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(Except for the extended study of the text for Rogate Sunday, which is by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were abstracted and translated from C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* by Prof. Alex W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are by Mr. Arno Klausmeier, St. Louis, Mo.)

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI SUNDAY

JOHN 10:12-16

Many in Christendom look upon the words "There shall be one fold and one Shepherd" as a prophecy pointing to a time when all heathen, Jews, and Mohammedans will come to faith in Christ. But this interpretation is in conflict with the teaching of Scripture on the nature of Christ's kingdom on earth, on the hope of the Christians in the world, on the last days, and on Judgment Day. All these articles of faith will be destroyed if one supposes that Christ's words "one fold and one Shepherd" indicate a period when all men are bound together by faith in Christ. What is the meaning of Christ's words? On the basis of the Gospel for today let me point out to you

*The True Meaning and Application of Christ's Words "There Shall Be One Fold and One Shepherd"*

We shall inquire into

- I. The true meaning
- II. The true application of these words

I

A. Before the time of Christ men were divided into two flocks: Gentile nations without knowledge of the true God and descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, who had received prophecies of the coming

Redeemer. To Abraham, Jacob, David, Isaiah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Hezekiah, was given the promise that the Messiah would tear down the wall separating the Gentiles and His chosen people and would join them into one flock with the true Israel.

B. A comparison of the prophecies concerning the new covenant with the words of v. 16 of our text points out the true meaning of Christ's words. The former distinction between Gentiles and Jews will disappear. The doors of the church will be open to all believers from all nations, and all will be one flock.

C. The Holy Spirit made Christ's words clear on Pentecost Day. He poured out the gift of faith in Christ on many heathen people and joined them to the apostolic church. Since that time in whatever land and language the Word is proclaimed, Christ is adding the "other sheep" to His one flock. (Cf. Eph. 2:11-18; Rom. 10:11-13)

D. See, therefore, the fulfillment of Christ's words. Do not expect a general conversion of people to Christ or the joining of all believers in one glorious church. Such a hope rests on mere human thought. It is dangerous and harmful. It fails to distinguish between truth and error. It hinders proper preparation for death and Judgment Day.

II

A. To apply the truth of Christ's words properly, we must understand that of necessity there can be only one true church of Christ on earth, that we should cling to the apostolic confession "I believe in the (one) holy Christian church," that we should be and remain members of this one true church.

Christ's words "one flock," "one Shepherd," cancel out all shallow thinking on religion and salvation.

B. Furthermore, the proper application of Christ's words makes it clear that the true church is attached to no other person or power than Christ Himself and His Word. We will avoid all false notions of the church if we let the words of v. 16 direct us only to Christ and if we follow only Him, the Good Shepherd.

C. Finally, the proper application of Christ's words invites us to use our time and gifts so that we are instruments in God's hands to bring the truth of the Good Shepherd's words to other people.

D. Remember, therefore, your high calling and do your part in bringing others into Christ's one fold. Think of the heathen and those who are being misled. Let nothing get in your way to keep you from setting forth the light you have received so it can light the way to salvation for someone else.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 431

The shepherd imagery in both Epistle and Gospel for this day has given it the name "Good Shepherd Sunday" in common parlance. Thus the hymn of the week is a metrical paraphrase of the 23d Psalm. The author, Sir Henry Williams Baker (May 27, 1821—Feb. 12, 1877), was editor of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, one of the classic English collections, to which he also contributed 33 hymns. "The King of Love" appeared in the Appendix to *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1868, and has been included in most hymnals since then. It appeared as early as 1873 in a missionary hymnal in Bechuanaland. The author is reported to have died with the comforting words of the third stanza on his lips.

The virile tune, taken from Michael Praetorius' *Musae Sioniae VIII* of 1610, originally

appeared in Bohemia in 1595 as the melody of the anonymous morning hymn *Ich dank' dir schon durch deinen Sohn*. It is worth learning!

## JUBILATE SUNDAY

JOHN 16:16-23

Some people who claim to be Christian are almost always sad. Like Jonah they are sad because things are not going their way. This is really worldly sorrow, just the opposite of true faith. It frequently clothes itself in a garment that looks like Christian earnestness, but is nothing else than smouldering dissatisfaction with God and a loss of love for the neighbor. It can only lead to eternal sorrow in hell. Christ, however, not only praises His disciples when they suffer for His sake but also adds, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Godly sorrow, then, is salutary. It is the way to joy. It "produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret." That is the Biblical truth we shall consider this morning. Let me show you that

*Only Godly Sorrow Is the Way to True Joy*

- I. It is the way to true joy of faith in time
- II. It is the way to true joy of sight in heaven

### I

A. Faith in Christ is the only way to eternal joy. But it cannot be obtained without godly sorrow (v. 20). True faith cannot be born without pain (v. 21). It comes only when a man can honestly say with David, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head," etc. (Ps. 38:4, 5)

B. Some people, however, entertain the idle hope of salvation without having godly sorrow. They are not only those who know nothing about Christ but also those who come to church and pretend to be Christian. The latter take sin too lightly, do not hesitate to let anger, deception, and other sins

dominate their actions if this seems to further their interest, and refuse to exercise restraint if that should entail pain or sorrow. They have no real faith in Christ.

C. If there should be such people among us, will you not let Christ show you that you can have faith only through repentance, through a godly sorrow over sin? Do not try to console yourself with a faith without repentance. Do not continue to resist the Spirit of God.

## II

A. When the disciples came to Christ, they undoubtedly experienced godly sorrow because of their sins. Why, then, does Christ talk to them about godly sorrow for the future? Christ did it because it was useful and necessary for eternal joy in heaven. Without continued godly sorrow the disciples would have lost the high dignity of their ministry and the glory of their gifts. But godly sorrow prevented this loss. Therefore when St. Paul was in the midst of affliction and anxiety, God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," etc. (2 Cor. 12:9)

B. Christ follows this same pattern with all Christians (vv. 16-19). Their life is not an unbroken stretch of sorrow. There is an interchange of joy and sorrow. When they are aware of Christ's presence, they are happy. But sorrow takes over because at times they fail to see Christ or are uncertain about His nearness.

C. Christians certainly share in the sorrow that sweeps over all people. Their sorrow, however, is intensified by the scorn, shame, and persecution hurled at them by the world. They know no treasure greater than the grace of God. This makes life sweet and worthwhile to them. Yet as long as they live on earth, they continue to be flesh. Today they are strong in faith, tomorrow weak. They find it necessary to call out with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). They swing back and forth

between certainty and doubt, rest and unrest, strength and weakness, joy and sorrow—a constant struggle! False faith knows no affliction. True faith is always under stress.

D. God uses sorrow to keep Christians with Christ. Blessed is he who walks with Christ through time into eternity. (Vv. 22, 23.)

*The Hymn of the Week:* "O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 263

The note of comfort spoken by Christ to His "little flock" in the Gospel makes this hymn of the certainty of triumph an ideal selection for "Rejoicing Sunday." Although its origin is somewhat cloudy (it has been attributed to at least three authors), it is clear that it was sung as the Evangelical forces under Gustavus Adolphus prepared for the Battle of Lützen in 1631. Its connection with this battle has led some to assume that Gustavus himself wrote it or that it was a versification of his ideas through the pen of his chaplain, Jacob Fabricius. The most probable author of the first three stanzas (the fourth is still anonymous) is Johann Michael Altenburg (1584—1640), Evangelical pastor in Gross Sömmern, near Erfurt. The translation, an altered version of Catherine Winkworth's, first appeared in her *Lyra Germanica*, First Series, 1855, omitting stanza four.

The original melody for this hymn was written by Altenburg, but most hymnals use the tune *Kommt her zu mir*, which finds its origin in a five-line folk melody from the late 15th century. The repetition of the fourth line makes it suitable for a six-line text.

## CANTATE SUNDAY

JOHN 16:5-15

You cannot expect anything more of a man than that he always acts according to his conviction. This is a widely accepted

principle in our day. However, no matter how you look at it, it is false. In religion it leads to the greatest degree of indifference. No man can be acceptable before God by following his own thought. Only the Holy Ghost, whom God alone confers through His Word, can turn a man away from his own thinking and to God's way of thinking. The Gospel for today presents God's thought on the way to salvation. Let me speak to you on

*The Right Kind of Conviction Which the Holy Ghost Alone Can Confer*

- I. Concerning sin
- II. Concerning righteousness
- III. Concerning judgment

I

A. The world has a wrong understanding of sin. To some it is only a weakness in human nature, or it is due, they think, to a lack of education. Others believe that gross outbursts of sin certainly make man damnable before God but that He will overlook lesser sins, especially if the guilty person is weak. Finally, some admit that overt sins against God's love and against the neighbor are damnable but excusable if the sinner tries to make amends.

B. The Holy Ghost brings the proper conviction of sin (vv. 8, 9). He uses His ministers to preach that all men without exception are sinners, that Christ died for all the sins of the world, that all who believe in Christ will be saved. Through this preaching the Holy Ghost convicts the world of sin for not believing in Christ. The first and greatest sin is lack of faith in Christ.

C. God forbid that any one of us should want to turn against the Holy Ghost! Woe to us if we should want to deny that by nature we are enemies of God and should refuse to accept the grace and mercy of God in Christ! Whoever does not believe in Christ is under God's wrath, and nothing in heaven and on earth can save him.

II

A. A number of people are ready to admit that man must have forgiveness of sin if he is to be righteous before God. But there are diverse opinions among men about the nature of righteousness that avails before God. Some of these are: Do what every good neighbor and citizen would do; perform what your religion or church prescribes.

B. Vv. 8 and 10 point the way to the right conviction on righteousness before God. The whole redemptive work of Christ is the only way to God. Anything we may do is of no avail. All our work toward righteousness is just a filthy rag. Whatever our heart may say against the righteousness of God in Christ, the Holy Ghost nevertheless is going all out to convince us that Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection is the only righteousness that counts.

III

A. Some unbelievers are not afraid of the judgment of God. They believe there is no judgment or suppose that God could not judge them. Conscience, however, preaches a loud sermon about the day when God will bring all hidden things to light. This causes many people either to try to blot out the memory of the Day of Judgment or to think about it in fear and trembling.

B. Christ's words in vv. 8 and 11 throw a wonderful light on Judgment Day. Though they contain a threat, they are filled with comfort which human reason could not have produced. The Holy Spirit is persuading the redeemed to see that Christ has conquered Satan. Every believer is freed from sin, shares in Christ's righteousness, and need fear no accusation from Satan. For him Judgment Day is the day of complete redemption, of victory, of revelation of his freedom and glory in Christ.

C. Blessed is he who has permitted the Holy Ghost to bring him to this conviction. The Holy Ghost has led him from sin to

faith, from faith to righteousness, from righteousness to glory. Glory, honor, and thanks be to the Holy Ghost, together with the Father and the Son, forever and ever!

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 387

The ninth stanza of this hymn, Luther's first (1523), is quite an explicit tie with the Gospel for the day; the Introit's "marvelous things" are summarized in this classic résumé of the Gospel. The roots of Luther's hymn probably lie in the hymn "Ervreuwe dich, lieffind krysten gemeyn," which appeared about 1500 in the *Liederbuch der Anna von Köln*, which Luther apparently knew during his monastic days. First printed in pamphlet form, but included in the 1524 *Etlich cristlich lider*, this "setting forth [of] the unspeakable grace of God" was credited by Tileman Hesshusius with having "brought to the noble faith" "many hundreds of Christians . . . so that in my opinion the hymns have helped the spread of the Gospel not a little." The translation, somewhat altered, is by Richard Massie, appearing first in his *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs* (1854).

The tune accompanied the text in *Etlich cristlich lider*.

## ROGATE SUNDAY

JOHN 16:23-30

By Robert H. Smith

For the Sundays after Easter the church has selected lessons from epistles and gospels written by men who figured prominently in the resurrection narratives. Furthermore the distinctive themes of these Sundays are facets of the resurrected life: song, joy, and prayer.

### I

Nathaniel Micklem, an Oxford scholar, with an eye on the famous dictum of Descartes, expressed a basic Christian conviction

in the words "I pray, therefore I am." Man is the one creature who stands erect and upright, looks up, and speaks. He is the one creature addressed by God and capable of responding to God. He is intended and ordained to live in full and free fellowship with God, as a child with a father.

With His disciples gathered about Him in the hours just prior to His arrest and execution, Jesus spoke to them of prayer. He did not merely teach and command them to pray. He gave them reason to pray and made them capable of prayer.

At the banquet table of the Last Supper Jesus addressed His disciples concerning the new era in the history of salvation about to be inaugurated by His departure. His death will signal not an end but a new beginning, because He is going not into the kingdom and power of death and the devil but through them to the Father.

He is departing from the world, but will not withdraw and absent Himself from His followers. He will send the Paraclete, who will guide the disciples into all truth. The disciples will be one with Jesus as branches are organically connected with the vine.

The first moment of the new era will be one of sorrow and even of despair for the disciples, but the resurrection of Jesus and His sending of the Paraclete will inaugurate a time of access to the Father and the Son and a new intimacy with them, a season of joy and prayer for everyone who believes. A bond of love will unite Father, Son, and sons. Men will converse with God as sons by Him who is the Son.

V. 23 — "In that day" (John 14:20; Rev. 9:6; cf. Mark 13:24, 32; 14:25; Acts 2:18; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; etc.), the Day of the Lord, the Last Day, which according to the previous verses is coming in "a little while" (John 16:16-19). Throughout Jesus' last discourses there is a sharp contrast between the present and the post-Paschal future. Furthermore His use of words seems to be de-

liberately ambivalent, as C. K. Barrett points out:

The sayings about going and coming can be interpreted throughout of the departure and return of Jesus in His death and resurrection; but they can equally well be interpreted of His departure to the Father at the ascension and His return at the *parousia*. By this ambiguity John means to convey that the death and resurrection were themselves eschatological events which both prefigured and anticipated the final events. The Church of John's own day was living in the *ἐσχόμενα* (16:13) which it was the Spirit's work to declare. (*The Gospel according to St. John* [London: SPCK, 1956], p. 409)

Jesus is departing, but He will be with His disciples in that day when sorrow has turned to joy, when He is resurrected. Then doubts, confusion, skepticism, dullness, and unbelief will give way. The disciples met His assertions in the farewell discourses with questions (13:25, 36, 37; 14:5, 22; 16:17). In that day they will ask no longer; for they will then be true "gnostics," knowing the Father and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. (17:3)

Any beginning Greek student can translate the words *ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν* (25 times in John). Yet these words, as Heinrich Schlier notes, contain our whole Christology *in nuce* (*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, I, 341). Jesus points to Himself as the One who is the Fulfillment of God's promises, as the One who has responded to God's will with perfect filial obedience and fidelity, as the One who can therefore address men with absolute and unexampled authority. Jesus is the Amen (Rev. 3:4). Even though He does not here use the sovereign and emphatic *ἐγώ*, the "I say" passages which begin with the solemn and liturgically doubled *ἀμὴν* stand together with the great "I am" and "I came" sayings, as a central part of Jesus' self-revelation.

Vv. 23, 24—"Whatever you ask" (cf. Matt. 7:7, 8; Luke 11:9, 10). Jesus urges His disciples to make requests and sets no limits

to the gifts they may petition for. And yet He emphasizes not so much the gift as the condition of the one who prays.

"Ask in My name" (cf. John 15:7, 16), says Jesus. This means more than praying merely with the invocation of His name. It means to pray "according to His will" (1 John 5:14), to pray as persons in whom His words abide (John 15:7), to pray as persons who are, so to speak, identical with Him. (Hermann Strathmann, *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, IV, 227)

Such prayer, as Luther said, is omnipotent. "You will receive." And the result of the praying and the receiving is the full joy of the disciple (John 15:11; 17:13). Among the early Christians joy was indissolubly bound up with the advent of the *eschaton* and the gift of the Spirit. When the heavenly Bridegroom appears, His friends are happy to take a back seat to Him and are filled with joy (John 3:29). John wrote the first epistle that his (or his recipients') joy might be full. (1 John 1:4)

V. 25 — *παροιμία* (hard saying, proverb) is roughly the Johannine equivalent of *παραβολή*, preferred by the synoptists. The story of the Good Shepherd, which fell on uncomprehending ears (John 10:6), is a *παροιμία*. It is a type of speech contrasted to speaking "plainly and openly" (*παρρησία*, nine times in John).

The veil drops, the mystery is solved, and the scandal is overleaped only in faith in Jesus as the Crucified and Resurrected One.

Vv. 26, 27 — In that day Jesus does not step aside as a teacher does. He is not the expendable professor in His relationship with the disciples and the Father. The new covenant depends absolutely on Him, His person and His work. The new age comes, exists, and consists in Him. (See the oft-repeated *ἐν αὐτῷ* of Eph. 1:3-14, for example.)

To pray to Jesus as the kindly Son who will intercede with His aloof and angry

Father is to misunderstand both the Father and the Son; "for the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from the Father" (John 16:27). God loves the world (John 3:16), and He loves the disciples (14:21, 23; 17:23). His love is prior to man's and is surely not caused by it. What is meant is that the disciples have received grace upon grace (John 1:16), according to the principle that to those who have, more will be given (cf. Matt. 13:12). Jesus made known to them all that He had heard from the Father (John 15:15). Jesus calls His disciples friends (φίλοι, John 15:14 f.). "Love is, as it were, the bond of existence within the unity of Father, Son, and believers." (Barrett, 397)

V. 28 — "I issued out of the Father and came into the world" is the way C. H. Dodd translates (*The Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: 1950, p. 259]). Jesus is the Son of God in the unique and exclusive sense. And He came forth not on His own initiative, but (to expand on the previous verse) He was sent by the loving will of the Father. (John 8:42)

"I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father." The whole career of Jesus — preexistence, incarnation, death, and exaltation — is distilled in this one verse.

Vv. 29, 30 — The disciples were about to ask Jesus concerning His departure. Because He has anticipated their question (cf. John 1:50; 4:19), and because He has spoken plainly (παρησιᾶ) of His origin and goal, the disciples claim confidence in Him as the Revelation of God. But in the concluding sentences of the chapter Jesus predicts that only some few hours later they will scatter and forsake Him. They have yet to learn that His way to the Father leads through humiliation and suffering and ignominious death.

## III

In his commentary on Luther's Catechism Herbert Girsgensohn writes:

Prayer is the ultimate mystery enacted between God and man, man and God, the mystery revealed not by talking about prayer, but by praying. Prayer is something that happens when a man no longer talks about God and His revelation, but speaks with the revealed God Himself, when he really confronts Him as an I to a Thou. It is an anticipation of the world to come in the midst of this world, in which is fulfilled the promise: "He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3). Prayer is entering into this new world out of the world of godlessness and separation from God. (*Teaching Luther's Catechism* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959], I, 199)

In our age of alienation from God we are witnessing a decrease in prayer. This is not only the age of "God grown silent" but also the era in which men no longer readily or comfortably pray. When men feel trapped, hurt, frustrated by circumstances, they are more likely to curse and utter oaths. In the midst of adversity, gripped by a growing desperation, some simply become sullen and silent. Others, when they have exhausted every other means, when they have paid huge fees to the specialists, turn to prayer as a last resort, as a final desperate measure.

Some take the psychological approach to prayer and call it a good thing. It helps people, as whistling in the dark helps when you walk past the cemetery at night. But is this so different from the prayer of a Christian, mouthed in routine manner, pouring forth not from an overflowing heart but from ingrained habit — prayer from which he rises feeling good because he's done his duty?

Prayer is a hazardous and mysterious business. It is not vain monolog but holy dialog. In C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* the senior devil, Screwtape, writes to his demonic protégé about the abomination called prayer:

Whenever there is prayer, there is danger of



the Enemy's [Christ's] own immediate action. He is cynically indifferent to the dignity of His position . . . and to human animals on their knees He pours out self-knowledge in a quite shameless fashion.

"Cynically indifferent to His position" God came and walked upon our planet as a Man among men, as One who loved so deeply that He was willing to go the way of the cross. In Jesus God pours out fatherly, adoptive love, pressing to His bosom as His own children those who will accept Him as Father.

Prayer is the natural language of the children of God. It is man's reaction to the action of God, man's word of response to the Word of God in Jesus the Christ. Whenever there is faith in God through Jesus Christ, there will be people who lift up holy hands to God in prayer; for prayer is "the actual putting into practice of the Father-child relationship at its innermost point, in the I-Thou relationship, in which we really take God seriously as the loving God who has given us everything in Jesus Christ." (Girgensohn, 201)

#### *Children Should Be Heard*

- I. Ours is an age of crisis for prayer.
  - A. The age tempts us to join the "realist," who releases his tension by cursing and swearing or else lapses into a life of quiet desperation.
  - B. The age addresses us through the psychologist, who encourages prayer as a healthy form of mental and emotional exercise.
  - C. We all too often pray out of habit, or trusting in our own piety, or only half believing that God will hear us.
- II. Man is able to pray.
  - A. Unlike the dumb beasts, we are made by God for fellowship and conversation with God.
  - B. We have been given new life through Jesus' "departure," when He inaugurated a new age, in which we have access as children to the heavenly Father.
- III. Prayer is our filial privilege, and we should exercise it.
  - A. Jesus commands it.
  - B. Pray in the strength of right relations with the Father through the Son with full confidence in His promise attached to prayer.

*The Hymn of the Week:* "Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 458

The Gospel's admonition and invitation to pray "in the name of Jesus" could find no better answer than in Martin Luther's versification of the Lord's Prayer. It appeared originally in broadsheet, but was included in Valentin Schumann's *Geistliche Lieder* (Leipzig, 1539), where it has the subtitle "The Lord's Prayer briefly expounded and turned into meter." Many hold this to be Luther's finest hymn, surpassing even "A Mighty Fortress." The translation in our *Hymnal* is a composite of the many extant, leaning quite heavily on Catherine Winkworth.

The melody has been ascribed to Luther, too, but this is dubious; the noted hymnologist Von Winterfeld maintains that it appeared already in 1537 in Strasbourg, and in 1531 a very similar melody was in use among the Bohemian Brethren. At any rate its solemn solidity marks it an ideal choice for this text.

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#### ASCENSION DAY

MARK 16:14-20

We are gathered here today to commemorate the coronation and ascension of our gracious King Jesus Christ. Everyone ought to leave this house of worship rejoicing that he has been baptized in the name of this Lord, who has gone into the heaven of heavens.

If we should rejoice only because Christ finally overcame all enemies and entered heaven as a kind of reward for His faithfulness unto death, we should fail to receive the actual benefit of His ascension. We must look up in faith to the ascended Lord as our *Redeemer* and let His whole work of redemption be the foundation of a joyous faith. Then we shall have the benefit Christ's ascension brings us. The Gospel for this day contains Christ's last will to His disciples. The words "believe in Me, go and preach" put power and joy into the lives of all Christians. Follow me as I present

*Christ's Ascension the Sure Foundation  
for a Joyous Faith*

- I. It makes our faith certain of the complete deliverance from all enemies
- II. It makes our faith certain of the constant gracious presence of Christ in His congregation

I

A. Through the disobedience of our first parents all men fell into the power of three great enemies—sin, the Law, and death. No man had the strength to overthrow these enemies. But God in His mercy let His Son Jesus Christ step on the battlefield. He took the guilt of all sin upon Himself, fulfilled the Law to the very last requirement, and abolished death. When He arose from the dead, the whole fallen world arose with Him victorious over all enemies.

B. Only one thing still remained to be done if Christ was to be the undisputed Victor. The scepter of almightiness had to be put into His hand, the crown of heavenly glory had to be placed on His head, and the throne of heavenly majesty had to become His throne. All this took place through His ascension and declared Him to be the Mediator between God and men, the indisputable Victor over sin, the Law, death, devil and hell.

C. It is important now to look upon

Christ not only as the Head but also as the Representative and Forerunner of the whole human race. David expressed this truth in Ps. 68:18; so did St. Paul in Eph. 2:4-6. We were raised with Christ, ascended into heaven with Him, and are lords over all our enemies in Him. No sin can harm Christ. The Law cannot condemn Him. Death cannot rule over Him. Think of the joy that is ours when we believe that He is in us and we are in Him. Now we can say to sin, "You can no longer make us your slave"; to the Law, "You can no longer condemn us"; and to death, "You can no longer frighten us." Christ, our Lord, has freed us from all our tyrants. Such is the certainty of faith because Christ's ascension brought freedom from all enemies.

II

A. In our day many believe that since His ascension Christ is no longer in the world according to His human nature. This erroneous idea rests on a misunderstanding of what happened when the Son of God, or the Son of man, ascended into heaven. We have no conception of what Scripture means by heaven when it says, "Christ ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10). What does Scripture mean? Heaven has not taken Him, He has taken heaven. And according to our Gospel "He is sitting at the right hand of God." The right hand of God is His almightiness, omnipresence, dominion over all things, and His eternal divine majesty and glory. All of this does not pertain to Christ's deity but to His human nature. For His divine nature could not suffer any humiliation or exaltation, nor could His divine glory suffer any decrease or increase.

B. Now judge for yourselves whether Scripture says that Christ is no longer with us according to His human nature. True, He is no longer with us in visible form. But when He withdrew His visible form

from His disciples at His ascension, He entered divine majesty with His human nature, and also as a human being He took part in the almighty and omnipresent dominion over heaven and earth and all creatures.

C. When we look at Christ's ascension through the clear testimony of Scripture, we find certainty in it for a joyous faith. He is near us at all times. Through the Gospel He comes to us so that we may know Him, come to faith in Him, and finally see Him as He is. As our High Priest He does not cease the work of interceding for us before

His Father's throne so that the gates of hell cannot overwhelm us.

D. Oh, let the ascended Christ give you faith and strengthen it through a continued study of His glorious ascension. He thought of you also when He said, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," etc. (vv. 15, 16). Let no trouble, affliction, or danger drive you from Him. For your sake He has all power over heaven and earth. He will use it to keep you firm in faith so that you can sing an eternal hallelujah in the temple of heaven. To Him be glory and praise forever and ever.