimand me; you saw the danger to my soul, but you did not warn me; you should have joined me in redeeming the time, but you joined me in wasting it; you could have furthered me in my Christianity, but by vain talk you joined me in abusing and neglecting it; you did not love me, you despised my soul; you should have helped to save it, but you also are guilty that it is lost.

God be praised, my friends, that we have again the true teaching of the spiritual priesthood; we know from God's Word: in the circle of his acquaintance every Christian should be a teacher of the Gospel; but now let us also turn this teaching into practical use; reform not only the teaching but also one's daily life.

If we have a friend with whom we associate, let us think of this: God has brought us together that I should either bring him to Christ or to keep him with Christ; every time we are in a social gather let us think: God has called me here so that as a priest I will promote the general edification and be a blessing to all gathered here; yes, even among children of the world let us think, that as spiritual priests we confess Christ to them in word and deed and be the means whereby they also come to know the truth.

Yes indeed, nothing happens by chance; therefore, whenever we gather with the children of the world, we should ask: Can I benefit their souls? For even the children of the world rejoice now if we act as they do, if we deny our faith, if we fall in with their godless talk, as long as we do so with a friendly countenance; but some day they will accuse us before God and say, I have often associated with you; you knew how one could be saved but you never told me; I was a spiritual deaf-mute; I did not know Christ; I could not pray to him; you should have led me to Christ, but you said nothing to me about him; in order not to lose my favor you were silent about the saving truth; you called yourself a spiritual priest but you were unconcerned about my soul.

To be sure, we should not cast that which is holy before dogs, as God's Word says, that is, we should not urge the Gospel upon a person who despises it and mocks it; but wherever we can lead a soul to Christ or defend Christ's honor, we are to let neither the good will nor the fear of the world hold us back from courageously bearing witness of the truth.

Oh, what a joy it must be when in eternity many meet us and say: My brother, my sister, you have saved my soul! I came to you and you admonished, and reprimanded, and enticed, and comforted me, and showed me the way to Christ, and behold! without you noticing it, Christ spoke the word "Ephphatha" to my soul; from that time on I became a Christian and now I am saved! Oh, what a joy will that be to all eternity to see souls about one who came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ through us, through us found the way to heaven! Then we ourselves will exclaim with them and all the angels in even greater joy, "The Lord hath done all things well." To him be honor and power from eternity to eternity. Amen.

12TH S.A.T. - 2

Mark 7:31-37

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

In our Savior, dearly beloved hearers.

According to the admonition of the Apostle Paul all Christians should "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth," he says, "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about

with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of man, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Eph 4:13.14. In reproof the same apostle, therefore, says in the Letter to the Hebrews, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Heb 5:12. In understanding, therefore, Christians should not in the least be children but rather become men.

Part of this manliness of Christian knowledge is among other things this, that a Christian is not only entrusted with the Christian doctrine, but that he also knows the words to use by which to express it; for according to God's Word Christians should not only be one in divine matters but also as much as possible speak one language, hence use one word. Even though this one and the same teaching can be expressed in various words, by such modes of expression a different doctrine can be easily introduced and steal into the church unnoticed.

I now call an expression to your attention which nowadays is used not seldom in a false sense and by which, therefore, a very dangerous error can very easily be spread; I refer to the word means of grace. Not seldom is this word used today in order to indicate not only that which is only part of the arrangement of grace but even all those things which men themselves have chosen to awaken their devotion, to practice piety, and to serve God. If a religious organization institutes all kinds of churchly rites by which they according to their idea intend to give a hand to the kingdom of God, they usually call these means of grace. As immaterial and without risk as it seems to be whether something is called by this name or that, nevertheless it is here in these important matters which concern the true way to salvation, not the least irrelevant. We know that God's Word and the holy sacraments comprise the means of grace; now if one gives this name also to other things and even to such as men themselves had invented, a false conception of God's Word and the holy sacraments must necessarily arise; for if other things, fabricated and devised by men, are just as valid means of grace as those of God's institution, it follows that man can provide for himself even the means of grace and build his own way to grace. A Christian, therefore, has to take special care that without suspecting it he is not misled by unbiblical language to believe false doctrine.

Moreover, it is clear that only that can be a means of grace by which we become partakers of divine grace, whereby it is conveyed to us, that is, in part offered to us, in part given and confirmed to us; however, only God's Word and the holy sacraments are such means, and not at all as the enthusiasts nowadays teach, prayer-time, repentance, praying, fasting, and the like. Let me make a comparison. The means whereby our earthly life is preserved is not the eating in itself; for then our life would be preserved even by eating a stone; the real means of our preservation is rather nourishing food which we take in by eating; eating is, therefore, merely using the means for nourishment. The same is true also here. If a person goes to church or to the prayer meeting, if he repents, if he prays, and the like, that is not a means whereby he receives grace, but we should go to church in order to use the means of grace, and if we pray, if we repent, and the like, we do something which the means of grace must have already produced in us, for a true prayer and true repentance cannot take place until one has first received grace. Repentance, prayer, hearing the sermon indeed are part of the arrangement whereby grace comes but these are not the means of grace. The only sources from which the hearer, the one praying, the penitent draws grace are and remain the Word and sacraments; everything flows to us upon earth from these opened fountains; they are the only hands of God which offer, give, and seal to us everything; they are the only streams of grace whose course God has directed from heaven to earth; they are the only

heavenly chariots in which God comes to us men and visits us in grace.

The more certain it is that Word and sacrament are the only means of grace, the more faithfully we should, therefore, also use them. This is it which we want to continue to study now.

The text. Mark 7:31-37.

In the Gospel just read we find a most noteworthy miracle of healing which Christ did to one deaf and dumb. Whilst Christ usually spoke only a word or merely laid his hand on a sick person and he became well, here he uses many special means; in this case Christ does this after he had been especially asked in prayer simply to lay his hand upon the deaf-mute. Christ who bore all the treasures of wisdom within himself certain did nothing without wise purposes, including this event. Why did he contrary to the wish of the petitioner use so many means for healing the sick man? Without a doubt to teach us that we should not despise those means which God has ordained for the healing of our soul but should use them faithfully.

Accordingly, permit me to speak to you on:

WHY WE SHOULD FAITHFULLY AND DILIGENTLY USE THE MEANS OF GRACE

We should do this:

- I. Because God has so Earnestly Commanded Their Use, and
- II. Because God has Promised to Give Us Grace Only Through These Means Ordained by Him.

O Lord God! Now that instruction on the right use of your means of grace is about to be given us, grant that all these hearers may now above all use the means of grace of your Word correctly, that all not only attentively hear with their physical ears but also on the basis of the Word preached to them earnestly examine themselves, thus let their heart be opened to your Holy Spirit, and so come to true faith and be saved. Oh, let us not ask in vain; hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I.

They were, my friends, most unusual means which according to our Gospel Christ used to heal the deaf-mute brought to him. "And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his finger into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." Vv. 33.34. Certainly, the purpose of all this the deaf-mute knew least of all, and yet he willingly let Christ do to him what he did. This teaches us, first of all, that we must faithfully and diligently use the means of grace because God has so commanded it, even if we would not know whether this use would bring us a special benefit or not. God's command should be reason enough, yes, supersede everything.

How earnestly God has commanded the use of the means of grace, especially the use of his holy Word! Listen to only a few of such divine, formal commands. In Deuteronomy 6 the Lord says, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlet between thine

eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Vv.6-9. Accordingly, a true servant of God should be surrounded by God's Word as by the air, and day and night it should be not only in his heart but also before his eyes. Therefore, Joshua received the command, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left." Josh 1:8.7. Thus says Isaiah, "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate; for my mouth it had commanded, and his spirit hath gathered them." 34:16. The very same commandments we find in the New Testament. The Lord says, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Jn 5:39. Indeed, the apostle demands above all of a preacher, writing to Timothy, "Give attention to reading," 1 Tim 4:13, but he also says in general, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim 3:15-17.

However, we find not only God's clear command to be thinking of his Word diligently, but also only they are called true children of God who do this. In Psalm we read, "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Ps 1-1-3. To his eternal blessed remembrance, therefore, the expressions of David are in Scripture, "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors." Ps 119:24. "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." V.97. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" V.103. "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." V.72. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." V.105. The New Testament has great things to say that the Bereans daily searched in the Scriptures, and that the eunuch from Ethiopia read in the writings of the prophets even during his journey and, sitting in his chariot, searched for the way to salvation.

Therefore, if we knew nothing more than this: It is the Lord's will and his first command to use his Word and the holy Sacraments connected with it diligently, that should be more than enough to move us to use these means of grace faithfully. If we as the deaf-mute would perceive no benefit from them, we should think: "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious." Ps 111:2.3; and if he, our Creator, commands something, it is fitting for us in deepest humility and joyful willingness to obey.

Therefore, bear in mind, oh man, what a great terrible sin you commit, who are indolent in hearing and reading God's Word, or you who omit this almost completely. Do not think that in other respects you are an honorable, upright man, that otherwise no one can say that you live in sin and vice, that you labor faithfully and diligently from morning until late at night and thus you try to earn bread for your children like an honest father and provide honestly and honorably for yourself and your family. Know: because you despise this one command of diligently and daily busying yourself with God's Word, all your other good works are useless in God's eyes. The commandment to read and hear God's Word is just as important as the one: Thou shalt not kill; yes, the commandment to use God's Word is the greatest, the highest, the most important one,

for just through the reading and hearing of God's Word the person learns to know God's commandments and his holy will and his whole counsel for our salvation. How can you boast of providing for your family as an upright father when you do not use God's Word with your family? What does it profit you that you so lovingly provide for your children when in so doing you neglect their souls? True, you preserve their life but you kill their soul, and in God's eyes you do not pass for a provider of your children but for their murderer, that is, the murderer of their souls.

Yes, many say, I have no time to read much in God's Word. He who has the time can do that; I have to earn a living by the work of my hands. You who say that know: that is the very reason why God has given you your span of life so that during this time you should prepare yourself for eternity, that you should serve and obey God and provide for your soul. If your heart were not so completely swallowed up by greed, you would indeed find an hour every day in which you would set aside temporal matters, take God's Word before you, and search in it for what is necessary for your immortal soul. Bear in mind: with the excuse, I have no time to ponder upon God's Word, you will never stand before God; God will answer you: Then you also had no time to seek me your God; I also do not recognize you as one of my own, so depart from me forever; go back to the world which alone you sought and now find your help from the world, for now my grace has been trifled away. Oh you indolent Bible readers, think upon this and remember the times which belong to your peace. Here on earth seek Christ, your salvation in the Scriptures, for truly he wishes to be earnestly sought for and zealously clung to; for in eternity he will never be found; then the gates of grace are closed. As he could not enter into the holy of holies who had not first passed through the annex and the holy place, so also can he not enter into the holy of holies of heaven who here has not entered into the annex of grace.

At this point another will perhaps say: What does it profit me if I would read the Bible? I don't understand it anyhow! Bear in mind, you who confess this: the very reason why you understand the Scriptures so little is because you read it so seldom. Be like a David, like the Bereans, like the Ethiopian eunuch and search the Scriptures daily with whatever understanding you have; it will become clearer, more understandable and so also ever more lovely and sweet. For he who eats of this bread will never hunger. That is why St. Peter says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Pet 1:19.

II.

This now leads us further. Secondly, we should faithfully and diligently use the means of grace because only through these means ordained by him has God promised to give us his grace.

There is no doubt my friends: Christ could have given the deaf-mute hearing and speech even without using the means which he employed; he need merely speak one word, yes, merely use his will and what he wishes shall take place. Also of him, the Son of God, we read as of the Father, "He spake, and it is done; he commanded, and it stood fast." Ps 33:9. But would the deaf-mute have been healed if he would not have let Christ do with him as he pleased, if he would have resisted and would not have wanted to let Christ put his finger into his ears, touch his tongue, and the like? Certainly, in this case resistance would have had the result that this miserable man would not have been healed of his malady.

You see, my friends, the same is true also of the means which God has ordained for the healing of our soul. Indeed, God is not bound to them; he has the power to enlighten a person without his written Word which is preached by men and also without baptism and the Lord's Supper, to bring him to repentance and faith and thus to lead him to salvation. But for men God has made the irrevocable ordinance that only those shall partake of his grace who do not despise his means of grace but faithfully use them. For thus it is written, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Rom 10:17; that is why Peter calls God's Word the seed of the rebirth, and in another passage Christ himself says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jn 3:5.3. From this we see clearly that God intends to give his Spirit, faith, grace, and salvation only through the means of the Word and the holy sacraments. These are the only seeds of a godly life. Therefore, whoever does not want to use the Word and the sacraments, though he may exert himself ever so much, remains without faith, without the Holy Spirit, and without grace; in vain does he seek elsewhere for another bridge to heaven. He who does not let the finger of the Holy Spirit, that is God's Word, be placed into his ear, his soul remains in spiritual death, for then God's Spirit will also not awaken his soul by his might Ephphatha.

And he who has already been converted by God's Word but does not use God's Word any more or uses it unfaithfully loses his faith again, falls back into spiritual darkness, kills his soul, and thus falls into secret or open unbelief and under God's wrath and displeasure. As little as a light in a lamp continues to burn if it is not filled with oil, so little does the spiritual light of a living faith continue to burn in the heart if it is not preserved by new nourishment from the Word of life. Christ's Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that is, upon their word; all Christendom is, therefore, nothing else but a constant building up of oneself upon this foundation.

Let everyone of us examine himself according to this. I ask you, my dear hearer: First of all, have you merely at one time, in general, received the Spirit, faith, and grace through the use of the means of grace? Remember: every person is by nature spiritually a deaf-mute, yes, spiritually dead, even if he otherwise lives most honorably before the world; therefore, as that deaf-mute everyone must be brought to Christ so that he can make him alive, open the ear of his soul, and loose the band of his tongue; otherwise he cannot be saved. Now my dear hearer, have you at one time been under the treatment of Jesus Christ? While you read or heard God's Word, have you experienced that God's Spirit cried into your soul with divine power, "Ephphatha! that is, be opened!?" Has not your heart then opened so that with terror you perceived your sins but also became partaker of God's sweet grace in Christ? Or my dear hearer, are all these things still completely strange matters to you?

Oh, then bear in mind: you are still spiritually a deaf-mute, yes, dead in your sins. Oh, at least in this moment let God's Word penetrate your heart; it calls to you: You are a sinner who has grievously offended God; oh, do not remain indifferent to this call; commune with yourself; begin to care for your soul; begin to be concerned that you are reconciled with God; enter your chamber, fall there on your knees before God, and cry to him that he would open your eyes so that you would recognize how wretched you are. Oh, if you then become divinely grieved and sorrowful, if then you begin to groan: Oh that God would show mercy upon me! behold, then Christ has also called to you, "Ephphatha!" Then you are on the right way; then cling to your Savior and never let go of him until he will fetch you to himself by a blessed death.

But now let me also ask you hearers who already have learned this: Have

you remained in the living faith? Are you still in your first love? Is God's Spirit still in you? Do you still carry Jesus in your heart? You will ask: How shall we know this? I answer: By whether you have constantly used the means of grace with your first zeal; whether you still constantly seek Christ, the eternal life in the Scriptures; whether you are not satisfied merely to hear a sermon on Sundays, whether you use God's Word also at home, yes, whether you use God's Word not in a cold way out of habit but to learn from it how to strengthen your faith, how you can conquer those temptations through which you go, and live uprightly and piously in this world.

Oh you who now feel struck, wake up from the sleep of security into which you have fallen; God has against you that you have left your first love; remember from whence you have fallen and repent and do the first works. What does it profit you if you are continually regarded as Christian by men who cannot see into your heart, if God who truly sees whether the fire of his Holy Spirit still burns in your heart or is extinguished rejects you? Bear in mind that the Lord can come soon to summon you from this world; therefore, set your house in order so that when your last hour comes you are ready to appear before God.

Oh Lord God, who alone can awaken and change hearts, you want to do the best. You want to take mercy on us all, awaken the dead, establish the fallen, strengthen the weak, preserve the strong. Oh, do all this through the living, powerful Word for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

12TH S.A.T.-3

Mark 7:31-37

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

In this same Savior, dearly beloved hearers.

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;" these are the words with which according to the first chapter of Genesis the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, expressed the counsel of his eternal life of calling the human race into existence. Shortly thereafter we read, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." Gen 1:27.

Consequently, when man came from the hand of God, he bore the image of God in himself. Wherein this must have consisted is not difficult to guess, for everyone knows that an image is a reproduction of a thing which has certain likenesses or at least a visible similarity with it. Therefore, if it is revealed to us that God created man in his image, this means simply that originally man resembled God, yes, in a certain sense was like God. Whoever saw man saw God's attributes shine in him; man's whole essence was a faithful copy of God and a lovely, bright reflection of his glory. As the sun is mirrored in a calm sea, so the Creator was reflected in man who had just been created.

If we want to know what really was reflected in man, we need but picture to ourselves the nature of God, for everything which God possesses in the greatest perfection he out of eternal love used to adorn man, scaled down for a

creature. According to his essence God is an eternal, omnipotent spirit; also man who was created in his image was, therefore, originally immortal; his body was eternally young and vigorous, without sickness, without pain, never tiring and without the seed of death and corruption; neither heat nor cold could harm him. In addition, as a copy of God's omnipotence, he was stronger than any other earthly creature, ruling by his nod and will all the animals on earth, moving among them as their lord and king.

Moreover, according to his intellect God is the eternal and complete truth and wisdom; man who had been created in his image was also at one time full of truth, wisdom, and heavenly light; without any error and without wearisome learning man knew God's essence and will, knew himself and his true destiny without self-deception; the entire creation lay before him unveiled; his bright spirit penetrated without let or hindrance all the mysteries of nature and its amazing powers.

According to his will God is, moreover, the most perfect holiness; man who had been created in his image was, therefore, also originally holy; what God wanted, that also man wanted; man's will was in the most beautiful harmony with God's will; God was his greatest treasure, he truly loved God above all things and his neighbor as himself; no sin, no evil desires, no unholy thoughts dwelt in man's breast; his body also was free from every sinful incitement, an unspotted temple of the Holy Spirit; much less, therefore, did a sinful word cross his lips and all his works were good, for they were all done in God.

Finally, according to his state God is also perfectly happy; and also in this point man was a faithful reflection of this most happy Being. Since man was without sin, no restlessness, no anxiety, no fear fill his heart and conscience; he not only loved God, he also knew that he was loved by God, that he was his gracious God and Father. Peace, rest, and the purest joy dwelt in his soul. In addition, God had placed man into a paradise in which there was nothing but what could delight the heart, the eye, and all senses; also at that time, no curse lay upon the earth, no troubles, no evil dwelt upon it; the tears which men wept were only tears of love and joy; in short, man was happy in time and his earthly dwelling was an annex of heaven.

See, my friends, that was the condition of man when he still bore God's image in himself. He was more glorious than could be described, more happy than we could grasp and suspect. Alas! what happened? By the seduction of Satan man fell into sin, and sin in turned robbed us of God's image, divested us of our original adornment, hurled us from the peak of the most blessed good fortune into darkness, death, and ruin, and converted this world into an arena of misery. Who must not agree? Who has not experienced in himself that by nature he is no longer fortunate and happy and that this world is not a paradise but a vale of tears? He who wants to deny this must wilfully close his eyes to the misery which surrounds him and which dwells in himself.

Yet blessed are all who painfully feel what they have lost and who yearn to recover the glory which was trifled away, for just this reason God's Son appeared in the world in order to re-establish God's work which was destroyed, in order to bring back that which we lost, in a word, in order to re-establish in us the divine image of which we were robbed. So permit me to speak to you further on this point.

The text. Mark 7:31-37.

My friends, everything which Christ once did to those suffering physical misery was a picture of that which Christ mainly wanted to do to men, that is, he wanted to take all misery from man and bring him back to the glory which he lost which God once had created in him, therefore, in a word, re-establish the

image of God in man. Permit me, therefore, to speak to you now of

THE RESTORATION OF THE DIVINE IMAGE THROUGH CHRIST

- I. How it Begins Already in This Life, and
- II. How it will be Completed in the Life to Come.

Lord Jesus Christ, you not only want to forgive us our sins but you also want to help and free us from them and renew in us again the image of God in which we once were created. Awaken in us a holy longing for complete freedom from sin and for the lost treasure of a perfect innocence. Take from us the idea that we are indeed absolved from sin but still need not forsake it completely, so that we finally do not through the deceit of sin trifle away our salvation but even here let ourselves be transformed into your image from one brightness to the next through your Spirit, until we come to the light of eternal perfection. Amen.

I.

My dear hearers, that we no longer are as God originally created us men, is, as I already stated in the introduction, simply not to be denied. Why, our reason finds it most absurd to assume that the almighty, all wise, holy God should have created beings who are burdened with sickness, distress, and death, with error, blindness, and darkness, with sin and all impurity, and with discord, unrest, fear, anguish, and pangs of conscience. But such a being man is now. He is aware that he is destined for another world and yet he is subject to death, thousands of different kinds of illnesses, and countless evils; he is more powerless, helpless, and needy than many irrational animals; by nature he knows nothing certain about God and his will, yes, is a mystery to himself; his thoughts and endeavors are only evil from his youth on; in addition, he is full of unrest and travels without peace of soul through this world as though through a valley full of tears and misery. Tell me: if God would have created man and the world as they are now, could we really read, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good"? Gen 1:31. Not at all. Of this there can, therefore, be no doubt: this world and particularly we men are now no longer in our original state. Yes, we still have the light of reason by which we are different from the animals, but that is only like the ruins of a former, glorious, lovely edifice which has not been rebuilt; it is a memorial of a former better state; the true image of God we have lost; our reason has become darkened and without the divine light which could show us the way to salvation; our will has turned away from God and our heart is alienated from the light which is from God; our state is unhappiness and our bodies the dwelling of mortality; therefore, instead of God's image all of us bear the image of sin and physical and spiritual death in us.

But blessed are we! We are not to remain in this misery. For that very reason God's Son became like us so that we would again be like God; for that very reason he assumed the image of a sinner so that he might bring us back to God's image. John, therefore, says in his first letter, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil," 1 Jn 3:8; and Peter preaches, "Whom (Christ) the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3:21.

Consequently, we dare not think that God's Son became a man only to fulfil the Law for us by his holy life and suffered for our sins and died on the cross only to win for us the forgiveness of our sins, deliver us from the punishment

we deserved, reconcile us with God, and in spite of our sins open heaven and salvation for us. Yes, many think that of Christ; they, therefore, also seek nothing from Christ but comfort for their restless conscience; that they should actually again become holy, of that they ask nothing. However, they are in the grips of a great, most dangerous error.

As Christ in our Gospel not only in a friendly way received the deaf and dumb man and assured him of his grace but as he also, as one might say, treated him, actually healed him from all his infirmities, restored to him hearing and speech and made a healthy man of him, so Christ wants not only to forgive all men their sins but also free them from their sins, not only declare them righteous by grace but also make them truly righteous, not only comfort and soothe their heart but also cleanse and sanctify it, not only reconcile them with God but also re-unite them with God, not only make them acceptable to God but make them like God, in short, restore the entire lost image of God in them, lead them back into the state of innocence, make them perfectly health in body and soul, and thus finally bring them to the blessed goal for which God had destined them from eternity and called them into existence.

Of course, the first thing which Christ must do to the sinner is to forgive him his sins, for no person can atone for his sins himself and make them right. However, if God did nothing more with sin but forgive them, he would not be a perfect Savior; if he would leave men in sin, he would also leave them in unhappiness; part of true blessedness necessarily is that sin actually is abolished, wiped out, destroyed, and crushed in us.

Therefore, the moment a person believes in Christ from his whole heart, Christ not only forgives him all his sins but he also gives him the Holy Spirit who battles against sin in the flesh and cleanses his heart more and more from it. The moment, therefore, a person accepts Christ's grace, sin also loses its dominion in him; hatred against sin is, as it were, the first impulse of the divine image which Christ restores in man. This hatred of sin reveals itself in the fact that every day the person regrets, deplores, rues, and humbles himself before God and men because of the sins he has committed; that he also prays against sinning more, is on guard against temptation to sin, notices the gentlest impulses of sin in his heart, arms and strengthens himself against sin from God's Word, and thus unceasingly battles against sin, even his dearest pet sins, and with all his powers tries to be free from every sin.

Everyone whose sins are truly forgiven through Christ does this, and he who does not struggle to be completely free from his sins certainly does not stand in Christ's grace. For to whomever Christ gives grace, to him he also gives power; to whomever he grants forgiveness of sins, to him he also gives the hatred of sin and the zeal to fight against it. Whomever Christ graciously receives as he did the deaf and dumb man, his infirmities of soul he also begins to heal. However, he who has only forgiveness of sins from Christ but still keeps many sins and does not want to be completely cured by Christ makes Christ a servant of sin, simply does not believe in the true Christ, has a false Christ, and will be lost with his self-made "sin-Christ". Oh, how many thousands who live on without the daily struggle against sin will, therefore, some day discover that they have deceived themselves!

Not only is the fact that sin is destroyed in man a part of the restoration of the divine image but also that the man is renewed and sanctified. It is indeed true that no person can work a righteousness which avails before God; therefore, Christ had to fulfill the Law for us, so that if we believe in him we should be declared righteous by grace for his sake. But we dare not think that Christ by his grace would abolish the Law and that we now would not have to fulfill it. Definitely not! The Law is the declared, eternally unchangeable

will of God; it is, therefore, not in the least revoked through the Gospel; it must, therefore, be fulfilled to the very smallest letter not only by Christ but also by every individual person; and to bring man to this ultimate, completely perfect fulfilment of God's Law is the final purpose of the whole redemption of Jesus Christ. Clearly he says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Mt 5:17-19. Therefore, St. Paul also says, "Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid; yes, we establish the Law." Rom 3:31.

Therefore, Christ bestowes his fulfilment of the Law first on those who believe in him and thus by grace makes them righteous before God, not that they can boldly transgress the Law, but rather that as children of God they will again become willing and capable of fulfilling the Law and finally come to the perfect image of God to which they were created. If people are pardoned, then the call goes out to them, as we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph 4:23.24. And again as we read in the Letter to the Colossians, "Put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Col 3:9.10.

Examine yourselves according to this, my dear hearers; you say that you are righteous through Christ, that is, through faith. Good! but remember: if that has actually happened to you, if Christ has really bestowed his righteousness upon you, then Christ will also have awakened in you the sincere desire to fulfil God's Law yourself, truly to know God's essence and will, to love God above all things, and serve God in true righteousness and holiness; then you will also have received a new heart from Christ which delights in the Law of the Lord and desires to speak of his Law day and night. But if you have no zeal to fulfil God's Law yourself, your faith is Christ's fulfilment is a fleshly comfort, for he who is really seized by Christ's grace, him it also transfigures more and more into God's image.

II.

My friends, all this will become still clearer to us when we now secondly ponder that the restoration of the divine image through Christ is not perfect until the life to come.

As certain as it is that through his grace Christ heals his believers even here of their natural blindness, opens the eyes of their spirit, kindles in them a heavenly light, and again works in them a true knowledge of God, nevertheless they still do not here have that complete knowledge which man once had when he still bore God's image in himself. Even the most enlightened Christian must confess, "We know in part." Moreover, as certain as it is that through his grace Christ even here cleanses his believers from sin, gives them a new heart, and makes different people of them, works hatred of sin, true love of God and one's neighbor, and a zeal in sanctification and in all good works in them, nevertheless, here their will is never as sanctified as it was in the state of innocence; they never make it perfect; perfect sanctification in this life is a dream of blinded, proud enthusiasts; everyone, even the most zealous Christian, must say with Paul, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am ap-

prehended of Christ Jesus." Phil 3:12.

Moreover, it is certain that those who are justified through faith also receive peace through our Lord Jesus Christ; yet they never have that undisturbed peace here as man enjoyed it in Paradise; very often even believers must groan with David when they do not feel their faith, "There is no rest in my bones." Ps 38:4. Finally, as certain as it is that Christ even in this world makes his kingdom a kingdom of heaven for his believers, they must very often discover that they are still in the land of temptation, tears, and death; even those Christians strongest in the faith must, therefore, often confess with Paul, "We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." 2 Cor 5:8.

Christ's Church on earth is not a mortuary; his believers are all spiritually alive; it is not a house of the healthy but an infirmary, a hospital in which everyone waits for perfect health of soul. Here Christians have only the first-fruits of Christ's harvest; the full harvest has not yet come to them. The nature of Christ's kingdom of grace here is the blossoming of spring, the time of the full maturity does not come until eternal life comes.

But blessed are all Christians! some day it will come. As Christ in our Gospel restored the deaf-mute not only in part but completely, so he will also restore in the world to come in all who believe in him the image of God to which they were originally created, yes, there by his grace the redeemed will shine more gloriously than they would have shone had they not fallen.

There knowledge in part will cease and all of Christ's redeemed will be permeated with the light of perfect knowledge. There sin will be completely abolished and Christ's redeemed will be filled with perfect love and shine in the adornment of perfect innocence and holiness. There also the last germs of fear and restlessness will be destroyed and Christ's redeemed will enjoy a perfect peace in the most holy, the most perfect fellowship with God. There all misery will end and Christ's redeemed will again have entered the gates of a more beautiful Paradise which once were closed but now are opened to them, as once had been their lot here on earth. There death will be no more but eternal life, eternal joy, eternal blessedness in God's presence. In short, there Christ's redeemed will again awaken fully according to God's image, and they will see and experience that through his redemption Christ has again built up a more beautiful world than that which was ruined by sin. Therefore, if we read of the first creation, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good," all of the redeemed will at the sight of the second creation cry out so much the more, "The Lord hath done all things well!" V.37.

Is there really anyone among us who would not wish to awaken again some day with the perfect image of God? Certainly no one. Well then! if you want this, then allow Christ to heal your souls here on earth. May no one be so foolish as to seek only forgiveness and not also freedom from sin, only being declared righteous and not also sanctification in Christ! This is and indeed remains inseparable: Whoever wishes to be and remain pardoned by Christ must also let himself be healed by him. Therefore, whoever will not let a beginning of God's image be restored in him will also not there awaken in God's image at the end of the world. Amen.

13TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 10,23-37

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

"Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is what a lawyer in our today's Gospel asked Christ. We find this question in many other places of the New Testament. When Peter had declared in his Pentecost sermon that God made Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ, we are told that these words pierced their heart and they said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37. When Saul, breathing threatenings and slaughter, was on the way to Damascus in order to persecute the Christians there, we are told that a light from heaven suddenly shone down upon him, the Lord appeared to him, and said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Acts 9:5. Saul, falling to the ground, replied with fear and trembling, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When in despair the jailer at Philippi wanted to kill himself and Paul cried to him, "Do thyself no harm," we are told that the jailer fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30.

My friends, this question is beyond doubt the most important and necessary one a person can ask. In just this respect man differs from the animals; his expectations and hopes go beyond this short earthly life. Can a person act more foolishly than to ask what he must do in order to be happy for a short time on earth, but be unconcerned about his fate in an endless eternity? Though he may otherwise act ever so wisely for this life, he has sunk to the level of the irrational animals, no longer even deserves the name of a human being, to say nothing of the name of a Christian.

Though the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is important and necessary for each person, it is seldom asked earnestly. Mockers and blasphemers do not ask it because they are ashamed of this question. Those swallowed up by earthly things do not ask it, for they forget it because of the cares, or goods, or joys of this world. Most of the others who ask this question are not in earnest because in their opinion they do not need it. They deem the answer to it a well-known matter which they had already learned in their school, which they have known from their youth, and which is superfluous at least for them. Still others earnestly seek the way to eternal life, but sad to say, they forsake God's Word. It is not the only lamp for their feet nor the only light for their way. They make their own answer to this most important question, or in false trust they accept the answer of men and thus miss the heavenly goal in spite of all the zeal which they use.

Oh that I might have the high hope of at least all of you who have appeared here today to hear God's Word, that you have earnestly asked this important question of yourselves and have sought and found the answer to it in God's Word and have applied and still apply it daily to your salvation! But how many of us have read and still read the Scriptures and other Christian books with earnest sighs, prayers, and petitions to God, in order to experience for their person what they must do in order to receive eternal life? How many of us enter the house of the Lord each Sunday with this silent question in their hearts? How many of us are greatly concerned that they do not go astray on the way to eternity, and that they are not deceived as far as their hope for the future life is concerned, that,

in short, they might become, be, and remain certain of their salvation? Must not perhaps many of us rather confess, if they want to be honest, that the questions, What must I do to become rich, purchase a house, get a profitable business, or earn my daily bread? have hitherto been more important and have received more concern than the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now since this question is and remains of the greatest importance for us all, also for those who have long since earnestly pondered it, let us once again take it into consideration this morning since our today's Gospel presents us with the opportunity to do so.

The text. Luke 10:23-37.

On the basis of the Gospel just read permit me to show you:

WHAT A PERSON MUST DO IN ORDER TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE

Examining our Gospel more closely we will find that it teaches us two things on this point:

- I. The Person Must Recognize, That He can do Nothing to Save Himself, and
- II. He Must Believe in Him Who has Done for him What he should have Done.

Oh Lord God, if you do not grant success, the planting and watering done by your servants is fruitless and lost. We, therefore, pray, give your Word power to prosper in the things whereto you send it. Not only let these souls be shown simply and clearly the way to eternal life but through your Word also step before each one with your Holy Spirit, knock on the hearts of each, graciously visit and enlighten each one, awaken and move each one, that we all not only learn to know the true way but also enter upon and remain on it until finally we are completely freed from eternal death and hell, enter into life, and there praise and glorify you forever and ever. Amen.

I.

That man cannot earn eternal life himself, that it is rather a gift of the free grace of God, is written so clearly on all pages of Holy Writ that no attentive Bible reader can deny it. However, there are not a few sentences in Scripture which at first glance seem to teach the very opposite. If these passages are examined more closely according to their context, the doctrine of salvation by grace is contained no less positively. It is evident that God often speaks, as one might say, in proverbs, in order to incite us to search the more earnestly in his Word and to reprimand those proud spirits who despise and find fault with it. Such apparently contradictory words of Scripture become an offense to them, yes, a savor of death unto death.

Our today's Gospel is one of these passages. Even this has become for many enemies of Scripture a savor of death unto death. In this passage Christ with clear words seems to teach that man can earn eternal life through love, hence by his own works. When a lawyer, as Luke tells us, asked this question of Christ, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Christ said to him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" V.26. The lawyer answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." V.27. What does Christ hereupon answer? He says, "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." V.28. How can Christ answer that way? Does he not clearly contradict himself since in other passages he says,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jn 14:6. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Jn 11:26.

To be sure, the enemies of faith use Christ's words in our text to show that even according to Scripture not faith but the works of man save. They say, doesn't Christ clearly say that the correct answer to the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is: Love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself?

I admit that a cursory consideration seems to bear this out, but let us consider our text exactly in its context. Christ had, as Luke relates, just before called his disciples blessed because they saw and heard him. A lawyer had indignantly listened to this benediction. He might have thought in his heart: How dare this miserable Jesus call those blessed who see and hear him? Is it not enough to hear Moses and his divine Law? Why do I need this man if I do what is commanded in the Law? When he therefore, asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" he did not ask out of an honest desire to learn the truth, nor from concern for his salvation. Luke says expressly, that the lawyer wished rather to tempt Christ with this question. He wanted to see whether Christ would speak in such a way that afterwards he could accuse him as an enemy and blasphemer of the divine Law.

Christ who looked into his heart, therefore, answered him as he asked; he directed him to the Law, and when he had summed up the Law Christ answered, "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." V.28. With these words Christ has spoken the absolute truth. It is indeed true, that if a person keeps the Law perfectly, he would receive eternal life. But where does Christ say in our Gospel that in this world there is a person who can enter this way into eternal life? Of that Christ utters nary a word. To be sure, he says that man must keep the Law, but not that he can. Between "the can" and "the must" is as great a difference as between heaven and earth. Therefore, whoever wishes to prove from our text that man can save himself by his works does not take this teaching out of our Gospel but rather reads this into it.

Perhaps you will say, if man cannot be saved through keeping the Law, why did Christ say to the lawyer, "This do and thou shalt live?" Why doesn't he rather say, Believe in me, and thou shalt live? My friends, his great wisdom moved Christ to do that, in order to bring the lawyer first of all to the knowledge that he can do nothing to gain eternal life. Had Christ said to him point-blank, You can not be saved through the Law but only through faith in me, the lawyer would have laughed at him. He supposed that he had already done everything which he was obliged to do. But when Christ says to him, "This do, and though shalt live," that is, go ahead and try to keep the Law perfectly, he would in just that very way run into trouble and through his experience finally be convinced that he could not keep it.

That this is the correct explanation we see beyond a shadow of doubt from the following words, "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" V.29. Is it not clear from this question that Christ had replied as he did in order to take away from the lawyer all hope that he could justify himself, that this was also the reason why Christ in the following verses told the parable of the Good Samaritan? Undoubtedly. Christ wanted to show him that he hasn't fulfilled even the command to love his neighbor, must less the command to love God above all things; that he in this way could never inherit eternal life and would, therefore, have to look around for another way.

Every person must come to the knowledge that of himself he able to do nothing to inherit eternal life. To this knowledge Christ sought to bring the lawyer. This knowledge is the first rung on the ladder up which alone man can climb

to heaven. It is the narrow gate through which alone a person, who wishes to receive eternal life, must squeeze. Whoever does not come to this knowledge does not come to eternal life.

Do not suppose, my friends, that it is easy and common for a person to learn that he can do nothing to inherit eternal life. To be sure, nothing seems to be easier than for one to despair completely of himself, but it only seems to be so easy. As blind as the lawyer was that he thought he could justify himself, so blind are all men by nature. By nature each one hopes to be able to manage some day with his pretended love to God and his neighbor. Even the most notorious transgressor of the Law commonly comforts himself with the thought that he has kept the Law at least to some extent. In the main even those who say with their mouth that they make Christ their only confidence without suspecting it build in the depths of their heart their hope of salvation alone on their Christianity.

According to God's Word the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. Man builds either on his own works out of stubbornness, that is, out of pride, because he does not want to humble himself before God and be a beggar. Or he builds on his work works out of despair, because he does not dare to hope and receive the great gift of eternal life merely by grace. There are not a few who concede the doctrine that they can do nothing to inherit eternal life, and yet without knowing it are firmly bound with the bands of self-righteousness. What else can the source of the enthusiastic striving and running and chasing be than self-righteousness? That is why they pray; that is why they struggle; that is why they wrestle. They want to be able to say: I have done this or that; first of all I prayed, wrestled, and struggled in this way or that; that is why I now believe that I am a Christian and an heir of eternal life.

My friends, believe me that this is not even the beginning of true Christianity; yes, it is nothing but a refined Phariseeism. If I should briefly describe to you the beginnings of the true way to eternal life it is this: Man must enter the school of the Holy Ghost; he must implore him really to show him that he cannot fulfil the divine Law, cannot of himself love God above all things and his neighbor as himself, and can do absolutely nothing to inherit eternal life. Whoever is in earnest with this prayer, and whoever uses God's Word faithfully to come to the living knowledge of his corrupt heart, his heart the Holy Spirit will soon open and enlighten his soul with heavenly light. Finally, if he arrives at the point that he sees himself forsaken by all his supposed good works, as a person who cannot swim is hurled into the sea and is forsaken by all human help; if with terror he sees that if God does not extend his gracious hand he must necessarily be lost; if he then thinks that it is all over with him, that he must go to hell, then the very hour of deliverance and salvation has struck. He is on the true way; he is then in the proper state in which God not only will but also can have mercy on him.

However, one more thing is necessary; permit me secondly to speak to you of that.

II.

Clearly the next point which Christ has in view in the parable of the Good Samaritan was this: the scribe was to examine himself according to this example and come to know that he does not have this love toward his neighbor as he imagined, that his love toward his neighbor is not at all pure, and, therefore, that he could not stand before God. Undoubtedly, Christ had another purpose in telling that beautiful parable. If the scribe had learned to know and be

ashamed of his loveless, selfish, biased, cold heart from the example of the Good Samaritan. He should be led to the knowledge of Christ's love through this same example. For no one is really a truly merciful Samaritan; Christ alone is that. He saw the whole human race which God had created in his own image suddenly attacked by Satan, the hellish robber and murderer, stripped, and lying helpless in his sin. No person, yes, no creature could help fallen mankind; as the priest and Levite, they had to pass by on the other side. But God's Son took pity on our misery, he came into the world to us and by his suffering and dying for us, he bound the wounds of our sins; by having his Word preached to us, he, as it were, poured in the oil and wine of his heavenly comfort; and by taking us into his kingdom of grace through holy baptism he led us into the inn of his holy church, where we should be cared for through Word and sacraments until we are forever cured, either by a blessed death or until he will visibly return to judge the living and the dead and take his own into his blessed kingdom of heaven.

See from this Christ's love of sinners. Although the scribe only from hypocrisy had asked him about the way to eternal life with the purpose of tempting him, Christ nevertheless answered him in such a way that he could very well have known not only his error but also the way of salvation in Christ. If the scribe would not have hardened his heart against Christ's Word, he would now, as one redeemed and elect, triumph in heaven. But since he did not let himself be brought first to a living knowledge of his helplessness, he also did not come through the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan to a living knowledge of that grace which should and could have helped him.

May this not be the case today among any of us!

According to the parable of our Gospel, what is the second thing a person must do so that he can inherit eternal life? Clearly nothing else but this, that he must give himself up as a helpless wretch to the merciful, heavenly Samaritan; that is, that he believes in Christ who already has done for him what he should have done.

As important and indispensable as the knowledge of his helplessness is to receive eternal life, this knowledge is not the most important; the chief thing is faith. By that knowledge man should first be emptied of all false comfort, through faith he will then be filled with the true comfort; through that knowledge man should first learn to give honor to God, ask only for grace from him, through faith he should seize it; through that knowledge he should be driven as a sick person to the physician, through faith he should be healed as though with the correct medicine; through that knowledge he should be stripped naked in his thoughts as far as his soul is concerned and learn to be ashamed of himself before God, through faith he should be clothed with the garment of salvation and righteousness; through that knowledge he should become hungry and thirsty, filled with a yearning and longing for salvation, through faith salvation should be appropriated.

Perhaps this also will cause many to think: Oh, if receiving eternal life depends mainly upon faith, what an easy matter! But my dear friends, as easy as it is to get a pretended faith, that is, mere thoughts about faith, just so difficult is it truly to believe!

True faith is a living confident trust in God's grace in Christ, a certainty for which one is ready to die; it is a heavenly light which glorifies Christ in the heart; it is a divine power, a relying so firmly upon Christ that one would not let go of Christ even if all the world, yes, death and hell rage against the

believer... True faith is a holy, mysterious bond whereby the believer is most intimately united with Christ as the grapes with the vine. True faith is a divine seed from which an entirely new, godly, and holy mind grows up in a person which reveals itself in an entirely new true pious life, in hatred of and constant struggle against sin, in conquering the world, in denial of one's own will, and in true zeal in sanctification before the whole world.

Such a faith man receives only in the school of the Holy Spirit, and no one remains in this true, living faith who does not at the same time remain in the school of the Holy Spirit, who does not try to strengthen and preserve his faith through the diligent use of God's Word and the holy sacraments and through daily prayer.

Thus I have briefly shown you from God's Word the correct way to eternal life. Now go and do likewise. Really learn to know your impotence and Christ's gracious omnipotence, exercise and strengthen yourself in this knowledge, and persevere in it until your end. Do not think that all these things are old, well-known matters which you knew long ago; he who thinks that certainly has nothing but a literal knowledge; his soul, however, is still dead in darkness and sin. A Christian who actually is upon the way to eternal life has the directive to learn to go this way until his death; he remains an eager student of the Word and, therefore, he must always regard himself as a mere beginner; he will never become surfeited with the Word; the old Word is, therefore, always new, always precious, dear, and lovely to him.

So may Jesus Christ, the merciful Samaritan, look on each of us in mercy, bring us all to feel the feverish wounds of sin, and heal our soul through his Word and his holy Sacraments; some day may he bring us into his heavenly home. Amen.

14TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY-1

Luke 17:11-19

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

In this same Savior, dear hearers.

True, the Holy Scriptures report that after the world had stood for 2,000 years God from that time on chose a certain nation to whom he especially revealed himself and through whom he intended to preserve and transmit the pure, true religion; nonetheless, Holy Writ also reports that outside of the nation chosen by God there always were people who likewise recognized the true God, believed in him, served him faithfully, and received eternal life. Yes, Scripture even reports that often then most faithful confessors were outside the visible, orthodox Church of God.

If we scan the whole Bible we will find this confirmed. Genesis 12 tells us that God chose Abraham and his descendants to be his people and his Church; one would, therefore, suppose that at that time outside of Abraham and his family there must have been no other true believers on earth. But that is not so. Two chapters later we are told that one time when Abraham returned from a war, Melchizedek, a king of Salem, met him, of whom we read, "He was a priest of the

most high God." Gen 14:18. Hence, outside of Abraham's family and the visible church there still were true servants of the true God. Yes, Melchizedek was even placed over Abraham, for we are told that he blessed Abraham and he, in turn, gave him one tenth of all his goods.

Moreover, when the nation of Israel had gone out of Egypt as God's chosen nation, had seen God's most wonderful revelations and deeds, and experienced the most miraculous divine deliverances, and yet murmured against the Lord and wished they were back in heathen Egypt, behold! while they were on the way through the wilderness, a heathen named Jethro came to them; when he heard what God had done to Israel, he was immediately converted from his heart to the true God, burst into loud praise of this God, brought his sacrifice, and said, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods." Ex 18:11.

Again, when the preaching of the Prophet Jonah in the kingdom of Israel among the nation of the true visible church had been almost entirely fruitless, God sent this prophet to the great heathenish and godless city of Nineveh to preach repentance to it. And behold! as fruitless as Jonah's penitential sermons were among God's own people, just so glorious were the results in that city. All of the inhabitants of the city, from the king down to the lowliest beggar, repented in sackcloth and ashes.

If we proceed into the writings of the New Testament, we again find the very same thing. We are told that Christ came unto his own, unto his chosen Church, and they received him not; only a few believed in him; whereas often it was the heathen or those who came from the heterodox sects, who revealed the strongest faith of all. Who was it, for example, of whom the Lord exclaimed, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel"? Mt 8:10. It was not an orthodox Jew, but the heathen centurion of Capernaum. And who was the woman over whose faith the Lord himself was so amazed that he exclaimed, "O woman, great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt"? Mt 15:28. She was not an Israelite but a heathen, a Canaanite. And finally, who was that merciful man, of whom the Gospel of a previous Sunday speaks, who so mercifully assisted him who had fallen among murderers, whilst with a hard heart the priest and Levite from the orthodox Church passed by the wretched man? He was a Samaritan, a person from a heterodox communion.

Is it not noteworthy that even Holy Scripture so repeatedly expressly reports that often those who were not in outward communion with the true visible church showed the strongest faith and the most ardent love? Why would God hold them up to us in his Word? That we should be indifferent as to which religion and church one joins? That we should think that every faith, even a false faith, saves? Far be it! Now since we hear in our today's Gospel that a Samaritan was firm in the faith, whilst his nine Jewish companions fell from faith, let us now seek the answer to the question: What does the fact teach us that of the ten it was a Samaritan who remained firm in the faith?

The text. Luke 17:11-19.

After the evangelist has related that of the ten lepers whom Christ had healed, only one remained firm in the faith, returned, gave glory to God, and humbly thanked Christ, he adds with great impressiveness, "And he was a Samaritan." By these words the evangelist clearly intends to direct our attention above all to this circumstance as being especially noteworthy in this story. And indeed why, my dear hearers? Undoubtedly because this circumstance offers the readers a most important and necessary lesson. Therefore, let us now answer the question,

WHAT DOES THE FACT THAT OF THE TEN LEPERS IT WAS THE SAMARITAN
WHO REMAINED FIRM IN THE FAITH TEACH US?

I answer, it teaches us:

- I. That Even Among the Heterodox there are Those who will be Saved, and
- II. But that Even They will be Saved Only Through the True Faith.

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by you. You are the Door; if anyone enters through you, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. In you rests all our salvation. Nothing can condemn us, no sin, no error, if we believe in you from our whole heart, but nothing can save us, no work nor knowledge be they ever so great, if we do not seize you in true faith. Oh help us then that all of us place our hope alone in faith in you. Guard us, therefore, from the deceit of an imagined faith and work this true faith itself in all our hearts. And since you have given us the grace of being in your pure orthodox church and partaking of your pure Word and sacraments, grant that we may faithfully use this great grace, so that heterodox Samaritans may never arise against us and shame us, but that we fight the good fight here, keep the faith, and finally receive the crown. Hear us, Lord Jesus! Amen.

I.

In our days not only do the Roman priests still teach that outside their church there is no salvation but even in the midst of protestantism, yes, in the midst of the Lutheran Church more and more teachers arise who claim the same for their church.

Now if this were true, if true children of God and true Christians were to be found only in the visible orthodox church, if only there there were those who could be saved, Christ's kingdom and work would really be in an inexpressibly tragic state. For example, now small is the number of Lutheran Christians in comparison to the many millions of other Christians! And again how few true, living, believing Christians there are even amongst those who call themselves Lutherans! What a poor King of Truth and Grace would our dear Lord Jesus Christ then be!

Yes, if only those who are in the visible orthodox church could be saved, then millions would have to be lost merely because they were born of parents who instilled in them many errors early in youth; then salvation would depend not only upon faith in Jesus Christ but also upon a good, pure, complete knowledge; then, if one wanted to be certain of his salvation, it would not be enough to know that one has a Savior and take comfort in him; then at the risk of losing his salvation everyone would of necessity have to know whether he is in the true visible church and of necessity, therefore, the church would be a second savior for a Christian.

Of course, it is true, if God himself would say this in his Word, we would have to believe it and be silent. But where is it written that no one can be saved who is still caught by this or that error? Where is it written that something else is absolutely necessary for salvation in addition to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? We find nothing of that either in the writings of the Old or the New Testaments, neither in the writings of the apostles nor the prophets. On the contrary, all such thoughts are refuted in our today's Gospel with the brief phrase, "And he was a Samaritan."

This was true of the Samaritans. When the Assyrian king Shalmaneser had led the ten tribes, who had separated from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, into the Assyrian captivity, only a few were permitted to remain behind; when thereafter the king of Assyria colonized the country of Samaria with heathen, there also arose through this mixture of Jews and heathen a mixing and falsification of religion. Whilst according to God's command the true Jews held their services at Jerusalem, the Samaritans in their own devotions, on the other hand, without God's command built a temple on Mt. Gerizim; and whilst the true Jews accepted all the writings of the Old Testament from Moses to the Prophet Malachi as God's Word, the Samaritans, on the other hand, accepted only the Five Books of Moses. Therefore, the Samaritans were almost universally condemned and avoided by the Jews as godless, heterodox heretics, so that the Jews supposed they could accuse Christ the most severely if they called him a Samaritan; thus they intended to say that Christ was a hardened heretic.

Now let us go back to our text and see how Christ acted toward such a Samaritan who was a leper. We hear that the Samaritan joined the other nine lepers, who perhaps were Jews, in crying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." And what did the Lord answer? Did he perhaps say, You nine who are members of the orthodox Jewish Church I will and can help, but among you is a member of a heterodox sect, a Samaritan; him I will and cannot help; first let him renounce all his errors, forsake his erring congregation, and become a member of the true visible church; then, and only then I will take pity on him? Do we hear something like that from Christ? No, not a single word; but scarcely had the whole group besought him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," when Christ also helped all without exception in body and soul, the Samaritan as well as the Jews.

So tell me, what is the first thing which this miracle teaches us? First of all, it teaches most clearly that even among the heterodox there are those who have experienced Christ's help and will be saved; for this is certain: Christ does not change; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever; as once he was minded and as once he acted, so is he minded and so he acts today as well.

Christ is not here and there with his grace, but wherever his Word is. Therefore, heaven is open to man everywhere. As once Christ did not travel only through Judea but, as we hear in our Gospel, went also through Samaria and Galilee which is inhabited by heterodox, so even now Christ goes through those congregations, cities, and countries where false preachers twist and falsify his Word, provided they confess his Word as his Word before men. Yes, Christ is such a Good Shepherd, that he takes pity especially upon those poor souls who are as sheep having no shepherd. The less such lost souls hear of the true way to heaven in their churches, the more mightily Christ works in them in secret through his Holy Spirit, if they seek light and comfort in his Word. And even if in the midst of hosts of deceivers and heretics they cry to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," Christ does not look at the person, he helps them all in body and soul without making a distinction and saves them. And if because of a weakness a person is still in the grasp of great errors, if he is earnestly trying to be saved, Christ nevertheless helps him if he turns to him, just as he helped Lot in the midst of Sodom, just as he helped the three men in the midst of the fiery furnace, and just as he helped Daniel in the midst of ravening, roaring lions.

Therefore my friends, let us free ourselves from that dangerous error of our times, according to which one denies grace and salvation to all who do not enjoy the grace of being born, baptized, trained, and instructed in a visible, orthodox church. Let us not foolishly and wickedly want to bind the helping

hands of the Savior which he stretches out to all sinners, nor set limits to his grace. Let us confess with Christ, "The wind bloweth where it listeth," and praise him that he so gladly grants salvation to all sinners and, therefore, also to us and, therefore, has subjects of his blessed kingdom of grace even in the midst of his foes.

II.

My friends, the fact that of the 10 lepers it was the Samaritan who remained firm in the faith teaches us a second important truth; permit me to present that to you briefly.

As in our days there are Christians who cherish the error that no one outside the visible, orthodox church can be saved, so there are also such s-called Christians who cherish the opposite error, who think that nothing depends upon what a person believes, provided that he lives correctly. They say: What do you want with faith; just be a good person and you will be saved. They think that one religion is as good as the next; and just as long as a person is earnest about his religion and acts as his conscience directs, he will be saved. A heathen who zealously serves his gods, a Mohammedan who lives strictly by the Koran, and a Jew who clings scrupulously to his Jewish laws will enter heaven just as well as a Christian. There are many ways to heaven and every religion is one such way.

Is this to be confirmed by the fact that Christ had mercy on the heterodox Samaritan as on the orthodox Jews? Is this actually to follow that one can be saved through every faith? Absolutely not!

Let us consider the example of the Samaritan somewhat more closely. It is true, my friends, that because he was trained in his heterodox sect, this man may have cherished very many errors, and since he as a Samaritan considered only the Five Books of Moses as God's Word, he may have known much less of the promised Messiah than the orthodox Jews. But what had happened to him? He was visited with a great affliction; God had permitted him to contract the most fearful and loathesome of all sicknesses, leprosy, which even in the writings of Moses was called God's punishment on account of sin. This had reminded the poor Samaritan of his sins and deeply humbled him. He might well have thought that because he was such a great sinner, God would never again take pity on him.

Yet behold! he heard that a certain Jesus traveled throughout the country; he was most gracious and friendly toward the greatest sinner, helped all the wretched who called to him, and did great miracles; without a doubt he was the promised Messiah. How often the poor Samaritan must have thought and sighed: Oh that this Jesus would come once into this region! And lo! his wish was fulfilled; Jesus came. With the other nine Jewish leper he immediately raised his voice and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!" And when Jesus said to the lepers, "Go show yourselves unto the priests," what did the Samaritan do? He not only did not refuse to go to the Jewish priests because Jesus had said that to him, but in a wonderful way he alone, when he saw that he was healed, quickly turned around again, praised God with a loud voice, fell on his face at Jesus' feet, and thanked him.

Why indeed did and could Christ help the Samaritan even though he was a member of a heterodox sect? Perhaps because in spite of all his errors he was a pious, virtuous man? No, the Lord himself states the reason when he finally cried, "Arise, go thy way; thy FAITH hath made thee whole." V.19.

So, what does the example of the Samaritan teach us? Clearly this: that

among the heterodox there are indeed those who have experienced Christ's help and will be saved, but that even they receive salvation only through true faith.

Yes my friends, that even among the heterodox there are those who will be saved is not due to the fact that a person can even be saved by unbelief or a false faith, but to the fact that though a person has many errors he can nevertheless have a true, living faith in Jesus Christ in his heart worked by the Holy Ghost.

It is true: the person who is in an orthodox church and, therefore, has a good pure literal knowledge of all Christian teaching enjoys a great advantage, yet he can in spite of all his good literal knowledge be without the true faith and be lost. Then if a person is not poor in spirit, if he does not have a humble, broken, and crushed heart, if he does not live in fear and trembling of every sin, even the very least, to him his good knowledge becomes only a poison and his ruin; of him we read, "Knowledge puffeth up." On the other hand, it is also true: the person who is in a heterodox sect and, therefore, cherishes many errors is in great danger of being killed by the poison of errors; yet if an erring Christian is upright, if he lets himself be brought to the knowledge of his great sinful misery by God's Word, so that he casts away all trust in himself; hungers and thirsts after Christ's righteousness, places his only hope in God's free grace in Christ, and perseveres in this faith until the end, then that person will be saved as truly as Jesus Christ died on the cross a Savior of all sinners and for the reconciliation of the entire world.

Now then, my dear hearers, let us also take the warning to heart which is in the story of the thankful Samaritan who remained firm in the faith. The heterodox Samaritan came to the true faith, remained firm in it, and was saved; the orthodox Jews also came to the faith but again fell away and were lost. That can happen also to us. Many a member of a sect even now honestly and earnestly seeks his Savior with true tears of regret and the heartfelt sighs of an inner longing, forsakes the world and sin, never again looks back, and Christ graciously covers his sins and errors and saves him. Of what profit is it to us that we, on the other hand, are members of the orthodox church if we do not earnestly seek Christ nor faithfully hold fast to him, but along with the glory of our faith and pure doctrine again become proud, secure, worldly, greedy, and the like?

Oh that Christ will not some day have to say: Were not all who were baptized cleansed, but where are my Lutheran Christians? For this is the way Christ expressly speaks, "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," that is, the external members of the true visible church, "shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Mt 8:11,12. Oh that at that time none of us Lutherans may be in this group! Amen.

14TH S. A. T. - 2

Luke 17:11-19

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

In Psalm 50:15 we read the glorious, well-known passage, "Call upon me in

the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." We see from this: no one has reason to despair in any distress of body or soul. According to this passage, though a person may be forsaken by everyone, he still has one Friend in distress, the gracious God in heaven, to whom he not only dares go and on whom he not only dares call for help, but also should; God, God himself, has even commanded it. Therefore, though a person's misery may be so great that there seems to be no possible way out, he dare not despair; for God is all-wise and almighty; he always knows how to help and can always help; Paul Gerhardt sings thus:

Thy hand is never shortened
 All things must serve Thy might;
 Thine every act is blessing,
 Thy path is purest light.
 Thy work no man can hinder,
 Thy purpose none can stay,
 Since Thou to bless Thy children
 Wilt always find a way. (520,4)

Though a person may know that he dare not reckon himself among God's children, though he may be completely unworthy of God's help, if he finally lets his distress drive him to God, if it is only in misery that he calls upon God, even he has no reason to despair in his distress because of his unworthiness. God has commanded everyone, "Call upon me in the day of trouble," no matter who he may be, and has promised everyone, "I will deliver thee;" in these words God has bound himself; since he is truthful and cannot lie nor deceive with false promises and pretence, everyone dare and must appeal to God's command and promise in his distress, everyone will then be heard. Only, he should not tire quickly of praying and imploring; he must persevere and not prescribe to God the time when, nor the manner in which he should help; finally, God will certainly hear him.

It is, therefore, also a great sin not to call upon God in distress. Thus a person sins first against God through disobedience, since God has commanded it, and through contempt of his goodness and truth, since God has promised to hear him. Thus he also sins against himself, for when he does not call upon God in distress he wilfully jams shut the source from which help could flow to him. St. James, therefore, writes, "Ye have not because ye ask not," Jas 4:2, and again Paul Gerhardt writes:

By anxious sighs and grieving
 And self-tormenting care
 God is not moved to giving;
 All must be gained by prayer. (520,2)

My friends, although very many people almost completely forget about God as long as all is well, nothing is more common than this, that even the worst despisers of God turn to him with sighs and praying when they fall into trouble, and especially when they are in great trouble. Few people are so hardened, as that malefactor at the Lord's left hand on Golgatha who in the Savior's most frightful anguish of death could mock and say, "If thou art the Christ, save thyself and us." Though most people never think of nor ever speak to God, yes, deny God, they, as we said, finally take their refuge in distress in God. In the 26th chapter of his book, Isaiah, therefore, writes, "Lord in trouble have they visited thee, they have poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." V.16. And of the godless Jews God himself says in Hosea 5, "In their affliction they will seek me (German has: and say): Come, and let us return

unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Hos 5:15c.16:1.

My friends, as there are many who let that word, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee," be told them, so there are, on the other hand, few who do what follows this command and promise: "Thou shalt glorify me." Scarcely has God heard the lamentable cries of a person, scarcely has he provided help, scarcely is the distress over, when most people also forget God and the divine help they experienced. The natural heart is unutterably unthankful. An example of this is presented in our today's Gospel. On the basis of this text permit me, therefore, to speak to you on the great unthankfulness of the human heart toward God.

The text. Luke 17:11-19.

On the basis of this Gospel just read I will now speak to you on,

THE GREAT UNTHANKFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART TOWARD GOD

- I. Wherein it Consists, and
- II. How One can be Healed of it.

Oh Lord, how manifold are your works! in wisdom you have made them all, and the earth is full of your goodness! The heavens declare your glory and the firmament shows your handiwork. Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. All the earth offers you thanks, praise, glory, and honor. Only we, we human beings, we sinners whom you created as proof of your highest love and over whom you have poured all the fullness of your goodness, we are dumb, we are silent, we do not want to praise nor thank you. Oh, have mercy on us, change our heart and set us afire, so that also our mouth will show forth your praise here in time and hereafter in eternity. To that end bless your holy Word in this hour for the sake of your infinite love and goodness. Amen!

I.

My friends, once as the Lord upon a trip to Jerusalem journeyed through Galilee and Samaria and came near a town, ten lepers met him, people who were in the most pitiable condition. Afflicted with a most loathsome and contagious disease, such people were expelled from human fellowship. Shunned by everyone as an abomination, besides being plagued day and night by violent pains in all members, they had to live alone, away from inhabited cities and villages. Since the sickness was beyond any medical help, their condition in addition to all their present great distress was a hopeless one. The one hope which the lepers in our Gospel had was that Christ would perhaps come into their neighborhood; they had heard that he could miraculously heal even incurable leprosy with divine power and was always ready to heal.

For a long time these unfortunates may have waited with great yearning for such a happy moment. And behold! this moment finally came. Jesus comes into the region where they stayed. And so the moment they saw Jesus they humbly remained in the distance but they raised their voice as loudly as they were able because of the hoarseness connected with their sickness and cried, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." V.12. The Lord sees them and says to them, "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." (The priests must decide whether a person still had leprosy or not.) And what happened? As they went they were cleansed.

The joy that must have gripped the ten when they saw that suddenly they had been cleansed and healed cannot be described in words. It must have seemed as though they were suddenly pulled out of a horrible slimy pit and, stylishly clothed, seated at a royal table, yes, lifted from a hell into a heaven.

What more do we hear about them? The moment they had shown themselves to the priests according to the law, should not all the ten have turned about, hurled themselves at Christ's feet, ardently thanked him, and said, Lord, how are we to repay you for all your benefits which you have shown us wretched little worms? Here we are, you have given us new life; we also want to be yours body and soul and serve you as long as we live!? Alas no! Only one of the ten did that; the Lord must complain, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." Vv.17.18. No! Scarcely had they experienced this blessing when the nine forgot their gracious Benefactor; no word of thanks and praise to him comes from their lips, no thought in their hearts of the debt they owed for the blessings experienced; yes, in black, accursed thanklessness they appear to be convinced by the hostile priests that they were healed not through Christ but through them, the priests and their sacrifice, to have joined Christ's foes, and used the health they received through Christ only to join in blaspheming and persecuting Christ!

Who is he who, when he hears of this, does not turn from such wicked, such shamefully unthankful persons with the deepest aversion? However, my friends, just so we don't silently bless ourself at seeing them and perhaps say with the Pharisee, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." For, though it may sound hard, it nevertheless is true when I say: in those nine lepers we have a living picture of the unthankfulness of every human heart, as long as it is in its natural state and has not been changed and renewed by God's grace. Let us draw a parallel and we will recognize it only too soon.

The thanklessness of the nine cleansed lepers showed itself above all in the fact, that, first, they forgot the inexpressibly great blessing which they received, second, that they were silent about it and had no word of praise for it, third, that they showed they were not ready to repay their Benefactor and serve him, and finally, that they even used this blessing to do evil to their Benefactor.

Now I ask you: do the people who still do not have a changed heart act in a different way toward God? On the contrary, the nine lepers are a true image of them.

The blessings which everyone has and continually receives from God are just as inexpressible in their number as in their greatness. Our existence, our soul with all its powers and our body with all its members are God's gifts and blessing. Every moment we live, every thought we think, every breath of air we draw, every beat of our heart, all the food we eat, every drink we take, each night's slumber, all the strength to work, each success which crowns our labors, each possession we own, each pleasure we enjoy, each deliverance we experience, every warning of misfortune which strikes another, all these are pure gifts of the creating, preserving, ruling, and providential love and goodness of God. No day, no hour, no moment passes by in which we do not enjoy thousands of God's benefits; wherever we go, sit, stand, or lie, everywhere we are encircled by God's blessings and surrounded by them as by the air. If God would not let countless blessings continually flow to us in veritable torrents, we could not exist for one moment; yes, the instant God would withdraw his hand from us for one moment, we would receive nothing but hell and eternal death. And if I were

to begin to name the blessings which God unceasingly shows all people also in spiritual matters, when he not only gave and offered his only begotten Son for their deliverance and salvation, but now also offered them his grace through the means of grace, his Word and sacraments; uses them to knock at their hearts through his Holy Spirit and draws them and so guides and directs all things that everything, even their troubles, can and must work together for their good and their eternal salvation, if only they would allow it, where would I find words to describe the greatness of God's blessings which every person continually experiences?

And how do people react? Most do not even once perceive this or never think of the fact that everything which they are and have is a gift and blessing from God. They live on like the irrational animals who know nothing of God. They, as it were, swim in a sea of God's gifts and yet their heart and mouth say, There is no God; it is all nature.

Others indeed know that there is a God; but scarcely have they received some blessing from God, if they now and then think of the fact that it comes from God, scarcely have they enjoyed this blessing when the heavenly Giver is also again forgotten. If most people do not once keep their divine blessings in a faithful, thankful heart and remembrance, then naturally their mouth is even less often full of continual praise and glory to God. If they are in trouble, particularly great trouble, then indeed they, as we heard above, often cry immediately to God; then God should help them immediately; but when God has helped them, then only a few feel compelled to offer the sacrifice of praise to this gracious God for his kindness.

Most are silent about what God has done for them; yes, they try to convince themselves that God did not hear their prayers but that they helped themselves or a happy accident rescued them. With all their blessings of which they speak many indeed say, God be thanked, praise God, etc.; but whilst this thankful hypocritical talk crosses their lips, their heart knows nothing of thankful feelings toward their divine Benefactor. Especially if people took great pains to acquire something, they consider it the greatest folly to sing to God a psalm of praise for it. Without supplication, therefore, they sit down like animals at the table and without a prayer of thanks they leave.

And finally, where are the people whose heart is melted by the knowledge of the host and greatness of God's kindnesses which they daily and hourly receive, so that day and night they think about how they want to repay God for these kindnesses, how they might serve him more and more faithfully and zealously, and want to live, suffer, and die to him wholly in body and soul? In trouble many indeed still promise God that if he would again deliver them this once they would become different people and begin an entirely different life. As a rule, however, what happens when God hears their prayer? As that song says: When the sick recovered, he becomes so much the worse. Far be it that they would then pay to the Lord their vows; they repay him evil for good. That by God's help they are no more in trouble is for them reason enough no longer to ask about God, to live on in fleshly security according to the ways of the world in its vanity, with a heart which forgets and scorns their God, without daily watching and praying, without daily struggling against sin, without daily and devoutly using God's Word, without concern for God's approval and their soul's salvation. God does not cease to do good to them day and night; his goodness rises upon them every morning with the sun, and nourishes and clothes and strengthens and cheers them, and they -- do not cease day and night to insult God with a thousand sins.

Oh the thanklessness of the human heart! If this very person shows another only a small kindness and the receiver is not thankful, yes, even repays the good with evil, how this enrages the giver! how contemptible, how godless, how wicked

that thankless person seems to him! And he himself lives and moves in nothing but benefits from God and still deems himself pious, even though he never truly thanks God in his heart, nor with his lips, nor by his life but rather every day and hour lives contrary to God's will. Oh thanklessness! oh the black, damnable thanklessness of man's heart toward God!

Is there no way by which a person can be cured and become thankful toward God? Yes, indeed, there is such a way, and in the second place permit me to speak to you of this.

II.

As our Gospel tells us, there was one among the ten lepers who showed himself thankful toward Christ. We read of him, "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan." Vv. 15.16. Certainly a wonderful example! Indeed, he also, as all men, by nature had an unthankful heart, but his heart was changed. What was the way by which this glorious change had been produced in him? The Lord tells us when at the close he says to him, "Arise, go thy way; thy FAITH hath made thee whole." See, faith was, therefore, the means by which the Samaritan had been completely helped and healed, not only physically but also spiritually, and by which he had, therefore, also received a thankful heart. When he had in faith looked at Christ in prayer, his faith was not only directed to his physical but also to his spiritual leprosy, to his sins. And behold! his faith had also made him well body and soul.

There you see, my friends, the only means by which also all others can be healed of the natural thanklessness of their heart: it is nothing else but faith.

A sure sign that a person still does not have the true faith is that he still lacks a heart thankful toward God; on the other hand, a sure sign that a person has the true faith is that his heart is filled with thankfulness toward God. A quickly passing emotion of thanks can at times also be found in a godless heart, but only faith works the state in which a person is always full of thanks over everything which he is and has.

No one, however, can give such a faith to himself; no one but God the Holy Spirit can work that, and he works it through his Word.

The first stage to which the Holy Ghost tries to bring a person is that he learns to know himself as a poor, great, wretched sinner, unworthy of any of God's grace and kindness. The Holy Spirit works this knowledge partly through the Law which is preached to men, partly through all kinds of misfortune which strike him. Of course, most people resist the Holy Spirit. Though it may be shown them over so clearly how holy and strict God is and in how many ways and how seriously they have sinned against God, they still try to convince themselves that they are not such great and damnable sinners; and then if severe trouble strikes, instead of letting their heart be softened, it becomes only the harder; instead of accusing themselves as sinners they accuse God of being unjust.

However, if a person does not resist the Holy Spirit, if he believes that God certainly has the right to demand that he should be perfectly holy and that he is a damnable sinner; if he lets himself be softened and moved by his trouble to see into his unworthiness and guilt more deeply and clearly, then he also begins to look around for help for his poor lost soul which he cannot find

in himself; and if in this condition he hears the Gospel of Christ, the Savior of sinners, the Holy Ghost awakens him to pray, as the lepers in our text, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!"

And, blessed is the person who lets himself be brought this far by the Holy Spirit! Such groans not only bring true faith but are already the first workings and revelations of the truth faith. The moment true faith enters into the heart of a person in this way, his heart is also suddenly changed by God. Along with faith the Holy Spirit enters the heart, with the Holy Spirit love, and with love thankfulness.

He who has become such a true believer can then scarcely hold back his tears when he glances back over his past life. Often his heart almost wants to burst when he thinks back on how sinful his life was and with what shameful thanklessness he had every day and hour received and misused God's countless benefits. Along with true faith in Christ the desire has then entered this person's heart to thank and to praise and to extol God that he must not only thank and praise and extol him for everything, even the least which he has and enjoys, but of which he considered himself completely unworthy, even for the cross which God sends. Then he says with David, "It is a good think to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High; to show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night." Ps 92:1.2. Yes, even in tribulation he will, if not immediately then finally, cry with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21. Above all, that here the true believer, oppressed by the flesh he still has, often feels unable and averse in praising God, therefore makes the temporal life so burdensome for him and awakens in him the yearning for heaven. Even now in the spirit he looks forward to eternity when with all the angels and elect he hopes to be able to thank and sing praises to God eternally with pure lips and from his whole soul.

And now, my friends, whom are you like? the one thankful Samaritan, or those nine thankless? Do you still have the old thankless heart, or is your heart already changed by a true, living faith? Do you consider it a good thing to praise the Lord and to sing praises to the name of the most High, and is this your only pain that you cannot thank your God often enough, nor ardently enough, nor joyfully enough? Do you turn around as the Samaritan every day at morning and at night and every time you enjoy God's kindnessess and as the Samaritan cast yourself humbly on your face before your God in thanks?

Ah, let no one who has not learned to thank God ardently every day think that he will some day be among those singers who will hereafter offer to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in eternity. He who does not want to howl eternally as one cast away by God, let him learn here to praise and thank.

To him be honor and praise in time and in eternity. Amen.

15TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 6:24-34

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

In this same Savior, dearly beloved hearers.

That everyone is obligated to serve God is a truth which is engraved on the heart of every person with letters which can never be completely erased. True, in our day the number of those who do not want to recognize even this truth grows greater from day to day; however, if these miserable people would only admit it, they would soon see that even in their heart there is a voice, which they vainly try to silence, crying with increasing intensity, There still is a God and him you should serve.

Though the stream of atheism may now roar ever so fearfully even through Christendom, thank God, it still has not even in this our day carried everything before it; there still are not a small number of people who today confess in words and deeds that they believe in God and confess that they are obligated to serve him. Thank God, there still are millions who are not ashamed to come streaming into God's house every Sunday, there to bow their knees before God's holy majesty, to lift their voice to call to him and to praise him, and to listen attentively to the words of this King of all kings and Lord of all lords. There still are millions who believe that some day they must appear before God's judgment in order to give account of their whole life and to receive according to that which they have done, whether it is good or evil; who, therefore, also fear to open their mouth against God and to act openly against his holy commandments. Do not all of you also who have assembled here belong to this number? Certainly; if you did not want to serve God, you would not have appeared today in his house.

My friends, as many as there still are in our time who profess and confess in words and deeds that they must serve God, that he is their Lord and that they are his humble subjects, his servants in his employ, experience nevertheless teaches that most serve God but do not want to serve him alone. It is most apparent that the majority wish to divide their heart between God and the world; true, they want to have God as their friend (that is why they serve him) but to sacrifice the friendship of the world for it, that they do not want to do; of course, they do not want to lose heaven, but to deny the treasures and joys of earth for it, that they find impossible; naturally they want to assure a good place for their soul in the world to come, but to renounce a good comfortable life for their body here, that seems to be too much.

Or is that not so? Do not very many think that piety can be carried too far? Do not many think that the Sunday has been appointed for worship, that during the week the laboring man has no time for worship, during that time he must attend to his daily work? Yes, do not very many think that if they were in church on Sunday, they have more than enough offered the service which they owe God, then no one can find fault with them if they during the remaining hours of the Sunday allow themselves a few pleasures as other people do? If they are admonished to serve God always and entirely and alone, do not many say that no one can demand that much from them? they could not day and night sit before books, or be on their knees? Do not most young people, even those who otherwise do not want to refuse all service to God, say: Should we not enjoy the most beautiful time of our life? Should we pass the time of our youth, which we experience only once, in mourning? Do not most business people say or

at least think: How would we exist if we do not side with the world, if we offend our customers? do we not have to live from the world? Yes, do not most Christians think: Why would faith in Christ be necessary and profitable if it were so necessary, as many preachers tell us, to be so concerned about our salvation? what is the use if one would have to follow after sanctification so anxiously, be so exact about every sin, and must shut himself out so completely from the world and its joys? No, they think, that one does not forget God completely, that one serves God also, that is right; but always to have nothing else in the world in one's mind except God, to serve him always, completely, and alone, that is demanding too much; whoever would do that could finally be gripped by a deep melancholy! In short, most Christians think that even in serving God, as in all matters, there is a middle road, consisting of not surrendering oneself completely to the world nor to God, rather serving God but also not being completely indifferent to the joys and treasures of the world, in a word, most wisely uniting service to God and the service to the world.

Of course, those following this principle think they are acting in true wisdom and are sailing happily between piety and enthusiasm, and going the best, safest, and easiest way to heaven; however, are they really right? Alas, no! The thought that there is a middle road which leads to heaven is an empty dream, and those who comfort themselves with it and remain in it are lost beyond hope of deliverance. Among the ways which lead to eternity is the middle road -- the highway to hell. He who wants to serve God and be saved must serve him alone or else his whole service is in vain. Christ testifies to this in our today's Gospel, and of this let me, etc.

The text. Matthew 6:24-34.

Of all the Gospel lessons which are publicly read and treated on the Sundays of the churchyear, without a doubt the one just read is one of the most earnest and the most stern. It contains a reprimand, not for those known to be godless, but for those who want to be pious and because of their piety suppose they deserve not reproof but commendation. It does not show that the godless should be converted but this, that many of those who think they are already converted must first be converted if they want to be saved. Thousands who regard themselves good Christians will, therefore, be judged and condemned by this Gospel. In short, it is a Gospel especially for us who still want to serve God, and it tells us that we should serve either God alone or spare God our half-service. Permit me to show you:

THE FOLLY OF THOSE WHO SERVE GOD BUT DO NOT WANT TO SERVE HIM ALONE

The reasons are mainly twofold:

- I. Because thus They Undertake Something Absolutely Impossible, and
- II. Because thus They also Undertake Something Definitely Fatal.

God, you are not only our Creator, our Lord, our God, but also the only source of all joy, all happiness. Therefore, we are not only obligated to serve you, to serve you only, but we also can be happy only if we serve you only, for to serve you and only you is happiness indeed. Alas, we must lament and confess to you that we are so deeply ruined and blinded that we are afraid to serve you; that we want to give only half of our year to you. Therefore, you would be completely in the right if you were to hurl us away from your holy presence forever as faithless servants. But oh, God, you have given your Son also for us; we beseech you, have mercy on us for his sake. With the sword of your Word sever all cords with which our poor heart is still bound to the service of the creature,

and incline our heart which has turned away from you toward yourself, so that we may serve you, serve you alone, and be happy in serving you. To that end bless also the present preaching of your Word for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son, our Mediator. Amen. Amen.

I.

That they act foolishly who undertake something which is absolutely impossible all of you will certainly grant. For example, if a person would want to go two ways at the same time, one to the right and at the same time another which goes left; one which goes up and forward, and at the same time another which goes down and to the rear, surely everyone would regard him as a fool; why? because he is undertaking something impossible.

Now what if those who serve God but do not want to serve him alone were doing the same? Would it not be plain that such people are acting most foolishly? Without a doubt.

How does Christ speak in our today's Gospel? He begins with the noteworthy, plain, unambiguous statement, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." V.24 Clearly and plainly the mouth of eternal Truth states the fact: as impossible as it is for a person to sell himself as a slave to two masters and render both the service due them at the same time, just so impossible is it to serve God and to serve another master at the same time.

But is this actually so absolutely impossible? Are there not thousands upon thousands who know how to combine this very well? who indeed serve the world, mammon, and many sins, yet who never forget God, yes, who in their worship are so much the more diligent, diligently go to church, diligently come to confession and the Lord's Supper, diligently hear and read God's Word, and also diligently pray and sing at home?

It is true, my friends: if God actually were served by such outward, so-called religious works, one could by all means serve God and mammon, Christ and the world, the Creator and the creature at the same time. But they deceive themselves. If a person would do such so-called religious works, he does not really serve God but God rather serves him. To serve God is something entirely different.

To serve God means to surrender oneself to God, to give God his love, to give God his fear, to give God his trust, in short, to give God his heart. What God demands as service he shows us in the First Commandment where he says, "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me," Ex 20:2.3; therefore, we should have God as our God; and what this means, to have God as his God, cannot be more clearly and definitely expressed than as Luther has expressed it in our Small Catechism in the words of the explanation, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." God himself has also explained the First Commandment, when for example he says through the wise Solomon, "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Prov 23:26. Therefore, ourselves with all which we are and have, our heart, our heart we should give God, that, that is the service which God demands of us and with which alone we can serve him.

Now who is so wise that he can serve God and at the same time serve another lord in addition? To do this not even the wisest are wise enough; for this is something absolutely impossible.

True, many a one serves mammon, that is, he seeks to become rich, or he places his trust in earthly property, and thinks that only then is he secure and can look calmly into the future if he has a fair amount of capital laid aside; or he worries himself out with fretting about temporal matters and not clinging to God's providence he asks daily in unbelief, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?" v.31, or he regards the loss of his earthly property a misfortune over which he can scarcely be comforted. And yet such people think that because they go diligently to church they in spite of their worship of mammon still serve God. But they deceive themselves; God demands their heart and their heart with which alone they can serve God they have long since taken from God and given to mammon!

Moreover, many another serves the world, that is, he still goes with the world, still takes part in the empty pleasures of the world; or he still seeks the favor and friendship of the world; or he is afraid of the mockery and the contempt of the world, and because of such fear he fails to confess his faith, yes, denies his faith in plain fact and by express deed. And yet such suppose that because they perhaps hear and read God's Word diligently they in spite of this service of the world still serve God. But they deceive themselves; God demands their heart, and their heart with which alone they can serve God they have taken from God and given to the world!

Finally, many openly serve sin, that is, they let this or that known sin still rule over them; the one lets the thirst for honor rule him, another envy, wrath, and irreconcilableness, a third greed, a fourth lust, a fifth vanity, a sixth drunkenness, a seventh usury and secret deceit, and the like. And yet such suppose that because they associate with Christians and take part in their divine services and customs they in spite of their service of sin still serve God. But they deceive themselves. God demands their heart, and their heart with which alone they can serve God they have long since taken away from God and have given it to sin and thus to the devil.

Oh, all of you who have wanted to serve God in the past, but who have also served mammon, or the world, or a sin, recognize that you have undertaken something absolutely impossible. Believe the mouth of Truth who speaks so clearly and plainly in our Gospel, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" or any other lord. As little as it is possible for a soldier to be enlisted with two kings warring with each other and be able to serve them both; as little as it is possible for one to sell himself as a slave to two masters at the same time and be able to serve both; as little as it is possible for a man to be engaged to two brides and be able to be faithful to both, so little is it possible for one to serve God and at the same time be able to serve still another lord. He who does not serve God alone does not serve him at all; his service with a half, divided heart merely looks like service therefore is no service; everything which such a half-hearted servant of God does, and if he at times seems to tire himself out ever so much in his sham service is nothing but lost labor for which he can expect no other reward than the one that soldier must expect who in addition to serving in his own army also served the enemy, hence: the reward of a traitor. Therefore, when the nation of Israel once served Jehovah but wanted to serve Baal as well, the Prophet Elijah cried to them in divine fiery zeal, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 28:21. And at one time when the bishop of the church at Laodicea also wanted to serve Christ and the world at the same time, the Lord had John write to him, "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God, I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will pure thee out of my mouth." Rev 3:14-16.

Listen to this, all of you who want to serve God but do not want to serve him alone; this terrible threat of the Lord is directed not only against the bishop of Laodicea but also against you. If you do not wish to be warm and happy in the love of God, you might at least be cold, or God will spue you out of his mouth. If you wish to serve mammon, or the world, or a sin in addition to God, save yourself the trouble, forget your service, God has no pleasure in it, God does not look at it, he says the great: Either -- or, to you, "Either be completely mine, or completely not at all."

But if you wish to serve God, that is good! then serve him alone! "Seek ye," as the Lord says in our text, "FIRST the kingdom of God and his righteousness." V.33. Carefully compute the cost! Do not promise more than you can fulfil. If you wish to serve God, it must be as though there were only one God in heaven and only one God in your heart. You must decide to tear your heart completely free from mammon, that is, from temporal treasures; you must forever break with the world and write a farewell letter to sin. You must come to the point where you have only one purpose on earth: to live to God's honor and to use everything which you have to God's honor. Yes, you must finally come to the point where you forever renounce a calm and comfortable life, in short, the so-called happiness of life, and learn to say with Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever," Ps 73:25.26; that you are ready for God's sake gladly to be poor as well as rich, gladly despised as well as honored, gladly sick as well as healthy, gladly dying as well as living.

Oh, grant that nothing in my soul

May dwell but Thy pure love alone!

Oh, may Thy love possess me whole,

My Joy, my Treasure, and my Crown!

All coldness from my heart remove;

My every act, word, thought, be love. (349,2)

II.

My friends, now that we have seen that those, who indeed want to serve God but not serve him alone, act most foolishly because they undertake something impossible, let us secondly ponder on the fact that this is most foolish because they also undertake something definitely fatal.

Those who indeed wish to serve God but not serve him alone are, of course, so minded because they suppose that if they would serve God alone they would become most unhappy people who could no longer enjoy a single happy hour in this world; but if, in addition to God, they served also other things, mammon, the world, sin, they could enjoy the advantages of serving both, here lust in serving the world, there salvation in serving God. Alas! how entirely different is that what they find from that which they seek! In our Gospel Christ sketches for us a picture of the state of those who wish to serve God besides mammon and shows us how miserable those people are. A continual anxious concern for body, life, food, and clothing dwells in their heart. Their one anxious, constant question is, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? where-withal shall we be clothed?" V.31. It is not enough that they, as everyone, must carry a burden every day; they are also wilfully pre-occupied with the whole heavy burden which the coming days might bring them. They do not possess their temporal treasure, but their temporal treasures possess them. They have no joy but only a burden from them, not delight but vexation. In the same way all those are rewarded who in their hearts wish to serve another lord in addition to God.

Such people are much more miserable than those who do not ask about God and unashamedly serve the world and sin. Because they want to serve also the world and sin, they enjoy none of the happiness which a person tastes who serves God alone; and because they also want to serve God but not spoil it with God, they spoil for themselves the delight which he enjoys who serves only the world and sin. Their fear of God and his judgment embitters their joy in earthly things, and their clinging to earthly things robs them of their comfort in God, his grace, and fellowship. They hover between heaven and earth. They feel that they do not stand right with God, and they see that the world regards them with a suspicious eye. In their inmost soul, in their heart and conscience they have no peace, but unrest, doubt, fear, and in physical things they also find no freedom. Above all, such Christians who straddle the fence have terrible thoughts about death. They can never conquer their fear of it. Their conscience tells them that perhaps their real unhappiness will first begin with death.

And alas! my dear friends, if this fear of those who want to serve two lords were an unfounded fear, if at least they could expect a good reward in the world to come for their supposed service which they rendered God, they might anyhow endure a little misery for their unfaithfulness and half-heartedness; they would still at last be eternally happy and joyous. But the most terrible thing is this: He who does not serve God alone does not serve him at all, and, therefore, he who does not serve God at all has also no Christ, has no faith, no grace, dies in his sins, cannot be saved, is lost, his reward is -- the punishment of an enemy of God -- hell.

Oh you unfortunate people who indeed serve God but at the same time serve also mammon, the world, and this or that sin, and do not serve God alone, and do not want to give him your whole heart, remember, oh remember, how wretched you are. Here you never are at rest either in God or in the world; and there the bleakest fate awaits you. Even if you imagine you are, because of your half-service to God you still are no Christian, no spiritual priest, no child of God; you are no longer under the covenant of grace of your holy baptism, for you have constantly trampled upon your baptismal covenant according to which you have denied the devil and all his works and all his ways.

Therefore, do not try to combine what cannot be combined. If you do not want to forsake mammon, the world, and sin, well and good, then also serve these gods only and don't make any efforts to serve God also; all your trouble will be in vain and lost anyhow; yes, you merely increase your temporal and eternal misery.

But if you want to serve God -- and oh, that you would decide to do so! -- then serve him alone. You will never regret it. The only things you lose are misery, restlessness, worries; you receive the certainty of God's grace, peace, and joy here in the Holy Ghost, and in eternity there awaits you the eternal reward of grace which God has promised to his faithful servants. Oh, dare to take the bold plunge and finally give up your service to all other lords.

My friends, before I close, I must mention one more thing so that no one who admits I am right may still deceive himself in regard to his salvation. No one should think if he now says: Well, then, I will from now on serve God alone, that this finishes the matter. Alas, countless have made the same decision and still were lost. They wanted to serve God alone by their own power; they thought that if they had the good intention, they would also be able to carry it out. But behold! in a short time that warmed and kindled heart was again cold, they again fell back into the service of mammon, the world, and sin, and finally were lost.

Therefore my dear hearer, if you actually want to serve God alone from now on and be saved, you must follow the order which God has made; first of all,

you must try to learn clearly from God's Word what a poor, miserable, lost sinner and unfaithful servant of God you have been in the past. To receive this knowledge you must unceasingly cry to God upon your knees. If you will do this honestly, God will also hear you; God will give you his Holy Spirit and he will give you divine light, so that you clearly and distinctly and with terror recognize your unsuspected ruin and misery and bitterly and honestly bewail it. But do not stop there; then if your sins oppress you, you must also flee to Christ the Savior of sinners; in his blood and death, in his grace and merit you must then seek comfort and rest in faith. The gracious promises of the Gospel you must then appropriate to yourself and then live, fight, suffer, and die completely in Christ and in his Word.

Oh, if you will do this, then you will no longer want to serve God and mammon, Christ and the world, divine grace and sin at the same time, then you will gladly surrender yourself body and soul, your whole heart and all which you are and have to your God and Savior alone. Then even here you will discover unsuspected blessedness in him and there you will enjoy them forever in their fullness. For when the sun of divine grace arises in a person's heart, all the flickering stars of the lust of sin and the world will set; here then follows a brighter, fairer morning of grace and peace, but there an eternal day of an inexpressibly happy life. Amen.

16TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 7:11-17

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

Man, you must die! this is God's message in his holy Word to us all. If there is any truth expressed in Holy Writ which no one denies, even though it is the most earnest, it is this one. No living person has experienced the truth: you must die, in his own person, yet not a one dares to contradict it; everyone, willingly or unwillingly, believes it.

And who dares deny even this truth? From their graves all the countless millions who have lived and died in the past, though their bones are silent beneath our feet, shout as irrefutable witnesses louder than all the living, Man, you must die. And should someone not want to believe the story which is finally related of everyone, "And he died," then the thousands of events happening before our eyes, here the incapacitating sickness, there the graying hair of old age, here the devouring flood, there the consuming fire, here the steep abyss, there the shattering crash of lightning, here the burning rays of the sun, there the chilling northwind, here the deadly weapon, and there the poisonous serpent in the grass, yes, all this wherever we may be cries aloud to us, Man, you must die; and all the dying to whose bedside we are led, and all the funeral processions we meet on the streets, and all the graves which we dig for our loved ones and water with our tears, impress the seal of absolute certainty upon the words, You must die. If we look around in the world we see: the entire world is one huge wide grave upon which we live for a time until finally the

lid opens and the hand of death drags us into its dark chambers.

Though all men certainly believe that their life upon earth will not endure forever, yet most live, as the prophet says, as though they had made a covenant with death and arrived at an understanding with hell. Securely and thoughtlessly they live on, do not prepare themselves for the great important change which sooner or later stands before them, and calmly meet their death as though it were the most unimportant event in their life.

Tell me, whence this indifference? Why such zealous concern for this uncertain life and so little or none at all for certain death? The reason is that they never earnestly ponder what the words, Man, you must die, really mean. Any one who truly ponders these words, will certainly earnestly ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

For what do the words, Man, you must die, mean? They mean: Man, perhaps now your heart clings to the world and seeks its pleasure, its heaven upon earth, in its good things or joys; but the hour is coming when you must forever leave this world and then you have nothing but your treasures which you have gathered for eternity, or the guilt of sin which you have heaped up for the day of accounting. Perhaps without any merit on your part you have a better earthly lot than many of your brethren, perhaps you have attained to wealth or honor among men; but the hour is coming when the difference which in the past obtained between you and a beggar will cease; then you, and though you were ever so rich and respected, yes, a king, will suddenly be like the least in the world; what you have gathered at great expense will suddenly cease to be yours, others will possess it, and you will go out of the world as naked as when you came into it, out into the unknown eternity, where only they will reap with joy who here have sown with tears, and where only they will enter into eternal life who have done good and striven for it by good works. Now perhaps you adorn your wretched body and walk proudly and vainly the way the world does; but the hour is coming when you will be stripped of your beautiful garments and be clothed in a shroud; your youthful body will begin to decay, an unbearable pestilential stench will arise from it, and even your loved ones will hurry to shove your body which has become a decaying corpse into the ground.

And there is more! Now you are judged by men on the basis of the good "front" you have put up, and perhaps you have shunned the opportunity to examine yourself earnestly and learn to know your inner self; but the hour is coming when you must appear before God who has eyes like flames of fire, who tests and searches out the heart and reins; not only will he bring all your works to light but reveal even the secret counsels of your heart, and you will be weighed upon the scales of a righteousness and holiness which no pretence can deceive and no obstinate denials can delude.

Finally, you are still in the time of grace, now you still have the choice of whether you wish to go the way of life and salvation or the way of death and ruin; but the hour is coming when your period of grace will have run out, when your fate will have been decided for all eternity, when no repentance, no conversion is possible, when no praying, no beseeching, no tears will help; if you do not stand before God in this hour, you will be cast out into outer darkness where there shall be howling and gnashing of teeth. See, that is what the words, Man, you must die! mean.

Hence, do we not need the certainty for this hour that we can stand before God? Must it not be frightful to be surprised by the hour of death and not to know how one stands with God? What will give us true comfort in this our last distress? Of that, etc.

The text. Luke 7:11-17.

Here we see how Christ showed that he was Lord also of death, when he with almighty power called a young man back to life, whose body was already being carried to the grave. This fact is a pledge that Christ can and will deliver us also from the miseries of death. Therefore, I now present to you:

THE TRUE COMFORT IN DEATH

- I. The Kind of Comfort Every Person Needs in Death,
- II. That This Comfort is not to be Found in our Works or Piety, and,
- III. That This Comfort can be Found Only in Christ by Relying Upon Him with One's Whole Heart.

Oh God! We are sinners and therefore children of death, for the wages of sin is death; although in your righteousness you must condemn us all to death, yet you do not want the sinner's death; for that reason you have also prepared eternal help for us from death and hell. Therefore, grant that, when our last hour shall come, our souls may not despair. Do not forsake us, Lord, in that hour when all creatures will forsake us, and when no earthly thing can comfort us any more be our comfort. Snatch us from all anxiety and pain and accompany our soul from the prison of this world into the paradise of your eternal joys. Hear us for the sake of the pains, anxiety, and death which your Son bore on the tree of the cross. Amen.

I.

My friends, as long as a person thinks of being happy here in time, so long temporal comfort is enough to satisfy him truly. Then he finds great comfort if he sees himself well provided for in a temporal way, or if he finds himself in such circumstances where he has the prospect of not lacking temporal things. As long as a person does not think of death which awaits him, he finds great satisfaction in having rich and respected relatives, friends, and patrons and in being highly respected and honored by those among whom he lives; and if he wants to be a Christian, it will suffice if others consider him a Christian. And the means which most people use in order to rid their mind of all disturbing thoughts of death is the intention of being converted to God later on.

As fleeting and fragile as this comfort is, yet most of the people of the world take refuge in it; and it is true: if there were no death, it would suffice for most people. But man must die. This life is merely the seedtime in which we sow what we will some day reap. This life is merely a preparatory school in which we are to learn what is necessary for us to enter into eternal life. This life is a race for the treasure, which is reserved for us in heaven, a struggle for the crown of victory which is set aside for us in the world to come.

If, therefore, the hour of our death has struck, the worldly comfort which perhaps fully sufficed during our life is of no more help. The houses, fields, gold, and silver of the earthly-minded rich man will give him no comfort; rather all these items of earthly wealth will step before his deathbed as his accusers. Then his conscience will say, How are you going to stand before God? How wretched you now are that you have forgotten or postponed your concern for your immortal soul as you gathered your temporal wealth? Then the help of relatives, friends, and patrons also ends. That others considered him a Christian and perhaps still do will no longer give rest to the dying. Then his heart will no longer say: Don't be concerned about eternity; you can be converted

at any time. No, in death man needs another comfort, if he is not to despair or through death enter into a wretched eternity.

And what is the comfort which we then need? None other than this: At death we must know whether our sins are forgiven, whether or not any are still written down in God's account book, whether they no longer accuse us before God, whether we are completely reconciled with God, whether he is angry with us no more, whether he is our Father and, therefore, in grace considers us his dear children. At death we must know whether we can stand in the strict judgment which will be held with everyone after death, whether we will not have to become silent and be condemned by God but hear a gracious verdict. At death we must know whether we will not die eternally but will enter eternal life through death, and whether our miserable body will on Judgment Day be awakened not to shame but to glory. In short, at death we must know whether hell is closed and heaven is opened to us and whether we actually belong to the elect who shall inherit the kingdom which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

Alas, it is tragedy enough if he does not know this during his life, but it is frightful beyond words, yes, who can describe the misery of him who dying, stands at the gates of eternity, knows that in a few seconds he will stand before God's judgment throne, and still does not know whether he will enter into eternal joy or into eternal pain, into eternal honor or into eternal shame, into eternal communion with God or into eternal separation from him, into eternal blessedness or into eternal damnation, into heaven or into hell.

II.

My friends, all of you will agree with me in this point; permit me, therefore, secondly to show you that the comfort which we need in death is not to be found in our works and in our piety.

If all those who are calm and confident in the hour of their death had the true comfort, one could certainly believe that the true comfort was to be found in our own works. Although many who relied upon their piety during their lifetime finally awakened in their last hours as though from a dream, in terror perceived that they could not stand before the Most High God, and, therefore, became restless and filled with great anxiety of heart and fear, the majority who lived securely on during their life are calm and confident also in death. Either they hope to the very last moment that they would not die but recover, or if they can no longer hope for that, they do not permit the thought that they could be lost to enter into a heart tortured by the physical anxiety of their last battle. The relatives and friends who have gathered around such a dying person also usually try to avoid everything whereby he could become concerned about his salvation.

Though ever so many may die confidently and calmly and comfort themselves with the thought that they never injured anyone, that from their youth they were as good as was within their powers, that they indeed were not such great, manifest, and gross sinners and for that reason will certainly enter heaven, anyone who consoles himself with such thoughts does not yet have the true consolation in death; the more peacefully he falls asleep, the more terrible will his awakening be in eternity. We are not told that the rich man died amid great anguish; since he would gladly have returned to his brethren in order to preach repentance to them, we must conclude that he softly and quietly fell asleep so that it was generally believed that his was a beautiful blessed end and in death went into the land of an eternal reward without torment and pain. Yet how frightful was his awakening in that world! Scarcely had his soul separated from his body

when it was surrounded by the flames of hell and perhaps whilst at his grave they talked of his beautiful, edifying end and eulogized his virtues, he himself was in hell and in torment. Alas, how often could that happen even now!

Therefore my dear friends, do not let yourselves be deluded into believing that a person can find true comfort at his death in his own works. Granted that he would have done everything which he was obliged to do, Christ says that he himself would then have to say that he had been an unprofitable servant who could not demand or hope for a reward, for he did only what it was his duty to do. Yet where is the one who can say that he has done his duty before God? Must not everyone confess, "We all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God?" Rom 3,23. Must not everyone join David in saying especially, "Lord, remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions?" Ps 25:7. Must not everyone admit that he had often wounded his conscience by this and that sin? Does not everyone carry around with him the secret reproach in his heart, See, you have done this and this? Men indeed do not know it, but God, who sees and hears everything, knows it very well; he will judge it; how can you stand?

And my friends, now I am speaking only of the knowledge of sin which every person has, even he who does not earnestly examine himself according to God's Word. But whoever opens his heart before the Holy Spirit so that he can really reveal his heart will perceive not only this and that stain of sin in himself, he will speak entirely different and soon will say, Alas, I am a sinner from the crown of my head to the sole of my feet; the imagination of my heart has been evil from my youth; my sins are more than the hairs upon my head and the sands of the sea; and wherever God's grace has done any good through me, it never has been pure but I have stained it with much evil which God saw in me.

Now if everyone must say that of himself when he has learned to know himself in only a measure, I ask you, how can, therefore, our own works and our own piety be the true comfort in death? How can one console himself with his works before God, since everything, even the best, is spotted with sin, and since in addition there are countless other sins which move God to reject and condemn us? He who in death relies upon his works, upon his piety, upon his virtuous life, upon his Christianity, upon his going to church and communion, upon his prayers and songs, and the like, acts just as foolish as though he wanted to build a bridge of straw over a river of fire. A person will much more readily sail across the roaring ocean on a plank and reach the opposite shore safely than to cross the abyss of death with his good works and arrive safely at the shore of that blessed world.

III.

The third and final question now arises, Which, therefore, is the only true basis for comfort in death? Our Gospel shows us that. There we see how at Christ's Word and will death and hell stand still; he not only called to the mourners, "Weep not," but also actually dried their tears by awaking the dead person and robbed the grave of its booty. It is none other than Jesus Christ upon whom we must rely with our whole heart.

There are many who really see that no one can merit heaven by his good works and truly comfort himself with them in death, yet who do not place their only consolation in Jesus Christ; they trust in the love of God and hope, since God is the Father of all men, he is also their Father and he would certainly not deal in absolute sternness with them but out of grace and love save them. To be sure, it seems as though they have good grounds for their comfort. For can there be a better basis than God and his eternal love?

Yet my friends it only seems so. God is indeed full of love by which he wants to save all sinners, but is he not also righteous? is he not holy? In conformity to his righteousness and holiness he must punish the sinner and according to his righteousness and holiness God threatened death to sinners already in Paradise; therefore, anyone who wants to turn with his sins to God the Father and pass the Son by must without hope of deliverance die the death eternal.

But, you will say, must not the whole world then be lost, if God's love cannot save? I answer, No. That is why God's Son died the death of a sinner so that the sinner could live. That is why God's Son took upon himself the punishment of death which God had threatened upon all sinners and drained the cup of death and tasted its bitterest bitterness in Gethsemane and upon Golgatha so that God could remit the punishment to those who call upon his Son's death and rely upon him with their whole heart. Except in Christ, God can and will not be gracious to anyone; but whoever comes before God with Christ, with him God can and will not be angry; except in Christ, God must deal according to his strict righteousness since he is a consuming fire, but he who draws near to him with Christ finds God a reconciled Father and an overflowing well of love, grace, and mercy. Except in Christ, God must reject and condemn everything in us; yet if we come to him with Christ, we please him well with our entire life and that which is still sinful and spotted in us God graciously covers for the sake of Christ's death.

Therefore my dear hearers, if some day you wish to have a true, firm, reliable comfort in the anguish of your death, you must learn to rely from your whole heart and alone upon Christ. Bear in mind: alone and from your whole heart. Many indeed say, I rely upon Christ; but they take Christ in addition to their work, in addition to their prayers, in addition to their church going, in short, in addition to their Christianity; they believe in Christ not because they have experienced that they have absolutely nothing but because they want to take the certain in place of the uncertain. All such will some day find themselves horribly deceived. For he who has one eye upon his Christianity and the other eye upon Christ wants to share with Christ the honor of his salvation and rejects Christ because he thinks that he believes in him.

Yes, you say, according to this thought, who might give himself such a faith? And who can ever know definitely whether he has such a faith? I reply, You speak correctly; no person is in a position to give such a faith to himself, and no one is in a position to know of himself whether he has the true faith. That is a mystery which no one can teach but God the Holy Ghost. For says St. Paul, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor 12:3; and Christ himself says, "When he, the Spirit of truth is come...he shall glorify me." Jn 16:13.14. Therefore, Luther speaks the truth in his preface to Paul's Letter to the Romans, "Pray God that he works faith in you, otherwise you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you do."

Oh that is why you should not help yourself but pray, pray God that he work in you the true faith which relies upon Christ alone and from one's whole heart; and if the Holy Spirit bears testimony that he has worked in you, then remember that this faith can very easily be lost again. Therefore pray daily as did the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith," Lk 17:5; that is, make us ever poorer in ourselves, constantly poorer in spirit, so that we seek our riches, our righteousness, our comfort, and our salvation only in Christ. If you will do that, God will never let the light of your faith ever be extinguished, though it may often becomes a smoking flax.

And oh, blessed is he who stands in a living faith in the hour of his death! Though his heart may feel joy or fear, grace or wrath, life or death, he clings to the Word which Christ, "Christ is the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live." With this light in his hands the believer confidently descends into the dark valley of the shadow of death; for, though it becomes darker and darker about him, though even the terrors of hell surround him, though here one depth may open wide and there another in which he seems to sink, it lasts but a moment; after a brief struggle he finally breaks through the narrow gate and enters into life eternal. Therefore

Run thy race, run thy race,
Zion, swiftly run thy race!
Let no languor ever find thee
Idle in the market-place.
Look not to the things behind thee.
Zion, daily strengthened by His grace,
Run thy race, run thy race! Amen. (479,4)

17TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 14:1-11

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

In our Savior, dear Christian friends.

Among the many laws which God through Moses imposed upon the nation of Israel was the law of the Sabbath day and Sabbath year.

The Sabbath day was the seventh day of the week; we call it the Saturday. God speaks of that in the Third Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." Ex 20:8-10. From other portions of Scripture we see that the Israelites could make no visits, bear no burdens, gather no wood, nor bake, nor cook, nor kindle a fire on the Sabbath day. All this was so strictly forbidden that the death penalty was passed upon him who worked. Once when an Israelite gathered wood in the desert, he was upon God's express command stoned to death.

Not only did God command the Israelites to observe every seventh day, but as we see from Leviticus 25, every seventh year they had to celebrate a Sabbath year. Moses informs us that even the land had to observe the Sabbath year. The Israelites could neither sow nor reap, neither prune the vine nor gather its grapes. Whether the Israelites were the master or servant, day laborer or family member, an Israelite or an alien, they could eat whatever grew of itself.

Besides the seventh year, the Israelites had to observe a second year at the end of the 49th year. This was the jubilee year, the year of general pardon. Not only were they forbidden to sow or reap, but everyone should regain his possessions. Land purchased from an Israelite had to be returned during the jubilee year. Slaves had to be freed. Debtor and slave were all freed

at once at the beginning of this year; the impoverished and displaced persons were immediately returned to the inheritance of their fathers.

God had four purposes in view in giving this command on the celebration of the Sabbath days and Sabbath years: 1) The Israelites should bear this heavy burden in order to awaken in them a yearning for that freedom which the Messiah would bring; 2) All workers, especially the poor, should have a vacation, and the unfortunate and oppressed should regain their property and thus greed, avarice, and oppression should be controlled; 3) The Israelites should be reminded of the fact that they are called to be a holy people who should bring their time and possessions as a sacrifice to the Lord; and finally 4) The Sabbath days, as well as the Sabbath years, should be pictures of God's rest after finishing the work of Creation and prototypes of the Messiah's rest after the work of redemption was completed, the rest of the believers of the new covenant, and the eternal rest of the blessed in heaven.

You see from this that since the command of the Sabbath days and Sabbath years were partly a disciplinary law, were partly prototypes, we Christians of the New Testament times are freed from them. Of course, we Christians now celebrate the first day of the week, the Sunday, not because God has commanded the institution of the Sunday, but as a free, human, yet good church and Christian ordinance in remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior, from the dead.

That this is true we see from several clear passages in the New Testament. Paul writes in Col 2:16-17, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Again he writes in the 14th chapter of Romans that a strong Christian in true knowledge "esteemeth every day alike." He considers no day in itself more holy than another; he considers every day of the week as holy as Saturday or Sunday.

However, you will say, Hasn't God given us the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt sanctify the holy day?" Isn't the Christian of the New Testament obligated to keep this commandment? I answer, Of course; yes, woe to him who wants to be a Christian and not observe the Sabbath! This, however, needs further explanation. Let us consider that this morning.

The text. Luke 14:1-11.

We hear in this Gospel how the Pharisees watched Christ because of the observance of the Sabbath day and how Christ explained it. Permit me, therefore, to present to you

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH WHICH GOD DEMANDS OF CHRISTIANS

I. Not an Outward Observance as much as an Inner.

II. Not one Connected with a Certain Day, but a Daily Observance.

I.

If we read the history of the people of Israel as it is told in the writings of the Old Testament, we will find that most of the Israelites were of the opinion that, when they outwardly observed the works which were commanded them, they had done everything which God demanded of them. God commanded them to be circumcised, observe certain outward purifications, offer certain sacrifices, and stop working on the Sabbath day in their earthly calling. If they did this,

most supposed that they satisfied God and pleased him. This, however, was a gross delusion which the prophets of all times often and earnestly reprimanded. They showed the people that God above all looked at the heart, faith, and love. If these were missing, no outward works would satisfy him. Jeremiah, for example, speaks to the circumcised Jews, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart...lest my fury come forth like fire." Jer 4:4. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." 4:14. Isaiah writes, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Who hath required this at your hand?...Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." 1:11.12.16.17. Therefore Samuel says to Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice." 1 Sam 15:23. The Prophet Hosea says in the name of the Lord, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." 6:6. David knew this well and says in his prayer of penitence, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." Ps 51:16.17. The prophets reprimanded the Israelites just as severely when they supposed that they observed Sabbaths and feast days in a God-pleasing manner merely by resting from all work. The Prophet Amos says in the name of the Lord, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies...Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." Amos 5:21.23. Yes, the Lord in the Prophet Malachi calls all outward celebration of the Sabbaths and feast days without a pure heart dung, and says, "I will spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts." Mal 2:3.

The Pharisees of whom our text speaks were of the same mind. They were so strict about doing absolutely nothing on the Sabbath, nothing which did not belong to the public worship on the Sabbath day, that they were even more strict than the law of Moses, and declared that Christ's doing good on the Sabbath day was a most flagrant violation of the Sabbath. When Christ, according to our text, accepted the invitation of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread in his house, we read, "They watched him." V.1. In order to tempt Christ, they had a man sick of the dropsy near at hand. What did Christ do? He immediately put a question to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" V.3. No one dared answer; no one trusted himself to prove that it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath but no one wanted to admit that it was right. Since all remained silent, Christ took the man sick of the dropsy, healed him, let him go, and asked this question of these hypocrites, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?" V.5. Smitten in their conscience, all the guests present observed a deep silence follow upon this question. Their conscience told them that Christ had spoken the truth, and that their outward strictness in observing the Sabbath was nothing but hypocrisy.

But Christ did not let matters rest. When the guests who acted so piously "chose out the chief rooms," he reprimanded their ridiculous pride publicly and showed them that only a humble person pleased God, that all their outward strictness in observing the Sabbath was an abomination to God, if the true inward Sabbath, namely, stopping all sinful desires and inclination of their hearts, the thirst for honor, their love of amusements, and avarice did not also come.

My friends, you see from this, the Sabbath law, even in the Old Testament times, had such a spiritual meaning. Now, if it had such a spiritual meaning then, it has the same meaning in the time of the new covenant even more.

Although a Christian knows that God did not institute the Sunday, and did not forbid working on Sunday, that this is rather a human church ordinance, every Christian will certainly strictly observe the Sunday. He will never let his daily work get the upper hand. He will carefully stay away from all works which are not a necessity of love. He will take no pleasure trips on this day, much less visit places of public amusement, but go to church and on this day, at home and among his good friends, busy himself especially with God's Word and divine matters. Though a Christian may observe this day strictly by not working at all, this is not the observance of the Sabbath which the Lord demands of the Christian. Yes, a person may perhaps never have labored on Sundays, perhaps never took part in worldly amusements, may on the other hand have attended every church service, and yet he can never have observed the New Testament Sabbath.

Luther briefly and clearly expresses the true, real nature of the New Testament Sabbath in his hymn, "That Man a Godly Life Might Live," in the words, "Keep hand and heart from labor free That God may so work in thee." (287,4). By nature all are in the same boat; sometimes this, sometimes that storm of sinful inclination or passion buffets them about. By nature man wanders about in this world, seeking peace and never finding it. He has an eternal hankering for a lost place of rest which he never finds. For that reason one seeks riches, another pleasures, a third honor. Yet even this goal few reach and even if they attain it, they do not find that rest and peace which they hoped for. Man finds true rest and peace only if he rests in God and God in him.

My friends, you see from this, only that man celebrates the New Testament Sabbath who stops chasing after the vain pleasures of this world, stops trying to become rich, stops running after sinful pleasures, stops seeking honor, in short, stops his sinful passions and finds in God, in his grace and communion, the gratification of all his wishes.

You must examine yourself according to this, if you want to know whether you have begun to observe the true Christian Sabbath; whether you no longer seek your fortune in honor among men, as the Pharisees, or in earthly things, in worldly lusts, but whether you have already found it in God and his grace; and, even if all earthly things are taken away from you, whether you can say, I have not lost the best, yes, I have lost nothing, for I still have God and rest in his arms.

Everyone must come to such an inward observance of the Sabbath here on this world; otherwise, he does not celebrate it in eternal rest. Only through true repentance does a person celebrate that kind of a Sabbath. First of all, he must come to a true alarm over his sins and indeed such an alarm in which he cannot rest, until he can say:

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)

II.

My friends, the celebration of the Sabbath which God demands also from the Christians of the New Testament is not only not so much of an external as an inner observance, but secondly it is not one connected to a definite day but is a daily observance.

Over no other teachings are such false notions held for more than the past two hundred years, even in the midst of the Lutheran Church, than over the teaching of the Sabbath. Most have believed that as God instituted the Saturday for the Old Testament, he has fixed the Sunday for the New. And there are many who, when they never work on Sunday and if possible go twice to church and at times to the confessional service and to Holy Communion, think that thus they have fully done their Christian duties, even though during the week they strive almost alone for earthly things, conduct no family devotions, yes, even never pray in the morning or the evening, before or after meals. They suppose that they have six days to sacrifice to the world and their flesh and God would gladly be satisfied if they offer him the seventh. Six days during the week they want to be heathen, and on Sunday's be a Christian.

There are still others who know very well that the Sabbath of the Old Covenant has been set aside and that the Sunday has not been instituted by God but by the Church; so they imagine that they need celebrate none, not even the Sunday. To be sure, these are more wicked than the former. For whilst the former at least are legalistic Sunday-Christians, these, on the other hand, are lawless seven-day-a-week-heathen.

Both understand God's Word falsely according to their blind, evil mind and the inclinations of their heart.

Of course, it is true that God did not institute the Sunday as he did the Sabbath; therefore, the worship of all those is lost who place their righteousness before God in their strict observance of the Sunday. However, we dare not suppose that a Christian is, therefore, no longer obligated to God to celebrate any day. Definitely not! In the last chapter of his prophecy Isaiah predicted that in the times of the New Testament there rather would always be "one Sabbath to another," that therefore for Christians all would be a Sabbath. St. Paul confirms this when he says to those who in the manner of the Jews observed a special day, "For none of us liveth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Rom 14:7.8.

Consequently you see: our entire life should be the Lord's; therefore, if a person wants to be a Christian, he must celebrate the Sabbath every day; his entire life and all his works must be a service to God, that is, he must do everything in the name of the Lord and to his honor, in faith and in love.

And he who does this will gladly observe the Sunday instituted by the Church; he will freely and without compulsion dismiss all earthly cares and business on the Sunday in order to hear God's Word in the Lord's house, never neglect it to serve his flesh, and then also busy himself the rest of the day with divine matters. But a true Christian is not satisfied with that. He will turn his own house into a church in which he with his family serves God. Not only will he begin the morning and end the evening with prayer to God, not only never sit down at the table nor leave it without praying; he will also read God's Word for himself and with his family daily every time he can tear himself free from his earthly business. Day and night the flame of faith, love, and hope will burn upon the altar of his heart, and his dearest wish is to be and remain in body and soul for time and eternity God's possession.

If you examine yourself on this basis, my dear hearers, what would you find? Are there also such Sunday-Christians among us who want to give God the seventh day but want to offer the six weekdays to the world and their flesh? Moreover, are there perhaps even those among us who understand Christian freedom

in such a way that besides the weekdays they can also offer the Sunday to their flesh? But where are those who celebrate the Sabbath every day? whose house is a temple, whose chamber a chapel, whose life a continual service to God, whose family a church at home, and whose heart is an altar full of the constantly glowing coals of devotion, faith, and love?

Oh my friends, do not deceive yourselves! The very reason why Christ came into the world is that he could bring into this restless, quarrelsome world that inner, constant Sabbath of the soul, so that we may rest in God and God in us. Only if we let this work in us and preserve it are we true Christians. Blessed are we then! even if here we have not yet entered into perfect rest, even if here our peace of soul is still often disturbed by the remains of our sin and unbelief, by the enticements and threats of the world, by outward tribulation and inner temptations, Scripture calls to us, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God," Heb 4:9, namely in heaven; this will be perfect and undisturbed.

With this comfort yourselves, you tired, warring Christian. Keep on working and struggling confidently; in a short time you will receive your holiday; soon the painful workdays of this earthly life will be ended; if you have remained faithful, the eternal Sabbath in the temple of heaven will dawn with your death; there you will not have to bear the day's burden and heat any more; there you will no longer have to eat your bread in the sweat of your face; for "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

True, your body will lie a short time in the grave and decay, but on Judgment Day you will again receive it wondrously glorified and don it as a beautiful festive garment which you will never again lay aside; for then with the angels and the elect you celebrate the eternal jubilee year in the real promised land, in the Canaan of the heavenly Paradise. Amen.

18TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 22:34-46

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

In this same Savior, dear hearers.

There is no doctrine of divine revelation which has not been attacked by false prophets. Among these doctrines is also the doctrine of the Law. Should we suspect that a person could reject the Law, since this doctrine is not only written in the Bible but is also engraved on the hearts of all, even the heathen, with indelible characters? And yet that is so.

When 300 years ago Luther again brought the sweet Gospel to light, when he used it to cheer frightened consciences, who had tormented themselves in vain by their own works, and comforted them with the doctrine of God's free grace in Christ, against all of Luther's expectation there soon arose a sect which claimed that the Law must no longer be preached in the Christian Church but only the

Gospel. This sect was called the Antinomians; its founder was a certain Agri-cola, a preacher in Eisleben in Saxony.

Do not think, however, that these Antinomians did not appeal to the Scriptures. No error in Christendom, no matter how plain, has ever arisen which has not been defended and justified by misinterpreted Bible passages; so also here.

The chief passage to which the Antinomians appealed was the statement of Paul, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man." 1 Tim 1:9. From this they want to prove that the Law must not be preached to those who are baptized and are righteous by faith; they dare not be frightened by the Law but dare be led to heaven only by the preaching of grace. However, that word of Paul has an entirely different meaning. He wants to say as much as this: insofar as he is righteous by faith, insofar as a Christian has a new heart and a spirit willing to do God's will in all things, insofar a believing, reborn Christian does not need the Law; he need not be first frightened and forced by threats; out of love he does what is right of his own free will.

Yet what Christian can say that he is already completely spiritual, that one finds in him only the desire and love of all good things, and that his flesh is absolutely dead? In the name of all Christians, John gives answer, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, ... and we make God a liar." 1 Jn 1:8.10. And St. Paul agrees with that when he confesses, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing." Rom 7:18a.

Here, my friends, you have the reason why even Christians still need the Law; they still have their sinful flesh with them, which lusts against the spirit, which must be crucified and frightened and kept within bounds by the Law. What would, therefore, happen if the Law would no longer be preached but only the Gospel? One would soon lose both, and all would fall into security and wickedness. In his Postills on the Gospel of today, Luther says the following of the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel, "If one of the two is lost, it takes the other along with it; and on the other hand, if the one remains and is rightly used, it brings the other along with it."

Since, sad to say, there is no mistaking the fact that many of us nowadays wish to hear practically only the Gospel and set aside the eternally binding doctrine of the Law, I today wish to warn you against the disastrous results of despising the Law.

The text. Matthew 22:34-46.

My friends, the text just read treats both, the doctrine of the Law and the doctrine of Christ, or the Gospel. I take the opportunity to speak to you on

WHICH ARE THE DISASTROUS RESULTS OF DESPISING THE LAW

- I. It is the Reason why so Many Despise the Gospel, and it is also the reason
- II. Why so Many Deceive Themselves with a False Faith.

You are a holy God; you are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness; whoever is wicked cannot stand before you. We therefore pray, rule us through your Holy Spirit that we do not play with sin and wantonly abuse your grace but by good works seek eternal life. Awaken us now to do that by your Word for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is true, my friends, that only the doctrine of the Gospel shows sinners the way to salvation; yet why did Christ, as our text reports, preach not only the Gospel to the Pharisees, but also answered the question of the true content of the Law, which was brought to him? Because without the help of the Law no one arrives at the proper understanding of the Gospel, and despising the Gospel arises chiefly from the fact that the Law is despised.

Those who in our day reject the Gospel allege, as the Pharisees of Christ's day did, that they want to be satisfied with the Law alone, or as they say today, with ethics, with the doctrine of virtue, uprightness, and good works. For, they say, all depends upon whether one is a good person; he and only he who lives a clean moral life has religion. Sad to say, these are merely so many empty words.

That in Christ's time the Pharisees, and that today the unbelievers, want to know nothing of the Gospel, is not that they would rather bear the entire burden of the Law and keep it as God wants it kept. On the contrary, because they today no longer heed the demands and threats of the Law and refuse to believe them, that is why they think little, yes, nothing of the comfort of the Gospel.

The Gospel shows how one receives forgiveness of sins, how one is delivered from God's wrath and is pardoned by him, how one is rescued from hell and eternal damnation and saved by pure mercy. As only the sick seeks the doctor, as only the hungry desire bread, as only one in danger cries for help, so only he can treasure the Gospel and joyfully accept it, if in terror he perceives that he is a sinner, if he believes that he is really burdened with God's wrath and has deserved death and damnation by his sins.

Now if he despises the Gospel, is he going to be more strict in regard to the Law? Not at all. Most of the foes of faith live in manifest sins and shame, in cursing and blaspheming, in wrath and thirst for vengeance, in drunkenness and gluttony, in unchastity and adultery, in lies and deceit, in false oaths, yes, in hatred so great as to commit murder; yet they do not ask about the Law, human or divine, nor about God, hell, heaven, or a future judgment; they say with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" Ex 5:2; or as Isaiah says, "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not." Is 3:9a. Isn't that despising God's Law?

Nevertheless it cannot be denied that there are many unbelievers, who abstain from all such gross outbreaks of sin; many live honorably in the eyes of the world, and by their way of acting before men earn for themselves the reputation of being strict, moral people. Where, however, is the unbeliever who really perceives the consequences of sin? Which unbeliever believes that God has the right to demand that he be holy and perfect? Which unbeliever perceives that some day he must even give account to God of every idle word which fell from his lips? Which one knows that merely an evil desire, an impure lust, an ungodly thought is a great sin? Which unbeliever considers it true that before God he is an abomination, if he merely has proud thoughts, if he seeks the least honor before men, if he exalts himself over the most insignificant person in the world, if he is not gentle and humble and regards himself as nothing? Which unbeliever believes that the mere seeking for riches and good days plunges him into eternal damnation? that in God's eyes he is a murderer if he is just angry with his neighbor? that even the least sin is a terrible insult to the great God and that he then becomes guilty of eternal death? What unbeliever, though he may live ever so honestly and blamelessly before men, is filled with fear and trembling at the smallest sin? Which unbeliever watches and prays daily,

that he may not fall into temptation? Which one battles unceasingly that his heart is filled with nothing but pure love to God and his neighbor? Are they not guilty of thousands of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, which they consider insignificant? over which they themselves often laugh and joke?

Here, my friends, you have the real reason why so many despise the Gospel of Christ and his grace; that does not happen because they live so piously that they do not need a Savior; nor is the fact that they are now too wise and enlightened the reason; no, that happens because they despise God's Law in which God tells them how a person should be; they do not believe God's threats, his righteousness and stern judgment, and the eternal punishment which will follow sin. See, that, this contempt of sin, this Pharisaical conceit of their great worth, this horrible blindness because of which they do not recognize their daily, hourly transgressions in their greatness and huge number, that is the real root of their unbelief; that is why they loathe the doctrine of grace, hate Christ the crucified, and his holy precious reconciliation so greatly.

If a person earnestly begins to believe in God's Law, he is also not far from Christ and his kingdom.

Why was it that at Luther's time the Gospel was received with such great, almost universal joy? Why was it that then in a short time entire countries were converted, that the message of peace spread like wild fire over the whole known world, and thousands upon thousands of hearts throbbed as one with that of the courageous herald of the Gospel, kissed the little book, which he published, with tears of gladness, and joyfully thanked God for his gracious visitation? Why did the preaching of the Gospel have such great results then, and not now? This is the reason: At the time of the Reformation the poor people had been oppressed by the burden of the Law; even though it had been so dark, the irreligious priests still continued to apply the Law in all its sharpness. Great numbers were, therefore, filled with deep concern for their salvation and with great fear and anxiety of eternal damnation. Great numbers were afraid of the coming of Judgment Day. Great numbers felt their sins. That is why they listened to the Gospel as such a blessed message, as those rejoice whose prison gates are opened and are told, You are free! But this preparation of hearts by the workings of the Law is now generally missing.

And what was the reason why Luther had to complain so soon that the men of his times were tired of the Gospel? The reason was that most misused the Gospel freedom and again became secure, did not heed the threats of the Law, and again considered their sins of little significance. Soon contempt of the Gospel also returned, a contempt which in our days has reached its highest point.

II.

That many deceive themselves with a false faith is also a part of the ruinous results of despising the Law. This is our second point.

Sad to say, there are not a few who live in manifest sins and yet imagine that they have faith. Wrath may be their besetting sin and yet they think: Faith makes up for that. They are not honest and scrupulous in their dealings; they grab as much as they can get; and faith should make that good also. They are delinquent debtors who cause their creditors to lose their money because they act as though no one could demand anything of them, and that also should be made good again by faith. They tell lies, are irreconcilable toward those who offend them, vain about their clothes, worldly in their conduct, friends of the children of the world, insolent, inflated with self-esteem, greedy, slan-

derous, and all this faith is supposed to make amends for.

Oh those wretches! They, of course, think that according to St. Paul a person is saved by grace, but they do not recall that the same apostle also said, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest,...of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal 5:19.21. And in another place, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Heb 10:26.27.

On the other hand, others do not live in such manifest sins, but they are lukewarm and indolent; they are not earnest about their Christianity; it is nothing more than idle talk, a phantom; their prayers come from their lips only; their reading and hearing of God's Word is not a thirsty drinking from the well of eternal life; they use it merely to become smarter and in proud conceit to criticize the sermon; they do not watch their heart; they do not battle against flesh and blood; they are surly toward their family; they argue about temporal and foolish things. If they are not completely hardened, they suppose that though they are not the best Christians, they are still Christians and righteous before God because they have faith.

That's the way Christ is made a servant of sin and faith a cloak for disgrace; such deceive themselves in regard to life and salvation. A faith which produces such fruit is a faith of froth and foam, nothing else but fleshly security; a dead lifeless thing, by means of which one hurries away to hell.

Whence comes this self-deception? It arises from nothing else than contempt for God's holy Law. They think that the Law no longer concerns the believer; he no longer need turn to its demands nor fear its threats. But how dreadfully they deceive themselves! Christ clearly says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, nothing. Mt 5:17-19a.

Oh yes, it is true: the believer as a believer is not subject to any law; he is free and above all laws, for in Christ he has perfect fulfilment of the Law and has the Holy Ghost, who wants him to do good without any Law. But the believers as God's creature and as a sinner is still under the Law. The Law is the revelation of God's will; it is, therefore, eternal and unalterable; it can not possibly be repealed by faith, as little as God can change himself and permit a creature to sin. St. Paul, therefore, says, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." Rom 3:31. The apostle means to say: Our sins are not forgiven so that we can act contrary to the Law but because we have received the Holy Ghost, through whom we have become new men, received a new heart and mind, so that we actually begin to fulfil the Law from our hearts.

My dear hearers, if you do not wish to apply yourselves diligently to fulfil the Law, to love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself, if you do not want to live in constant dread of sin and God's wrath, if you do not wish to pursue sanctification with great earnestness, then know that your pretended faith does not help you; it will rather make you only the more reprehensible before God and condemn you the more; for you confessed that you wanted to accept Christ as your Redeemer and you merely turned him into a servant of sin and count the blood of his holy reconciliation an unclean thing.

No one should think that because he has accepted the Gospel he can despise the Law, live on carelessly without earnestly battling sin day and night, for then the threats of the Law still apply to him. If will not help him at all that he wanted to pretend that he sought in Christ protection against the accusation and condemnation of his conscience; only those whom the Law has frightened, who gladly would fulfil it and yearn for grace, for power, for the help of the Holy Spirit, only they find protection in Christ. If you do not earnestly want to be free of your sins, God also will not cover your sins by forgiveness.

Ah, how many of us receive from our text perhaps a blow which awakens his sleeping heart! I beg all these: For the sake of Christ and your own salvation keep yourselves busy with this impulse of the Holy Spirit, do not thoughtlessly suppress it again, begin a better Christianity this hour, ponder in solitude your former empty life whereby you comforted yourselves, and call upon God to convert pretence into reality, a Christian in name to a Christian in fact, hypocrisy into deed and truth. Do not despise my voice; it is not I who am speaking to you; it is God who stands before you in his Word. Of what help is the lamp of pretence when, as the foolish virgins, you lack the oil of true faith, the Spirit, and power? Think of the last hour when you will hear, "The bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!" Mt 25:7. Then there will be no time to buy oil; then you will cry in vain, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" The Lord will answer you, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Mt 25:12. Therefore, my dear Christians, arise! Seize the Word with the courage of faith; with fear and trembling see to it that you will receive the greatest treasure. After the hard battle will follow, peace, rest, and salvation. Amen.

19TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 9:1-8

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

Without a doubt the most miserable and unhappy people are those who still do not have forgiveness of sins; even though in earthly things they may be poor or rich, beggar or king, or live in temporal distress or earthly glory. If a persons' sins are unforgiven, he is still under the authority of darkness and excluded from the blessed kingdom of the great God. Because of his unforgiven sins he is still at war with God; he is God's enemy and God is his enemy. The holy angels, therefore, abominate him; in horror they view him as the adversary of the Most Holy whom in deepest respect they serve with eternal praise and rejoicing. If his sins are unforgiven, God's wrath still rests upon him; do what he will, God hates it; not only do his manifest sins but also his seemingly good works offend God; yes, upon everything which he undertakes, upon his coming in and his going out, upon his works and his rest, upon his sleeping and waking, upon his eating and drinking, upon his joys and sorrows, rests God's curse. His hope for another better life in eternity is an empty dream; day and night, in body and soul, he stands at the brink of a frightful abyss, into which at his death he must fall and, eternally separated from God, in which he must perish body and soul.

The saddest thing in this connection is that those whose sins are unforgiven usually do not recognize their dreadful condition, their misery, their unhappiness; they have the delusion that all is well, everything is peaceful, and there is no danger. They are unhappy and deem themselves happy; they are under God's wrath and they suppose that they in God's favor; they are excluded from God's kingdom and with assurance hope of eternal salvation.

Accordingly, what can be more important and necessary than that everyone should earnestly examine himself to see whether he has received forgiveness of sins or not, and, if he does not yet have this great blessing, to seek it with all earnestness? What deception can be more bitter than supposing that one has received forgiveness but in reality he has not? What can be more terrible than having God angry with us, while we believe we are sitting in his lap; what more horrible than being secure and carefree on this world where we are really living as God's foes and must in the world to come appear before his judgment throne as his enemies.

On the other hand, what person is more happy than he whose sins are forgiven? God is his friend; he, therefore, also has the holy angels as his loving and protecting companions and all of God's children as his brothers and sisters. Whatever he does, even the most insignificant thing, is pleasing to God. The curse is taken away from him and a blessing rests upon everything which he undertakes and meets. He can be of good cheer in poverty because he is rich in heavenly treasures; he can be of good cheer in tribulation because he knows that God sends him everything out of love alone and that everything must, therefore, work together for good; he can be of good cheer even if all forsake him, yes, are hostile to him. God does not forsake him; if God is for him who can be against him? He can be confident in death itself; his death is but the narrow gate to a perfect life, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

My friends, if you compare the lot of those who have this treasure and those who do not, should you not all exclaim: Oh that my sins were also forgiven! Certainly, all of you agree with me. Let us, therefore, today in heartfelt devotion learn from our Gospel what a man must do, in order that God will forgive him his sins also. God give us, etc.

The text. Matthew 9:1-8.

Upon the basis of this Gospel permit me to answer the question:

WHAT MUST A MAN DO SO THAT GOD WILL FORGIVE HIS SINS?

According to our text, I answer:

- I. He Must Recognize that he can do Nothing to Merit His Forgiveness, but Receive it Alone out of Grace, and
- II. He Must in Faith Cling to the Word, in Which God Promises him the Forgiveness of All his Sins.

God, "who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy!" Micah 7:18. Oh grant, that your amazing love to us sinners, your willingness to have mercy upon us and forgive us our sins, is not revealed in vain. Open the hearts of everyone of us, as once you did Lydia's, so that we permit ourselves to be led by your Word on the way of salvation, remain upon it, and in eternity enjoy your forgiving and blessed love and grace without end. Amen. Amen.

I.

"Son, be of good cheer." According to our text, that is the way Christ once spoke to a man sick of the palsy, to whom he wanted to give forgiveness of sins. Would Christ have spoken that way to him, if he would have been in good spirits, unconcerned about his sins, and supposed that he could have easily obtained and earned forgiveness himself? Certainly not. From Christ's words it follows logically that the man sick of the palsy had in the past been comfortless, full of anxiety and unrest on account of his sins, and must even have been ignorant of how he could obtain forgiveness. From this example presented to us in Scripture we see that the first thing a person must do in order to receive the forgiveness of his sins is that he really recognize that he can do nothing to merit the forgiveness of his sins but can receive it alone by grace.

Yet most do not wish to enter through this narrow gate.

A large number of so-called Christians are never at all concerned about the forgiveness of their sins. Either they just do not believe in God, or they think: God is not at all concerned about man's little sins; or, He is too gracious to punish men on account of their failings and sins; or He punishes sin on this world; he does not let the affairs of the godless prosper to punish them, the virtuous and the upright, on the other hand, he blessed. Many are so blind that they suppose that they are not sinners. If one asks them, Do you hope to be saved? they answer, Why, yes, who doesn't hope for that! If one continues and asks, Upon what do you base this hope? they reply, From my youth on I have been pious; I have never injured anyone; no one can honestly speak evil of me; I have not been like other people, a curser, Sabbath-breaker, robber, murderer, fornicator, adulterer, thief, perjurer, and the like; God has always been in my mind; I have prayed diligently, given alms to many poor, and kept the holy Ten Commandments to the best of my poor ability; I have not lived like many another. Why should I not be saved?

However, there are others, who because of many sins are restless; they want to do something to have their sins forgiven. What do they do? They want to pray away their sins; by certain good works, by keeping certain oaths, by bearing all manner of pain, and the like, they want to atone for them.

But my friends, all these are false ways, which never attain their purpose. Yes, by these ways God is more angered than reconciled; sins are multiplied and not forgiven. For is it not a sacrilege to demand from God the forgiveness of our sins as something he owes us, something he is in duty bound to give us? Should we not give God all honor? should we not ascribe everything, which we are and have, to God's goodness? Is it not terrible that a person is willing to admit that out of love God created him, out of love has given and preserved and provided for his body and soul, and then when it comes to the greatest of all treasures, the forgiveness of sins and salvation, wants to take the honor from God and ascribe it to himself? Woe to all such self-righteous! Their sins will be retained forever and ever.

No, if anyone wants to have forgiveness of sins, he must go a different way. Bear in mind that even if he were not a sinner, he could not humble himself deeply enough before the great holy God, for even though the angels did not fall, but remained in their implanted holiness, they nevertheless bow most deeply before God; they give him alone all honor; they know of nothing which they have deserved; they take everything as a gift of free mercy; they throw their crowns down before God's throne, cover their faces before God, and in reverential awe sing to him the trishagion. How much deeper must, therefore, man, the transgressor of the divine commands, the fallen creature, humble him-

self before God, if he seeks the forgiveness of his sins before the Most Holy God!

One does not merely humble himself by outward actions, for God sees the heart. It above all consists in honestly confessing his sins in their number, greatness, and seriousness, in seeing that he has deserved God's wrath and displeasure by them, and that nothing but grace can save him, nothing but God's free mercy. Whoever perceives that, so that he becomes comfortless as did the man sick of the palsy, that he must say with David, "Oh Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed; but thou, O Lord, how long?" Ps 6:1-3. "Neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." Ps 38:3b.4. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord...If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Ps 130:1.3.4. If anyone perceives his sins that way, that he says with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners," he has taken the first step in obtaining the forgiveness of his sins.

No person, however, can do that in himself! Only the Holy Spirit can humble him that deeply, and He does that through God's Word. Whoever wishes to arrive at that state must sit down with God's Word, especially the Ten Commandments, and examine himself according to them, fall upon his knees, and cry to God, Lord, open my heart and eyes, that I may see the wonders of your Law and honestly confess my sins. If one does that, God will soon take pity on him and reveal his sinful life and heart so clearly to him, that he will become anxious for comfort.

II.

This, however, does not dispose of the matter. Here knowledge of one's sins, and though it is connected with the deepest remorse, brings to no one the forgiveness of sins, "even though," as the hymns says, "he shed a sea of tears." The second thing which he, who wishes to have forgiveness of his sins, must do is that he holds fast in faith to the Word in which God promises all sinners forgiveness of their sins.

If God had only the attribute of love, he could forgive the sins of everyone who humbled himself before him and desired forgiveness from his free love. God, however, is not only very love but also very righteousness and holiness. Since his righteousness and holiness absolutely demand the punishment of sin and payment of the debt, God cannot forgive anyone his sins merely because he humbly prays for it; for God would then cease being righteous and holy; he would cease being God.

Nevertheless, God has done something, so that he could remain righteous and still forgive sins; he sent his dear Son into the world, let him become a man; and although he was without sin and not obligated to obey God's law, he made him subject to the Law, and gave him up into suffering and a bloody death. All this the Son of God did and suffered not for himself but for sinful mankind; for them he fulfilled the Law and thus won a righteousness which avails before God; for them he was punished and died and thus atoned for their sins. And all this God had recorded and preached to all men.

What must a person, therefore, do if he wants to receive forgiveness of his sins? He must accept what God announces and offers in his Word and cling to it, or in one word, he must believe it.

We see this clearly in the man sick of the palsy in our text. He was comfortless; he perceived his sins, perceived them clearly; he knew of no other counsel or help; he considered himself a lost sinner; and yet he firmly believed that Christ would help him body and soul; for our text expressly states: Christ "saw their faith," namely, the faith of the man sick of the palsy and those who brought the man to him. And what did Christ do? Did he prescribe some work? Did he impose some penance upon him? Nothing of the kind. He merely said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." What did the paralytic have to do in order to receive forgiveness? Nothing but accept and believe what Christ said to him.

Do you suppose, my friends, that indeed the paralytic needed nothing but faith in order to receive the forgiveness of sins, but Christ himself said to him, "Son, be of good cheer," etc. Do not say, Oh, yes, I would also believe this, if it would be said to me. No, bear in mind that Christ came into the world for all men; he atoned for the sins of all men through his suffering and death; he earned for all men a perfect righteousness by his obedience to the divine Law. This is now also told to all men. The Word of God is, therefore, a general absolution for all men; it says to all men, "Son, be of good cheer," etc., for Jesus is the Savior of all of you. And whenever a person is baptized, whenever he partakes of Holy Communion, especially whenever he hears the absolution, then especially is he told, "You, you be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." What can and must a person then do in order to receive the forgiveness of his sins? He should accept the word which is preached to all men and thus also to him; he should trust it completely; he should believe it -- that is the way he has what he seeks.

See, what a pleasant and easy way into heaven God has prepared for us! How shall we escape if we neglect such great salvation? Is it not horrible if a person remains without forgiveness of sins, because he does not want to recognize his sins? because he does not want to experience divine sorrow? because he does not want to let himself be disturbed in his enjoyment of the world? because he does not want to let go of certain sins? because he does not want to embrace God's Word before the mocking world?

Oh, may none of us so burden himself. May everyone to whom the way to grace and forgiveness is shown also travel on this way; then here on earth we will walk in good cheer as God's children and in eternity be happy and blessed as God's heirs.

Jesus Christ, oh help us all! Amen. Amen.

20TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 22:1-14

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

In our today's text the preaching of the Gospel of Christ is likened to an

invitation to a wedding. Thus is indicated that the Gospel is such a doctrine, which does not demand difficult works from us, yes, absolutely no works at all, but only tells us, what works God has done for us. This parable should show us, that one does not become a Christian by some personal piety but by listening to God's gracious voice, comforting oneself in Christ's grace and righteousness, and having the benefit of it. We are to learn from it, that Christ is not a new Lawgiver, that he does not wish to be our stern Judge to punish us for our sins, but that he wants to forgive us our sins, that contrary to all our doubts of God's grace and the worries and anxieties of our conscience, he wants to give us freely a joyful certainty in God's good will, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and eternal life; although we have deserved nothing but punishment with our sins, he wants to seat us in eternity at the table of heaven to refresh and comfort us forever. In short, if in our text the Gospel is called an invitation to a marriage, we are to understand that the Gospel is something entirely different from the Law; whereas the Law is a message which hurls sinners into despair, the Gospel, on the other hand, is a sweet blessed message of joy, which fills even the greatest sinners with the hope of salvation.

Oh yes, there are many who cannot find this difference existing between the Gospel and the Law, many who view the Law just as joyful a message as the Gospel, yes, an even more joyful message. There are many who would much rather hear that a man is saved through his virtue and noble works than through Christ; who would much rather hear that a man must become ever better than that he can be righteous before God through faith; who would much rather hear one preach that man himself must reconcile himself with God than that he is reconciled through Christ the Crucified.

How does it happen that one would rather hear the Law than the Gospel? Perhaps from the fact that he can actually fulfil the demands of the Law? Ah no! rather because he hears the earnest voice of the Law, but does not believe that he means what it says; because when they continually preach that by his good heart and noble works man must and can earn heaven himself, he is finally rocked to sleep in the sweet delusion that he actually has such a good heart and very often produces such noble works. Moreover, those preachers, who do not preach the Gospel of the Savior of sinners, do not preach the Law correctly. They, on the one hand, make the picture of a sinner so horrible and, on the other hand, the picture of an honorable man of the world too lovely, that even the rankest servant of sin blesses himself and thinks: No, I do not belong to the wicked; why don't I reckon myself among the virtuous?

How far different the Law seems and works when it is preached to a man according to its true content, in its demands which are unfulfillable for all men, in its spiritual meaning which goes to the heart, with its hard and frightening threats directed against all transgressors! Alas, then the Law is not a sermon of joy; it is like God's thunder before which one convinced of his sinfulness trembles; the word: Ye shall be holy; you are, however, a sinner! like a deadly bolt of lightning from heaven pierces his quaking heart.

Blessed is he in whom the words of the divine Law have become flashes of lightning through his heart! If the Gospel is preached to him, that is, the doctrine of Christ's reconciliation on the cross, oh, what a happy message that is for him! Then it is as though the dark storm clouds were scattered, as though the shinging heavens opened above him, and as though he now saw the Son of man standing at the right hand of God, who in inexpressibly grace said to him: Be not afraid! You have found grace!

Certainly, if only all men would recognize from the Law the sin and the

curse which lies upon them, all would also receive the Gospel of Christ as an invitation to a wedding. But since most men do not recognize nor feel the distress of their souls, what is the attitude of most toward it? Permit me to present that to you in this hour.

The text. Matthew 22:1-14.

In the Gospel just read Christ through a parable gives us a general view of the Gospel's fate among men in the course of the ages. He compares it to an invitation to a wedding and shows how it went out especially three times into the world, but that it went in vain. I, therefore, present to you

THE ATTITUDE OF MOST TOWARD GOD'S INVITATION TO HIS HEAVENLY MARRIAGE

- I. They Either Remain Indifferent and do not Want to Come, or
- II. They Hate and Persecute it, or finally,
- III. They Accept it Outwardly but not from Their Hearts.

Gracious God and Father! Through the Gospel of your Son you so kindly invite all men to the heavenly marriage of grace and salvation. But we must confess that by nature our hearts would rather remain in sin and in the deceitful lusts of the world or it would rather help itself than accept your gracious invitation. Oh, Lord, do not let a single one of us remain in this terrible delusion; grant that we all follow your gracious voice in your Word, cling to your grace with our whole heart, and walk in the power of your grace as new heavenly-minded creatures. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior. Amen.

I.

Christ begins our Gospel with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come." Vv.2.3. In this first portion of the parable Christ describes the time in which the heavenly marriage was decided upon but not yet prepared; this is the whole time before Christ's appearance on earth. The results of this invitation to the heavenly wedding at this time, or the fate of the Gospel, Christ describes briefly in the words, "And they would not come."

These words give us important information. If we look back over the whole period of world history before Christ's coming, we notice with dismay that during these four long millenia only so few knew something of the Savior of the world that these few believers in comparison to the huge host of heathen were viewed like a small ripple on the ocean, a grain of sand over against a mountain, a drop in a bucket. While, for example, at the time of the flood God graciously revealed himself to Noah and his family, millions lived on in the natural blindness of their hearts without the knowledge of God and his promised Savior. Later on when God sought out Abraham and made a covenant of grace with him, all the other nations lived without God's Word, sunk in the most miserable idolatry and in the most abominable worship of idols, the sun, moon, stars, yes, honoring wood and stone as their gods. Finally, later on in Canaan when the light of divine revelation burned brightly among the Jews, darkness covered all other portions of the world and gross darkness the nations who then inhabited the rest of the world.

If we ponder this, the question must arise: How does it happen, that in

the whole period before Christ's birth so many remained excluded from the heavenly wedding, that so many lived in this world and were finally lost without the Gospel, without the knowledge of the true God, and without the comfort of having a Savior? Did God according to an unconditional decree elect only so few, whom alone he would bring to the knowledge of his Son and the saving truth, whereas he passed most men by with his grace and without pity let them be lost? Many foes of Christendom have pointed to the fact that the teachings of Holy Scripture, especially before Christ's times, were known only in one corner of the earth. They exclaim, If the doctrine of the Bible were God's revelation and contained the only saving faith, would not God, who is love, have also seen to it that this teaching would become known to all men of all ages?

Christ's words in our text, "And they would not come," give us the key to this seeming contradiction and puzzle. We see from this that the reason that before Christ's times most nations of the world did not take part in the spiritual wedding feast of the promised Savior and that they remained without the knowledge of the true way to salvation, was not that God had shut them out but that they did not want to come when God called them and thus excluded themselves. At all ages God made arrangements that no one need be lost but that everyone could come to the knowledge of the truth; men, on the other hand, did everything they could to hinder the Word of God from entering in among them.

Scarcely had men fallen when the Gospel, that the woman's seed would crush the head of the serpent, was already preached to them by God himself. Adam lived 930 years thereafter and in his time certainly faithfully and tirelessly invited his children to the heavenly marriage feast. When Adam died he had lived 56 years with Noah's father, Lamech, who fell asleep believing the promise five years before the coming of the flood. Those who died in the flood in the year 1656 after the creation of the world, could have heard the preaching of a pupil of Adam. So what was at fault, that most even in the first sixteen centuries of the world did not receive the salvation announced in the Gospel? God sent enough messengers out who had to invite all, but, Christ says, "they would not come."

Later on God chose one nation to whom he entrusted his revelation, not because God wanted to pass the heathen by with his grace, but because God wanted to have his Son born from this nation, and because he, as it were, wanted this nation to be the torch-bearer for the other nations. God, therefore, also led it wonderfully and finally scattered it into all the world, so that they would testify of this promised salvation and invite all other nations to the marriage. So why did they sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, whereas in Israel the light of divine revelation burned so brightly? Because God had not wanted to show mercy upon them? No! Christ tells us, "They would not come."

You see, that is the tragic story of the Gospel of Christ. God let the world be told that he would prepare a marriage for his only Son and all men were to be guests at this wedding, but behold! the world did not believe it; it despised the promise of heaven by grace; it sought its own heaven on earth.

II.

Let us continue with our parable. Christ proceeds, "Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth;"

and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." Vv.4-7.

What period Christ describes in these words is not difficult to recognize; he is picturing the days of his flesh; when Christ lived, suffered, and died on earth, the table, as it were, was set for all sinners; Christ the Lamb of God who carries the sins of the world was offered, and when he cried on the cross, "It is finished," all messengers of God could finally call out in the fullest sense of the word, "All things are ready; come unto the marriage." The forgiveness of your sins is ready, God's reconciliation with all of you is ready, the righteousness which you need before God is ready, light, comfort, power, eternal life, heaven with all its blessedness and glory, in short, everything, everything is ready; you need only come; you need only accept salvation in Christ by faith, rejoice and comfort yourself in him, and enjoy everything which he has won for you. That is what Christ, John the Baptist, and all the apostles preached at Christ's time.

And now, how did the world react to this friendly, comforting, and even more gracious invitation, the way the invitation of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Covenant had been accepted? Did not the world at least now begin to be ashamed of its former indifference? Did it not at least now let everything go and hurry to the marriage, which the heavenly Father had prepared and to which he had invited all sinners?

Alas no! the greater the grace was which was offered to men, the greater was their resistance; it was not enough that most despised the invitation to the marriage of grace and salvation and thought: Yes, if God's messengers were to distribute money, honor, and good days, we would gladly come; it was not enough that they turned away, the one preferred his field, the other his business, some were even so embittered by this friendly invitation that they laughed and killed the servants of the Lord, yes, his Son himself.

Is not this a dark mystery of the malice of the human heart? If Christ would have come to impose many difficult works on the world, to lay an unbearable burden upon it, and only to show it how it must earn heaven for itself, then we might not be surprised, if the world would reluctantly accept his message, yes, if it would become angry with him and seize his servants; but who can understand why they raged and stormed when they were merely told, "Come, for all things are ready"? that they did not rest until they had nailed Christ to the cross and wiped his apostles from the earth?

But, my friends, that is the way man is, as long as his heart is not yet changed by God. The natural man joyfully hears the strictest doctrine of virtue and good works, even though he strives for anything but virtue and does anything but good works; yet if Christ the crucified is preached to him, if he is told that he must be a poor sinner, who can be saved alone by Christ's grace, and if all this is offered to him in the most friendly manner, this arouses him to the most bitter hatred, yes, even to the most inhuman persecution.

The preaching of grace did not have this result only in the days of his flesh; until this very hour that has always been the attitude of the world. Why did millions of martyrs shed their blood in the first three centuries during the persecutions by the heathen? Because they admitted that there was no salvation in any other, that no other name was given men whereby they could be saved, than alone the name of Jesus Christ the crucified. Moreover, why were so many executed as heretics under the papacy? Because they had admitted that Christ was the only head of his church and that no works or penances dreamed up by men but only faith in Christ saves. And even now, what mostly awakens

the derision and mockery of the world, yes, even the scorn and ridicule of those who want to be the most zealous Christians? Nothing else but the teaching that everything is ready, that the sinner can find everything which he needs in Christ, that man dare earn and battle for nothing by himself, that only faith avails before God, and that in the Gospel, in baptism, and in the Holy Supper the table of grace is set for all sinners.

However, our text depicts not only the attitude of men toward the Gospel but also the attitude of God toward such despisers; we read, "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." V.7. In these words Christ tells us in advance what the fate of Jerusalem and the whole Jewish nation would be, when in part they despised the invitation to the heavenly marriage, in part had replied to it with burning hatred and murderous persecution. And as Christ had announced it, so it happened; the Romans came without their knowing it as the avenging army of God, prepared an unprecedented miserable destruction for the Jews, leveled Jerusalem to the ground, and wrote over the desolated place with bloody script, That is the final fate of all those who despise and reject the invitation of God's servants to the heavenly marriage.

To be sure, the despisers of the Gospel laugh at these threats. They think: Oh, that Jerusalem was destroyed amid such misery soon after the preaching of Christ and the apostles was an accident; many have rejected the Gospel, and they have prospered until their death! Of course, this last is true, but the true punishment for the citizens of Jerusalem was not the destruction of their city; that was only a brief prelude of that which awaited them in eternity to warn the world. Woe to the world, which does not let itself be warned; in eternity it will find out what it means: To despise Christ and persecute his messengers; they will not see the heavenly Jerusalem and will be hurled into the smoking pits of hell.

III.

But let us proceed to the last part of our parable. Christ concludes it in the words, "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither no having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." Vv.8-14.

Here Christ pictures the attitude of the world toward the invitation to the heavenly marriage during the entire period of the time from his day until the end of days. Christ says that after the Jews will have rejected the Gospel and Jerusalem would be destroyed, God's messengers would go out into all the world and seek out the heathen everywhere and say also to them, "Come unto the marriage." And behold! a huge crowd will soon appear, not only the good but also the evil; the tables will all be full, though not everyone will appear in the wedding garment of true faith.

We see from Christ's description that in his eyes the whole future lay revealed just like the present. For has not his prophecy gone into literal fulfillment? Yes, the servants of the Lord cast the empty net of the Gospel into the sea of the world, and drew it filled to the shore; they tilled God's desolate

acre among the blind heathen, and soon the richest harvest moved gently in the breeze; through holy baptism they opened the gates of the church and soon drew entire nations into it. Yet though the work of the Lord's servants at the ev-entide of the world appeared to be so successful, the results seem to be en-tirely different when they are examined more closely. The net of the Gospel contains only too many worthless fish; God's field only too many weeds; the Christian Church only too many hypocrites. If, therefore, the attitude of most toward the Gospel in the period after Christ should be generally shown, it consists in this, that they indeed come to the marriage hall of the Christian Church, but without the proper wedding garment; that outwardly they accept the invitation but most do not from their heart.

This part of the parable concerns us above all others. We are not number-ed among those who remained indifferent to Christ's call though his servants and did not want to come; still less do we belong to those who openly despised the Word of grace and laughed at and persecuted the preachers of the word; we have rather, when we received the invitation, appeared at the place of the mar-riage, the Christian Church; we have seated ourselves at Christ's table, for we use his means of grace, his Word and holy sacraments, but are we all also clothed in the proper wedding garment? do we really want to be spiritual wed-ding guests? is it our concern to please the true heavenly bridegroom? that is, do we really use the means of grace in order to receive forgiveness of sins? do we go to church in order to learn of the way to salvation and then also by God's grace to travel on that road? are we truly in earnest to have a gracious God? do we let God's Word actually enter our heart? in so doing, do we open our heart to the Holy Spirit and let him work true faith in us through the Word? have we let God's Word convert and change our heart, so that we now also walk as new creatures? Or do we perhaps suppose that everything is done when we merely come to church, read and hear God's Word, and use the sacraments? do we still serve sin secretly? are the temporal joys of the world as yet more dear than the spiritual joys of the heavenly marriage?

Oh, let us not deceive ourselves! If even here we are guests at Christ's table of grace but without the wedding garment, men can indeed consider us good guests, but there will come a day when the King of Heaven will inspect his guests who have appeared; how unhappy we will then be when our Christianity will be only pretense not power, only outward not inward, only half-hearted not with one's whole heart! how wretched when we will be found without the wedding garment of true faith! Then bound hand and food we will be cast out "into out-er darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

But happy will we be if, hungry and thirsty, we seat ourselves at the Lord's table of grace; some day he will let us take part in the wedding joy of eternal life. May he help us do that through Jesus Christ! Amen.

21ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

John 4:46b-54

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 Christ Jesus.

Our Savior says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mk 16:16. St. Paul says in Rom 14:23, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" and in Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please him." These passages have been a thorn in the side of many. They say, Yes, yes, all the religions of the world say, that faith in their mysteries is absolutely necessary; because all religions demand this, doesn't this prove that this is supported by error and deceit, or must finally be thus supported? And why should everything depend on faith alone? Is it not more natural that God above all depends on the character, on the noble convictions, on the proper principles, on the good works of a person?

We answer, That all religions, even the false, demand faith from those who wish to be saved does not cast suspicion upon the doctrine but rather confirms their indisputable truth. Just because all men feel that without faith it is impossible to please God, that is why there is no religion whose first demand would not be, You must believe.

It can be no other way. No one can offend and insult us more grievously that those who contradict our words, do not want to believe them, and say to our face, What you say is not true. Now if a poor sinful human being feels deeply offended when someone refuses to believe him, how much more must God be offended if his Word is not believed! Yes, what sin can be greater than unbelief! Whoever does not believe simply says, God is a liar. As little as a blasphemer can enter into blessed communion with God, so certainly does the unbeliever exclude himself from all blessedness in God. Whoever is a true Christian brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. He does not in unbelief say when the mysteries are revealed, How can this be? but, Oh, what depths! A true Christian makes no distinction between Holy Scripture. He does not accept the one point which he can understand, and reject the other which seems incredible, but in childlike simplicity believes every Word of God as it is written, and clings firmly to it even though the whole world does not. He thinks, All men are liars, but what God says is true; what he promises he fulfills; nothing is impossible for him. Whoever does not have this faith is not a Christian, because whoever does not believe God does not consider God his God and denies the very first point of true divine worship, namely trust.

This must also be added: The Holy Scriptures teach that the Son of God is the Savior, the Surety, the Substitute of all men; that he bore the punishment of sins for all men, fulfilled the Law, and paid their debt. Faith is nothing else than the assent of man to this covenant of grace; it is accepting what Christ did and suffered for him. Whoever does not believe, not only blunders and falls into an error of his reason, but he does not accept Christ and his redemption, rejects the payment made by his Surety, rejects the blessedness which his Savior won and which was given by grace, and wantonly hurls himself into damnation. To be and remain without faith and still be saved is, therefore, impossible, as certainly as God's Word is the eternal truth.

As nothing in this world is perfect, so is also the faith of the Christian never perfect; his faith always remains somewhat mixed with unbelief; and of this unbelief of the believers let us hear more for our instruction and comfort.

The text. John 4:46b-54.

This Gospel just read gives me the opportunity to direct your devotion to a very important subject, namely the unbelief which remains in this life even in the heart of believers. Hence, I will speak to you on

THE UNBELIEF FOUND IN CHRISTIANS

- I. What the Condition is, and
- II. How Believers can be Increasingly Cured of it.

Lord Jesus, you are the True Vine and your believers the branches. You not only threaten that your Father will take away every branch which does not produce fruit, but you also promise that he will purge every branch which brings forth fruit, that it may produce more fruit. We pray, let your Word which is to be preached now, serve to cleanse all your believers among us from the defects still clinging to them, and especially that they may be cleansed and freed ever more from all traces of unbelief, that they all enjoy the rest and peace which you brought us from heaven, serve you joyfully, and every hour come into your presence with rejoicing that no tribulation may drive them away and that finally they through you joyfully conquer sin, world, death, and hell, and are saved. Amen. Amen.

I.

Our text tells us, "And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die." Vv.46b-49. From this narrative we see three things. First of all, wherein the unbelief with which even the believers are burdened really consists, when this unbelief is the strongest, and finally, under what circumstances it is most often revealed.

Undoubtedly the nobleman, of whom we are told, carried the seed of true faith in his heart. We hear that he firmly believed that Christ not only could help when man could not, but he also had the firm confidence that he wanted to and would help. Whoever expects all help from Christ and confidently flees to him as the helper in all distress certainly has true faith in which he will never be ashamed. When Christ reproaches the nobleman, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," v.48b, we see that in his heart a considerable residue of unbelief had remained. He believed that he could be assured of Christ's help only if Christ would go with him into his house, lay his hand upon the head of his fatally sick son, and say to him something like this, Be well, my son, stand up and walk. The nobleman wanted something for his faith which he could see, hear, and notice with his senses. He instructed Christ as to what to do and did not yet want to trust Christ Jesus completely and blindly.

This remainder of unbelief we find among all believers of all ages, and the younger one is in faith the less free he is of it. Most are open unbelievers; either they live securely, do not concern themselves about God's Word and their salvation, seek only worldly things, live in vanity, yet deem themselves good men while despising Christ and his grace. Or they have only an imaginary faith which is in their mouth and mind but not in their heart. Thank God there are people whom God's Word has penetrated to the very heart, who know that they are lost sinners, who are frightened of themselves and earnestly sigh, Alas, what must I do to be saved? If such who are concerned about the salvation of their souls hear the Gospel of Christ, that Christ is also their Savior, who made amends for their sins through his suffering and death, and that whoever believes in him receives forgiveness of sins, is in God's eyes considered righteous by grace for Christ's sake, and should be saved, oh what a joyful message is this precious Gospel of grace for such people! For them Christ is an ocean

of blessedness, joy, pleasures, and delight. They exclaim, I have found Christ and with him my eternal salvation; oh, how fortunate I am, how blessed I am! What rest, what peace, what certainty I have in that which before I really Christ I did not know, yes, did not even suspect! Oh, if all would know, say such young believers, how well off a man is with Christ, they would joyfully leave the world and sin, like I did, and go to him and be saved!

Now if one considers this condition of young Christians and hears their joyful confession of faith, it seems as though all the unbelief of their heart is all at once forever and completely conquered. But it only seems so. The fewer experiences a man has in the ways of the Lord, the more he is like the nobleman in our Gospel. Also of other newly converted we can say, "Except ye see signs and wonder, ye will not believe." V.48b. What is their usual condition? Most are so quickly and so joyfully certain of their salvation, because they have a sweet feeling in their heart; because they discover that God instills a friendly comfort in their souls; because the Gospel as a soft refreshing shower has fallen upon their languishing heart; because their heart and conscience no longer condemns them; and because God perhaps lets them prosper also in temporal things.

If we consider such newly converted people in spiritual or temporal distress, what happens? Then it again often seems as though the light of faith is completely extinguished. If he no longer feels grace in his heart, he thinks that he has again lost grace; if he no longer finds the comfort of the Gospel, he thinks that this comfort has no meaning for him any more; if he detects no special refreshment at the preaching or the reading of the Gospel, he thinks that he is completely hardened and the Word no longer makes any impression upon him; if he is again smitten by his conscience, if sin rages in his members, if he is again assailed by the terrors of God's wrath and hell, he thinks, Alas I have fallen from grace under God's wrath, from communion with Christ under the rule of sin, from heaven into hell. If on top of it, together with such inner distress he must also bear the cross; if poverty oppresses him, or he is laid upon a painful sickbed by a lingering illness, or if he falls into shame, or if God perhaps takes a dear child or a dear spouse or his only faithful friend though death, if things always appear more troubled and dark about him, then he thinks, God has departed from me; how can I be God's child! Alas! my faith was only something I imagined.

There it is; thus the powerful impulses of unbelief show themselves in a young Christian. They all suffer from the spiritual sickness of wanting to see first, feel first, discover first, seize with their hands, so to say, the miraculous help of God first of all, and then to believe firmly.

Although with experienced Christians the power of unbelief is broken more and more, and they are more accustomed and skilled in trusting God even in the dark, no person is so firm, so high, so perfect in faith that he is not often tempted in a similar way. The desire always to walk in the mild sunshine of God's friendliness remains until our death; the desire for having visible supports for our faith never leaves us until our eyes close in death and the eyes of our spirit see the crown and the hand of our soul swings the palm of eternal victory. Even the most experienced Christian must confess with David of himself, "Lord, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Ps 30:7. God's Word gives us many examples. Even a Moses was weak in faith when in the wilderness he was merely to speak to the rock to have it produce water for the languishing people; in unbelief he struck the rock twice with his staff. Even the apostles in the ship around which the waves raged, cried to the slumbering Son of God, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" Mk 4:38. "Lord, save us; we perish." Mt 8:25. Even the apostles in

little faith did not only say in the wilderness when 4,000 hungry had gathered around them, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" Mt 15:33, but shortly thereafter, after they had witnessed Christ's miraculous feeding and then forgetting it again, they were very much concerned at having brought only enough bread for themselves and Christ. So deeply is unbelief rooted in the human heart.

II.

Let us in the second place hear how believers can be healed and increasingly freed from the unbelief remaining in their heart through God's grace.

The nobleman of our text furnishes us a wonderful example. We see Christ do three things in order that the nobleman is healed of his unbelief: first of all, Christ showed him his unbelief, directed him to his Word, and finally, crowns the little faith of the nobleman through his miracle in a manner he did not expect.

When the nobleman in weak faith came to Christ, Christ did not reject him; he received him, but when he insisted that Christ should go to his home and let his miraculous help be seen, he reprimanded him saying, "Except ye SEE signs and wonders, ye will not believe." V.48b. When in spite of that the nobleman stood the test and implored, "Sir, come down ere my child die," v.49, Christ only gave him the promise, "Thy son liveth." V.50. With divine power this Word entered his weak, despairing heart, the haze of unbelief quickly left his soul, and his faith received great power and certainty because we read, "And the man believed the WORD that Jesus had spoken unto him, and went his way." V.50b. How happy, how strengthened, how full of confidence the nobleman went on his way! And lo! when on the next day he was close to home, his servants met him and brought him the good news, "Thy son liveth." V.51. As certainly as the nobleman had expected no other news, yet he heard it uttered with joy. He immediately asked, when his son became better and heard, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house." Vv.52b.53. His weak faith became strong and great, he also became a zealous and blessed preacher of faith to his family, and finally got his wife and children and servants to join him in being faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Here we hear, my friends, how believers are increasingly cured of their unbelief. From this we learn first of all that Christ does not reject those who out of weakness do not want to believe firmly before they see, feel, and discover, but that he also rebukes this as a great weakness in them. Do not be deceived by the sectarians of our day, who lead their hearers to strive unceasingly for the sweet feeling of grace and the perceptible witness of the Holy Ghost in their hearts, and not to consider themselves children of God until they have received this. This is a completely wrong order of salvation. Such preachers seek to plant in their hearers that from which Christ seeks to free his Christians; they praise that in them as a true sign of a true Christian which Christ rebukes in them as weakness and sickness.

Hence, whoever hitherto did not want to let anything calm him until God, as it were, had given him visible and feelable signs and wonders must recognize this as a remnant of his natural unbelief; from now on he must accustom himself to build and found everything only on the Word. A Christian must thank God, if he sends many perceptible signs of comfort into his heart; but he must not desire to have these remain always in his heart. He must accustom himself

in all the distresses of body and soul, in all afflictions, anxieties, and temptations not to ask, What does not heart say now? how do I feel? but rather, What is written? What does God promise sinners?

Oh, if a Christian begins to practise that, if he begins to seek his comfort in God's Word and clings to it, his natural unbelief must increasingly leave; the seed of faith which he carries in his heart grows ever stronger, and finally becomes a deeply rooted tree, which not even the fiercest storm of temptation is able to uproot. Then God is also so gracious that he lets such a Christian who clings firmly in all misery to his Word increasingly experience how he need never be ashamed of his faith, how God must help those at all times who hope in him for the sake of the honor of his name, of his Word, for the sake of his promise, and his truth. Finally, an assailed Christian often arrives at the point of being able to say, "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be light unto me." Micah 7:8b. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," though I feel nothing, though on the contrary I find in me nothing but wrath, condemnation of my conscience, and the power of sin, yes, though it seems as though I were completely forsaken by God, "I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Ps 23:4.

Oh, if a Christian arrives at the point, where he is satisfied with a few supports of the Word, if he desires nothing but that God should not take his Word from him, and preserves him in it, then he is strong in the faith, and as we read in our today's epistle, he is strong in the Lord and in the power of his might because he has put on the whole armor of God, so that he is able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Then he has nothing to fear from his last misery, his hour of death. He knows: though in death everything may leave me, and all comfort forsake me, I will cling firmly to the Word of grace for poor sinners, and with this anchor of hope confidently venture upon the sea of death. This anchor keeps me fast, with its help I will arrive at the shore of that blessed land where my faith ceases and blessed sight will begin.

Oh then, all of you, my dear hearers, if you learn to believe in the Word in the darkness of this wretched life, the eternal day will finally arrive in the new heaven and on the new earth where righteousness will dwell. Amen.

22ND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY Matthew 18:23-35

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

In this same Savior, dear Christian hearers.

The duty to reprimand a sinning fellow Christian from God's Word is a duty seldom exercised and, of course, difficult to do, and yet it is an extremely necessary and holy duty.

That those who themselves are not earnest Christians do not reprimand their sinning fellow Christians is no cause for wonder; they have to fear that, if they would reprimand others, they themselves would be told, "Sweep in front of your own door first," or as we read in Romans 2, "Thou art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind...Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest

thou not thyself, thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" Vv.19a.21-23. Sad to say, even those who take pains to walk as true Christians very often neglect the duty of brotherly admonition. Oh yes, they take offense at the sins of those who want to be Christians and have joined a Christian congregation; they secretly and among their friends complain about members who are disorderly; but they do not want to go and admonish the sinner. That is the cause of inexpressible harm. Those who sin remain in their sins and drag even more along with them; the congregation receives increasingly more worthless members and constantly sinks deeper into corruption; offenses increase; the congregation is poisoned; brotherliness disappears and mutual distrust takes over; God's blessing departs; the congregation ceases giving light to the world as a city on a high hill; honest and zealous people who are weak in knowledge do not want to join such a congregation, and many who once were members timidly withdraw and sever relations.

I admit that it is true that the duty of brotherly admonition is, as was said, one of the most difficult and, one might say, the most thankless of Christian duties; for the more zealously and faithfully a Christian carries out this duty, the less he very often, yes, generally is appreciated. His love is explained as lovelessness, and instead of accepting the reprimand and improving himself, the one reprimanded hates the one who reprimanded him.

Nevertheless, this should not keep a Christian from fulfilling this duty, for it is extremely necessary and most holy. Everytime God's Word admonishes us to love our neighbor and be concerned about his soul, we are also admonished to reprimand him when he sins against us or others. When the self-interested are reprimanded, they, of course, view this as lovelessness, but on the contrary, a Christian cannot act in greater lovelessness toward his fellow Christian than by letting him live on in his sins unreprimanded; yes, then he will be viewed by God as a person who hates his neighbor; the unreprimanded sins of his neighbor will be imputed to him and all the corruption which he could have prevented but because of sinful fear of man and love of ease did not, falls upon his conscience as his guilt. As he is justly considered a murderer who did not pull out someone who fell into the water or who did not warn a blind person of the precipice ahead of him, so he is a murderer of souls who does not reprimand his sinning fellow Christians.

In God's Word the duty of admonishing one's brother is expressly laid and impressed upon a Christian. We find this even in the writings of the Old Testament. In Leviticus 19 we read, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." V.17. Psalm 141:5 says, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." The New Testament is full of similar statements. In Hebrews 3:13, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Most important of all is the admonition of the Savior, which we find in Matthew 18. There he himself says, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Vv.15-17. Oh, blessed the congregation where this brotherly admonition is practised! But woe

to those where it is omitted! There in spite of the purest and richest preaching of God's Word corruption must soon take control; it must at last become spiritually desolate; for every congregation is like a body; if every member does not want to do its duty, the entire body must necessarily die at last.

If reprimanding the sins of one's fellow Christian is commanded, is it permitted to hate him if he sins against us and is hard and irreconcilable? Definitely not! Though reprimanding the sins of his neighbor is a holy duty for Christians, he has the equally holy duty of forgiving him.

The text. Matthew 18:23-35.

In the verses preceding our text we read how Christ impressed upon his disciples the duty of brotherly admonition. When Peter had heard this, he asked Christ, "Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" V.21. Hereupon the Lord answered not only, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven," but he also told the parable in our text. So, permit me to show you:

HOW POWERFULLY AND URGENTLY THE FORGIVENESS RECEIVED FROM GOD
DRIVES A CHRISTIAN ON TO FORGIVE HIS BROTHER'S SINS.

The reasons are:

- I. The Sins from which God has Absolved him are Incomparably Greater than those from which he Should Absolve his Neighbor,
- II. God did not Owe him the Forgiveness which He Gave, but he Owes it Indeed to his Neighbor as his Fellow Servant, and finally,
- III. God will Again Charge Their sins to Those who do not Want to Forgive Their Neighbor.

I.

As we learn from the close of our text, Christ through this parable wants to incite Christians to absolve their fellow Christians from their sins. That is why he pictures a king of whom he relates the following things: The king held an accounting with his servants, and lo! when he began to reckon, one of them was found who owed him 10,000 talents. This was a huge sum, which he could never repay, for one talent according to our figuring was \$1,500.00; the whole debt amounted to \$15,000,000.00. What did the king do? Since the servant was not able to pay, the lord commanded that he and his wife and children and everything he had be sold to make payment. The servant fell down, worshiped him, and said, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." And behold, the lord took pity on this servant, set him free, and also canceled his debt. But what happened? This same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii; he seized him, choked him, and said, "Pay me what thou owest." Then his fellow servant fell down, pleaded with him, and said, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." He would not, but went and threw him into prison until he paid what he owed.

What is the meaning of this parable? That is very obvious. By the king Christ means God, the King of all kings, by the servants the rational creatures of God, angels and men, by the servant who owed the king 10,000 talents, men, by the 10,000 talents the sins of men against God, by the fellow servant one's neighbor or fellow Christian, and by the 100 denarii the sins which a Christian commits against another.

First of all, what does Christ intend to teach with this first part of his parable? He evidently intends to show that a Christian owes it to God to forgive the sins of his fellow Christians; for as that servant out of love and thankfulness toward his lord, who had canceled his debt of 10,000 talents should have canceled his fellow servant's debt of 100 denarii, so out of love and thankfulness toward his God, who has forgiven him so many sins, a Christian should forgive his neighbor his offenses from his heart. And is that not true, my dear Christians?

Think of what God has done for you! You, like all men, owed God 10,000 talents; you had transgressed all ten of God's commandments a thousand times, yes, countless times; you shamefully had squandered all the blessings which God had entrusted to you; in thoughts, words, and deeds you had insulted God by omitting the good and doing the evil; you were worthy of being sold to hell as slaves of sin with everything which you were and had. You were not able to pay your debt to God.

Yet what did God do? Did he deal with you according to, etc.? No; from eternity he thought of how he could help you -- his Son -- as soon as you were born, through baptism -- and even after your baptism when you accumulated new sins -- God often held an accounting with you in your conscience, presented your guilt to you from the Law and threatened to reject you but only that you might turn to his grace; for the moment you from your heart prayed to God for patience, God immediately in grace canceled your debt of 10,000 talents.

Do you not owe God thanks for that? Yet how do you intend to thank God? God never does anything to harm you, so that you can forgive him in return! Neither can you give him anything, for all is already his! So that you can thank him, he has declared, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Mt 25:40. If one of your fellow Christians sins against you, then know that here God is giving you an opportunity to prove yourself thankful toward him and his forgiveness.

So what are they doing, who do not want to forgive their fellow Christians? They show such black ingratitude toward God, that all creatures would shudder at it. They deny completely that God has forgiven them their sins. They are like a murderer standing under the very gallows ready to be executed, but who suddenly is pardoned and upon his return shows his thanks for the pardon by immediately committing a new murder.

Therefore, all of you who have received forgiveness of your sins from God, watch your heart closely. If men sin against you, think of the grace you have received from God and that you, therefore, owe it to God to forgive your neighbor in return.

II.

We, however, continue. Christ continues thus in his parable, "So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Vv.31-33. Our attention is especially directed to the fact that the king said to the unfaithful servant that his debtor is his fellow servant; he intends to say: I was your lord, and yet I have canceled all your great debt; how much more should you have forgiven your debtor his insignificant debt, since you are not his lord but his fellow servant?

Here we have the second reason why Christians should forgive their fellow Christians their sins; they, in the second place, really owe it to their fellow Christians.

My friends, most suppose that if they are greatly insulted, it is indeed not right to avenge oneself on them; but whether they should forgive him all his insults, whether they should love him in return and take a liking to him, is entirely up to them; if they would do this it would show special generosity and grace. Yet that is not true. It is true that God owes us no love, no forgiveness, for he is our Creator, our Lord, our absolute Despot; we belong to him with everything which we are and have; we are completely subject to him; he can deal with us like the potter with the clay who can make out of it whatever he wishes, a vessel of honor or dishonor. After we have transgressed God's holy Ten Commandments and have all become sinners, we cannot demand grace from him. If God would have permitted all men to be lost, no man could have said to him, What are you doing? He would still have remained righteous. That God sent his only begotten Son into the world to save men, and that he has forgiven them all their sins and wants to save those who repent and believe in his dear Son, did not take place because his righteousness had compelled God to do it; this was a deed of his free, fathomless love, grace, and mercy. Therefore, those who will be saved will together with all the holy angels in eternity praise nothing but this grace.

It is not so with us. None of us is the lord of someone else; on the contrary, we are debtors to all our neighbors, and especially to our fellow Christians, as the apostle says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." Rom 13:8. We owe love to all our neighbors, our fellow Christians; even if he has offended us, we owe it to him to offer him our reconciliation and still more, to be reconciled with him if he himself asks us for it.

Hence, what do they do, who do not forgive their offender from their heart, who no longer speak to them in a friendly manner, nor cross their threshold, nor see them, or those, who, as they say, mocking God, forgive the offence but will not forget it? What are such irreconcilable persons doing? They are not only unthankful to God, but they also sin grievously against their neighbor; they not only stop practicing a noble generosity, they also deny their neighbor something which they absolutely owe him and are pledged to show him, and which he has the perfect right to demand of them; they make a god out of themselves and thus become even greater and more blamable sinners before God than he who offended them, no matter how great the offense had been. Yes, they become like Satan, who in his hatred and wrath is also irreconcilable; to become angry is certainly human, but to want to remain angry -- that is devilish.

III.

In the third place, a Christian should forgive his neighbor his sins because he owes it to himself. We read at the close of our text, "And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses." Vv.34.35.

From this we see that as dear as a Christian's and salvation is to him, so earnestly does he have to guard himself against harboring hatred and ill will in his heart and refusing to be reconciled with his offender. For God's wrath rests upon irreconcilableness. He is not a Christian and does not belong in Christ's kingdom, for Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love, grace, and reconciliation. His sins are not forgiven him, for God will only forgive in the measure that he

forgives his neighbor, as the Fifth Petition says, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." If an irreconcilable person had forgiveness before, he has again lost it by his irreconcilableness. He is not in the faith; if he thinks he is, it is a deception, for faith is active through love. His baptism is in vain for him, for he has broken the baptismal covenant. In vain he does other things which are called good works, for they spring forth from the evil fount of an irreconcilable heart; they, therefore, do not please God. Vain is his worship; he serves the devil. In vain he prays; he cannot pray the Lord's Prayer in faith; the Fifth Petition condemns him; God does not hear him. In vain he goes to church and hears God's Word; it cannot save him, for a curse lies on his heart. In vain he goes to the Lord's Supper; he partakes of it unworthily to his damnation. Vainly does he refrain from other sins and lead a secluded life; for wherever the sin of irreconcilableness rules, there all sins rule; whoever keeps the whole Law and sins in only one point, he is guilty of all. An irreconcilable person has no promise with which to comfort himself; all the threats and curses of God in his Word are directed against him.

Woe, therefore, to the one who dies in this state. He dies accursed and does not get to see God; the gates of heaven are closed to him; in vain he cries, "Lord, open to me!" Christ answers, "I never knew you; depart from me you evildoer." He comes under judgment; he finds no grace; Jesus is not at his side; he does not recognize him as his own. He is as assuredly damned as God's Word is sure and true. He will be hurled to hell as a hypocrite and apostate and as a child of sin, darkness, and the devil. He will be given over to the tormentors and will be tormented by the without end, and the smoke of his torment will ascend from eternity to eternity. His worm will not die neither will his fire be quenched. Repenting like Cain, he will torment himself and yet not find mercy, for there is no deliverance from hell.

Oh, let us then become terrified at the fearful, devilish sin of irreconcilableness. Let us examine ourselves, whether we are angry with anyone in this world, and if someone finds this in himself, let him repent in time and quickly become reconciled with God and man, in order that he may stand on the fearful day of reckoning and not be ashamed. May our heavenly Father grant that to us through Jesus Christ, his dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

23RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 22:15-22

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

From of old the objection has been raised against those who were faithful servants of God, that they were enemies and disturbers of the general community welfare. When King Ahab after a long vain search found the Prophet Elijah who had reproved the sins and idolatry of the people, he immediately yelled at him, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Elijah, however, boldly and fearlessly replied, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou, and thy father's house, in that

ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." 1 Kings 18:17,18. The Prophet Amos experienced the very same; when he announced God's judgment upon the land of Israel, in anger the priest Amaziah said to King Jereboam, "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words." Amos 7:10.

Even Christ the Son of God was not free from the charge of this reproach. When he stood before Pilate, the chief priests raised the accusation against him, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." Lk 23:5. The insult with which Christ was once slandered in the world all his faithful followers must also bear after him. It went no better for the apostles. When Paul and Silas had preached the Gospel of peace in Philippi, they were led before the leaders of the city and were accused, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." Acts 16:20,21.

Though this charge that the teaching of the Gospel would cause an uproar and upset the city was unfounded, in later times this was always the charge raised against Christians and used as a powerful weapon against them. Because they could not obey the prohibition not to preach Christ, they were called rebels; because they did not want to burn incense before the picture of the emperor, which was a sign of divine honor, they were called guilty of les majesty; because they did not participate in the general merry-making of the people, in the public spectacles, and the like, they were branded as gloomy enemies of the whole human race. In order to preserve and nourish these thoughts regarding the first Christians among the heathen, Nero caused the city of Rome to be set on fire and then accused the Christians of this fearful act of arson.

Everytime the Gospel was preached in its divine purity and power in the world, that old objection was also renewed against faithful Christians. This happened also at the time of the Reformation. Luther and his comrades in the faith were publicly accused of rebellion and the overthrow of all good civil order. Luther writes of his experiences in a preface to his works, "People cry: See, you yourself confess and lament that much uproar has arisen; but who else has given cause for it than you with your teaching? That is," Luther continues, "now their art so that they can overthrow Luther's doctrine, as they regard it. If one should imitate the affected wisdom of their high art, all prophets must also have been rebels, for thus they have been regarded, blamed, persecuted, and all usually executed by their own people. Even Christ the Lord himself had to hear the same from his Jews and was also finally put to death on the cross as a rebel. The apostles and disciples fared no better than their Lord and Master. Is it any wonder," Luther concludes, "that also we who now preach and confess Christ in these last terrible times are condemned as rebels in the same way as they?"

My dear brethren, we, therefore, dare be amazed even less that the unbelievers of our new fatherland still come up publicly with the claim that Christianity is harmful to the well-being of this state, that it will prepare the downfall of the United States, since it gnaws like a worm at the root of the tree of freedom; in short, that zealous Christians cannot possibly be good citizens as well.

Is this reproach perhaps not so completely unjust? should the Gospel actually oppose the wholesome laws of a land? should Christ's Church actually endanger the state? should the rulers of the world really have to fear Christ, the King of truth, fear for their people and government? can a good Christian not be a good citizen as well? Of this, etc.

The text. Matthew 22:15-22.

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," v.21, is the decision which Christ once gave to the question whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. In these few words Christ clearly said that the kingdom of the world rightfully exists alongside God's kingdom and that, therefore, one can be a Christian and at the same time a good citizen. On this basis permit me to present to you:

THE CORRELATION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CITIZEN

We will learn two things:

- I. That One can be, yes, Must Necessarily be, a Christian and at the Same Time a Good Citizen,
- II. But that there is More to being a True Christian than in Being Merely a Good Citizen.

Lord Jesus, eternal King, it is indeed your will that your Christians here be subject to people with their works, but it is also your will that they surrender and subject their heart to no other lord than you. We, therefore, ask you, give us grace to be subject to all human ordinances for your sake in free love; above all we ask you, take possession of our heart, dwell in it, rule in it, be King in it, and remain in it until we leave the visible kingdom of this world and hereafter worship at your feet in the invisible kingdom of your glory forever and ever. Amen.

I.

In the section of the Gospel story preceding our text we are told that Christ presented his kingdom under the picture of a royal wedding and thus indicated how most of the Jews despised the invitation to it, yes, how some of this nation would seize, ridicule, and kill the inviters, but how God would destroy these murderers, burn up their city, and invite the heathen to the wedding in their stead. With suppressed wrath the Pharisees heard this. Not only was this most offensive that Christ compared his kingdom to a worldly realm and thus called himself the Messiah; they also knew very well that by the murderers Christ meant them and no one else. What did they do? They met and took council on how they would trap Christ in his talk. They decided to strike a mortal blow against Christ by enticing him to commit an offence by his words against the emperor; thereupon they hoped to be able to prepare the way for his fall as an offender against the king. They thought that since Christ presented his kingdom as a worldly kingdom, he certainly cannot be a friend of the Caesar who at that time ruled over the Jewish nation. To be on the safe side, the Pharisees themselves did not go to Christ but sent their disciples to him accompanied by servants of King Herod who should immediately arrest Christ the moment he would have committed an offence in words against the highest authority in the land.

The disciples actually began very cleverly. With a friendly and respectful mien they say, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men." V.16. With these flattering words they hope to make Christ secure and entice out of him his supposedly secret thoughts against the existing government. Seemingly without malice they, therefore, also add, "Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" V.17.

What did Christ do? We read, "But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" V.18. How these wretches should have been frightened at these words! In spite of all their cunning they saw their secret betrayed against their expectation. Christ continues, "Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." Vv.19-22. What was the point of Christ's answer? This: since Caesar's tribute money was used among the Jews, one can conclude that they owe Caesar tribute and are subject to him; therefore, every upright Israelite is obligated and bound to give Caesar what is Caesar's, that is, tribute, taxes, honor, obedience, and the like, and this does not in the least prevent one from giving also God what is God's.

In these words Christ also decided the question whether a person can live as a Christian in his kingdom and at the same time be, yes, must be a good citizen. Christ answered this with a decided yes.

The first reason for this lies in the nature of Christ's kingdom and the kingdom of this world. It is true: if Christ had as his purpose to conquer lands with his kingdom, and if he also used physical power to spread it, then indeed states might refuse to accept Christians as citizens and fear treachery and mischief from them. But that is not the case. The nature of Christ's kingdom and of the kingdoms of this world is completely different. Christ's kingdom is an invisible, spiritual kingdom, worldly kingdoms are visible, physical kingdoms; Christ wants to rule only over the souls of men, worldly kingdoms rule over their bodies; in Christ's kingdom we are concerned with heavenly treasures, in the kingdoms of the world with earthly; Christ's kingdom has eternal life and heaven as its goal, the worldly kingdom temporal life and this world as theirs; in Christ's kingdom the only weapons are God's Word, prayer, and tears, in worldly kingdoms, on the other hand, one uses weapons of iron and steel; in Christ's kingdom he is the greatest who serves others the most humbly, and he is the most glorious conqueror who endures and suffers with the least reluctance; in worldly kingdoms, on the other hand, he is the greatest who rules the most people, and he is the conqueror who suppresses others.

Accordingly, should the state have to fear the Church, civil arrangements fear Christianity, the kingdoms of this world fear Christ's kingdom? No! Where Christ enters with his Word, there he builds his kingdom alone in the hearts of men; he desires no tribute money, no physical tax, no earthly throne, no visible fortress, no castle, no fortified city, and no armed mercenaries who should fight for the protection or the spread of his kingdom; he desires only man's heart, a spiritual mind, a heavenly disposition, faith, and trust. Nor does he promise his subjects places of honor in this world, nor earthly wealth, nor good days, but disgrace, poverty, tribulation, persecution, and not until after death eternal life.

As little as it, therefore, hinders citizens from being at the same time fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and united in families, so little does it hinder citizens from being at the same time Christians, and moreover having their citizenship in heaven. As little as the light destroys and disarranges matters when it enters into cities and homes, so little does the invisible kingdom of Christ disturb and disarrange matters if it enters among a nation. When Christ comes into a country with Word and sacrament, he does not come in order to bring about a change in the state but in man's heart; then he says to every-

one, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." 1 Cor 7: 20. Secretly and unnoticed by human eyes Christ conquers entire states, but he lets the king on his throne, the state officials have the powers and honors, the judges their benches, the land its laws, the republic its freedom, the cities their privileges.

Yes, Christ does not want to have the kingdoms of the world ruled according to his Gospel. In his kingdom reconciliation and forgiveness of sins, even the greatest, even that of a murderer, should rule; in the kingdom of the world vengeance and punishment; there the law should be: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. In Christ's kingdom no believer should desire interest and no debtor should be pressed for repayment; on the other hand, in the kingdoms of this world the judge should sternly demand payment of the debt with interest and force its payment with punishment. In Christ's kingdom there should be no divorce except for adultery; in the kingdoms of the world, on the other hand, in order to guard against greater harm, authorities according to Moses' example dare to permit the godless to separate also for other reasons. In short, whilst Christ in his kingdom provides only for eternal life, in worldly kingdoms government officials, even if they are Christians, should above all provide for the welfare of this life.

And we must add. Christianity places this commandment especially upon Christians, which makes it their duty, to be faithful citizens. Christianity commands them to honor the worldly government as a divine power on earth, to regard its laws as God's laws, to be obedient to its laws, and to pay their taxes, in short, to distinguish themselves in all civil virtues. God's Word says to them, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake. Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Rom 13:1. 2.4b.5.7. Christians should let themselves be used even for military service; for when Roman soldiers came to John the Baptist and asked him, "And what shall we do?" this forerunner of Christ did not command them to leave their calling as an unchristian one but approved of it and said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." Lk 3:15. In a word, God's Word commands Christians to do everything on their part so that the welfare of the state is promoted and to turn aside everything which could do it harm. Therefore, when the Israelites had been led captive to Babylon, they received God's command through the Prophet Jeremiah, "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Jer 29:7.

Therefore, blessed is the kingdom in which Christ also invisibly sets up the throne of his kingdom; the foundation of its welfare has then been laid. Blessed the state whose citizens are true Christians; in the peace of the country they will be solid pillars and in war the best protecting walls of the nation. As in a realm they protect the throne of the prince, so in a republic they as free men nourish, guard, and protect the tree of freedom.

II.

Now that we have seen that one can be a Christian and a good citizen at the same time, yes, must necessarily be at the same time, let us now in the second place see that more belongs to being a true Christian than being a good citizen.

My friends, considering also this is very necessary and important. Most so-called Christians live in the dangerous delusion that if they are subject to the government which has power over them, if they obey the civil laws and ordinances of their country, if they unquestioningly pay their taxes, if they honor their government officials, if they are amicable and helpful neighbors, if by their diligence and industry they deserve well of a state or city, if they never give cause to be haled into court, if everywhere they are praised and highly honored as faithful, blameless, and virtuous people, then they certainly are also upright Christians.

As was said, this is nothing but a delusion. He who makes this boast may indeed be a good citizen, but he is not at all for that reason a citizen of the kingdom of heaven or a true Christian. This person indeed gives Caesar what is Caesar's; but when Christ wants to describe the obligation of his Christians, he not only says, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," but he also adds, "And unto God the things that are God's."

It is clear from this, as I have mentioned above: the world's kingdoms and God's or Christ's kingdom are two different kingdoms. Therefore, one can prove himself a good citizen of the first without being a citizen of Christ's kingdom. Therefore, note the difference well.

One becomes a citizen of a state by his physical birth and by the petition to be accepted in the civil rolls; that way one never becomes a citizen of Christ's kingdom; this happens by holy baptism; there one is born spiritually and thereupon written into the lists of the kingdom of heaven. The citizen of a state must keep his certificate of citizenship and thus identify himself as being the one who he really is; this certificate of citizenship has no validity in the kingdom of heaven; rather a citizen of the kingdom of heaven must prove by the keeping of his baptismal covenant, by daily drowning the Old Man and daily renewing himself in the Spirit, that he is still a Christian. The citizen of a state is unhesitatingly obedient to its laws and ordinances; this obedience has no validity before the King of all kings; a citizen of the kingdom of heaven must rather be subject to God's Word in unconditional obedience; that is the true Lawbook of the Most High. The citizen of a state pays those taxes to his government which it demands; with this tax a person does not pay up what God demands of his subjects; there is a tax in God's kingdom -- the human heart; that, that is what God wants to have from his subjects.

Examine yourselves on the basis of this, my hearers: If you have the reputation of being a good citizen, blessed are you! But do not imagine that for this reason you are already a Christian. If you want to be Christians, then tell me: where is your certificate of citizenship in the invisible kingdom of heaven? You say: we are baptized; good; but have you also preserved this certificate by daily repentance? Do you thus daily drown the Old Man with all its sins and evil lusts, and do you daily arise as a New Man which lives in righteousness and purity before God?

If you want to be Christians, I also ask you: Are you perhaps satisfied if your works agree only with the laws of the land? Bear in mind: Christians have another Lawbook than those who want to be citizens only of the kingdom of the world; the Lawbook which Christians follow is God's holy Word. What God's Word forbids, that Christians stop doing even if it is not forbidden in any law of the land; and what God's Word demands of them, that they do even if no laws of the world demand it of them.

Finally, if you wish to be Christians, I ask you: Do you also give him your whole heart? Is God's honor, God's pleasure the ultimate reason for all your deeds? Are you, bear in mind what I ask you, are you completely in earnest in

giving yourself to God, living to him, suffering for him, dying to him?

These, these alone are the signs whether you are not only good citizens of a state but also good Christians.

Oh that none of us might deceive himself in these matters! For woe to him who here indeed lives praised as a good citizen and still does not belong to the invisible spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. A day will come when God will separate those merely citizens from those who are Christians; then even the most honorable and most blameless will not stand; then their reputation before men will turn into disgrace; for "the world passeth away and the lusts therefore," with its righteousness, with its virtues, with its honor, "but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." 1 Jn 2:17. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God that things that are God's." Amen.

24TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 9:18-26

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

Dear friends in Christ Jesus.

Among the unbelievers and the enthusiastic sects no doctrine is held in greater disrepute than the doctrine that through faith alone man receives God's grace and eternal salvation.

The unbelieving world maintains that the doctrine of salvation through faith stifles all zeal to produce noble deeds, suppresses all struggles against one's own passions, falsely soothes man's conscience despite his sins, and finally lulls him completely to sleep. Although these very unbelievers give full and free rein to their lusts and are ashamed of no sins except at best those which they can make contemptible in the eyes of the likes of them, they nevertheless make faith the source of every sin revealed in Christians; they exclaim then, See, these are the tragic results of the doctrine, that one is saved alone by faith! Unbelievers must admit that those who want to be saved alone by grace are as a rule the most zealous in good works, distinguishing themselves by truly Christian virtues as chasteness, love, humility, gentleness, generosity, a forgiving spirit, moderation, and the like; but if only one hypocrite is revealed in the Christian congregation, one who talks about faith but denies it by his works, the world exclaims, Oh, faith is nothing but hypocrisy; Christians are all slaves of secret sins!

As far as the sects are concerned, they are always speaking of faith so that one would suppose that they are not the foes of the doctrine of faith and of salvation by grace; but do not be deceived just because they repeatedly use the word faith. If one examines the walk of the heterodox of our day more closely, one will soon perceive that when they speak of faith, they do not really mean faith; they do not mean that daring trust which a poor sinner places upon God's grace, which is promised and offered to all men in God's Word, and which should be sealed to them through baptism and the Lord's Supper, but they mean by faith the sweet feeling which arises in a person when he reads, prays, and wrestles. That the sects understand that this alone is the meaning of

faith arises from the fact that God's Word is most disdainfully called by the sects a dead letter and those who rely upon the letter of the written Word are reviled as being wretched slaves of the letter.

That the sects of today use the word faith but understand something entirely different by it and reject the true doctrine of faith is also clearly seen from the fact, that they speak most disparagingly of the holy sacraments upon which faith relies. Not seldom do they utter such unchristian words as: Be converted; your baptism does not help you and if you were baptized 100 times a day; how can a handful of water help you? If a sinner wants to comfort himself by receiving absolution and holy communion, they say, that that is one of the chief tricks of the devil to make one only the more secure. But when these enthusiasts speak of their sinners' rail, their class meetings, their so-called love-feasts, their panel discussions, and similar human institutions, they do not say: This does not help! but they cling to that as the most effective means of grace and recommend them more strongly than baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution, and all the things which God himself instituted; and if anyone dares utter just one word against their human inventions, they immediately pillory his name in their gatherings and public writings as a foe of true Christendom.

The greater the zeal these enthusiasts show in pious exercises, and the more they at the same time speak of faith, the more dangerous their haughty rejection of the means of grace ordained by God is for true Christians, and the more easily they can mislead them from the true faith, which is grounded on the Word and sacraments. It is, therefore, extremely necessary, that we repeatedly review and impress upon our hearts the true doctrine of the faith and its glorious power to comfort and to save. So, let us do that now.

The text. Matthew 9:18-26.

In this Gospel lesson just read, we find two wonderful examples of how faith conquers the most powerful foes of man, sin and death. On the basis of this text permit me to speak to you about that:

FAITH, THE ONLY CONQUEROR OF SIN AND DEATH

I. Of Sin, and

II. Of Death.

I.

The first example which is presented in our today's text of the power of faith is that of an ailing woman. According to the combined report of the first three Evangelists, we are told the following about her. For twelve years she had had a flow of blood and had sought help for her sickness from many doctors, but in vain. Mark and Luke write, "She suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, neither could be healed of any." How great this woman's misery was only those really know who amid great poverty have been down with a sickness as painful as it was incurable. Day and night her tears and sighs were her food. What happened? When her distress had reached its highest degree and all doctors gave her no hope of ever being cured, behold Jesus came into her city; she about about him, about his love, and about his miracles; immediately the hope was kindled in her that this was the man who could and would help her. She hurried to him; and when she saw that he was surrounded by a great throng and that she could not speak alone to him, she did not despair but said to herself, "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole." V.21. She forced her way through the people, approached Christ from behind, and with palpitating heart "touched his garment."

And lo, the open bleeding sore was dried up in a second and she felt that she was healed of her trouble.

But what did Christ do? Of course, it was not hidden from him, the Omniscient, what had occurred; so in order to reveal this glorious example of such a wonderful faith so that it would help others, he said to all the people, "Who touched me?" When all those standing about began to deny having done this, Peter said, "Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" Lk 8:45. But Jesus said, "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceived that virtue is gone out of me." Lk 8:46. The woman saw that her deed could not remain secret; tremblingly she came forward, fell down before Christ, and told the whole truth before all the people. And Christ? He turned to her graciously and said, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." "And the woman was made whole from that hour." V.22.

There my friends, you have an example of the great power of faith. I have often mentioned that the sickness of the body, from which Christ miraculously healed many, is a picture of sin, the spiritual sickness, and to heal that Christ came into the world. So if we want to know how man can conquer sin, the example of the woman with an issue of blood shows us this most clearly.

What happened to this woman when she did not yet know that her sickness of the body was incurable, happens to every person as long as he does not yet know that sin, the sickness of his soul, is incurable for human powers: he seeks help in this person, then in that without finding it. Yes, as things only became worse for the woman the more she used human help for her sickness, so the condition of man's soul becomes worse the more he exerts himself to conquer his sins by his own powers. Most who practise any vice know that only too soon they become its slave and that it is impossible for them to become completely free of it.

Many a thief who has ended his life on the gallows has confessed, that during his life he had often decided never again to stretch out his hand for the property of another; but a certain desire for another's property living in him had time and again irresistibly carried him along and seduced him. Many a drunkard has often vowed God and men with tears to watch over himself so that he would never again fall into the great and disgraceful sin of drunkenness; but in the next time of temptation he had forgotten his oath and had fallen anew. Many an unchaste libertine has earnestly resolved to become modest and chaste; he foresaw the temporal and eternal ruin into which he would finally hurl himself by living in shameful lusts; but lo! he could not resist the next new enticement; soon the lust of the flesh again sucked him like a whirlpool into the depths of sin. Many a liar and slanderer, many prodigal and hot-head, perhaps because they have reaped only too bitter a fruit, have bitterly regretted their sins; but only too soon they saw themselves again conquered by them.

To be sure, there have been men who by their own powers have actually bettered themselves to a certain extent, who turned their dishonesty into honesty, drunkenness into temperance, libertinism into respectability, lies and slander into truth, prodigality and laziness into thrifty and hard workers, hot-headedness into gentleness, and the like; but never has a person arrived at the point that by his own powers he could have left and hated his former sins out of fear and love to God. By his own powers a person can achieve no more than hating the harmful results of sin, but never so far as to hate sin itself. Then man does not conquer sin but sin conquers man. Just as an unproductive tree is not improved but only becomes a stronger tree if a few limbs are sawed off, so also man does not become a better man in God's eyes, if he puts off only a few vices and sinful works; that makes man only the more proud and conceited. As an external ailment which is quickly cured often then attacks the internal or-

gans of the body and penetrates the system more deeply and causes even greater devastation, so does sin withdraw itself in those who have outwardly put off only a few vices only the more deeply into the heart; he then becomes only the blinder concerning his sinfulness, more proud, self-satisfied, and self-righteous over against God, and finally things go so far that such a respectable person does not want to know anything of God's grace, but demands heaven and salvation as something due him; thus he makes himself his god. If one arrives at that point, sin has reached its highest point in his soul, even though he thinks that he is an example of virtue and piety.

You see, that is what man gains by fighting sin with his own powers! Sin finally withdraws into his heart & blinds him to such an extent that he no longer considers all his selfish and proud works sin but virtues, and thus with the sweetest delusions he goes to the eternal judgment.

What is man to do that the head of this serpent be crushed? There is no other advice than this: join the woman of our text in perceiving that the sickness of sin is absolutely incurable for us men, despair of all help through our own powers, and in faith lay hold of the hem of Christ's garment. For even though Christ does not walk visibly among us today, there are nevertheless garments in which even now Christ envelopes himself and by which we can seize him; these are his Word and his holy sacraments. Whoever, despairing of himself, clings to the fact that God's Word announces grace and forgiveness to all sinners, that God in his baptism has graciously enrolled him in the book of life, and that in the holy supper Christ gives himself to be his very own with his blood, death, and perfect worthiness, I say, whoever clings to that, he as the woman of our text touches, as it were, the hem of Christ's garment; even if he as this woman, fears and trembles, and must continually struggle with doubt, yet a saving power goes out from Christ and he also can appropriate the Word which Christ spoke to the woman, "Be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." The moment this Word is seized in faith, he at that hour is healed from the sickness of his soul, his sins are forgiven, God is no longer angry with him, turns to him in grace, considers him righteous, and out of grace confers upon him the crown of life. From that moment he is also a new person; sin loses its former dominion in him; he receives a new heart which out of love to a gracious God can forsake and hate sin; he begins a new life in love and humility.

At this point many will perhaps say, Is this actually true? I have occupied myself much with God's Word and his holy sacraments; I have often touched the hem of Christ's garment; and yet I am no different; is the sickness of my sin perhaps incurable even for Christ, or have I not been sufficiently prepared? May you, who speak this way, know that no sickness is too great and severe for Christ, and if it would depend upon a sufficient preparation for his grace, no one would receive it. Examine yourself, therefore; perhaps you were like the people in our text, who also pressed upon the Lord and yet no power went out from Christ to them, because they indeed touched Christ's garment but without faith. In a similar way you perhaps also used God's Word and sacrament but have never truly believed, that the grace lying in them was also for you. My dear hearers, let go of your thoughts of your own preparation to make yourself worthy; as the woman of our text, attempt only once, in spite of the feeling of your great and many sins, to appropriate the grace which the Word and sacraments promise, comfort yourself through them, and thus, though it be with trembling hand, grasp Christ's garment.

II.

We now continue and ponder how faith not only has power to conquer sin but in the second place can conquer also death.

We are told the following in our text: Jairus, a ruler in the synagogue, had a twelve-year-old daughter who was deathly sick. She was beyond human help. The parents tearfully stood about the bed of their dear child; they expected that in the next second she would draw her last breath. They also heard of Christ's arrival in the city of Capernaum, where he had already done many a wonderful miracle. The father immediately set out, went to Christ, fell at his feet, and as Mark tells us, first spoke to Christ with earnest voice, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death; I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live." Mk 5:23. Immediately Christ followed him. But scarcely had they started when messengers arrived from the house of the afflicted father and said to him, "Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master." Lk 8:49. Yet even now Jairus did not throw away all hope; once more he turned to Christ and said, "My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live." V.18. Jesus then answered him, "Fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole." Lk 8:50. Silently they neared the home; since it must have belonged to one of the important people of the city, a large crowd of mourners with funeral music had already gathered about the house. Jesus cried to them, "Give place; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth." At this the people gathered there laughed him to scorn; but without saying a word Christ went with the parents and a few disciples into the room in which the corpse lay, seized her by the hand with the words, "Talitha cumi!" that is, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise!" and behold! to the amazement of those standing around, the girl suddenly opened her eyes, got up, and walked; as evidence that the child was not only alive but also well, Christ commanded the parents to give her something to eat.

There my friends, you have the second example of the great power of faith! Of course, we are not to draw the conclusion from this story, that we by our faith can also call our dying children back to life, as Jairus did, for we have no promise for such a faith. What would it profit us if we could hold all our dear ones back in this wretched life by our faith? Finally, we ourselves with our loved ones would yearn to be out of this world and sigh with Elijah, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." 1 Kings 19:4. But Jairus' example should give us a much greater and glorious, an eternal comfort, namely the comfort that death cannot harm him who believes in Christ; for as believing Jairus conquered the death of his child through Christ and turned it into life and perfect health, so is every believer also victorious over his own death through Christ.

Yes, though the unbelieving world or the unfortunate enthusiasts who seek rest and peace in their own holiness, may fear death, he who believes in Christ, and though he were the weakest in faith, has no cause to dread this king of terrors. Anyone who has not seized Christ in faith must be afraid, for his ungiven sins are the sharp sting which death still has; but whoever clings to Christ with his faith, his death has lost its sting, for his sins are forgiven and death is the very means by which he is to be at last completely freed from all his sins.

Whoever has not seized Christ in faith must indeed be afraid, for the future judgment awaiting him makes death a messenger of the saddest news; but whoever clings to Christ with his faith, his death is a message of eternal peace, for Christ has stood in his place in God's strict judgment and endured his terrible judgment upon his sins. Therefore, whoever believes does not come into judgment but a complete absolution of all his guilt before all angels and men follows his death.

Whoever has not seized Christ in faith must indeed be afraid, for a threatening hell and damnation turns death into a monster which opens its fearful jaws to swallow him and eternally separate him from God and all the saints; but

whoever clings to Christ with his faith, his death is a gate of heaven, the entrance into eternal blessedness and glory; for Christ has already tasted eternal death for him in Gethsemane and on the cross.

Whoever does not seize Christ in faith must indeed be afraid, for the grave and decay make death the end forever of all his beauty; but whoever clings to Christ with his faith, his death is a sweet sleep after the burden and heat of the day, the beginning of that peaceful slumber in the chamber of the grace until the beautiful morning of a blessed resurrection; that is why Christ lay in the grave and rose again from the dead, that he could some day awaken also all his followers, glorify their bodies, unite them with their souls, and finally take them up into his eternal glory according to body and soul.

So you, my dear hearers, who have hitherto been afraid of death, go to Christ with Jairus and complain to him about your misery; Christ's answer applies also to you, "Fear not, only believe!" As you believe so it will happen to you. If you do not believe that Christ has wiped out your sins as well and will have you share in the salvation won by him, you will have no comfort in your last hour and you will taste the bitterness of death in all eternity. But if you rely upon Christ to have your death as well under his control, just as he had the death of that young girl; if you rely on him to lead you through temporal death into eternal life, Christ cannot let your faith in him be ashamed; the moment you close your eyes in death you also will see there what you believed in here.

Therefore, many none of us be so foolish as either not to want to enter the battle against sin and death at all or conquer them with one's own powers, with one's own works, with one's own righteousness and piety. Sin and death must be conquered by us or we will be conquered by them and then remain their prisoners forever and ever. By our selves we are far too weak to conquer these fearful foes of the human race; Christ alone is the one who has wiped out our sins and robbed our death of its power. May therefore, everyone of us accept the completed conquest of his sins and death; then Christ's righteousness will cover his sins forever and Christ's life will forever swallow his death.

To him be honor and power from eternity to eternity. Amen.

25TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Matthew 24:15-28

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 Christ Jesus.

No danger seems to pose a greater threat to the Christian Church than a bloody persecution; and it seems as though God never tempts his Church more severely than when he condemns her to suffer persecution and permits her foes to cool their burning hatred against Christians through the most savage cruelty. Therefore, the most dangerous times full of the greatest temptations seem to have been the first three centuries of the Christian era.

In the first three centuries Christians had to endure ten protracted perse-

cutions, cruel beyond description, under the heathen Caesars of Rome. The Christians not only reprimanded heathen and Jews by their words and works but also renounced the heathen as well as the Jewish religion; they had neither temple nor altars and had earnestly withdrawn from all popular worldly amusements; that is why the godless Jews and heathen hated and considered them not only foes of the state religion but also foes of men and atheists. Every disaster and plague which struck land and people was attributed to Christians; it was called a punishment of the gods who were avenging the decrease of reverence to them caused by the Christians. About the year 200 A.D. the Church Father Tertullian writes: "When the Tiber River flooded the streets of Rome, when the Nile did not overflow and water the fields, when the clouds did not give rain, when earthquakes, famine, or pestilence broke out, the people immediately cried, 'Come, throw the Christians to the lions!'"

Frightful were the pains which during this time thousands of Christians had to suffer. They were beheaded and burned; they were crucified and scourged to death; millstones were tied about their necks and they were then thrown into the sea, yes, they were slowly submerged into boiling pitch; they were thrown to ravening beasts or were sewn into the skin of a wild animal and then dogs were set upon them to tear them to pieces; all their members were dislocated and then they were killed with clubs; their flesh was cut from their bones and hot lead was poured into their gaping wounds; they were roasted upon white-hot stools; they were tied up in chains and either let die of hunger and thirst or a small fire was kindled under them and they were slowly consumed by fire; they were tied to a stake, covered with wax and pitch, and burned as lamps in the royal gardens. Their eyes were put out, an arm, a leg, or other member of their body was cut off, or they were mangled in other horrible ways and then they had to work the rest of their lives in the mines.

For 300 years Christendom bled and languished with but few interruptions under these and similar tortures greater than those which hell itself could have found. Yet what were the results of this bloody persecution? Far be it that the Church should have been convulsed or destroyed by them; it was the more firmly grounded and the more greatly extended. The church historian Eusebius writes: "At last the swords themselves became dull and broke as though worn out; the hangmen became tired and had to relieve one another; the Christians, however, joined in singing songs of praise and thanks to the honor of God almighty until their last breath." The number of those, who because of fear of torment denied Christ, was small in comparison with the number of those who remained firm. Yes, the more the heathen raged, the more joyful and courageous the Christians became; the weak became strong and even children became heroes, who mocked at the pangs of death. "I am a Christian," exclaimed Sabina, a young girl, "I am a Christian and we do no wrong," although the blood already flowed in torrents from a tender body, torn by sharp iron instruments, and finally wrapped up in a net and gored by the horns of a wild steer. With every new persecution the divine power of the Gospel, which Christians bore in their hearts, only revealed itself the more. The heathen had to perceive that the Christian's Christ gave a peace of heart which the world could neither give nor take away, and a hope, which did not wither even in the hottest flames of the funeral pyre, but which, as though watered with the dew of heaven, became only the fresher. The blood of the sainted martyrs showed that it was a fruitful seed, from which more and more Christians constantly grew. Often, when even the roughest tormenters of Christians saw their joyfulness amid their torments, they themselves finally collapsed with a broken heart, confessing that they were convinced by the truth of the Gospel, and declared themselves ready also to die as Christians.

You see from this, my friends, that although the horrible persecutions, which Christians once had to endure, seemed to have been the severest of all temptations, they actually are not; they were rather the vineknife, with which the heavenly Gardener pruned the vine of his Church, so that it brought forth even richer and sweet fruits. The severest temptations which can come upon Christians are really the temptations of false doctrine; and these are the temptations, which above all God's Word predicts will come upon Christendom in the last evil times in which we are now living. Our today's Gospel contains such a warning, accompanied with an urgent warning for the Christians of the last times. To this let us now direct our devotion.

The text. Matthew 24:15-28.

On the basis of this prophetic Gospel text let me present to you:

CHRIST'S WARNING AGAINST THE VOICE OF TEMPTATION RISING
IN THE LAST TIMES, "BEHOLD HERE IS CHRIST, THERE IS CHRIST."

Let us:

- I. Seek to Learn to Know the Import of This Voice of Temptation Better,
but then also
- II. Listen the More Attentively to the Voice of Warning which we at the
Same Time Hear from Christ.

Lord Jesus! faithfully do you warn us against the dangers of the age in which we live. Oh grant that we do not hear with our ears and yet do not understand; open our closed heart. Let us not sink into the corruption of this age which submerges your Christendom like a wave of the sea; let us not become entangled in the errors and falsifications of your Word, which are spread out over the earth like a net. Though generally most have turned back, let us, oh Lord, follow you in love; your Word, O Jesus, is life and spirit; Lord what is it which one does not enjoy in you? Hear us, O Jesus! Amen.

I.

My friends, our text is divided into two parts. In the first the Lord foretells how things will go for the Jews after they have rejected the promised Messiah and the Gospel preached to them; in the second part the Lord foretells how things will go for the Christians in the last times, because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.

What concerns the Jews, thus says the Lord, when they see the abomination of desolation which is spoken of by the Prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, then it is time to flee Judaea in haste, for he says, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be." V.21. The fulfilment of this prophecy began in the year 66 A.D., 36 years later; the Roman army under Gessius Florus, Roman governor at that time, appeared for the first time before the gates of the holy city. At this time the Christians quickly fled from Palestine and sought refuge in Pella, a little city lying on the other side of the Jordan. Scarcely were the Christians safe when, as the Lord predicted in our text, tribulation without parallel in world history broke upon the Jews. A four-year war arose throughout the whole land, which ended when Jerusalem with its glorious temple was turned into a heap of rubbish, yes, leveled to the ground; more than one million Jews were killed, some by the avenging sword of the Romans, some by hunger, some by pestilence, some by suicide; the Jewish state was wrecked and the remnant of the Jews were

scattered over the world; they are without sacrifice, without temple, without homeland until this very day. To describe in its frightfulness the depths of woe during the last days is beyond the ability of human tongue and pen. With bloody letters God himself wrote over the ashes of Jerusalem and all the roads of Judaea for all nations of the earth: Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whoever rejects God's Word him God will in turn reject; and whoever will not hear God's gracious voice in the Gospel, his voice, his cry of misery God will also not hear in the day of distress.

So much for the first portion of our text. In the second part, in which the Lord foretells the last times, he does not speak of great tribulation of the body but something much more terrible. He says: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." V.22. In the last days before the destruction of the world the danger will not be so much the loss of life as in the times before the destruction of Jerusalem, but something much greater, the loss of the salvation of our souls.

According to Christ's prediction, what one thing will cause the great danger of being lost in the last times? Christ indicates that when he continues: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not." V.23. "Here is Christ, there is Christ." This is the dangerous voice of seduction which according to Christ's prediction will be raised on all sides in Christendom in the last times.

What, my dear hearers, is the import of these words? There are enthusiasts who explain these words as applying to the preaching of orthodox teachers. Orthodox teachers preach the Christ can be found only where God's Word is used and where the holy sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are administered and used according to Christ's institution; they say to the world: You, who want to find Christ, must come here; here is the only true font of truth, grace, and salvation; here and nowhere else is God's house and the gate of heaven. When the enthusiasts hear this they exclaim: See, that is the voice of seduction, for these preachers are continually crying, "Here is Christ, there is Christ," "Here is the temple of the Lord, here is the temple of the Lord."

Yet, my friends, though many weak Christians let themselves be convinced that this exposition of those words and the accusation against orthodox preachers is absolutely correct, a quick glance in the Holy Scriptures shows how falsely they expound those words about a seducer and how completely groundless and wrong the accusation is. After the giving of the Ten Commandments God says through Moses, "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Ex 20:24. God's name is recorded where his Word is preached and his sacraments are administered.

Moreover, Christ gives his disciples the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!" Mt 28:20. But who are they whom Christ calls his own? He himself says in Lk 8:21, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God and do it."

Moreover after Christ had given the congregation the promise that their loosing and binding, their prayers and intercession will avail in heaven, he says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Mt 18:20. Those are assembled in Christ's name who have gathered at his command and together use his Word, unlock heaven by means of holy baptism, and publicly preach his death at the table of his holy supper.

Christ moreover says, "If any 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. And Peter, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until

the day dawn, and the day star," namely Christ, "arise in your hearts." 2 Pet 1:19. And especially of the sacraments St. Paul says, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," Gal 3:27; and in another passage, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Cor 10:16. Especially clear is St. Paul's word, "Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it," (namely, the righteousness of faith)? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart." Rom 10:6b-8a.

Decide for yourselves. According to the clear utterances of Christ, the prophets, and apostles, is not Christ really and truly present in grace where his Word is preached in its purity and the sacraments administered according to his institution? What do they do who call it the voice of seduction when the preacher of the orthodox church says, Here where the Word is, there where the sacraments are is Christ, his Church, his grace, his salvation? Anyone who calls this the voice of seduction makes Christ himself and his apostles and prophets seducers and blasphemes the true Word of God as error and lies.

But my friends, Christ means the very opposite when he warns the Christians of the last times against those who say, "Here is Christ." He means those false prophets who falsify God's Word and preach the thoughts of their own heart and reason; who say: Christ is not to be found in God's Word but here in this or in that work; not in baptism and the holy supper is Christ to be found but "there" in this or that arrangement, and the like, which we have made; it does not depend upon the pure doctrine and the unadulterated sacraments if we want to find grace but upon our strivings, upon our experience, upon our improvement and sanctification, and the like.

That this is the correct exposition follows beyond all doubt because Christ immediately adds, "For there shall arise FALSE Christs, and FALSE PROPHETS, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall DECEIVE the very elect." V.24. That shows us wherever they indeed preach Christ but preach him "falsely," preach error, do not remain with God's Word but falsify it, swerve from God's Word and lead away from God's Word; wherever they do not preach: If you want to find Christ, do not seek him in this or in that thing, nor in your heart, nor over you in heaven, nor outside of you in your works, but seek him in his Word and holy sacraments; wherever, I say, they do not preach that but tell you to seek Christ somewhere else: there, yes indeed, there you hear the voice of seduction in the last times: "Lo, here is Christ, there is Christ."

Christ gives us even more information; he continues, "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not." V.26. First of all, who are they who say Christ is "in the desert"? The answer to this question is quite apparent. The history of the papacy from the beginning until this very hour shows us that this voice of seduction has raised itself chiefly in the papacy and the Roman Church. For whither are they in the papacy directed who wish to be absolutely certain of their salvation. In the desert. They say: Sell and give away what you have and become poor, renounce your marriage, forsake the world, and enter a monastery, become a monk, become a nun, become an anchorite, and then keep your vows; this is the way upon which salvation positively cannot escape you; that is the means through which you will certainly find Christ.

Who are those who say, Christ is "in the secret chambers"? That also is not difficult to answer. They are all those enthusiasts who reject public worship, fellowship with an organized congregation, the holy ministry and the public

preaching of God's Word, and the public administration of the sacrament in the churches and say, If you want to find Christ, do not seek him in such outward things; stay in the stillness of your "secret chamber;" descend into the depths of your mind and plunge into holy meditations; there, there you will find the true church; there you will hear the true preacher; there will you find the Spirit; there you will find Christ, his grace, and the kingdom of heaven.

Note well, my dear friends, that I once more repeat what I have said: when Christ warns us against the voice which says, "Lo, here is Christ, there is Christ; he is in the desert; he is in the secret chambers," he does not warn against those who say, that Christ is in all places where his Word and sacraments are, for he certainly is there as certainly as he is the omnipresent Son of God and as certainly as his Word and promise is the truth; but Christ warns us above all against those who point away from his Word and sacrament and tell us to seek him, Christ, in something else, who instead of binding Christ to his means of grace to which he has bound himself, unite him with something else in heaven or on earth, wherever it may be.

II.

Now that we have learned to know the significance of the voice of seduction which raises itself in the last times, let us also in the second place listen with even greater attention to the voice of warning which we hear from Christ himself.

In the main there are three warnings which Christ gives us in our today's Gospel. We find the first warning when he tells us that unless this time of seduction to error by the false prophets were shortened, no person would be saved. Of a truth, there cannot be a more earnest warning against false doctrine that this one! Oh, that we might all take it truly to heart! For what is the usual conception about false doctrine today? If it at all a high one, gross unbelief is considered ruinous; in any event, no one will object if one zealously opposes the known enemies and blasphemers of Christ and his Gospel; but in the main, false doctrine is not considered today so very dangerous; as a rule, fault is found with those preachers who oppose such doctrines which preach Christ even though they do not teach it in its purity. What does Christ do in our text? Does he warn us against manifest unbelievers, against the blasphemers of his Word, and against the declared enemies of his cross? No, for such wolves without sheeps' clothing are not dangerous to true Christians. Christ rather warns against such who also preach him, but preach him falsely; who do not directly reject his Word but merely falsify it; who do not slander the truth but merely mix their error along with the truth; and of such he says that, if God would wait a long time, not one could finally be saved. Who is to be right, Christ who calls false doctrine so dangerous, or our heart which views it as innocent and trivial? Ah, away, away with our deceitful heart; let Christ be right! Let us, therefore, perceive from his warning that war, famine, pestilence, and every evil in the world are insignificant in comparison with false doctrine; for those things merely cause us to lose temporal property, but false doctrine eternal; yes, false doctrine is itself more frightful than a sinful life; for although sin damns a person, if the true doctrine is preached to one, it can turn him from his sins, and he can be brought to grace and salvation; but where false doctrine is in full swing and bewitches and poisons the heart no help is possible, even though outwardly one may live ever so piously.

Christ, however, gives us a second warning in our text, when he says, that the false prophets will do such great signs and wonders that (if it were possi-

ble) they would deceive even the elect. Christ wants to warn us against letting ourselves be blinded by the fine appearance by which false doctrine will be surrounded in the last times. Many suppose that one must flee only from those in whom one immediately perceives that they are the foes of Jesus Christ; on the other hand, if a preacher praises Christ and walks piously in the eyes of all, it would be a sacrilege to flee and avoid him as a false prophet. But Christ tells us something entirely different in our text. Whoever lets much talk about Christ deceive him will soon be deceived in respect to his salvation; for not every Christ but only the true Christ as the Bible pictures him can save us; and whoever lets himself be immediately deceived by the appearance of piety will soon be misled into soul-destroying error; for even though true believers do not live in any controlling sin but are sincerely pious, yet the piety of their sincere heart is often hidden under many weaknesses, whereas on the other hand, not seldom does roguery enter under the guise of great spirituality and perfect sanctification; yes, whereas the truth lies like an unappreciated treasure in the dust as Christ says, error is often confirmed by great shining works and signs and wonders. Therefore, whoever does not want to be deceived, let him hold in everything to the touchstone of the infallible Word of God; in that way and only in that way will he remain upon the correct way even though Satan acts like an angel of light.

There is one more thing which Christ says in our text to the Christian of the last times. We read at the close, "Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert, go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Vv.25-28. With these words Christ warns his Christians against being inquisitive. "Go not forth; believe it not," he says; he wants to say, Alas, the treasure is soon lost; this is not a joking matter; no one dare think: It won't do me any harm if I believe something false for a time; I can always be converted. No, says Christ, bear in mind that I will come some day again like lightning; you dare not feel safe for one hour. That means you must watch and be ready at any second to go to meet Christ with the burning lamps of faith. Woe to him who Christ surprises in the hour in which he has forsaken his pure Word and hurried after a false Christ! Even though he had sweat blood for his false Christ, such an unfaithful Christian will be lost with his self-made false Christ. But happy are all those who remain in a living faith in Christ's pure Gospel and unadulterated sacraments; in these things they have the true Christ. When Christ returns visibly, they will also see him with joy, go to meet him with rejoicing, and be gathered together with all the elect around him in the new heaven and upon the new earth in which dwells righteousness. For "wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Completed this 22nd day of November in the year of our Lord 1964.