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Homiletics: Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 KINGS 19:4-12

The Text and Its Central Thought.—After the spectacular Carmel victory of Elijah over the prophets of Baal, the Prophet entertained high hopes that Israel would return to the worship of Jehovah and that Jezebel's efforts to make Baalism the state religion would be thwarted. But instead of capitulating, the queen hurled defiance at the Prophet and threatened him with death. This also cooled considerably the enthusiasm of the people and of the vacillating king. His hopes dashed, Elijah turned and ran from the fray and left the Kingdom of Israel for the safety of the desert south of Beersheba. Here beneath a juniper (broom) he prayed for death, convinced that the cause of true religion was hopeless in the face of a determined paganism.

After rest and refreshment twice miraculously provided through angelic hands, God made known to him that he must go 200 miles in a period of 40 days and nights to Horeb, the scene of the Covenant God's appearance to Moses. It is most significant that Horeb was named and that a period of 40 days and nights was set.

Through the symbolism of tempest, earthquake, and fire, God wanted to show to Elijah and to all men that He does not operate in the Kingdom of Grace by His omnipotence. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit." There will be judgments prior to the great Judgment in which God's power will be utilized to break the hardness of the heart of man, but under normal circumstances He will operate not by the spectacular, not by the phenomenal, not by the compulsion of His power, but by the "still small voice."

Noteworthy is the use of the term "voice." God calls men to repentance and faith through His Word. Displays of omnipotence may prepare men's hearts for the Word, but only the Word can convert, because through it the Spirit is imparted. This Word is, of course, God's pure Word without human admixture, and His entire Word.

"Still" and "small," or "gentle rustling," as the original denotes it, implies the merciful purpose of God in this Word. This is not the thunder of Sinai, though that, too, has its purpose, but the sweet pleading "Come unto Me" of the Gospel. So God has ordained that men's hearts are to be changed and prepared for His indwelling. So are men to be won for heaven.

"What doest thou here?" (vv. 9, 13) as well as God's command to anoint Hazeal, Jehu, and Elisha implies that Elijah and other human intermediaries are to speak this "voice." Elijah was a prophet. He had no business being away from men and in the desert, because he was obligated to speak the "still small voice." Modern prophets—and every Christian is one— must likewise by word and deed echo the "still small voice."

The burden of the text, then, is this: God desires to draw men to Him, not by spectacular displays of power, not by pomp and circumstance, not by catastrophic judgment, but by the tender pleading of the Gospel, which we are privileged to proclaim.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Propers of the day round out this thought nicely. The Introit pleads that men hear God's Word and find refuge in His deliverance. The Gradual urges the singing of God's praise for His wondrous salvation. The Collect bespeaks readiness to do God's bidding and invokes His protection on such as do His will. The Epistle emphasizes the need for true conversion before God's will can be done. The Gospel points out that the heart of the Christian religion is not the performance of miracle works, nor betterment of social conditions, but "the forgiveness of sins."

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—This text strikes at the very heart of one of the great problems in the Christian Church today. Rome lusts for power and seeks to win adherents through spectacular displays of pomp and circumstance. Reformed churches tend to the principle that conversion is a matter of externals: a better environment and a set of new and good habits for the old and bad. Sometimes Lutherans have forgotten that God's plan is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins through Christ and the pleading on His part, through the church, for the souls of men. The Gospel, and not buildings, accessions, growth, large sums gathered, etc., must be our boast.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The proclamation of the simple Gospel, not lavish displays or pretentious buildings, is the one great purpose of the church and its members. The church programs and the lives of God's people must revolve about this point.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Not only the "gentle rustling voice" but also the kindly and gracious treatment of the errant Prophet indicates the message of God's love by which He would persuade men. Such is God's kindness to men.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Christ's rebuke of the "sons of thunder," James and John, who desired to call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56).

God's rebuke of Jonah's anger at Nineveh's repentance. The parables, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son show God reaching for men. The Great Commission says that this is to be done through the proclamation of the simple Gospel. Paul's preaching (1 Cor. 1: 18-24; 2:1-5) also illustrates this point.

Outline

Introduction: When is a church successful in God's thinking? Not externals, such as large churches, memberships, budgets, nor involved programs or activities, but when the simple Gospel is preached.

I. The voice is God's voice in Scripture

A. Not the voice of nature or catastrophes.

B. But revealed truth, as to Moses at Horeb and to other holy men at "sundry times and in divers manners," but especially through His Son.

C. This is a word of gentle pleading.

1. Not dictatorial or condemning (John 8:1-11).

2. But merciful and kind.

How God through Christ made it possible for men to be saved.

3. Reflected in God's treatment of the fleeing Prophet.

D. This is a Word of God's pleading.

1. Nothing human dare be added. Not philosophies of men. Not reason.

2. All of the counsel of God is designed to preach the Gospel. All Scripture must be understood in relation to its central point.

II. This voice must be proclaimed to men

A. The church — Elijah, a prophet. His duty. God criticized him for failure to do so. "What doest thou here?"
So the church today through pastors, missionaries, and the printed page must set forth the Gospel.

B. But each Christian, too, has this responsibility. Both direct Scripture and the example of the early church bear this out.

C. Involves planning and programs. Hazael, John, Elisha anointed to further the Kingdom and its work. V. 15. Evangelism efforts, joint services, public relations, all play their role, but always the Gospel of God's love for men must be featured.

Conclusion: This was the program of the church of the Reformation that succeeded so admirably. It must be the program of the church of the Reformation today.

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 42

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Psalm 42 opens the second book of the Psalter. Here the over-all emphasis is on sin and redemption. This initial song sets forth redemption as particularly apprehended within the framework of *worship*.

Three ideas are interlaced within these stanzas: 1. The disquiet of the soul cut off from worship. 2. The unquestioned power and willingness of God to save. 3. The trust that God's help will again be realized within the worship service in the temple. Note the frequent and varied reference to "my soul" in the second and third person as the writer describes his anguish. This son of Korah had been a leader in the temple procession and its music. Now in exile, cut off from public worship, he finds his life unstrung. The "glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving" are replaced by the daily taunts of his enemies and the janglings of his own disintegrated spirit. Tears are his sustenance, as body reflects the hunger and thirst of soul. The very elements of creation threaten and thunder against him. Yet God is the Lord of life. His steadfast love does not change, day or night. His song is still within the heart, though unheard without and interrupted within. Salvation will come. God will restore his child to the homeland and to the temple. Vv. 5 and 11 are both creed and petition: "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the Health of my countenance and my God." The central thought may be stated: The distraught man of God longs for the consolation of worship in God's house.

The Day and Its Theme.—The theme for the Twentieth Sunday is: "In our worship we praise God's mercy." The Introit directs the attention to ". . . the city of our God, the mountain of His holiness." The Collect pleads for pardon and peace that may lead to a "quiet mind" in exchange for the "disquieted" (this quietness consists not in inactivity, but in finding the traits of personality integrated under the redemption of the Cross and channeled into powerful accomplishment within Christ's kingdom). The Epistle urges that the time be redeemed in the face of evil days first of all in acts of worship—the speaking

of psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—then also in works of obedience. The Gospel underlines the tragedy of those rejecting God's invitation of grace. *Parish Activities* places emphasis on building a praying church.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To strengthen in the hearer a longing and love for worship in God's house among God's people. The particular challenge is not to reprimand for lax worship attendance but to show that life is no life at all save as it is held through the means of grace within the creative, redeeming, and sanctifying hand of God.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sermon may show the devastating effects on the human soul of those enemies, the devils, who make us absent ourselves from the presence of God and the company of His people—the "they" voices (v. 3), which taunt the modern mind with material pressures and anxieties, driving it to spiritual exile, disintegration, and death.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Worship leads us into the presence of the God of our salvation. In worship the Holy Spirit takes the crazed and broken soul of a man and, reorienting him through the Cross of Christ, which comprehends all of death and life, reintegrates his being—spirit, mind, and body—enabling him to live purposefully with physical creation and within the society of which God has made him a part and promising him also pleasures in God's service forevermore.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—This poem itself is replete with imagery suggesting channels of illustration and expression. Note particularly the sound words, the contrasting of harmony and cacophony as related to the human soul. Isaiah 55; John 4:14 and 7:37 suggest themselves with v. 2.

Alexander Schmemmann has described Christian worship as a *procession* (v.4) of God's people into the presence of the living Christ, where the Savior receives them, speaks with them, instructs them, comforts them, shares His body and redeeming blood with them, binds them together in the mystical body of His church; then sends them forth to do the Father's bidding in the world.

Outline

The Christian Longs for the Blessings of Worship

I. The soul without worship disintegrates and dies

A. The Psalmist describes his disquieted soul.

B. Modern man dies spiritually when apart from God.

II. God invites all men to the blessings of worship

- A. He offers the means of grace, churches, the right of free assembly, the Lord's Day (Gospel).
- B. He urges man to redeem the time in spiritual growth (Epistle).

III. The worshiping soul lives in fruitful communion with God and the church

- A. The Holy Spirit sustains him in the mystical union with Christ.
- B. He unites him by faith with Christians in the congregation, the mission field, the church suffering persecution (the interceding church).
- C. He strengthens him to live effectively within God's physical creation and society.

Farmington, Mich.

A. KARL BOEHMKE

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ISAIAH 59:17-21

The Text and Its Central Thought.—These are clearly bound up with the great redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we shall get a much better feel of the power and impact of this splendid text when we think of the Champion not in the terms of the Person of Jesus but rather in terms of our wondrous and glorious God.

In simple and bold outline, this 59th chapter shows us, in panoramic view, the battlefield of this world, where the satanic forces of evil threaten to rob God of the people He created for Himself. And seeing "that there was no man . . . that there was no intercessor" (v. 16) to champion the cause of His people, God Himself takes the field to protect and save His people. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Thus Isaiah has but one purpose in this whole chapter, namely, to fix people's eyes of faith and hope on their God, their one and only Protector and Savior. Having already hinted at His saving power in verse one, the Prophet first pictures the fearful plight of man: enslaved by Satan, ruined by sin, blinded by warped thinking, sapped by indulgence (vv. 2-15), and then focuses all attention upon God, who, Himself taking the field, armed to the teeth (v. 17), lifts the standard of heaven against the hosts of hell. And to give everyone confidence in

this great God and Protector, he shows that there is no halfheartedness in God's determination to protect and save His people. Clothed in "a garment of vengeance" and "clad with zeal as a cloke" (v. 17), he pictures Him striking out with "fury" and "recompence" against the foes of His people (v. 18). Nor does it matter if "the enemy come in like a flood" (v. 19), strong enough to completely overwhelm His people, God's strategy of love and grace will hold the field. The forces of evil will meet their defeat in His Redeemer (v. 20) and in His Spirit, who will not depart from His people and their seed and their seed's seed forever (v. 21).

The Day and Its Theme.—How well our text fits into the theme for this day! Both Epistle and Gospel throw into bold relief the forces of evil and the determined love and grace of God to protect and save His people. Not only does the Epistle (Eph. 6:10-17) alert us to the "principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness" pitted against us, calling for the whole armor of God, but also the Gospel (John 4:46-54) shows us the deadliness of it all by leading us to one "at the point of death." None can help or save except God, who is there to say: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." And while the Introit acknowledges: "O Lord, King Almighty, there is no man that can gainsay Thee," the Gradual concludes: "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed but abideth forever."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—It is clearly charted by the text. It must impress the listeners with the undeniable fact that, left to themselves on the battlefield of life, there would be no escape from the doom of sin and evil; but then it must leave hearts beating with joy and gratitude over so wondrous a God, a true Protector and Savior.

Sin Diagnosed and Remedied.—The text does not call for the diagnosis of any particular sin, but it does call for a clear presentation of the reality and deadliness of sin, against which there is no protection and for which there is no remedy except the "zeal of the Lord," so pointedly set forth in the text.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The text will not let you bypass it.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—A story like the Exodus, where God Himself with mighty arm brings the Israelites out of their awful captivity and safely brings them into the Promised Land, may indeed illustrate man's complete dependence upon God for any deliverance from the powers of evil, but God's zeal for the salvation of sinners has no parallel.

*Outline***God Is the Protector of His People**

- I. There is none other to help His people
- A. They are overwhelmed by an enemy "come in like a flood" (v. 19).
 "We wrestle not against flesh and blood" (Epistle).
 "Dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).
- B. They have "no man . . . no intercessor" to champion their cause (v. 16).
 "None of them can by any means redeem his brother" (Ps. 49:7).
- II. God alone is fully armed to take the field against the enemy (v. 17)
- A. He has a perfect Redeemer (v. 20).
 One "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).
- B. He has a mighty Spirit, who will not depart from His people (v. 21).
 "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Corvallis, Oreg.

A. W. SCHELP

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**PSALM 123**

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This is one of the fifteen psalms (120—134) which are entitled simply "songs of degrees." A few of these ancient liturgical pieces have been ascribed to David, one to Solomon, and the authors of the rest are unknown. It is not our desire to go into the problem of the meaning of the title, but it is possible that the psalm before us was written during the Exile or after the Exile, since v. 4 speaks of a situation which fits conditions in Babylon and after the Jews' return to Palestine. They were exposed to derision and contempt for their loyalty to their faith. The Psalm is a prayer from the depths of distress, more specifically it is a prayer for mercy, for forgiveness. The Psalmist directs the prayer to the proper source, Jehovah, the God of mercy, of forgiveness in Christ. Lifting up the eyes is the Oriental form of prayer showing that God dwells in the high places above, as the Psalmist himself says, "O Thou

that dwellest in the heavens." Although God is everywhere, the Scriptures everywhere depict Him as dwelling above. Cp. Ps. 2:4. This is an exact counterpart of Jesus' exemplary prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," and the preacher will naturally make use of all the suggested thoughts. The only real difficulty in the Psalm is what is meant by the looking at the hand of masters and mistresses on the part of slaves (v. 2). We know it is a picture from ancient Oriental master-slave culture, but to what does it refer? Some understand it as the hand of punishment which strikes the slave. When beaten, slaves look with pleading eyes to their master knowing that this is the only way to stop the lash. However, since neither masters nor mistresses actually did the punishing, especially not the mistresses, it is better to understand the metaphor as the directing hand of God, a sign of willing obedience. Just as a servant watched every gesture of the master so as to determine his will, so the children of God are always ready to do God's will. St. Paul calls himself a δούλος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, meaning that he had no will of his own. He was slave but yet free. Others speak of the supplying hand, the protecting hand, or the correcting hand, all of which do not fit the context too well. In the light of the context, especially of the entire Scripture, we should not interpret the words "until that He have mercy upon us" as if God withheld his mercy until someone has demonstrated he is worthy of it. No, this is the confident waiting upon the Lord. In truth there is no other source of mercy; and if we do not wait upon Jehovah, we shall go away empty. But we know Jehovah's promises and wait in earnest, confident, trusting prayer. This in itself is a wonderful lesson in prayer—perseverance. The beautiful plea "Have mercy upon us, O Lord," is also a New Testament prayer. It is a cry in true repentance for forgiveness in the Savior. The unmerciful Servant uttered such a cry and was forgiven. The Psalmist does not mean that God's people are filled with contempt (v. 3) for others, but that the proud and mighty enemies of the church have filled them with contempt and hatred. The Hebrew verb means "to be saturated" or completely filled. V. 4 expands the thought. "Those that are at ease" means those who are rich and proud and/or feel themselves secure. The Psalm, then, is a picture of the church in the world of opposition and hatred pleading for mercy and confidently knowing that deliverance is sure.

The Theme of the Day.—The preacher will want to connect the thoughts of the text with the church year. The key to the day is forgiveness, especially as this is related to prayer. The Gospel for the day is the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. God's forgiveness is the

incentive for forgiving others, much as God's people in this psalm watch the hand of the Lord for His every will. Forgiven people forgive others. In developing this theme we must, according to the text and the day, treat both forgiveness and prayer.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The purpose of the message is to teach the people of God to pray sincerely one of the hardest petitions—"Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who sin against us." If the pastor wishes to build a praying church, this petition must first be taught, for it is the epitome of love. The implications of sanctification in the Lord's Prayer should be stressed.

Gospel Emphasis in the Sermon.—The entire prayer in the text rests on the fact that Jehovah is a God of mercy who hears prayers and gives His Spirit without measure. V. 3 has been called the constant Kyrie of the believers of all time. There is a great opportunity for preaching Gospel from this text, especially from v. 3 and parallels.

Illustrations and Parallels.—Notice how Paul has connected the Gospel with prayer in the Epistle (Phil. 1:6). Paul is also praying in confidence, and notice that he prays for the church. The pastor will not neglect to use the Gospel and its pointed lesson of forgiveness. Other parallels of the Kyrie may be found in the Scriptures.

Outline

Introduction: Did the people of the Old Testament pray differently from the believers of the New Testament? There may have been differences in outward form and gesture (raising the face to the heavens, while we pray with hands folded and heads bowed), but the Spirit and basis of true prayer is the same for believers of every age.

An Old Testament Psalmist Teaches to Pray

- I. True prayer is directed to proper source (v. 1)
 - A. Not to idols or earthly power.
 - B. But to Him who dwells in the heavens.
- II. True prayer has implicit trust (v. 2)
 - A. In the power of God.
 - B. In His gracious will.
- III. True prayer pleads for mercy (vv. 3, 4)
 - A. Mercy or forgiveness is found in Christ Jesus.
 - B. Mercy is by grace and not by merit.
 - C. Mercy is given without measure.

D. Mercy is basic to true prayer (in Jesus' name).

E. He who has mercy has all other necessary blessings (Rom. 8:32; Luke 5:23, 24).

IV. True prayer implies the obedience of faith (v. 2)

A. The implications of the Lord's Prayer and Gospel of the day.

B. Practical value of prayer for the church.

Springfield, Ill.

LORMAN M. PETERSEN

ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE

THE APOSTLES' DAY, October 28

EPISTLE: 1 PETER 1:3-9

Questions Incidental to the Day.—1) Why commemorate these two apostles together? "The association of these two apostles may be due to nothing more than their immediate connection in the lists of the apostles in Luke [6:15, 16] and Acts [1:13]. There is a tradition, however, that Simon the Zealot (extreme nationalist) and Jude (identical with Thaddaeus) labored together in Persia and were martyred there on the same day." (Reed, *Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 508.) See also Matt. 10:3, 4; Mark 3:18.—2) Why not an Epistle for the day from the Book of Jude? Probably because of some doubt that that book was written by this Jude.—3) Why 1 Peter 1:3-9? Because it is appropriate. Other suitable passages: Eph. 4:7-13 (Missal), and Eph. 2:19-22 (Prayer Book).

Biography.—1) St. Simon. In the Bible he is mentioned only in the lists of the apostles: Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13. To distinguish him from Simon Peter, he is also called "the Canaanite" (from an Aramaic word meaning "zeal") and "Zelotes," or "the Zealot." These names may refer to his zeal for the Jewish Law before his call and conversion to the Christian religion, or they may indicate that he was a member of the Jewish patriotic party called the Zealots. When he became a Christian, knowledge of the truth (John 8:32) was added to his zeal. It is not possible to reconcile the various traditions concerning his life after Pentecost. He was "the companion of St. Jude on many of his missionary tours. . . . The exact manner of [his] death is not told us, but he is generally supposed to have been sawn asunder [the same is said of Isaiah; see also Heb. 11:37] or else beheaded. That he suffered martyrdom is quite certain." (Webber, *Church Symbolism*, pp. 206—208.)—2) St. Jude. He is mentioned in the lists of the

apostles: Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 ("Judas, the brother of James"); Matt. 10:4 gives his other names ("Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus"); see also Mark 3:18. "Jude" means "celebrated," or "object of praise"; "Lebbaeus" comes from the Hebrew and Aramaic words for "heart" and may mean "courageous, stouthearted"; "Thaddaeus" comes from an Aramaic word referring to a mother's breast and points to the idea "beloved child." Jude seems to have been quite a likable and outstanding man, even though he cuts no large figure in the pages of the Bible. He may have been a brother of Simon and James the Less and as such a cousin of Jesus. The only other mention of him in the Bible is in John 14:22, where he asks Jesus: "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" The specific answer is in John 14:23-26, calling for love of God and its reflection in life (v.24) and including the "deep, mysterious, yet wonderfully comforting doctrine of the mystical union of the Ever Blessed Trinity with the individual believer" (Ressel). But it did not end there. The entire following discourse, to the end of John 16, and including some of the most beloved and precious chapters in the entire Bible, was touched off by the question of Jude. See, for example, John 15:26; 16:7, 13-16, 22, 25. The story of his life after Pentecost is as obscure and as uncertain as that of St. Simon. We are told that he was a tireless missionary in Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia, traveling far and often with Simon and finally suffering martyrdom with him on the same day in Persia. The exact manner of his death is not known.

A Grammatical Note.—Are ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, "rejoice" (vv. 6 and 8), and ἀγαπᾶτε, "love" (v. 8), imperatives or indicatives? You must decide this for yourself. The verb forms are exactly the same in the Greek. The King James and the Revised Standard versions favor the indicative. But Robertson, in his unabridged grammar, favors the imperative in v. 6 (p. 949). The imperatives might be translated: "Rejoice in this . . ." (v. 6); "Love Him, even though you have not seen Him; and believing in Him whom you do not now see, rejoice . . ." (v. 8).

What Does the Text Say?—This text is pure Gospel. It shows us our Savior Jesus Christ and tells us what God in His mercy has done, still does, and will finally do for our salvation. Luther: "This is now the grand summary of these words: Christ, through His resurrection, has brought us to the Father; and so also Peter would with them bring us to the Father by the Lord Christ, and he sets Him forth as Mediator between God and us. . . . Oh! it is a blessing infinitely vast, bestowed upon us through Christ, that we may go into the presence of the Father

and claim the inheritance of which Peter here speaks." (Lenker's translation, p. 43.)

The text divides easily and naturally into three parts, each of which speak of *saving faith*. On October 28 we commemorate two saints. The Augsburg Confession (Art. 21) says: "The memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their *faith* and good works." So we take as our theme: *The Faith of Saints*. For special examples of faith we look on this day to Sts. Simon and Jude. But the word "saints" in the theme includes all who are saved, also the most obscure and unsung among us, who are known only to God (2 Tim. 2:19).

After a brief word of benediction in praise of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, vv. 3 and 4 tell us that the faith of saints is a miracle of God's creative power. It is *He* who "has begotten us again unto a living hope . . . to an inheritance incorruptible. . . ." Luther: "If God produces faith in man, it is certainly as great a work as though he recreated heaven and earth" (on 1 Peter 1:5. Lenker's translation, p. 48). Example: It was God who put faith into the heart of Simon and Jude and made them apostles. Eph. 4:11. — Emphasize: 1) *God* is the Author of saving faith (Heb. 12:2 and Phil. 2:13). Christian faith is not man-made. 2) God's mercy, *ἔλεος*, which is elicited by the misery of man. See Titus 3:5: "According to His mercy He saved us." See also Pieper-Engelder, *Christian Dogmatics*, II, 7, 8. 3) The part which Christ's resurrection plays in this. 1 Cor. 15:14-20! 4) As children of God we look forward to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. 5) Our hope is assured of its fulfillment, because our inheritance is "reserved" in heaven, that is, safely guarded and kept; it will surely, definitely, positively be there for us when we leave this life. See Rom. 8:28-39!

The second part of the text (vv. 5-8) tells us that it is God also who *keeps* the saints in faith. — Emphasize: 1) The day-to-day and hour-to-hour miracle of God in continuing faith. If you are a Christian today, it is not because of your own strong character or will power (or "won't" power). See Phil. 1:6. Never fail to appreciate God's personal and direct interest in you! Never forget to thank Him in word and deed and to serve Him in your life for His constant blessings, especially the blessing of faith! Luther: "Faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing, so that it is impossible that it should not always be doing something good. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks, it has done them and is always active in doing them." (Preface to the Epistle to the Romans.) Example: The missionary activity of Sts. Simon and Jude. See also Acts 27:23. 2) Since it is

God who upholds you, all trials of faith which come upon you according to His will, even the most severe, can be endured successfully. Example: The martyrdom of Sts. Simon and Jude. See also Rom. 8:18! In 1 Peter 1:6: on the words "for a season" compare Rev. 6:11; on "if need be" compare 1 Peter 3:17. On "rejoicing in Him" (1 Peter 1:8) compare Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1. Here is more than love at first sight—here is love without sight! Tennyson:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing, where we cannot prove!

The third part of the text (v. 9) tells how God finally rewards the faith of saints. There are overtones here of Luke 21:19: "In your patience possess ye your souls," and of Matt. 10:28 and Luke 12:4, which remind us that persecutors can gain power only over the body. Example: The final suffering of Sts. Simon and Jude was for them the gate to eternal glory. See also Acts 14:22; John 10:27-30! God is the *Finisher* of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

How to Preach on This Text.—Luther: "We must preach Jesus Christ, that He died and rose again and why He died and rose again, that through such preaching men might believe on Him and be saved. That is preaching the true Gospel. Whatever is not preached in this manner is not Gospel, and it matters not who does it." (Sub loc., Lenker's translation, pp. 42, 43.)

Outline

The Faith of Saints

1. Created by God (vv. 3, 4)
2. Preserved by God (vv. 5-8)
3. Rewarded by God (v. 9)

See the above exposition for further subdivisions.

(NOTE: This is the eighth and last in the current series of studies on the Epistles of the minor festivals, begun in this journal December 1953. The author regrets that the editors cannot find sufficient space in the pages of the CTM to continue and possibly complete the series.)

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