

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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Reports on Interchurch Relations

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The Readiness of the World for the Mission

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The Total Ministry of the Church

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Homiletics

Theological Observer

Book Review

VOL. XXXIII

*January 1962*

No. 1

# HOMILETICS

## *Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series\**

### THE FIFTH SUNDAY

#### AFTER EPIPHANY

MATT. 13:24-30

In America everyone enjoys freedom of conscience in religion and in divine worship. Many, however, abuse this freedom by departing from the Word of God and building up their own system of religion. It is imperative for the Christian, therefore, to cling to the pure Word of God and the true sacraments. He will add nothing to the Word of God nor take anything away from it. He will not let himself be blinded by the glamor of heterodox churches nor be offended by and grow angry at the weaknesses of the orthodox church. The Gospel for today warns against such offense and anger.

Let us, therefore, dwell on the following question:

#### In What Way Does Christ's Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat Render Us a Service?

- I. *It serves to make those ashamed of themselves who grow angry with church members that do evil*
- II. *It serves to comfort those who worry about church members that do evil*
- III. *It serves to warn those church members that do evil*

#### I

A. Some people always have maintained that the church of God must be perfectly pure. Every member must have genuine faith, be pious and holy. Concord and undisturbed

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\* Editorial Note: Except for the study on the text for the Transfiguration, furnished by Pastor Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines are based on the sermons of C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille*, abstracted and translated by Prof. Alex W. C. Guebert, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

peace must be earmarks of every congregation. Donatists of the fourth century and Anabaptists of Luther's day insisted on perfection in life, but both failed to achieve their goal. Today some people still insist on purity in life for all church members. When it does not develop, they grow angry, criticise severely, and some leave the church.

B. For such people Christ spoke the parable of the tares among the wheat (vv. 24 to 26; 36-39a). God sows the good seed, Satan the evil. In the Old and the New Testament church we see how Satan strove to wreck the church. Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Jacob's sons, who sold Joseph, the thousands of idolaters among the Israelites in the wilderness and in the days of the Judges, the kings, and the prophets, Judas, the sins and disturbances St. Paul uncovers in the letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians show Satan's activity.

C. Sins and offenses that occur in the church do not make the church a false church. If the church teaches the pure doctrine, Satan is going to be all the more hostile to cause disturbances and disrepute. Those who grow angry when they see evidences of sin within the church, despise it, and separate themselves from it should be ashamed of themselves, for they are turning against God Himself. God is not ashamed of the church in spite of its sin, as long as it teaches His pure Word.

#### II

A. For the earnest Christian this parable offers an answer to the question: What can be done to remove the offenses, conquer sin, and adorn the church with exemplary members of Christ? In verses 27-30a Christ urges the called leaders and upright members of the church to watch so that Satan cannot bring hypocrites into the church. The Bible

passages Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:11, 13b; John 20:23; Matt. 18:18 are to be consistently applied.

B. In the words "Let both grow together until the harvest" Christ says that His church will never be a visible glorious kingdom completely without sin, weaknesses, and offenses. Yet He will nourish and uphold His church until Judgment Day. The true church does not, as the papacy did, use the sword against weedy growths that sprout within its limits. Through Biblical teaching and discipline she strives to keep the weeds from choking the wheat, knowing that Christ will for His sake present the church on the Last Day without spot and blemish, though sinners here did heap shame upon her.

### III

A. Finally, Christ holds forth a warning (v. 30b). Here Christ plainly points to this fact (vv. 41, 42): those who sin and dishonor Christ through an ungodly life, who refuse to repent, though they mouth the words of the Bible and the Confessions, certainly will be rejected and hurled into hell.

B. This warning does not touch the true believers. They are comforted, for the sins of their false brethren will not be charged against them. Though they were subjected to much ridicule here from the lips of hypocrites, they shall "shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 292.

The hymn, *Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ*, expresses the conflicts and anxiety which beset its author, Nikolaus Selnecker, 1530 to 1592. Reared in Nuremberg, a city famed for its culture and the home of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs, Selnecker became a proficient musician at an early age. Melancthon persuaded him to study theology, however, when he came to the University of Wittenberg at the age of nineteen. Selnecker assisted in the preparation of the Formula of Concord and traveled through Saxony to secure signatures for the document. He was deposed as pastor of St. Thomas' Church

in Leipzig by the Crypto-Calvinists under Elector Christian I in May 1589. He fled Leipzig, stayed briefly in Halle and Magdeburg, then was appointed *Superintendent* in Hildesheim. On Christian's death he was recalled to Leipzig, only to die five days after his return. This life of *Sturm und Drang* is clearly reflected in this hymn.

Another hymn by Selnecker which reveals this same inner conflict is *Lass mich dein sein und bleiben*. The hymn tune, *Ach bleib bei uns*, first appeared in *Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig, 1589.

### THE TRANSFIGURATION

MATT. 17:1-8

By Robert H. Smith

Suppose that you had the TV tuned in to the Presidential inauguration last January 20. Imagine furthermore that you became drowsy and dozed off and had a dream. In your dream you saw John F. Kennedy standing there, and suddenly two dim figures whom you recognize as Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt appear and strike up a happy conversation with him. And then a voice comes booming like thunder out of nowhere, "This is the thirty-fifth president of the United States; follow him!"

When you wake up, you would not have to be Sigmund Freud to figure out a plausible explanation for that vision. John F. Kennedy stands in a particular line, a clearly defined political heritage. Certain strands of history are fulfilled in him. And the booming words from the sky point out that your destiny, for better or worse, is bound up somehow with Kennedy's.

The transfiguration of our Lord was something like that. Past, present, and future converge. Those two heroes of the past, Moses and Elijah, symbolize the hope of the Jewish people. They converse with Jesus and set their stamp of approval on Him. At the same time Jesus appeared transfigured in the glory which will be His without let or hindrance in the future Kingdom. If the two figures are redolent of the past, and the glory is a

portent of the future, the way that Jesus goes for the present is defined by the voice as the downward way of the Servant.

V. 1. The opening words, "and after six days," set this story in the closest relationship with the preceding paragraphs, connected especially with Caesarea Philippi. Note the sequence of events:

a) Peter, speaking for the Twelve, confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus applauds: "You did not learn that from mortal man; it was revealed to you by My heavenly Father." (Matt. 16:17, NEB)

b) Jesus begins to unfold to His disciples the fact that God wills (θεῖ) His suffering and death (Matt. 16:21). Suffering stood diametrically opposed to the common Jewish notion of messiahship, and talk of dying is thus a cold dash of water on the disciples' burgeoning hopes. Their shock and disapproval are voiced by Peter (Matt. 16:22). With a stiff retort Jesus scotches the incipient rebellion, recognizing in it the old voice of the Tempter: "You are bound and determined (φρονεῖς) by the things of men and not by the things of God." (Matt. 16:23)

c) The third scene summarizes the preceding with a paradox: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25 RSV). He promises that the Son of man is destined to come in glory.

"Peter and James and John" form an inner circle, standing midway between Jesus and the rest of the Twelve. (Matt. 26:3; Mark 5:37; 13:3)

Why does Matthew bother reminding us that Jesus led them up a "high" mountain? Some while away the hours trying to locate the "high" mountain, opting variously for Tabor (too low), or Hermon (not supported by tradition) or one of the three mountains over 4,000 feet high, southeast of Caesarea Philippi (not dignified by names). Others point out that Jesus commissioned His disciples on a mountain (Matt. 28:6) and as-

cended from a mountain (Acts 1:12). Still others see a parallel in Sinai or Horeb, where Moses (Ex. 24:15,16) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:3) saw God's glory and heard His voice. But Matthew more likely noted that this mountain was "high" because he saw a correspondence with the "high mountain" from which Jesus saw "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" (Matt. 4:8). There Satan had tempted Jesus to see His Sonship in terms of political messianism. Jesus had repudiated that interpretation, but Satan came again (through Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi). Now on another "high mountain" Jesus is strengthened in His resolve to go the way of the cross and suffering service.

V. 2. "He was transfigured" (μετεμορφώθη). His form (μορφή) is altered. He does not appear as an ordinary, earthbound mortal, but as one from the divine side of reality. The change is signaled by the shining of His face and the luminous whiteness of His garments. It is not enough to compare the brilliance of His countenance with that of Moses after he had been talking with God (Ex. 24:29 ff.) or that of the Sadhu Sundar Singh and other saints or mystics sunk deep in ecstatic devotion and prayer. His face shines like that of the angel at the tomb (Matt. 28:3), nay, like that of the victorious Son of man in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:16). It was a part of Jewish and Christian eschatology that the pious would in the end be transfigured and shine like the sun (Matt. 13:43; 1 Cor. 15:51 f.; Dan. 12:3; 2 Baruch 20:4; 51:3 ff.; Eth. Enoch 38:4; 104:2; 2 Esdras 7:97) and wear "garments of glory." (Enoch 62:15 f.; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 3:5; 4:4; 7:9; cf. Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:8)

At a critical turning point in Jesus' career the Father strengthens the Son and bolsters the faith of the disciples by letting Jesus appear in the form of one resurrected from the dead. Jesus and the inner circle catch a glimpse which guarantees the future glory. (Luke 9:31; 2 Peter 1:16-18; 1 Peter 5:1)

V. 3. "And behold" (καὶ ἰδοὺ) alerts the

reader for something demanding particular attention, and is repeated before the appearance of the cloud and before the voice.

"There appeared" (ἔφθη). ἔφθη is a word regularly used of revelation, especially of visual revelation granted by God.

They see Moses and Elijah, both of whom received revelation in theophanic visions on mountains and neither of whom was thought in late Jewish folklore to be dead (Josephus, *Ant.* IV, 326, in spite of Deut. 34:5-8; cf. 2 Esdras 6:26). Late Judaism developed the notion of two precursors of the Messiah. Outside the NT they are usually Enoch and Elijah, never Moses and Elijah (Eth. Enoch 90:31), except in a Jewish commentary of the ninth Christian century, where the first-century rabbi, Johanan ben Zakkai, is quoted. The Seer of Patmos evidently has Elijah and Moses in mind as the two witnesses. (Rev. 11:3 ff.)

It is sometimes asserted that Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets respectively. This attractive notion lacks substantial foundation. In Jesus' day Moses was counted as a type of Christ. The rabbis contemporary with Jesus had a slogan: "As was the first redeemer (Moses), so will the last redeemer (Messiah) be" (J. Jeremias, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [hereafter cited as TWzNT], IV, 864). And early Christians believed Jesus was "the prophet" like Moses whom Moses had promised (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22 f.; 7:37; John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40). Jesus was a second Moses who led His people out of bondage in a new exodus accomplished in His death (cf. Luke 9:31; Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about His "exodus"). Elijah was expected as the precursor of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5; note the reference to a fuller in Mal. 3:2 and Mark 9:3; Elijah's work is done!). A recent essayist on the transfiguration has written a fine summary of the significance of the double appearance:

Elijah's task is to restore the Mosaic covenant in all its pristine purity. But this time not

with fire and sword as at the time of Ahab on Carmel and at Kishon. Rather will he turn hearts by his peaceful work! Thus also is Jesus to conceive His task. (H. Baltensweiler, *Die Verklärung Jesu*, 82)

V. 4. Peter said, "It is well that we are here." Well for whom? For the disciples or for the heavenly three? Some believe Peter would prolong the heady vision on the mount, high and lifted up, far from the madding crowd. But then we would expect the sentence to say, "It is good for us (ἡμῖν) to be here." But he says, "It is a good thing (for you) that we (ἡμεῖς, James, John, and I) are here," to pitch tents for you three, as at the Feast of Tabernacles. (J. Schniewind, in *Das NT Deutsch* [hereafter NTD], I, 123)

"Booths" or "tents" (σκηνάς) can designate any shelter, all the way from the poor tent of a nomad or a soldier, through the tabernacle or temple, to the heavenly dwelling place of God. (Rev. 21:3; 7:15)

Why the reference to pitching tents or erecting booths? Because the disciples wanted to capture the glory and linger? Because they wanted shelter from the cool night air? Most recent commentators believe that the remark was occasioned by the proximity of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths, Succoth). Stated as a mathematical proportion, the current consensus suggests that the transfiguration is to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles as Easter is to the Jewish Passover. In both cases an event in the life of Christ fulfills (and in fulfilling transcends and obsolesces) a particular set of Jewish hopes crystallized around a major national and religious holiday.

Preeminently an agricultural, harvest festival (Deut. 16:13 ff.; Ex. 23:16), Tabernacles also served as a reminder of the days when Yahweh tabernacled with His chosen people in the time of the wilderness wanderings (Lev. 23:33-43). Together with Passover and Pentecost, it was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals obligatory on adult Jews. Billerbeck writes,

That it was called simply "the Feast" shows that Tabernacles was the most popular of all Jewish feasts. Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 100) says that it was the holiest and greatest feast among the Hebrews. (Quoted by C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 256)

It was celebrated with enthusiasm and hope. "In late Judaism people liked to picture the new, future world of God with the joyous colors borrowed from the Feast of Tabernacles" (Schniewind, *NTD* I, 123). Zechariah describes the Day of the Lord in terms of the Feast of Booths, witnessing to the Feast as the celebration of the enthronement of the king, the Lord of hosts. (Zech. 14:9, 16, 19)

It was believed that the Messiah would dwell in a booth. And at the time of this Feast the air was charged with the electricity of nationalism, and people longed even more fervently than usual for the Messiah to come and restore God's people to independent station. (Baltensweiler, 59 ff.)

If the transfiguration occurred on the eve of the Feast of Tabernacles (15—20 Tishri), then the great confession of St. Peter at Caesarea Philippi was uttered on the Day of Atonement (10 Tishri). This background would partly explain why the Evangelist is so careful to give the precise date of the transfiguration.

V. 5. Peter was in the middle of a sentence, when "lo (ἰδοὺ), a bright cloud overshadowed them." In the Old Testament, theophanies are regularly described in images drawn from storms. Clouds are a standing feature of epiphanies of the Lord. The children of Israel were led in their wanderings by the Lord, who went before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21, 22; Deut. 1:33; Ps. 78:14; 105:39). The Lord used the cloud as His garment, the sign that He was present, though veiled.

The cloud and the glory of God are closely related and very nearly identified, as appears

in these lines: "The cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days" (Ex. 24:15; cf. Deut. 4:11, 12; 5:22, 23). The cloud appeared at the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10). And it was believed that in the last times the cloud would once more appear. (2 Macc. 2:8)

From the cloud came a voice, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." The exact same words are spoken "from heaven" (i. e., from God Himself) at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17), except that here are added the words: "Hear (and obey) Him" (ἀκούετε), declaring that Moses' promise of an eschatological prophet (Deut. 18:15) is fulfilled in Jesus.

At Caesarea Philippi Peter echoed the words at the baptism and anticipated the transfiguration in his confession: "You are the Christ, the *Son of the living God*." Peter spoke in terms of victory and majesty and exaltation, reflecting the language and conception of Ps. 2:7. But the words at baptism and transfiguration are decisively shaped by Isaiah 42:1, one of the Servant Songs to which Isaiah 53 also belongs. The amalgamation of these elements adds up to a double conception of Jesus' person and work. The voice declares in effect, "You are My only Son; you must fulfill the role of the Servant of God" (see O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 281—290).

The words, "My Son, My beloved," are thus ambivalent, that is, doubly significant. They are the words with which Satan tempted Jesus again and again to go the way of political messianism, to use supernatural powers to provide material sustenance, to achieve world empire, to win the populace by signs to His banner. But Jesus always "refused to confuse His Messiahship with dictatorship" (T. W. Manson, *Servant-Messiah*, 56). To the disciples Sonship meant privilege, rank, advantage, power; for "son" was a lordly title. But to Jesus both after His baptism and

here, to be the Son of God means to serve and to suffer, and then (and only then) to enter into glory.

V. 6. "When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe." The transfiguration was a numinous, theophanic event, which strikes a primal fear into human hearts. The disciples in effect cry out, "Depart from us; for we are sinful men."

V. 7. "The resurrected One, and here the One who is transfigured in brightly beaming glory, is the presence of God" (Schniewind, *NTD* II, 194; cf. John 1:14, ἐσκήνωσεν "tabernacled"). But Jesus' presence is not destructive. He touches the disciples and reassures them, "Rise and have no fear" (μὴ φοβᾶσθε). Compare the accounts of the miraculous draft of fish (Luke 5:9, 10), the storm on the lake (Matt. 14:27), the events of Easter (Matt. 28:5, 10; John 20:1-14), and the appearance of the glorified Son of man to the Seer of Patmos. (Rev. 1:17)

V. 9. "And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." The pericope begins and ends with Jesus alone.

Keeping in mind the very real probability that the transfiguration occurred on the eve of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the ideal of political messianism was to the fore and fervent nationalism was surging in every Jewish heart, and summing up the details of the story and its connection with the baptism and temptation, it is possible to arrive at an interpretation of the story as a unit. An excellent summary is that of Johannes Behm:

What is promised to the pious for the new aeon, Jesus experiences already here in the present, not as one among many but rather as the bearer of a unique office. The fact that the human appearance of Jesus is changed before the eyes of His most trusted disciples for a few brief moments into that of a heavenly being from the transfigured world is an anticipation and a guarantee of an eschatological reality. Jesus is revealed to the disciples as the Son of man who was expected to come in the last time. They are

to know that the goal of His way through suffering and death is the glory of the Consummator and Perfecter of the world. (*TWzNT* IV, 765)

This story thus states an oft repeated New Testament theme: Jesus is the long expected Jewish Messiah, but He is not the kind of Messiah the Jewish people expected. They wanted a king to go the glory road of pomp and circumstance. But in Jesus Christ God entered into history as love which sacrifices and serves and suffers, and only by this downward route arrives at glory everlasting.

Theme: Glory in the Lowest

I. *The 20th-century Christian is in danger of outdoing the 1st-century Jew in his search for success and flight from sacrifice*

A. This is not to say that Christians do not worship the crucified One. We loudly sing His praises in chant and stanza, read the passion history, and make the sign of the cross.

B. But are we His followers? Do we not rather stand on the sidelines and cheer Him on as He goes alone? Are we not at ease in Zion, while He still bears alone the pain of a suffering humanity?

II. *Jesus died and was raised up again for us*

A. The Messiah suffered to make peace between the Father and us ease-taking, disobeying children. He bore the stripes that were rightly directed at our own stiff necks and ramrod backs, too proud to bear the burdens of our neighbor, too high to stoop to lowly service.

B. And we who live in these post-Easter days know the glory He has entered. It was prophesied and guaranteed at the transfiguration, and it became enduring and unending reality at His resurrection.

III. *"Hear Him!"*

A. Believing in a Lord who is both Son and suffering Servant is inseparable from obeying and following Him. The word and water which made us sons of God and heirs

with Christ were accompanied by the sign of the cross laid on our heads and hearts.

B. The service road and servant's entrance is the only way to glory. Any other way is a blind alley. But the road that leads the Christian from the high mount of transfiguration descends through the forsaken depths of Lent and Good Friday but leads inerrantly to the kingdom and the power and the glory of Easter.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 343.

In 1597, while pastor at Unna, Philipp Nicolai (1556—1608) wrote *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* and *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, known as "the king" and "the queen" of chorales. The extreme hardships endured by Nicolai explain the strong eschatological note of *Wachet auf* and the fact that his *Morgensternlied* is filled with *Jesusliebe*. He suffered under the Spanish invasion of Westphalia in 1586. In his pastorates at Cologne and Alt-Wildungen Nicolai experienced severe disappointments. The pestilence had struck with vicious might when he wrote both the king and queen of chorales. In that year he buried family members and many parishioners. He was also engaged in continuous controversy with the Reformed and Rome. All these difficulties did not stifle the strong confidence and hope of these two great chorales. "How Brightly Shines" was sung at weddings and was also used during Epiphany. The Hymn-of-the-Week Plan appoints it for the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Christian hope years for the return of the gloriously splended Lord, Jesus Christ.

Philipp Nicolai also wrote the melody for this acrostic hymn. In the original the individual stanzas begin with the letters WEGVHZW to indicate that Nicolai dedicated the hymn to his much beloved pupil, Wilhelm Ernst Graf und Herr zu Waldeck.

## SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

MATT. 20:1-16

God's Word reveals everything that is necessary for our salvation. Many, however, reject this precious Word as foolishness. Others who accept the Word as the Word of

God are not satisfied with it. Some want to penetrate into the secrets God's wisdom has withheld from human understanding. They want to know how a loving God could let sin, death, and misery come into the world; why God gives many opportunities to one man, few opportunities to another to repent; why He creates those who He knows will be damned; why He showers His gracious Word upon one nation for a long time and lets other nations sit in darkness for thousands of years.

Unfortunate is he who does not stand on the words of St. Paul in Rom. 11:33-36. He who tries to peer into the secrets of God will blind himself, black out God, and be overcome by many destructive errors.

The Gospel for today presents a doctrine the human mind cannot fathom, a doctrine on which some men have expressed erroneous ideas. It is the doctrine of election or predestination. Let me show you how we may avoid all error in this most comforting doctrine by answering the question:

*What Must We Steadfastly Keep in Mind If in the Doctrine of Election We Do Not Want to Err to the Right or to the Left?*

- I. We must keep in mind that according to Holy Scripture a man loses eternal life because of his own fault and not because of a decree of God;
- II. We must keep in mind that according to Holy Scripture a man is saved not through some merit of his own but only through the pure grace of God.

### I

A. God does nothing in time which He did not determine to do back in eternity. God knows from eternity how many will be saved and how many will be damned (Matt. 20:16; Acts 13:48). Though God definitely speaks of an eternal election, many in Christendom go off on a tangent to the right or to the left when they apply their finite mind to this doctrine.



B. Some church bodies have maintained that since God did not decree that all men shall be saved, He must have decreed that the rest shall be damned. They have contended that since all men are dead in sin and God must work repentance, faith, and sanctification, it is because God does not want to save a man that he does not come to faith. God must, therefore, have determined from eternity that such a man shall be damned. Some men in Christendom single out the Bible passage which says that God hardens whom He will. They draw the conclusion that these, like Pharaoh, are people God does not want to save.

C. God's Word clearly shows that such contentions and conclusions are false and erroneous. The Bible passages 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Peter 3:9b; John 3:16; Ezek. 33:10, 11; Matt. 23:37; Is. 1:5; Prov. 1:24-31; Acts 7:51; Hos. 13:9; 1 Sam. 6:6; Heb. 3:15 open up God's heart. He wants to save. It is indeed true that in eternity He knew that some would not be saved. But He has no pleasure in damning them. He casts them into outer darkness because their stubborn impenitence forces Him to do so.

D. On your part, therefore, cling to what the Word of God reveals. God loves all men. He also loves you. God's Son redeemed all men. He also redeemed you. The Holy Ghost earnestly calls all men through the Gospel. He calls you also. The Triune God wants to save all men. He wants to save you also. Believe in particular the words of John 10:27, 28. He who is lost is lost because of his own fault.

## II

A. If we are to depart neither to the right nor to the left in the doctrine of election, we must also firmly hold to these two points: on the one hand, God does not will that anyone shall be lost; on the other hand, no man is saved because of some merit of his own.

B. The Gospel for today underscores the second point. Jesus endeavored to lead Peter to see that only the goodness, grace, and mercy of God can make a saint out of a sinner, that the grace of God is always a gift, never a reward for services rendered.

C. God did not choose His elect because He foresaw some good in them; but because He elected them they became holy Christians and blessed people. Cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI, 8, 88.

D. Those of you who believe and hate sin, rejoice! Though you have fightings and fears within and without, because of faith in Christ God is letting you see what He determined for you in eternity. Therefore rejoice in the crown of righteousness which is reserved for you in heaven.

E. Do not forget the Lord's warning, v. 16. Do not lose what has come to you through faith. Be diligent in the use of the means of grace, in prayer, in warring against sin and the world, in all good works, in the practice of faith, love, hope, and patience in bearing the cross. Write the words of St. Peter, 2 Peter 1:10, 11, on your heart and give all glory and honor to Christ forever and ever.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Salvation unto Us Has Come," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 377.

As hymn writer, Paul Speratus (1484—1551) is second only to Luther during the early Lutheran period. Prussian-born Speratus was converted early in life to the Lutheran faith and served as pastor in Dinkelsbühl, Würzburg, Salzburg, and Vienna. In 1523 he was imprisoned in Vienna because of his allegiance to the Lutheran faith. It may be that during this imprisonment Speratus wrote the hymn, *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*. It seems that the feeling of immediacy and reality of justification by grace alone, as expressed in this hymn, could come only from a saint in prison. (Hymnologist E. E. Koch calls it: *das Feldzeichen im Kampfe der Protestanten gegen das Papsttum*.) *Es ist das Heil* is given second place in Luther's first hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch*, following *Nun freut euch*. It supports the theme of the Gospel for this first pre-Lent Sunday. Early Lutherans began using this emphatic hymn on *sola gratia*

on this Sunday as a safeguard against Pelagian practices of the Roman Catholic Church especially during the Lenten season. We sing the text to the hymn tune, *Es ist das Heil*, a chorale melody from the late 15th century. Its author is unknown.

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SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY      LUKE 8:4-15

In apostolic and postapostolic days Christians frequently had to worship in private homes, in unfrequented places, in forests, caves, and catacombs. Even when they were permitted to erect churches, these were often later destroyed. That kind of persecution was sad and dangerous. It is far more sad and dangerous to have a beautiful church in which the Word of God is blasphemed or adulterated. In a church in which the Word of God is still preached or read, but falsely interpreted, many springs of life and comfort are stopped up. There Satan is sowing his seed beside the Word of God.

It is a blessing for Christians to have a church they can attend without any hindrance, in which the whole counsel of God is taught and the sacraments are administered as Christ instituted them. We ought not suppose, however, that Christians who have such an opportunity could not lose their souls. They can be in great danger.

In the text for today Christ shows that of the many who hear His Word only a few obtain salvation. Therefore He uttered the words of warning, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"

As a warning to us let me answer the question:

*Why Are So Many of Those Who Hear the Pure Word of God Not Saved?*

- I. Many hear the Word of God diligently, but do not come to *faith*.
- II. Some come to faith through the Word of God. But they do not let it strike root and therefore do not continue in faith.

- III. Others let the Word of God take root. But they let worldliness take over again and bring forth no fruit with patience.

I

A. All people are like an acre of ground. Except good seed is sown, an acre will produce weeds. If the Word of God is not sown in the human heart, man can produce nothing but the weeds of sin.

B. Many people suppose that hearing and reading the Word of God diligently is sufficient to bring them salvation. They look upon this hearing and reading as a good work which will earn salvation for them. They are mistaken. (Vv. 5 and 12)

C. The Word of God is similar to the seed. The seed must fall into the ground, sprout, and produce. If the seed lies only on top of the ground, it will be wasted. If the Word of God remains only on the surface of the heart, Satan comes, takes it away, and makes faith impossible. (Heb. 4:2b)

D. Hearing the Word of God alone does not help. God has given us His Word to make citizens of heaven out of us. Through it He wants to show us the misery of our sin, to enlighten us through the Holy Ghost to see the need of Jesus Christ and faith in Him as Redeemer. If the hearing of the Word does not make us yearn for Christ, we have heard the Word in vain. Therefore, he who would be saved must, besides hearing the Word of God, let it fill his whole heart so that he will have a living faith in Christ and become a new creature.

II

A. The Word of God is alive and powerful. Many who hear it diligently are gripped by its penetrating power. They have the germ of a living faith, and a new heavenly life becomes evident. But hear the following words of Christ in the parable: vv. 6 and 13.

B. Seed will sprout in thin soil. But dry weather and a hot sun do quick damage. The

Word of God awakens many sinners. They turn to Christ with joy and accept Him as Savior. They evidence great zeal for the church. They confess their faith before the world. But there is a change. Former sins overpower them again. They cannot refuse the enticements of the world. The mockery of the world beats them down. They cease to pray, to hear the Word of God, to watch over themselves. They sink into spiritual impotence and spiritual death. They are lost.

C. Remember! We are not saved because we came to faith once upon a time. We shall be saved when we continue in faith and in the fellowship of Christ to our death. Dip deep into the Word of God, and let it strike deep roots into your hearts. As poor sinners cling only to God's grace, seek only that grace, and find pleasure only in that grace! Then no storm of affliction nor flood of temptation can tear down the house of your salvation.

### III

A. Our text also talks about Christians who let the Word of God take deep root in their heart and still are not saved. (Vv. 7 and 14)

B. A tiller of the soil easily understands the Lord's words. Plants that have taken deep root can be choked out by weeds. A Christian may have a heart well cultivated by the Word of God. Yet if he does not exercise care, sin will crowd out the Word of God. There are two kinds of sinful weeds that threaten the best of Christians—the weeds of worry and the weeds of riches and pleasure of life. Therefore, daily watchfulness is in order. Infinite care must be employed to root out the weeds through the Word of God and prayer.

C. A Christian who has joined a church where the Word of God is preached should not feel that therefore no danger is confront-

ing him. In such a church heaven is indeed wide open, but the way is narrow that leads to it, and the gate is small that admits the traveler. Let us not give ourselves a false security!

D. Let us deepen the soil in earnest, daily repentance that our faith may not shrivel in the heat of affliction. Let us watch and pray that we pluck the weeds out of our heart and bring forth fruit with patience. Then in heaven we shall speak the words of Jacob in Gen. 28:16, 17.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "May God Bestow on Us His Grace," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 500.

Although some hymnologists disagree, it is generally agreed that Martin Luther wrote his six psalm-chorales in 1524. These are:

*Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein* (Psalm 12)

*Es spricht der Unweisen Mund wohl* (Psalm 14)

*Es woll uns Gott genädig sein* (Psalm 66)

*Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit* (Psalm 124)

*Wohl dem, der in Gottes Furcht*

*steht*

(Psalm 128)

*Aus tiefer Not schrei' ich zu dir*

(Psalm 130)

All but two of these (Psalms 14 and 128) have been retained in modern hymnals. In paraphrasing these Psalms in the vernacular Luther could draw on a rich background of studies in the Psalter: his treatment of the Penitential Psalms in 1517, his *Betbüchlein* of 1522, and his translation of the Psalter in 1524. In these hymns Luther was not only achieving his purpose of making hymns available to the common people in the vernacular but he was also giving a concrete demonstration of the principle that hymns should be based on the Scripture as directly as possible.

*Es woll uns Gott genädig sein* is a bit ponderous, and the English translation by Richard Massie, particularly of the second stanza, does not relieve this heaviness. But its majestic content and spiritual power justify its inclusion in most modern Lutheran hymnals in Europe and America. It serves to undergird the witness of the Christian life before all nations (the Gradual) and the fruits of faith (the Gospel). Luther may have written the melodically and rhythmically strong tune, although some attribute its composition to Johann Walther.