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Homiletics

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EBENEZER: "Hitherto the Lord Has Helped Us"

The Homiletics section for this month presents, in addition to the customary studies in texts related to the church year, a special study on the "Ebenezer" text that will be highlighted in parishes of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in connection with the synodwide thankoffering to be gathered during 1967. The textual study and the homiletical suggestions based on this text from 1 Sam. 7:2-14 represent the joint work of two members of the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill.: Ralph D. Gehrke and Martin L. Koehneke. Dr. Gehrke is chairman of the college's Division of Theology and author of the commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel in the projected Concordia Commentary series. Dr. Koehneke is president of Concordia Teachers College and is currently serving also as the executive director of the Ebenezer Thankoffering.

**SERMON STUDY AND PREACHING HINTS
ON 1 SAMUEL 7:2-14**

Key Concepts of the Text

Israel Lamented

An anguished lament of the kind that was ordinarily heard only when a person died continued to rise from the throats of the people of God in the years after their disastrous defeat at Ebenezer. There in the first battle of Ebenezer (4:1 ff.) the Lord had smitten them in judgment. Their mortal enemies, the Philistines, had decimated their ranks and, worst of all, had captured the most sacred possession of their nation, the ark of the covenant, the throne from which their heavenly King, the Lord of hosts, invisibly reigned over His chosen people. What the capture of the ark meant had been expressed by a young mother whose birth pangs came suddenly as a result of the shocking news of the defeat (4:19 ff.). The news of the birth of a son gave her no joy; in no way

did it compensate for the loss of the holy ark of God's presence. Her child was given the inglorious name Ichabod, "The Glory is gone." She lamented not the loss of her husband but the Lord's abandoning of His people. And even though the Lord had also humbled the proud Philistines by plaguing them when they failed to respect the captured ark (1 Sam. 5—6), nevertheless that very important symbol of the 12-tribe confederacy had not been restored to Israel but was in fact still lodged in a Canaanite border city under Philistine control (7:1-2). Israel was experiencing one of its gravest crises. Its very existence as a nation was threatened. To such a sorry pass its unfaithfulness had led!

Gather All Israel at Mizpah

In this crisis it was the prophet-priest Samuel who stepped forth in faith and courageously summoned the tribes to a new tribal sanctuary (to take the place of Shiloh, which the Philistines had sacked and now controlled) five miles northwest of Jerusalem. There at Mizpah Samuel indicted them for the idolatry that had caused their defeat; but he also called on them to repent and turn again to the Lord. Hence what took place at this assembly was more than a service of repentance and prayer. It was a renewal of their covenant with the Lord. By means of the liturgy of covenant-renewal Samuel intended to reestablish Israel's relationship to the Lord. First, however, they had to get rid of the idols (earrings, magical amulets, figurines) that represented the male and female Canaanite deities of fertility and power, the Baals and the Ashtaroth. The Israelites' fasting and pouring out of water were symbols of their confession of sin. ("We have sinned against the Lord.")

Samuel Judged the People at Mizpah

The context makes clear that Samuel's judging was not that of "hearing and deciding law cases." Rather, like Moses, the first mediator of the Lord's covenant with Israel, Samuel interceded with the Lord in behalf of covenant-breaking Israel and then renewed that covenant by proclaiming its sacred stipulations (cf. Ex. 34).¹ Only then could he embark on the steps that were customary at the beginning of a "sacred war": offering of the initial sacrifice and seeking from the Lord the salvation-oracle needed so desperately: "Fear not! The Lord is with you. He has given the Philistines into your hands!" Without a genuine renewal of the covenant this nation had no future. Meanwhile the Philistines, sensing revolt, drew near to attack.

The Lord Thundered with a Mighty Voice That Day Against the Philistines

Rather than attempting to explain away the Lord's marvelous intervention (saying, for instance, that the Philistine investigators merely saw that a harmless religious service was being conducted and therefore left, after the Israelites maintained their composure and continued their worship), the student of this text must realize that military action did indeed take place (v. 11), even though it is not described for us in purely military language that would enable us to construct battle plans but rather in theological language which realizes that the real victories of God's people are won by God alone. That, of course, has always been faith's view of history, even in the midst of unresolved crises. Hence in Israel's customary way of reporting its wars, not the military tactics of *men* are decisive but the activities of the *Lord*, who lays bare His mighty arm, striking panic and confusion (v. 10) in the ranks of the enemy, often to the accompaniment of thunder and hailstones (cf. Job 38:22 f.). It is in keeping with such customary conceptions that we

hear in this account of Samuel's initial sacrifice (significantly a snow-white, innocent lamb), of Samuel's seeking an oracle of salvation, and of the Lord's gracious answer (v. 9). The victory is not to be a chance stroke of luck but the result of God's clearly announced Word! (If the Gath of v. 14 is *not* the nearby Gath-Gattaim of 2 Samuel 4:3 on the northern Philistine frontier but Philistine Gath in the heart of Philistine territory, it is possible that the skirmish fought here is considered only the first anticipatory step toward the ultimate help that was first proclaimed at the Mizpah gathering, since it was only Saul and finally David who accomplished what is referred to in verses 13 and 14: driving the Philistines completely from all the Israelite territory that they had annexed.²)

Ebenezer

The famous stone was evidently situated on the route by which the Israelite hill country was normally invaded (the route up the Valley of Ajalon through Beth-Horon; cf. 14:23, Joshua 10:10 f.). Ebenezer had been the place of Israel's disastrous defeat at the hands of the Philistines (cf. 4:1). But now that first defeat at Ebenezer is reversed; traffic on this route moves in the opposite direction; the place of defeat has been converted into a place of victory. (It is possible that this stone, like the stone of 6:18, had once been a *Canaanite* altar and was now, significantly, transformed into a memorial of the Lord's saving activity for *Israel*.) John Knox's translation-paraphrase brings out not merely the backward-looking, past-reviewing aspect of Samuel's deed, but also its forward-looking, future-confident aspect, "Samuel chose out a stone and set it up . . . , calling the place, The Rock of Deliverance, in token that the Lord was still their protector." This forward-looking aspect of our text should not be neglected, since with this victory the Lord was fulfilling in ever greater measure His

ancient promises to His people that they would possess the Promised Land (Gen. 12: 1-7; 13:14-17; see Hebr. 11:8-9). Hence this victory marks a milestone in the history of salvation, the history ultimately fulfilled not when David decisively defeated the Philistines and established his great kingdom but when Jesus rose from the dead as the true King, in whom, in the fullness of time, all things will be united, "things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). At Ebenezer we not only look back to God's gracious deeds on our behalf in the past; at Ebenezer we catch a vision of our task in the future: the laying claim on God's glorious promises in Christ our Lord.

Suggestions for Preaching

The account of 1 Samuel 7 is an important part of the history of God's salvation of His people. It may be wise for the preacher to let this vivid historical text speak directly to the congregation by retelling the story in an interpretative manner (see above, *Key Concepts of the Text*) to highlight its character as part of the history of salvation ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The pastor will readily see many parallels between the experiences of God's Old Testament people and those of His New Testament people (modern equivalents of Canaanite worship of power, fertility; modern New Testament equivalents to conquering the Promised Land, etc.).

Six suggested sermon outlines may spur the pastor toward preaching a sermon that will give his people a wide vision of both past and future at the beginning of the Ebenezer Year. It is hoped that the seventh outline will be the best, because it will be the pastor's own.

(1)

Introduction

A new year invites us to look back to the past and to look ahead to the future. The

Ebenezer Year makes us Christians ask the searching question

How Far Does the Lord Bring His People?

I. *How Far He Brought His Old Testament People at the First Ebenezer*

A. He brought them to review their past:

1. The idolatry that had ruined it
2. The repentance to which He called them
3. The gracious victory He gave them over their foes

B. He brought them to see the glorious future of claiming His promises.

1. Ebenezer was the starting point for future conquests.
2. Ebenezer marks the initial victory in the campaign to establish the Israelite kingdom (David establishes the prototype of God's coming greater kingdom).
3. When their Old Testament efforts ended in failure, God brought Israel to a fulfillment of His promises in Christ Jesus.

II. *How Far God Has Brought Us New Testament People at the Beginning of 1967, the Ebenezer Year*

A. He has brought us to review our past:

1. The idolatry that has ruined it
2. The repentance to which He calls us (Law and Gospel)
3. The gracious victory over our foes (Life of faith flowing from use of the means of grace)

B. He has brought us to see the glorious future of laying claim to His promises:

1. Ebenezer: the task before us
2. The struggle and tensions of the future
3. The ultimate victory

(2)

Introduction

The year of our Lord 1967 is the Ebenezer Year, to which "the Lord has helped us." A familiar expression. What does it mean?

The Path on Which the Lord Leads Us

I. *The Path of Defeat*

A. Israel in distress at Ebenezer (4:1 ff.). Narrative.

B. We in distress. Our idolatries: fallen from the covenant of Baptism.

II. *The Path of Repentance*

A. Israel in repentance at Mizpah. Renouncing idolatry; trusting the Lord's promises. The *great* miracle of the Ebenezer story.

B. We in repentance. At worship returning to the baptismal covenant: daily dying and rising with Christ. Renouncing idolatry. Rejoicing in the Gospel.

III. *The Path of Deliverance*

A. Israel at war, pursuing the enemy from Mizpah to Ebenezer, fighting in faith; the Lord brings deliverance.

B. We at war; in faith routing the enemies after the Lord brings deliverance.

IV. *The Path of Conquest*

A. Israel at the starting point of future conquests (Ebenezer).

B. We at the starting point of continued laying claim on God's promises. Our Christian vocation in the world: To this future the Lord has helped us.

(3)

Introduction

A new year is one of God's new beginnings for the Christian. He teaches each of us at the beginning of the Ebenezer Year in our Synod to ask the searching question:

How Far Is the Lord Willing to Lead Me?

I. *As Far as He Always Led His People in the Past*

II. *As Far as He Needs to Achieve His Saving Purposes for Me*

(4)

Introduction

The year of our Lord 1967 is to be known in our Synod as the Ebenezer Year. We shall sing the *Ebenezer Hymn* frequently (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 33). We shall on our birthdays bring Him a special thankoffering, an Ebenezer Birthday Thankoffering. We shall give Ebenezer birthday gifts to loved ones during 1967. Ebenezer is a strange and unfamiliar word to some, beloved and well known to others.

What Does Ebenezer Mean?

I. *It Means Defeat and Repentance*

II. *It Means Deliverance and Praise*

III. *It Means Renewal and Hope*

(5)

Introduction

This new year, the Ebenezer Year, will no doubt be a strange mixture of inconsistencies. Only God, our "Stone of Help," the Rock of our Salvation, will remain constant and faithful.

O Thou Who Changest Not, Abide with Me

I. *When I Forget You and Follow After False Gods*

II. *When I Need the Censure of Your Judgment and the Renewal of Your Grace*

III. *When I Am Rescued by You for Grateful Remembrance of Your Mercies and for a Clearer Vision of the Promised Land*

(6)

Introduction

The year of Ebenezer will be a cycle of defeat and failure, victory and success. God

will be in the middle of our tension, our struggling, our striving.

From Defeat to Victory

- I. *The Decay That Leads to Defeat*
- II. *The Love That Leads to Repentance and Renewal*
- III. *The Victory That Leads to Grateful Remembrance and Clearer Purpose*

NOTES

¹ H.-J. Kraus, *Die prophetische Verkündigung des Rechts in Israel* (Zürich-Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957).

Arthur Weiser, *Samuel, seine geschichtliche Aufgabe und religiöse Bedeutung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 5—24.

George E. Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," esp. pp. 56 ff., in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, edited by Bernhard Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962).

² Gerhard von Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952).

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The sermon studies that follow represent the continuation of the homiletical helps for the current church year based on texts selected for the 1842 edition of the Perikopenbuch of the Evangelical Church in the Province of Saxony. Studies on these texts are being prepared by one or more faculty members at the colleges and seminaries of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The first two studies in this issue are the work of a member of the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The remaining three represent the cooperative efforts of three members of the faculty of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind. Professors Korby and Droege of the university's department of religion invited Mr. Marc Riedel, professor of philosophy, to sit in on their text discussions as a "lay" consultant. Their experiment suggests the intriguing possibility that pastors may be encouraged to develop new approaches to sermon preparation by inviting laymen to join them in text study preceding the actual writing of a sermon.

SERMON STUDY FOR MARCH 5, 1967

LAETARE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY
IN LENT

JOB 22:21-30

"Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother." The words from the Epistle (Gal. 4:21-31) are probably the cue for calling this Sunday "Mothering Sunday." In England it is a day to go home and visit mother. It is a day for mother to bake a special mothering day cake. And it seems like the very last day to be thinking of bringing Job home for a visit—or perhaps even worse, Eliphaz! The Introit urges us: "Rejoice with Jerusalem," and we echo the response of the Introit and Gradual for the 18th Sunday After Trinity: "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

It is mid-Lent Sunday, a day for taking a breather from Lent's austerity. It is "rejoice" Sunday, an opportunity to make a new beginning on our self-discipline. As Lent began, we had hoped to live the kind of preparatory life that would enable us to celebrate Easter with a sense of having expressed our love to our Lord in life. Every year we welcome the chance to make a new beginning. And the somber record of our attempts at growth in holiness keeps us from forgetting that it is still Lent, the time to remember how much we need our Lord's forgiving love. The Collect describes us—"we who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished." Perhaps Job and his comforters are fit companions for us today. But the Collect also clues us on the real reason for rejoicing on this Sunday. "Grant that by the comfort of Thy grace we may mercifully be relieved." Can Job show us something for relief—something that is better than potsherds?

The Gospel's account of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15) has more things to say than this, but this it says clearly: "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" And because He gives us

that bread of life which is His body and enables us to drink His blood, we poor sinners can rejoice. But along with the Galatians we are often foolishly eager to claim Hagar as our mother instead of Jerusalem above. We want to be bond boys, born of the bondwoman, and hunt our own salvation. We actually desire to be under the Law.

Interesting, relevant preaching should begin where the people are. It is surely a false assumption that every one in the congregation is eager to hear the details of the propers for Laetare Sunday. But if we are going to use this day's Epistle—and it may well be the least understood of the Epistles—we ought to help the worshiper understand its import before we read it and expect him to be reacting to God as he hears it. Whether the explanation precedes the service or is printed for the worshipers in the day's bulletin, it should be clear to them that their cause for rejoicing is this, "For freedom Christ has set us free." (Gal. 5:1a)

This could be the Sunday for an inductive sermonic approach. Ask the people of God who have gathered in the church to do their liturgy whether they find the words of Eliphaz spoken to Job a helpful summary of the way to live joyfully. Whatever their troubles, they can scarcely outgroan Job today. And if things are better than could fairly be expected, they should be concerned to keep them going well. It would be both fair and a way to excite more careful listening to remind them that this is a speech in a drama and therefore not necessarily the Word from God at all. Then read the text.

I. At first glance it seems to be a genuine prescription for joyful living . . .

"Agree with God and be at peace. . . . Receive instruction from His mouth. . . . Humble yourself, . . . remove unrighteousness, . . . [make] the Almighty . . . your gold and your precious silver." All these things seem to be right in line with what we keep telling ourselves and our children. And

the results are what we have led ourselves to expect: "Then you will delight yourself in the Almighty. . . . You will make your prayer to Him, and He will hear you. . . . You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you. . . ." Only two verses remain. "God abases the proud, but He saves the lowly." We've heard that before. That's New Testament talk. "He delivers the innocent man; you will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands." Apart from the little uneasiness we often feel when Old Testament people talk about how they get along with their God, that's about it, isn't it? We're not supposed to be proud of it, but we are supposed to lead a good life. Right?

. . . At first glance, yes. But God condemns it out of hand. Read to the people of God Job 42:7: "The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of Me what is right.'"

Well, what's wrong with it?

II. It doesn't really work, does it?

Job protested that it didn't. Of course, his comforters were saying that he seemed to protest too much. But figure it out for yourself. Did Sarah, or Abraham, for that matter, have such clean hands? And were Hagar and, especially Ishmael, so criminal? But who kept the reputation and whose was the blessing? Five thousand people really showing their devotion to the teacher from Nazareth—and what happened? They nearly starved to death. Yes, they were fed, but only to get hungry again. Some of them may well have starved later on. Take Jerusalem herself. Rejoice with her? Be glad with her? And how about all of you, you clean-handed citizens! How many matters have you decided on, and how many really paid off?

What's wrong?

III. Check the premises.

"Agree with God and be at peace; thereby good will come to you." Job agreed—he

wanted to agree with God (Job 23:3-7). And he could not but be aware that there certainly was a disagreement somewhere. Certainly that's the first point we must, wholeheartedly or brokenheartedly, accept; there is a serious disagreement between us and God.

Agree, but how? Even Job discovered his way wasn't feasible (Job 23:8-9). Even if he could find God to reason with him, it would be useless (Job 23:13-17). That's the second point: we cannot by any manner or means accomplish the agreement ourselves. Eliphaz is all wrong because no man has clean hands.

What then? Here is the whole point of the Book of Job. Its dramatic format utilizes the question "Why do the righteous suffer?" But the book never answers that question. Its point is really the nature of faith. "With a keen sense of drama and a profound knowledge of psychology, the poet withholds until the climax of his work the secret of his intention, which is to show the divinity of God, the humanity of man, and the specific nature of the relation between a God who is truly God and a man who is truly man—namely, one of grace alone apprehended by faith" (Samuel Terrien in *The Interpreter's Bible*, III, 898). When Job really hears God, really is confronted by God, he agrees not only that he is bad but that God is good (Job 42:5-6). And this is the third point, so much easier for us New Testament believers than for Job: God has worked out the agreement with Himself by Himself, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have indeed seen the Lord. We have indeed heard the Lord. It is given to us to celebrate His victory by receiving that body and blood that gained the victory. He came into our life so that there could be no mistake. He took our griefs and sorrows, so that, even though we cannot answer the ceaseless "Why?" we can depend on the God who "spared not His own Son." Since that

God has raised His Son from the dead and highly exalted Him, shall we doubt that He will in His good time raise and exalt us, no matter how low life has brought us?

If we have been thinking like Eliphaz—and what red-blooded American has not?—then we need to be reminded that it is *Jesus'* sacrifice and *His* intercession that make us free, better than seven bulls and seven rams and the prayers of Job. (Job 42:8-9)

This is the way to joyful living. To know this, even with nothing but sackcloth and ashes and a potsherd in our hands, is better than having seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants, not to speak of seven sons and three daughters, and *not* to know that Christ has set us free.

SERMON STUDY FOR MARCH 12, 1967

JUDICA, THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

ISAIAH 53:4-5

What really *is* often differs from what *appears*. Job's sufferings (see sermon study for Laetare) appeared to his comforters as obvious evidence of some tremendous guilt. It wasn't. Job's conviction was that it was some awful mistake on the part of a God who wouldn't discuss the matter. It wasn't. It was a matter of guilt and of God, but both were very different from what human opinion concluded them to be.

Passion Sunday presents to us Jesus Christ as God's Suffering Servant. Unless we are able to see Him through the eyes of faith, which God alone gives, what we see may be quite different from what is really there. And if we see what is really happening in the suffering of Jesus Christ, we are compelled to look at our own lives. We could be tragically mistaken about them too if we are taken in by appearances. It would be a mistake to be confounded, as though the

Passion of the Lord had made no difference. It would be equally tragic to be complacent, as though the Passion of the Lord should make no difference.

Some attention must be given to the question of the identification of the Suffering Servant. It is clear that the Servant is sometimes a figure for Israel itself (Is. 41:8-10; 43:8-13; 44:1-5). But in other instances no reference is made to Israel (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-6—where, although Israel is mentioned in v. 3, its meaning seems to be individual; cf. v. 5; 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12). Among all the suggested interpretations, none by itself can actually incorporate all the implications. But for our purposes in preaching on this text it is sufficient to realize that our Lord Himself took over this designation for Himself, and that the identification of Jesus and His life and death with the Suffering Servant of the Lord is constant in the New Testament (Matt. 8:17; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:33; Acts 8:26-39; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; the day's Epistle, Heb. 9:11-15; 1 Peter 2:24). The preacher would do well to inform his hearers of the problem, but no more than that is needed to enable him to treat the text as material illuminating the suffering of Jesus Christ and the difference the Passion makes.

I. His life—It was not what it appeared to be, thank God!

He appeared to be a great sinner, stricken by God. Job's comforters would have thought so. "We esteemed Him [as one] stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." The believers of His own day thought of Him as a sinner, even though they could not meet His challenge in today's Gospel, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46-59)

He was in fact and deed the holy, innocent Servant of God bearing away our griefs and sorrows and iniquities (53:10). "Borne" is used in the sense of taking away the sin of someone, of expiation, or the procuring of pardon (Lev. 10:17; Job 7:21). It sug-

gests the lifting up and carrying away of a burden. More is involved than merely suffering sickness and sorrows as man with men. He bore them away.

II. Your life—It is not what it appears to be, thank God!

The evidence is great enough, man knows! All the griefs and sorrows, all the steadily increasing evidence of mortality and incipient decay. Is there anyone so optimistic about the human race or so deliberately blind to his own condition as to miss the obvious transgressions, iniquities, and fractured personality within himself?

But we have been healed. Our iniquities and transgressions have been carried away as far as the east is from the west. Christ our High Priest has Himself entered into the holy place and with His own blood has made an offering that has made the difference!

III. Our lives—They are becoming what they ought to be, thank God!

We are healed. We ought not to be discouraged by the contrary evidence, the relapses, the deliberate courting of contagion. By His stripes, not by our merit badges, we are healed. But the healed man who insists on remaining abed must by daily contrition and repentance be roused to try, and the healed man must daily come forth and arise and live before God in the righteousness God has given.

We are made whole. The evidence notwithstanding, God has made us whole men. When we live half lives, half-asking, half-trusting, half-serving, it is enough to make a man think he is not wholly God's. But we are His by His choice. The chastisement that made us whole was laid on Him, and He knows how much that suffering accomplished. He says we are His, wholly, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy. . . ." We need no longer insist on our "rights," since by Him we are made right

with God. Our place is a given; we no longer need insist to some brother that he give place. We need no longer feed on our brother, nor use him to make up our deficiencies. God has made us whole. His will is our meat and drink. The body and the blood of our Lord given for us for the remission of our sins is given to us as well to eat and to drink for our living in wholeness.

St. Louis

GEORGE W. HOYER

SERMON STUDY FOR MARCH 19, 1967

PALMARUM

ISAIAH 53:11-12

Christ's Soul Poured Out to Death

1) The preacher's task in preaching the Palmarum text requires him to be precisely selective of themes and emphases which, on the one hand, are exclusive enough to allow for concentration and depth and, on the other hand, are broad enough to maintain the tension inherent in the text and proper. Victory in and through suffering is so central to the work of Jesus, and the question of what to do with suffering is so pertinent to the hearers' experience, that neither thrust dare be lost or dissipated in the proclamation of the day's text. (On the question of the identity of the Suffering Servant in this text see Paragraph 3 of the sermon study for Judica Sunday.)

2) The cry of dereliction of the Introit is coupled with the cry of faith: God, be near to help me. Meditative reflection on Psalm 22, used extensively in both the Introit and Gradual, will serve the preacher well. The anguished cry, "Why?" in the Gradual discloses Christ's union and identity with us men. The sufferer sinks into the most humiliating lowliness; from there he cries out for God's nearness.

3) "Nearness" is an important theme and should be fruitful for imaginative development. The nearness Jesus craves is not the

nearness of *proximity* but of *approach*. That is, Jesus Christ calls for the help of His Father so that in the union with this work the united will of the Father and the Son may be achieved. God's help is not for escape from suffering but for victory through that kind of suffering and death which unites Him to His brethren in the congregation, giving Him the righteousness to declare the coming generations that God has done this.

4) In the Collect the congregation has poured out its desire to follow the Son in His patience and has asked to be made partakers of His resurrection. This expressed desire of the congregation is to be answered in the sermon's proclamation. As Jesus' death and resurrection are God's answer to Jesus' plea for help, so the proclamation of the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is God's answer to the congregation's plea in the Collect.

5) God's nearness to us in Jesus Christ to help us is anchored in two points: (a) Jesus is united with us in our human flesh; and (b) Jesus is united with us in His death as the Sinner. These two points correspond to the anchor points of our human existence: (a) we are born into humanity and (b) our destiny as men is that we die as sinners. Everything in our life is suspended between these two poles; everything in our life is determined by them. It is here that Jesus unites Himself with us—according to the will of the Father—with the aim of raising us from death to life, now and forever. We desire this union with Him. This union is given to us by the proclamation of God's deed in Christ; it is received by faith.

6) Jesus Christ's death is death to our death as sinners. In this way He becomes our life. To be united to Him and to live in Him is to die—for life. This is how we are to understand the prayer, asking to be made partakers of His resurrection and, out of this new life, to follow the example of His patience.

7) From the text. Greatest advantage is to be taken of the text's theme of victory through suffering and death for sinners.

(a) In verse 12 the victory theme is expounded in images of conquest: dividing a portion with the great, dividing the spoil with the strong. Note especially the particles: "therefore," "because," and "yet." The victory is conclusion; the *cause* of the victory is the Servant's self-oblation: "because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors." And yet, there are here no mere celestial heroics: "He bore the sin of many," making intercession for the transgressors. His Passion for sinners links Him to their shame and death; herein is His victory.

(b) "He poured out His soul to death." Advantage should be taken of this image, "pour out." It is a sacrifice image. It describes self-oblation, yielding life utterly. It is an image related to the Hebrew phrase, "The life is in the blood." Thus, pouring out His life to death contains the picture of His pouring His life into our death—to destroy our death and to give us life. Compare this "pour out his soul to death," with the Epistle, "emptied Himself," He "humbled Himself," He became "obedient unto death."

(c) In verse 11 the radicalness of His death as transgressor (in His identity with us) dare not be glossed over. If death is not terminal, it is not death—with its shame and terror. But even more radical is His victory, His resurrection from the dead. To die is not the only problem. The problem is to die with Him so that we live as He died and rose from the dead. Thus verse 11 describes the joy and satisfaction of the Servant (Jesus Christ). You, the Christians, are the results ("the fruit of the travail of His soul") of His suffering and the sign of His victory. The tension must be maintained in the knowledge of Christ: the suffering and death with Jesus Christ are the signs of victory. In this "knowledge" of the righteous Servant,

He "shall . . . make many to be accounted righteous."

8) Great attention should be given to making the link between this victorious suffering of Jesus Christ and the concrete life and pain of the hearers. The preacher will know and explore the pains of his people; the link with Jesus' victorious suffering is made by proclaiming it; that is, by preaching Christ's work that which is Christ's for us is predicated to the hearers. To preach is to predicate. To take part in Christ's resurrection now is to live in the flesh, in the pain of life and death, with everything going toward life from the dead. Thus the curse of defeat and mortality are converted into the blessed life that blesses with victory.

The central thought of the sermon could be: In Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, God is near to us in our flesh, in our pain, in our sin and death. We cry to Him to be joined to us so that His death is our death—that is, the termination of our sin and defeat; and so that, taking part in His resurrection, we may now live in the victorious patience of waiting for life, not death.

The goal to which the hearers are to be moved is faith; they are to receive this victorious union with Jesus in His death and resurrection, in which we are the results of His suffering, the joy of His victory.

Suggested Readings

- 1) The Letter of Paul to the Philippians.
- 2) George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1895), II, 233—289.

SERMON STUDY FOR MARCH 23, 1967 MAUNDY THURSDAY

MATTHEW 26:26-28

The Institution of Holy Communion

- 1) He who preaches on this text on this day will do well to meditate on the Introit

for the day, noting especially the context for the opening sentence (Gal. 6:14). He can profitably use Paul's interpretation to understand what it is to glory in Christ's Cross ("by which"—or, as the text can also be translated, "through whom"—"the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"). Similarly, the second sentence of the Introit can be used profitably as a commentary on the words of institution: "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

2) If the preacher used the image "He poured out his soul to death" in the Palmarum text (see Palmarum study, Paragraph 7), he will have a fine point of departure for rehearsing the connection between the atonement achieved by Jesus Christ on Golgotha and the atonement administered by Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion. Two other images are correlatives to the giving of Christ's body and the pouring out of His blood: they are "eat" and "drink." Jesus speaks of pouring out His blood for the forgiveness of sins in connection with the cup of the Sacrament, where the atonement is administered by Him, rather than in connection with the Cross, where the atonement is effected by Him. The preacher will want to meditate long and hard on this fact, for the forgiveness of sins is not some general principle, participation in which is achieved by adherence to a legally ordained procedure. The forgiveness is a willed decision of God's love, carried out in an action of God, by which God rearranges the affairs of us men with Himself. His forgiveness is anchored in the sacrificial action of His own pain. Through His Son, in whom the reconciliation was achieved, that same reconciliation is now administered. Thus, the commentary on "forgiveness of sins" can be found in the Introit's words, "salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead: by Him we are redeemed and set at liberty."

3) Full use should be made of the correlatives, word (mouth) and hearing (ear),

body and eat, blood and drink. These correlatives contain the profoundest description of intimacy and union. That which we receive enters us in the most intimate way and becomes our very existence. Furthermore, these correlatives contain also a profound description of continuing participation. We become what we eat and drink. We eat the body of Christ; we become the body of Christ. We drink the blood poured out for us; we are made alive in salvation and resurrection from the dead.

4) Such emphasis can help the preacher and the congregation avoid two dangers:

a) The one tendency is to "shave" down the catholicity of the "forgiveness of sins." With the above emphasis something very similar to the scope of Luther's phrase in the Small Catechism can be retained: "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

b) The second tendency is to miss the strength of reality and intimate depth in the words, "eating," "drinking," and "dwelling in Christ and Christ in him," which run throughout the day's service. "Eating" and "drinking" are bodily actions, but their meaning is not exhausted in the bodily action. Connected with the bodily action is an image, a parable: as really as we take in and become united with that which we eat and drink, so really and intimately do we become united with Jesus Christ in receiving Him sacramentally. "Eat" and "drink" are words that denote real eating and drinking; they are also images of faith and its union with Jesus Christ. Faith is receiving the achieved atonement as it is here administered.

A good question to raise in the minds of the hearers as they are celebrating the Sacrament is, "What do you desire of God when you ask, 'Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us?'" If the preacher can focus the parishioners' attention

and if their desires can be articulated, the sermon becomes the exposition of God's gift (by which godly desires are determined), and the proclamation nourishes faith and love as those fruits of the redemption manifest themselves.

5) Up to this point the attention has been centered in the *present* action of the Eucharist. Its present reality, however, is anchored in a past act; furthermore, it is aimed at future completion. To use the sacrament of Christ's body and blood so that the fruits of His redemption are continually manifest in us, is to remember and to hope. *Remember!* "Do this in remembrance of Me," He commanded. The Collect for the day calls this sacrament, "a memorial of Thy Passion." Jesus drank the cup to the dregs: that is His Passion. Thereby Jesus brought in the way by which God rules us in gracious love. Jesus now gives this cup to us, the cup whereby He links us to Himself in His death that we may blessedly die and live in salvation. With Him we die to the independence that makes us the source of our own life, to that self-authentication which is idolatry. To remember is therefore more than to recollect. To remember Him is to be united with His death; it is "to glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to it." If He died *for us* (as He did!) then we are dead with Him. The result of that death with Him cuts the umbilical cord with death, for we are united with Him in His resurrection from the dead. In Him is life, redemption, and liberty.

a) A good contrast can be made between the "bread of forgetfulness" and the "bread of remembrance." Men who are nervous, insecure, and fearful often eat and drink to forget. They try to forget their terror and defeats by eating and drinking. We eat the bread of remembrance to enter fully the death and termination of our sin and death

that we may live in the freedom of life and love and hope.

b) The alternative Gradual in *The Lutheran Liturgy* picks up the striking phrase from Psalm 111, "He [God] has made His wonderful works to be remembered." Thus "remembering" is not merely arousing ourselves to recall what we know about the past act. It is, rather, being stimulated by and drawn into that which God has done and is here causing to happen to us and in us.

6) From the text we derive direction about the "future" which is included in the Sacrament. It must be remembered that this future is eschatologically presented. That is, as the past is present in the Sacrament, so is the future. What is given in the Sacrament now (to the faithful users) is not something less than or different from Christ's completed death and resurrection. Hence what is coming in the future (chronologically speaking) is the consummation, the completion of what has been fulfilled. It is not essentially different from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ours with Him through faith. The end has begun: Jesus Christ has brought to an end the old realm of sin and death, slavery, and condemnation. He does drink with us anew in the Father's kingdom. The down payment is on the full inheritance.

The central thought of the sermon could be: Eating Christ's body and drinking His blood for the forgiveness of sins describes the most intimate union with Jesus Christ in His death, which is our liberty and life. The glory of His death is that it is death to our sin and death and that it is life in a new dominion, in which we live in God and God lives in us. To remember His death is to remember our own with Him; to remember Him is to share in the life now that has as its goal not death but the completion of the resurrection from the dead, which has already been fulfilled in Him.

The goal of this sermon is to expound the

words of institution in such a way as to give God's answer to the prayer of the congregation in the Collect, "Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us." Whatever specific needs of the congregation are known to the pastor can be related to "these fruits of (Christ's) redemption." The Epistle gives good guidance as it points to the tenderness with which Christians care for each other in the fulfillment of the purpose of God.

However, the preacher is reminded to use this service as the opportunity to deal concretely with death and guilt, with an exposition of the union of Christ and the Christians in the death by His cross, which means life and glory in fellowship with God.

Suggested Readings

- 1) On "remember," see Psalms 25 and 111.
- 2) Luther's commentary on Psalm 111, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 351—87, is indispensable reading for the pastor in relation to this text.
- 3) Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), pp. 585—663.

SERMON STUDY FOR MARCH 24, 1967

GOOD FRIDAY

JOHN 19:30

It Is Finished

1) There is a strange pathos and terror about this text, a loneliness, an agony we can easily miss or misunderstand. We can speak glibly about this death without sensing the shameful shock that cracks through the cosmos as the God of Life takes into Himself the termination of life, which is death. In this way Jesus' humiliation may become

unreal to us and may appear to have no relationship to us. Two subtle distortions can develop:

(a) Despite what the words say, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," we do not, in fact, let go of our griefs and sorrows, together with the guilt and anger they bring. In that case the "It is finished" is operative for us (if at all) only as a potential, a possibility, a goal to be achieved. In this distortion we will not see faith as "letting go of our life" with its self-pity and self-love, so that we may receive the life God gives. Good Friday becomes, rather, a kind of psychological self-flagellation.

(b) The other distortion is the glib insistence on the "It is finished" so as to negate the presence of the good news to work holiness in our continuing pain, loneliness, sorrow, and death. Our glibness drives a wedge between the "It is finished" and our work, our pain, our suffering, and our defeat.

2) In one way the entire sermon will be a continuing exposition of the "It" in "It is finished." What is that "It"? A goal to be achieved? A power to perfect us? The tendency to soften the seriousness of death, its loneliness, its shame, and its finality will tempt the preacher either to evoke pity for Jesus or to describe the "perfected work" in such a way that it leaves the hearers untouched in their present struggle with death, loneliness, and sorrow.

3) Death is defeating and terminal. Hence all of life becomes a struggle to hold back death at whatever point it makes its most severe threat. From this point of view let us try to understand the problem in our lovelessness and anxiety. Who can really give up his life in "perfected" yielding to God except the person who trusts God for that full restoration in resurrection? Thus the preacher and the congregation have the advantage of knowing Easter Sunday already on Good Friday. However, we dare not leap

over Good Friday to Easter Sunday, to have resurrection without death. In such a case both Easter and Good Friday are distorted. Easter illuminates the reality of Good Friday; Good Friday has its outcome in Easter. Death does not, in itself, contain anything of resurrection and life; but Jesus' resurrection does demand and include the terror of terminal death on Good Friday!

4) When Jesus utters, "It is finished," He has entered fully into humiliation and death. There is the mystery of God's own beloved Son bearing the full revulsion of God against sin and sinners. Similarly, Jesus' "It is finished" is a description of the end to which His life has been lived and of the death He now dies. His love has been perfected in obedience. Never has His love been unhinged from the cross, nor relaxed from sinners. He sinks to the lowest humiliation and condemnation to be where we are. The death we must die (and cannot) He alone dies in the perfected death, which perfects even ours.

The "It is finished" must be set into the whole strange time pattern of John's Gospel: "O woman, what have you to do with Me? My hour has not yet come" (2:4); "Jesus said to them [His brothers], 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here'" (7:6); "And Jesus answered them [Andrew and Philip], 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'" (12:23); "After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished . . ." (19:28). No one takes His life from Him. Jesus offers His life as the obedient love that will not let go the Father's will and as the action of love that will not let sinners go. At the beginning of His ministry stands His baptism with water; at the end of His ministry the shedding of His blood in the sacrifice. This ministry is perfected, finished. The new and perfect way is open. The Law, which is against sinners, is perfected in His being the curse for us; the

way of salvation is open in resurrection from the dead.

5) The contraries involved in the Cross (the Beloved suffers and dies; the Dead One is raised; we are linked to His death and resurrection in Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar and in receiving the preached Word of God) must be maintained if this "It is finished" is not to be misunderstood. Jesus fulfills God's law, which legally executes sinners; through His identification with sinners our death is fully died. All the Satanic accusations made against sinners on the basis of the Law are picked up in His body and carried to their full conclusion. Without Christ all life moves only to death; death is its goal and termination. But in Christ we are carried to the death that is for life; He is the Substitute that gives life out of death. The substitution of Christ for us, the exchange ("Surely He has borne our griefs") is not a *legal* exchange: it is a gracious exchange, the promised good news of life with God, which is now fully donated. The exchange is in Christ, for there the mystery of God is full and fully revealed. God Himself bears death and in return gives full life from God. The dispossessed are repossessed. The reconciliation has been perfected. However, none of this can be based on a legal principle; by the Law the innocent cannot be punished for the guilty nor the guilty made innocent. What we are preaching is the good news of Jesus Christ, that gracious substitution by God Himself, whereby the death can be died fully (we die with Jesus Christ) and the new life given as a free, perfected gift ("by His stripes we are healed") in the resurrection from the dead.

6) "It is finished." When Jesus said this, He Himself had not yet risen from the dead. How are we to understand this fact? Jesus has perfected His life as God's Son among men. Jesus has no regrets about un-lived days, unfulfilled tasks, wasted efforts. He

does not grasp for a few extra minutes in order to arrange a disorderly life. He is victor over death by becoming its victim. In Jesus Christ there is perfected the faith in His Father that is the perfect worship of God, the fulfillment of the First Commandment. This being so, the faith that receives Jesus Christ receives the perfected worship, which shares while it awaits the resurrection of the body from the dead.

7) We are those who wait! Are we waiting for God, as Psalm 27 describes it? Specifically, this is Good Friday. We conclude this service with the narration of the death and burial of Jesus. We wait in the quietness of death on Holy Saturday. What is true symbolically in the church year and liturgy also marks our life! While we live in the resurrection, we wait for the resurrection of the body on the Last Day.

"It is finished," but we are not yet finished! We are not yet perfected in love. Death, our last enemy, has not yet been met terminally. The finished work of Christ is finishing us off. It is finishing off our Adamic nature in the daily death of contrition and faith in the forgiveness of sins. The perfected work of Christ is to be employed to perfect us in waiting for the resurrection of the body as we meet death daily in love, for to love another is to lose your own life. Especially, the proclamation of the "perfected" work of Christ is perfecting us in trusting God to be our gracious Father. Even though He slays us, yet we learn to trust Him. Particularly when God's own law, in the hands of our consciences, in the screaming accusations of our disordered and failing lives, or as the subtle accusations of Satan, lays low the totality of our lives, then the finished work of Christ's perfect worship is proclaimed to us to perfect us as beloved children of God.

The central thought for this sermon could be: The perfect work of Christ's ministry,

as God's Son by God's will perfectly bears the wrath of God against sinners, taking into Himself the grievous and lonely wound of death, is the perfect and gracious mystery of God to deal death to our death and give healing to our lives. "It is finished" is the cry of faith of our Brother in death. It is proclaimed to us to call us to that faith which is death with Him and life with Him in God.

The goal of this sermon is so simply and plainly to proclaim the finished life of Jesus that it comes to grips with the shame, defeat, and lonely death that people face, not only in the "cemetery event" but in the simple call to trust God when we are called to give up our lives in love, patience, and service. Such trust is to be marked by "waiting"; that is, expecting God to raise up our lives and sustain them in the resurrection that destroys death and cannot be destroyed by it. Since fear, defeat, and lovelessness work in our body, the totality of the resurrection of the body is to be stressed.

Suggested Readings

- 1) The Gospel According to St. John.
- 2) Selected sermons on the Seven Words of Jesus. See especially Caemmerer, Luther, Pelikan, Stoeckhardt.
- 3) For a helpful study on death, see Luther on the exposition of Psalm 90, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 73—141.
- 4) Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961).
- 5) William Stringfellow, *Instead of Death* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963).

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