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## Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series

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## HOMILETICS

### *Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series*

(Except for the extended study of the Gospel for Quasimodogeniti Sunday, which is by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were condensed and translated from C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* by Prof. Alex W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are supplied by Prof. Robert R. Bergt, St. Louis, Mo.)

#### LAETARE SUNDAY

JOHN 6:1-15

The Jews believed the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, who would be a great king and establish a worldwide kingdom. When Christ began His public ministry He proclaimed the nearness of His kingdom and called His teaching the "Gospel of the Kingdom." He permitted the people to shout hosannas to Him as the King of Israel. And before Pilate He definitely called Himself a king. But because the Jews had built up erroneous ideas about the character of the Messianic kingdom, which still persist in many Christians, the Gospel for today urges us to examine ourselves to see whether we are like the Jews of Christ's day. Today I want to talk to you about this fact: *Like the Jews Many Christians Want to Take Christ by Force and Make Him King*

- I. They want to become and remain citizens of Christ's kingdom without repentance
- II. They are looking for ease and prosperity

#### I

A. Christ undoubtedly described the beauty of His kingdom in glowing terms and aroused the desire of multitudes for membership in that kingdom. But since He did nothing to take them into His kingdom,

as they understood it, the people planned to take Him by force and make Him King.

B. Many Christians recognize the folly of this move and yet make the same mistake. They want to become members of the Kingdom without repentance. They are baptized. They may look upon Christ as Redeemer, come to the Lord's Table, and associate with other Christians. Outwardly they have joined the Kingdom.

C. The kingdom of Christ, however, is an invisible spiritual, heavenly kingdom. It is worldwide. No one can work his way into this kingdom.

D. Anyone, however, who hears Christ's call to repentance, has genuine sorrow over his sins, and clings to Christ's redemptive work is a member of His kingdom. He prays for mercy and forgiveness. He hears Christ knock at his heart, sees Him set up His throne there, and knows he belongs to Christ.

#### II

A. When Christ made five loaves of bread and two small fish feed thousands, many believed that drudgery and work had come to an end for them, and they determined to force this Worker of miracles to be their constant Provider. They saw visions of ease, prosperity, and freedom from want and trouble.

B. This is a true picture of many Christians today. Though baptized, they are not concerned about their soul. They want to become rich. Money is their real concern (cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-10). Some other Christians are interested primarily in a secure, carefree, easy life. They do not battle against their sins. Prayer and worship are very minor concerns in their lives. They are like the



Jews in the text. Christ finds it necessary to tell them also that they want to be in His kingdom only because they think it will give them an easy life. As long as they cling to such opinions, they do not belong to Him.

C. Christ asks you earnestly to consider Matt. 6:24 and Luke 14:26. God forbid that we suppose we can serve Him and mammon, that we can divide our heart between Christ and the world. May He grant that we give ourselves wholeheartedly to our King, Jesus Christ. Only in Him is full joy and lasting satisfaction.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Jesus, Priceless Treasure," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 347.

Just as the Third Sunday in Advent (Gaudete) injects joy into the penitential tone of Advent, so Laetare Sunday lights up the beclouded sky of Lent. In the Hymn of the Week, *Jesu, meine Freude*, Johann Franck (1618—77) expresses his joy in Jesus in strains of a mystical yearning for the union of the soul with Christ, and it therefore lacks some of the objectivity and congregational character of earlier Lutheran hymns.

Unlike the hymnists Prudentius and Georg Weissel, jurists turned clergymen, Franck remained a lawyer and public official all his life. His deep religious convictions and feelings, however, moved him to write 110 hymns, of which 57 appeared in *Geistliche Lieder* (Grimma, 1846), with a biographical preface written by J. L. Pasig. The best of modern hymnals include either one or both of his two most popular hymns, *Jesu, meine Freude* and *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 305).

These two hymns have the distinction of receiving original melodic settings from the pen of the famed Lutheran composer Johann Crüger. Both melodies appear in his *Geistliche Kirchenmelodien*, 1649. Although a translation of *Jesu, meine Freude* by Catherine Winkworth was available, the version in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is a composite translation.

## JUDICA SUNDAY

JOHN 8:46-59

In Mark 3:28,29; Matt. 12:31; Heb. 6:5-7; and 1 John 5:16b the New Testament talks about the sin against the Holy Ghost. This is the only unforgivable sin. He who has committed this sin will not be saved. Some Christians, however, believe they have made themselves guilty of it and are living in indescribable fear. Everyone therefore ought to know the character of this sin and the reason why it cannot be forgiven. The Gospel for today offers wholesome instruction on these points. For your instruction and preservation in the faith I present the Biblical truth on

### *The Unforgivable Sin Against the Holy Ghost*

I shall show you

- I. The character of this sin
- II. The reason why this sin is unforgivable

#### I

A. Many false ideas exist about the character of the sin against the Holy Ghost. It is held to be such things as impenitence unto death, denial of the truth, defection from the true religion, every conscious sin after conversion, every false oath, every cooperation with the devil, every evil thought that in spite of prayer cannot be shaken. In examining the lives of Paul, Peter, Job, and of other Christians, it becomes clear that the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be equated with the sins mentioned above.

B. The Jews in the text had actually committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. They answer Jesus' words of vv. 46, 47 with v. 48b and vv. 52, 53. There is no attempt to answer Jesus' questions; they express only their satanic conviction that now they are sure Jesus is of the devil. Though they knew that Jesus was a Teacher come from God (cf. John 3:2, "we"), yet they fought against



Christ with hellish hate. His words (v. 58) stirred them to fanatic hatred against Christ. They refused to let the Holy Ghost lead them to see the truth in Christ but picked up stones to kill Christ and silence the mouth of Him who had uncovered their shameful heart.

C. Here you see the sin against the Holy Ghost in action. This sin is committed by those whom the Holy Ghost has persuaded of the truth of God in Christ, but who refuse to accept what they recognize as the truth. With hardness of heart and satanic villainy they rant and rave against the truth and express deep hatred against God. For such the mercy of God has come to an end, and judgment has already set in. (Cf. Heb. 10:26-51)

## II

A. The sin against the Holy Ghost is unforgivable but not for the following reasons: God has predestined these sinners to damnation; God's grace cannot cover the greatness and grievousness of this sin; Christ did not take this sin upon Himself and die for it; this sin is directed against the person of the Holy Ghost. The unforgivableness of the sin lies in this fact: Christ repeatedly opened the door of His grace (vv. 46b, 51-58b). But each time the Jews slammed the door shut and became increasingly violent in their hatred against Christ.

B. The sin against the Holy Ghost is unforgivable because it is directed not against the person but against the office of the Holy Ghost, against enlightenment, awakening, chastisement, strengthening, conversion, in short, against all the work of the Holy Ghost. The sin is directed against the foundation of salvation—Jesus Christ; against the means of salvation—the Word of God and the sacraments; against the order of salvation—conversion and faith. All this was trodden under foot, and therefore God let eternal condemnation step in. (Cf. Matt. 25:37)

C. Receive this teaching of Scripture, and

so keep yourself from slipping into hardness of heart. Receive this teaching also as a source of comfort. God forgives the greatest sins, even those against the person of the Holy Ghost. Whoever repents, believes in Christ, and accepts His mercy need not worry about the sin against the Holy Ghost. God blesses such a person in Christ.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "The Royal Banners Forward Go," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 168.

Although Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 530 to 600) is not regarded as a first-rate poet, he nevertheless achieves high grandeur of language and imagery in this famed office hymn. The translation in *The Lutheran Hymnal* by John Mason Neale (1851) captures much of its original beauty, although he takes some liberties with the original eight-stanza hymn as it is found in four manuscripts from the 8th and 9th centuries.

*Vexilla regis prodeunt* is not as widely sung in Lutheran circles as in the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions. Although it was primarily used in procession in early centuries, it was later sung at vespers on Passion Sunday (including vespers on the Saturday before) and daily up to Maundy Thursday. To the present day it serves as a processional hymn on Good Friday.

The isometric tune, *Vexilla Regis*, by John Hampton, which appears above this ancient text in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, is unfortunately no more than an academic exercise, and the harmonization a mere lesson in modulation. No doubt this factor has contributed to the infrequent use of this hymn text in our services. Singing it to the Gregorian melody with an appropriate accompaniment, as found in other good hymnals, may aid in restoring it to more general acceptance. It deserves to be selected as the Hymn of the Week for Judica Sunday. It stresses God's mercy through the cross of His Son, by which the sinner can stand in His judgment.



## PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 6:67-69

You children have pledged loyalty to Christ today. You do not want to be like other children who also pledged loyalty, but broke it soon afterward. In John 6 Jesus looks with a heavy heart on many who turned against Him and asks the apostles, "Will you also go away?" Peter's answer is vv. 68, 69. If Jesus should ask you the same question today, I'm sure you would earnestly repeat Peter's answer. Listen carefully, as I dwell on this thought:

*Your Answer to Christ's Question:  
"Will You Also Go Away?"*

Your answer is

- I. "Lord, to whom shall we go?"
- II. "Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"

## I

A. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" was Peter's way of saying that the apostles could not be ungrateful for what they had received from Christ. Apart from Him they could not find the light of truth, satisfy the hunger and thirst of their souls for the grace and peace of God, still their longing for genuine happiness, and find comfort in sorrow and sin, deliverance from death, and eternal life.

B. All who desert Christ think they can find happiness elsewhere. They seek it in money and earthly goods, in pleasure, in the favor and friendship of the world, in the applause of men, in research, wisdom, and travel. Judas, David, Solomon, Peter, Paul, experienced the folly of leaving Christ. All had to admit that they had cheated themselves. Judas perished. The others repented and returned.

C. What are you children going to do? Will you try to find happiness in worldly

treasures, in the lust of sin, in acclaim, in wisdom? Will you not say, "Lord, if we cannot find happiness in Thee, we do not know where we can find it"?

## II

A. Besides asking the question, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Peter spoke the words of vv. 68b, 69. "Your words, Jesus," Peter said, "have given us new life, have quickened and comforted us, have given our souls a foretaste of heaven, have assured us of the forgiveness of our sins, have told us that we are heirs of the glories of heaven, have made us certain that you are the true Christ, the only Savior of the world, the Son of the living God. We cannot leave Thee and lose everything.

B. Can your answer be different from Peter's? By no means. You will have to add: "If we should leave You, we should be like wanderers without a guide, like sheep without a shepherd, like people swept from the deck of a storm-tossed vessel. No, Peter's words are our words. Let this be true not only for today but also for the rest of your life.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Ride On! Ride On in Majesty," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 162.

Every good modern hymnal contains this majestic hymn of Henry Hart Milman (1791 to 1868). It is the first English original to be included in the Hymn of the Week plan. Written especially for use on Palm Sunday, it is the only product of Milman's pen to have achieved lasting recognition. Thirteen of his hymns first appeared in Reginald Heber's *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year*, 1827. The author was professor of poetry at Oxford University and is perhaps best known for his *History of the Jews*. Poet, historian, churchman, expert translator of Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, Milman also wrote a number of poetic dramas.



The first stanza originally read:  
 "Ride on! Ride on in majesty!  
 Hark! all the tribes Hosanna cry!  
 Thine humble beast pursues his road,  
 With palms and scatter'd garments strew'd."

Murray changed the third line in his *Hymnal* (1852) to read:  
 "O Savior meek, pursue Thy road."

This reading has found its way into almost every hymnal in preference to the original.

## GOOD FRIDAY

MATT. 27:31-54

Today we are commemorating the death of God's Son, of whom St. Paul wrote, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." The redeemed in heaven glory in the "new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book," etc. (Rev. 6:9). The angels hail "the Lamb, who was slain" as worthy to receive power, etc. (Rev. 5:12). The picture drawn for us in our text has as its title the words "Be ye reconciled unto God." Let me therefore point out to you that

*The Death of God's Son Is the Most Urgent Call to All Men to be Reconciled to God*

We shall consider

- I. The way the death of God's Son issues this urgent call to all men
- II. The way each man should and can follow this call

### I

A. Through sin all men have become enemies of God. Yet most people believe they are God's friends. They point to their good character and prosperity and think everything is well. What a mistake! Most people are still unreconciled to God. Some are afraid to seek reconciliation because they fear rejection. Others are not interested in it.

B. If God had not offered reconciliation, how could any sinner dare to step before Him and demand it? But since the Son of God died for the reconciliation of all men, His death is urgently calling to all men: "Be ye reconciled to God."

C. If God had sent His Son, or an angel, or a mere man to announce reconciliation, that certainly would have been an urgent call to return to Him. But God did not send His Son to announce a reconciliation. He sent Him to sacrifice Himself and so establish it. This makes the call to be reconciled all the more urgent.

D. Now no one can doubt whether God will receive him or not. No sin, no wrath of God, no threat of the Law, can intimidate him anymore. God is reconciled. If this fact will not draw the sinner, what will?

E. "Be ye reconciled to God" is written in large letters on the cross for every sinner to see. Every drop of blood that flowed from Christ's wounds, all the angel voices, all the dead rising out of their graves, the trembling earth about the cross, all those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, cry out with a loud voice, "Be ye reconciled to God." Woe to him who turns away from this insistent cry. There is no help for him!

### II

A. The meaning of "Be ye reconciled to God" is: Believe that you are reconciled to God through Christ and accept the reconciliation God is offering you in the Gospel. You will not be able to believe and accept reconciliation by your own strength. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can open your heart and mind so you will bow before the reconciled God.

B. The Holy Spirit will lead you to receive reconciliation if you will read the Bible, the Law and the Gospel. He will open your eyes to see your sin. Every commandment will tell you that you are an enemy of God and deserve eternal punishment. But



the Holy Ghost will not let you despair. He will hold the Cross of Christ before your eyes and show you how Christ has died for all your sins and reconciled you to God. He will lead you to say Yea and Amen to the whole Gospel and to exult in your loving, reconciled Father. This is the way you can follow the call "Be ye reconciled to God!"

C. This is the way to freedom from sin, to comfort in sorrow, to victory over Satan and the world, to the narrow way that leads to heaven.

EASTER SUNDAY

MARK 16:1-8

Many Christians who know the real meaning of Christmas have no clear understanding of Easter. They seek its meaning in the glorification of Christ, the confirmation of His teaching, the confirmation of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. However, real Easter joy is to be found in Christ's resurrection from the dead. Here is the source of Easter joy and genuine comfort. On this festival day I shall dwell on

*The Comfort That Lies in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*

I shall lead you

- I. To see what this great comfort is
- II. To understand how you may enjoy the benefit of this great comfort

I

A. Easter is without question the greatest festival of the church year. It speaks about the resurrection of Christ. No Christian minister dare keep silent about this fact into which God has poured the riches of His grace if he is to proclaim the whole counsel of God and afford his hearers real comfort.

B. At first blush it may seem that Christ's resurrection does not concern us too much. But when St. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:15 that they who live should live to "Him who died

for them and rose again," we must see that in His death and resurrection Christ is our Substitute. This is the key to the comfort that Christ's resurrection offers. His battle was our battle, His victory our victory, His triumph our triumph, His conquest our conquest, His justification our justification. Now you will understand such Bible passages as Rom. 4:25; Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14b; John 14:19b; John 16:33.

C. God offers this comfort in Christ's resurrection to all sinful men. After Christ had suffered and died for us, God did not wait for men to come and ask Him for grace in Christ. Because of Christ's resurrection He hurried to men with the comfort of His grace earned by His Son.

II

A. Blessed is the man who recognizes, possesses, and enjoys this comfort! If you ask how you may enjoy this comfort, the answer is quite simple. You must accept justification or pardon which God the Father has established through the resurrection of His Son for the world and for you. In other words, you must believe. Anything else you might want to do is useless.

B. Consider these Bible passages: Rom. 10:8b,9; Is. 55:1. Both of them insist that you accept and believe in the comfort of God's Word, particularly that comfort offered in Christ's resurrection.

C. Those of you who may be clinging to the world, or are willingly walking in sin, or believe you are unworthy to come to God, forsake your folly. Rise out of the grave of your sin with Christ, and find the comfort you need in His resurrection.

D. Those of you who have been wise and have accepted God's offer in the resurrection of Christ, rejoice with St. Paul, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" etc. (Rom. 8:33,34); "O Death, where is thy sting?" etc. (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Then when death comes, you will say with Job,



"I know that my Redeemer lives," etc. (Job 19:25-27)

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 195.

*Christ lag in Todesbanden* is one of the eight *de tempore* hymns written by Martin Luther and published in *Eyn Enchiridion*, 1524. What better response can the congregation make to the glorious Easter Gospel (Mark 16:1-8) than the singing of this great hymn? Luther here seems to be at his best in putting into poetic form the great Easter message of Scripture in all of its rich imagery. Hymnologist John Julian said that Luther reaches poetic heights in Gospel proclamation in this hymn, second only to his *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*.

The claim that this hymn is derived from *Christ ist erstanden* can hardly be substantiated although both are sung to a similar melody. The text in stanzas 4 and 5 seems to be based more on the sequence hymn *Victimae paschali laudes*, and certain thoughts reflect *Surrexit Christus hodie*.

The Easter melody *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, dating to the 12th century, is one of the most ancient in existence. It is easy to recognize that it is a modification of *Christ ist erstanden*. Both hymns enjoyed great popularity in Germany since the Reformation. It is a matter of record, e. g., that they were sung annually on Easter Day, both in the morning service and at vespers in St. Nicholas and St. Thomas churches, Leipzig.

## QUASIMODOGENITI

JOHN 20:19-31

By Robert H. Smith

This is the story of how the disciples were "born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). And the tale does not rest there. It presses on to tell also of the mission

of the reborn disciples, the apostolic task of the reconstituted fellowship. Until Easter the church had been in the womb. On that day it seemed to be stillborn, but the Resurrected One appeared and vivified it, and He immediately set it running.

### I

On that first Easter day the whole world certainly stood in dire need of new life. Picture Sunday morning in Jerusalem about the year of our Lord 30. Pontius Pilate is having breakfast in the fortress Antonia with his wife, Claudia, who is nervous and gloomy. Pilate himself is in a vile mood and snaps at her, "I wish you would cheer up; I tell you that Fellow got what was coming to Him. And even if He didn't, it's finished and done, and there's no use crying over spilt milk." Still she is inconsolable and continues to protest, "But the dream I had of that Man; I do wish you had let Him off. But no, you had to give in to those Jewish priests!"

The chief priests of the Jews are just assembling for morning prayer when the guards set at the tomb come bursting in with the report of the earthquake and the appearance of the angel. Worst of all they say, "The tomb is empty." The priests are visibly shaken, but crafty old Caiaphas quickly regains his composure and takes charge. He hands each guard a little purse of money and commands them: "Make sense! Dead men don't wake up. You go out and spread the story that His disciples came in the night and robbed the grave."

The disciples—what are they doing? Exactly what Jesus had predicted. He had said the prophecy of Zechariah would come true: "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

One conviction was held in common that Sunday morning in Jerusalem by Pilate, his wife, Caiaphas, all the chief priests, the 11 disciples and the several women followers: Jesus of Nazareth is dead and gone.

Then it was that strange things began to



happen, reversing firm judgments, compelling men to change their minds, and indeed transforming their entire lives. They saw Jesus and spoke with Him and touched Him, and they were forced to concede and confess: "He is not dead; He is alive." They began to remember what He had said before that awful Friday: "I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have power to take it again." The massive doubt and skepticism of the disciples was finally and fully crushed by face-to-face encounter with Jesus, resurrected and alive.

## II

Vv. 19, 20 — "Late that Sunday evening" (NEB) the disciples were behind locked doors (vv. 19, 26) out of fear of the Jews. Throughout the Gospel the Jewish authorities strike fear in the hearts of the disciples (7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 19:38) and thereby stop their mouths and prohibit confession.

Jesus came and stood in their midst (vv. 19, 26). John describes an epiphany, or more precisely, a Christophany. Jesus' presence is marked by sudden and mysterious appearance. No door opens to admit Him. And as in the case of epiphanies and theophanies (cf. Gen. 18:15; Ex. 4:17; Is. 6:13), there is no word of departure. The scene simply closes, and a new pericope begins.

How can Jesus do it? The late Dorothy Sayers in her cycle of plays on the life of Jesus, *The Man Born to Be King*, made a brave but vain attempt to "explain" the sudden comings and goings. She notes that an explanation is not necessary for faith or morals, but it is good for the artist to have a consistent picture, which she proceeds to draw. "We may suppose that the physical body was, as it were, dissolved into its molecular elements, drawn out through the graveclothes and through the stone, and re-assembled outside — this phenomenon being (not surprisingly) accompanied by a violent

'electrical' disturbance, perceptible as a kind of earthquake. . . . There is no reason to imagine that the body was obliged always to carry its original physical components about with it. Presumably it could build itself up from any atomic material that happened to be handy. But the disappearance of the original earthly body was obviously necessary as evidence." (London: Gollancz, 1943, p. 317)

However, Jesus comes to the disciples not merely from the other side of the tomb or from outside the room. He comes from the far side of all we see and feel and hear, from the divine side of reality.

The Resurrected One graciously seeks out His terror-stricken disciples and gives them peace and joy (ἔχάρησαν). In common parlance "peace" was not much more than "hello." But the word early became pregnant with Christian significance (Luke 10:5; John 14:27; 16:33). Bengel comments, *Opportunitissima salutatio, qua timor culpa per fugam contractae pellebatur et scandalum sanabatur*. It is the comprehensive term which designates the harmony and the vitality of the new order of things in Jesus Christ. Peace means the restitution of men to a life of wholeness with God and one another, a life in which men here and now taste eschatological joy. (John 16:20-24; 17:13)

And this Jesus who comes so mysteriously is neither apparition nor ghost (Luke 24:37). He is there for the hearing, seeing, and touching by His disciples (1 John 1:1 ff.). His body is real, and in His resurrected body He bears the marks of His crucifixion. They are His identifying features — and more. His stripes and wounds are the means by which He won peace for us (Is. 53:5). "The marks of Calvary remain; and it is with wounded hands and side that the risen Jesus gives His peace to the disciples." (A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ*, London: G. Bles, 1946, p. 82)

V. 21 — Gifts and tasks go hand in hand. "As My Father has sent Me (ἀποστέλλω),



so I send you (πέμπω)." The two verbs of sending can hardly have differing meanings in this verse. Jesus arranges the extension of His own mission (cf. John 13:16; 17:18). Their fear driven out, the disciples are enabled to speak openly the word of forgiveness, that is, the word concerning Jesus Christ, the word in and by which Jesus continues His ministry for us men and for our salvation.

V. 22 — The one indispensable equipment for the apostolic mission is the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed (ἐμφυσάω) on them (cf. Ps. 104:29 f.). Jesus is the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). More than that, Jesus stands in the place of God Himself and bestows the Spirit by whom man was created a living being in the beginning (Gen. 2:7), by whom each man still is constituted (Wisd. Sol. 15:11), by whom the dry bones in the valley were seen clothed with flesh and filled with breath and come to life again (Ezek. 27:5-10, 14). "As the Word was 'in the beginning' at the creation, so the Word Incarnate is here at a new creation. The work of redemption is over, and He is creating new men to be His fellow-workers." (R. N. Flew, *Jesus and His Church* [London: Epworth, 1943], p. 176)

Was the Spirit given on Easter or on Pentecost, 50 days later? Or does John view Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost as an indissoluble unit? Perhaps Strathmann is right, "Standards of pedantic exactitude never do justice to John's manner of writing" (*Das Neue Testament Deutsch* IV, 259). Nevertheless it is possible to retain both accounts as they stand. The present Archbishop of Canterbury makes the point neatly: "The Holy Spirit overshadowed the manhood of Jesus both at His conception and at His baptism. Subsequently the Holy Spirit endows the people of Christ both in baptism and in the laying-on-of-hands. Similarly a twofold action may have occurred in the original redemptive events: on Easter Day,

a bestowal of the breath of the new life; at Pentecost, an outpouring for the execution of those tasks which the new life involved." (Ramsey, p. 88)

V. 23 — "If you forgive, if you retain." The business of the church is forgiveness (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18). The world stands before God the Judge, who declares that the world *is* under sin (John 3:18). God gave His Son for the forgiveness of sins, and the Son sent the church to declare forgiveness in Jesus. "It comprises the entire office of the Church to bring to mankind the cleansing made possible by the cross." (Ibid., p. 87)

The Fourth Gospel, which uses the word "forgiveness" only here, speaks often of sin and judgment (1:29; 3:19; 5:24-29; 8:21, 24, 34; 9:41; 15:22; 16:8; cf. 1 John 1:9; 2:12). Sin can be removed by acceptance of the forgiveness proclaimed by the church. If the world rejects the message of the church, there is no other name (Acts 4:12), or Gospel (Gal. 1:7 f.) by which its sin can be removed. If the Sin-Remover is rejected, the world retains its sin and its guilt remains. (John 9:41)

And the flock of God exists by taking heed to its own message: "The Church does not live by morals, by the knowledge and observance of God's Law. Nor does it live by religion, by lofty experiences of the divine and an awareness of the mysteries of God. It lives solely by the forgiveness of sins." (H. Sasse, *Here We Stand* [Minneapolis: Rugsburg, 1938], p. 59)

V. 24 — "Thomas" is the Greek name which, because of similarity of sound, was commonly adopted by Jews who bore the Aramaic name ܛܘܡܐ, which literally means "twin." The Greek word which means "twin" is Didymos.

Thomas appears also in 11:16, where he voices a lament of quiet desperation and resignation, and in 14:5, where he appears to be rather dull. Strathmann refers to him



as a "phlegmatic pessimist." Jesus had all kinds of men among "the Twelve," the representatives of the New Israel, which He was creating.

V. 25 — Thomas refuses to believe the report of Jesus' appearances and expresses his doubt in "vigorous, almost brutal terms" (Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, p. 546). It is unfair to single out Thomas as the only doubter, however. They were all "doubting Thomases." From the very beginning doubt and incredulity were the normal reactions to the reports of the resurrection.

V. 26 — This scene and the words which Jesus speaks shows that the Lord is fully aware of Thomas' words and the stipulations which he laid down. It is the following Sunday. On that Lord's Day, Thomas confronted His Lord visibly, as the church has met her Lord invisibly down through the centuries.

He receives belatedly the peace and the faith which had previously been bestowed on the others. In his case, as in theirs, it is the gift of the crucified but resurrected Jesus.

V. 28 — Thomas' confession "My Lord and my God" expresses the same high Christology found on every page of the New Testament. Here, however, it is connected with an intimacy and a personal quality of a rare order. The Lord of the church is the Lord of each individual.

The meeting between Jesus and Thomas resulting in Thomas' confession is strongly reminiscent of the eschatological deliverance and restoration of the remnant as described in Zechariah: "I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'" (Zech. 13:9; cf. Hos. 2:23)

Bengel writes, *Discipuli dixerant τὸν κύριον, Dominum; nunc Thomas, ad fidem revocatus, Jesum non modo Dominum sed etiam deitatem eius confitetur*. In rapid succession came encounter, faith, confession.

Vv. 29, 30 — Frequently quoted on the blessedness of those who have not seen and

still believe is a saying of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish (ca. 250): "A proselyte is more precious before God than those crowds who stood on Mount Sinai. If they had not all seen the thunder, and the flames and the lightning, and the quaking of the mountain, and had not heard the sound of the trumpet, they would not have submitted themselves to the dominion of God. But the proselyte has seen none of these things, and yet he comes and surrenders himself to God and takes upon himself the yoke of his will. Can anyone be more precious than he?" (from Hoskyns, p. 549). And one might compare also 1 Peter 1:8, "Without having seen Him you love Him; though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy."

Signs, concludes Strathmann, are "crutches for the weak" (260). But in the next verse John turns right around and talks positively of signs. Ramsey interprets the tension by pointing to a fundamental motif of Johannine theology: "The Word was made flesh; he who would know God must face the deeds of Jesus in the flesh: he must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood. But of itself the flesh profiteth nothing: it is the spirit that quickeneth." (Ibid., p. 84)

Genuine Easter faith is by no means dependent on bodily appearances of the resurrected Jesus, and faith resting on verbal, eye-witness testimony without external signs is specially blessed.

V. 31 — John speaks of signs (rather than of wonders), deeds of Jesus eloquent of His nature and mission. Of all His deeds John offers a mere selection, but such as will be sufficient to bring men to faith. (1 John 5:13)

Faith is no volatile emotion, but it is firm confidence in the first-century rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, as the eschatological Agent of God for the establishment of the Kingdom (Messiah) and as the One who exists eternally with the Father (Son of God).



Through faith in Jesus men on whom He has breathed come to the life of God's new creation and enter the Kingdom (John 3: 5, 15). "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life." (1 John 5:12)

### III

Jesus showed Himself alive to His disciples to gather them into one flock. They had scattered when Jesus died, like so many sheep running for shelter when mountain lions attack an unguarded flock. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, calling her by name. Then He showed Himself to Peter, who had sworn up and down three times that he never had a thing to do with anybody called Jesus. Then He came to the disciples gathered on Easter night in a room locked and barred for fear of the Jewish authorities. Eight days later He sought out Thomas, who had been absent on Easter, and He met every one of Thomas' stipulations. In all this we see the Good Shepherd seeking out His scattered sheep, calling them back to the fold. We see Jesus creating the church and commanding it to share its new life by the offer of forgiveness.

#### THE CREATION OF THE CHURCH

- I. The fear of the first disciples is matched by the atomic jitters of men and women in the afternoon of the 20th century. Our fears like theirs stem from our want of faith. And our knowledge of our guilt compounds our anxiety. Fear and faithlessness cut us off from the life of God.
- II. Jesus still comes to His church on the first day of the week. He does not stand

aloof from the doubter and the fugitive but bends low and seeks out each guilty, haunted heart. In the Word and sacrament we see exhibited His wounds, by which we are healed and restored.

- III. The life He offers with His peace is not ours to hoard but ours to share.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Ye Sons and Daughters of the King," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 208.

The office hymn *O filii et filiae* most likely comes from the 17th century. John M. Neale, one of seven English translators of the hymn, states that it originated in the 13th century, but there is no manuscript evidence of such an early date. It first appears in a German translation in the 17th century — in the same year that it was included in the *Office de la Semaine Sainte*.

In the original Latin version the hymn begins with a threefold alleluia, which is repeated to the same melody after all 10 stanzas are sung. In addition a single alleluia concludes each of the stanzas. John Mason Neale's translation (*Mediaeval Hymns*, 1851) adheres strictly to the original form, from which the adaptation of *The Lutheran Hymnal* is a departure.

The use of this hymn on Quasimodogeniti Sunday gives opportunity for the worshiper to voice the Gospel (John 20:19-31) in answer to the question raised in the Epistle (1 John 5:4-10), "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The objective text is coupled with an equally dynamic melody composed by Melchior Vulpius, *Gelobi sei Gott*, 1609.