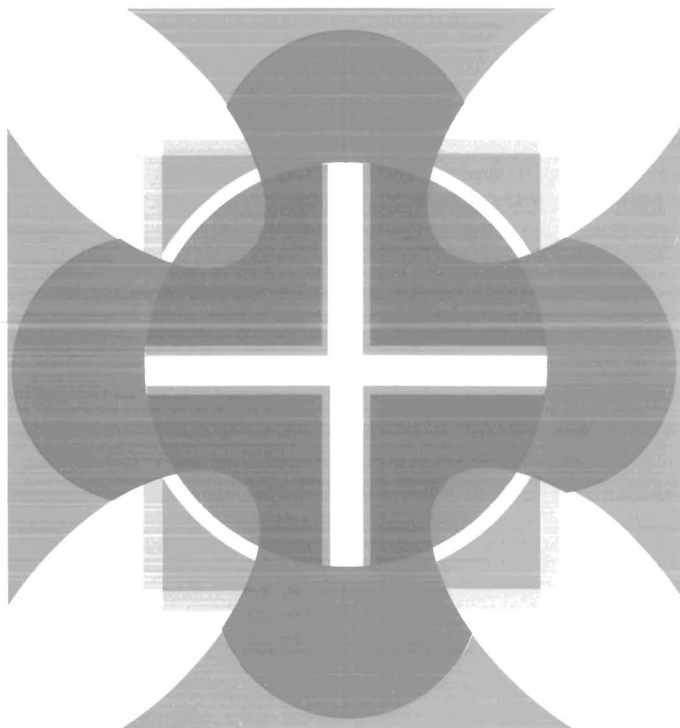


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HOMILETICS

PENTECOST, FOURTH AFTER

Micah 7:18-20
1 Timothy 1:12-16
Luke 15:11-32

If your church has not yet designated Old Testament pericopes as lections during the service of the Word, this Sunday would be a good time to introduce the custom as a regular occurrence, or at least to do so by way of informing the congregation that Old Testament lessons are also proper. Micah's adoring declaration of the Lord's abiding, sweeping pardon, of His assuaged anger, and His delight in mercy sounds the note of unending, irreversible forgiveness. One of the best-known chapters in the gospels, Luke 15, has been wisely retained here. The story of the Prodigal Son is the sequel of the ancient Gospel. This lengthy, overwhelming narrative from our Savior's lips, enshrined in the church's memory of Him, echoes Micah's great proclamation of divine unending mercy.

So to our choice of text—the Epistle. From Micah and Yahweh over the father who receives the debauched young man to Paul the heresy-hunter turned aggressive and successful apostle—that is the sequence. First Timothy, usually called one of the pastorals, contains advice to Timothy, the young bishop of Ephesus, in the time-honored fashion—the voice of experience speaking to the novice or successor. Really Paul's pastoral counsel is based on his own experience of divine grace—sufficient, as God once told him, for everything (2 Cor. 12:9). Here that grace is extolled for enabling the most unlikely candidate for the apostolate to become the greatest of them all. If Paul can be “graced,” then anyone can. For Paul had been guilty—a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man with defiant *hybris*, the worst of all human passions directed against God and His church. And yet Paul received overwhelming grace, he received faith and was kept faithful, and with grace and faith he was given love. Thus equipped, Paul became the great preacher of what is summarized in v. 15—a Gospel in capsule form in the mold of John 3:16.

In this career as preacher of divine (Micah 7:18-20), fatherly (Luke 15) recon-

ciliation in Christ (v. 15), the chief sinner (Paul) became even in his person the pattern for his own contemporary generation and all succeeding generations of people who are won for Christ. Paul was a living example; he introduced his first sermon in a new place with a description of his pre-Christian career of wickedness cloaked in assumed perfection—of what can happen when God really gets a hold on a man. The Damascus interruption, the hesitant reception by Ananias, the baptism, the three-year-long preparation for ministry—all led to his pointing to himself as an example of what the Gospel can do and pointing away from himself to Christ, who could do it to anyone who heard him or read his writings.

Oh, it is a grand subject, this theme of a man rescued from damnation through the Savior and His accomplishments, rescued to salvation no matter how great his sin, no matter how great his corruption, no matter how wayward the course of his life has been. Paul is really saying, “If it can happen to *me*, then it can happen to you, to anyone.” Paul had his difficulties with Peter (Acts 15; Gal. 2), with opponents (Acts *passim*), and with himself (Rom. 7:19). But Christ's long-suffering was always great enough to keep him in grace and faith. He calls this a pattern for other, later believers who are to be eternally saved. A sermon on that note, linked to the Old Testament and the Lucan pericopes, ought to lift any pastor's spirit while preparing and delivering, and any listener while hearing it, right out of sin into His amazing grace.

PENTECOST, FIFTH AFTER

Genesis 50:15-21
Romans 12:14-21
Matthew 18:21-35

The story was told about Giuseppe Angelo Roncalli, Pope John XXIII (1958-63), that he greeted a delegation of Jews who waited upon him: “I am Joseph (Giuseppe), your brother.” The dramatic stories concerning Jacob, Joseph, and his brethren never fade from memory—read Thomas Mann's trilogy *The Tales of Jacob*,

especially *Joseph in Egypt*. The Old Testament lesson for the day about the last confrontation between Joseph and his brothers, after Jacob's death in Egypt and burial in Canaan, emphasizes reconciliation as the way of God with men and the way of His children with one another. Rom. 12: 14-21 emphasizes that no vindictiveness should enter into any Christian's action toward any man. Vengeance, wrath, evil—there is no place for them when men to whom God has been good deal with an offending brother. The heading of the Gospel could be: Forgiveness Unlimited—Forgiveness Forfeited.

What? Can one *lose* divine forgiveness? *Only* when the person forgiven is *unforgiving* to his fellowman. Surely anything done against us is never as hard to forgive or as great an offense as what God has forgiven us for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. This then is the good news and admonition in the lesson from Genesis.

Unfailing Forgiveness: God's Way with Men—Our Way with One Another

- I. God means it unto good—He sets all things straight, v. 20.
- II. We are not in the place of God, vv. 19-21.
 - A. He deals with us to remove our guilt and evil.
 - B. We in turn can do no less.
 - C. As God frustrates men's evil against Him, so—
 - D. We must comfort and forgive those who do evil against us.
- III. Joseph's inclusive reconciliation with his brothers—the pattern for us in reconciliation with one another in church and society, vv. 15-18.

Gilbert Amadeus Thiele

PENTECOST, SIXTH AFTER

Lamentations 3:22-26 (Sermon Text)

1 Peter 2:4-10

Luke 5:1-11

If the ascription of the authorship of Lamentations to Jeremiah is only traditional, the tradition at least correctly points to the era in which alone this book could have originated. Jeremiah's last days coincided with the last days of pre-exilic Jerusalem and Judah—those days of "affliction and bitterness," of "wormwood and gall"

(Lam. 3:19) which constituted the historical context of the origins of Lamentations.

That historical context included those fateful 35 years in Judah's history in which that kingdom soared to the heights of new hope under good King Josiah only to plunge with precipitous speed to the depths of despair when King Nebuchadnezzar's troops ended their protracted siege of Jerusalem by devastating Yahweh's city and deporting the remnant of His people into Babylonian captivity. The story of those three and a half decades, related in 2 Kings 22:1–25:26 and 2 Chron. 36:15-21, provides the grim background of the Book of Lamentations.

The sheer physical agony of it all was unbelievable, unbearable: the loss of property and possessions, the human suffering, the slow torturous starvation during the siege, children fainting in the streets, infants dying at their mothers' breasts, dehumanization to the point that compassionate women are reported to have boiled their own children for food (see Lam. 2:20; 4:10; cp. Jer. 19:8f.). Still more: the inevitable breaching of Jerusalem's walls by the besieging Babylonians, the barbaric treatment accorded to those who attempted to flee (2 Kings 25:6f.), burning of "the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem" (2 Kings 25:9). And then the agonizing weariness of the unwilling journey to distant Babylon, and the hopelessness of homelessness in a land of foreign foes. Could there be anything worse?

Yes, there could be and there was! The Book of Lamentations highlights not merely the physical and mental anguish of those who experienced all this. It emphasizes above all the accompanying crisis of faith.

It was a crisis of faith closely related to a whole set of religious misunderstandings which had taken root in Judah. Yahweh's promises had been "externalized" into a kind of automatic guarantee of assured protection, seemingly unrelated in popular thinking to the people's response of faith to their covenant God. After all, wasn't it our father Abraham to whom Yahweh promised this land? Wasn't it our forefathers whom Yahweh chose to be His own people and with whom He made His abiding covenant at Sinai and to whom He gave through Moses those two stone tables

of testimony “written with the finger of God”? Wasn’t it our great King David to whom Yahweh said: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before Me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:16)? And wasn’t Jerusalem nothing less than “the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High”? Surely, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved!” (Psalm 46:4f.). Nobody, but nobody, believed Jerusalem could ever fall (Lam. 4:12). What had developed was a concept of the “inviolability of Zion” which laid claim on Yahweh’s covenant promises without responding to those promises in faith and obedience.

The Book of Lamentations reflects the questions which precipitated the crisis of faith: Is Yahweh truly powerful? If so, why didn’t He intervene to stop the Babylonians? Is He a God of justice? If so, how come He allowed a noncovenant nation to conquer us who are His covenant people? Is He superior to the gods of other nations—even those of Babylon? If so, how do you explain that Babylon won while we lost? Is He faithful to His promises? Can we count on Him? Does He exist at all? Do we have any future, any hope?

Ancient Judah’s questions about God in those crisis experiences were answered by His prophets and men of faith—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the unknown author of Lamentations, and others—who called the people away from any mere external relationship to Yahweh and back to an inner, personalized, trusting relationship which responds to His never-ending covenant love with an unflinching faith, an unshaken hope, and a confident conviction that He is a forgiving God who graciously restores His repentant people and who is always just and righteous in all His dealings with them—even when they are unable to understand the mysteries of His ways.

In the last analysis the theology of the Book of Lamentations, far from being what has been called the “dreary sobbing of a prophet,” is a theology of hope. It is a hope which found its culminating fulfillment in Jesus who, in this Sunday’s Epistle, is declared to be the Cornerstone of God’s new temple in Zion and in whom we have the assurance of being God’s own people who have received *mercy*—that same mercy which enabled the author of

Lamentations to find hope when everything seemed hopeless.

The preceding paragraphs provide the background for a sermon on Lam. 3:22-26 on the topic “Finding Hope When All Seems Hopeless.”

Introduction: The author of “Go to Dark Gethsemane” used the expression “the wormwood and the gall” to portray our Lord’s suffering (*TLH* 159:2). The expression is borrowed from the portrayal in the Book of Lamentations of God’s people as a “suffering servant” (Lam. 3) at the time of the fall of Jerusalem and Judah and the deportation into Babylonian exile. The agonizing experiences of those shattering events undercut Judah’s hopes and gave rise to perplexing questions and doubts.

But in those days of affliction and bitterness there was at least one man of God, the anonymous author of Lamentations, who was able to say, “I have hope!” (Lam. 3:21). Do you see in ancient Judah’s questionings about God in those dark hours any parallels to the questions that arise within you when life seems hopeless? If so, you’ll be interested in what the author of Lamentations can teach us about:

Finding Hope When All Seems Hopeless

His advice centers in two suggestions:

- I. Remember that the Lord’s mercy never ends, vv. 22-24.
- II. Remember that He is good even when things are bad, vv. 25-26.

Some key words of the text to open homiletical doors:

V. 22: *steadfast love*—the Lord’s enduring covenant love for His people. The noun occurs here in its plural form, used frequently to designate Yahweh’s covenant love *in action*, usually as a reference to His past historic acts of deliverance performed in His people’s behalf. For centuries God’s people had recited the liturgical refrain: “For His mercy (steadfast love) endures for ever.” Had this been allowed to become an empty jingle? The poet here reaffirms its meaning as a basic element of Old Testament faith.

V. 22: *His mercies*—This noun, too, occurs in the intensive plural, which most often refers not merely to an abstract attribute but especially to concrete actions. The reference then is to the Lord’s *acts*

of mercy toward His people which, the author insists, are never-ending. They occurred not only in the historic past, but they occur even now. Even in days of affliction and bitterness His acts of mercy are "new every morning."

V. 24: *my portion*—The Lord is my "lot" in life, my assured inheritance of which no one, nothing can rob me—not even tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword. For a New Testament assurance of this "inseparability" from our inheritance in Jesus Christ see Rom. 8:35-39.

V. 25: *the Lord is good*—It is His nature to be beneficent, kind, benign, ever and always. The experience of suffering frequently raises doubts about His goodness. The author counters by reaffirming the Lord's goodness. It is not He who has done wrong, but "we have transgressed and rebelled." (Cp. vv. 40-42.)

Vv. 25, 26: *wait, seek, wait quietly*—The verbs combine to encourage God's people to maintain a steadfast faith in their steadfast Lord, manifested by their patient, prayerful, submissive reliance on His gracious covenant promises. "Wait" connotes an eager, optimistic expectation of help. "Seek" includes the advice to be constant in prayer and worship. "Wait quietly" encourages both to hope and to patient submission, based on the recognition that Yahweh's will is always good and gracious and that there is a positive disciplinary value in suffering. The thoughts of these verses find New Testament elaboration by St. Paul in Rom. 8:(18-)28.

What then is the basis of hope when all seems hopeless? For the Christian that basis is Jesus Christ in whom the God of steadfast love has given us an abiding hope for time and for eternity. "All other ground is sinking sand."

Walter Wegner

PENTECOST, NINTH AFTER

Old Testament: Genesis 12:1-4a (4b-7)

Epistle: Galatians 5:16-25

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

I. Blessed to Be a Blessing

The ILCW selections for this Sunday are very obviously related to the Collect. There Christians confess that they "cannot

do anything that is good" without the Lord. They pray for "the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right" so that they may "be enabled to live according to Thy will." In the Gradual His people profess reliance on the "strong rock" in whom they put their trust and whose will they learn through His Law and the words of His mouth. The Old Testament lesson is an excellent choice, standing as it does at the close of primeval history and the beginning of sacred history (von Rad). Abram, who is nothing by himself, is the person chosen by God to receive a blessing so that he can be a blessing to all the families of the earth. To be that blessing Abram had to believe and act on the promise, leaving his homeland and setting out for a new land. His faithfulness brought the promised blessing, and for that "loving-kindness" His people give God praise. (Introit)

His "loving-kindness" reached its climax in Jesus Christ through whom a new people of God have been blessed to be a blessing. They are to be, as the Gospel declares, salt and light in the world. Salt preserves. Light illuminates. The light is to shine so brightly through good works that men will say, "What a great God you have." The Spirit of God is necessary to keep the light shining as Paul indicates in the Epistle. The works of the flesh ruin salt and extinguish light. But life in the Spirit produces fruit which is an expression of the will of God.

II. Flesh vs. Spirit

The Epistle has been selected for the text because of its richness and relevance to contemporary Christian life. It is a graphic description of the dialectic of Christian existence. The translation used is the Revised Standard Version.

V. 16. Paul uses four ways to describe relation of Spirit to person. Here, "walk" (*peripateite*) by the Spirit, which describes the conduct of life. In 18, "led" (*agesthe*) by the Spirit, which indicates guidance. In v. 25a, "live" (*zomen*) in the Spirit, which describes the life and power which the Spirit supplies. In v. 25b, "walk" (*stoichomen*) by the Spirit is better translated "walk in line" with, or "in fellowship" with, the Spirit. "Flesh" (*sarx*) connotes all the sinful tendencies, impulses, inclinations, and desires of human nature.

V. 17. Flesh and Spirit are in absolute

opposition to each other. Man is slave either to flesh or Spirit. But, paradoxically, life in the Spirit is freedom. (5:1, 13)

V. 18. "Not under the law" because those led by the Spirit have risen above it and are living in a way no law could prescribe or produce.

V. 24. "Crucified the flesh" in baptismal context in Rom. 6; Gal. 2:20; 6:6.

V. 25. See discussion under v. 16.

Addicts Anonymous

Introduction: Alcoholics and addicts are slaves to habit that makes them lie, cheat, steal, even kill. Some moment, person, force comes that causes change and the struggle to overcome. A constant struggle against temptation to slip back. Christians are those into whose life God has come to change from flesh addiction to Spirit freedom. The fight is on! We shall overcome!

I. Flesh Addiction or Spirit Freedom
There is no struggle for a true flesh addict. It can only happen to a Christian when Spirit opposes flesh.

II. Watch Out for Relapse!

A. Idolatry. Serving a god made according to human desires and satisfying physical sensation.

1. Sexual excess: immorality, impurity, licentiousness in cultic prostitution, and sexual fragrance then and now.

2. Drugs: the use of drugs in witchcraft and other ways then and now.

3. Drink: drunkenness and carousing permitted then and now.

B. Selfishness. Self as god insisting on own way and disrupting relationships. Enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, dissension, party spirit, envy.

C. Relapse results. Not inherit the Kingdom now or then.

III. Spirit Freedom

A. Crucified with Christ. Through Baptism died to sin and rose again to life with God.

B. Spirit Freedom. No law produces it and no law against it. Involves variations on a theme of love (*agape*) which integrates and relates to God and others; joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Conclusion: Alcoholics and addicts

maintain anonymity through use of first names only as they try to make a new beginning. Christian's old life anonymous. Go by new name into which baptized. Have a new spirit for a new beginning and a continuance of the struggle, the Spirit of God. A winning combination.

Robert Conrad

PENTECOST, TENTH AFTER

Exodus 32:1-7 (8-14), 15-20 (30-34)

Philippians 3:7-11

Matthew 25:14-30

St. Paul was in the twilight of his stormy life. In these latter days he writes to his Philippian friends. He had elsewhere reviewed his qualifications (2 Cor. 11:20-30). Catalogued for all to see were the physical crosses he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. In the context of our text (vv. 4-6) he lists his religious dossier. Yet he calls neither to the bar of justice to support his claim to faith or salvation.

His outward religiosity is called dung (KJV) and so much garbage (NEB and Beck). What one might have considered an asset (NEB) or advantage (Beck), Paul denies. Note how Paul plays upon the terms "gain" and "loss" when it comes to confidence in just outward physical things.

Nor is it just knowledge that Paul stresses. As a Hebrew, Pharisee, Israelite or son of Benjamin, few were as qualified in pure and faultless temporal knowledge. Still there is no appeal to head knowledge or to knowing in the abstract.

Here St. Paul presses for knowing the truth—it is almost a synonym for "becoming a Christian" or "becoming converted." It signifies not intellectual enrichment, but that enlightenment from God which is a stimulus to a new way of life.

V. 7. Things both physical and psychological are loss in relationship to Christ Jesus. He is the all in all for the apostle.

V. 8. Knowledge here is knowledge of a very special kind and of a relatively high character—for Paul of Jesus Christ, the Master of life. Any other purely human knowledge is but "garbage."

V. 9. No false righteousness, for that is produced only by legalistic means. That's just "filthy rags." Instead Paul depends upon a righteousness by faith alone. God declares us just, not on the basis of our knowing but as a gift (forensic justification).

V. 10. Knowledge is not excluded, however, for St. Paul like John (17:3) avers that "this is life eternal that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." A matter of personal faith. "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). And thus in fellowship (*koinonia*) with Christ through life and into eternal life.

V. 11. The end result is arrival at the same spot as Christ—resurrection unto life eternal.

Knowledge unto Life

Introduction: This is a world where there is a premium on knowledge. Education for life and for success is a cry often heard. Is there any relation in the realm of the spiritual existence of man? Can there be an anti-intellectual approach to the spiritual life? The measure of success—contrast it in the world and in the church. Who measures accomplishments here? Are there facts of salvation? Knowledge comes as a gift from God alone.

- I. What Is Knowledge?
 - A. What it is not
 1. Not purely the factual amassing of materials and data.
 2. Not only about oneself and his sin. Far more than a Greek "know yourself."
 3. Neither is it just "head knowledge." (V. 7)
 - B. True knowledge
 1. It is factual, and there is content to it. Facts are needed, but not in isolation. (V. 10)
 2. It is practical, usable material. There is always the *pro me*. (V. 8)
 3. Surely it is about self and sin, but also about Savior.
- II. True Knowledge Frees
 - A. From yourself
 1. Consider St. Paul, who turns to something other than his personal problems. (V. 9)
 2. So that a man can live in spite of his miseries or his cares.
 - B. From sin
 1. Sin and misery are plentiful in one's life. There is more here than just recitation of ills. (V. 8)
 2. One can see himself before God as redeemed and not only as sinner.

3. And now God has declared me just. (V. 9)
- III. Belief unto Life
 - A. To live today
 1. Beyond mere existence.
 2. For a richer life as a child of God. (V. 10)
 3. Not in darkness of sin, but in God's light
 4. In fellowship with other sinners, redeemed. (V. 10)
 - B. To live forever
 1. As Christ lived, died, and rose again—so is the direction of our lives. (V. 11)
 2. Thus we have eternal life with Him. He is the resurrection and life.

John Constable

PENTECOST, TWELFTH AFTER

Introit: Psalm 68

Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 1:7-12

Epistle: 1 Peter 5:5b-11

Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

The properties of God that defend the humble believer are stressed in this Sunday's pericopes: His strength, mercy, vindication, forgiveness. The Introit reminds us that God's powers and might create community ("setteth the solitary in families") and then defend it against enemies.

The Collect prays to the God who gives more than we expect to give and forgives in a degree greater than we can imagine.

The Old Testament Lesson illustrates the Collect. Solomon asks for wisdom and is given riches, honor, and so forth, in addition.

The Gospel of the Pharisee and the Publican stresses facts that we need to hear: God's forgiveness is there for all, not on the basis of our piety but on the terms of God's mercy. Humility and repentance are the essential prerequisite.

The ILCW Epistle (1 Peter 5:5b-11) unites many of the day's themes. The passage forms the letter's climax, according to John Elliott (see appended bibliography). That letter was written to encourage Christians at a time of persecution (the fiery trial of 4:12). The letter calls men to see that suffering leads to Christ (*ta eis Christon*

pathemata, 1:11) and the glory that awaits us (*tas meta tauta doxas*, 1:11). In persecution we are to give glory to God (2:12; 4:11). The letter is both an exhortation to steadfast confession (*parakalon*) and a witness to the grace of God in which men stand even in persecution (*epimartyron tauten einai alethe charin theou, eis hen stete*, 5:12). Our Epistle combines this exhortation and witness.

The formal structure of this passage is impressive. It opens with three general exhortations. In each case the exhortation is followed by the basis or ground for the exhortation. The passage then concludes with a benediction of the readers and a doxology of God. An outline of the passage follows:

A. Three Exhortations to Christians Generally

5:5b *Exhortation 1*: Be humble in your relationships to other Christians.

5:5c *Basis*: Because God gives grace to the humble. (Prov. 3:34)

5:6 *Exhortation 2*: Therefore be humble before God.

5:6b-7 *Basis*: Because He exalts the humble, that is, those who trust Him as the God who cares. (Ps. 55:23; Wis. Sol. 12:13)

5:8 *Exhortation 3*: Be alert in these last times when Satan is especially active against God's people.

5:9 *Basis*: Since you know that this is the common lot of God's people.

B. Liturgical Assurance and Response

5:10 *Benediction*: The God of all grace, who made you a Christian destined for eternal glory, will reverse your short suffering by perfecting you.

5:11 *Doxology*: God's power abides forever. Amen.

Some terms and ideas in this text will be especially useful to the preacher. The term "humility" (*tapeinophrosyne*, the noun related to the verb in v. 5, 6) is a specifically Christian "virtue." In paganism it was regarded as a servile trait not worthy of the fully developed man. "Always to be the best and to stand head and shoulders above the crowd." Thus Achilles formulated the heroic ideal in Homer's *Iliad*. The Stoic philosopher sought to stand out also by his wisdom and self-control; he desired to be

the purple border on the senator's toga, to use a picture from the philosopher Epicurus. (1.2.18)

But all Christians (*pantes de*, 5:5; see 3:8) are to tie on humility like the apron that slaves used to protect their clothing (*enkomboasthe*, 5:5; so Kelly, p. 306). Humility is putting one's self into the role of slave for the advantage of others (*dativus commodi, allelois*, 5:5). Qumran also knows of humility, but there it is urged as a proper way to rebuke one another and to advance in accord with one's perfection in the community. (1QS V. 23ff.)

Humility is based on a recognition of God's power and its use in dealing with men (see the Introit). God's powerful hand (5:6) is a phrase used in the Old Testament to describe both the disciplining activity of God (Job 30:21; Ps. 32:4; Ez. 20:34 f.) and the mighty acts "by which God raised up a people for himself and brought them out of Egyptian bondage" (Fitzmyer, II, 368, with references to Deut. 9:26, 29; Ex. 13:9; see also Best, p. 173). God's power to raise is exercised specifically on humble people. (1 Sam. 2:7, the case of Hannah; Ezek. 17:24)

There is also a strong eschatological flavor to this passage (as there is to 1 Peter generally). God will exalt *en kairos* (5:6), "at the proper time," that is at the parousia, the "last time" (*eschatos kairos*, 1:5), the "day of visitation." (*hemera episkopes*, 2:12). That time is close (4:7; 1:5). Therefore one is called to eschatological living. That living means putting your worries on God (the language of 5:7 is drawn from Ps. 55:23), who truly cares for you. (See Wis. Sol. 12:13; Matt. 6:25-33.)

Eschatological living also calls for eschatological awareness and care. To be sober, to stay awake (see the use of the same verbs in 1 Thess. 5:6) is the proper attitude as we await the *kairos*. Jesus emphasized the same need (Matt. 25; Luke 12 and 13). There is no room for either fatalism or relaxed thoughtlessness.

The reason is given in 5:8. The *kairos* before the parousia is characterized by a special effort on the part of Satan (both *antidikos* and *diabolos* are used of him in the Septuagint). That time is the time of testing and temptation for the people of God (*peirasmos*; see Matt. 24:4-28 parr.; 2 Thess. 2:3-12). In language taken from

Ps. 22:14 Peter describes Satan as being fearless, present all over, and destructive (Selwyn, p. 237). Persecution is due to the demonic. (Qumran also uses the lion as a symbol of the persecutor, 1QH V. 9; 4QpeshNah I.1ff.). Satan is responsible for the sufferings of the church; that is why men can resist because they know (causal participle *eidotes*, 5:9) that the entire church (brotherhood, *adelphotes*, see 2:17) has to pay this same tax, that is, suffering. (*epiteleisthai*, 5:9)

The liturgical close is very similar to 1 Thess. 5:23-28; 2 Thess. 3:13-17; and Heb. 13:21-22. It gathers up the ideas of the epistle. It suggests that the letter is strongly influenced by early Christian worship life. The God of all grace, the many-splendored grace (*be polipoikilos charis theou*, 4:10), is the God who possesses power forever (5:11). He called Christians into the church for them to have eternal glory. And His power will accomplish it. Satan may indeed be able to cause suffering for a little while, but God's will for His humble people will be done. He will make them perfect, stable, and strong.

Suggested Sermon Outline:

God's Grace Will Bring His Humble Servants to Glory

- I. The Eschatological Style of Life
 - A. The expectation of His coming
 - B. The life in humble service to one another
 - C. The life of resistance to eschatological temptation
- II. The God Who Makes It Possible
 - A. His grace has called us to Him.
 - B. His power directs us to the goal.
 - C. His care surrounds us in the present.

NOTE: Pastors who want additional material are advised to consult the following books:

- Best, Ernest. *I Peter*. Greenwood, S. C.: The Attic Press, 1971. *New Century Bible*. Most recent. Useful.
- Elliott, John H. *Doxology: God's People Called to Celebrate His Glory*. St. Louis: Lutheran Laymen's League, 1966. A most useful short commentary, packed with helpful comments.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "The First Epistle of Peter." *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Pren-

lice-Hall, 1968. II, 362-68. Outstanding one-volume commentary.

Kelly, J. N. D. *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969. *Harper's New Testament Commentaries*. All in all, the best commentary for the pastor's shelves. Learned and pious.

Selwyn, Edward Gordon. *The First Epistle of St. Peter*. London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969 (1947). Learned, detailed, a masterful work.
Edgar Krentz

PENTECOST, FOURTEENTH AFTER

Genesis 4: (1-7) 8-16a

1 John 4:7-11

Luke 10:25-37

The new choice of Old Testament Lesson and Epistle provides much better unity than did the former ones with the historic Gospel of the Good Samaritan. Loving care for one another is now the single theme.

The Collect is appropriate, with its prayer for an "increase of faith, hope, and charity." Introit and Gradual are taken from Psalm 74 (except Hallelujah verse, Ps. 88:1) and are best understood in this connection as the lament of the suffering brother or neighbor who needs our loving care. By joining our own voices to his cries for help we are also implicitly committing ourselves to act in love on his behalf. (James 2:15-16)

The Epistle begins and ends with the exhortation to "love one another"—no restrictions. It includes brother (Old Testament Lesson) and neighbor (Gospel) alike. In Adam we have all one father, and Eve is the mother of all living. There is no man whose brother-ness I may disown. This relationship is expanded to the outermost limits. The Holiness Code in Lev. 19:18 commands, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Only a few verses later this is defined to include also the alien who may enter our sphere of life (Lev. 19:34), and ultimately even the enemy and the persecutor (Matt. 5:44). The Samaritan is a perfect example.

Yet men ask the impudent question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We desire to justify our noninvolvement by setting

limits, asking, "And just who is my neighbor?" The answer challenges all our rationalizing. It comes as a counter-question: "Which one seems to you to have *been* a neighbor to the man attacked by the robbers?" Be a brother! The Samaritan did so by showing "mercy," simply doing for the man in compassion what the situation required. Cain provides a contrasting example.

The Old Testament Lesson is a masterpiece of the Yahwist's storytelling style. The spotlight shifts continually between Cain and Abel, Yahweh and Cain. In this way the structure itself mirrors the conflict motif. A simple form of dramatization can greatly heighten the impact for modern listeners. Each contrasting pair of statements may be divided between two readers, A and B. Reader A speaks his half of each pair first, except in the cases indicated in parentheses. The contrasting pairs are vv. 1 and 2a (B first); the two halves of 2b; 3 and 4a (B first); 4b and 5a; 5b and 6 (B first); the two halves of 7a; the two halves of 7b (B first); 8 (the two readers in unison);¹ 9a and 9b; 10-12 and 13-14; 15 and 16. Pencil the cues for A and B into the text, and mark the end of each pair for a slight pause.

All men are neighbors, even brothers. Yet both the Cain story and the parable of the Samaritan openly accept the existence of basic differences among men, such as those due to occupation or ethnic background (modern parallels easily supplied). These lead inevitably to conflicts, a fact of life recognized without comment in both pericopes. Even the reason for the acceptance of Abel's offering but not Cain's is unimportant and is not discussed. Cain's offense, if any, may have been of a purely ritual nature and unwittingly done. The word for "sin" used in v. 7 often means no more than that (contrast the term in v. 13, translatable as "iniquity, guilt, punishment"). Cain simply saw that his labor for the necessities of life was meeting with no success, even though he had carefully made the required offerings to the God from whom all blessings flow. He had done what he should, and yet he was faring less

well than his brother. This led quite naturally to envy and anger.

The real issue confronted in both pericopes is how to react in a personal relationship in the face of such stinging inequalities, what to do about it when "unfair" situations arise, as they inevitably will between fellowmen. The Samaritan overlooked the humiliating treatment he had so often experienced at the hands of Jews and saved his neighbor's life. Cain succumbed to his envy and anger over being humiliated and took his brother's life. He failed to heed God's warning to the contrary. Verse 7a has better sense and rhythm if the word "sin" (in the meaning already referred to above) is transposed to the other half of the contrasting pair: "Is it not true that if you do right there is pardon for sin? But if you fail to do right a demon (or wild beast) is lurking at the door." So bring it under control now while it is still manageable, and do not let your feelings becloud your judgment to the detriment of another person who may not even be at fault.

In spite of the warning the worst happens. So monstrous is the crime that the bare telling of it, without depicting reactions, makes a devastatingly effective turning point for the story. After this, Cain's opposite number can no longer be Abel; he must face Yahweh Himself.

The sentence meted out to Cain, like various other aspects of the story, has many contacts with that referred to in the preceding chapter. This fact invites us to compare and contrast them theologically. Amid all the similarities one overriding difference comes through: in Gen. 3 only the serpent and the soil are actually cursed, whereas in chapter 4 a curse is laid on the man Cain himself. All men have been estranged from God, and death now sets a limit to their life; but in this extraordinary case life itself is lived under the curse, for Cain has murdered his brother. He has so totally destroyed a relationship that his own banishment from other human relationships is the result. Cain catches the full impact of this and laments the fact that others may now kill him on sight. As in chapter 3 God shows continuing concern for the convicted transgressor, but the punishment must stand. Yet it is a sentence imposed directly by God; no human, not even the usual avenger of blood, is to in-

¹ Beginning v. 8 with the conjunction "But" would emphasize the climactic character of this turning point in the story and is supported by the Hebrew text.

flict capital punishment on him. That much is clear from both the decree of God in v. 15 and the mark, whatever it may have been. He must dwell "east of Eden" (see John Steinbeck's novel of that title, reflecting the Cain and Abel theme), in a "land of wandering" (same Hebrew root as in vv. 12 and 14), perpetually unsettled and restless. As at the end of chapter 3, the ultimate consequence of his crime is banishment from direct communication with God.

Cain, the first brother, has made himself an alien. The alien Samaritan, on the other hand, proves himself to be a neighbor, a true brother.

Christ's parable is meant to be universally applicable; likewise the Cain story, for it is not particular history but universal, prototypical, arch-history (like everything up to Gen. 11). This spares us from pursuing inappropriate questions (for example, who were the people whose vengeance Cain feared, and whom did he marry?) or pressing incidental details. Further, it points us strongly away from any particularistic interpretation (for example, that Cain stands for all nomads, or for the Kenite tribe). This also makes the story more directly available for theologizing and preaching with reference to our own situation. We offer several suggestions.

The command to love the neighbor, or to be the brother's keeper, is intimately related to the first and fundamental command, to love God with all you have and are (Gospel, v. 27; see Matt. 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-34). This is a quote from Deut. 6:5, where the entire context of chapters 1-11 propounds the idea that the First Commandment is basic to the keeping of all the covenant stipulations (see Luther's explanations to the commandments, which succinctly make the identical point). The Yahwist implies the same when he depicts the murder of the first brother as the very next stage after man's rebellion against God and his attempt to become like God.

The Epistle restates the idea memorably: "Love is of God, and he who loves . . . knows God," as well as vice versa. But it also adds the specifically Christian viewpoint to this generally Biblical theme: God's love is made known most fully and brilliantly in His Son. In Him we see and experience what loving care for others

really means. He has proved neighbor to us in the most climactic sense possible, by becoming the propitiation for our sins. He is His brothers' truest Keeper, and we are truly His brothers. The curse of Cain is removed through Him, and we are restored to full fellowship with brother man and with Father God.

The Brother's Keeper

Introduction: This story is about all mankind, including us. Our crime, our burden of guilt, our hope.

- A. Cain did indeed commit an enormous crime. (See above for further supplementation.)
- B. Afterward he expresses unconcern, attempting to justify himself. Like lawyer in Gospel.
- C. But God hears Abel's blood crying and *is* concerned. He wants to see in men loving care for others, *becoming* a neighbor, *being* a brother. The Samaritan as example of what God desires—and so often fails to find.
- D. An awful punishment, too great to bear. God excludes Cain from enjoying the fruits of the settled land and from having close relationships with other people.
- E. We too may build a shell of unconcern and rationalizing, while deep down we hurt and are weighed down with guilt too great to bear. We fear an inability to have close, caring relationships.
- F. Then God comes, totally unexpected, showing concern and loving care for the unconcerned, the murderer, whom He has judged (as also in Gen. 3).
- G. Even more amazing, the Epistle announces that God gives *Himself* in loving care, as propitiation for our sins, so that we might live through Him. Christ is the truest brother, the genuine neighbor.
- H. With him living in us, we too can show loving care as brothers, neighbors.

Arlis J. Ehlen

PENTECOST, SEVENTEENTH AFTER

1 Kings 17:17-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 7:11-16 or John 11:17-27

"From death to life" is the experience referred to in all of the lessons appointed

for this Sunday. The Old Testament lesson introduces us to the episode in the life of Elijah in which he restored to life the child of the woman who had befriended the prophet. The Gospel tells of the plight of the widow at Nain and how our Lord restored her only son to life. The alternate Gospel speaks of the raising of Lazarus from the dead after he had already been dead for some time. The Epistle is the first part of that well-known chapter of the New Testament usually called the Resurrection Chapter. It tells of the resurrection of our Lord and its meaning for life.

The propers for the day make mention of the mercy of the God in His wondrous acts, not the least of which is to hold out this great hope of life again in Christ, the Lord. The Collect properly requests the grace of the Lord to surround us in all our actions and to show itself in our daily living. The Gradual points to the end of time when God will reveal Himself in all of His glory and all men shall acknowledge Him for what He really is, namely, a God of mercy and a God of trust.

In the Epistle, Paul would remind the Corinthian Christians that his message was the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and that only in this message can they find the basis for their faith in a merciful God. He also encourages them to hold fast to this faith and not to let anyone teach them anything else for fear that they might be believing in vain. The noun "Gospel" is a favorite term with Paul. He uses it no less than fifty times in his letters.

Paul then expounds the heart of the message of this Gospel which is the news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and all for a purpose, briefly summarized in those unforgettable words, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (v. 3b). This sacred truth was at all times the heart and core of Paul's preaching (2 Cor. 4 and other passages in Paul's epistles). Paul then refers to witnesses of the resurrected Christ and names a goodly number, both among the immediate disciples and others, a group of more than five hundred who saw the living Christ all at one time. Last of all, Christ was also seen by Paul.

Paul speaks of himself with a sense of both shame and pride. He had persecuted the Christians before his conversion on the road to Damascus (Gal. 1:11 to 2:2).

It was very hard for Paul to forget this fact. Yet at the same time he as a witness of the living Christ and had been commissioned by Him to preach the Gospel; of this fact Paul was proud, humbly so, for he always mentions that he was able to do what he did only because of the grace of God given him. This grace of God was so great that, unworthy instrument though he was, in the hand of God he accomplished great things for God. The grace of God can today achieve great things in the life of His people. Not without reason, therefore, do we speak of

Amazing Grace

- I. Based on life, death, and resurrection of Christ
 - A. God's mercy revealed in His Son's
 1. Life and its meaning for us
 2. Death and its benefits to us
 3. Resurrection and its fruits in our lives
 - B. Basis of our Christian faith, a revealed message of God's mercy
- II. Assures forgiveness of sins—the heart of the Gospel
 - A. Good News, "your sins are forgiven."
 1. All that Christ did, He did "for us."
 2. Resurrection is our assurance that God's plan for our salvation is fulfilled.
 - B. Essence of true Christian freedom—no longer slaves to sin but free to serve God and man.
- III. Results in newness of life and living
 - A. Faith in the Gospel changes life and living.
 1. Paul's experience
 2. Every Christian's experience
 - B. God continues His work until He calls us home to Himself.
 1. Grace of God in Paul and what is achieved
 2. Grace of God in our lives and the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23)

L. C. Wuerffel

PENTECOST, TWENTY-SECOND AFTER

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Acts 4:23-31

Matthew 5:38-48

It will not be many days before the great American holiday, Thanksgiving Day, is celebrated. Preaching on this Sunday might well be geared to prepare for the task that will be ours on that significant day, opening up the hearts and minds of the people to the realization of the innumerable blessings of God for the well-being of our lives. The emphasis of the Old Testament lesson is that we with our families should choose to serve the living God. The Epistle involves us in the prayer of the early Christians that we might serve with boldness the sovereign Lord who made heaven and earth. One emphasis of this week's sermon ought then to place the centrality of God in all aspects of our lives before us. The Gospel spells out various ways in which our lives will reflect that focus on God; but it clearly directs us to serve Him in our fellowmen. To be "sons of your Father who is in heaven, who makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust," we ought to love even our enemies.

In thanksgiving we have a tendency to separate the material and spiritual gifts of God. In facing up to our responsibilities to serve our fellowmen we may also err either on the side of sharing only things material or on the opposite side of stressing only the sharing in spiritual things. However, all things belong to God, who "has made heaven and earth" (Introit). This recognition of God as the creator of all things is also affirmed by the Gradual of this Sunday which says, "Thou hast formed the earth and the world: even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." But both the Introit and the Gradual add the importance of the spiritual in our relation with God. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord." They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion." Trying to distinguish the spiritual and the material gifts of God and overly stressing the spiritual gifts of God, we often fail to recognize the material goodness of God. Sometimes Christians become like Hindus and Buddhists who escape the material world and consider the negation of material things of the world as something positive. But we Christians should recognize that all gifts, including material things God has given us, belong to God. We should rejoice in them and give thanks to God. We should see our responsibility

to share them as God would have us do.

At the same time, Christians should not overindulge in material comforts and material things of this world. If we emphasize material gifts and material comforts too heavily, we may become victims of a new idolatry of scientism and materialism as if modern science and material progress could solve every human problem. Thus we might begin to follow a false God and fail to give God central position in our lives, fail to give thanks to God, and fail to do proper sharing.

However, in spite of the sins of our faithlessness, God is faithful and merciful to His people. Although His people "worshipped other gods," God is still the faithful God who "brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and who did great signs in our times, and preserved us in all the way that we went . . ." (Joshua 24:17). His goodness compels us to recognize Him, but urges us as well to realize we are all His people.

An important aspect of thankful lives, therefore, is to recognize the value of our fellowmen and to love them for God who is the creator of all. All men are fellow children of God who are "made of one blood" (Acts 17:26). Such recognition of each man's individual importance and of human values is expressed in Christian life in acts of love to our fellowmen. The Gospel for this Sunday is a text to develop this theme of love to our fellowmen as a way to give thanks to God, even to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us." The theme of today's sermon is

Love One Another as Thanksgiving to God,
the Creator of Heaven and Earth

I. Creator of Heaven and Earth

- A. God is the source and giver of our life. He provides all good things for our well-being, including "material" and "spiritual" gifts. (Cf. Acts 4:24)
- B. God is the father of all our fellowmen. He is our common father, and we are all precious children of God (cf. Acts 17:26). God our father is merciful and protects us. (Joshua 24:17)
- C. We are to recognize one another's need and value. God's gifts are distributed and shared through the

working hands of every man, and we are all in need of each other and dependent on each other.

II. Idolatrous Possibilities

- A. Failure to recognize one another's need and each other's value is the failure to recognize the centrality of God in our lives and leads our lives to new idolatry.
- B. Man's new idolatry in materialism. When we do not place God in the center of our life, then science, material progress, and machines may become the means of solving our problems.
- C. New idolatry in spiritualism. May be a denial of God's goodness in material things or a failure to meet the material needs of our fellowman. Some today in American

society abandon their social responsibility and develop a kind of new ascetic, an Oriental mysticism which does not see the need of the material things in our lives.

III. Thanksgiving to God with Love to One Another

- A. Sacrificial love to our fellowman, even "not resisting one who is evil." (Matt. 5:38-42)
- B. Even love for our enemies and prayer for those who persecute us. (Matt. 5:44)
- C. Such sacrificial and unselfish love is the way to recognize the central place of our heavenly father in our lives and a way of giving thanks to God as "sons of our father in heaven." (Matt. 5:45)

Wi Jo Kang