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Homiletics: Outlines on a Series of Free Texts

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on a Series of Free Texts

All of the outlines in this series have been furnished by Professor Herman A. Etzold, Concordia Senior College, Ft. Wayne, Ind. The suggested general theme is: "Whom will you serve?"

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 6:19-23

The Connection: Man's great problem is his sin, his great need is God's forgiveness, and his only solution to his problem is Jesus Christ. The Gospel lesson for this Sunday (Matt. 9:1-8) demonstrates above all the power of Christ to forgive sins and to effect man's spiritual healing. Such a healed child of God lives the healthy life to which Saint Paul urges us in the Epistle (Eph. 4:22-28). He serves God. The alternative is the paralysis and death in which the service of lust results.

Introduction and Central Thought: Saint Paul was writing to Christians who had experienced the healing of the grace of God. He knows how strong the tug of our old nature is in the opposite direction, how our perverted hearts are so quick to abuse even the most sacred things, and how our carnal reason may so easily conclude: "If I have been redeemed by Christ from all sin, and if I need not fear condemnation because of sin, then I need not be careful about whether I sin or not." Such reasoning is fatal.

To offset this deadly conclusion, Paul reminds us of our baptism. By it we have been initiated into the kingdom of God and incorporated into the very body of Christ. Now we are dead to sin, alive to righteousness, and members of Christ's kingdom who rejoice in His gracious rule.

There is a rival king, the prince of darkness. Our old Adam loves darkness rather than light. The Christless world seeks to seduce us with winsome smiles and giddy

gaiety into the ways of death and destruction. To this we need to alert one another in the fellowship of the redeemed.

Christianity involves a constant choice between truth and untruth, right and wrong, and adhering to the choice which we make in Christ's favor. Grace and justification result in sanctification. The fruit of forgiveness is the Christian life which manifests itself in the avoidance of sin. In these thoughts lie

Life's Great Alternatives

I. We Have a Choice

- A. Life is filled with choices — vocation, college, marriage, friends, church, etc. Not to choose actively makes one a floater or drifter, which is a form of choice, too.
- B. There is always a choice between right and wrong. Joshua challenged Israel: "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Paul admonished: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). God has not made us like machines which respond to pressure on a button, throttle, or gear shift. We have the choice to respond either by obedience or by disobedience.
- C. The new life in us is God's creation. We were dead in trespasses and sins. As Lazarus, who was totally helpless in death, was brought to life by the Word of the Son of God, who said, "Lazarus, come forth," so we are called by Him from spiritual death to life. Conversion is entirely the work of God in us through the Holy

Spirit. But we have the power to commit spiritual suicide.

- D. Ours is now the choice of the alternatives: to sin or obey; to disbelieve or believe; to reject or accept His salvation. Judas and Demas made the fatal choice. Joseph made the blessed choice: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

II. The Greatest Choice Which We Can Make Is the Choice of a Master.

- A. Man likes to think of himself as free. "I am the captain of my soul; I am the master of my fate!" One of the great ironies of life, however, is that not making a choice is making a choice. In Matt. 7:13, 14, Jesus depicts two roads and two destinies. There is no middle road where one can wander blissfully and without goal through pleasant woods and streams and get nowhere. Not to choose puts us on the broad and easy road which leads to destruction, whether we realize this or not.
- B. Everyone of us has a master. At the bedrock of our moral and spiritual being there is a directing, compelling force. It is God or Satan, spirit or flesh. Not to choose Christ as Master is to choose to remain the servant of Satan and sin by default.
- C. The predominant word of the text is "servant." "Master" is implied. Paul reminds his readers what they were before they became believers and were baptized (vv. 19-21). He reminds them also of what they are now (v. 22). What blessed servitude to choose Christ as our Master!
- D. To serve both Christ and Satan, God and mammon, spirit and flesh, uncleanness and righteousness, is impossible (Matt. 6:24). The attempt

is dishonest and hypocritical. Choose Christ as your Master!

III. The Master We Choose to Serve Determines Our Eternal Fate.

- A. Regardless of Satan's promises to the contrary, the wages of sin is death (v. 23). Sin and death are related as cause and effect. Paul is not merely speaking of the death of the body as we see it lying in a coffin, but of the dead soul in a living body. The death of sin is like a touch of frost in a garden of tender flowers. With sin something comes between one and life's best. It spreads and affects the whole of life, like the rotten speck on an apple. The last stage is eternal perdition in hell. This is the final payoff, the legitimate reward of services rendered to Satan, despite his alluring promises of fancy rewards. (Cf. Gen. 3:4, 5, 7, 17-19.)

- B. The gift of God to those who serve Him is eternal life. It is not merely life stretched out a little, like a rubber band, but unending life in the fullest sense. "I am come," said Christ, "that they might have life; and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). This is not wages. We do not earn it. It is the gift of grace to those who serve Him, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

Conclusion: Here is the choice which we must make. You cannot choose both; you cannot be neutral. The campaign promises of Satan are lies and deception and end in slavery, misery, and eternal destruction. The campaign promises of God are yea and amen and bring freedom, blessedness, and life. The wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life. What we do with our life now does make a difference! In Baptism we died to sin and were made alive to righteousness. To repent of that which is wrong and to do that

which is good and right indicates that we have Christ as Savior and Master. In His service we have more than wages—we have eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord, as a gift of grace. "Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things."

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

JER. 6:16-21

The Connection: Unwillingness to hear and heed the Word of God necessitated the 16th-century Reformation of the church. This unwillingness is an ever-present problem. It afflicts us, too. "We obeyed not His voice," is the confession in the Introit. We pray for pardon and peace in the Collect, so that we may be cleansed from all sins and serve God with a quiet mind. In the Gradual we look away from ourselves to God for all we need. The Gospel depicts the rejection of God's invitation to His feast of grace and the futile effort to come on our own terms. The Epistle bids us understand what the will of the Lord is. All of this speaks of the need for an ongoing reformation in and among us.

Introduction and Central Thought: Jeremiah wrote: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30,31). The people were not irreligious. They came to the temple, kept the feasts, and made sacrifices. But they did not hear or heed the Word of God. There was much religiosity, but little of true religion. The description fits the world into which Christ came, too. The knowledge of the Word of God was lacking. They taught for doctrines the commandments of men. Their hearts were far from God and truth. In the Middle Ages the Gospel was also all but lost to a church in which the Word of God was overlaid with pious myths, human ordinances and man-made doctrines.

What about today? Our flesh, too, tires of the old message and craves something new. God needs to raise men in every age who cry the message of His grace, who proclaim His Word, who call men to repentance. The ancient prophet has a relevant message for us and suggests pertinent thoughts on

The Ongoing Reformation

Every age, every church, and every individual experience a strong tension and temptation to veer from the spiritual to the secular; from revelation to human opinion, authority, and tradition; from the service of God to service of self; from grace to self-righteousness. In this sense a reformation must continually go on so that we may become what God wants us to be. We shall view this ongoing reformation in three spiritual activities:

- I. In the Proclamation and Reception of the Word of God.
 - A. The condition in the days of Jeremiah (14:14): The prophets proclaimed lies. They pretended visions, insights, and authority from God, while they taught the deceit of their hearts. Moses had warned about such people (Deut. 13:5). This is the greatest deception of all—to use our tongues and say, "Thus saith the Lord."
 - B. There had been an attempt at a reformation under King Josiah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chron. 34). In the process of cleaning and repairing the temple, a copy of God's Law was found. Complying with its demands, Josiah commanded a reform. God's Law was again read to the people; shrines and images of idols were destroyed; and the Passover was kept. But Josiah's successor to the throne was as wicked as those who preceded, and the people reverted to idolatry and evil.

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- C. Delight in the prophets' lies and refusal to obey God's Word made the people as guilty as their erring spokesmen and leaders (vv. 16-19). For this reason God visited his punishments upon them. Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city, plundered and destroyed the temple, tore down the city walls, and carried the Jews into captivity.
- D. The dire consequences of despising and mocking God's Word are depicted in the fall of Jeremiah's Judah. God's curse rests upon the false prophets and their false hearers. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."
- E. Christ warned that there would be false, destructive prophets in the world (Matt. 7:15-23). St. Paul urged Timothy to "preach the Word" and predicted a time when people would follow false teachers who would please their itching ears by saying the things men like to hear instead of the things God wants them to hear (2 Tim. 4:1-4). All too soon these predictions came to pass: Judaism, Gnosticism, Arianism, Montanism, Pelagianism; all culminating in the Christ-obliterating, man-made teachings of the Middle Ages. To this day, all the basic ancient heresies are taught in one form or another and "the people love to have it so."
- F. The ongoing reformation needed in every age is: "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein" (v. 16). Let God speak to you and lead you to repent and believe in His Son. The world is full of false teachers who would mislead you, destroy your faith, and thereby destroy your soul. We have this warning on the authority of Christ.
- II. In the Worship of God.
- A. The second activity in which the reformation should go on flows from the first. Where the testimony of God is rejected, only the externals of religion remain. The people burned incense and made sacrifices. God, however, was not pleased with these because the repentant heart was lacking. (Vv. 20, 21)
- B. In the Middle Ages religion, churches, and churchmen were plentiful. But human ordinances and human doctrines obscured God's grace. Worship which flowed from a thankful heart for the grace of God in Christ was displaced by worship which sought to merit God's favor. The *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia* needed to be restored to their rightful place in worship.
- C. There was need of a reformation in the days of rationalism, which denied the holy Scriptures and salvation through the blood of Christ. Through the grace of God the fathers of our church demanded loyalty to the Word of God. We are the spiritual heirs of those who brought their reason into the captivity of faith.
- D. This reformation must go on in us individually. The only acceptable worship flows from a repentant heart and an acceptance of God's grace through Word and Sacraments.
- III. In the Daily Witness of Our Lives.
- A. Our life is a testimony to the God we worship. The natural mind is enmity against the true God. Scientism refuses to believe anything which cannot be demonstrated empirically and reduced to mathematical formulae. Materialism measures all things in terms of dollars and cents and makes the possession and enjoy-

ment of things the highest good. These are 20th-century gods and heresies. They call for a continuation of the reformation.

- B. What should be the witness of those who know, love, and serve God? Not merely stating that God's Word is true, but living in its truths! This calls for Bible study and a life of love. Not merely stating that we are saved by grace, but living in the assurance of God's grace! This calls for the faithful use of the means of grace and the worship of a thankful heart in spirit and in truth. Not merely contending that a man is justified by faith, but risking our lives upon it in the service of Christ! This calls for a sharing of the faith in our daily contacts and our mission efforts.

Conclusion: Such is the reformation as it must go on in our individual hearts, souls, and lives. And in the faith which God has created, in our own transformed lives, and in the eternal inheritance which His grace offers, God will achieve His saving purpose.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 19:11-27

Connection: Christ is Lord and King by whom all things were made. Those who trust in Him shall be as Mount Zion. By faith in Him they are invincible, indestructible, and immortal. Christ has the power over Satan, death, and all the foes which would destroy us. In their conflict with these foes, His subjects arm themselves with the whole spiritual armor of God, which includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Spirit, and the Word of God. They serve Him with good works to the glory of His name. Many churches of The Lutheran Church—Mis-

souri Synod will observe Synodical Sunday. The thoughts of the Propers, as indicated above, and the sermon text are fitting for this observance. We are to engage in spiritual warfare and service in His kingdom during the interval between His ascension into heaven and His return at the Last Day. This has worldwide implications.

Introduction and Central Thought: The Parable of the Pounds was spoken by Jesus in the home of Zacchaeus, the newly converted tax collector. The Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. The time was about one week before the crucifixion. The disciples sensed that something great and important in our Lord's career was about to happen, but they had not grasped that His mission included suffering and dying for the sins of the world. They were still harboring the fleshly hope that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom in which they would be prime ministers and heads of state. Luke explains that "they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately." The Parable of the Pounds was to teach them that things would be totally different. First He must go away. Meanwhile they are to do business for Him with the "pounds." Surely, the great commission (Matt. 28) is the practical application of this parable. We are to

Do the King's Business Until He Returns

- I. This Is Our Opportunity to Prove Our Love and Faithfulness to the King.

- A. The details of the parable are presumably borrowed from the political conditions of the day, and the hearers to whom the Lord related it were well acquainted with the reference. Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, who had been appointed heir to the throne, went to Rome after the death of his father to persuade Emperor Augustus to transfer to him the rule over the lands of his father. The Jews, who were weary of the shiftless Idumean

- princes, requested the emperor, instead, to make the country a Roman province. Fifty Jews were sent to protest the appointment of Archelaus and eight thousand more followed to strengthen the protest. Despite this, the Emperor appointed Archelaus as tetrarch over part of Herod's lands and placed Roman troops at his disposal. With these troops he attacked the opponents who had rebelled during his absence. He built a magnificent palace near Jericho, and it is possible that the disciples saw the palace that day while at the house of Zachaeus. (Cf. Joh. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, p. 237.)
- B. The nobleman in the parable is Jesus, God's Son. The far country to which He went is a reference to His ascension into heaven, from which He will return at the Last Day. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection, He obtained eternal life for us. (John 14:1 f.)
- C. The ten pounds which He gave His disciples are, in this case, not individual abilities, gifts, and resources. These differ in quality and quantity. He gave to all the same amount. This refers to the Word and Sacraments with which we are to do business for Him. Cf. Acts 12:24: "The Word of God grew and multiplied." Also Acts 19:20. By witnessing to the Word we multiply the pound in terms of believing souls who likewise witness. (Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16—4:2.)
- D. Some protest Christ's reign. They shall perish when He returns. (Mark 16:15, 16)
- E. "Do the King's business" is another way of saying: "Serve Christ by preaching the Gospel to every creature." By this the servants do not gain the Kingdom. Jesus obtained the Kingdom and we are His servants by grace. But doing business for the King with the pound gives the servant the opportunity to prove his love and loyalty.
- F. A major purpose of our Synod is to evangelize the world. For this purpose we maintain our colleges, seminaries, and other training institutions; send missionaries; build churches and chapels; broadcast the Word, engage in world relief, etc. (Use significant statistics from *The Lutheran Annual* and the *Statistical Yearbook*.) The work of Synod represents what we do as congregations and individuals.
- G. There is the temptation to wrap up our pound in a napkin. That is why the Lord tells the parable (vv. 20-26). It indicts us when the Word of God does not grow and multiply because we do not reach out into the community and the world with the Word.
- II. On His Return He Rewards Those Who Have Proved Their Love and Faithfulness.
- A. The servants report in humility. "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds" (v. 16). They take no credit. The Word is the power of God and converts (Rom. 1:16). But the servant is regarded. (V. 17)
- B. We in no way deserve to reign with Christ in His everlasting Kingdom because we loved, did good works, proclaimed the Gospel, and were faithful. It is a reward of grace. (Eph. 2:4-10)
- C. From the servant who did not do business with the pound there was taken what he had (v. 24). The only way to keep the Word and its blessings is to share it. (Cf. Dan. 12:3.)

Conclusion: In this parable the Lord urges us to faithfulness in winning people with His Word by assuring us of a reward. We shall reign with Him when He returns. He will come again, perhaps sooner than we think, either to call us out of this life through death, or to judge the world on the Last Day. The world is on the brink of annihilation today. It is only wise that we do the King's business and lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven.

This parable applies to our work in our congregation and through our Synod. The Lord has given us the "pound," His Word and Sacraments. He has charged us, "Do business with this till I return." He promises the reward of grace to those who are faithful. What are we going to do with the "pound"? Each of us must individually supply the answer. May the Lord's commendation, "Well done, good servant!" sound in our ears when we report to the King on His return!

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PHIL. 1:12-21

The Connection: The thread running through the Propers is praise to God, the Author of godliness, who forgives sins, heals the brokenhearted, and binds up our wounds. The glory and praise of God is expressed through growth in knowledge and judgment, so that we approve what is excellent and are filled with the fruits of righteousness, which come through Jesus Christ. We are called upon to be pure and blameless for the "day of Christ" when the heavenly Father will settle accounts with His servants. The sermon text continues where the Epistle left off.

Introduction and Central Thought: The standard which modern man sets for the good life includes ease, leisure, comforts, and gaiety. To have plenty of money with which to buy these things, congenial companionship, youth and health to enjoy them is the "heaven on earth" for many. Modern adver-

tising caters to this standard of the good life. Its appeal is to "lighthearted living." The Christian religion, too, offers and extols the good life. But the standard is not ease, leisure, comforts, and gaiety. Rather, it stresses Christ, the forgiveness of sins, sonship with God, and eternal life. It lifts us above the creature comforts, for which the flesh strives, to higher values and aspirations. It makes its appeal not to "lighthearted living," but to

Christ-centered Living

St. Paul demonstrates such a life. What Christ did for Paul, He will do for us, if we allow Christ the central position in our lives.

I. The Source of the Christian Life Is Christ Himself.

A. When Paul wrote this Epistle, He was in prison in Rome. (V. 13)

1. He is one of a variety of convicts. Some are sullen and silent; others discouraged and sad. Some are guilty of murder and violence, while their lips form lies to hide their guilt. In the shifty eyes of some is sly cunning as they plot escape to resume the old life which brought them into prison. These are broken and shattered lives wrecked by sin.
2. Paul is a completely different prisoner. He wears the expression of a man at peace with God and his fellowmen. He is not guilty of murder, violence, or deceit. He does not curse his lot nor seek revenge. He speaks Christ, forgiveness, and eternal life to the praetorian guard to whom he is manacled and to all who will listen.
3. What sad circumstances these seem to be! But Paul says in effect: "I can tell you about a lot of good that is coming from this.

God has a plan and this is part of it. I am only His tool. After this life I have eternal life with Christ. And so, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!"

- B. Paul demonstrated what Christ can do for a man. In Christ a man possesses peace, love, joy, and purpose for living independent of creature comforts, external freedom, and earthly wealth and undiminished by the absence of these things.
- C. Paul knew the opposite kind of life, too. As Saul, the Pharisee, the center of his life was self-righteousness. He had been without love and peace. With ferocious, fanatical zeal he breathed out threatening and slaughter against Christians as he tried to save himself and to please God in his own way.
- D. On the Damascus Road, Christ came into his life. He became Christ's willing slave. Christ's free and boundless grace became his theme. Christ became the center of his faith and life.
- E. Now hatred was dispelled and love took its place. Blind and frantic fanaticism evaporated, and quiet peace and assurance flooded his soul. Trust in his own strength, ability, and wisdom gave way to faith in Christ. This is the kind of a man who sits among prisoners, but is totally different; who is manacled to a guard, but who succeeds in binding the guard to Christ; who reflects and expresses joy, peace, assurance, and freedom which the nobility of pagan Rome did not possess. The source of all this was Christ.
- II. The Joy of the Christian Life Is the Cause of Christ.
- A. Joy is the theme of Philippians. Paul reflects this joy also in the text (v. 18). His joy is in the furtherance of the cause of Christ.
- B. What is "the cause of Christ"? Cf. John 10:10. All that Christ did was done to give men life. For this purpose He commissioned His disciples to proclaim His saving Gospel.
- C. The cause of Christ will become our concern and desire, if Christ is the center of our lives. The success of the Gospel will be our joy.
- D. Paul's joy is that his imprisonment served to further Christ's cause.
1. It gave the Gospel publicity. The attention of 10,000 praetorian guards and the Roman populace was drawn to it. (Vv. 12, 13)
 2. It encouraged others to preach more boldly and effectively. (V. 14)
 3. It even stirred Paul's rivals to greater activity. Church work is not always done from pure motives, as we well know. Some went into competition for Paul's place of leadership. Paul rejoices in the fact that they do preach the Gospel, even if their motives are wrong. (Vv. 15-18)
- E. The greatest result of Paul's bonds was not known to him, however. It gave him leisure and opportunity to write the rich and deeply spiritual epistles which have instructed and inspired God's people through the ages. Through them he is still speaking the Gospel to us.
- F. Have you ever wondered why God made you what you are and placed you where you are? We can't always see the answer. But if our life is centered in Christ, and if His cause is our joy, then God will use us, though perhaps not as dramatically

as Paul, for His purposes. God's measure of us is not the same as the measure by which we often evaluate ourselves, or by which the world evaluates us.

III. The Aim of the Christian Life Is the Glory of Christ.

- A. Christ will be glorified in the hearts of others by our life, if Christ is central. What happened to Paul had a purpose in God's plan of saving others through his witness.
- B. We shall be partakers of Christ's eternal glory. (Vv. 19, 20)

Conclusion: Paul knew that his imprisonment might end in death by execution. It finally did. But he expressed no fear. His faith and trust in Christ were such that victory was sure. Heaven would be his at last. And even death cannot diminish the joy of the Christ-centered life. In fact, it increases it. He declares: "Should death come, I have Christ. He is mine and I am His. Nothing more is necessary. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 PETER 2:9, 10

Connection: The people of God praise Him for deliverance from the captivity occasioned by sin and frailty. Since we have been gloriously delivered through the Cross of Christ, our commonwealth is in heaven, as the Epistle points out, and we live in expectation of eternal glory and in avoidance of those things which formerly held us captive. This heavenly citizenship does not absolve us from loyalty and obedience to earthly government. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Gospel). Nor should we shirk the responsibility inherent in our heavenly

citizenship. To this point, the sermon text speaks penetratingly.

Introduction and Central Thought: In the eyes of the world, the Christian, like the Christ he serves, is despised. If we truly confess our faith, we shall be under scrutiny, criticism, and attack, as was our Lord. Because of the scorn, hatred, and criticism of the world we tend to withdraw into our shell. We begin to think of ourselves as odd and inferior people, and our efforts become feeble. We are content to let others, perhaps a professional clergyman, do our thinking and work for us. Such thoughts and attitudes are wrong.

What are we really? How should we regard ourselves? St. Peter describes us quite differently from the way the world sees us, or even as we see ourselves. You are "a chosen race," "a royal priesthood," "a holy nation," "a people that has become God's possession." We want to capture something of the glory, honor, privilege, and high distinction which God in His grace bestows upon us by permitting us to serve Him. To this end we shall focus the light and insights of Peter's well-known words on

The Ministry to Which God Has Called Us

I. The Nature of Our Calling

- A. Vocation and calling mean the same thing. We tend to limit vocation to the job at which we make a living. To the question, "What's your vocation?" we receive the answer, "I'm a clerk, or engineer, or storekeeper, or farmer." Obviously, there is nothing necessarily Christian about employment *per se*. Christian vocation means that God has called us from something to something, and we are to be that in our station in life, including employment, whether we are husband or wife, son or daughter, father or mother, employer or employee, student, citizen.

- B. God called us to be His people. Both the call and what we became are products of His mercy. (V. 10)
- C. From what and to what has God called us? "Out of darkness into His marvelous light." This is Bible picture language. Darkness denotes spiritual ignorance, sin, separation from God, death; light signifies spiritual understanding, God's Word and revelation, reconciliation, holiness. Cf. Ps. 119:105; Is. 60:1, 2; Luke 1:78, 79.
- D. The world regards us as poor, benighted souls because they do not understand Christ and what He has done for us. They sit in darkness, not knowing God's grace, the meaning of the Cross, and the assurance of life in Christ. Out of this darkness He has called us. In His light we see the road which leads home to the presence of the Father.
- E. He has called us through His holy Word. We responded because the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts (cf. 1 Peter 1:22-25). Now we are the children of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's very own people. We are this in whatever station of life we may be. This is our Christian calling.

II. The Expression of Our Calling

- A. God has not only called us out of darkness into fellowship with Himself, but He has also called us for something. "That ye should show forth the praises of Him who called you . . ."
- B. Peter explains throughout the Epistle how this is done. We are to practice the holy art of Christian love (1:22, 23). Since our rebirth occurs by the power of the Word of God, we show forth His praise by desiring the sincere milk of the Word, as a new-born baby desires the nourishment of its mother's breast (2:1-3). Peter has a word to say to people in all stations in life—neighbors, citizens, servants, husbands, wives, young people, and pastors. (Read through the five chapters with this in mind.) And if you suffer, don't let it happen because you did evil, but because you did good, following Christ's example. (2:19-25)
- C. We emphasize the doctrine of the universal priesthood. Usually we stress that the Christian is free from the need of mediation by church or priest. He has direct access to the throne of God's grace through Christ. This is true, but we should not stop there. Each Christian is to function as a priest or priestess. This involves ministering before God in behalf of others. It means praying for, witnessing to, and being concerned about others. "Laity" is a Greek word meaning "people." It is this laity about which Peter speaks as "a royal priesthood" to show forth His praises.
- D. Elton Trueblood points out that millions seem to think that the church is like an orchestra society. The members make the employment of the orchestra possible. They raise the funds. Along with this goes the privilege of attendance at concerts. But during the performance, the members sit in a relaxed way as observers, auditors and spectators. The whole responsibility lies with those on the platform. (*Your Other Vocation*, p. 51). The Christian should see himself not merely as a member of the orchestra society, but of the orchestra. We are not merely to raise funds so that others can "sound forth" the praises of God, but we are to show forth His praises.

E. A variety of skills is needed, there must be a "conductor," but all should "play." The church is a functioning body in which each member has his task to perform in showing forth God's praises. Revolutionary things will take place when people feel that the work of the church is their work and a work to which they have been called.

Conclusion: This does not mean that every Christian is to quit his job, enroll in a seminary, and upon graduation go forth as a pastor to a congregation or as a missionary to some foreign land. If you are a farmer, you can serve God by staying on the job! But remember, as a Christian you have a call to be a Christian farmer, to serve God in that profession, to produce food to feed your fellowman, and to break the Bread of Life to nourish men's souls. The same is true of any profession. In all circumstances and associations, we are to serve full-time as Christians. "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 COR. 3:21-23

The Connection: Appropriately, the last Sunday after Trinity has an eschatological emphasis. All that Christ did and taught culminates in Christ's return to receive the church, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband, into eternal glory. It admonishes to watchfulness and prayer in the joyful hope of Christ's second advent. Victory is assured to those who trust in Christ, and eternal life is the inheritance of the children of God.

Introduction and Central Thought: "What about the future?" The question is frequently on our hearts and minds and sums up many a worry. It is asked by the young with their lives before them and by the aged

in the twilight of life's little day. It concerns the thoughtful man in a world preoccupied with space exploration and torn by the distrust of nations. The solicitous father wonders what kind of a world his children will have. Will there be any world left at all, if man continues to harness the forces of nature for destructive purposes? What about the future of the church? Will godless ideologies conquer and stamp out the saving faith of Christ in large areas of the world?

The fearful questions are legion. In answer, St. Paul radiates the confidence which we need as he declares in summary: "All things are yours." He dared to go very far in his faith when he wrote this. His answer may seem vague to us. But it is vague only because the eye of faith is dim and we suffer from spiritual cataracts. There is a higher Power than the obvious and sinister powers which would destroy us, and that Power is for us. Not only are we safe in Christ, but

All Things, Even Death, Serve the Christian

I. Christ Assures Us of His Blessing in All Things.

A. One on the side of God is a majority (Matt. 28:18). This is demonstrated in the dramatic incident of 2 Kings 6. To the servant's question "What shall we do?" the prophet's answer seems like madness: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." There were two in Elisha's house; a whole army encircled the city. The Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. This was the army of the Lord in which Elisha trusted and which the servant saw when the Lord opened his eyes.

B. Our need is spiritual sight, too. Through the Word the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of His servants to see by faith the invisible, indestructible

forces of God which protect us. (Rom. 8:31-39)

- C. The hope of man is always for a better day. This is vain, unless we learn that the roughness of the day has a good purpose for the Christian. It, too, is our servant. (Rom. 8:28)
- D. Death is a grim preacher with one theme: We must leave this world and leave it with nothing, as we entered. In the light of that, the preacher of Ecclesiastes cries: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" The ancient bard characterizes life as "a brief tale, signifying nothing." Paul has another slant: Death is a servant. It ministers to our highest good, if we belong to Christ, who conquered and subdued death for us.
- E. From Christ, who drew the poison out of death through His victorious resurrection, we have the assurance of forgiveness, a glorious life after this life ceases, and victory over all that hinders our salvation. (Vv. 21-23)

II. Christ Has Made Us His Own.

- A. This is the one important thing: "Ye are Christ's!" The Corinthian church forgot this and became tragically divided (1 Cor. 3:3-9). Paul, Apollos, and Peter were mere men, their servants, to bless the church with their wisdom, oratory, forcefulness, and energy as they declared the Gospel of Christ. "Let no man glory in men."
- B. We, too, are often unduly impressed by externals. The worthy minister serves us by conveying Christ's wisdom, by presenting Christ, and by getting things done for Christ. "He is a wonderful preacher" is not as great a compliment as "He preaches a wonderful Christ." The ultimate

defense against all things evil, and the ultimate service of all things to us consists in belonging to Christ. Those who belong to Him are invincible, immortal, and indestructible.

- C. These are appropriate thoughts for the last Sunday on the Christian church calendar. In the services from Advent to Trinity, we are to see Jesus only, for He is our only Hope. If we belong to Him, then all things, even death, serve us to bring about our salvation.

III. Christ Has Changed Death into a Friend and Servant.

- A. Commonly death is looked upon as the Destroyer, the Enemy, the Divider. Can we look upon this awful force, which tears loved ones from our side, which breaks up happy homes, as a friend? Can this force, which we cannot command and often comes against our wishes, serve us? Paul rings out his "yes" emphatically.
- B. In what respects does death serve those who belong to Christ?
 1. We shrink from death because it is a step into the unknown, a leap into the dark, and we do not know what to expect. Christ brought about this change. He walked through the valley of death for us. He goes with us to bring us safely into the house of the Lord. (Ps. 23:4, 6)
 2. Death seems like an enemy because it takes us from our activities and occupations. But those who belong to Christ know that beyond the coldness of death is "nobler work for us to do."
 3. Death is so frightening because it divides us from our loved ones. But those who are Christ's are

united in eternity where Christ is. Death, the divider, becomes the uniter.

4. Men shrink from death for fear of the judgment of God. In Christ we may stand boldly before the throne as God's redeemed people.
- C. We put these four contrasts together:
- 1) Death as a frightening step into the dark unknown vs. death as a step into the region lighted by Christ;
 - 2) Death as a halt to all activity vs. death as the introduction to greater opportunities for service to Christ;
 - 3) Death as the great divider vs. death as the means of uniting us to Christ and all His loved ones eternally;
 - 4) Death as bringing us into judgment as guilty offenders against God vs. death as bringing us into

Christ's presence as God's redeemed people. Now we can see how Paul can say: All things are yours; all things must serve you—even death!

Conclusion: Christ's own resurrection makes this certain. Those who believe in Him have His peace and shall never die. This faith changes a man. He lives the risen life. It changes death from a curse into a blessing. Christ awakens us, removes the chains that bind us, and leads us through the gates into the freedom of the heavenly city, whose streets are gold and where the Sun of Righteousness never sets. Christ has redeemed me "that I might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." Put Christ into the present and your future is secure. "All things, even death, serve the Christian."