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## Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series

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*Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series*

*(Except for the extended study of the Gospel for Pentecost, 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.)*

**EXAUDI SUNDAY**      **JOHN 15:26—16:4**

Many people suppose that all sins are alike. Yet there is a great difference. Original sin is common to all men in the same degree. Actual sin, however, manifests itself in varying forms as voluntary and involuntary sins, sins of weakness and malicious sins, sins of rashness and dominant sins, sins that are forgiven and the one sin that will not be forgiven. Every sin, small as it may seem to be, is rebellion against God and can be forgiven only through the merits of Jesus. Even those sins which we commit unwittingly, or which we do because we believe we are accomplishing some good thereby, are nevertheless sin. This is the truth Christ points out to us in the Gospel for today. I invite you to follow me, as I talk to you on

*The Error and the Sinfulness of Depending on One's Own Good Intentions*

I shall show you that

- I. Great sins are committed by depending on one's own good intentions
- II. Such sins cannot be excused or justified on the basis of one's own good intentions

**I**

A. Good intentions without a doubt are the mother of countless sins and constitute the main comfort by which men try to calm their conscience and so stifle true repentance and slip ever deeper into sin. In a very short time the apostles were to experience the truth of Christ's words in John 16:2 that "whoever

kills you will think he is offering service to God."

B. During the persecutions of the Christians the Roman emperors regarded them as enemies of the state, of society, of the gods. Liquidating them was meritorious. Heathenism in all its religious practices is woefully sinning against the First Commandment. Yet it is proud of its religion.

C. The Roman Catholic Church has the best of intentions in her teachings on Mariology, veneration of the saints, purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass for the sins of the living and of the dead, but in these and other points she is in error and is misleading her members.

D. In much of Protestantism, too, good intentions are doing untold damage. Many Protestants believe they are building God's house, and working against the enemies of true godliness. Yet they are corrupting God's Word, undermining the church, and fighting against the true servants of Christ. Even some unbelievers in their most bitter attacks on Christ, the Gospel, and the Christians may have the good intention of seeking light, truth, and morality.

E. Also Christians, like the apostles Peter, James, and John, can at times let their good intentions mislead them.

F. This point, now, ought to be clear: no sin is so great, no error so manifest and hurtful, no religious fanaticism so ruinous, no worship service, church, sect, religion or principle so wrong that some men will not

justify them as coming from good intentions and as being a service to God.

## II

A. In verse three of the text Jesus assures His disciples that people who persecute them, though they point to their good intentions, give evidence by their action of their failure to understand the Word of God. They are enemies of God and are caught in the meshes of sin. In spite of their good intentions Christ cannot excuse or justify their sin.

B. Christ does not mean to say that there is no difference whether a man commits sin with malice or with the intention of accomplishing some good. Scriptures distinguish between the sins committed by Pilate, by those who crucified Christ, by the Sodomites, and by Paul. This does not justify the first three, nor does Paul justify himself. Both Christ and Paul maintain that those who sin without knowledge of the Law also are guilty of the Law.

C. Even among those who do evil out of a good intention there is a great difference. Some who have the Word of God willfully resist the Holy Ghost. Their blindness leads them to look upon the greatest crimes as services done in the name of God (John 16:2). The good intention they may have will not excuse them before God. Since the good intention is actually enmity against God's grace in Christ, it will condemn them.

D. Other people know nothing of the Word of God and therefore consider the most horrible sins virtues. But we must not forget what Paul says about the heathen who do not have the written Law, but do have the voice of conscience in their heart. Their conscience will finally condemn them. They will be made to see that what they did with good intention was nothing but horrid sin.

E. Even Christians who accept the Word of God do wrong now and then with good intentions. They do not always let God

guide them in all things. Yet God expects every Christian to hew to the line of His Word and never to detour from it either to the right or to the left. Christians, therefore, have no excuse to offer before God when they act according to their own opinions. May their zeal and devotion be ever so great, they will be condemned for following the wrong leader.

F. Therefore let us realize that good intentions are not the bases on which true worship and the salvation of souls rests. Let us see that the whole Word of God must be the rule and norm of our faith and life, the only lamp for our feet, the only light for our path through life. Then we shall not err. Then we shall always carry the humble prayer of Samuel in our heart, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." God grant this for Jesus' sake.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "If God Had Not Been on Our Side," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 267.

The second verse of the Gradual for this Sunday reads:

I will not leave you comfortless;  
I go, and I will come again to you,  
and your heart shall rejoice.

(John 14:18a, 28a)

The expectant church finds continual comfort in these words of her Lord and is assured that He is on her side. The hymn, "If God Had Not Been on Our Side" voices this confidence of the proper for Exaudi Sunday.

"Wär' Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit" is one of six psalm chorales written by Martin Luther in 1524 (cf. "The Hymn of the Week," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXIII [January 1962]). Basing the text squarely upon Ps. 124, Luther gave us strong verse. The hymn was most likely written for use during the Epiphany cycle. It offered consolation in the days of the Counter-Reformation.

If the melody "Wär' Gott nicht mit uns" appears too difficult, then the hymn may also be sung to the melody "Herr, wie du willst," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 406. However, the original melody, as it appeared in the *Wittenberg Gesangbuch*, 1537, is the stronger tune and is better suited to the text.

## PENTECOST

JOHN 14:23-31

By Robert H. Smith

The eye of faith apprehends that God inaugurated a new order of things by the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit on the first Pentecost. Unbelief says that all things continue as they were, that nothing is new under the sun.

Faith calls Pentecost a new creation; unbelief says it is just another day.

Every vital power or spirit in history strives for concrete and palpable expression. The Jews of Jesus' day had very definite notions concerning the new order which the coming of the Spirit would create, and Pentecost in A. D. 30 just did not measure up to the national expectation.

### I

Pentecost was originally a harvest festival, one of the three great pilgrimage festivals of Israel. When it could no longer be celebrated at the temple after the Roman devastation of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, the feast received a new interpretation and was observed as the festival of the giving of the Law at Sinai.

The attempt is often made to interpret the Christian festival on that later Jewish background. One of the greatest authorities on the background of the New Testament writes:

Philo has no idea that it (Pentecost) represents anything connected with the giving of the Torah. But between him and Luke the step has been taken; for Judaism Pentecost has become the feast of the giving of the Torah, and for the Church it is the day on which the new gift of the Holy

Ghost replaces the Torah as God's supreme gift to man. (Wilfred L. Knox, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge, 1948], p. 81)

As attractive as such a hypothesis may be, there is no evidence that Pentecost was so observed in the days immediately after Easter or in the days when Luke was writing. Furthermore such unsupported guesses obscure the suggestive possibilities of a relationship between harvest and Christian Pentecost.

Pentecost was originally the Jewish festival of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. It was a day of promise of things to come and thanksgiving for what had already been granted. The men converted to the Christ on the first Pentecost, gathered from the far corners of the earth, are the sign and promise of the triumphant march and course of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And the gift of the Spirit is itself a downpayment and first installment of the fullness which will be manifested only when the form of this world passes away.

### II

Vv. 23-31 are an answer to the question, "How is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?" (John 14:22). That question is in turn prompted by the foregoing words of Jesus, who set forth the contrast between the world and the disciples. (Vv. 15-19)

The world cannot know or receive the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), any more than the world could know or receive Jesus (1:10, 11). When Jesus has been crucified, the world will breathe a sigh of relief and see Him no more (14:19). The disciples have begun to believe in Jesus and love Him, and when He is taken away by crucifixion, they will feel bereft, sorrowful, desolate. (14:18)

"In that day" (John 14:20), that eschatological day of the first Easter, the faith and knowledge and sight of the disciples will be confirmed (14:20); for then Jesus will fully

manifest Himself to the disciples as the long-awaited Coming One. (14:21)

Judas, the son of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13), wants to know why Jesus will not show Himself to the world for what He really is. A similar question is put to Jesus at the beginning of the Book of Acts just before the Ascension: "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6; cf. the question of Jesus' brothers in John 7:4)

Both are questions of impatience and annoyance at the secret, silent, subtle coming of the Kingdom, at the scandalous kingship of Jesus, whom so many lightly disregard and disbelieve. When will the Lord step out of His hiddenness and make Himself manifest? "How long, O Lord?"

The question disturbed the primitive church, which looked for the rapid return of Jesus in His open glory. Christians prayed earnestly, "Maranatha," "Come, Lord Jesus!" They longed for Christ to come and manifest His power and dominion. They strained toward the Last Day, the day of God's just Judgment.

We Christians of the 20th century still feel the tension. We beg God for peace and love and justice and wholeness and consolation. We continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

The trouble is that often we, like the disciples to whom Jesus speaks in John 14, would like to have God's gifts on our terms, cut to fit our definitions, plain for every eye to see and behold. We, too, are afflicted with the age-old hankering after a crown without a cross.

### III

Vv. 23, 24 — "Keep My Word." Jesus said, "If anyone keeps My Word, he will never see death" (John 8:51), he "has eternal life" (5:24), he is truly "My disciple" (8:31). Love of Jesus takes the form of keeping His Word, receiving His message in that obedience whose motivating power

is faith and not outward compulsion or threat.

The love of Father and Son for the true disciple will not result in his translation to a starry realm or to Elysian fields beyond the touch of pain and affliction. Instead the promise is given, "We will come to him and make our home with him," right in the midst of this ongoing old and evil age.

"Our home" (μονή). Compare John 14:2, "In My Father's house are many mansions" (KJV) or "rooms" (RSV). Whatever the translation, the Greek is *μοναί*, a common verbal noun of the ordinary μένω, "remain," or "abide."

Luther wrote, "This is the true dwelling of God that is typified in the Old Testament by the ark of the covenant and the temple, namely, the little group of Christians, who believe and confess the Word of Christ" (American ed., 24, 160; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 3:17; Rev. 3:20). Luther paraphrased Jesus' promise, "We will be his daily guest, yes, members of his household and his table companions" (Ibid., p. 158). And he soberly noted, "If God does not come to you and take up residence in you, the devil, with all his angels, dwells in you." (Ibid., p. 164)

Deification, or apotheosis, was the goal of the mystery religions and Gnosticism. It involved ascent to God and removal of the worshiper from his humanity and from material entanglements. Christianity declares the downward movement of God to men and women living and working in history at common tasks. Our God is "the Hound of heaven" doggedly picking up the scent and seeking out every erring, wayward, run-away son.

V. 25 — "While I am still with you" (παρ' ὑμῖν μένων), hinting once again at imminent departure. Throughout the pericope Jesus' words are heavy with His impending death: "I bequeath" (v. 27, last will), "I go away" (v. 28a), "I go to the Father"

(v. 28b), "I will no longer talk much with you" (v. 30), "I do as the Father has commanded Me." (V. 31)

V. 26—But when He is gone, they will not be cast upon their own resources. The Paraclete (ὁ παράκλητος, "Comforter" in KJV, "Counselor" in RSV, and "your Advocate" in NEB), the Holy Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, the only place in the Fourth Gospel where the full phrase occurs), will come.

The noun "Paraclete" was originally used in the sense of "one who is called to the side of, to someone's aid." Thus it is an exact equivalent of the Latin *advocatus*. Some dislike the legal associations of the term "advocate," but from beginning to end the Fourth Gospel has a juristic background. A primary concern is the judgment of God.

Of course, the work of the Spirit is also one of comfort. However, the consolation of the disciples occurs exactly in the midst of condemnation, and if "Comforter" secures recognition of God's boundless mercy, "Advocate" (or "Counselor") secures recognition of the sternness of the issue. (See E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* [London, 1947], p. 469)

In the Scriptures παράκλησις and παρακαλεῖν denote the prophetic exhortation of Christian preaching (Acts 2:40; 1 Cor. 14:3). And the words also refer to consolation, especially that which the Messiah will establish in the last times (Is. 40:1; Matt. 5:4; Luke 2:25). The work of the Paraclete is to exhort men through the preaching of the Gospel to receive that consolation which is in Jesus. (See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [London, 1955], pp. 385 f.)

The Paraclete will stand in contrast to those pseudoprophets who will come and teach and lead many astray by falsely claiming that they speak in Christ's name, that is, on Christ's authority (Matt. 7:21; Mark 13:21). As the Word of Jesus is the Word of the Father (John 14:24), so the authority

of the Spirit is that of the Father and the Son.

The Paraclete will teach (διδάξει) and bring to mind (ὑπομνήσει). The two functions must be taken as closely together as possible. The Spirit does not stir a man to look within himself and discover there the knowledge of his heavenly origin, as in the Platonic doctrine of remembrance. Nor does the Spirit bring new teaching over and above what has been manifested in Jesus. He makes present what is in Jesus. "Jesus is the Way in which the disciples must be led by the Spirit, and He is also the Truth to which they must be guided" (Hoskyns, p. 486). "Remembrance" is not merely mental meditation but the actualization in the present of the eschatological gift which entered this age in Jesus.

Luther wrote, "The Holy Spirit does not present the trifles and hocuspocus of men, but great and serious matters, namely, Christ with His gifts. . . . so that you will know [Him] ever better and see how through [Him] you are delivered from sin and death." (American ed., 24, 177, 175)

The Paraclete is no human spirit welling up from within the Christian but is given from above by the Father. He comes, intruding, invading, opening a new age and a new world, marked by that enmity with the old world which is peace with God. The Father sends the Spirit, and in the Spirit's activity the eschatological act of God speeds on, and the revelatory work of Jesus is continued.

V. 27—The ordinary farewell in Jesus' day was simply "Peace," that is, "I wish you peace." Jesus removes peace from the optative and the future and makes it declarative and present: "I bequeath peace to you." It is a strange and novel kind of peace and wholeness. It is established by a death ("bequeath"), and it is the Christian's possession precisely in the midst of assault and persecution and maiming by the world.

V. 28—Jesus speaks as the Servant and contrasts the present and the future. In Luther's words, "Now He is a poor, wretched, suffering and dying Christ; but with the Father He will be a great, glorious, living and almighty Lord over all creatures." (American ed., 24, 190)

The disciples' love, like their faith, is incomplete and shaky. They do not yet understand the significance of Jesus' death.

V. 29—That significance will come later and will be Spirit-given. (Cf. John 13:19; Mark 13:23)

V. 30—Jesus faces a contest with Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 16:11; cf. Eph. 2:3; Matt. 4:8), who is the lord of sinners but has no claim on Jesus. (Cf. John 8:46)

Luther here puts these words into Jesus' mouth: "The devil is approaching. . . . I must submit to him. He is wicked and angry. He wants to devour Me. But he will find that this will tear his belly apart; for he has no jurisdiction over Me, and I owe him nothing. I have not deserved this. Yet he assails and kills Me out of vile and venomous hatred. But he will pay for it." (American ed., 24, 191)

V. 31—Jesus goes as the Father commands. It is God's will that Jesus be the suffering Servant and redeem the world through the cross. By His obedient death He sets men free from their bondage to Satan. (John 8:31-34)

*The Peace and Consolation of God's Spirit*

- I. The most common error in the world is optimistically to imagine that genuine peace is within the realm of human possibilities—that it can be achieved by political or psychological means. But genuine peace comes not from within but from above, from God the Father.
- II. Even we Christians tend to believe that God should act powerfully and establish a peace which is apparent to every eye.

But God the Father gives His gifts in the Crucified One, and the sign of God's peace is the cross.

- III. Peace has been created by Christ's departure. But the Spirit grants us God's peace and consolation by making Jesus together with His cross present to us. Attachment to this present world and the disinclination to accept Jesus and His cross keep men from entering God's new world of peace and consolation. But those who love not the world but God will be granted access to a better world, which they enter even now, although the old world continues for a time.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 224.

At the close of the *semester Domini* of the church year (Exaudi and Pentecost) we do well to sing two of Luther's hymns. In the year 1524 he wrote the following two hymns on the work of the Holy Spirit: "Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott" and "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist," and produced the translation "Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist."

The first stanza of our hymn of the week is an adaptation of a Latin antiphon, found as early as the 11th century. This antiphon reads:

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium,  
et tui amoris in eis ignem accende:  
qui per diversitatem linguarum cunctarum  
gentes in unitate fidei congregasti.*

Luther's first stanza is an adaptation of the German version of this antiphon from the *Crailsheim Schulordnung*, 1480. The second and third stanzas are Luther's creation.

The hymn immediately became popular in Germany. Hymnologist Koch reports that Münzer and his army sang this hymn on

May 25, 1525, before going into battle at Frankenhausen during the Peasants' War.

The hymn vigorously supports the theme for Whitsunday, as it is expressed in the Proper Preface:

. . . Who ascended above the heavens and, sitting on the right hand, poured out on this day the Holy Spirit, as He had promised, upon the chosen disciples; whereat the whole earth rejoices with exceeding joy. . . .

The melody "Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott" is found in the *Crailsheim Schlordnung* of 1480, and it appeared together with Luther's text in *Eyn Enchiridion* (Erfurt, 1524).

## TRINITY SUNDAY

JOHN 3:1-15

Some people believe that one must know the exact day, hour, and minute when rebirth takes place. Though many reject this possibility, they still do not understand what the truth concerning rebirth is. One group supposes that when a person has been reborn through Baptism in infancy, he necessarily must be a reborn Christian in adult life. Another group espouses the opinion that people have experienced rebirth when they turn away from gross sins and vices and lead honorable lives. Even some of us are not on the right track when we imagine that we are giving proof of our rebirth merely by ridiculing and rejecting the heterodox for their false views on rebirth. Battling error with error inflicts great harm on the kingdom of God. It is therefore necessary for us to let the Bible tell us what rebirth actually is. On the basis of the Gospel for today I shall discuss

### *The Important Teaching of Rebirth*

I shall point out

#### I. The need for rebirth

#### II. The nature of rebirth

#### III. The way rebirth is effected in us

##### I

A. In vv. 3 and 4 Christ does not say merely that it is good, desirable, and salutary to have experienced rebirth. His words are very sharp. Whoever is not reborn, He insists, does not belong in the kingdom of God, has not even "seen" it, is still a lost sinner. Christ emphasizes this fact with a fourfold "verily."

B. The word "flesh" (v. 6) points to every human being conceived and born in sin. By natural birth we are all filled with darkness, blindness, and enmity against God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). Though some men have a kindly heart and possess many praiseworthy characteristics and virtues, before God they are ungodly and not spiritual. All men, therefore, without exception need rebirth.

C. The need for rebirth becomes clearer when we look upon the man to whom Christ spoke the words of v. 3. He is Nicodemus, a circumcized Jew, a leader in Israel, a strict Pharisee, a learned man well versed in Scripture, held in high esteem in the Sanhedrin. He did not repudiate Christ but called Him a rabbi and a teacher come from God. Everyone could think, "If he won't go to heaven, who will?"

D. Yet Christ closes heaven before him and says that if he is not reborn, his knowledge, virtues, and works, his holiness, righteousness, piety, and experience, will damn him forever.

E. Here Christ is holding a warning before our eyes. You may have been reborn in Baptism, you may have outwardly joined the church, you may hear the Word of God diligently, know the whole truth of God, cherish and defend it, you may be considered an outstanding saint, and yet you may be shut out from the kingdom of God—if you do not now have a heart filled by the Holy Spirit. For God looks upon the heart.



## II

A. What the word "rebirth" means Christ makes clear in the final verses of the text (vv. 14-16) when He defines it as true *faith* in our hearts. This faith is not a dead, empty opinion of the truth of the Gospel but a living, active power that changes our mind and renews our whole being. It makes us new creatures. It makes us think and judge according to the Word. It makes us willing to suffer for the Word, even die for it, if necessary.

B. In how many of us has the Word of God, the divine fruitful seed of rebirth, blossomed forth? Some of us hear the Word, but it makes no impression on us. For some of us the Gospel is not the power that saves all who believe in it. Some of us consider ourselves to be Christian because we happen to be in the company of Christians.

C. Wake up and seek seriously the jewel of salvation. Outward improvement which may have taken place is useless; it cannot save. Remember Christ's insistence on rebirth. (V. 3)

## III

A. No man can give himself the necessary rebirth. He cannot do this anymore than he could have given himself his natural birth. Christ points out a man's impotence in this respect in v. 8. According to Christ's words, the new spiritual birth is effected only by the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments. In the text Christ points to Baptism as the means through which we enter the kingdom of grace (Luther).

B. The Word of God, the teaching of the Gospel, is the only means that works rebirth (cf. James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). We cannot effect rebirth, but we are under obligation to read and hear the Word attentively and to do nothing to keep the Holy Spirit out of our heart.

C. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves to see whether we have that faith which

cleanses the heart and brings forth the fruits of faith. (Cf. 2 Peter 1:9, 10; John 3:3)

*The Hymn of the Week*: "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 233.

Authorship of the hymn has been ascribed to Charlemagne, St. Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and Rhabanus Maurus. While it can be shown that it is not the work of St. Ambrose or of Charles the Great, the available evidence is too scanty to determine the authorship with certainty.

Fifty-one translations from Latin into English attest both the popularity and importance of this office hymn from the 10th century. Luther's German chorale "Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist" is a complete and faithful version of the original. *The Lutheran Hymnal* offers two translations: "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest" (No. 233) by Edward Caswall, 1849, alt., and "Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid" (No. 236) by John Dryden, 1693, alt. The former is the more faithful rendering and includes the doxological stanza which later manuscripts also add to the Latin version.

The hymn tune "Komm, Gott Schöpfer" is based on an ancient plainsong, Mode VIII, acclaimed the most ancient melody of those sung to this day. Martin Luther offered the rhythmical version in 1529. The harmonization in *The Lutheran Hymnal* remains true to Mode VIII and helps make this hymn one of the purest jewels, both textually and musically, in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 16:19-31

Holy Scripture describes the Christian church as a field in which wheat and weeds grow side by side, as a group of wedding guests in which some are not wearing clothes fit for the occasion, as a fisherman's net that contains good and bad fish. The history of

the church in the past bears out the truth of these pictures. Today 2 Peter 3:3,4 is being fulfilled. Many who have been baptized have turned from faith to unbelief. A reformation seems to be impossible. Yet the end of the world is drawing nearer. The angels of God are standing ready to gather in the harvest and the countdown is under way. Where shall we find light and certainty in this dark hour? Christ gives us the answer in the parable of the rich man in hell. Here He lets us see this truth:

*If a Man Ignores the Word of God, Nothing in Heaven and Earth Can Save Him*

This truth rests on these two points:

- I. Nothing is so certain as the Word of God
- II. Nothing is so powerful as the Word of God

#### I

A. The rich man had not anticipated hell as his future, permanent home. When he found himself there after his death, he was shocked and saw that God was his enemy and that he was God's enemy. His appeal for help was too late. Not even his appeal to send someone to warn his brothers on earth was accepted. God's answer is recorded in vv. 29-31. Nothing aside from His Word can save.

B. Many people today entertain the same thought as the rich man in hell. Faith in the mere Word of God seems so out of place for an enlightened man, so unreasonable. If there is a God and men are to believe in Him, something extraordinary must happen. The dead must arise and tell them about heaven and hell, or angels must appear and inform them what God's will concerning them is, or better still, God Himself ought to come in person and let each one know what He expects of him. If one of these appearances should take place, they feel everyone would rush to be saved. All these ideas are nothing more than wrong ideas of man's perverted heart. The truth that nothing is so

certain as God's Word (v. 31; cf. Is. 8:19, 20), stands supreme.

C. Great, undeniable miracles were performed by Moses, the prophets, the apostles, and Christ. Yet Pharaoh remained obdurate in spite of the plagues. A few days after God came down on Mt. Sinai amidst thunder and lightning Israel was dancing around the golden calf. The Pharisees hardened their hearts against the miracles of Christ and the apostles. The Jewish leaders decided to crucify Christ after He had resurrected Lazarus. Judas witnessed numerous miracles, yet he betrayed Christ. The Sanhedrin was not impressed by Christ's resurrection. The miracles themselves saved no one.

D. Realize that nothing can save those who will not let God's Word save them. God's Word is not a fantastic twist of the mind or a hollow dream. It brings us incontrovertible certainty. It tells us what we are to believe. It is an inexhaustible fountain, welling up a continuous stream of truth with clarity. It gives the wisest counsel to everyone who seeks it. It is the throne of mercy that dispenses forgiveness and peace. In it we have "a more sure word of prophecy." (2 Peter 1:19)

E. For the salvation of our souls we can depend on nothing outside of God's Word. Our heart, our reason, the mere testimony of men will all leave us in the lurch. God alone is reliable. So is His Word (Ps. 33:4). That is the light, the staff, the fortress, the weapon, the compass we need to take us out of time into a blessed eternity. Hold to that Word!

#### II

A. It is the eternal, unalterable will of God to take those people to heaven who repent of their sins and in faith accept the whole redemptive work of Christ. This embraces more than instruction, warning, and admonition. It requires a means that will open men's eyes to sin, rouse them out of spiritual death, fill them with childlike faith

in Christ, fashion them into new men who love God and serve their neighbor.

B. Money does not furnish this means as we see in the parable of the rich man. The Word of God alone possesses the power to drive out sin and to bring in real life. In the beginning it was the power of God's Word that created all things. This same Word is written in the Bible. Wherever it is read and preached, it has the power to make saints out of sinners. It is the tree of life whose fruit preserves us from eternal death. It is the stairway on which we walk up to heaven. It is the key to heaven by which God enables us to open the heavenly Jerusalem.

C. Let nothing take the Word of God away from you! Nor be satisfied in merely possessing it. Do not be like the rich man in hell. Follow the call of your Savior in the Gospel: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

*The Hymn of the Week:* "We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 231.

In singing the hymn "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist," on the First Sunday after Trinity we express our need of the Holy Spirit in holy living. We pray in the Collect for the day:

... grant us the help of Thy grace that in

keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. . . .

The Holy Gospel (Luke 16:19-31) should cause us to invoke the Holy Spirit, the "most precious Light," "sacred Love," and "highest Comfort," that we may cling to our Savior to the end.

This hymn by Martin Luther first appeared in *Geystliche gesangk Buchlyn*, Wittenberg, 1524. He based the first stanza upon a sentence hymn, "Nu bitten wir," which was in popular use in Germany before the Reformation. Stanzas 2, 3, and 4 are Luther's original composition. The hymn has the distinction of belonging to the group of chorales concluding with *Kyrieleis*. In his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottis Diensts* of 1526 Luther refers to this chorale as the type of German hymn that may be sung (by the choir) between the Epistle and Gospel. "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist" was soon sung on Whitsunday and at other times: for Holy Communion, the ordination of ministers, and before the sermon.

The melody is from the 14th century and appears with Luther's text in 1524. The stately and vigorous character of the melody is undeniable. An improvement in the translation of the last phrase of each stanza would aid the rhythmical coincidence between text and melody.