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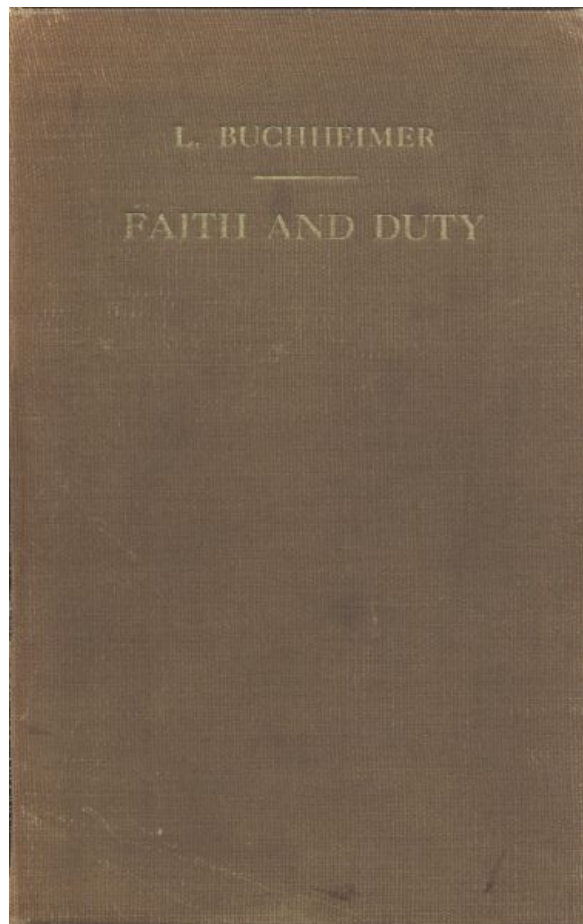
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Faith and Duty

Sermons on Free Texts

With Reference to the Church-Year

By the

REV. LOUIS BUCHHEIMER

Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, St. Louis, Mo.



ST. LOUIS, MO.
CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
1913

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FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

[1]

Come thou and all thy house into the ark.—*Gen. 7, 1.*

The Bible, from beginning to end, is a series of object lessons. God sets before us certain persons, things, events, and bids us look at and learn from them, just as the teacher at school draws a diagram on the blackboard, and tells the children to look at and learn from it. No word, or single incident, recorded in the Bible, is wasted or useless; what may, at first glance, sometimes appear trifling and unimportant to us, may, on closer examination, mean very much, like the decimal point in arithmetic or the accent on a word. So it is with the words of the text just quoted. They may seem insignificant, yet are they most important.

The present season, beginning with this Sunday, is called Advent. We are accustomed, in the four weeks before Christmas, to direct our minds to Christ's advent or coming. This advent, we say, is threefold: First, there is Christ's coming in the flesh, when as a little babe He lay in the

manger at Bethlehem, taking upon Himself the form of Abraham, made in the likeness of human flesh, and performing the pilgrimage of an earthly life that He might thus save man. Again, we distinguish His second coming, *i. e.*, His return, as we confess in the Creed, "to judge the quick and the dead," when, arrayed in all the power and majesty of Almightyness, He shall come to execute vengeance upon the evildoers, vindicate and take home with Himself those who believed in Him. And between these two comings lies a third, which we are wont to designate "His spiritual coming," by which we mean His coming and knocking at the door of our hearts for admission. This coming is not visible, however, as the other two, but invisible, yet none the less real on that account, and it is carried on by means of His Word and sacraments, through the instrumentality of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for the execution of which He has founded a divine institution called the Church. To that Church He has entrusted the work of Gospel preaching and sacramental giving. She, if true to her calling and message, is the conservatory of His truth, the disseminator of His kingdom upon earth. It is within her pales that He dispenses salvation. Outside of the Church He does not promise to bestow forgiveness of sin and the blessings of His grace. How these preliminary remarks bear upon the selection and consideration of our text, what precious and instructive lessons we may gather from the comparison, that let us see, and may we be wise and heed.

[2]

"Come thou and all thy house into the ark," reads the command of God. We immediately perceive with what account of ancient history that connects. The people of the Old World, the antediluvians, as they are generally called, had become so corrupt in morals and life that God determined their destruction and said: "The end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with violence," yet, to show His desire to save them, He appointed His servant Noah to preach righteousness to them, and directed him to build an ark as an evidence that He was minded to carry out His purpose, and as a means of safety for Noah. Few, however, none, in fact, except Noah and his immediate family, eight souls in all, took the warning to heart. Many a one of that perverse generation, we may surmise, even assisted in the construction of the ark, and the patriarchal minister would exhort them to forsake their sins and worship God, only to be sneered at for his credulity and ridiculed for his nonsensical eccentricity of building such a boathouse.

But the hundred and twenty years given for probation expired, and Noah receives directions to embark. "Come thou," is the command, "into the ark." Just one week is allowed to bring into the ark all his family, and the birds and beasts to be preserved, and then—what an unusual sound it must have been—the door was shut, not by Noah's, or any human hand, but by the hand of Jehovah; for it is written: "And the Lord shut him in," and now, amid the war of heaven's artillery and the shaking of the earth, the fountains of the deep burst open, and the windows of the skies break loose, and the greatest and most terrible calamity Revelation records is on. Imagination cannot portray the scenes that must have then been enacted,—how, forgetful of everything but self-preservation, they fled towards the singular building, which but a little before they had insolently defied; how, perhaps laboring in their distraction to scramble up its huge sides, the angry tide of waters keeps them down, and with a cry of despair they dash into the watery abyss; how some, climbing up to the loftiest pinnacle and summit of the mountains, in the hope that perhaps at the end the door may be opened to receive a few more, they see the wondrous ship dashing along, gallant and safe, and hear that gurgling sound, the death requiem of their race, rising higher and higher. Oh! who can describe the anguish, the woe, the cursing of self. But it was now too late, and yet, whose fault was it? Provision had been made, probation time had been granted them; there was none to blame but themselves. God's warnings are not empty sounds, His institutions not for ridicule and rejection. And now, more generally, for the application.

[3]

We, too, have an ark, a New Testament Ark. God, Himself, as the divine architect and artificer, has built it; He devised the plans, He selected the material, and employs the Noahs in its construction; daily do we see before our eyes its towers and walls, hear regularly and pleadingly the bells sending out the invitation: "Come thou into the ark." You know what this ark is,—it's the Holy Christian Church, that divine structure which by Him has been finished these 1900 years. There, in the midst of a world of sin and depravity, upon which God has pronounced His righteous judgments as clearly as upon the race of antediluvians, it stands,—the great, the capacious Gospel Ark, a refuge of safety; come whatever Jehovah may commission upon our guilty world, it is certain to ride safely above the tumultuous tempest and bring us gallantly to the celestial mountain, the Ararat of Heaven.

My dear hearer, have you entered into that ark? Is your name enrolled among the list of passengers? And why not? Make known the reason of your backwardness. In other words, without figure, lay before you the question: Why are you not a church-member? Why do you stand aloof from the church? Why do you not join? I shall listen to a few of your reasons, and then tell you why you ought to join. Perhaps you are laboring under the fear that there is not room enough for you in the ark, that you are not invited among them to whom the gracious offer is tendered. Banish that thought instantly from your mind. "Not room enough in the ark!" "Not wanted!" "Come thou and thy house into the ark." You know the beautiful parable of the Great Supper, to which all and sundry were invited, and after everything had been precisely done as the master had commanded, the servant comes and tells the master of the house: "Yet there is room." A striking truth! Those words reveal that the Christian Ark is not yet fully tenanted, that, as the invitation is still out, you are yet in time.

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"Not *room*—not *wanted*!" God forbid that such a thought should in your breasts be found. "Come unto me," declared your Savior, "come thou into the ark." But you say: "I do belong to the church, the so-called 'Big Church,' *i. e.*, to the number of those who still profess to be Christians, who uphold Christian principles and live good moral lives, who aim at what is right, and I am just

as good and honest as any in the church." Perhaps so, my dear friend, perhaps more so, for not all that profess to be church-members are such; some are slimy and wily hypocrites. But *you*, as an honorable and professing Christian, ought to be a church-member, for you know that Christ does not acknowledge the "Big Church" of which you are speaking. You cannot put asunder what Christ has joined together. He has joined these two things together, Himself and the Church; outside of His ark He promises no salvation, and you have no right to expect it. For what is the Church? It is Christ's provision for the salvation of man,—how? By the preaching of His holy Word and the administration of His sacraments, as we heard. Is the Word of God preached in the "Big Church"? Is Baptism administered, the Lord's Communion received? How can faith in the Savior then be wrought, maintained, forgiveness of sins secured, hope and salvation? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," says the Bible. "If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples, indeed," says the Savior. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

I doubt not that many of the antediluvians did not despise the ark outright. Who knows but what they might have thought there was something to it,—when the great calamity comes we shall be all right,—and that they told the preacher of righteousness: "Never mind about us, Noah, our record is still good." But salvation was in the ark, and there it is to-day; you cannot separate Christ from His Church, Christliness from Churchliness, for the Church is Christ's, and Christ is in His Church; and I know not, from the study of God's Word, the Bible, what right any man has to stand aloof from the Christian Church and call himself a Christian. The "Big Church" is a big delusion.

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"Yes, I recognize that I ought to belong to the Church, but I do not like to bind myself," pleads another. Bind yourself? To what? To a life of godliness, to a conduct becoming a Christian, to the duties incumbent upon a member? Why, if you are a Christian at all, you are bound by these things already. The further few hours occasionally given to the deliberation of congregational affairs ought not to deter you. You are bound already, why speak about binding yourself? And you certainly do not want to be unbound,—for in the ark alone is your safety.

There are yet other reasons why some do not join the Church. In our materialistic age, there are hundreds whom the love of money keeps out of the house of God. It costs something, and they shun costs, no matter for what purpose—ever so noble. They hold connections which the Church cannot sanction, belong to organizations against which it finds itself compelled to testify, and because people cannot bear to have their connections reproved, and do not stop to weigh and consider what the Church has to say, they immediately, without any further ado, break off all relation with the Church, and raise the cry against it of being too strict, and stay away from the preaching and the sacraments, none of which have been denied them, and to which they are warmly invited and heartily welcomed. They will once have to answer for it. The invitation remains: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark."

And now, having listened to why some people do not belong to the Church, let us regard a few reasons why each and every Christian ought to be a church-member. First, there is the positive command of God. The Lord said unto Noah—commanded, directed him: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." His directions to us and ours are not less specific. His Third Commandment reads: "Thou shalt sanctify the holyday." Where does the sanctification of that day take place but in His Church, in the observance of its institutions? He warns: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Again, take all such clear passages in which He commands us to profess piety as this: "I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven," which, if it means anything, certainly means that we must either be publicly and openly rated among His confessors, or He will not consent to acknowledge us among His saints. How can a man be a proper child of God who will not so much as give His name as a believer? What guarantee has he to count securely on salvation if he refuses to say before men whether he takes Christ as his Redeemer, or not? It is true: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness," but it is equally true: "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Church-membership is not optional; it is imperative, it is based upon God's command.

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Another reason for church-membership is, that a Christian must advance his Master's cause. If you are at liberty to decline connection with Christ's Church, then I am; if one is, all are, and how, then, can there be the maintenance of the ministry, the furtherance of the manifest kingdom of God? We pray daily: "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When is God's name hallowed? When does His kingdom come? And by what influences and agencies is His will done on earth but by this organization established by Himself for that purpose,—His holy Church? Who keeps up the work of the ministry with its schools of education, who maintains the propagation of the faith by the support of missions, and all those other efforts essential to the preservation and spreading of Christ's kingdom, and you, as a disciple of Christ, should be found standing aloof from it, not helping along yourself, yea, by your passive indifference and non-cooperation setting a bad example unto others? Your duty in this respect is as plain as Noah's,—you should get into the ark.

And, reason last. It promotes your own good. Aside from what we have already emphasized, there is something in the simple matter of being known and feeling committed as a member of a Church which strengthens and helps a man. It restrains where otherwise there would be no restraint. It induces to arouse a livelier sense of religious obligations, stimulates to stricter fidelity in the observance of things which otherwise are easily neglected, secures the watch and oversight of experienced Christians, and, withal, gives a force and quickening which comes from conviction that one is rated as a disciple of Christ and looked to for example in faith, in word, and

in deeds. It brings spiritual things and Christian duty closer home. If conscientiously attended to, it is a blessing to you, and it makes you a blessing to others.

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Let this suffice on this subject at this time. Let those who have held and are holding membership draw a rule from what has been said for the regulation of their conduct. So divine and essential a cause enlists their endeavors. Let them make it their business to honor it, to widen and extend its influences by being punctual at the services, by being particular in the observance of its sacraments, by being uncompromising in the belief and defense of its faith, by being active in encouraging all efforts necessary to its life and success. And those who have hitherto stood aloof from the Church, or who are mere lingerers about its gates, let them also learn from this the unsatisfactoriness of their position, and be admonished of the duty and necessity that is upon them if they would find God and salvation.

"Come thou and thy family into the ark,"—what time could be more opportune than this first day of another year of God's grace? Consider the matter, and may it lead you to lay your vow upon God's altar and have your name recorded on the roster of the Church. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.—*Rev. 20, 11. 12. 15.*

We are all acquainted, my beloved, with the verdict that was once pronounced upon King Belshazzar of Babylon,—how, seated one night at a royal banquet, with his princes, his wives and concubines, eating, drinking, and making merry, there suddenly appeared upon the wall of his palace the ghostly fingers of a man's hand tracing in clear and distinct letters the words: "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." When the king saw the mysterious script and surmised its probable meaning, his countenance was changed, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. The wisest man in his realm was sent for, one Daniel, the Lord's prophet, interprets the words and tells him: "Mene: God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Tekel: Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting. Upharsin: Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Nor was it the space of two hours before the verdict met its fulfillment. Darius, the king of the Medes, by a subterranean passage, dug under the city's walls, broke into the city. Belshazzar was slain that night, and his mighty empire shattered like chaff before the wind.

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"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," that is the handwriting which one might appropriately inscribe over the portals of this day. Loving and warning as was the picture which we contemplated on the last Lord's Day, where we observed our Savior riding in royal state, in the City of David, and heard the prophet's prediction: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon a colt," just as tremendous and awfully solemn is the account in to-day's Gospel, which presents to us that selfsame King transformed into a judge, His meekness into righteous display, His offers of salvation into sentences of sharpness, justice, and retribution, parceling out to every one, as He did unto Belshazzar at Babylon, the just verdict of his deed. It is Christ's "Second Advent," His coming to judge the quick and the dead, that forms the topic of our present contemplation, and taking up the account read from Revelations, step by step, may God's Holy Spirit make our consideration of it a blessing to your souls. Four things enlist our devotion: *I. The Judge; II. the judged; III. the books; IV. the results.*

The first thing that arrested the Apostle's eye was the throne. "And I saw a great white throne," he tells us. Thrones are the seats of kings and sovereigns, and they are always associated with the idea of regal splendor and magnificence. Just so the meaning is, that when the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, appears in the clouds of heaven, He will be surrounded with the manifestations of grandeur, majesty, and dominion, as the Gospel indicates when it says: "Then shall ye see the Son of Man coming in great glory," and things are particularly specified, too, regarding this throne. It is a "great throne," like the one which Isaiah, the prophet, saw in one of his visions "high and lifted up," so that the millions and myriads of earth can easily discern it as the spot where they shall hear their eternal destiny read out. And it was also a "white" throne. White, in the language of the Bible and of all nations, is the mark of purity and holiness, and when, accordingly, the throne is designated as being "white," it means that white decisions will be rendered there, stainless judgment, unspotted by the least prejudice, crookedness, partiality, or mistakes; none will think of questioning their equity, or dream of appealing to any higher court. Their verdict will be final and fair.

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The next object that attracted the Apostle's eye was the Judge Himself: "And I saw Him that sat on it." No further description of the personal appearance of the Judge is given. John simply says: "I saw Him," whence it follows that He can be seen, and, accordingly, it could not have been the absolute, invisible God, who cannot be seen. Who, then, was it? It was none other than Jesus Christ, of whom we confess in the Second Article that He was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead and buried, and the third day rose again, and, ascending into heaven, shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. This is the plain teaching of Scripture throughout. Christ Jesus, the Son of Man, wearing the very nature of those whom He judges, will be the Judge. "God

hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." But not any longer as the gentle, compassionate Savior, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, but as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as the Judge from whose face the earth and the heavens will flee away, and the unrighteous call out in despair: "Ye mountains, fall upon us, and ye hills, hide us from Him that sitteth on the throne." And think not, we would here add, that we are describing matters of imagination, such as poets and painters may dwell upon. We are describing things that will really happen. John saw these things in vision. You and I shall one day see these things in reality. "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him." Where shall be *our* place, what *our* portion at that time, in that day?

This we learn from the next point of consideration: Who shall be the judged? "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." By the "dead" here are meant *all mankind*, the entire family of earth, all of woman born, from Adam down to the last offspring of human race,—they must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. It is computed that there are more than eighty millions of inhabitants in our land. This is about one-twentieth part of the entire population of the globe, which, at this time, is calculated at one billion five hundred millions. These one billion five hundred millions will be all gathered together into one thronging assemblage, and not they only, but also, in addition, the two hundred generations of men who have preceded us, and those generations—how many we know not, God knoweth—that will still live in the earth between these days and the last general judgment. These all, which no man can number, shall be judged. It says: "The great and small." There will be no distinction of age, size, color, or nation, condition or rank, those of high degree and those of low estate, the rich and the poor, the sovereign and his subjects, the man of silvery hair and the infant of a span long, the distinguished scholar and the untutored savage, husband and wife, pastor and people, apostles and sinners,—all shall stand before God. All the dead, whose bodies were once consigned by loving hands to quiet resting-chambers beneath mother earth, those whose bones lie bleached upon the desert's sands or Alpine mountains, those whose corpse was lowered down into watery depths,—immaterial how, when, or where dead,—these all shall yield up their tents when the trumpet of the archangel sounds to gather the children of men unto judgment. And with the parties thus arrayed at the bar, we proceed to the judgment itself.

[10]

"And the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books." Two sets of books are here spoken of: first, two books, and then another book. Other passages in God's Word also speak of books in connection with the Judgment. What the character of these books spoken of is we are not at a loss to determine; the one is the book of God's remembrance, and the other is the book of God's Word. Not as if God in reality employs books to make His entries; the all-knowing King needs no such helps to remind Him of men's actions. His all-capacious mind knows all things and forgets nothing. The idea is: Just as men, in their manifold dealings, do not trust to their memories, but use memoranda and records in order to be able to refer to them as occasion requires, just so, in condescension to our way of thinking, figuratively speaking, God represents Himself as keeping a book in which He has an exact record of what has been done by any creature, past, present, and future. And an exact record it will be, accurate in the minutest detail. Not only man's general character, the sum total of his life, whether (taken altogether) he was, on the whole, a worldly or a pious man, or the like, will be taken into account, but every trifling act, good or bad, of which his entire life was composed. The word is: "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Everything. Nothing shall be kept back, nothing will be overlooked. That thought that passed so rapidly through your mind as hardly to be noticed, that word that so hastily escaped your lips, all the deliberate and determined actions which have left their stain upon your life, all these, down to the secret sin that you have been so successful in hiding from the sight of man, all, whether done in childhood, youth, manhood, or old age, all that has been committed or omitted, will be opened out to public view by the all-seeing, all-remembering Judge. This is the first book, the Book of Remembrance.

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And the divine Arbiter opens another book. We have no difficulty in recognizing it at once. It is to us a familiar volume,—"The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you in the last day," is the language of the Judge Himself. That book, we contend, is the guide and rule of our faith and actions in this life; it is also the statute-book of heaven, the touchstone by which our hearts and lives are to be tried in the life hereafter. Plain enough are the directions that book tells you. "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." Plainly does it speak to you and to all of heaven, of judgment, of eternity, of faith, of holiness, and of the new birth and conversion; plainly does it inform you of Him who redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, that he that believeth in the Son hath eternal life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. In brief, according to that opened Bible man shall be justified or condemned. Here is the standard, the rule.

How important, my beloved, that we should see on what terms we stand with our Bibles now—whether they justify us, or whether they condemn us. Oh, for that oft-neglected divine Book!

[12]

But there is a third book to be opened. That is the book of life, and "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." It was a custom generally observed at the courts of princes to keep a list of the persons employed in their service, of the officers of their armies, and sometimes even the names of the soldiers; and when it is said in the Bible that a person's name is written in the book of life, it means that he particularly belongs to God, is enrolled among His friends and followers. It is also probable that the early Christian churches, like our churches now, kept lists of their members, and that this term "book of life" was derived

from such a custom, it being regarded that any one on the list was also an assured member of heaven. And how may I know whether my name is inscribed in this book of life? "He that believeth in the Son hath eternal life," and "he that believeth not in the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." What determines our eternal destiny, our acceptance or rejection by the Judge, is our personal belief and faith in Jesus Christ; on that depends our salvation, our being enrolled or canceled from the book of life. "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, my jewels are, my glorious dress; in these before my God I'll stand when summoned to His own right hand." Nothing else will avail but faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Redeemer. That places our name in the book of life; with that men will stand or fall. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

But does not the Record here, verse 12, and the Bible *elsewhere*, emphasize that we will be judged according to our works, according to what we have done? Indeed, but this does not contradict salvation by faith in Christ Jesus; our faith, to prove itself genuine, must work and does work. If there are no works, we may rest assured there is no faith. At the last day our works will be inquired into to ascertain the nature of our faith. If there is no love toward the brethren of Jesus, no manifestation of Christ's Spirit toward Christ's suffering members, we may take it for granted that faith is dead. Our works come into account as fruits of our faith; but faith in Christ Jesus is the principle on which all stand or fall, for—what will the outcome of that final judgment be? "And they shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." The Bible everywhere speaks, in connection with the Day of Judgment, of mankind being separated into two distinct portions. Now the wheat and tares grow together. There is a difference between them, even at the present, which the skilled eye in many instances can detect, but, as yet, they run together, and there is no severance of them into separate fields or pastures. It will not always be so. Infidels and Christians will one day cease to live under the same roof, or believers and unbelievers to be unequally yoked together, or the children of the devil and the children of God to be intermingled in the same families, firms, and societies. When men come to appear before their Judge, the record is: "He shall separate them one from another, and shall set the good as sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left." In ancient times the left and right hand of a judge meant much. To be placed on the right hand signified acceptance, acquittal; on the left hand, condemnation, rejection. And He shall say to them on His right hand: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And, addressing Himself to the other, there break from the lips of the Judge the dark, desolating words: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." One shudders to speak them, but here are the words from the lips of the almighty Judge Himself. Who can alter them? On the one side is an inheritance, a realm of divine blessedness, a kingdom which knows no evil, a life which knows no death. On the other side gapes a lake of unquenchable fire, never, indeed, meant or made for men. Punishments are there, and tears that ever fall, and flames that ever burn, and miseries that never exhaust. Exactly what it is I cannot tell, and wish that none may ascertain. I can only rehearse the expressions of God's Word upon the subject,—"blackness of darkness, worm that dieth not, weeping and gnashing of teeth"; and no representation is more awful than the one employed in the text, "a lake of fire," seething, sweltering, weltering fire, that shall never be quenched, everlasting burning.

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And why, brethren, bring before you these solemn truths? Is it to torment you before the time? No, indeed, but as He Himself in to-day's Gospel declares, "that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man," that you be sincere believers and worshipers here on earth, diligent in good works, and on that day be rated among those who shall inherit their Father's kingdom, and to that end:

[14]

King of Majesty, tremendous,
Who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us,
With the favored sheep, O place us!
Nor amid the goats abase us,
To Thine own right hand upraise us!

Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

They are the messengers of the churches.—*2 Cor. 8, 23.*

St. Paul the Apostle was laboring in Macedonia. He had there learned that through the famine which then prevailed the pious converts in Judea were in pecuniary straits. He had applied for aid in their behalf to the brethren in Macedonia, and they, considering their poverty, had responded in the most liberal manner to his appeal. He informs the church of Corinth of this large benevolence, and states his conviction that the Corinthian believers, who were so much richer than those of Macedonia, would not allow themselves to be outdone in the extent of their bounty. Not satisfied with having informed them by letter, he also sends to them Titus and other Christian ministers to explain to them fully the wants of their suffering brethren and to raise the necessary supplies. Now, it appeared requisite for the information of those who were not

sufficiently acquainted with the men sent that they should carry with them some introduction, some credentials. St. Paul, therefore, accredits them in the words of the text: "Whether any do inquire of Titus or of our brethren, they are the messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ."

It is not my intention, on the present occasion, to dwell upon the circumstances to which our text most immediately refers. My object is to impress upon your minds the solemn character of the ministerial office as explained by the expression: "messengers of the churches." The epistle of this Sunday suggests this, and the fact that it is the —th anniversary of my ministry among you lends it a personal coloring. Two chief items commend our thoughts: *I. The office of Christ's ministers, II. the duty of Christ's people,—what is it?*

[15]

The office of Christ's ministers,—what is it? Announces Paul in the text: "They are the messengers of the churches." We all know the office of a messenger. It is to bear a message from one person to another person. This figure is frequently made use of in the Bible to illustrate the intercourse between God and man. Thus it is employed in reference to the Lord Himself. From all eternity He had been in the bosom of the Father, and when the fullness of time was come, He appeared in the form of a man, to make known, to declare, the message of the Father. That message was the unfolding of the everlasting covenant whereby God might be just and yet pardon and save the sinner. Hence, the Prophet Malachi predicts Christ's coming under this very name of Messenger: "The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in." Our blessed Lord, accordingly, was a messenger.

The angels, also, have often been employed to bring messages from God to man. They, likewise, are spoken of under this title. The Greek word which we translate "angel" means "messenger." The vision which Jacob saw at Bethel, the angels of God ascending and descending upon the ladder, aptly represents the services of those heavenly beings who are continually descending and ascending with tidings respecting the business which is being transacted between heaven and earth. Hence, the angel, or messenger, who appeared to Zacharias and told the purpose of his visit from the courts above: "I am Gabriel," said he, "that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee and to show thee these glad tidings."

But, besides the Lord Jesus and the angels, it has pleased God in His mercy and condescension to make use of *men* as His messengers to the human race, and so they are described in the Word of God. We read: "Thus spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger," and St. Paul, in writing to the Philippians, respecting their minister, says: "I supposed it necessary to send unto you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labor, but your messenger."

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But, alas, through the corruption of our common nature, everything human is liable to be perverted. There are many who profess to be the Lord's messengers, who are not such. It is, accordingly, intimated in the Scripture, for the warning of Lord's people, that there are two classes of messengers, the evil and the good. In the history and prophecies of the Old Testament we read of false prophets who were not sent, and yet they ran and taught the people perverse doctrines and led many away from the true service of the living God. In the days of Israel in the wilderness there were Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who, contrary to the spirit of God, taught the people to rebel against Moses and Aaron. The Prophet Jeremiah speaks of a very busy set of false prophets who did not stand in the Lord's counsel and misled His people. And in the New Testament they are not missing,—there were the Pharisees, Judas, Hymenaeus, and Alexander. St. Paul bitterly complains about some who, to gain their own selfish purposes, pretended to be apostles, but who were not. Our Lord admonishes that, at all times of the Christian dispensation, we may expect false prophets wearing the clothing of sheep. Now, how are we to distinguish between the real and pretended messengers of Christ? The Lord Himself has told us: "By their fruits ye shall know them." If, therefore, a minister does not bring forth the proper fruits, say what he will to the contrary, he is not accredited by Christ,—he is not the Lord's messenger. One chief point by which we may judge is the "fruits of the lips." What message does he deliver? Is it the Lord's message, or is it some conceit of his own? The popish priest, who preaches salvation by works, the intercession of the Virgin, the lying delusion of purgatory, delivers not the Lord's message. The Unitarian minister, who talks of the virtues of humanity, who denies the Trinity, the atonement of the Redeemer, the converting and sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, he, too, certainly does not deliver the Lord's message. And to come nearer to ourselves, he who professes to be a Lutheran minister, and who yet denies the doctrine of Justification by Faith only, who does not preach the regenerating power of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism, and the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, he, likewise, whatever may be his profession to the contrary, does not deliver the Lord's message.

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What is the Lord's message? The voice said: "Cry," and the faithful messenger said: "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand forever." "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath *my Word*, let him speak my Word faithfully."

"Preach the Word," was St. Paul's advice to Timothy. "Preach the Word"; "be instant" with that word "in season and out of season"; in the pulpit and out of the pulpit; in the schoolroom and on the platform; in the sick chamber and in the abodes of health; in the highways and in the byways. Only one-half of a minister's duty is done when the services of the sanctuary are over, and the marriages, funerals, and baptisms are performed. "The minister," one has remarked, "is a physician. He has a vast field before him. He has to study a variety of constitutions. He has to furnish himself with the knowledge of the whole system of remedies. He is to be a man of skill and expediency. If one thing fails, he must know how to apply another. He must be able to speak

a word in season, to deliver the Lord's message to the saint and to the sinner, to the heavy-laden and to the presumptuous, to the contrite and to the inquirer,—to all, in short, that come." "For the priest's lips," says Malachi, "should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth." For this reason, he will unceasingly be on the lookout for tidings. He will not, indeed, originate new things. He will not speak anything which comes into his own head, but he will diligently study what the Word of the Lord says, and that will he, no matter who may be present in the congregation, boldly and unreservedly deliver. He will deliver the whole counsel of God. He will be zealous for the truth, and neither teach nor tolerate any manner or degree of error; but, above all, he will preach, as the most important part of his message, Christ Jesus. Other preaching may inform the head and please the ear, but it is the setting forth of Christ in all His willingness to pardon, Christ in all His mightiness to save, which alone can storm the outworks and force the citadel of the heart. It is not the flowery language and the rounded period, embellished with sparkling figures and brilliant metaphors, that will of itself win souls to the Lord. No, it is the discriminating, earnest, and affectionate preaching of Christ, whether in the polished language of the scholar or in the ruder accents of a less accomplished zeal,—it is this preaching alone which is worthy of the name. The minister of Christ has a much more important matter in hand than some imagine. As a faithful messenger, he is to deliver, not information about political issues, lectures on morals, literature, and topics of the day, but he is to give hearers a full exhibition of Christ as He is revealed in the Bible and ought to be imprinted on every human heart,—the sinner's Hope, the sinner's Refuge, the sinner's Surety and Substitute, the sinner's High Priest and Advocate, the sinner's All and in all.

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This, dear members and hearers, is the message. And oh, what a blessing such a message is! How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth these good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth these good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation. As refreshing rain upon the dry, parched soil, so is such a faithful message to them that hear him.

And this is the character which he who now addresses you is anxious to sustain, as minister of this congregation. For — years have I preached this message of redemption among you. Most graciously have you received it at my lips, which leads me to thank God and take courage, asking for the Spirit's influence to make that message effectual. This, then, is the duty of Christ's ministers.

What, to come to the next consideration, is the duty of Christ's people?

If it is the duty of Christ's ministers to declare His message, it is equally the duty of Christ's people to receive that message. Now, it is well to note that, according to God's Word, our message is twofold. It is Law, and it is Gospel. Both we are to proclaim,—the Law, which demands, threatens, and condemns in its sharpness and terror, and shows us our sin and the wrath of God; and the Gospel, which shows us our Savior and the grace of God, and offers forgiveness, life, and salvation in its sweetness and comfort. Can you bear to be thus slain by the Law? Can you bear to speak with the lesson of this Sunday—the ministry of John the Baptist, the man girt about with a leathern girdle, expressing himself in the language of bold reproof, and declaring that "even now the ax is laid unto the root of the trees," and that "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire"? Can you bear to be told that, virtuous as many of you may be, you must seek salvation as sinners? Can you bear to be told that, if any man will be Christ's disciple, he must deny himself daily, and take up his cross, and follow his Lord wherever He may lead? Can you bear to have it forced upon you: "Be not conformed to this world"?

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These things belong to the message, and we would not be ministers of the Gospel of Christ without telling you them. And remember, too, that you must receive them not with your ears only, but with your hearts. Believe me, it is not enough to come hither and to attend these messages, and as you quit the sanctuary to say you are pleased with the sermons you hear. Highly as we, that are ministers, value your kind regard and affectionate esteem, we miss our object if that is all we accomplish. No, beloved, we seek not your praise, but you. We want your eye to pass on from the servant to his Master, from the messenger to Him that sent Him. Like John, we are but His voice, the voice of one that crieth amid this wilderness and waste. He that cometh is Christ. We are but the tube, or trumpet, through which He speaks. Forget thus the messenger, shut your eyes upon the preacher, and think of the Savior. Hear His voice, let that go to your heart.

One more duty,—assist the messenger. Various are the means and channels in which that may be done. We have in our midst a willing band of Sunday-school teachers; what are they doing but helping to bring the message to the hearts of our youth? We have those who are not ashamed or afraid to invite others to come and hear the message spoken in public, those who encourage some to go and hear it in private, in catechetical instruction. Then, too, are our church societies laboring usefully in the Lord. Many are the means and ways in which these messengers may be assisted in the performance of their duty, and to so assist in the duty of all. My dear members, may God continue to bless, as He has visibly and bountifully blessed, these past years, His message and His messengers and those that hear it! The Lord hear and answer this our petition for our Great Redeemer's sake! Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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In directing our attention to this text, we would regard, *I. by whom the words were spoken*, and *II. of whom they were spoken*. At the time of our Savior's birth the spiritual conditions in the land of Israel were distressingly sad; religious life had become very degenerate and corrupt; all manner of sects, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, with their stiff and ossified formalism, ceremonialism, materialism, had caused a dark eclipse to come over the once living faith of God's chosen people. Things were droughty and dead. But no period is ever so desperate, the Church of God never so forlorn and miserable as not to have in it some true children of faith, yea, when things are at the worst, divine Goodness is sure to interfere to bring about a change for the better; and so it was in these desolate days of Judaism. Residing in the hill country of Judea was an aged couple; they had lived long together without being blessed with offspring. This, with the Jews, was not only a defect in matrimonial happiness, but a positive reproach. The name of this pair was Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias was a priest, and Elizabeth was of the daughters of Aaron, and the testimony given of their character in Holy Scripture is that they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless—a devout and honorable pair. One day, so runs the story in the beginning verses of the Gospel of St. Luke, while he was engaged in his ministry, offering incense in the temple, there appeared unto Zacharias at the right-hand side of the altar an angel of God, and told him that his prayers were answered and that he would receive a son, whom he should call John. Zacharias startled at the heavenly apparition, and quite forgetful of the birth of an Isaac and Samson and Samuel, and that what happened of old might again happen, since nothing is impossible with God, he skeptically asked for a sign as the proof of the angel's message, whereupon the angel replied: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee and show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." When Zacharias came out of the temple to the multitude of worshipers that had been impatiently waiting for his return, he beckoned to the people with his hand, and they perceived that he had seen a vision.

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Nine months had elapsed after that miraculous visitation and annunciation of the angel, when the details in the paragraph immediately preceding our text came to pass. Elizabeth, having received the fulfillment of the heavenly message, and a company of her neighbors and relatives having gathered for the circumcision of the child, a question of friendly contention arose over the name, the most of them being in favor of calling him after the name of his father, Zacharias. Zacharias, being consulted and asking for a slate whereupon to write his opinion, wrote the name John. By this writing he showed that he consented in the name of the child according to the angel's direction, and it says: "His mouth was immediately opened and his tongue loosed, and he spake and praised God in a song of blessing and joy." This song of Zacharias, which is called the "Benedictus," because it begins with the word "Benedictus" or Blessed, is one of the treasured songs of the Church.

Significant—as we read that song it is that his own circumstances largely are overlooked or disregarded. Two grand and miraculous events had just happened to him, the birth of a son and the recovery of speech. These, it may be supposed, would have primarily employed his mind and called forth his praise and adoration to God; but whilst he does speak a few words of exultation over his son, a great, more transporting, and august theme fills his breast; he thinks in pious rapture of the prophecies that have gone before, the promises of God by the mouth of His inspired servants, that He would send a mighty Savior to deliver His people. Now that his own son, who was to be the forerunner of the Lord and messenger, was born, he sees the incarnation of this almighty Deliverer begun; under prophetic inspiration he proclaims what first happened six months after: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people," and none among us are less interested in this propitious event than Zacharias was. We have before us the same prophecies that Zacharias had; we have the same need of this Savior, and we desire the same blessings from Him which he did. Why, then, should it not be the rapture of our hearts, the topic of our triumphant song, as it was of his? With pious joy let us hail the glorious festival that shall be upon us in a few days, and in this may our reflection on our text aid us.

[22]

"The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." It is interesting to note how to one whose heart is wrapped up in Christ every object becomes a preacher, a memorial. That beautiful star, last in the train of night and first in the forehead of morning, sings of Him who is the bright Morning Star. That orb in the skies, shedding the benignant rays over the earth, tells of Him who is the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. The bread which I eat becomes to me a symbol of Him who is the Bread of Life; the water which I drink reminds me of the living water whereof who drinks shall never thirst again. In brief, Christ is seen in everything, in every object of external nature, and so with the figure employed by Zacharias in these words: "the Dayspring," or, as we would say—the dawn of the morning. Beautiful is dawn. The ancient poets have represented it as a lovely maiden rising from the waters of the East (casting aside the gloomy veil of night), and hastening forward on the foremost rays of light, to open the gates of day, whilst her rosy fingers scatter abroad the drops of sparkling dew. Zacharias employs the same illustration only to a subject more noble. He sees Messiah near at hand, breaking on the world just like the approach of dawn. Yes, the vision of His coming is so clear that he says not, "The Dayspring shall visit us," but, "The Dayspring hath visited us." Let us spend a few moments in considering, not every, but a few features that connect with this description of our Lord as the "Dayspring from on high." And here, to begin with, we have a significant thought. "The Dayspring from on high" suggests His *origin*. The day-dawn comes from the heaven; it is not of man's ordering and making, but of God's; it bears the imprint of the Creator's hand, and for this reason the Bible

styles Him "the Father of lights," and says: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." So with this Dayspring, Christ,—He is from on high. His origin and His coming are divine. We sing:

True Son of the Father, He comes from the skies,
To be born of a virgin He does not despise.

This earth is not His home, as it says: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." He came from elsewhere and He departed again elsewhere. From eternity He lay in the bosom of the Father, and when the fullness of time was come, He descended upon this earth and tabernacled among us thirty and three years, and then returned to the glory whence He came forth. It was, indeed, a transcendent sojourn, a visit that spells everything, that connects with salvation and blessedness. Yes, it was only a visit; He was from on high. To use the words of the Nicene Creed: Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, God of God, Light of Light (note that expression as in accordance with the figure in the text), very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father, who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. Verily, He was the Dayspring from on high.

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Again, observe *the manner of His coming*,—how like the day-dawn. What so gentle as the light of morning, rising mutely in the brightening east and pouring the light so softly that never a leaf is stirred; noiselessly, peacefully does it make its approach. So when the Savior was born, He came into the world silently and unobtrusively. All heaven was moved and followed Him down to the threshold of earth; but few on earth were aware of it. One solitary star pointed to the humble birthplace, and the hymn that sang of it was heard only at night by a few watching shepherds, and His whole life partook of the same character. For which reason we sing in one of our favorite hymns:

As His coming was in peace,
Noiseless, full of gentleness,
Let the same mind be in me
That was ever found in Thee.

He came like the dawn in its soft and silent approach. Then, also, in another manner. Not suddenly, nor all at once. The sun's rising is a gradual and progressive thing. First, there is but a faint gray twilight, softening the darkness and heralding what is to come, then a few dim purple streaks spread upon the far eastern horizon, followed shortly by the golden tips of the great luminary lifting the gates of the morning. So with our divine Dayspring. From all eternity it was determined that this Dayspring should come. Adam, going weeping from a paradise lost, and after him Seth and Enoch and Noah and Shem and Abraham beheld from afar the early dawn, the dim and vague streaks. The types and holy sacrifices offered in the temple after that, the psalms and prophecies given by God's inspired servants, gave still nearer and clearer views of what was to come. Zacharias exults as he sees the tips, as it were, beginning to appear. And we, with the whole Christian world, are hastening these days in spirit to see the sun rising over the hills of Judea in Bethlehem's town. How in its promises and preparations—its gradual development—was the coming of Christ like the day-spring, the rising dawn.

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Nor can we afford to overlook one other feature in the manner of Christ's visit as the Dayspring. The sun comes every morning, shining for all and singling out none. There is a universality of kindness about it. The poorest man and the richest, all classes and all things, have the same access to its undivided radiance. How much is this like Christ's coming! "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." "Behold," was the angelic proclamation on Christmas night, "I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to *all* people." The Christmas story enters into the world with the broad universal look of daylight. It is as wide and open to all as is this earth. It singles out none, it excludes none, it wishes to bless a whole guilty world with the same impartiality as the sun. The Christmas message is unlimited in its invitation: "Come hither, ye faithful, O come, one and all." Silently, gradually, universally, hath and doth the Dayspring from on high visit us. And why—that is the concluding feature of our contemplation, why has it visited us? What is its object in doing so?

The sun is the dispenser of the world's light and warmth and fruitfulness. Without the day-dawn everything would be chilliness, darkness, desolation, and death. Let the sun arise, shoot forth his cheering and enlivening rays,—the dormant germs start up, the buds swell, the birds sing, and man goes forth to ply the occupation of his hands. Christ is the same to the human race. He rose above the darkness of Judaism and over the night of heathenism. He declared: "I am the Light of the world." "When once Thou visitest the heart, the truth begins to shine." New life, new energy, new understanding takes hold upon the dormant and dead soul, and the fruits of righteousness spring up. To quote the text and language of Zacharias: "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." There is not the least exaggeration about it; wherever Christ is preached, the darkness flees as night flies before the sun, the clouds of ignorance and superstition pass away. Pardon of sin, purity of morals, comfort in affliction, triumph in death,—these are a portion of what follows. Do these things not constitute the light of life of man? What else does?

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Is, to conclude, Christ such a light to you? Would you permit this season to pass without diligently inquiring whether "the Dayspring from on high" has visited your souls? Do you rejoice

at His coming with holy joy? Invigorating, inspiring is the sight of a morning dawn; are you so welcoming again the Dayspring from on high about to send its healing beams, its cheering, holy splendor upon our world? Open your hearts to receive and to realize the significance and blessedness of this "Dayspring from on high, which by the tender mercy of our God hath visited us." Amen.

CHRISTMAS.

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift.—*2 Cor. 9, 15.*

Joy to the world,—the Lord is come,
Let earth receive her King,
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

With these words of exultation would I greet you on this festival morn. Joy to the world, the Lord is come; the King, Messiah, after weeks of preparation, is making His triumphal entry into the habitation of men. Indeed, the long expected guest, with whom our thoughts, songs, and services in the past season of Advent were occupied, has at length arrived. How shall we receive Him? When He first came, nineteen hundred and — years ago, in Bethlehem's town, there was a stir and commotion. Wise men suspended their studies and speculations and followed the sign in the firmament which conducted them to the place where the young Child lay; an angel from heaven was sent as a herald to proclaim the glad tidings of great joy, while the multitude of the heavenly host eagerly descended to congratulate men and made the celestial heights resound with their seraphic acclamation: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." And, taking up that chant: "Our heart from very joy doth leap, our lips no more can silence keep." Dull like the ground he walks upon must be the man who, amongst the holy demonstration that is upon the social world, the cheerful merrymaking that is in earth's homes, the radiations of festivities and greetings of cordiality and good will, will not feel a pulsation of that cheer and brightness in his own heart. How this fact of our Christian faith, our Savior's birth, God's assumption of mutual flesh, the coming of the Most High to tabernacle among men, has been more than any other an occasion of universal rejoicing, the center of earth's noblest and holiest joy in family and in the sanctuary! Is it not fitting that it should be so? Merry Christmas, happy Christmas, blessed Christmas, we bid thee welcome! We rejoice that in the rounds of the calendar it has come again. And how shall we observe it? How receive its spiritual and highest blessedness unto ourselves? By lighting up a few candles on our trees? Decorating our windows and walls with some sprigs of garlands and green? By attending a few services during which we are present in body, but largely absent in spirit? The quiet contemplation, the sinking of our minds into the great mystery of godliness: God manifested in the flesh, the realization as it comes from pious meditation of what it all means to us and to all mankind, and that when the external glamor and motion shall have passed over, it shall have left us benefited and blessed in soul, beloved, is not this, after all, for us Christians, the true significance of this holiday time? And it is in harmony with this, that we would bring to our minds the words of the text. Let us devoutly, with concentrated and holy thoughts, regard God's gift, for thus reads the text: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift."

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I. *Which is this gift?* II. *Note what is said about it.* III. *Our conduct respecting it.*

Which is it? God, my beloved hearers, is always good. His very name, God, which means good, bespeaks that. Continually is He bestowing gifts and favors upon us. "His constant mercies," declares the psalmist, "are new to us every morning." What is there which we possess that He has not given us?—clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods. But there is one gift that excels and outstrips them all.

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Our children, in the course of the year, are being constantly provided with all that they need to support their bodies and lives, articles of food and dress and mind, and yet the best donations we afford them, those which cause their youthful hearts to skip as the lambs, are invariably given in the days of Christmas festivity. So with the beneficent Parent on high,—always good and gracious, yet His foremost and most excellent gift He bestows at this time. And which is it? Yonder, in Bethlehem's manger, it lies. Insignificant enough as you gaze upon it with outward eyes: how tiny, unpretentious, judged by the standard of men; what lowly quarters, what unfavorable circumstances, what socially unassuming people; that woman watching over the Child, those shepherds hastening thither from their humble toil,—certainly nothing there to impress one. And this is Heaven's foremost and precious gift, the gift of all gifts. Is that the best that God can give us? Yes.

For various reasons. In determining the value of earthly donations, different considerations weigh and prevail. For once, it is the sentiment that prompted that gift; it frequently is not so much the mercantile value of the gift as it is the considerations, the spirit, the sentiment, and affection that go along with it; and there, after all, rests its real power and beauty. Regard God's Christmas gift. The Apostle calls it "unspeakable"; he declares that it towers in its value and majesty beyond the reach of language and beyond the power of human expression. 'Tis truly so.

What sentiment prompted it? "God so *loved* the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." There we have the motive, His love. And why did He love man? Because he was so lovable? Nay, man had rebelled against Him, had raised himself up in disobedience against Him and His holy commandments and was at enmity with Him, and still God loved him, loved the child that had forsaken and sinned against Him, and so loved him that He spared not His dearest and His best, but delivered Him up for us all. Oh! the greatness of that charity, that love divine, all love excelling, love that passed all knowledge and understanding and expression too,—that supplied the Gift unspeakable, says the Apostle.

Again, when we are the recipients of gifts, we examine them, we give them careful scrutiny, we desire to know: What is that which we have received? Apply that to God's Christmas gift. What is it? He tells us: "Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord." Not a star, not a world, not any created thing, but Christ, the Lord.

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Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail th' incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

O the mystery, the impenetrable mystery of the gift! As you sit down and meditate upon it, as you reflect and gaze upon that divine Child, reason is confounded, thought is pushed to confusion, faith stands in profound contemplation on the brink of this sea, too deep for human intelligence to fathom, too broad for man's mind to encircle, and yet, let us not stagger at the wonderful fact. We are standing to-day, my beloved, in the presence of the greatest miracle of time. We behold here no ordinary child. It's Deity in humanity, Divinity in infancy. In this little body is bound up God's immensity, in this Babe's weakness is enclosed heaven's almightiness. This child resting at His mother's breast (who can grasp it?) is the Lord of glory, the worshipful Creator of the universe, God blest forevermore.

Such is the nature of the gift—"unspeakable," as the Apostle declares.

Again, we consider the purpose of the gift. There are every variety and quality of gifts bestowed at this season: ornamental ones, serving the purpose of decoration and embellishment, beautiful for the eye to behold; useful ones, administering to the necessity and the comforts of their recipients. How about God's Christmas gift? Ah! for human lips to speak out its value. Again we lisp, "Unspeakable." What illustrations might I employ? You lift up your eyes and encounter the bright rays of the sun; what would this world be without the light and warmth that comes from its radiant face? You feel the drops of rain falling in gentle showers; what would the soil be without these rivulets and streams that fructify its acres? Yet all such illustrations are too improper to express what this world would spiritually be without Christ. Said the angel: "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior." In that word you have the key of Christmas and the purpose of God's Christmas gift. "A Savior"—what a chapter that opens before us! Back to the days of Paradise does it conduct us, when man was dwelling in innocence, fell and falling, carrying himself and all his posterity to universal and eternal destruction. Sin, that most terrible of all evils upon the soul, thorns and thistles upon the ground, misery and sickness and death upon the body, the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain,—this was the sorry consequence, and this is the sad, sad story as it is read in the history of every man's life and of the world at large. And whence was deliverance to come? From man? Helpless, powerless, hopeless creature, how could he cancel the curse that rested upon soul and body and ailing earth? A more powerful one held him at his mercy; and what could he do to pluck out the sting of death beneath whose dominion he had completely fallen? A more dismal condition could never exist. What man needed was a Savior, a Deliverer mightier than the forces that held him bound, and such a one God had promised man. Adam and Eve, leaving Paradise, were consoled by the prediction of the Seed of the Woman that should bruise the head of the serpent—the Savior, Abraham, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, and Jacob looked forward to that Deliverer and were sustained by the hope: Ah, that the Savior soon would come to break our bondage and lead us home! Succeeding saints and prophets took up the pleading strain, and sang and prophesied of His advent, and finally, when the fullness of time was come, He arrived; and what did He bring?

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The supply of man's foremost and chief requisite—what is that? Wealth, affluence of estate? Support of body? Not so. This is not man's foremost need. Education of mind, culture of intellect? Neither that. What is it? Deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and the salvation of man's immortal soul; for what is a man profited though he should gain the whole world, and possess all treasures and mines of knowledge, and possess not and know not how to save his soul? Beloved, when you reflect what this world would be without this divine Christmas gift, then we might well ask, Would life be worth living without Him? It would, indeed, be a dark chapter, a barren and gloomy prison cell. And so, having regarded these various particulars, we almost instinctively give voice to the Apostle's declaration: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." That brings us to the concluding part of our consideration.

A donation so transcendent calls for some corresponding attitude. What would we think of a child accepting its holiday gifts without showing appreciation, and speaking not a word of acknowledging thanks? Nothing is more rude than ingratitude. That spoils it all. Look at the interest the heavenly inhabitants took in that unspeakable gift. They came down with gracious messages concerning it. They were all present and sang their highest songs when the Savior was born. Their conduct was just such as we may expect from beings so pure, so intelligent, and yet it was not to them, nor for them. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us this Son is given." It is for us and

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for our salvation that the Lord of glory came and was made man. Here is a thought that ought to stir us to a higher pitch of emotion and gratitude. People have capacities to appreciate favors, to acknowledge good, to feel the worth of help when great and pressing need is upon them; why not over against this amazing goodness of God? Oh! that any human heart should be found weighted down by such leaden dullness that it should fail in its adoring thankfulness to God for His unspeakable gift. Far better such had never been born!

And thankfulness and rejoicing, if genuine, is never selfish. Observe our children at this time. When they have received their gifts, they do not selfishly hug them to themselves, place them in a corner, and strive to keep others from seeing them; they run about displaying what kindness has bestowed, shout and make commotion, nor feel happier than when others—their playmates and companions—come to share in their merriment. It is not different with God's Christmas gift; it is designed to be the occasion of universal joy. "I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son."

A certain ancient writer remarks: "Were some explorer to discover the real elixir of life by which life and health and youth might be made perpetual, with what shouts of triumph and songs of joy would the discovery be heralded forth!" Friend would rush to bear the glad tidings to friend, over hill and mountain; across valley and plain would the joyful tidings roll, until there were no solitary inhabitant, be his dwelling ever so remote or concealed, but would have found it out. Beloved, here is the true elixir of life, in Bethlehem's manger; there is the fountain of perpetual health and youth. Let the glorious truth, then, receive universal proclamation; let the tawny African in his dark jungle, the Eskimo in his icy, squalid hut, the dweller in the most distant isle, and the man, woman, and child that lives with you and next to you,—let one and all hear the glad news that God's unspeakable gift has come to earth. Yes, let this blessed truth spread till every sinful and sorrowing brother may rejoice with us, and that from earth and sky may echo forth in grateful refrain: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift," now on these present Christmas festivals, and then when these earthly celebrations will have passed over into the celebration of heaven, we shall see and adore Him who was once a babe in Bethlehem, but now sitteth upon the throne, God blessed forevermore. Amen.

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LAST SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

We all do fade as a leaf.—*Isaiah 64, 6.*

There is perhaps no truth which is more generally admitted and which is more frequently referred to than that life is short and time is fleeting, that—"man born of a woman," as Job expresses it, "is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down." Every tolling knell that resounds its muffled voice from the church's spire, every painful sickness that casts us upon a weary and dreary couch, every change of season in nature's annual round and tearing off one leaf after the other from the calendar, until the present date, the 31st day of its last messenger, bids us discard the whole,—all these are just so many solemn and constant monitors reminding us of the brevity, the rapidity of time's flight. And yet, with all these numerous and unmistakable evidences of the transitoriness of all earthly things, how little of an abiding impression they produce! Who of us, in thoughtful reflection, does not admit the necessity of asking in this matter for divine instruction and of preparing ourselves for the time when time shall be no more, and when we shall be called upon to give account of how we have used our earthly days, and to leave this world and all its concerns? It is to this that I would invite your thoughts on this day which marks the concluding day of another chapter of life's calendar. May God's Holy Spirit teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom, as I endeavor to explain and apply the words of our text.

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Human life, man's natural existence, is most aptly represented by the figure before employed, the fading of a leaf. More than two thousand years ago did the inspired penman, the Prophet Isaiah, write these lines, and yet its truth is preached to us with unfailling regularity and solemnity in every recurring autumn. As we go out into the woods towards the close of each successive summer, we observe a gradual change in the appearance of the trees. We see the leaves, first one and then another, and then by degrees all of them alike, changing their green for a brown and yellow hue, at length, till, shriveling at the edges and loosening their hold to their native boughs, the wet and the cold and the wind cause them to fall to the ground with a sound so soft that it is almost silence and there, by the action of the elements, they soon decay and mingle with the earth, out of which they were first produced. Just so, my brethren, it is with ourselves. As soon as we begin to live, we begin to die. "Our hearts like muffled drums are beating funeral marches to the grave." If we succeed in adhering to the tree of life during the spring and summer of man's allotted years, autumn and winter of old age will certainly overtake us, and we shall sink away as surely and as silently as the descending leaves in fall, our spirits returning to God, who gave them, and our bodies mingling with the dust from which they were taken. We look over the annals of the world,—where are those mighty conquerors, a Hannibal, a Cæsar, an Alexander, a Napoleon, who once made whole nations tremble and kingdoms fall? Where are those brilliant statesmen, a Bismarck, a Webster, a Calhoun, and a Clay, upon whose lips admiring senates hung with wonder and delight? Where are the poets, the historians, the warriors, the divines, who, each in his day and generation, were the theme of general conversation, and were lauded with the tribute of a nation's praise? "Like the baseless fabric of a vision,"—gone. It is related of Xerxes, the powerful King of Persia, that when about to cross from

Asia over to conquer Greece, he ordered a review to be made of all his forces on the shores of the Hellespont. A magnificent throne was erected upon a lofty peak. Seated on this pinnacle of gold, he gazed upon the unnumbered millions below him on ship and shore. No sight could have been more dazzling or more august. The hillsides were white with tents, the sea with ships. Gay banners floating in the sun, glittering with gold and silver, weakened the eye by their brightness and beauty; whatever unbounded wealth and intense love of display could produce or suggest was there, and in the midst of such transcendent glory and deepest homage, where multitudinous nobles were urging to kiss the hem of his garment and worshiped him as a god, the great king, Xerxes, wept. Amazed at such an act, expressive of feelings so contrary to those in which they were indulging, they reverently inquired the cause of his tears. "Alas," said he, "of all this vast multitude not one will be left upon the earth a hundred years hence." That was said more than two thousand years ago. How many generations have followed that, over which he wept and uttered this sad truth! We occupy their places now for a few days, and then we shall lie beside them. Of the congregation that is looking up into my face this morning, twenty, thirty, fifty years, where shall it be? The church bell will be rung out, I hope, from its steeple, but it shall be rung by other hands, and for other worshipers. This pulpit will be filled by another preacher and the pews by other listeners. As you would pass in your way home from its door, in your family and social circles, how you would miss the old and once familiar forms, yea, perhaps our very homes will be occupied by strangers. As the prophet says: "We all do fade as a leaf."

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Lest our subject should be rendered useless by being too general, I will proceed, without further delay, to apply our text and this by addressing the various classes of persons among you, so that all, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, may derive some spiritual benefit. That our text refers not to one class, but to every, is evident from the word "all,"—"We all do fade as a leaf." It applies itself, then, first to the young. Not only in autumn and winter, but even in the spring and early months of the year, leaves are seen to fall. And similarly, as the inscriptions upon the many tombstones in our last resting-places will testify, so many of the human family disappear in infancy and youth. It is a mournful sight to see them thus carried off in the vigor and tenderness of opening bloom, but it's one that ought to convey solemn teaching to those of youthful years. And what teaching? Wise King Solomon has expressed it in these words: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." And why? Because it is the most favorable time, the most God-honoring time, the most profitable. At no other time is the soul so capable of deep and abiding impressions, are the affections more easily touched and moved, are we more accessible to the influences of emotions and truth. It is preeminently the choosing time, the valley of decision, in which at almost every step we do or leave undone something which has its effect, for good or ill, upon one's future habits and character and eternity; and you can only be prepared to determine matters that call for decision when you have made the great decision; you can choose and act safely and wisely in all the other departments of life, the social, the intellectual, the moral, only when you have taken a decisive stand upon the subject of religion. Hence, our Savior urgently entreats young people: "Seek ye first," first in point of importance and first in point of years, "the kingdom of heaven." Ah, my young members, if the sun does not dispel the mists pretty early in the morning, you may look with reasonable certainty for a foggy day, and so if the Sun of Righteousness, Christ Jesus, does not early in the day of your lives dispel the mists of unbelief and sin, the chances are that it will be more or less gloomy obstruction the rest of your lives. You will never be such Christians as you would have been; there will not be the development of character as if you had started at the right time, and there will always be a feeling of regret in your heart. Note, then, that this is the time to begin to serve God; now is the time to put the yoke of Christ upon your necks and to break yourselves in for lives of usefulness. And what is more God-honoring? Religion is always an ornament, it decorates the silvery locks and the wrinkled brow, but it looks exquisitely attractive and suitable when worn by youth. God accepts the sinner at all times, even when he comes with tottering footsteps and with stooped back; but is it right to do service to another and make Him suspend His claim as your rightful Lord to satisfy the world and the flesh, His degrading rivals, to sow wild oats in the springtime of your years and send Him forth to gather among the stubbles the gleanings of life, after the enemy has secured the harvest? Nay, to Him belong the first-born of your days, the first-fruits of your season, the price of your love and devotion,—give them. You will never regret it. Incalculable are the benefits of early piety, beneficial for body and business, for character and connections, for mind and morals, for after-life and life after death; for, as our text inculcates, your earthly existence hangs but on a slender, frail, and feeble fiber. Do you know of none in your circle of acquaintances swept low by the grim reaper whom we call death? And what assurance have you, my youthful hearers, that you may not be among his victims in the succeeding year? Glory not, then, in your health and strength. Pride yourself not on anything which is so feeble and frail, but seek those solid blessings which are to be found in Christ Jesus, and make true preparation against the time when you shall go hence and be no more. "Remember thy Creator," thy Redeemer, thy Sanctifier, "in the days of thy youth."

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Again, the text addresses itself to the middle-aged. Scarcely a summer passes over our heads but some tempests, lightning, hail, rain, and thunder, rage in the sky, and these commotions of the elements drive myriads of leaves, although then firmly grown and filled with sap, from their branches to the ground, and there, like those that fall later, they fade away. It is so with man. In the midst of all his hustling industry and matured vigor, when, as Job says, his bones are moistened with marrow, he is liable to be carried off by various diseases and casualties. Absalom died before his father. The list of orphans in the Bible is not small, and among us those attired in sable garments, because of those whose sun has gone down at noon, are not few. A tender leaf, which the first strong wind, the first descending shower loosens in its hold,—that is man in the strength of his days. And what does that teach those of maturer years? That they presume not on

their sturdiness, and that they forget not, amidst the distractions of all manner of connection for what life has been given, and correspondingly rightly improve it. Life has been given us for a high and noble purpose; it is not only a time of preparation and of probation for the world to come, it is a time of activity, of usefulness in the service of God and fellow-man, and "he most lives who thinks the most, feels the noblest, acts the best." There are those who live a mere animal life, whose sublimest principle and purpose is embodied in the motto: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall be dead." As for God, heaven, and eternity, there is none. There are those who live a mere worldly life; gaining a livelihood and property, acquiring a social standing and a position, perhaps a ribbon or a medal,—that's their life's chief object and design. There are those who lead bad lives, diabolical lives, making society miserable and families wretched; and there are those who lead good lives, morally and socially, providing things honestly in the sight of all men. But there is one class that, according to Scripture, lives a right life, a life that will bear the sight of the Judge eternal and receive His heavenly plaudit: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," and that is the man and the woman who lives a Christian life, a life in Christ Jesus, who, while believing in Him as their only Lord and Savior, are seeking to imitate His precepts; who live to His glory, with the furtherance of His kingdom constantly in mind; who make everything that they undertake and do conducive to the praise and honor of their God; who delight to render their time, talents, and means in such a service. Any other kind of a life but that is a life of God's grace neglected, of moments wasted in selfishness, in indolence, in sensuality often, in wickedness, and it fails of the purpose for which time has been given. Let us be careful, then, how we employ it; never live a week in vain; having something at the close of it for the reviewing eye to fix upon; something for God, for your fellow-creatures, for yourself. Live for Christ, and thus best live while you live, and be best prepared when you are called upon to die, for as you live, thus will you die, and thus will you be judged.

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There remains, however, one more class to which our text refers with great propriety, and that is the aged.

If the young and middle-aged may fall, the old must; there is no remedy or human skill, or physician's antidote against the wrinkled brow, the failing memory, and the stiffening of the joints. "The days of our years," says the Psalmist, "are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." How soon this may take place, who can declare? What attitude, then, becomes those who have upon them declining years? I know no better answer than to gaze upon that patriarchal couple in to-day's Gospel, Simeon and Anna; what a beautiful picture of declining life as it is calmed and brightened by the comforts of religion and the hope of nearing heaven. How impressive to see them meet in the temple of God, and taking upon their arms the blessed object of their faith and prayer for all those long rolling years, speaking of Him, as it says, unto all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem, finally singing their "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." "The hoary head is a crown of glory," says Solomon, "if it be found in the way of righteousness." Let the aged saints, then, among us use their advancing years to speak, as years' and hearts' experience alone can speak, of Him who is their Salvation and Consolation; let them, by the respect due them, cause us to more greatly respect Him whom they have learned to know, and by their lives be an example to the younger generations how to live.

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Having, then, regarded our text: "We all do fade as a leaf," let us have learned, as these years pass away, how to receive the crown, incorruptible, and undefiled, and which passeth not away. Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Our Father which art in heaven.—*Matt. 6, 9.*

Dr. Luther, after his inimitable fashion, once remarked: "The Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr upon earth. It is a pity above all pity that such a prayer by such a Master should be so terribly abused in all the earth. Many pray the Lord's Prayer a thousand times a year, and though they prayed it a thousand years, yet have they not properly prayed one letter thereof."

It is a sweeping and striking assertion. The truth of his remarks, however, who would wish to contest? Take, in evidence, the words of the text. The opening words of that divine prayer taught by the Lord Himself are indeed familiar words,—no service but we recite them, no day but a Christian ought to recite them; yet, have we ever regarded the deep significance that is contained, the inspiration that is hidden, in them? A little reflection will prove how appropriate they are for this day, the beginning of a new year in civil life.

Our Father,—that expresses, I. *trust in God*, II. *obedience in duty*, III. *submission in affliction*. All these we need for our encouragement and spiritual profit to-day.

What sacred associations cluster around the word "father"! The thought of him, *if he was a father indeed*, was inwoven into all our youthful plans and early ambitions. We knew no worldly care when we dwelt beneath his sheltering roof; as we grew in years, we increased also in confidence in him. He was our adviser in doubt, our protector in danger, our supporter in perplexity. A true father is the best earthly friend while he is alive, and after he is gone, there gathers around his memory a halo of tender remembrance. All that is generous, manly, noble,

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and wise is to a loving son treasured up in the word "father." But the earthly significance, the human fatherhood, does not exhaust the meaning of this blessed name; it is but a mere pattern and shadow of that relationship which God sustains to His people. He is a "Father"; we, then, are His children by nature and adoption, by creation and redemption, and, as children, we may go to Him, and with all confidence and boldness ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. And such confidence, such trustful looking up in faith and reliance to Him as our Father, is a becoming attitude to-day. We stand upon the shores of another year, as it lifts itself, veiled in mist, from the great ocean of the future. Futurity means uncertainty, and uncertainty suggests anxiety. Say not that it is not so. As God created man, he is forecasting in his thoughts. It is as easy and natural for us to have regard to what is before us as it is for the waters of the Mississippi to flow towards the Gulf. Nor does God forbid it. Says wise King Solomon: "A wise man deviseth his way." He forms his plans, he frames his resolutions, he has his ambitions, his object in life that he wishes to attain. It is not a sign of sanity or of Christianity to walk into the future blindfolded, irresolutely, improvidently. The business man who at this time looks over his stock and ledger and strikes a balance of profit and loss, so as to make prudent arrangement for the business of the incoming year, the man of family who gazes upon the members seated about his table, and, considering demands and expenditures, weighs his income and ability to make ends meet, or whatever situation you may be in, or relation you may sustain, an intelligent, provident, weighing, considering, looking into the future is legitimate, wise, proper. But that is one thing; another thing, and not an uncommon thing, rather too prevalent, is to look into the future with fear, trembling of heart, and anxiety of mind. "Oh, how shall we ever get through; it's been none too rosy in the past, income scant, debts, some yet to pay, children growing up, health not to boast of,"—what a dreadful nightmare these considerations are to many people at the start of a new year; how it crushes out all good cheer, happiness, the very thing men are wishing each other!

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'Tis foolish, 'tis needless, and godless! A man bending and staggering along the road under the weight of a heavy load met a passing wagon; he was invited to get in. He did so, but he still kept the load on his back. Foolish man! Yet that's the common attitude. God's chariot drives up to us this morning, overtaking us on life's way. "Get in, traveler, I will bear thee along," is the invitation. "Cast all your cares upon me. I will care for you." "Thank you, kind Lord, but I prefer to bear the load myself." There is a Being that has brought us into this world,—Father, we call Him. He is a resourceful Father, having all forces and agencies of sky, land, and sea, all the operations of men, angels, and beasts at His command; He is a loving Father; He has pleasure in the children after His heart. Silly child, you say, that will start to cry and make a great ado because it has conceived the notion that its wealthy father cannot feed and clothe it any longer. Is it not just as incongruous, my dear Christian, for you to perplex yourself with thoughts of anguish that God cannot provide for you any more? "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?" He should neglect His loving providence, leave and forsake thee this year? O ye of little faith!

In one of the books handed to our children at Christmas time is the history of a familiar and beautiful German hymn. Reduced by financial straits to sell his only means of support, his violin, a poor musician took it to the pawnshop of a Jew. As he gave it up, he looked lovingly at it, and tearfully asked the Jew if he might play one more tune upon it. "You don't know," he said, "how hard it is to part with it. For ten years it has been my companion; if I had nothing else, I had it. Of all the sad hearts that have left your door, there has been none so sad as mine." Whereupon, pausing for a moment, he seized the instrument and commenced a tune so exquisitely soft that even the Jew listened, in spite of himself. Then, laying aside the instrument, he said, "As God will," and rushed from the shop, only to be stopped at the door by a stranger, who, having listened, said to him, "Could you tell me where I could obtain a copy of that song? I would willingly give a florin for it." "I will give it to you without the florin." The stranger happened to be the Swedish ambassador, and when he heard the poor man's story, his troubles ended then and there. Redeeming the instrument, he called his landlady and his friends, and sang, to his own accompaniment, his own sweet hymn, No. 350 in our hymn-book, of which this is the first stanza:

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Leave God to order all thy ways,
And hope in Him, whate'er betide,
Thou'lt find Him, in the evil days,
Thine all-sufficient strength and guide.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on a rock that naught can move.

This is the first reflection that lies in these introductory words, "Our Father." It expresses trustful looking up to Him at the beginning of the year. And, *again*, it supplies obedience in duty. It is a part of the father's relation to direct and control, as well as provide, for his children. He has a rightful authority over his household, the right to tell them what to do and how to do. None other with our heavenly Father.

The new year means new activities, new problems, new duties. With the morrow the tradesman, the mechanic, and the clerk will return to the work of his calling, the student to his books, and the housewife will be as busy as ever before. The great machinery of secular life will all clatter and hum in all its complexity and parts. And in the church, there will not, as there dare not be, a standstill. Much still remains to be done. How shall we face it? In our own strength? "With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected." After our own plans, doing things to suit our own selves? Is that the way it is in a well-regulated household? There is one

whose law obtains, whose word determines, whose wish regulates it all. So ought it be with our life's duties. No matter what may be the occupation of your head and of your hands, whether you be a physician ministering to the alleviation of human ills, or a carpenter constructing the earthly home for man to dwell therein, our blessed Lord was both, physician and carpenter. Whether life's work finds you busy with the pen, like Matthew, the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom, or, like Martha, cumbered and concerned about many things, one reigning principle ought to be governing it all, as it governed the life of Him who was our example in all things, this: "My work is to do the will of Him that sent me."

Begin your work with Him, consecrate it to Him, conduct it with Him. Serve Him in it. There are two ways of doing everything—with God and without God. You may go to your work on Monday morning with God or without God; you may discharge its thousand and one different details with God or without God; your fellow-workman and companions may not know the difference, and yet, my dear hearer, it makes all the difference in the world, and a difference even for the world to come, whether you do your work with a glance of the eye upward and a spirit that says, "Our Father." Work without God is drudgery, duty cold and stern; it lacks inspiration, warmth, joyful energy. It is done because it must. It makes the worker a slave. That is not the way God would have us perform it, and it is not the work—neither in family, nor shop, nor church, that brings grand results. Whenever you feel your service becoming irksome or your duties degenerating, done with little conscientiousness and still less joy, then speak, "Our Father"; and when you saunter forth knowing that you are going to perform your Father's business, then the direst and most uninteresting things of daily life will acquire a new importance in your eyes, and will be done with a spring of elasticity and gladness. Let me ask you to try this heavenly specific, and you will find that bending over your toil, with these thoughts, it will be lit up with radiance and significance hitherto inexperienced and duty will be merged into delight. This is the second consideration, when we can truly and intelligently say, "Our Father," life's work becomes transfigured with a new meaning and joy. In such a spirit go hence to this year's employments. Do them with God.

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One other phase of human experience remains to be touched upon at this time. The Lord Himself hath said by the mouth of Solomon: "He that spareth the rod hateth the child," and He is too wise a Father to think of training His children without discipline. It is by sending them trials that He leads them to bethink themselves and to return when they have been backsliding, develops them in character, and prepares them for the discharge of arduous and important duties. Whatever we may regard this method of dealing with us, this is His method, and it will be no different with the incoming year. What shape that trial will take, this none can say in advance; it may bring sickness to ourselves or to our near and dear ones; pain of body, feverish tossing, restless nights, weary days; it may bring reverses in fortune; the position we thought so secure may pass into the hands of another; our income may decrease, trade languish, accidents and expenses multiply; it may be that the grim visitor will invade our homes, a casket, little or large, be placed into our rooms to remind us that in the midst of life we are in death. God alone, who knows the future, knows. And when these ordeals occur, it is well to keep before us a few things.

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In the first place, we must recognize that, however strange and unwelcome these experiences are, 'tis He who sends them, and gives them just because He deals with us as His children. Discipline is a privilege that a father reserves for His own children. One does not get himself to correct the faults of all the young people in the neighborhood. You direct your efforts along that line to your own, and only because of your affectionate interest in them do you visit them with correction. Even so it is with God, and when we are suffering from His hands, instead of thinking that He has forgotten us, we ought to see in the chastisement a new evidence of His continued regard for us. The trials sent us, my dear hearers, are the tokens of a heavenly Father's affection, and happy art thou if in life's salutary discipline you have learned to look up and say, "Thy will be done."

Then, knowing from whom it proceeds—to mention the second consideration,—you will be wonderfully sustained. To illustrate, a story from my holiday reading: A little girl sent on an errand had to cross a wide but shallow stream, but there were firm and tried stepping-stones all the way over. "Oh! I'm afraid," said the child to a lady who was passing. "Why are you afraid, there are stones all the way over. See how easily I can cross it." Very timidly the little girl began to cross. "Just one step at a time is all you have to take," said the kind guide. So one step followed another—the first few were the hardest to take,—and soon she was safe on the other shore, smiling at her fears. "It is not so hard after all," she remarked, "just one step at a time brought us over." Beloved, when troubles come,—they are sure to, in this year also,—do not look so much at the waters before you, but at the stepping-stones the Father has placed for your feet. Here is a strong, firm stepping-stone that has often sustained me: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Here is another: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Have a few such stepping-stones, select one in particular for this year. This, perhaps, will do, small, but weighty, "Our Father." Amen.

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EPIPHANY SUNDAY.

I am the Light of the world.—*John 8, 12.*

Underneath Rome, the ancient capital of the world, and extending for miles and miles between

the River Tiber and the Mediterranean Sea, are those mysterious passages called the catacombs. How far they go, whither they lead, at what exact point they terminate, no living man can tell. From the examinations of the learned who have explored them for some little distance, at some few points, we know that they are long and narrow quarries in the rock; underground roads mined out of the soft volcanic tufa, or stone, on both sides of which the early Christians, who would not burn, but insisted on burying their dead, would deposit their departed, and where during these fierce persecutions they would also assemble for worship. These passages are but high enough to walk upright through them; they are so narrow in width that you can touch the sides on either hand, as you grope along, and they are unutterably silent and dark. If you strain your eye forward, you see nothing beyond the few feet which the feeble torch or flickering candle illumines; if you look up, the rock is there; if you gaze to the right or to the left, you see the shallow niches, like shelves, one over another, where are strewn the bones of the dead, crumbling into dust and ashes; and gazing behind you, you feel a choking sensation at the heart, that if your light should go out, or your guide should forsake you, you would never find your way back,—as it is a well-known fact that many too curious in their researches have disappeared. Such, then, are the catacombs, a subterranean home of death, a place of impenetrable darkness. And, my beloved, what better emblem could be found to illustrate what this world is like, without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, than the hopeless labyrinths of darkness underneath the City of Rome?

Take the time when our Savior pronounced these words of our text, or when, as Epiphany suggests to us, those wise men came from the East, following the star,—what darkness was spread over the earth! With the exception of the one people, numbering only a few millions at most, and these sunk away in general apostasy, aside from the little wax lights of the Jews, there was universal gloom. Around them, to the farthest limit of the earth, including enlightened and refined Greece and Rome, the whole world of man lay in heathenism and idolatry, feeling after God, but knowing Him not, worshiping and serving creatures rather than the ever-blessed Creator. Think of Egypt's adoration of bulls, rams, cats, bugs, birds, and crocodiles! Think of the Assyrian's worship, or of any of those people of antiquity, rendering to beasts or to heroes and the spirits of dead men, like the Chinese and Japanese and Hindoos of this day, the homage due unto the living God! Add to this the attendant miseries, shameless debaucheries, cruelties, revolting abominations, practiced all over in the name and belief of honoring God and meriting the favor of heaven, and it may well be said, the world was darkness, pitch black darkness. And it is so even to this present day where Christianity has not yet shed its redeeming light. It is so with every human soul; the darkness of ignorance, of sin, of misery is upon it. The man whose understanding has not yet been enlightened by the beams of spiritual truth is just like a tourist groping along, and stumbling among, the bones and dust of the catacombs. He knows not what he is living for, as little as the underground passenger knows whither he is going. Whenever misfortune and sorrow comes, there is none to turn to for consolation.

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Whenever conscience is troubled and agitated with a sense of its guilt, and there are times when the spectral hand of conscience, like in the case of King Belshazzar, writes bitter things against them, there is no remedy or peace. When death comes, it is all gloom, spiritual night, a prison-house, a catacomb.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
Till God's brightness breaks our night
By the beams of truth unclouded.

And that is the lesson of this season, which means manifestation, that is the message of Christ to the world of man and to each soul. He is the Light. As God at the beginning of the world, when it was a huge mass of confused matter, wrapped in unpenetrable darkness, spake the word: "Let there be light," and there was light, so, when humanity at the beginning of these — years was spiritual darkness, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and men saw His glory, the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

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Addressing ourselves to our text, let us *I. trace some points of resemblance between Christ and light; II. note the conduct which becomes us toward this Light.*

The purest and most untarnishable thing in this world is light. Snow is pure, so is ice, water, and air, but each of these will admit of defilement, may be marred and polluted. It is not so with light. Man's hand cannot soil it. No corruption can infest or cleave to it. Nothing can defile its rays or attach pollution to its beams. And such is Christ. All creatures have shown themselves liable to sin and moral taint, but Christ passed through the world of sin as a sunbeam through a house of filth and disease, and came forth as pure and blessed as He sprang from God Himself. He took on Him sin's form, that He might endure sin's due, but sin's stain He never knew. In Bethlehem's manger, He was the holy Child. He lived a human life, oppressed with all its cares and temptations, grew up among its corrupt children, suffered its coarseness, its rebuffs, and its villainies, but with all this He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. He was the spotless Lamb of God, pure; for He was the Light.

Again, light is as bright as it is pure. Things are bright in proportion as they are full of light. The day is bright when no clouds shut out the sun. The scenery is bright when illumined by the greatest number of rays. The hope is bright when it is freest from gloomy forebodings and fullest of the light of promise. And such is Christ. He is brightness, "the brightness of the Father's glory," and His office is to dispense brightness. That is the brightest time in the soul when there

is most of Christ in it. That is the brightest page on which most of Christ is found. That is the brightest sermon in which most of Christ is heard. That is the brightest life in which most of Christ is seen. That is the brightest world in which Christ is most fully received; and that heart, that home, that church is but confusion and darkness where Christ is not.

Light, likewise, is free. It comes without cost, and it comes everywhere. No poverty is so great as to debar from its blessing, nor is there an open crevice, a nook or corner in all this wide world into which it is unwilling to enter, or where it fails to throw its heavenlike smiles. The halls of the great and the huts of the humble does it gild alike, and that without money and without price. As related, it is free, and so is Christ. The command is: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." There is no place nor spot where its beams are not to be diffused, no heart into which it does not struggle for entrance. To the poor as well as to the rich, to Jews as well as to Gentiles is Christ offered equally freely, and on the same terms of free grace to each and all willing to accept Him. He is the true Light, ready to lighten every man that cometh into the world.

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Another quality that pertains to the nature of light is that it is revealing. Darkness obscures. Where it is not light, a pit may gape at our feet, a murderer may be waiting in our path, a dagger aimed at our heart; we do not see and know, our vision is held. It requires light to perceive these things. And so in the spiritual world, Christ is the great Revealer. By Him we come to know God and our true selves. By Him we learn who and where we are, what our needs are, and how to relieve them. One of the hardest things in the world is to make people believe that they are guilty and lost beings. The reason is, they are in the dark. They need the light to show them themselves. And that light is Christ. Only let a man examine himself in the light of Christ's life and teaching, and it will not be long until he sees that self of his to be a mere mass of guilt, and things appearing quite differently in this world of imperfection and sin.

And to mention the final feature, light is life-giving. Without light the world is dead. Where the sun rarely shines, or not at all, there is barrenness, dreariness, perpetual winter, desolation. It is the warming light of spring that starts the dormant germs, that swells the buds, and clothes the vineyards, the field, and the woods with vegetation, fragrance, and plenty. So with the spiritual Light. Where Christ is not, life is not, there is spiritual barrenness, winter upon the soul. But when His beams shine in upon the soul, the seeds of virtue put forth, the tree of faith lifts up its fragrant bloom, and the fruits and flowers of love and grace spring and bud.

Thus, by a few comparisons with the material, natural light, have we sought to explain in what sense Christ is called, or rather calls Himself, the Light.

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Let us inquire how we ought to conduct ourselves toward Him. First of all, if you would enjoy the blessings of this Light, you must receive the Light; the outward illumination must be followed by a corresponding inward one. What good does the light do the man who, when its morning rays shine into his room, will pull down the shades and close the shutters and pull the cover of his couch over his head? It's only the worse for the man. The thing is to receive it, to throw open the shutters of your heart, and to let its radiant sunbeams burst into its every corner and crevice. That is what it is for, and we fail of its purpose and benefit if we fail to so treat it. What if the incoming rays do show us the dust that lies upon furniture and floor? Should we therefore dislike it, reject it, or should we cleanse the furniture and the floor? What if the spiritual Sun reveals to us our darling sins and ignorances? Should we therefore avoid it and dislike it? It is extremely sorry to see the attitude of the most of mankind, how they will cling like bats and owls to darkness who fly away to some dismal haunts, and there sit and blink whenever a ray of spiritual sunlight reaches them. Christ Himself said: "Men love darkness rather than light." Let it not be so to us. Let us accept and profess it, take its blessed rays into our souls.

And, again, let us reflect it. The Bible directs us not only to be radiant and luminous ourselves, but to give light and shining so as to enlighten others, just like the moon and the planets, who, borrowing their light from the sun, are directed to do service in their way and sphere. So, borrowing from the Sun of Righteousness, we must shine forth, each in his respective sphere. "Let your light so shine before men," says our Savior, "that they may see your good works." And be it understood this pertains to every Christian, to be a lamp and light-dispensing orb. Parents are called to a large share in this office. Young men and young women in the Sunday-school partake in the same commission. The officers to be installed this morning, every man, woman, and child in the church have a large and responsible share, and charged to let his or her light shine in carrying light to the souls of others. With this opening of the new year let us be reminded of our Christian duty. Having seen the Sun of Righteousness rising over the hilltops of Bethlehem, and rejoicing in its spiritual splendors, see that the benefits be of lasting impression. Ask yourselves, at the outset, where its Sundays will find you. And know they are the rays of brightening and illumination in sacred thoughts and improvements, the days in which the divine Word shines forth in its radiancy and the gracious Light of salvation flashes in its glory; then, how can you be children of light and yet forsake the assembling of yourselves together where the light is? How can you thus be light-bearers, according to God's direction? And so in every particular. Taking on the brightness of the true Light, may it exhibit itself in your energies and activities. "No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel or under a bed, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house." Let it be in your houses, and if in the past year the candle of your faith and devotion has been flickering low, it's an opportune time to trim the wick afresh and to brighten the flame.

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We have seen that Christ is the true and only Light. Let us believe in Him and walk in Him, now in this day of Gospel brightness and salvation,—so that we may become partakers of that still more stupendous Epiphany, that glorious manifestation, when the Son of Man shall appear in full

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.—*Eccl. 12, 1.*

There is no idea, my beloved, more common among men than this, that not childhood, nor youth, nor manhood, but old age is the most suitable period for becoming religious. The argument in support of this idea runs thus: In old age we have less to do with the affairs of this world, and consequently shall have more time and leisure for those of the next; then this world will afford us little enjoyment and pleasure, and with our passions quenched, with hair turning gray, hands palsied, limbs tottering, can we fail to recognize these as the heralds of the grim king and hear his voice that says: "Be ready, the Judge is at the door"? As a vessel, rocked by storms and falling to pieces, makes all haste to get to port, so will we. So runs the argument.

Prevalent as this idea is, it's a wild fancy, a mocking and baseless delusion. For various reasons: At no time is change of heart more difficult than in old age. Not as if God's grace were less powerful then, but because the difficulties of conversion increase with years; the heart grows more callous, the sinful habits stronger. Take a sapling, for instance; it bends to your hand, turning this way or that, as you will. When seventy springs have clothed it with leaves and the sun of seventy summers has added to its breadth and height, it scorns, not yours only, but a giant's strength. Every year of the seventy, adding fiber to its body and firmness to the fibers, has increased the difficulty of bending it. In the matter of our everlasting welfare it is much the same. Advancing time hardens the fibers of man's heart. Of all tasks we know, there is none so difficult as to touch the feelings and rouse the conscience of godless old age. Moreover, it is an extremely doubtful matter whether we shall ever reach old age. Few do, and the probability is that we shall not. Of all our race, nearly half die in infancy. Another large proportion sinks into the grave ere the summer of life is past. Ask that aged man with stooping form and slow gait, where the playmates are of his childhood; where the boys that sat by him at the desk in school; where the youths, flushed with health and full of hope, with whom he started in the race of life; where his fellow-workmen or partners in business. With one blow of His hand, one sentence of His lips, God may dash all our expectations of threescore years and ten to pieces. This night thy soul shall be required of thee, and then think of the folly that suggests that old age is the best for getting an interest in Christ, peace with God, and a meetness for the kingdom of heaven. Do men act with such infatuation in other and far less important matters? Here is a man who insures his life,—why? Because, he will tell you, life is uncertain, because nothing is more uncertain, because the chances are he may not live to be old; "and if I would be cut off suddenly, what is to become of my family?" Men regard this worldly prudence. But, oh, that man would reason as soundly and act as wisely where high interests are at stake! Let me change but a little the terms of that question: If you should be cut off suddenly and early, what is to become of your family, and ask: If you should die suddenly and early, what is to become of your soul?

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Let me this morning, prompted by the Gospel-lesson of this Sunday, which presents to us the youthful Savior in the temple, ask you, especially my young hearers, to ponder with me the words of our text: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." We shall consider, *I. that youth is the most favorable season in which to begin a religious course; II. point out some of the beneficial results of early piety; III. conclude with a word of general application.*

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Youth, my beloved, is the most favorable time to begin a religious course, because, we would say, in the first place, it's the critical time of a person's life. Childhood receives impressions easily, but these impressions, while lively, are not deep or abiding. How soon the infant forgets its mother and transfers its love to another, and the children that stood so pitiful at a parent's casket, a few weeks afterward are as buoyant and gay at their play as the happiest of their playmates. Manhood, again, on the other hand, like the solid rock, retains impressions once made, but does not easily receive them; what the intellect has gained in ripeness, the heart has lost in tenderness; and impressibility, lying between these two periods, is youth; then it is that our minds, like the wax to which the seal, or the clay to which the mold is applied, possess both the power of receiving impressions and the power of retaining them. Then the character is fixed; then the turn is taken either for God or for the world; then the road is entered which determines our future destiny. It is an old and trite saying, found in another tongue, "What the boy does not learn, the man does not know." In youth the powers are more volatile, the memory is receptive and tenacious. The mind is lively and vigorous, the affections are more easily touched and moved, we are more accessible to the influence of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, we engage in an enterprise with more expectation, ardor, and zeal.—Moreover, the season of youth will be found to contain the fewest obstacles, and is most free from the troubles which afterward embitter, cares which afterward perplex, and the schemes which engross, and engagements which hinder one in more advanced and connected life. And, hence, it has been the advice of the wise men: "In the morning sow thy seed." It is the young and tender root that penetrates the soil; it is when the fibers are delicate that, entering the fissures, it passes into the heart of the rock; and the earlier the mind is brought in contact with religion and becomes acquainted with its great and immense objects, the more thoroughly in after life will it comprehend and, like a root wrapped around the rock, the more firmly hold to it. It is the young recruits that become the best soldiers, and young apprentices the best mechanics, and the best Christians, in like manner, are those who have been so early. Run, in evidence of that, over the list of names which God so honorably distinguished in

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history, Joseph, Samuel, David, Solomon, Jonah, Timothy, John,—and you will observe that in almost all cases they are examples of early piety. And if we come to later times and read the biographies of those that have been eminent in God's kingdom, like our great reformer, Dr. Luther, and his colaborers, of Dr. Walther, and scores and hundreds of others, the Almighty seems to have acted almost invariably by the same rule, and appears to have seldom conferred distinguished honor, with very few exceptions, except on early piety. They were all men that feared the Lord in their youth. How important and reasonable, then, is youth to begin a religious course.

And, again, we would remark, it is, of all others, the most honorable period in which to begin a course of godliness. Religion is an ornament. Piety in any situation or age is pleasing to the Most High. It is well, when the world cannot fill our hearts, to turn our trembling steps from its broken cisterns to the fountain of living waters. It is a grand testimony to religion to see a gray and bent old man standing by the door of mercy and with loud and urging knocking imploring God to open and let him in; but it's exquisitely more attractive and noble to see a youth in the beauty and dew of his age giving himself to Christ and a life of high and holy virtues. Would you thank any one to offer you the shell without the kernel, or the stalk without the flower, or a purse without the money? And think you God is pleased with the dregs of the cup, the refuse and few declining years of a man's life? Is it fair and reasonable that men should employ their time and talents, their health and their strength, and their genius to serve Satan, the world, and the flesh, God's degrading rivals, and then ask Him to gather among the stubble of life after the enemy has secured the harvest? In the Old Testament God commanded that green ears had to be offered; the *first* had to be chosen for His services: the *first*-born of man, the *first*-born of beasts, the *first* fruits of the field. It was an honor becoming the Lord they worshiped to serve Him first. And, correspondingly, it is your duty in the New Testament that you should give Him the first-born of your days, the first fruits of your reason, the prime of your affections. It is with such sacrifices that God is well pleased. The Apostle John was the youngest disciple; he was called the disciple whom Jesus loved. It's the most suitable and honorable, and it is the most profitable and advantageous. It has its reward. That is our second consideration, *viz.*, the beneficial results of early piety.

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Here we would note, as the first advantage, that to serve God in youth is a safeguard, a defense against vice and temptations. No age, indeed, is secure. Till we arrive in heaven and have laid off this body of sin and infirmities we are never safe. Here, like travelers in the mountains, where a coating of snow hides the treacherous ice, and one false step may prove the Christian's ruin, we walk in slippery places, and have need to lean on an arm stronger than our own. Still youth is of all ages the most dangerous. With its ardent temper, its inexperience, its credulity, taking appearances for realities, its impatience of restraint, its unbroken passions, and feeble hands to control and guide them, it requires the utmost care and vigilance. "Lead us not into temptation," should be its daily, constant, earnest prayer. We read at times in our public prints of the wrecks that happen on the shores of our great lakes or the ocean, of vessels gone down in disaster and storms. What is that list of wrecked vessels to the number of men and women who year by year are wrecked in their youth on the dangers and vices of our towns,—our town? What a graveyard of virtue, honor, and honesty! Let the places of business where employers show no regard to the welfare, but only to the work of those in their service; let the houses where no friendly interest is taken in their domestics; let the halls of public amusement, the haunts of drunkenness, and the hells of vice, give up their secrets, as the sea does the drowned cast upon the beach, and we should have a roll like the prophet's, "written without and within with lamentations, mourning, and woe," as shocking, if not more so, as the field of battle, covered with the carnage of war. And out upon the scene, from the virtuous influence of home and school, steps the unsophisticated youth, a thousand avenues of seduction opening around him and a siren voice singing at the entrance of each. Evil companions surround him, erroneous publications ensnare his eye, means and opportunities of temptation and sin. He may flatter himself that his own good sense and moral feelings will render him secure, but as the wise King Solomon says: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." The force of examples, the influence of circumstances, the voice of railing and ridicule, the fascinations of the pleasure party, stifle the finest resolutions, and often render us an astonishment to ourselves, as the old proverb says: "Give the devil an inch, and he will take an ell." No, depend upon it, there is nothing that will do to keep you virtuous, noble, and happy but a hearty consecration of soul and body to the God that loves you, and the Savior that redeemed you, nothing else than the restraints which that God inspires in His holy Law, and the helps that He provides in the rules and ordinances of His Church. Let a young Christian love the habitation of His house, the place where His honor dwelleth, and let Him follow the Savior's direction to watch and pray, and he will retain an undefiled soul in an undefiled body.

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Nor only thus before God, but as it says of the youthful Savior in to-day's Gospel. He increased in favor with God and *man*. Early piety is honored, commands the respect of every right thinking person in this world. You will remember how the sterling piety of the youthful Joseph was honored by Potiphar and afterwards by the King of Egypt himself. Nor need I remind you how Daniel and the other three Hebrew youths, because of the excellent spirit of piety that was in them, was promoted to the highest post of dignity and responsibility in the Chaldean empire, and whilst God does not promise you that if you seek Him in your youth, you will be advanced to sit among princes and to rule kingdoms, He promises you honor and respect, in whatever station you may be placed. The most worldly people and religiously careless people would rather have the godly lad in their employ, the young man who is loyal to his conscience and of genuine integrity of character, who will do his duty, "not with eye-service, but in singleness of heart, as unto the Lord," than any other kind. In brief, as the Apostle says, you will find that "Godliness is

profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Let me, then, in conclusion, charge you, my dear hearers, to consecrate to the Lord the first fruits of your days. "Remember," says our text, "thy Creator in the days of thy youth." What though frivolous men and thoughtless women ridicule your devotion, and scoff at your churchgoing and professions! What though some shallow-minded companions charge you with fanaticism or singularity, hypocrisy or pride! The day is fast coming when they will be compelled to justify your conduct, to confess that you have chosen the better part, and to mourn that they neglected to seek the Savior in the morning of their existence.

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And to those among you who have feared the Lord from your youth, and are now glorifying your Redeemer in the maturity of life, I would say: "Go on, earnestly pursue the glorious course which you have begun; be not weary in your religious life, grow in grace as you advance in years, be illustrations and stimulating examples unto others, and thus spend your life usefully for God and man, before the evil days come and the years draw nigh, when you will say: "I have no pleasure in them," when eternity stands at the door, and you will face your Maker. God strengthen you in this determination for Christ's sake. Amen."

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Marriage is honorable in all.—*Hebr. 13, 4.*

"And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." These words of Holy Scripture immediately following the statement: "And God created man in His image, male and female created He them," contain the divine verdict regarding the social relation that we call matrimony or marriage. Declared the all-wise God: "It was very good."

That, however, was in the holy and happy days of Paradise, in the midst of righteousness, purity, and bliss. Sin entered, and things changed; the image of the divine Maker was forfeited, that purity effaced, over that bliss was written in indelible letters: "Paradise Lost." What, then, became of the marriage relation? Was it, too, dissolved, forfeited, lost? Wonderful Providence! From that universal wreck,—of the few things which God permitted man to carry with him, remains, to insure him happiness and welfare in the midst of a world otherwise steeped in misery and tears, the marriage estate. It was not lost.

The Gospel-lesson of to-day presents the Savior as being present at a marriage feast, and records that on that occasion He changed water into wine and manifested forth His glory. By His presence and by that miracle He also manifested forth, endorsed, sanctioned, and placed His divine approbation upon matrimony, as He once did amid the scenes of Eden's creation and loveliness. Nothing could be more significant than that, when the God-man came to found His kingdom upon earth, and entered upon His Messianic work, His first work should have been wrought in honor of the wedding tie. And so God's Word speaks of marriage throughout. When the Apostle desires a comparison to set forth the holy and pure relation between Christ and His Church, he knows none more sublime and noble than the union that exists between man and woman in wedlock, for which reason the Church is called Christ's bride—Christ is called her Bridegroom.

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To raise one's tongue or pen in impiety or censure against marriage is to raise them against heaven and Christ. To set up in its place the teaching and practice of celibacy, by which men and women are divested, in the name of religion, from the ties and duties of family; to turn away, or in any manner to advocate what may break down the proper relation between the sexes, is casting reproach upon God's institution, and a perversion of true religion, as it is of nature's laws. To speak depreciatingly, disparagingly of marriage, to arch the brow, to puck the lips up in a smile, when it is called "holy" matrimony, and in any way to entertain light and derogatory views concerning it and family life, is to get oneself into conflict with, and to invite the ill favor of, Him who has thrown a sacred hedge around the institution, when on Sinai's mountain, in His Ten Commandments, He commanded how we should regard this estate.

"Marriage," says the Apostle in our text, "is honorable in all." There is nothing concerning it that is unworthy, unholy, hindering to piety and salvation. The Son of God would not have graced with His presence and miracle those Galilean nuptials if it had not been holy throughout. Concerning the honorableness of that estate would I speak at this time a few words of plainness and truth. May He who is called the God of families bless them to our instruction!

Among the views concerning matrimony, there is also this one, taught by men sitting in professors' chairs and senselessly repeated by the ungodly multitude, that, as man has evolved from a lower to a higher form of existence, so morality and also matrimony have only gradually, in the course of many centuries, yes, thousands of years, evolved to what it now is. Originally man knew as little of matrimony as the beasts of the field. Little by little, pride and self-interest induced especially strong men to take unto themselves, and keep with themselves, one or a few of the other sex, and so it eventually grew into a custom and rule that one man and one woman should form a union for life, and in evidence of that they will even point to the Bible, the instance of Abraham, who beside his wife, Sarah, had her maid, Hagar, and Jacob had two, really four wives, and David, Solomon, in fact, all the Jews among the Old Testament kings practiced polygamy,—it was only with the introduction of Christianity that monogamy, the union of one man and one woman, and the indissolubleness of the marriage-tie, became general rule. What

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folly of folly, contrary to all sacred and secular story!

Without entering too explicitly upon this subject, do we not read in the chapters of Genesis that when Pharaoh of Egypt had cast his eyes upon Sarah, thinking she was Abraham's sister, that after he had been rightly informed, he at once desisted from his advances and made explanation? And did not Abimelech, when about to fall into a like error, offer apology and make restitution? Is it not plain from these cases that they well knew that the marriage relation was not to be broken, that one man was not to take another man's wife? Moreover, it never occurred to Abraham, or any of the patriarchs, to put away from themselves their wives, for any reasons, and these men lived nearly two thousand years before Christ. How absurd the contention that men originally lived without a knowledge of the sanctity of marriage! Turning to secular history, we have record of the same. Rome, for instance, was founded in the eighth century before Christ. Its first citizens were robbers, and such as had been banished for gross offenses from other cities of Italy. But concerning the marriage relation—they did not live as brutes. Every physically able inhabitant was legally required to wed, and for several centuries not a solitary case of divorce occurred. Such a thing was regarded simply impossible. It was not until late centuries, when effeminacy had taken hold upon the city, that we hear of those social abominations. The same may be said of our heathen forefathers, the German and Teutonic tribes; marriage, with them, was held in highest respect.

This, then, is the true view according to Bible and history. God instituted marriage at creation, and God ordained that it should be a union between one man and one woman, and that this union is indissoluble and inseparable. As everything else, however, suffered by the fall of man into sin, so also this divine regulation. The corruption at the time of the flood was such that God destroyed the world on that very account. "They took them wives of all that they chose," is the sacred account. It is with regret that we read of men like Abraham, Jacob, David, who were not found strong enough to resist the common corruption, but were deplorably drawn into looseness of the marriage ties.

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How was it at the time of the Savior? The teaching of the synagogue was, that "whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement." When it entered a man's mind to get rid of his wife, all he needed to do was to write upon a piece of parchment: "I divorce myself from my wife," have it signed by two or three witnesses, and the wife had to go; or if it occurred to a woman to sever herself from her husband, she demanded a writing of divorcement from him, and if he refused, life became miserable, or she would simply run away, as Herodias did from her husband, Philip, and married her husband's brother, Herod Antipas. And these occurrences were not done with blushing reserve, those guilty of it boasted of it. Beloved, are we not rapidly falling upon such times?

The miserable revelations that come from our courts are veritable cesspools reeking with stench and bestial filth. As one eminent jurist has expressed it: "Broken marriages are as common as broken window-panes." Divorce, what is it practically, in effect, but enabling men and women to live in successive polygamy? Now, over against this and all like influences and evils that would break down the honor of marriage, our Lord clearly and emphatically laid down God's Law. Here it is: "They are no more twain, but one flesh." "What, therefore, God has joined together, let not man put asunder," and again, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery, and whosoever marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery." These words are as clear as language can be. Only one exception does Christ give to the rule, Matt. 5, 32: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication." Fornication means unfaithfulness to each other in the marriage relation. Illicit intercourse with another person, that is given as the exception, as a just cause for severance. As for other causes, the Bible recognizes not one. And even in cases of fornication it does not *demand* a divorce. That, then, is the position of the Scripture and of our church. This is the practice of her clergy.

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Again, another particular that tends to the honorableness of the marriage state, as pointed out in the text, is the high purpose which it is intended to serve according to the will of God. The family life is the foundation of human society. Married life, without seeking to fulfill its first purpose, the perpetuating of the human race and the bringing up of one's offspring in the proper manner, is to undermine, frustrate, that foundation of the state. This leads me to refer to an evil which I hardly know how to speak of, which should be named in the blackest of evils,—I mean the willful intention and resolve to defeat the first of those purposes for which matrimony was instituted by God. It comes looming up on the view of this generation as a great, a growing, an almost national crime. The foundation of a home is the first thing intended in matrimony. But some deliberately resolve that there shall be no home, or at least that it shall be as narrow, as limited, as possible. Be it to avoid pain, be it to shrink the duty of the parent, be it to remain free to enjoy the world,—arts base and black, devices which in the Old Testament were punished by death, are used to carry out these ungodly and absurd resolves; ungodly, because it would not be possible more grossly to outrage God's law than in this way; absurd, because a marriage contracted with that understanding and intention is a contradiction, a misnomer, a fraud on society and on the Church. And so I say, as God's minister and in His name, as we who must speak fearlessly, that this act of deliberately preventing the formation of a home is a crime, and one which brings down curses from a God of justice, who knows and who rewards according to our deeds. "Marriage," be it noted, "is honorable in all"; it is a holy and pure estate, and holiness must prevail therein.

And now let us regard the other part of our discourse: If marriage is a holy estate, then it must be entered honorably and must be continued honorably.

Marriage ought to be entered honorably. There is something appalling in the thoughtlessness,

the irresponsibility with which young people will contract marriage; there seems to be often no apparent sense of the gravity of the act, no reflection upon what is involved. A pleasant face, captivating demeanor, money, or position are not infrequently the flimsy threads that tie the conjugal knot.

But how can any one who is a Christian enter upon that relation which, more than any other, affects the whole life, without consulting and seeking the blessing of the divine Author? Yet it is done, and alas! done only too often by those who ought to know better. Some contract acquaintanceship, keep company, and have an interchange of hearts, and never think of their God and Savior in connection with it. Religion, in fact, seems unwelcome and out of place to many at such a time, whilst one heart-felt prayer to Him in connection with such an acquaintance would in thousands of cases have prevented anguish of souls from which there is no refuge but the grave.

In other words, whether you will be happy or unhappy in the marriage life depends largely upon the companion of your choice. Therefore, when choosing a life's companion, ask God for His counsel to give you the spouse of His choice; and when you marry, marry honorably.

The contracting parties in to-day's Gospel-lesson were not a runaway couple, or Jesus would not have honored their wedding feast with His presence. Nor did they marry from sheer necessity to hide the results of sin. Their relatives and friends, and, if still living, their parents were there; they had asked for and received the honest and unqualified consent of the latter. It is not an idle service or the mere acknowledgment of a civil contract, but a proper and significant Christian act to have marriage solemnized by a religious ceremony, conducted by a minister of the church, and blessed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

No Christian man or woman should ever think of contracting a marriage alliance at which a servant of God is not present to invoke the Savior's blessing. Marriage should be entered into reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Nor can I in this connection refrain from calling attention to the good old church custom called in English "publishing the banns," the persons asking for the prayer of a Christian congregation upon their union. Thus, in the ways indicated, does a Christian enter upon marriage "honorably."

And having entered upon it thus, it ought to be so continued. There is one thing that married couples ought ever to remember, this: that they are both sinners. If they bear that in mind, they will not look for imaginary perfections in their life's partner, and will, conscious of their own shortcomings, bear with the shortcomings of the other. And where there is this conviction that both are sinners, they will find their balance in the Savior of sinners. It is well enough to bring into married life an amiable disposition, the happy faculty of controlling one's temper, but, believe me, the best thing to bring along, the most effective safeguard against discord and estrangement, is the fear of the Lord, the mutual respect for God's law and authority. Temporary differences, quarrels even, may arise in that home, but cannot remain. The husband has been hard and unkind, but will be prompt to make amends. If the wife has been contrary, quarrelsome, or has in other ways angered her husband, the love of Christ will not let her rest, but to acknowledge and seek reconciliation. There is nothing like genuine religion to regulate the household, to take off the frictions of daily life, to educate us in self-denial, in bearing and forbearing with one another.

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Let us, then, keep before us the dignity of the estate, and conduct ourselves honorably therein, until God shall summon us from this earthly relation to the marriage feast of the Lamb on high. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto Him, Sir, give me this water.—*John 4, 14. 15.*

Our blessed Lord, having provoked by His preaching and by His miracles the enmity of the Pharisees, they began to plot His destruction. To escape their persecutions, His hour having not yet come, He departed for Galilee, between which territory and Judea lay the province of Samaria, through which, accordingly, as the holy writer expresses it, He must needs go. The first place at which he stopped was Sychar, one of the cities of Samaria. In its vicinity was a well, called Jacob's well, in all probability because the patriarch Jacob had caused it to be dug. Arriving there about the sixth hour, or noon, fatigued with the toils of the day, He seated Himself, while His disciples went into the city to purchase food. He could easily have relieved His wants by a miracle, but His miracles He employed only for the relief of others. While thus resting and alone, there cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Our Lord at once resolved to benefit her. He was one who sowed by all waters, and with Him one hearer was enough to justify the finest sermon. He introduced Himself to her by asking a favor, the best way that could have been selected. It must be spoken to the credit of our poor humanity that a request for a favor is always regarded as allowable. There are men and women whom you would not dare speak to on the street, without expecting to be reproachfully treated, but whom you may with perfect confidence ask a small favor of, such as the time of day, a drink of water, or the like. Jesus saith to her: "Give me to drink." The woman is astonished, for she saw, by His features and His dress, that He was a

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Jew. Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" It was a very natural question. The Jews regarded contact with a Samaritan disreputable. Their touch was pollution; to spend the night at the house of one of them was to reproach a family for generations. A Jew would not speak to a Samaritan, much less ask a favor of one. But the mind of Jesus knew nothing of this narrow bigotry, this odious illiberality. His object was to benefit all, and He, therefore, freely conversed with all. His answer was: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." The Savior, as you will have noted from your Bible reading, often seizes upon incidents and objects before the eyes of His hearers to shadow forth spiritual truths. Thus, when He had fed the multitude with bread, He spoke of Himself as "the bread which cometh from heaven and giveth eternal life." Being at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people in crowds drew water from the pool of Siloam, He cried with a loud voice: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." So here He takes occasion to elevate this woman's thoughts from the earthly water to the heavenly. Still supposing, however, that Jesus referred to common water, she objects to Him: "Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence, then, hast Thou this living water?" And to suppose that He could find better water elsewhere would imply that He was greater than Jacob, who esteemed this the best in all the territory, and so she adds: "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children and his cattle?" Jesus, pitying her ignorance, and bearing with her weakness, began more fully to explain the properties of that water of which He spoke. He said to her: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The woman, still taking the words in a natural sense, was disposed to turn them into ridicule, and she begged the Savior by all means to give her some of that excellent water which would prevent her from ever thirsting again and would render it unnecessary for her to come so far and draw water. She says: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." To check her impatience, Jesus shows that He was perfectly acquainted with her character. He bids her call her husband. The woman replied: "I have no husband." Then came the crushing exposure; Jesus said to her: "Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly." She, at once convinced of Jesus' prophetic character, adroitly changes the subject. Said she: "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

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This was opening up an interesting topic. When the Jews returned after the Babylonian captivity, they went to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The Samaritans proposed to bear part of the expense, and to worship with them, as they accepted some of the Jewish laws and ceremonies. The Jews rejected their offer, and would have nothing to do with them. The Samaritans then built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim. Hence, the woman wished to be informed by this prophet which was the right place, Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. The reply of Jesus was full of instruction; with great stateliness and dignity He said: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship. God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The woman, hearing these instructions, without disputing with Jesus, but also without approving entirely of what He said, refers the entire decision of the question to the coming of the Messiah. "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when He is come, He will tell us all things," to which Jesus replies: "I that speak unto thee am he."

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Here the disciples, returning from the city, interrupted the conversation. The woman went back to the city and told the people of the wonderful stranger. Full of curiosity, they came out to see Jesus, and prevailed on Him to stay two days with them, and "many," records the sacred writer, "of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him."

There are a number of important lessons that we may profitably dwell upon from this interview between Christ and that woman of Samaria. We shall restrict ourselves to the most outstanding one. Our Lord teaches us here the nature of salvation; He compares it to water. It is noteworthy and most suggestive that whatever in the material world is most useful and highly valuable to man is also the most common and most abundant. Things which can, without serious loss and injury to any one, be dispensed with, or which serve merely or mainly to give pleasure, such as gold, diamonds, and jewels, exquisite foreign fruit, these alone are rare, the property of a few. But what all men need, and most largely ministers to their comfort and enjoyment,—the wholesome food, the pure, refreshing water, the air, and the light,—these are spread out in free, unstinted store before rich and poor, young and old, one and all.—But besides this material world there is another with which we have to do, an unseen spiritual world, in which our souls are living and breathing, and there the same law obtains. God has abundantly supplied us with what we need. Two-thirds of the earth's surface is covered with water. You find water all over and everywhere, in oceans, rivers, springs, wells, sufficient to supply all the wants of man. So, too, there is not a meager quantity, but an abundance of living water. If all the human beings who have ever lived upon this earth could come to this heavenly Fountain in a body, there would be water enough and to spare, and it is everywhere and for everybody. It is for Americans, for Europeans, for the inhabitants of Asia, Africa and the islands of the sea. There never will be a diminution of its vast and boundless supply. Nor will God permit any barrier to hedge it in.

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Like the water in your homes, salvation is being brought to your doors; it is gushing forth like a stream at your feet now, and it flows through the very aisles of this church, and filters into every

pew. And like natural water, Christ's water of salvation possesses like qualities. To mention the particular He dwells upon in this text, Jesus answered and said to her, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The soul has its desires, its yearnings, its appetites, as well as the body, and it is miserable until that thirst is satisfied. And how is this done? Certainly not by anything of man's provision. The various schools of man's wisdom, philosophy, have tried it, and we have their confession that they failed to find what they sought. The same may truly be said of this world's pleasures, possessions, and honors. These things, being earthly, leave the soul as thirsty as before, yea, even worse, like sailors in distress who drink the ocean's brine; it will but increase their thirst a hundredfold. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Christ's water, alone, is able to satisfy the thirst of the human soul.—The reason is very apparent. Man's happiness depends, first of all, upon a right relation to his God; as long as that is severed or strained, satisfaction and peace of heart are out of the question. And it is only He, that divine person, who sat upon Jacob's well, that has this supply of living water. We are made for God, and our hearts remain thirsty and restless until they find satisfaction and repose in Him.

But, you will note, it says: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I give him." Christ gives it, but there is something, accordingly, for the thirsty soul to do. Water cannot quench the thirst unless it is taken; not all the water in the river at the foot of our city can save a man that does not partake of it. Nor can Christ's water of life assuage the thirst of a soul that declines it. There must be personal appropriation, or it fails of the blessed effects. Not as if there is anything meritorious in that, any more than it is a merit for one to drink a glass of water to allay his physical thirst. And yet, it is only thus that one becomes partaker of it; and the only reason why so many fail of its blessed effects is,—they do not drink it. It is told of a ship that its supply of fresh water was exhausted. The passengers and crew on board were at the point of perishing. For several days they had lacked water, and were almost frenzied. At last a vessel was sighted in the distance. They raised their cry: "Give us water, water; we are dying for water!" The reply came back, "Let down your buckets! You are in the mouth of the Amazon! You have fresh water all around you." They had been floating three days in fresh water and knew it not. It is so spiritually. Ignorance is what keeps many from salvation. The churches, like vast reservoirs and pumping stations, are seeking to supply the masses with the knowledge of Christ and His Gospel. They are actually floating like these perishing souls in the midst of religion, and yet they dip not their buckets to fill. With some it is because they are too indifferent, and with others, because of sheer stupidity they care not to give such matters concern. It is positively surprising to see how many otherwise intelligent and wide-awake men and women will be found altogether destitute of the first things, the A B C of Christian teaching and principles. Ask them to select the real things of man's life, to tell you the true purpose of existence, touch on matters of eternity, soul and God, and they are as ignorant of those things as children of the value of currency, who will tear to pieces a five-dollar bill and cling to their five-cent picture-book, or who will at any time take in exchange for a ten-dollar gold piece a large, glittering ball of Christmas tinsel. They know not, and so they value not, and allow the treasures of heaven, the gift of God, as our Savior called it, the blessed water of life, to flow by undrunk and unimproved.

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To this first reason, ignorance, may be rightfully added another,—prejudice. There is a vast amount of that against Christ's religion. In fact, there is in every material heart a feeling of aversion against the whole thing, and, strange enough, those who might be expected to be most favorably inclined toward salvation, the outwardly good, honest, and honored, are, as a rule, set against it. Their self-sufficiency is in the way. Take the case before us. It was a most unpromising one, this woman. The reproof openly given by a stranger, a Jew at that, would have irritated many a one. Some would have replied by abusive language. Others would have denied the charge, especially as it did not appear probable that this unknown person could uphold them. But the Samaritan had different sentiments, and bears out the statement of our Lord that the publicans and sinners were nearer the kingdom of heaven than the Pharisees, who were so devout in their outward appearances. Some of the most unpromising characters prove the most promising, and those whom we should have regarded as giving Christ cordial welcome, the religionists of His time, were offended at Him.

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So to-day, there are numbers of those who regard themselves good enough or not worse than many others and these very church people, and so are never seen in a house of Christian worship, except to see some one married, or buried; who will read anything and everything, and who are ready to meet with you and talk with you on every topic except one, and that is religion. Prejudice, my beloved, prejudice, short-sighted, cruel, unreasonable.

But, to conclude; to us, my dear hearers, as to this woman of Sychar, has the Savior come. He is sitting not only, as of old, on Jacob's well, He is sitting beside you in the pew, He is offering you the same water of life. Why not take and drink it?

People will go far and spend much to drink of earthly springs for bodily invigoration and health. Here is the life-water, which alone can give health to the soul, and which springs up into eternal life. Oh! that some of its life-giving drops may fall upon your hearts in these moments to soften them into penitence and holy resolve: "Sir, give me of this water."

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink and live.
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out in fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.—*Matt. 14, 22-27.*

Our blessed Lord was both, He was true God and He was true man. To-day's Gospel-lesson presents Him to us in the fishermen's boat, weary and sleeping on a pillow. There is humanity; for of God it says: "Behold, He shall neither slumber nor sleep." Again, the same story presents Him as commanding the winds and the waves. There is Godship; for of God alone can it be said: "Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them." And this remarkable contrast you will find running through all His earthly history. You enter the stable at Bethlehem. You see a babe slumbering on its mother's lap. You say, "This is Mary's child." Presently a company of shepherds enter, and tell what they heard and saw while keeping watch over their flocks by night. Scarcely have they finished their description, when wise men from the East appear, alleging that they have been guided thither by a star, and worshipping the Child with costly offerings. You stand on Jordan's bank and mingle with the thousands who have come to hear the word and submit to the Baptism of John. You behold one, Jesus of Nazareth, going down to be baptized, but you think little of it, for He differs, apparently, in nothing from those by whom He is surrounded. But as He comes up from the water, the heavens are opened, and the Spirit of God descends like a dove, and lights upon Him, while from the celestial heights comes a voice, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." You accompany Him to the grave of Lazarus, and you see the tears trickle down His cheeks, and you realize that He is a man; for neither Deity nor angels weep. But soon you behold Lazarus come forth from his sepulcher in answer to His word of power, and once more you ask in wonder verging on adoration: "What manner of man is this?" And so till you see Him on the cross, His back lacerated with the scourge, and His brow bleeding from the pressure of the crown of thorns. You hear the words, "It is finished," and see the pale cast of death settle on His countenance. But on the third day after, you meet Him in the upper room at evening, extending His hand in resurrection greeting: "Peace be unto you."

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Now, what shall we make of this wonderful dualism, as we may call it? There remains nothing for us to do but to accept that Christ was true God and true man. No other interpretation or explanation will do. Our church, in the standard Confession, in the Third Article of the Augsburg Confession, thus voices its belief, and to that we subscribe. We teach that God the Son became man and was born of the Virgin Mary; that the two natures, the human and the divine, inseparably united in one person, are one Christ, who is true God and man. So much as to the great doctrinal truth taught in the Scripture-reading of to-day. It contains also a very instructive and comforting practical truth. We shall regard as our topic:—

The experience of Christ's disciples on the Sea of Galilee a picture of Christ's people on the sea of life, noting, I. their adversity, II. their security.

The poet has said that human life is

Bits of gladness and of sorrow,
Strangely crossed and interlaid;
Bits of cloud belt and of rainbow,
In deep alternation braid;
Bits of storm when winds are warring,
Bits of calm when blasts are stay'd,
Bits of silence and of uproar,
Bits of sunlight and of shade.

And it's more than poetic fancy; it is stern reality. Like that Sea of Galilee, the sea of life is sometimes calm and sometimes stormy, sometimes reposing under the soft smiles of a sunshiny sky, and sometimes ruffled and whipped by the restless gales.

Wearied from the toils and turmoils of the day, our Lord constrains His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitude away. When He had done this, He retired. Whither? Into a neighboring mountain. For what? To pray. He wished to be alone; His heart yearned for communication with His Father; He also needed strength and preparation for the work and conflicts of the morrow. How could He secure it? By prayer. How suggestive and instructive for us. Our Lord needed thus to strengthen and prepare Himself for life's difficulties and battles. Let us learn a lesson from Him,—discover where the secret of our power lies.

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But while thus engaged, His disciples were in danger upon the sea. A fearful storm, one of those sudden, violent squalls, peculiar to the Sea of Galilee, had arisen, and was lashing the sea with violent fury. Try as they might, and they were accustomed to the sails and oars, they were perfectly helpless, and the greatest misfortune was that the Master was not with them. Had He been there, even though asleep, they might have roused and brought Him to their rescue. But, alas! He was far away. Consternation and despair seized hold upon them, when, at a sudden, they discern in the distance the form of a man walking on the foaming crests of the waters. What? Could it be He? Indeed, there He was, and He speaks to them. No sooner did He set His foot on the ship than the tossing waters sank down to their quiet bed. There was a great calm.

Beloved, these stories of the Bible have not been written for entertainment, but as the Apostle declares: "Whatever was written aforetime was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Life has its times of prosperities, and it has its times when the wind is contrary and wave dashes fast upon wave. The occasion of this storm may be various. Sometimes it is the matter of livelihood. Circumstances over which we have no control overwhelm us, embarrass us. Try as hard as we may, like these disciples, who made only thirty furlongs, we can make no headway; yes, in spite of our willingness and energy, we go backward; reverses set in, loss is ours. We are mightily tossed by the waves, and the clouds look dreadfully frowning and dark. Sometimes it is bodily ailment; suffering of one sort or another comes over us like a destructive wave; we are called to battle with disease, the probabilities and improbabilities of ever becoming strong again,—it is bitter experience. Or it may be the wave of bereavement. Like this little fisherman's craft, we are carried down into the depths of heart-rending sorrow; our eyes are wet with tears; before us closes the grave upon one whom we would have given the whole world to retain.

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Contrary winds! Dashing billows! Rolling, tossing sea! And imagine not that by believing the Gospel, your being a Christian, will make you exempt from these storms. We are sometimes told: Do what is right, and you will not suffer. It sounds very plausible, but it is not true,—very unfrequently otherwise. Why was Joseph cast into prison? He did that which was right. Why were the martyrs put to death? These disciples in the path of duty when the storm came upon them were doing what had been commanded by the Lord. You may not infrequently be exposed to fierce blasts by being a Christian consistent, consecrated in life and duties. It matters not what your profession or portion in life may be, whether you are a Christian or not, godly or ungodly, rich or poor, famous or obscure, the storms of life will certainly, with more or less violence, overtake you. There is no exemption, no escape from them. Now, what shall we think, what say, to sustain ourselves amid experiences like that?

It may be well enough to note the experience of those disciples yonder on the Sea of Galilee. "And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." What could it be, that moving form? A man? No, impossible! How could a man tread upon the waters? Then it must be a ghost, an apparition, a grim visitor from the other worlds. And as this idea forced itself upon them, they could not refrain from crying out with terror. Thus, my dear hearers, God's people are sometimes perplexed, when scenes of distress appear, and bereavement, humiliation, and sorrow appear upon life's sea. They are sometimes disposed to cry out with terror, "What can it mean?"—these dark and threatening forms. Surely, a loving and beneficent God would not alarm His children, and add still greater anxiety and anguish to their already fierce battling with the waves and the elements. My beloved, that is just what God does, and wisdom on our part, our sustaining strength, and the comfort consists in this, that we recognize that form, nor, mistaking it, cry out in terror.

That storm on the Galilean Sea was not an accident, it did not come by chance, it was sent by and with the permission of the Governor of the winds and the waves; and when the billows were rolling fiercest and fastest, His hand was there guiding and controlling. None less so with the streams of life. These are not accidental, but intentional. They do not come by chance, but are sent by, and with the permission of, the Governor of the universe, and when the billows are rolling fast, His hand is guiding and controlling our afflictions. Perplexing as they may be, they are part of God's grand and sovereign system of dealing with us. It is He, His Providence, His divine appointment and arrangement, not some strange, unmerciful power, which people call Fate, Chance, Nature, but the divine form of our blessed Savior. That is the first thing we must bear in mind amid life's storms.

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"But straightway Jesus spoke unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Human lips cannot describe the effect which these words uttered by that familiar voice must have had upon them. In a moment the whole truth flashed upon their minds,—the apparition so much dreaded was no other than He whom, above all others, they longed to see. There is a common expression in English, which speaks of "blessings in disguise." Such are all of life's untoward happenings to a Christian—"blessings in disguise."

That Galilean experience in the night and storm gave to these disciples enlarged ideas of the Master and His power, it developed their faith and trust in Him. Not for all the toil and terrors

would they have foregone it. They never forgot it. Beloved, the time will come when you will look back upon that experience that wrenched your soul, that household cross that proved so heavy, that disheartening reverse that caused a big black mark to be drawn through your life's prospects and plans, those hours of dread and darkness, as the very occasions of your highest blessings, the making of yourselves. The "evils of life"—speak not thus—are blessings in disguise. "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee, e'en though it be a cross that raiseth me." Have you ever seen anything but a cross raise men? The smiles of prosperity, the sunshiny sky, the even waves of the sea of life are not the means calculated to raise a soul nearer to God; that takes the buffetings, the storms, and the rising billows (blessings in disguise), sent by a wise God in loving purpose.

And one more. When the disciples recognized and realized that it was their Master, their fear vanished. Let the winds blow, the ship toss, and the waves run high, they felt secure,—He was with them. It is a simple thought, yet it constitutes the whole of religion, the essence of faith, our comfort in life, our hope in death, our all in all, this one thought: He is with us, Jesus, the Master.

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I am thinking this moment of a man,—his eyesight impaired, sickness upon his body, his head bending low with age, striving hard to live, afraid to die. The religion of Christ was never his, and he desires none of it now. A more melancholy lot never was man's as he is tossed about with many a conflict and many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, dissatisfied, unhappy. I am thinking of another,—his eyes have not seen the light of day for eight years; his once powerful frame is now as delicate as a child's, his hair is gray from much weariness and pain; but none was ever more cheerful, submissive, hopeful, and happy. The difference? The one has recognized the divine form walking on the surging billows, and has taken Him into his life's boat; the other has not, and will not do so. With the one it is a "great calm," stillness, joy. With the other, tumult, danger, and despair. That is the difference,—*what* a difference! So, whether it be sickness, or that the world goes against us, or that we are straitened in our means of living, or experiencing the loss of the dearest and nearest; not *from* them has Christ and Christianity promised to save us, but *in* them, trusting in Him, it has promised, and that we shall feel safe.

And that is the one great practical lesson of the day's texts, that is why they are recorded in the Bible, that we may have this faith, this comfort and hope. Then in the day of trouble we shall think of something more than the mere earthly and temporal look of the trouble; we should all think of God in it, of God guiding it, and of His sheltering and sustaining hand in it. Then when we are sick, our thoughts would not be so taken up with the mere pains and annoyances we suffer, the probabilities or the improbabilities of our getting back to health and strength again; but whether we get better or not, the remembrance of the Hand of our Savior in it will make us feel easy, submissive, and patient under it, as no other strength can. And so with all other trouble. Amid the waves of the sea of life, which is seldom calm, and often swells into mountainous billows, let us heed the voice of the Savior, "Be of good cheer, it is I." Let us toil on. No contrary wind can last forever. After a time we shall reach the other shore, and when we touch that, we shall be done with these storms. Then will there be a great calm. Amen.

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FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.—*Matt. 13, 47, 48.*

A number of our Lord's discourses were addressed to those who were engaged in agriculture. To such were uttered the parables of the sower, of the wicked husbandmen, of the mustard seed, and to-day's Gospel of the wheat and tares. Others of these discourses were spoken more immediately to His own disciples, the most of whom had been fishermen on the Lake of Galilee, and to them mightily appealed an illustration like that which we are about to consider. They had often experienced what our Lord so simply describes. They had gone forth in their boats to fish, and after they had drawn their nets to shore, they had made an examination of what they contained, and out of the meshes they had gathered the good into vessels, for sale or for use, and that which was worthless they had thrown away. A very simple figure setting forth a very affecting and awakening truth. May the Holy Ghost solemnize our minds and write some abiding impressions on all our hearts!

The subject divides itself into two parts. It shows us, *I. The present mixed character of the churches; II. the future separation.*

The Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the Church, is likened by our Lord to a net cast into the sea. The net spoken of is not the ordinary casting-net, but a seine, or hauling-net, which was sometimes half a mile in length, leaded below that it might drag the bottom of the sea, and kept above the water with large corks. A net of such dimensions will naturally enclose fish of all sizes and kinds, some bad and others good, some valuable and others worthless, some in the best condition, others out of season, dead, or putrid, and unfit for human food. And so it is with the net of the Gospel. It is a large, capacious draw-net; it is not merely let down into one stream or river, but it sweeps the ocean, the wide and open sea of the world, and its threads are so strong, so well knitted together that scarcely a single fish can escape. In other words, we have here a picture of the all-embracing Church of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel to every nation. But as the divine fishermen, the ministers of Christ, cast their net into this universal sea and enclose an

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abundance of human fishes, not all are of the same quality; it's a mixed and motley multitude. "In the visible Church there is a deal of trash and rubbish, refuse, and vermin, as well as fish," says an old commentator.

In this our own blessed country, where the Gospel is preached in nearly 2,000,000 sermons every year, and where churches and chapels rear their spires on the right hand and on the left, there are many professed Christians, and those who belong to the visible Church, but they are not alike. They were baptized in infancy, and many of them renewed their solemn covenant at God's altar in Confirmation. But there their religion ends. They never seek God's face in private prayer. They profane and desecrate God's holy day. They neglect God's sanctuary. They never read God's Word. They are daily supported by God's bounty, but they cherish no more gratitude to the Author of all their blessings than if they were sticks or stones. What are such baptized Christians in reality but vile refuse in the net. Others, again, are not so pronounced in their conduct; they do observe to some extent the proprieties of a religious life; they are seen now and then inside of God's house, and have their names enrolled upon the communicant or membership list of some church, send their children to Sunday-school, and withhold not at times a charitable hand. But, then, that is the whole of their religion. They do not believe in always running to church, in being so awfully sanctimonious; a person can be a Christian, read his Bible, and pray at home just as well.—That's the type of many. It is the form without the power. The virgin's lamp of profession is there, the oil of God's Spirit is not there, or very, very low. And, in addition to these various classes, there is a "remnant," as the Apostle calls it, in many places a very small remnant, "according to the election of grace." These are they, and some such are now hearing me who have received the truth for the love of it, and who have embraced the Gospel as it has embraced them. They belong not to them that are "good enough," and "if God accepts any one, He cannot pass them by," but being convinced by the Holy Ghost that they are poor, soul-sick sinners, they seek Christ's blood as their only remedy and Christ's righteousness as their only ground of acceptance, and flee to Christ's cross as their only hope, and seek to adorn this doctrine by a consistent and holy life and a diligent and conscientious attendance upon the Word and Sacraments.

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These, my beloved, are some of the various classes of the mixed and motley multitude that are now being gathered into the net, the outward church, and yet it is sheer impossibility to distinguish between them. They are so closely mixed together; people may live in the same houses, walk together the same street, sit side by side in the same pew, listen to the same preacher, kneel at the same sacramental altar, and at last lie down, amid sacred ceremony, in the same burial plot, and yet may be inwardly utterly dissimilar, the one from the other, the one genuine, the other spurious; the one be finally saved, the other ultimately lost.—This is something which we cannot determine, which our natural, material eye cannot discern. But that is the teaching of our text,—there will come a time when this will be made manifest. As in the drag-net, first of every sort are gathered together in the same enclosure only for a little while, till the nets are drawn in to the shore, so in the spiritual net, the outward Church of Christ on earth, the opposite descriptions of mankind are equally enclosed, but only for a season, a brief season; they will presently be divided. Says our parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." When the net shall be full, when the last saved of the number of God's elect shall be gathered in, the examination will be made, and the separation will take place. There is a time set in God's everlasting purposes,—we know not when, indeed, that time will be according to the measurement of our years, but we know that it will be when the Gospel shall have fulfilled that which it has been sent for; for, according to the Master-Fisher, it must not return void and empty, but full. And so the net is now filling, faster at some times than at others, all along continuing to be filled until it will be drawn to shore, the shore of eternity; and then will the dividing process take place.

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From this parable, and from the corresponding one of the wheat and the tares, we see what a mistake we make if we expect to find anywhere a perfect Church upon earth. To expect the Church to be a community of perfect saints is to expect more than its divine Founder ever expected, according to the words of His own parables. There was a Balaam among the prophets of God, and Achan in the camp of Israel, a Judas numbered with the twelve apostles, an Ananias and Sapphira connected with the first little flock in Jerusalem. In the Corinthian, Galatian, and Ephesian Churches, planted and superintended by St. Paul, there arose bad ministers and disreputable private Christians. No wonder, then, that in our church and charges there should be found reprehensible and undesirable material, and no preaching, however powerful and faithful, no discipline, however strict and prudent, no watchfulness, however careful and ready, can ever make it otherwise. Even to the end of the world the goats will mingle with the sheep, the tares grow up with the wheat, whilst the nets are being filled, the bad fish will be gathered with the good. Perfection is not to be found this side of heaven.

The second error pointed out by this part of our subject is this, that we must not seek, by force or persecution, to get rid of what we may call putrid or unprofitable fish. Church discipline is, indeed, enjoined in the Scripture in regard to doctrine and in regard to practice. When Paul writes to Titus: "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," and advises the Corinthians concerning the man guilty of incest, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person,"—when a person has become manifest as an outspoken disbeliever or as an open transgressor of God's Law, flagrant in his morals, then it becomes incumbent upon a congregation to admonish, to discipline, for the saving of his soul, that person. Church discipline is not intended to cast away, but to bring back to proper belief and proper conduct, to save a person's soul, to keep him in the net, by removing his error and inducing him to live a decent life.

However, if such a one obstinately persists in his wickedness, then it commends itself to every one that he can no longer be admitted to fellowship.

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But it is not this quality of fish that our parable speaks about. In fact, such, to make it plainer, are no fish at all; they are vermin, lizards, or whatever species of reptile you wish to name them. A man that is outspoken in unbelief and profligate in his morals is not within the Gospel net. Christ in this parable is speaking of such people as wished to be recognized as Christians, confess themselves as spiritual and converted children of the Kingdom, and as long as they do that, we may have our serious doubts as to their sincerity; we may, as we see their faults and obliqueness of conduct, consider their Christianity of a rather dubious specimen or type—hypocritical is the common term. But it's not for us to read them out of the membership of the saints, much less dare the Church deny them access to the house of God, or resort to external force, police or military measures to enforce her teachings and persecute those who differ from her. Has that ever been done, you question? My dear hearers, the robes of the professing Church are red with the blood of saints, because it has failed to heed the parables of our consideration to-day. We think of a John Huss, a forerunner of the Reformation, taken to the stake at Constance, burned as an arch-heretic; of the Albigenses and Waldenses, persecuted, slaughtered by the so-called holy Christian Church, banished for no other cause but adherence to their Bibles. We call to our remembrance the scenes of the Inquisition, the horrible treatments and tortures, when Rome undertook to separate the bad from the good, and destroyed thousands of Christians better than herself, 18,000 in the Netherlands, 60,000 in France. We can still hear the bells tolling on that fatal day, August 24, 1572, called St. Bartholomew's Day, when the signal for a massacre was given that cost 30,000 Huguenots their lives in the streets of Paris. Time fails us to speak of England and Germany with their gruesome thirty years of religious war, of the countries where fanaticism, armed with the sword, wished to root out what it thought was tares, and cast away the bad fish; and let us mark that the Pope resides not only in Rome, but there are a multitude of little popes everywhere, judging and pronouncing on one another, with all the stringency and self-confidence of their colossal type in Rome, their anathemas, and who would, if they could, quickly and radically empty the net. But, says the Savior, let them be gathered together until the day of separation.

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And by whom, to continue the parable, will the separation be made? Not by the fishermen, the ministers; for they are liable to make great and fatal mistakes. Ministers cannot see people's hearts. They may often think, "These are God's elect," when God says, "I know them not," and the reverse. No, my brethren, ministers will be sifted like the rest, themselves be classed either with the wicked or the just, and, strange as it may sound, those who have cast the nets, may themselves be cast away. God will, therefore, according to the parable, employ brighter agents for this important work. "The angels," it says, "shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just." The same is told in the parable of the tares. "The reapers are the angels"; and they will do their work with perfect accuracy. They will make no mistakes. The angel that passed over the houses in Egypt committed no error. Every house on whose door-posts was the blood he spared, while in every house where the blood was not seen he left a first-born dead. So, in the separation on the final day, these celestial reapers will see at a glance who have been justified by the Lord and sanctified by the Spirit, and who have not. Not one will escape their discerning eye. Oh! what a separation that will be. There will be no haste, no precipitation; all will be calm and judicial. The angels will "sit down," as the term is, to denote the calm inquiry and the patient investigation of each member of the visible Church; and the good they will then gather into vessels, into the mansions above; but the bad will they cast away into a furnace of fire, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Methinks that these concluding words of our Lord are the most terrible that can be anywhere found, and yet, withal, they are the words of a loving Savior, graciously telling us beforehand what the result of the final separation will be. Well may we heed for our instruction the solemn appeal: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

There only remains now for me, to rivet these lessons upon your minds, two further remarks: First, be not offended; secondly, be not deceived. Too often do we hear the remark, "There are too many hypocrites in the Church, I don't care to associate with such people." You are right, my dear friend; but such a clear-sighted person as you are will certainly not judge a Christian Church by the faulty character of some of its members. Have you remained unmarried because some people have proved failures in marriage? Or do you keep your children from being educated because some educated people are great rascals? Is this the fault of marriage or education? And will you contend that the Word of God and the water of Holy Baptism make those who hear and receive it hypocrites and spiritual counterfeits? What hollowness of reasoning! You would not spurn the gold because it is embedded in quartz, or discard the diamond because it lies buried in sand, or refuse the daylight because there is a spot on the sun. You know too well that a cause must be judged by its principles, its teachings, and not by the faults and failures of its adherents. And so when the question arises as to your connection with the Church of Christ, it is for you to consider the principles and doctrine of that, and act accordingly.

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Again, be not deceived. We are all of us, in a sense, in the net; and in the net are to be found of every kind, good and bad. Which are we? Christ tells us that *many*—not a few—many at the last day, will cry to Him, saying, "Lord, we have heard Thy ministers preach, and by them Thou hast taught us in our churches;" but He will say: "Depart from me; I never knew you." Do you, then, belong among the good? *i. e.*, those who have their souls appareled in the garments of Christ's goodness? In other words, are you a sincere and simple believer in Christ Jesus? Then shall you be cast into the vessels. May God grant us a favorable judgment when the drag-net of the Gospel is drawn to the everlasting shore! Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Is thine eye evil because I am good?—*Matt. 20, 15.*

Such was the question put by the householder, in the parable, to the laborers that murmured against him. He had gone forth early in the morning to hire men for his vineyard. He discovers that those engaged at first were not enough, so he continues to go forth at different times during the day to the market-place to employ others. With those first hired he had made a stipulated contract, fixing the wages at so much; with those later hired no such fixed agreement was made, but merely the general promise given that he would pay them whatever was fair and just. In the evening, when the work was over, and the steward ready to pay off the men, he directed to give them all one and the same coin; each was to receive a penny, the value of which, considering all things, was about \$1.50 in our present-day currency, a common laborer's wage. Whereupon, relates the parable, those who had been in the vineyard all the day thought themselves hardly, unjustly treated. They said, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal with us which have borne the burden of the day." "So I have," said the master of the vineyard to one of those murmurers; I have paid you alike, but have you not received your just due, the sum you agreed for? "Take that thine is, and go thy way. Have I not the right to do as I like with my own money?" And so, if I choose to remunerate these men after the manner that I have, what hurt or worry is that to thee? "Is thine eye evil because I am good?"

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Let us regard for our study and profit this morning this one particular, "the evil eye," noting *I. its nature, II. its cure.* And may God bless His Word!

What, to begin with, is meant by an "evil eye"? It may in different places of the Bible mean different things. What is meant in the text is clear enough. The evil eye here is such an eye as the laborers in the vineyard had when they looked askance at their neighbor's good fortune. An evil eye, therefore, is a grudging, an envious eye. To say of any one in this sense that he has an evil eye, is the same as saying that he is of a grudging, an envious turn of mind. Now, this particular turn of mind is far more common than it ought to be. The divine Householder still has occasion to ask, "Is thine eye evil?" It is a spirit very general, in truth, it is the moral epidemic of the world, it is found everywhere, and more or less in everybody, yourself, my dear hearers, myself not excepted. We open our Bibles, and we read of Ahab, King of Israel, dwelling in the midst of affluence and of plenty, yet he goes to his royal palace, heavy and displeased, and lays himself down on his bed and will not eat,—why? His evil eye grudged a poor vineyard which Naboth would not surrender. Haman was the favorite of King Ahasuerus, the mighty ruler of Babylon. All the princes of Persia pay him respect and riches are his; the evil eye has stung his heart, and he says, "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate, who will not bow to me." Nor is it confined to the rich, this grudging cast of mind. Coming down the ladder of life, who were the people that murmured against the owner of the vineyard? Were they not common laborers, who had been hired to work for the day, day laborers? And the disease is prevalent among them yet to-day. The disposition to grumble and tease themselves into dissatisfaction and discontent over the good estate of their more favored and fortunate fellow-men, is not this the fundamental heresy of Socialism, the evil eye? Again, coming from the various classes of men to the different spheres of life, in the private and social sphere, what mean those jealousies and rivalries that are ever dividing a neighbor from a neighbor, friend from friend, relatives from relatives? Because the one possesses more of this world's money or goods, because one is more attractive and amiable in person, has greater intellectual endowments, is more popular, eloquent, skilled, holds a position superior, he becomes the occasion for a brother or a sister or a neighbor to envy him, and the butt of all sorts of petty and annoying uncharitableness on the part of relatives. Example: Because he was beloved by his father and had dreamed a dream which showed him superior to them, Joseph was hated by his brothers, and they could not speak peaceably to him. No, let us beware of flattering ourselves that this malignant eye is not in the Church. The vineyard of the parable symbolizes the Church. The minister of the Gospel who looks askance with green-eyed jealousy at another whose efforts are crowned with greater success than his own; the Sunday-school teacher who throws up the work in wounded self-love because some one else occupies the place and prestige he or she covets; the over-sensitive member who smarts under the feeling that his or her talents are not sufficiently recognized, their efforts duly respected and flattered, and so withdraws altogether from every kind of cooperation and enterprise, may all look into, and carefully examine, their spiritual eyesight in the light of this text.

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And having regarded the prevalency of the evil eye, what shall we say to it? It is something foolish. It shows a want of thought. People are envied for their superiority in fortune and estate, but the distinction between the gifts of God to man are not so wide as you may think. The rich man has his park, the poor man can look at it and enjoy it without the expense of maintaining it. Some people live in a stately mansion, but they have to pay very heavily for the privilege. The rich man has his valuable picture gallery; but to see the sun rise in the morning and set in golden splendor in the evening is a picture such as no human artist can paint. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniences and delights of the better favored, but, in return, he is free from the many embarrassments to which they are subject. By the simplicity and uniformity of his life he is delivered from a variety of cares. His plain meal eaten with relish and appetite is more delicious than the luxurious banquet. You are acquainted with the story that tells of the king who invited a dissatisfied subject of his realm to visit him in his palace. He put a rich spread

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before him in his banquet hall, and asked him to indulge heartily. But the man instantly turned pale, and his appetite was gone, as, accidentally looking up, he beheld a sharp sword suspended by a tiny thread over his head. Then why envy the man whom God has gifted with talents of mind and tongue? Greater gifts entail greater responsibilities, toil, study, and more arduous duties. Foolish!

Moreover, what does all this envy of a fellow-man's better fortune avail? For me to pine over my neighbor's better fortune, for me to covet his superior talents of mind or beauty of person, will not make me more attractive and talented. What folly, then, because you are not so fortunate as another to make yourself miserable over it! "Envy," says a certain writer, "is the source of endless vexation, an instrument of self-torture, a rottenness in the bones, a burning, festering ulcer of the soul."

But the evil eye is not only foolish, it is more, it is positively sinful, and to indulge in such a spirit leads into all sorts of misery and woe. Because she was envious, Mother Eve stretched out her hand, and, eating, brought a blight on Paradise and a curse over God's creation. Because envy filled his heart, the first child born into this world rose up and slew his innocent brother. Because of envy Joseph was cast into the pit by his brothers. Why was David persecuted by King Saul? Why did Ahab shed the blood of Naboth? Why did the high priests, the scribes and Pharisees seek the death of the Holiest and Best that ever trod this earth, and did not rest till they fastened their eyes upon His agonizing form on the cross? What was it? Envy. It has ever been the mother of every evil work and vice. And its workings are to-day no different than then. In how many thousand ugly shapes does it show itself!

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Now, this is the most important part, how may it be overcome? What is the remedy, or the remedies, that might be suggested? The laborers had been called into the vineyard, the householder was under no obligation to hire them; that he did so was by his own free choice. In a much higher sense, the heavenly Householder has placed us into this world. He has given us certain things, certain talents; some of us have received more, some less, but all that all of us have in body, mind, and estate we have from Him. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" "By the grace of God I am what I am." Whatever we have we have from God. Seeing this, and that all alike are but the recipients of God's gifts, for me to be envious of another, whom God has given more, argues dissatisfaction, discontent with God's will and ways. God well knows how to distribute His gifts, and why He distributes them as He does; and so let no one of us arraign His providence. You have and receive just what is fair, and just that you should receive, and so learn to be content with that. "Take that thine is, and go thy way." That would I suggest as the first remedy against envy,—contentment, a sense of the conviction that what we have is given us all by grace, God's kind favor, and that He gives us just what is proper and right.

The second remedy is this, that we bear in mind that envy is the spirit of the devil. Heaven and heavenly creatures are never envious; hell and its occupants are aflame with it. Envy is against the Fifth Commandment, which reads: "Thou shalt not kill," a disposition of the heart that lusteth unto murder. St. Paul classifies it among the works of the flesh, putting it in such company as adultery, fornication, idolatry, murder, drunkenness, and the like, and over and against such things and associations a Christian's mind and conduct is plain. We must fight it and avoid it. Not the evil spirit, but the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is to rule in our hearts, and Christ's Spirit is a Spirit of love, not the evil eye, but the good eye, the eye that wishes good and rejoices in the good of his neighbor. Since we cannot have both an evil and a good eye, it is for us to consult the heavenly Oculist. Let us pray God to help us against this murderous spirit; it is a work of the flesh; in a word, ask Him for the "good eye," and use it. That is, cultivate the spirit of rejoicing over the good fortune and success of another, giving due recognition to his talents and his endeavors, thanking God that, if one cannot himself do it so well, there is another whom He has given the means and ability to serve Him. Remedy second, then: root it out with God's help. He can do that, and He will do that, if we ask Him.

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And to come back to the parable, it is only the workman who puts aside the evil eye that is acceptable in the Lord's vineyard and does His work well. The person that is always bent on his own honor, dignity, and self-consciousness is easily offended, and easily draws back. The superiority or success of another unnerves him, and not infrequently he acts like a balking horse. Not so the person who has been with the Divine Oculist, and has received in the place of the evil the good eye. He is willing to pluck grapes in a corner of the Lord's vineyard where they are not so plentiful and luscious. What if there was a St. Paul and an Augustine and a Luther and a Walther, and if to-day we have men in the ministry who quite overshadow me? Shall I for that reason keep my hands from filling grapes into my church basket? Nevermore. Should you, because you are no church officer or esteemed pillar in the sanctuary? Even if you cannot pluck some grapes, you may at least hold the basket.

The Church has a place for everybody; five times did the householder go out to hire laborers. It has a place for you; but when you come, leave behind you the evil eye. For that the Church has no place. Let every one think seriously over the text, examine his eyesight, ask God's forgiveness, for Christ's sake, for the sins he has committed in this respect, and help with His divine help to overcome it, so that he may be found an approved laborer in God's vineyard. Amen.

This year marks an event of more than passing interest to the English-speaking world, *viz.*, the tercentenary or 300th birthday of the translation of the Bible. It was in 1611, early in the summer, when, after seven years of the most painstaking labors, the most scholarly men of that time completed and turned over for publication their manuscripts. It was styled the King James Version or Translation, because it was with the help and patronage of that monarch of England, King James, that it was issued; and so as the Germans speak of Dr. Luther's Bible translation, the English speak of King James' Version.

It is this translation of God's Word that lies before us, for though in the past three centuries there have been more than a score of worthy revisions, none has dislodged this from its place of supremacy, and so it is fitting that grateful mention should be made of the glorious work, the blessings of which continue to flow out to us whenever we open the holy pages.

It must be remembered that the Bible, prior to these translations, was a sealed book. One seal was the tyrannical policy of the Church of Rome, that forbade the people to read it for themselves. Chained to the altar of some cathedral or to the wall of some library, like that which Luther discovered in the University at Erfurt, it was securely clasped and locked. The only persons who had anything to do with it were the monks, who in their dark and obscure cells would spend their days mechanically copying the sacred parchments. It was in this respect, indeed, a sealed book. Another seal were the languages in which it was written, so that, even if the people had possessed a copy, they would for that reason have been unable to read it; Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were things they could not understand and read. And to this might be added another seal, *viz.*, that the Church of Rome had well seen to it that the majority of the people could not read at all. Ignorance among the masses was profound.

Now, thank God, no such seals exist. There is no prohibition of Bible reading in this land. There are to-day more Bibles than ever; it is the very best seller of all books, and no one dares forbid us to read God's Word as freely as we please. We also have the Scriptures in our own tongue, and never has there been a time in the world's history when people were as universally able to read. And yet, glorious as this all is, is it not true that the Bible is a book that is shut and sealed? Which is that seal? That seal, my dear hearers, is one of the people's own making, one that they themselves place upon it,—it is a lack of genuine study of it. They do not go and search the Scriptures that they may learn the wonderful things it has to teach them. If, then, I shall succeed in a measure to break that seal, and to stimulate you to Bible study, I shall consider that God has blessed the humble effort of His servant.

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We shall regard this morning: *I. Why you should read your Bibles. II. How you should read them.*

Why you should read them. Because God says so. "Search the Scriptures," is His plain and authoritative command. We are well enough acquainted with the arguments of Rome that would tell us it is a great mistake to let every layman read the Bible. See what confusion it has caused. Whence came all these hundred and one different sects, these endless conflicting opinions, this skepticism among you Protestants? Is it not because you permit every one, without distinction and discrimination, to read the Bible? To which we answer: By no means. That is not the fault of the Bible. That some have wrested the Scripture to their own harm, misused it, does not do away with its proper use. God has beautifully made this world, and it is full of His blessing; that some, in selfishness and sinfulness, abuse it, is not His fault nor that of His gifts. He has given man His only-begotten Son for their salvation; the fact that hundred thousands do not accept and believe in Him is not God's fault, nor His Son's, nor His Gospel's, nor His Church's fault. Just as destitute of all sound reason it is to place the abuses which some have made with the Bible to the Bible itself.

No, clearly, distinctly, positively rings out God's command: "Search the Scriptures." He bids us do it. He points to each and every one of us, as if to say, "Thou do it." Does it not lie in the very nature of the Book? For whom did He cause it to be written? For the clergy, that the ministers might have some texts to preach on? No more so than He gave the Ten Commandments only to the clergy. They are the universal possession, they are for all the laity as well as the clergy. And to whom, as you examine the Inspired Volume, are most of its contents directed? There are the fourteen letters, or epistles, of St. Paul. A few of them, like those to Timothy and Titus, are addressed to a clergyman, but the greater majority are addressed to the congregations at Rome, at Ephesus, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, and so forth, to the members accordingly. Moreover, the direction in many places is, that the hearers should examine what the preachers say, lest they preach something contrary to the Scriptures. How could the hearers do this if they were prohibited from reading the Bible? Away, then, with this opinion that is gaining ground, that the Bible is a professional clergyman's text-book, and let the personal application strike home in your own case, Thou shalt search the Scriptures.

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And one other reason does God furnish us in the text why we should read it. He says, "For in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." Those are deep, wonderful words; they tell what Bible reading benefits, brings us, *viz.*, eternal life. That this present life is not all there is to life, that there is a life besides and after this, that all men in all ages and in all countries have conjectured; that life is dependent upon a right relation to God, this, too, an inward monitor, called conscience, however unwelcome may be its voice, tells every one with greater or less distinctness; but how man is to get into right relations with his God, to that problem one book, the Bible, and it alone, holds the key. What is that key? The text says it:

"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think we have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." "Me," is the speaker, Jesus Christ, and doing what the text directs, we find that everywhere does it link "life" with Christ. "I," says Jesus, "am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "I am come that ye might have life." The writings of the Apostles are full of the same thought: "In Him was life." "He that hath the Son hath life." "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life." "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

Would we, then, have life, life that is life indeed, spiritual life, life that passes over into eternal life, then must we find it in Christ, and this is the teaching of the text, and its application to us; to find Christ you must read your Bible. Outside of what the Bible tells us there is no salvation, no hope, no life. Let that thought, I pray you, sink down indelibly into your minds. There are some certain truths which men may know without the Bible,—that there is a God; that this God has certain attributes; that He is almighty, all-knowing, holy, just, gracious; for it is only an almighty Being that could have created, only an all-wise Being that could so adequately have fitted up this universe. Men also know without the Bible that there is a difference between good and evil, and that the one is to be done and the other left undone. Likewise they have a strong notion that man is immortal, and that there is a future state. These few things men may know without the Scriptures, and these few even only imperfectly. But when it comes to the questions: Who is God? What is His will? What His purposes toward us men, purposes of damnation for offenses and sins committed against His holiness? What guarantee have you that there is a life beyond this? And what sort of a life is it? Who has ever brought us information regarding it? What can afford me peace against a conscience that convicts me of wrong and offense against the holy God? When, as stated, it comes to deal with such and innumerable other questions, there is only one source of information, one book that can enlighten and instruct us, and that is this Book which God Himself has inspired to be written; in which He has revealed Himself, according to His person and His attributes; in which He proclaims His plan of salvation for the sinful and condemned race of men, and opens out to them with divine assurance the gates of immortality and life. There is none equal to it, nothing like it, it stands in a class all to itself,—it is not man's book, but God's.

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Wouldst thou, then, my dear hearer, know these things that affect thy soul, thy salvation, thy everlasting destiny, then take this volume and read. So much as to the first concern, why we should read it. Because God commands it. Because of what it brings us. And now let us regard: How should we read it?

Here I would say, first, regularly, with pious consistency. It is well enough for a person to come to church on Sunday. As long as he does that, and attends to what is going on there, his soul is not left altogether without spiritual nourishment. But church comes only once a week, and if the soul gets no spiritual food beyond what it may pick up there, I leave you to judge whether it is likely to shoot up into a strong and healthy growth of godliness. The First Psalm describes the godly man as delighting in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law doth he meditate both day and night. Time, indeed, for the most of us may be very limited; but none of us—I say that without fear of challenge—but can, if he wishes and so wills, find a few minutes to read a verse or two when he comes home in the evening, or before he goes to work in the morning, or while going to work, and a couple of verses well thought over will do a person more good than whole chapters swallowed without thought. Resolve to do but this little, my dear hearers, and God, who judges us according to our means, and who looked with greater favor on the two mites of the poor widow than on all the golden offerings of the rich, will accept your two verses and enable your souls to grow and gain strength by this their daily food. The doctors tell us that our health is largely determined by the regularity of our habits, and this is as true of our spiritual health as of our bodily. There is none of us who fails to take a glance at the daily paper,—why not at the Bible? Be regular.

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Then, again, as you have time, read it carefully. That is the direction of the text. The word "search" in the original is a very strong one, much stronger than "read." It may be rendered "ransack." Turn up and down,—bring all your industry to bear upon the quest. One trouble with our hearers is that they imagine that they are pretty well familiar with all the Bible has to tell them, and the result is that they miss the wealth of its hidden treasures. But there is no royal road to Bible knowledge. It calls for thought, earnest research, and thorough investigation. For that reason every one, to become right practical, every member of the family should have a Bible of his or her own, of clear type and good paper, and of substantial binding. On the margin that Bible ought to have the marginal references of which I spoke to you at length in a former service. In the rear of your Bible have a concordance; there you will find a large number of passages on a certain topic, for instance, prayer. Look them up in your Bible, compare them, and you will learn what the Bible has to say regarding prayer. So of other subjects, such as faith, charity, redemption, and the like. It is profitable and delightful work. It is like digging out gold. You will not mind the labor in the fascinating charm it has for you. And to this you may add as a most helpful guide a good commentary written by some sincere lover of God's Word. What other devout and learned students of God's Word have written it is well for us to profit by in our understanding of the precious volume.

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Not a charm or an ornament to keep on our shelves or to lock up in our closets, not a story-book to read for amusement, is the Bible, but, as the text tells us, the means of giving us eternal life in Christ Jesus; and so we ought to make use of it.

There, then, it is—Holy Bible, Book Divine, our chief treasure in this sin-darkened world, giving strength, comfort, and salvation. Ah! who should not prize it, read it, search it? God make us ministers and our members Bible students; how much better ministers, how much better

members we would then be!

May God bless the words of our lips and the meditation of our hearts! Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.—*Rom. 3, 23.*

A few days more, and we shall have entered upon Lent. What is Lent? Lent is a time of several weeks which for ages has been set apart among Christians for a period of more than usual seriousness. As observed in our Church, it is a time marked out from the rest of the year as more especially devoted to the contemplation of those vital truths on which our Christian religion is founded. To be brief, Lenten time with us is Passion time. Passion, in simple English, means suffering, more particularly, the suffering of Christ. Accordingly, Passion time, or Passion tide, is the season when we are more especially called upon to commemorate, and call to mind, and ponder, and think over the suffering of our Savior, Christ, those scenes announced in the Gospel when He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and by them was falsely accused, reviled, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified.

In order that we might do that in the proper manner, as we ought to do, the Church, from the earliest period, has appointed the forty days of Lent, just as it has appointed the four Sundays in Advent, to be a preparation for Christmas. For there are two great seasons in the year which it behooves every Christian to conscientiously observe, if he wishes to pay dutiful honor to his Savior.

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The first season is Christmas, in memory of His loving kindness in coming down from heaven, putting on the nature of man. The other season is Lent, to commemorate His dying love. Both these seasons are so important, of such moment to the welfare of the soul, that the Church has set apart the four Sundays which come before Christmas and the forty days which come before Easter as a time of preparation. The wisdom of such an arrangement no one can doubt. Just like the early bell on Sunday is meant to call us to get ready for church, the service of God's house, so Advent and Lent call us to get ready for Christmas and Good Friday. When a musical instrument has been laid by for a while, it needs tuning, or it will make but sorry music. The minds and hearts of most Christians, too, require to be gotten into tune before they can bear their part fitly and harmoniously in the services by which the Church commemorates the death and resurrection of her Lord. And how? What is the best way to prepare for a profitable and advantageous Lent? That is conditioned by another question: What was it that delivered our blessed Lord into the hands of those wicked men, that caused Him that shameful treatment, mockery, and finally nailed Him to the cross? The malice of the chief priest, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pontius Pilate? Deeper, my beloved, deeper; they were but the instrumental, not the procuring cause. The real cause, you know it, was something else,—sin. To do away with, to secure the pardon of that, Christ died. Then it is plain, that in order to understand the value of His suffering, to observe that season aright, we must begin with being convinced of the evil, of the exceeding hatefulness and danger of sin.

Here is the first elementary truth which meets us at the threshold of Lent, without which it will be of no more value to you than a lock without a key, a mine without a shaft; herein consists its best preparation, to secure a right conviction of sin. That, God blessing the effort, shall be the intent of our sermon.

When the ostrich, scouring along the sandy desert, finds that it cannot escape the huntsman, it is said to thrust its head into a bush, and fancying that the danger which it ceases to see has ceased to exist, it remains there, quite tranquil, to receive the death-blow of the huntsman. Poor, senseless, stupid bird! Yet not one degree more so than is the folly of many who are not birds, but possessed of reason and soul. Plenty there are who, shutting their eyes to the evil, burrowing their heads in the sand-heap of excuses and false peace, thus hide until the fatal stroke of death puts an end to their earthly career, and opening their eyes in a place where there is no repentance, as the rich man in the parable, they realize that it is too late.

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If we turn to the Bible, it teaches that there are two great classes or kinds of sin; and if we turn to the witness within and the evidence without, we shall find what the Bible tells us everywhere corroborated and borne out. The one kind of sin is the Original or Birth Sin, that all men are naturally engendered, are conceived and born in sin; that is, they are all, from their mother's womb, full of evil desires and propensities, and that this is the fountainhead of all other, or actual, sins, such as evil thoughts, words, and deeds. There are many who reject this doctrine; they contend that when man is born into this world, his soul is as pure as the snow that comes down in beautiful flurries from the sky, and as perfect as the vessel that passes from the potter's hand; they tell us that we are God's favorite creatures, that He has made us lords of the creation and heirs of eternal life, and that, therefore, it is quite impossible that we should be so prone to sin, as our Church, setting forth the doctrine of the Bible in her confession, declares us to be. But they are willfully ignorant. The question whether we are prone to sin from our cradles upward is a mere question of fact. One has only to look into one's own heart, and what do you find there, good or evil? You will say, a little of both. Be it so; but tell me, or rather tell yourselves, honestly and truly, which of the two cost you the most trouble to learn, and which of the two comes the easier? Is there a doubt? Does one contract good habits easier than bad, or the reverse? Is it

easier for a sober man to become a drunkard than for a poor, miserable, besotted drunkard to trace his steps back and to become sober? Or, another point of view. Ask mothers, accustomed to watch their children from earliest infancy, whether every child that has come under their observation had not something to learn that was good, and something to unlearn that was evil. Now, whence did this evil come from? It cannot have been taught to the child, for the evil showed itself at a time before all teaching; it had it naturally. And so it is in other things. The good wheat must be sown and looked after, or it will never amount to much. The weeds sprout up and spread of themselves, and it is as great a labor to keep them down as to get the good wheat up. The truth is, "Like begetteth like." "In Adam's fall we sinned all." The fountain was polluted, so is the stream; sin is born in the bone, as it were, and without God's help we can no more mend it than a sick man can mend and cure himself without the help of a physician.

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But this original sin is not the only kind. Though men deny that, they cannot deny the other, what our Catechism calls Actual Sin. Like trees in the forest does it surround them. Where is the man that dares affirm that he has never been guilty of doing what he should never have done, or guilty of not doing what he should have done? Lives there a person so happy as to look back on the past and feel no remorse, or forward to the future and feel no fear? What? Is there no page of your history that you would obliterate, no leaf that, with God's permission, you would tear from the book of life's story? To David's prayer, "Lord, remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions," have you no solemn and hearty Amen? If you could be carried back to the starting-post, and stood again at your mother's knee, and sat again at the old school desk with companions that are now changed, or scattered, or dead, or gone, were you to begin life anew, would you run the selfsame course, would you live over the selfsame life? Is there no speech to unsay, no act to undo, no day, Sunday, or evening to spend better? No one among those with whom you are now living or among those that have gone before—to whom you would bear yourself otherwise than you have done? Where is there a breathing man that can say: "I am pure in my heart. I am clear from all sin"? If he does, he deceives himself, the truth is not in him. As well deny your existence as deny the existence of actual sin.

But what men will not deny they will seek to excuse. It were amusing, if it were not a matter so serious, to observe with what palliation and apologies defenses are thrown up by which, after all, men's sins do not look so exceedingly sinful. Thus there be those who say: If we are naturally born to evil, as the Bible says and our experience testifies, we cannot help it, and how can it be a fault of ours if we do wrong? And how can God blame and punish us for not being better than He made us? It is thus that Scotland's famous poet, Burns, sings:

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Thou knowest that Thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong,
And listening to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

In other words, I am a sinner, but the fault is not mine, but God's.

Or, again, they ascribe the blame to the power of temptation. "The serpent beguiled me," was the excuse of the first sinner; it is still, in a more or less measure, the excuse of every sinner. Temptation came upon them so suddenly and with such stealth and vehemence that it swept them off their feet before they were aware of it. Or (once more), like the original sinner, they lay their blame upon their fellow-man. "The woman that Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." What parent or mother has not discovered, in correcting a disobedient boy, that he is uniformly punishing the wrong one? It was always the other boy who brought about the evil act, and so, invariably, it is the bad company, evil influences, peculiar surroundings, locality, that make people to sin.

Whatever the palliatives and excuses, my beloved hearers, the thing will not do; it is vain and ignoble, and, in part, what has been said is blasphemy. In the first place, whatever prompted, tempted the act, the act was done by the sinner himself, and not by another; he knew of it, he consented to it, he gave his members and body to it. It is also useless to say that he was swept away by temptation. The same excuse might the suicide plead who seeks the river, stands on its brink, and, leaping in, is swept off to his watery grave. We go down like Samson to Delilah; we stand in the way of sinners, we frequent the places of guilty pleasures, and then, falling, complain about the strength of temptation. Away with all such subterfuges and opiates that simply drug the conscience!

What is sin? Sin, says God's Word, is the transgression of the Law, the most terrible and abominable thing in this world. Sin is that which drove man out of Paradise garden, robbed him of the divine image, severed the happy relation between him and his Creator, and plunged him into accursedness and misery. Sin is a disease which turns all moral beauty into rottenness, causes all grief and distress, breaks hearts, and fills our cemeteries, man's worst, man's most ruinous and most formidable enemy, that dogs his every footstep in this life, and calls down upon his body and soul the wrath and eternal damnation from a God who hates and who punishes sin.

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What greater comfort, then, than to know how and where to receive deliverance and remedy from it. It has been stated before among the excuses that man is born a sinner, and because born so, he cannot be blamed for sinning, any more than a sick person for dying. He cannot help it. That seems very plausible, indeed. It would be very unjust to blame a sick person for dying, provided there were no remedies; but in a country where there are plenty of physicians and the sick have only to send for them,—if in such a country a sick man is obstinate, and will not send

for a physician, nor take the means of being made well, he is to blame, and if he dies, he is guilty of his own death. And suppose now that the physician does not wait to be sent for, that he comes of his own accord to the sick man's bedside, that he brings a medicine of rare herbs in his hand, and says to the sick man: "My friend, I heard you were very sick, and so I came to see you and fetch you a medicine which is a certain cure if you take it. Never mind your poverty, I ask no payment." But the sick man refuses it; he does not like its look, or he finds it is bitter to take, or a neighbor has told him not to heed the physician, and he dies. Who is to blame? That's our case precisely. We have a soul's sickness. But a great Physician is come to us. He has a dear remedy, a specific, made of the most precious ingredients, *viz.*, His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He brings that medicine to our doors. Shall we refuse to take it? Shall we say that we will have none of it? We may do so; there is no compulsion; this heavenly Physician foists Himself on none. But whose shall be the blame, who be the loser? Be wise, then. Lenten time is repenting time. May we, as it says in the Collect, so pass through this holy time of our Lord that we may obtain the pardon of our sins. May we enter this incoming season with a solemn earnestness toward spiritual things, with a resolve to spend its days in sacred devotion under the cross, and with sorrow over our past failures set ourselves to a better and more consecrated life. And to this may the good Lord graciously incline the hearts of every one of us! Amen.

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FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him and fought with Amalek; And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon: and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side: And his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.—*Exodus 17, 8-13.*

An impressive picture of modern art is that which has for its scene the Evil One, the devil, sitting at a table playing a game of chess. Bending over the board, with the self-possession of a master, reclines the adversary of man. At the opposite side is a young man. There is a look of diabolical glee upon the dark brow of Satan, whilst the features of his playmate wear the signs of deepest agony; for, alas! that which the youth has staked on the results of the game seems hopelessly lost—his immortal soul. Back of the young man, unseen by him, the artist has painted a calm, benignant figure. It is his guardian angel, or better still, the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord, whose heavenly skill at last checkmates the destroyer.

This is not merely poetic and artist's fancy. It is with no cloudy vagueness that the existence of a Spirit of Evil is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. There are many these days who are disposed to laugh at the account which tells us of man's temptation and fall in the Garden as a myth, an Oriental hyperbole, and to characterize the closing chapters of Revelation, which inform us of the Tempter's fall and fate, as allegory and romance. But there still remains scattered throughout the Bible, in connection with every prominent Bible character and Bible event, mention of a personal agent of evil, the foe of God and the foe of man, bent with restless activity and mastery of deceit upon the destruction of souls and the corruption of the creation of God.

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Not a matter of speculation is this belief in the existence and power of the chief of fallen angels, and far wiser and prudent were it if, in place of talking of, people, in humble acceptance of God's Word, would recognize their foe, and seek the strength and means to contend with him.

What we need against the arch-enemy of our souls is the simple faith and the bold defiance that breathes forth in the life, the words, and the hymns of our great Reformer, a spirit which prompted him to do—what is perhaps only a tradition, yet fully characterizes the man—*viz.*, that when his mighty imagination had conjured up before him the very form and face of the Wicked One, he took his inkstand and hurled it at him, leaving behind, as memento, an ugly spot upon the wall of his study.

It is of this conflict with the Prince of Darkness that the text speaks.

Three particulars would we note: *I. The foe to be encountered; II. the weapons employed; III. the victory achieved*, and as Moses was distinctly bidden by God in the 14th verse of the chapter from which our text has been taken: "Write these for a memorial in a book," let us write the words spoken for a memorial on the tablet of our hearts.

We meet the people of God in Rephidim engaged in a fierce encounter with the Amalekites. No doubt, the Lord could have led His people safely through the wilderness without any such conflicts if He had chosen to do so, but He had His own, wise designs in permitting them. And so with Satan's workings and attacks people may argue and speculate. Why did God ever permit such a dangerous foe to exert his malicious power and tempt mankind? Suffice it to answer: It thus seemed good unto Him, and is in perfect accordance with His almightiness and wisdom.

The Amalekites, the people with whom the Israelites were in conflict, were the descendants of Esau, Amalek having been his grandson, and as is wont to be with relatives, unfortunately, the hatred which Esau entertained toward his brother Jacob had become transplanted upon his

children, yea, seems to have grown the more bitter, deeper, and malignant as time progressed. And the offspring of both multiplied into a great and prosperous people. The Amalekites at this time occupied a large tract of land extending from the confines of Idumea to the shores of the Red Sea. When, therefore, Israel crossed over and encamped at the Mount of Sinai, they were close upon their borders; but they offered them no injury nor provocation, and far from invading their territory, they were turning rapidly away from it when Amalek assaulted them, and that in a most dastardly manner; for, not daring to engage them in front, they smote the hindmost of them, even all that were faint and weary, who had lagged behind and were alike incapable of resistance or flight. When Moses became aware of the enemy, he issues command unto Joshua, the military leader: "Choose us out men, and go out, and fight with Amalek; to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand." "So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill." And whilst the battle was raging in the valley, whilst the swords were clashing, the warriors grappling, the wounded groaning, and the fighting masses surging to and fro in fierce and bloody encounter, Moses was stationed upon the brow of Mount Sinai, lifting up his hands in prayer and intercession to the God of Battles. An encouraging sight! From that ancient battle-ground, a picture and pattern, we would direct our eyes unto ourselves.

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Like as of old, we are warriors of the Lord, soldiers of Jesus Christ. We have our Amalek, the old evil Foe, who means deadly woe. Let us take our stand by the side of Moses in the mountain, and for a few moments look at the enemy. Foremost, the leader of the host, is that original tempter, deceiver, destroyer, and murderer, that Wicked One, the Father of Lies, the Prince of Darkness, the roaring lion that goes about seeking whom he may destroy. Marshaled around him, as their mighty captain, are legions of lesser spirit-beings which arithmetic cannot begin to calculate. Scripture tells us that Satan could spare seven devils to torment one poor sinner. What, then, must their number be? And as the Amalekites, they hate us with a perfect hatred. Having by their bad ambition and pride lost heaven and being hurled to the bottomless pit, they are now most bitterly and irreconcilably opposed to everything that stands in connection with the Redeemer and His redeemed. To think that we, who are equally fallen into sin, should be restored to grace, accepted to the very thrones they have lost, is more than their envy can endure. For this reason they pursue us through life, dog our every step, and press us to the very gate of death. What tactics does this spiritual enemy employ? As the enemy in the field, by false signals, feigned movements, masked batteries, and every strategic art, seeks to conceal his position, disguises his plan of attack, just so our spiritual enemies seek to beguile by a thousand stratagems and schemes to mislead the unwary and inexperienced and bring to fall the strongest.

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As in the case of the Amalekites, they attack you in your most vulnerable points and at a time when you are faint and weakest; and they are as vigilant as they are cunning. Always and everywhere they are on the watch for souls. If you come to the house of God, they are here before you; if you enter your room in prayer, you cannot shut them out. By day they compass your path, by night they surround your pillow. Wherever you are they are; whatever you say, they hear it; whatever you do, they perceive it. From our birth to our burial—a frightful thought!—we are perpetually watched by myriads of malignant eyes, unclean and accursed spirits, ready to avail themselves of every opportunity to do us harm and ruin all our hopes. Or need we any examples for what harm they have done? Behold that lovely pair fresh from the Creator's hand walking the groves of Eden, and behold again the outcasts—we know the cause. Observe Job, that perfect man of Uz, robbed of his property and his children, and smitten in body with a sore disease. Who was it that instigated Judas to betray the Lord, Peter to deny Him, all Jerusalem to clamor for His blood, the Roman governor to condemn Him to the cross? St. John said in his day that the whole world was lying in the bosom of the Evil One, and it is much the same to this present day. All men are more or less subject to his influences, and two-thirds of the human race controlled by this evil genius. This, then, is the foe with whom we are obliged to contend.

But how can the lamb cope with the lion? How can we expect to conquer that enemy who conquered our first parents in the strength of their original purity? Truly, "With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected." And yet we have nothing to fear. We have a precious ally, we battle under a valiant, an unconquerable Leader. The Lord of Hosts is with us, just so we are firm in the strife and rightly use the weapons He has furnished us. And which are these? Reading the 13th verse of our text, we find it distinctly mentioned: "And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." And which is our spiritual sword? For our enemy being spiritual, it is evident our weapon must be likewise. Saint Paul gives answer when he says in Ephesians: "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Here, then, Christian warrior, is a weapon, better than Damascus blades. With this our Lord defeated Satan in the wilderness; with this St. Peter pierced the hearts of thousands on Pentecost; with this St. Paul made Felix tremble, and Agrippa, as he confessed to Paul, was almost persuaded by him to become a Christian; with this Martin Luther prevailed against the son of Belial and his besotted minions. Grasp it firmly, wield it vigorously. Or do you claim you do not know how? Then permit me to give you a few general directions. You are all familiar with the story of David and Goliath,—how the great champion of the Philistines daily came forth, cursing and challenging the people of God, until one day a shepherd lad of Bethlehem comes into the camp and with a stone from his sling stretches the huge form of the giant flat upon the ground. You, my beloved, are spiritual Davids; the smooth pebbles you have gathered up from the brook of God's Word are the holy Ten Commandments; learn to sling these aright, and you are invincible. Are you, for instance, tempted to speak the Lord's name irreverently, then place pebble, called the second, in your spiritual sling, which says: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain," and your tempter will fall flat like Philistia's giant. Are you tempted to negligence, indifference in regard to

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the Lord's day and the Lord's house, take No. 3. Would Satan tempt a young Christian to disobedience, to indecency, or an old Christian to dishonesty, intemperance, covetousness,—whatever the sin may be, select the proper pebble, and victory is yours. "This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none, he's judged, the deed is done, one little word can fell him." Then, too, let us remember that we are "more than conquerors through Him that loves us." In His strength let us battle. When the devil would deceive us, or seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice, let us cast ourselves upon Him who vanquished the Evil Foe. His cross is our strength. Let us hold that up before him, and he will skulk away in sullen retreat. The precious Gospel of Christ will quench all the fiery darts of doubt, unbelief, and despair which the hellish enemy would shoot into our hearts. Thus with the Law and the Gospel we can conquer him.

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Nor is this all. Another powerful weapon is placed at our command. Most graphically does our text describe it when it says: "And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." The Israelites would not have conquered had they not fought. But the other is equally as true: they would not have conquered had Moses not prayed. The real decision in the matter seemed not so much in the conflict in the valley as with the man of prayer, the suppliant on the mountain. And here, my dear Christian, still rests your power. Much as people may sneer at prayer in these atheistic and skeptic times, prayer is the hand that moves the world. "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." Our Lord warning Peter addresses him, "Simon Peter, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee"; and His constant exhortation in the sore hour of Gethsemane was, "Watch and pray lest ye fall into temptation." How many a one when he asks himself, How was it possible that I should have fallen so deeply and strayed so far from my God? will hear his conscience whisper: You had grown indifferent, neglectful in your devotion and your prayers, and hence came your failure. Prayer must be incessant and mutual. Two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Moses, Aaron, and Hur, together they prevailed. Where man and wife join in sacred communion to the God of families, His blessing will rest upon them, and the Evil One be kept at bay. Where a congregation is strong in devout and earnest looking to God, it can accomplish wonders against the Prince of Darkness and the wickedness of the world. When the day closed and the sun had sunk beneath the battle-ground in Rephidim, the victory was won; Amalek was defeated. It was Israel's first achievement, but not their last. Amalek continued to harass them, and even Saul and David had to take up arms against them. Nor is it different with us. The spiritual campaign lasts "until we draw our fleeting breath, till our eyelids close in death"; hence, "from strength to strength go on, wrestle, and fight, and pray, tread all the powers of darkness down, and win the well-fought day." And if at times your hands would grow weary and your knees weak amidst the conflict in the valley, then look up like Israel of old to the mountain from whence cometh your help, to that blessed knoll where hangs our divine Moses with his arms extended,—look up to the cross. Amen.

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SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.—*2 Tim. 4, 10.*

There is nothing sadder, my beloved hearers, nothing more calculated to strike dread into the heart, than the punishment of a deserter in the army. The offender is led before his regiment, and after the rehearsal of his disgrace to his fellow-soldiers, his arms are pinioned, his eyes bandaged, and an open coffin stands ready to receive his lifeless body. The file of soldiers aim at the one fluttering heart, and the lightning-like death ends the dreadful scene.

And why is a deserter's doom made so awful? Simply because the crime of desertion is so great, its demoralizing effect which it would have on the army so fatal, that it must be punished in the most telling and fearful manner. History, both sacred and secular, has put no deeper brand of infamy than on deserters. Benedict Arnold stands forth as an instance of the one, Judas Iscariot as an instance of the other. American history holds up the one before us, bandaged, pinioned, shot through with the bullets of a nation's abhorrence and malediction, whilst the other, Judas, is a name detested as far as the Bible is read and to the day of doom.

In our text we read of another deserter. His name is Demas, and the Apostle Paul has set the mark of infamy upon him.

Who, we question, was this man Demas? And what was the nature of his offense? We know very little of his early career, but that little is most favorable. He had been an associate of St. Paul in the ranks of Christ's followers. Paul more than once makes honorable mention of his name. When he wrote his letter to the Church at Colossae, he coupled the name of Demas with that of St. Luke. He thus writes: "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you," which shows that he must have been favorably known in the Church, and that his greetings must have been highly thought of, else would the apostle not have forwarded them through his own letter.

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And one more fact do we know of him. He not only professed love toward Christ, but he had once suffered for his Christian profession. He most likely had worn the honorable mark of prison chains in the name and for the sake of Christ. In his letter to Philemon, St. Paul, remembering his companions in suffering, writes: "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Lucas, my fellow-laborers." So the apostle once wrote from a

Roman prison of Demas, and it was from the same prison that he afterwards sadly penned these painful words: "Demas hath forsaken me." And why? Did his health fail? Did he go to labor elsewhere? Paul tells us: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." There we have the reason, and it is one that we shall more clearly regard in our instruction these moments.

On the previous Lord's day we considered the first great enemy of our soul, Satan. To-day we come to the second, the world, reserving the third, the flesh, God willing, for next Sunday. To deal practically and directly with the matter, let us ask the questions: *I. What is worldliness, and how can I tell whether I am worldly or not? II. How can I overcome my worldliness?* And may God's wisdom and blessing attend our meditation!

If we read our Bible carefully, my beloved, we shall be impressed, overwhelmed by the number of Scripture passages which refer to God's people and their relation to this world. These passages are found in the Old Testament and in the New, and they are plain-spoken, their own interpretation. In the Old Testament they are such as these: "Deliver my soul from men of the world, who have their portion in this life." "And ye shall be holy unto me, for I, the Lord, am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."

In the New Testament we find the passages still more explicit and manifold. To begin with, there is nothing that Jesus teaches with greater frequency or with greater positiveness than this fact, that we are to be unworldly in our Christian life. "Ye are not of the world," He declares, "for I have chosen you out of the world." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

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And as the Master, so His apostles. "Be not conformed," exhorts Paul, "to this world." "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." James writes: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "True religion before God is to keep oneself unspotted from the world." And to finish our quotations with the words of St. John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." There is nothing uncertain about these statements. Their teaching is clear. They declare that there is a broad and ineffaceable line of demarcation between the people of God and the world. They are so far apart that no man can belong to both at the same time. To try to do so produces an absurd piety and a sham, is as foolish as trying to mix light and darkness, oil and water. They refuse to mix. It means either—or, one or the other. Either Christianity will have the sway, and it will conquer and eradicate the world, or the world will have the sway, and it will efface Christianity. The world proposes a compromise, it is true, but the compromise always means death; that is why it proposes it. How imperative, then, that we should analyze what worldliness is and plant an interrogation in our heart: Am I worldly?

What, then, is worldliness? There are some who have no difficulty whatever in defining it. "Worldliness," why, that's easily explained; going to races, theaters, balls, playing euchre and dressing flashily—that's it. No doubt it is; but worldliness does not confine itself merely to theaters and balls, cards and dress. There are hundreds of people who have never been inside of a ballroom, rarely or never attended a theater, and yet they may be intensely worldly for all that. Worldliness implies something vastly more and deeper. It is something which affects not only the external acts of a person, but the heart; something which is determined by the spirit with which we do things, and not so much by the things with which we have to do. It is not the earth, the objects and the people that fill this earth, that we may not love, but the way in which we love these objects and people that constitute the world. "Worldliness," I answer, is a condition of the heart.

Let us look into this a little closer. It has to do with the inner spirit of the man or the woman. Demas' mistake was that he loved the world. Did not Paul love the world? Did he not love it when he renounced ease, gain, promotion, and station, and threw his whole soul into the holy effort of saving a poor lost world for Christ? Do we not read that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son? And that only-begotten Son, did He not love the world when He gave His heart's blood to redeem it? Yes, they loved it and showed their love by lifting it out of its sinful and guilty condition. In the same way you and I may love the world that we may do it good, and so give more of our time, money, talents, and energy to win it back to God.

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But that was not the love that brought Demas to fall, and against which we are warned. No, something quite different,—the world's ways, maxims, aims, ease, pleasures, and fascinations. Tradition tells us that Demas afterwards became a priest in a heathen temple. If so, it was no doubt because he found more gain in silver and gold than in the service of Christ. How do you regard the things of the world in your heart, and how do you regard the people of the world? That is what determines worldliness. If you love pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than your Bible, any house better than God's, any person better than your Savior, you are worldly. You are surrounded by people who do not fear God, who do not keep His commandments, who have no treasure in heaven, no plans or purposes which extend beyond the grave, minus faith, minus hope, minus all spiritual life,—what is your attitude toward such? Do you make your choice of friends from these professed worldly men and women? If so, you are worldly. I assure you some of our worst foes are our ungodly friends.

Then, you may reply, we cannot go into society at all, we must live secluded lives. The Bible does not say that. What it says is that, when we go into society, we ought to take our Christianity with us. Our Lord went into society, and wherever He went, they felt the sacredness which was about Him. You go into society, what is the result? Do you influence it, or are you influenced by it? What effect has it upon your religious life and professions? Does it secularize you and make

you unfit for prayer? Does it silence your testimony of Christ, and cool down your interest and enthusiasm for the Church? Know, then, that it is making you worldly. A woman who cannot be recognized in society as a Christian by her modest dress and her pure ways, and the tone and topic of her conversation, is a worldling. The man who can do business, and not be known as a Christian by his business scruples and methods and spirit, is a worldling. If a worldling can truthfully say of you, "He is no better than I am," you are a worldling. If you live as a worldling, you are a worldling. That needs no argument. But, after all, be it noted that, however it manifests itself in manner, dress, social companionship, and conduct, worldliness primarily is a temper, spirit, and disposition of the heart. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The world would have done Demas no harm if he had not loved it. It will do us no harm as long as we keep it out of our hearts. But here is where lurks the very danger,—it so easily, so silently, and very gradually insinuates itself into the heart. To use an illustration: In olden times the sailors, a race given to superstition, used to tell that somewhere in the Indian Ocean there was a magnetic rock that rose from the deep with power of attraction. Silently a ship was drawn towards this rock, nearer and nearer, and gradually one by one the bolts were drawn out of the vessel's side by the magnetic power. The end was that, when the doomed vessel had drawn so near that every bolt and clamp was unloosed, the whole fabric fell apart, and the crew and cargo would sink down into the waters.

So stands the magnetic rock of worldliness, enchantments, and fascinations. Its attraction is slow, silent, and yet powerfully it draws the soul that comes within its range. Under its spell, bolt after bolt of good resolutions, clamp after clamp of Christian duty are drawn out, until at length the whole structure of Christian profession falls together, a pitiable wreck. Attracted by the things of time and sense, the affections become chilled, the mind step by step full of the world.

O for the poor victims, thousands of them, equally as promising, that have foundered like this unfortunate Demas! We can see them floating everywhere on the surface of society, like spiritual driftwood, alas! see them in the church keeping up a little outward appearance and forms of religion, but generally found absent from their pew and taking little or no interest in matters of the Church.

And in what way, coming to the second consideration, may we overcome this dangerous evil, worldliness? The Bible does not leave us without answer. As worldliness is a disposition of heart, it first aims at that. We are not to spend our time in saying this is worldly and that in formulating absolute and universal rules and binding church-members to them. It is not so much a matter of correct outward conduct as of correct inward principles. If the blood is in good condition, the complexion will be. If the heart is right, the conduct will be, and so the Apostle, getting at the root of the cause, says: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed," by the renewing of your minds. Christianity is a spiritual power. When the soul opens to it, the Holy Spirit resets and new-creates the spirit of the man, so that he looks away from earth to heaven, and from the things of this world to the things of God and eternity. Another bent is given to his feelings and his aims. He walks in the light of a new sun. He feels the presence of a new law drawing him in a different direction. He sees with other eyes, estimates things by another rule, and is moved by other principles. And as he yields to this new graft upon his nature, he instinctively realizes what is contrary to it. He does not need outward rules, it is plainly told him from within. The written Word is at hand to direct in many cases, and in questions of doubt the honest consultation of his own moral sense, the life of faith in the soul, will tell him where the line is to be drawn between him and the world.

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And to mention one other way. If you would overcome worldliness, look after your associations. The Bible is full of admonitions and illustrations to that effect, but one perhaps stands out in boldest type, the story of Lot. He moved out of his simple patriarchal life into Sodom, the world center of his age, and the result you know. His family became hopelessly worldly, he himself without influence and power among men, and the end was destruction of his estate and judgment upon his unfortunate wife.

If not quite as disastrous, the result is always the same in character. Keep godly associations and connections, attend to the house of God. We need the fellowship of God's people to respiritualize and recharge our depressed Christian lives. It should be a place of strengthening to you. Make its people your special companions and confidants; have some from among its membership with whom you are on terms of intimacy and friendship. It is wonderful how much we are influenced by our environment and fellowship; let us, then, be careful to live with God and with God's people.

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To conclude,—God help us by His grace and Holy Spirit so to live in this world as to live above it and look beyond it, diligently use the means He has given us for strength and fidelity, and preserve us from the deadly snare of that great enemy of our soul, the godless, Christless world. Nor, let us ever remember, can we successfully meet this enemy without looking for strength to that divine source upon which our eyes are centered at this season, the cross of our adorable Savior. He that kneels in devotion at the foot of the cross, that has the love of Him that suffered and died for us upon that cross spread abroad in his heart, cannot divide that heart with his rival, and enemy, and obtain force and power to combat against his assaults. Without Him we can do nothing. With Him we can prevail.

Grant that I Thy passion view
With repentant grieving,
Nor Thee crucify anew
By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun
Every sinful pleasure,
Since for me God's only Son
Suffered without measure?

Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him; for she is a sinner.—*Luke 7, 39.*

Our Lord was reclining at a social meal in the house of Simon the Pharisee, when, unbidden, a woman enters the room, and, standing at the feet of Jesus, bursts into tears. She had not come for that purpose, but stationed aside of the Lord, she was so overcome that she could not restrain her emotion, and as the tears fall thick and fast upon the feet of her Lord, she wipes them with her hair, and kissing them, anoints them with costly ointment. The whole transaction is so simple and touching that we feel at once interested in the stranger. It is a question much discussed by Bible students who this woman was. It has been said it was Mary Magdalene, but that is a mistake; nor was it Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany. Her name, for wise and kind reasons, is withheld from the Church. But we are not left entirely in suspense about her history.

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From several incidents in this chapter we infer that she lived in the City of Nain where our Lord raised up the widow's son. Furthermore, we are told that she was a sinner; that means here, she had abandoned herself to a life of sin and impurity, and finally, it seems quite probable, judging from the precious quality of the ointment used, that she was a person of some wealth and fortune. What fixes our attention most is that she was a sinner, and a penitent sinner at that. What was the precise character of her transgression we are not told; but whether she had been an adulteress, or, being unmarried, had yielded to her depraved dispositions, and was leading a life of criminal voluptuousness, one thing is certain, she had reason to weep and lament. If she was guilty of the former,—adultery, unfaithfulness to her own spouse,—what opinion must a woman form of herself that has committed this offense? And if she was guilty of the last-named transgression, prostitution, no tears could have been too bitter. Human words fail to describe the condition of a woman who has arrived at such a depth of dissoluteness as to eradicate every degree of modesty, hand herself over to infamy that overthrows the whole social life, and converts mankind into a state of putrefaction and decay. If there is one offense that is calculated to become a perpetual source of sorrow, piercing the heart with thousand arrows of sad reflection and remorse, fixing daggers in the souls of loving parents, and covering one's family with public disgrace, it is the offense which defiles the most sacred and inviolable relation of human life. And however it may be done, we ought never to speak of such crime in the way of extenuation. Holy Scripture characterizes such not as pitiable, but as criminal, not as imposed upon, but as deceiving, not as corrupt, but as corrupters, the only course for whom is to do as this penitent, prostrate themselves in tears at the feet of Him who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

These introductory remarks point to us the topic which shall employ our further contemplation this morning. We have considered the first great enemy of our souls, the devil, that wicked spirit who walketh about seeking whom he may devour, and the second, the world, and now we come to the third, the flesh, in contemplating which *we shall note a few of the most prevalent forms in which it manifests itself*, and secondly, *how we may overcome it*. May God grant His divine blessing!

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There are topics, my beloved, which if a minister treats of them, he will be regarded indelicate and forward, and which if he does not treat of them, he will be charged with timidity and neglect of duty. His course, however, is clear. As a faithful steward of divine truth, he must declare the whole counsel of God, irrespective of criticism and fear, lest any man's soul be required at his hands. No diligent attendant of God's house will have failed to have marked the reigning note in the Epistle readings of the last Sundays. That note is a call to purity and sanctity of life. "Abstain from fornication,"—"But fornication and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints, for ye know that no whoremonger nor unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God,"—solemn words, and not superfluous words either, as little now as then, or since the beginning of man's sinful career. We turn to the pages of Holy Writ,—what is it that brought on that most terrible calamity, all except eight persons going down in the waters of a universal flood? The sacred volume answers: "When man began to multiply on the face of the earth, the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose. Then it repented the Lord that He had made man," and the

judgment was let loose for destruction. What was it that caused Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain, to go down in fire and brimstone? The still gurgling sea of salt and death gives back the answer of its brutality and uncleanness. What caused the twenty and three thousand to perish in one day, their white carcasses to strew the wilderness sand? Moses tells us: fornication, sensuality, and impurity. And who is not bent with grief as he reads of David and of Solomon? And the hearts of mankind are as full of impurity now as then, in thoughts, words, deeds, and dress. There are spectacles to be seen in places of amusement, there are reports to be read in our public prints, which indicate little or no improvement, though decking themselves with the name of Christian and moral. What St. Paul wrote: "It is a shame even to speak of these things which are done of them in secret," is still true and too true, alas! of some professed Christians.

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Fire, my beloved, is a most valuable, an indispensable agent of the human race. What would we do without it? But fire must remain within bounds. Woe if it overleaps them! Then it becomes a terrible and destructive power! Man's body, likewise, is a great and noble instrument, a fine handiwork of God, with powers for good; but it must remain within its bounds, it must always be kept as a servant in subjection. Woe to man's happiness and the welfare of others when it overleaps its legitimate bounds, and the servant becomes the master, a tyrant, and a destroyer! "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection," says Paul. Our great business as Christians is to learn to control our body, its lusts and desires; to subdue and master it, to bring it into a pure and honorable service, above and beyond its own miserable gratification. "Dearly beloved," writes St. Peter, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Yes, back in the days of Mount Sinai, God voiced His will in words of fire and thunder on stony tablets: "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which means we are to lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and each curb, guard, and control the sinful desires of the flesh.

Nor is this unchastity, the overstepping of the proper relation between the sexes, the sinful indulgence of man's lower nature, the only temptation that comes from the flesh. From the long list enumerated by the Apostle in his letters we shall select one other.

That is *intemperance*, the too free indulgence in stimulating drinks. Nor can it be questioned that a word in this respect is occasionally in place. The history of strong drink is the history of ruin, of tears, and of blood. It is perhaps the greatest curse that ever scourged the earth. Other evils have slain their thousands, but this has slain its tens of thousands. It is simply impossible to picture the crime of which it is the cause. It is the Mississippi among the rivers of wretchedness. It is an evil which is limited to no age, no nation, no sex, no period and call of life. It has taken the poor man at his toil and the rich man in his palace, the statesman in the halls of legislature, and the workingman on the street, the preacher in the pulpit, and the layman in the pew, and plunged them into a common ruin.

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Since the time that Noah came out of the ark and planted vineyards and drank of their wines, nearly five thousand years ago, we see the foul and murderous track, destroying some of the mightiest intellects, some of the happiest homes, some of the noblest specimens of man. It has supplied every jail, penitentiary, almshouse, and charity hospital with inmates, and flooded every city with bestiality and crime. It empties the pockets, disgraces the character, brutalizes the affections, brings disease to the body and poison to the intellect. It does infinitely worse,—it bars the soul out of heaven; for thus it is written: "No drunkard shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

Such is the result of appetites indulged, what it means when the flesh gains the supremacy, when a person turns himself over to become a slave of his lusts and excesses. Nor let any one say as he looks upon such a miserable victim of this vice: "I shall never be like him." God grant that we may not, but "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The drunkard once thought the same. No one can be certain that he will not yet fill a drunkard's grave, unless he learn and employ the lessons which God has given us to overcome this enemy, the flesh.

And which are these lessons, and how may this enemy be overcome? We shall mention two. The first is this: "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Our enemies are not only without, they are within. It is our Savior who remarks: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adultery, fornication," and other shameful sins. And the enemies within are the more dangerous, just as a traitor in our city is worse than the enemy without the walls. So, then, our first attention must be given to that. Keep, *i. e.*, watch, garrison the heart.

How? Keep from thoughts and purposes of sin. As long as we live in this sinful body, in the midst of a perverse generation and unchastisement, our eyes will behold scenes, our ears hear language, our imagination suggest pictures that are impure and lewd, but it's for the Christian to watch that such gazes of the eye do not become purposeful, not to permit the imagination loose reins and range, that unvirtuous thoughts are not indulged in, but repressed; as Dr. Luther expresses it: "You cannot prevent the devil from shooting arrows of evil thoughts into your heart, but take care that you do not let such arrows stick and grow there."

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The young Christian, who buys a ticket to the average theater, with its abounding sensualities, has no right to complain if his imagination is impure. Can any one take coals of fire into his bosom and not be burned, handle pitch and not be soiled? The man and woman who delight in reading lewd books, sensational, spicy newspaper reports, who gaze upon indecent pictures, suggestive sights as they are euphemistically termed, who listen to smutty stories, evil communications, foolish jestings, as St. Paul calls them; the woman who mixes in loose company, dresses indecently, and allows the thoughts to dwell upon any subjects which connect with such sin, need not wonder if the heart is invaded and influenced with unholy sentiments, and fleshly appetites run riot. Guard your heart, what transpires therein, and what enters in, with all

diligence.

It was a wise man, in fact, the wisest of all men, one who, speaking from own sad experience, gave this advice. Heed it, my dear hearer, heed it!

And, again, the second lesson furnished by the holy Apostle is this: "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." There is a mine of wisdom in that. Our religion not only tells us what not to do, it also tells us what to do; it is not only negative, it is positive. There are two ways of dealing with temptation. The one way is negative, the other is positive. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," that is negative. We are to eradicate vice, that is positive.

The effectual safeguard against drink is not prohibition. Neither the most cunningly devised laws, nor the most unrelenting persecution of liquor dealers, nor any other device of man can arrest this terrible evil. To successfully combat it, to make the poor victim a worthy and honored member of society, requires some stronger and firmer basis, some more controlling motive than mere earthly considerations. "Put on the Lord Jesus," is St. Paul's plain direction, "and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." The eye that has gazed upon the cross of Calvary with penitence and faith, the heart that has been regenerated by the washing of the Holy Ghost, and in whose soul is diffused the Spirit of God, and who strives to walk in the Spirit, he, and only he, can escape the temptations of the dreaded serpent of intemperance. And so, whatever the habit, you cannot wrestle successfully with a vicious habit, unless you cultivate a higher and different taste, a love for the things of God's Spirit. Life, to be safe, must stand for something, not simply against something, must express itself in the spirit, not simply suppress itself in the lust of the flesh.

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From away back in the past comes to us a voice, the voice of a young man who, when tempted by the dark-eyed adulteress in Egypt, said: "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Oh, that the young and the old would let these words of Joseph incessantly ring in their ears! A positive attachment, devotion to God will prompt us to be and to do what He wants you to be and to do, and as it inspires you to do what is right, it keeps you from doing that which is wrong.

And here again, to conclude, in our combat against this enemy of our soul we cannot stand upright unless we have some mightier power to sustain us. We know as Lenten Christians whence this power flows. How can any one who has looked up to that divine Sufferer in faith crucify Him anew by unholy living? The thought of what He has done for us, the love that prompted Him to shed His holy, precious blood for our sins, will restrain us from falling a victim to this insidious and wicked enemy. The Lord grant us repentance over past falls, gracious forgiveness, and strength!

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.

Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!—*Matt. 18, 7.*

It has grown a custom with us to regard on this particular Sunday some particular phase of sin. Now there is a sin which very many people think little about; that is the sin of making others sin. They feel that they are accountable for their own sins, the sins of their hands, tongues, and thoughts, but as to responsibility for what others have done, they feel no guilt that belongs exclusively to them. And yet, when one reflects on the matter; when we consider how we are all bound up with one another, what influence we exert, what our words and deeds cause others to do, how, without our knowing it, others have taken our example to encourage themselves in what is wrong, thinking they could not go wrong if following in our steps; when we reflect that the first sin committed in the world was the sin of making others sin, that of the devil tempting Eve to disobey God, and that the first evil consequence of man's fall was that Eve, when she had sinned herself, was to make her husband sin also,—we begin to realize that it is a real sin, and a common sin, the sin of making others do wrong; nor can there be any doubt or mistake as to our Lord's judgment concerning it.

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Our blessed Savior, in the course of His ministry, denounced woes upon other sins. He said: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" But when He said: "Woe unto the world because of offenses!" He qualifies it; He bitterly adds: "For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." It could have been no ordinary occasion, it can be no common sin that could have drawn from the merciful lips of our Redeemer, that could have wrung from His loving heart, so tremendous a

condemnation.

Let us regard, then, *I. In what way we may cause others to sin. II. How we may prevent it.* May God's Spirit make the words spoken profitable and instructive to every one of you!

Causing others to sin may be done in two ways: by direct temptation and by evil example. Sin loves companionship; having done wrong themselves, men look for others to do wrong with them. There are but few sins that men can do alone. They require some one to sin with them.

There is nothing an infidel loves so much as when he can gain the ear of some unsophisticated person to fill his mind with ungodliness and infamy. The vile libertine never gloats more in fiendish glee than when he can, by flattery or love of dress and amusement, make some innocent girl the tool of his debauched sensuality. It seems the delight of some to teach others the habit of taking God's name in vain. What shall we say of those foul brothels that, like poisonous mushrooms, pollute our cities, leading men's steps down to the house of the strange woman; what of the conventional drinking-houses and pool-rooms and gambling dens, the haunts of profanity, intemperance, and profligacy; what of the playhouses with their usual performances, beautifying vice and placing a low estimate on marriage and morals? What are those but just so many places and occasions of direct temptation to sin? And those who conduct and foster them are under the condemnation of this text. What are they but vultures that feed on the carrion of sin, making men's lusts and depraved animal passions a source of ungodly gain? No words would be a more truthful sign to place over the entrance of such places than these of Matt. 18, 7: "Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!"

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But this is not the only way in which men may transgress this text. There are, be it said to the credit of our race, men who have not much scruple about doing wrong themselves, but who have not so far lost nobleness and generosity of mind as not to shrink from directly tempting others who are as yet free from guilt. They think little of the sin themselves, still they would not have others share their bad experience. However, though they would not like to bring on their souls the sin of directly tempting others, they forget what judgment they are heaping on themselves by their evil example. And here it is that we are all more or less concerned.

It may be well to observe that in the paragraph preceding our text the Lord is speaking of little children, and so, we may consider, first, the responsibility of parents. There are but few parents who do not desire to bring up their children well, and to this end are careful to teach them to be truthful and honest, pure, gentle, and unselfish. But of how little avail to teach these things as theories and principles when the example which parents set is precisely the opposite to their teaching! When the head of the family commands his children to attend divine service, but himself does not, what, in fact, is he teaching but to stay away? Or does he think for one moment that the children are so foolish as not to reason thus: If it were really my duty to go to church, would not my father go himself? Why do what my father fails to do? Or if the wife and mother is seen by her offspring to practice deception in little things, resorts readily to untruth, is not "in" when she is "in," and the like, how quick they are to notice it, and grow up to think that truth and honesty are to be held as theories, rather than practiced as virtues. Nor need we restrict it merely to the home sphere, it applies to every other, school, college, workshop, friendship. Without limit is the effect of unconscious example. We uttered it as a mere joke, or what we styled as a harmless way of getting out of a difficulty, but the falsehood we uttered has stuck, and taken root in some one's mind near us, and blossomed into a full-blown way of lying, which he says he learned from us, and defends by our example.

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Because when we were young, we looked up and trusted and admired some one, a teacher, a friend, on account of their attractiveness, or brilliancy, or personal magnetism, we imitated them, and that, perhaps, in things not at all commendable. And what we have done and do, others in time do with us. The minister who will tell his members and catechumens, You must mind only what I preach and not what I *do*, is a caricature and disgrace to his office. The religious teacher of the Sunday-school who goes to places of frolic, and is seen by his or her pupils, or by the grown sisters and brothers of these pupils, who then defend their presence there because they, the teachers of religion, were there,—such teachers are dropping evil seed which strengthens others in wickedness, and do well to examine their conduct and character under the sharp lens of this text.

The young man or, for all that, he, too, of advanced years, who is seen seeking his couch in the late hours of night, or the small hours of morn, apart from his family and the companionship of reputable associates, may also reflect how this is likely to affect the honor and peace of the home, and serve as an example for others.

Enough has been said, I take it, to make plain what is meant. And is this a sin to think little of? Let us awake to our responsibility! No man liveth to himself. The moral impulse, the influence we exert, the example we set, God holds us answerable for them.

What, then, to come to the next particular, shall we do if we have become guilty in this respect? I was once told of a man who on his deathbed had something on his conscience which greatly disturbed him. He had not been a bad man, from the world's standpoint, and it was only a boyish freak. What he related was this: "I was going across a common one day, and I saw a sign-post at the crossroads, pointing the way to two different places. The post was old, the sign easily removed, and so for fun I took down the arms and changed them, so as to make them point to the wrong roads. It was a foolish thing, but of late years it has continually haunted me. And now on my deathbed it greatly troubles me to think how many a poor, weary man crossing that common I have sent on the wrong road."

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Beloved, this is a parable of life, nor leave it till you are on your deathbed. Think if by your example you have ever sent any poor fellow-creature toiling across the common of this life on the wrong road, the road which leads to destruction, instead of the narrow way which leads to heaven! Think if by any example of yours you have removed the guiding post which would have led the man aright had you not pointed out the wrong way, and if your conscience accuse you of this, repent of your guilt and ask God honestly and humbly for His forgiveness. That is the first thing we ought to do.

And, in the second place, we must give most careful heed to ourselves. One thing we must never forget: we are Christians, Christ's disciples, and concerning His disciples, Christ says: "Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world." That is their distinctive property, their mission. Salt is an active principle; it works, and purifies, and diffuses its saltiness. So, too, it behooves us, by speech and pen, by example and influence, by suffrage and legislation, by every agency in our power, to set ourselves against the social sins of our land and age,—intemperance, Lord's day desecration, uncharitableness, lewdness, insubordination, which, like cancers, have fastened themselves upon the moral and religious life of our nation, and are fast destroying its vitality. We are to be a salt, a savor of moral health to all who come into contact with us, and a light, so the Savior directs. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

We had respect to the evil example of parents,—why, correspondingly, should it not make for good? We find not uncommonly that the child catches the words, nay, even the tone of voice which he has heard his father use. Will he not be still more likely to catch his other habits?—to be mild and kind, sober and industrious, if the manner and behavior of his father are marked by mildness, kindness, sobriety, and diligence? And so in all departments. They are familiar lines, fraught with deep thought:

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Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

Let's leave some such footprints, some stimulating, ennobling influence and example, around and behind us.

These, then, are the truths presented by the text. Let them be seriously and deeply considered. May God by His grace deliver us from the bitter "woe" of having given offense, causing others to sin, and grant us wisdom and power to turn many into the right way through faith in Christ Jesus, the Savior of sinners. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

When I see the blood, I will pass over you.—*Exodus 12, 13.*

The one grand theme, the central, all-pervading subject of the Bible, from beginning to end, is redemption by the blood of Christ. It matters not who held the pen, whether Moses in the land of Midian, or David in the mountains of Israel, or Daniel in the court of Babylon, Paul, a prisoner at Rome, or John amid the bleak rocks of the Isle of Patmos,—one golden thread runs through all their records.

Just as in an orchestra the various notes and chords of the musicians' instruments express the one central idea of the composition they are rendering, so whatever chords are touched by the hands of the holy writers in God's Book, one keynote vibrates, that is, *salvation through the blood of the Lamb.*

"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin," is the testimony of St. John. "Ye know that ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ," is the plea of Saint Peter. "Justified by His blood," is the Gospel of St. Paul. And the voices of heaven blend with those of earth, for thus is the saints' eternal song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us to God by His blood." And this is the Church's theme on this particular Sunday, as it reads in the Epistle: "Christ by His blood hath obtained eternal redemption for us." The past Sundays in Lent have we been seeking to learn what sin is and what sin does; how could we more appropriately spend this service than to consider how we may be saved from sin, and in that may the Scripture selected profitably aid us.

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Eight times had Pharaoh's hardened heart brought sorrow upon the people of Egypt. As one calamity after another was fulfilled, he seemed softened for a while and willing to comply with God's command to let His people Israel go, but no sooner was the pressing plague removed than he again defied the Lord of heaven. And now the tenth, the last and most dreadful and desolating of visitations, was to be sent. The king and his people are informed that, if Israel were not allowed straightway to depart, the first-born in every home shall, at one and the same hour, be slain.

But before the destroying angel started on his sorrowful mission, the Israelites were directed to kill a lamb, to take its blood and besprinkle therewith the headpiece and the two sideposts of

their dwellings. This was God's sacred mark. Wherever that crimson sign would appear, the messenger of judgment was to pass over and spare.

It was as told. At the hour of midnight the avenging angel swept over the land. All the first-born were slain. Not a house where there was not one dead. In Pharaoh's palace and in the pauper's hovel, stricken hearts bewailed the countenance of their eldest suddenly darkened by death. Only in the houses of the Hebrews there was security and peace, because the blood was on their doors. Such is the simple historical event connected with our text, designed by God to foreshadow a far greater and more important event, an event that was to bear upon the whole race of man wherever, whenever, and however found.

Three leading thoughts are suggested thereby: *I. All men, like the inhabitants of Egypt, are exposed to the destruction and penalty of death. II. A means of escape has been supplied. III. One condition that connects with that escape.* And may God's Holy Spirit work enlightenment and conviction!

That man, to take up the first point, is exposed to destruction and death, is the clear and abundant testimony of Scripture, and it tells why. "All have sinned," it says, and, "The wages of sin is *death*." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And is there a single heart among the sons and daughters of Adam that dare offer remonstrance?

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Since the time that the first human pair, smitten by the sense of guilt, hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden, and their first-born son, with his hands reddened by a brother's blood, declared that his punishment was greater than he could bear, down to the ignoble disciple who, after selling the life of his Master for filthy lucre, unable to bear the upbraidings of conscience, went and hanged himself, the consciousness of having broken God's Law and exposed one's self to the righteous displeasure of the great Lawgiver, has haunted and pained man everywhere and at all times, and filled him with a fear which all his own efforts and every human appliance is powerless to remove. Why go farther than our own selves? Is there a person here who can declare that never for a moment has his soul's surface been disturbed by feelings of regret, who can truthfully affirm that he has never known what it means to experience remorse for duty neglected, for wrong spoken or done? We have sought on previous Sundays to drive home to your conscience the terrors of the law on matters of the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Commandments; and do you mean to say that in a review of your past life you have no slightest pain of self-reproach along these lines? If not, then your spirit has been cast in a different mold from all others, or your memory and conscience are both fast asleep. I take it that all are ready to acknowledge not only that there is a law, a law written in God's Word, as well as in your own hearts, but that we have also broken that law time and again, and thereby—to quote the familiar words of our Catechism—"have we exposed ourselves to God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation."

This is the A B C of Christianity. And is there a way of escape, as in the case of Egypt's death and destruction? no possibility of its being said: "I will pass over you"? Ah, it is here that we come to the heart and center of our holy religion, its pith and core, its Holiest of Holy. Sprinkled upon the headpieces and the two posts of their doors was the blood, God's own sacred mark. A lamb, none over a year old, none with the slightest taint or blemish upon it, was made to yield up its life in sacrifice to secure that blood. Need I inform you what that typified, of whom that lamb was a type and shadow? That unblemished lamb of sacrifice referred to Christ, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." That innocent blood which turned aside the angel of death foreshowed the blood of Christ, who through the Spirit offered Himself without spot to God. Yonder upon that post with its two beams, reddened by crimson drops, is the fulfillment, the realization, of it all. Simple, is it not?

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God, by the application of a coat of blood upon its homes, could redeem Israel from the avenging stroke. It was not for any among them to speculate about it, to doubt and refuse it. To do so would have meant disaster. Only in that blood was security, safety, and deliverance.

There are many these days who are offended at the blood doctrine of the cross; they will have none of it; it's puerile to them. They know not whereof they speak. It reflects Heaven's profoundest wisdom; it was thus, and only thus, that the authority and dignity of God's Law could be maintained, and yet the transgressor pass unpunished.

The supreme, the perfect and sinless Lawgiver Himself, even the eternal Son, bearing the penalty in the room of those by whom it had been incurred, and on whom it must otherwise and most justly have fallen,—this is the only way in which peace could have been reinstated between God and man, deliverance made possible. And this, even this, is the great burden of the Gospel message, the only balm of peace to the troubled soul, the only solid ground of hope for another life,—without which all in this world would be darkness, disorder, and despair. Imagine a prisoner under sentence of death in his lonely cell; the last morning sun he ever expects to gaze on streaming through his grated window, and the sound of busy hammers erecting his gallows ringing in his ears, and, then, unbar the bolts of his prison, and instead of leading him out to execution, put into his hands the Governor's pardon, and bid him go forth and enjoy till life's latest time the best and sweetest it can offer. Or think of a crew of voyagers on a dark and stormy sea, a fearful hurricane above, all around perilous rocks and quicksand, and the vessel threatening every moment to part asunder below,—think of them wafted all at once into a peaceful harbor and landed on a hospitable shore. Figure yourselves placed in such and kindred perilous circumstances, and followed by a like happy deliverance, and you will still have only a dim shadow of the glorious and blessed reality to which our text points. Far more terrible than bodily bondage, more appalling than death of the body, is the terror and the doom that attends a

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soul exposed to the extent of God's wrath and destruction, and from that—deliverance, safety, and escape through the blood of the Lamb.

There is, however, one point still that practically and to each of us is the most important of all. It is not said simply: "I will pass over you," but, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." It was not enough that the paschal lamb had been slain. Nor was it sufficient that the Most High Lamb merely purpose to spare them as His chosen people. If they would escape the calamity that was to fall upon their heathen oppressors, they must sprinkle the blood of that lamb openly on the posts of their doors. And even so it is not enough that God will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth; not enough that the Lamb of God was slain to take away the sins of a guilty world, unless that blood is sprinkled by faith on the heart, unless, in other words, Christ is taken by each separately and individually as his or her Savior. It is faith which forms the grand connecting link between the priceless blessings of redemption and the perishing sinner's soul. What avails it to the wretch who is being borne down by a rapid current nearer and nearer to the fatal cataract to throw him a rope if he will not grasp it? Or what to him whose dwelling is in flames, to place a ladder for his rescue, if he will not so much as step upon it? Even so, what will it serve any of us, but only fearfully to heighten our condemnation, to be told of the great salvation, and have that salvation pressed on us in almost every form of persuasive appeal, as the only means of escape from death and destruction, if we still refuse to it the homage of our hearts, and deem ourselves perfectly safe without, and treat it as an idle tale?

Christ's blood has been shed, but before it can work its wonders, can stay the arm of divine Justice uplifted to smite, that blood must be sprinkled, too; and the reason why it is not sprinkled on some, why it is not sprinkled on all who have heard of it, why all such do not feel in their hearts and display in their lives its cleansing, sanctifying power, is, and can only be, their willful, stubborn unbelief. How it is with you whom I am now addressing it is not for me to say. [124]

Those only who are thus marked have any right to count themselves to the Lord's people, and to set themselves at the Savior's table. Let us hold, not as a dry doctrine, but as a blessed truth, that apart from Christ's blood there is no salvation. Let us fix our hearts with deeper and more prayerful love on Him; let it be ours with a glow of spiritual fervor, a joy with which nothing else will compare, to confess:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Amen.

PALM SUNDAY.

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau, thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments. And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.—*Gen. 35, 1-3.*

The passage before us refers to a very interesting part in the history of Jacob. To escape the fury of his brother, Esau, whom he had deprived of the patriarchal blessing, Jacob, at the proposal of his mother, Rebecca, flees to the house of his uncle, Laban. On the first night of his journey he dreamed he saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, angels ascending and descending upon it, God standing at the top; and God also speaks to the poor pilgrim resting on a stone beneath. He assures Jacob that He was the Lord God "of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac." He promises to give the land of Canaan to his seed, to render his offspring illustrious and innumerable as the stars of heaven, and finally, in one of his descendants, to bless all the families of the earth; and to accommodate Himself still more to the condition in which Jacob then was, He added: "And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." [125]

Deeply impressed with this vision of God's presence, Jacob arose. But before he proceeded upon his journey, he vowed a vow, saying: "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Twenty years had passed since that occasion, years of hard service and vexation, when Jacob resolves to return home. He crosses the Ford of Jabbok, where he wrestled with the Angel, and comes to Shalem. Here he buys a piece of ground, builds an altar, and lingers for seven or eight years; he was now enjoying the delights, the comforts of home and of plenty. God had fulfilled His engagement with him to the letter,—He had been with him and defended him, led him back to his country in peace and prospered him, who had had nothing but a staff in his hand when he fled before the face of his brother, until he was now two bands. But where is now his vow, where his altar, where the tenth of all his possessions, as he had promised? Nor does he show the least

disposition to redeem, to perform it; and so it becomes necessary for God Himself to stir him up; and thus reads the first verse of the text: "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau, thy brother."

From this little piece of history let us seek to derive some instructive observations, and pertinent with this Sunday, the character of which is well known to you.

First, we may note how soon the influence of impressive scenes wears away, how quickly we lose the sense of God's mercies, and the religious feelings they produce. If a person had seen Jacob on the morning after his vision, when he was leaving the spot made sacred by his experience there, and had said to him: "God will accomplish all thy desires; He will guide and keep thee, and bring thee back enriched and multiplied, but thou wilt live year after year unmindful of thy vow," he would have exclaimed, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" How were the Israelites affected when God appeared at the Red Sea? They sang His praise, they resolved to distrust Him no more. They said, "All that the Lord commandeth us will we do." But they soon forgot His words and the wonders He had shown them. They murmured, and they rebelled time and again; all their vows and promises were written in the sand, and the first returning wave of trouble washed them out. If some kind of spiritual device, after the manner of our present day, could be invented to secure our feelings in certain periods and conditions of life, so that we might afterwards review them and compare ourselves, what revelations it would disclose! Like a sieve, full while lowered, but, when raised up, empty and dripping, or like water, which has a natural tendency to be cold, if it has not a perpetual fire below to keep it warm, so do we constantly need means and helps; so necessary is it to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance; and as we learn from our text, God also does that. He reminds His people of forgotten duties. Various are His ways of doing so. One of His principal designs are afflictions. When difficulties are upon us, it is then that we remember former deliverances and vows, and our ingratitude in not keeping them.

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Another such witness and monitor is man's conscience, which accuses the transgressor, and often presses a thorn into man's side. Ministers of the Gospel are also God's remembrancers. Their business is, not to bring strange things to your ears, to entertain you with novelties or speculation, but their calling is to remind you of things you already know. As St. Peter writes: "I will therefore put you in remembrance of these things, though ye once knew them," and St. Paul says: "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." And our text furthermore shows us that good and pious characters give heed to these reminders. There is where we perceive a difference between Christians and others. Christians, it is true, are encompassed with faults and infirmities, they may err; they may fall, but there is in them a principle which secures their rising again. A man who is only asleep is easily distinguished from one who is dead; the difference will appear as soon as you try to wake them; the one remains motionless, the other stirs and springs up. The branch of a tree may bend down to the earth under a pressure, but remove the load, and it is upright again. When our Lord looked only upon Peter, "he went out and wept bitterly." Jacob here does not argue the matter with the Lord. He does not seek to excuse himself.

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Thus reads the second verse: "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments." Here we may stop a moment to emphasize the truth that there may be wickedness in a religious family. We find "strange gods" even in Jacob's, the patriarch's, household, and we may view such a condition in two ways,—first, as a good man's affliction, and also as a good man's own fault. An affliction it certainly is to behold wickedness in one's family. It is bad enough to have bodily sickness and ailment in the house, but it is immensely worse to have sin, the plague and pestilence of the soul.

But, could we see things as God sees them, could we trace back effects to their cause, we would oftentimes not be surprised at the disorder and wickedness which prevails. How many masters of families resemble Eli, whose "sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not,"—or David, "who had never displeased Adonijah at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?"

Others, again, have provoked them to anger, till they are discouraged; while they preach humility and meekness in words, they practice pride and passion by example; while they send them to receive the nurture and admonition of the Lord at the hands of others, they rarely or ever recommend religion by their own personal behavior,—and they then wonder at irregularities in their households. Rather ought they wonder at their own folly in seeking "to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles." Observe Jacob here, he would not go alone, but calls upon his family, and all that are with him; everybody must attend. And thus our religious interest should not be confined to ourselves alone, we must bring our families along with us to the exercise of devotion.

In our own families we possess authority and influence, and this authority and influence we are to employ for religious as well as civil purposes. God holds us answerable for it. There is nothing more lovely than the members of a family going to the house of God in company. Such families are nurseries of their churches, and it is with delight that a minister addresses a hopeful audience made up of a number of amiable, orderly, serious-minded families. But oh! how it pains one to see you separated, and coming in alone,—the wife without the husband, the father without the son, the mother without the daughter.

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Reflect on these things, my beloved. It is sometimes said that so few of those who make their confirmation vow remain loyal. To me it is inspiring that so many do remain loyal when you

consider the influence and the atmosphere in the homes they come from. Never a Christian word escapes the lips of the mother; all kinds of political, secular newspapers and books are daily read, never a line of God's Word or a church-paper. All sorts of time set aside for visits and trivialities on God's day, never for divine service.

There remains yet the third and last verse: "And let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." Jacob arrives at Bethel, he looks around, he discovers the stone, now covered with moss, which, twenty-eight years ago, had served as his pillow. What feelings must have throbbled through his soul! what shame! what joy! And he fulfills his vow, erects an altar, does God honor and service, and gives the tenth to Him of all he possesses.

The application of all this? To you who have this day laid down upon God's altar your vow of allegiance, let Jacob be to you an example of warning. God greatly disapproved of Jacob's delay, his forgetting and breaking of promise, and, as we heard, he himself suffered by it,—wickedness, strange gods, had gotten into his household. Vastly more noble than his conduct was that of the woman who one day appeared in the temple leading by the hand a lad, and, presenting him to the high priest, said: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore, also, I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord." You know who he was—Samuel, afterwards Israel's high priest and judge. May you prove to be Samuels brought hither to the temple, become useful members. It is only thus you may glorify God. Or, those who, perchance like Jacob, have neglected their vows, who blush to recall them, let them take this episode to heart, strive with the aid of that God who called Jacob's vow to remembrance to fulfill their engagements; following the patriarch, may they say: "Let us go up to Bethel," that means, to the house of God. The Lord grant you Christian courage and determination! Amen.

EASTER.

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Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.—*John 5, 28. 29.*

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." These solemn words, pronounced at the most solemn time, at the close of man's earthly career, are familiar words, and each Lord's day do we confess in words equally as familiar: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." In that committal and confession we say much. We voice a belief that is peculiarly, distinctively Christian. Natural reason, assisted by some light lingering in tradition and borrowed from the Jews, was able to spell out the immortality of the soul; but that the body should rise again, that there should be another life for this corporeal frame, was a hope which has been brought to light by revelation only. When natural man hears the doctrine the first time, the mere natural mind marvels. The next thing it does, as the philosophers at Athens, when Paul preached it unto them,—it mocks.

"Can these dry bones live?" is still the unbeliever's sneer. The doctrine of the resurrection is a lamp kindled by a hand which once was pierced. It is linked with the resurrection of our blessed Lord, and is one of the brightest gems in His crown. Throughout the writings of the holy apostles do we find them giving great prominence to this truth. The Apostle Paul, as he describes the Gospel by which true believers are saved, says: "I deliver unto you first of all that which I received,—how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures," and argues that, "if Christ be not raised," both your faith and our preaching are "in vain." In the early Church the doctrine of the resurrection was the main battle-ax and weapon of war. Wherever the first missionaries went, they made this prominent that the dead would rise again to be judged by the Man Christ, according to the Gospel. It is, indeed, the keystone of the Christian arch. Let us, then, to the honor of Christ Jesus, the Risen One, regard this article of our faith so prominent in the Easter thought of man, observing *I. The certainty of the resurrection, II. its results.*

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"The hour is coming," saith the Savior. Those words spoken by the Mouth of Truth express certainty. There are some events which may or may not be. Kingdoms and the great powers of the earth may stand or they may fall, their throne broken into dust and their might wither like autumn leaves. Events which we suppose inevitable may never come to pass, another wheel in the machinery of Providence may make things revolve in quite another fashion from what our puny wisdom would foretell. There is nothing certain on this earth, in fact, but uncertainty. But the resurrection is certain, whatever else may be contingent or doubtful. "The hour cometh," it surely cometh. In the divine decree it has been so unchangeably fixed. "The hour," saith Christ. I suppose He calls it an hour to intimate how very near it is in His esteem, since we do not begin to look at an exact hour of an event when it is extremely remote. An event which will not occur for hundreds of years is at first looked for and noted by the year, and only when we are reasonably near it, do men talk of the day of the month, and we are coming very near it when we look for the precise hour. Christ intimates to us that, whether we think so or not, in God's thoughts the day of resurrection is very near. He would have us think *God's* thought about it, not reckon any time too distantly and the event far away.

This, too, is practical wisdom, to bring close up to us that which is inevitable, and to act

towards it after a manner as though it were but to-morrow when the trumpet might sound. And most significantly does our Lord speak of that "hour." He calls it "the hour." We read of hours that have been big with the fate of nations; hours in which the welfare of millions trembled in the balances; hours in which the die was cast for peace or for war; hours that have been called "crises" in history. But here is the culminating crisis of all, the master, the royal, the august hour that is coming. Every second, every swing of the pendulum, every beat of the heart of time is bringing it nearer; silently, surely, we are drifting along the river of time to the ocean of eternity, and there is nothing to stop the constant flight.

We pass on. "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice." "All that are in the graves,"—by this term is meant, not only all whose bodies are actually in the grave at this time, but all who ever were buried, though their bones may have mingled with the elements, been scattered by the winds, dissolved in the waves, or merged into vegetable forms, all who have lived and have died—all these. All! What a numberless number! Think of the inhabitants of this world at the time of the flood, more numerous than now when men's numbers are so terribly thinned out by death! Think from the time of the flood onward, of Adam's vast offspring! Nineveh, Babylon, and Chaldea, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome were enormous empires of antiquity. The Parthians and Scythians, and Tartars, and Goths, and Huns in the Middle Ages, what teeming hives of humanity; and our present communities and nations, what a numberless band! Think of Ethiopia and the whole continent of Africa; remember India and Japan and the land of the setting sun; in all lands great tribes of men have come and have gone to rest in their sepulchers. What millions upon millions lie buried in China this day, a country of 400 millions. What innumerable hosts are slumbering in the land of the pyramids, embalmed in Egypt of old. And every one, all who have ever lived of woman born,—not one shall be left in the tomb. *All*,—all the righteous and the wicked; all that were engulfed in the sea; all that slumber in the lap of the earth; all the great and the humble, all the children of luxury and the sons of toil; all the wise and all the foolish; all the beloved and the despised. There shall not be one single individual omitted, nor you, my dear hearer. As surely as you sit here this morning, so surely shall you stand before the Son of Man. You shall not be forgotten; your departed spirit shall have its appointed place, and your body, which once contained it, shall have its place, till, by the power of God, it shall be restored to your spirit again at the sounding of the last trumpet. It is a wondrous truth, and yet, as the Savior directs, "marvel not at this," so as to doubt it, though you may marvel at it and adore the Lord, who shall bring it to pass.

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And so it continues: "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice." Yes, that ear that was buried a thousand years ago, and of which there was not the slightest relic left, that ear so long lost in silence, it shall hear—hear the almighty voice of that God who made man's ear at the beginning, who makes the ear of the newborn babe now, and is able, according to the working whereby He is able to do all things, to renew and refashion the ear, and hearing it shall start up, as the next words say, "shall come forth." It is not in the power of man's speech or imagination to conceive what a spectacle it shall be when, as the heavens are passing with a great noise, and the elements are burning with furnace heat, the angels are sounding the arrival of the great day of Judgment, we shall see the multitudes in the valleys of the dead rising up from land and sea, from mountain top and deep ravines, swarming up a great and countless number before the bar of their Judge. Ah, what a sight it will be! What a wonder!

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And how will they look? you may naturally inquire. In answer I would say on the basis of God's Word: Like themselves. To each one will be given "his own body." Our resurrected body, whatever it may exactly be and however different and superior it will undoubtedly be to our present body, will yet in some way be identical with our present body, and it will so far retain the appearance and individuality of our present body that in that future resurrected body we shall easily be recognized by those who knew us, and will be known as the same distinct personalities which we are now known to be in our present body. "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

We pass on to weigh the results. The text goes on to say: "And shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." From this we gather that the whole family will be divided as it is even now, indeed, into two, and only two, classes of characters: "They that have done good," and "they that have done evil." Who are those who have done good? By nature no one is "good." We are all sinners. There is none righteous, no, not one. The best of us are unprofitable servants. We can only be "good" in our way, and that is by having the goodness of another, the goodness of Christ set down to our account. Then, when we are thus joined to Christ by faith in Him, we shall, from principle, strive to do good. Good, my beloved, is a word that may be measured according to those who use it. The "evil man," the unpardoned sinner, may "do good" in his sense and the sense of the world,—good to you, to his child, his wife, his friend, but he has no care for God, no reverence, no esteem for the great Lawgiver. Therefore, that which may be good to you may be ill to God, because done for no right motive, even perhaps done with a wrong motive. It depends upon what position I occupy towards my God and Christ that determines on the Day of Resurrection, and that position is either for or against Him; there is no middle, mixed, or mingled character. I am either a pardoned sinner or an unpardoned sinner, and my destiny will be accordingly. And what will that destiny be? Either "life" or "damnation."

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"Life" does not mean here mere existence; for both will exist, and exist forever, the "evil" and the "good." But "life" means happiness, joy, rapture, bliss; in fact, it is a term so comprehensive that it needs no small time to express all that it means. As for the other, theirs shall be a resurrection to damnation; their bodies and souls will come under the condemnation of God,—to

use our Savior's word, "shall be damned." We are shocked at the very sound of the word. We may well be so; we should be ten thousand-fold more shocked, if we really knew what the word fully means. It is vain for us to describe it, and we are loath to describe it. It were better for such that they had never been born, never awakened. From so terrible a portion, from Thy wrath and from evil damnation, good Lord, deliver us! We have thus seen, first, the certainty of resurrection, and secondly, the results. It remains, in conclusion, to draw one or two lessons from the text.

The first is a lesson of consolation. We are frequently called upon to stand beside opened graves; some of you have stood there lately. What comfort for our wounded spirits is such meditation: to never mourn with regard to the souls of the righteous because they are forever with the Lord. The only mourning that we permit among Christians concerns the body, and here God's Word offers us the assurance: Weep not as though you had cast your treasure into the sea, where you will never find it again. You have only laid it by in a casket, whence you shall receive it again brighter and more beautiful than before. Thou shalt look again with thine own eyes into those eyes which have spoken love to thee so often. Thy child shall see thee again. That departed friend and father and mother, having loved his Lord as thou dost, shall once rejoice with thee in the land where they die no more. It is but a short parting; it will be an eternal meeting. Forever with the Lord, we shall also be forever with each other. "Let us comfort one another," says the apostle, "with these words."

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The other lesson is that of self-examination. If we are to rise, some to rewards and some to punishments, what—let each conscience ask—what shall be my position? Where shall I stand? That depends upon what your life and your life's principles have been. What has it been? To amass wealth? To procure honor? To provide for your family? If so, it has been deficient. Life's object and duty is to prepare for life, for the resurrection unto life. And to prepare for that, you must undergo a resurrection right now. There is as great a difference between men now as there will be hereafter. At present we have all living bodies, but in those living bodies, what is the state of the soul? There are in some living bodies living souls. There are in other living bodies souls that are dead. And that dead soul must be resurrected to life, or salvation is out of question; and that resurrection must take place *now*; it is too late hereafter. It takes place when you now give heed to that same divine voice that shall start the dead into life, the voice of Christ Jesus in His Gospel and Church. "He that believeth on Him hath life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

Easter calls for a rising up to spiritual life now, that it may be a resurrection unto eternal life, when all the dead shall come forth from the grave at the voice of Him who this day so gloriously arose from the tomb. May we be partakers of both! Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.—*John 21, 4.*

The last chapter of the Gospel of St. John takes us back to some of the scenes and circumstances of Christ after His resurrection. The immediate text portrays to us how seven men come slowly and thoughtfully down to the narrow beach, enter a boat, and push out a little way from the land. They are clad in the coarse garb of Galilean fishermen. Their faces are bronzed by exposure to the wind and the sun; their hands calloused from dragging the dripping net and pulling the laboring oar. But they are men destined to hold the highest mark among the great teachers of mankind. Foremost among them is Simon Peter, fiery soul, as ready to smite with the sword as to weep in sorrow at a look from his Lord. After him follows John, the gentle and loving, who leaned on His Master's bosom at the Passover. Then comes Thomas, the slow and distrustful, so honest in his doubts and so yielding in his confession. Then James, who was the first to seal his faith with the blood of martyrdom. Lastly Nathanael is mentioned, the upright and guileless, whilst the names of two are withheld. Says Simon Peter to this number: "I go a-fishing." The rest join in, and soon the crew sets sail for the higher waters, but with no success. The long hours pass in fruitless toil; day creeps into evening, evening into night, night into morning, and still they cast and cast, and catch nothing. At earliest dawn a figure appears on the beach, and a voice is heard speaking to them. The text tells who it was.

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For some reason, as our text states, they do not distinguish Him. Perhaps it is because they are not expecting Him, and it is still morning twilight, and they cannot see distinctly, or, what is more probable, because some change has come over His risen body like that which on Resurrection Sunday had prevented Mary Magdalene and the two disciples journeying to Emmaus from readily recognizing Him. Taking Him, quite probably, to be a fish-dealer, one of those who daily came out at dawn from the town to meet the boats and make their purchase, they hear a voice coming to them from the dim shore, saluting them,—to translate the question into our English idiomatic equivalent, Boys, what luck? "None," answer the weary fishermen. Again the voice sings out to them, "Cast." No sooner done than their net was filled with fishes. And then at once, by a spiritual instinct, rather than by the vision of his eyes, John knew who this stranger was, and said to the rest, "It is the Lord." Whereupon, "When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea."

It is this beautiful incident that we shall regard in a few phases, in accordance with this season and practical life.

In the first place, let us note that the resurrected Lord revealed Himself, and still reveals Himself to us in the midst of our daily work. The Lord came to these men while occupied with the toils and duties of their trade. Many are the instances in which it has pleased God to show His special favor to persons while earnestly occupied with their ordinary callings. David was summoned from the care of his father's flock to be Israel's king. Elisha was following the plow when called to be Elijah's successor. It was to faithful shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night that the angel choirs were sent to announce the birth of the Prince of Peace, and here, while the disciples were busily engaged in their familiar toils, it was that Jesus came and manifested Himself to them. Was there not something very instructive in this appearance at such a time? It showed that Jesus ratified their decision to be up and doing. It showed that He was present with them in the midst of all their work. It showed, too, that upon His presence depended entirely the success of their labors, for before His arrival they had caught nothing; their nets were only filled with seaweeds. It was through His direction and through His direction alone, that their nets at last were filled with fish. What a lesson this for all faithful toilers, whether on sea or on shore, the lesson that Jesus is with us in our daily tasks, whatever these tasks may be.

We know that Jesus Himself once stood in the ranks of the world's toil. Many a day, for many a year, He wrought in the sweat of His brow in the carpenter shop at Nazareth. He thus stamped with the approval of His own example the work of every toiler, and showed the high dignity that belongs to all honest labor. By this manifestation of the risen Jesus to those fishermen of Galilee He sanctified and glorified the work of His children. Like that dim figure on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus stands over against us, watching us with eyes of sympathy, and waiting to bless us with His counsel and help. He has not changed. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Let us not forget this glorious truth as we bend over our desks, or machines, stand behind sale counters, or move in household duties; the thought: Jesus is looking on, will shed its hallowed light upon the "common task," as it is styled, fill us with courage and cheerfulness, though our own work be irksome and hard, and enable us to do it faithfully, to quote the words of the apostle, "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, as unto the Lord," who looketh on.

Again, we note, Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples on this occasion, not only in the midst of their daily work, but in the *hour of their failure and disappointment*. They had gone forth to catch fish; but they had caught nothing. They were wet and cold, weary and hungry. And it was to these tired and disappointed men that the Lord appeared. He filled their nets with fish; He filled their hearts with the joy of His presence, nor did He forget their bodily comfort and needs, He kindled a fire upon the shore, and provided for them a welcome meal of fish and bread. And Christ's methods, my beloved, have not altered with the years. That scene on Lake Gennesaret is an allegory with a deep meaning for ourselves. It reminds us that our schemes and plans and endeavors, toil however hard we may, not infrequently meet with disappointment. We have perhaps all of us experienced what the poet says:

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Oh! it is hard to work for God,
 To rise and take His part;
 Upon this battle-field of earth,
 And not sometimes lose heart.
 He hides Himself so wondrously
 As though there were no God,
 He is least seen when all the powers
 Of ill are most abroad.
 Or, He deserts us at the hour;
 The light is all but lost,
 And seems to leave us to ourselves
 Just when we need Him most.

And yet, to speak with the text, though we may recognize Him not, He is tenderly watching us from the shore. He has long since passed over to His glory. But while His disciples are yet on these waters, He keeps Himself near the margin, and looks down upon them in their toil. His great heart is with us all in our disappointments, difficulties, and disheartening endeavors, and in some way, at the right time, He will come, just as yonder on the Sea of Galilee, to help us. Let us believe that, and go ahead with our present duties, steadily, bravely, hopefully. Hopefully, I repeat; there is all the difference in the world between working with hope and without it.

The sailor on the raft sinks into despair as long as there is no vessel in sight, but let a ship appear on the far horizon, and immediately he is alert, and seeks by every means in his power to attract the attention of those on board, if, haply, he may be saved. In the same way, if we lose the hope of Christ's help, we shall give up and break down. Let us hold on, no matter what we are required to contend against in the battle of life, in the Lord's cause, and rest assured that at length Christ will come to us with such strength and supply as will abundantly compensate us for the toil and worry. Let us believe that, or we shall fail in our undertakings.

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Nor only, to follow our text, in the midst of work and disappointment, but in the time of spiritual doubt and difficulty does Jesus reveal Himself. In those days the hearts of the disciples were burdened with many regrets and uncertainties and fears. In that stern of that very boat perchance their Master had often reclined, upon those same waters, and as they sat throughout those long and weary hours with the sails idly flapping, or plying the long, heavy oars, the waves splashing against the side of the boat, how these various sights and sounds must have reminded

them irresistibly of One who used to be beside them constantly, and of the vanished happiness when they had been His pupils and His friends. That life of close companionship was ended now. Their beloved Master had been taken from them by wicked hands and crucified and slain. And, though since He had already appeared to them after His resurrection, and assured them of His living presence and power, yet He had appeared only to vanish away, and they did not know exactly how they were to think of Jesus, or what He would have them do. They were in a state of spiritual doubt and uncertainty, full of regrets for the vanished past, and with no clear outlook for the years to come.

Jesus appears to them on this morning. They learn more fully who He was, and also what He would have them do. Immediately following this description is the interview He had with Peter, three times directing him, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." He was teaching them all the while a valuable lesson. Up to this time they had been in visible companionship with the Lord; He was now educating them into the thought that, though His visible form should be withdrawn, His personal presence would be with them still. In short, He was preparing them to believe the great truth, on which the very existence of the Christian Church depends, and which He announced to them in the words of His parting promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the ends of the world."

It is quite similar with believers now. Our faith is often sorely tried, we are "tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt." We need those things; the Lord is thereby educating us, teaching us some lesson or lessons, so that our faith may become stronger, purer, and better. "Doubt," one has said who lived long ago, "doubt is the daughter of the devil." There is that kind of a doubt which is the sign of an enlarging faith. Of that sort was Thomas. How gloriously it was removed, and he the better for it! So with these men here, and so with us. Not seldom do we find a soul must be tossed all night upon a dark, tempestuous sea of doubt and misgiving before Jesus comes with the morning light to speak His word of peace, and to make all things plain.

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This leads to the last thought, *viz.*, that Jesus reveals Himself to the eyes of those who love Him. We must not think that work, or disappointment, or religious doubt, in themselves, insure the vision of the Lord. On the contrary, it may be these things precisely that veil Him from our sight. Sometimes a man's work so absorbs his heart that he has no thoughts left for spiritual things. And sometimes worldly disappointments only make a man hard, bitter, and cynical, while spiritual doubt drives him into sheer unbelief and black despair. A certain condition of heart is needful in order that these things become blessings, the occasion of fresh revelations of the Lord. This narrative suggests which it is. It was John who saw Jesus first in the figure that stood on the shore, and John, as we know, was the disciple who loved Jesus most and best, and there was a real connection between these two facts. It was the love of John's heart, rather than the sharpness of his eyes, that enabled him to say, "It is the Lord"; for love detects the loved one afar off, and where others see only the indistinguishable figure of a man, it cries: "Nay, it is he himself." And love, my beloved, is still and always a great condition of spiritual knowledge. "He that loveth me," said Jesus, "shall be loved of my Father, and I will love Him and will manifest Myself to him." Often, like those fishermen of Galilee, we have to face life's duties and burdens with a dull and heavy heart; if there is love to Christ, He will appear to our faith, if not to our sight, filling our hearts with the joy of His presence and compelling us to say in wonder and delight: "It is the Lord."

God grant that we may know Him in this life, so that when the morning of eternity dawns upon us, we may see Christ standing on the shore of heaven and hear His words of welcome. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.—*John 21, 15-17.*

It was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first pale shafts of the rising sun were shooting across the eastern sky, revealing seven fishermen out upon the water in a little boat. All night they had been toiling, rowing and letting down their nets, but nothing had they caught. Disheartened by their fruitless toil, they were just about to give up further attempt when a once familiar form is seen standing upon the beach, and they hear a voice telling them to cast the net on the right side of the ship. They heed the direction, and the success which follows—a draught of one hundred and fifty-three fishes—confirms them in their belief that it was their risen Master who had given the command. Thereupon they drag the boats to shore, and find a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread, whilst He whom all know to be the Lord, but whom none from holy awe dares ask, "Who art Thou?" bids them, "Come and eat."

It is here that our text sets in—one of the most pathetic incidents in sacred story. To understand it properly, we go back in spirit to that scene in the high priest's palace when Peter, the bold and courageous, whose impulsiveness had caused him to promise great things, had shamefully and cowardly denied his Master in the hour of distress. Thrice had he averred that he

knew not the man of whom they spoke, and aggravated his offense by denunciations and an oath. It was a grievous, a most terrible fall for the apostle, one that virtually excluded him from the circle of his fellow-disciples and from his holy office; and whilst it is true that he had wept in sorrowing repentance when the eye of his Master had met his insignificant look, yet the occurrence was such as to demand a personal heart-to-heart interview and setting aright. This interview took place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, after the miraculous draught of fish. Everything tended to prepare the apostle for the holy scene. It was just three years before, at the same sea, after a similar miracle, that the Lord had established him in his ministerial office. The early hour reminded him of the morning watch, that fire of coals answered to that fire of coals in the palace of Caiaphas,—all of this must have touched Peter's heart to the quick, made him exquisitely sensitive to the scene that followed. The particulars of that scene we shall now ponder, regarding, *I. The examination, II. the charge.*

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When they had finished their meal, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Each designation is touchingly significant. "Simon, son of Jonas." Why not "Peter," the name He had Himself once bestowed? Because he had proved himself anything but a Peter, a rock man. It was not as Peter, as a rock, but as Simon, son of flesh and blood, that he had acted in denying his Lord. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou *me*?" Remembering what had occurred, how divine, how unspeakably tender a word! "Lovest thou *me*?" even Him whom thou didst say and confirm with an oath, "I know not the man," and more than these, as thou didst boastfully claim: "Although all should be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Truly, a rigid examination if accompanied by the same look that once brought tears to his eyes, calculated to cut down deep into his innermost soul. Moreover, the Lord repeats the inquiry three times, evidently as a reminder of the thrice shameful denial.

And what does the disciple reply? Sad almost unto death, he would prefer to turn aside and give vent to his feelings in silent tears. But the Lord has put a question to him, and speak he must, and so he responds with great tact and deep emotion, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And the last time, with additional force, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee," as though he said: "Others may misjudge me, these brethren and apostles, those servants in the high priest's palace, but Thou, Lord, the Omniscient, knowest that I love Thee." And we may believe that it was so. On the day of Pentecost, when boldly confessing his Master in the face of thousands, until the day when, pinned to the cross in Rome, he at last made good his promise, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee,"—in all this we have the evidence of that love thrice avowed. And has that original scene on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and that question no concern and no application whatever for us? No superfluous or unprofitable inquiry, my dear hearers.

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If the Lord were to appear personally in our midst this morning, look straight into your eyes, and, addressing you by your name, say, as He did to Simon, son of Jonas: "Lovest thou me?" could you answer as promptly, as heartily as the Apostle did, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee"? Or are there no tests by which to find out? It was written by a pious man, but it is poor, unchristian theology:

'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?

We need only settle down to a faithful and impartial scrutiny with ourselves to find out, "Lovest thou me more than these?" What "these"?

Love, according to its object, has been variously classified. There is social affection, or love of friends. In spite of much that has been said about the fickleness of friends and friendships, there is no darker lot and no gloomier epitaph could be inscribed upon the monument of any man than that: "He lived and died without a friend." History gives us many noble testimonies of its strength and beauty. We think of the Bible account of David and Jonathan. Again, more beautiful and binding is the affection which subsists in the family circle. The bond that ties together husband and wife, that unites together brothers and sisters, brought up around the same domestic hearths, sharing in common joys and sorrows, how strong and enduring it ought to be, and especially that which exists between parents and the child. The recollection of a noble parent, of a devoted mother, time nor place nor change can ever uproot the affection from the heart. But, asks the voice of our text: "Lovest thou me more than these?"

There is One toward whom we sustain a still nearer and holier relation, One whose care surpasses that of an earthly parent, and whose love is more deep and sublime and unailing than a mother's, even He who has created you, redeemed you, and who crowns not only your life, but your whole eternity with His goodness. It matters not what, and hence you may embrace in that riches, honor, property, possessions, fame and name, or even self,—there is One who requires that all these should be held in subordination to a still higher, all-sustaining affection. "Lovest thou me"—is the question, "more than these," and where is the evidence?

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If you love a person, you will delight in the fellowship and company of that person. Love finds its greatest happiness in the presence of the beloved. The thought of a long absence is painful, or hopeless separation, intolerable. It is so with Him who asks "Lovest thou me?" Every opportunity of communion with Him the believer values as a privilege. The Word in which He speaks to him, the place in which He meets with him, the table which He spreads for him, these are his greatest

delight, his favorite and fondest resort.

Again, if you love some one, you will constantly aim to please that person. You will be considerate of his feelings, you will refrain from any conduct that might be displeasing, and strive in every possible way to be of service and help to his interests. It is none else with Christ. Consideration for Him and obedience to Him, and that as a pleasure and privilege, is a criterion of our love to Him; and this alone you will find where there is true attachment. The maiden that loves will think nothing of leaving a pleasant home to cast her lot with the man of her devotion. The mother will spend herself, unselfishly sacrifice her comfort, strength, and even life itself, for the objects of her affection, and this rule applies to the Christian sphere.—No man ever possessed true love for Christ who was not willing to lay down in sacrifice what he cherished highly. Here, then, are a few criterions, and now, with all sincerity, repeat the question once more, "Lovest thou me?" Lovest thou my Word, my house, my sacraments? Is my service thy delight? What sacrifice art thou bringing? Shall the Savior say unto thee as Delilah said unto Samson: "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?" Or are you able to say with the Apostle, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee"? May we all be brought to love and adore, with our whole, undivided heart, Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who is the Model and Source of all pure and ennobling lives.

But there is yet another consideration for us to weigh in the text. Peter, making threefold confession of His attachment, is three times, after each answer, commanded, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep." A desperate cause, in this passage as in a few others, wants to find a proof of Peter's supremacy. There is a certain pontiff who wears a triple crown—the tiara—upon his head, styles himself Peter's successor, and seals his briefs and documents with the "Fisherman's Ring," and he affects to rule all Christendom in virtue of the right conferred on that Apostle by Christ. But in vain do we seek the scripture for any such reference, and surely no such sense is implied here. That scene on the shores of the Sea of Galilee can by no means be interpreted to mean that Peter was being exalted above his fellow-apostles. Neither could we regard it as a reproof and abasement. None other had so sorrowfully forfeited his charge as Peter had, and it was not necessary to reinstate them. Where, then, is the exaltation? Nor is there any such a sense implied in the words themselves. "Feed my lambs," is Christ's direction. Romanism, you will observe, exalts the ruling; you can see that in such words as pope, cardinal, primate, bishop, prelate, diocesan, throne, and so forth. Protestantism emphasizes the "feeding." Protestantism makes much of preaching, Rome but little. Rome exalts the clergy, Protestantism gives prominence to the congregation.

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It is easy enough to decree and lord it over, it is not so easy to feed. And food is what a flock explicitly needs. It can live without edicts, it cannot live without food. Observe, also, the pronoun "my" sheep. The flock was not Peter's, it was the flock of Peter's Lord. The flock does not belong to the under-shepherd; it belongs to the chief shepherd. And did not Peter himself—and that is one reason why his letters are never read in the Romish Church—very strongly denounce the very things which it is asserted that Christ had invested him with: lordship over the Church, a separate hierarchical priesthood, and refuse such honors as are freely given to his successor? As Luther has well said: "Popery never drew its doctrine from the Bible, but uses it as a means to thrust upon the world an audacious system which has its origin somewhere else."

Nor can we leave entirely unnoticed the difference the Lord makes between His people,— "Feed my lambs," and again, "Feed my sheep." Some of Christ's flock are lambs, lambs in years. Perhaps there are more lambs than sheep, more true members of Christ in the nursery and in the Sunday-school and in the Christian day-school than in the assembly of the adults, and these we are to feed, and it becomes those who are invested with the sacred office, and those who are supporting the sacred office, to dispense to them wholesome and health-sustaining spiritual food. Our responsibilities in this respect are great, and all the greater because the more secular knowledge would crowd out religious, the many things that are now regarded needful, and set aside "the one thing needful." "Feed my lambs," and, "Feed my sheep," says the Chief Shepherd. See that they get the proper food and get it in proper proportion.

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And "My sheep;" we are not always to remain lambs. Christian life is a growth. First the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. First babes, and then we need milk; afterwards adults, and then we need meat. Alas! that, like the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, we are sometimes constrained to complain "that many of you who ought by this time be teachers, are yet needing again that one teach them the first rudiments of the oracles of God, having become such as have need of milk and not of solid food."

This was a crisis in Peter's life. Hitherto he had been tended as a sheep, henceforth he was to tend as a shepherd. Having been converted, that is to say, having been turned again to his Master, he is henceforth to strengthen his brethren. What hinders us from doing likewise, pastors and teachers, educating, tending, and feeding the flock of God? This is the privilege of the laity, not less than of the ministry. When the laity really do their work, they, too, are really a ministry, true shepherds. But let us evermore keep in mind—which was the first part of our sermon—that the essential qualification, the principle of such service, as it is the only thing that will render your work delightful and carry you through all difficulties, is love to Christ, "Lovest thou me more than these?—Feed my sheep." Amen.

Neither do men, light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.—*Matt. 5, 15. 16.*

The religion of Jesus Christ is the religion of everyday life. He touched the common things, and, like a magic wand, they changed into the finest gold. He went into the kitchen for a text, and transfigured the meal, the dough in the bread wrought into a parable of God's working grace. He went into the garden or the woods, and found a lesson in the springing seed and the flowers which carpeted the ground. "Consider the lilies," He said in His Sermon on the Mount. He went on board the fishing boat, and the nets become a picture of the kingdom of heaven. Here, in this immediate verse, our Lord steps into an Eastern or Oriental house for a text and speaks under the illustration of an article which is to be found in every home, of a candle, or rather, a lamp.

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The Apostle Peter, who was present at the original preaching, must have carefully noted the comparison, for he speaks in to-day's Epistle-lesson in nearly the same language as His Master when he admonishes his hearers to let people see their good works and thus glorify God. May we do likewise as we shall now regard, under God's blessing, the Christian's duty to let his light shine before men, observing, *I. How this is done; II. why it ought to be done.*

Be it noted, my beloved, at the outset, that man, in and of himself, is not a light; he is darkness. Says the Apostle, writing to the Ephesians, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye a light in the Lord." How did they get light? Not by worldly science and learning. Many are very learned and literate, and yet their souls are unwrapped in thick darkness and without hope in the world. And there are those who are illiterate, incompetent to read and write, who rejoice in this light as the star of their hope. In the eighth chapter of John the Lord says: "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Jesus Christ, then, and He alone, is the one true Light. To have light, light unto eternal life, you must seek, embrace Him as your Savior, your Righteousness, the Propitiation and Reconciliation for your sins. You must recognize in Him the wisdom of God and the way to God. Here you have in what sense Christians are lights, *viz.*, by Jesus Christ. The sun shines by its own inherent light, the moon by borrowed light. In itself a dark body the moon shines only because the light of the sun falls upon it and is reflected from it. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, resplendent in His own glory, which He had before ever the world was. We have our light from Christ, the true Light, which lights every man, says the Bible, that cometh into the world.

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And what dispensation is made of this light? "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." A candle or lamp under a bushel would be of no advantage to any one. A light locked up in a cupboard would leave the house in darkness. Correspondingly, we Christians are meant to be lights that can be seen. A man cannot be a Christian in secret. It is a delusion if a person thinks he might be a Christian privately for himself, that he need not associate with, join the church, or make a public confession of his faith.

In the days of Christ many of the chief rulers believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogues. It is said of them that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, and had their reward. We, my brethren, as Christ's people, must not keep our religion locked up or hidden; we must not be ashamed of it, and we must not be selfish about it. If you believe in the truth of the Gospel; if you hold the doctrine of the Church; if you reverence the Bible; if you are given to prayer,—hang out the light, let others know it, put that precious lamp where others may share it. What use is there to tell us that such and such a person is a burning and shining light in the religious world, unless we can see his light shining before men? They are no more helps as guides than a lighthouse whose lantern is gone out; no one is the better for it.

And this light is twofold; it is a light of warning, and it is a light of holy example.—A light of warning. If you look at a great railway station at night, you will see numbers of lamps, some showing a red, some a green, some a white light. These are all warnings to the many trains leaving or entering the station, and upon them depends the safety of hundreds of lives. If the signal man fails to show the red light when there is danger, wholesale destruction follows. Dear hearers, there are times when we are called upon to show the danger signal. If we see a relative or friend deliberately going into danger, taking a course which means ruin to his character, ruin to his soul, what is our duty? Are we to say, I am very sorry, and thus hide our light under a bushel? No, we must try to stop a brother from destruction; we must say a word of warning, kindly, tactfully, but firmly; we must say, For God's sake, stop! If you see an acquaintance imbibing too freely, frequenting the place at the corner, show him the danger, hang out the red light. If you see young people neglecting religious duties, slinking about after dark in bad company, going with those who bet and gamble,—let them go? No; try to turn them on a safe road; hang out the red light, the danger signal.

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I once read of a man who was engaged as a laborer on a railway. One stormy night, when he returned to his cabin, he found that a sudden landslide had occurred, and that part of the track was blocked where the express would pass in a few moments. Would he remain quiet and let the accident happen? What could he do to show the danger signal? He had in his cabin an old lantern lighted by a piece of candle, but that would not show the red light. Then, when the roar of the advancing train was audible in the distance, he seized a glass flask and with the broken neck cut into the veins of his wrist he let the blood color the lantern, and the candle shone through it with a dim red light, and this, scarcely able to stand, he held up on high, just in time to stop the express at the edge of destruction. Take that illustration for what it is worth, just so it impresses you with the importance of showing the red danger signal unto others.

And so it is also with the signal light that is clear and white, the signal of holy example. Let that also shine. As we look carefully at our text, it would seem as if the Master had two spheres in mind when He spoke these words. We are told that when the lamp or candle is put in its proper place and doing its proper work, it gives light to *all* in the house. There is nothing like household religion. Sometimes professing Christians are very bright and shining lights in public, and quite dark in private, in the home and family circle. The right sort of Christianity shows a pure, clear light amid the troubles, worries, and anxieties of home. It will not do for the wife to be a shining light in society or at the public meeting, and at home be fretful and unkind to her husband, a constant scold and a scare to her children, perpetually complaining and quarreling. It will not do for men to make brilliant speeches on the blessings and benefits of Christianity, if they show no example of it by the fireside. Take care of the home light; let it shine clear there, if anywhere. But not only there!

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A lady who was once asked to unite with a society of the church, no circumstances or other considerations preventing, declined, replying that she had a society to look after with which none compared. Which is that? "That society is my family." There was truth in that; the family is the chief society. Parents are to exercise a Christian example in the home. Christian discipleship, like charity, begins there. But it does not end there, nor is it restricted there. "No man liveth unto himself, neither alone unto his family." He belongs to his country, to his church, to the world, to mankind at large, and has duties toward them. "Ye are the light of the world," is the language of the Savior. What will men not do to gain followers for a party in politics and otherwise! And in matters of salvation, Church, Gospel, eternal life, we should be timid, silent, diffident, shy, reluctant to open our mouths and assert our convictions, stand aside, and place our convictions under a bushel? Surely, that's not letting the light shine. So much as to the nature and mission of this spiritual light.

In conclusion, a word as to the blessedness that attends it. This blessedness, in part, affects ourselves. Blessing others, we are blessed. Gaining others, we gain. I think here, by way of illustration, of the two travelers who, plodding along through snow and bitter cold, discovered a man lying by the roadside frozen and numbed. Said the one, "I cannot stay here to attend to this fellow, I must take care of my own life." The other, like the good Samaritan of old, remarked, "I cannot pass on without having made some attempt to restore him," whereupon he set about to rub him with all his might. His efforts were rewarded; after a little while the unfortunate man opened his eyes, and, arising, went with his rescuer. What surprise was theirs when, passing along, they saw the man who had selfishly and heartlessly continued his way, lying frozen to death. The good Samaritan, by his labor of love, had stirred his blood into intense circulation, and thereby saved his own life. Spiritually it is just that way. Seeking to win others for eternal life, we win eternal life for ourselves. Our faith is strengthened, charity increased, we are blessed in our deed.

And this is the second consideration,—our Father in heaven is glorified. That is the great thing we must aim at in everything we do in religion. In this center the lives of all our actions must meet. We must not only endeavor to glorify God ourselves, but must do all we can to bring others to glorify Him.

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We have considered a grand spiritual truth, our exalted position and calling. Conscious of it, may we shed forth the beams of illumination for the lightening and the brightening of a dark and gloomy world, receiving supply from the true and only Light, Christ Jesus, until we shall dwell in the world where God Himself is the Light and where we shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.—*Col. 3, 16.*

We read in the 28th chapter of Genesis that when Jacob, the patriarch, was fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau into the land of Mesopotamia, while resting at night upon a stone for his pillow, he had a wonderful dream. A ladder extended from heaven to earth, angels ascending and descending upon it, and God, standing at the top, spoke to the heartsore traveler beneath. That vision was highly typical. The ladder was a symbol of the intimate connection that existed between him and the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac; the angels ascending and descending, were a symbol that his prayers and sighs had come up before the heavenly throne, whilst the words of the Almighty were a guarantee that his journey would take a prosperous end, and cheerfully, we are told, did the patriarch take up his pilgrim staff and resume his route in the morrow. Now as it is with all things we find written in the Old Testament, so with this also. We have the reality of what Jacob experienced in dream only. The ladder which now extends between heaven and earth, connecting us pilgrims or strangers with our heavenly home, that ladder is Jesus Christ, man's Mediator, who declares, "I am the Way; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."—The word of the Almighty, then spoken, we have, greatly amplified, in this divine revelation, this holy volume before us; nor are the angels, these celestial messengers, missing to carry on communication and intercourse between God and sinful man. Figuratively and symbolically speaking, these angels stand for all those agencies, exercises, and accompaniments by which the soul is lifted up to heaven and God, and by which we are spiritually helped and

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edified, and it is one such holy agency and accompaniment of sacred truth that we wish to consider in these moments of devotion.

St. Paul speaks in our immediate text of "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Let us regard these words, and may ours be the same confession as Jacob's at Bethel: "How venerable is this place! This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven."

"O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things." "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, sing forth the honor of His name, with the harp, with trumpets and the sound of cornet. Praise ye the Lord." These are the words of the 98th Psalm of David, and it was with this Psalm that the service began, in the ancient Church, on the fourth Sunday after Easter. The name of the Sunday is Cantate, which means "Singing Sunday," and probably there is no time in the course of the civil church-year more appropriate to raise one's voice in rejoicing and heart-felt song. In nature a new era of revival and tender growth has gone forth; the earth is clothed with loveliness, refreshed with energy, and from birds and blades, from flowering buds and a tender branch goes up a joyful melody and proclamation to their Creator; and when we come into His sanctuary, the house of His Word and His worship, and reflect on the blessed Easter scene from which we are just coming, we have reason to tune our voices in strains of loudest and loveliest anthems, and an appropriate and beautiful thing it certainly is to bring this noblest of human arts to the aid of the soul in its communication with God. Since time immemorial has the power of music been acknowledged over the heart of man. "Let me make the songs of the people," said a celebrated statesman, "and I care not who makes the laws." An illustrious Greek philosopher was not far wrong when he stated that the human soul was closely allied to rhythm and harmony, and we know that the Court of Rome feared the sacred hymns of Luther as much, if not more, than his publications and fiery eloquence.

Turning to the Holy Scriptures, we observe a constant recognition of music in the Old Testament and in the New. Standing on the shores of the Red Sea, Moses, the man of God, chants forth the gratitude of his people after their safe deliverance from Egypt's bondage in song, whilst Miriam, his sister, responds with timbrel and dance. David, the anointed shepherd boy, takes his harp and charms into tranquillity the ferocious spirit of Saul. Elisha, when he would prophesy, calls for a minstrel, and under his playing the prophet's heart grows warm and his lips eloquent with a message from God. And where do we hear of more magnificent renderings than in the temple at Jerusalem, thousands of voices organized in costly choir to chant with accompaniment of complete orchestra, the psalms written by their monarch, David, called the sweet singer of Israel. Cherubim and Seraphim are incessantly praising God in thrice "Holy to the God of Sabaoth," and angels' choirs filled the midnight stillness of Bethlehem's plains. Add to this Zacharias' *Benedictus* and Mary's *Magnificat*, which have lent their hallowed inspiration to ages since in the Christian Church, and if there is one scene which impresses every reader of his Bible, and to which he looks forward with pure delight, it is the worship of the Lamb in Revelation, the joining of the celestial choir in hymns of endless melody. Desiring to bear our part in that tuneful service, can our lips be silent on earth? Nay, music is one of God's good and perfect gifts, of which to-day's Epistle speaks as coming down from above. True, like all other good gifts to man, it has been seized upon and perverted for evil purpose by the enemy. Satan it is who has levied upon music and made sad havoc in the line of song. But shall we abandon to him the territory? Shall we not make reprisal upon the enemy, consecrate to the divine Giver His first-fruits? And unquestionably, in the worship of our Lutheran Church, hymnology has a larger and a more correct province than in any other body of Christians. I have listened to various music, I have heard entranced the melting tones of the *Miserere* in early mass at the Catholic Cathedral, the sweetly attuned antiphons of a vested Episcopal choir. I have listened to solos and quartets, accomplished tunes, composed by masters; but what do all these solos, superbly rendered, amount to when in God's worship the congregation itself sits mute in its pews, deprived of every response, as in the Catholic Church, or too indolent to respond, as in many others? Is it Christian, is it churchly, is it consistent with our text or the spirit of true worship, that ninety-nine tongues of a hundred be silent in the house of the Lord? When the minister turns to the people and says, "The Lord be with you," is he supposed to address only four singers and an organist? No, my dear hearers, praise is the duty and privilege of all the people, and to deny or stint them in a share in it is to wrong their souls and insult their Maker. A well-tuned solo is good, the chorus of the choir is better, but best of all is the response and song of the entire congregation, sending up its confession and praise to the God of heaven. There is nothing more solemn and pleasing to the Lord of Sabaoth than a singing congregation, and nothing more dull and spiritless than singing wailed forth in melody calculated to freeze the last spark of holy fire upon the altar of the heart.

Having emphasized which is the best form of songful worship, that by the congregation, let us regard it a little more closely. The singing of a congregation of worshipers is, as it were, the preaching of the congregation, is the confession which it renders on its part and in behalf of its faith, is the Amen which it places upon the words and utterances of the preacher. The most important place, it must ever be maintained, in a truly evangelical service, is the exposition, the setting forth of God's Word. A worship consisting exclusively of singing, commonly called a Song Service, is an innovation in Lutheran church life, and a very questionable one at that. The object of our attendance at church is not to hear "sweet music,"—this can be better answered at the concert or the oratorio,—honest Christian people come to hear God's Word, to build up their souls in divine truth. The sweetest tune sung by the lips of angels or of man cannot replace the least passage of the Bible, for it alone is the power of God unto salvation. Christianity is not rapturous ecstasy, super-induced by fine melody, not emotional feeling; Christianity means

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repentance and faith.

There is nothing, no symphonies and oratorios, no strains, that can bring peace and rest to a sinner's heart, but only and solely the simple words of the Lord received and believed. The sermon, then, occupies the central position of the worship, just as the sun is the center of the solar system, and, in turn, determines the true place of the song and music. It is the noble handmaiden, preceding and accompanying the preaching of the Word, the sweet odors which carry our devotion and sacrifice upward to heaven, in harmony with the utterance of the speaker. It is thus we value our hymns as the finest ornament of our evangelical worship, and nothing is more significant than to find in your homes the Christian hymn-book lying upon God's Book. And what does a careful survey of that hymn-book reveal to us? We would not from any feeling of denominational pride detract any from the grandeur of hymns originated in dissenting bodies, many of which are embodied in our hymnal, but if there is one church whose voice swells out loudly among the hymnody of Christendom, that can look with satisfaction on its collection of sacred songs, it is our beloved Lutheran Zion with its stately and majestic chorals, its incomparable anthems. There is about our hymns a spirit of divine power; they are the expressions of our Christian faith, church-hymns in the fullest and best sense, not only inspiring and devotional, but educating and instructive, designed to lead us in our way to salvation and heaven. Take, for instance, the various seasons of the church-year: Advent, expectant and exultant over the coming of the Savior of man; Christmas, what hymns will compare with those of our church in childlike simplicity and depth of feeling? Passion-tide, with its solemn lines: "O Bleeding Head and Wounded," "O Lamb of God Most Holy;" Easter-tide, with its stirring hallelujahs. How doctrinally sound are our hymns of faith, how cheering our hymns of praise, how touching the melodies of penitence and death! Referring to our text, we find the first requisite for a correct church-hymn is this: to bring God's Word closer to us. The Apostle says: "Teaching." Our hymns will stand the test of this standard. In the days of the Reformation they were one of the most beneficial means of winning hearts and conquering lands for Bible truth and Bible Church. Many a priest, history records, was sung down from the pulpit and out of the church by the congregation joining in a Lutheran hymn, and later, in the dreary days of Rationalism, when man's folly was put in the place of God's wisdom, it was these church-hymns which still afforded spiritual food to the children of God, and till this day, wherever those tried and heavenly true hymns resound, we can cheerfully be persuaded that they assert their influence in making men wise unto salvation.

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Nor are they merely calculated to instruct, but also to cheer and inspire. There is scarcely another power that will ease the heart, strengthen and sustain the lagging and downcast spirit, as will a heartfelt "Commit whate'er may grieve thee," and kindred hymns. In the darkest moments of his life, David tuned his harp and bade sorrow and grief flee. In Philippi's dungeon, at the hour of midnight, Paul and Silas raised their voices in melody of praise. After days of bitter conflict and labor the Reformer would produce his lute, and sing unto the Lord a pleasant song, to the joy of the angels and the chagrin of the devil. Gustavus Adolphus, Sweden's valiant hero of the faith, who fought and died for religious liberty, never entered a battle without prostrating himself with his army before the Lord of heaven and singing, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "Fear Not, O Little Flock, the Foe." Sacred story tells us of Saul, that whenever the evil spirit came over him, the king would send for David, and under his tune find relief from his torments.

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Nor has the spiritual song lost any of this soothing element. "The singing of songs and hymns purifieth our thoughts," says a church-father, "represses sensuality, stirs the heart to pure emotions, awakens a love and a longing for the beauty of holiness, moves to holy contrition and godly sobriety." No wonder that Luther ranked music next to theology of pure religion, effectual as it is in warding off Satan's suggestions, and aiding us in becoming better and more noble, and hence, in harmony with this Sunday, Cantate, we are justified in bringing this topic to your consideration, especially in our times, which are replete with so much vain and shoddy music, senseless and overwrought travesties, often set to tunes that are a perfect scandal and shame upon all divine worship, and better suited for the opera than for the house of God. Let us rejoice in this good gift God has bestowed upon us, and diligently use it in our churches and homes until it shall be our happy lot to join the multitudes of those who shall raise their voices to pour forth their everlasting song, and cause the city of God to ring with anthems of perpetual worship. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.—*Eph. 6, 18.*

Among the things that people believed in olden times was a certain stone, called a touchstone. By means of this stone it was claimed one could determine whether a gem or a precious piece of jewelry was genuine or not. The sham diamond might glitter ever so brightly, the sham gold externally deceive the eye, let the touchstone be applied, and its real character would at once appear. Spiritually, in religion, there is such a touchstone by which those who profess to serve God can discover whether they are genuine Christians or not, whether their religion is pure gold or inferior metal, whether their faith is a gem of great price or only worthless imitation, useless dross. That touchstone of true spiritual life is prayer, communion with his God, for as a man communeth with his God, so he is. How, then, does this touchstone apply to you? Are you a man,

or woman, of prayer? What sort of Christian are you?

Nor can it be said that we need no instruction on this subject. We must be taught to pray just as we must be taught how to write and talk correctly. Let us, then, in all simplicity, with plainness of speech and practicalness of purpose, consider. *I. When, II. where, and III. how we should pray:* and may God's Holy Spirit, the Lord of Prayer, attend with His blessing our meditation.

There are many passages in Holy Scripture which seem to command impossibilities, and we tacitly pass them by as not intended for us. This cannot be a wise or safe thing to do, for God does not command impossibilities. So with the text, "Praying always." In other places we read, "Pray without ceasing," "Continue constant in prayer." Our first thought may be, That's beyond us. How, in this busy life of ours, shall we ever be able to give ourselves over to never-ceasing prayer? A few minutes a day, a special prayer occasionally at special seasons or special emergencies, that's about all we can afford. That is a mistaken notion of these texts of prayer. It is a familiar expression: "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath," the Christian's native air. We are always breathing. Ceasing to breathe means death. So with the spiritual life. For a person not to pray means spiritual death. Every one who is a Christian prays; not to pray stamps him as a non-Christian. [157]

And yet, as in the bodily sphere a distinction exists between breathing and using that breath for speaking, so we must draw a distinction between "prayer" and "saying prayers." A Christian, as he is always breathing naturally, so he is always breathing spiritually. He lives a life of prayer; he is always in such a state of faith and heart and spirit that he can lift up his heart in prayer. Even when we are silent, we breathe; even when a Christian is not "saying prayers," engaged in forms of worship, he is in a spiritual frame of mind, and is living a life of prayer. To pray always is to live as in God's presence, to be constantly conscious of Him.

And still, true as it is that a Christian is always living a life of prayer, there must be times for prayer—times when we engage in "saying prayers." There is more in this matter of habit than many persons think. It means regularity, and makes it both easy and pleasant. There is no absolute rule on this subject, no technical limit. Each one must determine himself how often he ought to pray daily. David, in the Psalm, says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray." Daniel was accustomed to kneel upon his knees three times a day. There is, if we may so speak, a natural propriety in thus thrice addressing the throne of grace. Three times a day we are accustomed to feed our bodies, and this very act may suggest to us that our souls need similar attention. "Men shall not live by bread alone." We have our blessed Lord's example for it. The holiest and most fruitful Christian lives have been lived by men and women who thus prayed not less than three times a day. The early Christians were exemplary in the discharge of this duty. What Christian, arising from his bed in the morning, can neglect his prayer? Everything seems to invite him to lift up his heart unto God. When we arise from our beds, it is like a resurrection from the dead, and it seems almost impossible for a pious mind not to view it in that divine light, thanking God for his waking; and as he sallies forth from his home, not knowing what a day may bring forth, and feeling his weakness and frailty and danger, the temptation to which he is every moment exposed, how can he do it without first raising his eyes and thoughts on high, committing himself to the faithful Creator, and invoking His protection and strength? Moreover, knowing that everything is resting upon His blessing, he should invoke it upon the occupation of his mind and hands. [158]

Direct, control, suggest this day,
All I may deign, or do, or say,
That all my powers, with all their might,
In Thy sole glory may unite.

When we thus go forth into the world, it is with an atmosphere of devotion around us.

And then again at night-time, when we have given all our strength to the work of our calling, tired and exhausted from the toil of the day, and our couches invite us to repose, who can look back on the blessings of the day without being moved to gratitude to Him who kept us safely through it? There was this and that of the day's transaction that deserves a calm retrospect in the sight of the Lord, confession of one's discrepancy and wrong-doing. And who can resign himself to sleep, the emblem of death, and to his bed, the type of his grave, without saying a few words of Christian committal? And who, during the day, cannot find a few moments to lift up his thoughts on high? Nor, beloved fellow-Christians and church-members, neglect to speak grace at your table; there are blessings, direct and indirect, which connect with that pious and time-honored custom which no household can afford to forego. Frequently the only time when the family meets during the day, it forms a link of spirituality between its members. It is no little means of keeping the devil out and bringing the dove of peace back. Permit not this grand old and well-tried custom to lapse into disuse; hold fast to it as a sacred heirloom transmitted from your godly parents. Thus have your fixed, established season of prayer.

And it is good not only to have stated times, but also stated places for prayers. This is our second consideration: Where? You can pray anywhere. You can hold audience with God at your own option. The place is not essential to prayer. Peter prayed on the housetop, Paul in prison, Daniel in the lions' den, Jonah in the fish's belly. The Lord is everywhere, and His ears are always open to the cries of His people. But the law of association is the friend of religion. As you speed to your labors in the morning, as you sit for recuperation in the shade of one of our beautiful

parks, as you are busy with your duties in kitchen and workshop, your heart can go out to God in devotion. And so it is well to have a little nook somewhere, a spot especially suggestive to us of prayer. There is help in this. Daniel had his spot, where, when he came in from the excitement of the court, he could kneel down and pray to his God. His window opened towards Jerusalem, not accidentally, but by special arrangement, and his eyes swept over the western hills until vision was lost in the distance; his imagination swept onward till he stood in the courts of the Lord's house on Zion's hill, heard its holy songs, and inhaled the incense that arose from its sacred altars. There is something dear to us in such a spot. Our Lord, in His direction on prayer, enjoins: "Enter into thy closet and pray." It was the custom of the Jews to have certain private rooms on the flat top of their homes which they especially reserved for devotional purposes. One such place you certainly ought to have.

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God in His Word calls our churches "houses of prayer." It is a significant title. Not only preaching ought to employ us in the holy place, for what profit is there in preaching, the best of preaching, if there is no outgoing of the heart to God? No singing, no music that has not in it the element of devotion can make melody in His ear. Prayer is an essential part of our service, at the altar and in the pulpit; and it ought to be in the pew. It is here at least, in God's temple, that the Christian soul ought to find a spot, and regularly, where, amid the distressing scenes of earth, it can come to itself, where it can feel and commune in the ear of God, where, lifting itself above the sordidness and the perversity of this earth, it can bathe in the invigorating atmosphere of a nobler world, and draw inspiration for the affairs of life, in a few moments of communion with a Higher Power. Let, I beseech you, this house be to you a house of prayer, and have a similar place in your own home. There's wisdom and great help in that.

Having answered the *when* and *where*, let us now note the *how*. By this we do not mean the posture in prayer, whether we ought to pray standing or kneeling; neither do we mean whether we ought to use a fixed prayer, committed to memory, or pray extempore, out of the heart, finding our own words. I do not think it is wise to use no form as a rule. Extempore prayers are apt to lack both orderly arrangement and fullness, and when weary or dull, or our thoughts are wandering, we cannot make prayers for ourselves,—we want to have a form of devout words put into our mouths. Those simple, yet stately prayers of our Catechism and hymn-book have been, and are still, the inspiration of thousands of the most devout of God's children. And yet, there is one danger. Using a regular form of prayer stately may lead to listlessness and lifelessness. It is not only the Romanist who, counting his beads and making his crossings and prostrations, nor the Mohammedan, who at the priest's call from the mosque falls upon his knees, who does not pray, but the Protestant may say or read his addresses to God, and yet not pray. There is a difference between saying prayer and praying. Prayer, to be right, must be offered up in the spirit of prayer, and by the spirit of prayer is meant a devotional tone and temper of the mind and the heart. Reads our text: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." It is the heart that prays, not the knees, nor the hands, nor the lips. To hasten over the words heedlessly, anxious to be done as quickly as possible, to do it because it's a custom, and perhaps with a superstitious fear that if we do not do it, something might befall us, is making a mockery of prayer. We ought to pray, but we must pray in earnest, with faith, reverence, sincerity, as if we meant it. As it has been expressed: God does not look at the arithmetic of our prayers, how many there may be; nor does He look at the logic of our prayers, how methodical and nicely arranged they may be; nor at the rhetoric, how beautiful they may be. What He looks at is the sincerity of our prayers, how earnest they are. And lose not the Spirit in your prayers; that is the one direction of to-day's text. And the other is, "Praying always with all perseverance," *i. e.*, prayer must be constant, unceasing. The Apostle knew the defects of earth-born man, and, knowing, bids them to beware of being tardy in their prayer. There is a good reason why. Prayer is spiritual breath, we said. If a man's breathing is bad, if it is hurried, fitful, some mortal mischief is at work. Even so spiritually. If our prayers are hurried, if they are irregular, if we regard them as disagreeable duties, if they are not the natural and necessary consequences of our spiritual life, natural and necessary as breathing is to every living man, then that life is sadly weak and diseased. Why are we so weak in Christian faith? why so wayward and sluggish in our Christian life? Why have sinful habits such power over us? It is because we breathe, *i. e.*, pray, so badly. How is it possible to work for God, or fight for Him, if we are tardy in holding communion with Him?

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Think it over, my dear fellow-Christian, and may it aid you in making you a man, a woman, of prayer! For what is a man of prayer? See yonder mountain. Below is its gigantic base; then your eye runs up the mountain side, and you see—what? That the peak is lost in the clouds. So is the man of prayer. His feet stand upon the earth, his heart is in the clouds; there is a something that keeps him in constant communion with God. There lies his strength. We call it "prayer." Amen.

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ASCENSION.

So, then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.—*Mark 16, 19.*

The Christian Church, from the beginning, has made the ascension of our Lord the subject of a special annual festival and service, and with excellent reason. The ascension of Christ ranks in importance with His birth, His death, and His resurrection. Strange to say, however, much less attention is given to it. Many are prompt and devout in noting and observing Christmas, Good

Friday, and Easter, but when it comes to the glorious ascension, the heavenly enthronement of our blessed Lord, though furnishing equal cause for our gratitude and rejoicing, few seem to so regard it, and make little over its celebration. This ought not to be.

Christ's ascension into heaven is one of the great foundation truths of our Christian faith, a part of the fundamental Creed. "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty," we recite in the Apostles' Confession. The ancient prophets spoke repeatedly of it, Christ, Himself, on several occasions foretold it, and the apostles and evangelists, most of whom were eye-witnesses of it, testify to it, and, moreover, it is also full of blessedness and precious consolation for those who enter into it with spirit and understanding, as one of the sick, after a sermon on Christ's ascension, preached by our missionary in the City Hospital, exclaimed, "Thank God for this precious truth of Christ's ascension!" The man was right. It is a truth full of strength for a Christian's faith, hope, and love, that it well behooves us to regard it, considering *I. Its significance for Him; II. its significance for us.* [162]

St. Paul, summing up the history of our Savior's life, says: "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." That is the last item, the capstone, as it were, of His life. His work upon earth was completed, the purpose for which He had come perfected; there was nothing for Him to do. "It is finished," He had spoken upon the cross. Moreover, He could not remain upon earth, and eventually die again as a man, for He had conquered death. What, then, was left for Him to do but to return where He had come forth, to ascend on high? This ascension was not a vanishing out of sight, as, for instance, when Christ vanished out of sight in the case of the disciples of Emmaus; nor was it a concealment of Himself, as He concealed Himself from the Jews in the Temple when they lifted up stones to cast at Him; nor was it a transfiguration of His body, as on Mount Tabor, when His face shone as the sun and His garment was white with light.

By Christ's ascension we mean that Christ, according to body and soul, was taken up in a visible manner, by a true and local motion ascending into the clouds, so that now "body and soul" He is in heaven. We shall not speculate, throw up all manner of questions how this could be, but accept the statement of trustworthy, reliable witnesses, men of unimpeachable veracity, that so it was, and we know that it was not the only case of such heavenly ascension. The Bible records two others; the one occurred in the days before the Flood, when it states of Enoch "that God took him and he was seen no more"; and the other took place after the Flood, when Elijah, the prophet, was conveyed in a fiery chariot into ethereal realms. These Old Testament incidents were types of Christ's ascension. The ascension of our Lord stands out as an indisputable fact, witnessed by many. The exact time, place, and circumstances are all minutely given. Thus, what is the first particular of its significance for Him, it shows that He was the divine Being which the Bible states, that He was divine God blessed forevermore.

And we rejoice at this elevation of His. How delightful it is to-day to lift up our eyes and behold Him who for our sakes became a babe in the poverty and humiliation of Bethlehem's stall, Him whose life was one uninterrupted series of woes, Him who was despised and rejected of men, whose head was pierced by the crown of thorns, and in whose hand was placed the insulting rod, who hung suspended from the cross,—how delightful to see Him worshiped by the host of heaven, conquering, triumphing, receiving the very honor that behooves Him as the true God. On this day we invite and unite with all Christendom in "bringing forth the royal diadem, and crowning Him Lord of all." As He once said to Nicodemus: "No man ascendeth up into heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven." The ascension of Christ is evidence that He was the God-Man, having come from heaven. [163]

Again, Christ's ascension shows that His work on earth was accomplished, and that He had done that work well. When our Government sends an ambassador to effect a treaty with a foreign nation, and on his return home this ambassador is received with public demonstrations of joy, and is accorded a seat of honor in the national capitol, this reception is proof that he has performed his mission well, to the satisfaction of the Government. The event which we to-day commemorate, this gladsome reception of Christ into heaven, this exaltation to the right hand of God the Father, prove conclusively that the work He had been sent to do was done and was done well, to the complete satisfaction of the Father. This is implied already in the text by the word "sat." He sat down. Sitting is a posture, an attitude of rest. God rested on the seventh day, after all His work of creation was finished. Christ now sits upon His throne, at the right hand. That is a mark of honor. When we read that Bathsheba, the queen-mother, went in to see Solomon, her royal son, she was placed on a throne at the king's right hand, in token of the respect he paid to her as his parent. So when the same term is used in the case of our Savior, it means that Christ, in His human form, as man,—for as God He needed not to be glorified,—that Christ the Man was lifted up into the exalted dignity of heaven, high above all the powers and dignities of the angels, that at the name of Jesus every knee must bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The right hand also implies power. Our right hand, as a rule, is the stronger hand. So when Scripture speaks of God's right hand, we are well aware that that is not to be taken literally, since God is a spirit and has no parts of a man, but is a figure of speech, to imply His majesty and power. Christ's taking His seat at His right hand means that Christ, the God-man, as our Catechism says, ruleth and reigneth with infinite, eternal majesty and power over all creatures and works of God's hand. To quote His own words, expressed to His disciples at His departure, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Yes, it is one of the great and glorious truths of our holy Christian faith that He who was born in Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and buried [164]

in Joseph's tomb, is now enthroned as the Lord of angels, the Head over all things, and that He particularly takes care of His Church. That this is indeed the case we may learn from the experience of Saul. When Saul was smitten down on the way to Damascus, he was asked by a heavenly voice, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Saul was persecuting the Christians, but the voice says "Me." Jesus thus identifies Himself with His people. Their interests are His interests, their sufferings, His sufferings. They are the apple of His eye: no harm can come to them but when He permits it.

What consolation this thought ought to afford to believers amidst all the sorrows of life! But this leads us already to consider of what significance Christ's ascension is to us.

We sing in one of our Ascension hymns:

Th' atoning work is done,
The victim's blood is shed,
And Jesus now is gone
His people's cause to plead.
He stands in heav'n, their great High Priest,
And bears their names upon His breast.

Reference is here made to the great day of Atonement, when the Jewish high priest, bearing on his breast the plate upon which were inserted the twelve stones, each stone of which was engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel, and having in his hand the blood of sacrifice, would take it into the Holy of Holies, and presenting it before the Ark of the Covenant, would intercede, ask forgiveness for the sins of the people whose representative he was. So our great High Priest, having given His life a sacrifice for our sins, passes into the Holy of Holies, there to make intercession for us, for which reason we speak of Christ as our Advocate, our Spokesman, for instance, when it says: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." The best of us are continually coming short, but there stands our mutilated and meritorious Brother, holding up the hands that felt the nails, ever pleading in our behalf, ever drawing down upon us the compassionate mercy of an offended God. Yes, "He stands in heav'n, our great High Priest, and bears our names upon His breast."

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And, again, in Christ's ascension we have an earnest pledge of our own. He is the Head, and, "Where the Head is," we sing to-day, "well we know the members He has left below in time He surely gathers." He is our Forerunner, and a forerunner means that others are on the same way to the same place. His entering for us implies our entrance also. Christ did not only take our human nature upon Him for thirty-three years, while He dwelt upon earth among us, then, however, discarding it as a worthless and worn-out garment,—He took it along with Him into heaven and glory, and we are branches of the same vine, joined with Him in the same organism, and thus His ascension is virtually our ascension, the first-fruits of a like harvest to follow. Taking our stand to-day on Mount Olive and gazing on the blessed Savior as He mysteriously mounts up into the high heavens, we behold our Lord clearing a way for us into that upper world, and giving us an example of how all believers are to ascend at one time to the same heavenly realms. "In our blessed Lord's ascension we by faith behold our own." He has told us, "I go to prepare a place for you. Where I am, there shall also my servants be."

How the ascension of Christ confirms our faith, animates our hope! Who can question that there is as much to awaken our grateful joy in our Savior's ascension as in any other event of this marvelous destiny? Christmas joy is right, and Easter joy is right; but there is no less reason to give due honor to the event of our devotion to-day, so blessed, so assuring, so vital. And if we have duly entered into the joyous truths of our faith, the practical effect is plain. The Apostle directs us, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Where your treasure is," the Savior said, "there will your heart be also." Christ is the Christian's treasure, and since He has ascended into heaven, there is a corresponding uplifting of our love to that home of blessedness whither He has gone, and which He is making ready for His believing people.

These, then, are some of the chief thoughts which connect with the event we are commemorating to-day. To this ascended Savior let us anew render our devout homage. Anew let us give Him our love, our gratitude, our faith, our service. Let our lives, down to their very close, be spent in Him and for Him. Then, too, the day shall come when we also shall go up in triumph. Angels of God will then also escort us as conquerors to the skies, and we shall be and reign forever with Him. Grant us this, O Christ! Amen.

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SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION.

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.—*Luke 9, 26.*

It is an awful doom that our text bids us to look forward to, that when Christ comes in His glory and in His Father's and of His holy angels, then He shall be ashamed of us, refuse to acknowledge us, and yet we are inclined to think, at first sight, that, so far as it depends on our being ashamed of Christ, there is not so much fear. There is much that is wrong among us. But

being ashamed of Christ, ashamed of being known as His disciples, ashamed of His name and religion, does not seem one of our shortcomings and dangers. Were not the words rather applicable to the early disciples than to us and our days?

And true it is, as the Gospel to-day presents, that confessing Christ was a very different thing then from what it is now. When first the Gospel was preached among men, not to be ashamed of Christ meant nothing more or less than that a man was ready to leave everything in this world and to die for Christ. When all the powers of earth, Jews and Gentiles, were arrayed against the new faith, when men were brought before kings and rulers, and simply told that, unless they would deny Christ, they would be thrown to the wild beasts, or buried alive, or be sent to prison to labor like convicts all the rest of their days; or when almost everybody took it for granted that the Gospel was mere folly, and that every one who followed it was the most stupid and obstinate of bigots; in other words, when believing and confessing Christ meant to be laughed at, jeered at, mockery, persecution, and martyrdom,—at such seasons we can understand the suitableness and solemnity of Christ's warning to them. But those times, thank God, have passed away; the Gospel is no longer met with fagot and sword. The open profession of religion does no one any hurt in life, exposes him to no special mockery or insult, causes no unfavorable or unpleasant feelings towards him.

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Yes, so far from its going against him, he will not infrequently stand higher and have more credit. And yet, let us not be led into mistakes. This easiness in being religious, which without contradiction is greater nowadays than it ever was in the world since Christ came into it, must not blind us to the spirit of our Lord's words. They have a meaning still, and, while men are men, will continue to have to the world's end. *I. In what way, or ways, they apply to us; II. what is the one main lesson they would bring home to us,—*that let us, under the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit, consider.

There is, my beloved, extant among us these days a confession of Christ that is general. By general we mean it does not like to go into particulars. And it is in the general that we are so brave and bold in professing not to be ashamed of Christ. Take, to make the test, that upon which our religion rests, the Holy Bible. People respect it as a sacred book; something is missing in a Christian home if it is not there; they reverence it in the general. But when it comes to the particular, how little is it really pondered; how little do men feel bound by its particular statements; how easily are its direct communications set aside when they conflict with their notions or feelings or wishes.

Did God actually create man out of the dust of the ground, or is he the creature of evolution? Is the account of the fall of man into sin to be taken literally, or is it only an allegory, a poetic interpretation, a childish and primitive way to account for sin and its sad consequences? Is there a personal devil, or is the devil only to stand for evil in the abstract? The narrative of Balaam, or Jonah, of the men in the fiery oven,—are they to be received as they read? And when it comes to the New Testament,—how are we to understand the conception of the virgin birth of our Savior? how His glorious ascension? how His descent into hell? how His words of the Sacrament: "Take, eat; this is my body. Take, drink; this is my blood," literally or figuratively, "is" meaning "represents"? Does Baptism work forgiveness of sin? Is it the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says to Titus, chapter 3? Go, and question among Christ's followers, consult the thousands of books that are flooding the market,—what do they teach? They are ashamed to admit that God created the world in six days of twenty-four hours each; it's unscientific; they blush at the accounts of Balaam's ass and of Jonah's whale. The blood doctrine of the cross, that Christ has redeemed us by His holy, precious blood and by His innocent suffering and death, is repugnant to many. Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, Baptism the means of a new birth,—they are abashed to acknowledge such teachings. It is the tendency of the age to acknowledge everything in general, and in particular nothing, nothing distinct and definite. People are ashamed of the words of Christ. Why tinker and twist in order not to make the writings say but the one thing they do say? What is this but being ashamed?

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And as in the doctrine, so in matters of religious duty. To speak first, in general. We come to church. Others around us do the same. It's the fashion to do so. But let us ask ourselves, What if everybody around us did not do so? There are places and associations where it is not customary; some of us get among such also: no one goes;—at the very utmost one service a Sunday is thought the full limit. At such times are we shy of doing differently from other people when we know and feel what is right? What is this but being, in reality, ashamed of His words? Or take the Lord's Table,—how many know that they ought to come to the Lord's Table, know and acknowledge what the Lord's command is, and not only that, but in their hearts would like to come, and yet they stay away because they are ashamed to do what other people don't do, of being asked, perchance, sneering questions, of its being said that they are seeking to set themselves up and making more pretense of religion than their neighbors. What is this but staying away because they are ashamed to confess Christ and His words before men?

One instance would I emphasize this morning in particular, and that is church-membership. People are ashamed of the church, not in general,—they regard it as a charitable institution. They have no objection to go there, nor do they mind, if the minister is a fascinating speaker, to part with a little spare change. But there is where the connection ends. With many—their number is tens of thousands—the doctrine is, that one can be just as good and hopeful outside of the Church as in it, that as long as they maintain a general uprightness of behavior, do not defraud any one, live on kindly terms with their neighbors, act as honorable citizens and profess belief in a Higher Being, it does not matter whether they just believe this or that doctrine or not, whether they are confirmed or not, whether they attend public worship, or consult their own ease and pleasure on

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that subject. Indeed, they can see no difference between conformity to the moral teachings and rules of some order, Odd Fellows' associations or Masonic fraternity, and the Church of Christ. In a word, they confound mere outward respectability and godliness with the teachings of Christianity, and place man's organizations, secular societies, on a common par and level with God's organization, Christ's Church, and they quite forget that, in matters of religion and sound morality, it is not for them, nor any man, to point out the way and set up the standard, but humbly to bow to the requirements, and walk in the way which God has ordained and appointed for us to walk in.

And now turn to Christ and His Word,—what does it say? The teaching there is, that outside of His Church, and apart from those acts of Baptism, Holy Communion, public worship, and public identification with the Lord's people, there is no right Christianity and confession of Him. The statement and impression throughout is to this effect that a man's religion is spurious and sorely lacking if it does not bring him into the common fellowship of believers, if it does not lead him to live and move and have his being in observance of the Christian ordinances, and maintaining Christian recognition and membership in the communion of the saints. Can any one think for a moment that in those early days of persecution, when it meant either—or, life or death, people distinguished between being a Christian or a church-member? To be one meant to be the other.

And now go and ask people to join the Church. Ask our young members, when arriving at the age of twenty-one years, to come in and help, to support with means and vote, give a little of their time, and see whether they regard it a privilege and a delight, a God-enjoined duty. In general there is churchliness; and in particular flimsy excuses, pretexts, subterfuges are offered.

And why, to come to our next consideration, why is this? What is the cause? Why this distinction between the early disciples and our present-day confessors of Christ? There was one thing they possessed, which is now so largely lacking,—what is it? Christianity those days, we heard, meant personal sacrifice, persecution, martyrdom. Thank God that form is now over. To-day we see not the Church weeping in sackcloth and ashes at the graves of her slaughtered children, nor hear the Coliseum ringing with the wild shouts: "*Christianos ad leones*: Christians to the lions!" And yet, while not so striking, something of the same vigorous principle, of the same spirit, must characterize the conduct of every Christian. "If any man will follow after me," says the Master, be my disciple, "let him deny himself." There must be readiness, now as of old, to suffer for righteousness' sake. I am glad to note there still is. Young men go out into the ministry, from their associations and their kin, into places the crudest and the rudest to preach the Gospel of Christ, enduring poverty, calumny, and finally are broken down in health, thrown upon the charity of a cold, unfeeling world. We know some women who were lured by fair appearance into marriage by young men who won their love, and who, though now abused, lampooned, mocked, are holding fast to their faith. We know of some who, in order to attend to their religious worship and duty, have sacrificed positions of better income, and we know of some who have forfeited money and social honor by giving up their connection with beneficiary and fraternal societies. But for these the Christian faith would perish from the earth. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

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Yet, apart from these, what is the religious life of Christians? Is it not simply a matter of convenience, custom, inheritance, yes, sometimes of fashion or of business? Do we not find numbers of Christians who cannot give for God's worship an hour out of the 168 hours a week, who would not lift a finger or a foot to help a sinking brother, to save a wandering boy, to speak a kind word to restrain a wayward girl, who, like Cain, his brother's murderer, insolently reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, as we survey the average Christian life to-day, it seems to have lost all strenuousness. Tact, worldly wisdom, policy, not truth, God's wisdom, principles, more of profession than deeds, more of criticism than service. We see clergymen begging people if they won't be Christians, urging them to accept the glorious blessing of salvation, or, if professing Christians, humbly beseeching them to fulfill their vows, asking oft with fear and trembling for a little pittance to keep up the grand work, and when given, given as if an act of favor and grace, not from the conviction that they owe it to God and grace, whose it is, who demands it. Oh! it is pitiable, a mock and farce upon the religion we profess. When we think of the apostles and evangelists and martyrs for Jesus' sake, how they parted with homes, occupations, possessions, and even life itself for Christ and His Word, we have reason, every one of us, to hang our heads in shame. What the Church needs to-day are those who are not ashamed of Christ and His Word, *i. e.*, men and women who will do their duty without ceasing; men and women who, when they have done their duty, will not be expecting the praise of men, but who find their reward in their service; men and women who are ready to sacrifice of their time, their labors, their money, themselves; men and women who, when principle, divine truth, is at stake, will stand by and rather go down, upholding what is right, than surrender to that which may be popular and fashionable, but is wrong.

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My beloved, the religion of the twentieth century is no other than the religion of the first century. It calls for self-denial, sacrifice. To what extent has it entered, and does it enter, into your religious life? Examine yourself in the sight of Him who said: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels." Amen.

PENTECOST.

We shall first explain, and then seek to apply the words read.

The Lord, through the Prophet Zechariah, addresses this message to Zerubbabel under remarkably instructive circumstances. Zerubbabel was the prince and leader of the Jews, under whom the first company of the exiles, numbering about 50,000, returned from the seventy years' captivity in Babylon. On reaching Jerusalem, he with his fellow-exiles promptly set about the work of building the second temple. They laid the foundations with great rejoicing, in high hope of speedily and successfully completing the work. But seeing the smallness of their resources and the vastness of the work, the large numbers who opposed, and the fewness of those who helped, also hearing the old men, who remembered the glory of the former, *i. e.*, Solomon's Temple, say, as they looked with tears on the crude beginning before them, "It is as nothing in comparison," Zerubbabel and his people became discouraged and ceased from the work. For fully fifteen years nothing was done. To arouse the leader and stir up the people, to resume and press forward the work, the Lord by Zechariah now addresses them. Though they are poor and weak in comparison with the builders of the first temple, yet the Lord will have them know that this work is not wholly theirs, but is emphatically His, and must therefore be accomplished. By way of teaching them how this would be done, He sent them an impressive symbolic vision recorded in the verses immediately preceding the line of the text.

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The prophet sees a candlestick all of gold, having seven branches, and on the top of each branch nine lamps. On the right side of the candlestick is a living olive tree, and on the left side a similar olive tree. These trees pour from themselves a plentiful and unfailing supply of oil into the central bowl of the candlestick. Then the prophet asks what the vision means. The reply given are the words of the text: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The meaning evidently is this: As the candlestick—which stands for the Church—is furnished without cost or labor, with an unfailing and abundant supply of oil—oil being the symbol of the Holy Ghost—from the living olive trees, so will the Spirit of the Lord furnish abundant power and resources in ways within His power, to enable His servants to successfully complete the building of His house.

Thus, instructed and encouraged, leader and people promptly resume the work laid aside fifteen years before. There was no lack of materials. The building advanced rapidly to completion. In the sixth year afterwards the house was dedicated to God. As the people looked upon the great structure in its completeness, every stone and timber, from the lowest foundation to the highest pinnacle, seemed to reecho the language of the text. It is done, not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

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Such is the original meaning and application, but it by no means exhausts the lesson,—rather suggests a much wider and universal use. In the New Testament and the Church of Christ it is also most emphatically true that all depends upon the light-giving, life giving, power-giving of the Spirit of God. It was so on the first Pentecost, which we commemorate to-day; it is just so now. The source of the Church's life, and its success, is the energy of God's Spirit. That is the one prominent thought and truth that we would meditate and impress upon our minds in these moments of instruction. Men are accustomed to look on the outward appearance. They are disposed to trust to material resources. Thus, quite naturally, they are inclined to fall into the error that God's cause, the preservation and extension of Christ's Church, are dependent upon the same things, that these same things are necessary to the success of the Gospel truth. Thus, to be more explicit, they have a notion that wealth and worldly influence are such necessary helps. We see money exercising a nearly unlimited sway for external comfort and enjoyment. We behold how those who possess it secure respect and homage, thousands standing ready to do with hireling eagerness their slightest wish. To the success of every scheme, whether material or intellectual, money in our day would appear to be the one thing needful. It is called the *nervus rerum*, the nerve of things. And is the Church exempt? How is it to be supported at home, how the heathen brought within its fold, unless the ear of the rich and the powerful be first gained and their purse-strings opened to supply the financial aid? Has it not come to this, that, when inquiring as to the prosperity of a particular congregation, wealth suggests itself as the most prominent, and piety and high moral worth as only subordinate ideas, if, indeed, these occur to people at all? Now it would be foolish to contend that money and wealth may not be, and actually are, a means in God's providence to further His cause. We need money, but, let it be noted, not as a necessary, but as only a very accidental means. To take any other view of the matter is to put it in the place of God, whence alone it can derive its efficiency.

Any one who has given calm and careful attention to the history of the Church, from the first publication of our holy faith by Christ Himself down to the present day, will have found that the favor of the rich and the powerful is not essential to its advancement. In the period of its rise and apparently greatest weakness, when it had only a few poor fishermen for its adherents and advocates, its growth was most rapid. After wealth began to make itself felt, its progress was retarded, and internal decay set in. By that we do not say that such has been, and naturally is, the result of every influence of this sort, but simply that the cause of divine truth is independent of all such agencies for its vitality and effective power. Riches and civil power cannot in themselves, and irrespective of the divine blessing, promote the cause of Christ in the world. That, I know, every one professing himself a Christian is ready at once to allow, and yet in view of the undue prominence that is made over the matter, it is proper to call heed to the warning contained in the text. Let us not overestimate and exaggerate the value of money in spiritual matters.

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Again, it is well to remark that the cause of Christ is not dependent for its advancement on personal talents and high intellectual endowments. How much is not made of that these days! Correct enough, as the supernatural gifts of the Spirit ceased with the early Christian age, the Christian Church, guided by common prudence, as well as by the express statements of the Bible, has ever since required that those who occupy the sacred office should possess such an amount of mental culture as might fit them to interpret, expound, and apply the truths of Scripture, but that there is danger of overestimating and idolizing the intellectual ability of these office-holders to the practical neglect of the truth they present, is only too lamentably apparent. Since the day that Paul, Apollos, and Cephas divided the favor of the Church of Corinth, the one being for Paul, the other for Apollos, and the third for Peter, this partiality, or favoritism, has been very common and yet is. Add to this the growing intelligence of the age, its high and general standard of education, and the loud cry for men of talents and superior scholarship is strong and pronounced.

These things, accordingly, are not to be despised or neglected; on the contrary, cultivated. But let us not for one moment believe that Gospel truth is dependent on learning and genius to keep it awake. Learning and genius and oratory are nothing except when they are blessed; nay, without the blessing they are likely to be productive of injury, just in proportion as they are great. Let us beware of regarding them in any higher or different way. Unless an energy or agency superior to that of man pave the way for truth to enter, the finest scholarship and the most persuasive eloquence will not force a passage. What that energy and agency is the text tells us.

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One other agency and resource upon which too much stress is laid is this: We have fallen upon a generation of fuss, bustle, trumpet-blowing, and advertising. It would almost seem as if many of us believed that we were to take the world by storm. We see it in every department, and the Church is falling in line. We have all sorts of noisy demonstrations and manifestations; ministers advertise themselves and their sermons under ridiculous announcements, as if to draw the crowd, and not rather regenerating their heart, were the only and sole purpose. Let us beware of placing too much significance on this matter of advertising. We must not be forgetful of the Master's direction: "Let your light shine before men." "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick." And yet, it is well to remember that vision of Elijah, when he stood upon Mount Horeb, and the Lord wished to speak to His servant. First there was a terrific earthquake that shook the ground; "but," it says, "the Lord was not in the earthquake." That was followed by a terrific whirlwind rending the trees and causing havoc around; "but," it says, "the Lord was not in the whirlwind." Then, following it, came a fire; "but," it says, "the Lord was not in the fire." Then, when tranquillity reigned again, and earth and skies lay in silence, "came a still, small voice." The Lord was in that. He is still in the still, small voice of Gospel grace.

Let the ministers preach this Gospel grace in all its purity and in all faithfulness, and it will do the work. It is the only instrument the Spirit employs in changing a man's nature. Let him and his members live that Gospel, let them show in their characters and behavior that they have been born again and are sustained by the agency of the Holy Spirit; that they are temples of God, and the Spirit dwelleth in them, and thus by a godlike life commend the religion they profess; let them both, minister and members, be found where they were all with one accord on the first Pentecost, in one place, that one place the place of worship; and let them both be doing what the first disciples were doing,—praying for the outpouring of the Spirit, upon themselves and their cause, and, verily, as God's promise is true, they shall not fail of a pentecostal outpouring, success, and blessing upon their undertaking.

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Summon all your forces, mention all your resources. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." God, Holy Spirit, we invoke Thee, Come into our hearts, take possession of them, come into our homes, rule there. Come into our churches and our church. Come, and Thy people bless, and give Thy Word success, for Thou, and Thou only, canst and must do so. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.—*2 Cor. 13, 14.*

We are entering to-day upon the second part of the Christian church-year. The seasons and festivals of the church-year may be compared to a river that takes its rise, like the stream which washes the banks of our city, in some small and distant lake, and then ever continues to grow, widen, and deepen, until it becomes a majestic flow, and finally empties into the vast gulf of the ocean.

We have seen in the past months the river of grace and salvation issuing as a tiny rivulet from under a humble manger on Bethlehem's plains, passing through the gorge of Nazareth, flowing along the banks of Jordan, sweeping past the cities of Galilee and Judea, lifting up its surging billows to the height of Calvary and Olivet, until it overflowed the world with its heavenly billows on the day of Pentecost.

By that river it has been our good fortune to linger each Sunday, to dip up of its waters many a draught for our thirsty souls, and bathe in its currents for the washing away of our sins. To-day, however, we are called to ascend to its source, to leave Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Judea behind,

to climb above Golgotha's Mount and Olivet's top, yes, to soar beyond the cloud which once received our ascended Lord out of sight, and to gaze upon a gulf, an ocean, which has no boundary and no shore. To speak in simple and unadorned speech: It is the subject of God Himself which we are invited to contemplate, the most overwhelming, mysterious, deepest of them all. "Who by searching," asks Job, "can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" And yet there are some things which we can and which we must know, for the subject of God is at the base of all things, of all religion. Without the right knowledge of God no man is a right man, and no one can rightly adjust himself to his place in this world or in the next. Let us, then, approach the great mystery of godliness, letting heavenly wisdom be our teacher.—

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To-day's festival is called the Festival of the Trinity. What is the doctrine of the Trinity? For it certainly behoves every one to understand what is meant thereby, and this doctrine is held by all the Christian churches. Whosoever believes it, becomes a member of the Church. Whoever rejects it, ceases to belong to the Christian Church, and becomes a heretic.

Scripture tells us on the one hand that God is one, that there are not three Gods, but one God; on the other hand, that the Father is God, that our blessed Lord Jesus, the Son, is God, that the Holy Ghost is God, each person being a perfect God, yet so joined, each to each, that they constitute one invisible God. We are taught that these three persons are uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal, almighty, equal in glory, majesty, and power. None is before, none after, none greater or less than another; they are coeternal and coequal.

That is the plain teaching of God's holy Word. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, each of them is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. How these three persons are so united as to make up only one God, so that the persons are neither confounded, nor the substance divided, we are nowhere told in Scripture. On this, as with regard to many other matters, we must be content to be ignorant. That is a great hardship to the pride of the would-be wise. And so in the earliest ages men arose and strove against this doctrine of the Trinity. The first violent strife that agitated the early Christian Church was just on this point. Arius, a certain bishop, would not accept the simple statement of Scripture that Christ is God, in the same sense as the Father is God; he would make Him inferior in divine nature. A most fierce controversy was waged, which ended in Arius' being branded a heretic, as, indeed, he was, and the true faith being only the more clearly confessed in the creeds of the Church, called the Athanasian and the Nicene Creed.

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Does this doctrine sound strange and hard to believe to the carnal understanding? Let those who would be wise come forward, and prove their right to be admitted into the mystery of heaven, by showing that they have fully mastered the lesser mysteries of earth. Let them tell us, for instance, why the needle of the compass always turns toward the north. Perhaps they will say, Because it is in its nature to do so. But that is no answer. Our question is, *Why* does the needle so turn? What secret and invisible hand twists it around and causes it to point always the same way? Or, if this be too puzzling a question, perhaps these wise people who think it so great a hardship that they are not permitted to understand God, may tell us a little about themselves. They can perhaps teach us how it comes to pass that the blood keeps flowing unceasingly through our veins, without our being aware of it, except when we are in a high fever. We grow tired with labor or with exercise, we tire even with doing nothing, but the blood never ceases in its flow; from the hour of our birth, day and night, summer and winter, year after year, it keeps on with its silent round, never stopping, till it stops once for all. How, I ask, can these things be? No answer. And this is not the only matter by any means. There is, for instance, sleep. Who does not sleep? One-third of our lifetime is spent in sleep. Who can say what this is? And if you cannot,—and no one can,—let those who know nothing about the how and the why in so many, yea, in most of earthly matters, not be so very much surprised that they cannot understand the existence of that invisible, that eternal, that infinite Spirit whom we call God.

But though Scripture has only told us *that* these things are, without teaching us *how* they are, yet for the sake of showing that the mystery of the Trinity is not so utterly at variance with what we find in earthly things, as unbelievers would fain persuade us, for the sake of proving how possible it is, even according to our limited notions, for that which is three in one sense to be one in another sense, learned and pious men have busied themselves in seeking out likenesses for the Trinity among the things of this world. These likenesses, it should be borne in mind, are very imperfect, and they do not give us a full and just idea of the glorious Trinity; yet such comparisons may help us in attaching some sort of notion to the words of the Creed, may keep those words from lying dead in our minds or, rather, on our tongues.

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One such likeness or comparison is the glorious object which our eyes see in the sky—the sun. That grand orb yonder, from which all life doth come, may be compared to the Father, from whom all blessings flow. From it issues light. This we may compare to the second person of the Trinity, who came forth from the Father, and who John tells us is the true Light, which lights every man that cometh into this world. But besides this, there comes from the sun, heat, which is different from light, and may exist altogether without it. This heat of the sun may not imperfectly be compared to the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, as the Creed calls Him, for heat is the great fosterer of life. Thus we have, first, the sun in the sky; secondly, the light which issues from the sun; thirdly, the heat which accompanies the light—three separate and distinguishable things; for the sun viewed as an orb is one thing, the light sent forth from it is another thing, the heat still another; and yet, what can be more undivided than the sun, its light and its warmth?

To mention another.—As with the most glorious of heavenly bodies, so with the purest of earthly bodies—water. Here, too, we have, first, the fountain, high up among the rocks, far out of man's reach, answering to the Father; secondly, the stream which issues from the fountain, and

flows down into the valley for the use of man, which may be likened to Jesus Christ, the Son; thirdly, the mist which rises from the water, and falls in rain or dew upon the thirsty ground, which, I need hardly state, answers to the Holy Ghost, who, as we regarded last Sunday, came down visibly, like the rain, with a sound as of a rushing mighty wind on the apostles, but who now descends gently and silently, like the dew, in the silence of night, on the heart of the believer.

And these comparisons may be multiplied without number. Thus you are yourself a trinity, a three in one, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. A clover leaf is one, yet has three lobes. A tree is roots, trunk, and branches, yet one tree. Time is past, present, and future; constitutes one thing, —time. By these comparisons we do not make the difficulty in the mystery of the Trinity conceivable to man's reason. What God is in Himself,—how the Son is the Only-begotten of the Father; how the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father; how the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost abide forever in inseparable union and trinity,—these are questions of no importance for us to know, and therefore God has not thought fit to reveal them to us more clearly.

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And having considered the doctrine of the Trinity, as expressed in the words of the text and of Scripture at large, let us draw a few practical lessons from it. Many regard the doctrine of the Trinity to be what is called a speculative doctrine only, that is to say, a doctrine concerning which men may think and conjecture and dispute for their amusement, but of no effect or importance in real life. This is a mistake. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is eminently practical and eminently profitable. Our religion is founded upon it. Deny or think lightly of this article of our faith, and you remove the very corner-stone. If it be not true that Christ Jesus is God in the same degree and sense that the Father is, then He was not God at all, then He was a creature, then His redemption is none-availing,—"for no man can redeem his brother,"—then, in other words, we have no Savior, and our faith is vain, and our salvation a delusion, and all that brings us together in Christian worship is false; for in whose name, then, have we been baptized, for what purpose do we recite the Creed, and does the minister at the end of the service pronounce the blessing, and the congregation sing the doxology?

You will observe that this doctrine lies at the very center and heart of all our faith and worship, of all our Christian life of joy and hope. And some exceedingly profitable lessons does it teach us. One is humility. To hear some people talk, one would suppose them the embodiment of all wisdom; they are so self-consequential and conceited as if they knew it all, and what they cannot figure out on their fingers or by the rule of two is not worth accepting. Let such learn in view of this doctrine to put their hand upon their mouth, and their mouth into the dust, and learn to confess their insignificance and folly. It is said of Augustine, the great bishop, that he was once in great distress of mind how he might comprehend and describe this article concerning the Three-One God. When thus engaged, he tells that he dreamed that he was walking along the seashore; he saw a little child who had dug a hole into the sand, and was employed dipping the ocean water into the hole with a shell. "What are you doing?" said the church-father. "Oh," replied the little one, "nothing, only trying to empty this sea here into the hole." Laughingly he rejoined, "You will never be able to do that, will you?" "Indeed," answered the child, "and thou wouldst empty the mysteries of the infinite Triune God with the little dipper of thy thoughts!" Let us guard against being overly wise. Study to be humble when it comes to matters of God and our holy religion. And, to conclude, let us encourage ourselves by such meditation to joyous and childlike faith. God is great beyond all searching; therefore, may we rest assured that all is well in His hands and management. A farmer once remarked to Dr. Luther that he could not understand the Creed when it speaks of God Almighty. "Neither can I nor all the doctors," said the Reformer, "but only believe it in all simplicity, and take that God Almighty for thy Lord, and He will take care of thee and all thou hast, and bring thee safely through all thy troubles."

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The same is true with regard to the second part of the Trinity. "If God," says the apostle, "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" And the Holy Spirit coming into our hearts, changing, sustaining, and enlightening us—ought not a devout consideration of this loving, redeeming, sanctifying work of the Triune God prompt us to trust in Him—for life, in death, for time and eternity?

To the great One in Three
The highest praises be
Hence evermore!
His sovereign majesty
May we in glory see,
And through eternity
Love and adore.

Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.—*Matt.*
25, 46.

Truth, my beloved, never changes; it is always the same. What was true 1900 years ago, is true

to-day; what is true to-day, will be true 1900 years to come. And this is emphatically so with regard to heavenly truth. There is no new revelation in religion. What the Bible taught of old, it teaches now; we have no new Bible. The Christian faith, like its Founder, is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Thank God that it is so; that among the ever-changing things of earth, the constantly fluctuating and shifting ideas and opinions of men, firmer than the Rock of Gibraltar, more solid than the mountains, there stands the Word of our God. And this pertains also to the doctrine which this day's Gospel prominently sets before us, the doctrine of future punishment.

It is only recently that the public prints quoted the minister of a prominent church as saying: "Modern Christianity has happily grown away from the old traditional doctrine of hell. The Church no longer believes in a place of literal fire and brimstone, into which all unbelievers are cast for an eternity of torment. Even the most rigid orthodoxy allows wide latitude of belief in the problem of future punishment." Such utterances are very prevalent, and have caused untold confusion of thought. The matter, however, is very simple. It is not a question of what some certain minister thinks, however prominent he may be; neither are we to be guided by what modern Christianity thinks, for modern Christianity ought not think and believe differently from ancient Christianity, since Christianity ought to be ever the same; nor are we concerned what was the old traditional doctrine, since tradition is not, nor has it ever been, a criterion for us. The only determining factor in this, as in all articles of our religious belief, is, What saith the Scripture? Nor may it be superfluous, in approaching the subject of to-day's instruction, to warn against another element, which is sentimentality. Sentiment in its place and sphere is noble and good; but it must remain within its place and sphere. When it comes into conflict with God's teaching, or when it sets itself against the teachings of God's Word, and, because it cannot think or feel how a loving and righteous God could do or permit certain things, then sentiment degenerates into sickly sentimentality, becomes ignoble and sinful. We must never allow our emotion to outrun our sober reason, and, least of all, to set itself against the statements of religion and the arrangements of a holy and all-wise God.

And what is that arrangement in respect to the future? Two main thoughts would we dwell upon at this time: *I. Hell, what is it?—its nature. II. How long does it last?—its duration.*

Whenever a general in war wishes to surprise his enemy, he seeks to conceal himself from him, endeavors to make his antagonist believe that he is not at all about, or that he is not as formidable as the other might think. Just so the infernal enemy of men's souls seek to delude them into the belief that there is no hell; that, at any rate, it is not what some would make it out to be. Hell is within you; it's the pinching of conscience in this life, or the misery you have to endure here. At the most, it is not terrible, it is not going to last forever; there is going to be a final and universal restoration; all unbelievers will ultimately be delivered.

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All this passes for naught. Whether there is a future life, and of what sort that future life is—only one can positively tell us, and that is God—I repeat, *positively* tell us. Human reason and philosophy have conjectured its probability or its possibility, but as to its *certainty*, that we have exclusively from the book of God's revelations—the Bible. And the Bible tells us, in plain, unmistakable terms, as plainly as it tells us that there is a heaven and a God, that there is a hell. To discredit it is to discredit the Bible, to contradict our blessed Lord, to shut one's eyes willfully against the truth, and what is it? Something within us—something confined to this world? Never does the Bible so speak. Hell, according to the Scriptures, refers always to the future. So in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man *died*, and *then*, after his death, in hell, he lifted up his eyes. When this life is over, the scenes of this world have faded upon their vision, then, for the unrepentant and unsaved, comes hell.

And what is it? To give it with one word—punishment. "These," declares the eternal Judge, "shall go away into everlasting punishment." This punishment is twofold; it is outward and it is inward. Man consists of body and of soul; both are the instruments of his guilt and condemnation; both receive the just reward of their deeds. Whenever Scripture speaks of future punishment, it uses expressions like these: "darkness, blackness of darkness, thirst, fire, lake burning with fire and brimstone." The Gospel parable represents the rich man begging for a drop of water to cool his tongue. It has been said that this is nothing but imagery, mere drapery, pictorial embellishment; but it is *true*. Imagery and the figure are always less terrible than the reality. It may be idle curiosity to speculate as to whether this fire which the Bible speaks of is material fire, how God can support life in the burnings of hell,—though we know that He sustained the companions of Daniel in a hot furnace in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar whose image they would not worship. Waiving all such questions as to the nature of the fire, the place where it is, and the extent to which it is inflicted, the fact that Scripture almost always employs the idea of fire to express the sufferings of hell leads one to believe that there unhappy sufferers literally endure torments like those which men burning in flames feel; and without running into all sorts of revolting descriptions, so much is plain: Hell is pain, acute sensation of the body, the sense of feeling physical suffering; and coupled with this outward punishment is the *inward* anguish of mind, remorse of conscience. Thus, in the parable, Abraham speaks to the rich man, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." Memory will be a dreadful source of misery.

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Here, again, we shall not enter upon any speculations as to the workings of mind and conscience in future retributions, but we know what agony remorse of conscience occasions in this world. It has made strong men tremble, it has smitten the knees of Belshazzar together in the midst of his pleasure. It has forced many a one to confess his misdeed, to give evidence against himself, and seek punishment to escape its excruciating agony. Terrible is an awakened conscience, and yonder it shall be fully awakened. It will have to do homage to an offended and

avenging God; be obliged to say to itself, You are the author of your own punishment, you suffer for your own sins. The recollection of his selfishness, his uncharitableness, sensuality, of possessions, and of opportunities abused and misspent, as in the case of this rich man in the parable, will cause him keen and tormenting self-reproach. Anguish, inward and outward, and all this aggravated by the society, the companionship about them. Imagine the associates in yonder accursed place! No wonder that the unfortunate subject of to-day's parable plaintively pleads: "I pray thee, father, that thou wouldst send Lazarus to my father's house; for I have five brothers, lest they also come into this place of torment." The thought, not that of pity,—for pity and sympathy are unknown in hell,—but of increasing his misery, knowing how much he was guilty toward them in leading them astray by scoffing word and lewd example,—it was this that wrung from his lips this plea. How awful such association! How dreadful it is all!

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So much as to the first particular, what hell is: outward and inward punishment in the society of the damned. And such punishment, it is further revealed here, is ceaseless in its duration. Many theories are taught to the contrary. It is contended by some that this punishment is only for a time, then follows annihilation of the wicked, they cease to exist. Others, again, hold that all the wicked will be finally restored to God's favor and heaven; that they are now only in a state of trial and probation; that hell will come to an end. I grant you that we would be very much inclined to believe that if we could. But what say the Scriptures? There is not a single word in all the Bible which indicates that there will be probation, another chance, after death. As the tree falleth, so it lies. When the sand has run out of the glass of life, there is no reversion of the glass, the period of grace is gone. "There is a great gulf fixed, says the Gospel, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

What plainer words could be spoken: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Mark the comparison,—everlasting punishment, life eternal. If you tamper with, lessen the one, you do so with the other; the only thing in fairness is to accept them thus strictly and expressly, meaning just what they say. *Eternity*, that is the word which is written over the portals of the blessed, over the place of the cursed.

Thus in its dread and awful solemnity have I set this subject before you. Why? Because it is the duty of a faithful servant of God to declare to his people the whole counsel of His Master, and do so unreservedly. A much abused subject is the subject of "Hell,"—from the playwright who works it up for public amusement, to the swearer who uses it in his foul mouth to add poison and fury to his oath, to the over-sensitive churchmen who treat the passages which treat of hell like a waxen nose that they can twist and turn to suit, and who would not recite in the Creed: "Christ descended into hell," since it sounds so bad. Over against these and all other perversions it behooves us to vindicate the clear and unmistakable teaching of the Bible. It is the Savior Himself who tells us to-day's parable, who spoke the words of our text, and it is for us to believe and declare what He says, to avoid all levity in the matter and all vain speculation, and to give it its proper weight and place.

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But above all, this dreadful subject is held up before us that we may know how to escape the terrors portrayed. How? "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness and blessedness." That is the purpose of the Gospel. God wants none to perish, not one soul has He destined to eternal perdition; He would have all men to be saved. He has made every provision to save man from everlasting doom. The terrors of yonder place magnify the riches of that grace which in Jesus Christ delivers from it. Let us adore the wisdom, the unspeakable mercy that would spare us from such a doom. Let us turn to the Cross, employ the time of grace in faith and in wholesome service and life,—

So whene'er the signal's given
Us from earth to call away,
Borne on angels' wings to heaven,
Glad the summons to obey,
May we ready, may we ready,
Rise and reign in endless day.

Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.—*Acts 24, 25.*

Felix, the man here mentioned, was the Roman Governor or Procurator of Judea. Felix is a Latin word and means "happy." But Felix was not happy, for no wicked person can be happy, and Felix was a wicked person. Tacitus, the historian, says of him: "In the practice of all kinds of cruelty and lust, Felix exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave." A sample we

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have here given. It reads in the previous verse: "After certain days, ... Felix came with his wife." Strictly taken, she was not his wife, but, being persuaded to elope to him from her husband, the two were living together in an adulterous alliance. And before this man appears a prisoner, unpretentious-looking, loaded with chains. He had stood before the Governor once before in answer to certain charges made by his countrymen, and had so ably and convincingly defended himself that, had it not been, as it says in the next verse, that Felix expected to realize something out of the case by way of a bribe, he would have set him free. As it was, the Governor had been so impressed with Paul's (for none other was the prisoner) forceful speech that he requested the apostle to give him a more explicit account concerning the religion he preached. He arranges the occasion, and the champion of the cross gladly availed himself of the opportunity. We do not know the precise course which he followed in his address to Felix, but his general outline was based on the same principles that every good Christian sermon is based on, viz., faith and practice. First he spoke concerning the faith in Christ, that is, the Christian faith, laying down its fundamental and cardinal facts and doctrines. But as a sick man will never send for the physician till he is aware of his danger, so the sinner will never betake himself to the redeeming blood of his Savior till he becomes sensible of his lost and sinful condition. The apostle, therefore, not only preaches the Gospel; he also preaches the Law. "He reasoned," it says, "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." No topics could have been more appropriate. Felix was a high-ranked magistrate, accustomed to see every one prostrate at his feet. Paul points out to him that though there be various gradations in social life, the one a king, the other a subject, the one stepping on a carpet of down and gold, the other walking barefoot through the dust, in the sight of God all these distinctions avail not. Yea, having higher opportunities, a man's responsibilities are but the greater, and woe if in the discharge of his office a man measure not up to the responsibilities. Thus, turning to the next particular, he reasoned of temperance, *i. e.*, the right government of the passions; he showed him how intemperance degrades the character, debases society, and invites the punishment of God, and, finally, placing his sermon on still higher ground, he draws away for a moment from the eyes of Felix the bandage that concealed the sight of futurity, and ushers him in thought before the judgment-bar of his unalterable Judge. [188]

He had invited this prisoner, far-famed for his topic and eloquence, to give a display of his powers, but he had never supposed such a presentation. As the divine word, the two-edged sword of the Spirit, wielded by such an arm, cut into the joints and marrow of the profligate sinner's conscience. It had the same effect which the handwriting on the wall once had upon Belshazzar of Babylon. He moved about uneasily, his color changed, his knees smote one against the other; "he trembled," it says. The truth had smitten to the heart, and then? Was truth victorious? Did virtue conquer? Did the judgment-hall echo the words of the Philippian jailer, "What shall I do to be saved?" or, like the publican, did he smite upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? How the angels would have rejoiced, and Felix would have been what his name means, "happy." But Satan knew his man too well. In a moment the smitten sinner had rallied from his shock; with a grace and courtesy, truly admirable if it had not been so disastrous, he says: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

The story of Felix has been written for our admonition. God grant that like an arrow it may smite into the joints and marrow of our conscience to-day. Our theme is:

THE CONVENIENT SEASON,

- noting, *I. A few things that hinder the convenient season;*
- II. The delusion of putting it off.*

We have heard Felix' plea; it was not an abrupt turning away from the topics Paul had spoken to him of. He did not declare in express terms that he would never embrace the faith in Christ, that he would not renounce iniquity and prepare for the final account. No, his answer implies that he would do all this, but he begs to be excused from doing it for the present. "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Felix' plea is still a most prevalent plea. Perhaps it is the most prevalent plea, never advanced so much as in our times. It is not that people are deliberately determined to rush into the arms of the devil and hell; many of the most thoughtless and the most profligate, convicted by the emotions of conscience within and the presentation of religion, still have the intention that some time or other, bye and bye, they are going to become more serious, to reform. The drunkard will some day abandon his cups, the swearer his profanity, the lewd man his profligacy, but not just now. And not only these, the thoughtless, the profligate, but those who are very thoughtful and of excellent standing and morals. What a universal plea it is! [189]

There is one class, they are "too young to be religious. Youth is the time of gayety. Even if they do not sow wild oats, they must have their pleasure. As they advance in years, they will eventually grow more serious." Let me caution you, my young hearers! Of all other seasons, youth is the fittest for God and godliness. No man ever became more disposed to be religious by mere age. He may become more thoughtful and serious, but thoughtfulness and seriousness is not yet religion. The duty enjoined is: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," and it is a solemn fact that the greater number of those who are Christians indeed have been so in early life. —So be not deceived! The present time is the most convenient season. You can never enjoy a better.

Another apology and hindrance which multitudes offer against the convenient season is what they style "business." I suppose Felix had occasion to offer that, too. The office of a governor was

no lazy one; he had a large docket of pending cases, a considerable correspondence, many distracting cares.

Correspondingly, at the present, there be those who are occupied in providing for their wants, gaining a livelihood for their families, accumulating a fortune. It is impossible for them just now, but in a few years they will have more leisure; their property will be greater, their anxiety lessened, and then, relieved of pressing cares, they will devote their time and their attention to God's service. Sad mistake! Business never lets up. The world gives no man leisure for the consideration of the greater business of salvation. I have known those who have urged this excuse ten, nearly twenty years ago; they still urge it, and will continue to do so so long as they live. Some may regard it as a witticism, but it was immensely serious when a child recently informed its mother that the child did not think papa was going to heaven, and asked why, replied, "He can't possibly leave the store." We have a number of that class in connection with our membership. It is a sorry business that keeps any man away from the main business, the one thing needful.

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One more plea would we regard, that is health. How many, when aroused to the importance of attending to matters spiritual, will seek to soothe the clamors of conscience by the reflection: It is true, I must be renewed and holy, or I will perish. I cannot go to heaven as I am, but I hope to be better before I die. I will look after these things when I get sick; then I shall have leisure for reflection. With nothing else to do then, I will repent and make my peace with God. Oh! the folly and the wickedness of such reasoning! Not only does it reflect on God's religion, as if it were a tyranny and a grievous yoke that one puts off as long as it is possible, not only is it God-dishonoring, giving unto the devil and to the world, the Lord's foremost rivals, the best fruits of one's days, and turning over to Him the stubble and the dregs left in the cup of life, but who knows the time of his death, the time appointed when he shall go hence, and whether occasion shall be left for any reflection? Like a lightning flash it may summon us into the presence of the Almighty. And even granted that everything shall be propitious in that respect, have you ever seen persons on a sick- or death-bed? Their pulse feverish and their body weak; their senses so impaired that they seem utterly unable to collect their thoughts; and this is the time that people want to select for religious reflection? Then, too, when does the Bible say that a man can convert himself at any time that he chooses? The Bible speaks of only one solitary case of death-bed, or eleventh-hour repentance, and that is the instance of the dying thief on the cross. And there is a tremendously wide difference between him and the people who offer up that plea. The dying malefactor had never deferred his conversion to his dying day; he had never put religion off until then. So his case does not belong under consideration at all, though it is always quoted by such delinquents. No, there is only one convenient season, and there is only one course to pursue in view of it. That one convenient season is now, and the only one course to pursue in view of it is to seize hold upon and attend to its demands.

We have all seen mottoes on the walls of business offices: "Do it now," "Never put off until tomorrow what can be done to-day," "Now or never," "Make hay while the sun shines." And as you see them at their worldly interests, they follow those mottoes; they are up and about, straining every nerve, using every moment to gain an advantage. Yes, as you study the whole working creation of God, you will discover that everything is on time: The birds know when to fly southward; the stars of heaven meet all their appointments; the earth is believed to make a circuit of five hundred millions of miles and back again at the winter and spring solstice on the second, yes, on the millionth part of a second. There is only one who wastes time, and that in the most important matter, and that creature is *man*.

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Observe in this the terrible delusion of procrastination. And it cheats us all, more or less; or how—to make the application to ourselves who are church-members—how is it that we can hear the things which we hear Sunday after Sunday, and on many other occasions, things which, so far from denying or contradicting, we like to hear, we would be uncomfortable not to hear, and agree with them and still go on living and doing as if they were mere words and meant nothing, if it were not that we fancy to ourselves a time when it will suit us not only to agree with them, but actually to put them in practice,—a time when we shall pray in earnest, though we are careless about praying now,—a time when we shall take up the reading of the Bible, though we neglect it now,—a time when we shall be gentle, and loving, and heavenly-minded, and pure, whatever to the contrary we may be now? But is it not a delusion? If you are putting off saying your prayers regularly and earnestly because it is not convenient now, do you really think that the time will come when it will be easier, and more natural for you to do this? If you are still putting off, as so many have, and are putting off for years, what yet they acknowledge to be a Christian's bounden duty, employing the much-needed means of grace, the coming to the Lord's holy Sacrament, can you really expect that anything will happen to you which somehow or other will be the opportunity you cannot find now of hearing the Gospel and drawing near to that blessed communion?

Reflect! Felix waited for a convenient season. It never came; it will never come where he is now. Let him be a lesson to us. The convenient season is just now,—and let us beware of trifling with it.

Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, It might have been.

And of all devices by which the devil throws a loop around the sinner's neck, the most effective is this: "A more convenient season!" "Not yet."

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My dear hearers, I have again, like my great predecessor, the apostle, made an appeal to you to accept the faith as it is in Christ Jesus. What say you? With Felix: "Not now," or, "I will"? O for the right choice! God gives you the opportunity to make it now. Will you not seize it? Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom; and He said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed Him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.
—*Matt. 9, 9-13.*

The text just heard contains much of interest and importance—first, for the history which it gives, and secondly, for the Gospel which it preaches. We shall consider both for our encouragement and instruction.

It was in Capernaum, the capital of Galilee, on the borders of Lake Tiberias. Jesus was walking by the seaside when He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of customs, collecting the duties, or taxes, on goods landed from the vessels. To all human appearance this collector of customs, or publican, as they were called, was a very unlikely person to become a convert, much less an apostle. Publicans, or taxgatherers, in those days were held in very ill repute. One reason for this was that they were in the employ of the Roman Government, and no patriotic, loyal-hearted Jew would permit himself to be employed by these despised and oppressive Gentiles. Another reason was that those who were thus employed generally managed to make it profitable for themselves. By practicing fraud and distortion upon their own countrymen, overcharging and collecting more than was due, they succeeded in accumulating means, and many, like Zaccheus, a large fortune. There is nothing to show that Matthew was guilty of such extortion and fraud, but he was by office and occupation connected with this odious and unprincipled set of men; nor is it necessary for us to believe that he was altogether free from the taint that attached to them. And yet, out of the ranks of these base and detested publicans, Jesus did not disdain to take at least one of those twelve men whom He chose to be the heralds of His Gospel, the great leaders of His kingdom to a perishing world. Good men, let us learn from this, often come from despised and unworthy classes. Outward circumstances do not always prove as unfavorable nor as adverse to piety as we are apt to imagine. There is often a wide contrast between outward appearances and inward realities. It may be that Matthew inwardly was very much disposed to follow Jesus when addressed by Him. It is not for us to discern what is going on in the inner man. We may hear the blasphemer uttering a vile oath and pass him by as one on the verge of perdition, while the heart of the poor wretch at the very moment may be bursting with anguish and filled with self-reproach, and one word of kindness might melt him into contrition and love. We see another amid the wild whirl of earthly dissipation and pleasure, and may suppose that it would be casting pearls before swine to waste a word on religious topics with him, while he may be aching with a sense of the emptiness of the world, and a single expression of Christian kindness may draw from him a confession of the vanity of all his pleasures, and the inquiry, Who will show me any permanent and real good? Never let us judge of the hopelessness of man's salvation by the mere outward appearance.

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No den of infamy is so vile, no hall of skepticism, or haunt of worldliness is so impenetrable, no prison cell so deep or polluted, but that Jesus can gather thence gems that shall shine in His crown. Who was ever a more devoted follower of Christ than Mary Magdalene?—and yet she once had seven devils. Who was more voluptuous, depraved, and infamous in his course as a young man than Augustine, who became the great bishop of Hippo and one of the most illustrious doctors of the Church? And what did Jesus see in any of us to lead Him to visit us with His salvation? Was there any such native excellence in your character, or such a purity in your conduct, when out of Christ, that God was attracted thereby and stooped from heaven to save you, because it was a pity that so much worth and goodness should be lost forever? Oh, no, not for our merits, but of His own infinite mercy does He save us, and if we feel aright, we shall never think that we deserved to be saved, while the vile sinner deserved to be damned, but that all of us are sinners worthy of God's wrath and curse, and that none have reason for boasting. Viewed in that light, we shall not wonder that Christ chose an apostle from that most ill-favored class of men known in Palestine at the time.

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And the call was not unheeded. It is not necessary to assume that the call came to Matthew as a clap of thunder out of a clear sky. Matthew, as a dweller in Capernaum, where our Savior was preaching and performing some of His most noted miracles, and as a man who daily had to do with people of all classes, could not have been without some knowledge of what was going on. In all likelihood he had seen and heard Christ, and so was not wholly without preparation for what happened when the great Teacher and Wonder-worker came into his office and said to him, "Follow me." And what was the decision? Our text informs us: He left all, rose up, and followed Christ. Promptly, cheerfully, he surrendered his worldly interests, unites his fortune and his future with the Master. It was not so in every instance. We know that the same call was extended to others, who at once propounded something else to be attended to. The one remarked, "Lord,

suffer me first to go and bury my father;" another, "Lord, I will follow Thee, but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house," and still another, it says, "went away sorrowing," because he was not willing to separate himself from his great possessions. It is so to this very day and hour.

To every one that hears the Gospel the word is: "Follow Me." There are those who heed it like Matthew. Then others who hear the same call make a thousand excuses, but never reach the point of honest decision. Obedience, as it is the first virtue of a child, in a soldier, or a servant, so it is the first virtue in a Christian. When you hear the blessed Savior's voice, asking you to take up the obligations of a Christian faith and life, then respond like Matthew, instantly, promptly.

And not only was it prompt and ready obedience, it was steadfast, persevering. It was not a spirit of momentary enthusiasm that presently died away. Never again did he return to his old profession. With unfaltering devotion did he cling to our Lord, and finally laid down his life in His cause. There are those who, when they hear the merciful call of the Savior, are prompt enough sometimes to follow. They are greatly captivated with the Christian profession. They like the distinction it gives them, the new attitude and surroundings in which they are placed, the gaining of new friends, sympathies and credit with which it invests them. But when it comes to the serious side,—and Christian discipleship has a serious side,—it does not mean only wearing a bright uniform and carrying a flag, but standing on guard, enduring hardships as a good soldier of Christ. Then the cross becomes too heavy for them, and by and by they are offended, their zeal expires, and their once flaming devotion dies. Matthew was not of that class; his decision was as honest, thorough, and enduring as it was prompt, and in this he is an example for us.

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Nor was this all. Not only did Matthew follow the Savior, but the subsequent verse informs us that he made a great feast for the Master. We can easily see the motives of the man in making this feast. "My Lord has had mercy on me," he would say, "and I wish to do something to testify my love and gratitude to Him. I will make an entertainment in His honor, and I will invite my old friends among the publicans to it, for it may be that His words of power may reach their hearts as they did mine, and turn them from their sins." That, my beloved, is one of the strongest evidences of a truly converted soul—*anxiety and concern for the soul of others*. A person that has found the Savior is anxious that others should find Him, too. Christianity is not like gold, which every one wishes to secrete for his own use, but it is like a full fountain—it runs over; like the sun—it must shine forth. And so we behold the Savior now seated in the midst of a large company of publicans and sinners.

But have you, my dear hearers, ever known of a noble and holy work, no matter what it is, that did not meet with some criticism? Some carping voice is bound to be always heard, and so here. That Jesus was found in such company, and agreed to be a guest with such society, was a scandal in the eyes of the ceremonial, self-righteous Jews, and "He it was who claimed to be the long-expected Messiah." It was conclusive evidence to them that He was a sheer impostor, a glutton and wine-bibber, equally as bad as those whom He met on such familiar terms. Nor were they slow in making known their conclusions. They uttered their malignant feelings, not to Jesus Himself, but to His disciples. When Jesus learned their cavils, it does not appear that He was ruffled in the least. He knew His mission, for what purpose He had come into this world, and so with all firmness we hear Him setting forth His association with these ill-reputed people as in accord not only with the best principles of common sense, but with the whole spirit and intent of His Messiahship. "But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Sin is a sickness, a disease, and these publicans and sinners were very deeply under the power of this disease. Now, where should a physician be but with the sick and the dying? Is a doctor to be blamed for entering a hospital full of suffering invalids? Is it not rather a blessed demonstration of His fidelity to his profession to go to such ailing people? Well, then, what right had these self-constituted saints and judges to find fault? They claimed to be good and holy people. They kept the Law. They were *whole*. They had no need of a physician to make them better,—so they thought. Why, then, was the great Healer of souls to confine Himself to them? Thus upon their own principles and common sense, Christ amply justified His conduct.

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There is a double lesson to be drawn from our text. First, if you have always maintained a good moral character, through the restraints of a religious education and of God's grace, be thankful for it; it is, indeed, a great mercy to have been kept from gross sins, and it will be a great help to you in a life of godliness. But be careful that you do not rest salvation upon it, make a Savior of your own goodness, and so refuse Christ, without whom you will be damned as surely as the vilest transgressor. Beware that your outward decency of character does not puff you up and make you think that such as you can never be lost. There is no other name but that of Christ whereby you can be saved, and you must come to Him weary and heavy-laden, just as the vilest sinner does, if you would find rest to your soul.

On the other hand, if there be one present who has fallen into gross transgression, so that it seems almost too much for him to hope to be forgiven, let him hear the words of Jesus, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," and let him be encouraged. Is there any wound this great Physician cannot heal? Is there any sin the grace of Jesus cannot pardon, or His blood wash away? Doubt not His infinite compassion, doubt not His almighty power. Lay your soul in His hands. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Oh! that, like Matthew of old, we might yield ourselves to His gracious summons, go down to our houses, humble, obedient believers in Him who came into this world to call sinners to repentance. Amen.

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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
—*Matt. 16, 19.*

Fixed in our Church calendar for the 29th of June is Saint Peter the Apostle's day. We do not, as a rule, observe these days, or minor festivals, as they are styled. And it may be asked why we have them given in our Church calendar and observe them at all. In answer we would say that we do not, like the Romanists, regard the saints as mediators, do not address prayers to them, nor ask them to pray for us. And we differ further from the Romanists in that we place none in our Church calendar as saints save such as are clearly set forth in that character in the Word of God. Rome is continually adding new saints to her list. Any one who has been eminently holy—in the odor of sanctity—is canonized by the pope, and his or her name placed in the calendar; and there are instances on record where other influences besides piety placed it there. We place the word "saint" before none but those who, we are sure from God's Word, are deserving of it. Nor even all of these do we thus honor. Enoch and Elijah were translated into heaven and are assuredly among God's saints. The same is true of Abraham and Moses, Joseph and Daniel. But we never speak of St. Abraham, St. Moses, and the like. In this matter we follow our Lord's rule: "He that is least in the kingdom," meaning the Church He came to establish, "is greater than he," and select for our list only New Testament persons; and here, again, those especially near to Him, such as the evangelists and apostles, and so we speak of St. Peter, St. Matthew, St. Paul. These we honor because Christ honored them. On his birthday each year we extol the virtues of a Washington; on Reformation Day we speak on the character and life-work of a Luther. Why should we not, therefore, on one day of the year, especially when it falls on a Sunday, note for our instruction what God in His Word has recorded of these favored servants? Only ignorance and prejudice could ever find fault with such an observance of these days and minor festivals which the Church in her wisdom purposes, and so from the lesson of this day would we regard the latter part. An important truth is it, a truth which has given rise to endless controversy, that this line sets forth to us. We shall inquire, *I. What is the office or the power of the Keys? II. How is it exercised?*

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In the opinion of some, these words addressed to Peter on that memorable occasion when he confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, gave to Peter a direction to take charge of divine affairs. The religious destiny of the race was placed in his hands. It was for him to save or condemn at will, and this power and commission he then turned over to his successor, alleged to be the pope at Rome. That was the common interpretation for hundreds of years. In consequence of that we have such happenings in history as that which took place at Canossa, when Henry IV of Germany, deposed from his royal office through the influence of the pope, came over the Alps to secure the Holy Father's absolution. He presented himself at the gate of Gregory VII, and made his humble petition. He was ordered to remain at the gate and abstain from food; he was further ordered to strip himself of the royal purple and put on hair-cloth. At the end of three weary days of penance, standing out in the cold and snow, and nearly famished, he was required to go into the presence of Pope Gregory and kiss his feet. Then this "vicar of God," as he styled himself, was pleased to say, "*Absolvo te,*" "I absolve thee." And what child knows not the account of Tetzels, who, with an armful of indulgences and a chest bearing the inscription: "Soon as the money in the chest doth ring, the soul at once to heaven doth spring," sold as an article of merchandise, for so much consideration, so many and such great sins? The confessional, the extreme unction, the deliverance of souls from purgatory, these and other adjuncts and accessories that have risen from the claim of the Romish Church to the power of the keys, they allege were once given to St. Peter. But it rests, like so many other claims of that Church, upon a serious misinterpretation and perversion of the passage.

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In the following chapter our Lord says to the whole band of apostles: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And this He said not only on one occasion to them all, but on several. On this particular occasion He said it especially to Peter because Peter had acted as the spokesman of the rest and rendered a grand confession. Never do we find that any command, blessing, office, or grace was ever conferred here or anywhere upon Peter which was not conferred equally and also upon all the apostles of the Lord. Nor can it be shown from the Bible, nor from the history of the Church in apostolic times, or from those who lived next after the apostles, that Peter ever asserted, or sought to assert, such authority. On the contrary, Peter, in his Epistles, invariably refers to himself as simply one of the apostles, in no way the superior of the others, and when the first Christian synod was held, though he was present, it was James that presided and gave the official judgment of the assembly. If God's authority prevails, we must dismiss the Romish dogma which would entrench itself in this text as a falsehood, without the remotest claim to our respect. No, not to Peter exclusively was given the power of the keys; not even to the twelve apostles exclusively, in the sense that it belonged to them personally. They received it as a power, a commission, which belonged to the Church. In the 18th chapter of St. Matthew, speaking of this very thing, the Savior directs: "And if he neglect to hear them, tell it to the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Correctly does our Catechism define the office of the keys. It says: "The office of the keys is the

peculiar Church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth, to forgive the sins of the penitent unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent." We learn, then, who is invested with this authority, viz., the Church, the congregation of believers. It is something which belongs to all Christians, not to one apostle only, or to twelve apostles only, but to every congregation that is met around the Word and the Sacrament. They have this jurisdiction and power. What jurisdiction and power? The power that attaches to the office of the keys is twofold. It is used to lock and to unlock, to fasten and to open the door.

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First, there is the power to fasten and to lock. We call this administering discipline. This is necessary to the health and life of the Church. In the Corinthian church a certain man was guilty of a nameless crime. Possibly of good social standing, his offense was winked at. St. Paul, however, exhorts the Corinthian congregation to deal summarily with him; he exhorts them to meet in the name of the Lord, and deliver this evil-doer over to Satan in the hope that he might come to his senses and be reclaimed—"for the destruction of the flesh," as the phrase is. In another place he writes: "I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." It was what we call suspension, excommunication, or the ban.

It is not a pleasant duty by any means, as little as it is a pleasant thing to amputate, to cut off a member of the body; but if the member be gangrenous and a menace to the life of the body, and nothing but an amputation will do, then let it be done. A congregation is answerable before the Head of the Church; it must keep its membership and roster clear; it dare not permit among its membership impenitent and manifest sinners, those who are despisers of God's means of grace, the Word and the Sacrament, whose morals are a blot, whose lives are a stench in the nostrils of the believers and of the world. Such, after due hearing, exhortation, remonstrance, must be turned out. They have no place in the company of Christians. This is the exercise of the office of the keys in the one direction. In general, it is to be deplored that the Christian Churches do not exercise this power as they ought. It would mean the reawakening and recovery of many a sinner.

The other part of the office of the keys is what is called absolution, the power to forgive sins. That power the Church has committed to it, as we heard in the text, by Christ Himself. There is much misconception on this among even Christians; to some it is no small stumbling-block. It need not be. The matter is quite simple and plain.

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Could Peter forgive sins? The Lord says so. Could the apostles forgive sins? The Lord says so. Can the Church, through its called ministers, forgive sins? The Lord says so. Yes, we may press the question still further and ask, Can every Christian forgive sins? What the Church, as the collective body of Christians, can do, that each Christian can do as an individual. Yes, every Christian can forgive sins. How is that to be understood? Peter, as Peter, as a man, could not forgive sins of himself and by his own authority. No man can forgive sins—that is a divine prerogative. But Christ gave to Peter the charge, the commission, to do so. The power, then, was not in Peter, but in the charge, the commission. When the Governor of our State issues a pardon and sends a messenger to deliver it, it is rightly and properly said that the messenger brings pardon to the prisoner. The power, of course, is not of the messenger, but of the Governor, as vested in the message of pardon. Equally so the Gospel is the message of pardon to sinful men. The ministers of Christ, as the messengers of the Churches, proclaim that message. The power of the pardon does not depend upon them, their general piety or impiety; the power of the pardon rests upon Him that gave it, the great Governor of the Church. And yet, can it not be justly, truthfully, and properly said in their case, as in the case mentioned, that the messengers bring pardon to the prisoners, that they forgive sins? So our Lord spoke, so our Catechism speaks, and so we may speak.

Not the power of absolute forgiveness does the text confer upon the Church, but that of declarative forgiveness. But this declaration of forgiveness, it must be held, is real forgiveness. When the Church forgives sins, they are forgiven. The words of Christ say that as distinctly as words can say it. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." The pardon brought by the messenger is a real pardon, as certain and valid as if the Governor had brought it himself. And so, declares our Catechism, when in the confessional service the minister pronounces the forgiveness of sins, you are to receive it as from God Himself and in no wise to doubt, but firmly to believe that by it your sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

This is the teaching of God's Word in regard to the loosing power of the office of the keys. A comforting teaching it is. We Christians, it is true, have the assurance of forgiveness already in our baptism, in the general preaching of the Gospel, and in the Lord's Supper; but that does not make absolution superfluous. Battling, as we have daily to do, against flesh and blood, disturbed as we are by many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, how uplifting the words of absolution addressed to you directly, individually: "My son, my daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee!"

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God preserve us from all abuse, perversion, and misunderstanding of His Word and ministry, and give us the comfort and blessing that come from both! Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him, said,

Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized.
—Acts 9, 17, 18.

We hear in the Gospel of this Sunday how by speech and by miracle our Lord called four of His disciples from their fishing boats to the labors of His ministry. His first selection fell upon persons from the humble walks of life, plain, unlettered fishermen, toilers for their daily bread in a lowly occupation. There was divine wisdom in the choice. Being of the common people, they knew the thoughts, feelings, and habits of the common people, and so could best adapt themselves and their preaching to the general masses. But the time came when God, for the propagation of His saving Gospel, for the upbuilding of His Church, needed another sort and stamp of man, a man whose learning, eloquence, and boldness should elevate the Gospel before the eyes of all the world. And then as now He was not at a loss to secure such a chosen vessel. We shall regard in these moments sacred to devotion the call or conversion of St. Paul.

About the time that the boy Jesus was found in the temple seated among the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions, far to the northwest of Jerusalem, in the heathen city of Tarsus, there was born a babe, born of strict Jewish parents, of the tribe of Benjamin, but also, because his father in some way had become a Roman citizen, also born to the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. Being a bright child, of great natural gifts, he was given careful training at home in the schools of his native city, and then sent to Jerusalem, to finish his education under the care and tuition of Gamaliel, the most renowned rabbi of the Jewish land then living. His family, apparently well to do, spared no expense to make him one of the most learned men of his day; nor did they fail in their attempt, as his writings, masterpieces of composition and logic, abundantly testify.

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The first mention that we have of Paul, or, rather, at that time Saul, is in connection with the scenes that led up to the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. When the Christian religion began to spread in the very center of Judaism, Jerusalem, great disputation arose between its followers and the Jews. And Saul, who belonged to the strictest sect of the Jewish religion, the Pharisees, and was a man of strong feeling and enthusiastic in temper, soon became involved in these discussions, and so we find that when the mob took Stephen and ignominiously stoned him to death, it says of Saul: "He was consenting unto his death," and that the murderers "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet named Saul."

Nor did he stop here. His whole being was so aflame with religious zeal that he knew only one purpose of life, and that was to blot out the name of that detestable Founder of the new religion and His followers. Accordingly, we read in Acts that "Saul made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." And not satisfied with his work at Jerusalem, he began to extend his persecution to distant cities. The opening verses of this chapter read: "And Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." Damascus, in Syria, now the oldest city in the world, had opened its gates as a refuge to the Christians, and provided with legal papers from the high priests, he set out at the head of an armed and mounted force to bring those Christians at Damascus to terms. But he did not. In the affairs of men it ever remains true: Man proposes, God disposes, and most wonderfully did He dispose in the case of Saul of Tarsus.

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It was high noon in Syria, the sun standing in its zenith. On the road leading from Jerusalem to Damascus could be heard the clattering of horses' hoofs. The horsemen could already see the beautiful city rising upon their sight and its gates swinging open, when, suddenly, there came a flash from the sky, and "a light above the brightness of the sun" shone round about them, with such overwhelming effect that it struck the chief with blindness, smote him to the ground, and filled every man with terror and dismay. And to this brilliancy of light was added a clear and distant voice ringing through the air, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

Like pointed steel these words went down into Saul's heart. He had been persecuting the Christians, and now comes a voice from heaven, saying, "Why persecutest thou Me?" What! could it be possible that God identifies Himself with these people he, Saul, was seeking to destroy? Could it be true that He whom His nation had crucified was indeed the Messiah, risen and alive? Overcome with remorse, Saul raises his sightless eyeballs on high and asks, "Who art Thou, O Lord?" And back comes the quick reply, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." That was too much for him. Here was the voice of Jehovah Himself,—what could he do but submit? Trembling and astonished he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The victory was won. The Galilean had conquered. "Arise," said He, "and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." For three days Saul lay sick in Damascus unable to see, to move, to eat and drink by reason of the great convulsions that had shaken up his body and soul, but during that time undergoing a change which has placed his name among the great and noble members of the kingdom of heaven. At the close of these never-to-be-forgotten days God sent to him one of the faithful disciples, or Christians, living at Damascus, Ananias by name. Ananias at first was very reluctant to go, having heard such evil report of the man, but the Lord had said, "Go," and that settled the matter. He found the dreaded Saul lying on his couch, addressed him with brotherly kindness, told him why he had come, and laid his hands upon him. "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized." This interesting narrative shall we view as to the subject of conversion and as to its significance to the Church.

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Taking up some practical lessons on the subject of conversion: What was there in St. Paul's case that need not be looked for in other cases? And what was there in it that is common to every case? Let us look at St. Paul's case. He was called in a miraculous manner by the Savior. It was a miracle to prove the truth of Christianity in that early day. But now we have no ground to look for like circumstances in the conversion of any one in our day. If Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus appearing to him in the way, the sinner must not, for this reason, also expect to be visited by some remarkable call, dream, vision, or supernatural impression upon his mind.

Again, Saul fell to the earth, and was in great distress of mind and body for three days. It does not follow from this that every unconverted person must be in such distress before he can take a step in the right direction. The Ethiopian eunuch, of whom we read in the preceding chapter, received the Word without any such process, and "went on his way rejoicing." Of the three thousand who were converted in one day it is merely said: "They gladly received the Word and were baptized."

Sometimes true Christians feel much uneasiness and anxiety because they cannot point to any such distinguishing moments in their experience. They have never passed through the mental anguish that others speak of. They have never felt as Saul of Tarsus must have felt those three days of blindness. Such persons forget that in most of the cases recorded in the Gospel there were no experiences of this kind, but conversion consisted simply in the cordial and quiet acceptance of the Lord Jesus.

Again, in Paul's case there was something to fix the precise time of his conversion. He could name the day, the very hour, when he fell upon the ground trembling and afraid. Is it, therefore, necessary that every believer should be able to designate the precise time of his conversion? Not one Christian out of ten can tell the date of his conversion.

It is generally the case that the grosser the sins are, the more marked will the change be. When any one who has made himself conspicuous in crime and wickedness is converted, it is like the lighting of a candle in a room utterly dark. There is a sudden change from darkness to light. It is, therefore, easy to fix the precise time when darkness ceased and light prevailed. But the case is very different from those who have been molded and influenced from youth up by religious teaching and training.

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How was it possible for Timothy to tell when he commenced to be a Christian? He was instructed from his youth in the Holy Scriptures. He could not remember the time when he was not pious and God-fearing. He always belonged to the Lord—in his childhood, in his youth, in his manhood. The same is true of John the Baptist. How could he tell when he was converted? He was sanctified from his birth, we are told. Where, then, was there room for a sudden and marked change in him? Yes, I am free to remark that it is just what God wants in the case of each one. He does not want us to know the precise time of our conversion. He does not want any one to give a part of his life to sin and Satan, so that a sudden, marked, and definite change seems necessary. He does not want you to act the part of an infidel for awhile, in order that you may be able to tell us the day or the hour when you became a believer. No, God wants your whole life; from beginning to end it is to be consecrated to God, our Savior. And does it not follow from this, that the more faithfully our children are instructed in the doctrines and duties of our holy religion, in the family, in the Sunday-school, and in the catechetical class, the less the number will become of those who can point to the particular time of their conversion? The whole work of the Sunday-school throughout and the whole work of the pastor in the catechetical class has this grand object in mind, to make a Timothy out of every child, one who is instructed in the Holy Scriptures from his youth, and who knows no time when he did not belong to the Lord.

Finally, we may observe that Saul's conversion was unsought by himself. He set out on his way to Damascus full of hatred against Christ and His disciples. He had not a single desire to become His follower. In this also his conversion is singular. We are not to expect, as some seem to do, that we may carelessly continue in our worldly affairs, or in sinful pleasures, or in other opposition to God; and nevertheless some time Almighty Grace will strike us to the ground, and raise us up Christians. God may do that, but the general rule is that God does not do that. The general rule is that God is found by those who seek Him. The eunuch was reading the Scriptures when Philip preached Christ to him. Nathaniel was meditating and praying under the fig-tree when he was led to the Savior. Lydia was at the place of prayer when the Lord opened her heart, and she attended to the things spoken by Paul. The Samaritans were listening to Philip's preaching when they were brought to believe. All were using the means of grace, and were brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. So with us this day,—by the Word of God, in private reading, in public preaching He converts souls. In this particular conversion, Paul's case differs from others.—What, however, do we find in every case of true conversion, no matter how varied the circumstances are? Conversion is to turn from the love and practice of sin, and through faith in the Son of God to the love and practice of holiness. When a man has conviction of sin, believes in, and depends on, Jesus as His Savior, he is converted, and it matters not how, when, or where. Never could there be such a conviction, such a belief, such a striving, unless there has previously been a change, and that change we call conversion. Believe it that when a man can look up like the man Saul of Tarsus, and say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he is a converted man.—

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Viewed as a public event in its significance to the Christian Church, the conversion of Paul is one of the strongest external proofs furnished us in the Bible for the truth of the Christian religion. If it can be established that Saul became Paul, then the Gospel must be true, and all that it tells us of Jesus as our divine Lord and Redeemer must be true. And there has never yet been a man who has dared to deny the historical truth of this conversion, or to contradict that Saul *did* become Paul.

At the beginning of the last century Sir Gilbert West and Lord Lyttleton, two great literary lights of England, determined on a masterstroke for the suppression of the Gospel. It seemed to them that the two greatest miracles of the Christian religion were Christ's resurrection and Saul's conversion. Gilbert West agreed to write a refutation of the resurrection of Christ, and Lord Lyttleton a refutation of the conversion of Saul. At the conclusion of their work they met by appointment. Lord Lyttleton asked, "What is the result of your work?" The answer was: "I have thoughtfully investigated the resurrection of Christ, and have come to the conclusion that He who is said to have come forth from the sepulcher of Joseph's garden was, as He claimed to be, the veritable Son of God." And Lord Lyttleton said: "I have fully investigated the narrative of the conversion of St. Paul, and am satisfied that this man, on his journey along the Damascus highway, really saw Jesus of Nazareth, and that this Jesus was the very Christ of God." No other conclusion can be reached as we enter upon the study of the character of the man, and the results that have come from that event.

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To finish our meditation with a personal application: St. Paul, whose conversion we have considered, wrote much for the instruction of all after ages, but he never penned more memorable words than these, words which perhaps have been oftener quoted than any sentence of any writer that ever lived—may God enable you to take the words home to your heart—: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am chief." Paul's conversion is a beacon-light to encourage us never to despair for the worst and most hopeless of sinners.

If Grace could take a blasphemer and persecutor like Saul, then there is hope for you and for me. May we realize it! Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.—2 *Tim.* 3, 5.

Things are not always what they seem. There is much deception, sham, pretense in this world. And religion forms no exception; much that passes under that name is not such in reality. The text just quoted distinguishes between "the form of godliness" and "the power of godliness," thus intimating that there may be one without the other. All created things indeed have some form. We cannot think of anything without form. Every essence and substance manifests itself in some shape, through some medium, external substance; and so religion finds expression in outward forms, in prayer, in this institution called the Church, in that Book called the Bible, in the sacraments and other ordinances.

But, whilst we cannot have religion without form, there may be form without religion. Not every eye sees, though it was created for that purpose; not every ear, though it have the perfect form, hears. We discover eyes without seeing and ears without hearing, and in like manner we discover the form of godliness with none of its power. A man may appear very religious, and yet not be religious. The Bible and history both are full of such. Thus, St. Paul in his day came to the city of Athens and was constrained to confess: "I observe, O men of Athens, that ye are exceedingly devout." Judging by the form, he saw, in that representative city of heathenism, a great degree of religiousness and devotion; gods and goddesses, altars and temples, stood on the right hand and on the left, carved out in the most exquisite marble, with the most exquisite skill. Every public edifice was a sanctuary. The theaters were ascribed to the deities. As any scholar of ancient history knows, the streets and markets, the groves and public places were full and overflowing with the figures and statues of Jupiter and Diana, and every other god and goddess which their imagination had invented. Yes, the men of Athens were exceedingly religious, and, withal, they were notoriously ungodly, and Paul could not help expressing himself to that effect.

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Again, take the religionists mentioned in to-day's Gospel—the scribes and the Pharisees. As to the form of religion, they were scrupulous to the last degree. On their phylacteries, and on the frontlet which they wore between their eyes, were passages of Scripture such as: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord, your God is one Lord." They fasted twice in the week, more than the law required. They paid tithes, not only of the common products of the field, but of their garden herbs, mint, anise, and cinnamon. They were extremely careful as to their cleansings. Thus the washing of hands in the six books of the Mishna, written by the Jewish rabbis, is prescribed: One and one-half eggshells full of water must be used; the hands must be lifted in a certain position when the water is poured upon them; then the right must rub the left and the left the right; then they must be held in a downward incline, palms upside down, so that the water may drop off. And the towel must be properly held. Thirty chapters alone in that Jewish book treat of the cleansing of cups and platters. And yet, in spite of all this scrupulosity and punctiliousness and ceremonialism, the Savior had occasion to declare in the opening words of to-day's Gospel-lesson: "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." The form was there, the show of godliness, but something vitally essential was missing; our text calls it "the power."

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Nor would we confine this formation of religion to ancient heathen or Judaism. An acquaintance of mine tells of a scene recently witnessed in the city of Mexico. A company of men were shuffling cards, and casting dice, and indulging in profane and unholy jests in a drinking-house, when suddenly the ringing of a bell was heard without. A procession of priests was passing through the streets bearing the consecrated water to the bedside of the dying. At the sound all in the

iniquitous place fell upon their knees and muttered their prayers. The bell ceased, and they resumed their pleasure. What was this but the form of godliness without the power? Nor need we go to distant Mexico to find the same manifestation among the devotees of the same religion,—ceremonialism, grand and spectacular, the waking early at the break of day to perform one's worship, the lighting of candles and bending of knees before graven images, the ceaseless twisting of the rosary beads, and making of crucifixes and anointing with holy oil and water. What are these but the forms of godliness without the power thereof? Let us not be uncharitable, but the words of the Savior press themselves upon one's lips: Except your righteousness exceed that which so garbs itself, and puts in the place of Christ another's righteousness, which is the righteousness of such hollow ceremonies, pretensions, and good works, it shall not avail to enter into the kingdom of God.

And is Protestantism exempt? Are there no formalists among those who profess to be members of, and visit, our churches? Is there no outward ceremonial observance there, no form of godliness without the power thereof? As we pointed out, everything has a form, and that form needs attention. Injure the shell, and the kernel will be impaired. Refuse to give due respect to your body, and its immortal tenant, the soul, will leave it. And so in religion. The outward must be attended to. It will not do to say, I need not go to church, God is everywhere, I can worship Him just as well under the trees of the park, under the blue canopy of the great temple of Nature, as in the four walls of a building. The church is God's; it is there He has recorded His name, and promised to convey His grace and blessing as nowhere else. Godliness and churchliness are joined together, and it is not for any man to divorce them, to put them asunder.

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The godly man, it will ever be found, is the best churchman. It will not do to say: I can be just as good a Christian and stay away from the sacrament of the Lord's Table,—it is only a form. Granting it is, it is a form which God has commanded by and through which He communicates life and salvation to men's souls. You do not despise to drink the water of the Mississippi River because it flows through pipes and comes out at the faucet. And so you ought not reject life, grace, and salvation promised by God, because He has laid it down for you in the partaking of bread and wine in His sacrament, which is the channel by and through which He conveys it to your soul. The same may be said of all the ordinances of religion,—prayer, the reading of the Bible, the saying of prayers. These things must be attended to. They are the forms in which it expresses itself—takes shape. And yet, we must beware of mistaking the shape for the substance, the shell for the kernel, the body for the soul. Going to church as a mere form saves no one; neither does going to the Sacrament. To read the Bible, for instance, merely to find out what a fine literary product it is, has no religious value; and to mumble one's prayers in a thoughtless and spiritless way, our Lord tells us, is worthless, yes, it may be an abomination to Him. What good does food do you if you do not digest it, take the strength out of it, the necessary qualities? Equally so with the spiritual food. Religion as a form, a mere external life, a show, avails nothing; rather, it is a snare of delusion by which men may deceive themselves and others.

When, then,—that is the question to which our text leads up,—when have we the form of godliness together with the power thereof? In order to have true religion, two things are necessary, the new birth and the new life. First, the new birth. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Religion, first of all, above all, aims at and affects the heart. It is this which is primarily concerned. "This people," the Lord complains, "draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." "Give me, my son," my daughter, "thy *heart*," is the request of the merciful Lord.

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Whoever has sat under the pulpit of God, listening to His instructions and exhortations, or scanning the pages of His Holy Word, that has not had his feelings stirred and his soul warmed after the manner of those two disciples on their way to Emmaus, to whom the risen Lord opened the Scripture, whereupon they confessed, "Did not our heart burn within us?" Whose bosom has failed to beat higher with noble resolution and holy endeavor when kneeling before his God in prayer or at the sacred Communion? In a word, whose inner life has not been touched by the Spirit of God, and who has not undergone a change of mind which brings him to see things by faith in Christ, in a new light? The promise is: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "If thou shalt believe in thine heart, thou shalt be saved." The heart belongs to true religion, and true religion belongs into the heart. This is the first requisite and essence of godliness—a new heart.

The other requisite is the new life. It is the natural and the necessary outflow of the new birth. When the heart has been changed by the Spirit of God, the new life will show itself. The Lord once remarked, "By their fruits ye shall know them." You cannot be a bad citizen, an undutiful parent, a spiteful husband, a fretful, quarrelsome wife, an unscrupulous business man, and, at the same time, a good Christian. It does not exhibit the power of godliness to listen devoutly to a sermon on righteousness, and temperance, and purity, and straightway imbibe freely from the intoxicating cup, speak words of profanity, and do things that are tainted. If you would discover if the works of a clock are right, we look at the hands; so by our hands and deeds we may test whether our hearts are right. You cannot be in possession of an evil tongue, of a lustful eye, of a covetous, selfish, miserly hand, and, at the same time, of a pious and devout mind.

If our text teaches anything, it teaches that godliness is a "power," an energy which renews and sanctifies men. But when there is power, it exerts and manifests itself. Then there must be, in order to have true religion, a regenerated heart and a corresponding life. How, then, to make a few direct words of application, is it with you, my dear hearer? One of the chief sources of offense, they tell us, is that those who profess godliness are so woefully short of it. "They are everlastingly running to church, praying, and hymn singing, but they live and act like heathen."

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Not infrequently that charge comes from an ugly and malicious, fault-finding spirit. Let us see to it that it is only that, a mean, unfair charge, that, as far as we are concerned, it be not true. Let us in the light of our text see to it that we have not only the form of godliness, but the power thereof, that our heart is right with God, and endeavor earnestly and conscientiously to make our head and tongues and hands right. God strengthen us in this resolution!

Lord Jesus, it is Thy religion we profess. Keep us by Thy Holy Spirit to be true disciples of it, to our soul's welfare, our fellow-man's uplift, and Thy glory. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?—*Luke 12, 6.*

Our Lord always spoke in the plainest possible terms. Whenever a vital truth was to be stated, an important doctrine to be set forth, He did it in language so clear that no one could misunderstand. The statement of our text this morning shares that quality. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" The little creature mentioned is one of the most insignificant that could be thought of; the Lord selected it just for the sake of that utter insignificance to bring out a significant and all-inspiring truth. That truth is this: that God is in relation with everything that exists; that He superintends all; that there is nothing so minute as to be overlooked or forgotten. We call this the doctrine of God's providence, and a most prominent teaching of God's Word it is, as also one of the most cheering and practical.

Prompted by the Gospel-lesson of to-day, which shows us our blessed Lord as providing miraculously for the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fishes, let us *I. seek to establish the doctrine of God's providence; II. show its application and effect upon us and our lives.*

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them," thus we confess in the explanation of the First Article of our Creed, and what our Catechism thus confesses, the sacred Scriptures with especial clearness teach. God did not only, as some are willing to admit, create the universe, but He also now governs it personally and completely. It is the theory of our modern evolutionists and materialists that God has left the world to govern and develop itself, that, having placed it under certain natural laws, it must take care of itself, wholly independent of God's interference. As Melancthon once characterized their position: "They think of God as a shipbuilder, who, when he has completed his vessel, launches it and then leaves it, or like a clock which you wind up, and then let run off." A different impression is that received from God's Holy Book. That assures us that, so far from turning over His government to unalterable laws, so far from retiring from His works to dwell apart in His own unapproachable Godhead in some distant sphere, unconcerned and uncaring for such a world and such creatures as we, there is nothing done, nor said, nor thought, nor felt by man but He knows it and notes it, and orders His dealings with reference to it. His providence includes every event,—the rise and fall of nations and states, the experiences and vicissitudes of the Church, the occurrences of the history of each family, the unnumbered instances which make up the life of each individual, no matter what their character. His supreme hand is in and over them all. Those words which we so commonly use in daily speech—chance, accident, strictly and consistently regarded, are untruthful, for there is no such thing as chance, an accident; nothing happens but it has been determined in His wisdom, and is sent, directed, or permitted according to His will. Chance or accident rule in nothing—God's providence in all. What more satisfactory assurance would we desire for that than what is told us in the text? It was a customary thing to see sold in the marketplace of Jerusalem, as an article of merchandise, the little creatures here mentioned. The price was a minimum, five sparrows for two farthings, equal at the most, to two cents of our money. Our Lord, in referring to it, calls attention to the little regard taken by men of this poor little bird, and brings out in vivid and grand contrast the regard taken of it by God. "And not one of them is forgotten before God."

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Elsewhere, in one of the Psalms, God says: "I know all the fowls upon the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are in my sight." We watch in their season of immigration the flight of birds, when in long flocks they cross the sky, passing from the North to the South, or back again. To think that each in those countless tribes is known, as if by name, to its Creator, not one confounded with the other in the view of God! We observe the tiny sparrow as it skips from ground to housetop, busily gathering its food, or the frail materials wherewith to construct its nest below our house roof; how little we reflect that every one of them is numbered in that sight which nothing can escape, and that in the ephemeral history of the poor little bird, of which the great God and Savior deigns to speak, not one item is forgotten, each is seen and known and retained in a faithful memory; "not forgotten," implying a knowledge that lasts, a consideration though the thing known may no longer exist. This, then, is the way we are taught to think about our God. All things that transpire, all that has been and shall be—all are embraced within the circle of God's unforgetting, all-remembering knowledge, vision, providence. That is the Christian doctrine as taught by our Lord in such plain illustrations as this, and as preached by His apostles on the pages of the Old and New Testament throughout.

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Let us now ask of the application. That it means something to us when the Lord says about God's not forgetting one of the sparrows sold in the market-place of Jerusalem is a matter of course. What does it mean? The doctrine of God's providence is, we would thus consider it first, a stern and restraining truth. Consider for a moment,—there is nothing about you, or in you, or of you, but God knows and sees it all, the thoughts of your mind, the desires of your heart, the motives of your deeds. He spieth out all your ways, He understandeth your thoughts afar off. Yesterday, for example, He saw you when your eyes first opened to the light, and He traced your steps till they closed once more in sleep. You know what you did, and He also knows. You may have thought yourself unobserved, and some things there are which you should prefer to forget, wish that you could conceal them, ashamed or afraid to have them known. God does not forget, from Him you cannot conceal; all the while you are standing in the concentrated blaze of a light, brighter than the brightest sun, and eyes that see everything are reading you through and through. That is, as stated, a stern and awful truth. But let us not deceive ourselves concerning it. Let us remember that there is no privacy anywhere for us, though we may long for it, and many live as if they had it. Our follies and vanities, our erring steps, our ugly temper and evil disposition, every idle word that you spoke, every oath that has fallen from your lips, every vile action, every dollar you have wasted in luxury, folly, or withheld in miserly selfishness, every influence you have exerted, apt to lead a brother or sister astray,—God sees and knows them all. You are read like a book by the Reader of the lives of all men. Man, my beloved hearers, needs a check upon him, a hand to keep him straight. He has it in this belief. A person cannot go far wrong who believes that God sees and knows all. The sense of His nearness is a moral force, a thousandfold greater than any other that can be named. He that thinks thus of His God is ever putting to himself the question whether God approves what he is about at any given moment. That saves him; it acts as a constant check; it is a lantern to his feet, a light to his paths, a bridle to his lips. And God knows we all need to be so held in. That communities are defiled, that the social order is imperiled, that men are shocked at the growing ravages of sin, and souls are ruined one by one, we may trace these things to their sole cause, the losing sight of the fact that God's eye is on them always, and that they are accountable to Him for what they do. Let the doctrine of God's providence be generally rejected, and it is only a question of time till that comes to pass again which once occurred in the days of Noah, when God saw that the wickedness of man was great, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Here, then, is a truth which may be called the beginning of the moral law, the foundation of Christian ethics, the Alpha and Omega of Christian practice. The doctrine of God's providence is a stern and restraining doctrine.

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But there is another side to the picture. To that shall we turn for the greatest comfort and peace that mortal man can know. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" "Ye are," continues the Master, "of more value than many sparrows." If one of them cannot fall to the ground unnoticed by our Father, how much more in His thoughts, (that is the evident line of argumentation,) are we, His children, made in His likeness, redeemed by His own precious blood. What should there be for us each day and hour but loving, unwavering trust. It cannot fail to impress every reader of his Bible how it dwells continually upon this very point. Our Lord knew what a burdensome world this is, and how easily perplexed men are. He has sought in all possible manner and ways to bring home to us the truth we are considering. He has given us precious and numerous promises. "Trust in the Lord and do good," is one of them, "So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Another is: "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Still others: "My grace is sufficient for thee:" "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." These might be multiplied from the Scriptures by the score and hundred. And again He has sought to impress His divine providence upon us by numberless examples. There is, for instance, Noah. Noah trusted Him, and lo! when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the floods rose, and millions of the ungodly sank into a watery grave, sheltered and shut in by God's protecting hand, the ancient saint outrode the deluge in safety, with his family. Elijah, alone yonder in the wilderness, in time of famine, trusted Him, and, behold, even the ravens, divinely bidden, came flying with bread to feed him. And so David, and Daniel, and Peter, and all of God's illustrious saints whose biography the Bible records, put their trust in His governing providence, and never were ashamed, and their experience has been the universal experience and testimony of all who have ever really put their faith in Him, and that applies as much to us as to them. Come what will, the true and trusting child of God feels secure. "Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere?" Is ghastly pestilence mowing down its victims? Is financial depression over all the land, labor unobtainable, wages low, and bread scarce? Has sickness prostrated one? Has death broken the family circle, and is the heart bleeding under bereavement? In the midst of it all the Christian sees the wise, loving, all-governing providence of God, the almighty and all-gracious hand of His own divine heavenly Father; and in this assurance, that God is thus in all that befalls him, his soul is filled with abiding calmness. There is nothing, amid it all, which is more calculated to banish our cares, to throw sunshine across life's path, to make us more content, than the belief that our God holds the reins of universal rule, and that all is controlled and guided by His wise and kind hand.

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And this, to conclude, also gives a Christian strength and encouragement in his work. The thought that God is near us, the feeling that He is working with us, gives an impulse, a force which nothing else can impart. To rise in the morning with that sense of divine presence, that God sees all our endeavors, is to take up one's work with an entirely different mood than where that feeling is missing. Nor are we then easily discouraged; it gives us renewed inspiration, the courage required for long, steady, earnest work.

We have considered a glorious truth of Christian doctrine from the lips of Him who never

exaggerated, never erred. Lay hold of it, believe it, not languidly, but as a power in your lives, and be happy in such belief. Amen.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.—*1 Tim. 6, 20.*

Everything in this world is liable to be spoiled. There is nothing safe against the doings of corruption. The holiest things are often perverted, the richest flowers blasted in their bud. Man himself, as the Psalmist tells us, was made but a little lower than the angels, but his glory was soon tarnished, and he frequently sinks a little lower than the brute. There is none, though he appear as a veritable saint among men, who is beyond the reach of danger. And it is so also with religion.

Beautiful as is religion, and pure as it is, coming from the mind and bosom of God, it is liable to be spoiled in the hands and hearts of its professors. Such at least is the teaching of the text and the testimony of experience. Just like the crystal mountain stream in its course from the virgin spring down to the ocean gathers some of the unclean and filthy deposits of the shores it washes, so the waves of religion, in flowing through many lands and hearts, have taken up some of their noxious and poisonous ingredients; while purifying and refreshing the earth, the noble river contracts some of its corruptions. The Jews, for instance, had a pure religion, communicated to them by the patriarchs and prophets, but heathenish elements were continually mingling with it. Moloch and other hideous idols would now and then stand in the very presence of Jehovah's temple, and the priests of Baal oft took the place of the sons of Aaron. When Christ came, the Jewish religion was exceedingly tainted and corrupted with Gentileism and other defiling influences. The Christian religion in its turn has fared no better, starting out on the pure basis of its divine Master's directions; but it has been subject to the same influences. It was given to the world as a plain, simple system. But when kings and emperors began to take it into favor, magnificent outward ceremonies were instituted, privileged orders were appointed; bishops and other high authorities were set up, claiming extraordinary power, and at last what started as Christianity became little more than baptized heathenism. Masses, penances, and confessionals took the stead of Christ and His righteousness. In place of the old heathen gods were placed patron saints. Venus of the Greeks became Mary of the Christians. The true glory of the Church was gone, until God in His mercy turned back the tide to His own Revelation and Book, the Holy Bible. That was in the days of the Lutheran Reformation. But that did not settle matters; the soil of misguided religion and of man's perverted opinion has been defiling, and is still defiling, its pure and holy waters. It need not be. Christianity is as simple as simplicity can be, its teaching is as clear as is the sunlight in its noonday radiancy; but, of course, it must be guarded, protected against corruption on the part of man's delirious and sickly reason.

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This is the caution St. Paul makes in our text to his beloved pupil Timothy, when he directs him: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith." There are two classes of science falsely so called that have erred concerning the faith. The one is the worldly science, and the other the Christian Science, and concerning both classes I would ask for your most careful attention.

When speaking of science, it must be observed at the outset that true science and the Revelation of God are not at variance. How can they be? The Book of Nature and the Book of Religion have been written by one and the same Hand, and cannot contradict each other. What man by investigation can find out in nature cannot be of a character to make him doubt or deny the truthfulness of religion as laid down in the Bible. But this is what some of the men of supposed higher learning are doing. They look askance at religion. They shake their wise heads, and, putting on their eye-glasses, superciliously state that the Bible is not what people think it is. They are willing to admit that it is a book of much good history, a book of sublime poetry, a book of excellent moral precepts, a book which admirably describes human nature, a book from which all men may gather a great deal of practical wisdom and comforting promise, but many of its texts are spurious or faulty, it is not altogether up to date in their opinion. The geologist has bored into the earth, and found that the various compositions must make it much older than Moses seems to say. The astronomer has put his telescope into the heavens and finding our planet, the earth, the smallest among heavenly bodies, considers it too insignificant to be the object of all that divine concern the Bible speaks about. The anatomist has examined the skulls of dead men, and comparing the one with the other, questions whether they have all proceeded from one human pair. The natural historian has never found a race of snakes with power of speech, and so he puts down the account of the serpent in Eden as a myth. The people of the earth speak hundreds of languages, and hence it must be a mere dream that there was once a time when "the whole earth was of one language and one speech." Miracles, they say, are so contrary to the general experience of mankind that they must be rejected as falsehood and fiction, and thus might we continue to give the objections of these wiseacres, called scientists, who are looked up to with undisguised admiration by numbers. It would lead us too far, though nothing might afford us greater pleasure to examine these objections in their true light.—We will only ask, How do these wise people know what length of time it took the almighty God to form the various strata which compose the crust of the earth? How can they tell that this world of ours

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is too small to engage Jehovah so deeply for its welfare? How can they prove that the human race and language do not extend back to one common stock? How dare they deny the credibility of miracles in the face of the many wonders which are spread about them every day, and appear every season in their sight? What authority have they for their high-sounding, but hollow assertions? They think themselves wise, but in fact they are but babes in these matters, and those who follow them are their senseless dupes.

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The truth is that with all the advances of knowledge which have so wonderfully marked the last three hundred years, searching heaven and earth and sea, knocking at every door and gathering wisdom from every source, there has not come to light one truth to contradict these holy records, or to require the relinquishment of one word in all the great volume of God. Only a few instances to prove what I state. It has been but a few years since Newton laid open the laws of gravitation, and yet the Scriptures spoke of the earth being hung "upon nothing," as if familiar with the whole subject, before human science had begun to form even the feeblest guesses in the case. Again, take the theory of wind currents, and of the circulation of the blood, why, read the 1st, 6th and 12th chapters of Ecclesiastes, and observe where Solomon describes it at least 2,500 years ago. And so in every case. You may lack understanding or research, you may fail to grasp its truth, by reason of its being too wonderful to you, but as far as being false and spurious, let no man dare to raise that charge against God's religion and Book. Our wisdom, at best, is only fragmentary, as St. Paul says, "We know only in part." No man, not even a scientist, is the personification of all wisdom, and ought not so consider himself. Let every man be a liar, but never accuse God's truthfulness. Avoid such, as St. Paul says in our text, as being profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called.

This, then, as much as worldly science is concerned, and now let us turn to the other species which calls itself Christian Science, but which is neither Christian nor Science,—not Christian, because it has erred from the faith, as our text puts it, and not a science, because, to quote our text again, it is falsely so called. It might be well to approach the matter more closely. In the first place, it must be noted that Christian Science is nothing new; it is, to be candid, a rehash of what is termed in Church History, Gnosticism. In the early Christian Church, about the year 200 after Christ, there arose certain heretics, Montanus and his prophetesses Maximilla and Priscilla, who advocated theories and things similar to those in our days advanced with so much zealously by the late Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy, the founder and high priestess of the Church of Christian Scientists. These heretical views referred to also found adherents in the early Church, so that the excellent Bishop Irenaeus, of Lyons, wrote a book against them called, "The Refutation of Christian Science falsely so called." Mrs. Eddy very deftly succeeded in bolstering up these ancient opinions, and launched them forth in the various editions of her book called "Science and Health, with a Key to the Scriptures." I have carefully gone over that book, and I confess I am overwhelmed with shame to think that any one who lays claim to Christianity or to well-balanced reason can earnestly believe such matter. To mention only a few of her doctrines:—The Bible says 1 John 5, 7: "There are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." Mrs. Eddy says: "The theory of three persons in the Godhead reminds us of heathen gods." In other words, she stamps the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as heathenish. The Bible says, Rom. 5, 12: "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Mrs. Eddy calls this an "illusion," purely imaginary; there is no such thing as death. Naturally, then, in line with this, she also rejects Christ's redeeming us from sin, stating that the time is not distant when these common views about Christ's redemption will undergo a great change. In other words, while she mentions Christ's name with seemingly the greatest reverence in her book, she calls Him a fraud and deceiver, because the Bible tells us in just these words that Christ came to save His people from their sins, came to destroy the works of the devil, came to redeem them that were under the Law. But Mrs. Eddy spurns the existence of a personal devil, denies the existence of sin, and rejects redemption. Such passages as 1 John 1, 7: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," are "hideous" to her. Her entire system is nothing else than unchristian bosh. I say "unchristian" because, on closer investigation, there is not a single particle of Christian doctrine and belief that she does not openly or indirectly at least overthrow. It is true, she claims "faith in the Bible"; the title of her book is, "Science and Health, with a Key to the Scriptures," but it is a key that binds, but does not unlock. Her comment to the very first verse of the Scripture: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," is this: "This creation consists in the developing of spiritual ideas and their identities, which are grasped and reflected by the unending Spirit." That may be Mrs. Eddy's creation of the world, but it certainly was not the creation which the first chapter of Genesis tells us about.

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But let us go on to the second chapter of the Bible. This does not suit Mrs. Eddy, as she expressly states it is diametrically opposed to scientific truth, and "inspired by falsehood and error," and in consequence she rejects the second chapter of Genesis entirely. We could go on at this rate, but enough has been shown to characterize Mrs. Eddy's "Key to the Scriptures." And alas! that men should be carried away with such barefaced craftiness and such thick-coated and consummate falsehood! Oh, may it teach us to love to study our Bible!

But there is still another phase of Christian Science of which we must speak, would we do it justice, and that is the healing phase. Mrs. Eddy claims that she has restored the sick and brought back the dying to life. "Science and Health" and our community have been repeatedly agitated by specimens of this healing ability. It is well known to every one that Christian Science in its treatment of disease starts from the fundamental theory that there is no sickness and disease, as it says in their text-book, "Science and Health": "You call it neuralgia; this is all delusion, imagination. You expose your body to a certain temperature, and your delusion says

that you catch a cold or get catarrh. But such is not the case; it is only the effect of your imagination." The consequence of this fallacy is that no medical remedies are resorted to; in fact, to a Christian Scientist ignorance of medicine is bliss. Mrs. Eddy warns against a knowledge of medicine as a hindrance to learning her system.

Stopping here for a moment to show the unscripturalness of all this, I would but briefly call your attention to such passages as Is. 38 and 2 Kings 20, where we read: "And Isaiah, the prophet of the Lord, said to Hezekiah the King, Let them take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover." Or, turning to an instance from the New Testament, St. Paul the Apostle writes in 1 Tim. 5, 23 to his afflicted pupil: "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities," thus suggesting a medicinal tonic or medicine. Our Lord approved of physicians when He said: "They that be whole," that is, healthy, "need not a physician," which evidently implies that the sick do need a physician, and we know from Col. 4, 14 that there was a physician among the first disciples of the Christian Church, and that was none other than the man who wrote the third and the fifth book in the New Testament, namely, St. Luke. It says in Col. 4, 14: "Luke, the beloved physician, greets you." And moreover, when we read that in the days of His flesh the sick and the palsied and the lame, and those afflicted otherwise, came to Jesus and He healed them, does not Christian Science, denying that there is no sickness, no palsy, and no disease, brand our Lord as a liar and a fraud? God protect us from such abomination!

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But let us come to the final question: By what power or remedy does Christian Science heal, or, rather, claim to heal? Answer: By denying the existence of matter, of sickness, of death, and by seeking to give the mind complete mastery. Just imagine it is not so! Prayer is employed, but Mrs. Eddy does not attach as much importance to that as some of her followers, and from what we have heard, such prayer is not the prayer of faith, for she has far erred from God and the faith. God certainly does not answer such vain and profane babbling of lips that speak falsehood and lies. The whole Christian Science is a blustering, high-strung delusion. St. Paul gives a true characterization of it 2 Thess. 2, 9: "It is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish."

God grant that we may "avoid profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called." With our hearts firmly grounded in the simple truth as it is in Jesus, and laid down in the Volume before us, let us hold fast through God's grace what we have. It is the power, the only power, unto salvation. Amen.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.—*Luke 12, 16-21.*

It is a serious matter to call any man a fool. It ought never to be done except when circumstances make it imperatively necessary. Christ, you know, employs very strong language in reference to this in the Sermon on the Mount when He says: "Whosoever shall say to his brother: Raca, shall be in danger of the council, but whoever shall say: Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire." But we must bear in mind that our Lord does not condemn the expression "Thou fool" in itself, but rather the spirit in which it is spoken. He does not affirm that it is wrong to say that a fool is a fool, even to his face, but that it is intensely wrong to do so from a feeling of hatred, from spite; and so when God in the words just quoted says to the rich man, "Thou fool," He says so, not because He hated him, but because it was a fact, because He pitied His miserable condition, and because He wishes to deter others from following his example.

To deter others from following his example, by the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, is what we shall attempt to do in our pulpit instruction this morning. Permit me simply and briefly to direct your attention to two points in this striking parable, *I. That the rich man spoken of in this parable was in some respects a wise man; II. in some, and the chief respects, a foolish one.*

That this man was in some respects a wise man, of this we have sufficient evidence before us. In the first place, he was a rich man. It says: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully." It is very often said that anybody can make money, that it requires no extraordinary powers to become rich, that those who have prospered in the world are more indebted to adventitious circumstances than to any merits of their own, and true it is that men without intelligence, without education, without genius, are sometimes, through a favorable combination of circumstances, enabled to accumulate a vast amount of wealth. Yet, as a rule, riches are acquired by those who work hard, who rise early and go to bed late, who devote themselves with untiring energy to the serious business of life. The great law is that "The hand of the diligent maketh rich." Success is a prize which can only be secured by those who diligently seek it. The very fact of this man being rich was in itself a strong proof of his prudence; for the two, riches and good common sense, stand, as a rule, connected.

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Again, we are told that the land brought forth plentifully. What did that prove? Anything further

than that the land was fertile? It proved that he was a skillful farmer, that he cultivated his land well, that he knew how to make the most of it. For while it is true that the abundance of the harvest depends on many circumstances over which man has no control, such as the refreshing dew, the genial rain, and the life-giving sunshine, so that after man has done his best it is God who must give the increase, we ought also to remember that God invariably observes the laws which He Himself has established: He never causes corn to grow where seed has not been sown; He never makes the uncultivated soil bring forth at the same rate as that which is properly tilled; the smiles of Providence and the help of God do not attend the indolent, and the careless and thoughtless. If a man would reap abundantly, he must sow abundantly, use the brains God has given him, and conform to God's laws; and so, when the land brings forth plentifully, it is a proof that it belongs to a skillful and prudent farmer.

And he was careful of his goods. He thought within himself: "What shall I do because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" There was nothing wrong in this thinking, planning, and contriving. It would have been an unpardonable negligence on his part to let the corn rot in the fields for want of sufficient room to store it in, and it would have been hardly natural to expect him to distribute that for which he had no room among the poor. Doubtless it is the duty of those who are very prosperous to be also very liberal; according as they receive from God, so ought they contribute to God's institutions. But God nowhere commands them to give away *all* they have to spare after supplying their own immediate wants. Men are perfectly justified in storing up for the future, in laying aside, and allowing to increase what they have no need of at the present. And it's the part of a thoughtful man who likes to make the most of his advantages and opportunities so to do.

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Say what people, demagogues, and unprincipled orators may, and envy them as they do, those who increase wealth in an honest way have an unquestionable claim upon our respect. They are, as it were, the sinews of human society. Wealth is a mighty agent in the spread of civilization and good. Without wealth, railroads could not be constructed, ships could not be launched, towns, mansions, and harbors could not be built, most of the conveniences and comforts of civilized life could not be secured. Barbarous nations, you will find, are always poor. This man, from all accounts, did not acquire his riches by defrauding his neighbors or by wild and hazardous speculations, but in the exercise of a legitimate and respectable calling; he was entitled to it, he was deservedly respected. Nor did he—in this there was also a degree of wisdom—deny himself the comforts which his possessions were able to afford him. He was not a tight-fisted, miserly fellow who half starved through fear of spending his money, denying himself the things necessary to make life more enjoyable. Rather the man who, like him, says to himself, Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry, than the man who in possession of abundance of this world's goods denies himself its comforts.

So far, then, we have many favorable traits in his character, some of which we might do well to imitate. He was an industrious, skillful, contemplating, wide-awake person who, in a business, social way, stood well with all who knew him. But this only makes the remaining part of his conduct, which we shall now consider, all the more deplorable.

But God said unto him, "Thou fool." Why did God address him thus? Because, first, all his thoughts were centered upon himself. With him everything was *I, myself, and mine. My fruits, my goods*, says he, as if they were absolutely his own, as if he owed them entirely to his own skill and industry, and had a right to apply them to his own selfish ends.

The man with all his worldly wisdom—and he has many like himself—had not mastered one very essential and elementary truth, namely this, that nothing that we have, nothing that we are, comes from ourselves; if we possess anything, we have either inherited it or earned it. If we have inherited it, it is not we who gave life, energy, power to those who have bequeathed to us what we have. If we have earned it, it was not we who gave ourselves the active brain, the strong arm, and steady nerve that did the work. At the most we have improved, made the most of a gift. Our powers, moral and intellectual, physical and spiritual, come from the Author of our life; our life itself is a gift. "It is God who hath made us, and not we ourselves." We do not exist as of right, we exist on sufferance and as a matter of bounty. We are stewards, trustees. We hold what we hold on trust, as life-tenants, for an unseen Lord. The first thing this man ought to have done when he found that his lands were crowned with plenty was to bow down before the heavenly throne and say: "Father of all mercies, I thank Thee that Thou hast remembered Thine unworthy servant, and hast so bountifully prospered the labor of his hands." But no, he says not a word about God or to God; all he said was about himself and to himself. "My" fruits and "my" goods—is his language. And as he received them without thought or thanks to God, he also used them. It is this feature which our Lord emphasizes when he remarks: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Selfishness is the basest of all sins. It is the most repulsive, degraded, and degrading form of depravity, and to our shame it must be confessed that it is the peculiar fault of man. The whole constitution of nature is a standing protest against it. No created object exists for its own sake, or to serve its own ends; but everything contributes its share to the well-being of the rest of creation. Think of the sun, the most glorious of visible objects, how from day to day, from year to year, it lavishes its light upon the earth, giving life and beauty and freshness to the vegetable and animal kingdoms. Or think of the clouds, how with unwearied constancy they drink the waters of the ocean, not to retain them in their own bosoms, but to pour them down in plentiful showers, both on barren mountains and on fertile plains; or how this earth, after supplying generation after generation, is as productive as ever, and its mines inexhaustible. Everything, in fact, seems to teach the grand doctrine that it is better to give than to receive. Man alone, Heaven's chief recipient, forms the contrast. He is selfish, and herein

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consists his folly. Can we think of these things, and not blush at our own selfishness?

Again, his folly appears in this, that he provided only for the flesh, the least important part of his nature. 'Tis true, he talks about his soul, but only in such a way as if he hardly distinguished it from his body, and as if it ought to have been well satisfied with the things which his body only enjoyed. "And I will say to my soul," said he, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "Thou fool." He talked like a madman, like one beside himself, and hence he deserved the severest rebuke. For what is man? Not anything that he owns; not anything material that he can so handle as to make it serve his purpose; not even the bodily frame with which he will part company at death. Essentially, man is a spirit, enclosed in a bodily frame. The soul is the man, and that soul calls for first and best consideration. The contrary course is folly.

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It is quite proper for us to be careful of our bodies, to provide things suitable for our present condition; indeed, it is necessary to do so. Alas! that rational and heaven-born creatures should confine their attentions exclusively to, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" and utterly neglect their souls, feed their bodies sumptuously every day, and leave their souls to perish with hunger. Is this right? Is it reasonable to do this? Man has been created for a higher purpose, and his ambition ought to be higher than to find blessedness in eating, drinking, and sensual pleasures. These things cannot appease the cravings of his soul. Man needs God for his portion and Christ for his Savior; it is only as he believes the Gospel that true peace is his.

And, lastly, he provided only for *time*, the least important portion of his existence. What a glorious place this world would be, what a glorious time it would be eating, drinking, and being merry, according to the ideal of the flesh, if—well, if it were not for one thing. What is that? The summons quoted here in our text. "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." "Many years," the man had said. "This night," God said, and from that decree there was no appeal and is no exception. That awful truth is applicable to every one of woman born and just as uncertain. Look around you, my dear hearers, within the circuit of your own experience, and see if you do not recognize the picture in the parable—an indolent, indifferent epicureanism whispering to itself, "Soul, take thine ease; don't be alarmed, eat, drink, and be merry," broken in upon by the same message flashed from heaven coming in a railway accident, in a sinking steamer, by death in the hunting field, or the river's waves, or by the sudden stoppage of the heart's action. "Thou fool, this hour thy soul shall be required of thee,"—and how do you know whether the next summons may not mean you? Learn from this parable the terrible uncertainty of human affairs, and, above all, learn from it the lesson of wisdom, *viz.*, to look forward to the future, to forecast as to how it will be with you when the scenes and pursuits of this busy world will have ended. There is a life beyond this. Be wise, then, and provide for it. How? To speak with our text: "By being rich towards God." Hear the Gospel. Believe that Jesus suffered and died for you, reconciled you with God and heaven. Become members of God's kingdom on earth, the Christian Church. Make diligent use of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and thus be prepared and blessed in time and for eternity. Amen.

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TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.—*1 Cor. 12, 12 and 26.*

There is, perhaps, nothing more remarkable, when you study the life of the Church at large and of each congregation individually, than the little interest which its members take in each other. In most cases the entire concern of the membership devolves on a few, or perhaps on the pastor alone; in many instances the amount of interest and sympathy which is shown to each other extends only to a formal, a very cool, social recognition; in some there is not even the interest which secures that. People go in and out of the same church-building, month after month, year after year, without as much as knowing, or caring to know the name of their fellow-member or worshiper. When difficulties arise and embarrassments, those who belong to the Christian Church feel no more liberty to call on a member of the Church for counsel or aid than they would on any other person; when disheartened and discouraged, in need of sympathy and a kind word, they have no reason to suppose that a single member of the Church sympathizes with them. And when living in the neglect of Christian duty, none of the members ever stop to administer an admonition or gentle rebuke to keep the backslider from a melancholy fall. In a word, people are left to take care of themselves very much alone; and this is the more remarkable when you consider the condition of those who largely make up the membership of a congregation like ours. Many of them are young and inexperienced in Christian life, gained from families where there is no religion, no kindred to help them on to God, rather, where they are exposed to influences that would draw them aside, and where every effort ought to be made to keep them in the fold.

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The reflections, my beloved, and the constant cry, "What is the Church doing for its members? See how other organizations are helping each other, how they care for their constituents," have led me to propose for our consideration this morning: *What are the duties which the members of the Church owe to each other?* We shall inquire *I. What the Christian Church is, II. note a few traits which ought to distinguish its members.* May God's Spirit make the sermon a profitable

one.

First, what the Christian Church is. The Christian Church is an organization, a body, separate, different from all other organizations or bodies. It has a separate origin, a separate purpose. It has separate principles and law. As to its origin—the Church is divine. It is not a human institution. It is not a mere voluntary association, such as an Odd Fellows' Society, a Masonic Fraternity, a Mutual Improvement Club, an Insurance Company. None of these have in them any higher wisdom, authority, or goodness than human experience or contrivance has given them. It is different with the Church. God made the first Churches, and through them He made all other Churches. What the Church teaches in her creed is not from man, but from God. His revelation, the sacraments she administers, are divine institutions, God-appointed, and all the terms and the spiritual process by which people come to be part and parcel of the Church are directly from God. Men can no more make a Church than they can make a world. It is altogether a thing of God. Though human agencies are employed in its perpetuation, it is altogether of God.

This, it may be well to emphasize, is a point which does not enter into the practical consideration of men as it should. People come to church or stay away the same as they would go or stay away from a lecture on human science, politics, or travels. They forget that in the one case they are dealing with men and the things of men, in the other with God and the things of God. They listen to the preaching of the Word as they would listen to a candidate for political favor, except with a little more drowsiness and indifference. They forget that it is but man speaking in the one case, and that it is God, though by a man, speaking to them in the other. People all gaze more idly upon a baptism or an administration of the Lord's Supper than upon the shams and mockeries of a stage play, not reflecting that the one is mere empty buffoonery, whilst the other is a transaction upon which angels are gazing with reverence, and in which God is setting forth the precious riches of His almighty grace. They are great on praising their unions, clubs, lodges, fellowships, regarding them as the very connections for true fellowship, benefit, and improvement, and setting aside that organization without which the good that is in those connections would never have been. The little light with which those societies shine is only a borrowed light, reflecting feebly the spirit and principles of the Church which they largely despise. Beloved, these are no hasty utterances on my part. They are the words of deliberation and truth. There is a laxative goodishness, a weak religiousness spreading in our Churches that holds other organizations just as good as God's organization.

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The fact is that the true and certain divinity, the God character of the Church, hardly enters any more into men's hearts. Let it be once rightly grasped and felt that the Church, as such, is a thing of God, that God's name and saving grace are linked with it, and that it is the channel, conservatory of heaven's truth and saving grace, by which alone men's souls are saved. Let those who profess to be Christians avoid any and every connection that holds teachings, rituals, prayers, and practices contrary to its teachings, prayers, and practices, and the Church would not be shorn so much of her strength and be so little thought of. If men are "brethren" in other connections besides the "brotherhood of Christ," which is the Church, hold with one hand to idolatry and with the other to Christianity, it need not be wondered that their zeal is a divided one, and, in most cases, the Church receives the smallest division.

The first general thought, then, is this: The Church is God's. Says the text, it is the body of Christ, distinct from all man-made associations, and so to be honored.

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And what—to consider the second and larger part of our discourse—are some of the distinguishing traits of its members? By what are they to know each other and to be known of one another? Other societies have their pledges and badges. In some it is a secret sign known only to the initiated, the brethren of the craft; in others it is some peculiarity of speech or of dress, the cut of the cap or the hair. Now, it is remarkable that the Savior and His apostles prescribed no such external badge of membership, more remarkable because, perhaps, every society then, as now, could be known by such an outward badge. The Jew would be known everywhere by his broad phylacteries and the borders of his garments; the Roman soldier had some mark wrought with imperishable dye in the skin; the Greek introduced into the Eleusinian mysteries had some outward method of expressing that fact to the world. And nothing would have been easier than for the Savior to have appointed some such emblem for His followers. But in the sacred record there is not even a distant intimation of any such badge by which Christ's people or Christ's ministers are to be externally so distinguished. And yet, was there no badge, no mark of distinction? There was. What was it? Permit me, in answer, to quote a few passages. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." "As touching brotherly love, ye have no need that I write you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."

And the story of John the Apostle is well known. In his old age of 98 years he was carried to the Church, and when he was asked whether he had anything to say, he would feebly respond, "Children, love one another." Not by signs, peculiarity of dress, or password—by attachment for each other were Christ's followers to be distinguished the world over, in all ages. In His Church they were to feel that, regardless of wealth, learning, office, or other human distinctions, they were on a level, that they had common wants, had been redeemed by the same precious blood, were going to the same heaven, and were in every respect "brethren." And under this conviction of feeling they were to hold to each other, love each other. My dear hearers, did this love ever in

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the history of the Church form such a distinguishing badge? It did. The time was when the attachment of Christians for each other was such as to impress the world with the reality of their religion, and with the fact that they belonged to the family of the redeemed. "See," said the heathen in the early days of Christianity, "how these Christians love one another, and how ready they are to lay down their lives for each other." Is it so now? I answer for anything that you can tell, if persecutions were to arise, those scenes of ancient martyrdom story might be acted over again. But if there is not this love of which the Savior and His apostles speak as a distinguishing characteristic of His Church, let it be for all of us a matter of self-examination and reflection. I, as a servant of the Master, can only tell what He requires of His disciples.

Again, a second trait and duty required,—they are to be characterized by sympathy for those of its members who suffer. The members of the Church are indeed expected and required to have sympathy for all who are afflicted, but the idea is that they are sympathizing with each other in a peculiar manner. Christians are exposed to the same kind of afflictions as others. They are liable to sickness and bereavement and poverty like others, and, in addition, they have sources of sorrow peculiar to themselves,—internal conflicts and struggles, persecutions and trials on account of their religion; and in these, as well as in the occasions of joy, they are supposed to find cordial sympathy and interest among their brethren. That is the idea set forth in the text when it says: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."

Such is the formation of our body, the constitution of the nervous fibers and the tissues, that pain in one part affects the whole frame; that joy in one part diffuses itself over all. A pain in the heart, the side, or in one of the limbs does not confine itself there, leaving the rest of the body in a state fitted for its usual employments, but every part sympathizes with that which is affected. [235] And so the pleasure which we receive from beauty of objects seen by the eye, or from the melody and harmony of music as perceived by the ear, is diffused over the whole frame, and we are filled with enjoyments. So is the Church which is the body of Christ. What affects one member is supposed to affect all. What gives pain to one gives pain to all. What honors one honors all. As an injury done to a nerve in the body, though so small as not to be traceable to an unpracticed eye, may be felt at the remotest extremities, so is the body of Christ. The dishonor done to the obscurest member should be felt by all; the honor done to that member should produce rejoicing. Without any officious intermeddling with the private concerns of individuals, there should be such an interest felt in the common welfare of the whole that each might depend on the sympathy of his brethren at all times and in all circumstances. Say not that "So it is not." The consideration now, the Savior's teaching, is that so it ought to be, and that every member of His Church should strive to make it so.

And one more duty must we mention, however briefly. It is this: As an essential to healthful congregational life there must be mutual admonition among the members. Here is the fundamental principle laid down by the Savior. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." You are not to blazon his fault abroad, you are not to allow the suspicion that he has done you wrong to lie, and rankle, and fester in your own mind. You are not to allow it to make you cold and distant, and evasive and repulsive when you meet him, without his knowing the cause; you are not to send an anonymous letter or a message by any one. You are to go to him and see him by himself, and give him an opportunity of explanation, or confession. It is a painful duty, and it is not a duty that devolves on the pastor, but according to the rule laid down by the Savior, upon a brother, *i. e.*, clearly every one who is a member of the Church. Beloved, the more I study congregational life and gather practical experience, the wiser does the Lord's rule appear to me in preserving the welfare of the Church. Let us all strive to conform to it. Let us openly and frankly treat each other like brethren. If you have been offended by a brother, or if you have offended a brother, here is the rule that guides you; if you see a congregational member wandering from the path of true religion, going astray from Church and godliness, fail not to do your duty by him, by an attempt to admonish and reclaim him. [236]

We have set before us to-day what the Church is, and what the characteristics of its members are,—a peculiar love founded on their common hope of heaven, and their attachment to a common Savior, sympathy with each other in joy and sorrow, and a common interest and proper admonition when going astray. God grant that all of us may rightly understand and may strive to live up to these things, so that the Church may answer its high and holy purpose, the salvation of men's souls through faith in Christ, to whom in all matter be glory and honor forever. Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.—*Rom. 3, 28.*

Whoever has read his Bible with attention must have observed that there are some passages which, at first view, appear hard to reconcile. Take, for instance, the passage before us. St. Paul here says "that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law," and to confirm his assertion produces the example of Abraham. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." St. James in his letter, the second chapter, produces the same example, that of Abraham, and draws from it a conclusion directly contradictory. He says: "Ye see, then, that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Can any two opinions be more opposite in appearance? And as may be expected, all manner of conjectures have been presented. I will not

tire you with a tenth part of these interpretations. Only two shall I mention as a specimen. A writer of great eminence, recognizing the difficulty in its full strength, allows that it is not only hard, but impossible to reconcile the two apostles, and concludes that, since it is impossible to hold both their sentiments, we must abide by him who wrote the last. Accordingly, he gives up the doctrine of faith without works, supposing that St. Paul wrote with carelessness of expression, and that St. James wrote after him to clear up what Paul had obscurely or inaccurately expressed.

Again we would note that our great Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther, having felt the power of St. Paul's doctrine in his own soul, that he would have defied an angel from heaven to oppose it, when his adversaries pressed him with the passage from St. James, styled it an epistle of straw, because, in his opinion, it did not urge Christ sufficiently strong.

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But what of an explanation of these apparently so contradictory passages?

Is there an explanation? Indeed, a simple and satisfactory one. God's truth never clashes. When St. Paul speaks of justification, he means the justification of our persons,—how we may be accepted by a just and holy God, that is, by faith, and by faith alone, not by works. When St. James in his letter speaks of justification, he speaks of the profession as believers, how a man proves, shows, that he has faith, and that he can only show that he has faith in one way, namely, by his works. St. James, in his epistle, is addressing such of his day as *said* they had faith, though it had no influence upon their hearts and conduct. He shows that their hope is vain. He asks: "What doth it profit though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works? Can faith save him?"—that is, can such an idle, empty faith save him? He quotes an example: "If a brother or sister be destitute, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" Would such empty professions of charity prove a man to have charity? No more, does he argue, would a person's mere assertion that he has faith, unless it were followed by good works, justify his profession. A Christian's faith is proved to be what it ought to be by works, and not by mere empty profession of faith. And so the example of Abraham is pertinent in both cases. According to St. Paul, "Abraham believed," had faith in God, and God counted it unto him for righteousness, accepted him by faith, and being thus accepted, Abraham, already justified before God in person, showed that he had the true faith by the effects which it produced in his heart and life, and when God directed him to offer his son Isaac upon the altar, he obeyed. Thus, concludes the Apostle James, his obedience, his works, justified his faith, his profession as a believer. In a word, St. Paul speaks of the justification of our persons, and that is by faith, and by faith alone, and St. James speaks of the justification of our faith, and that is by works. Viewed thus, there is no discrepancy, no difficulty, and having taken up the subject, let us continue to consider these two statements, perfectly consistent with each other:—

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I. That there is no acceptance or justification for any of us with God but through Jesus Christ received by faith, and that in this concern of justification works of every kind are absolutely excluded.

II. That where faith in Jesus Christ exists, it must show itself by works.

To begin with,—what is it for a man to be justified? When a person has been brought to trial for any offense and has been found guilty, he must make satisfaction for this offense. If he is able to make a sufficient satisfaction for his offense, either through his own ability or that of his friends, and the law accepts such an indemnification, the criminal departs from the trial justified. He is not, indeed, an innocent man, but he is so regarded by the law, and though guilty, he would be no more liable to prosecution and punishment for that offense than a person who had never committed it. Now this is the way in which we are justified before God. We are guilty beings; the sentence of eternal punishment is pronounced upon us; we have no ability of our own to make satisfaction to the court of the just Judge. But an almighty Friend has died to make satisfaction for us; God is ready to accept this satisfaction, and in consideration of it He releases us from the penalty of eternal death to restore us to His favor, in a word, to justify us, to treat us as innocent. A person who is found in Christ, having the infinite merits of his Savior to plead for his justification, is no longer liable to punishment.

But how do we secure this satisfaction of an almighty Savior? Again the text answers: By faith. Take, in illustration, the incident of Peter's walking on the sea. We have in our natural state nothing more substantial under our feet to keep us from sinking into everlasting destruction than Peter had from sinking into the watery deep, and it is only when we realize our situation as he did, when we feel our entire helplessness and destitution of hope as he did, when we cast the imploring look and hold out the same suppliant hand, confident that He is able and willing to save, that we exercise a Gospel faith, receive all that Christ has ever done or suffered in our behalf. Faith is the hand that lays hold on the Savior, and so justifies.

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Again, "We are justified," is the Apostle's assertion, "without the deeds of the Law." In the first chapter of this epistle to the Romans, Paul labors to show that the Gentiles had sinned against the law of nature which was written in their hearts, and in the second and third chapters, that the Jews had equally transgressed their written Law, and then, having thus shown that all the world is guilty before God, he concludes: "Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified." In other words, that good works are of no account in our justification, they cannot set us right with God,—make us acceptable with Him, cannot gain His favor. That is the teaching of the Scripture and the doctrine of the Church. Declares the Fourth Article of the Augsburg Confession: "We teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers, deservings, or works, but are accounted righteous in grace only through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ

received by faith."

Nor is there a lesson which we learn more slowly. It is a task most difficult for us to give up the idea of merit in ourselves, to feel that we can do nothing, absolutely nothing, towards purchasing the favor of God. Talk with the sick and the dying upon the grounds of their hope, and they will often be found pleading that they have always endeavored to live good lives, and have never been guilty of any gross sins, showing by such language that they are clinging to their own good works, instead of trusting to the heaven-procuring righteousness of God. Converse with Christians, even some of our church-members, and they will often speak in such a way as to show that they are placing some merit in their good character or endeavors to serve God. With one foot they may indeed be standing on the rock of salvation, but the other is too often still in the miry clay of our own deservings. We must learn to rest wholly on Christ. We must pray God to break down every vain dependence, to look away, with loathing and disgust, from anything that we possess or can do, to receive a crucified Redeemer as our only hope. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."

This is the first proposition, that there is no acceptance with God but through faith, and that in this concern works of every kind are absolutely excluded. But this proposition, simple and plain as it is, must not be perverted. It will not do, then, to say, It matters not what our lives are, just so we only have faith in Christ. When the Scriptures assert that we are justified by faith, they do not mean a faith which leaves us indifferent to our practice. The faith that saves a man is of the kind that has a prevailing and ennobling influence upon the hearts and lives of those who possess it. Because man cannot gain salvation by his own righteousness and works, he must beware of falling into the fatal and ruinous delusion that he can abolish righteousness and good works. God demands good character and good works from His people. The same apostle who declares in the epistle: "By faith we are justified," adds: "And His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all." The Bible wants every Christian to be busy; his life should be filled with fruits of good. But these things must be put in their right place; and which is that? As an evidence of the faith within us. Faith saves us, but good character and good works prove that we have this saving faith. The truth of the matter is that to set little store on good works is an immoral and most pestilent heresy. The works by which we recommend religion and adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior; the works which spring from love to Christ and aim at the glory of God, the works by which a good man blesses society and leaves the world better than he has found it, are not worthless and "filthy rags," but they are the gracious and graceful ornament of a blood-bought soul, the fruits of God's Spirit within us, the clear and comfortable evidence of our being the children of God; and in this St. Paul and St. James agree. Whereas a faith that professes to believe in Christ, and denies Him in character and works, is not only unprofitable, but loathsome and offensive, a dead carcass.

God grant that we have all rightly understood that we place our sole and undivided dependence for salvation upon our blessed Redeemer, and that we evidence such faith in Him by the virtues of a holy character and the performance of godly acts. To God be all glory in Christ Jesus! Amen.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.—*Prov. 22, 6.*

It has grown to be a custom to speak at this time a few words concerning our youth. No one, I trust, will dispute the wisdom, nor question the appropriateness of this. After months of relaxation and rest our little ones have returned to the walls and duties of school life. God grant His blessing that they may become intelligent citizens, worthy and useful members of the commonwealth. That is our pious wish and prayer, and for such wish we have reason abundant. Perhaps there has been no time when the matter of education and bringing up of our children has called for so much thought and concern as at the present. Statisticians tell us what startling conditions prevail in our country in respect to wrongdoing, that murders, unchastity, forgeries like a tidal wave are sweeping our land far above what it is in other countries, and that a large percentage of these crimes are being perpetuated by mere striplings of boys. By far the larger number of the inmates of our penal institutions—work-house and penitentiary—are young men. Our reform schools—Good Shepherd institutions and similar places—house boys and girls by the hundreds, causing one to heave a sigh of inexpressible sadness. Look over the docket of our Juvenile Court, and it convinces you beyond cavil that there is enough to justify its existence; and then we have said nothing about the stubbornness against parents and superiors, flippancy, and other sins of youth daily on the increase. And who is to blame? Said an honorable judge of this city lately: "I do say that there is a fearful amount of depravity among the children in the cities of this country, and I don't blame the children as much as those who put them into existence, the parents;" and continuing, he says: "We are prating entirely too much about the unreal and unsubstantial. After all, the real questions are the ones that affect the homes and the children in the homes, and because we have neglected them, we are reaping the ill results." The testimony of thousands of others could be quoted to the same effect. Sufficient reason, accordingly, why we should direct attention to this vital subject. God blessing His word spoken, let us regard the text which reads: "Train up a child in the way he should go," noticing that this is done, *I. By instruction, II. by example, III. by discipline.*

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First in order to a proper training of the young belongs instruction, and by that we mean religious instruction, education not of the mind only, but of the heart. We have no quarrel with education of the mind, the culture of our children in all the accomplishments and acquisitions of facts and sciences; on the contrary, we regard intellectual knowledge, to speak with King Solomon, as more precious than rubies and more to be chosen than fine gold; we hail with delight every facility and agency that would make our children just as bright as possible, and commend the spirit that makes our schools among the most elegant and conspicuous of public buildings. And yet, education of the mind alone will not do; we might point in evidence of that to the refined nations of antiquity. Is not ancient Greece with its music, painting, poetry, and the arts the model of modern states? And who has not heard and read of the Romans and the ancient Egyptians and Persians? Go to your public libraries and see the books on its shelves and the mutilated statues of Apollo, Juno, and the like that tell of their genius. Why did these nations not last? Why did the fabric of their grandeur crumble to pieces? Because it was not combined with the unperishable principle of virtue, and their want of virtue resulted from their want of religion.

Far more simple, however, is the consideration that man is not only mind, but soul, and that this soul is preeminently what makes the man, here and hereafter; that it is upon the attention given to that soul that man's happiness, or the reverse, depends. Hence, the importance and duty of educating the soul. And that duty—where does it begin? Most assuredly where God first put the children—that is the home. At as early a period as possible, as soon as the little ones begin to think and to reason, it is for us to bring them into uninterrupted contact with the sublime and simple truths of God's Word. You cannot begin too early. From veriest infancy let them breathe the air of a religious atmosphere. The names of God, Jesus, heavenly Father, words like heaven, angels, Bible, church, and others of this kind, let them be used over and over, constantly in the hearing of the child. At first they convey but little meaning to it. But the brain retains even what it at first does not understand, and day by day the impression deepens and the understanding grows. Moreover, parents cannot begin too early to teach the child to abhor sin. Mothers should give especial attention to their little daughters and train them in maidenly modesty and chastity, reticence and reserve. And this home education does not cease when the children at tender age are sent to the Sunday-school and the parochial school. What great things are expected from that short lesson on a Sunday morning! How unreasonable to look for results of any amount unless there be the cooperation of the parents with the teachers. How many parents cooperate with the Christian instructors? How often do parents inquire about the Catechism and Bible history lesson? sing with their children the religious songs taught? If parents fail to interest themselves in what is going on in this way, never speak to the little ones about their work, of what little value must this appear to the children. It needs the earnest and ardent cooperation of the parents. And so when it comes to confirmation. What is confirmation? A course of religious instruction by the pastor. My beloved, have you ever reflected what a most excellent appointment that is? What would our Lutheran Church be and do with it? Those few months spent in personal instruction with the pastor have been the most fruitful period of many a life, have laid a foundation, solid and impenetrable—and God prevent the day that parents would begrudge the hours devoted to that purpose, or regard the securing of a public school diploma higher than the Certificate of Confirmation. As the new term is about to open, let parents and sponsors carefully weigh this matter!—We train the children, in the first place, by religious instruction.

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Again, it has been stated, by example. To bring up a child in the way it should go, you should go that way yourself. An ounce of example is better than a pound of precept. If children are to honor parents, parents ought to honor themselves and each other. If father and mother are rude to each other, no wonder if the example be soon followed. If father and mother are unpunctual in their hours, irreverent and vulgar in gesture and speech, it needs no sage to tell what the effect would be. Children need models more than criticism. Boys do not learn honesty and girls modesty so much from text-books—the parents are the best living encyclopedia of practical morality. What can one expect where the father is heard blaspheming his Creator, lives in debauchery, drowning his reason in liquor, spending his time and his earnings for purposes and in places unbecoming. How many a boy's soul has been poisoned by filthy talk heard from an adult's lips! An irreverent joke on some Bible story has well-nigh shattered the faith of many a lad!

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And it will never improve the moral condition of the young where the mothers are "white" liars, practice deception upon their husbands, and indulge in eavesdropping and gossip and find their chief delight with the world, its amusements and pleasures. It well becomes us to examine ourselves and our homes in this respect.

Two things in particular have tended to break down the religious prestige of parents and to make our homes irreligious homes. The first is this: the lack of family worship and prayer. In many, aye, most cases the family altar has, to quote the language of another, "been carried to the woodshed, and there demolished for kindling." What multitude of homes are veritable boarding houses! Each member of the household comes, goes, eats, and sleeps at will. When you add to that the rush and push of modern business life, the spirit of the age, which regards religion lightly, the multiplied evening enjoyments, we have no time for family worship. But right there we are making an irreparable mistake—as foolish and worse than taking the roof off our house. Dear Christian parent, put that Bible back where it belongs; let never a day pass but a chapter is heard in your dwelling. Consider what I say, and the Lord grant you courage and blessing!

Parents who do not fear and love God and live according to His commandments, what reason have they to complain when their children, misled by them, fail to fear and love God and live according to His commandments?

So the second means of training up a child in the way he should go is by example.

The third is discipline. Foolishness is in the heart of a child. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," says the Bible, and this foolish and evil heart shows itself very early and ugly betimes, and then needs restraint. Children must be trained in the way they should go, also in this particular; namely, to control their passions, to master their self-will; to render obedience, respect, deference to parents and all elders. A child is in a very precarious condition if it has gained the impression that it is too much for papa and mamma, and that it cannot be made to mind, and that papa and mamma cannot do a thing with it. And if the parents unflinchingly take the side of their children when something comes up between them and some other party, as the teachers and neighbors, they may be certain that they are making all around good-for-nothing children of them. Children should be compelled to curb themselves, and not allow ugly words to come over their lips, or to frown, and scowl, and get into a fit of anger whenever they receive an order, or are reprimanded.—And how are parents to overcome disrespect and insubordination of children? First of all, they must cease to coddle their children, and connive at their faults, or laugh at their rudeness and misbehavior.

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Again, God, by the pen of Solomon, has set down a word in the Bible which needs mentioning to-day: "He that spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." The rod indeed should be used with caution and good common sense, and only in extreme cases of disobedience and wickedness. Parents should be heedful in this respect. When a child does a trifling wrong, not out of malice, but out of mischief or thoughtlessness, parents must not resort to extreme severity. Parents should take the trouble to train their children, to talk to them, to explain what is right and wrong, to get the consent of their will, and persuade them to obey, and it is only after all patience and clemency has been exhausted and the child remains intractable that the rod will come in for its share of training. It is a well-known dictum of Luther, that the apple and the rod must go together, that is, love must be combined with justice, otherwise children feel abused, and become embittered.—But neither must we refrain from using the rod for the good of the child, nor can we begin too early.

And one thing more do we emphasize in this important matter of children's training: Keep your child out of bad company. Boys and girls are often allowed to run wild, early and late, with all kinds of companions, in all sorts of places, and this has marked the beginning of many a boy's and girl's downfall. You would not suffer your little ones in the company of children infected with some malignant disease. But some parents seem to dread such ailments more than the vicious and degrading influence of ill-trained children; they never inquire about the character of their children's playmates, about the nature of the games indulged in. On a Sunday morning parents will leave their children at home, feasting on the comic section of the Sunday paper, a flagrant exhibition of the criminal meanness and spitefulness of some bad boy. To pass by other things, the five-cent theaters, or nickelodeons, may present wholesome pictures at times, but enough has been said and written to convince us that the nature of the entertainment offered is in many cases, if not in the most, of a low and trivial order. It is certainly a training in the wrong direction if children can talk fluently about plays, actors, and actresses. Let a child taste that sort of opiate, and life elsewhere will seem dull and insipid, and the outcome far from the paths of righteousness and religion.

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May God, according to the riches of His mercy, bless the words spoken so that they may arouse us parents to renewed endeavors, multiplied zeal, and irresistible enthusiasm in our duties over against our youth. To His great Parent heart and Parent care we commend them and us. Amen.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.—*Matt. 25, 40.*

We Christians are sometimes at a loss whether to regard it as a matter of congratulation or as a matter of disdain when we hear people who otherwise repudiate our blessed Lord, who have no use for His teaching and His Church, quoting Him as an authority and a model. Thus there be those who say with great emphasis that Jesus Christ was a Socialist, yes, the first and real Socialist; He loved the common people and severely arraigned the rulers of His nation. Others, when they find it convenient, contend that Christ was no temperance man. Did He not perform a miracle, turning water into wine? While others contend that Christ was a great philanthropist; His purpose and mission was to make this world a better place to live in; wherefore He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and devoted Himself to the betterment of social conditions generally.

Whether our Lord was a Socialist, or not, that depends upon the definition, "What is a Socialist?" Unfortunately, there are as many different definitions of Socialism as there are individual Socialists; scarcely two are perfectly agreed. Suffice it to say that, in the popular acceptance of the word, Jesus of Nazareth was not a Socialist; and we do not feel greatly flattered to have Him so rated. The same is true when He is quoted as a non-temperance man, in the mouth of those whose use of wine and other intoxicants consists mostly in the abuse. And as to our Lord being a philanthropist, whose mission was the betterment of social conditions, this, while a favorite idea, is far from the whole truth. What does our Lord Himself say was His mission in this world?

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He declares that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He says: "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." What did He mean by "life"?

Surely not the hand-breadth of time which we are living here and now. To Him man was more than a creature whose wants were only those of a stomach and its appurtenances. It is true, He did not minimize the present life. He relieved men of their distresses and healed their sicknesses; but that was quite subordinate to His greater work. The emphasis was always placed on their eternal interests. "The life," He said, "is more than meat and the body than raiment." His great question was, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" What are health and comfort and wealth, and all earth's emoluments in comparison with the life hereafter? Christ's mission was to make it possible for men to attain to that high destiny; and this He did by sacrificing Himself and dying on the cross for them, in expiation of their sins, so that, whosoever would believe in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. This, be it ever kept before us, was the purpose and mission of Christ. It is not true that the ministry of Christ had to do principally with the temporal welfare of men. To say so is to contradict His words and belittle His work. He did champion the poor; He did vindicate the rights of the working classes; He did insist on happy homes and just government and the betterment of society every way. But He came to be a Savior, He came to save the soul from the ravages and penalty of sin; and when people quote Him in favor of one thing only, and that the inferior part, and reject the other and the superior, it is only a half truth, and not to our Lord's credit. And as people judge in these matters concerning Christ, so concerning His Church. The Scripture-lesson of this Sunday, treating of this subject, tells us of the good Samaritan and his work of love.

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Let us, for once, take for our topic of instruction: *I. The wrong view and attitude of the Church over against the works of benevolence. II. Which is the correct Bible teaching and practice?* The Lord grant us understanding and wisdom!

There is no question that the expectation of the multitude regarding the churches has largely changed. Formerly the one and only thing which it was expected for the churches to do was to preach the Gospel, to minister to people's souls. Public opinion now is to the effect that the business of the Church is along the lines of social science and social service. There are churches to-day which have, accordingly, been practically transformed into hospitals, for the healing of nervous diseases, and there are Social Settlements, supported by Christian people, where baths and gymnasiums, play-rooms, lunch counters, musicales, moving pictures, and scientific lectures have free sway. "Not only with the unseen and eternal has the Church to do, but with the seen and temporal. Give a man a square meal, a good suit of clothes, better social conditions for him and his children, and you will have better success as to his soul. Let the churches preach that and practice that, and they will come up to their proper ideal and purpose." Beloved, as to what is the proper ideal and purpose of the Church, that is for Him to say who founded the Church; and what does He say? Of Himself He said, as we heard: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost," and to His disciples He said: "As the Father hath sent me," into the world, "so send I you," that is, to seek and to save those who were lost in sin. And this salvation is to be accomplished in what way? By social science and service? His direction is: "Go ye and preach the Gospel." That, be it noted, is *the* purpose and mission of the Church. "Teach the Gospel," the tidings how man's soul may be saved from the guilt and power of sin through Jesus Christ, their Savior. That is the heaven-appointed sphere and commission, at home and abroad. The object of our missionaries in foreign lands is not to heal the sick and teach the heathen how to wear clothes, and cultivate the fields. To civilize is not yet to Christianize. Their duty is to preach the Gospel, and invite souls to Christ. They may have to do other things, such as translating the Scriptures, helping the poor, and treating their sick bodies, but always with one thing in mind, namely, the winning of souls to Christ as their Savior from sin. And so among us. Let us beware of putting that which is only subordinate, the improvement of material conditions, in the place of the higher purpose of the Church, the winning of souls. God's method, however men may be in love with their own, is always the best. Men's method is this: Give men better social conditions, improve their circumstances, and you will improve their souls. God's method is the reverse: First improve their souls, and you will improve their social condition. The Gospel does not aim directly at improving men's circumstances, it aims at improving men themselves. But no sooner does it bring about a moral improvement in men than they bring about a noticeable improvement in their surroundings.

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Search the history of all Christian countries and communities, and see whether it is not so. Which are the richest and most prosperous and flourishing nations in our day? Countries like Germany, England, America, countries that have received most abundantly of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us beware, then, of having our attention and efforts directed from the main thing. Some of those social service features may serve a good purpose as far as they go, but only when they are in line with the great mission of the Church as the Lord gave it: the preaching of the Gospel. A few years ago, when Japan began to emerge from barbarism, the thoughtful people of that country were accustomed to say quite candidly that they wanted our Western civilization, but were not prepared to accept Christ with it, and this is the attitude of China just now. One of her great statesmen has said: "We purpose to keep the philosophy of Confucius, but we are ready to believe the religion of Christ for its fruits." This will not do. Neither Japan, China, nor any individual can borrow the clothes of religion and leave the vital thing out of it. This is precisely the tendency in these days. People would reject the Gospel, yet would take advantage of the blessed results which flow from it.

We learn, then, that the preaching of the Gospel is the first purpose of the Church of Christ; to that it must direct its main effort; therein lies its life and success, and all other undertakings must be subordinate and in harmony with that. In other words, the greatest charity, the noblest act of Good Samaritanism is that which aims at a person's soul, and that help can only be effected by the Gospel of Christ; that is the oil and the wine which the heavenly Samaritan has designed

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to be poured into the soul's wounds of sinful and dying man.—But this does not exclude that the Church should practice Good Samaritanism towards men's bodies. On the contrary, this is her Lord's direction. And the Church has ever done so, and is doing so, as a whole and in her individual members. This is our second consideration.

No duty is more constantly enjoined by the Scripture than that of contributing to the necessity of others. We think, for instance, of the Savior's words to the rich young ruler: "Sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." The Christian congregation at Jerusalem had a treasury out of which distribution was made continually as any man had need. St. Paul tells of collections that were taken for brethren who were in distress because of the famine which prevailed throughout Judea. In the days of early Christianity we read of much almsgiving; beautiful instances are on record of believers who, constrained by the love of Christ, gave away large estates and gladly spent the rest of their days in poverty for their brethren's sake. Hospitals, institutions never before known, were erected by wealthy Christians, and the story of Laurentius is well known, who, when ordered by the Roman officials to produce the treasures which it was thought the Christians had in hiding, brought out the aged, the sick, and the crippled, and remarked, "These are our treasures." And the Church is not slack concerning works of benevolence now. Look at the chain of institutions of every kind that are maintained within the bounds of our Synod, by our congregations in this city. Whence comes the revenue for the support of our Orphanage, Altenheim, Hospital, City Mission? From the pockets of the hearts of those who attend the public worship of God. This past week there was laid to rest a man who, whatever may be our verdict concerning his work and the organization of which he was the founder and head, the Salvation Army,—Rev. Wm. Booth,—it cannot be denied that such a religious movement could only have sprung up on Christian soil, fostered by Christian principles of charity and beneficence.

And what pertains to the Church at large pertains to each of us individually. In the text the Lord Jesus, sitting in judgment upon each child of Adam, says: "What ye have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." What words could be more pointed! How those few words tell us why and to whom we are to show beneficence. "Ye have done it unto Me,"—that infirm and aged one for whom you have provided a permanent and comfortable home, "ye have done it unto Me." Those "least of all my brethren,"—those orphaned children whom ye have sheltered in a Christian home or a suitable institution, "ye have done it unto Me." That coin and dollar which you have given unto worthy charity—to the man or woman, battling against life's odds and reverses,—"ye have done it unto Me."

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Beloved, never let the springs of your Christian charity dry up because of ingratitude, sorry experiences; it was, after all, not that destitute one that you were dealing with, but Him.

We have regarded in our reflection to-day, first, what is the chief mission of Christ and of His Church, namely, the saving of the soul, and that this is effected by the preaching of the Gospel; secondly, that where there is concern for men's souls, there will be charity shown toward their bodies also. In other words, where the love of Christ has taken possession of the heart, there it will also show itself in deeds of love to Christ's destitute brethren.

My beloved hearer, what is the measure of your love? What are you doing unto the Lord's brethren and thus unto Him? Remember that on that day an inspection is going to be made, a report openly rendered. What kind of report will yours be? Lord, give us ever a kind heart, a charitable hand, and through Thy grace the reward which Thou hast promised in heaven for those who served Thee on earth. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.—*2 Pet. 1, 5-7.*

It is a very easy thing, my beloved, to be a Christian, and it is a very difficult thing to be a Christian. That may sound paradoxical and strange, but it is soberness and truth. It is very easy to be a Christian by name, but it is very difficult to be one in reality. It is an undeniable fact that there are people who call themselves after the Savior, and yet are a disgrace even to common decency; whilst others again keep slightly more within the bounds of morality, yet their tempers remain unsubdued, their tongues unbridled, they mind earthly things, and there is little or no difference between them and the people of the world. Even when they have connected themselves with the Church, and taken formal discipleship and membership upon themselves, this inconsistency appears. Some are great saints on great occasions, when there is a chance to shine in the esteem of men, but are glaringly deficient in private spheres and duties, and are very leaden and dull where no applause is forthcoming. Others can always be depended upon where it costs them nothing, but when burdens are to be borne, their interest lies somewhere else. Still others are generous enough with their means, but expect their dollars to answer in place of a pure life and to counterbalance a vast deal of self-indulgence and unsanctity. Another class are those who are full of zeal and energy, provided they are allowed to do everything their own way, and are not compelled to cooperate with certain other people whom they despise. And so there are multitudes of chaotic, one-sided, undeveloped, unsatisfactory professing Christians whose conduct is anything but consistent with their claims, and in little accord with Him whose name

they would bear.

Now turn to the Scripture,—read the descriptions given in the holy writings of what constitutes a full-fledged Christian, and holding up the picture before your spiritual eyes, begin to compare the modern Christian with the Scriptural one, the real one with the nominal. For what is a Christian? A Christian is, first of all, a person who has been justified by faith in Christ; that is his real character and standing, and as long as he remains true in his faith and to his Savior, he remains a Christian. But this does not offset, but rather involves, that the faith by which we are justified and saved must be a live, an active and vigorous principle, which draws after it a train of noble virtues and good works; we must not only be Christians, but show it; we must not only have justifying grace, but also sanctifying grace, leading us forward in our Christian profession. We Christians must not be like mill-wheels which move indeed, but always stand in the same place, or like mill-horses which go round and round, but never get beyond the one narrow circle. Nay, we must advance in Christian holiness, go forward to the full measure of our stature as a Christian. This is the principal thought that the various Sundays of Trinity urge upon us, and again in harmony with which we find our text. These words point out to us: *I. The additions we are to make to our faith; II. the manner in which we must make these additions.* May God bless our meditations upon them!

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The Apostle begins: "Add to your faith virtue." You will observe he does not want his readers to seek after faith,—that he supposes them to possess already,—he addresses them as believers, and calls upon them to add to their belief, as if he would say: You claim to have faith (it is a good thing to have), but you seem to forget that faith without works is dead, that Christianity is not only a spiritual religion, but a practical one. What does a foundation amount to if the superstructure be not reared? Nothing; it is a beginning without a progress. Just so with faith,—it is *the* chief requisite of Christian religion, and must not be a scheme of doctrine which lies asleep in the mind and never stimulates.

Abraham had faith, and he offered up Isaac. Moses had faith, and he esteemed the afflictions and hardships of the people of Israel greater rather than the treasures of Egypt. Abel and Noah had faith; it led the one to build, and the other to die the death of a martyr. And so you, claiming to have faith, "add to your faith virtue." This is the first addition mentioned. Virtue here does not signify goodness in general, but a particular quality; it means as much as fortitude, courage, bravery,—add to your faith courage. And the exhortation was indeed necessary in those days of the Apostle's writing. Heathenism and Judaism were making common cause to despise, persecute, and malign the followers of the new religion. Many of the followers of Christ had to sacrifice home, country, family, and friends, and wander about as the offscouring of the earth. Temptations and distractions of the most dangerous kind were assailing them. And it could not be otherwise; if not rooted and grounded, firm, courageous, inflexible, they would surely make shipwreck. It is no less necessary this day. The world is not more a friend to religion and religionists now than it was then. It is not an easy thing to encounter adverse opinion, to incur the sneers and frowns of relatives and associates, or the scorn of persons in business and society. It is not a pleasant feeling to find yourself in a small and despised minority, and that minority oftentimes lacking in appreciation, sympathy, and cooperation. When you add to these the petty jealousies, misrepresentations, and stabs in the back, hypocrisies and ingratitude, one is prone to become discouraged, and to drop off in sullenness and despondency. What we need in such moments of weakness to support our flagging minds and faltering energies is virtue,—courage, moral and religious resolve to do and to dare, to show ourselves as men, and not as moral cowards and fretting babes. Fie on a Peter that denied his Master before the taunts of a maid, and shame on the disciples who forsook Him in the hour of emergency. How noble does there appear in comparison that Roman soldier at Pompeii who stood in his place when the avalanche of lava and fire was engulfing the city, where, over a thousand years afterwards, he was excavated with his sword drawn and still guarding the city gate. O for a stand to our profession and to God's Word till He shall say, "It is enough," for a little boldness, holy determination, courage, firmness to follow our convictions and to voice them, regardless of the reproach we may endure, or the losses we may sustain.

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The second addition to our faith mentioned is "knowledge." A knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ, these people to whom St. Peter wrote indeed had. But there are such heights and depths, lengths and breadths in Christian knowledge that the greatest of saints can never get done learning it. The most knowing are like children on the seashore. Though they may gather the many precious pebbles and beautiful shells, the vast ocean of truth still lies unexplored before them, and we need all strive after a deeper and cleaner insight into the mysteries of God and of His grace.

A person once told me that some people know too much, and that their very wisdom in sacred things spoils their piety. This may be where the knowledge is merely a thing of the head and not affecting the heart, but it will be a sad day for Christianity if ever it comes to accept the maxim: "Ignorance is the mother of devotion." Another once told me that it was useless for him to go to church, for he knew it all. Mistaken man! I saw him on his deathbed and found his soul so destitute of true knowledge that he had not enough wherewith to die in peace.

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Let us not be deceived! Never can we come to the strength and stature of men and women in Christ except we search and study the Scripture, listen attentively to the exposition of the Word. Even what is most familiar to us we need to have continually repeated in our ears, lest we forget it, or our piety will go out and die, just like a lamp that is not supplied with oil. For not only theoretical knowledge does the Apostle mean here, but, I take it, practical knowledge, that knowledge which we ordinarily call prudence, which is knowledge applied to action. And it is a

quality which a Christian must seek to cultivate. A Christian ought to grow wiser as he grows older. A Christian is intent on studying his character and his ways. He seeks to make every day an improvement or correction of the former, deriving strength from his very weaknesses and firmness from his falls. A Christian distinguishes times, places, circumstances; he does not rashly offer his opinion, but discerns when to speak and when to keep silence. When he reproves, he does so with skill; when he gives, he does so with judgment. A Christian does not overrate his position and talents, nor does he underrate them; he is willing to approve things that are excellent, even if he is not the first to advance them, and is upright enough to speak against what is wrong, even if it might not be popular. But alas, what numbers there are of normal Christians whose temper, character, disposition marks no improvement; they are the same year in and year out, no better, no holier, no stronger in Christian life; their Christian experience and advancement is equal to naught. "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way," says Solomon, and the Apostle exhorts: "Add to your faith knowledge."

Thirdly, "Add to your faith temperance," *i. e.*, moderation. Keep your passions within due bounds and your desires regulated.

Having dwelt at length on this quality recently, we pass on to the next: "Add to your faith patience." Things are not always to our fancy and taste. The weather is not always fair and the roads agreeable. Men and things are liable to vex us, torment us, our circumstances and connections prove galling and exacting. Nothing is then more desirable than an antidote to strengthen and invigorate the soul than patience. It prepares you for every changing scene and every suffering hour. It sustains you under afflictions, and gives you that calmness and resignation which so much becomes the Christian. Nothing is more dishonoring and disnobling than to behold that disposition which must continually be pampered and stroked and rocked like a child, under the slightest provocation and unfavorableness will froth and foam. Amid life's ills practice patience. As the Holy Scripture expresses it: "Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

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Of the remaining virtues mentioned we next have "godliness," meaning the fear and love of God as it is shown in our lives, pervading our actions and controlling our every deed. Here is the difference between morality and religion. An unbeliever, a non-Christian, may conduct himself just as civilly and respectably outwardly as a believer, as a Christian. Outwardly, I say, the difference between the two lies in this: the one does it from consideration, probably, of gain in society, or probably from a fear of avoiding the penitentiary, whereas the Christian is prompted in his conduct by motives and considerations toward his God. You cannot be godly without being moral; you can pose for moral, and still not be godly. Godliness consists in this, to bring God into every part of life, to make Him the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all we do; and it is only when we do that, and when we make His Word our rule and His glory our aim, that life is what it is intended to be, and answers the purpose for which the Creator has given it. To live without godliness is like an arrow without point and feather,—it will never hit the target.

Where there is godliness, it will be attended by the other two virtues mentioned, "brotherly kindness" and "charity." Where there is water, there it is wet; where there is a tree, there it is shady; where there are right sentiments toward God, there will also be right sentiments toward our fellow-Christians and fellow-men. It matters not how they may differ in age, they possess the same powers of conscience, reason, and mentality; they are liable to the same afflictions, are members of the same family, travelers to the same heavenly grace; they need the same assistance and cheer, hence I am to exercise toward them brotherly kindness and charity. But the last is surely not in this case the least, for charity is the highest attainment in practical Christianity, the fulfilling of the Law, the bond of perfectness, and, need I add? the most difficult of all Christian virtues. This charity manifests itself in our conduct toward the brethren. It is the opposite of that hasty spirit and temper which is ever finding fault and breaking out in sudden and rash anger. It is that benignant spirit which does not reckon up the injuries received with a view of having satisfaction for them. It pities men's infirmities and moral failures, and makes ample allowances for them. Nor does it scramble for its own gratification in disregard of others' rights, dues, and comforts, but seeks to serve all men as it would serve itself. Nor does it lose heart and give up in disgust when all meets with discouragements and obstructions, ingratitude on the part of those for whom it labors and lives. It is willing to forgive and forget, to defend, and to put the best construction on everything. It is the highest and best test of Christian character, the most important, the most exalted, the most enduring of all virtues. We wonder that the Apostle mentions it last in the divine category of Christian graces, directing us to add to our faith.

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Let us now proceed, secondly, to inquire how this is to be accomplished. The Apostle tells us in our text. It is by giving all diligence, and in order that we might do so, remember these things deserve your diligence, that diligence will secure them, that they cannot be secured without diligence. They deserve your diligence. It is pitiable to see how many thousands are employing their zeal, and wasting their strength and spending their money, talents, and time upon practically nothing. Examine the objects for which most men are striving, the aim for which they are living, and ask yourselves, Does it reward their toils and indemnify them for the sacrifices they make? But this cannot be said of spiritual blessings and virtues. These are in the sight of God of great price, and necessary to man in his true and real character. They enrich him, dignify him; they are his chief interest and his glory, making him a blessing to himself and to all around him. Or who can conceive a higher purpose and model of existence than a man or woman, pious, moral, courageous, wise, self-denying, gentle, kind and benevolent?

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Secondly, diligence will secure them. In the career of worldly good, in the sea of life few obtain the prize, and the race is not always to the swiftest nor the battle to the strongest; wealth and

good fortune do not always fall to the lot of men that strove after them, nor fame to those that covet it. Here the principle obtains: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "To the righteous there is a sure reward." And finally I stated, there is no attaining these virtues without diligence. Diligence is indispensable in whatever you undertake. You must labor "for the meat that perisheth." The bread upon your table—through what a succession of processes it must pass before it is ready for use. The same may be said of your clothing; in fact, of everything else. "On earth naught precious is obtained but what is painful too," and perhaps we would not value and esteem things if it were not so. And what is true of temporal gifts pertains to spiritual equally as well.

Awake, then, my dear fellow-Christian, be zealous, be progressive; it is the only way to prosper. Remember religion is not airy notions, sleepy wishes, feeble resolutions, and your strength is not to sit still. The learned are daily adding to their intellectual treasures, the rich are adding house to house and field to field, and none of them say: "It is enough." Will you as a Christian not add to your faith knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity? Reflect and apply, by the help of God. Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Casting all your cares upon Him, for He careth for you.—1 Pet. 5, 7.

In that wonderful book which, next to the Bible, has been most extensively circulated in the English language, *viz.*, Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," there is a scene which is most impressive. It represents to us Christian fleeing from the city of this world, with a large bundle upon his shoulders. He comes to a place somewhat elevated; upon that place stands a cross, and a little below there is a sepulcher, and as he comes up with the cross, the bundle looses from off his shoulders and rolls away, till it comes to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it rolls in and he sees it no more. How many as they have read or seen the picture of the quaint old story have wished that it might be so with them as it was with Christian, that the load which they are bearing might slip off their backs, leaving the heart light and spirit free. And there is no reason why it may not, provided they take it, like Christian, to the proper place. What is set forth in the allegory, that, according to St. Peter in the text, may be experienced in reality and in truth. God grant that with the Holy Spirit's aid we may acquire the art. Three thoughts are set before us: *I. That every child of man has a burden to bear; II. what he should do with it; III. why he should so dispose of it.*

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A distinguished German preacher, speaking on the Gospel of this Sunday, remarked that man in this world has a solemn companion that follows him whithersoever he goeth. Like a shadow, it will cling to his footsteps, dogging his every movement and occupying his every moment. In the silence of the chamber it will steal through the keyhole, and when slumber is about to fall upon his weary eyelids, it will whisper rest-disturbing messages into his ear. No spot is too desolate, no mind immune against its perplexing assaults. The German calls the name of this dreary attendant "Sorge." Our text calls it "Care," meaning anxious care, solicitude, distracting fear. That, as stated, is the burden of every child of Adam. It may not externally appear so,—it may be hidden behind silken tapestry or marble apartments,—but it is there. People look at a king; they gaze upon a rich mansion, see its occupants, driving forth in an elegant equipage. They think, "What a favored lot is theirs!" They realize not the dark shadow of care sitting behind the coachman, and realize not what the poet expresses thus: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Nor can it be said that it has lessened. We have made mighty advancement; never was the world so rich in material things, never did we possess so many devices for lightening human toil and tasks, and yet due likely to the speed at which we have to move, the high pressure at which we have to live, the complexity of the social organism of which we form a part, it is a matter of fact that the man and the woman of to-day are getting more nervous and highly strung, less able to bear their burdens calmly and patiently. Worry, constant distraction, and disquietude are wearing out many people before their time. And what are they worrying about? What is the burden of their care? Various. With some it is the burden of ill health, bodily indisposition. That's an extremely heavy burden, one that takes the color out of the sky and the sweetness out of life, to spend most or a great deal of our time in bed or on a sofa,—no taste for food, a throbbing head, a laboring heart, constant and gnawing agony, nights often filled with sleeplessness and days with weariness. This is trying, indeed. With others it is business burdens. Rivalry is keen, competition acute, thousands are the things to harass and perplex and annoy the man of industry. The Lord, in the Gospel, mentions a whole array of burdens that rise from the question: "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Worldly sustenance, the apprehension of poverty, of future years, of loss of property, of health, of coming deaths and sorrow in the family, the changes and disasters that might come, the miscarrying of our plans, the possible ill success of our labors,—these things are the burdens that make men full of worrying cares.

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And what can you do to rid yourself of this? There are those who would drown their worry. They take to the intoxicating cup. It's a miserable expedient, a ruin to body and soul; and oh! for the shame and remorse added to the load of ills. Others turn to the gay and glittering world, to some place and company where men and women are apparently happy. For a time the thing may work well. As the child of care goes up and down within the great dance-hall and through the illuminated gardens, where the merry voices of laughter and song ring out, and instruments are discoursing sweet music, it may seem wise to have disposed of the burden that way. But—what

when the entertainment is over, and your wraps carefully labeled with your name are handed back to you? Then back come the old sorrows, perhaps with new ones added.—And one other expedient might we think of: Have some one bear the burden with you. There is good reason and sound sense in this. Men in trouble instinctively seek human sympathy; a sorrow shared is a sorrow lessened. Fortunate the person that has an ear and a heart to which he can apply for comfort and strength. But there also is danger. Friendship is an uncertain thing; it is often too delicate to bear much handling, it evaporates under pressure. Few are the friends that care, or are able to bear, the burdens of others; and again, there are friends who are not really such, who will betray your confidence, secretly rejoice over your ill fortune, and even use it to harm you. Beware of a man whose breath is in his nostrils.

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So, then, we are shut up to one effective resource, and that is the course given in the text: "Casting all your cares upon Him." What does that mean? It means two things: In the first place, it means trust in God's providence. There is a Providence which has brought us into this world and is taking us through it. And it is for us to practically, not only theoretically, believe this. Theoretically, we may hold very correct views on the subject, but it is practically, in the application to the affairs and scenes of our own life, that we may fall short. And alas! that many of those who call themselves Christians do fall short. Else why these perplexing anxieties, this tormenting solicitude? If they believe in God, who has pledged that He will ever provide for them, and without whose permission not a hair of their head can fall, why do they yield to the same unbelieving fears as the worldling?

We Christians believe in an almighty Maker and Provider, that He has given us these bodies, our families and all. We furthermore believe that He knows what our wants really are, and we hold that it is in His power to supply our wants. Besides, He has pledged Himself by His almighty character to supply them. Surely, it is a great inconsistency and unbelief to find Christians showing the spirit of worldly carefulness, losing the comfort of trust in God amidst a host of distracting cares. If there is a word more expressive of Christian character than any other, it is this one, trust,—trust in God, trust in Jesus to save, in His Spirit to sanctify, in His providence to provide; trust amidst perplexity and mystery, for the future, the present, in life and in death,—in all things trust in God.

Yes, dear child of affliction and sorrow, God loves you. He has redeemed you by the blood of His own dear Son. He cares for you. He knows your ailments, and He would not permit His children to suffer anything to their hurt. Believe that. To give way to contrary feeling and expressions is to dishonor and provoke God. When a father knows that he can uphold a child in any threatening danger, he does not like to hear the continual expression of that child's fears and apprehensions. It vexes him. When we have chosen a pilot, he would be offended, were he to find us trembling as to the safety of the ship; he would throw up the helm, and tell us to guide for ourselves, since we had no confidence in His skill. It is doubting our heavenly Father's wisdom, it is distrusting His power and goodness, and contradicting His gracious powers and pledges to be overanxious. The thing is to look up to, and confide in Him: "God never does forsake in need the soul that trusts in Him indeed." And with this trust goes something else, and that something else is prayer.

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"Be careful for nothing," says the Apostle in another place, "but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be known to God." Prayer: What is there to it? Nothing, if you have never tried it; and since ours is such a prayerless age, it is such an anxious age. Would they be cured of the evil, they must follow the Apostle's direction, so simple and yet so effective. Prayer is God's specific, His antidote, against care. In one of two ways God answers the request of every care-worn soul. Sometimes He takes away the thing that troubles it. Sometimes He still allows them to remain, but fills the soul itself with such grace and strength that it learns to smile at its old fears, and refuses to be fretted and worried any more. Try it, thou anxious, distracted, worried soul, go to the Lord, speak out in His ear whatsoever gives thee worry,—anxiety for worldly sustenance, illness, concern of family, solicitude for those who are at a distance, and how many moments of dejection you might save yourself. As an old commentator says: "Care cannot live in the presence of prayer; but prayer extinguisheth care as water extinguisheth fire."

To conclude, there will always be burdens, and anxieties will never fail, but we have God's instruction as to how to treat them. Let us commit to memory such a text as this. Let us in moments of gloom repeat it over and over again, and oh! how like Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress" anxious cares will roll off your shoulders; distrust, impatience, and fear will yield to holy hope, prayerful committal, humble and peaceful trust. God bless and impress His Word to that effect! Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the Prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying: I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David, thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of

None reading the Gospel-lessons of these successive Sundays with an observing mind will have failed to discover that they treat of life's ills, its sufferings and sorrows. Last Sunday it was the matter of care, anxiety, worry concerning which our Lord gave us instruction; the Sunday before ten lepers—the picture of intense bodily affliction—appear upon the scene; and previous to that we heard of the deaf-mute and of the Good Samaritan administering his work of love, until in today's Scripture, as if the climax, we observe a young man, under circumstances the most pathetic, being carried out to his burial-place. Nor can we do more wisely than to follow the line of thought thus indicated, for which reason we have selected the foregoing text. May we, under God's blessing, learn its comforting and practical truths!

Three things would we note from the Scripture: *I. King Hezekiah's affliction; II. his recovery; III. what he gained from his experience.*

The verses before us tell us that just after the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, which had been laying siege to Jerusalem, King Hezekiah was prostrated with a dangerous malady, the result, most probably, of the fatigue and anxiety in connection with the defense of his capital. At first it would seem that he had little apprehension as to the issue of his illness, but when the Prophet Isaiah told him that his disease was mortal, and bade him set his house in order, his heart sank within him. He was yet a young man, possibly forty years, in the prime of life; he had just escaped a great peril; the Lord had given him a marvelous, yea, miraculous deliverance, from the hands of the Assyrian oppressor, and he was a good man, a pious king, who, more than any other since the time of David, was zealous for the honor of Jehovah among the people.

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But now all these hopes were dashed to the ground; the cherished purpose of his heart frustrated, his life's work promptly cut short; and as he thought over these things, he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, and wept sore. He could not understand God's dealings with him. Why had he been delivered from the Assyrian king if he was thus and now to be removed? To what end had all his efforts in the interest of true religion been if he was to be cut down before they could be carried through? It was like the gardener plucking the flower before it was opened, like the builder destroying his own structure before it was finished. It was not Hezekiah's case alone; there have been and are many others since. It is an old problem and a constantly recurring problem: Why does God deal so, and why does He deal so with those who are His people?

In reply, I would say that a full answer to that problem has not been furnished us, and yet there is some light cast upon it by this and other accounts in God's Word.—First of all, would we ward off the rash conclusion, so commonly heard and everywhere repeated, that because we are afflicted, we cannot be the objects of God's love, that, if a person is sick and suffering, he must have done something, committed some sin or sins which have brought upon him such affliction. How frequently does this lamentation reach a pastor's ear, "What have I done that God should thus deal with me?" The Savior distinctly warned His disciples against such a conclusion, that particular suffering is always the consequence of some particular wickedness. It is clear that all such reasoning in the case of Hezekiah was unwarranted; he had done no special sin; he was not a sinner above all other sinners; his ailment came in the course that all bodily ailments come. Why, then, make such conclusions regarding ourselves and others? No, God's Word offers a different explanation. The Savior, on one occasion, speaking of the sickness of His friend Lazarus, said, "This sickness is for the glory of God." Let us mark that statement. The design of God in the affliction of His people is to show forth His glory. In what respect? How? In two respects, in the afflicted one himself and upon others. God's glory is advanced by the afflicted person, if the person afflicted is helped by the affliction in his spiritual growth, is made firmer in faith, established in Christian character. Luther numbered trials as among his best instructors. The Psalmist records the experience of multitudes when he says: It is good for me that I have been afflicted. When afflictions have this effect, they are to the glory of God. Then, again, the afflictions of God's people may redound to His glory in the effects which they may have upon others, to silence the gainsayer, convert the careless, or educate the weak believer into stronger faith. An instance of that is Job. The calamities came upon him to prove the utter falseness of the assertion made by Satan that Job was serving God for what he could make thereby; and I doubt not that even in our days many Christians have been sorely afflicted just to show the unbelieving, scoffing element by whom they are surrounded how firm and abiding their faith is, and how lovingly God can sustain them in their deepest distress.

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Sometimes, too, through the sufferings of a believer the indifferent and careless are awakened and led to the Lord. The affliction of a parent has been a blessing to a son or daughter; the illness of a wife, borne with Christian submission, has led many a man to Christ, while all of us are strengthened in our faith by the sight of the calm and simple trustfulness of a dear one on whom God's hand has been laid. Afflictions are often to the glory of God. These reflections may not, indeed, fully explain the mystery why God lays low His people, but it lessens it. In any case it ought to keep us from that rash and altogether too common conclusion that because we are afflicted we are particularly faulty. The contrary seems really true. When the teacher desires to demonstrate his own excellence as an instructor, he takes not the poorest, but the best pupil and subjects him to the severest examination; so sometimes, I think, the Lord exposes His dearest people to fierce trials, just because He knows their strength and would thereby commend that faith by which they stand to the acceptance of their fellow-men.

That is the first consideration that we would direct attention to: Hezekiah, the beloved, pious, God-praying King of Judah, was laid low with a serious malady. And so, as the Apostle expresses

it, let God's people not think it strange concerning the fiery trial that cometh upon them as though some strange thing had happened unto them. The very best of men are often the greatest sufferers.

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Again, we notice the conduct of Hezekiah. His case was hopeless. The prophet had been directed to tell him: "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." What does the king do? The record says: "He turned his face to the wall." Was it to conceal his grief at the fatal intelligence he had received from the prophet? Was it to be more unmolested from the presence of his attendants, or because the wall was on that side of his mansion which faced toward the Temple of God? We are not told; but it says: "He turned his face to the wall, and prayed." He had a place whither he went in his distress. When all earthly hopes vanished and all help seemed at an end, he addressed himself directly and immediately to Him in whose hands alone rests the outcome of life and of death. Pouring out his heart in tearful sobs, he pleads with the Lord, tells Him of his sincerity of life and purpose to serve Him, and of God's promises to His people to give length of days; and He who by the mouth of His prophet had directed: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee," had His ears open unto his cry. He is not displeased with the outpouring of their souls to Him, He delights in it, and it has power with Him. Yes, it is by this very conduct that one can test whose they are and whom they serve. To whomsoever they first go in the time of their extremity, to which refuge they betake themselves when calamity is overtaking them, determines, more than anything else, whether they are God's followers or not. To use an illustration: Traveling once, there was among my fellow-passengers a little girl who romped about and was at home with everybody, and while she was frolicking around it might have been difficult to tell whom she belonged to, she seemed so much the property of every one; but when the engine gave a loud, long shriek, and we went thundering along into a dark tunnel, the little one made one bound and ran to nestle in a lady's lap. Then one knew who was her mother. So in the day of prosperity, it may be occasionally difficult to say whether a man is a Christian or not, but let him be sent through some dark, damp tunnel of severe affliction, and you will see at once to whom he belongs. That will infallibly reveal it. Take a note of it, my beloved hearer, and when affliction comes, observe to whom you flee for help; that is a sure test whether you are Christ's and Christ is yours.

To recur to the narrative,—Hezekiah's appeal was not without results. As he lay there tearfully communing with his own heart and with God, Isaiah returned to his chamber with a message of healing assuring him that he should go up to the temple on the third day, and directed him to take a lump of figs and place it upon the boil. This simple direction goes to refute and correct some errors very common in our day. The one is that remedies are to be absolutely tabooed, that they do no good; faith and prayer alone are to be resorted to to effect a cure. The theory, and the heresy that has prompted it, are set at naught by this one direction, in which God's prophet, under the direction of the almighty Physician, specified the remedy to be used. And the other error which it sets at naught is, that medical remedies have, in themselves, aside from God, any virtue or value. Too much does suffering humanity rely upon medicine; the drug bottle has become with many a veritable idol; that is their god who is going to help them. The application of figs to boils was a remedy known before Isaiah suggested it, in all likelihood it had been tried in Hezekiah's case without result; now, at the prophet's injunction, it is tried again and effectively. In other words, this time God worked through it, and so it proved of value. All the medicine in the world is worthless if He does not put divine properties into it. And so let us beware of idolizing the medicine, and forgetting over it Him who put the good into it, and when we take it, let us not fail to offer up with it prayer to Him who can and must make it efficacious.

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And so it came about, through the use of the means which the prophet prescribed, that Hezekiah improved,—*improved*, I repeat, only physically, to natural strength and health? Is that all that his sickness was intended for, that is included in his recovery? Is that all that our affliction is intended for, that, having been confined to the sick-room for a while, we return to our work and calling as before? Hezekiah was a wiser man than that. The song that he wrote after his recovery, recorded in the 38th chapter of Isaiah, shows that looking death in the face had not failed of good results. No man, if he be a thinking man, can be brought to the brink of the grave, and raised almost as if from the dead, without some benefit from the experience. For one thing, it ought to make him a better Christian. "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee, e'en though it be a cross that raiseth me." Luther was wont to say that his three great teachers were prayer, study, and trial, and any reader of his life can perceive that if it had not been for the experiences that he passed through, he would not have been the sturdy character that he was. What the tempering is to the iron, giving it the toughness and endurance of steel, that afflictions are to the soul. The wind might shake and uproot the stripling of a tree, but its blasts are harmless to the oak that has passed through many a hurricane and storm. And so unbelief may give out its miserable twaddle, the faithless world raise its scoffing and deriding tongue, the man who once turned his face to the wall and prayed will not be upset, he knows whom he has believed, what he has experienced in his own soul and life.

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And, again, as it strengthened his faith in God, Hezekiah, after his recovery, was a faithful servant of the Lord, using his kingly authority to bring his people back to the true worship of Jehovah. Simply enough; a man who has been in the very grip of the last enemy and has recovered, cannot but reason thus: "What if I had died? These possessions would have been no longer mine. They cannot, therefore, be mine at all in the highest sense; they must have been entrusted to me by God, and I must use them for God." Usefulness, in most cases, is the result of discipline, the trials we have passed through. Who is the sympathetic person? You will find it to be him who has passed through similar affliction that you are passing through. Who is the one that is willing to give a helping hand? Not the priest and the Levite, who, if we knew their prior

testing, never knew a serious affliction,—but the Good Samaritan, who very likely knew from personal experience what it meant to be waylaid.

And so, to conclude, despise not the chastening of the Almighty. Learn to look upon it aright; go to the right source for relief, and thus derive from it the spiritual benefit which God designs. May you lay up what you have heard against that time when you need it, for there comes a time when you will need it. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.—*1 Cor. 3, 11-15.*

In order to understand these startling words we must, in the first place, gain a clear idea of the picture which lay before the Apostle's mind. He sees the Church of Christ as a building, harmonious in structure, every part fitting into, and each stone supporting, the other, thus presenting that oneness which the divine Architect designed it to have. The foundation of the building had been laid once for all, but for the uprearing of the walls men are to bring the materials.

No materials except those worthy of God and of the precious foundation on which they are to be built, ought to be brought and laid there. Nothing but the pure and eternal truths of the faith revealed in the Scriptures ought to be preached as the doctrine of the Gospel and the Church. This was the ideal, perfect picture which stood out before the mind of the Apostle. But he also spoke of men placing perishable and vile materials upon the walls of God's building, using "wood, hay, stubble," substances unworthy to be made a part of Christ's spiritual temple. What did the Apostle mean by "wood, hay, and stubble"? The Church of Corinth, whom he addresses, had lost, so far as some of its members were concerned, that perfectness which ought to characterize the whole body. There was a working towards disunion. Envy and strife, factions, and a disposition to make this or that man the religious leader and guide, had been allowed to disturb the harmony of the congregation. The names of men had become watchwords. Parties rallied around Apollo, mistaking his eloquence for the Gospel to which it ought to lead; around Cephas, that is, Peter, because of his prominent position; around Paul, because he brought out certain doctrines into special prominence. And so, instead of regarding these men as doing each his own part in helping to maintain and preserve the whole truth, they foolishly set up this or that one, Apollo, or Peter, or Paul, as their favorite. Still, notwithstanding all these outworkings of a carnal or earthly spirit, there was as yet no rupture. The organic unity of all believers and builders remained unbroken. Individuals differed in opinions, but the Church had still only one creed. There were parties, but no denominations; factions, but no sects; strifes, but no schism. But even these cannot be allowed to disfigure the furnished temple, the Church of the final future. The Apostle looked beyond the poor work which narrow-minded men were doing at Corinth to the day when, as he tells in another place, that same Church which had been built upon the one foundation shall be presented to God, "not having spot or wrinkle," but "holy and without blemish." That day, he says, "will try every man's work, of what sort it is." Whatsoever is worthy of Christ, the solid and precious stone, shall abide, and the builder thereof shall have, along with eternal life, a reward due to his faithfulness to God's plan and design. But the human materials which unwise and ignorant workmen brought—all these shall be burned with the cleansing fire and go for nothing, but the builder himself shall be saved, because his own soul was built upon Jesus Christ, as the foundation of his faith and as his Redeemer. That is the meaning of the Apostle's solemn teaching. And now for the application.

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That application may be made unto each Christian. We are all builders, and it is for us to use the proper materials. What is built upon Christ, from faith in Him and love to Him, according to His mind and the honor of His cause and Church, is "gold and silver and precious stones." What is done to serve self, the gratification of one's vanity and ambition, is to heap up stubble for themselves which cannot abide in the day of testing fire. But the more special application in accord with the text is that which pertains to the Church as a whole, of the various bodies of Christians, the many denominations of Christendom. Concerning these let us speak a few words, taking occasion, *I. to explain our position, II. to regard our duty in this respect.*

"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The Church is a building reared upon that foundation. Therefore, there is and can be but one Church. As the Apostle says in the Epistle-lesson: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," so he says there is *one body*. To rend the body of Christ, to divide His Church into different sects, where altar is set up against altar, ministry against ministry, is contrary to the will and purpose of its Founder. Some look amiably upon this Babel of beliefs and unbeliefs and counterbeliefs, think well of and would justify all so-called churches, consider one as good as another, and meekly settle down in the nearest, because "they are all aiming at the same end." This is not the teaching of the Bible nor the position of our Church. Not as if we read the members of these denominations out of the Church of Christ. We admit that they are built upon Christ, the Foundation, and we furthermore admit that they are building some gold, silver, and precious stones upon that foundation. To be

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more specific. Take the Roman Catholic Church. We have many things in common with the Catholic Church. It believes with us in the divinity of the Trinity, in the Godhead of Christ, in the personality of the Holy Ghost, in the divinity of the vicarious atonement, in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Far be it from me to contend that in the Catholic Church souls cannot be saved. Notwithstanding the many grave errors the Catholic Church has clung to up to this hour, it has produced characters, true, noble children of God, whose lives we may profitably study. Nearer to us stand the so-called Reformed Churches, by which term we understand the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists. With these Protestant Churches we have in common the great fundamental principles of the Reformation, namely, first: that the Word of God is the only source of religious knowledge and the only judge in matters of salvation, and secondly, justification before God by Christ through faith only. Thus it stands in the matter of doctrine; nor can we dispute that in matters of practical Christianity they are zealous, even putting us to blush. We all love to hear that the Bible is the most widely read book in the world. But to whose efforts is this mainly due? What little we do is far outdistanced by the work of societies principally supported by Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians.

We glory that we accept the whole Bible, but who studies the Bible as a whole most earnestly? I well know that we teach Bible History in our schools, and that we also have many earnest Bible readers, but if I could show you at greater length what is done for the study of the whole Bible by both young and old people in some of the churches mentioned, you would confess that at least many of our younger and older people are put to shame in this respect too. We point with satisfaction and pride to the mighty changes which the Gospel has wrought in heathen lands,—but who for the most brought them that Gospel of Christ? Who has footed the bills? We preach as no other church does that the grace of Christ is powerful to rescue the vilest, the most degraded sinners,—but who goes after them and labors the most extensively among them? Who, to mention one more particular, gives most liberally for the support of the Church and for charity? Lutherans? Roman Catholics and others. Of course, it is not all gold that glitters, and splendid things could also be said to the glory of our Church. Who first gave the Bible to the people? Through whom has the whole Church been redeemed from the bondage of Antichrist? Who was the first to begin modern mission work? But our present purpose is to point out that the various Churches are, thank God, also adding gold, silver, and precious stones upon the foundation which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus. But is that all?—Fair-minded as we are to the one, should we be short-sighted as to the other, namely, that they are also building worthless, perishable material, material of their own human choosing, "wood, hay, and stubble"?

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Who, enlightened by the plain Gospel, as it shines to us from every page of the sacred Book, can help but see that the errors of the Roman Catholic Church are many; that they seriously obscure the truth; that they lessen the merits of Christ; that, among the masses, they produce a mere formal religion devoid of soul and life? Their divinity of the Church, with its visible head upon earth, the Pope, of purgatory, mass, worship of the Virgin and the saints, indulgences, confessional,—are these not wood, hay, and stubble? And coming to the Reformed Churches, which of them believes in baptismal regeneration, accepts Baptism to be a christening? Which believes in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament? Not one. Then, again, the Baptists insist, contrary to God's Word, that immersion is the only mode of baptism; he that has not been completely put under water has not been baptized. Likewise they sneer at infant baptism. The Episcopalian upholds as divine his form of church government,—so that, if a minister has not been ordained by an Episcopalian bishop, he is no minister. The Methodist overestimates the knowledge of one's conversion, and, like all of the Reformed Churches, cultivates a spirit of legalism, placing religion in such things as abstaining from intoxicants. The Presbyterian Church has never yet revoked the teaching of their catechism that God has elected certain persons to damnation, and insists upon its form of government as divine. "Wood, hay, and stubble," teachings and practices that are not according to the teachings of God in His Bible. What about them? The text declares that the fire will try the Christian work of all the ages. Every religious system not in harmony with God's will, all human speculations which men have woven around the truths of the Bible, all the wood and the stubble, though brought with pious hands and placed in sincerity upon the one foundation, shall turn to ashes and wither like grass. And yet, because of that foundation, and the faith of those who wrought thereupon, they themselves shall be saved. We would distinguish between sectarian systems and the individuals gathered under them. We recognize the unity of all Christians as believers in Christ, but we can never recognize these divisions of Christ's spiritual body. That would be sanctioning the "wood, hay, and stubble."

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What, then, is our duty—to come to the second consideration—in this respect? So sensitive, my beloved hearers, have people become these days that when a clear Scriptural presentation of this matter is given, they will stop up their ears, and without giving thought or attention, will say: illiberal, uncharitable, bigoted! We are none of these. Not illiberal; we are just as liberal as God's plain Word permits us to be. We are not uncharitable;—the greatest charity is to tell a person the greatest amount of truth. And as to the charge of bigotry, that shows so much ill-feeling and bad judgment that we dismiss it without comment.

The truth is, that, guided by the Bible, we cannot justify and hold fellowship with religious societies that teach doctrines contrary to the Bible, without sinning in a twofold way. First, we would mislead our own people to believe that the differences are of no fundamental character, that it makes no difference whether you believe that Christ's body and blood are in the Sacrament, or not, whether children are baptized and regenerated in baptism, or not, and so forth. That would be practically denying the faith; and secondly, by fellowshiping with these denominations, we would be endorsing their errors, and arouse the impression that it makes little

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or no difference whether they believe in the Bible, or not.

When a man builds a house, he is very much on the alert that no shoddy, inferior material enters into the building; not one joint or door but it should measure up to the specifications. Strange that in the infinitely more important building of Christ's Church, people should be so indifferent as to the material and of things measuring up to the specifications of God's Word, and allow "wood, hay, and stubble" to take the place of gold, silver, and precious stones.

God protect us against indifference. And then, to conclude, the members of what Church are we? The character, legitimacy, and proper Christianity of a church is its true, clear, unmistakable confession of the doctrines of the Scripture, and it is our right to say that these doctrines are embraced, held, and taught by us, and were thus held and taught by us before any of the multitudinous sects and parties about us had a being. The Mother of Protestantism,—what church is it? It was born, existed, and was mighty in strength before them all, and upon them rests the burden of proof and apology for their separate being. And we should go borrowing to them, or hesitate to speak a modest word in our favor?

My Church, my Church, my dear old Church!
I love her ancient name,
And God forbid a child of hers
Should ever do her shame.
Her mother-care I'll ever share,
Her child I am alone,
Till He who gave me to her arms
Shall call me to His own.
Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.—*1 Kings 18, 21.*

It was a remarkable, but wise decision that King Solomon once rendered in a difficult case which was brought before him. Two women came to him with an infant to which they both asserted a mother's claim, the one contending that the other had overlaid her child, and taken hers from her before she was awake, and laid her own dead child in its place, whilst the other asserted that the contrary was the truth, saying, "The dead child is hers, and the living is mine." And now it was for the King to decide. But how was it to be done? Solomon calls for a sword. "Divide," he commands, "the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." Then spake, says the Holy Record, the woman whose the living child was unto the King, for her bowels yearned upon her son, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Solomon instantly recognized the true mother's heart. "Give her the child," he said. The same it is with God, our true heavenly Parent. He does not want His children divided; He will have them entirely, as a whole living sacrifice, or not at all. The sum of His commandment and will regarding us, as repeated in to-day's Gospel lesson, is: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy mind." Of that would we remind ourselves in our present worship, taking for our instruction the Scripture read as our text.

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With the aid of the Holy Spirit we note Elijah's challenge on Mount Carmel,—*A call to Christian decision. I. The question at issue: "Is the Lord God?" II. The obligation involved, "Then follow Him."*

Israel had had many wicked kings since the suicide of its first monarch, Saul, upon Mount Gilboa, but none more so than Ahab. The crowning iniquity of this unprincipled and despicable prince was the introduction of the idol called Baal into Israel. Baal signifies governor or ruler, and was the name given in the East to the chief male idol of the heathen. To the honor of this idol, temples were erected, bloody sacrifices offered, and the most shameful things perpetrated. Ahab had married Jezebel, the daughter of the idolatrous King of the Sidonians, and under her sway the worship of this idol had become sinfully popular in Israel. Four hundred and fifty priests served at his altar, and nearly an equally large number were appointed to the worship of his mate, Ashtaroth, for every male idol was wont to have his goddess. This abominable form of idolatry was going on in the land where God had thundered from the sides of Sinai as His first requirement: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and had declared: "My glory will I not give to another, nor my praise to graven images"; and in consequence the judgments of Jehovah were not slow to follow. No rain or dew had fallen for the space of three years, the heaven was as brass, and the earth like a nether grindstone.—Famine stalked throughout the land, when one day, as Ahab was wandering up and down the country searching for food, he met the stern and fearless prophet of Jehovah, Elijah, called the Tishbite. "Art thou he," asks the King, "that troubleth Israel?" Elijah retorts: "Not I have troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandment of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

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And so the contest is on, not so much between Elijah and Ahab as between the supremacy of

Jehovah and Baal. How is the dispute to be settled? Elijah proposes a method. All Israel should be convened at a place specified, Mount Carmel. Two altars were to be erected, one by the champions of Baal, another by himself. Sacrifice was to be laid thereupon, and the God that would answer by fire to devour the sacrifice should be recognized victor. The test is accepted. You, as well-informed Bible readers, know the outcome. After futile attempts by the priests of Baal to secure the hearing of their God, Elijah addresses his God. In fervent prayer he raises his eyes and hands and heart to heaven. No sooner had the last words escaped the prophet's lips than down came the fire of God consuming the whole sacrifice and the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench, whilst the fickle people fell on their faces, crying: "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God." Elijah then follows up his victory by commanding them to seize the whole group of Baal's priests and slay them at the brook Kishon. Thus did Jehovah terribly and surely vindicate His honor and majesty.

What lesson may be gathered from this thrilling story? Beloved, the conflict between the forces of the true God and His opponents is not yet over, and, as of old, that conflict, in the final issue, centers in a question. At that time it was, "Is Jehovah the Lord God?" Formulated by the Lord Himself in the Gospel-lesson of this day, it now reads: "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?" Or, in other words, Is He, Jesus Christ, God? Around that question are rallied the religious forces of to-day. The answer to that question determines men's attitude, their position on the one side or on the other; their answer to that question decides the destiny of every individual soul. According as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is accepted or rejected, will men stand or fall. What is it in its significance but the conflict of Mount Carmel over again? And how is this vital question to be decided? For the determining of the question, "Is Jesus Christ God?" there are many proofs, all of them conclusive and incontrovertible. We might point to Christ's spotless character and His immaculate life. "Which of you," He challenged His enemies, "convinceth me of sin?" And none who has ever examined into His life and character but is unstinted in His admiration and praise. "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; He was divine. We could point furthermore to His teaching. Merely human mind and merely human lips never conceived and spake as He spake. As you study our Lord's utterances, what loftiness in His maxims, what profundity of wisdom in His discourses! The hearers of His time were constrained to exclaim, "Never man spake as this man speaketh," and He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes. No wonder, for He was the teacher come from God,—He was God.

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We could point out the divine influence His religion has exerted upon the world. Why do the nations write 1912 in the enumeration of time? Who has taken possession of everything great and grand in our age? Rather, should I say, who has made that which is great and grand in art, in music, in literature—the masterpieces, the sublimest productions? Whom do they treat of? The civilization of to-day—whose product is it but of His religion? thus stamping it and its Founder as divine, as God.

But, my beloved, after all these and manifold other proofs have been adduced, there remains one more which, more than any other proof, brings home to us the conviction that Christ is God, not only intellectually, but morally, spiritually. From the scene upon Mount Carmel I would direct you to a scene upon another mount, Mount Calvary. There, too, we witness a sacrifice; there, too, lies a victim upon an altar, the altar of the cross. The fire of God's wrath comes from heaven to consume that sacrifice. How is that a proof of Christ's divinity? Because it solves, as nothing else can solve, the great problem of Religion, "How can man be saved, justified before God?" "No man can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." It required one more than mere man to do that—God Himself. What man can look upon that Calvary scene and contemplate the significance of it, but exclaim with the Roman centurion under the cross, "Truly, this was the Son of God,"—nor gaze upon the print of the nails in His hands, and the mark of the spear gash in His side, but confess, with the multitude upon Mount Carmel, "Jehovah—Jesus, He is the God! Jehovah—Jesus, He is the God!" There is no proof so powerful that Christ is God but the sacrifice of Calvary; yea, he who accepts not that sacrifice, together with the resurrection of Christ, believes not in Christ. That Old Testament scene and sacrifice points, and is a type, of the New Testament scene and sacrifice. May the impression and the confession it produced be the same on the lips of every one of us, as it was yonder on Mount Carmel,—"The Lord, even Christ, is God. He is my God."

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And now let us note the obligation it involved. The particular offense with which Elijah charges the people on this occasion is "halting." The word translated "halting" is old English. It does not mean standing still, but limping. Elijah's question, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" accordingly means, "Why do you not make up your minds; why do you not take a positive stand one way or the other and instead of vacillating between the worship of Baal and the worship of Jehovah, accepting neither fully, seize on to one or the other with full conviction, and follow that with *all* your heart?" Decision, the taking of a position and holding to it, is the appeal of the prophet. And is his appeal not applicable in our own day? Is there no halting, limping, swaying, and swerving between two opinions? It is of just such people that our modern and immediate community is full; they take an intermediate position, a sort of betwixt and between; they are not out and out Christians, and still they wish to be rated as Christians. They admit their reverence for the Bible; they would not question anything taught on its testimony; they take delight in hearing occasionally a Christian preacher, attending upon Christian services; there is scarcely a mental or moral persuasion in favor of Christianity which they do not cheerfully entertain; they would not think of having their children grow up unchristened or a marriage in the family performed without a Christian minister, and when trouble and sorrow comes upon them, they look to Christian sources for consolation. And still, when the test comes for them to confess themselves in the appointed way as Christ's disciples, to take their places at the family table of

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the Christian Church, they have their excuses; they turn their backs and go off on to something else. "They've not been confirmed"; perchance, "they want to consider." As stated, our immediate neighborhood is full of such halting, compromising, so-near-and-yet-so-far people. What they want is not to "consider," but to act. Time for deliberation they have had plenty and long enough. One year, ten years, finds them still "considering." What they need is decision, action, and not to arrive at that is to remain in a state of sin and of danger, of ingratitude to God and discomfort to their own soul. If I am addressing any such, and I know that I am, let them not be offended, but earnestly regard and give up a position so unworthy, unsatisfactory, God and Christ-dishonoring.

But does the appeal of the prophet in no wise apply to those who have made a pronounced confession, who have taken a stand, and whose names appear on the roster as His followers? Is there no indecision of conduct there, no limping, no dividing of one's heart between Baal and Jehovah? The ordinary type of Christian and church-member is not a person of fixedness, determination, neither in doctrine nor in practice. Baal still has his altar, only decked out in a different shape:—in the market-places of business, in the houses of amusements, in the halls of secret organizations and lodges. It is not an unusual thing to see men and women in our churches going to the Lord's Sacrament and belonging to societies which know not Christ and will have none of Him, reject His Godship and His sacrifice upon Calvary. It is not an unusual thing to hear men and women, young and old, singing hymns and doxologies and speaking words of Christian prayer, and then lifting up their voices in speech and song that tells not whose they are and whom they serve. The trouble with all of us is that we are not as outspoken in our testimony, as consistent and faithful, and unflinching as we ought to be, as our Christian duty and the honor of our Lord calls for and deserves. Having performed our vows and service to God in His temple, we are content to go back to the world and to business, forgetful that there, too, we should bear faithful witness for our Lord. From the text of the day may you form the noble resolution: "I will be always and altogether the servant of God, the follower of Christ; in which resolution do Thou, Lord, sustain me to the end."

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Thine forever! God of love,
Hear us from Thy throne above.
Thine forever may we be
Here and in eternity.

Amen.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water; whosoever, then, first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.—*John 5, 1-9.*

The most serious charge that can be placed against mankind is this, that when the Gospel is proclaimed to them, that Gospel is rejected, that when pardon and salvation of God is offered, that offer is coldly and indifferently turned aside. We are sometimes surprised at this. We ought not to be. The same coldness and indifference was manifested years ago. It says: "Christ came into His own, and His own received Him not." To-day's Gospel records to us the cure of the paralytic. It was a most remarkable and convincing evidence that He who could bring to His feet this debilitated and disabled man was indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world. But no; it started a wrangling among His enemies about the power of forgiveness of sin, and caused Him to be haunted with hatred and malice. And as a parallel passage to that Gospel miracle is the record here in the fifth chapter of St. John, part of which we have just heard. Let us notice now, *I. the history of the miracle; II. the instruction it imparts.*

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"After this," says the Evangelist, that is, after Jesus had conversed with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, and after He had healed the nobleman's son who was lying sick at Capernaum, "there was a feast of the Jews." The feast, it is generally supposed, was the Passover. And "Jesus went up," out of Galilee into Judea, "to Jerusalem." He went thither not only that He might pay all due regard to the Temple and to the Law, but also that He might have an opportunity of manifesting Himself and His doctrine to a greater number of people. "Now," says the next verse, "there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market," or sheep-gate, a "pool," or a bath, the ordinary purpose of which was for bathing or swimming, but on account of the supernatural character of the water was called Bethesda, that is, the House, or Place, of Mercy. Around this pool, or bath, were built five porches, porticos, or verandas, which served to shelter from the heat and the cold those who frequented the place. In these porches "there lay a great multitude of impotent folk;" some of them were "blind," some "halt" (or lame), and others were "withered," that is, their

sinews and muscles were disabled, withered in one particular part of the body, as the man with the withered hand, or all over, as in the case of the paralytic, whose friends had to bear him on a litter. These patients, at least most of them, were probably deemed incurable by ordinary methods, and therefore they were carried to Bethesda to wait and hope for a miraculous recovery there; for it pleased God (in order to show that He had not forsaken His chosen people, but was operating among them) to send "an angel" who went down at certain seasons into the pool and "troubled the water," by which troubling of it, and by the extraordinary motion that followed, the sick were informed of the time of the angel's descent, and, "whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in" was instantly healed, while those who bathed afterwards obtained no relief. All sorts of opinions have been advanced as to this healing spring. That it was not the natural virtue, as in the case of mineral springs in this country, that wrought the cure, is evident from the circumstance that not one disease, but all manners of disease were healed by it; that these cures were performed not always, but only at the seasons appointed by God, and that not all who stepped in, but *one* only was healed after the troubling of the water. What became of this fountain we are not told; very likely its miraculous properties did not continue for many years. In the porches around this pool was an impotent man; he had labored under a bodily infirmity for thirty and eight years. How long he had waited at the pool we know not, but certainly for a considerable period. But it was hoping against hope. The man was so utterly helpless that even if he saw the water disturbed, whilst he was slowly dragging himself along, another stepped in before him. When Jesus, therefore, passed by and saw him in this helpless condition, and knowing his past history, He asked him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man does not even give direct answer, but narrates the story of his long and futile expectation, whereupon Jesus gives this command: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," when instantly, easily, as if the withered limbs had been thrilled with electric sparks, the man arises, takes up his bed, and walks away. Such is the history of the miracle; and now let us regard some of the instructions it imparts.

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Our interest is naturally divided between the man who had lain sick such a number of years, the pool, and the cure. And, surely, a long and wearisome time he had had of it,—thirty and eight years. The woman with the issue of blood who touched the hem of our Savior's garment, had borne her affliction twelve years, but that was scarcely one-third as long, and she was still able to be up and about. As then, so now. The number of those who lie on pallets and are bent low with sickness is larger than superficiality credits; in fact, those who have never been racked with pain, distressed with fever, are few and far between. How many ever give thought as to this providential dealing—have stopped to ask whence it comes, or what profit and lessons may be in it? It has been remarked by a famous writer that there are two chapters of human history that shall never be read upon the earth; the one chapter is the chapter of the dying. The feelings and emotions, the inexpressible thoughts and sensations that pass through the soul when the things of this world fade upon the senses, and the doors of eternity are about to swing open, is an experience which no human tongue or pen can describe, is something which none but ourselves can discover. And another chapter is the chapter of the sick and the ailing, as it is written in quietness within the narrow space of a couch and four walls, alternating perhaps with the operating table and passing through the dark valley of the Shadow of Death. And yet, something of this chapter may still be read, and most remarkable, significant, and oftentimes blessed things are experienced in the sickroom. Who dare say that the world in its present condition would be what it still is without this check, this intruder upon the affairs of life? Most men are inclined to regard sickness as a calamity, as a positive misfortune, a smiting scourge. It is not that. It has blessings both to the one afflicted and to those around him. Sickness may contribute to the development of the noblest qualities of the mind and heart. In the rush and tug of life men are too much inclined to concern themselves with the affairs of this life, to lose sight of the greater value of the unseen and eternal. Put such a one from the excitement of business and the frivolity of this world's fashions and pleasures prostrate upon his back with the hot fingers of disease clutching for his vitals or the sharp pains striking upon the heartstrings, and he must be thoughtless, even base, whose appreciation of the merely earthly things does not fall, and who does not learn that with all his boasted strength and all that he has and hopes for, he is only a pilgrim and stranger on this earth, and that there is something more worthy than what is seen and temporal. Oh! the quiet reflections of a sickbed. Many a man is indebted to them for a revelation which has been the wisdom and power of God unto his salvation when the message of Church and its servant had but very little effect. The parched lips of disease are often more eloquent and effective than man's lips. And he that fails of this salutary end of affliction, does not come forth a better person, more devoted and consecrated to his God, has missed the purpose for which it was sent, and gone out of the way of the Almighty. Of this man in the text we may have the assurance that the experience of thirty-eight years remained indelibly upon his mind and enrolled him among the faithful disciples of Christ. May it serve likewise in your case, my dear hearer, at the sickbed of many of whom I have had occasion and may yet be called to minister. And not only for the person afflicted, but for those attending and affected by the affliction, sickness is a blessing, a positive messenger of good and mercy. It is when disease has broken in upon their habitation that many a man has first learned to appreciate the kindly ministry of his life's partner; has keenly felt what this world would be like should death part them asunder, and the hearts sometimes estranged have again become reconciled and determined to bear and forbear. It is when the little cheek is hard pressed against the feverish and aching pillow that we feel how intensely we love that boy and girl and would sacrifice everything else dear to us to keep them. Yes, there is nothing in human experience to bring into larger and better exercise our common love and sympathy and to show that there is still some nobility, kindness, and pity in our shattered humanity than in the care and memories that cluster around the sickbed. Would to God that these experiences

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touching the hearts that perhaps for long time were dead would be of longer duration, for commonly they are so quickly forgotten and so easily erased from the mind.

So much as to the first suggestion—the man's sickness. The place where he was lying was called Bethesda, which means House of Mercy. Nor need I inform you which is the true Bethesda, the House of Mercy, provided for the cure of those souls who are spiritually halt, blind, withered, and weak. That's the Church of Jesus Christ, and in that place there was a pool, as we heard, endowed with miraculous properties, greatly valued, thronged about by patients. To that pool we have in our Bethesda an exact and superior counterpart, a blessed fountain from which issues the stream of health and salvation upon the sinful and diseased race of man, a water allied not only with the contact of an angel, but with the presence of the Savior Himself. You know of what water I am speaking, you yourselves have been committed into this salutary flood. It is the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. It might be well to speak a few words on the subject. What Bethesda's part was for the body, that, my beloved, is Holy Baptism to the soul. It was a means of restoration and recovery, it gave health back to the limbs and frame. So does Baptism. "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins," said Ananias to Saul. "A washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," says Paul. "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation," says Luther. Baptism is the means by which the Holy Ghost operates in a soul, the outward washing which you see with your eyes is a type of the washing which God's power affects invisibly. We speak of Baptism in our church not only as a rite, a ceremony, a form of initiation, but as a means of grace, as a means of salvation, by which we are christened, that is, made Christians. To elucidate. Outside of our city there are enormous reservoirs holding millions of tons of water, and we daily see vast tanks holding thousands of cubic feet of gas. But all of these would be useless unless pipes are laid to convey their currents. Lay those pipes, and you have the means of securing water in your homes and light in your dwellings. So the Sacraments, of which Baptism is one, are means by which God's blessings are brought to our souls. It's not an idle ceremony which one can dispense with at liberty, nor is it something which people can wait with till they are old enough to be taught the Christian faith and to understand it; as well might they dispense with the supply of water and illumination, or wait until they themselves can lay the pipes. No; God has given us the means, now we must use them, and use them as early as possible. If this man had spoken as disparagingly of the pool of Bethesda as some people speak of Baptism, and had in consequence kept away from its waters, he would not have met with Christ, and would have remained a cripple all his days. It is for us to use God's means, and to hold with the Scripture that no man is a Christian until he has been baptized. Of course, there is this difference between the impotent man in the Gospel and some in our community. He *could* not enter the healing water, they *will* not. They lie by the side of Bethesda, but, not believing in the healing waters, are never benefited as to their own souls.

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There are many objections made against Baptism. To repeat and publicly set aright one objection sometimes met with in our circles: What good does Baptism do? See how many children turn out bad afterwards notwithstanding. What good does it do? I answer: The same good that it does if you had water and illumination connection, and then cut it off. No good; on the contrary, if, having been made God's children, Christians, in Baptism, we afterwards live as heathen, so much the worse the sin as our Savior particularly warns this man who was healed. "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." But had the man nevertheless gone back to his sinful life, would that have made the healing of no account? And so the fact that people once baptized live in sin does not make Baptism of no account. Marriage is not a failure because some who have married have proved failures. When a man enlists in the army, the form of enlistment makes him a soldier, but not necessarily a good soldier; he may prove to be a coward and traitor, but it put him in a position to lead a brave and useful life and to win honor and glory; if he chooses otherwise, it is his own fault. So in baptism we are made Christians, but it is our own fault if we afterwards turn out bad Christians. Baptism is the beginning, the means, not the end. We are put on the right road, we are made God's children, citizens of His kingdom of heaven. It is our own fault, not the Sacrament, if we develop into prodigals, wander out of the right road, prove cowardly soldiers and bad citizens.

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As to the third suggestion made, the cure, let us briefly note that the condition of that poor paralytic is the perfect emblem of our human nature, of ourselves without Christ. As he was diseased and helpless in body, so are we all diseased and helpless in soul. To a miracle of grace he owed his recovery; and where he found his cure, we must find ours. He stands before us this very moment again, that omnipotent Son of God, that compassionate Savior, and asks, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Wilt thou receive the absolution of thy God, the forgiveness of thy sins, through the mediation of my suffering and death? Nothing else can remove the palsy of our nature, nothing else can give health and soundness.—Let us, then, who feel our malady and wish it removed, answer, Yes, Lord, I will be whole.

Jesus, give me true repentance
By Thy Spirit come from heaven.
Whisper this transporting sentence,
"Son, thy sins are all forgiven."

Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

And He said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites! Ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?—*Luke 12, 54-56.*

Men have always been solicitous about the weather. In the morning they are desirous to know what the day will bring forth; in the evening, what sort of temperature it will be on the morrow. Curiosity, in part, a lack of something more important to think and talk about, and, in part, the regulation of one's duties and work prompt this concern. It has ever been so. In the Holy Land, when the sky was aglow with the exquisite tints of an Oriental sunset, it meant fair weather the next day; when the west wind, sweeping over the Great or Mediterranean Sea laden with moisture blew over the land, it was a safe indication of rain, whereas the breezes coming from the sterile and desert plains of the East portended a heated season and continued drouth. We have similar indications. Flocks of birds, at this season, flying across our city in search of a more congenial home, tell us of approaching winter. Not relying on such indications alone, the Government has established everywhere meteorological stations; weather forecasts are distributed broadcast, wireless telegraphy flashes out the approach of devastating storms, thus forewarning navigation and securing protection to citizens and property and life. All of which is commendable, argues forethought, wisdom, which God has designed that men should exercise. Nor does our Lord in the text in any wise disapprove of such precautions and measures. He would have us make application of that same forethought, wise provision, with respect to another sphere. "As you study the weather," is His direction, so you ought with equally observing and wakeful mind study the times, watch the signs, regard the phenomena that appear in the political, civil, social, mercantile, domestic skies, marking their bearing on the affairs of God's kingdom, and exercise respecting them the same forethought and sense of provision. That duty shall we now do in these moments of public worship, noting as our theme: *A few signs of the times and the corresponding duties of Christians and church-members. We shall observe: I. Three such outstanding signs; II. what it becomes us to do.*

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The first outstanding sign, prevailing and predominating characteristic of our times, that we shall mention is commercialism. To explain:—the question of "what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed," has always and everywhere been a live question. Men must live, and "to live" means the possession of the things just mentioned, food and drink, dress and property, the possession of this earth's goods; but it is a question whether in the history of the world these matters have bulged out so prominently and so monopolized the efforts and attention of men as at the present and in our own country. With the avenues of success open to every man that is industrious and intelligent, with competition keen, demanding concentration of energy and effort, gaining a livelihood and a little of this earth's goods has become like a whirlpool which draws and drags everything into its devouring current and vortex. The spirit of commerce is supreme; not, I suppose, that everybody loves money and this earth's goods simply and only for its own sake, but there is an excitement and fascination in having it; it stands for the standard of efficiency and worth and influence among men, so that all are scrambling and scheming for it. Listen to the trend of conversation, the topic of discussion in people's homes—what is it? Show a man a material advantage that he may secure, often at the sacrifice of honesty and principle, and he is your undying friend. Now, with men's minds thus set, it is but a natural consequence that it should affect their heart, endanger their spiritual life. Business, indeed, is not incompatible with piety. A man may be a devout Christian and church-member and an excellent business man, but it may so preoccupy his mind and preengage his heart that he ceases to think about religious matters at all. It is not an uncommon thing to see a man attentive unto the things of the Lord, intent in the services and the meetings of the church; when anything special is to be done, he is on hand to help. Business responsibilities increase, he becomes less earnest in these respects; he has to rise so early in the morning that he has no time or thought for prayer; he comes home so tired in the evening that he has no consideration for anything else, and if he goes out, it is in the interest of business. Even the Lord's day is levied upon, and when it comes, his mind is perchance more occupied while he sits under the pulpit with his figures than with the sermon. Tell him he is being missed,—the retort is the common, trite answer, "No time." But the real reason lies deeper. He has gotten into the current, he is being drawn into the whirlpool of commercialism, and if there be any who feel that I have been holding up a mirror wherein you have seen yourselves, let me urge upon you to take heed. You are paying too much for your material success, and if you do not return to your old anchorage, you may find yourself where you had never thought to get—afar from Christ, His worship and service. There is nothing better than for a man occasionally to take his bearings, to find where he is located, and whether he is holding his own against the stream of opposite tendency that is flowing through our social life, in which he is drifting, being carried in opposite direction, among those who pass from the neglecting to the despising and rejecting of the great salvation.

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Hand in hand with this tendency of our times there is another: indifferentism. Certainly, if everything is gauged by the measurement of dollars and cents, then men's thoughts are absorbed by material considerations. It is quite natural that religion should be placed on the same low basis. Indifferentism generally resolves itself into a question. That question is, "What's the use? What's the use of prayer? Has it ever brought you any gain? What have you that you wouldn't have if you had not prayed?" "What's the use of going to church? What benefit has it ever brought you? It has not fetched you one customer, one penny of profit, rather the reverse—it has been an expense, easily avoidable." "What's the use of going to the Lord's Supper? A man may be a

Christian for all that." "God governs the world, His providence overrules it all, but it is, after all, the man who plans and plods that wins out, so why be concerned about this overruling Providence?" "When the end comes, well, then I hope there is a place where those who, like myself, have tried to be honest and upright will finally get to. I am willing to risk my chances. What is the use of being over-much concerned about the future?" It is not that our times are stubbornly and positively atheistic and infidelic; perhaps there was never less of that than now. But comparatively few in speech or person or in print venture to attack Christianity as a system. The danger lies elsewhere. We have lapsed into a state of indifference. There is a passing away of an earnestness of conviction, of moral stamina, of strength of belief. What was once accepted as God's truth is now called into question. "Don't emphasize creed, doctrine, destructive belief; we have gotten beyond that." Yes, we have gotten beyond that, and in consequence have gotten and are daily getting into a current that shall find us contending for the simplest truths of the Christian faith. What fad, however unscriptural and irrational, but it finds multitudes of followers. Consider the greatest fad that is sweeping over the land—Christian Science. How is it possible that such an absolutely heretical, nonsensical system of unchristian, anti-Biblical statement should ever have had such a phenomenal growth, if our people were not so dreadfully indifferent in matters of Bible teaching? The same is true of the Russellites, whose publications are being distributed broadcast over the land, who deny the simple doctrines of hell and resurrection, and foretell the time of Christ's coming to Judgment and to reign in unadulterated bliss for thousand years.

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The Catechism is denounced from the pulpits. "Why instruct the juvenile mind in such fetters of theology?" "What is there to confirmation?—teaching children in their teens to confess a faith they do not half comprehend?" The good old Bible Book—"is it really what has been claimed for it?" Do not most clergymen of progressive ideas put allegorical interpretations upon its stories, for instance, the fall of man into sin? Do not many learned scholars point out what they claim to be discrepancies, and say it must be considered and weighed just like every other book in which are some good things and some inferior? And the sorry consequence of all this? It is this, that we have no positive conviction at all, that the majority are like a vessel without a guiding compass or a determinate course, floating hither and thither, as the wavering current of whims or opinion may chance to drive them. And if, to note the application, we are asked whether we join in this trend of thought of the times, this contemptuous treatment of the Word of God and Catechism, we should answer with an emphatic "No." But are we quite sure that we have not imbibed a little of it unconsciously? After so much has been said about the old-fashioned hell,—a hard doctrine for sentimental souls to believe,—why not mitigate it a little, and believe that after this life poor sinners have another chance?—'Tis true, the Savior does say, "This do in remembrance of me," "but I guess I'll not be condemned if I do not go to His Sacrament." Beloved hearer, you may flatter yourself that it will have no effect upon you, but unless you conscientiously and determinedly watch it, you will find yourself yielding to it. Beloved, we watchmen on the towers of Zion, scanning the skies and observing the signs, are everywhere noting the indifference among our older members, among our young people, and the only thing to do is to get back to the old anchorage, to place our faith firmly and securely upon the rock of eternal Truth, *i. e.*, the grand old Bible. Its words are truth and nothing but the truth. Let that be our guide in doctrine, in practice. What that says let us believe; what that forbids let us forsake; that will put us right and keep us right. These vagaries and fluctuating opinions of men and women will pass away like the clouds of the air; but even though heaven and earth pass away, God's Word will not pass away. Our safety and happiness lies in adhering to what it teaches and following its directions.—When the storm-clouds are gathering in the horizon and the weather bureau flashes out the danger signals, then it is wisdom to seek shelter, to get under somewhere. There is such an ark of safety yet, and that is the Church of Christ, where His cross and Gospel are preached, held and confessed, uncompromisingly. Take your place there as a consistent, positive member, and avoid indifference in religious matters.

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And one more disastrous sign of the times would we regard. I need not remind you that the brightest jewel that we possess under the Constitution of this country is religious liberty. Its wise and pious framers, knowing both from reason and from sharp experience that religious liberty can only exist in the strict separation of Church and State, adopted every precaution to prevent the admission of anything hostile to religious liberty, to go into the political machinery of the state. Their object was "a free church in a free country." It is well known, not suspicion merely, but known by those who have the best understanding of the times, that a spirit has of late years prevailed which is intensely hostile to the civil and religious principles of our government. There have been some bold encroachments on the part of a subtle and formidable antagonist. You know whom I mean—Rome, dangerous Rome, which does not believe in the separation of Church and State, which acknowledges but one head, who is the embodiment of temporal, political, and spiritual power, which openly and unequivocally asserts that the civil authority is subordinate to the Church. Rome's representatives have been loaded with official favors and flatteries; Rome's interests have been fostered with the most fatal insidiousness by political leaders; Rome has been caressed, and complimented, and taken into confidence and alliance with those in authority. What is the meaning of all this? Sordid maneuvers of diplomacy and craft undermining the fundamental principles and rights of our Constitution, menacing clouds in the sky that threaten our civil liberty. And what is to be done? We ought to know; the name which graces our denomination points the way. Luther gave Rome its death-wound in his day by wielding so powerfully the sword, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Let us grasp that selfsame sword; let us teach the doctrines which he taught so effectively to its overthrow, and we, too, shall prevail. Point out the soul-destroying errors of Rome, and you unarm her spiritually. And again, as citizens, let us make a determined and combined movement to repel the

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creeping invasion, the subtle but forceful and successful invasion of popery. The political leading men of our day may not be conscious of it; let us hope, in the judgment of charity, that they are not; but it is perfectly clear that the influence of that dark and mysterious and tremendous system is upon them. For us who have studied and know Rome it becomes to counteract, eradicate every tendency that would break down or reduce our constitutional liberties.

We have mentioned three specific signs—commercialism, indifferentism, Romanism. Let us, keeping our eyes open, beware of the destructive power of the first, the deadening influence of the second, the insidious danger of the third, and so pass through these things temporal that we lose not the things eternal. Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.
—*Luke 14, 28-30.*

In the pass of Thermopylae, in the country of Greece, there stands a monument, world-renowned, erected to Leonidas and his valiant three hundred. It bears the inscription: "Go, stranger, and tell at Sparta that we died here fighting to the last in obedience to our laws," and commemorates that thrilling event when Leonidas with his three hundred successfully held the pass of Thermopylae against tremendous odds until betrayed into the hands of the enemy. What it bears magnificent witness to is the quality of loyalty, steadfastness. The same noble quality does God require, look for, in His people. The Apostle in to-day's Epistle, summing up the conduct of the spiritual soldier, says: "Stand, therefore, and having done all, stand," and again, emphasizing the same virtue, he remarks: "Watching thereunto with all perseverance." It is not the boldest regiment that always makes the best record, but that which holds out the longest. It is not the most enthusiastic Christian and ardent church-member that wins His Master's commendation, but he that proves "faithful." The parable of our text brings home to us the same lesson. It tells us of a man who contemplates the erection of a tower. Before entering upon his enterprise, he first sets down and, with pencil in hand, figures the cost, whether his funds will permit him to undertake the matter, lest, having begun and failing, he become the laughing-stock of his neighbors, and the uncompleted structure a monument to his folly. Equally so, does the Savior point out, is it, in another sphere, the realm of religion. A person hears the call of religion, feels its power and promptings, its necessity and claims; his heart is persuaded, his mind is made up, he ought to, and wants to be, a Christian, in the words of the parable, he contemplates the erection of the tower, but ordinary prudence bids that he should sit down and consider the costs, lest, beginning and not completing, the venture end in dismal failure, and he become the object of mockery and contempt. And yet is it not this ordinary, common-sense method, which they apply so keenly otherwise, that so many disregard in matters of soul? Why else would there be so many apostates, fallings away, in the ranks of confessed believers? Let us, then, wisely and for once sit down for a few moments in public Christian worship, and consider this matter, noting: *The parable of the tower—an exhortation to Christian steadfastness.* We shall group our remarks around two chief thoughts: *I. What does it cost to be a Christian? II. Does it pay to be one?*

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To begin with, let it be noted that Christianity connects with cost; it *does* cost to be a Christian. There is a type of religion which is not only a very easy, but a most inexpensive kind. Putting on the garment and speaking the language of godliness, it is stranger to its power. However, that type is not the building of a tower, rather of a shack, a flimsy construction which the slightest wind-storm and rising rivulet will soon sweep away. In building a substantial structure, the first concern is the foundation. You do not see that, it is hidden from view; yet upon that foundation rests the building, and it is just as strong as its foundation. So, spiritually, the main part of Christianity is hidden, it is something that takes place away from human view; yet upon that unseen experience rests its reality, its strength. What is that experience?

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In laying a foundation, there is, first, the excavation, the removal of the soil, of all obstructions and obstacles. This is difficult work and costly work. So, spiritually, religion calls for the removal of obstacles, obstructions, soil. Man's heart is not fit to build the tower of Christ's religion, it must undergo a change; "old things must pass away." There must be a plowing up. There are painful memories to be recalled, sins to be mourned over, habits and ways of thinking and doing to be given up, likes and loves and feelings to be renounced. It is as true now as it ever was that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We call this repentance, contrition, sorrow over one's sin. It means the reconstruction and transformation of one's nature, and costs many a pang, many a sigh, many an inner struggle and protest.

Then, when the rubbish and soil have been removed, the excavation has taken place; there must be a laying of the foundation. Which that foundation is, is plain. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Belief in Christ, faith in the Savior, must follow, else there can be no tower. My dear hearer, have you undergone that change of heart, experienced that inner sorrow? Have you paid the first cost?

Laying a foundation without building thereupon does not answer the purpose. We must add a superstructure, and this also costs. And what is the superstructure? St. Paul speaks of it when he writes: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," when he says to the Corinthians: "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are God's," or quite briefly remarks: "For me to live is Christ." We call this adding of the superstructure, consecration, and what does it involve? Everything. Beginning with yourself, it levies upon your body, your mind, your soul, your time, talents, influence, possessions, property, money, your all. It is just to this particular, of consecration, dedication of oneself and possessions, that Christ refers in the verses preceding the text: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

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Earthly love, domestic relations, material considerations—nothing is permitted to stand in the way of absolute and entire consecration of oneself, and all one has and possesses, to Christ. Beloved, is this not a particular which many who profess to be Christians do not apprehend? When they are called upon to give themselves, of their time and means and ability, to the cause of the Lord, they feel and act as though some great thing is being asked of them, that they are doing something superfluous. They need not feel so. It is a matter they ought to have weighed when they entered upon Christian life. God lays His hand upon all that you are, and all that you have, and says: "This is mine," and only he and she are building properly upon the foundation which is Christ who say: "Here, Lord, am I and all that is mine. Upon thy altar it lies in holy consecration. Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?"

And one other cost would we mention. It costs courage. Not exactly the same courage as when called upon, in the early centuries, to face the tortures of the rack, the beasts of the Coliseum and the flames of the martyr's stake, yet a courage, none the less noble, a moral courage. There are plenty of things to discourage us. "Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to God?" No, it is not. It is full of conflicts and criticisms and sharp collisions. If so many Christians of our day have such a good and easy time of it, is it not because they are not Christians after the style of the apostles and the early martyrs?

Satan is still the god of this world, and one need only take a decided stand against him, and the things that belong to him, to find it out. Yes, it costs something to be a Christian, a consecrated church-member. A Christian cannot be, cannot act and do, as non-Christians, non-church-members act and do. Aye, does it not frequently call for courage even to be known as a church-member? The finger of scorn is pointed and the sneer of sarcasm is hurled at many a one for that.

Nor only from those that are without; discouragement frequently comes from those who are within. Christians are the communion of saints, but their behavior toward each other is not always saintly. Human nature, everywhere ugly and crabbed, is apt to make itself manifest there too. Appreciation deserved, gratitude looked for, is not always received. And this is very trying, betimes; in fact, some think that it is beyond all endurance, judging by their withdrawal. But have those that so feel ever thought it over? Whoever builds a house without having some unpleasantness, and sometimes great unpleasantness? But does he, therefore, desist from completing the structure? Know, my dear hearer, whatever may be the nature of the annoyances, difficulties, and hindrances to Christian life and church-membership, they belong to the costs, and when they occur, face them with becoming courage and steadfastness. A sorry soldier that will throw away his gun and quit the ranks because of the discouragements in the way! This, then, is what it costs to be a Christian—repentance, consecration, courage.

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And are the returns adequate to the cost? What benefit is there in being a Christian, erecting such a tower? Does it pay? There are people who think not. They consider that they make the most by keeping aloof. Whether they have done it by careful figuring out, like the man in the parable, is doubtful, but they are persuaded in their own mind that they are the gainers by not identifying themselves with Christ and His Church. They do not like religious restraints. They wish to be free to do as they please. They can enjoy more of the comforts and pleasures of life, can pursue their ways with less compunction, make more money, gain more friends, if they keep themselves out of the church entanglements and obligations. So they reason and congratulate themselves. But what advantage have they over us? The truth is that there is not a single relation or human interest in which it does not pay to be a Christian. To specify briefly: It pays to be a Christian physically; godliness teaches and inculcates all those laws and things that produce and promote health, the welfare of one's body. It pays to be a Christian materially, in one's labors and business. To be a good man, to have the reputation of honesty, is as fine a business capital as any one would want. It pays domestically; the home where godliness prevails approaches the ideal home and is the strongest bulwark of society. The same holds good with regard to the joys of life. "Religion was never devised to make our pleasures less." Religion sanctifies our pleasures; it draws the checkreins upon ungodly extravagances and excesses; and so it pays also in this respect. And when it comes to the dark side of life, the manifold difficulties and troubles that accompany man in his abode here below, "when other helpers fail and comforts flee"—oh, for the power, the comfort, the divine support of religion! And we have said nothing yet of the strictly spiritual advantages. It pays to be a Christian; a Christian possesses a good conscience, which is more valuable than all of this world's possessions, the sunshine of God's forgiveness and favor through faith in his Savior; the blessed joy and inspiration that comes from prayer and worship of God. Nor does the matter stop there. When the scenes of this time and world fade upon our vision; when, passing through the dark and shadowy valley and before the judgment seat of Him to whom we must give account; when the glories of the Golden City open and the crown immortal is placed upon our brow,—then we shall realize that it pays to be a Christian.

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To conclude,—there should be any right-thinking, calculating person that, having begun, will fail to complete the building of this tower? How foolish before God and men, how dangerous!

Be steadfast! be wise!—
"Build on, my soul, till death
Shall bring thee to thy God;
He'll take thee at thy parting breath
To thy divine abode."

Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.—*Gal. 6, 1.*

The Christian Church is frequently compared with a hospital. The comparison is correct. Christ calls Himself a Physician; then those to whom He has come to heal are sick, and the institution which He has established for the spiritually soul-sick is the Church. Not for those who regard themselves well, who in self-righteous haughtiness would be no sinners, but for those who, acknowledging their soul-sickness, are looking for healing from the Physician of souls, Christ Jesus, is this divine institution. The Church, we may aptly say, is a hospital.

In a hospital, however, we have respect to proper treatment, we desire to become rid of our ailment, and are ready to submit to any course and remedy that will promote our healing. Equally so in the spiritual hospital ought we to be ready and thankful for any method and manner of treatment that helps us become rid of our sins, our faults, our errors. Such a course, suggested by the Gospel-lesson, would we for once regard in this morning devotion. Let us consider *a Christian's duty toward an erring brother*, noting, *I. what this duty is; II. how it is to be performed; III. some of the happy results.*

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"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." What the Apostle here commands is this: If a Christian, a member of a congregation, falls, those who are standing are to help him up again. If he falls into error of doctrine, they are to bring him to the belief of the Bible truth, and if he falls into some sin of life, they are to remonstrate with him, so that he may repent and return into the way of right. That this is one of the most difficult of Christian duties is true, and that it is a duty grossly neglected by Christians is true also. But for that reason it becomes all the more necessary to call attention to it. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him," we read Lev. 19. Solomon says: "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." A greater than Solomon, even our Savior, has said: "If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault." Again, St. Paul directs: "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering." These are but a few of many similar texts of Scripture that might be cited to show that to reprove an erring fellow-Christian is just as solemn and weighty as that which tells us, "Thou shalt not steal," or admonishes to read our Bibles, and attend on public worship. And be it noted, this is every Christian's duty. It will not do to say: Let the pastor do it, or let those do it who are better qualified than myself. It is indeed the pastor's duty, and it is the duty of those of whom you say they are better qualified than yourself, and it is also your duty; for thus says the Apostle: "Ye which are spiritual restore such an one." If you are spiritual, if you are a Christian, it is your duty to apply brotherly admonition; and is it right to shift your duty on to the shoulders of others?

Christians may easily sin by depending too much on the pastor to do everything. The pastor cannot be everywhere, cannot see everything, and often it is wrong to tell him about everything. The direction here is not only for the pastors, but for all the members. That question of qualification is indeed a delicate thing. The truth is that those who think themselves qualified, and therefore use impertinent boldness, are generally not qualified for effectual brotherly admonition. If God has placed you into such a situation that you see a brother in danger of losing his soul through error, sin, or despondency, then let not the feeling of disqualification seal your lips, but sigh to God to open your lips to speak a word of instruction, rebuke, or comfort as it seems needed. Remember, it is a duty, this matter of Christian reproof, something which God has plainly and strongly commanded us to perform. This is our first consideration.

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However, if brotherly admonition is to have the proper effect, it must be applied in the right way. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault." That does not mean that a Christian should make it his business to rebukingly approach others for little and insignificant faults. In that case he would soon be regarded as a faultfinder, an overly eager critic, and would no more be listened to. Brotherly admonition should be applied in such things by which the brother's soul is endangered if left to go on therein.

I shall mention a few,—neglect of attendance upon divine worship and sacrament, intemperance, when one is convinced that the visits to the drinkhouse are too frequent, habitually frequenting the playhouse, the dancing-floor, living in some secret sin, using ungodly, profane speech, being irreconcilable with one's housemates or fellow-members. These are faults, and when one is overtaken in such a fault, then it becomes my Christian duty and yours to restore such a one—how? In the spirit of meekness, with mildness, kindness, humility. Nothing is more opposed to the spirit in which Christian rebuke is to be administered than harshness,

haughtiness, abruptness, overbearing manner. Hard words are apt to incite opposition and stubbornness. A reproof kindly given is like a healing oil. A tornado destroys, a mild breeze refreshes. Brotherly admonition is only then indeed brotherly when given in a brotherly manner.

In reproving an offending brother, we must make it apparent that it is his highest good that we honestly seek; it must be obvious that we have no personal dislike to gratify, no spleen to vent, no feeling of superiority. It must be manifest to him that we do it from a sincere conviction of duty, from a feeling that if we did not care for him and sincerely desire his happiness as a Christian, we could never be induced to attempt this painful duty. This is the spirit with compassion for the offended. There must be a spirit like this, and oh! the power in Christian rebuke when administered like this. It will subdue and reclaim anything but a heart of adamant. But this meekness must be mingled with humbling conviction of our own frailty and liability to sin. "Considering," wrote the Apostle, "thyself, lest thou also be tempted." We must go to the erring brother with that gentle and subdued spirit resulting from conviction and practical view of our own numerous sins, and a holy fear of falling ourselves, that we may soon need the Christian reproof of a brother for our own faults. Fraternal kindness and gentleness does not exclude—what we must yet mention—firmness. The hand of the surgeon who amputates a diseased limb or growth from the human body, must be a steady hand, unmoved by the cries and the writhing of the patient. It is not cruelty, but kindness to the sufferer, that keeps the surgeon undiverted and firm to his purpose till the operation is performed. So he that would successfully administer Christian reproof must have his heart firmly set on the work. He must go about it with an inflexible determination to accomplish, by God's aid, what he attempts. The wincing irritability, ill temper, and provoking replies of the offended must not for a moment divert him from his purpose, or throw him off his guard. He must approach with the purpose of winning him back to truth and the path of righteousness. Hating the sin, but loving the sinner, he must hold on until the person has been saved or proved to be incorrigible, a manifest and unrepentant sinner.

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So much as to the manner—"with meekness and firmness." And are there any happy effects to be realized from the faithful performance of this duty? That is the last general thought to be presented, namely, the blessed consequences of Christian reproof.

The first happy effect is that it will free the Christian who performs this duty from being partaker of others' sins, and will give him a peace of conscience which he cannot otherwise enjoy. God has solemnly warned us Christians: "Be ye not partakers of other men's sins." Now that professing Christian who fails to rebuke or reprove a brother whom he knows to be in fault, silently assents to that brother's sin. His conduct obviously shows that he either does not consider his brother as sinning at all, or that his fault is so trivial that it is not necessary to tell him of it. That is the inference which the erring brother himself draws. Now we are, to some extent, the keepers of our brother's soul, and if we do not use the means and the influences which we might use to free him from his faults, God will hold us accountable, partakers, a portion of the guilt attaches to us.

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We may complain of this as hard if we choose, but this will not alter the case. There are two ways in which we can free ourselves from being partakers of other men's sins. The one is by living holy lives ourselves; the other, Christian reproof to them for their faults. Not only must our lives testify, but our lips. You would pardon the personal illustration. We were friends. Six years did we occupy the same desk and room together. A sin was fastening itself upon him, the general word for it is "tippling," fancy drinking. I remonstrated with him, as talented a student as ever was. He has long fallen from the Christian ministry, and his body lies in a drunkard's grave, one of the saddest experiences of my life. But one consolation,—I spoke to him words of Christian reproof. Would you be untarnished by the guilt of other men's sins, and blessed with a peace of conscience to be procured on no other terms, be faithful in the performance of this duty.

A second happy effect of the faithful performance of this duty is that it will prevent the evil of talebearing and backbiting. A prevalent, giant evil this, also in some of our churches among Christians. Anything that would remedy this evil ought to be hailed with gladness. God has brought His authority to bear on it in the direct command: "Thou shalt not go up and down in the land as a talebearer; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." The Lord Jesus Himself has laid down the law that Christians are not permitted to talk about the faults of others till they have gone to them and told them their faults alone. How much this rule is regarded some of our consciences can testify. But let it be done, and you will see how talebearing and backbiting will cease; for either as you go to the erring brother or sister in the spirit in which reproof ought to be administered you will find, in not a few instances, that you were mistaken, that the person is not guilty in the matter, as you had supposed, and then, of course, you cannot go about speaking of his fault; or if you find that he is actually at fault to the extent that you thought he was, he will no doubt, on faithful reproof, make an apology, and then, with what face can you go about talking to others of his fault? If there is anything distressing, causing permanent estrangement, discord, and heart-burning, it is to take up evil reports against each other, circulate them without ever going to the person incriminated, and inquiring into the truth or falsehood of what is spread. And this devilish work will cease or become rare, and the calumniator will be regarded as doing the work of his father, the devil, if Christians will faithfully perform the duty of reproof in the right spirit. To repeat,—if we have anything to say of a brother, let us say it first to him. Let us say nothing in his absence that we should be afraid to utter in his presence. And when any one comes with an evil report against another, let us refuse to listen to him, unless he can assure us that he has said all that he is going to utter to the person whom it most concerns. It will check, prevent the evil of talebearing. And to mention briefly one other blessed effect,—it will promote a feeling of brotherliness and promote prosperity of the

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congregation. To speak to a delinquent brother, give him to understand that he is missed and doing amiss, is to give him to understand, at the same time, that he is thought of, that we should like to have him to be what his own conscience testifies he ought to be; and this consideration, kindly and firmly made, cannot but make him, if he is not past all correction, feel attracted and attached toward those who are concerned about him. To keep the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace, to banish prejudice, hatred, to promote and build up a strong, solid, permanent church-body in which the members cling to each other, Christian reproof is a most valuable means. Christian reproof is something which deeply concerns the spiritual life and growth of a congregation.

To conclude: How far, Christian brethren, have we been faithful to the admonition of the text? Have you ever, since connected with this church, made one serious attempt to reclaim an erring brother or sister? There is, I know, a little of this spirit among us; may it prosper and grow, and the Lord will surely give His blessing. Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury. And many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples and saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living.—*Mark 12, 41-44.*

The words just read from sacred story are the simple record of a pious deed performed more than a thousand years ago in the city of Jerusalem. It speaks of a poor woman modestly putting in her contribution into the treasury of the Temple. At the time to which the text refers the Savior had just silenced the cavils and objections of the scribes and Sadducees, as we heard in the Gospel of to-day, and was remaining in the temple a few moments longer and taking His seat near the place where the people were wont to deposit their offerings. As He watched the multitudes surging to and fro and with His all-seeing eye scanned the various depositors placing their gifts into the receptacle, He had nothing to say. But when a poor widow came along, unnoticed and overlooked, as the artists generally picture her, with a little one at her side and an infant upon her breast, and drops in her insignificant coin of two paltry mites, there was something that broke the current of His thoughts, and calling His disciples, He directed their attention to the humble gift and the unpretentious offerer.

Though that gorgeous Temple has long passed away, and the magnificent city is in ruins, that simple act of piety lives on, as fresh and beautiful as the moment of its performance. This Sunday has been set aside in the course of the church-year for the consideration of Christian beneficence. It is an eminently proper and legitimate topic, and one on which instruction and stirring up is needed the same as on any other. Some think such sermons aside from the Gospel, but that only shows how imperfect is their knowledge, and how important it is to bring the matter forth from the obscurity to which some would consign it. Paul frequently introduces it into his doctrinal epistles. The Savior Himself embraced in it many of His discourses, and it is difficult to see how any Christian minister is discharging his duty of faithfully and fully declaring the counsel of God to his people who fails betimes to give it a prominent place in his pulpit ministrations. Let us regard as our theme this morning: *The widow's mite, an encouraging model of Christian beneficence, observing, I, the motive why we should give; II, the measure and proportion in which we should give; III, the method how we should give.* May God bless the presentation of His Word!

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First, the motive of giving. What prompted this poor widow to give? She had been worshiping in the Temple, had witnessed the beautiful and inspiring services, had been edified by the instruction of God's Word, her heart was warmed and stirred with appreciation for these spiritual blessings, and as she passes out with the throng and views the receptacle at the entrance, well knowing what it had been placed there for, she cannot resist, but under a sense of obligation, a strong feeling to reciprocate, and do something toward the maintenance of God's house, she draws forth two little coins and drops them in, then, more destitute of means, but richer in heart, proceeds on her way.

And the like motives ought to prevail with us. We confess in the Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He richly and daily provides me, that He defends me against all danger"; that Jesus Christ, our Lord, has redeemed us lost and condemned creatures; that the Holy Ghost has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith; and for all that, what shall we render for God's gifts? His blessings are indeed always freely bestowed, without any merit or worthiness on our part; nevertheless, they call for gratitude, recognition, appreciation. And in consideration of gifts so unspeakable is any offering of gold, or frankincense, or myrrh too large? what ointment of spikenard too costly? The spirit of showing gratitude, as in the case of this widow, is one motive, and a most beautiful and God-honoring one, why we ought to give to Him: the honor of His name and the spread and prosperity of His cause—in His temple.

The other is this,—the sense of our obligation. He desires and commands us to do so. Everywhere in the Scripture of God do we find the matter of giving, especially for religious

purposes, spoken of with commendation and inculcated as part of the very essence and life of true godliness, whether we look to the Old Testament or to the New Testament, to prophets, apostles, or Christ Himself, the language is the same. "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase." "To do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." In to-day's Gospel the Lord plainly enough says: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." In a certain sense it is all His, of course. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The silver and the gold are His. But it belongs to His wisdom and providence to make us His stewards in the disposition of His, and in that disposition He lays down very emphatically the law: "Render unto me the things that are mine." Every penny that we possess is stamped with the divine image and superscription. He still sits over against the treasury, and observes what we are putting into the receptacle, whether we are giving unto Him what it is our duty to give. These are, then, the motives,—gratefulness and dutifulness.

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And now as to the *measure*, the amount of Christian giving—the how much. As we turn to the record, two parties are distinguished. The one wealthy.—"Many," it says, "that were rich cast in much." That the rich should give and gave largely, and that this was the case not with a few, but with numbers of them, was to their honor, especially since the practice has never been common, experience showing that "many that are rich do not cast in much." And the other, indigent, the poor, selected by way of a specific example—a widow.

The idea sometimes is that poor people ought not be asked to give. This is a mistake. Poor people can give, and ought to give, out of their poverty, as well as rich people ought to give out of their riches. Poor people can hurt themselves, and injure their souls, and prove themselves niggardly and illiberal by not giving just as well as rich people can. True, they cannot give as much as the more favored, in the actual amount of their gifts, but they *can* give as much in proportion to their means.

We often hear people say, if they were only rich, willingly would they contribute to every good cause, and munificent things would they do with their money. But all such charitable words and sentiments are just nothing. The thing is to give the gift of poverty, if poor, without being ashamed of it, and not to sentimentalize about the great things we would do if we were rich. The fact is that few people ever get rich, and if wealth increases, desires, styles of living, and general expenses increase with it, and the wealthy man has so many expenditures, so many demands to meet, so many drains upon him, that he is just about as poor in his riches as he was without them. This is the plain fact in the vast majority of cases. Indeed, exceptions are very rare. It is, therefore, a mere matter of self-deception for people to talk how liberal they would be if they were rich. Moreover, what are we coming to if we regard only the rich as under obligation to give? No! Christian liberality is a thing for the poor as well as the rich, and for the most part facts prove that the poor are more liberal than the rich.

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To come back to our text: Such were the donors our Savior recognized, both poor and rich. Let us note, furthermore, their contribution. While the rich gave much, the widow "threw in" only "two mites," which make a farthing, with us half a cent. It is easy to conceive what the givers themselves would think of their donations. The rich would be satisfied, imagining that they had done their duty, if not more than was required of them, while the poor widow would deem what she had done unworthy of notice, and, perhaps, felt ashamed to cast into the treasury such a mean trifle.

Others, too, who were lookers-on, had they known what the parties gave, would have extolled the one as prodigies of liberality, while they would have treated the other with neglect, or reproached her for giving what she could not afford. But how were those two mites viewed by Him whose eyes were as a flame of fire, and who searcheth the reins and the hearts?

"And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living." At first this seems strange, and our Lord could not mean that she had given more than all the others as to quantity, but more as to motive, more as to principle, more, relatively, as to their condition and her circumstances; more comparatively.

These men had given much; they had done it of their abundance and superfluity, and could go home to houses filled with plenty, and to tables spread with delicacies, while she went home to a lonely apartment, and opening her cupboard, found little, and that the earning of her hard toil.

What an encouragement this! And the less favored in this world's goods require it. We have known persons remaining away from the house of God—this house of God—because they could only appear in workday clothing, and others who have been prevented from meeting with the congregation because they felt that they could not do what was expected of them. Let none such, however humble their condition, or limited their means, for a moment suppose that they are less regarded; let them beware of making the sad mistake that because they cannot do much, they are justified in doing nothing. The commendation of Mary was: "She hath done what she could," whereas the condemnation of the unprofitable servant was that because he did not have ten talents, or five, he failed to trade with the one he did have. It's not the inability that God judges you by, but by the indisposition to do what you have. In the light of these two mites let us take heart, and do what dutifulness and gratitude would prompt us to do toward His temple, knowing that it is a small thing that we should be judged by any man's judgment, but that He that judges us is the Lord.

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And, again, our Lord's decision teaches us, in fact, seems to be the main inference to be drawn

from the subject, that the rule with regard to liberality is proportion. These men gave "much" (much when the amount was considered, much according to their own opinion and their admirers); yet, was it much relatively? much compared with what others gave whose means were unspeakably less? What self-denial was there connected with it? "Charity," an old commentator remarks to these words of our text, "is to be judged of, not by what is given, but by what is left." These men gave of their abundance. They never felt it. True benevolence feels it. The widow did feel it; and many, I take it, among us feel it in the sacrifice of self-decoration, self-gratification, when they put their contribution into the plate in regular service, and occasionally a special donation, as on the Day of Humiliation and Prayer and Church Anniversary. That is the right kind of benevolence that feels it; those are the coins that count in God's treasury which have, as they ring in the basket, a piece of ourselves attached to them, stand for self-denial; that gives them their highest value,—not merely the 1, 5, or 10 stamped upon them.

Let each of the assembly here worshipping examine himself accordingly. There is no law in the case. Christianity does not tax, coerce, dictate how much in exact proportion to your income and means you ought to give. It is not for you to tell me how much I am to do for God and Church, nor for me to tell you. That is my business and yours, left to us individually. Only this are we to observe: All are expected to give, and all who are really touched with the Spirit of Christ and true religion give and will give, and it is for them to give in proportion as God has blessed them.

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Giving is a thing of character, which, like every other, must grow little by little, more by more, until through diligent practice and repeated acts it becomes a habit. To give once in a while, impulsively, as one is moved by this or that plea, is good enough, but far more fruitful and blessed is systematic giving, however small the amount be at a time. The plan which has God's authority, and which has borne the most encouraging results, is the one which St. Paul has laid down in 1 Cor. 16: "On the first day of the week," on Sunday, when men's thoughts are turned from earth to heaven, from the things of this world to the next, when God's unspeakable gift is brought to our mind and our duties to the good Lord, then "let every one of you lay by him in store as the Lord hath prospered him."

To aid you in doing that, the system of envelopes has been introduced. The idea has never been to burden any one, to tax any one, or to prescribe to any one, but to present an easy and secure method for collecting what each one, in conscience and calmness, might consider his or her proper gift to the Lord and His treasury. The very boxes bear that name, "The Lord's Treasury," and I hope that each time as you scan the words you will think of the "widow's mites."

Nor do we have any reason to be dissatisfied with results. The waters that flow down the great Niagara with such rush and roar, and then sweep onward in deep majesty to the ocean are formed by countless brooks and rills and trickling streamlets and melting snows and little raindrops, and so the results that have all wrought for our congregation, and the amount upon which it is still largely dependent, comes from the small contributions of our members, regularly and systematically given. In view of the fact that a large indebtedness rests upon us, I feel warranted to bring this matter before you in the pulpit, asking for a faithful continuation of the plan.

"The widow's two mites"—what grand services they have accomplished, what an immense harvest of good they have brought forth to the whole world. Remembering how His all-seeing eye still scans the church receptacle, let us not allow selfishness, avarice, and a carnal greed to hinder what conscience dictates; rather let us strive to secure this commendation which this poor widow received, and be blessed in our deeds. Amen.

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HUMILIATION AND PRAYER SUNDAY.

TEKEL: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.—*Dan. 5, 27.*

The words of our text connect with an account of Old Testament story which, if once heard, is never forgotten. The place was Babylon, a city so vast in extent that after its capture it was three days before the fact was known all over it. The scene was in the royal palace, a marvelous structure within the walls of which were the famous "hanging gardens," which the world has agreed to number among its "seven great wonders." There, in the most sumptuous of all his banquet halls, at a table groaning with the burdens of massive plate and the rarest and richest of viands and wines, reclined the proud and voluptuous King of Babylon, Belshazzar. Around him reclined a thousand of his lords and the fairest women of his harem. A more magnificent banquet was never given or enjoyed. Golden lamps, suspended from a ceiling, paneled with ivory and pearl, shed soft luster on walls pillared with statues, on a floor paved with alabaster, and carpeted with richest rugs from the looms of India, on couches mounted with silver and cushioned with velvet, on illustrious princes, gorgeous costumes, in the most bewildering splendor, whilst over it all floated the sweet strains of music and song. Every heart in that glittering company was wild with delight. No one seemed troubled with care.

In the midst of the feasting an impious deed suggests itself to the king's mind. Calling a servant, he orders him to bring the golden and silver vessels which his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had carried away from God's altar in Jerusalem. They were brought and placed before him in a glittering row. They had been consecrated to the service of God centuries before, and had never been put to any common use. For any man to use them, unless he were a heavenly-

appointed priest serving at the altar of Jehovah, would be sacrilege of the most damning kind, Belshazzar knew that, but he was resolved to insult Jehovah in the presence of that great company, and so, at his command, those consecrated vessels were filled with intoxicating drink, and he and his princes, and his wives and his concubines, drank from them, amid profane jests and ridicule, to the health of the god of Babylon, whose images of gold, silver, brass, and stone adorned the hall where the wild revel was held. Suddenly a cry of agony is heard. There sat Belshazzar, pale as marble, pointing to an object on the wall. With horror unutterable they look and see the fingers of a human hand slowly tracing a style across the wall,—that was all that was visible. The pen and hand vanished, and nothing remained but the writing. At that the banqueters stared, transfixed with speechless terror. No one in that drunken crowd was able to read it, until Daniel, the Lord's prophet, was summoned. This was the inscription: "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." The prophet gave their hidden meaning: "Mene: God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Tekel: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Upharsin: Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." And so it was. That very night, by an underground channel, Darius the Mede entered the city of Babylon, and Belshazzar was hewn to pieces.

And is there nothing in this piece of ancient history, transferred to God's Book and interpreted by God's prophet, that has value and application to us? Is not everything that we find recorded in the Scripture written for our learning, our warning? Those four words, and particularly, the one chosen for our immediate devotion, "Tekel," has it no spiritual warning for us? We have met this morning for that very purpose—to weigh ourselves. Fifty-two Sundays—another year of grace has come and has departed in the church calendar—we are invited to solemn retrospect and thoughtful review, to consider what report we have to make. Let us, then, honestly and conscientiously, address ourselves to it on the basis of the text, and may God's Holy Spirit touch your hearts and solemnize your minds!

"Tekel: Thou art weighed in the balances." We all know what a balance is, a pair of scales. The beam is suspended exactly in the middle. The two arms are equal, and supplied with a pan, not to differ by a hair's thickness. If equal weights are placed in the two pans, the beam rests perfectly level. Such is God's balance. It is sensitive to the last degree. It weighs men's acts; it weighs men's words; it weighs men's thoughts; it weighs men's characters. It weighs them accurately, and every weight is set down in the book of divine memory. At the judgment on that Great Day that book will be opened, and every one shall be judged out of those things which are written in the book, according to their works. Ask you me the name of God's balances, I answer: Justice,—that's God's balance.

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But in weighing there are two scales. On the one pan is placed that which is weighed, and in the other that against which it is weighed, the standard, the weight. And so God, in weighing man, uses weights which have been tested by a perfect standard. Conscience is such a weight, that "still, small voice" which speaks to you out of your own soul, that forceful monitor in your breast, that weighs against your acts and words and thoughts, excusing or else accusing you, from whose troubling thoughts you cannot escape, and which, as the saying is, makes cowards of us all. Conscience—that's one.

Another, heavier than the first—for it is made out of stone—we recognize at once: God's Ten Commandments, a holy standard. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," reads the first line, and we know that means that an idolater is not he alone who bows down to rocks and stones; whosoever worships self in greed or manner, or bestows supreme regard for anything short of the true and only God, sets up an idol and is an idolater. And so he is not the only murderer, according to the sense and spirit of these tables, who has killed a fellow-mortal, but he already that hateth his brother, that indulges the malicious feeling, the revengeful desire. Nor is he the only lewd man who has given himself to lewdness, but according to this sixth line on that measure, the impure thought, the sensual look, and the cherished unchaste hope already fix the guilt of adultery. We observe, then, it is an exact weight, and so if all that a man has thought and said and done is up to the standard, the beam hangs level, and the divine face of the weigher is wreathed with smiles. If not, the Judge frowns, and from His lips issues the verdict: "Wanting!"

The third weight that God employs when He wishes to learn the avoirdupois of your soul is opportunity. Into one scale He puts the man's character and life; into the other He puts all the opportunities which he has enjoyed for getting and doing good. That includes such things as these: godly parents, godly example, a Christian school, Confirmation, the preaching of the true and pure Gospel, the faithful ministry of the Word and Sacraments. It includes bereavements, disappointments, startling events of Providence, losses of health, fortune, family, all of which were to direct you nearer to God. It includes every example of holy living which you have witnessed, every occasion presented you to glorify your Master and bless your fellow-men. All these and such like opportunities, impulses, and impressions to move the soul and bring it into saving harmony with God, make up the sum of his opportunities, and if the weight of what the man has done and is, equals the sum of all these opportunities, it is well; if otherwise, God's scale goes up, and the sentence is: "Wanting!"

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And one more weight must be named. We shall not dwell lengthily upon it, for we can all see it so conveniently. It lies before me. Let us take it and put it into the pan of the scales—the Bible; as your Savior says: "Ye have Moses and the prophets,—ye have the Evangelists and Apostles,—hear ye them." That is your standard, your measure, placed against you; by its precepts you shall be weighed.

And now let us proceed to put something into the other side of the scale to counterbalance, and watch the result. Let us judge in the light of conscience, God's Law, our opportunities, and the

Lord's Bible, our beloved congregation. They tell us that knowledge of one's self is one of the hardest and most unpleasant attainments, but the most needful and most salutary for all that. Weighing ourselves, what report have these fifty-two Sundays to give of our congregation as a whole and of you, my dear member, as an individual? How has it been with the worship, the attendance at services? Nothing to boast of, in most cases something to be ashamed of. Some are hovering near the verge of church discipline for their laxity and deficiency; particularly does this pertain to the male portion of the flock.

"Thou shalt sanctify the holyday," reads the third and unalterable command of their God, yet months pass at a time, and their face appears not in the assembly of the worshipers. But for the visitors and strangers, especially at the evening services, these pews would be deplorably depleted. Others come with a commendable degree of regularity, but is there participation in the services and punctuality in arriving? Do not the hymns drag along at times so dull and spiritless because many never open their lips? How listless and devotionless the hearers betimes appear, their eyes roaming about elsewhere, and even closing in sleep. Remember every attendance is weighed in the balance. Occasions when every member ought to regard it a loss to be absent, like Pentecost, Reformation, Easter, Church Dedication, little increase in the audience is noted. Announce a particular topic for the following Sunday, and it would seem as if some deliberately stay away. O what a poor thing it must appear in the case of the average Christian, of the most of us!

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Is it much different—to take up another point—with our partaking of the Lord's Supper? What drudgery, what shrinking and hesitancy with regard to the sacred feast! The Lord says: "This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." Paul the Apostle directs: "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup." Luther, in his preface to the Small Catechism, thus interprets this "oft:" "If a person does not seek nor desire the Lord's Supper at least some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament, and is not a Christian." Weighed in this balance, what shall we say of our Communion Table? How many times have you gone in these twelve months, these fifty-two Sundays? Observe the handwriting on the wall! Read those letters: "Wanting," and ask yourself, Does that mean me?

But permit me to pass briefly to an examination of your hearts and your homes. Have you grown in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior? Do the fruits of your discipleship abound in greater liberality and activity? Do you read God's Word at home, say grace at table, have family devotion? Are you increasingly imbibing and personifying the temper of your religion in the control of your passion, in the subduing of your pride, in the cultivating of a forgiving spirit? Do you pray thoughtfully, regularly, cheerfully? For you to live—is it Christ? As you grow in age, do you grow in heavenly-mindedness, draw closer to your God? To serve the Lord, to speak for Him, is this your delight? I need not press these inquiries. With each one of you the scale takes an upward turn, and I hear you saying with sighing of heart: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord," for this servant is wanting, *wanting*.

And what is to be done, with the scales always rising higher and higher and striking the very beam? First of all, repent; learn to understand and acknowledge your dismal condition. That was the fault with Belshazzar—his security and vain confidence; as God said to him through Daniel: "O Belshazzar, thou hast not humbled thine heart, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven." Therefore, in the dust with thee! Let ours be the publican's cry: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" "If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" With the balances suspended, God's Law, God's Bible, conscience, against us, repentance, conviction and confession of sin, is the first thing required of you. But that alone would lead to despair. Dear hearer, observe the scales as they are held by the stern and just hand of divine Justice, the one down, the other with man's soul, asking for mercy. Behold, another hand appears. It is a soft, delicate hand; in its palm is a wound, from that wound there oozes out a drop of blood upon the weighed and wanting soul. Instantly the scales go down, till the beam hangs evenly poised, and a voice is heard: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Faith in that blood, belief in Christ Jesus, your Savior, is the next thing necessary. And the last is renewed consecration, earnest, honest resolve with God's help to do better, firm determination that the incoming year of grace shall be characterized by a brightening of faith, an advance in holiness, a progress in all lines that grace a follower of Christ, that it find you at its close a more intelligent, a more humble, a more sanctified Christian than to-day.

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Beloved, cast another look at the handwriting on the wall, lest it be written against you on the day of Judgment. Repent, believe in Christ, amend—in this may God help us! Amen.

REFORMATION.

His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.—*Ps. 87, 1-3.*

The history of the Christian Church may be expressed in three words—Formation, Deformation, and Reformation. The first period begins with the story of the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains on Christmas night 1912 years ago, and ended with the establishment of the Church in cultured Europe and Asia and Africa.

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As we pass the main occurrences of that first epoch of its formation, before our mind's eye, we

see how the infant cause of Christ spreads from Jerusalem round about to the surrounding countries, conquering and to conquer. See how in her course of advancement she meets with opposition the fiercest and bloodiest; see how the blood of her children wets the sands of the amphitheater, and how their bones are crushed by the lions and wild animals of the arena, whilst the ashes of thousands of others strew the funeral pile upon which they died praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Those were the days of persecution, when the church was despised and rejected of men. And yet, in the indestructibility of her life she overcame that opposition. Yea, as one said, "the very blood of the martyrs was the seed grain of her progress." Before the preaching of Christ faded the glories of heathenism, and where once stood in splendid magnificence the pagan temples of heathenish paganism was placed in its simple and sublime beauty the cross. The Galilean, the Carpenter's Son, God's Son, had conquered. The Church, in a word, had been established.

And then the view changes. A new period begins. Across the face of this period there is written in all directions one word. That word is *Rome*. It is Rome at the altar swinging the censer, Rome on the battlefield wielding the sword; it is Rome in the councils of kings, and Rome in the judge's seat; it is Rome in the professor's chair, and Rome in the children's nursery; it is Rome in the market stall telling what to sell, and Rome in the kitchen telling people what to eat and drink. It is Rome first, last, and all the time.

At Rome, styled the Holy City, the Mistress of the World, sat a triple-crowned dictator. Princes kissed his feet, and held the stirrups for him as he mounted his bediamonded horse. An emperor stands barefoot in the snow of his courtyard suing for forgiveness because he had dared to govern without his sanction, whilst his clergy, monks without number, swarmed in every place, all sworn to stand by him on peril of salvation, and themselves guarded from all reach of law for any crime they may commit. Gigantic, powerful, proud, wicked and wanton, haughty Rome, drunk with shocking abomination! That is the second period, the era of deformation. [316]

Once more the view changes: Antichrist—for none else is the pope—is assailed by a poor, unknown monk in far-away Saxony. "Who minds a monk? 'Tis nothing." But, lo, the monk towers like a giant, and German princes are by his side, while a nation hangs on his lips. Tidings of great joy, like once from Bethlehem's plains, are again spreading from the little town of Wittenberg on the banks of the Elbe. Ninety-five theses nailed up by that monk against the church-door on the eve of October 31, 1517, are borne on the wings of the wind. How they talk about them in London, now in Copenhagen, now in the streets of Jerusalem. Men, women, youths, fearlessly give the lie to the priest whom they had dreaded too much before. Rome startled; she would use her old force. She would suppress the new teaching, which was nothing but the old truth repeated again. Of no avail! "She's judged. The deed is done." The Lord has smitten Antichrist with the breath of His mouth. The world is enjoying once more the pure and abundant Gospel preaching. A new life is upon the nations. The Church has entered upon another epoch. We call it the period of the Reformation. It is the topic of our concern and gathering to-day. And in order that we may duly grasp its meaning and appreciate its blessing, let us observe, on the basis of our text, *The glory of the Lutheran Reformation and Church*. That glory is threefold: *I. a glory of foundation; II. a glory of possession; III. a glory of prospect*. And may God help us understand and appreciate!

First, a glory of *foundation*. The psalmist, referring to the Old Testament Church, speaks of its foundation. So, too, the New Testament Church has its foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay," writes the Apostle, "than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," the Son of God, God Himself. The work of redemption which He came into this world to perform is the foundation of our religion, our Church.

What our children learn from their Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil,"—that is the heart and marrow of our faith, its foundation. This was the point Luther made in those ninety-five theses and in all the teachings, preaching, and writing that he did ever afterwards. [317]

But does not the Church of Rome believe that too? My dear hearer, accompany me in spirit to one of their places of worship. It matters not in what direction we go, they are plentiful everywhere. We enter. Our Protestant eye looks for the Savior. Thank God He is still there. But what means that statue at His side—whose is it? Francis De Sales, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Vincent, St. Anna, St. Elizabeth. Have they forgotten the First Commandment which says: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness to bow thyself down to them"? We look upon the assembled worshipers. What is it that they are holding in their hands, busily twisting the beads while their lips move in devotion? "Hail, Mary," they pray, "mother of God, queen of heaven." Why not Christ?—for there is only one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

As we stand there in observation amid the striking of little gongs, there enters, gorgeously arrayed, a priest. "Why a priest?" We, in the New Testament, according to the Bible, know of only one Priest, and that is He of whom the Apostle says: "Such an High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." What does the priest do? He is offering sacrifice, in an unbloody manner, for the sins of the people. They call it "mass." But does not the Bible teach that "by one sacrifice," *viz.*, by His sacrifice upon Golgotha, "Christ hath forever perfected them that are sanctified"? Why, then, this mass? Do they think they can, as they claim, improve upon, perfect, that propitiatory sacrifice?

Or, while we are en route, let us transfer ourselves in spirit a little further; let us go for a few moments to Rome. There sits a man whom they style "Holy Father." God's Word says: "Ye shall call no man in religion your father nor master upon earth. One is your Father," even He who is in heaven. "One is your Master—" Christ. This man at Rome claims that he is the vicar of Christ upon earth, with power to rule both the Church and the world. But, says Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world," and I, even I, am its only Head. And not only so, but in how many innumerable ways does this man at Rome contradict Christ! Thus: Christ, through His Spirit, says: A bishop, a minister, ought to be the "husband of one wife." "The husband of no wife," contradicts the pope. "It is a great wrong for a priest to marry." "Abstaining from meats," forbidding people to eat what they choose and at any time they choose, is "a doctrine of the devil," says Christ through His Spirit. "It is a sin to eat meat on Friday and throughout Lent," says the pope. "You must diligently pray and liberally pay, and then shall the souls of your beloved ones come out of purgatory." There is no such place, is the teaching of Christ, for instance, when He spoke to the thief on the cross: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." "I have redeemed you with my holy, precious blood and with my innocent suffering and death." Let your only hope and constant prayer be:

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Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

"Not so," says the pope. "Heaven and salvation do not depend only upon what Christ has done, but much depends upon what *§1* have done." "If any one saith," so reads the decree of Rome, "that we are justified, saved, by faith alone, let him be anathema—cursed." Your good works must help along. It is only as you do *this* and give *that*, buy indulgences, pay for some holy candles, appropriate of your earnings an adequate amount to the Church, remember it in your last will and testament, and set apart a certain sum for the reading of mass,—it is only thus that you can expect to die in peace and your soul find its way to heaven. Now, beloved, we leave it to the smallest child—is this making Christ the foundation? And it was against this that Luther protested in the ninety-five theses which he nailed up 395 years ago; and it is against this that we would raise our voices and pen. Jesus Christ and His work of redemption—He shall be our foundation. "Ave Marias?" No! Saints and popes? No!

All hail the power of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.

Again, our Church not only glories in its foundation, but likewise in its *possessions*. And what does it possess? Look upon the imposing churches and cathedrals of Rome, those stupendous hospitals and institutions of one kind and another. What wealth of property, what revenues and revenues of silver and gold! Who will dispute that Rome is rich, possesses much? But since when are silver and gold and splendid edifices the marks of the Church? If those things constituted true churchliness, then none would have been more despicable than the early Christians, for they had no churches and worshiped in catacombs and the recesses of darkest forests. If pompous ceremonies and spectacular display and strains of fine music stand for the worship of God, the same might be seen and heard in Jewish temples.

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Over against this, what possessions does our Church glory in? To mention a few. Open before us lies this holy Book, God's Book, accessible to all, inviting examination and study of its sacred pages, and that in a language not foreign, Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, but intelligible to all its hearers and readers. Rome would not so have it. It forbids its reading, and calls it a dangerous book. It adds to its infallible teachings the traditions of men, and wants all its pages read through the eye-glasses of the pope. It has always been, and still is, to them an "unknown" Book. You have, perchance, already seen the picture, quite familiar, which, beneath the title "Caught," represents an aged man and his little grandchild reading the Bible while some soldiers are seen entering the room to arrest them. The story that connects with it is this: Philip the Second of Spain and the Netherlands had sworn the pope that no Protestant should be allowed to live in his provinces. In a little town in Holland lived a good old man with his grandchild Bertha, who had become believers in the doctrines of the Reformation, and since the Bible was forbidden to be read and everywhere taken from the people, the only time for them to strengthen themselves with its sacred contents was the dead of night. They were just reading the fifth chapter of Matthew, wherein occur the words: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," when a rough knock on the door tells them that the Roman spies had discovered them. "Grandfather," cries the child, "we are caught." "Yes, my child. God's hour seems at hand." And it was. The next moment the axes of the soldiers had battered down the door; the Bible was seized and burned, the aged man and his little granddaughter were hurried off to prison, and were tortured and afterward stretched on the rack until they died amid horrible pain. That is Rome's attitude toward the Bible. Thank God, then, for this blessed possession, a free Bible, which we read everywhere and at all times.

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Then, too, there is the blessed Sacrament, not in its mutilated shape, the lay people deprived of the cup, but in both species. We possess that. Furthermore, our services. Take those stately and sublime hymns that are the inspiration and comfort of a Protestant Christian. The Romish Church knows them not, the people do not sing at their services. They are deprived of that. Then, when

we pray—what a possession, the privilege of free, unlimited, and direct access to God's throne, without the intercession and intervention of priests and patron saints, but according to Christ's invitation and commandment: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Here, then, are a few of the many blessings we glory in, wrought and brought back to us through the Lutheran Reformation, and for which on this day we thank and praise God.

And now a few words yet as to the third part mentioned, the glory of *prospect*.—When Luther closed his eyes, our haughty enemies predicted the death of the Lutheran Church. As a Romish priest once said to a Lutheran peasant, "With your Church it will soon be 'Matthaei am letzten,'" that is, Matthew the last, which is a German expression meaning, "Things will soon be at an end with you." The peasant remarked, since he was acquainted with his Bible, "That's splendid!" In Matthew, the last chapter and the last verse, our Savior says: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Our Church has come to stay, for it is Christ's Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against that. Great in membership, numbering millions of souls, spread throughout every people and nation, her faith proclaimed in nearly every dialect and tongue of earth, great is her prospect.

Take it in this land of ours. Men are awakening more and more to an appreciation of her history and progress and power. In this age of unsettling of creeds and of abandonment of time-honored convictions, in the age of sensationalism and of pulpits which have no messages, except those of political and sociological interest, the old Church of the Reformation stands where she ever stood. Mr. Roosevelt remarked while he was President of the United States: "The Lutheran Church is of very great power numerically and through the intelligence and thrift of its members; but it will grow steadily to even greater power. It is destined to be one of the two or three greatest in the United States."

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If, then, to conclude, any of you have been ashamed of her, apologized for being Lutherans, perchance even been casting their eyes in other directions for church-fellowship, if any of us have not been as loyal as we ought to have been, neglected her glorious possessions, indifferent to the high blessings she affords in Word and Sacrament and services, let him and her reflect and amend.

May it be our heartfelt conviction and determination:—

My Church, my Church, my dear old Church!
I love her ancient name,
And God forbid a child of hers
Should ever do her shame.
Her mother-care I'll ever share,
Her child I am alone,
Till He who gave me to her arms
Shall call me to His own.

Amen.



Transcriber's note:

Minor typographical and punctuation errors have been corrected without note. Irregularities and inconsistencies in the text have been retained as printed.

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