

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

What's Going On Here?

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The Secret of God's Plan—Studies in
Ephesians—Study Three

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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

TRINITY X

AUGUST 2

Worship Supplement:
The Holy Eucharist III

The Liturgy of the Eucharist (*Supplement*, p. 64) begins with "The Prayer for Peace and Unity." Since last Sunday we accented "unity," a follow-through on "peace" might be helpful and relevant this Sunday. For practical reasons it would seem advisable to use any new form for a number of Sundays. Generally the ability of a congregation to use a form for their actual worship is somewhat dependent on their familiarity with the sequence so that they are free to concentrate on the worship task.

In the first announcements of this homiletical series it was suggested that the most beneficial results might be discovered not in sermon ideas but in congregations' rethinking their worship practices. The majority of congregations whose pastors are interested in this series probably do not yet celebrate the Eucharist each Lord's Day. This suggestion that new forms be used several times in a row in order to assess their usefulness might be one of the simple approaches to new consideration by congregations of an every-Sunday Eucharist.

In "The Thanksgiving" of this service the phrase is included which concisely summarizes the mission of the congregation to its community and world: "Be the sign of His peace." The peace of which our Lord spoke in His prayer in the upper room at the institution of this Supper is a peace which this Supper also gives to us, since in it He gives us the body and the blood which secured our peace. It is our obedient response to His command, "This do," which positions us to receive that peace in the Sacrament. It is our obedient response to His commands that

we "surrender ourselves completely to His service, and that, in the midst of this world, and before the eyes of all His people, we may live His Gospel and . . . that we support and serve each other in love; that our hearts be opened to the poor, the sick, and dying, and to all who are in need" — it is in this response that we really become "the sign of His peace." If we are really to be the church of Christ, we must be "signing" the peace and not simply *be* statically *at* peace. That is the point.

It may well be that the Gospel for the day provides a word of law for the *Point*. Jerusalem did not know — and are there indications that we are different? — what things make for real peace. The tears Christ shed for Jerusalem have not been dried by the records of succeeding ages of cities and nations and peoples. The *Problem* is clearly indicated in "The Confession": "We have turned away from each other in our thinking, speaking and doing." We are self-serving. We live at the expense of others. The Old Testament Lesson (Jeremiah 7:1-7) warns us even as does the fierce action of Jesus in the Gospel that we cannot take sanctuary in church membership. It is only in true amendment of our ways that we have any future.

It is Jesus Christ Himself who is the *Power* for peace. He entered time and our lives with the message ringing through the heavens, "Peace on earth!" He went to the cross telling us that He was leaving us a peace which the world could never give, and giving us a peace which, unlike the world's kind of peace, would never leave us. He rose victorious from the grave and repeatedly showed Himself to His disciples, repeating the Easter greeting, "Peace be unto you!" That same peace echoes in our ears as we hear the words of the distribution, "the

body of Christ—for you,” “the blood of Christ—for you,” and the words, “Depart in peace.”

Should we then not celebrate this sacrament of peace on the Lord’s Day? Should we not join to pray, “Give us Your peace, Your love, and Your help. Send us the gifts of Your Spirit,” mindful of the Epistle’s message (1 Cor. 12:1-11)? And should we not pray that “we may greet one another, not deceitfully nor hypocritically but blamelessly and purely, in the bond of peace and love . . . for there is only one body and one Spirit”? And should we not in this service provide deliberate signs of peace—interceding for the absent brothers, reaching out to the brothers present with the greeting of peace, sharing with one another this common meal? And should not all this be the prelude to all those signs of peace that are included in “The Dismissal,” which enjoins us, “Go out into the world in peace”?

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TRINITY XI

AUGUST 9

*Worship Supplement: An Order
of Corporate Confession and Absolution*
(pp. 56—58)

“When the Pharisee Plays the Publican”

Suppose the Pharisee and the publican returned to the temple a second time, and this time the Pharisee said, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” and the publican uttered the thanksgiving of the Pharisee, maybe not quite as boastful, but approaching the apostle Paul’s declaration in the Epistle: “I labored more abundantly than they all.” Again, it would be the Pharisee who would be condemned and the publican who would be justified, for just speaking words, of course, doesn’t do the trick.

An Order of Corporate Confession and

Absolution is certainly written in the spirit of the publican’s humble confession. Hearing people go through this order, one would have to say, “No Pharisees here, only humble publicans confessing sins and iniquities and heartily repenting of them.”

But are we really and truly penitent publicans, or are we basically Pharisees just playing the part of a publican and speaking his words? This is a particularly important and necessary self-examination as we prepare to approach God in the Holy Communion.

Obviously, the publican not only *said* he was a sinner (as hypocrites will also do), but he also believed it. The penitential motions he exercised (standing far off, not lifting up so much as his eyes to heaven, beating his breast) indicated that he believed himself to be condemned before God. He knew he had something about which to “cry.” He wasn’t just playing when he said, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

How about us when we confess our sins? How much shame do we feel because of them? Are we really concerned about our mistakes and our failures? How many of us are ready to confess with St. Paul that we are “the least” and “not worthy to be called”? Today the philosophy of situation ethics and a new morality almost destroy the absolutes of God’s law in its judgment of right and wrong behavior.

But before God, “to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,” every sinner needs to be sincerely repentant, as was the publican.

Again, the publican indicated where he placed his hope of forgiveness and of heaven: not in himself or in anything he did, but solely and alone in the mercy of God, even as did the apostle Paul — “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

His hope—our hope—is not based on confession nor on contrition nor on God’s knowledge of our open heart, our desires and our secrets. We would be of all men

most miserable if we merely knew that God knows. In His mercy and grace God acted to solve what He knew was our problem. In Jesus Christ He came and was tempted in all things as we are tempted, but He lived without sinning. That perfect life He offered to God as a substitute for our failure. The condemnation pronounced by a just God against sinners He took upon Himself—in our stead. For our sins and by the condemnation they deserved He was nailed to a cross. And by His resurrection to life again He released a new life-power for us to use in our living.

It would be false modesty to say that we have done nothing good and do nothing good. God's grace was not bestowed on Paul in vain, and it's not bestowed in vain on us. Like publicans and like Pharisees, you and I, in addition to producing good works (going to church, praying, giving) also sin and do wrong. But the difference between believers and unbelievers lies in their solution to the problem of how to remove their guilt. Unbelievers (Pharisees) do it by attempting to have their good works neutralize and even outweigh their wrongs. Believers have found a more satisfactory and conscience-easing solution. They throw themselves on the mercy of God, letting Him punish their sins in the Substitute He has provided in His only-begotten Son. The means to remove guilt is confessing sins and receiving absolution.

And this provides the power to amend sinful living.

TRINITY XII

AUGUST 16

Worship Supplement:

The Holy Eucharist II (pp. 59—62)

"How Jesus Sets Us Free"

The Holy Gospel brings the record of how Jesus once set a man free from physical ailments and impediments. Jesus still sets us free, many times from physical ailments

when it is His will, but always from spiritual impediments, for such healing is always His will.

Jesus first took the deaf and dumb man "aside from the multitude." God chooses us and calls us aside, in Baptism, and throughout our life whenever He comes to us in His Word, His house, His Sacrament. These are the means by which the Spirit who gives life comes to us and performs His work of correcting, healing, saving, strengthening, sanctifying. We need this work of the Spirit because "we are men—we do not love God nor other people as we ought—we war against life—we hurt each other." We do not (as the man in the Gospel could not) listen to God, and we fail to speak His praise. "We are sick from it"—from all of it.

Nor does this go unnoticed by God. It grieves Him whenever His perfect creation is corrupted or impaired. Jesus "sighed" when He came upon the deaf and dumb man of the Gospel, just as He must also sigh when He comes upon us in our sin. But His compassion extends beyond the compassion of any mere man—and even beyond the willingness of most men to be of help—for He has divine power at His disposal. He, "looking up to heaven," finds no condemnation, but sees a Father who is well pleased with Him and who will do whatever His Son asks and desires.

The Lord could not speak to the man in the Gospel because he was deaf. In order to communicate with him and to let him know what great things He was about to do for him, Jesus laid His hand on him, establishing a direct, living, and vital contact and connection between them.

Perhaps because we so often turn a deaf ear to His Word, Jesus gave His church another means to communicate God's grace to His people, namely, by the "touch" of His real presence in the Sacrament. At His table we receive life and healing. Here our ears

are opened and our tongues unloosed. And in the Holy Communion liturgy we sing our most exultant songs of praise and thanksgiving. We pray that "in this Holy Communion we may be made one with Him, and He with us." That is why He came. That is what His living and His dying and His living again have made possible. What a miracle—and how quickly we are able to take it for granted, as if it were "natural" for God to take on our human nature or for God to give us His divine life. That He did once, and once for all. This He gives us again and again, so that we might accept new strength to live out His miracle.

"Come, risen Lord, live in us that we may live in you." From the Lord's altar we go forth as men who have been freed by the Spirit to serve the Lord with all our being. After we have received His healing, we go forth saying, "He has done all things well." "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good."

TRINITY XIII

AUGUST 23

*Worship Supplement: An Order
of Corporate Confession and Absolution*
(pp. 56—58)

It is every communicant's concern that he be found worthy at the table of the Lord. Luther's Small Catechism reminds us that "he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words, ' . . . for you [and] for the forgiveness of sins.'" The "Christian Questions" long served many communicants as a helpful basis for private meditation and for background in examining themselves. The Order of Confession can be a similar aid. As the pattern in parishes more and more includes the Sacrament in each Sunday service, the preacher may wish to address himself to the individual preparation of communicants. The well-known Collect for Purity, used at the beginning of the Holy Communion service in the Anglican, Metho-

dist, and South India liturgies and incorporated in the Order of Worship recommended for experimental use by the Commission on Worship of the Consultation on Church Union, may supply a helpful beginning point. It is included in the *Worship Supplement's* Order of Corporate Confession and Absolution.

Your Communion prayer and mine . . . what is it that we pray? Each of us really stands alone before Him "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." In substance each of us prays the same, short prayers and simple prayers, yet great prayers and mighty prayers, prayers that the lips of sinners have whispered in the ear of their Creator since the first sin: "Wash me. Save me. Help me. Feed me. Remember me." (Ps. 51:2; Matt. 14:30; 15:25; Prov. 30:8; Luke 23:42)

"Wash me." David was no longer a shepherd or a warrior on the battlefield. He was wearing the clean, soft raiment of those who live in palaces. And yet this immaculate monarch had to confess that his hands were soiled and that his heart was dark. We can take small comfort in the fact that ours may not be gross sins as man measures, when we remember our Lord's measure and His apostle's. (Matt. 5:28; 1 John 3:15)

"Save me." Peter, overconfident and proud, presumed to walk on the water as he saw the Master do. The boisterous waves quickly made of him who would have been like a god just another fearful creature of the earth. "Save me!" We suddenly and frequently see that we are neither as good nor as strong as we thought and felt we were. We begin to sink. "Save me!"

"Help me." The help we seek is often not directly for ourselves, but for suffering ones who are near and dear to us and whose sufferings we cannot ease. The woman who prayed these words sought help for her daughter, resisted the disciples' attempts to turn her away, and knelt before the Master

simply to say, "Help me." To her great faith—to our faith—God gives great answers.

"Feed me." Few of us have known the pangs of real hunger, although millions in our world do. Lest we take equally for granted how ready He has always been to give to us the bread of life, we look again to our dependence on Him for real life. We pray, "Feed me."

"Remember me." All our requests are drawn into a single phrase, the words of the good thief to the new King of his heart. Again and again Jesus said to His disciples, "Believe . . . follow . . . abide." But at the end He left a single instruction, commanding His own to break bread and eat it, to take wine and drink it, promising to give them His body and His blood, and saying, "Remember Me."

This is the prayer that brings all our petitions into one. He whom we remember now in this celebration also remembers us, washes us clean in His blood and saves us from our sin, has mercy on those for whom we pray, and supplies us with the bread we need to live.

He is worthy who has faith in the words, "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins."

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TRINITY XIV

AUGUST 30

Worship Supplement: "Lord of All Nations,
Grant Me Grace" (Hymn 779)

"O Fount of Good, to Own Thy Love"
(Hymn 777)

One of the repeated requirements for any new hymnal is that it contain hymns which express the realization of the church's responsibility toward social problems of the day. It is not easy for Christians accustomed to finding help only for themselves in the church's services to shift to expressions of

determination to give help to others. And it is not easy for Christians accustomed to singing hymns comfortably familiar to shift to a willingness and a determination to learn and to sing unfamiliar hymns. When these two difficulties are placed together in one service, perhaps the challenge will be sufficient to involve congregational participation.

Perhaps one word from the Epistle for the day might serve as a text—"selfishness" (Gal. 5:16-24). There are more positive words listed among the fruits of the Spirit. But taken negatively or positively, the words must be expanded to include a societal responsibility if they are to be understood in terms of these hymns. We have heard these words so frequently and applied them only to the close circles of friends and family in which we circulate. But surely the presence of the Son of God walking on the way to Jerusalem between Samaria and Galilee (Gospel: Luke 17:11-19) and taking time to heal the ten lepers ought to alert us to the hymn's *Point*: "Lord of all nations, grant me grace/ To love all men of every race." Or again: "Let me seek first my neighbor's good/ In bonds of Christian brotherhood." Those words are not to be sung only in strongly Lutheran neighborhoods. They are written to be sung in this world, everywhere.

It is true that Jesus Christ did not set up an organization to fight Hansen's disease. Nor did He set up an underground railroad to free slaves or establish the explicit wording of a constitutional amendment that would free slaves in the United States. But is there any question that all Christians in all lands would rally to whatever would be required to destroy slavery if it still existed in North America? And would any have any doubt that such a goal would be God-pleasing? Ought we not then be equally committed to the causes which would equally please the heart of our loving Lord? He

befriended the poor and ill, the demon-possessed, and the men and women called unclean and outcast by the society of His day.

He did not undertake the campaigns that would be required to bring powers of government and society to bear on such problems. Instead He devoted Himself to the work the Father gave Him to do — of living a completely obedient life, obedient to the guidance of the Spirit, and of offering that obedience and that life itself to the Father in satisfaction for all the failures of all men. Because we have not crucified our flesh with its passions and desires, He let Himself be crucified for us. But can it be argued that we should therefore also have nothing to do with the use of political power and national effort to help all those for whom Christ died? He has changed us so that we could work together to change our world. There is work for us to do in sharing what

He has done for all men. But He left the work of changing the patterns of slavery and poverty and poor housing and hunger and war and suffering and the neglect of the old and the children for us to do. Unredeemed, we could only be selfish. But, redeemed, we can crucify the selfish self, and we can move to help "His needy brethren here."

Would you vote for a national candidate who called for greatly increased taxes to solve the problems of poverty in our time? Our Lord was greatly pleased that the Samaritan, former leper, returned to give Him thanks. He probably rejoiced if that Samaritan learned to find his way to the temple and gave thanks to God every Sabbath. But surely He would not be pleased if that were all that Samaritan did about leprosy in Samaria.

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