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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 the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 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 by Prof. Robert R. Bergt, St. Louis, Mo.)

#### THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 7:11-17

By Robert H. Smith

##### I

Death is both universal fate and perpetual riddle. It holds unquestioned sway and has all men in thrall sooner or later. It is a question mark writ large over every human life and achievement. It stands at the end of every human road and mocks the puny efforts of men to reduce its potency or escape its grasp. There are no loopholes in the law of death.

Optimists would have us believe that nature is in continual process of replenishment and growth, bursting with vitality and surging forward with ever new life. Yet death rather than life seems to be the fundamental law of all of nature. Some time ago a scientist told the story of his expedition into a side valley of the Amazon basin. He was in a lightly-built canoe of the kind used by natives. Silently gliding along he saw a llama quenching its thirst at the river's edge. Without warning, a leopard sprang on the peaceful beast and the two animals were locked in battle in the shallow waters. Suddenly they fell apart and both let out a scream of terror. Shoals of small fish with razorsharp teeth had come up from the depths of the river and attacked both fight-

ing animals. Within a quarter of an hour they had stripped the flesh from both of them and an uncanny stillness lay over the dark water. The scientist could not suppress the awful thought that if his canoe were smashed against a rock, he too would share the same dread fate. Poets and other sensitive persons claim that they can almost hear the roar of greedy, all-devouring death.

As common as death is, we do not accept it as a merely biological fact. And the death of a human being is fundamentally different from that of an animal or a vegetable. We know that we must die, that the span allotted to us must end. And we know that we deserve to die and are distressed by the thought of death.

The thought of death is oppressive and looms large on the horizon of contemporary history. One of the currently popular sick jokes has a man inquire of a little boy, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Without hesitation the little fellow answers, "Alive." The threat of wholesale atomic oblivion hangs ominously over our world. State and federal agencies have taken it upon themselves to teach people how to defend themselves against nuclear attack. With proper precautions we are told that we can be one of the 97 out of 100 who need not be killed by fallout. Thirty years ago the government had a slogan: "Two chickens in every pot." Today it is "You can survive."

The thought of death has worked in diverse manners on the minds of men. Hamlet, the original melancholy Dane, prince of Denmark, debated with himself the possibility of escape by suicide to an eternal rest and sleep. His famed soliloquy begins bravely enough, praising death, but further on it



becomes uncertain. In the end Hamlet prefers known and present sorrow to the unknown eternity beyond. And another prince, Prince Myshkin, hero of Dostoevski's *The Idiot*, pondered life and death. He pictured a man standing cramped and crowded on the uncertain precipice of a tiny ledge over the pounding surf of ocean breaking on the surrounding rocks. Life on that ledge, joyless and horrible as it may be, was preferable in his mind to the awful void of death.

On the other hand, man's knowledge of his eventual demise has been called the chief factor in his efforts to build lasting institutions and create an enduring art. A stronger and less introspective prince than Hamlet or Myshkin was Philip of Macedon. He had a slave to whom he gave strict and specific instructions to enter his quarters each morning and interrupt whatever he was doing by announcing aloud, "Remember, Philip, that you must die!" It had the same effect as applying the lash to a brace of lethargic oxen.

The Christian posture in the face of death is not melancholy. We believe that a new reality and a new possibility has dawned in Jesus of Nazareth, that death has met its Master, that God has visited and redeemed His people.

## II

V. 11. ἐν τῷ ἔξῃς (sc. χρόνῳ) means "afterward." Some MSS read ἐν τῇ ἔξῃς (sc. ἡμέρᾳ) "on the next day." Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10) is an extremely long walk from Nain (7:11-17), a whole day's march. Nain is usually equated with the modern hamlet of Nein, located on the north slope of the hill of Moreh, commanding a view of the valley of Jezreel and the plains of Esdraelon, which separate Galilee from Samaria. Nain was therefore only two miles from Shunem, about which more later.

The chronological note is probably intended only to tie this and the preceding

story together and present them as double preparation for the Baptist's question (Luke 7:19).

Jesus was traveling with a considerable entourage. "His disciples" designates a large and indeterminate group extending much beyond the Twelve. Besides His adherents there was a crowd of uncommitted people glad to be in the presence of a striking person and happy to have their day filled with novelties and the unexpected. Jesus and His troupe meet another and grimmer procession. Death is the ruler of one, and the Author of life leads the other.

V. 12. As Jesus neared the city, a funeral procession came toward Him on the same road. Moving slowly to the dirgelike cacophony of cymbal and flute, accompanied by the shrieks of professional mourners, it cut a pitiful figure. The scene was particularly heartrending because the dead man was a widow's only son.

If death seems to be the last thing, premature death seems to be the last straw. That an only child dies before his time is particularly embittering. To be childless was taken by the Hebrews as a sign of God's particular displeasure. Mourning for an only child is parabolic of the profoundest tragedy and grief. The term that most often recurs in descriptions of the lamentation and weeping of parents bereaved of an only child is the word "bitter" (Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech. 12:10).

Abraham's faith was the more awe-inspiring, since he stood ready to sacrifice his only son (Heb. 11:17). Jephthah's vow was the more grievous, because his daughter was his only child (Judg. 11:34). And Elisha's deed was the more joyous, since the resuscitated boy was his mother's only son (2 Kings 4; cf. 1 Kings 17).

V. 13. ὁ κύριος ἐσπλαγνίσθη. Because Jesus is the Lord, ὁ κύριος, He is not dismayed in face of death. He is the Master of every



situation, no matter how desperate. Because He is ὁ κτίσις, Lord and Creator, He is never at a dead end or in a blind alley. He always has room to act.

And the Mighty One has compassion. In the present case Jesus' compassion is not called forth by faith as in the story of the healing of the centurion's child (Luke 7: 2-10). He is filled to overflowing with divine pity.

First Jesus turns to the grieving mother and, oblivious of the crowd and commotion, speaks a simple and matter-of-fact command: "Stop your crying!" (Cf. Rev. 5:5)

V. 14. Jesus then stopped the pallbearers in their tracks by laying His hand on the bier or coffin. Then followed neither lecture nor sermon. Jesus did not bother to speak to the bearers or the mother, explaining His intent or perhaps remarking on their faith or the lack of it. Nor did He lift up His eyes and voice to His Father in fervent suppliant's prayer. Rather He directed a command to the dead man, addressing him with regal authority, as though he merely slept: "Young man, I command you to get up!" (Cf. Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54)

V. 15. The dead man sat bolt upright (ἀνεκάνθησεν, cf. Acts 9:40) and began to exercise that faculty unique to human beings, the power of speech, as a sure sign that he had been fully revived.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," said Job. Here is an instance in which death had taken away, and Jesus gave back, restoring the only child to his mother. And they all said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

V. 16. φόβος or numinous awe is the regular human reaction to the divine action. The deeds of the invisible God make a visible impression on all who witness His mighty acts. When God acts, people stand in fear and awe and are amazed. And finally

they either glorify and praise God, or they kick against the goads.

Here the bystanders glorified God, as did the shepherds after seeing the infant Jesus (Luke 2:20); as did the man cured of paralysis (5:25) and the crowd who witnessed the deed (5:26); as did the blind man healed by the word and will of Jesus (18:43).

Awed by the victory of Jesus' word over the power and thrall of death and hades, they were driven to conclude that God had raised up in history "a great prophet." Jesus was held by the common people to be "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Luke 24:19; Matt. 16:14; 21:11,46; Mark 6:15). The religious authorities in Palestine thought that Jesus' unorthodox behavior amply refuted the extravagant claims made for the man from Nazareth (Luke 7:39).

The people at Nain evidently did not think Jesus was *the* prophet, promised by Moses (Deut. 18:15) for the last times (see O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], pp. 13—50). But Jesus' action most probably evoked immediate memories of ancient Elijah and Elisha, both of whom raised up the stricken sons of women. Shunem, where Elisha had worked his marvel was a scant few thousand yards from Nain.

The citizens of Nain may well have felt that the ancient prophets suffered by comparison with Jesus. Elijah had stretched himself upon the child three times and cried aloud to the Lord. Elisha in an elaborate and almost liturgical ritual prayer, lay upon the child—mouth to mouth, hands to hands, eyes to eyes—got up, walked about, returned, stretched out again. Then the child revived. But at Nain Jesus simply said, "I command you to get up!"

To call Jesus a prophet is an astounding confession. It was believed that prophecy had died out and that no prophets would arise again until the last days, the days imme-



diately before the end of all things. The resurrection of the widow's son served notice that the eschatological era was dawning and that Jesus was, at the very least, one of the final prophets announcing the end and extending God's last offer to men to repent and be saved.

Surely, the eyewitnesses concluded, "God has visited His people." In modern Greek *ἐπισκέπτομαι* is used of a doctor's visit, and the word was sometimes used that way also in ancient times. In the Old Testament the word is especially significant when God is subject. Then it means that God intervenes in the life of an individual or of Israel and by a concrete act of rescue or of punishment demonstrates anew that He is Lord of history. Visitation became a messianic designation when it was joined with redemption and the Dayspring from on high (Luke 1:68, 78; H. W. Beyer, in G. Kittel, ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, II, 595 to 602).

V. 17. The event occurred on the border between Galilee and Samaria, but was too astounding to be contained. News of Jesus' deed — and speculation concerning His person — spread to Judea and came at length to the attention also of John the Baptist.

### III

When John the Baptist sent disciples to question Jesus concerning His identity and mission, Jesus answered,

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at Me. (Luke 7:22, 23)

Jesus had opened His ministry by reading the very similar words of Isaiah 61 in the synagog of Nazareth (Luke 4:18, 19). Jesus had been anointed by the Spirit of God to serve God by inaugurating the last times. By giving a garland instead of ashes

— the oil of gladness instead of mourning to the widow of Nain — Jesus signified to men that God is indeed acting as He had promised, that death, disease, and debility are being met by a superior power and rolled back.

#### *The Dead Are Raised Up*

- I. Your fate and mine is mirrored forth in the widow's son.
  - A. Death is universal and our own demise is inescapable.
  - B. We feel that death — especially premature death — is tragic and crushing; it calls God into question and shakes our faith.
  - C. Nevertheless we know also that we deserve to die.
- II. By the grace of God in Jesus you and I will live beyond death and can live in joy before death.
  - A. Jesus comforted the widow — not by sympathy alone or words of wisdom — nor by assuring her that her son would live in memory.
  - B. With divine, invincible compassion, He raised her son from the dead.
  - C. Jesus' deed was a sign, discovering Him as the One in whom God's new world is inbreaking, and pointing forward to His own resurrection and beyond to the final death of death.
  - D. Our lives need not be melancholy nor merely humanly heroic; by faith in Jesus, in whom God's compassion has visited men, we live and we die joyfully and without dread.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "The Will of God Is Always Best," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 517.

In *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Luther D. Reed suggests as the theme for the third cycle of Sundays after Trinity (XII—XVIII): Christian faith in action manifested by works of



love and service. The propers for this Sunday remind the Christian that his life is surrounded by love (Collect) and that *in via* he experiences the comforting and life-giving power of Christ (Gospel). No matter what tribulations confront the man in Christ (Epistle), he is sustained by the mercy of God (Introit). Let us give thanks to God in all His glory (Gradual).

A thoroughly suitable hymn for this theme is "The Will of God Is Always Best," commonly ascribed to Albert, Margrave of Brandenburg-Culmbach and Prince of Bayreuth (1522—1557). Albert's father, Margrave Casimir, died when his son was eight and the young prince received his education at the court of his uncle, Margrave George of Brandenburg, one of the signers of the Augsburg Confession. Turbulent and restless, Albert's adult life was that of a soldier of fortune. He fought for Emperor Charles V against France in 1543 and against the Schmalkald League in 1547, shifted to the French side, and defected to the Emperor again when the latter was willing to recognize him as Prince of Bayreuth. He led his forces to defeat at Sievershausen, Brunswick, Schweinfurt, and Eulenberg in 1553—1554, was placed under the ban of the Empire for his depredations in Franconia, fled to France, and entered the service of the Emperor's enemies; after being allowed to plead for the return of his lands at the Diet of Regensburg in 1556, he died, repentant and firm in the faith, at the residence of his brother-in-law, Margrave Charles II of Baden at Pfortzheim.

The fourth stanza is a later addition. The tune was composed by Claude de Sermisy in 1529 and was originally used for a French lovesong, "Il me suffit de tous mes maux." Its high quality, despite its origin, is attested by the fact that Johann Sebastian Bach incorporated it in four major works; the harmonization in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is not wholly by Bach.

## THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 14:1-11

In our country a great number of people insist on a legalistic observance of Sunday as a day of rest. At the same time our own city is a sad example of the most flagrant Sabbath desecration imaginable. Statistics show that one half of our citizens do not attend church on Sunday. They dishonor God and worship at the altars of liquor, pleasure, and the lodge. God has been patient with our country and our city. Yet He has let us feel His displeasure and wrath in the horrors of the Civil War. Blessed is everyone who sorrows over this evil and is a true Lot in this modern Sodom (cf. 2 Tim. 2:19). Even among those who hold the Sabbath day in high regard there is a great difference. Some do observe it in the right way, others in a wrong way. Since all of you, no doubt, do not want to desecrate the Sabbath day, let me talk to you on the basis of our text on

### *The False and the Right Way of Keeping the Sabbath Day*

- I. The Pharisaic, legalistic way
- II. The Christian, evangelical way

#### I

A. The text for today gives us a graphic picture of the Pharisaic, legalistic way of keeping the Sabbath day. Instead of listening to the Word of God spoken by Christ, lawyers and Pharisees watched Him to see what He would do to the palsied man they had brought into the house of the chief of the Pharisees. For them a work of love like the healing of the palsied man was a desecration of the Sabbath, but to despise and reject the Word of God proclaimed by Christ was not. They believed they had sanctified the Sabbath by merely hearing the reading of Moses and the prophets, by mouthing some prayers, and by abstaining from work.



B. The generation of Pharisees like these has not died out. There are too many in America who desecrate the Sabbath. Some like the Jews condemn works of love done on a Sunday and consider it a sin to work on a Sabbath. Others think they have committed a great sin if they miss a church service, not because they have neglected to hear the Word of God but because they consider attending church as a good deed. It is immaterial to many whether they hear the true or the adulterated Word of God. A third group goes to churches where the true Word of God is preached. These people listen attentively and, like the Pharisees of old, are stirred and shaken by what they hear. But they do not change. They hang on to their old sins. Enmity, hatred, wrath, ambition, pride, greed, dishonesty, drunkenness, lust go on unabated. On Sunday they present a pious exterior, yet sin is the dominant force in their lives.

C. All these people are hypocritical, Pharisaic, legalistic desecrators of the Sabbath who are fulfilling the letter of the Law, but are denying the very essence of the Law. Though they be celebrating a Sabbath, they are not sanctifying it, but are breaking it.

## II

A. The Gospel for today also shows us that the Sabbath may be observed in a Christian, evangelical way. Christ no doubt had been in a synagogue before He went into the house of the chief Pharisee. He went there to lay the Word of God on the hearts of the guests, to testify to the truth, to admonish and discipline them in love and so bring them to faith and stimulate to true Christian living. At the same time He performed a work of love and healed a palsied man. In these few words the text draws a complete picture of a true Christian, evangelical observance of the Sabbath Day.

B. An evangelically minded Christian follows Christ's example. He is not bound by

the Old Testament Sabbath law, Col. 2: 16, 17. He will not work on Sunday unless necessity demands it, nor will he lightly neglect church attendance on the Lord's Day. He will not consider the right observance of Sunday as a burden, but will look upon it as a most precious privilege. He will not give up the Lord's Day for any treasure the world might offer.

C. The Christian, evangelical observance of the Sabbath day consists primarily in reading, hearing, and meditating on God's Word. A Sunday without the Word of God and worship is no Sunday for a Christian. His interest lies in hearing the pure, unadulterated Word of God. He wants to grow in knowledge, in faith, in love, in hope, in humility, in patience and in all Christian virtues. Therefore he prays God that he might not hear His Word in vain. He diligently searches Scripture to be sure that what he hears in sermons is actually written in the Bible. If the Word of God touches him to the quick, he does not flare up, but he realizes how this particular Word instructs and comforts him. He is ready to follow Christ's example in doing works of love on Sunday. He knows that taking care of children, visiting and ministering to the sick, and helping the unfortunate is not a desecration of the Sabbath, but a work of love well-pleasing to God.

D. A Christian will not use a Sunday to sit among scorners nor go with the world to worship at the altars of lust and vanity. He will enjoy God in nature or seek pleasure and companionship in the company of fellow Christians and insist that conversation and entertainment be carried on in the fear and to the glory of God. He will not ignore invitations of the children of the world, if he can company with them without participating in their sin and if he has the opportunity to witness of his faith in Christ.

E. If the observance of the Sabbath is carried on in a Christian, evangelical way,



every Sunday becomes a glorious day that throws a radiant light on every other day and points to the eternal Sabbath in the life to come.

F. May God help all of us to keep a true Sabbath here that we may enjoy the Sabbath of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "The Church's One Foundation," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 473.

This is the second hymn of English origin to be included in the "Hymn of the Week" plan. Universally popular, it is especially suited to the Epistle for this Sunday, with its stress upon the eagerness with which Christians should maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The author, Samuel John Stone (1839—1900), a Church of England priest, was inspired to write the hymn by Archbishop Robert Gray's valiant defense of the historic faith of the church against the heretical teachings of Bishop John William Colenso (1814—1883). The hymn went through three stages in its development: First, a seven-stanza version published in 1866; then, a five-stanza version published two years later; finally, a ten-stanza version developed for processional use in the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Salisbury in 1885, of which *The Lutheran Hymnal* reproduces the first five stanzas. It has been translated into Latin twice (as *Qui ecclesiam instauravit* by T. G. Godfrey-Faussett in 1878 and as *Nobis unum est fundamen* by E. Marshall in 1882), as well as into several other languages.

The tune "Aurelia," by Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810—1876), was originally written for "The Voice That Breathed o'er Eden" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 622). It has also been widely used with the English version of the great medieval hymn of Bernard of Morlas, *Hora novissima* (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, Nos. 605, 613, 614, 448). The tune is one of Wesley's best, with its more consistent diatonic progression and greater rhythmic variety. Another happy combina-

tion of text and tune, suggested by *Songs of Praise*, is the use of "Herzlich tut mich" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, Nos. 172, 264, 258, 269) with "The Church's One Foundation."

#### THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 22:34-46

The entire Old and the New Testament contains two major doctrines, the Law and the Gospel. These doctrines are inseparable. The Law cannot achieve its purpose without the Gospel, and the Gospel cannot reach its goal without the Law. But although these two doctrines are indissolubly connected, each serves a different function. Whoever does not understand the separate and distinct function of each one of these two doctrines, lacks a basic understanding of the Christian faith. The mingling of Law and Gospel is the source of all error in Christendom. Thanks be to God for giving Luther to the church. In his preaching, teaching and writing and in the Confessions of our church the difference between Law and Gospel is clearly set forth, so that everyone can come to a clear understanding of and embrace the only way to salvation. Since in our church some do not clearly understand what the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is and are confused about the way to salvation, I shall show you today on the basis of our text

#### *The Folly of Seeking Salvation Through the Law and Not Alone Through the Gospel*

This is foolish because

- I. It is vain to seek salvation through the Law, for
- II. Salvation is found only through the Gospel of Christ.

#### I

A. In the paragraph preceding our text Christ had silenced the Sadducees on their foolish question concerning the resurrection



of the body. The Pharisees, vv. 34-36, however, thought He would have no answer for their question. Christ foiled them also, vv. 37-40. All those present undoubtedly felt that the supposedly unanswerable question had actually been answered. For since the love of God and the love of the neighbor are a summary of the whole Law, the commandment enjoining love necessarily is the greatest, highest, and most prominent of all commandments.

B. We would be very much in error to suppose that Christ intended merely to put the Pharisees to shame. His purpose was to show them the folly of seeking salvation through the Law. If one could avoid all evil and do only what is right, salvation could be possible through the Law. But vv. 37 and 39 show how impossible the avoiding of the one and the doing of the other is. Where love fails, the greatest of the commandments has been broken.

C. Where is the man who loves God with all his heart, all his soul, and all his mind? Such a man will have to be pleased with everything that pleases God, be displeased with whatever displeases God; love the good, because God loves it; hate the evil, because God hates it; always desire God's company, find his greatest joy only in God (even when he must make great sacrifices), and continue to love God without interruption.

D. The Law also demands that each one love his neighbor as himself. No one has any difficulty in loving himself. He does this automatically and genuinely. He plans no evil for himself, but always a benefit, no matter what the cost might be. Only he loves his neighbor as himself who loves him as uprightly, fervently, and constantly as he loves himself; he protects his neighbor from harm and seeks that which is advantageous to him, and if necessary, is ready to give his life for his neighbor.

E. Where are the people who love God and the neighbor according to vv. 37 and 39?

Though there is much talk in our day about expressing love through organizations and institutions financed through funds raised by giving dances and dinners with entertainment, measured by the Word of God, this love is nothing more than the crassest kind of selfishness.

F. Can at least the true Christian say that he loves God with all his heart, soul, and mind, and the neighbor as himself? Enthusiasts in our country maintain they actually love with this kind of love. However, this is the height of blindness and insanity. The flame of true love to God and the neighbor, even to the enemy, has begun to glow in the hearts of all true Christians. But where are the Christians who can claim that nothing but the love of God dwells in their heart and that their whole life has been one long continuous service of the neighbor? When the Christian, even the most holy one, examines himself according to the commandment of love, he must confess the words of David in Ps. 143:2.

G. If God is to judge man according to the Law, He will have to judge him according to the love that he has, for love is the fulfilling of the Law. If there were no other doctrine in the Bible besides the Law, no man could be saved. Therefore it is so foolish, yea, insane, to seek salvation in the Law.

## II

A. Eternal thanks be to God because that which the human being needs for his salvation is found in the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, vv. 41-46. Through these words Jesus wanted to open the eyes of the blind Pharisees. They had a false idea of the Christ prophesied by the prophets. They thought He would be a mere man, set up a glorious kingdom, and make the Jewish nation the leading nation in the world. Therefore Christ showed the Pharisees that the promised Messiah, though David's Son, was David's Lord, not a mere man, but the



eternal Son of God Himself. His kingdom then could not be a worldly kingdom. It would have to be the divine, heavenly, eternal kingdom in which alone salvation could be found.

B. As our love to God and to the neighbor is the summary of the Law, so Christ's love to us is the summary of the Gospel. Since we must hang our heads in shame when we hear the question, "Did you keep the Law?" we can lift them up with joy upon hearing the words, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" and glory in the words of Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. No one can pluck salvation away from him who can claim Christ as his Lord, though he has not or cannot fulfill the Law. Christ *has* paid the debt of our sins in full and *has* overcome all his enemies.

C. Therefore, do not be so foolish as to try to save yourself through the Law. Flee from the Law as from a burning Sodom and seek refuge in the quiet Zoar of the Gospel of Christ. There you will find forgiveness, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. There we *receive* by grace, what the Law had *demande*d of us under threat. He who seeks salvation in the Gospel receives a new heart that begins to glow with love to God and to men. He sees the firstfruits of his love here. When he dies, all that remains of his sin also dies, and he awakens in glory before God, clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness and purity.

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God and David's Son, grant this to all of us.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 429.

With the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity the third cycle of Sundays after Trinity, which began with the Thirteenth, comes to an end. The propers at the same time direct us toward the consummation of the world,

which is the increasing emphasis in the propers of the remaining Sundays of the church year. Both the Epistle and the holy Gospel point forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ after the Father shall have made the Son's enemies His footstool. The Introit, the Psalm-verse of which is repeated in the Gradual, sings of the reward to be given to those who wait patiently for Him, in prayer and in worship—their hearts (in the words of the Collect) being directed and ruled by the Holy Spirit.

Martin Schalling (1532—1608), a pastor's son who is the author of the "Hymn of the Week," had an eventful ministry. A favorite pupil of Philip Melancthon at the University of Wittenberg, a friend of the theologian and hymn-writer Nicolaus Selnecker, Schalling was dismissed as assistant to the pastor at Regensburg in 1558 for his opposition to the errors of Matthias Flacius. Ten years later, when assistant in Amberg, he was again dismissed from office, this time because of his refusal to conform to the Calvinist doctrine and worship which the Elector of the Rhenish Palatinate directed. After Schalling had spent eight years ministering to the Lutheran parish at Vilseck, Duke Louis, the Lutheran son of the Reformed Elector, appointed Schalling his court preacher at Amberg and, after succeeding to the electorate on his father's death, he named Schalling court preacher at Heidelberg and *General Superintendent* of the Palatinate.

Once more Schalling was banished from court (1580) and ultimately deprived of both offices (1583), this time because of a scrupulous reluctance to sign the Formula of Concord. After a brief stay in Altdorf, he became the pastor of St. Mary's Church in Nuremberg in 1585 and held this post until he finally retired on account of blindness. James Mearns describes "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart," the only hymn known to have been written by Schalling,



as justly ranking "among the classic hymns of Germany." The English translation that we have derives its first line from Richard Massie, most of the remainder from Catharine Winkworth.

The melody from Bernhard Schmid's *Orgelbuch* amply repays the struggle of learning it. Once mastered, the hymn will become a treasure for life. Johann Sebastian Bach gave it three different treatments: a chorale setting, Cantata 174, and the closing chorale of the *St. John Passion*.

### THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 9:1-8

The Christian religion and church is a religion and a church of forgiveness in Christ; Christ earned forgiveness of sin for men through His suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead; Christ established the church and ordained the holy ministry, so that forgiveness of sin could be proclaimed throughout the world. Everyone who believes the message of the forgiveness of sin through Christ is saved. The Lord furthermore added Baptism and Holy Communion to His Word as means to remove all doubt about the forgiveness of sin. He also commissioned the church to absolve every sinner individually who confessed his sin in private, and He promised that He would recognize such absolution on Judgment Day. Since Christ offers the palsied man private absolution in our Gospel for today, I shall speak to you of

#### *The Special Comfort of Private Absolution*

I shall show you

- I. The reason why you can derive special comfort from private absolution.
- II. The reason why people frequently fail to recognize the special comfort of private absolution.

#### I

A. The parallel passages in Mark and Luke describe the faith and determination

of the friends of the palsied man, who because of the crowd opened the roof and used ropes to lay their sick friend at the feet of Christ. When Christ said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," He saw more than the faith of the palsied man. He saw the man's need for comfort concerning his sin, for that was worrying him more than his palsy.

B. Christ usually announced forgiveness of sins in general terms. That was the case in the three parables in Luke 15. In the home of Zacchaeus Christ addressed the words of Luke 19:10 to all who were present. He dealt differently with the palsied man because He recognized this man's special need. His sins troubled him more than his palsy. The woman, who wept bitterly at Christ's feet and wiped her tears from His feet with her hair, received similar treatment (Luke 7:36-50).

C. There is special comfort in private absolution for us sinners. God, indeed, offers forgiveness through the preaching of His Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion. Anyone who clings to what God offers through these means has forgiveness and the guarantee of salvation. Yet many a sinner has doubts about the forgiveness of sins. He reads about the forgiveness great sinners like David, Manasseh, Peter, and others received, but cannot believe that his sins will be forgiven. Even the best of Christians frequently has the desire: "Oh, if Christ would only come to me and say to me what He said to the palsied man, 'Your sins are forgiven you!'"

D. The words Christ spoke to His apostles and to the church in John 20:23a and in Matt. 18:18b are a great comfort to us. When we receive private absolution based on these words, all doubt disappears. We have Christ's own words and are convinced they open the doors of heaven for us.

E. The writings of veteran Christians offer us many examples of the comfort private



absolution afforded them. Outstanding among them are words of Luther, the Augsburg Confession (Article XI), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article VI), and the Smalcald Articles (Part III, Article VIII). Since this is the voice of the Lutheran Church, it is in order to ask the question why many Lutherans fail to see the comfort they could derive from private absolution.

## II

A. It would be most unjust to put all opponents of private confession and private absolution into one group. The sharp words Luther uttered against all who wanted to abolish private confession and absolution in his day cannot be applied to all such opponents today.

B. Many Lutherans have an aversion to private confession and absolution because in their mind this institution smacks too strongly of Roman Catholicism. This is an erroneous idea. Private confession and absolution was in vogue in the church long before Roman Catholicism arose; it held sway in all Lutheran churches in all countries and was not generally abolished until rationalistic preachers raised their voice against it.

C. Others agitate against private confession and absolution because they no longer believe the church has power to forgive sin. They are like the Pharisees who considered it blasphemy when they heard someone pronounce the words of absolution. They fail to distinguish between forgiving in one's own name and forgiving in the name of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20; 2 Cor. 2:10b).

D. A third group does not see the comfort private absolution offers because they fail to feel the enormity of their sin. They say, "I do not need private absolution. The general absolution is sufficient for my needs." The people in this group have no deep sense of sin because their faith is weak. Even

though they may be strong enough in faith not to require the comfort of private absolution, they nevertheless ought to make use of it to encourage others to hurry to this institution and refresh themselves.

E. A fourth group refuses to use private confession and absolution because in the early church only gross sinners were required to submit to it if they wished to become members in good standing again. They suppose every Christian is free to decide whether or not he wants to make use of an institution the Lutheran Church has set up. This decision certainly is part of Christian liberty. But is it always desirable for a Christian to do that which he is at liberty to do?

F. Finally, many frown on private absolution because they believe they will have to make a detailed confession of their sins. This they refuse to do. They fear the confessor may abuse the confidences they convey to him. Their fear is unfounded. A private absolution need not be preceded by a detailed confession. Christ did not hear a detailed confession of sin from the palsied man before He absolved him. A good Christian minister will always follow the example of Christ. (Cf. Augsburg Confession, Article XXV.)

G. I have shown you the comfort that lies in the full use of the Office of the Keys. Think this over in the fear of the Lord, and do what the Lord expects of you. May His Holy Spirit guide me and you in all truth for the salvation of our souls through Jesus Christ.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Praise the Almighty, My Soul, Adore Him," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 26.

Luther D. Reed says of the teaching of the propers for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, which begins the fourth and final cycle of Sundays after Trinity, that it "requires that we 'be renewed in the spirit of our mind' and 'put on the new man'



(Epistle), while it assures us of Christ's power to heal the ravages of sin (Gospel) and to make us 'ready both in body and soul' (Collect) for life here and for the consummation of all things, since the Lord is our 'God for ever and ever' (Introit)."

"Praise the Almighty, My Soul, Adore Him" beautifully reinforces the theme of the propers; compare, for example, the Holy Gospel with the fifth stanza of the English version. Johann Daniel Herrnschmidt (1675 to 1723), the author, is rated by James Mearns "one of the best hymnwriters of the older Pietistic school." A pastor's son, his career ranged from a ten-year assistant pastorate in his native Bopfingen under his father through a three-year assignment as court preacher and consistorial councillor at Idstein to eight years as professor of theology

at the University of Halle, during the last seven of which he was also subdirector of the famed Orphanage and Pädagogium that Francke had founded in Glaucha. Best known in Germany for the hymn "Gott will's machen, dass die Sachen," Herrnschmidt is represented in *The Lutheran Hymnal* only by "Praise the Almighty," presented in an altered form of August Brauer's 1925 translation.

The melody, *Lobe den Herren, o meine Seele*, was adapted by Herrnschmidt at Halle in 1714 from a tune that can be traced back to Ansbach [anc. Onolzbach], 1664, and was first known as *Seelenharfe*. It is a worthy *cantus firmus* for congregational singing. It seems obvious that in this case the tune came first and that the text was written to fit the meter of the melody.