

# On This Rock

## Twenty-Five Sermons & Addresses

By

### Herman Amberg Preus

Born in Kristiansand in southern Norway in 1825 Preus immigrated to America in 1851 upon acceptance of a Call to the Spring Prairie parish in southern Columbia County, Wisconsin. His entire ministry centered around the parish a short distance north of Madison, and, the Norwegian Synod.

After the publication of *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging* by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1979, which offered a sampling of the work of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren in English, work which I had headed up by invitation of former Bethany Lutheran College president B.W. Teigen, I began to work on material from the ministry of The Reverend President Herman Amberg Preus. He was first elected president at the 1862 Convention, succeeding Adolph Carl (A.C.) Preus [a cousin]. He had been president of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from 1862 until his death in 1894, 32 years, one-half the life time of that church body. From the materials available to me the following has resulted.

Because he was primarily a pastor, a preacher, I put these examples of his preaching first.

To the best of my knowledge these are all the sermons and addresses of his that have ever been in my library, gathered from the Synod's *Maanedstidende* (monthly) and *Kirketidende* (weekly periodical), from the *Postil* (book of sermons) it published, and from a booklet published in the parish in 1901 on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The sermons are arranged here chronologically, beginning with Preus' first sermon at Spring Prairie when he was a 26-year-old beginning his Ministry, to his last sermon before his death in 1894, when he was 69. The source of the sermon or address is noted at the end of each.

Scripture quotations are basically from the King James Version, using, however, "you" rather than "thee," "take" rather than "taketh." Where there are italics, they are in the original; I add none. When it has been possible I have copied Preus' quotations from Martin Luther from the American Edition of *Luther's Works* and in some instances from the three-volume anthology, *What Luther Says*, and perhaps in an instance or two, the Philadelphia Edition of Luther's Works. When Preus gives no hint of the source from which he quotes Luther, and I have no inkling of where to look, I have tried to render Luther myself. Similarly, when Preus quotes hymns, I have sought English translations in the *Lutheran Hymnary* or the *Lutheran Hymnal*. When that has failed I have tried to translate from the Norwegian *Salmebok*.

For some time my thoughts have been in this direction: No one should read and study these sermons and addresses for the sole purpose of looking to see what President Preus' stand on this or that point of biblical doctrine was. Preus is here a preacher of the Word, a witness for Christ, an ambassador of the King. I believe these sermons and addresses must be read primarily for the purpose of seeing Christ for the edification of the reader's own soul, to see how this one man preached, and if preachers or theological students read them, let it be for the purpose of learning how, under God's gracious blessing, in answer to unceasing prayer, to be at least an echo of President Preus in their own pulpits. I enjoy seeing his use of the entire Bible, his references to and his quoting of it are not confined to a small number of passages. He is familiar with the contents of Scripture and is quite at home in it, drawing upon it to illustrate his preaching, to cite it in support of what he says, etc.

Near the close of his own ministry, years after Preus' passing, Norwegian Synod Pastor Ole Juul wrote of Preus in his *Memoirs*:

He was not as great a man as Walther, but for us and among us he was, however, a great man. Other men in the synod certainly surpassed him in learning and in gifts, but there was something about President Preus which it is not easy to find in anyone else among us. He really wasn't what a person will call a great speaker; his language was not the easiest to follow nor did it always flow smoothly; his sentences were often long and somewhat involved ... but when Preus warmed up to the subject he was preaching or speaking about, he became eloquent, and so engrossing and pleasing to listen to, that seldom have I heard a better speaker than he was. His pleasant voice, his sonorous pronunciation, his handsome, fatherly face, were then as though inspired from a higher world, and at such times he was at his best. Through his instructive sermons and through the addresses he delivered at meetings and visitations, he has built and strengthened the synod, whose faithful servant he was. *Built on the Rock*, p. 47.

It is that purpose which is always in mind in translating, namely, that readers will also be faithful servants of the Lord for the building and strengthening of his Church. Christian readers quickly realize that it is On This Rock that Christ builds His Church.

These are all examples of how Christ-crucified is preached week after week and year after year after year by men who truly are ambassadors of Christ, witnesses to Him. Preachers such as Preus are not just talking or lecturing about the doctrines of Scripture, they are preaching them, with the Spirit's gracious blessing, into the very hearts, souls and minds of those who listen with believing hearts. The sermons bear evidence of preparation. If his sermons are longer than we have grown used to, is it not to our shame and to our spiritual deprivation that sermons may not get the time which good preaching demands.

Where possible at the close of the ordination sermons I include brief biographical information about the ordinands, primarily from the 1903 *Festschrift* published by the synod for its 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee convention. In one instance I include in this collection of Preus sermons, one by H.G. Stub. In 1865 Preus preached at the ordination of Torger Andreas Torgerson and Tobias Larsen. In my studies of the synod I also have translated Stub's sermon at the burial of Torgerson in 1906.

The translations were begun in the early 1980s, following the publication in 1979 of *Truth Unchnged, Unchanging*, a selection of works from the ministry of U.V. Koren. The words of sainted Bethany Seminary president Theodore A. Aaberg [d. 1980] in what became his last Report to the Synod also gave me incentive to work at these things. Pastor-emeritus M.E. Tweit has been very helpful in assuring accuracy of translation and an easy-to-follow English text. Refinements of the translations continue to the present.

J.H. Larson, Pastor-emeritus., ELS, Fischer, TX

2003

# Table of Contents

First Sermon delivered by H.A. Preus at the Spring Prairie Church.....6 WHAT IS GOD’S WILL WITH RESPECT TO HIS CHURCH AND HIS SERVANT?	6
Address at the Cornerstone Laying at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa .....11 THE TRUE CORNERSTONE	11
Ordination of Torger Andreas Torgerson and Tobias Larsen.....15 YOU DESIRE A GOOD WORK	15
Pastor Torger Andreas Torgerson Burial .....21	21
Dedication of the New Building at Luther College .....25 EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN THAT BUILD IT.	25
The Ordination of Niels Thorbjørnsen Ylvisaker .....32 WE ARE AMBASSADORS IN CHRIST’S STEAD	32
Ordination of Eleven Pastors .....39 THE LORD’S SENDING OUT OF PROPHETS	39
Opening of the 12 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Convention .....46 THE MOST EXCELLENT GIFT	46
Sunday, June 14, 1874, During The 15 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention.....52 FAITH AS THE VICTORY WHICH OVERCOMES THE WORLD	52
Ordination Sermon .....60 THE GLORY OF THE HOLY MINISTRY	60
Ordination at Spring Prairie Lutheran Church .....67 TRUE FAITHFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY	67
Address at Luther College Graduation.....72	72
Dedication of Immanuel Church .....75 THE INVITATION TO THE GREAT SUPPER	75
Sermon at the Ordination of Otto Christian Ottesen.....83 ENDURING HARDSHIP AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST	83
Address at Luther College Graduation.....91 A TRUE SENSE OF HONOR	91
Dedication of the New Spring Prairie Lutheran Church .....94 THE PROPER DEDICATION OF A CHURCH	94
Opening of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Regular Synod Convention .....101 THE COMFORTING TRUTH, THE GRACE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT FOR US	101
Address at Luther College Graduation.....109 THE FAITHFULNESS OF SERVANTS	109

Address at the Cornerstone Laying of the New Luther Theological Seminary Building .....	112
Dedication Address .....	115
Fiftieth Jubilee.....	121
OUR HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE LORD	
Christmas Day.....	126
THE GLORIOUS TIDINGS OF CHRISTMAS, “UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY A SAVIOR”	
Septuagesima Sunday.....	133
THE GREATNESS OF DIVINE GRACE IN THE WORK OF SALVATION	
Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity .....	141
THE ORIGIN, ESSENCE AND GOAL OF TRUE FAITH	
Sermon for the Sunday after Easter .....	147
THE BLESSED FAITH OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS	
Norway Grove Lutheran Church.....	155
JESUS RECEIVES SINNERS	

# First Sermon delivered by H.A. Preus at the Spring Prairie Church

August 10, 1851, the 8th Sunday after Trinity

*Jesus, I long for Thy blessed communion,  
Yearning for Thee fills my heart and my mind;  
Draw me from all that would hinder our union,  
May I to Thee, my beginning, be joined;  
Show me more clearly my hopeless condition;  
Show me the depth of corruption in me,  
So that my nature may die in contrition,  
And that my spirit may live unto Thee!*

*O that I only might learn consecration,  
Make full surrender of heart day by day!  
O that my Jesus might be my whole portion,  
I am, alas! all too far, far away.  
Jesus, whose voice full of love's gentle warning,  
Gladly I follow, O give me Thy hand,  
That in pure holiness, faith's bright adorning,  
Like a true Christian I walk to the end.<sup>1</sup>*

*"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Matthew 7:15.*

## WHAT IS GOD'S WILL WITH RESPECT TO HIS CHURCH AND HIS SERVANT?

Dear congregation! Fellow redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ!

Christian friends!

Two thousand years have soon passed since a Man whose name was Wonderful and the Prince of Peace, from whose lips flowed words like milk and honey and who spoke the words we have heard read, stepped forward at the River Jordan. What was it really which drew people to him every time he came into their region? What was it which made crowds flock around him from far and near and in silent anticipation listen to the blessed words which came from his mouth, to the kind voice which spoke to them? What was it which made many of them who had come to him never want to leave him but rather to forsake everything they had and to follow him and to cling to him with all their soul throughout their lives?

We know what, friends! It was a not seldom deep, earnest need, a strong and inner yearning which did not allow them any peace but which urged them on. It was because they believed they would find in him, and many times they did find it, what their hearts had desired in hours of pain, that which they knew made up for all their shortcomings and which had healing in itself for the sicknesses, the evil which gnawed at their innermost heart. It was because they had to acknowledge that he did not speak as the scribes but as one who had authority and because the words which he spoke were like heavenly manna for their hungry souls, and poured soothing balm into their wounds and brought a peace hitherto unknown to them, and salvation to their troubled, fearful hearts. Yes, my friends, because they felt that the serpent of sin was devouring life at its root and that the angel of death had laid his hand upon them, that's why they fled to him in the pain of despair as the Rock of their salvation and their source of blessedness! That's why they listened to those words of life which we wonderfully refreshed them and which, when they accepted them in faith, let them feel the powers

<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Hymnary # 461, verses 1 and 3

of life surge through them, chase the angel of death away and bring life into everything which before was dead. Then they recognized that the Lord was a gracious God who does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they should live, and that for their sakes he revealed himself as a man, since he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to the world.

This Jesus Christ, we know, left the world with his visible presence only a few years after he had appeared.

Did the grace and mercy of God stop then with that? Was his longsuffering over and afterward did he only turn the face of his anger toward his creatures? Or did the Savior who was those people's comfort and hope and true life go home to his heavenly dwelling because perhaps following generations did not need him but could walk in love and true fear of God, as before the face of the Lord without him? No, certainly not, brethren! None of that was the case! There is still a sigh going through all nature and there is a hunger in the whole creation even if they do not all want to feel it and yearn after getting it stilled, but neither do they want to languish, because death clings to us all, because we have all sinned, because we are all conceived in sin and no one is righteous, no, not one, apart from him who was man and also God. In him there was no sin. Neither has God turned away in wrath from any of his creatures who cry out to him for help in sincerity of heart. No, God is still the same loving Father who sincerely pities and who is merciful to his creatures who have fallen from him but who implore him again and again for grace. His Word stands firm that he wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And that his Word was not an empty sound, but powerful and alive, as is every word which comes from his mouth, that he has also shown through a fact evident to everyone who wants to see, evident also to this very day. Because just for our sake, for our righteousness and salvation, Christ walked through the gates of death and sat down at the right hand of the Father, as he says himself, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," and "he shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." Jo. 16:7.14.

And the Comforter did come. The Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon Israel's sons and daughters as the prophet Joel had foretold. He was poured out upon the apostles on that great Pentecost festival so that in the fire and power of the Holy Spirit they prophesied and spoke in various languages.

And the fact is, witnessed clearly and distinctly for the world by God's grace and love in Christ, that on that day the first congregation of the Lord in the New Testament was established, the Christian Church was founded, a divine agency for people's salvation and life in him through their sharing in Jesus Christ.

Yes, thanked and praised be his mercy eternally! Through his church he lets the Word of salvation about him who is the way, the truth and the life, go out through his servants throughout the heathen world. Through his church he grafts the wild branch into the true vine. Through Holy Baptism he makes us members of it, members of the body whose head is Christ. In his church he makes us partakers in our dear Savior's body and blood which were given into death and shed for us for the remission of our sins, and he gives us eternal life.

Oh, Christian friends! has not this fact been generally known among us? Has not his kingdom, his church, come also to us here in this foreign land? Has he in some measure left himself without a witness to us? Or, does not this very day bear an incontestable testimony of God's singular, unchanging love to us, this day, when he sends you one of his servants, when he offers you rich, blessed words through me whom he has called to proclaim his pleasing will and the rich grace which is given us in Jesus Christ our Lord?

Indeed we had to be ungrateful then, both you and I, if in this hour we did not feel our hearts burning within us and filled with the fire of love for him, the Giver of all good things, if we did not give God the glory due him, and turn to him with praise and thanks and heartfelt prayer that we may preserve his grace and that he will be with us now and always with his rich blessing.

Yes, Lord! Fear and anxiety strike me in this hour when I consider what an all-important calling you have placed me in, what precious goods you have given me to administer. Shame and holy trembling do I

feel, that I, a man sinful and frail, that I, dust and ashes as I am, have not been rejected by you but have been placed as a shepherd over your flock to lead and to watch over it according to your holy will. However, at the same time I am permeated with a holy joy in the Lord over the fact that you have deigned to give me so glorious a gift of grace, making me steward over the good things of your house. O. that you then also, O God, will preserve the gift of grace which is given me! O, that I, O that we all might be found to have been faithful stewards when you call us to give an account!

The Lord's words to Peter speak earnestly to me, "Feed my sheep!" Lord, you know that I love you (Jo. 20). I have sworn to feed your flock with the food which nourishes unto eternal life. Lord, give me wisdom and understanding to do that! Let the light of your truth shine in this congregation so that all its members may see your works and praise you, so that more and more your kingdom may come to us, your will more and more be done among us!

Yes, Christians! It's about the will of the Lord our God being done among us all. May all our work be directed to that.

My first words to you, fellow redeemed in Christ! shall therefore be an answer to the question:

### **WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD FOR HIS CHURCH AND FOR ITS SERVANT?**

Jesus tells us the will of God for all of us in general in the words just before today's text, "Enter in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in there. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." Mt. 7:13.14.

It is through the strait gate and along the narrow way that God wants us to walk because it leads to life. O, how loving is not our Lord! You see, it's life, true life, which consists in fellowship with him in which he wants us to have a part. O, that we all, though, would consider our own welfare and walk this path! But alas, unfortunately, most people are going down the broad way to destruction instead. Let us guard against walking in their footsteps. Let us do the will of God and walk the way which truly is narrow, but which has so good an end. But where do we find this way, this gate?

"I am the way, the truth and the life," Christ says, and in another place, "I am the door of the sheep." Jo. 14:6; 10:7.

Christ therefore is the way, the door for us. It is the will of God. We should follow Christ. Through him, only in fellowship with him, can we obtain a share of life.

But can there then be talk about the fact that the way can be so narrow and the gate so strait, so difficult to get through regardless of where it leads, since he says that there are many who are walking on the way which leads to destruction? Can it then be so big a thing to follow Christ?

Yes, friends, it is certainly hard work, yes, impossible, for the natural man! It first becomes possible for us through the power of God when through the Spirit's working in the Word and Sacraments we are born again to a new life and become a new creation. But even for them who are converted and have received another Spirit and another power in this way, even for them it is difficult to follow Christ. The old Adam with all his natural affections and lusts has to be killed so that the second Adam, Christ, can grow within us. The weeds and the hypocrisy of the times must be pulled up by the roots so that they do not grow up and choke the good growth through the heat of the world's sun. How much pain for the natural heart, how many bitter hours will it not cause you, and yet it must be done if you want to walk the way which is Christ. If Christ is to be everything for you, if you are going to abandon yourself to him completely and because of his atonement in your stead expect grace from God and forgiveness for your sin, then you must forsake the world with its lusts and temptations, the devil and all his works, yes, forsake father and mother if it has to be so, for the sake of Christ in order to remain with him.

Yes, just as we could then for the first time grasp Christ and in true faith in our justification appropriate to ourselves what he has done and suffered for us when in the acknowledgement of the greatness of our sins and our complete inability to help ourselves, we are brought to doubt ourselves and with a contrite spirit and a broken heart bow before the throne of grace, just as in that way the way can be said to be narrow when a soul comes to Christ, that will also be the way if a person is to remain with Christ and follow him. Many a cross will stand in the way before us on this walk of ours, but we must take them upon our shoulders and follow Christ our Crossbearer. Many a suffering will befall us, but we must bear it patiently and not succumb to the burden but seek comfort and strength through looking to him who suffered so much for us.

We will be exposed to many temptations, many of them. In our Gospel for today Jesus warns against false prophets, false teachers who will try to bring us to fall away from the faith in which we were baptized, the covenant we have concluded with God. They will come clothed in the garb of light but hiding the fiery darts of the wicked one which they want to hurl at us. Then we have to resist, armed with the shield of faith. They will come in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves who will try to tear the flock apart. They will promulgate false doctrines through which they deceive many people. "Beware of them," says Christ.

Many of these false prophets have the appearance of godliness but they deny its power. They proclaim a Christ, but not the Christ we preach, he, who became flesh and died for us, and who is revealed to us in God's holy Word. There is another Christ, a false Christ, because they make him out to be a servant of sin. True, they are constantly using words such as "Spirit, faith, justification," but they do not want to hear about the Spirit's true fruit of faith, which is sanctification. True enough, they can boast about faith but they don't want to exert themselves to improve their lives, just as if it would do to have faith and not at the same time be permeated by love for their Savior, his Word and Sacraments, and love for the brethren. Beware of such people! They can easily deceive us. But they cannot fool God. The words apply to them, "*Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,*" (Mt. 7:23).

Others of these prophets try to set up another rock of salvation than ours, who is Christ. Pharisees in mind and appearance, they urge good works a great deal and try to fulfill every letter of the Law, forgetting its Spirit and fulfillment which is love, and without looking to the source from which power is to be drawn. Like monks of the Middle Ages they demand abstinence from the enjoyment even of the good things which God has given to people to accept with thanksgiving. Instead of using the gifts of God with thankfulness toward the Giver, as those who do not misuse them, they drag out their lives in sluggish dullness, wailing constantly. They set up a righteousness of the Law and demand keeping of the Commandments without asking about the frame of mind from which the deed receives its worth, without complying with the Father's will to believe in him and the One he has sent. Only where faith has taken root will a good work sprout. "A corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree which does not produce good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire" Mt. 7:18,19. So will it also go with them if they do not turn from their way of destruction and seek God's mercy in Christ. Therefore, beware of false prophets! Who can enumerate the errors they bring? How seductive do they not sound! Don't forget that it has to do with your soul.

You see, it was the will of God for us all and for every individual in particular, each in our situation, that we should believe that Christ has become our Reconciler, he and no one else; that we should consider as an accursed thing everyone who proclaims salvation in someone else or preaches another Christ than he who was preached by the apostles.

My friends, if we do the will of God in this which is the chief thing, then we will neither forget nor neglect that which God requires of the congregation or its servant in the individual things as they relate to one another.

Let us never forget that when God has gathered his church here, that he has gathered it around his Word and Sacraments. We are stewards over them. And more than anything else, faithfulness is required of stewards. We should show faithfulness in hearing the Word and in living according to it. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," Ja. 1:22. God demands faithfulness of the hearer toward the Word as God's Word. God demands faithfulness of his servant so that he does not add to or take from it, does not preach himself, but Christ and him crucified, that he divides the Word rightly by chastising



the stubborn but comforting the downcast, fearlessly without respect of persons, without wanting to rule over the Lord's flock, knowing that he is not the congregation's lord but its servant, but also God's servant to whom he is someday to give account of his stewardship.

Let us never forget that the church of God is to be built up not on the world's wisdom, not on any foundation which man can lay, but on the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone.

But for that reason we should also remember that we are members one of another and take Paul's admonition to heart, "You should walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ep. 4:1-6).

O, dear Christian congregation! Let us always ask God for that for our congregation! Then the preaching of the Word is not going to be in vain. Then our work together here in the Lord's vineyard is going to be to his glory and our good. Then we will also live as his children in faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, in love and forbearance toward one another and with a blessed hope in our hearts.

Be then our workday short or long, it will be blessed. Let the way even be wearisome and narrow, it leads to a good and blessed end.

If you will your Savior honor,  
Then to Him your life do offer.

May it be our motto then: "My Father works hitherto, and I work." Jo. 5:17. "I must work his work." Jo. 9:4. And to that end, O God, grant your grace for the sake of Christ! Amen.

*Mindeblade til Jubelfesten paa Spring Prairie, 1851-1901, pages 6-12. (Souvenir of the Jubilee Festival at Spring Prairie)*

# Address at the Cornerstone Laying at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

June 30, 1864

*Merciful God, faithful Father! We thank you for all our unspeakable benefits, but especially because you have given your dear Son, Jesus Christ, to us lost sinners unto salvation and redemption. We thank you for your blessed Gospel in which you give us your Son with everything which he has earned for us, which is: forgiveness of sins, justification, life and salvation! We praise you that in spite of our great unfaithfulness, in gratitude and indifference you have preserved this your Word of life among us, through it also have gathered a small number of believers who even if in much weakness do, however, call upon your name from their hearts, comfort themselves with your grace, contend for your glory, work in your vineyard, and await the revelation of your glory! We beseech you, gracious God, through your gracious Holy Spirit, that we, however, may regard this your Word as our most precious treasure so that we may build upon it with firm trust and confidence, with heartfelt joy rejoice in it and delight in your law! Yes, grant that we may fight courageously to the last hour of our lives for your precious Word of truth and that we gladly may give willingly and generously of our temporal goods for its preservation and spread! And thus when our departure from this veil of tears is at hand, then fulfill your promise upon us who hope in you and let us find an eternal rest and be revealed with your elect in contemplation of your blessedness. Hear us, O loving Father for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son!*

*“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’” 1 Peter 2:6.*

## THE TRUE CORNERSTONE

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ!

The fact that you have gathered here today in such large numbers for this celebration, and your sending of delegates to us from afar, surely shows our entire synod’s backing of it. The work for which we have come together here is of course of great importance not merely for one congregation, not merely for the moment, but for our entire synod in the time to come. And truly our hearts must be filled with inexpressible joy, with heartfelt thanks and praise when we consider what grace our dear God has demonstrated to us, that we, a little group of Norwegian Lutherans in the midst of this land of sects, and at a time when the war<sup>2</sup> troubles the hearts of so many people and demands such great sacrifice, dare to make up our minds to do so, and so far have already provided the means for beginning the construction of so large a building for use as a Christian college where the flower of our synod, its Christian youth, in the course of time, under God’s protection, shall be trained and be made capable of being “pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Ep. 4:11.12), and thereby God’s Word and its pure doctrine be preserved for the present and coming generations. Because even if our willingness and joy have been very meager in comparison with the Jewish people’s, yet we must, however, exclaim as David did when he and the people had given so generously gifts for the temple which his son was to build, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.” And again, “O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build you a house for your holy name comes from your hand, and is all your own,” 1 Ch. 29:14.16.

But brethren, do we dare hope that this large undertaking which we have begun in great weakness and also to the surprise of many people, shall also be completed, that these walls which have begun to rise shall also be finished, these rooms filled by a teachable, pious youth and this school in the course of time send out armies of faithful witnesses to the truth? Yes, God be praised, we certainly do dare hope for it and cheerfully

<sup>2</sup> The Civil War.

we put our confidence in it as truly as we lay the proper cornerstone and always build upon it! I mean the Cornerstone of which Peter speaks in the holy words I read to you just now. It was surely of it that the Lord already says through the prophet Isaiah in his 28<sup>th</sup> chapter, “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (vs. 16).

This tried, precious Cornerstone is of course no one other than our dear Lord Jesus Christ, God’s and Mary’s Son. Since through the devil’s cunning and seduction man had fallen away from God through sin, become totally depraved and subject to death and eternal condemnation, he then, God’s Son according to his Father’s merciful counsel from eternity took our nature upon himself, was made to be sin for us, suffered our punishment, yes, became a curse in our stead and in that way atoned for the Father’s cruel wrath and reconciled the world unto God. And through just this his perfect work of redemption he became the Cornerstone in the spiritual building, the new Zion, the Christian Church, which of his inexpressible grace the Lord wanted to raise up out of fallen mankind. Therefore also all the Scriptures testify of Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone, the Rock of our salvation. And for that reason God lets the Gospel of his kingdom be preached so that through it we should as living stones be built up unto a spiritual house on this precious, tried Cornerstone against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

And every poor sinner who has learned thoroughly that all the imaginations of his heart are evil from youth on, and all his own deeds and failures to act are sinful and damnable and he himself is under God’s wrath and curse, and who therefore listens to God’s friendly words of comfort in the Gospel and lets God’s Word through the power dwelling in it convince him and work faith in his heart and the comfort that God is no longer angry but that he thus places his heart’s hope and comfort alone in Jesus Christ and the reconciliation which took place in him—he, you see, is such a living stone in the building, the Zion of which Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, when we made the decision to build this building whose cornerstone we lay today, and when we gave and gathered the means for the carrying out of the work, then it was of course all only a fruit of the faith through which we ourselves, as many of us as believe, are living stones, built upon and fitly joined together on the true proven and firmly grounded Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. We certainly would not have gotten it into our heads to carry out such a work nor been willing to go to such sacrifice and pains if this faith had not been found among us! But since God kindled faith in our hearts and let us taste the sweetness of his Gospel and through it made us rich in all kinds of spiritual treasures which are much more precious than gold, yes, pure gold, when he comforted our thirsty, starving souls with the forgiveness of sins and heavenly peace, and made us miserable, forsaken sinners fearlessly to defy sin, death and the devil—you see, then his Word and pure doctrine became for us the pearl of great price which we will not exchange for all the riches and glory of the world. Then it also became our chief and constant concern to see how this Word which had become life and salvation for us could also be preserved pure and unadulterated among us and the generations which are coming after us. Then it also became our hope that they also could get to drink of the same fountain of life, be fed with the same heavenly manna and be strengthened to hold their ground against all the devil’s attacks. When through faith we became living stones built up to be a spiritual house on the immovable Cornerstone, Christ, then we became willing and anxious to bring forth temporal as well as spiritual sacrifices which are well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, when we have gathered today in order to lay this cornerstone here in this building then we do not do it as though we place our confidence in it, as beautiful and solid as it is, or that the successful completion and safekeeping of this building should be to our credit, and even less, the blessing of the work which shall be carried on in these halls. No, when we hope for a successful progress for this building and for rich blessing from the work in it, we will not place our comfort in the fragile stone nor in the deceitful heart of man, in its zeal, strength, cleverness and wisdom, nor upon earthly riches. But in him do we place our confidence, in the one thing as in the other, who “upholds all things by the word of his power” (He. 1:3) and who has loved us unto death and has come to save us. This cornerstone which we lay here, you see, is to be a symbol and reminder of the fact that we and our church body are founded upon the chief Cornerstone which the Lord has laid in Zion, Jesus Christ, and that in faith in him as the true Cornerstone we will build this house and do the Lord’s work in it.

We surely do not want to give the young men who shall be admitted to this school a worldly training, a mass of knowledge with which, serving the spirit of this world they could gain power, honor and riches in this world and perhaps cast a condescending glance on our Norwegian name. Nor do we want to bring up our youths to practice an outward Christianity, train them in pious manners and teach them, inspired by their great wit and deeds, to comfort themselves with their outward righteousness and piety! No, we do not want this building for such a purpose. Then we would have built it on sand and because then in unbelief we are ashamed of the true foundation and Cornerstone, it would be a stumbling stone to us. Then, even if we could succeed in erecting this building, the Stone which we rejected would fall on us, crush us and destroy our work.

No, brethren, primarily, we will teach the youth here rightly to know Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. We will teach them to love him as their soul's Bridegroom and Friend, to build on him and to entrust themselves to him as their solid Rock and Fortress, who when the world fails, shall stand immovable with that which is built upon him. We want to teach them to continue in his Word and to regard one word of God worth more than heaven and earth. We want to teach them along with this saving doctrine, also other useful knowledge which we can give them here, to honor and to thank our dear God and to serve the brethren whom he has redeemed with his holy blood. We want to teach them to give themselves with body and soul, talents and powers, goods and gifts, yes, to offer their entire life as a thank offering to the Lord who out of love for us has offered his life to be the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. Therefore with Christian discipline, admonition and prayer we will also seek to mortify and subdue the flesh, its pride and many kinds of wickedness wherever it might emerge in these young men. In this way, dear friends, we want to build on the chief Cornerstone which is laid in Zion who was chosen by the Father himself and is very precious in his eyes.

But now, if the work in this college above all is to be this: to teach the students to know the Lord in his Word and to be immovable in it in spite of all the objections of reason, the changing opinions of the spirit of the times and the devil's poisonous errors, and in this way to build upon the Cornerstone which the Lord has laid in Zion, then of course Jesus Christ will also be laid as the chief Cornerstone for our entire church body in the coming years through this work. Because the pure Word of God with which the young men have learned at this college to comfort themselves and to hold firm to, they will one day proclaim in the congregations. They will also teach them to hold this Word of God precious above everything else, to be immovable in it in spite of all the devil's attacks and to comfort themselves through it alone through the righteousness which is by faith in Jesus Christ. They will teach the congregations in this faith to praise and to laud God, to work for the preservation and spread of the Word, to fight the good fight of faith, to grow up into him who is the Head, Christ, and thus to build upon the proven precious Cornerstone which truly is laid. If we build now, brethren, in this way upon this true Cornerstone, if we work now in faith in Christ, then our work shall not be in vain, because "he that believes on him," our text says, "shall not be confounded."

And how were it also possible that the Lord should withhold his blessing from this work! Has not he himself commanded us to do it when he says, "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15)? When we then out of thankfulness for his boundless love, in obedience to his Word seek through the instruction in this school that the youth can become capable of preaching the crucified Jesus Christ, then we should know for sure that the Lord will bless this work to the salvation of souls in our generation and the generations to come because for that reason of course he also gave his only-begotten Son into death so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Yes, when we also build this building just so that God's Word can be preserved, be proclaimed among us so much more richly, and spread further, then we should be assured that the Lord will allow this work of ours to succeed as surely as we do it in faith in Jesus Christ, because then it is the Lord himself who does it and we know of course that where the Lord builds the house the laborers do not labor in vain.

We can be sure that the devil who only aims at hindering and destroying the kingdom of God and corrupting our souls will try to sow his poison at this school, to stir up controversy and factions, or through seduction to the vice of covetousness will attempt to stop its building, because he well realizes that his own kingdom is going to be torn down and the kingdom of God built up if this work goes forward and large numbers of the Lord's disciples are sent out from this place to proclaim salvation in Jesus' name. But we can be comforted. His cunning shall in no way benefit him because if God is for us, who then can be against us?

And God is for us in the one thing as well as in the other when we build on the true Cornerstone which is laid in Zion and work in confidence in his promise in Christ, because whoever believes in him shall not be confounded!

And you, dear brothers, whom God has called to be the young men's first instructors and teachers at this school, I know of course that I do not need to admonish you to continue to build on the Cornerstone which is laid in Zion because that is what you ought to have been doing as before the face of God from the moment you began this work. But I would very much like to say a word to you for your strengthening. When you feel the weight and responsibility of your holy and glorious office resting heavily upon you, when many times you get to see your finest hopes disappointed and on the other hand often see little fruit from your work, oh, do not lose heart then, but just keep on building confidently on the precious Cornerstone and be assured that your work cannot be in vain because even if it is so that it is often the case that it is the following generation which first can rejoice to see the fruit of their forerunners' work, yet the Lord's truthfulness is still a refuge for us that his Word "never returns void" (Is. 55:11).

And you, dear students, to whom God shows such exceeding grace since he lets you grow up under Christian nurture and gives you so rich an opportunity to grow in the true knowledge of God, oh, see to it that you also build upon the true Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, because if you don't, all your effort and work as well as the knowledge you might acquire for yourselves will do you no good. But if you yourselves are built up upon the true Cornerstone as living stones and if you continue building on it alone, you will be letting your Redeemer's boundless love and the glory of the calling for which you are being trained and also your dear teachers' concern for you and work with you and the congregations' sacrifices for you, motivate you very strongly not to spare any effort and work so that you can grow in the various branches of learning and be made capable of doing the work of God in the calling into which he may place you.

And you, dear congregations, their delegates and pastors, let us embrace this school with our whole heart's sincere love! Let us always bear it on our heart and not cease with our intercessions for it! Let it be our privilege to give God that sacrifice of thanksgiving to support and to maintain it through our temporal gifts! Do not let the materialistic spirit of the times make us indifferent and sluggish, nor lying prophets confuse us, nor a spirit of dissension stop the work, but let us hold fast to the Cornerstone which is laid in Zion and in faith do the Lord's work so that we shall not be confounded, and then we and our children shall have the joy of being comforted in distress and death with the sweet comfort of the Gospel. Then shall we see our young men as teachers of the people proclaim the Gospel throughout our regions, as teachers of the children feed the Lord's lambs with unadulterated milk, or in other positions proclaim the works of the Lord and build up his congregations.

And now, our God, to you be the work commended! It is yours. Let the spirit of peace and love dwell within these walls, the spirit of wisdom and knowledge fill their hearts who shall be led here, teachers and students! Let your blessing rest upon their work so that it may be done to your praise and glory and to the salvation of your redeemed church until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Yes, Amen in Jesus' name!

*Maanedstidende* December 1864, pages 365–370.

# Ordination of Torger Andreas Torgerson and Tobias Larsen

Norway Grove Lutheran Church, DeForest, Dane County, Wisconsin

July 23, 1865

*“Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself and them that hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16.*

## YOU DESIRE A GOOD WORK

The apostle Paul says to Timothy “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1Ti. 3:1). With these words Paul wants to strengthen this servant of Christ in proper love for the ministry and its serious work which he was called to carry out. And to you, dear brothers, who have first been examined in accordance with the apostle’s command in 1 Timothy 3:10 and who have accepted calls from congregations of God, to you who now present yourselves here today in order to be ordained to this office of a bishop according to apostolic and ancient church custom through the Word and prayer during the laying on of hands, to you I say with the apostle, “*You desire a good work.*” Because this office which you desire is not established by men but is instituted by the Lord God himself. Nor is it instituted for the preservation of order and peace on earth or for the gaining of temporal profit and earthly success, but in order to bring to people the peace which surpasses all understanding, peace with God and their own conscience in order to give them the eternal gifts: forgiveness of sins, righteousness, eternal life and salvation which Christ has earned for all the world with his blood and glory with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and with all the elect in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity.

O, what an important and glorious ministry whose work is to make lost but redeemed souls partakers in the salvation of Christ so that they can be saved for ever! Therefore it is not with earthly means either that the work of this ministry is to be done, not with carnal weapons that its battles are to be fought. Our ministry is a spiritual one. Therefore the weapons must be spiritual, that is, the Word of God which is the Sword of the Spirit. Thus the Confessions of our church also say:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. (Augsburg Confession, V.)

You are called to this “Holy Ministry of the Word”! You are being ordained to it today! What grace on his part who gave you a desire for so glorious a work, who made you capable of it and who led you to desire the office of a bishop! Him would we thank, both you men and we, for his great mercy, that he thinks of us in grace and frequently sends laborers into his great harvest among us.

O, dear friends, if we could rightly grasp the need in the congregations in which these brethren shall now be placed as pastors and overseers, if we could also see the great indifference which unfortunately has gripped the masses, also truly realize the feeling of want which is felt by the pious, the longing for a pastor who can gather the scattered people and feed the hungry with the bread of life, if we could gather up the sighs which rose to the Chief Shepherd from such starving souls in the course of years—oh, yes, dear congregation, then you also would thank God, who for a number of years has allowed you to enjoy the blessing of the ministry of the Word. Then you would thank the Lord with us, who now also has heard those people’s sighs and through these his messengers will come to them with good news to comfort the afflicted and to save the lost. Then with us you would ask the Lord in prayer to strengthen these his servants and to allow their work to prosper for the salvation of the congregations!

But if we are going to be able to hope that of God’s grace, then we have to take the apostle’s admonition to us in our text to heart and follow it, which we will consider more closely for our mutual edification.

Surely the higher a servant of the Word is placed, since the Lord has placed him as a shepherd and overseer to guard, feed and defend the flock entrusted to him, made him to be a servant of *everyone*, surely the more important his work and the greater his responsibility is for the souls entrusted to him, the more important it is that according to the apostle's admonition he *take heed a) to himself, and b) to the doctrine, and c) continue in them.*

#### A.

As servants of the Word we are to lead the impenitent to a thorough knowledge of sin through the Law, guide believers to an ever deeper and more earnest sorrow over sin and abhorrence of it, and to see all of the heart's deep and total corruption, as well as warn against all kinds of sins in thoughts, word and deed. If we are going to be able to do this with the proper earnestness and seriousness as well as with meekness, if we are to be faithful to the truth in love also in this, then it is important that we *take heed to ourselves.*

Daily must we examine the state of our own heart before the face of God, whether we are remaining in and are growing in a humble acknowledgement of our sins, in sincere sorrow over them and in hatred and abhorrence of them, whether we are watching ourselves for every kind of sin especially those to which we might be especially exposed because of our temperament, inclination and station in life.

And if we find something of the old Adam's nature here and there, then we must take heed to ourselves so that we do not look the other way and excuse our own errors and sins, but that we denounce them sharply and condemn them in ourselves so that we should not be condemned with the world. Surely the more we acknowledge our own sins and our own soul's need the more we shall be able to understand the imperfections and hurt of others and have compassion upon everyone. And the more sharply we judge ourselves, shall we not be able to chastise others with greater candor, but at the same time shall we not be able to show greater gentleness and patience toward the weak?

The chief work of the preaching ministry is to work faith through the proclamation of the sweet, saving Gospel to anxious sinners so that through it they can have comfort, peace and salvation. This is an art which the servant of the Word can only learn in the school of the Holy Ghost. Therefore we are able to take heed to ourselves whether we are in this school, whether we are in the faith and are making progress in it. We are to examine ourselves whether we seek our only comfort in our anguish and distress over sin in a full forgiveness of sins as we appropriate to ourselves through faith the grace which God gives us in his Word in Christ Jesus; whether we daily go for courage as well as strength for our work in looking only to him who has placed us in it and who has promised the faithful servant blessing and fruit from the work in his own time; whether we lift up our eyes confidently to him in sickness, poverty and want without whose will a sparrow does not fall to the ground, who "feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field" (Mt. 6:25ff.). And as he has said that "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Lk. 10:7), but has also added: "having food and raiment, let us therewith be content" (1 Ti. 6:8), whether we patiently resign ourselves to our heavenly Father's will in scorn and derision and other crosses, convinced that the fact that he who has loved us unto death in Christ only intends to purify us as gold in the fire through such tribulation, and both will and can carry it all out gloriously—if in such faith we confidently wait for the glorious end he will make and in the meantime rejoice in the blessed hope of life which he has given us, and through the grace and glory that we are found worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus.

Because the pastor who in that way, in all things, builds his faith on God's grace in Christ "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth his fruit in his season; and whatsoever he does shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3). His heart shall be like an open fountain of water from which streams of living water shall daily pour out for the sheltering and refreshing of the weary and thirsty in Israel.

Then he is going to be able to speak from experience when he directs poor, troubled sinners to Jesus Christ, and because he has tasted how good God is he can lure anxious and frightened souls to the fountain of comfort which the Father has opened and allowed to flow for us from the Son's bloody wounds, with the warmth and power of conviction. The sick, the fearful, the afflicted, the powerless, he can comfort and strengthen them all with the word of life since he says with the apostle, "I believe, therefore I speak." (2 Co. 4:13.)

A servant of the Lord is to be an example to the flock. His conduct is to guide, enlighten and strengthen the congregation. It is to be a testimony throughout of the power of the Word and of faith to comfort, to make alive and to sanctify a person who is in himself a weak and lost sinner. Therefore the apostle says, "*Take heed unto yourself!*"

Thus we should therefore examine our conduct carefully, the private in the home, the public in and outside the congregation. We should see to it that we "rule our own house well and have obedient children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man does not know how to rule his own house," says the apostle, "how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Ti. 3:4,5,) And again he says, "If any provide not for his own, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Ti. 5:8.) A servant of the Lord ought to see to it that he is temperate, moderate and hospitable, so that the person who is suffering distress and is in need knows that he never seeks counsel, comfort and help from his pastor in vain. He must see to it that his conduct throughout is honorable and blameless so that he can have a good testimony even of them who are without, so that he does not give the weak any offence, but even in such things where Christian liberty is given him he does not misuse it lest he should give offence to the weak. But above all, a servant of the Lord is to take heed daily to his being faithful in the work of his calling so that he is not negligent but diligently preaches the Word and keeps on doing it in season and out of season, "reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine" (2 Ti. 4:2), because "cursed be he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully." (Je. 48:10.)

With similar faithfulness must he interest himself in all his congregation's members. He must be no respecter of persons. "I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." (1 Ti. 5:21.) Yes of course the weaker a member is the more does love compel the faithful pastor to set such a person right, just as the shepherd leaves his ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness in order to seek after the one who is lost. He must visit the sick diligently and comfort the grieving. Those who have been led astray he has to convince with a spirit of meekness, and those who oppose him he must be able and ready to instruct in ??? God would give them conversion to the acknowledging of the truth. Those who are of good will he is to encourage and strengthen. Those of ill will he is to chastise candidly and make them ashamed. And he is not timidly to get out of the way of the stubborn and defiant but boldly refute their arrogance in his Lord's name. He is also to take a loving and diligent interest in the lambs, the children in the congregation, so that nourished with the sincere milk of the Word they can grow soundly into the maturity of adults in the fulness of Christ.

But of course the more difficult and the more important all this work is, the more is a servant of the Word to take heed that he unceasingly applies all diligence and care so that day by day he can become more capable of doing it. Therefore the apostle also says, "Give attendance to reading." (1 Ti. 4:13.) And he must do that above all through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, the Book of books, the fountain of revelation, and next, from the Confessions of the church, from the good writings of the fathers and others through which he can be led into the treasure chambers of the Holy Scriptures, become familiar with its precious treasures and learn to draw from them old things and new for every situation which he faces. He is to study diligently and with earnest prayer prepare himself very carefully for every time he is to step forward and speak to the congregation in the name of God. Woe unto him if he takes his work lightly and thinks it a small matter for him to talk for an hour to a group of people who are but little enlightened, or if he cries: "Spirit, Spirit!" in the manner of the enthusiasts. He is to bear in mind that he is standing before the face of God, an ambassador in Christ's stead, to "preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, to comfort all who mourn." (Lk. 4:18,19.) Cursed be he if he goes to such work indifferently, if he takes God's Word into his mouth thoughtlessly!

## B.

The apostle says next in our text, "*Take heed unto the doctrine.*" All our taking heed unto ourselves will be of no benefit if we do not take heed unto *the doctrine*, as we hear. All our ability, all our diligence, ardor and zeal, our earnestness and blamelessness, will all be in vain if the doctrine which we bring is not correct and is not properly applied. Because no ability or zeal, just as little as any holiness, can save people. But the Word of God "is the power unto salvation" (Ro. 1:16.) It is the "seed that gives life," the Word of God which



wounds but which also heals. It humbles and exalts. It crushes to pieces and it binds together. It kills and makes alive.

Therefore, let us *take heed unto the doctrine* so that we hold fast to the sound doctrine according to the instruction so that we can be mighty both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers with sound doctrine. “Hold fast,” the apostle says, “the form of sound words, which you have heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Ti. 1:13.) Add nothing to, take nothing from and put nothing in place of the Word of God, so that you can say with Paul, “You know how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ac. 20:20-21.) Therefore the same apostle also says in warning, “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed!” (Ga. 1:8) and again, “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof come envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw yourself!” (1 Ti. 6:3-5.)

And you are to preach not just individual portions of God’s Word in their truth and purity, but all of God’s Word, Law as well as Gospel; the Law in all its majesty and crushing power as the holy, almighty God has given it when he says, “Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them!” (De. 27:26; Ga. 3:10) and again, “whoever shall offend in one point, he is guilty of all,” (Ja. 2:10.)

But you are also to proclaim the Gospel in its truth and purity, free and unconditioned, sweet and pleasant as God has given it to us. Woe to the blind guides who out of ignorance or from pride, since they rely upon their own works, set up all kinds of conditions and restrictions around the Gospel of God and build a fence around Golgotha just as there was around Sinai. They forbid other people access to the kingdom of heaven and do not want to enter it themselves. They make the Gospel into a Law and instead of luring the anxious and frightened sinner to faith, to the freedom and salvation of children of God in Christ Jesus by holding before him the undeserved and unending love of God in Christ Jesus which he has earned for everyone and which he wants to give everyone so that everyone can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, they place a new burden upon him which he can as little bear as the former. Therefore, let us above all apply ourselves so that we proclaim the pure and unabridged Gospel of Christ. It justifies. It gives life. It saves. It also makes holy and pious people, and nothing but the Gospel of Christ does such a thing.

But take heed to the doctrine also so that you parcel it out properly, that is, rightly dividing Law and Gospel! We are not to quench the smoking flax, not crush the broken reed, but neither are we to cast pearls before swine or the Lord’s holiness before dogs. We are to preach the Law to the unrepentant so that hard hearts can be crushed, but the Gospel to grieving hearts so that they can come to saving faith and to life in God. We are to proclaim the Law to them only for the daily dying of the old Adam and as a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path.

Furthermore, take heed unto the doctrine so that everything which you preach is the Word of God, so that you speak nothing at all except the Word of God, the truth unto salvation. You are to keep yourself not merely from errors and clever fables, from the sophistry of human opinions, from all talk which scratches the ear which itches, but you are also to keep all worldly wisdom away from the pulpit however useful even it can be for this life. You are to preach the Word of God and it alone because only the Word of God can save souls, and that is why God has sent you, so that souls shall be saved through your preaching.

*Take heed unto the doctrine* so that you can use it to *admonish* as well as to *comfort*, to *teach* as well as to *guide*, to *feed* as well as to *guard* the flock entrusted to you.

Exactly what we should take out of God the Father’s rich counsel chambers each time and in every instance has to depend upon the congregation as well as the individual’s need, and of course the stronger the influence is which the spirit of the times has on the individual and the congregation on the whole, and the

more must we take heed unto the doctrine so that with it we can judge, resist, and ward off the spirit of the times with all its false tendencies and ruinous, destructive effects.

C.

Thus, dear brethren, I have briefly sought to show how we should *take heed unto ourselves and to the doctrine*. But we should not merely do it once, but as the apostle says, *continue in them*. Day by day all the days of our lives we should take heed unto ourselves and to the doctrine. What good does it do us if we began in the Spirit but ended in the flesh! How sad, when the warmth of the first love dies down and is finally extinguished completely, when that which was warm becomes cold or lukewarm, he who was diligent becomes lazy and negligent, the zealous indifferent, the living dead! Therefore let us *continue* to take heed unto ourselves and to the doctrine!

Do you ask who is capable of this, dear brother? Certainly “not that we are sufficient for it ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God; who also has made us able ministers of the new testament.” (2 Co. 3:5.6.) “His strength is made perfect in our weakness.” (2 Co. 12:9.) And, “we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” (Ph. 4:13.) Therefore it will never be profitable either that we boast of ourselves, except as Paul did, of our weaknesses.

And even if these trouble us constantly and threaten to deprive us of all our strength, yet we are however comforted daily through the full forgiveness of sins and we rise from the cleansing and refreshing bath with renewed strength just like young eagles. And if besides the inner anxiety, we must suffer hardship as soldiers of Christ, if we must reap scorn and mockery as the reward of our work, if we get to see little or no fruit from it, still the promise the Lord gives us in our text today is comforting, for in doing this *you shall both save yourself and them who hear you*, what a wonderful reward of grace, dear brother! What work, what toil, what struggle, what privation and what sacrifice is worth mentioning alongside of such a reward of grace!

Thus may God grant then, that this comforting promise of the Lord may give also you, dear brethren, comfort, courage and strength during our toil and tribulation in the Office of the Ministry to which you are being ordained today!

Yes, should you not gladly perform the hardest work, bear the heaviest toil, fight the most perilous battle, suffer the most bitter privation, should you not be willing to make the biggest sacrifices, to consume yourself in such a ministry where the Lord himself says that the fruit of your work is going to be that “you shall both save yourself, and them that hear you”? Yes, of course!

May he who places you as his under-shepherds over the flock of God to feed it in the beautiful, rich pastures of the Word, may he grant you grace always to take heed to yourselves and to the doctrine and to continue in them, because when you do this you shall both save yourself and them that hear you! Grant it, O God, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

*Evangelisk luthersk Kirketidende*, Jan. 1866; pages 2–10.

TORGER ANDREAS TORGERSON was born at Ness Jernverk in the Holt parish in the Kristiansand diocese in Norway, on January 26, 1838. He came to America in 1852. He graduated from the Missouri Synod’s Concordia College in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1862, and was a Candidate of Theology from its Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri in 1865. He was called in the same year to be pastor of the Silver Lake, Shell Rock and Lime Creek congregations in Iowa. At the time he lived farthest west of any Norwegian Synod pastor and had a large mission field. In 1903 seventeen (17) Synod pastors were working in the areas where he had worked for longer or shorter periods. For several years he was secretary of pastoral conferences, which the Synod’s pastors held during the winter in Decorah, Iowa. He was secretary of the synod convention in Lisbon, Illinois in 1870, and served as secretary also at the synod’s 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee convention in the Koshkonong church in Wisconsin in 1878. He was also secretary of the Iowa District from

1876 to 1889, when he was elected Vice President of the District, which position he held until 1894 when he succeeded to District President when U.V. Koren became Synod President after the death of H.A. Preus. He was reelected to this position in 1895 and 1901. In 1903 he was secretary of the Synod's Kirkeraad, its Council. In the 1881–1882 academic year he was visiting professor in Theology at the Synod's Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. He was buried in the Silver Lake Cemetery at Northwood on January 11, 1906. H.G. Stub preached on the words in 2 Timothy 4:5. I will include that sermon here since it is a rare example, if not the only example I have found, of our having now the sermons preached both at the ordination and burial of any of these pioneer Norwegian Synod pastors.

TOBIAS LARSEN was born in Kvinesdal in the Kristiansand diocese in Norway on December 23, 1829. He studied for 2 years in Kristiania (Oslo), emigrated to America in 1851, and studied for one and a half years at the Platteville Academy in Grant County, Wisconsin. He was a Candidate of Theology from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1865. In that same year he became pastor of Greenfield (later called Harmony) church in Fillmore County, Minnesota. He also served for a time Richland, Union Prairie and Bloomfield congregations in the same county. In 1887 he became director of the Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin. In 1893 he moved to the Parkland congregation in Pierce County, Washington, where he assisted Pastor Bjug A. Harstad both in the service of the congregation and with the work at Pacific Lutheran Academy. Tobias Larsen died on April 27, 1903.

# Pastor Torger Andreas Torgerson Burial

Silver Lake Cemetery, Northwood, Iowa, January 11, 1906

Lord Jesus, to whom shall we go except to You? “You have the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” To You do we turn in this sad hour with the heartfelt prayer that with Your Word of eternal life You Yourself may meet the sorrowing family, the congregations, the entire synod, thus struck, sorrowing and bereaved, and that You may be seen in the light of Your Word and be borne and sanctified in the power of Your Word. Yes, grant that the underlying spirit in our hearts in the midst of sorrow might be *thanksgiving*, a deep-felt thanks for the great gift You gave the family, the congregations, the synod, in the long ministry of this godly, faithful servant, a deep-felt thanks because when the gift had served the purpose for which You gave it, You Yourself immediately took it to Yourself in Your heaven, as we so confidently hope. May there arise from the life and death of this man who now sleeps, in the light of the Word, a mighty drawing forward and upward! In Jesus’ name! Amen.

I had only intended to attend this service to show my deep sympathy with those who are sorrowing, and my high regard for this dear man whom I had known for over thirty years and with whom I had shared not so little of our synod’s work and strife, joys and sorrows, but when I was called upon to deliver the funeral sermon over him, and I paged through my Bible to find a word which could particularly lend itself as a text at his burial, I paused at these words of the apostle Paul in the Second Epistle to Timothy, chapter 4, verse 5: “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” These words are perhaps most appropriate as a text for an ordination sermon. As in a mirror, they hold before the man who is about to enter the most difficult and the most responsible work how he ought to be and what he ought to do so that this work on earth can be crowned with blessing and he himself someday be crowned with the crown of life. Whether these words were the text of the ordination address for this dear man, I don’t know, but I do know for sure that the same truths which this text contains were brought near his heart then.

Forty-one years have passed since his ordination day on the Call from these very same congregations in whose bosom he shall now be laid to rest in the grave and over whom a funeral address shall be delivered.

And consider then whether the same things which were held forth to him on the threshold of his life’s work as the great model, now dare stand as his posthumous reputation through God’s wonderful grace and fatherly guidance! Consider whether the various traits of a servant of God and Christ on earth which just these words reflect, are now to be found again in the dear departed, so that his funeral address truly dares point to his life and the carrying out of his life’s work as a realization of the great model of his ordination address, albeit not perfect, yet however more perfect than in so many others of whom we however must believe that they lived and died as Christians.

“*But you be watchful in all things!*” The *first* trait mentioned here which ought to make its appearance in a servant of Christ is then: *watchfulness in all things*. That same thought, often in the same words, runs like a red thread through the speeches of Christ and the apostles. Let us just think of the words: “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.” 1 Co. 9:26.

What does watchfulness in all things mean? Is it just temperance in food, in drink, in clothes, in managing a home, in the use of money? Certainly all that is an essential part of the watchfulness. But we have to go deeper.

To watchfulness in all things belongs moderation, one’s manner in words, in speaking, in deeds, in one’s attitude toward our fellowmen. To it belongs that one’s words, one’s speech is not boastful, not insolent, not arrogant, not disrespectful, but not an expression of despondency and despair either, and finally, that it is not foolish, to say nothing of indecent and filthy.

To it belongs that one’s behavior over toward one’s neighbor is borne by consideration over toward him so that a person does not want to hurt and offend him, does not want to overlook him or shove him aside, to say nothing of being harsh and unkind toward him.

To it belongs more than anything that in his thinking a person maintains the proper balance so that in his opinion of himself he is held within the proper bounds and in his emotions he maintains the proper balance so that he is not overwhelmed or carried away precipitously by any emotion.

This external and internal watchfulness again rests on the one hand in *humility* and on the other in a deep *feeling of responsibility*. It rests in humility because only the humble person truly will be able to maintain balance in his opinion of himself and his judgment of other people. Because he recognizes so deeply that everything he is and everything he has is an undeserved gift from God, he is then genuinely convinced that he has nothing to brag about and no reason to exalt himself at someone else's expense, but every call always to keep watch over his own ego.

It rests in a feeling of responsibility which simply makes the conscience tender. Because the thought of the responsibility, of the accountability for the gifts one has received, and for their use, as well as for his thoughts, his words, his behavior, cannot lead to anything else than watchfulness. Must not the thought that we are going to give account for every improper or unprofitable word we have spoken prompt us to watchfulness in word? Watchfulness in all things is to be found only in the truly humble, with the deep feeling of responsibility over toward God. And humility and a feeling of responsibility, again, are found only in the truly believing, in a child of God. But in everyone of whom we however may believe that they are children of God, watchfulness in all things is not equally strong, equally conspicuous. There are many degrees here.

When we ask now at this bier: Dare we not believe that the dear departed was a faithful Christian, a child of God? will not then everyone who knew him answer as with *one* voice: Of course we believe it! And that of course is the main thing: to live and to die as a Christian. And then we ask again: Did not this *watchfulness in all things* which again rests in humility and a feeling of responsibility appear in this man whom we so surely believe was a Christian, in a remarkable degree? I turn again to you who have known him through many years of living and working together in the home, in the congregation, with the question: Must you not give him the testimony in his grave that just this watchfulness in all things was a distinctive characteristic of him? One thing is for sure: No one who came in closer contact with him could escape the distinct impression that when he stood face to face with President Torgerson he was facing a *man*, and that, a man who had gained a great mastery over himself through self-discipline in the Spirit's school, a man who had learned to know his own limitations and therefore could be so watchful in his life, in his words and in his actions.

Who has heard reckless, unworthy, to say nothing of raw and obscene speech from President Torgerson's mouth? No, he always bore the mark of earnestness in his speaking and in his demeanor. There was a watchfulness about him which made it impossible for people in his presence to permit themselves anything unseemly.

This very watchfulness in all things was one of his strongest traits as a pastor and as a bishop. Just for that reason he was so eminently suited to be a president. Just for that reason people could look up to him with such confidence and trust him. It is surely a fact that many people wanted him as their father-confessor.

The admonition: "*Be watchful in all things!*" has been realized in President Torgerson's life and work in a remarkable degree.

"*Endure afflictions!*" That is a *second* trait which ought to appear in a servant of Jesus Christ, a servant of Christ is not to be dainty, not aspire to all kinds of comforts, not avoid exertion, fatigue, dangers, in brief, whatever is hard for flesh and blood. No, a servant of the Lord is to be ready to take temporal circumstances as they come, be willing to take and to bear with Christian patience whatever God might find useful to lay upon him. And to the general consequences of sin come now also some special ones for a servant of Christ, namely, that he is to be willing to suffer *affliction for the truth's* sake, for the Gospel's, for the sake of Christ. "Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," Paul shouts to Timothy.

When we ask then at this bier: Has this dear man tried to comply with that? will not then everyone who knew him answer as with *one* voice: Yes, this man has suffered affliction and he was willing to suffer affliction. He came to these regions 41 years ago. He has experienced the harsh conditions of pioneer life. He

has traveled day and night. He was not unfamiliar with hunger and thirst and frost. You old folks who are beginning to turn gray, you know all about that. You have lived through it together with him. Yes, you younger folks will know it too! If there was anything in his capacity of pastor and spiritual guide which Pastor Torgerson did not understand, then it was sparing himself, being careful of himself. And the pastors and congregations of the district will also give him the testimony: By virtue of his office he has endured afflictions more than *once* in later years. He has had sorrows of many kinds. And he has also endured affliction for his conviction's sake, for the Gospel's, for the sake of Christ. The history of our church in this country has not so little to tell about that.

The admonition: "Endure afflictions!" has also been realized in President Torgerson's life and work in a remarkable degree.

*"Do the work of an evangelist!"* This is a *third* trait of a servant of Jesus Christ, and the essential thing when someone asks about his work, his life's work. What is it then to be an evangelist? An evangelist of course is one who proclaims the Gospel. And the Gospel of course is the good, the glad tidings of God's merciful love in Christ Jesus. To do the work of an evangelist is therefore to have as his calling in life, as his primary task, yes, basically his only task, that of making as many of his fellowmen as possible to be good, glad, happy people for time and for eternity through the good, glad tidings of God's grace in Christ. Proclaiming the Law then, however necessary it is both for the unrepentant and for the believers, is not a servant of Christ's true and essential task, but precisely from the proclaiming of the Gospel therefore is also the work designated and is called the work of an evangelist.

When we ask at this bier: Has our dear friend tried to do the work of an evangelist? then again, everyone who knew him must say: Yes, he has done the work of an evangelist. As a poor, lost and condemned sinner he himself has found people for his heart in the Gospel, in the message of God's free, unmerited grace, and just because this was his life's greatest endeavor and experience, just for that reason it was his life's task to do the work of an evangelist. It was his delight, it was his life. It was the only thing which gave his life and his work content and worth. That is why he had to preach the Gospel. That is why the day was too short for him. That is why he had to steal from the night which is created for rest, in order to go on as long as he could, publicly and privately.

And not just in his own congregations. No, as a (district) president he has done the work of an evangelist, since through his guidance, through his speaking and his work among pastors and congregations he has strengthened and confirmed the old pure confession of grace. Among thousands upon thousands of people has he done the work of an evangelist. His heart burned for the Gospel. His heart burned for sinners. That's why everything else was only secondary to the one big thing of doing the work of an evangelist in the more narrow sphere and in the broader sphere. Surely the admonition: "Do the work of an evangelist!" is realized to a remarkable degree in President Torgerson's life and work.

*"Fulfill your ministry!"* This is the *fourth* trait of a servant of Christ. The ministry, the ministry of the Gospel, the ministry of Christ is to be carried out, to be fulfilled until God Himself dismisses from the ministry. Many men begin well, work very hard, but then give up the ministry without valid reasons. The dear departed had been in the ministry for 41 years until a few days before his death. Of him it can be said truly that he has fulfilled his ministry. He died in the ministry. He died in the saddle. Last New Year's Day he preached publicly to his congregation for the last time, then traveled 15 miles to a sick person whom he and others wanted to surprise with a gift of love. He spoke there—no longer standing—he wasn't able to—, but sitting. It was his last word as pastor to any gathering of people. It was his last work—a work of love, of which his life had been so rich. He fulfilled his work until the body's machinery stopped, until his big warm heart failed. The words in our text are realized in President Torgerson's life. And when he had fulfilled his ministry on earth God took him immediately home to Himself, to rest. And who of us will not envy him that, the rest which exhorts the weary worker to hold out, and which beckons him home?

And what an incentive for us does not lie now in such a life, we who still have not fulfilled our ministry but who are in the midst of it, to hold out until the end! What an incentive for the members of the congregations to follow in the footsteps of the faithful shepherd so that someday there can be a blessed reunion? Yes, may the image of this faithful worker who had throughout his life the goal of being watchful in

all things, including afflictions, doing the work of an evangelist, fulfilling his ministry, exhort, enlighten, admonish generation after generation! In Jesus' name! Amen.

*Kirketidende*, January 24, 1906, pages 85–95, esp. 89–95

# Dedication of the New Building at Luther College

Decorah, Iowa

October 14, 1865

*Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Psalm 127:1*

*O Lord, gracious, merciful God and Father, laud and praise be yours for all the grace and loving kindness which you have demonstrated toward us poor sinners and for the fact that you now allow us to gather on this day for such a wonderful celebration! O faithful God, bless now our going in and our coming out here, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our dear Lord and Savior! Amen.*

Dearly beloved brethren of the Lutheran faith, and countrymen! Grace be with you and peace from God our Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

I am convinced that in this festive hour you want to confess from the bottom of your hearts to the laud and praise of God with the psalmist in the 126<sup>th</sup> Psalm, "*The LORD has done great things for us; whereof we are glad,*" (Vs. 3). Yes, Christian men and women throughout our congregations, was it not joy over the wonderful thing which you heard that the Lord had done among us which moved and touched your hearts deeply at home? Was it not the eager longing to see this large, handsome school building which through the power of his grace the Lord has erected among us, which urged you here from your distant homes! Was it not this heartfelt joy which gathered you here today from far and near in unity of faith in Jesus' name in order to praise the Lord, the mighty King who has done such great things for us? Scripture often says of people when they had been witnesses to the miracles of the Lord, "*And they marveled greatly.*" Thus are there also many among you who marvel greatly in this hour. Yes, I know, many, myself included, looked forward to this work which the Lord has done among us so very, very much, that our joy over it only finds its expression in a holy awe. O, that's how I feel right now, dear friends, when I am to step forward in your midst and express the joy and holy awe which fills my soul when I consider the goodness, power and faithfulness of the Lord which he has shown to us, his poor servants, and of which this building is so excellent a testimony.

I remember well how a couple of years ago we talked about obtaining a suitable building for our school, but we talked about it as a fine hope *for the future*. I remember also that just one year ago we laid the cornerstone in this building with heartfelt joy but also with fear. We asked each other: "I wonder when we'll see it finished?" And, look, now it stands there, large, solid and handsome, ready for use, a work so well carried out in every respect as really hardly any of us had envisioned. And yet, my friends, how poor, how pitiful were not our joy if it were only a joy over the completion of this building of stone! How meager then were not our understanding of the great things the Lord has done among us? No, we will rejoice over the spiritual work which the Lord has done among us, over the power his Word of truth has obtained over our hearts, over the desire and the zeal he has awakened for the preservation and spread of this "his blessed Gospel." We want to rejoice over the fact that the Lord has made himself known through our evangelical testimony, however weakly we may have spoken it! Finally, we want to rejoice that through allowing this building to become reality the Lord has given us so excellent an opportunity to strengthen so many young men in the Word of his truth and strengthened our hope that he himself will graciously preserve it for our descendants! Because in this wise and for this purpose has the Lord built this house.

Or, is it not he, the Lord of hosts, the mighty Father of mercy, who has done it? Was it perhaps our zeal, our might, our sacrifice?

O brethren, in what great weakness did not even the most zealous among us work! How much ill-will and opposition did not this work meet both here and there? How many enemies did not make fun of it and predict a sad end for it? And its friends, how often were not they weak, how fainthearted and dispirited! In spite of the Lord so often demonstrating himself to us a Helper in need, how often did we however not say to ourselves: "We can't go on. Now there is no longer a way out! You're just tempting God by continuing!"



However, we have been put to shame with all our worries and doubts! The Lord would let us acknowledge that his arm is not yet shortened, that he still knows how to lead hearts to rivers of waters, that he is still capable of doing things where our own strength isn't worth a thing. While a dreadful civil war was raging in our country, while people in many places were hit by crop failure, scarcity and heavy burdens, the means were provided, often in surprising ways, and this building went up one foot at a time and now it stands here before our eyes a year later, completely finished. Yes, we really have to say: It has gone wonderfully; truly "*the Lord* has done great things among us," when "*the Lord* has built the house the work of the builders is not in vain."

However, at the same time as we give God alone the glory and joyfully confess that it is *he* who has done great things among us, yet we gladly want to extend them our gratitude who have been his instruments in this building: above all, the venerable German-Lutheran Missouri Synod through which the Lord has led us to a much purer and clearer understanding of the doctrine of our dear Lutheran Church and in that way to so much greater joy in the precious Gospel and zeal for its preservation and spread, without which understanding, joy and zeal we certainly would not have brought this building about, even less, have built it with the holy purpose as we have done: to "serve the Lord here in Spirit and in truth" ; furthermore, our capable as well as beloved architect, Mr. Griese, and our dear Building Committee, chiefly Professor Larsen, Pastor Koren and Dr. Gulbrand Rustad and Jens Naeseth, who have carried out the laborious, difficult tasks and duties assigned to them with so much zeal, eagerness and self-sacrifice; and finally, the pastors and congregations throughout the synod who have worked for the cause and supported it with great zeal and sacrifice. The Lord be praised for everything which he has done through them! May he bless them all with rich joy from the work!

Yes, friends, we have much reason to rejoice and to be glad, teachers and students, congregations, pastors, old and young: 'because the Lord has done great things among us.'

But in our joy let us now not forget that we ourselves can hinder, misuse and corrupt even the best work of the Lord.

The Lord has allowed this work of ours to go well. This building of stone now stands ready, but the spiritual building for whose sake it was constructed and which is to be carried on in it is not finished. Much rather, we are all now to work on it with much greater joy, zeal and strength. But, brothers and sisters, if we are to become capable of that, if we shall not instead come to work with sorrow and wailing, with faintheartedness and despair, without hope and without fruit, then the Lord must take neither his Spirit nor his hand from us but still "*do great things among us*," in other words then, "*the Lord must build the house*." How this shall occur now through the work we shall do, we want to reflect on with one another since we have gathered today in order to dedicate this house to its important and holy use through the Word and prayer. As the basis for our meditation we will with the help of the Holy Spirit consider the holy words which the Spirit of God has let be written in the first verse of Psalm 127:

### **EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN THAT BUILD IT.**

First then, Christian friends, we must have a clear picture of what the work is which shall be done here, what the spiritual house is which is now to be built. I will state it briefly in the same words in which it was expressed in the description which was placed in the cornerstone last year, namely: "to train pastors for the church according to the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran Church through whose service, by the grace of the Lord, the blessed Gospel can be preserved unadulterated in Word and Sacraments for those who come after us." These words certainly state the most important work most precisely, but in no way do they exclude striving toward helping as many as possible of the young men growing up in our congregations to a thorough and intimate understanding of the evangelical truth and imparting to them also all other literary knowledge so far as space and the means are provided, through which later in various positions in life they can the better use and make the most of the Christian understanding which God may have allotted to every individual among them. But now, even though this is the work which lies closest at hand, building *the kingdom of God in the hearts of these young men*, yet with it, if even further, *the building up of the kingdom of God in a larger circle round about in our congregations*, is and shall, however, be bound as the main objective in the most intimate way. Brethren, these are appalling times in which we are living. "We wrestle not against flesh

and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Ep. 6:12. The devil knows that “the end of all things is at hand.” (1 Pe. 4:7.) He has mounted one last battle against Christ and his bride, the church. The falling away from Christ is frightening and it appears to be growing each day. The prince of this world is active in the children of disobedience. His power is coming to light more and more clearly, partly in the general deification of man, his reason, his power, his pioussness, in the so-called Pantheism and Humanism, partly in the growing desire for this world’s goods and pleasures, in the so-called materialism. It cannot be denied that these mainstreams of the spirit of these times are penetrating into our congregations more and more and that the hope of our future, our youth especially, are exposed to the danger of being pulled along into the abyss. If we are not now, dear friends, to face the future with the utmost terror with regard to our children, yes, if we shall not have to be separated from them permanently in despair, since we leave the generation after us defenseless against a frightful future—oh, then, more than anything else it is up to us to bring up and to train our youth in such a way that they can always be on guard, ready to defend themselves against powerful as well as poisonous enemies so that in the generations which shall come they can stand as a bulwark against the mighty stream which is forcing its way in. And with this I have stated the essential basic difference between our “Norwegian Luther College” and the majority of the colleges which are to be found here in this country, even of those which belong to Christian denominations.

Our college is not to be a school of the world, the training here not a means for gaining this world’s goods, gaining its glory. No, it is to be a school in and for the church which the Lord himself has founded on the Rock and which he truly has placed here in *the world* but which he has separated from it from the beginning and until the end of time to do battle *against* the world which lies in the evil one, and God has made our college to be a leaven so that through its power as many of the children of the world should be saved as will allow themselves to be saved from this wicked generation.

From this basic difference flow all other differences in our and most other colleges’ organization, through their leadership, through the training, through the discipline, and that with respect to the subjects as well as also their varying importance, as well as with respect to the manner and the thoroughness of the instruction.

With absolute contempt and disgust for all superficial knowledge, all sham, all craving of praise and glory before men, the work in our college is to be directed toward the training of the heart for the kingdom of God with the soul’s salvation and the glory of God alone in mind.

You see, friends, *this* is the work, *this* is “the house” which is to be built!

O, who should not gladly want to be along in such a work? Who should not gladly want to build such a house where the stones are the believing hearts, which founded on the Rock, Jesus, are intimately knit together through the bond of love, such a house whose foundation the gates of hell itself are not going to shake, whose pinnacle shall reach above the highest heavens and one day be revealed in the splendor of glory?

But who are the builders?

Obviously they are *the teachers* and *the students* of the school. But since both of these have the foundation of their spiritual life in the church as their mother’s bosom, have come from the congregations, are supported by them and are expected to return to them, then *the congregations* have a mother’s calling over toward the school, and *every member of the church* is a builder in this work. But chiefly is this true of the officers of *the Synod* and *the Church Council* elected by the congregations, who because of their special call are in a special sense to be *the servants of everyone*. Thus then, all of us who are here should be builders! What a wonderful calling! O, that we might do our work properly and work with joy and delight!

Now we come to the third point, brethren, how we as builders should let *the Lord* build the house so that we do not labor in vain.

Everything which we could do with our innate natural powers is nothing but sin, therefore every such work of ours is vain and of no benefit. Yes, even if we could attempt to serve God with our best works, yet they were, however, nothing but a transgression of the Second Commandment and a blasphemy of God, our imagined worship were idolatry. Because, through original sin we are sold under sin. We are Satan's slaves, children of wrath from birth and deserving of eternal death and condemnation.

But out of boundless love God has decided from eternity to save us lost sinners, and "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jo. 3:16.)

The miracle of miracles happened. "The Word, who was God, became flesh and dwelt among us." Jo. 1:14. "Through Jesus Christ," God's and Mary's Son, true God and true man, "God reconciled the world unto himself," (2 Co. 5:19) for "he made him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we should be justified before God." (2 Co. 5:21.)

Through his holy life Jesus fulfilled the Law in our stead, through his unjust and innocent death on the cross he became a curse for us, reconciled us with God, freed us from sin, death and the power of Satan and earned for us forgiveness of sin, eternal life and salvation, through his resurrection he became our righteousness before God.

Everything which Jesus Christ has earned for us poor sinners out of incomprehensible love, he offers and bestows upon us out of undeserved grace in *the Word* and *the Sacraments* because they become sacraments when the Word comes to the natural elements. They therefore also have the same power and bestow the same grace which the Lord has and bestows. The Word of God and the Sacraments are therefore the true Means of Grace in which Christ is, even if invisible, however, mightily present with his disciples until the end of time and through which he works graciously for the salvation of souls.

Therefore Scripture also calls the Gospel of Christ the power of God unto salvation, a life-generating seed. Likewise Paul says to the Romans, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (10:17). And through faith which grasps and appropriates Christ and all his merit we are justified before God and receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which God bestows upon us in his Gospel.

Therefore, if we now want the Lord to build the house through this work of ours so that we shall not work in vain, then we must let the Word of God be the primary tool in our work so that we let it dwell among us richly, accept it in true faith and on its basis work with all faithfulness and diligence toward its proper understanding, so that we go to it for strength and power as well as for the desire for the work, so that we let it be our light and supreme authority also with regard to the use of the other means which God might give us for the furtherance of the work—all with the glory of God and the salvation of souls in mind.

And it is so very much more important that *we* hold the Word of God properly in respect and honor while not only the sects but also many so-called spokesmen and supporters of the Lutheran Church in our days partly deny the divine power of the Word and partly think that they can explain and interpret it as they wish according to their own distorted opinions and views. So, brethren, this is the work which lies before us, this is the tool which we should use for it!

Who of us must not exclaim:

What a wonderful work! We should be servants of our God, yes, his co-workers for people's salvation! Our main tool with which we should work daily is to be the almighty, blessed *Word of God* which is his power unto salvation to everyone who believes. What an honor does not God do us poor sinners, that we, even the most insignificant among us, get to be along in such a work! Shame and disgrace on him among us who would hold back here, who out of love for the world and its glory would fold his hands in his lap here where the glory of God and the salvation of souls is involved! No, let it be seen that we appreciate the honor the Lord shows us! Let each of us do our part in it diligently and faithfully!

But what our part is, we will consider now as we apply what was just said to each class of workers.

Exalted and sacred is the teacher's calling! To him parents bring their young sons, God's precious gifts, so that through his conscientious watching and knowledgeable, careful nurturing, the seed of God can thrive in the hearts of the young and produce a divine growth so that through his earnest, loving nurture and admonition in the Lord the young men can be brought up in order someday to work as men in Christ for the salvation of brethren. But the teacher's calling is also full of responsibility! Within the parameters of his work he is placed in God's stead to counsel and to rule over the young men who are entrusted to his care and he is to watch over their souls as he who shall give account for them. Only the teacher who has learned to know his own heart's deep depravity through the discipline of the Law and after that has sought and found peace in the Gospel of Christ and experienced that it bestows a divine power so that "we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us," (Ph. 4:13), only that teacher will be capable of doing his work with joy and with diligence, with faithfulness and patience. With all his instruction as well as discipline, he will be looking toward the salvation of souls as his main objective. He knows the power of the Word of God. He speaks because he believes. Through instruction as well as through admonition and discipline his efforts will therefore aim through the Law at leading his students to a thorough understanding of God's holy will and of their own and other people's deep depravity because of original sin, as also of their specific transgressions of the Ten Commandments so that they feel with fear and sorrow that it is the majesty of the holy and righteous God which they have offended with their sins, the loving Father they have grieved. Likewise, through the Gospel he teaches them ever more clearly to know God's boundless love for them in Christ, leads them to an ever firmer faith and comfort in God's grace in Christ alone and the justification of sinners through him, and thus are made capable in the same faith to testify fearlessly against the world's sin, to confess the grace in Christ and to give themselves wholly as an offering for the service of Christ. Through the imparting of all other knowledge then he will let it be illuminated and explained in such a way by the Word of God that it can be recognized that in itself it is of no value but is only to be imparted and used as a means so that the abilities of the young men can be developed, so that made capable for the Lord's service through the Word of God, enriched with all kinds of useful knowledge, they can work the more, and bear fruit to the glory of God and their neighbor's temporal and eternal welfare.

It is now coming to this that at the present time, through the schools, especially in this country, that as a rule only a mass of information with which a person will gain and serve the world is sought, a vain knowledge which most often is also extremely superficial, so that even the teachings of the Christian religion are considered a part of this information which a person must have with him for the sake of the same earthly end, so that often the discipline in the schools is nothing or worse than nothing since through it only a false feeling of freedom is grafted into the youths and natural pride and vanity are nurtured in their hearts, so that in a word we could say that such schools are in the service of sin and are well equipped for developing the evil nature in the young and for training them to be children of the world. You see then that in contrast to this it will be the primary task for our teachers to let the Word of God be the illuminating, quickening, purifying, reforming and all-permeating power through the instruction as well as through the discipline in our college.

Such faithful teachers shall certainly not be lacking comfort and encouragement during their difficult work because they shall surely know that their work is God's work, that the seed they are sowing has the promise that it shall not return void. They are going to be able to comfort themselves with the fact that their dear Lord willingly forgives all weaknesses and prevents their harming the souls entrusted to them, so that in no way therefore do they work in vain, because *the Lord is building the house*. "He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Ps. 126:6.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Co. 15:58.

We heard also that the dear *students* should be workers here. Now if their work is not going to be in vain, then it is up to them first of all that they acknowledge with heartfelt thanks and praise to God what unutterable grace the Lord is showing them by letting them be partakers in such a thorough Christian education and nurture. Above all, they must hold the Word of God in which they are being instructed in respect and honor, and accept it for both discipline and admonition, for the strengthening of faith, for comfort

and encouragement, so that they can also know for sure that they have a gracious Father in heaven whose work they are all called to do as students when they use their time and abilities zealously and faithfully, a Father who will gladly bless their work and enlighten and strengthen them while they can daily seek full forgiveness of sins in him. O, must not such a blessed faith truly prompt them to yield themselves body and soul to the Lord's work, day by day make them more obedient, diligent and faithful? O, must they not in love for the precious Savior, in the desire to thank him for his unspeakable grace, have a defense against the spirit of the ungodly world so that they do not pride themselves in their knowledge, do not seek it for its own sake nor in order to gain riches, glory and power in the world, but in order that they can become capable of someday working to the glory of God and the salvation of souls as pastors, teachers, or members of the church in another profession. Just as we heard that the student is especially exposed to being tempted by pride and love of the world to unfaithfulness, so does his work often become difficult for him. He gets sick of it, especially when it doesn't progress as quickly as he wished, or when sickness, need and want come. But the student who has peace for his soul in faith in Christ and who daily finds comfort in the Gospel and tastes how good God is, in whose heart finally is also kindled a heartfelt longing for becoming capable of helping others out of sin's distress to the same grace of God, he will not lose heart. The Lord will strengthen him and assure him that the builder's work cannot be in vain *when the Lord builds the house*. He will rejoice and be strengthened through the certain hope that the Lord who has given him abilities and gifts will also help him in attaining their proper development, and if he will deign to use him in his service, also place him in the position where he can bear the most fruit according to the measure of his gifts.

We come now to *the congregations*. Every member is to work together, young and old, men and women, lay and learned. And should it not be an honor, a joy, to get to be along with such a work where the Lord himself is building the house? But how is it going to happen?

The congregations should of course first of all be concerned that the Word of God is proclaimed richly and purely in their midst. Every member is to hear and read this Word so diligently and accept it in sincere repentance and faith that the Gospel can be the most precious treasure in the world for their souls, more precious than gold and silver and all treasures. Then they will also have their joy in the school's work because the spread of the consoling Gospel is being furthered through them to the salvation of souls. They will prepare their sons for the work of the school by bringing them up in Christian nurture and admonition. They will apply themselves so that a spirit of Christian love, humility and piety can be dominant in the congregations, so that from childhood the youths shall not be brought up to serve the world and enter the school with a mind which proudly, conceitedly and vainly only seeks its own, only aspires to the pleasure, glory and splendor of this world. The parents in the congregation will busy themselves with bringing up and sending to our school young men who have all learned from childhood to fear and love God and to trust in him alone, and who are used to modesty, humility and frugality, diligence and obedience. They will gladly offer those children of theirs to the Lord's service and look upon it as a great honor and grace if God will make them capable and someday use them as servants of the Word in his vineyard. They will willingly support pious young men whom the Lord has equipped with the necessary abilities and gifts so that they can attend the school. According to their ability they will share generously that which is necessary for the school's existence and progress, bring the matter to the Lord in prayer and pray for his blessing. They will not ask from the school a training of the young men after the custom of this world so that they can become rich in the things which are of this world; much rather will they not only be glad but will also see to it that the young men are strengthened in their knowledge of the pure truth and exercised in the fear of God. Then when such young men leave, with what thankfulness and joy will not the congregations accept and use such gifts of the Lord! And in all this, the pastors should remember that they are examples for the flock.

If the flock will thus cooperate in this work, truly even the work of the least significant member of the congregation shall not then be in vain because then *the Lord is building the house*. Then shall the school blossom forth as from the church's bosom and derive its warmth from it as from its maternal soil. And the congregations should receive the joy of being witnesses to a moral, enlightened Christian youth which very early is willing and able to proclaim the deeds of him who has led them out of darkness into his marvelous light!

Lastly, we come to *the Synod and the Church Council*. They are servants of both the congregations and the synod, to whom especially the superintendence and a special leadership is entrusted.

What we heard applied to every congregation-member with regard to the use and acceptance of the Word of God naturally applies even more to the officers of the synod and the Church Council.

According to this Word of God they have to provide superintendence and leadership so that they see to it that the teachers carry out their office faithfully and diligently in an evangelical spirit where both discipline and instruction are concerned, as I discussed earlier. Obviously, they are to see that the proper objective is in mind, namely, the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and that the proper Means, the Word of God, has its proper place in general as well as in specific matters. It will be a joy for them, where they can, to encourage the teachers in their arduous work and to assist them with good advice.

They will also see to it that the necessary means are at hand for the school's existence and progress, and to that end will encourage the congregations to share generously also of their temporal goods. If the synod and the Church Council now work like this in faith in constant prayer to God with the glory of God and the salvation of souls in mind, then surely their work will not be in vain either because then "*the Lord is building the house.*"

They shall also receive comfort under the cares of their office, strength to bear the burdens and crosses and tribulations which accompany it, and finally he who builds the house shall also gladden their hearts through seeing fruit here and there, and blessing from the work they did in faith, even if in great weakness.

And now, friends, let us put our hands to the plow and not look back! Let us work, all as one, diligently and faithfully in this way. Then shall this school exist, go forward and blossom, because then it is built on the right Cornerstone, Christ, standing firm on the Rock which is the Word of God. Then it is being built on it in faith in God's unmerited grace in Christ, with the proper tool, which is the Word of God—and then, "*the Lord is building the house.*" The Lord shall then also let us see many and wonderful fruits not merely in the capable Christian young men who will go out from it, but also round about in the congregations through the young men's work there, some as pastors, some as zealous, enlightened members of the church. And in these fruits we shall see with joy and thanks a reward of grace from our mutual, even if frail, however, heartfelt work for the school. In the times to come our children after us shall see in this Luther College a testimony that their fathers have held fast to the pure Lutheran faith and doctrine and in confidence in the promise of God have worked for the preservation of this most precious jewel also for their children and grandchildren. They shall also thereby be encouraged to similar zeal and willingness for the preservation and spread of the pure Gospel. Then of his grace the Lord shall also bless their work to the glory of his name and the salvation of many souls among the coming generations, because "*when the Lord builds the house, they who build it do not labor in vain.*"

Yes, brethren, brothers in the faith and brothers in the ministry, then shall God often surprise both us and them who come after us to look at this school and its work with heartfelt thanks and praise to him from whom all good gifts come! Yes, with glad hearts shall we often get to sing with the psalmist his song of praise, and say, "*The Lord has done great things among us, whereof we are glad!*" In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, then, we dedicate this building to the service of the Lord our God, to the preservation and spread of his Word of truth for the salvation of souls! Amen in Jesus' name! Amen.

Now, Lord, thus "*let your work appear unto your servants, and your glory unto their children! And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it!*" Ps. 90:16.17. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you! The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace!

*Maanedstidende*, December 1865, pages 358–371.

# The Ordination of Niels Thorbjørnsen Ylvisaker

The First Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Red Wing, Minnesota

October 18, 1868

*“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20.*

## WE ARE AMBASSADORS IN CHRIST’S STEAD

Dear friends! We have dedicated this building today<sup>3</sup> to be a house of the Lord and we see already how he is fulfilling his promises that he will fill it with his glory, since he is giving you, a Christian congregation, a servant of the Word, his best gift to a congregation.

Because of the increasing love of the world and hatred of Christ a general contempt and scorn for the Holy Ministry prevails in our days. And from it again follows a disinclination on the part of parents to offer their sons to this ministry which is so glorious in God’s eyes but so despised by the world, and in young men an unwillingness to undertake it, and finally, a temptation to those who are in the ministry to do its work reluctantly and unenthusiastically.

If we are going to let ourselves joyfully and willingly be singled out and made capable of the work, enter the ministry and do its work, and with the proper awe and thankfulness accept the ministry and its blessed work among us, then let us think rightly of the glory of the Ministry of the Word and the importance of the work to which a servant of the Word is called. Our text gives us rich occasion for that. The apostle says in the text I read: “We are ambassadors in Christ’s stead.” It is of those who proclaim the Gospel that he uses this expression: ambassadors.

But of whom are we ambassadors? That becomes our first question and the answer is: Of God, the Lord of lords and the King of kings, of the Most High God who has created heaven and earth. What an honor for us mortals, dust and ashes as we are! What then are kings’ and emperors’ ambassadors compared to us, messengers of the Most High God! Yes, what is the dignity of kings and emperors compared to that which the Lord gives those who proclaim the Gospel! Kings and emperors of course also have their offices from God; as every one else, they should be servants of God, but only those who proclaim the Gospel does he call his “ambassadors.” But this elevated position and honor which the apostle ascribes to the ministry of the Word is increased by the expression: “We are ambassadors in Christ’s stead.”

Jesus Christ, the onlybegotten Son of God, the reflection of the Father, the express image of his being, him, the Father sent to the world in order to reveal to it his essence and in order to give it life. And now the apostle says, “We are ambassadors in Christ’s stead.” Thus the Father sends us on Christ’s behalf, in Christ’s name. In his name and on his behalf, with his authority then, we should also step forward with our message. That’s why Christ also says, “He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me.” (Lk. 10:16.)

But the honor which the apostle ascribes to our ministry with these words is not to make us puffed up and proud over toward God or men. Because since we are the Most High’s creation, so are we also over toward him only his ambassadors. Whatever honor and power we might have is due us, however, only as his ambassadors from whom we have received it; but should we then boast of ourselves as though we had not received it?

<sup>3</sup> The dedication and Pastor Ylvisaker’s ordination were on the same day. Pastor J.A. Ottesen preached for the dedication.

Much rather it must humble us deeply that the Most High shows us such honor and grace that he makes us to be his ambassadors, because when we consider what we are by nature, enemies of God, transgressors of his Law, poor sinners, then of course we certainly have not deserved such honor and grace, but the opposite.

But when God shows us such an honor and makes us to be his ambassadors, then of course he thereby requires from them to whom we are sent that they show the deepest respect for the dignity of our office and the greatest willingness and joy in hearing and accepting the message from the Most High. And in saying that, he is saying to us who should be the bearers of the office, as he did earlier, to Moses: "Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you are standing is holy ground," (Ex. 3:5) for whether we are going to be entering the Holy Ministry or we have to carry out whatever it is of its usual functions, then at the thought of whose messengers we are, what errand of the Lord it is which we have to carry out, we must be filled with a holy earnestness, with a glorious trembling so that we shall carry out our errand properly according to his will and present our Lord's message exactly in the way he has given it to us.

But that same thought must also give us the proper confidence and staying-power for the work. If we have just ourselves in mind, or if we berate ourselves with our own unworthiness and feeling of inferiority, then he says to us: "I the Lord am sending you." If we are afraid that with our meager strength, in our great weakness, we will be able to do nothing, then he says again, "My strength is made perfect in your weakness," (2 Co. 12:9.) Just that comforts us and gives us new courage that we are only ambassadors and that we also carry a message from him of whom it says in the prophet, "There is none like unto you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might," (Je. 10:6) a message from the Lord for whom "nothing is impossible" (Lk. 1:37) and who himself says in the prophet Isaiah, in the 55<sup>th</sup> chapter, the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> verses, about his word with which he sends us, "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Yes, even if many times things appear dark, and fear and tribulations surround us, we shall however be able then to comfort ourselves with the words which the prophet allows to follow in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> verses, "For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree."

But can we then also be sure that we are the Lord's ambassadors? The prophet does however also speak about men of whom the Lord says, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." (Je. 23:21.) And again, "I have not sent them, yet they prophesy a lie in my name." (Je. 27:15.)

While the Lord did call his apostles directly when the church was being founded, now he has entrusted the ministry of the Word to his church with the command that it is to call shepherds and teachers itself. They who set themselves up as teachers of the church without this call of the church, appealing to an inner call, they, you see, belong to those prophets about whom the Lord says, "they ran, but I did not send them." But them who are properly called by the Church of God, them, the apostle says the Holy Spirit himself has installed as overseers of the flock of God. But these men must be faithful and proclaim the Word of the Lord who has sent them, otherwise they are not ambassadors in Christ's stead but belong to the unfaithful servants to whom the Lord's word came through the prophet Ezekiel in his 34<sup>th</sup> chapter, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves with the wool, you kill them that are fed: but you feed not the flock. The diseased have you not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and cruelty have you ruled them ... Therefore, you shepherds! hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them." (verses 2-4, 9-10.) Yes, such servants should also be driven away from the ministry in the sanctuary by the congregations if their unfaithfulness becomes obvious.



When a prince sends his ambassadors to another prince they are received with honor and a person honors the prince in his emissaries. How much more should not the Lord's ambassadors be received with joy and honor, and the power and glory, grace and love of the Most High God be praised in his emissaries! But, friends! only to a small degree do we dare expect that it will be like that for us, because the Lord says, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," (Mt. 10:16) and "in the world you shall have tribulation." (Jo. 16:33.) Certainly, an ambassador of God obviously gets his work assigned in the congregation of God which calls him and God's children will receive the ambassador with thanks and praise as a precious gift from the Lord, but God's children still have the old Adam partially clinging to them which often places obstacles in the way of the glad reception of the Lord's ambassador and full resignation to the message which he brings, and there are many hypocrites intermingled among the number of God's children who carry God's name on their lips but whose hearts are far from the Lord, who see the Lord's faithful ambassador or hear his message as little as the Lord's obvious enemies. Finally of course God's church is surrounded by the world of which the Lord says, "It hated me before it hated you," (Jo. 15:18) and "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (Jo. 15:20.) An ambassador of the Lord also has to bear witness to this world in many kinds of ways.

In a word, it is to people who by nature have fallen away from God, who are corrupted and held in bondage by sin, children of men who have fallen under God's wrath and judgment, that the Lord sends his ambassadors

And what then is the message which an ambassador in Christ's stead has to present?

O, what other message, do you ask, can the almighty God, the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, the holy, righteous God, the all-knowing, eternal Judge really have to bring to them who by nature are his enemies, his disobedient, stubborn children, the transgressors of his holy Law, than the proclamation of his ferocious anger and horrible judgment? And surely, brethren, were it such a message we had to bring, then it were not surprising if we who are guilty of the same judgment avoided presenting such a message, as Jonah did previously.

But, God be praised! Chime in, dear brother! And you, dear congregation! Yes, all the world, chime in! God be eternally praised and lauded! It is not such a message of wrath and judgment which "an ambassador in Christ's stead" has to offer! The Lord Christ said of himself, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." (Jo. 12:47) and again, "the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Lk. 9:56.) The world has one who condemns it, namely Moses, but Jesus is the Friend of sinners, come to save that which is lost.

And thus must it also be with them who are "ambassadors in Christ's stead." Neither are they sent out to proclaim to people the wrath and judgment of God but to proclaim reconciliation and peace as Paul says in our text, "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," "since," as the apostle has said right before this, "God reconciled the world unto himself in Christ, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Co. 5:19.)

Yes, a "word of reconciliation," a pleasant and saving Gospel it is which "an ambassador in Christ's stead" has to bring to the comfort, life, and salvation of poor sinners. The prophet Isaiah has already articulated the same thing when he says, "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Is. 61:1-3.

That's why the same prophet praises these ambassadors when he says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, Your God reigns!" 52:7.

Yes, this is the saving message which we have the command of God to proclaim to sinners and children of wrath in Christ's stead, that the righteous God who is offended by our sins has been reconciled with us and all the world through his Son's bitter suffering and innocent death, that thereby all our sin is blotted out just as also that God's holy and righteous demands upon us in the Law which we could never satisfy and because of which we are guilty of death, are fulfilled for us through Christ, that this Jesus Christ who was delivered up for the sake of our sin and who became a curse for us is risen for our righteousness and has become our Mercy Seat through faith in his blood.

And friends! If now the fact that we are the Lord's ambassadors has to make us all humble and fearless toward the work, oh, must not then the thought of what a message of joy we have to present, and that God's purpose with it is nothing other than that everyone should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, the thought that we poor sinners should be God's co-workers for the salvation and blessedness of our brethren, oh, must not this conviction awaken in us proper zeal and joy for the work of the ministry and prompt us to carry it out with the proper faithfulness and patience! Not as though we are capable of this by ourselves, or "to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also has made us able ministers of the new testament—not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills but the spirit gives life." 2 Co. 3:5.6.

Yes, we must ourselves have been enlightened by the Holy Ghost regarding the divine truths. We must have been taught by God, have tasted how good he is, have found comfort, peace and salvation for our own heart in Jesus' death and blood. Then the love of Christ will compel us to present the message to poor brethren. Then we will not proclaim the truth as though it consisted of rather uncertain, inconsequential human opinions and thoughts, nor will we then abridge or distort the Gospel of God to please people, nor will we keep quiet like dumb dogs for fear of people when we should lift up our voices like a trumpet and cry loudly and not become weary.

No, then we will say: "I believe, therefore I speak," (2 Co. 4:13) and, "Woe is unto me, if I do not preach!" (1 Co. 9:16.) Then we will "speak words which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Co. 2:13.) Because we considered ourselves not knowing anything unto salvation save Jesus Christ and him crucified, therefore will also "our speech and our preaching not be with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Co. 2:4.5.) Because we have learned to know the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, then in spite of all contradiction we will also continue preaching "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness," (1 Co. 2:3) but the rock of salvation for all those who believe.

But knowing that Christ's true ambassadors must go to the Holy Ghost's school and that all their sufficiency is of God, yet they do not however despise the external Means which God gives them for growing true enlightenment and in the knowledge of God, as the enthusiasts do. Much rather, because they know from Scripture that the Holy Ghost will not come to us and enlighten us apart from the Means of the Word of God, just as Christ says: "he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (Jo. 16:15), so with David they will meditate on the Lord's word day and night, and as Paul says to Timothy: "give attendance unto reading," as well as "to exhortation and doctrine" (1 Ti. 4:13).

Yes, with prayer and supplication they will apply themselves to study of the Holy Scriptures so that as good stewards they are able to bring forth things old and new from the rich treasure chambers of the Word, all according to what the various hearers' needs and interests might require. This they will do so much the more as they themselves learn from Scripture that this Word of God on the one hand is the only touchstone according to which they themselves and their hearers can judge whether the message they bring is the Lord's own and whether the doctrine they teach is from God, or they are speaking from themselves, and that this same Word of God is itself on the other hand the power of God unto salvation, or that because this Word of God carries in itself Christ with all his gifts, it is a life-giving seed which makes the golden fields of the heart fruitful and through which the Holy Spirit regenerates the hearts and works faith in them who hear the Word and do not stubbornly harden themselves and resist the Holy Spirit's work of grace.

In such a way, day by day made more capable for his work, an “ambassador in Christ’s stead” carries his Savior’s Gospel to each and every person in the flock entrusted to him, to rich and poor, prominent and not, educated and not, sick and well, children and adults, the troubled and the happy, sinners and righteous. He passes no one by, will forget no one, not let himself be unconcerned about anyone. The prominent person is not too prominent for him, the insignificant not too insignificant, the learned not too learned, the lay not too simple and ignorant. With Paul he seeks to be all things to all people and because they are all sinners and all need grace and all are redeemed through the blood of Jesus, he therefore proclaims to them all the incomparable grace of God and the salvation which has occurred in Christ, so that through the preaching of the Gospel they can all come to faith, be strengthened in faith and thus be eternally saved, and with this preaching of his he “is instant in season and out of season,” as Paul exhorts (2 Ti. 4:2). This is the message from God, the saving Gospel which an ambassador in Christ’s stead has to bring.

But since, as we heard earlier, wherever an ambassador of Christ makes his appearance, there are always some despicable hypocrites, hardened sinners, self-righteous, proud hearts which in their natural blindness rely upon and comfort themselves with their natural piety, with their virtues, good works, pious practices, devotion, holy emotions and feelings, self-made repentance and faith, and since the children of God also still carry with themselves the sinful “flesh” in which of course the Scriptures say there dwells no good thing and which always resists the Spirit in them, and since their understanding is still darkened by sin, and their knowledge of what God wants them to do and to allow in all their lives so that their light can shine before men and they can proclaim the virtues of him who led them out of darkness into his marvelous light, since also this knowledge always remains defective and piecemeal, thus, you see, an “ambassador in Christ’s stead” must not neglect to preach the Law, God’s holy, unchanging will in the Law.

And of course the more he has experienced its crushing power upon his own heart and how it includes everything under sin and condemns all his natural piety and virtue as sin, and himself with it, to hell, but has also experienced how it is without any power to comfort a poor sinner and make him alive, how the Law only demands but does not give, only threatens and kills but does not make alive, the more will he also preach it in all its majesty and severity without leaving out the smallest part of it. He knows that only in this way will it crush the proud, self-righteous, rock-hard heart like a hammer, reveal its deep corruption and judge its thoughts and actions, its word and deeds as sinful and abominable to God. But the more will he also take heed to himself so as not to weaken its demands and judgment in any respect or to use it in the service of self-righteousness. He will see that in that way it will only strengthen the unrepentant in their security and lead the sincere into despair.

However, with all his zeal in the preaching of the Law he will however never forget that he is not to be a Law-preacher but an evangelist, that he is called not to the ministry of the letter but of the Spirit, that like his Lord and Master Jesus Christ he is not sent to judge and to destroy but to save and to make people blessed. He will not forget that when he carries out the ministry of the Law he is carrying out a ministry foreign to him and is only doing it in order to come the sooner to his real work, the ministry of the Gospel. He wounds and crushes only so that the balm of Gilead can the better heal. He topples the proud and self-righteous from his imagined height, to hell, so that he can the sooner be raised up to heaven through the power of God. He lets the letter kill and slay the sinner so that he can become the more willing to let himself be made alive by the Spirit, because “they that are whole do not need a physician.”

Therefore he allows also the preaching of the Gospel to follow side by side with the preaching of the Law, partly so that the sinner himself can the better learn to know God’s holiness and earnest hatred of sin at the same time as he is merciful to the sinner and partly so that he can be preserved from despair, but also so that sorrow and a new hope and a new longing after God can begin to be awakened in him at the same time as his heart is gripped by anguish and fear of sin and the wrath of God. Therefore when an ambassador of Christ believes that the Law has accomplished this part of its work and has worked acknowledgement of sin and has become a schoolmaster to Christ, then of course he continues to preach the Law to the continued slaying of the old Adam, just as he constantly lets it shine as a light for the believer’s feet and as a lamp to his path, but he watches himself carefully in order not to strangle the crushed and anxious conscience with the commands, threats and judgment of the Law. No, he hastens to bind up the broken heart with the Gospel and to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Then he is just as anxious to comfort the sorrowing and to proclaim to the frightened, despairing conscience that Jesus Christ,

the Son of God has removed the handwriting which was against us, since he has nailed it to the tree of the cross, that he has freed us from the Law, its power and curse, thus no law lies upon the righteous, and death and hell are conquered for us. Therefore we have no reason to fear and despair but we can sing in hope with Paul, “O death, where is your sting! O grave, where is your victory! The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Co. 15:55–57.

But one thing more. The more an ambassador of Christ learns in this way to know both the power of the Law and its complete lack of power—power to kill, lack of power to comfort and to make alive, the more still he watch himself for what is so common in our days, namely, making the Gospel itself into a Law; the message of salvation, into a strict demand from God upon people. He will not preach the good news of salvation in Christ in a legalistic manner. He will not allow the Gospel to become a demand on the part of God to people about the fact that they are supposed to believe. He will not present faith as a condition which people have to comply with and fulfill in order that God can be truly reconciled with the sinner and as a reconciled God turn to the sinner with a friendly disposition and bestow his grace upon him.

No, he will above all apply himself to preaching the Gospel, grace in Christ, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, eternal life and salvation, free and unconditioned, as a free and undeserved gift of grace from God which Christ has earned for everyone with his blood and which he now wants to have proclaimed in the Gospel and given to everyone so that the sinner has only to take for himself from the gifts which are being offered, in faith to make grace his own, which is given in the Gospel. He will seek to picture God’s incomprehensible love in Christ in the most winning words, how compassionate and kind he is toward us poor sinners because of Christ’s sacrificial offering and how he burns with the desire to embrace sinners.

Yes, he will, as the apostle says in our text, “beseech and pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” See, though, he will say, how God is reconciled to you through his Son’s blood, how he does not have thoughts of anger toward you but thoughts of peace. Therefore do not be afraid and do not be dismayed or flee from him but comfort yourself through the reconciliation which the Son has made for you! Apply it to yourself just as God has let it apply to you! Do not pile sin upon sin by despising grace and do not harm yourself in impenitence by treading the blood of the covenant under your feet! Through your unbelief do not make a liar in his own Word! Thus will an “ambassador in Christ’s stead” seek by the grace of God to make the Gospel truly glorious, truly pleasant, God’s grace exceedingly great so that the Spirit of God can overcome the sinner through his almighty power in the Gospel and persuade him to believe the gracious, saving message and in this faith to have forgiveness of sins, peace and salvation.

To sum up. He will of course preach about faith as the only means on man’s part through which he can appropriate grace to himself and be saved, and that it therefore is God’s earnest will for us that we do believe, just as he wants us to be saved. However, he will not once preach as the Gospel’s saving message: You are supposed to believe, you are supposed to believe, but he will by the grace of God set forth the Gospel’s content which is salvation in Christ, as an undeserved gift of grace from God to the sinner, so that through it he is enticed to believe, so that faith therefore comes through the Gospel and grasps the Gospel, and with it Christ and salvation. Only then does he understand it, only then does faith also become a gift of God worked by the Gospel, only then does the sinner become justified by grace alone for the sake of Christ. But if he preaches the Gospel as a demand of God, a commandment to people that they are supposed to believe, then he sees that the Gospel becomes law, faith a work of man, and the sinner justified not by grace alone for the sake of Christ but through faith as a work of the Law. May God in grace preserve us all from that!

As now an “ambassador in Christ’s stead,” he will in this way seek to awaken, comfort, bind up and strengthen the sick and the weak with the heavenly message and as a shepherd feed his flock in the pastures of the Word, carry the sheep on his shoulders and the lambs in his arms, so will he also busy himself with defending and guarding his flock against the wolves, the false prophets, and sacrifice everything, yes, rather lay down his life than to allow them to make their way into and to tear the flock to pieces. And as such false prophets he will consider anyone who departs from the clear word of God in doctrine and will not let himself be convinced otherwise but who continues spreading his errors in spite of all instruction and admonition, even if they seem to be less essential in comparison with other chief doctrines, even if they are very popular with the educated people of the world or with the vast majority of people or whether the errors are those of a

false spirituality. As he knows that a little leaven leavens the whole lump and therefore is to be pulled out according to Christ's command, so does he also know that there is more power in one word of God than in all the wisdom of the world, all popular opinion, and all self-chosen demands of spirituality. He knows that he is not called to be their co-worker, but God's co-worker and the servant of truth. If it happens that an ambassador in Christ's stead receives both hatred and cold treatment as his reward for such faithfulness to the Lord who has sent him, as well as to the congregation to which he is sent, he will however not be tempted by it but will comfort himself through the assurance of God's grace and the fact that in spite of the world and Belial, the Lord will uphold his word and his work.

Now where the ministry of reconciliation is thus administered faithfully, there the fruits of the Spirit will not be lacking either. Through the creation of faith and of a new life, hearts have received a desire to rejoice in the Lord's will and the power to begin to do it. However, just as a servant of the Gospel must take heed to himself, guard himself against all offense, seek to adorn the doctrine with a holy life and thus be an example for the flock, so must he also and with all diligence admonish it to thank God for the grace in Christ, to follow after him and to offer itself to him with everything which is theirs, so that God's name and doctrine shall not be mocked because of their sins and vices but much rather so that when the heathen see their good works they must praise God on the day of their visitation.

Now may the Lord who has sent you here, dear brother, may he equip you with the gifts of the Spirit, strengthen you to do the work of an evangelist, let you find an open door to their hearts and bless your work, so that this dear congregation may grow as a member of the body of Christ, to its edifying in love! Amen!

*Maanedstidende*, Dec. 1, 1868; pages 353–364

NIELS THORBJØRNSEN YLVISAKER was born in Sogndal in Inner Sogn, Norway, February 11, 1832. He worked for several years as an emissary until he came to America in 1868, having received a Call to the ministry. He was examined by a committee and was ordained to serve the Red Wing congregation and others in Minnesota. He also served Our Savior's congregation in Minneapolis for a while. He died April 16, 1877. He was a brother of Luther Seminary professor Johannes Ylvisaker; an uncle to Sigurd Christian (S.C.) Ylvisaker who served in the now-Evangelical Lutheran Synod and as president of Bethany Lutheran College 1930–1950.

# Ordination of Eleven Pastors

During 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Festival at the West Koshkonong Church

September 2, 1869

*Jeremiah 1:17–19*

## THE LORD'S SENDING OUT OF PROPHETS

Dear friends in Christ!

In the text which I read, the Lord, as it were, ordains the prophet Jeremiah. With these words he is sending him out to do the work entrusted to him, proclaiming the word commanded him by the Lord. Now even as it was so that the holy prophets spoke, moved by the Spirit of God, so that their words, as the clear, unquestionable word of God, could be a flowing fountain and an unfailing rule for all our faith and doctrine, so shall it also be the work of the calling to which you dear young brethren are ordained today. If it was the prophets' calling to lay Christ as the foundation through the proclaiming of the Word of God spoken to them, so shall it be your work to build further upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles as you proclaim the word which the Lord has spoken through their mouths.

Now if no direct call from the Lord has come to you as it came to the prophet, as he himself says, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you, and before you came out of your mother's womb, I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet unto the nations," yet, dear brethren, you can comfort yourselves with the fact that the valid call which you have received from the congregations is just as unquestionably the Lord's call. That's why Scripture also calls you "ambassadors for Christ, the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (2 Co. 5:20; 1 Co. 4:1) and says, "God gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some *pastors and teachers*" (Ep. 4:11) and again, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which *the Holy Ghost* has made you overseers, to feed the church of God." Ac.20:28.

We are going to take these words in our text, then, dear friends, and briefly consider how the Lord is sending the prophet out with them, and apply them here to his sending you out.

### I

The Lord's word first contains a summons: "You are to gird up your loins and make yourselves ready."

When a soldier prepared himself for battle or those who run in a race for the race, they tied their long garment up around their waists so that nothing should hinder them during the battle or the race. So are you now also to gird up your loins and make yourselves ready and prepared to take up the battle prescribed for you, and to advance unhindered on your course. You have a battle to fight, not against flesh and blood alone, but against principalities and powers, against an army of spiritual wickedness under heaven, and that, not merely for your own souls alone but also for the flock entrusted to you. As its guide and example you are to take the lead and lead it into battle so that you all fight manfully and lawfully. By word and example you are to guide and encourage the congregation to a sure and brisk race on the course, not after a corruptible crown but after the incorruptible, eternal life.

Let nothing then be a hindrance to you. Prepare yourselves for such a battle, for such a race! says the Lord. What, you ask, should then really be a hindrance to us? Alas, unfortunately there is so much which will tempt a servant of the Word and hinder him in his work. There are such things, just to mention some of the most important hindrances, the temptation to pride, to laziness and easy living, to covetousness and care of the belly, to letting himself be led around by the fear or the favor of men. We cannot half love God and half love the world. We are to and we must love God with our whole soul, our whole mind, all our strength and

ability. “Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world; if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him,” says John (1 Jo. 2:15). The holy ministry of the Lord demands the whole man; whole and complete, with everything which you have, you must dedicate yourself to his service. Talents and powers, gifts and goods, you must offer to him if you want to enter into his service. “Whoever lays his hand to the plow, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God,” (Lk. 9:62) and “whoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple,” (Lk. 14:27) says Jesus.

But how much less will such a person be fit to be “a co-laborer” with Christ in the ministry through which souls are to be led into the kingdom of God? Were it your chief concern to take care of your body, to cram your stomach full, thus even if you think that the fear of God is a means for gain, and use the ministry as a convenient opportunity for making a living and an easy life for yourself, how should you then really be able to be willing to make the effort which diligent study demands, or be willing to tolerate cold and heat, night watches and labors, want and lack, for the sake of the congregation? If pride has moved into your heart, tell me: How are you then able rightly to humble yourself before God and to let his strength be made perfect in our weakness, or with Paul, in self-sacrifice be able to strive after becoming all things to all men, yes, for Jesus’ sake, to regard it an honor to become the nobodies of the world? If you let yourself be led around by the favor or the fear of people, how are you then to receive power to remain with the truth, to admonish by virtue of your office without respect of persons and to stand firm in a battle where you would reap ridicule, scorn and tribulation from the world and often receive ingratitude from your own people as a reward for the good to which you aspired?

Therefore, brother, the Lord says to you today, “Bind up your loins and make yourself ready!” Let all self-love, all love of the world be gone, because the place you now tread is a holy place! Look up to *him* who calls you! What an honor to be his co-laborer! But take heed to yourself so that his word to the angel of the church in Laodicea shall not apply to you,, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish you were cold or hot! Therefore because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.” Re. 3:15.16. Consider the *work* you are called to do! It is not your own gain but the saving of souls you are to seek to further, but it does not happen with a divided mind. Think of the responsibility you have. Look toward the *goal* which beckons—eternal salvation! And then the Lord appeals to us, “Be faithful unto death,” then you shall inherit the “crown of life!” (Re. 2:10.) And it is to the true servant that he shall say, “You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord.” (Mt. 25:23.)

You see, brother! If you have all that before your eyes today and constantly during the race and the battle, then you will also gladly follow the Lord’s command, “*Bind up your loins and make yourself ready.*”

And what the proper spirit is and what the proper weapons are with which we should be equipped and ready for the work and the battle, the apostle Paul explains to us beautifully in the last verses of the epistle to the Ephesians when he says, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” (6:14–18.) Yes, heartfelt *faith* and confidence in the Lord, confidence in his grace in Christ, sincere *love* for him who first loved us, and for the souls he has redeemed with his blood, and then you will wield the *Word of God* as the true sword of the Spirit with prayer. This it is with which you, brethren, above all else must be equipped! Then you are ready to take hold of the holy, responsible work to which you are called and today are ordained.

## II

Next, the Lord’s word to the prophet contains an order: “*You shall speak unto them all that I will command you.*” In saying that the Lord indicates what kind of work it is to which he is ordering the prophet, and you, to do, namely, *to proclaim the word of God*, yes, the *Word of God*. It is well to give attention to this, friends! It is not our thoughts, opinions and views which we should preach, but the *Word of God* alone as he commands us. Our times have high opinions of their wisdom and they really want to proclaim it. The pride in us really wants to carry on on its own. But Paul says, “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God,” (1

Co. 3:19) and “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” (1 Co. 2:4.) If in preaching we are to explain the Word of God to the congregation, then we should not inject our own opinions into the Lord’s Word nor venture an uncertain opinion about the Word of God, but let Scripture explain Scripture as Peter also says, “If any man speaks in the church, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Pe. 4:11.) Therefore we must be able to prove with the Word of God everything we say in the congregation, and what we are not able to prove, that we should be silent about so that we should not be shamed before both God and men. But the Word of God which we have in the Holy Scriptures, there, in the writings of the prophets and apostles, God has revealed to us everything which it is his will and command that we should preach just as it is his *Word* which is going to judge us on the Last Day, so is it also according to that which is written that both we and the congregation are to test and judge our speaking.

And if we ask about the reason why we should hold so firmly to the Word of God, then the answer is: first, because the Lord whose messengers we are, has commanded us to do so. Next, because we can accomplish nothing at all with our thoughts and opinions, however profound and highfalutin, however pious, stirring and sweet-sounding even they can be. But *the Word of God* does not return void, but accomplishes what the Lord pleases, and what he sends it to do it shall succeed in doing. Because the psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (119:105.) “The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” 119:130. And the Lord says in the prophet Jeremiah, “Is not my word like a fire and like a hammer that can break a rock in pieces!” (23:29) and again in John, “The words which I speak are spirit and life,” (6:68) while Paul calls it the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, a sword of the Spirit, a Word of grace, of truth, of life, of salvation, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written, “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” 4:12. Finally, because the Word of God is the Word which is going to judge us on the Last Day, and the Lord many times cries “Woe” unto them who pervert his Word and thereby blaspheme his Spirit and offend and lead redeemed souls astray. Because it is written, “Yes, to the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Is. 8:20.)

But when God commands you to preach his Word, then he orders you also to proclaim its whole truth. “I have set you,” says the Lord to Jeremiah, “this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.” We must therefore not withhold any portion of the divine truth from his church. You should give so much the more attention to this in the face of the demands of our day, namely that a person is to accommodate himself to the views of the scholars and to public opinion, as if in their preaching the holy apostles should have accommodated themselves to the command of the prince and to the prevailing opinions among the people and therefore remained silent to the sins which prevailed publicly in the church of God. But even if the dear apostles had done such a thing for the sake of souls and not merely in order not to lose the favor of the authorities and to create unrest among the people, as they say, then they would thereby have made themselves guilty of a denial of the truth. But merely to *believe* such a thing about them is blasphemy against the Spirit of truth who spoke through them. But we will strive after being able to say with the apostle, “Whereunto I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (Ac. 20:26.) But at the same time, in doctrine and confession we strive after being “faithful to the truth in love,” (Ep. 4:5) so that we certainly should aspire to being all things to all men, with the same apostle. Especially should we remember the words over the weak, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient,” (1 Co. 10:23) and again, “For though I be free from all men, yet I have made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” (1 Co. 9:19.)

But if we now, even as faithful servants according to God’s command, are to proclaim the *whole* truth and not withhold any part of it from our hearers, but take things old and new from the storerooms of God’s Word, yet we must however adapt the food to each person’s requirements, giving the children milk and the more advanced more solid food. Especially must we study “rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Ti. 2:5. The Word of God of course consists of both Law and Gospel. Each has its purpose and for that purpose we are to use the one or the other according to the various spiritual states and development of our listeners. We should not refresh the secure and the impenitent with the Gospel’s heavenly comfort. We surely should not cast pearls before swine and holy things before dogs, even less should we weigh down and hurl into doubt with



the punishment and threat of the Law the person who already lies crushed in fear and anxiety. No, we should earnestly chastise the impenitent and stubborn, and admonish the proud; but with the Gospel we should comfort the distressed, refresh the thirsty, make the disheartened glad and courageous, lift up the fallen and make the most corrupt and depraved into children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. If we ourselves know nothing unto salvation save Jesus Christ and him crucified, then we have no one else to whom to direct others, because we know no other truth which can free the human heart bound by the net of sin and the devil's chains, than the truth which is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. We know no other Good News with which troubled consciences can be comforted and the dead in trespasses can arise to life in God and the prison he opened for captive sinners, than the Good News of him "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," our Savior, Jesus Christ (1Co. 1:30.)

### III

Thirdly, the Lord's word to the prophet contains a warning, "*Be not dismayed at their faces.*" The Lord says this because he knows that when his servants faithfully do the work to which they are ordained, that it does happen as it says in the prophet, "In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: *your own sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.*" (Je. 2:30). He knows well that the Word of the cross is always a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks because, as Simeon confessed when he took the child Jesus in his arms in the temple, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." (Lk. 2:34.) And you who preach him are also going to be persecuted and mocked in the world for his sake, just as Jesus declares, "but I have chosen you from the world, therefore the world hates you." (Jo. 15:19.) "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," (Jo. 15:20) and John says, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you." (1 Jo. 3:13.) He surely knows that for the sake of the sheep the shepherd must expose himself to the attacks of bears and wolves, that the righteous servants of the Word must lead the way into battle and that the blows of the opponents must hit them especially. You will be the object of the world's mockery, ridicule and persecution. But when this happens to you, brethren, when the Lord's word is fulfilled upon you, "And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household," (Mt. 10:22,36) when you must experience that your best efforts are misjudged, that you are chastised, must endure evil report and dishonor and be considered seducers and deceivers because you will not move from the divine truth in any point, yes, that your own brother is he who lifts up his heel against you, when you see how God's little flock is pressed on all sides, that among them who press upon it are all those who have a reputation in the world for wisdom, might, riches, holiness and virtue, and that the number of these enemies is as great as their shrewdness and cunning so that it often appears to human eyes that God's people are going to be completely destroyed and his truth eradicated from the earth, and in addition, brethren, there come the feeling of your own inability, weakness and sin, then your heart will easily be afraid, and flesh and blood despair. But the Lord counsels you with his word of warning, "*Be not dismayed at their faces.*" Do not let your heart be struck with terror when you see the sight, multitude and advance of the enemies so that the Lord becomes small to you in comparison with them, so that you let go of the truth and power of the Word of God and doubt the Lord's wisdom, might and faithfulness and think that the Lord's arm is shortened so that he no longer is able to uphold his Christendom and defend and preserve his truth! Because, if you thus make flesh your arm and your heart wavers from the Lord and you forget that "*his right hand has gotten him the victory,*" (Ps. 98:1) that he is the One who says to the storm: "Peace, be still," and to the waves: "Calm down," and who also now is powerful to quiet the stirred-up waves of the people, then the Lord says in his word of warning to the prophet that the consequences of that will be that he will terrify you before them. Then he will as a chastisement for your unbelief and your idolatry which you commit by placing more confidence in human power than in the divine, and by making him, the Mighty One, weaker than a child of man, then he will himself so fill your heart with terror and horror before them that you shall hardly be able to free yourself from them, but must despair and perish in them. But if on the other hand, in spite of everything which you see and feel, you hold fast to the Lord and his word and say with the prophet Micah, "I, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God shall hear me. Rejoice not against me, mine enemy; when I am fallen, I shall arise again; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be my light. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he will plead my cause and execute judgment for me; he shall bring me forth to the light, I shall behold his righteousness," (7:7-9) if you thus cling to the Word alone against all anxiety and fright which can inject itself into your

heart, then, then shall fear and anguish give way, and your heart again be of good cheer and courageous in the Lord.

#### IV

The Lord also states the reason why we should not be terrified before them in *the words of comfort, and the promise* which is the last portion of his address to the prophet. "Because I," he says, "*behold, I will today make you a defenced city and an iron pillar and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against you and not prevail over you; because I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.*"

While the defenseless city lay open to every attack and its citizens lacked every protection, yet on the other hand they could dwell securely in the defenced city in the shelter of the protecting walls from which the watchmen warned and called the warriors in the defense against the approaching enemy. The Lord made the prophet Jeremiah such a defenced city for the whole land. "I have set you for a tower and a fortress among my people, that you may know and try their way." Je. 6:27. The Lord equipped him with wisdom and power. He put his word in his mouth and made him firm in confidence in the Lord's protection. Thus he openly exposed all the attacks of the enemies and in spite of the fact that the kings and princes of Judah, its priests, yes, the people of the country mocked and persecuted him because he chastized them for their sins and prophesied to them the most dreadful punishment, yet because of confidence in God's faithfulness and the truth of the Word, he stood as immovable as an iron pillar. He did not let himself bend like a weak reed by the favor or threats of the most mighty or be deceived by the seductive speeches and false grounds of comfort of the priests or become frightened and give in to the cries and rage of the people. And for the few who accepted discipline and turned to the God of their fathers and relied on his help, for them he was a wall of brass from which the enemies' shots and arrows fell back powerless without harming them. However many and mighty the enemies were, yet they did not prevail over the prophet because the Lord was near to him in the Word of faith which he preached, so that later we hear him say himself, "The LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one; therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper; their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten." Je. 20:11.

In these last times also the princes and the priests and the people of the nations go about in various ways against the Lord and his Anointed. They are also going to fight against you, brethren! The rich and the mighty most often aspire to the increase of their riches and power, or the satisfaction of their lusts. They want to spend their days in splendor and luxurious living. A large share of the pastors are false prophets who cry to the people, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace, or who seduce souls with their doctrines of men but do not teach the way of salvation properly. And the masses of the people are a race torn away from God, who, drowned in an appalling materialism, for the most part use the name of Jesus for covering up their service of mammon and the worship of their own flesh.

Now if you are not to keep silent like a dumb dog but are to say to them what the Lord has commanded you, chastise them for their sins and threaten them with God's wrath and judgment if they do not turn to the Lord their God from whom they are fallen, then their wrath is going to be kindled and they are going to fight against you.

But the Lord will also make you a firm city, an iron pillar and a wall of brass before the country before them, while more and more he increases the true knowledge of God in your hearts and gives you the blessed certainty of faith so that you hold firmly to his Word and promises and fearlessly and courageously confess him as your Savior, him, who came down in order to give life to the world, and who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Yes, if you just humbly hold firmly to the Lord's Word and promises in prayer and supplication, then you shall also stand solid as an iron pillar which is not bent by every wind of doctrine or does not waver under the weight of the cross which rests upon you. Then you shall also be as an unyielding city and a brass wall for the many or the few who have their delight in the words of the Lord and who know and follow the voice of their Shepherd. God's people shall dwell securely with you, warned by you against all the craft and cunning of the enemy and protected by the mighty brass wall of the Word of God with which they are hedged around by you. So even if they may fight against you, yet you shall experience that they shall not prevail over you, "because I am with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you." (Je.

1:8.) Because where the Word of God is believed by upright hearts, there Christ himself dwells in the heart by faith, and where the Word of the Lord is confessed in truth and purity, there is he near in the Word of faith which we preach, he, the Mighty One who has created heaven and earth and who will one day create the new heaven and the new earth—he, the Lord of the Church, who has said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” (Mt. 28:18) he “before whom every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” (Ph. 2:10.)

But, brethren, if you thus have the Lord’s promise that he himself will be with you to deliver you, then you can surely also be sure that he himself comes in the storm and that even if he does not stir it up or cause it himself, yet it is, however, he who permits the enemies to storm against you to their own destruction but to your chastisement, purifying and victory, so that all the attacks of the enemy must serve to the furtherance of the kingdom of God even against their will, and to your own and your congregations’ salvation!

How often have you not, dear congregation, experienced this in the twenty-five years which have passed since the Lord gathered you here and built you up on the foundation of the prophets and apostles? What besides *the Word of God* did we have to cling to? It was our shield. It was our sword with which we defended the precious truth we inherited from our fathers, the truth which saved them, which saves us and which shall save the generations after us, as many as believe. And when enemies raged against us because of this truth, who was it really that comforted us in tribulation, upheld us in battle and turned the enemies’ cunning and power into a disgrace for them but good for us and to the glory of God and his truth? Who else really than the Lord Jesus Christ, our church’s King and Prince who will never let his truth and those who cling to it be put to shame? Thus at this our Jubilee Festival we will take the comfort and assurance with us from days past in the work and the battle which awaits us, that “he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Ph. 1:6) yes, also perform it in *them* and through *them* who today are ordained to his service, whose ordination itself is the most excellent testimony of his faithfulness from generation to generation.

Therefore, brethren, in the power of the Most High, let us freely take up the work, go courageously into the battle which is appointed us, finish the course and keep the faith! Then shall we also be able to sing confidently with the psalmist at all times, “We will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.” 46:2–5.

To that end may God help you and us, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

*Kirkelig Maanedstidende* May 15, 1870; pages 145–153.

*Kirkelig Maanedstidende* Oct. 1, 1869, pages 314–316 gives the names and a brief biography of the eleven men. After brief biographical information I give only the congregation(s) which they began to serve in ‘69:

**Torger Olsen Juve** born in Vinje in Telemarken, Norway, October 23, 1840. Came to America when he was 12. Studied four years in Madison, WI. Luther College, Decorah, IA, 1863–66. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1869; to West Prairie and other congregations in Wisconsin.

**Ellef Olsen** born in Gol in Hallingdal, Norway, April 25, 1841. Luther College, 1866. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Brule Creek, South Dakota.

**Johannes Ellefsen Bergh** born in Voss, Norway, May 5, 1842. Came to America when he was 15. Luther College, 1866. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Muskegon and Cedar Creek, Michigan congregations.

**Lars J. Markhus** born in Skonevig, near Bergen, Norway, June 23, 1842. Luther College, 1862–66. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Norway Lake and neighboring congregations in MN.

**Olaus A. Normann** born Jefferson Prairie, WI, Jan. 25, 1845. Luther College. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to St. Paul, MN, and Reisepest for the Northwest.

**Peter Sjursen Reque** born in Voss, Norway, July 15, 1842. Came with his parents to America in 1845. Luther College, 1865–67. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Our Savior's in Pope County, MN.

**Ole Ambrosen Sauer** born in Hitterdal, Norway, Mar. 2, 1844. Studied at Gjertsen's Latin School in Kristiania 1862–1866, B.A. Kristiania U., 1866. Came to U.S. 1866. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Fjeldberg congregation, Story County, IA.

**Stener Svenningsen** born in Saude in Telemarken in Norway Feb. 15, 1843. Luther College, Decorah, IA 1865–1865. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to French Creek and other congregations in Trempeleau County, Wisconsin ...

**Johannes Johnsen Tackle** born Evendvig, Ytre Sogn, Norway, Mar. 8, 1838; Stordøens seminary in Norway, 1861; Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to Lee County, IL.

**Jorgen Andreas Thorsen** born at Drangedal, Kragerø in Norway Sept. 12, 1838; Asker seminary in Norway; 3 yrs as teacher in Kristiania (Oslo), during which time he studied languages under private instruction; emigrated 1867. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO 1869; to East and West St. Olaf congregations in Olmsted & Dodge Counties, MN.

**Johan Henrik Simonsen** born Drammen, Norway, Sept. 24, 1840; Kristiania U. '66; taught a couple of years in Norway. Came to U.S. in '69 to be pastor at Jefferson Prairie & Long Prairie, in Rock County, WI.

# Opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Convention

East Painted Creek Church, Allamakee County, Iowa

June 23, 1871

*Matthew 13:12*

## THE MOST EXCELLENT GIFT

Grace and peace from God our Father and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved brethren in the Lord! We who have gathered here have of course for the most part come together as the pastors and representatives of our dear congregations in order to counsel with one another about the requirements of our church body and about such plans as can be made for the building up of our dear church and the furtherance of the salvation of redeemed souls.

But now of course we agree that *the Word of God* not only is the proper light in which all our work should be considered and judged, and the rule by which our discussions should be conducted and our resolutions be drafted, but it is certainly also the proper fountain from which through the power of the Holy Spirit there flows the proper love, zeal, fearlessness and wisdom which are necessary so that the discussions can be pleasing to God and of true benefit to ourselves and the congregations.

Therefore then, dear brethren, before we begin our meeting and turn to the discussion of the matters before us, we will turn our minds and hearts to the *Word of God* and for our mutual edification in this hour consider the holy words which the Lord himself has spoken and caused to be written in Matthew 13:12: "*For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has.*"

May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation for Jesus' sake and sanctify our hearts in the truth!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with and upon you all!

"What do you have which you have not received? Now if you have received it, why do you glory as if you have not received it?" 1 Co. 4:7. Yes, friends, all the gifts and goods we have, all the powers and abilities we possess are gifts of the almighty, faithful God, the Creator of heaven and earth! They are gifts of grace, undeserved gifts which he bestows upon us for the sake of Jesus Christ, for our good. But of all these gifts which God bestows upon us poor, sinful men of his mercy, the Word of truth, the Holy Gospel is the chief, the most excellent, because in this Word he gives us his Son, Jesus Christ, and with him the forgiveness of sins, justification, life and salvation.

That it is now just this *treasure* which Jesus wants to urge his disciples in this text to seek to possess properly so that it shall not be taken from them, but so that they can have it in abundance, that you see, friends, we see clearly from the context. Shortly before this Jesus has taught the Parable of the Sower and concluded it with the words, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear," (Mt. 13:9) and in the following verses he himself explains the seed as the *Word of God*.

Now of his inexpressible grace the Lord has given our synod this blessed Word of God and has preserved it pure among us to this day. Yes, thanks to God's faithfulness and mercy we have this Word of God entrusted to us unadulterated in the Holy Scriptures. We have its correct meaning rightly set forth and confessed in the Confessions of our dear Lutheran Church. It is proclaimed, even if in great weakness and with varying gifts, yet pure and untainted from the pulpits in our churches and our children are instructed in it from orthodox textbooks in our church schools.

But, brethren, why does the Lord now admonish us so earnestly in our text to take heed and to see to it that we also truly *have* this treasure? Why does he admonish us so forcefully to have it in this way, as though we *do not* have it? Surely for this purpose, so that not even that which we have shall be taken from us, but so that we can have it in abundance.

Thus we will then, brethren, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, consider more closely the importance of this warning and admonition of the Lord. And so that we can hear and take to heart both the admonition with its promise and the warning with its threat with greater earnestness, we will consider with one another:

1. The excellence of the treasure, God's Word, and next
2. How we can have the Word of God in such a way that it is given to us in abundance, and
3. How on the other hand, we have it in such a way that that which we have is still taken from us.

In his Word which God has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures he has not only made known to us his *holy and righteous* will which he has written on everyone's heart already at the creation, but especially his *gracious, merciful* will. In the Word of God he has revealed to us his counsel of salvation for our salvation as Paul says in the second chapter of Titus, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (verses 11–14.)

Yes, in this Word he himself, the Lord of heaven, the Prince of life, the Light of the world, comes to us with all his grace and gifts which he has acquired for us children of Adam who have fallen into sin and who are corrupt and condemned. In and with this Word he gives us the forgiveness of sin, righteousness, peace, eternal life and salvation. Peter says: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," (Jo. 6:68) and Christ says: "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life," (Jo. 6:63) and again: "Yea, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Lk. 11:28.)

Through the Word of God the Holy Ghost who is the Spirit of truth explains Jesus Christ in our hearts so that we can know him who is eternal life and be justified and regenerated, so that Christ can dwell in our hearts through faith, and through the indwelling of the Triune God we can be more and more conformed to him who himself is love and the essence of salvation, and we thus can be made holy, saved and glorified.

Therefore Paul admonishes Timothy to continue in that which he has learned, because he knows *the Holy Scriptures* which are able to make him *wise unto salvation* through faith which is in Jesus Christ. And he adds, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Ti. 3:16.

Without this Word of God we all have to walk the way of damnation to eternal condemnation, darkened in understanding, perverted in will, made strangers to life in God and damned in our own conscience. But now, in the Word of God, we have a light for the blind, the bewildered and the ignorant, a fire which shatters rock-like hearts and cleanses souls defiled by sin, a cure for the sick soul, a comfort for the afflicted, an ointment for the wounded conscience. Thus the royal singer says in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (vs. 105.) "The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." Vs. 130. "How sweet are your words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." Vs. 103. "This is my comfort in my affliction: for your word has quickened me." Vs. 50. And the prophet Jeremiah says in his 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter, "Is not my word like as a fire? ... and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" Vs. 29. And in the book of Wisdom it says: "Neither herbs nor plaster healed them, but your word, which heals all."

Yes, the words of God are spirit and life, a life-creating seed, the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. Because when the Spirit bears witness to the afflicted sinner's heart through the

Gospel that its sin is taken away and its ransom paid, God is no longer angry but is reconciled with the world through the blood of his Son which cleanses us from all sin, when it admonishes and begs the sinner now also to let himself be reconciled with God, to let enmity go, to accept God's love and to comfort himself through the Son's satisfaction, then as truly as he does not resist the Spirit's convincing willfully, hunger and thirst after righteousness are created in the sinner's heart, the heart is assured of its sin's gracious forgiveness and the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Now, brethren, if we have this Word of God and have it in abundance, then we have all that we need, then are we rich in poverty, strong in weakness, joyous in tribulation, blessed in persecution and alive in death. Then sin, death, judgment, devil and the whole host of hell cannot harm us. Yes, if heaven and earth pass away we are still going to survive because the Word of God endures for ever. So let us earnestly take to heart the admonition in the Lord's words, "Whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

We must first then consider whom the Lord means by those who have this treasure in this manner, so that the Lord's promise will be fulfilled in them. Since in the same passage the Lord is talking about such a having which poses the threat that that which he has shall be taken from him, then it is clear that the Lord does not mean them who merely have God's word in the Bible outwardly on the shelf or so that they read it or who have it preached in church so that they can hear it, but he means his disciples who *believe* in him. Because faith alone accepts and has all the gifts which God bestows in the Word just as Christ also says in John 6, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on me has everlasting life." (vs. 47). And again, "Everyone who sees the Son, and believes on him, has everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." Vs. 40.

Therefore, brethren, we should see to it that we have the Word of God among us so that we hear and read it in such a manner that we also accept and take it to heart as the Word of the Lord to us, so that we both let ourselves be disciplined by it and be led to daily repentance and let ourselves be comforted and raised up by it because we appropriate to ourselves the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as reconciliation for our sins and with full assurance cling to him "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Co. 1:30.) Yes, friends, if we shall seek to *have* God's Word in this manner, then we have in it our true light and firmly rely upon the grace and comfort given in it and therefore also have our proper delight in it and in him, Jesus Christ, whom it gives us for our salvation.

But when the heart *has* the Word and Christ in the Word in such living faith, then it is necessarily combined with such faith that the heart bears fruit in patience. We also see of course from the Parable of the Sower that such a person is like the good soil which both hears and understands the Word and also bears good fruit. Thus we are also to apply ourselves so that our understanding of God's Word can always increase and that even if we have to make a distinction here between the more and the less important, we do not however consider any of God's counsel which he has revealed to us unto salvation as unimportant.

Likewise we must strive with all earnestness for confessing the Lord and his divine truth to the glory of his name and the salvation of other souls, and through a godly life according to God's Ten Commandments let the Word of God appear distinctly in our life in a life not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Through such a confession we shall also make the most of the talents entrusted to us, namely, like those who received five and two talents and who gained another five and two, and "save both ourselves and them who hear us." (1 Ti. 4:16.) But, you say: "Yes, if only I could have and use God's Word in this manner!" Then ask him who gives exceeding abundantly above all that we comprehend and understand for his good Holy Spirit and he shall give it you and he shall perform it in you and through you.

To such a believing possession of God's Word belongs furthermore that with all diligence you seek to preserve it pure, and therefore fight for it against all those who attack and falsify it so that you either suffer mockery and scorn, injury to goods and reputation patiently, yes, or gladly sacrifice life rather than that you should give up a single letter of the acknowledged divine truth because in that way you would deny and give up Christ himself.

But, dear brethren, if we are now all, grownups and children, young and old, thus to have and to use God's Word in faith, then it is clear that both as individual believers and as congregations and as a synod we must do what is in our power in order that the Word of God can be proclaimed adequately in our congregations, both from the pulpit and in pastoral care and in the schools, and so that it can dwell among us richly both through family devotion and instruction in the home and through instruction and admonition in our fraternal dealings with one another.

But surely, friends, the more we must now deplore the shortcomings and the lack among us in these respects, the more must we seek them remedied with all our strength through the training and sending out of pastors who truly can preach the Word of God. At the moment, we must all, synod, congregations and every church member, unite in the effort to support and to develop our schools and gladly offer them both our dear young men who might be disposed to such training, and our earthly means which might be necessary for it. Oh, that we might not be miserly, since God loves a cheerful giver! Oh, that we might give of our earthly treasure which God gives us so undeservedly and richly, with pleasure and delight! What is all the world's wealth compared with the honor of our being God's co-workers in his work for the salvation of souls? What can compare with the joy which must be felt over one sinner who repents? Dear brethren! When we have and use God's Word in this manner, then also upon us, upon our congregations and our synod shall the Lord's promise be fulfilled, "Whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." Thus we hear the Lord say to the faithful servants in the Parables of the Talents and of the Pounds, "You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord!" (Mt. 25:23.) Thus according to his promise the Lord of his grace will reward the faithful acceptance and use of his Word already here in this life. He will let the testimony of Christ be confirmed in us and let us be made rich in him in all utterance and in all knowledge so that we shall not be lacking in any gift of grace (1 Co. 1:5.) He shall let us abound in everything as he says to the Corinthians, in faith and utterance and knowledge and all zeal and in love (2 Co. 8:7.) He shall then strengthen your faith so that you shall go forth from victory to victory over the flesh, the world and the devil. He shall then increase your love so that streams of living water shall flow from your life. He shall then let individual believers among us as well as individual congregations and our whole synod more and more become a potent salt toward preserving the world from decay, and a clear light burning in this world's darkness. Our church shall blossom as a rose in the desert, shine as the city which sits high on the hill, and the heathen shall run to see it and to rejoice, and in its streets streams of water shall flow for the refreshment of all the thirsty and broken-hearted in Israel. His Word of truth shall then be preserved for our children and children's children, generation after generation shall know the name of the Lord and praise his wonderful works.

But in the world to come the Lord's promise is going to be fulfilled even more gloriously upon him who has his Word because there we are going to see him "face to face." (1 Co. 13:12.) There we are going to say with loud voices: "Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God! For true and righteous are his judgments; for he has judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and has avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. . . Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready!" (Re. 19:1.2.6.7.) There, we are going to see that: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." (Re. 21:3.4.)

Dear brethren, because we now have such glorious promises, then let us walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as wise, and accept and preserve and use God's Word rightly so that to us it can be given, so that we have it in abundance!

O, let none of us rest satisfied with the fact that we have God's Word pure in our Confessions, in our textbooks, in our churches, schools and homes while we ourselves live on in our sins without conversion and faith. Because then the Lord's threat hits us when he says in our text, "*Whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has.*"

Wherever faith does not come by hearing and does not accept and preserve the Word, there the person who hears obviously has no share in the Word's gifts of grace, not forgiveness of sins nor peace nor



righteousness nor life nor salvation. The hearing do not hear and the seeing do not see. Upon such people are fulfilled the words of Isaiah, "Hearing, you shall hear, but not understand; and seeing, you shall see, but not perceive." (6:9.) From such hearts the devil takes away the Word that is heard because they hold firmly to errors and prejudices or remain in their pet sins. Or, it does not strike deep roots, but withers away easily because the heart is offended by Christ's form of a servant. It flees and hates his cross, but seeks its own will and glory. Or, it is choked by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches which gain power over the heart which does not fight against them in faith, in watchfulness and prayer. From such a person, says the Lord, shall be taken that which he has or that which he thinks he has. What did the Lord say to the wicked and lazy servant who buried his talent in the ground? "Take the talent from him, and give it unto him which has ten talents—and cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" (Mt. 25:28,30.) What did the Lord say about the unfruitful fig tree? "Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why does it cumber the ground?" (Lk. 13:7.) And John the Baptist cried, "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which does not bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire." (Mt. 3:10.)

Yes, so shall it go with whoever among us, brethren, does not bear good fruit! He is going to be cut down as an unfruitful tree and be cast into the fire; and let us not be secure, because the axe is already lying at the root of the tree. First, because such a person is given over to doing what is not good. He acknowledges more and more distaste for the Word of God day after day and acts thoughtlessly toward it. He becomes less and less able to acknowledge and to accept God's counsel for his salvation. He becomes more and more incapable of becoming a vessel unto honor, well equipped for every good work. All the earthly circumstances which must serve the believer for good and in which he seeks to work for the glory of God and his neighbor's benefit, on the contrary, become like so many snares which entangle and immerse him deeper in unbelief and idolatry, or he falls from one error to the next, and from a person who is seduced, he becomes a seducer.

And now the congregation and the synod which behave so thoughtlessly and indifferently toward the Word of God! There will the Lord come and remove the candlestick from its place, and when they do not want to believe the truth and are not concerned about preserving the Word of truth, then will the Lord give them over to errors so that they believe lies.

Thus did it go in ancient times in many congregations in Asia Minor and after the Reformation, in many branches of the Lutheran Church in Germany and other places. Thus has it unfortunately also gone in several of our churches in this country. O, that it might serve us all as a warning that we might not hereafter be so ungrateful and show ourselves negligent and indifferent in the use of the Word of God so that no even more severe judgments shall come over us! Let us not forget what the Lord says to the angel of the church in Laodicea, "So then because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, so that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent." (Re. 3:16–19.)

But if the Lord's threat upon them who hearing do not hear and seeing do not see, who *do not have*, is so terribly fulfilled already here in this life, how frightfully will it then not be revealed to them in the world to come! The foolish virgins whose lamps were burned out when the bridegroom came, got to hear him say: "Verily, I say unto you, I do not know you" to their cry: "Lord, Lord, open to us!" (Mt. 25:12–11.) He himself has surely said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity!" (Mt. 7:22,23.) And "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" (Mt. 25:31,41.) Truly a frightful judgment, a dreadful eternity!

And now, dear brethren, so that this dreadful judgment shall not come upon us and our dear congregations, so that the blessed Gospel shall not be wrested or be taken away from us here and we lose eternal salvation in the life to come, let us not take God's name in vain by hypocrisy or false teaching, but let

us hold the Word of God in high esteem and honor and gladly both hear and learn it! And particularly we, dear brothers in the ministry, who should be examples to the flock and stewards of the mysteries of God, let us apply ourselves so that we can be found faithful—faithful in accepting and faithful in proclaiming the Word of God! Let us work while it is day, the night is coming when no one can work! Let us in cooperation with our congregations work so that the Word of God can dwell richly among us in all wisdom, so that all of us in our synod diligently might hear God’s Word and preserve it in fine and good hearts and bear fruit through it in patience! May God grant it abundantly by his grace for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

*Synodal Beretning* 1871, pages 6–14.

# Sunday, June 14, 1874, During The 15<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention

Holden Church, Goodhue County, Minnesota

*“For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:4.5.*

## FAITH AS THE VICTORY WHICH OVERCOMES THE WORLD

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Ge. 3:15. With these words to the serpent God has announced that there are always going to be two kingdoms on earth, the kingdom of the devil and the kingdom of Christ, or God, and that these two kingdoms are going to be as diametrically opposed to each other as fire and water are, and that there is never going to be reconciliation but an everlasting enmity between these two kingdoms and their princes. But he also promises that the kingdom of Christ shall be victorious because the Seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.

This prophecy of God was fulfilled and is being fulfilled daily. Nothing about the two kingdoms has changed since that time. There has never been peace or unity between them, but neither has the kingdom of the devil ever emerged from the battle victorious. The pitched-battle took place in Gethsemane, on Golgotha. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Life, died on the accursed tree. Only the condemned thief on the cross confessed him. The prince of darkness seemed then to have gotten the upper hand, the kingdom of God to be destroyed, but Jesus Christ descended into hell and proclaimed the victory he had won over the devil.

For 1800 years this victory which he revealed by his resurrection has been proclaimed to the world through the Gospel, and through this same Gospel the spiritual walk of the Savior who died for us but rose again has been an uninterrupted, unchecked course of victory in all these centuries down through the generations. Thus the psalmist sings, “Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.” (19:4–6.)

The prince of one of these kingdoms is also called “the prince of this world.” This world, insofar as it lies in the wicked one, therefore also belongs to the kingdom of the devil. That’s why there is and there is always going to be an everlasting enmity between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Christ says, “My kingdom is not of *this world*,” (Jo. 18:36) “*the prince of this world* comes, and has *nothing in me*,” (Jo. 14:30) and to the citizens of his own kingdom he says, “If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore *the world hates you*.” (Jo. 15:19.) It is true that in our progressive century people are suggesting a new, higher enlightenment, that a reconciliation between the world and the kingdom of God is not impossible, that a greater oneness must be produced, be it art, knowledge, culture, civilization, humanism or moral philosophy, wherein both powers can be united, and that by proclaiming the Gospel more palatably to the world’s taste a person would make it more appealing and acceptable to the world and win greater numbers of people for it. And people do not tire of proclaiming this new gospel-of-the-world from pulpits and speakers’ platforms, in schools and lodges, in books and newspapers.

But, my friends, this is neither a new nor a higher enlightenment but an old lie and delusion of the devil. Because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of them who do not believe.” (2 Co. 4:4.) The wise and haughty spirits of the world who did not want to be fools for God, its rich and powerful who did not want to be submissive to the Law of God, its covetous and successful people who did not want to forsake its pleasure and glory but who all, however, wanted to be saved, they have always known and found pleasure in this gospel, but souls were not won for the kingdom of God by it. No reconciliation is brought about between it and the kingdoms of the world in that way. Because it is written in the Word of God, “He (the Spirit of God) will *reprove* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (Jo. 16:8.) And again, “Love not the

world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever.” 1 Jo. 2:15–17.

That’s why the apostle Paul also admonishes Christians, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship does righteousness have with unrighteousness? and what communion does light have with darkness? And what concord does Christ have with Belial? or what part does he that believes have with an infidel? And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? for you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Co. 6:14–18.

When Christ says, “My kingdom is not of this world” and “the prince of this world has nothing in me,” he is also declaring himself and his kingdom to be in an irreconcilable opposition to the kingdom of the world and its prince. Reconciliation, agreement, compromise between them is impossible. In that case one of two things must happen. Either the world must return to God and thus cease to be the world, or through such an accord the kingdom of God must give up its essence as the kingdom of God and become the kingdom of the world, as far as the appeasement extends. It therefore stands firm as incontestable divine truth that a child of God, a citizen of the kingdom of Christ must be at odds with the world all his life. Children of God also have something of the world in themselves against which they must for that reason strive, as well as against the unbelievers in the world.

We also, my dear friends, are called to this battle! We were incorporated into the kingdom of God through Baptism and as Christians we confess ourselves as its citizens. If we are not going to be exposed as hypocrites we also have to wage this battle with the world unceasingly. And when I say, “with the world,” then these words of the apostle also apply here. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ep. 6:12.)

However, we are not to be afraid, because our Lord says, “The prince of this world is judged,” (Jo. 16:11) and, “I have overcome the world.” (Jo. 16:33.)

In the meantime, since our enemy appears in different forms and shapes at different times, although he is always the same spirit of darkness and lies, therefore it is of great importance that we rightly learn how he is attacking the kingdom of God in our days and how we are going to be able to overcome him. Now, since a large portion of us who have assembled here have come together as pastors and delegates of the church of God among us in order to counsel with each other about what can serve to the building up, advancement and victory of the kingdom of God among us, I have thought that it could be a suitable preparation for our participation in our meeting’s serious discussions if at this time we considered more closely:

## **FAITH AS THE VICTORY WHICH OVERCOMES THE WORLD,**

and then, 1) *The World As The Enemy We Have To Strive Against*, and 2) *Faith As The Victory Which Overcomes The World*.

### **I.**

It can hardly have escaped the attention of any thinking Christian that as a power hostile to the kingdom of God the world acts in an appallingly presumptuous manner, breaking down and overthrowing all divine and human order. Who is not acquainted with *socialism*, this enemy of society which gathers hundreds of thousands, especially from the working classes and dregs of the people under its banner, and also already has a mighty army of *internationals* scattered around the world to spread and to fight for the carrying out of their ungodly principles. Well do these names even now have a bad sound in the ears of many children of the

world. But what power their ideas have won, of that, however, the history of many legislative assemblies in our days will give the clearest proof. To remove all inequality from the world and to make everyone, and all human relationships on earth equal, in order in this manner to free us from all need and misery, and to make everyone happy, this is socialism's great task.

But it is not going to be achieved by bringing about a complete equality in political, and in part, in social respects, as many freedom-enthusiasts have worked for in well-intentioned zeal but without taking the proper regard for people's diverse spiritual abilities and development, and to the ordinances put in place and sanctioned by God himself, and without considering that they were preparing the soil for the socialism which is the undoing of society.

No, their battle cry is: *Away with religion and Christianity, away with authority and authoritativeness, away with family and property!* These poor, blinded people who are all but bereft of all reason, have as a rule seen near at hand, yes, themselves felt much of the poverty and misery of life on earth. They have often seen their best situated fellowmen, who did, however, have it in their power to render help, not lift a finger in order to ease the heavy burden for them, but on the contrary, greedily and unmercifully have taken advantage of their poverty in order to oppress them even more and to enrich themselves.

Without the humbling acknowledgment of sin as people's ruin, without the strengthening confidence in an almighty, gracious God's ruling of the world and the individual person's destiny, and in his righteous judgment, and finally, without the blessed comfort of the hope of eternal life, these poor people themselves try to take the governance of the world into their own hands and to secure for themselves the only happiness they believe in, the *earthly*, and that, through the means which seem to them the most proper and quickest for leading to their goal. They declare open war on all moral philosophy and religion, which based upon the unchanging nature of God, condemn their goal as well as the means, but above all, upon Christianity which preaches renunciation and patience, and comforts the suffering with the grace of God and an eternal life.

Then after having disengaged themselves and cast from themselves all divine ties and authority, they turn to human ordinances and seek to put them (i.e. Christianity, etc.) aside. The authority of parents and superiors, just as woman's subjection under the man, is to them an intolerable tyranny, property an authorized thievery; instead of marriage free love is to be the rule; and however much even the Fifth Commandment is respected, when it comes to bringing the new world-order into place, they have very recently had a grand demonstration in the Paris commune's activity, and many hints in the so-called strikes which have been taking place in several of the countries around the world.

This enemy has not yet appeared *among us* in its most threatening form, mostly because of the comparatively good circumstances and political power of the working classes, but from their ranks we have seen different persons push forward both in our legislative assemblies and in our newspapers, so that it is up to us Christians to be at our posts against the emerging enemy. "They who sow the wind, shall reap the whirlwind," Scripture says (Ho. 8:7.) People may also verify that here. For so long now, the world's learned, rich and refined, have preached and shown indifference and contempt for Christianity. They have lived in luxury and ease with their belly as their god. By taking the Word of God away from the schools and education, or by falsifying it, they have undermined all Christian faith and true fear of God among the people in the lower classes. Now totally immersed in indifferentism and materialism, these people are turning their weapons against their teachers and are demanding their prosperity in order to be able to partake of their lust. And the Lord in his righteousness lets this scourge of discipline rage over people and nation.

I mentioned *indifferentism!* This spiritual indifference is also one of the alluring forms in which the spirit of the world clothes itself and attacks the kingdom of God. In its coarse form it steps up to us with its: "Everyone is saved in his own faith." The religionless schools are most frequently its nursemaids, especially where they come forward with the claim of being adequate for the people's education. In the lodges of the Freemasons and other secret societies one finds as a rule, a stronghold for, encouragement and dissemination of it. People say there:

Christian, Jew, heathen, Turk,  
Each just worships God in his own way!

But just as often this enemy advances to meet us clothed in the cloak of Christian love. It is sensitive, and above all, wants no controversy even if the crown can be won by it. When people agree in the essential things, they say, then it doesn't matter so exactly what they teach and believe. However, a person cannot be sure in his cause then either. The Word of God is not so clear, and both sides can be entitled to their opinions, just so that a person lives like a Christian. It therefore tries to unite yes and no in a religious union. It does not understand nor does it want to understand that its alluring talk is the serpent's old: "Yea, did God really say that?" (Ge. 3:1) or Pilate's doubting outcry: "Yes, what is truth?" (Jo. 18:38.) It does not comprehend that as Luther says, that love is cursed in the abyss of hell, which is obtained with damage and detriment to the doctrine of faith (*Lectures on Galatians*). It does not understand that with its love and unionism it dishonors God and sneers at his Word, that only the true Word of God feeds faith properly and that only the correct, true faith brings about a sound Christian life and the proper good works.

When this indifference to unity of doctrine, this indifference to the Word of God as the chief heritage which was committed to us by the fathers, first enters into congregations, then it will soon reveal itself in other ways. People become indifferent to the salvation of souls, to the Christian education of children, to the establishment and support of Christian schools, to the furtherance of the kingdom of God generally. For the sake of precious peace, and out of love, as it is called, people deny the truth and bring about an appeasement with lies and error, call sour sweet, evil good and keep silent toward the sins of brethren instead of chastising and admonishing them. Truly, a dangerous enemy in our time against which every one of us must see to it that he is properly armed!

I also mentioned *materialism*. It denies or despises the Spirit and the spiritual. It sets up matter, the bodily, the earthly as the only reality, or at any rate as the highest kind of reality. I will not entertain its insane, audacious theory about the gradual development of all creatures, man as well, from matter, or about man's soul being only a bodily substance. On the other hand, how people are bypassing almost all education and are trying to push this materialistic bias forward through a one-sided instruction of the youth which is set up to develop such abilities thoroughly and to give such knowledge as can be useful for this life, how it is revealing itself in an impetuous coveting and chasing after acquiring this world's goods and finding happiness through their enjoyment, and how more and more it is producing a generation whose characteristic feature is covetousness, vanity, and addiction to sensual pleasures, is something to which no Christian can be blind. Granted that in broad daylight, in theory, many people do want to reject the materialistic principles, in practice there are unfortunately all too many of them who without a doubt display in their life the fact that their belly is their god, that they do regard the gratification of the body's needs and of truly sensual desires as the most important, yes, the only thing which is worth providing for, and that they regard thoughts of an afterlife as an idle musing and a striving after the eternal estate as foolishness.

I dare say that this enemy is perhaps the one which has gained most access into our congregations. But one thing must be obvious to us all, that just as it gains power over hearts, so will all spiritual interest and life be extinguished, and no talk about sacrifice, work and struggle for the kingdom of God will remain. When we then must complain so often about indifference, covetousness and lack of proper willingness to sacrifice where the affairs of the kingdom of God such as church and Christian schools are concerned, then we should not be uncertain about what kind of enemy we have to fight nor should we step out of the way for him because he has come to great power, but with the greater earnestness oppose him in the full armor of a Christian.

Finally in the fourth place I want to emphasize particularly the spirit of *self-righteousness and pride* as one of the forms the world assumes in its enmity to the kingdom of God. This spirit which brought about the Fall of man in the first place, instead of bowing completely to the Word of God and to his will revealed in the Word, wants to find fault with this word and by human strength do what grace alone is capable of. This same spirit is today keeping thousands from entering the kingdom of God and is luring other thousands to fall away from it. It is nourished and encouraged in the natural child-heart, yes, is imbibed by ever so many Christian children's souls through a humanistic education and religionless schools where a *moral philosophy* is imprinted and pursued which looks away completely from the natural depravity and spiritual impotence as well as from the necessity of grace for salvation and of every good work, and instead builds on the sufficiency and power of man's natural ability. The secret societies are also the widely spread nurseries of this spirit.

From the life-and-death battle against this spirit of self-righteousness and pride which had as it were embodied itself in that great kingdom of the world, the papal church, the Lutheran Church emerged through the Reformation, whose flower therefore is the doctrine of the sinner's justification by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. The existence of the Lutheran Church is dependent on this life and death struggle being continued. Also our synod's battles over it have essentially been a fight against this spirit and for the preservation of this precious jewel of the Lutheran Church. It was surely this old pharisaic, or, if people prefer, false pietism, that we have had to fight since our beginning. And after all, are not our synod's latest battles pertaining to justification and absolution fought against the same enemy? That God is not merely *willing to*, but has actually accepted Christ's atoning work and imputed it to the entire world for righteousness, and now on his part makes it known and gives it to poor sinners in the Gospel and absolution without regard for whether a person believes it or not, but really in order that he shall believe it and be saved, and therefore also leaves the entire glory for the salvation of sinners with the Lord, you see, people cannot comprehend this incomprehensible saving grace and therefore reject it, while instead a doctrine is insisted upon which must presuppose a cooperation and merit on the part of man.

But brethren, although we must thank God for it that he has preserved the pure doctrine in this point among us, no one must therefore think that we have driven this enemy so far from us that there is no longer any danger! On the contrary, he is lying and napping at the door of everyone's heart. Oh, how does he not tempt us daily on the one hand and to excuse, yes, to justify our sins both before God, ourselves and our fellowmen, not to believe God in his Word and to comfort ourselves fully with his grace but to conceive mistrust and despair toward his truthful as well as gracious promises, and on the other hand, to a proud, unloving manner over toward our fellowmen, to unwillingness to forgive one's brother and to reconcile oneself with his antagonist! Alas, yes, how much sin is there not in this direction among us and how important is it not therefore that we work very earnestly on sweeping out this old leaven!

You see, dear friends, in this way we have then considered some of the leading powers of this world with which a child of God has to fight in our days! And if I shall mention the poisoned source from which these destructive streams of the world flow, then it is *unbelief*, the unbelief which does not want to hold the words of Scripture, the chief truths with the lesser, to be unfailing, immovable divine truth and does not remain with it and build on it as the solid rock.

Truly, brethren, they are mighty enemies we have to fight against, so much more dangerous for us since they have an ally in the old Adam who beats in all our hearts. And yet you must overcome these enemies if you are not going to miss the kingdom of God and be lost eternally.

Therefore the answer to this question is extremely important for us:

## II

What is the victory which overcomes the world? The answer to this question is given in our text: "*Our faith,*" it says there, "*is the victory which has overcome the world.*" Thus it is therefore *through faith*, brethren, that we shall conquer all these mighty enemies. Yes, the apostle says our faith is itself the victory which has overcome them all. Therefore it is not by the light of our reason or by the strength of our will or by any other natural human power whatever that we are going to win the victory, but through faith. But when the apostle says further, "our faith," then he is clearly teaching by that that therefore not "everyone is saved by his faith," but only through the Christian faith—"our faith." And so that we should not nurture doubt about which faith he means, he adds himself: "Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Luther says:

The right, victorious faith is that which believes that Jesus is the Son of God. It is an invincible power created by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of Christians. Because it is a certain understanding which does not waver hither and yon or gape after his own thoughts, but grasps God in this Christ as his Son sent from heaven through whom he reveals his will and his heart and helps from sin and death to grace and new, eternal life. It is such a confidence and trust which does not rely upon its own merit or worthiness, but upon Christ, God's Son, and, relying upon his power and might, fights against the devil and the world. Therefore this faith is also not a cold, lazy, lame and vacant thought,

such as the papists and others dream about faith, but a living, active faith, so that where it is, there must victory, fruit and vanquishing follow along. If this does not follow along, then neither is faith there.

So that now it is clear that with the words, “Who believes that Jesus is the Son of God,” the apostle John does not agree with them who say: This article is the essential one on which all Christians must agree but about which the rest of the people can then believe as they wish. Because faith does not know Jesus as the Son of God at all apart from the Word through which he has revealed himself. On the contrary, as he reveals himself there according to his essence, his works and his will, thus does faith believe and continue to believe.

For that reason John also says at the conclusion of his Gospel, “But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.” (20:31.) And Jesus settles the matter when he says, “If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed,” (Jo. 8:31) from which therefore follows that if we do not want to continue in his Word, then we are not his disciples either and therefore cannot have the faith in him which makes us to be his disciples. The faith which is the victory over the world must therefore want to hold to Christ and his Word in all points, and insofar as it departs from this, insofar as it is not the true Christian faith and has no promise of victory over the world and does not want any such victory either, but itself remains overcome by the world. Therefore in these words the apostle gives indifferentism as little as false faith or obvious unbelief promises of victory, but only the correct faith, that which agrees with the Word of God.

But now someone will perhaps say: “Then it does not depend therefore on whether a person is *believing* properly, but only on the fact that he is orthodox and exhibits a confession which agrees with the Word of God.” That such an opinion is however false is clearly evident from the words the apostle has said before, “Whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world.” The faith, the apostle therefore wants to say, which is to be in a fight with the world and overcome this enemy, must not be an historic, a dead faith, an empty fancy or mere confession of the lips, but a living faith which is not born of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God, or: he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God and who through this faith is going to gain victory over the world, must not be an unconverted person in his heart’s natural state, but must be born again to a new life by God through his Holy Spirit.

Accordingly, brethren, we should therefore be zealous, considered both as individual Christians and as a synod, in order to hold firmly to the Lord’s Word and to the correct confession, and not let ourselves be dissuaded from it by anything, because the promise of victory over the world and therefore of salvation is tied to such a believing *correctly*. Therefore for the same eternal salvation’s sake, let us not forget that they who exhibit such an orthodox confession must be regenerated, if they, as they who become victors, are going to retain the victory.

And when we unfortunately see so little of the victory over the world among us, but plenty of them who are marching in step with the world or obviously are letting themselves be led by its prince, then we can conclude from it how common dead faith is and how much we need the warning against it.

O, therefore, then, let everyone be admonished in time, before it’s too late and he is cast out to his eternal ruin with his: “Lord, Lord!” there, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!

And because this new, spiritual birth is created by God himself through the Means of Grace ordained by him, thus everyone use them diligently and properly, so that he lets himself be disciplined by them to true repentance for sin and fear of God’s wrath and judgment. Thus in his sinful wailing’s feeling will God certainly awaken in him through his saving Gospel the living faith which grasps Christ and will create a new spirit within him as certainly as he does not willfully resist this Spirit of grace!

When as such a new creation in Christ you believe in him as the Son of God, then you will strive in earnest, and not hypocritically, against the world in all the forms in which it steps forward against you, and then not only is the victory promised you by God, and therefore certain, but then you, yourself, prove your faith as the victory which has overcome the world, and as long as you continue in faith you go unceasingly onward from victory to victory until one day you receive the imperishable crown of glory.



But, you say, how can this faith in Jesus as the Son of God be such a mighty power and overcome such powerful enemies? We heard above that Christ says, "I have overcome the world." Now it is of course faith alone which can grasp and actually also does grasp Christ with all his merit and gifts and therefore also with him, victory. Faith makes it one's own and comforts oneself personally, knowing that Christ has overcome the world, and however much the prince of this world still storms and rages against it, thus it is, however, peaceful and happy because it knows that the prince of this world is already judged and his power broken. Yes, however much the believer must still confess his own weakness to his humiliation and shame, and that through it he has brought on one wound after the other from the prince of this world, and through his cunning let himself be misled to take part in his essence and to be seduced into many kinds of folly and sins, thus does faith however comfort him anew daily through the forgiveness of sins, righteousness and victory which Christ has acquired, and says happily and boldly: "God be praised, this world's prince is, however, judged. He has no part in Christ, therefore he has no part in me either. I am free, however weak and overcome I even now many times can appear and feel myself to be!"

Now surely the more the believer daily holds Christ before himself by the Gospel, his work, struggle and victory, everything before him, the more light, pleasure and power thrills him there. He looks into the depth of the richness of the love and mercy in God the Father's heart whom the Son reveals, and he obtains all the greater and greater delight in being with him and following his commands. He obtains courage as well as the desire to forsake all and to resist everyone who wants to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Through faith Christ dwells in his heart. The power of Christ reveals itself in his weakness and he is able, as Paul says, to do all things through Christ who strengthens him.

But faith not only rejoices over the present good things, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness and peace, it looks to the things which are coming, as expecting them. In it it looks "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (He. 12:2.) Thus it does not become weary and lose heart over the sufferings of the present time, but preserves its soul through its patience and rejoices in the hope of the coming glory with which the sufferings of this present time are nothing to compare.

That's how faith acts, so that more and more for the believer the world and its glory lose their charm and allure, their captivating power. So far from it being the highest, the only thing his soul desires, thus does faith teach him on the contrary to consider all things to be filth and loss in order to win Christ. It gives him rich compensation for all the want and pain, for all the troublesomeness and sacrifices in the present and in the coming good things which he enjoys in the fellowship of Christ.

But just as faith gives him distaste for and abhorrence of the world's pleasure and glory which wants to obscure for him and separate him from the kingdom of God and its glory, and just as it gives him delight and courage to forsake its wealth, its friendship, its glory and its luxury, thus faith which is active in love also gives him power to humble himself before people as well as before God and to deal with them in love, forbearance and peaceableness. The faith which daily refreshes itself at the spring of grace and quenches its thirst at the fountain of sin's forgiveness makes the heart willing humbly to consider itself as the least, in love to forgive its debtors just as its debt is forgiven it, to show mercy as mercy has befallen it, to see in every needy brother the needy Jesus and to demonstrate to him the love and gratitude he owes him and which the soul unceasingly longs after demonstrating to him.

Finally, faith holds before the heart the shield with which it can quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. As faith, which has everything in its Savior, and lives by his grace and merit alone, beats back all the thoughts of pride and self-righteousness, thus does it comfort against all temptations to hopelessness and unbelief through the unailing testimony of the love of God in Christ to which it clings. Yes, even the raging storms of temptation must abate before the Word of faith from the mouth of God, "Be of good cheer, your sins be forgiven you!" (Mt. 9:2.) Because through these words God himself of course opens his heaven for the sinner against whom hell already has opened its mouth, and faith believes and comforts itself through these words because they are God's words and God cannot lie even if sins are blood-red as the color of scarlet and numerous as the sand of the sea.

Yes, also in death's struggle when this last enemy shall be overcome, faith has Christ at its side and in its heart. Therefore we sing in the hymn:

Naught but unbelief can ever  
Condemn me or deny me,  
For of all men Christ my Savior,  
Is Himself pleading for me  
And all who in faith continue  
And unto the end abide;  
In this faith I too continue  
Holding up this same strong shield.

Let Thy Spirit, O, dear Savior,  
Both confirm and strengthen me,  
So that in death's most bitter hour,  
Faith's hand grasped so firm by Thee,  
My soul may with its final sigh  
Ascend to God's throne on high!  
And there be near my gracious God,  
And wear life's crown 'pon my head.

Thus faith demonstrates itself as the victory which overcomes the world and as such shall it also be revealed on the Last Day. Then we shall be arrayed in white robes and receive the crown of life which is promised them who are faithful unto the end. Because Jesus says, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." (Re. 2:10.) And, Revelation 7:13–17: "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he who sits on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Now then, examine yourselves whether you are in the faith! May God help us also to be arrayed in the armor of faith and to fight its battles not in carnal zeal and with carnal weapons, but with spiritual weapons, which are the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God!

And may the God of victory give victory and success to our battle, so that we, as they who become victors, might retain the victory! Amen, in Jesus' name!

*Kirketidende*, July 10, 17 & 24, 1874.

# Ordination Sermon

October 15, 1876

Madison, Wisconsin

*“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:1.2.*

## THE GLORY OF THE HOLY MINISTRY

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.” Ps. 24:9.10. With these inspiring words the psalmist exhorts us and all the ends of the earth to lift up our ears and hearts to the Gospel in which the King of glory comes to us.

He exalts this Gospel and its hearers gloriously when through the prophet he exclaims, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, your God reigns!” (Is. 52:7.) Surely, then, dear congregation, do we have much reason to rejoice today with the many congregations who are longing for these messengers who shall bring them the Gospel of peace and break the Bread of Life for them, when we have gathered to ordain these dear young men to the Holy Ministry which proclaims peace. With these dear brethren we have much reason to thank God for the grace and glory he shows them by calling them into the great harvest as his co-workers. I am convinced that also our participation now, our thanks and glory will be an encouragement to you, my young friends, as you enter this Ministry! The Lord himself however gives you the strongest encouragement when he says, “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.” (1 Ti. 3:1.)

And you really do need such encouragement when you rightly consider its seriousness in the Lord’s words through the prophet, “O Zion, that brings good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that brings good tidings, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him!” (Is. 40:9.10.) Because here surely the Lord lays it upon the hearts of the Gospel’s servants that they give themselves to the work and apply all their strength to its faithful performance, so that he, the Lord their God, will be with them and give them the victory and a rich reward of grace.

Even though in this way there surely is prompting enough for servants of the Word to embrace their calling and to enter into the work with serious concern and yet with the confidence of faith too, yet we cannot however deny that experience, the pastor’s later life and work, unfortunately often show that dangerous temptations lie right here, at the entrance into the ministry. For example, the danger is here, a) that a man enters the ministry frivolously, or b) at any rate, does not sufficiently count the cost, or c) on the other hand, he enters upon it faintheartedly and despondently.

a) Some men of course do seek their livelihood, a position in life in it, thoughtlessly, yes, presumptuously, or they allow themselves to be led by the pursuit of gain, a good, comfortable life, vain glory, power, etc. That’s why Peter admonishes the elders, “Feed the flock of God, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind,” (1 Pe. 5:2) and Paul says, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” (1 Co. 2:1–4.)

b) Others are gripped by the loftiness of the goal: the salvation of souls, and they themselves are gripped by a sure recognition of and confidence in the power of the Word of God. But the opposition of the enemy, the gravity of the work and the kind of battle, as well as victory, that they do not understand how to judge in

a truly spiritual way. Therefore when the anticipated fruits are not visible, the world's hatred becomes their reward and their bright hopes are disappointed, then they lose heart, consider their work wasted and give up the fight because they forget that Christ won his victory right there on the cross.

c) Others again go to the work with a certain earnestness, but faintheartedly and unwillingly. As builders, they do not count the cost but along with the counting they take only or mostly their own strength and ability. And when they find so much weakness, sin and inability in themselves, they become faint-hearted and say with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," (Lk. 5:8) and they lose heart. But the power of God which is strong in the weak and the ability which God gives where the proper preparation and estimate of natural ability are present, that they do not properly take into consideration. They forget the Lord's words to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Co. 12:9.) The same apostle of course also says on another occasion, "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." (1 Co. 2:3.) So will it also be for you, dear brothers, as truly as the proper humility is in you. However, we hear that the apostle Paul can also say confidently, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain." (1 Co. 15:10.) That's why the Lord cautions us now already through the prophet Jeremiah, "Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound you before them." (1:17.)

Yet it is now quite clear to us. If we desire and undertake the office of a bishop thoughtlessly for the sake of worldly advantage, then it will be impossible for us to be able to show the faithfulness which God requires of stewards right here in our text. Likewise if we underestimate the powers of the enemy and perhaps overestimate our own at the same time, as we forget that we must work and fight with hope against hope and that our victory is often the most secure when in the judgment of the world we get the worst of it. But on the other hand, if we enter the work faintheartedly and with unreasoning fear, then we ourselves would place many obstacles in the way of our demonstrating the proper faithfulness. Yes, we would torment ourselves with charges of our unfaithfulness for which there was otherwise no valid reason.

Now if we know how much a proper estimate of the worth of a gift, a proper recognition of a work of great importance can contribute to our accepting it with the proper earnestness, the proper humble thanks, and preparing ourselves for it and carrying it out with the confident mind which is called for and where faithfulness in the work is to be demonstrated, O how good it would be if we could all therefore be permeated by a true respect for the Holy Ministry of the Word and be full of thanks and joy over the fact that of his great grace God is again sending us a host of workers into his harvest. How good, if you, my dear young friends, who in this hour are going to be ordained to the ministry according to apostolic custom, could be encouraged and strengthened already now at its undertaking, so that you enter into it neither thoughtlessly nor with exaggerated expectations nor with faint hearts and unreasoning fear but on the contrary with the conscientiousness, the awe and humility and yet also the confidence and assurance which are the very conditions for the proper faithfulness in its performance and so that in that way the glad hope which we nourish for you in this hour does not have to be disappointed! So then, with the aid of the Holy Spirit let us consider now:

### **THE GLORY OF THE HOLY MINISTRY,**

and then how this is evident from the fact that in this ministry you

- 1) are being sent by God.
- 2) You are being sent for the salvation of souls, and
- 3) you are being sent to preach the Gospel of Christ.

1.

The glory of the Ministry of the Word is already set forth by the praise which the Lord gives it in our text. In it he of course calls upon all the world to regard and to honor the bearers of this ministry as his

servants. However, its glory is evident most clearly from this that it was instituted by God himself, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the Majesty who is enthroned on high, our Redeemer and Sanctifier, our Lord and Judge. That is why the very men who carry out his ministry are called “the ministers of Christ and the stewards of God” in our text, as they who are sent out by him, the Lord of glory himself, and are installed by God himself to direct the stewardship in the house of God and to give him an account of it. In 2 Corinthians Paul calls them “messengers in Christ’s stead.” (8:23.) In Acts he says, “The Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God.” (20:28.) in the Epistle to the Ephesians, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets, and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry.” (3:11.12.)

When a powerful prince sends his ambassador, how humble does not that man feel then over toward his lord and yet also how highly honored by him! How faithfully does he not seek to carry out his mission, how careful is he not to convey the message correctly, and how sensitive of his lord’s protection! He knows that his prince looks upon an affront against the ambassador as though it was committed against himself, his own person and honor, and that he will avenge it as such.

How much more then should not we who are stewards of the Most High, his ambassadors who is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, we who are “ambassadors in Christ’s stead,” yes, “workers together with God,” feel ourselves humble over toward the divine Majesty, and yet besides, how highly honored by being entrusted with such a mission by him! Yes, how is it possible that we could rightly think of this and yet enter thoughtlessly upon the mission of such a Majesty! He, before whom the kingdoms of the earth tremble, who uses the winds as his servants and whose commands the holy angels stand ready to carry out, he, you see, lowers himself to us who are dust and ashes, poor worms, and chooses us over the angels to be bearers of this ministry, to be messengers of the Gospel! How can anyone who is conscious of these things take on such a mission without holy earnestness, without deep reverence, without heartfelt confidence! If they apply anywhere, the words which Moses heard at the burning bush apply here, “Draw not nigh hither: put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.” (Ex. 3:5.) If you are genuinely convinced what Majesty it is who has entrusted his message to you, how dare you then presume to misrepresent or just to adjust it? How dare you then risk uttering your own thoughts, the doctrines of men instead of the counsel and will of the divine Majesty?

And just as you will then strive after demonstrating the greatest faithfulness, faithfulness in the least details, in little things as well as in big things, so will you then also be zealous of your Lord’s honor. Personal insults, contempt, yes, hatred, you are always to bear patiently. Often, you must keep quiet about it. But scorn for the ministry, contempt for the message you bring, the misrepresentation and the adulteration of it can bring, that you must not tolerate. You are to see in it a violation of the divine Majesty himself and be inflamed to defend and to sacrifice everything for your Lord’s honor in holy zeal. Here you are to say: “The zeal of your house has eaten me up.” (Jo. 2:17.) That’s why David says, “I hate them that hate you.” (Ps. 139:21.) Cursed here is every yielding, every complaisance! That is not zeal, not humility, not faithfulness, but thoughtlessness, presumptuous arrogance and impudent unfaithfulness over toward the Most Holy.

Nor of course is it hidden to us that that is how the Lord himself regards the matter. Surely it is written, “Add nothing to the word, so that he shall not punish you, and you shall be found to be liars.” (De. 4:2; Re. 2:2.) Likewise Scripture says, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked,” (Ga. 6:7) even if it is only against his insignificant servant who is shown contempt and violence is practiced. Because the Lord has said this, “As my Father has sent me, even so send I you,” (Jo. 20:21) and, “Whoever receives you receives me; he that despises you despises me.” (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16.) Therefore we also hear him cry out in warning, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm!” (1 Ch. 16:22.)

Confidently and securely therefore can a servant of the Lord also go his way and present his message without needing to look to the right or to the left because “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Ro. 8:31.) Thus we know also of course that at the very time when Christ gave his command, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,” (Mk. 16:15) that he also added the promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Mt. 28:20.) Therefore a servant of the Lord, a messenger of Christ can also comfort himself with the words which he speaks to the prophet Jeremiah, “For, behold, I have made you this day a defended city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the

kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the Lord. And they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you, saith the Lord, to deliver you.” (1:18.19.)

But even if a servant of the Word may feel himself both honored and confident in the certainty that he is a servant of the Most High sent out and protected by him, he has no reason to behave arrogantly because of that. On the contrary, the thought of what kind of Lord he is who uses him as his servant will make him humble. He is and remains forever always only a servant of Christ, therefore never a lord over the flock. If he finds trouble, mockery and contempt, then he is to know that “the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” (Mt. 10:24.25.) Also the feeling of the responsibility you owe him who has instituted the Ministry of the Word and who has entrusted it to you, can do nothing other than humble you and awaken earnestness in your soul. How soon is not the day’s work at its end! How quickly does not the day come when the steward is asked about his faithfulness; when you shall give account to him, the righteous Judge, and account for the talent entrusted to you!

Thus may God then help you, dear brethren, that it may always be vivid before your souls that you are servants of our Lord Christ and stewards of God the Most High, so that you may carry out the ministry entrusted to you with the earnestness and the sincerity, the humility and soberness, the confidence and assurance without which you will not be able to be found faithful in the ministry!

## 2.

Now, my friends, we turn in our consideration to that which is God’s purpose and goal with the establishment of this Holy Ministry. And if we reflect upon the fact that it is nothing less than the salvation and eternal blessedness of souls which the Lord is earnestly seeking through it, then the great importance and the exalted significance of this ministry will be even more evident, because the apostle Paul of course says to Timothy, “Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine, continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear you.” (1 Ti. 4:16.) Likewise he also says, “And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Co. 5:18.)

We often worry about caring for the body’s well-being. Although it is our duty to take proper care of our body, and we can never thank God sufficiently for his blessings upon our bodies, what is the body however in comparison with the immortal soul? Even if it has lost the image of God in which it was created through the fall into sin, it is however immortal and eternal. And when this body of ours has at last crumbled, become food for the worms and returned again to the earth from whence it was taken, then the soul has already received “the things done in the body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Co. 5:10.) Then the soul is already enjoying an eternal, unalterable blessedness without any interruption, or, it is undergoing an eternal, excruciating torment and pain without once having the relief with which self-delusion and a false hope here on earth can deceive the soul troubled by a guilty conscience. Therefore the Savior also admonishes us, “Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body what you shall put on,” but “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Mt. 6:25.33.) And he shouts to us, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mt. 16:26.) Now of course the preaching ministry was instituted exactly for this purpose that we could be raised up from the fall, so that, born again through the “incorruptible seed,” (1 Pe. 1:23) the Word of God which is “Spirit and life,” (Jo. 6:63) we could “be created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ep. 4:24) in the image of him who created us, and “speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head” (Ep. 4:15) and thus be sanctified in order to “live and reign with him for ever.”

But, my friends, if God has now set so wonderful a goal for our work in the ministry, if he has promised so wonderful a fruit from this work of ours, namely, the salvation of redeemed souls, if he has honored us weak men, us poor sinners so highly that he has chosen us to be “fishers of men,” (Mk. 1:17) his own instruments for the saving of fallen souls from the everlasting sorrow of hell so that they should be partakers in the blessed joy of the kingdom of heaven, then away with all stupidity and lukewarmness, all false and

hypocritical being, then “cursed be he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully!” (Je. 48:10.) But then also, away with all faintheartedness and despair because he who has placed us in this lofty, responsible work “will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Ti. 2:4.) Yes, there is joy over one sinner who repents. On the other hand, he will also require from us the blood of those who are lost through our fault. O, should we not then with the greatest earnestness and zeal, with joy and fearlessness take hold of a work which in the proper understanding is the Lord’s work through which God’s holy angels rejoice and immortal souls are saved from hell’s eternal flames? What trouble, dear brethren, should really be too great, what privation, what suffering too heavy, where the saving of souls for eternity is concerned, souls for which God’s Son has poured out his own precious blood! Now then, “work while it is day! the night coming, when no man can work.” (Jo. 9:4.)

O blessed day! From far and near  
The servants of the Lord  
Shall meet the ransomed millions there  
Who heard God’s saving word!

O what a mighty, rushing flood  
Of love without surcease,  
Shall roll about the throne of God  
In joy and endless peace!

3.

Then finally, my dear friends, if we look at the essence or the quality of the preaching ministry from the means with which God has given us to work for reaching that goal, the salvation of souls, then the glory of this ministry meets us also from this side.

It is over the mysteries of God that the apostle says in our text that the bearers of the ministry should be stewards. But by these mysteries which they should distribute to the people of the household of God as faithful stewards, are meant of course the spiritual goods, the heavenly treasures which God the Father has appointed for us from eternity and which Jesus Christ has acquired for us with his blood and with his death, treasures which make their possessors eternally blessed. Because these goods and glorious treasures are of course the forgiveness of sins and peace, the crown of righteousness and the imperishable wreath of glory. These treasures are called mysteries because they are hidden to the human spirit and are foolishness to the natural man. (1 Co. 2:9–14.)

These goods and treasures are now held out and distributed to poor sinners in the Means of Grace, the Word and the Sacraments. Through these Means of Grace flow streams of grace and blessedness from the depths of merciful love in the Father-heart of God to the heart of the poor sinner, healing, comforting and consoling it. It’s true, these treasures of grace are insignificant and plain-looking to the carnal mind, just as the Means of Grace which bear them in their bosom, yes, just as the appearance of the Lord of glory was in the days of his flesh. But, dear friend, name for me more precious and more glorious treasures! What, for example, are all the wisdom and splendor of the world, all its honor and glory, its pleasures and tranquility, its piousness and virtue, in comparison with these spiritual, heavenly, eternal goods and treasures? What are the world’s riches and glory compared with the spiritual riches which he possesses whom God through the Word, forgives all his sins, in Christ Jesus adopts him as his dear child and makes to be an heir of the glory of heaven? He does indeed possess Jesus Christ, the express image of God’s glory, his heart’s dearest treasure, and in and with him to whom heaven and earth belong are added to him all other things.

What are all the world’s pleasures compared to the peace which surpasses all understanding, to the joy of the Holy Spirit, to the forgiveness of sins, this heavenly manna of which the hungry soul eats, and hungers no more, this refreshing and regenerating fountain of life by which the faint soul is refreshed and daily comes for new life-giving strength, just as thirsty deer from the spring of water in the wilderness!

What are the best peace and quiet of family life compared to the pardoned sinner’s comfort, the rest of the soul which weary workers have in the Savior’s arms! What are the hole-riddled and filthy garments of

human virtue compared to the radiant robe of Christ's righteousness, whiter than snow, more radiant than the sun! What is the bejeweled crown of the most mighty prince compared to the crown of life which the Lord has reserved for his elect! What is the most beautiful bridal wreath compared to the unfading wreath of glory with which the heavenly Bridegroom adorns his betrothed bride, the believing soul, on its festive day!

Yes, "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but the word of the Lord endures for ever!" (1 Pe. 1:24,25.)

And it is through this Word of his that the Lord not merely tells us of all these wonderful treasures which his Son has acquired for us, yes, neither merely holds them out to us in a way. How would even that help us since we are dead in trespasses and sins? We could however not accept these wonderful treasures by our own strength or believe so exceedingly great a grace. Yes, the more we learn to understand and to feel the depth of our fall, the less will we be able to believe that the holy God against whom alone we have sinned is so gracious toward us and is in earnest in giving us such incomparable treasures. And what good then does all their sweetness, all their glory do us? They are of course still not ours. But at this very point the glory of the Holy Ministry which is entrusted to us is revealed even more in the fact that the Word of God is not like the words of men, powerless to help the helpless, but it is "Spirit and life," mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, also of the devil's in a poor sinner's heart. It not merely crushes the poor sinner but it also heals and raises him up. It regenerates him, namely through the Spirit of God which dwells in him, the frightened sinner's heart and works in him the justifying faith through which he becomes a child of God, an heir of the kingdom of heaven, blessed in time and eternity if he remains in faith until the end. "Is not my word," says the Lord, "like as a fire and like as a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Je. 23:29.) And again Scripture says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (He. 4:12.) That is why the apostle Paul testifies also to the Romans, "the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes," (1:16) and Peter, "You are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." (1 Pe. 1:23.)

And now, my dear brethren, when we now have such treasures to distribute which can make the poorest people rich and the most wretched blessed, how can we then go to our work coldly and indifferently or do it as they who halt between two opinions? And when God himself now arrays us in "the full armor of God" for the battle, and above all, the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, what do we then have to pride ourselves in as if we were capable of accomplishing something by ourselves? And when he not only hands us such spiritual weapons for the fight "which are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," (2 Co. 10:4) even the strongest which the devil can erect around a poor sinner's heart, but he himself even fights for us and with us, and blesses our work and gives us victory in the battle, why then are we despondent and do we let our hands drop? "When I am weak," says the apostle, "then am I strong." (2 Co. 12:10.) Therefore, go confidently to the work in the Lord's name! "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and does not return there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Is. 55:10,11.)

Therefore, brethren, since the Lord has now called us to "catch me," (Lk. 5:10) then let us also leave all things behind and follow him! Let us not be idle where diligence is called for! Let us not become weary of holding forth the gift, proclaiming the heavenly message! "He that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Ga. 6:8.) And even if we must go and sow the seed in tears we shall however someday gather our sheaves with rejoicing. Halleluia!

Now I could of course, my dear brethren, in order to set forth the glory of this Holy Ministry even more, point out in closing, what co-laborers you have in this work, the holy prophets and apostles, yes, the Son of man himself; however, let this be enough! Because this much is sure: No office is as exalted and glorious as the Ministry of the Word. No work can be compared with the preaching ministry in importance for time and eternity, in power and might, in glory and honor. Therefore, let us be faithful, faithful unto death! Because "it is required in stewards that they be faithful."



And then, dear brethren, when you lay down your pilgrim's staff and long for rest after faithful service, weary and exhausted from the work and the battle, then shall also the Lord's friendly voice speak into your ears, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of your Lord!" (Mt. 25:21.) Then shall also the glory of this ministry, whose servants you were here in great weakness, finally shine forth through your revelation in glory when he fulfills his promise upon you, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Da. 12:3.)

Grant it, Lord, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

*Kirketidende*, January 19, 1877, pages 33–42.

A search of *Festskrift* yields these apparent ordinands:

Nils A. Forde  
Halvor B. Hustvedt  
Olaf Mandt  
Jørgen Nordby  
Christian Keyser Preus  
Andreas R. A. Rystad  
Thore Pedersen Schesvold  
Viking Larsen Seim  
Hans P. Solstad  
Nils P. Xavier

# Ordination at Spring Prairie Lutheran Church

Keyeser, Columbia County, Wisconsin

September 15, 1878

*Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

## TRUE FAITHFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY

My dear fellow redeemed in Christ! Grace and peace from God our Father through Jesus Christ!

We've just heard that we have gathered here with these young men, one of whom is certainly well-known to you, having grown up in your midst, in order to ordain them to the Holy Ministry according to apostolic custom with the Word and prayer, and we have called upon God for his blessing upon this holy calling.

Now it is the bearers of this holy office whom the apostle Paul admonishes the congregation in the text I have read to regard *as servants of Christ* and stewards of the mysteries of God. It is an admonition which our times really should take to heart since many people think that it is something which is optional for them whether they esteem the Holy Ministry and its bearers or not, since in many ways these men must be the nobodies of this world.

Yes, both for the Lord's sake who has given this admonition and for the sake of the salvation of the souls which of course the servants of Christ are to further, it is profitable for a congregation that it heeds the admonition and regards us as the servants of Christ, because Christ says, "He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me; and he that despises me despises him that sent me." (Lk. 10:16.) And he who has said that he will allow a dreadful judgment to come upon the despisers of his Word and his grace has shown it upon the people of Israel and Jerusalem. He has shown how fearful his punishment is upon them who mistreat his prophets.

But you, my young friends, who now are to assume this ministry, to you it must truly be comforting and encouraging that the Lord himself introduces you to the congregations with this admonition that they should regard you as the servants of Christ and that the Lord will watch to see that it happens. You are able to step into the work then with the comforting assurance that there will however be some who will be obedient to the Lord and take his Word to heart. And even if there will also be enough of them who will despise you and the Word, yet you know for your comfort that the Lord will count it as contempt against himself and will punish it as such. And then of course you also know that you should rejoice when you suffer persecution *for the sake of the Lord's name*, because great shall be your reward in heaven. However, my brethren, if we are to be able to demand and to hope that everyone regards us as servants of Christ, then we must consider ourselves as such.

Then all our effort must go toward proving ourselves such! That is why we also see that in this same text Paul admonishes servants of the Word to faithfulness, since he says: "*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*"

When I turn now to this admonition of Paul to servants of the Word, it is not my intention at this time to dwell upon the theme of how we should demonstrate such faithfulness in general or of how we should become capable of it. I know of course that you were well instructed in your Pastoral Theology course about how faithfulness is to be demonstrated with respect to the message we are to bring as well as with respect to the manner and the spirit and purpose with which it is to be brought. On the other hand it is my wish, dear brethren, while I am laying upon your hearts with this admonition of Paul the importance of showing such faithfulness, to caution you against a couple of very common mistakes to which we are so easily exposed and in which it is impossible for a servant of the Word to preserve faithfulness.

The one temptation for a servant of the Word against which I would caution here is that of wanting to be *the congregation's lord* instead of its servant. Peter cautions about it when he says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not as they who want to be lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Pe. 5:2.3.) Precisely because a servant of the Word is to be considered as a servant of *Christ* and comes to the congregation in Christ's stead, therefore is he also to stand out as he who has *authority*. He is not to relax in the least way his demand to the congregation of unconditional obedience to the Word of God which he proclaims. But here the danger lies near of demanding obedience to *his word* instead of to God's Word.

When a servant of the Word demands obedience because of his office, authoritatively demands that people believe what he proclaims and do what he commands, not because he has proven that it is the Lord our God who teaches and commands it, but because he is the pastor and has the office, then he makes himself *lord over God's heritage*. Therefore he does not merely succumb to this temptation and proclaim himself when he demands that people are to accept the doctrines *of men* he perhaps utters or to obey him in such things which God really has not forbidden but not commanded either, but also then when he really only demands obedience in the things commanded by God but demands it for his person's sake, not because God has said it but because he, the pastor, says it.

Experience teaches us that it is a strong temptation to rule over the Lord's heritage, and the papacy shows us to what heights the appetite to rule can rise. Here it has reached its zenith, since as the true Anti-christ the pope has placed himself in God's stead, and as God, demands unconditional obedience to himself, his doctrine and his commands.

The reason that those who should be Christ's *servants* are tempted to want to be *lords* over Christ's flock lies chiefly in the heart's natural *pride* and self-importance. They cause a person to demand something for himself, both glory and power, to want to be something himself and have something to say but not to want to concede other people the same things. Add a good dose of self-confidence to this distrust of the Lord and his Word about what he knows it can and will accomplish, and a person thus tries to help it along, and in this way makes himself—often with the best of intentions—a lord over the flock. It is certainly hard for a servant of the Lord to see how many people despise and make light of the Word and the admonitions of God which he preaches. But if he thinks of helping the cause along by adopting a sanctimonious ministerial air by placing his personality in the foreground or by using means of punishment for which God has given him no authority, then he makes a big mistake and proclaims himself against both God and the congregation by forgetting that he is only a servant. Likewise it is hard for a zealous pastor to see that his well-meant, well thought-out appeals to good works and beneficial projects stumble upon all kinds of opposition, and because of prejudice, ignorance or contrariness are rejected to the great harm of the congregation's development and growth. But if now in such things which God has left to Christian liberty and where love is to rule, he wants to force his will through with the appeal that people are to "obey them that have the rule over you in the Lord," (He. 13:17) then he proclaims himself loudly by making himself ruler over the Lord's heritage. He thereby is breaking down the church of God instead of building it up as he perhaps thinks he is doing. What misery this sin brings upon Christianity is clear as day. The papal church as well as the state churches offer sorrowful as well as frightening examples. The name of God is taken in vain, consciences are confused, the Christian liberty which Christ has earned for the congregation with his blood is lost and the congregation becomes the slave of man. Yes, even in the orthodox church where the pure Gospel can still be heard for a while, the hearts will be turned from obedience to the Word of God to obedience to human authority, from the worship of the true God, to the worship of man and to idolatry.

That such a rule over God's heritage cannot be consistent with the faithfulness which is required of a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God is obvious. He is unfaithful over toward God in the highest degree because the obedience he is to demand for God, he takes to himself. He is unfaithful over the congregation which he is to serve in the ministry of the Word as a co-laborer to its joy, because he violates its most precious right and makes it to be a slave of man. He seduces it to letting the heart depart from the Lord and he makes flesh his arm, and in this way robs it of God and of joy in him. How frightfully will not the Lord's judgment someday sound upon such an unfaithful servant! And how important therefore, my brethren, that we stand on guard and arm ourselves against the enemy who wants to seduce us to such *unfaithfulness*! Let us never imagine that we should be able in that way to further the Lord's cause or to build up the Church

of God! On the contrary, here it is up to a man to strive for *humility* so that a person will not be concerned about being something more or something other than a *servant* of Christ but also humbly regards this as the highest honor which is given a pardoned sinner. Here we should consider with horror and disgust the presumptuousness of which he makes himself guilty when a person places himself in God's stead by making himself to be lord over his flock while he is however only his poor, unworthy servant. How anxiously does not even a Paul seek to avoid even the appearance of wanting to take such a lordship over the congregation to himself when he says in 1 Corinthians 7:6.12.25: "I say this by permission ... Now concerning virgins I have no commandment, but I give my *judgment*." The pious consideration of the exalted nature and grandeur which God has given his church will also make us humble and keep far from us every thought of setting ourselves up as lord over such a congregation of *God* which consists of nothing but priests and kings whom he has cleansed with his own blood and made to be a holy people, a royal priesthood who bring forth spiritual sacrifices well pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.

Furthermore it is important here through devout prayer and meditation to strengthen faith in the power of the Lord whose servants we are and in the power of the Word we preach, about which the Lord has promised that it shall not return void. Because when this confidence dwells firmly in the heart a person will not be tempted to resort to human authority or other self-chosen means.

But, my friends, if a servant of Christ thus truly has to watch that he does not "*rule over the Lord's heritage*," he has to beware just as much that he does not become a *slave of man*! Thus we hear Paul caution the Corinthians: "You are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of man!" (1 Co. 7:23.)

A servant of Christ becomes a slave of man when because of *respect of persons* he becomes disobedient to God, suppresses, denies or distorts the truth and thus becomes *false* in his confession, in his conduct.

In our days, and not least in this country, we must be painful witnesses to the fact that the church of Christ is also becoming more and more filled with such servants of the Word who show themselves *slaves of men*. A strong temptation to this lies in our *natural carnal mind* which loves riches, favor and an easy life. A servant of Christ sees that he can get those things by denying a little of the truth when he should confess or chastise, by concealing it entirely, or only half of it, through ambiguities and flowery speech. He sees that in that way he can avoid unpleasantness, hatred and mockery. On the other hand, through standing firm in the truth just as John the Baptist did, of whom Scripture says: "He confessed, and denied not, but confessed," (Jo. 1:20) he will suffer loss of temporal goods and expose himself—if not to beheading as John was—then, however, to lack of due appreciation and hatred, yes, to removal from office and disgrace in this life. Besides this, by faithfully confessing the truth he gets a reputation for being hard, unloving, proud and contentious. On the other hand, if in his confession and chastising, he, as it were, breaks the sharp tip off of the testimony, he is praised for love, forbearance and modesty. At the same time he perhaps excuses himself by saying that otherwise he would make his work in the congregation impossible but in this way he will gain its confidence, and that later, then he will be able to come forward with so much greater firmness and resoluteness in his confession, and to the congregation's benefit. All this in connection with the fear of man renders him powerless and thus he gives away as he preaches as to itching ears. Thus he denies the truth and Christ, and becomes a slave of man instead of a servant of Christ. Yes, my dear brethren, even if it is the truth which you proclaim and even if you were in a position to do it fully in all points, but you did it for the sake of gain in order to please men because pure doctrine was in style, because the truth appealed to them for a while, or they really liked it,—you would, however, be a slave of men and not a faithful servant of Christ!

And now, my brethren, we dare not hide the fact that the temptations for us to do this are getting stronger day by day! There is a great lack of true Christian understanding in the congregations. Instead of seeking to have their understanding clarified and increased through diligent reading of God's Word and good books, many people are deriving guidance, light and nourishment from unsound books and political newspapers where free-thinkers and the enemies of the church and of the truth are often the leading spokesmen and come forward as leaders even in spiritual things and in the concerns of the church. With the cry: "It's the voice of the people, it's the will of the majority!" many a person then becomes stupified and confused and carried away, just as many were in ancient times by the cry: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" (Ac. 19:28.) People think it is the voice of the people and therefore it must be right and good and something to which everyone has to submit and be regulated by. Yes, for many people, what so many learned, so many pious people, what

the people, what the masses think and say is far more important than what God thinks and says in his Word. The former is decisive for them, the latter they do not ask about and do not want to hear about either. Now when a servant of Christ bows to such opinions from fear or in order to gain favor or even in hope of thereby later gaining access for the truth, without asking about God's Word, or in spite of it—yes, if it were only by being silent when he should speak,—you see, then he makes himself a slave of men. And what trouble and misery do not such servants cause! Peter has even given us a warning example when he denied Jesus in the high priest's courtyard. Such servants deny "the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (2 Pe. 2:1.) They strengthen the erring in his error and the ungodly in his ungodliness, yes, as they who should be the servants of Christ they even place the stamp of the truth and godliness on error and ungodliness and thus lull the conscience to sleep. With their deification of man they lead other people into idolatry, to fearing, loving and trusting in man instead of in the true God. Blind themselves, they become leaders of the blind, and finally both fall into the ditch.

That now the servants of the Word who thus become the slaves of man cannot possibly remain true stewards is obvious and needs no more explanation. Surely no one can serve two masters. If a person leaves his Lord's service and becomes a slave of another, how can there then be talk of faithfulness! But here again let us remember that we are not only unfaithful to the Lord when we proclaim lies as the servants of lies but also when we proclaim the truth for the sake of gain, because to the faithfulness the Lord demands of his servants belongs also that he does what he is supposed to do *in faith and love*. Therefore, my dear brethren, let us really be on guard, let us watch and pray that we should be the servants of Christ. Do not become the slaves of men!

It is also profitable here that we strengthen our hearts through considering how strong and mighty the Lord is, whose servants we are. If he is for us, who then can be against us? Furthermore, we should constantly remember what mighty, invincible weapons he has given us in his Word. Why should we then be afraid of people, or how they could harm us? And if we do win their favor through denial of the truth, then Scripture surely says, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26.) But if we forfeit their favor through the confession of the truth, yes, if we become the nobodies of everyone in the world, we are walking safely! The hosts of the Lord encamp round about them who fear him. And even if we appear to get the worst of the battle in the defense of the truth, the truth, however, conquers.

Furthermore, let us be reminded of how bitterly Peter wept when he had denied his Savior because of the fear of men. How terrible their pain becomes when the Lord says that he will deny them before his heavenly Father because they denied him before men! On the other hand, think of the joy you will feel when on the Great Day he distributes the reward, and if you remain true servants of Christ you hear this, "Well done, good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord!" (Mt. 25:21.) Think of the joy when the Lord's promise through the prophet Daniel is fulfilled in you: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (12:3.)

O happy day when we shall stand  
Amid the heavenly throng,  
And sing with hosts from every land  
The new celestial song.

O blessed day! From far and near  
The servants of the Lord  
Shall meet the ransomed millions there  
Who heard God's saving Word!

O what a mighty, rushing flood  
Of love without surcease,  
Shall roll about the throne of God  
In joy and endless peace!

So fight lawfully then, so that you can be crowned! Stand fast and immovable in the armor of God, with the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! To that end may God give you his grace through Jesus Christ! Amen.

*Kirketidende*, Oct. 25, 1878, pages 669–675

# Address at Luther College Graduation

Decorah, Iowa

June 16, 1881

My dear friends, older and younger teachers and students at this school, and other of its well-wishers, grace and peace from God our Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

I have always enjoyed being able to visit our Luther College. It has been doubly enjoyable for me this time to be able to be present for most of the final exams and to share in the joy of the results which have been achieved. To the earnest words which the school's honorable president has addressed to us, I shall add a few words in closing.

To honor God with body and soul ought to be everyone's purpose in life. That is why God created us, that's why he redeemed us, that's why he sends his Holy Spirit. So that our children could become capable of honoring God in the Lord's service as messengers of the Gospel to adults and children is the reason why pious men and women of the Norwegian people in America built this school, our Luther College—and that is why they continue to support it.

We thank God and we are also happy about the young men who leave here enriched with knowledge, but above all, with the intention of honoring and *servicing the Lord*, even if it is in other positions in life. However, we do have to be saddened, and see the purpose of our school not being fulfilled, if from lack of ability or of will they become fewer and fewer who leave this school in order to honor God in *the direct service of the church*. The school's students and teachers must not forget that this is the specific purpose which our church body has set for this training which it allows the young men to receive here. That must be the goal which everyone here has set for himself, for whose attainment every individual must strive, and toward which everyone in the Synod cooperates; a great, an excellent goal for your work here, my friends, older and younger. Yes, a high and glorious, and I can add, a holy goal for you to strive for! All honor to every conscientious person and every faithful worker in it, even if he is the most insignificant; however, blessed is he whose position in life places him as a teacher and guide of the youth with such a goal!

Blessed is he to whom God grants such a training in his youth to be a teacher and a guide of people on the way to heaven! He certainly has reason to exclaim, "The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places." (Ps. 16:6.) The glory and luster of the world will so easily dazzle our eyes, but on that Great Day in the clarity of eternity when we behold you surrounded by the hosts of witnesses whom we know in the thousands and by the millions who heard your words, then shall you attest to the truth that the lines fell upon you in pleasant places. It is good therefore that each of you have this exalted, glorious goal in view constantly from the beginning. It will strengthen you when weakness and fatigue attack you. It will revive you when despondency and faintheartedness depress you. It will give you staying-power when the course seems too long and wearisome. In a word, it will gather your mind and thoughts around the great main goal when pleasures of the world want to distract you.

Well do I know, my friends, that no one gives himself the will to have this goal in mind, even less, the strength and perseverance to retain it. God alone, who gives abilities and gifts besides, can bestow both parts. But he has promised that "he who asks, shall receive" (Jo. 16:24)—sometimes of course otherwise than we think, but always beyond our understanding. Therefore these things have to be asked for, asked for diligently, asked for in faith by teachers and students. Then they shall *be given* to you. Be sure of that. Do not doubt it! But the Spirit shall also be given to you through *the Word*. Therefore, it must be used, used diligently—by teachers and students—for doctrine, for edifying, for discipline—for self-discipline first of all but also for brotherly discipline and school discipline.

All this is old truth, my friends, nothing new, which I have presented to you here, but it is the old truth not the new which *makes free*. That's why I've wanted to lay it on your heart. If God grants it his grace then

we shall certainly have the joy of seeing our school blossom, and host upon host of our young men go forth from here and bear much fruit to the glory of God.

And even if it is so that we have reason to be reminded about practicing that old truth, when we look backward to examine the school year which is now behind us, much of what it revealed, just as the results of the examinations which have now been completed, does however give us hope that the work was not in vain and that with the help of God it will bear even richer fruit in his time. But we shall also attest to the truth that wherever we truly do have reason to rejoice in such a hope, there precisely that old truth has been drilled diligently, and it still must be if our hope for the future shall not be put to shame.

But beside this more general admonition there is an individual flower which I would ask you to apply yourselves on this occasion toward cultivating and fostering here at this school. I need only to mention *self denial* so that every one of you will agree with me that just as our Christian life on the whole only makes progress in the same degree as this virtue is practiced, so will your work toward the goal only succeed to the degree with which you apply yourselves to self-denial.

I will not dwell on the denial which every one has to practice over toward the lusts of the flesh which tempt a person to the more coarse deviations and sinful amusements. At a school such as this on which the eyes of so many people rest, much more self-denial is of course needed, even in the choice of amusements which are permissible and in themselves innocent, as well as in the manner in which they are enjoyed. Because if anyone is to follow the apostle's admonition to "abstain from all appearance of evil," (1 Th. 5:20) then it is here at this school. We simply cannot disregard how very different the Christian maturity and point of view are of those who do however embrace the school and all its work with warm love.

No, I would direct your attention more to the self-denial which your position as students at the school requires.

Thus a certain self-denial is of course required right away from the young men in not resisting with ill-will and struggling against, but willingly and joyfully submitting themselves to a good many of the rules and restrictions which often place unpleasant and often unnecessary restraints upon the freedom of individuals who are mature persons but which however are necessary for the sake of the whole for the keeping of order. This denial can seem twice as hard to the person who has been used to unbridled freedom through an errant upbringing. What constant self-denial is not required from those who are unsettled, from students who are inclined to being inattentive and lazy, for accustoming themselves to self-control, diligence, attention and order, and not lulling themselves to sleep with the idea that when they need to they can get by by the skin of their teeth? On the other hand, temptations can come to the faint-hearted to lose heart and to give up because you find that in spite of all your effort you are not making the progress you wanted or which other more gifted colleagues are making. Here, egotism and covetousness must be denied so that you find yourself well satisfied with and genuinely thankful for the abilities and gifts which God has given you, and in order that you can be found faithful in their use.

Or perhaps you are equipped with superior abilities, show great diligence in using them and are making excellent progress, but you notice in yourself a certain inclination to take pride in them and to look down on those who are less gifted—or you strain your abilities and your diligence to the utmost, yes, perhaps more than is required. You feel within yourself that the thought of showing off through your superior knowledge or of gaining a prominent position is not alien to you, you see—you will again have a struggle with denying your precious "I." The same will not less be the case when the temptation meets you that by taking up some other work, you, with *your* training and *your* knowledge will easily be able to gain for yourself both a more profitable and pleasing position than by continuing the studies you have begun.

The calling for which you are being prepared here will demand as broad an education as possible and that you be made familiar with various subjects and philosophies, which even if they might be said to lie on the periphery, are, however, very important for your development and continued studies. The awakened, studious mind can so easily be tempted here to throw itself into and to lose itself in such secondary studies with all too great a desire, and be stopped in its progress, if the goal is not thereby displaced entirely. Likewise, you need some diversions and distractions during your diligent studies so that the spirit can have



some rest, the mind be refreshed and the body be strengthened; and you know you are given opportunity for various such things especially when at the same time they can work to improve your disposition, but how easily is not the healthy young man tempted here with an altogether fine, noble and strong open mind to give himself over to such a thing with a *passion* and to sacrifice too much of his so precious time to it. In both these instances you will necessarily have to watch yourselves and to practice an often painful self-denial.

Finally—all the while your development is moving forward, knowledge is increasing and interests are being multiplied, and you notice as it were, wings sprouting and a desire in you to fly, to leave school—if not to say the world—to experience and enjoy the benefit of all the wisdom you think you have gathered, of the exalted pioneering ideas your spirit has conceived, believe me, my friends, self-denial is also required here to remember that one is still a student, and as long as he is he needs in all quietness to serve out the time of one's apprenticeship and to digest the learning, so that when it is over, one will be well equipped to be able to make one's appearance as a teacher and a leader in the sphere where God then places him!

Now may God help both you who are leaving school and you who remain, to show this self-denial during your continued studies! May his blessing be upon our Luther College, with its teachers, so that the work may go well, to the glory of God!

*Kirketidende*, July 8, 1881; pages 423–426

# Dedication of Immanuel Church

Watson, Minnesota

During the convention of the Minnesota District

2nd Sunday after Trinity, June 25, 1882

*Text: Luke 14:16–25*

## THE INVITATION TO THE GREAT SUPPER

“How amiable are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yea, even faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in your house: they will be still praising you.” Ps. 84:4.1.

With these words the royal singer expresses his longing, his love for the tabernacles of the Lord, the place where he could be taught and comforted by God through the Lord’s revelation, come into the most intimate union with the living God, and where he could pour out his soul to this God with prayer and thanksgiving. Yes, blessed are they, he says, who not only dwell there with a fleeting thought but who dwell there constantly and whose heart clings to the holy place just as Scripture says of the aged Anna that she “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.” (Lk. 2:37.) That’s why we also hear David exclaim: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4.)

Dearly beloved congregation, is it now this same love for the house of the Lord, this same longing for beholding the beauty of the Lord, for inquiring in his temple so that you may dwell in his house all the days of your lives, in that house which is not built with men’s hands, is it this love, this longing which has prompted you to build this house for the Lord which has brought you together today with large numbers of your brethren in the faith in order to consecrate it to be a house of God for worship of the true God? Oh, unfortunately! Here, as anywhere, there is probably more than one person who has been moved to be along in building it for such outward reasons as self-righteousness, habit or hypocrisy, and who has been lured here today by the infrequent celebration featuring so many pastors and so much pagantry. However, God be praised! The Lord has promised that his word shall not return void. Therefore we surely believe that the Lord also has his people here who brought a sacrifice of love and thanksgiving for this building and who have come here today with a sigh of longing and with a song of joy in order to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

And friends! if for this reason David already loved the tabernacles of the Lord, how much more ought not we go up to the house of the Lord with the cry of joy, “How amiable are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!” we to whom Scripture says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day-star arise in your hearts,” (2 Pe. 1:19) we to whom “God has spoken in these last days by his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” (He. 1:2.3.)

Yes, well may your hearts be filled with joy on this day, and we share your joy at this dedication celebration with heartfelt thanks to God when we reflect on the wonderful message which the Son has brought us from heaven and which is to be the sum of all the preaching which shall be heard in this church!

With the aid of the Holy Spirit then, let us consider with one another:

## THE INVITATION TO THE GREAT SUPPER

with which this text deals.

How gladly does not a person accept the invitation of a dear friend! What an honor when it comes to you from a king, from the leader of the country! But, brothers and sisters, how infinitely much greater grace and honor that we are invited to the great supper, and how much more willingly and gladly ought we not accept the invitation, and go to it!

1) Because he who here invites us is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, the Lord our God, the almighty and merciful God. Behold, the heavens are his throne and the earth his footstool and the angels his servants who carry out his commands, but he himself is the essence of blessedness!

2) And how excellent is not the supper, how tasty the meal to which he invites us? We listen with amazement to talk about the abundance, riches and splendor which are apparent at the banquets of the rich here in the world, where the tables display the most splendid dishes and vessels of silver and gold and crystal, and bow under the weight of the most tasty food and the finest wines. And yet how does that compare with the great supper to which you, my friend, are invited today? Here, you who hunger and thirst and have no money, can come and buy, eat and drink, buy wine and milk without money and without price, eat of the bread of life, the bread which is come down from heaven of which Scripture says, He who eats of this bread shall not hunger but shall live for ever. Here shall the thirsty get to drink from the cup of salvation and never be thirsty again.

And "the bread that I will give you," says Jesus, "is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world, for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (Jo. 6:51.55.-54.) O, dear friend, just hear what a wonderful supper is offered to you here! Your God wants to feed you here with such tasty dishes, with so nourishing a food that you shall not die eternally, and even if you do die, you shall however live. Tell me, have you ever heard of such food and drink at any king's or rich man's table? Ah, there they often drink themselves drunk and their gluttony can cause their death, but at the meal to which you are invited here you are filled with the good things of his house unto eternal life and you get to drink from the cup of salvation. The reason is simply this that God has given us his own Son. He took our flesh upon himself and in that way joined in his divine-human person our human nature with his divine. Therefore he could reconcile us with God with his suffering and death and holy obedience and through faith reunite us with himself, and from people who have fallen away from God and who were lost sinners, make us partake of his fellowship and let us enjoy his salvation. Since he was slain for the sin of all the world as the true Pascal Lamb God has prepared the great supper for us all in him. In a word: in the great supper to which God is letting his invitation go out to you here in the sermon, to you, my beloved, he is giving his own Son, Jesus Christ, so that freed from sin, death and the power of the devil you should be united with him through faith, enjoy him and in him all the good things of salvation! You are walking about crushed by the guilt and burden of sin and worried about punishment in hell. Behold, here he is giving you forgiveness of sins! You are hungering and thirsting for righteousness; behold, here he is dressing you in the garments of righteousness which were washed in the blood of the Lamb so that you sing:

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.

You can stand before God in them since he regards you in Christ as though you had never sinned. Thus you can hear the accusations of your conscience and the thundering voice of the Law without dying, and say with Paul, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, which is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." (Ro. 8:33.34.)

You are wandering around here so unsteadily, so restlessly, like Noah's dove seeking a place to rest your tired feet! Behold, here he fills your heart with the peace which surpasses all understanding, which the world cannot give but neither can it take from you, however much grief it can cause you the rest of the way, because "being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Ro. 5:1)! Here you are walking around so forsaken and afflicted, yes, nearly despairing, weighed down by the heavy burden of sorrow and tormented by the heavy yoke of the Law. Behold, here he lets you drink from the full flood of joy and to fill your heart with the joy of the Holy Ghost who comforts and sustains you in all sorrow and suffering, yes, makes you glad and blessed even in death!

Therefore, after being fully satisfied by this supper through the Word of life, the sweet Gospel in which Christ is offered and given with all his gifts, the psalmist exclaims, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." (Ps. 23:5.) Thus we also sing in the hymn:

Festive is the tasty banquet  
Thou before Thy guests dost set;  
Blessing, peace and full salvation  
Through Thy Word to us do flow;  
There our ev'ry pain Thou healest,  
There our souls salvation give,  
There so near Thee I refreshed am  
Both in life and in my soul.

But, my dear friends, this supper is going to taste even better when we shall sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven where they behold the face of God (Ps. 17:15) and of which the psalmist says, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house; and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures," (Ps. 36:8) and where, as the prophet says, "The Lord of hosts shall make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." (Is. 25:6.) Therefore Scripture says: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Re. 19:9.) "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters." (Re. 7:16,17.) Just as we sing:

God grant that I may, of His infinite love,  
Remain in His merciful keeping  
And sit with the King at His table above  
When here in the grave I am sleeping.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

All trials are then like a dream that is past,  
Forgotten all trouble and sorrow;  
All questions and doubts have been answered at last;  
Then dawneth eternity's morrow,  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

The heavens shall ring with an anthem more grand  
Than ever on earth was recorded;  
The blest of the Lord shall receive at His hand  
The crown of the victor awarded.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

O, brother and sister, how tasty is not the supper to which you are invited here—to see the Lord face to face and to enjoy eternal salvation in undisturbed blessed communion with God and the elect! But, who can fully grasp or describe what "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" [1 Co. 2:9].

3] And now, dear brother! Wouldn't you really like to *partake of this supper*, to accept his invitation? "But," do I hear you say, "how can there be any talk of that for me? How am I supposed to be able to believe that God will allow me, so great a sinner, to come to such a wonderful supper and partake of such blessedness? You see, I'm sure I've broken all the commandments, my heart is evil from my youth on and my mind is totally at enmity with him. With all of that I have surely justly deserved and am earning daily his wrath and disfavor, temporal punishment and eternal condemnation. That's why I can't love him now, nor have any pleasure in his commandments and will. How is he, the holy and righteous God, supposed to have mercy on me now and forgive and bless me instead of being angry and punishing me and cursing me just as he certainly says in his holy Law, 'Cursed is every one that does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them!' (Ga. 3:10). How is he who says, 'The pure of heart shall see God,' (Mt. 5:8) and again, 'God does not hear sinners' (Jo. 9:31) and again, 'What does Christ have in common with Belial?' (2 Co. 6:15)—how is he supposed to be willing to take me, an unclean sinner, into his fellowship, seat me at his table of grace, and let me drink from the cup of salvation?"

Of course, my dear friend! of course it is certain and true that by your own reason and strength you are completely unworthy and have not at all deserved to be a guest at this great supper, and that you cannot possibly accept the invitation to believe that God has such a kind disposition toward you and is willing to bless you and to make you happy eternally instead of punishing and condemning you. Therefore there is no reason at all to be surprised about it now that your *reason* is offended by such an invitation and thinks that it may well enough be meant for other people but not for you. But it is exactly through this wonderful invitation which is incomprehensible to reason that the holy, righteous God wants to have you, an unworthy sinner, as his guest at his banquet of grace in his blessed fellowship. Because God's compassion and mercy toward us fallen people was so great that he gave his only-begotten Son into death as the sacrifice for our sins. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jo. 3:16) And just as Jesus became the propitiation not only for our sins but for the sins of *the whole world*, so has he now also commanded his disciples to go out into all the world and to preach this Gospel to *every creature*. And just as you now certainly by nature belong to this lost and condemned world, so do you just as certainly belong to the world which was reconciled and freed from sin, death and the kingdom of Satan by the blood of Jesus and you are likewise one of all the creatures of God to whom this blessed message is to be proclaimed and who is to be invited to this great supper.

"Yes," do I hear you say again: "All too long have I despised this grace of God. In my childhood he embraced me with his grace, forgave me my sin, adopted me as his child and gave me the right of inheritance in his kingdom. But then came the day, when, like Esau, I scorned my rights as the firstborn and let myself be beguiled by the world. How many years have passed in which I have filled myself with the pig's-flesh of this world and I haven't listened to God's call and his friendly invitation to his supper. Now it's too late!"

Behold, my friend! it would of course be nothing other than righteousness on the part of God if he had already gotten tired of you, his patience been exhausted and he had abandoned you to your own ways, but God is now so merciful that he "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked shall turn from his way and live." (Ez. 33:11.) Therefore, when he has borne with you now and preserved you in the time of grace and again today lets you be invited and says to you: "Come; for all things are now ready, the perfectly valid sacrifice was given also for these sins of yours," then he is showing you thereby even more clearly how unutterably great his love for you is and how much your salvation and blessedness are on his mind.

Therefore you must not now continue neglecting the Word of God and despising his grace and adding that sin to your others so that through your unbelief you continue to make God a liar in his Word. So do we also of course hear in the Gospel that he lets them that are invited hear these words: "Come; for all things are now ready!" Now even though these people excused themselves and didn't want to come, and the master is angry with them for that and says that none of them who were invited shall taste of his supper, yet we do see though how these people's contempt for grace and their subsequent rejection must serve to glorify the very grace of God, because now we hear him order the servants to go into the streets and lanes with so much greater zeal and to bring in the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. And when the servants said to him that still there was room, he orders them to go out onto the highways and into the hedges and compel them to come in so that his house can be filled.

Here you see though that it is the Lord's intent that we all come to his supper, that we all be saved. He really does want to have his house full. The more the world's mighty, rich, respected, and pious scorn the invitation, the more is it the Lord's will that we should seek out the downtrodden and the poor and the despised. And the more wretched and unworthy they feel because of their sins, the more should we *compel them* to come in so that his house shall be filled. O, brethren, what love for our souls. How it lies on his heart that *everyone* be saved and be blessed. Yes, he wants us to *compel* them to come in. But now *of course God does not use violence and force* in order to convert the heart and to force it *to believe against its will*, but in a way which is incomprehensible to us he persuades it by his divine power so that he makes a willing person out of an unwilling as the prophet says, "Lord, you have prevailed over me, and I let myself be persuaded. You have been too strong for me and have prevailed." (Je. 20:7.) Thus neither should we now compel people with force to be baptized, nor gather large crowds to church through secular laws, punishments and rewards, nor lure them to church and to work for it through amusements, lotteries and similar lures. Because, the kingdom of Christ is not of this world and "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Co. 10:4.5.)

No, we *compel*, as Paul says to Timothy, by "preaching the word, being instant in season and out of season; reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Ti. 4:2.) We are to stick to chastising and enticing with threats, admonitions and promises, until if possible, the stubbornness of people is overcome by the grace of God. The anxious and troubled souls, the poor in spirit who long for grace but fear for their unworthiness, them we are to compel by holding before them again and again the infinite great love of God in Christ Jesus and his friendly invitation, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28.) In this way every Christian is to compel them to come in "by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," (2 Co. 6:7) with persevering prayer and intercession, through fearless witness and confession, through persevering struggle and patient suffering for the truth. Where God should see that it is needed, neither will he let chastisement and the cross be lacking in order to compel them to come in so that his "house may be filled."

But, do I again hear someone say: "Now when God invites *everyone* to his supper so earnestly, and as we have heard even *compels* them to come in, and we know however from both the Word of God and from experience that few they are who are walking on the narrow way and are saved, then there must be something good in their attitude or something less bad which prompts God and is the reason why he converts them while so many others go on to their destruction through their own fault. But I do not now find any such good, or less bad thing in my attitude through which I should have deserved in any way that God should look at me in grace and convert me in preference to others. On the contrary, I acknowledge myself as the greatest of all sinners and do not find anything other than resistance and stubbornness in myself. If there is anyone who deserves to be cast away, it is I. Therefore I cannot believe that God is gracious to me, and therefore I dare not come either."

But, my dear friend, you are mistaken in that. You are certainly correct in saying that if God should not take us into his grace and convert us before he found something good in us, or something less bad, then we could have no hope of being converted and saved, because "in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing," (Ro. 7:18) and if there was *something* in you which prompted him to convert you and to accept you as his child, then it was not by grace alone that we are saved, his supper no longer a meal of grace, his kingdom no longer a kingdom of grace in which the sinner who knows himself unworthy and who knows that he is dead in trespasses and sins could not hope to enter, then of course, neither were we as corrupted by sin as our *Catechism* teaches that we are, namely "*inclined only to evil and unable and unwilling to do that which is good,*" and as we sing in the hymn:

Our whole nature and our thoughts all,  
Ruined were by Adam's fall,  
Poisoned were we by sin's portion,  
We could find no help at all,  
If Christ, our Comfort, had not freed us  
From the threat'ning danger great,

And the wrath which came upon us,  
And o'er us did dominate.

But, God be praised! our Gospel teaches us that the matter is completely otherwise.

In the first place, we hear that it was the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind whom the master ordered the servants to bring in, people in misery and full of defects who did not have anything to boast of and in whom we do not hear the master in any way whatsoever praise something good but whose wretchedness and need went to his heart so that he *had mercy* on them and accepted them by grace alone. Thus he bids his servants to go out into the highways and hedges where the most miserable, the most wretched and the most needy people were to be found. And then these people, in the feeling of their wretchedness and great misery, would regard themselves completely unworthy of coming to so great a supper and consider it an impossibility, yes, presumptuous of them to accept the invitation which was meant for them, them too. So he says to them that they should *compel* them to come in. Therefore we see here that it is nothing other than pure grace and mercy which prompt him, both through his invitation and his compelling them.

Next then, we hear that the reason that those first people who were invited did not come to his supper wasn't that the master perhaps neglected to invite them or wasn't in earnest about getting them in. We see that they were the first people invited, prepared for it a long time in advance, and that he repeated the invitation to them and let them know that everything was now ready. No, the only reason was that they scorned the invitation and *did not want to come*. Some excused themselves and in that way acknowledged after all that they ought to have accepted the invitation. Another said he could not come; he had something to take care of. In all of them, mere excuses, indifference and contempt.

Thus we also hear Christ say about the Jews: "How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not." (Mt. 23:37.) But those who came in and who shared in the supper had his undeserved grace alone to thank for the fact that they were invited and were compelled to come in. But just for this reason is this invitation to the great supper so wonderful and enticing for poor sinners who know that they are not able at all to come in, because it is of pure grace. O, that we also may regard it as wonderful, and not despise and reject the invitation!

Many are you now, dear brothers and sisters, who have been invited again and again to the great supper, to whom grace in Christ has been proclaimed and offered again and again. If you have despised God's call just as these people of whom the Gospel speaks, Oh, consider what a frightful judgment will come upon you if you remain in your unbelief and scorn the grace. It says in the Gospel that the master was *angry* and said that none of the people who were invited should taste his supper. Lo, this temple is being dedicated today so that the invitation to the great supper shall go out from here in this area, and yet, my dear friend, you don't know whether you'll be able to hear it here again. Therefore today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts!

Furthermore, in the Gospel the Lord calls our attention to what it is which brings so many people to despise his grace. It's love for the world, its riches, honor and good times.

For how many people is not *temporal care* the most important thing? They find no time to occupy themselves with the Word of God, not at home and seldom in church. They have no means, no time, no intention of bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Diligently keeping them in school won't do; their help is needed at home. Coming into a position where they can work for themselves and further their temporal livelihood, it's toward that that their effort is directed first of all. Therefore they cannot spare anything, or anything important, for church, school, the training of teachers, etc.

For other people *the honor of the world* is the highest goal. They only care about worldly information, or are taken up with politics. They read newspapers but not the Bible. For the sake of honor, they conform to the world and deny Christ instead of confessing him and suffering evil for his name's sake.

Then there are those who see the highest good in the vanity, fun and pleasures of *life on earth*. They go and care for their loved ones, for they are getting old, for what they will leave behind them. They have neither time nor money to sacrifice for the food which endures unto eternal life. Naturally, they cannot come. Yes, rather do they say: "Let us eat and drink; tomorrow we die!" (1 Co. 15:32.)

But God does not let himself be mocked. His verdict is: "None of those people who were invited, shall taste of my supper." Thus the Lord also says in Proverbs 1:24–32:

Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but you have set at naught all my counsel; and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when you fear comes; when your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

O, watch and pray therefore, dear brethren, so that you do not fall into temptation! Do not despise the Lord's great grace which he offers you when he wants to gather you now here in his house in order to teach you to know, and to lead you on the way of salvation! Do not stay away from church and do not neglect his Word. Because if you do not want to hear it, then you are hindering the work of the Spirit of God, and if you remain in such contempt you make your conversion impossible. Thus we also of course sing:

But they who have always resisted  
His grace and on their own virtue depended  
Shall then be condemned and cast out from his face,  
Eternally lost and unfriended.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

Therefore, dear brother, attend here faithfully and "keep your foot when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools"! (Ec. 5:1.) Do not harden yourselves when he wants to convict you of your sins but humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, because it is impossible that you can have any longing for God's grace or want to accept this invitation and be partakers in his supper as long as you go on indifferent and secure in your sins. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." (Mt. 9:12.) Acknowledge your sins with repentance and sorrow. It is in the feeling of our sinful misery that faith is conceived.

And then when the Lord comes in the Gospel and wants to comfort you, do not resist the Spirit of grace stubbornly but sit humbly at Jesus' feet as Mary did, learn from him and take reason captive under the obedience of faith, neither go according to your feelings but stay with the Word as your only true guide! And the Lord who works both to will and to do shall himself do his work also in your hearts and give you grace to believe and to accept the invitation, and he will preserve you in his kingdom of grace until the day of Jesus Christ.

See then, that you this day  
God's mercy rightly treasure  
And of this mystery  
Do grasp its meaning proper!  
The Law whose sum it is,  
That sin you are to flee,  
Whose sum the Gospel is,  
Are born anew to be.

Yes, of his great grace, may God grant then that this joyous invitation to the great supper, to this blessed communion and the eternal enjoyment of his heavenly blessings may ring throughout as the sum of all the



sermons delivered here to the comfort of poor sinners who come together here and seek guidance and salvation for their poor souls! Then shall it always be said of them who proclaim the Word from this place, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them who bring good tidings, that publish peace." And thus when you and they who attend here in the course of time, come in through these gates with songs of joy and say: "Yes, beautiful upon the mountains are their feet who bear good tidings, who publish peace" (Is. 52:7) because there is nothing you are so desirous of as light, life and salvation, nothing which is as precious to you as the blessed Word of God which gives your heart peace, since it teaches you to know and to believe in him, Jesus Christ, the blessed Son of God who has made reconciliation for all your sins, because nothing tastes as sweet to you as the blessed Gospel which strengthens and preserves you in faith in him until the end, oh, yes, then shall all such hearers find that they were not disappointed in their hope, but on that day among the hosts of the elect they will sing praises to him and to the Lamb who sits on the throne.

Thus then, may the Lord's blessing rest upon this house so that it may be a forecourt to the heavenly temple which is not made with hands for the many who attend here in the course of time. May he preserve his testimony from this place in its truth and purity and bless it upon the listeners' hearts so that great hosts of the redeemed of the Lord may come in to the great supper!

May he bless the little ones who are brought forward to him at this baptismal font and preserve them in his name so that they may remain in Christ as they are grafted into him here through baptism!

May he bless all them who are going to kneel around this altar rail and confirm their baptismal covenant, and preserve them in their baptismal grace until their lives' blessed end!

May he bless also them who approach this altar to be strengthened in faith and love through the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood, and let them return to their homes with peace through the forgiveness of sins!

And with this then, be this church, with its pulpit, baptismal font and altar and the holy vessels, be sanctified and dedicated to the service of God in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost! Amen.

*Kirketidende*, Sept. 22, 1882, pages 589–600

# Sermon at the Ordination of Otto Christian Ottesen

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota

February 3, 1884

*"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." 2 Ti. 2:3*

## ENDURING HARDSHIP AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST

It is to his disciple Timothy who was installed as bishop in Ephesus that the apostle Paul directs this admonition. When Paul here lays it on Timothy's heart to get used to suffering as a good soldier, he does not, however, by emphasizing this aspect of Timothy's work, want to have it described as its substance. No, the apostle describes his chief work as being an instrument, when in the epistle to the Corinthians he places it alongside his own when he says, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of *Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*" (1 Co. 4:1). He himself gives a further explanation of those words in the words with which he makes his moving departure from the elders in Ephesus, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood!*" (Ac. 20:28).

Yes, Timothy was to serve the congregation as a *soldier of Christ* who is subject to and obedient to the Word of Christ and answerable to him alone as the church's Head and King, and as a steward of the mysteries of God care for it by guiding it into the good pastures of the Gospel and leading it to the still, flowing waters of Siloam. As the Master is called "*The Prince of Peace*" (Is. 9:6) and comes as the angels sang in order to bring "peace on earth," so are his servants to be *bearers of a message of peace* by proclaiming the blessed tidings of the Gospel to people who are lost and condemned on account of sin, to consciences which are troubled because of the judgment of the Law that man's sin was atoned for by the blood of Jesus, that God is a reconciled God, and by exhorting sinners, "Be reconciled with God" (2 Co. 5:20).

However, precisely because this is the chief work of the servants of Christ and of the Word, precisely because they are to proclaim the Gospel of Christ above all else for the conversion of sinners and their translation from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, precisely for this reason their position becomes a position of conflict. For this reason, a servant of Christ, a bearer of the message of the Gospel, becomes a *soldier of Christ*. The Prince of Peace himself proclaims this when he says: "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division" (Lk. 12:49,51). And how could it be otherwise?

He came of course to free us from Satan's power and was therefore to "demolish the devil's stronghold" as the stronger man comes upon the strong and overcoming him takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils (Lk. 11:22).

How was it possible that the devil and his army should look peaceably upon this? On the contrary, he raged bitterly and sought not merely to employ all his cunning and power in order to hinder the work of the Lord, but furthermore, walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour, or he puts on the guise of an angel of light in order to deceive even the elect if that were possible. When he can, he blows up a storm so that the church's ship will sink. And the world, his bride, is of the same sort. Therefore Jesus says, "The world hates you, because it hates me" (Jo. 15:18). The servant is surely not above the master but the servant ought to be as his master. Now because it is also the chief work of the servants of Christ to demolish the devil's strongholds through the preaching of the Gospel, they have to be exposed to his enmity and aggression. The enemies of *Christ* must be and remain *their* enemies. In a never-ending battle they must win their spoil from them and preserve the flock of God in peace. Without a battle there is no victory. Without a victory there is no crown, no peace.

Thus do we see that a servant of the Word, a bearer of the Gospel, must also be a *soldier of Christ*. More than that, that a servant of Christ must be on guard constantly, be in battle unceasingly, so that neither he himself nor anyone else is to be offended by this. If he abandons his post, runs from the battle for the sake of an easy life, or out of a false love cries "peace, peace" where there is no peace and wants to reconcile the truth with lies, then by doing that he shows himself not a servant of Christ but a hireling, a belly server.

Yes, every Christian has already enlisted as a soldier of Christ through Baptism and is assigned to battle against the enemies of Christ under the banner of the cross. At our Baptism we of course promised our God to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways. In this battle formation of the Lord, the servants of the Word have the leading but also the most dangerous post and the one most full of responsibility. They are to lead the way into battle under the supreme command of the Lord's Christ.

You also, my young friend, are placed here by the Holy Ghost through this congregation's Call to be such a servant of the Word and such a soldier of Jesus Christ! I know how your pious mother, as Hannah previously, promised you to the Lord and his service already when she was carrying you under her heart, likewise how your venerable father<sup>4</sup> has not let there be a lack of admonition and discipline so that you might become a willing instrument of the Lord in his service. And the Lord heard the many prayers which were offered up on your behalf and he has blessed your mother's nurture and your father's admonition so that both they and we have the great joy of seeing you present yourself here today to be ordained to the work of the Holy Ministry according to the old apostolic practice of prayer and the laying on of hands, after you first, as we have heard just now, have acquired for yourself the necessary knowledge and been declared fit for the work. Here, you are now by God's grace, through the preaching of the Law, to awaken sinners who are sleeping and cause secure sinners to tremble before the judgment of the Law. Here, by the preaching of the Gospel you are to lead weary, sin-oppressed souls to Christ so that they can be blessed in him. Always active, so that you can tear some soul from Satan, you are to stand at your post as a good soldier of Jesus Christ in order to protect the flock committed to you against the devil's attack so that none of the souls won to Christ shall be ensnared by the enemy and again come under his power.

But as to how you are to carry on your Lord's battle as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, I will only remind you of how the apostle Paul describes the armor in which a soldier of Christ is to be arrayed: "Therefore put on the *whole armor of God*, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the *word of God*, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ep.6:13–18).

We see from this that a soldier of Jesus Christ has to be arrayed in the *armor of God*. Even a Goliath's armor is not appropriate and good for a David who wants to wage the Lord's war. But we see that more than anything else, *faith*, justifying and saving faith, is what it means to be arrayed in the armor of God. Through faith alone are you clothed in the righteousness of Christ, do you have peace and skill in the Gospel of peace. Through faith alone can you protect yourself with the shield which quenches the fiery darts of the wicked one and properly use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and with which alone the enemy can be slain.

But in the next place it finally also applies to a soldier of Jesus Christ that as Paul says to Timothy immediately after the words of our text, he "strive *lawfully*," that is, in the manner which the Lord has prescribed for his soldiers in his Word, so that you do not act according to your wisdom, liking or thoughts, or according to what you think appropriate and helpful, but so that you set aside all worldly sorrows and cares in reliance on Jesus Christ and his Word and direct yourself entirely according to the will of the Lord revealed in the Word.

<sup>4</sup> The young ordinand was a son of Pastor and Mrs. Jakob Aal Ottesen.

I surely know, my dear friend, how, as a pious and obedient son you have often answered your father, "I will do as you wish," even when what he asked could have been contrary to your own liking and inclination. How much more will you not now strive to be obedient to your heavenly Father in everything and say, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Mt. 26:39).

However, we do not wish to look extensively here at the armor of a soldier of Jesus Christ or at how he is to do battle in general, but rather to dwell for a while on the apostle's special admonition about:

### **ENDURING HARDSHIP AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST.**

My friends, this admonition is very profitable and necessary. How many an inexperienced young man does not enter the ministry with the best of intentions about fighting the battle in the armor of God, with the highest expectations of successful progress. In his mind's eye he sees how larger and larger crowds will flock around his pulpit, how opponents will be convinced and fall at his feet, how the erring will let themselves be straightened out, sinners converted and forsaking the broad way, the troubled letting themselves be comforted, how the entire congregation will look up to him with confidence, love and gratitude, willing and glad to let itself be led by him to the true fear of God and to be encouraged to outdo each other in every good work to the glory of God and the welfare of the church. In *one* word, he sees himself working in his congregation in peace and quietness surrounded by children and adults, as a father by pious, obedient and happy children.

When he now begins his work and his battle and life's bitter experiences soon meet him, he sees his beautiful expectations disappointed and that so often he must live to see the exact opposite of all that which he expected should be the constant fruit of his labor. When added to this there comes a lack of proper appreciation of his honest intention, backbiting, mockery and persecution of all kinds, poverty and want, then, if he isn't prepared for "enduring this hardship," if he hasn't firmly impressed this on his heart that it is part of being a soldier of Christ "*to suffer hardship*," that *the cross* is precisely his proper trademark,—if he does not remember this, then even the most capable, the most zealous and the most stout-hearted will easily be tempted to grasp at carnal means and seek human ways out in order to conclude a false peace, or become fainthearted and despondent.

He begins to think: "You're not the right man here. You haven't approached the matter in the right way. You haven't used the proper weapons. You have not been arrayed in the proper armor. Otherwise it would not have gone like this. You wouldn't have had such sad experiences and not met such opposition." He begins to doubt his faith, his state of grace, or the power of the Word and God's help, and it ends perhaps with his letting down his guard, abandoning his post, giving up, and trying something which pays better. Or, what is by no means better, he continues the work of the ministry disheartened and indifferent. He works for his livelihood as a kind of machine which runs as long as it is greased. Or he makes a disgraceful truce with the enemy and betrays his Master and his cause.

Now, if this is not to happen, then it is very necessary that a servant and soldier of God familiarize himself with the fact that as such he must "*endure hardship*," so that when the rough days come upon him unexpectedly he isn't going to be confused and offended by his cross, and with it, by Christ himself

Therefore this admonition of the apostle in our text is so extremely helpful and it is extremely necessary that we earnestly take it to heart. Note, the apostle does not say: "*If you have to endure hardship, then ...*" No, he assumes it as taken for granted that a soldier of Christ must endure hardship, but he calls upon and admonishes Timothy now to be prepared for it and not to retreat from suffering but to take it upon himself willingly and to endure the hardship, and to endure it as a *good* soldier of Jesus Christ.

When the soldier marches to war he knows that he has to endure hardship, that it goes along with his calling to be exposed to fatigue, to suffer from the cold and the heat, from thirst and hunger, wounds and mistreatment, imprisonment, sickness and death. And a soldier of Jesus Christ should expect an easy life in the Lord's war! No, enduring hardship is a part of his war too.

We heard above that he is concerned with routing Satan from his fortifications, that he does not have to wrestle with flesh and blood, that is, with human wisdom and might, but with the army of spiritual wickedness in high places since it is the devil who shows himself active in the children of unbelief.

We heard also that they do not want to sit peacefully and wait for the attack. As our Lord Jesus Christ was led into the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry to be tempted by the devil, so does he also try his hand against us in order to inflict on us all the hardship, all the suffering he can.

He soon tempts us, especially in bodily and spiritual distress, to doubt concerning the divine truth, about God's faithfulness and gracious help, and in this way, to *unbelief* and despair, or, in unbelief, to make flesh our arm and in pride to rely upon our own knowledge, gifts and ability; soon, to despondency and faintheartedness by hindering the work in the congregation, since, in part, he arouses a lack of proper appreciation and discord, in part, seduces to error and ungodliness. He soon arouses the people's outcry, the hatred of the powerful in order to frighten the Lord's servants and to lure them into unfaithfulness, to preach to itching ears, and to seek the favor and support of the majority, the friendship of the powerful. He soon tempts them with the riches, goods and pleasures of this world and holds out the prospect of one thing: Of how much unpleasantness one can spare oneself, how easily one can make oneself the friend of everyone when one does not wrestle so conscientiously with the proclamation of the truth but cons the people, uses ambiguous expressions and adapts the Word, a little here and a little there, to the wishes of his adversaries, yes, gives the impression that in this way brotherly love shows itself at its best.

But if these attempts of the devil are in vain, if the servants of Christ stand firm against his attack, then he sets all kinds of traps in their way as he did before the Master and he pursues and torments them with the world's hatred and contempt, the lack of proper appreciation and the backbiting of false brethren, and with the breakup of and defections from the flock, or, with removal and expulsion from office.

We heard that it is the work of the Lord's servants to rebuke sin, to admonish sinners to abandon their false gods, to forsake the devil and to hold on to Christ. They are to be the salt of the earth; but this, we know, is sharp and biting. The proud, self-willed and defiant heart of man will not tolerate the humbling testimony of the truth. The correction and the prick which the testimony leaves behind in the conscience and which often disturbs men's rest and happiness, irritates them and they often pay those who bring them the most precious eternal treasures, but who like the surgeon need to use the sharp knife before they can apply the salve or pour the healing ointment into the wound, with slander, hatred and persecution.

The apostle Paul was an experienced soldier in all kinds of suffering. To the Corinthians he writes, "Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things until now" (1 Co. 4:11-13).

The apostle knew what that meant; therefore this admonition to Timothy, "*Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" You also, my friend, have really not yet entered into office but still you have already been obliged to have the experience that is called "enduring hardship" when one will not yield but holds firm to the Word of God and "*the form of sound doctrine,*" (2 Ti. 1:13).<sup>5</sup> But the more do you need both the admonition and the comfort which lie in the apostle's words, "Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ!"

You are not to go looking for suffering nor invite it. It will come in its time. But when it does come then you are not to get out of its way, but face it with hope, willingly and patiently bear it, and, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ hold out until God changes it. How terrible it would look for a soldier to flee because he saw the enemy approaching or to abandon the colors in the heat of battle or run from his post because of cold or

<sup>5</sup> Otto C. Ottesen was being ordained during the Election Controversy. Had he sided with the anti-synod faction of the Norwegian Synod the district president would have officiated. He refused, and thus President Preus ordained him.

rough weather or because his life was in danger! He would be treated as a cowardly wretch or disgraceful traitor, as one who went back on his word.

But how much more disgraceful would it not be, if we who fight under the banner of *The Most High*, who have Jesus Christ himself for our Commander, who strive for the Gospel's cause, not for a corruptible crown but for the incorruptible crown of life, if we, I say, would forsake the Lord's cause, leave our post and flee as hirelings! It would surely be the most shameful treachery against the Lord who redeemed us, and against his redeemed flock.

No, endure hardship, as it becomes a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The apostle has himself given us an excellent example of this. "We are troubled on every side, yet *not distressed*; we are perplexed, but *not in despair*. Persecuted, but *not forsaken*; cast down, but *not destroyed*, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Co. 4:8.9.16). Scripture also says about the Savior that he came to his own but his own received him not (Jo. 1:11). He had no place where he could lay his head (Mt. 8:20). In his final suffering he had to suffer the fact that all forsook him (Mk. 14:50). But he bore the suffering patiently, as a lamb which is led to slaughter (Is. 53:7). He held out and worked while it was day (Jo. 9:4) and then finally he trod the winepress alone (Is. 63:3).

Follow that example! You will perhaps find now and then that your work for the conversion of sinners is met with indifference and coldness, that your striving for the building up and progress of the congregation in the knowledge and fear of God does not find the support which could be expected, yes, is perhaps counteracted especially by those in whom you had hoped to find faithful co-laborers. You see little or no fruit from your work, but that sin prevails. Willfulness and self-conceit are spreading and errors want to creep in. You are tempted to think: "They're not worth it, these ungrateful people! I will shake off the dust from my feet and be on my way!" Or you get to thinking to yourself: "It's your fault. You don't have the necessary ability, the right gifts, etc. It's best that you give up your place to a more capable man." Or doubts about the power of the Word arise in you and the temptation to seek *that* which you think the Word is not able to accomplish, attained through other means, for example, through bazaars, societies and lotteries to get people to make the contributions which the love of God and the preaching of his Word cannot bring them to do, or by means of Methodistic prayer-meetings, anxious benches or so-called new strategies or through one's own works, to bring about the conversion which alone is the work of the Spirit through the Means of Grace, or finally, through the preaching of the Law to want to work the true fear of God which alone is the fruit of the faith which is worked through the Gospel, etc

But brethren! instead of all this, Scripture says, "Endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry!" (2 Ti. 4:5). Let the thought of your own frailty serve to make you properly humble so that the power of God can be made perfect in your weakness! But comfort yourself with this that "the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes," (Ro. 1:16) that the Word, however often it is still refused and despised, however, never returns void, but as the rain and the snow water the earth and make it fruitful, says the Lord, "so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Is. 55:10.11). It is up to us to plant and to water but for God to give the growth.

Your honest intentions are perhaps misjudged, you are slandered and made fun of, and confidence in your honesty and integrity is undermined. It hurts deeply, but the Word which assures you of God's grace and friendship keeps you on your feet. You say with Paul, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a man's judgment," (1 Co. 4:3) and thus you go calmly on your course further "by good report and evil report, by honor and dishonor" (2 Co. 6:8).

Yes, you perhaps live to see that you are denounced because of your faith, because you are not willing to yield a title of the Word of God you are ousted<sup>6</sup> and exposed to poverty and need. There can then be

<sup>6</sup> President Preus had himself been deposed, in fact, carried out bodily, as pastor of the Norway Grove congregation on the previous Good Friday, 1883, a congregation he had served for 30 years.

sufficient temptation for you to bitterness, hatred and revenge, or, desponding, to give up everything. But in the Word you have found a solid rock to stand upon. It gives power to endure hardship and to hold out. It hurts you deeply to see such great blindness or wickedness among them who want to pass for children of God because you know the Lord has said, "He who despises you despises me" (Lk. 10:16). But you will not be ashamed of our Lord's testimony but will endure hardship with the Gospel through the power of God. You comfort yourself knowing that the Lord says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt. 5:10–12). So you go your way cheerfully, glad that people cannot, however, take your Jesus and the kingdom of heaven from you; and you sing with the poet:

Thy way and all thy sorrows,  
Give thou into His hand,  
His gracious care unfailing,  
Who doth the heavens command;  
Their course and path He giveth  
To clouds and air and wind;  
A way thy feet may follow,  
He, too, for thee will find.

The church's need oppresses you. You see that it has happened as the apostle predicts: "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Ti. 4:3,4). You see errors increasing, enemies swarming up from all sides, storms howling and the waves pounding sky-high around the ship of the church and threatening it with destruction while most of the people onboard stand by like indifferent on-lookers, or, confused, run here and there. You, however, will not be disheartened nor despair concerning *truth's* victory. You know that Israel's Watchman is not sleeping, that he is with you in the ship, and that one, "Lord, save us, we perish!" (Lk. 8:24) awakens him who still commands the wind and the sea, and they are calm. And you say:

Well I know, that the Church of God shall sail,  
And as though lost, must oft the fear bewail  
The 'whelming waves will it sink;  
Yet, I am glad, And by the faith am cheered,  
That in His Church's ship Jesus Himself did step;  
Crash 'gainst it, O, wind and waves,  
Beat with all your might its sides,  
It is never going to sink!

Because it has the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18). Satan rushes in upon you with severe temptations whether you do after all possess the necessary ability for the difficult work or whether you have not misunderstood your calling. You feel so unworthy of so holy a work. Yes, your state of grace is made doubtful for you because of frequently recurring weaknesses and slips, and the depth of sin of which you are more and more aware in your heart. Your sins reach over your head. They have become a heavy burden for you. But especially do you dread the future, how you are going to remain constant in the great falling away. The enemies' number increases. One after the other of your friends forsakes the colors. And what is your own strength and ability in comparison with the enemies' wisdom and cunning?

How are *you* to keep out the gnawing anxiety, withstand the growing power, avoid the threatening danger? "Do not fear, little flock," Scripture says then, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" (Lk. 12:32). He, the great God, has, however, redeemed you and called you that you shall become one with him in suffering, but then also in glory! He who has begun the good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ (Ph. 1:6). Therefore, grasp again the shield of faith with which you can quench the fiery darts of the wicked one and sing boldly:

Who will now accuse me  
And for judgment drag me  
Off to Sinai?  
Sin I am confessing,  
And to Jesus turning,  
Free in Him am I.  
Meet me, then, at Golgotha!  
He shall plead there my case for me.  
Who will then accuse me ?

Who will then condemn me  
When I do immerse me  
Deep in Jesus' blood;  
All the world over,  
Will God's judgment go then:  
"This man, he is free,  
He is washed in Jesus' blood;"  
Satan, sin and death then *must flee* ;  
Who will then condemn me?

Thus the suffering brings you comfort through the Gospel so that you can the better comfort others with the comfort wherewith you yourself are comforted (2 Co. 1:4). Thus strengthened anew in faith, you rely alone upon him and his powers who sits on high at the right hand of majesty but who has promised, "I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20). And you say hopefully: "Whom shall I fear? If God is for me, who can be against me?" (Ps. 27:1; Ro. 8:31). As you know that he will direct all things for the best and do all things well, so are you certain that "he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day" (2 Ti. 1:12). Thus, instead of letting yourself be frightened by afflictions, losing heart and giving up, you learn by "enduring hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" to "glory in tribulations" because you know that "tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience hope; and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us!" (Ro. 5:3-5).

Thus ever striving after being arrayed in the full armor of God, armed with the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, you will be able to hold your position against every enemy and beat back his attack. Yes, even when it can seem darkest and as if errors were going to triumph and the truth succumb, then you, however, sing fearlessly:

Still must they leave God's word its might,  
For which no thanks they merit;  
Still is He with us in the fight,  
With His good gifts and Spirit.  
And should they, in the strife,  
Take kindred, goods, and life,  
We freely let them go,  
They profit not the foe;  
With us remains the kingdom.

And when you thus have fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith, then you can also add cheerfully with the apostle, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Ti. 4:7,8). Therefore, my friend, '*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*' To that end may God grant you his grace through Jesus Christ!

And with this, then, have I also wished for you, dear congregation, in this young man whom you have called to be your pastor, the best gift from God. May he give you grace to receive him as such!



May the Lord bless his coming in and his going out among you, so that he may save both himself and you! Amen.

*Kirketidende*, April 25, 1884, pages 257–266

# Address at Luther College Graduation

June 17, 1886

## A TRUE SENSE OF HONOR

The furthering of a school's goal and working toward it so that its students are made more and more capable both morally and intellectually because of it, has to be the joint effort of both its teachers and students. Nothing which truly can work toward the attaining of this goal ought to be overlooked. One such thing to which I want to direct your attention now, is a *true sense of honor*. A sense of honor is one of the instincts which God himself planted in the heart for maintaining the dignity which a person possesses as the most wonderfully endowed creature of God on earth, in esteem and having it recognized and made important. A true sense of honor therefore strives to give God the glory which is due him.

This natural instinct is perverted and corrupted by sin, as everything in man is. It appears in the natural man as an *ambition for vain glory*, that is, as a striving for his own honor, which is vain. "If I honor myself, my honor is nothing," the Savior says. (Jo. 8:54.)

That kind of ambition is always sinful. In many people it reaches a passion which contemptuously seeks the highest honor for itself, disdaining the worth of other people, and to their own harm, when real or imagined superior gifts are acknowledged and praised. Egotism is the mother of this vice which is a gross violation of the commandment of love.

I'm not going to dwell here on how this worldly vice is used in various situations in life as a powerful lever toward furthering its goals, nor am I going to dwell on how it can have called forth many heroic deeds, many wonderful feats which through the providence of God have been good for mankind without therefore having had any value in the eyes of him who looks at the heart.

On the other hand, I do want to call attention to what an important role ambition for vain glory plays in the school where the Word of God does not get to advise and govern. It is of course also so natural that where the means ordained by God for obtaining the necessary power and zeal for the work are despised or are missing, that there the spirit of man is resorted to as its own means which he thinks has been given him for achieving his goal. Thus it is unfortunately a fact that in such schools this very ambition is considered a superior, yes, often the most superior means for inciting the student to zeal, discipline, etc. They actually therefore study how to elicit and nourish this passion in the student. Nor is it to be denied that people do not call on its help in vain for being able to produce an apparently favorable result, at any rate, from the school's point of view. In many ways ambition for vain glory has also shown itself to be the most powerful, if not the only incentive for excelling in knowledge, diligence and conduct which the student has acquired in the school.

However, my friends, what value in God's eyes, what true profit for their possessors do this information and these skills, this distinction and praise won through them which have been acquired in this way, have, as long as ambition for vain glory is the never-satisfied passion which urges him on? We do not even need to take into consideration such instances where that ambition's passion has forced its slave to resort to such disgraceful means as hypocritical piousness and modesty, feigned diligence and zeal, or even cheating, in order to win the desired praise and renown. No, even there where real knowledge and skills are acquired through hard, tiring work and attentiveness, the splendid results which the school's work has been able to produce in this way will be just as displeasing to God as they are damaging to the student, if by the grace of God he has not himself become a servant of righteousness rather than a servant of unrighteousness. Because otherwise, later in life he will *per fas et nefas* (with proper or improper means) unceasingly pursue the goal of that kind of ambition; but the end of it is destruction. That's why already the wise Solomon mentions a "proud look" among the things which the Lord hates (Pr. 6:17). And the apostle Paul cautions his Galatians when he says, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory." (5:26.) Therefore, so far from nurturing and fostering the poisonous root of ambition for vain glory in the child's or young person's heart, the teacher who really has the student's true welfare in mind as well as that the school bring God well-pleasing fruits, must have a

watchful eye on the ambition in his heart and apply all diligence in order to root it out where it shoots forth and expresses itself. It is also up to the student to be watchful and to take heed to himself and to the motives of his heart so that the bitter herb shall not shoot forth from him when he is defenseless. Because, "foolishness," Scripture says, "is bound in the heart of a child." (Pr. 22:15.) And in the inexperienced heart ambition for vain glory lets itself be mistaken so much easier for a sense of honor, since we do of course by nature want to excuse and gloss over our mistakes.

But as important as it is for the teacher to suppress and to put ambition for vain glory to death, it is as important for him to develop and to nourish in the students *the true sense of honor*, because it is a powerful means toward eliciting and strengthening in the student the good intentions and the energy of the will which are so necessary, so that he shall not merely be left with good intentions, but they will also be carried out.

This sense of honor is and can only be found in the Christian, in him who is born again of the Spirit of God. In him the natural inclination is purified and sanctified. Because only he recognizes both the deep depravity and the complete unworthiness of his own nature for all grace and honor, and on the other hand the grace by which he has undeservedly become a partaker in Christ. Because what greater honor can really be given him than that Christ has become our brother and in Christ we have become justified and sanctified children of God and heirs of glory! It is of course a disgrace when the praise which we should have for God is understood as belonging to us. But even greater is the glory of which we have become partakers, that all the merit of Christ is accounted to us and all our bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The vivid recognition of just this and the constant certainty of it will develop the true sense of honor in our hearts. Or, should it be possible, that you are genuinely convinced and rejoice over the fact that by grace you are one of God's children, that Christ does dwell in your heart by faith, that your weak body is a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and you should not feel what extreme honor God has let you share in? And this genuine feeling of the glory to which God has exalted you, should it not on the one hand fill your heart with shame and humility over toward your God, and yet at the same time with a sincere thankfulness and an earnest desire for honoring God with body and soul which belong to him? Should it not develop in you a sincere striving after shunning and avoiding everything by which you would dishonor yourself just as certainly as your God, and on the other hand using the opportunity which is offered you for developing and utilizing the abilities and strengths given you by God to the glory of God, with the greatest diligence and persistence?

Surely you would feel that the more you honored your God the more honor was yours, just as he himself of course says, "he that honors me, him will I honor." (Jo. 12:26.)

Therefore it has to be very important that the teacher draw out and strengthen the true sense of honor in the student by awakening and sharpening in him the consciousness of his heart's sinful corruption and God's rich grace in Christ. This does not happen by appealing to the natural dignity of man and the innate rights of man, but through instruction from the Word of God and Christian discipline. The higher the level of moral and true liberal education is in which they are thus brought up through the power of Christianity, the stronger will their concept of honor be and the stronger their sense of honor will also become. The more will they then be preserved both from seeking their own honor out of a false sense of honor, and seeking it through illicit means.

The consciousness that although he is a slave of Christ, he is free in Christ Jesus will steadily sharpen his sense of honor in the Christian student and will urge him to retain his Christian dignity and to apply himself to everything which is honorable and is well spoken of. Then if his diligence and efforts toward which his sense of honor prompt him are crowned with success and win him deserved recognition he will not be seduced by it to exalt himself but on the contrary he will be prompted humbly to give God all the glory, yes, also gladly give parents and teachers the honor which is due them according to the words, "honor to whom honor is due" (Ro. 13:7). And if on the other hand he should see that his hard work and zealous efforts did not bring the desired result, yes, were even misjudged, then he will know how to comfort himself because he has not desired honor from men but only that which is pleasing to God.

May God grant that you, my young friends, who leave here now with the testimony of satisfactorily completed studies, may be able to say that the true sense of honor, and not ambition for vain glory has been the incentive through which you have achieved so favorable a result! Would that this plant which the heavenly gardener alone can plant in the hearts of the students may also produce many flowers for your own encouragement, to the credit of the school and to the laud and praise of God! May his blessing continue to abide with our dear Luther College, upon its teachers and students, so that his work here may always prosper!

*Kirketidende*, July 9, 1886; pages 429–432.

# Dedication of the New Spring Prairie Lutheran Church

Columbia County, Wisconsin

December 5, 1886

## THE PROPER DEDICATION OF A CHURCH

*"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which you have shown unto your servant." Ge. 32:10. With this humble confession of our insignificance and unworthiness of all your grace and gifts, we want very much to meet you, O Lord our God, as did the patriarch Jacob of yore, on this joyous festive day which you grant our congregation. O help us to do that! Yes, Lord, prepare our hearts rightly to celebrate it in such a way that it may truly serve to our edification and to your glory! With heartfelt humility and grief we acknowledge our great and many sins with which we have rather deserved your wrath and punishment instead of the unending love and the innumerable demonstrations of grace with which you have overwhelmed our congregation to this very day so that from our hearts we can properly exalt the greatness of your grace and praise and laud your holy name. Yes, to that end grant us your grace and blessing for Jesus' sake! Amen.*

*Text: Luke 19:1-10*

Dear congregation, and you, dear brothers and sisters who have come together in order to celebrate this festive day with us, grace and peace from God our Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" Ps. 103:1.2. Yes, how much reason do we not all have, adults and children, pastors and listeners, dear congregation, to encourage our souls to thank the Lord with the psalmist for all his benefits with which he has overwhelmed us and our congregation in the more than thirty years which have passed since we were assembled for the first time at this place to dedicate to the Lord a house of God to his service! When I let my glance roam about in this gathering then there are not really many it meets of those who were along at that time to construct the cherished old stone church on whose solid foundation this new, beautiful house of God is erected. Most of those dear old friends of ours are resting out there under the sod. And we who are still here, we who took part in the work at that time in the strength of our manhood, we are bent over with age, our hair has turned gray, our strength is weakened, and now we are awaiting only the summons to depart in order to be laid to rest beside our loved ones who have gone on before. In the meantime we have the joy of seeing many of them who were present at that time at that festive occasion in their youth or even as small children in their mother's laps, now taking our place in the work in the strength of their manhood. Yes, many and great are the changes which have taken place among us during this time, but the Lord's goodness and faithfulness have not been subjected to any change or alterations. He is the same yesterday and today, yes, for ever. At that time most of us were living as poor newcomers in little huts here and there between the thickets. Now we are living in good houses on well-cultivated farms. The blessing of the Lord has done this. And if the Lord asks you, "Did you ever suffer hunger or did I ever forsake you?" do you not then have to reply, "No, Lord! your goodness has always encompassed me from my youth on and upon your benefits there is no number." However pleasantly as well as earnestly we have just now been reminded of these things, yet I am not going to detain myself with them any longer. I must dwell a little upon only *one* thing, to the glory of God.

Through your Call I was the first whom the Lord placed as a resident servant of the Word among you. Young and inexperienced, I came to you and took hold of the work with the sincere wish and prayer that I might work toward the salvation of your souls. I know that I did that with many shortcomings and with many weaknesses. I know also that the Lord lovingly took me into his school and taught me to understand his truth better. Over toward the Lord it is only his grace with which I comfort myself; only shame covers my face. However, not to my praise, but to the Lord's glory do I dare hope that with the richer understanding and with experience I also received grace to proclaim the Word of God to you with greater clarity and more power. But here I want to testify to the fact, and I ask you to consider it well, that it is the same way of salvation and

the same divine truths which I preached and instructed the young in at that time, which I hold and proclaim to this very day. Although I have made progress in knowledge and understanding, I am not conscious of having changed my conviction in any point of the doctrine of faith since that time or of teaching anything different now than then. Hopefully, I dare appeal not only to the testimony of many hundreds of people who have heard my preaching from the beginning and up to this very day, or have been instructed for confirmation by me, but also to the Lord before whom I expect soon to have to give an account of my stewardship.

And this, dear congregation, you are to regard and appreciate as the greatest of all God's benefits toward you, that for more than a generation he has allowed *his Word* to be proclaimed in its truth and purity without addition and distortion and his Sacraments to be rightly administered among you. The Word of sin and grace has been proclaimed to you without interruption, and Christ and him crucified has been preached to you as he in whom alone there is salvation. Christ has stood at the door of your heart and knocked. If he did not come in to you, then it was your own fault because you hardened your heart and closed it to him. In the pure Gospel you have had an open fountain against sin and all uncleanness. If you have remained in your sins unconverted, then you must not blame the Lord but yourself, because you despised the fountain of grace and the forgiveness of sin. No anxious soul hungry for grace has sought comfort and refreshment from this fountain in vain. How many of our loved ones, whose bodies are resting out there, drank from this fountain and thirsted no more, that Great Day shall reveal. But for us the hours when we sat at deathbeds and saw those dear people overcome the terror of death through the comfort of the Gospel, and through that living hope cheerfully and gladly left everything and departed from here, were certainly among the most precious and beautiful. Whatever battles we have had, the congregation or an individual, against error and persecution, we came out of them victorious, with God's Word having won the victory. You see, I would that we should especially appreciate and thank God for this the greatest of all his many benefits which he has allowed to flow to us in the course of years when we held our services in the old church, when we are gathered today to dedicate our new house of God. Because, dear friends, the proper joy and blessing which we are to have from our comings together in this house are not based upon the beauty and comfort with which the love and care of so many men and women have furnished it, although this certainly can remove hindrances for even the elderly and the infirm coming to church faithfully; no, they are based upon the fact that God gives his grace so that we take the Gospel of Christ with us and preserve it as our precious treasure and the best adornment of our church. Through this Word of God the house is dedicated each day to be a sanctuary of the Lord and we the temples of God, and this is the proper dedication.

A closer consideration of our Gospel will teach us that this is so *because through the Word of God come I] Christ to us, and II] We to Christ.*

#### I.

Our Gospel begins like this: "*And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*" It was certainly not just by chance that Jesus came to Jericho that day and passed through the city. He, the Son of man, had come as he himself says at the close of our text, "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*" It was this merciful love for lost sinners which also guided his steps this time. We hear not only that he heals a poor blind man who called to him in the vicinity of Jericho, saying, "*Your faith has saved you,*" but in our Gospel it says, "*and, behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, who was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.*"

Certainly Christ has said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," (Mt. 19:24) yet he seeks and wants to save the rich publican as well as the blind beggar. And Zaccheus needed salvation, he needed Jesus to come to him. In Scripture publicans are placed alongside of gross sinners because they were notorious for extortion and fraud. And it was certainly with a definite intent that it is expressly reported that he was the chief of the publicans who accepted payments from his subordinates, and that he was rich. We hear of course that the Pharisees reproach Jesus for going to be the guest of "*a sinful man,*" but Zaccheus has been awakened from his sleep of sin and become concerned about the state of his soul. Jesus had come to him beforehand with his preparatory grace. Through the Law the Lord had opened his eyes to his sinful depravity and lost condition. He saw now that neither his riches nor his power could free him from his sin nor protect him against God's wrath. Therefore, when he learned that Jesus had come to the city and when he then had also heard of the miracle Jesus had just performed upon the blind man, then we hear Scripture say, "And he sought to see Jesus, who he was,"

whether there was something divine about him, whether he was the Messiah who should redeem Israel. And when his zeal prompts him to climb up into a tree, Jesus, who looks upon the humble of heart and to them who have a broken spirit, comes to him with his comforting words and says, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house," and again, when the Pharisees reproach him for going to be a guest at the home of a sinful man, "This day is salvation come to this house."

In this way, my friends, *Jesus comes* also now to us in *the Word and the Sacraments*. Thus we hear him at his departure from the earth charging his disciples with *teaching* all people to observe everything which he has commanded them and promising them unconditionally on that basis that he will be with them always, even unto the end of the world. Likewise he says to his disciples, "He who *hears you*," namely when you speak the Word of God, "*hears me*." (Lk. 10:16.) The Gospel is really nothing other than the Good News of *grace in Christ*, and the heart of the entire Holy Scriptures the truth that *Christ* is the way to salvation for all believing souls.

Thus it is also Jesus who blesses the little ones in *Baptism*. It is into *him* that they are grafted through *Baptism* and through him they are taken up into the fellowship of the Triune God. Thus he comes finally to us also in the Sacrament of the Altar and gives us himself in his body and blood to eat and to drink so that we shall not doubt that he is with us and bestows upon us the forgiveness of sins.

Thus Christ comes to us, speaks to us, deals with us in *the Means of Grace* and gives us his grace and gifts in them.

But "Christ"—it is written—"is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Co. 1:30). God from eternity, out of love for us sinners, he became our brother in the fullness of the time and in the likeness of sinful flesh and was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification. He fulfilled the Law in our stead since he was obedient unto death, through his blood on the cross he appeased the wrath of God, freed us from sin, death and the kingdom of Satan, and earned for us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

Now where Christ is proclaimed to you in his redemptive work in this way, where he is portrayed before your eyes during his earthly sojourn step by step, from the manger in Bethlehem to Golgotha, yes, until he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, there is bestowed upon you the fruit of this entire redemptive work of his. If God therefore preserves his Word and Sacraments to us and lets his Word ring pure and unadulterated in our church, then *Christ comes* to us and everything is given us in him—everything which we need: the healing remedy for every hurt, comfort and help in all sorrow and distress, yes, life in death and eternal salvation.

But if Christ comes to us in this way as often as we gather in this temple, then is it hallowed and dedicated to be a temple of the Lord, because Christ is the brightness of his glory and the express image of God's essence. In him are revealed to us the Father's unending love for our fallen race and his wise counsel for its salvation. In him the sun of righteousness shines upon God's temple and congregation.

## II.

What good does it do us however if Christ comes to us with all his grace and gifts, if we do not come to him and accept him? None. Much rather, if we turn away from him and despise his gifts, then he, the Cornerstone on which we should be built up, becomes for us the stumbling stone and rock of offence against which we offend and by which we are crushed. And yet all Christians surely confess as with one voice that our nature is so corrupted by sin that we "cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Christ, our Lord, or come him." For people it truly is impossible but for God nothing is impossible. He works in us through the Word and Sacraments so that we believe in Christ, accept and appropriate him and all his gifts to ourselves in faith—so that *we come to Jesus* just as Christ comes to us through the Word. Because Christ says, "*my words* are spirit and they are life," (Jo. 6:63) and Peter writes, "You were born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever" (1 Pe. 1:23) and James, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (1:18). The Spirit comes with the Word which never returns void. He does not however with an irresistible power put new abilities and power into everyone who hears the Word,

but he does his sanctifying and saving work only in them who do not willfully resist and harden themselves. With the hammer of the Law he first crushes the unrepentant hearts and leads them to contrition and repentance, because it is in the feeling of our sinful wretchedness that faith is conceived.

Thus we heard a minute ago that through the Spirit's preparatory work Zaccheus had come to a recognition of his sin and concern for his soul before the desire for seeing Jesus and learning to know him better had ever arisen in him. This desire also was called forth and worked through the Word and through the miracle which he heard Jesus had performed. Granted that his understanding of Jesus, both of his power and will to help him out of his sin's distress, has been very weak and deficient in many ways. His longing to see Jesus and to come to a better understanding of him must however have been deep, earnest and strong.

"He sought to see Jesus," it says. He takes great pains to know where Jesus will come by. But he was little of stature and could not see Jesus because of the press of the people. Zaccheus was a rich and highly respected man. To what reproach and mockery does he not expose himself when like a small boy he clammers up into a tree in order to get to see the sodespised Jesus of Nazareth? Scorn and mockery, though, do not stop him. He breaks through all barriers and "*runs ahead*" and climbs up into a sycamore tree along the way where Jesus is to come. Jesus, who had begun the good work in him and awakened this longing in him, comes to meet him now in order to satisfy it and to complete the good work in him.

Jesus was aware of him in the great crowd of people. He knows him and his longing but he also sees the shyness, fear and doubt which hold him back so that he does not approach him and disclose his troubles to him. Therefore he encourages him and says to him, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house." His longing, faith's weak spark which was kindled in his heart, is strengthened mightily by this friendly greeting and demonstration of grace from Jesus. "This man knows my name; nothing can be hidden from him, and yet he wants to step into my, a sinful man's, house!" We often see Jesus accepting an invitation from the proud Pharisees but never do we see him invite himself as a guest to their homes. But "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." Even though doubts and objections would certainly arise, Zaccheus is obedient to the word he heard. It says: "he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." We see that his faith has made progress. No longer is there any delay or doubt. He hurries down and receives Jesus, not with fear, but "*joyfully.*"

However, where Jesus has entered in, there the cross does not keep one waiting. Zaccheus must hear the bystanders in their selfrighteousness berate him for his earlier life of sin while they murmured against Jesus and reproached him for "*going to be the guest of a man who was a sinner.*" But now we truly see what fine growth Zaccheus' faith has made. He doesn't try to justify himself, yes, he does not even apologize for himself. He doesn't boast of his riches and of the fact that he is a chief among the publicans, even less of his virtue and good attitude which really could seem to make him just as worthy as the Pharisees of accepting Jesus as a guest. Without answering them, he says to Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." It isn't Zaccheus' intent to want to boast of himself, of his good works and promises, as the Pharisees would, but he does want to prove the sincerity of his repentance and his heartfelt love for Jesus. Now he has reached the true and saving knowledge of Christ. He has formed the intent to improve his life from now on and to bear fruits worthy of conversion, wellpleasing to God through Jesus Christ. Jesus' answer shows this, with which he strengthens Zaccheus' faith even more, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (that is to say not merely according to the flesh, but above all, through faith, because Abraham is called the father of the faithful). But he dismisses the bystanders' hypocritical talk with his, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Thus we have seen then how Zaccheus has come to Jesus and been saved through the Word. We also, my friends, must be led by Jesus on the same path of conversion and faith if we are going to come to Jesus. If Jesus comes to you through his preparatory grace and knocks on your heart's door, then the first thing you must do is not plug your ears and turn away from him. Oh, how many people have not hindered the Spirit's work, yes, perhaps forfeited their salvation through not wanting to come and hear the Word of God, even less, read it at home. Or, if they did come now and then to where it was preached, yet their mind was so filled with inappropriate thoughts, that hearing they did not hear and seeing they did not see.



However, the Lord is longsuffering and through his providence he has brought it about that you did heed his call. You have not been able to avoid feeling a certain unrest because in your conscience you've had to admit that the Law was right when it judged you as a sinner under the wrath of God. That was a bitter pill for you to swallow. Your natural pride and self-righteousness rebelled against it, and your love for the world and the things which are in the world tried to draw you away from the Word which disturbed your happiness, but you had no peace and could not free yourself from the accusations within you. You came to a sober fear of death and hell, and more and more you learned to know your sinful depravity with horror. Jesus who does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he shall repent and live, came to you now in the comforting Gospel. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. But you could not really believe that so great a grace was possible that that holy God could receive such a great sinner as you were. Therefore you still took all the frightening threats and judgments on unrepentant sinners which the Word of God contains, personally. But it appeared that the glorious pledges and the comforting promises did not take care of you and did not apply to you. However, at times it was as though a spark of hope was kindled in your soul and the thought came to you again and again: Should it however be possible that he would receive also you, that you also could be pardoned, be saved? You feel a certain yearning for a clearer understanding of God's Word, for learning to know Jesus better. And then, what Scripture says about Zaccheus applies to you, "He sought to see Jesus."

If you begin now to show a greater zeal for the Word of God, to separate yourself more from foolish, thoughtless company which you have sought before, if you really want to talk with earnest Christians about the things which are on your mind, about sin and grace, then for you, as for Zaccheus, many obstacles will place themselves in your way. There is shyness around people, fear of their mockery and scorn. There is a feeling of your own unworthiness and a temptation to want to try to make yourself worthy of grace. There are external circumstances, poverty or riches, and the temptations associated with both, etc. Here you must not let yourself be detained or stop in the course, but as Zaccheus did, press on in spite of all obstacles and keep on meditating on the Word of God day and night. "He ran ahead," it says of Zaccheus. He was afraid that Jesus should pass by before he came and got to see him. So must you also show zeal and not put off and postpone it until what you think can be a better time. You don't know how many days of grace are allotted you and whether he is to be seen when it is convenient for you. Oh, how many a person may there not also be among us, who in these many years Jesus has been coming to us, hasn't gotten to see him because they allowed themselves to be detained by various obstacles or put off and postponed it to a more convenient time.

But by the Lord's mercy you have succeeded in getting to see Jesus. You stood at the manger in Bethlehem and sang with the shepherds, "Unto us is born this day a Savior." (Lk. 2:11.) You followed him on his sojourn and saw how he comforted the grieving, healed the sick, made the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dead to live, and preached the Gospel to the poor. You went with him to Gethsemane, and stood at his cross and saw his struggle but also his victory. You heard his, "It is finished!" (Jo. 19:30) and your heart shouted for joy because you understood it was for you he had fought, for you he had won; he had finished your redemption. Furthermore you saw how death could not hold him, but he broke its chains and arose from the dead, and finally you saw how he ascended to heaven, so that you knew that you had him there at the right hand of the Father as your almighty King, your brother and redeemer. Thus you saw him in his humiliation as in his exaltation as if portrayed right before your eyes as he who had come to seek and to save the lost. During all this Jesus was aware of you and knew you, although still driven by doubt and unbelief you perhaps kept yourself at a distance and believed him far away from you. But he called to you: "Make haste, for today I must abide at your house." He saw what pains and distress you prepared for yourself with this doubt which you let find room in your heart and which kept you from him so that there came to be no real intimate fellowship between you. He saw how easily your weak faith could fail, the spark be extinguished, and you fall away completely. Therefore his "make haste," so that you could get to taste the blessing of his fellowship.

O, that you, my dear fellow Christian, might heed this appeal of the Lord and hasten to him as Zaccheus did! We are so slow, we let so much disturb us, we keep ourselves at a distance because of so many kinds of doubt and anxieties. We do not consider how quickly we can be exposed to the heat of temptation or the stormy weather of errors, or even death's final struggle where it is important to have a strong faith and to be firmly convinced in your mind. That's why not so seldom do we see people who began to run well, slow down on the course and fall away or allow themselves to be tossed about by the first, the most tempting wind of doctrine which blows over them. For that reason, uncertainty about the state of soul of dear friends often

makes the departure so painful. O, let us therefore make haste! Jesus comes today and wants to make his abode with you. You don't know whether he is coming to you tomorrow. "Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" Ps. 95:8; He. 4:7. He says to you, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you," (Mt. 9:2) but you feel so unworthy, you are afraid to yield yourself completely. O, here you must look away and turn your ears from everything else and look only at Jesus and hear his Word and be obedient to it in faith, as Zaccheus was. Then Jesus comes and gives the soul experiences of grace far beyond what we dared ask for or understood. Then if the cross does not fail to come either and you get to hear murmuring and that Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinful man, do not let it confuse you about Christ's attitude toward you nor tempt you to apologize for yourself or boast that such a big change has taken place within you now that you are holding diligently to God's Word and zealously have sought the Lord. All that however does not make you worthy of the Holy One making his abode in you and if you rely on that, then the devil has come away the winner. No, let it prompt you to ever greater humility and to look ever more intently upon Christ alone and cling to his Word and promise, and finally with ever greater zeal and diligence to letting your faith come to light distinctly in your life in order in that way to give evidence of the sincerity of your repentance and faith and in order to thank the Lord for his undeserved grace and mercy.

Behold how magnificently Zaccheus' faith demonstrated itself. He will not brood over his riches as the covetous do nor waste them in luxuries and luxurious living or spend them in living every day in grandeur and in pleasure, but toward relieving the needs of the poor. The half of his goods, you hear, he will give to them, and fourfold he will make up for every wrong he may have committed against anyone. You see, his heart is not clinging to mammon. It cannot do that because it is clinging to Jesus.

Dear congregation! We've been living and building here for thirty-five years. The loving-kindness of the Lord has been new to us every morning. He has blessed us all, many richly. But how have you used these gifts of his? How have you thanked him for them? We all say that we believe in Christ. But where are the fruits of faith? Oh, with the deepest pain must I say: They are few, altogether too few and feeble. How many of these goods have not been spent in drunkenness and sensual lusts or in the service of vanity! How much unrighteousness in business! How many people's hearts have not clung to mammon, so that "to do good and share" (He. 13:16) has been neglected altogether too much! How far have we not lagged behind Zaccheus! Yes, how often have we not been the reason that Christ's name has been mocked among the heathen? Or is it proper for them who bear the precious name of Christ to sit in saloons and in drinking bouts with gambling and lust? And yet he who has redeemed you with his blood has come to you year in and year out in order to seek and to save you. So today you are drawn into this new, beautiful house of God, today Jesus comes to us again; today he cries again, "Make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house."

O merciful God, thou God of our fathers, help us to appreciate your grace, help us to receive you! Grant that in faith we form the resolution that hereafter we will apply ourselves more zealously to living worthy of the calling with which we are called, and apply ourselves to a life which is well-pleasing to you!

Behold, my friends! if we meet the Lord in this way today, if we come in this way to Jesus and remain with him, then we ourselves are the temple of God, sanctified and dedicated to the Lord. Then we become also a magnificent adornment in this house of God as often as it is granted us to assemble here. Rich blessing shall we then take with us from here, blessing for our hearts and for our homes.

O blessed home where man and wife  
Together lead a godly life,  
By deeds their faith confessing!  
There many a happy day is spent,  
There Jesus gladly will consent  
To tarry with his blessing.

And then when we must leave our earthly home we shall be gathered into the house which is not built with men's hands, above in heaven, and live in eternal joy and blessedness with Jesus and with all our dear ones who have died in faith. May God grant it to us of his grace for Jesus' sake! Amen.

When we now dedicate this house in the name of the Triune God, we call to you, heavenly Father: Bless this house. Come to us, Lord Jesus, and fill it with your glory! Grant that they who shall proclaim your Word here in the course of time may reveal your glory, and that they who shall go in and out here may seek to see you, Lord Jesus, view your glory, and in holy adornment bear thank-offerings well-pleasing to you through Jesus Christ! Bless the children who are carried to this baptismal font. Receive them and preserve them so that they may remain in you as they are grafted into you, and bless the adults who here are reminded of their baptismal covenant! Bow their hearts who shall kneel at the foot of this altar, to true repentance. Hear their cry and refresh them with your body and blood as a pledge of their sins' forgiveness! Lord, hear the prayers which are offered to you from here and bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus! Lord, bless us, bless your heritage and let it all prosper! In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Kirketidende*, Feb. 11, 1887; pages 81–92

# Opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> Regular Synod Convention

Stoughton, Wisconsin

June 3, 1887

## THE COMFORTING TRUTH, THE GRACE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT FOR US

*"My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Co. 12:9.*

Paul experienced the great sorrow that false teachers had infiltrated the Corinthian congregation and drawn hearts away from the Lord and his truth while they looked down on the apostle and his teaching and exalted themselves as those who alone had the truth and were motivated by the proper love and concern for souls. In order to save the Corinthians from these seducers and to bring them back to the divine truth which he had proclaimed to them, the apostle comes, in contrast to the self-praise of the false prophets, to speak first about the sublime revelations the Lord had granted him when he was received up into the third heaven. He says expressly that he does not want to glory in himself over them so that no one should think more highly of him than he sees and hears from him, namely, that he was a poor sinner, but one to whom the office of an apostle was entrusted. He knew how inclined human nature is to make gods of men, how that because of special gifts and proofs of grace which a person possesses, people follow such people as their master, rely on and build on their judgment without testing it independently according to the one infallible touchstone, the Word of God. For that reason Paul had not spoken of his demonstration of grace for twelve years.

He goes on to report how the Lord had given him a thorn in the flesh so that he should not pride himself on the sublime revelations. The Lord who knew the frailties of human nature also knew to which temptations those who have received the greatest grace are exposed just because of special gifts and demonstrations of grace, and in his wisdom he employed the proper means for preserving his apostle from falling by sending him a very special affliction, a messenger of Satan, which buffeted him. He had prayed to the Lord three times that he might remove it from him. But the Lord, who saw that the affliction was profitable for him, let it remain, but said to him: "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." The Lord thereby assured him of his grace, and that it was sufficient for him.

Also to us, as many as are believers, a revelation has come. Indeed not of the same special nature as Paul's, yet it is a very glorious revelation, a revelation of the love of God, of salvation in Christ.

We took with us as the best inheritance of our paternal home the Word of God and Luther's doctrine. God blessed its proclamation so that the most glorious revelation of God's undeserved grace in Christ became the possession of our synod, while the masses of people around us either wandered without God or learned to know his image only falsified by human doctrines or obscured by deceitful feelings and the will-of-the-wisp of dreams. In spite of various attacks and during long-lasting struggles, the saving message of grace in Christ remained upheld among us unchanged so that the Gospel's stream could flow unhindered for the edification and the strengthening of poor, troubled sinners. But brothers and sisters, how did we treasure this grace? How were its precious gifts applied among us? It is written of those who drink of the Water of Life that living streams of water shall flow from their hearts, that those who are translated from the power of Satan to God are to proclaim the deeds of him who translates them. We do not want to be ungrateful, as though he who has promised that his Word shall not return void has left himself without testimony among us. We will thank and praise him heartily for every soul which found peace in life and salvation in death through the Gospel of Christ. But alas how little of those living streams of water have we been witnesses to from its proclamation within our congregations! Certainly we have had much reason for thanking God for the purity and unity of doctrine he has granted us for so long and for the unity of the Spirit which reigns among us because of that one faith. But how many were there not with whom this praising, just as faith itself, was on the lips and not in the heart? Alas, how little there was of the burning love and longing for the Word, sincere joy in it and willing sacrifice for it! How much indifference and disobedience toward it! How little of earnest Christian discipline in family and congregation! How much on the other hand, of laxness in discipline, vain and proud action, of not speaking about public vices and offences by which God's name was blasphemed

among the heathen! How poorly applied has it not been with Christian education among us, how distressing with brotherly admonition and discipline in the congregations!

All this, brethren, surely testifies sufficiently to how little we have appreciated the pure Word of God, how little concern there was among us for our own salvation and that of other people. What wonder is it if the Lord found that a chastisement is needed here, so that he allowed a bitter sore to develop in our midst—this tragic doctrinal controversy<sup>7</sup> with its many grievous consequences—in truth a thorn in the flesh for many of God's children, an eye-opener for many and a testing for the righteous!

Who can describe all the anguish, all the pain it has caused! Who can count all the tears which have been shed, the prayers and sighs which have ascended to the throne of grace that the chastisement might cease, that the controversy might be settled and the Lord again send peace and unity to his church! Oh, it can seem that prayers are not heard! Disunity grows greater, the controversy more sharp, and more and more it becomes apparent that the old unity in faith has departed.

In this distress we have now come together from the congregations of our synod, and every believer's prayer is to the Lord of the church for comfort and help in our distress. And the Lord's answer to us now is as it once was to his apostle in our text, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Dear friends! Let us ponder this answer of the Lord more closely with the help of the Holy Spirit so that we may properly acknowledge for our comfort and encouragement in our present distress:

#### **THE COMFORTING TRUTH: THE GRACE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT FOR US.**

We ponder: I. The Truth that The Grace of God Is Sufficient for Us, and II. How Comforting This Truth Is.

##### I.

*It is a divine TRUTH that "the grace of God is sufficient for us."*

The grace of God, my beloved, is surely the merciful love and goodwill with which God embraces us poor sinners and which he desires for our present and eternal welfare!

By nature no one knows the grace of God, neither can he grasp it. Because, how can any one grasp with his reason that the *holy and merciful God* who hates sin and must punish it, can love and be merciful to sinners who are deserving of his wrath and can grant them everything which is good?

And yet the truth is that the *holy and righteous God* is a gracious God, as Paul testifies, "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." (Ti. 2:11.) This has its foundation in the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became our brother and as the Lamb of God bore the sin of all the world and with his holy obedience and innocent death appeased the wrath of God, because in Christ God reconciled the world unto himself. The natural man can and will as little grasp and believe that this grace of God is also *sufficient* as that God is gracious. It is *foolishness to darkened* reason, which of course cannot grasp the spiritual things which pertain to God. Because what is more unreasonable to the intellect than to believe that when a person is in distress, is sick and in want, feels sin and has unrest and tribulation on every side, barely dares to cry out in his distress and to call for help, and if he does it again and again, still finds no help and relief but rather feels that the distress is becoming greater and the tribulation is increasing—what is more unreasonable than to believe that God is gracious to him and that he has enough, absolutely enough, in this grace of God, and that he can and should be satisfied and content with the promise about it? And now, what certainty does he

<sup>7</sup> The Election Controversy [JHL]

have for the grace of God being sufficient in spite of what he sees and feels? Only the Word proclaimed by weak, feeble men as despised by the world as the Word itself! That is supposed to do it!

And since it is foolishness to reason, so is it also an *offense* to the *proud, arrogant heart* to hear that *the grace of God is sufficient for us*. Because that is certainly saying that we need nothing other than the grace of God and that *it* is adequate for our being certain that God is friendly and kindly disposed toward us. It of course follows from this that everything depends on this grace of God, that all our success and well-being are dependent on just this. But this does not leave the least glory, praise and merit to man because even everything which man both can and should do, and by the omission of which he forfeits, yes, makes it impossible for him to share in grace, all this, however, does not bring any praise or worthiness before God. Because it is not on all this which we have properly done, even though in weakness, that we rely, but on the *grace of God* alone that help and blessings as well as our subsequent peace and salvation are based and are dependent. Grace is sufficient for us. But now it is a common sin and disgrace for us all in which the natural heart persists, that it wants to please itself, have praise and honor for itself, be worth something, even ever so little, both in the eyes of God and the world. Thus, if you are deep in distress, then you want your earnestness, your ability, your fear of God and also your prayer to be worth something. God now has to find you more worthy, even have some consideration for all this and therefore help you. But when no help is apparent then the poor heart will either murmur or think that the Lord is extremely unrighteous or it will see in this a sign of God's wrath, and worry that it has not done enough in order to avert his wrath, and so it strives even more zealously to make itself worthy of help in some way. Thus the natural, arrogant heart can hardly be anything other than offended by these words, "The grace of God is sufficient for you," and resist and oppose them with all its ability and strength. However, in spite of all opposition and offence it is and remains, God be praised, unshaken truth!

In the first place, this is the truth taught and testified to in the Holy Scriptures. In our text we hear that it is the answer the Lord gives his apostle to his repeated desire to be freed from his thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan which buffeted him: "You can be completely at ease and confident, Paul", he wants to say, "It is not going to harm you at all, because you have my grace and in it you have everything you need." Just as it is written: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Ro. 5:20). But now surely, sin is our worst enemy, the cause of all our misery, our heaviest burden. Grace, then, is even more abundant than sin. The power of grace is stronger than the power of sin and mighty to blot out, to over-come and to do away with it. The comfort of grace is stronger than the horror of sin, mighty to cast it away. Life-giving grace is more powerful than the wages of sin which is death, and mighty to overcome it. Surely grace then must be sufficient for you. That is why we also hear the apostle testifying in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," and this is how he extols this grace to the Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," etc. (Ep. 1:3-7.)

Next, the Scriptures teach us so clearly that Christ's work of redemption by which the grace of God was obtained for us is *completed*. When our dear Lord had completed his suffering, immediately before he gave up the ghost on the cross and commended his spirit into his Father's hands, we hear him cry out: "It is finished" (Jo. 19:30), namely, the work he had come to do in order to atone for sin, reconcile God with us, and obtain his grace for us. And the heavenly Father testifies solemnly to the fact that his work of redemption was finished by raising him from the dead on the third day. Now if grace should not be sufficient, then Christ must not have completed his work, our redemption must not be finished. But to deny this is a denial of Christ. It is blasphemy. No, God be praised, our redemption is finished! Therefore he can and does send his disciples out into the whole world to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News, and say, "Behold, all things are ready." (Lk. 14:17.) But now, if it should be said, "The grace of God is not sufficient for you, there is something lacking, there still has to be something besides grace to make you happy and blessed, something which is demanded from you for completing this, something which you have to do," you see then, my beloved, that all things could not be prepared. Then of course it is not a joyous but a terrifying message, a message of death which is proclaimed to us that something remains for us to do in order for God to be able to be gracious. Because we would surely not be able to pay what is demanded or to satisfy the demand, because by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins. But if we do have some ability, then it is of God, and if we are a

new creature, capable of good works, yes, if we can say with Paul, "All things are become new," then we must confess from the heart as he does, "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*"

Yes, the grace of God is adequate. It is sufficient for us. It is mighty to awaken the sleeping sinner and to make the dead alive. "God has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and *grace.*" 2 Ti. 1:9. And just as *the grace of God* is mighty to create faith in us, so we, as the apostle says, are born again "of incorruptible seed, which is the word of God," (1 Pe. 1:23) and "are *justified* freely by *his grace*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Ro. 3:24) as the same apostle says, that he is fully persuaded of this, that "he which has begun a good work in you will *perfect* it until the day of Jesus Christ—inasmuch as you all are partakers with me of *grace*" (Ph. 1:6.7.) Thus Peter also testifies against the sect of the Pharisees before the assembled apostles and elders in Jerusalem: "But we believe that by *the grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they," namely, the fathers of the faith. (Ac. 15:11.)

But when the Scriptures teach that we are justified and saved by *faith*, grace suffers no limitation in that way as though it should be an addition to grace in order to complete it, or a condition we are supposed to fulfill so that God will want to show grace. Faith is much more itself a work of grace, God's gracious gift, just as Paul says, "By grace are you saved through *faith*, and that not of yourselves: it is the *gift of God.*" (Ep. 2:9.) Yes, faith is a gift of God so that we can *grasp* and appropriate grace, which is why Paul says, "Therefore the promise is of *faith*, that it might be by *grace.*" (Ro. 4:16.) In order that grace can be preserved inviolate and unabridged, so are we saved and blessed by *grace alone*; therefore we are justified and saved by *faith*.

The fact that grace can thus be sufficient for us, yes, that it must be, the Lord himself explains to us in our text when he refers to how grace operates, because he says: "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

It is of course so, that precisely at the time that we know ourselves to be so poor, so wretched, and at the same time so completely lacking in power to extricate ourselves from the misery or to render even only the slightest assistance toward that end, and we yield ourselves completely and altogether with everything we are and everything we have of abilities, power and fitness, it is just then that we feel most of all that we need help, that we need grace, but then also are most of all close to despair. But it is precisely in this weakness of ours, the Lord says, that his power is made perfect. We are apt to think that we can be certain of the Lord's grace and expect his power when we think we possess something which is worthy of bringing to the Lord, or when we feel a certain power within us, a certain ability to meet and to overcome the difficulties, or when we think that by our own wits we should be able to find a way out. But no! When we stand there empty handed, and our own strength, ability and worthiness are nothing at all, then is the right time for grace to fill the empty vessel, then his strength is made perfect in our weakness. If God merely gave us forgiveness of sins, then it would be unspeakably great grace, but it is a special grace from him which does it so that in all conditions and circumstances, even the most burdensome and most difficult, we have sufficient in his grace, that he uses precisely our affliction and weakness to perfect his strength in us. Faith and confidence become stronger in weakness, prayers more fervent. Through tribulations the power of Christ works in us so that we let ourselves be content with the grace of God. Surely the more the outward man in us declines and goes to ruin, the more the spiritual powers increase, the more power the Word of God and the kingdom of God gain, and the *grace* of God becomes sufficient for us.

But now, my friends, let us turn our attention to the *effects* of grace. They also testify that the grace of God is sufficient for us. We hear Paul thanking God for the fact that the Corinthians "are enriched in everything, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" and that they "are not lacking in any *gift of grace*" (1 Co. 1:5-7.) Not only does the understanding become enlightened, grace also works a new light and power in the will and frees it from bondage, just as the prophet says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." (Ez. 36:26.) Therefore the psalmist can exclaim, "Your testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors," (Ps. 119:24) and again, "I will run the way of your commandments, when you shall enlarge my heart" (vs. 32).

By grace we become not only "equipped unto all good works" (2 Ti. 3:17) but also as we heard above, "blessed with all *spiritual blessings* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ep. 1:3.) We possess "the *peace* which passes all understanding" (Ph. 4:7) and an unspeakable *joy*—joy in the Lord. Thus the prophet says, "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Is. 35:10.) And the apostle says that they who believe in Christ shall "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," (1 Pe. 1:8) receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of the soul. Then joy shall become a perfect joy, an inexpressible blessedness. "And there shall be no more curse:" it says in the Revelation, "but the throne of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever." (22:3–5.) Now, my friends, do we not have sufficient in the grace of God? Certainly, his word is truth: "My grace is sufficient for you."

## II.

But we also want to consider next that *this Truth*: "*The Grace of God Is Sufficient for Us, " Is A Very Comforting Truth.*

As long as we are dwelling here in this earthly tabernacle we need daily bread for the sustenance of this life. In the First Article of our creed we confess that God, who has created all things, is also the One who provides us with daily bread. In the Lord's Prayer our Lord teaches us to ask our heavenly Father for our daily bread believing that he gives it to us, and to be thankful to him for this blessing. The Word of God also teaches us that we are to eat our bread in the sweat of our face, that the Lord wants us to be diligent workers although work neither produces bread nor do we make ourselves deserving of it by our work. God wants us to work, and he who will not work, neither shall he eat, he says.

But the fact that he should eat his bread in *the sweat of his face* is burdensome for flesh and blood. It would rather enjoy it without effort and labor. This comes about from the heart of man not being satisfied with the necessary sustenance, but driven partially by his own evil desire he aspires to and pursues more, and partially from really thinking that something completely different belongs to daily bread than the necessary bare subsistence, and therefore he also expects and prays that God will give more.

Next, it also often happens that in spite of all his hard work and capability the worker does not see the fruit of his labor. He is cheated out of his wages by evil men. Drought, hail or other disasters destroy his seed. In this way then we often are placed partially in an imaginary, partially in a real need. We cry to God in this misery of ours. The need remains, increases, and God answers us, "My grace is sufficient." But when a person does not see the need remedied immediately or in the way or to the degree which he asks or thinks necessary, then he does not believe that God has heard his prayers. He much rather believes than God is angry with us and therefore does not want to hear our prayers. From this now follows a restless, dissatisfied mind. People complain and murmur both against God and their fellowmen and seek by their own hand, often by illicit means, to get out of their distress and to help themselves to a better state in life. The violent unrest of laborers which is now so common toward those who hold power and against fellow laborers, as well as suppression and injury from the employers' side essentially has its chief cause in the heart's unbelief—God's grace is not sufficient for them. That's the trouble.

It's different with the person who in such distress firmly believes the divine promise, "My grace is sufficient for you." He has rich comfort from it because in it the Lord surely says to him, "Be content, dear soul! If you are poor and despised in your own eyes, so that your heart condemns you, yet, I am greater than your heart and I do not condemn you. Let it be sufficient for you that I think a lot of you and love you! Should I not mean more to you than all people? Or my unspeakable blessedness, should it be too cheap for you? Behold, my strength shall be made perfect in your weakness! He, who now confidently takes the Lord at his Word is comforted. Let it be that the need is imminent, the breadwinner lies sick, winter stands at the door, the purse is empty, there are many hungry mouths to feed, and no human help to be expected, no way out to be seen. Yet he believes the divine promise that God is gracious to him and loves him. He believes that his suffering is not a sign that God is angry with him but of the loving Father's care which disciplines his child because he loves it. If the suffering continues in spite of repeated prayer he is certain that it is for his



good that he is suffering and that his dear God both knows his distress and is also with him in the day of trouble and will deliver him from it when his time comes. Comforted, he therefore casts his care upon the Lord, persuaded that he will remember him. Resigned to the will of God he waits patiently and is satisfied that in the Lord's time he will change it.

Thus also, when he is thrown upon a sickbed for a long time, is the object of the hatred of the children of the world, or is misjudged and slandered by his own people. Although he calls upon God again and again that the cross may be taken away and he only receives the answer, "My grace is sufficient for you!" thus, however, this word comforts his heart. Although his conscience acquits him over toward men that with his life or particular offenses he has not deserved suffering, yet he acknowledges that over toward God however he is guilty, and that even if by grace God acquits him of guilt and punishment, he has however seen that his chastisement was useful to him so that he could be preserved and furthered in humility and be prompted so much more constantly and sincerely to continuing in prayer and supplication to the Lord and his Word.

Grace is sufficient for him. It teaches him to see light in the Lord's light, to kiss the rod and to say with the psalmist, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept your word," (119:67) and with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" (1:21.)

But if this word: "My grace is sufficient for you," proves itself rightly as a word of comfort when we are placed in physical distress, how much more when we sit in spiritual misery and the heat of temptation! A sinner is awakened from his sleep of sin. He sees sin in its hatefulness, his own distress of sin and his lost condition. He is terrified and bewails his spiritual depravity, God's wrath which is over him, the damnation which awaits him, and he cries in his distress for help and deliverance. The Lord in his grace lets the blessed Gospel be preached to him which proclaims to him salvation in Christ, that his iniquity is put away, that he shall not die, God is no longer angry but forgives him all his sin. It is a comforting word, medicine for his wounds! But how can he believe it is truth? How can such love be possible? Not to mention that he surely has not brought the holy and righteous God anything other than his sins and iniquities. Were he pardoned, were sin blotted out, then he ought not see only sin in himself and only feel the sting of sin. He ought to know the power of the new life flowing through him, see its fruits in the putting away of sin, in holy desire and longing, in purity and holiness in thoughts, words and deeds. But wherever he turns, within, as without, he sees nothing except sin and the filth of sin. If God were no longer angry and had really forgiven him his sin then he ought to feel happy and blessed, know peace and joy in his spirit, feel the Lord's nearness and the power and good will which issues from him. But now! Now he feels only anxiety and uneasiness, distress unto death, pain over his sin, pain that he feels no peace. In his heart's distress he cries to his God and prays that also this anguish and uneasiness may be taken from him, that he yet may feel the Lord's nearness, taste how good God is, be sensible of his power and see its revelation in his entire life.

But instead of getting to see and feel this he receives the answer, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Now, he thinks, the Lord assures me that he is gracious to me in spite of everything which I see and feel, and he tells me that his grace is sufficient for me. That is what I need and want. On the other hand, it does not depend at all on what I see and feel. Yes, he says that "blessed are they who do not see and yet believe. I'm not going to regard my trial as a sign of God's wrath" but as proof of his fatherly love. Thus these words, "My grace is sufficient for you," strike down all the uncertainties of doubt, all the tempting thoughts with which the enemy wants to hurl him into unbelief and keep him away from salvation in Christ. By grace he receives power to believe that he has found grace before the Lord and that this grace is sufficient for him. Thus grace testifies to him that it is sufficient. Although he still sees sin adhere to him, feels the accusation of his conscience, the Law's judgment and the devil's threat, God's grace is sufficient for him. It comforts him against sin, death, Law, judgment, and the devil. He does not lose heart but waits patiently until the Lord changes it.

Thus also in the severe trials to which God sees it useful that his children be subjected. If it were not so that God's grace is sufficient for us we would never survive them. When everything is so dark; our heart's uncleanness, the evil lusts and desires, the daily weaknesses, omissions and transgressions without number—all this will hide the sun of grace like a cloud so that not even a ray of it penetrates the poor heart. The Lord's threats and judgments upon the unrepentant, it applies to itself. Comforting promises, encouraging expressions pass it by as though they are not spoken to it. The tempter often seems to present even the

experience of grace which it has had as a blindness and self-deception of the heart which has imagined itself to be favored. Prayers die out, the poor heart is not even able to utter a sigh. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, carries them to the throne of grace, and the answer: "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," is explained by the Spirit. "Dear soul," he says then, "I know well that your sin is as great and varied as you say, yes, even greater, so that you can hardly measure it or comprehend it; yet my grace is more than abundant. Let it be that you have deceived yourself with respect to your former situation and that your belief that you were converted and favored has been a vain deception and your spiritual experiences likewise, I am grace to you nonetheless, this grace of mine is not a delusion. It has cost altogether too much for that—my only-begotten Son's precious blood. Therefore, in spite of all your sin, in spite of death and the devil, you have my grace. I love you as the apple of my own eye. 'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,' said the Lord your Comisserator (Is. 54:10); and this my grace is sufficient for you."

That's how the Spirit explains grace in Christ, its greatness and sufficiency, and comforts the anxious soul with unspeakable grounds of comfort. The weak faith which has smoldered under the ashes like a spark blazes again and the fiery darts of the wicked one are quenched with this shield of faith: "My grace is sufficient for you."

Dear brothers and sisters! We are placed in need, in great need. We ought well already have had the experience that we ourselves can accomplish nothing here with our wisdom, strength and ability, that help must come from above if we are going to be helped. If we cry now out of the depths, "Lord, help us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25) then the answer comes, "My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness." Yes, the grace of God alone can comfort us in distress. It alone can help us *out of* the distress. It alone can give the proper eye salve, convince hearts of their own faults and errors, reveal the divine truth to them and bend them to obedience under the Word. It alone can remove the dust from the eye as a stone from the heart and loose the chains which bind the will, and on the other hand give the heart the divine certainty of faith which makes it believe that it does have sufficient in the grace of God. As precious as we hold unity and brotherhood, the Spirit teaches us to place the grace of God even higher. Because it can also comfort the heart, yes, even make it glad and cheerful because it has sufficient in the grace of God. But, my beloved, God sends us this grace in his Word, the Gospel. How important for us, brothers, that by our discussions during these days we watch over this Gospel as the costliest treasure which is entrusted to us, that we either suffer and sacrifice everything rather than sacrifice something of the Gospel or permit it to be perverted in some way, but seek to preserve it unadulterated as it was delivered to us by the fathers! Let it be more than an empty word when we sing with the father of the Reformation:

Still must they leave God's Word its might,  
For which no thanks they merit;  
Still is He with us in the fight,  
With His good gifts and Spirit.  
And should they, in the strife,  
Take kindred, goods, and life,  
We freely let them go,  
They profit not the foe;  
With us remains the kingdom.

In the next place, let us do what we are able, by confession and gifts, so that this Gospel is richly proclaimed pure and unadulterated while we are concerned for the training and sending out of orthodox pastors, for an increased mission activity, and not least for Christian schools through which children can be preserved in their Baptismal grace! But above all, let us see to it that we do not only bear this Gospel on our lips, and, if it comes to it, sacrifice some dollars for it, but that it must dwell, live and rule in our hearts! Then the streams of grace shall also flow over us unchecked and we shall learn more and more to be content when we have the grace of God. This shall then certainly show its power by teaching us that it is sufficient for us and that we need nothing more, but are well provided for for time and eternity with it in whatever suffering and affliction the Lord in his wisdom may have ordered for each of us. Then our beloved synod shall also blossom as the rose of Sharon, even in whatever troubles and trials the Lord may have in store for it in the

future. Let us therefore not despise or neglect his divine Word but hold it in high esteem and honor and gladly both hear and learn it!

Yes, dear God, teach us to regard your Word and your grace above everything else! Destroy in our hearts all idols, not only of gold and silver but also of the flesh which will deprive you of your honor and us of our salvation! If it is necessary, then inject a thorn in our flesh all the way to the heart, but comfort us by grace! Yes, teach us in spite of all our unworthiness, weakness and misery so much more boldly to comfort ourselves with it, because it is sufficient for us.

Thus by Thine own hand do lead us,  
However Thou best can find,  
And let Thy Holy Spirit kind  
At all times do us remind,  
That however Thou wilt lead us,  
Thy way and manner is thus  
To counsel us,  
Though hard the way we trace,  
It is still but grace, pure grace. Amen.

*Synodal Beretning* 1887; pages 12–24

# Address at Luther College Graduation

June 15, 1887

## THE FAITHFULNESS OF SERVANTS

Unfortunately I've been prevented lately from being able to give our Luther College more of my time and to be present for the examinations here. I'm happy that this time circumstances have allowed me to be here. I also want then to use the opportunity to lay some precious truths on your hearts.

It is written that on the Day of Judgment the Lord will say to some people, "*well done, thou good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.*" (Mt. 25:21.)

Allow me then, my young friends, to speak to you a little at this time about "*The faithfulness of servants.*" We are of course all called to be *the Lord's servants*, also you, students and teachers. We are bound to thank our heavenly Father for whatever gifts with which he has equipped each of us and we are to *serve* him with them.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, has redeemed us, who are sinful, so that we shall be his own and serve him in righteousness, innocence and blessedness. But it is of *the servants* that the Lord's apostle says that it is required that they are to *be* faithful.

Now, my friends, it is however well to note that faithfulness is the only thing the apostle mentions which the Lord will require of his servants. Faithfulness in service, however, is not the thing the world in general is looking for primarily. Neither is faithfulness, certainly, the quality which our natural mind places as the highest thing we are to aspire to acquire through our development or to try our best to demonstrate by our service. Being able to become outstanding and to distinguish oneself—be it through hard work, knowledge, ability, talents in one or several directions—that as a rule is really the goal of its effort in service if the heart is not under the discipline of the Holy Spirit. It is also that surely which many students have set for themselves as the highest goal during their education. And yet, my friends, the kind of brilliant results which even such a striving can seem to produce is not however the striving which fulfills the Lord's requirement of his servants, nor is that the thing which will make the student more and more suited for the Lord's service.

As you all know, this school was erected to the service of the Lord. Here it is our wish, our endeavor, that our young men shall receive the preparation by means of which they can become capable especially for the Lord's service in *the work*, but in every case, for *the service of the Lord*. But at the same time as you are *being made capable* for that service, you are to serve him. But of servants we have heard, it is required that they are to be *faithful*. Faithfulness is the thing then to which we also have to admonish you first of all and to see to it that you demonstrate during your schooling.

In his wisdom God gives abilities and strengths in varying measure. Aptitudes and gifts are likewise divided quite differently, as well as such things as temperament, inclinations and the circumstances of one's life. The development of the abilities, as well as the acquiring of knowledge and skills will, for that reason also occur in very differing degrees. As highly as we may praise it that in this regard everyone seeks to go as far as he is able, yet *that* however is not the most important thing for us, even less, that in this regard one person outdoes another, as though we should regard him as the *best* student who rises highest in these matters. No, we consider him as the best, the most excellent student who demonstrates the greatest faithfulness during his schooling, i.e. most earnestly and zealously busies himself with being found faithful in the use of the abilities and gifts God has given him, faithful in the use of time and of the opportunity to learn something which is offered, faithful in the use of the material means he has, or gets to dispose of.

That, my friends, is why your effort is to be noticeably directed toward demonstrating this faithfulness during your education. That is what each of you is to busy yourself with, and with God's help, can busy

yourself with—also the least gifted—and thus win the praise of being an excellent student, faithful in his service.

In order to demonstrate this faithfulness, naturally it is necessary in the first place to acknowledge yourself a *servant of the Lord our God* and this station of yours as students as a *calling* in which God has placed you in order that you are to serve him, and the gifts and abilities, etc., which he has given you as *talents entrusted to you by God* in order that you shall serve him with them and that with all your diligence and effort you seek God's glory and it alone. This faithfulness toward the Lord your God must, as it were, form the foundation stone which shall give all your actions and behavior, all your diligence and effort, your devotedness and renunciation the proper tone and make it possible for you to be found "to be faithful" during this time and in that way. The fact that you must be children of God and be preserved as such in order to be able to have this inclination and to demonstrate this faithfulness, I will not develop further here. You know that. You also know what Means of Grace the Lord has given you so that you can be upheld in faith. Only one thing will I hold out to you, that it naturally belongs to the faithfulness which is required of you, that in watchful prayer you diligently and devoutly use the Means of Grace in the public services and devotions in church and school, as well as for your more private edification. Indifference and neglect in this matter is not only unfaithfulness but it will most certainly drag unfaithfulness in your entire conduct in its wake.

On the other hand, we do want to dwell a little on the Lord's words about being faithful in *the little things*, when he says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things." (Mt. 25:21.)

The studies which you shall pursue as students here may well be reckoned as "little things" in comparison with your future work as men in your life's calling to which God may someday appoint you. And that certainly means that those who are faithful in this apparently minor position he will then make rulers over many things. However, considered as the young man's life's calling by means of which he is being prepared for the work of a man, this so little regarded station undoubtedly becomes something big, yes, certainly the biggest, most responsible station in which a young man can be placed.

But also in this work of yours there is both that which is called small and that which is called big. If we are inclined not to regard the "little" as anything, then neither does faithfulness in something small appear so important to us. Thus many students think that to look upon the daily diligence, the thorough studies, the constant attention to the teacher's instruction and trying to remember what one has learned, to be something "small," even tiresome too, which it isn't so very important to apply oneself to. And, on the other hand, surviving, that is something big in his eyes. He thinks that he has to strain his powers, and he crams. Again, it may possibly happen that a student would consider it as something "big"—which it certainly also is—to stick strictly to the truth, guard himself against all immorality, all immoderate amusements, all major breeches of the regulations of the school, and he would do that so that he could be found faithful in such matters before God and man, while strict punctuality and exact following of the various rules of the school which are however of such great importance for the success of a large school, appear so unimportant to him that he doesn't bother himself much about them.

That's why the Lord reminds us about being faithful in the "little things" and adds a special promise to just such faithfulness. But in this way, my friends, the Lord is of course in reality making the "little things" into something big and he wants to get us to consider them as such too, because finally it doesn't depend on how we regard a thing but on how the Lord considers it. And now we hear the Lord praise just faithfulness in the *little things* so highly that he will say to him who demonstrates such faithfulness: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" and he gives him the most wonderful promise.

This is really also how the matter must stand that just by being faithful in these many small things we are being trained in part to be faithful in the big things, and are in part already demonstrating by that the proper, faithful temperament of a servant, and therefore are faithful also in the big things.

That the teacher also must busy himself with such faithfulness, yes, that it is doubly important for him, certainly needs no further pointing out. Through his instruction he is to be the student's guide, through his

example, a model for him, and not least, by being faithful in the small things. And as a servant of the Lord, of course, just that is required of him that he be found faithful.

Isn't it true, my friends, older and younger, that there is a loaded challenge here for all of us to examine ourselves. And it is written: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged ... with the world." (1 Co. 11:31.32.)

May the Lord forgive us our sometimes unfaithfulness, for the sake of Jesus Christ! May he give us the proper mind of faith and grant us all grace to again show greater and greater faithfulness in the service in which he has placed us so that on the great day of reckoning we may get to hear the greeting from his mouth, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."

*Kirketidende*, July 15, 1887; pages 429–432

# Address at the Cornerstone Laying of the New Luther Theological Seminary Building

Minneapolis, Minnesota

July 15, 1888

Dear fellow redeemed and people transformed by God! Grace and peace from God our Father and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

We meet here praising and glorifying God because his blessings upon us are more than can be numbered. We came here a small group of people; he has made us a large people. His loving kindness has been new to us daily and he has blessed us bountifully in physical and spiritual things. He chastised us. We called upon him in our distress and he delivered us. He preserved his Word among us. Therefore we praise him and say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" (Ps. 103:1.2.)

Our people brought an excellent *heritage* with them from the fatherland to their new homeland in this country, *the word of God*, worth more than all the world's gold and silver. God be praised, a large portion of our people have lived in this heritage! We had already learned at home to treasure it, or we learned it here under trials sent us by God. What the fertile soil, what the country's many excellent institutions could not give, the heritage contained: the true food which stills the hunger of the soul and preserves it unto eternal life.

We have sought to defend this precious heritage and to preserve it pure and unadulterated. The many battles through which our church body has had to fight incessantly, have especially been for the preservation of doctrine, for the Word of God. And God be praised, by his grace the Lord has let us succeed so that though not without many scars after the battle and many sorrowful losses, we have, however, kept it and can leave it to posterity unadulterated, as we have received it from our fathers! In meager circumstances we have also sought to make the most of this heritage of ours. Not just our parochial schools but also our institutions of higher learning, especially our Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and our Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, bear witness of that fact.

A new home for this seminary is now going to be built here. It isn't from a vain desire for getting more imposing buildings or in some way to excel, that the synod has decided to make this move. The deciding factor has been that it believed that it could make better use of its heritage here, and that a seminary in this center of the Norwegian population could better expand its work and in a wider circle exercise its influence for the spread of the Lutheran Church and the preservation of God's Word among our country-men who have immigrated to here, than in its former, in other respects so beautifully situated location in Madison.

Now we have assembled here solemnly to lay the cornerstone of the building. This act, three strokes of a hammer in the name of the Triune God, certainly has its own significance as a symbolic act. It is then really not the act itself which has brought us together in this place, but what it signifies and of what it is to remind us. This visible cornerstone, which actually is of little value, is to remind us of the *Invisible Cornerstone* on whom the spiritual work of building which shall be conducted here must be grounded and rest if it is to prosper and be permanent. We have also wanted to indicate this through the writings which shall now be placed in the cornerstone. They are: the Bible and the Book of Concord, the Synod's hymnbook, the Explanation and Illustrated Bible History, the Report of the synod convention for 1887, an issue of *Evangelisk luthersk Kirketidende* containing "An Accounting," and *The Independent Church.s* (In addition are deposited an issue of "Amerika," "Foedrelandet og Emigranten," together with "Boernebladet," a summary of the report which was placed in the cornerstone at Luther College, and a brief account of the later

<sup>8</sup> "The Proper Form of An Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State," by the Missouri Synod theologian Dr. C.F. W. Walther. [JHL]

development of the synod and its institutions of learning). The writings mentioned first here are to be a testimony for coming generations of Who the Cornerstone is upon whom we confess that our spiritual work of building in these halls is to be founded.

It is of course important for every earthly building which men's hands build, that it be laid on a solid foundation with firm cornerstones on which the weight can rest so that the first strong gust of wind does not blow it down or a rainstorm undermine it and cause it to fall. That will surely be the case if it is built on a wobbly foundation of sand. Without such a firm foundation all the cost and effort, even the best workmanship, is wasted. Even more must it be the case with a spiritual building, that if it is going to be permanent it must have a firm, immovable foundation which can defy all the storms and changes of time. That is also what the Lord wants to teach us in his Word when he says: "Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: and rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Mt. 7:25).

For the foundation of the spiritual work of building which this new building is to serve, we do not want to lay this world's highly touted wisdom and philosophical systems, or the constantly changing trends and opinions of the time, or our own reason's often vacillating and erroneous judgments, even though we will regard reason as a gift of God and use it within the sphere God has assigned it in his Word. Nor do we want to build on any human authority, be it called pope or synod or church fathers or the majority, all of which together are more or less exposed to errors. A spiritual building erected on such loose, shifting, sandy soil must always be wavering and subject to perishing. No, we will not lay any foundation of our own making, but will stay with the one which is laid, which the Holy Ghost discusses in our text, namely *Jesus Christ*. Because thus has the same Spirit testified already through the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that believes shall not make haste." (28:16.) It is the same cornerstone to whom the apostle Peter admonishes us to come when he says, "Come to him the living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." (1 Pe. 2:4.)

It is of this cornerstone that the apostle says in our text: "*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" Yes, Jesus Christ is the ground and rock of our salvation, and apart from him there is no salvation. All the treasures of salvation are given us in him. Because he, God's and Mary's Son, true God and true man, has redeemed us through his holy life and with his innocent and undeserved death, and he is our righteousness before God, as it is written, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Co. 1:30.) But just as Jesus Christ is the only ground of our salvation, so must and shall he also be the foundation of the spiritual work of building which is to be carried on here for the building up of the church and the spread of God's kingdom while young men animated by the Spirit of God are trained here as servants of the Word to go out and proclaim the counsel of God for the salvation of men. Because he who was *the word* from eternity has revealed himself to us in the Word of God proclaimed through the mouths of the prophets and apostles. Therefore the Lord himself also says about this Word, "*My words are spirit and they are life,*" (Jo. 6:63) and again, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *my word shall never pass away.*" (Mt. 24:35.) And the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the *apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." (2:19,20.) Peter has grounded his faith upon this foundation about which he lays down the joyful confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," a confession whose truth the Lord confirms with his reply, "On this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mt. 16:16,18.)

And now, brethren, from this solid rock of the Word of God the confession of faith which shall be laid down within these walls daily shall spring forth like a stream of water from a fountainhead. All the testimony which shall be given here shall rest on this foundation. And when God gives his grace to this end, for which we now and always will implore him, then, brethren, we can also be comforted about the fact that no enemy, be he ever so crafty and mighty, shall be able to destroy the work and cause the spiritual building which is erected here, to fall! No, even if the cornerstone which we now lay in this building of wood and stone someday crumbles and the building itself sinks into the ground, the spiritual work built here which it alone is to serve, you see, that shall still exist and continue in the course of time, perhaps under other circumstances



and in another language, but in the same Spirit. Because then the promise we heard the Lord speak about the foundation upon which it rests shall apply to the work, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Now, it is no doubt so, that all the material which we have to bring to bear upon and use for this spiritual work of building is not of equal importance and value or has the same importance for the building's progress and completion. Or to speak without metaphor: there are truths of the faith whose suppression or denial would involve the foundation itself being cracked and becoming a facade, while there are others of which a person can lack knowledge without straying away from the foundation which is laid. But by no means does a right to show apathy follow from this; for example, to be indifferent about such less important truths of the faith not being presented in their purity or even passed over completely as unessential. Such a way of thinking and dealing with the Word of God and the divine truths, which without fail must lead to a false unionism, is and remains however a violation of the divine majesty who reveals himself in his Word and who utters a curse upon everyone who takes something from or adds something to it or deals with it recklessly in another way and thus takes the Lord's name in vain. Just as a little defect in a watch completely ruins its sound and just as a little flaw in a single wheel in the watch's works can destroy its regular order and show us a wrong time, so will the incorrect interpretation and presentation of a single article of faith, for example, of God's grace, Christ's merit, man's free will, the power of the Means of Grace, etc., be able to displace the very foundation and put our salvation in jeopardy, in which we cannot be partakers through a *false* faith but only through the *true*. When Paul is to take his leave from the elders in Ephesus he lays it upon their hearts, saying, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Ac. 20:26.27.)

I want to remind you of one thing more, brethren, namely the excellent helps which the Lutheran Church offers in the Confessions, as well as in the writings of the fathers, especially Luther's, both for building on the proper foundation and giving each type of material the proper place in the building. If we do not lay them as *the foundation* or *build* upon them as *such*, yet we do, however, regard them as a blessed gift of grace from the Lord, whose proper use will help a great deal toward furthering the work which shall be carried on here. The name *Luther* Seminary is also to bear witness of that fact.

That they now, who shall be the workers in the spiritual work of building, both teachers and students, may receive grace thus to remain on the foundation which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, and to build on the gold and silver and precious stones, for that we will diligently call upon the Lord. We will also ask the Lord on behalf of this structure of wood and stone which shall be erected to the service of that spiritual work of building and in which the cornerstone shall now be laid, that it may be embraced by the congregations with good will and be supported through generous gifts, so that this building can soon stand here completed with its tower pointing upward as a symbol that just as the foundation for the spiritual work is laid deep upon the solid Rock so that it shall not be moved, so does the effort of the workers here always go upward and the purpose for all their work is heavenly, eternal and imperishable.

Now, Lord! we bow our hearts before you and ask you in Jesus' name: Let all the work here be very successful, both the external and the internal, both the physical and the spiritual! "Let your work appear unto your servants, and your glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands stablish thou it!" (Ps. 90:16.17.) Amen in Jesus' name.

*Kirketidende*, Aug. 3, 1888; pages 480–484

# Dedication Address

Norwegian English Lutheran Teachers College

Sioux Falls, Dakota Territory

October 13, 1889

Grace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Dear fellow Christians, we've heard just now what an important ceremony it is which brings so large a crowd of countrymen and brethren in the faith together here today, and together we have asked God to bless *the dedication of this new Norwegian English Lutheran Teachers College*.

We made an earlier attempt to do something like this in connection with our Luther College in Decorah but it was unsuccessful.

The synod has therefore believed that it ought not spare the sacrifice which would be connected with establishing its own independent institution of this kind and it is a delight to know that a large portion of the contributions to it have come in through the so-called "bushel collection" from our children who in this way have displayed a beautiful testimony to the glory of God of their love for God and his Word.

"But why," someone asks, "why establish such a school with such great pains and cost? There are surely enough of the so-called normal schools here where teachers are trained and which naturally can be far better equipped than we are able to do through this school of ours without it costing us anything? Isn't it an unnecessary expense for the congregations, and at any rate, don't we give a bad impression by separating ourselves in this way from the people to whom we belong, and from their public education? It surely cannot escape our attention that a dissatisfaction with this kind of thing is becoming apparent in high places, yes, how in individual states legislation is placing obstacles in the way of the separation of immigrants from the realm of public education."

But, my friends, if we consider the purpose of this school of ours rightly, which its name surely already indicates, then we will be convinced of *the necessity* of our establishing it *and of our right* to do so!

It is of course going to train *teachers* who not only confess the *Lutheran faith* but who shall also be capable of instructing our children in it. Since the language of our churches is still *Norwegian* and religious instruction that with which we are especially concerned, the *Norwegian language* will still remain for a while the means of communication in our schools and thus it is an important subject at this school. Add to this instruction in the *English language* which as the language of the country is of so great importance, and the various *secular subjects* in which they are taught in the common school. Then, everyone knows that there can be no talk of *the teaching of religion* in either the public normal schools or in the common school since all children in the country are entitled to access to them without regard to faith or the lack of faith. They must consequently be *religionless*.

But as such they cannot satisfy the requirements which *Lutheran Christians* must place upon schools to which they shall entrust their children.

In such schools the children will of course not be taught and strengthened in the faith of the fathers, yes, not even in the basic truths of Christianity. The *one thing needful* will have to be missing there. Because of that the rest of the instruction will also come to be lacking in the life-giving element which must permeate it, and through it the children if they are going to be willing to utilize the knowledge they acquire to their own and other people's good. Their education—and a school is an *educational institution* more than anything else, where the spirit and the heart are molded—will lack the foundation upon which all true education must rest, namely: the true fear, love and trust toward God.

Neither is it to be expected that the public schools advocate the *Norwegian language* as a general subject of instruction so that our children would be able to acquire the necessary skill in its use, even if only approximately. Therefore, as Norwegian Lutherans we need to provide our own schools to which we can defend our sending them, before God and our children.

However, the great importance of this teachers' college of ours will become even more obvious to us through a consideration of the importance which these *schools for children* have and for which this teachers' college shall train male and female teachers.

I will therefore ask you, my friends, to dwell a little with me on the consideration of the importance of our schools for children, and along with that, The Importance of Our Teachers College for Our Churches, Our Church, and Everyone.

Jesus Christ, who came into the world in order to save the lost, says: "*Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them from coming.* [Mt. 19:14] Jesus has redeemed the little children with his blood, so that they shall not be lost. It is therefore his will that they shall be brought to him in Baptism, be grafted into him, through union with him become a new creation, and freed from the power of sin and of Satan become partakers in this life and salvation which he has earned. It is his will that they should belong to him, just as he to them, so that they shall be his own as a special people and heirs with him of the glory of heaven. And they who have become his possession he does not want to lose again, but he wants them to remain in him just as they were grafted into him through Baptism. Therefore he also wants to come to them through the Word and that they shall be brought to him also through our prayers and intercession as soon as their understanding is sufficiently developed so that they can receive some instruction. He wants them to learn to know the great grace he has given them in Baptism so that their hearts have their comfort and true joy in him, that they shall learn how they can preserve and use this grace of his for thanking and serving him all the days of their lives. He wants them as well as older people to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God and to grow in faith as well as in physical strength so that they can be capable of every good work.

Thus he also wants us to lead these lambs of his to the Gospel's pleasant and green pastures and "*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" (Ep. 6:4.)

This command of the Lord about letting the children come to him and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is obviously given to *the parents* as the children's natural guardians and providers to whose care God has entrusted them and from whose hand he will again require them. It must therefore also be laid upon the parents' hearts first of all to bring their children to Jesus and to preserve them in him through bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord through teaching them the truth unto salvation. In so far as this cannot occur adequately in the home, it is their duty to seek the necessary assistance for it. *The school* will generally best be able to give it. It must therefore be *Christian*, that is, *the word of God* must govern in the school, in the discipline as well as in the instruction. The Word of God must not merely be an important course there, but the life-giving power which carries and permeates the other instruction, the *foundation* upon which the entire education in the school rests. The Word of God is to teach them to know their natural depravity as well as their daily sins more and more with abhorrence and sadness, and also the grace and sincere love of God for them. It is the Word of God which is to cleanse and sanctify their hearts in Christ Jesus, draw their childlike minds to Jesus and awaken and nourish in them the feeling for all that is good, beautiful and noble, and thus truly ennoble and mold their spirit and heart.

Luther expresses himself beautifully and well about this:

But where the Holy Scripture does not rule I certainly advise no one to send his child (*What Luther Says*. #1327). And again:

Above all things, the principal and most general subject of study, both in the higher and lower schools, should be the Holy Scriptures (Ibid. #1326).

And especially with regard to the higher schools he says:

But, you say, everyone may teach his sons and daughters himself, or at least train them in proper discipline. Answer: Yes, we can readily see what such teaching and training amount to. Even when the training is done to perfection and succeeds, the net result is little more than a certain enforced outward respectability; underneath, they are nothing but the same old blockheads, unable to converse intelligently on any subject, or to assist or counsel anyone. But if children were instructed and trained in schools, or schoolmistresses were available to teach the languages, the other arts, and history, they would then hear of the doings and sayings of the entire world, and how things went with various cities, kingdoms, princes, men and women. Thus they could in a short time set before themselves as in a mirror the character, life, counsels, and purposes—successful and unsuccessful—of the whole world from the beginning; on the basis of which they could then draw the proper inferences and in the fear of God take their own place in the stream of human events. In addition, they could gain from history the knowledge and understanding of what to seek and what to avoid in this outward life, and be able to advise and direct others accordingly. [*Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 45, p. 368–9.]

That, my friends, then, is the never-ending great importance of our Christian schools. They are to serve to our dear children being preserved in Christ as his possession and being blessed in time and in eternity!

Dear father and mother, is there any greater good which you can help your children in obtaining! Can you have any higher wish, any better goal to work for than to be able to present yourselves on that Great Day with your hosts of children before the Friend of Children, Jesus Christ, and to say: "Here am I and those whom you have given me. I kept them in your name"? (Jo. 17:11.12.)

What is all the worldly learning and knowledge, even the best and most sublime which you can impart to them, compared with "knowing God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent"? (Jo. 17:3.) What are all the world's riches, power and glory which you can provide them compared with being a child of God, an heir of the glory of heaven? It is written: "The glory of man is as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but *the word of the Lord* endures for ever." (1 Pe. 1:24–25.) And: "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul? Or, what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36.)

However, this is not the only importance our Christian schools have for *the children*, even if it is the most important. They are also to serve toward the children's varying *gifts of the Spirit* being developed in the proper way and useful *knowledge* being imparted to them with which they can serve God and their neighbor in various positions in life. Surely it is for this purpose that Christ has redeemed them and the Spirit makes them willing and able in the kingdom of Christ as his disciples through the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

But, my friends, the Christian school is of the greatest importance not merely for our children, but also for *the church*, and through it, to great numbers of people.

The church, the community of believers, is the institution of God, his kingdom of grace on earth. "You are the salt of the earth," "You are the light of the world," Christ says to his disciples. (Mt. 5:13.14.) Through the power of the Means of Grace he makes them more and more capable of fulfilling this high calling of theirs which blesses the world so richly.

But *the parochial school is the church's nursery*. In it the children who are already enlisted under Christ's banner in Baptism are made familiar with the state of his kingdom in this world, with its work, its struggle and its tribulations, with its consoling promises and its glorious hope. Here they are taught and strengthened for the battle against their and the kingdom's enemies and trained in the use of spiritual weapons for both defense and attack. Here they are made capable of taking their places as men in Christ in Christ's battle array alongside the fathers who have gotten gray in the work and fight, or to take their place when God calls them from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant after they have finished the course.

On the other hand, my dear friends, let the children grow up without the knowledge and nurture of the Word of God which is imparted in the Christian school. You shall soon get to see them forsake the fathers'

good, old paths and be led astray in the world. You will see how, even if equipped with superior knowledge, they use it in the service of the god of this world since they are following their own will and seeking their own glory and advantage but disdain their spiritual mother, the church and its divine calling and work. Yes, then we shall soon be witnesses to the church bell calling our youth in vain to meet their God in his house to a greater degree than now, until it is completely empty and falling into ruins when the old folks have laid down their pilgrim's staff and have gone to rest. In vain shall people inquire then about the Lutheran Church which the Norwegian immigrants founded and cared for with great sacrifice under much toil when they came here. Unfortunately, things are going badly enough with it as it is, and the chief cause is the poor state of the parochial school among us.

A warning example for us is the Swedish-Lutheran Church which was formed in Delaware two and a half centuries ago. Its vestiges are now obliterated, its descendants are to be found among the American sects or among the world's unbelieving multitudes. They neglected the Lutheran school and with it, the Christian education of their children. Brethren, what a terrible responsibility for both parents and the church! Because it is also its duty, if the parents neglect it, to provide for and to see to it that the lambs of the flock are not led astray and starve, but are reared in the green pastures of the Word. The church also cries to the Lord: "Feed my lambs!" (Jo. 21:15.)

Finally, we have also to consider the great importance these parochial schools have for *the people* and *the country* to which we belong as citizens.

Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord exhorts his captive people in Babylon: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall you have peace." (29:17). How much more ought not we immigrants who have been accepted with open arms by the country's inhabitants, have found a homeland here, and who enjoy all the rights of citizens, seek the country's best interests!

Now the Lord says that "sin is a reproach to any people" but that "righteousness exalts a nation," (Pr. 14:34) and that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Ti. 4:8.) But it is certainly exactly that that we are striving for through our Christian schools, so that our children are brought up unto *godliness* so that they do not seek their own but their neighbors' benefit and best interest. It comes down to this that through the great grace of the Lord his Word is preserved in the Lutheran Church in its purity so that the Law is proclaimed in its severity and the Gospel without abridgement in all its sweetness as the heavenly message about the salvation of sinners by grace alone through faith in Christ. More than any other therefore, *the Lutheran Church* has both the underlying basis for and the promise that its work with the children in the Christian schools shall not be in vain.

Surely we all know by experience how dangerous even the best tool, such as a sharp knife or fire can be in the hand of a child or of a deranged person. It's the same in the spiritual realm. He whose heart is not disciplined and trained by the Spirit of God through the Word, will, through the use of his finely developed understanding, his excellent knowledge and skills, not look upon other people's good and best interests, but driven by the selfishness and egotism which motivate him, will seek his own glory and advantage, often to the harm and ruin of other people.

Unfortunately we do not lack warning examples of the ruinous and sad consequences of a godless education without the discipline and admonition of the Word and of a school without the influence of the Word of God on children and youths. The youth of our country who are growing up, as well as its adults, provide us such examples in abundance, from the millionaire down to the beggar.

We therefore, dear brethren in the faith, cannot render our new country and people a greater service, we cannot thank them better for the love with which they have met us and extended to us strangers the benefits of the rights of citizens, than by taking care that our children receive an instruction and education grounded on the Word of God through which their hearts and spirits truly are molded at the same time as they acquire knowledge and skills which afford them the means of fulfilling their duties as good, useful citizens. Because it's true: "*The best Christian is also the best citizen.*"

Our *teacher's college* is now going to serve to that end, since its purpose is to train *male and female teachers* who can take over the leadership of such *Christian schools*.

"But," someone will say, "these schools do, however, seem to be a thorn in the side of many of the people. In several states, in fact, regulations have been drawn up as legislation which affect them seriously." Certainly it cannot be denied that that is the case, in spite of the loyal character of these schools which are so beneficial for the citizenry. School-laws have been enacted in some states which will only serve to interfere with and destroy the parochial school and the private school generally, yes, make them impossible. That would undoubtedly be an encroachment on the part of the state upon the parents' divine right, and their freedom of conscience be violated, as well as their freedom to the public practice of religion which is guaranteed every citizen by the country's constitution. So that these encroachments can be rejected and rolled back in a proper manner, every thinking citizen, and especially every Christian who treasures the benefits of religious freedom ought to work by every legal means, namely by seeking to get men elected to such responsible positions who do not persecute Christ in his believers injudiciously or out of ill-will. It is certainly true that the state also does have a duty over toward the education of the upcoming generation. It has to watch out that indifferent, ungodly parents do not altogether neglect their children and let them grow up without any instruction or impart to them the kind of instruction which can be dangerous and harmful to the state. In the first instance the state is certainly entitled to assure such children the most necessary instruction even by *force*. In the latter instance it is entitled to see to it that principles which are dangerous to the state are not imprinted upon the children in the private school. However, the right of the state in this area does not stretch further than this either. If it wants to use force to a further extent, it becomes an intolerable tyranny.

The establishment of Christian schools is therefore as much a matter of right as it is necessary for Christian congregations. However, since the people who belong to our Norwegian churches in many places live so far apart and are split up into a variety of church bodies, it will often prove impracticable, even if the will were there, to get such schools established where the children can be trained to be both good Christians and capable citizens. In such cases it can become necessary to use the religionless state schools alongside of the religious school so that the children can become at home in the English language so that later they can fulfill their duties as citizens.

Meanwhile, in order to lessen the danger of entrusting the education of our children essentially to the religionless school with its diverse elements, it will be our duty to do everything possible so that such young men and women are placed as the male and female teachers at those schools, in whose training we can have the confidence that they will conscientiously watch over our children so that they are neither led away from the faith of their fathers by word or deed in the school and that no offense is given these little ones who belong to Christ either.

This teachers' college of ours will have an important work to carry out among our people also in this regard. One aspect of its work will certainly be that of training young people to be male and female teachers in *the English common school* as well as in the congregations' *Norwegian religious school*.

But of course, friends, the more important we thus have seen the task is which this teaching institution has to discharge, the more responsible it also is; the more will both diligence and ability be needed here, but above all else, faithfulness from those who are appointed to lead it and to instruct the young people! However, you, dear teachers, know that "our sufficiency is of God," (2 Co. 3:5) and that it is he who must give you grace to be faithful in deed, he, who is also present to forgive and to comfort when the work does not always correspond to what the spirit proposes and desires because of the weakness of the flesh. May he, our merciful God, preserve you in the Word and in faith and bless your work for the youth entrusted to you here so that it may bear fruit to the glory of his name and the growth of his kingdom among us!

Also you, dear *students*. We are delighted to see so many of you at the beginning of this school bless the Lord so that you may appreciate the great grace God shows you in that you can enjoy the benefit of the instruction and training in the Christian school of higher learning which the loving sacrifices of the congregations have built! May the Lord grant you grace to demonstrate your gratitude through hard work, willing obedience and a good performance, but above all, through loving your Savior, Jesus Christ! You are

going to be made capable here of becoming guides of children, so that above all you can lead them to Christ. Pray without ceasing that God will let it go well! Then you shall be preparing for yourselves and us the joy of being able to take over the very important but also responsible work which is rich in blessing, as educators of the upcoming generation. Then even if you will find that many times your walk is full of thorns and not of the kind which always finds recognition and thanks in the world, then what the Lord promises faithful teachers shall however be your comfort, that those who have instructed others "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Da. 12:3.)

And then I offer the synod's thanks to the many young people who have assisted in building this college with gifts and work, and especially to the esteemed Building Committee for its hard and sacrificial work. May the Lord grant you much joy from it and allow you to see rich blessing from it; may that be your reward!

Yes, Thou, our God, for your mercy's sake, bless and preserve this house! Bless the teachers and students! Let them work toward the common goal in the love of Christ and let no bitter root ever shoot forth here! Let rich blessings go out from here upon our congregations, our nation and its people! Bless the synod with its congregations, whose sacrificial love has built this house!

And herewith be this college dedicated in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost! Amen in Jesus' name.

*Kirketidende*, Nov. 2, 1889; pages 685–693

# Fiftieth Jubilee

Western Koshkonong Lutheran Church

Cottage Grove, Wisconsin

May 27, 1894

*Dear Lord God, heavenly Father! We are assembled here to celebrate a Jubilee of Thanksgiving to your glory! O, teach us rightly to thank you for your innumerable blessings! Teach us rightly to praise you for your unspeakable grace in Jesus Christ! Teach us to appreciate what a precious treasure you have given us in your Word through which you regenerate our hearts through faith, preserve us in such faith, make us glad and content and zealous for every good work through the forgiveness of sins, courageous in death, and after death, eternally blessed! O, teach us rightly to acknowledge and to thank you for your great grace that now for a half century you have proclaimed the Word of your truth pure and unadulterated in this place through which you have preserved your Christian church on the Rock, Jesus Christ! Be with us, bless us for your name's sake! Amen.*

*Psalm 100*

## **Our Heartfelt Thanks To The Lord**

Fellow redeemed in Christ! Christians gathered for this Jubilee, grace and peace from God our Father, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost! Amen.

It is as glorious a celebration, as it is seldom, which we Norwegian Lutherans celebrate here today at this congregation's Jubilee. We can say: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad." [Ps. 118:24.] Many people are perhaps thinking that last year when we celebrated the anniversary of the discovery of this part of the world,<sup>9</sup> that there was good reason for doing that; just as some years back we celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the American republic. But the fact that fifty years ago some poor Norwegian emigrants, most of whom are now dead and gone and whose names are hardly known outside this area, formed a small Lutheran congregation here, is really, however, an all too insignificant, everyday occurrence, for their children and grand-children, not to mention brethren in the faith from the entire district, to hold a Jubilee honoring the event.

However, my friends! As surely as we had good reason for remembering those events to his praise which have opened a home for thousands of homeless people from the over-populated old world and a freedom many people pursued, just as surely do we have the greatest summons to hold a celebration with thanks to God in memory of the so plain-looking but memorable event which took place a half century ago under the old oak tree over there when a little grain of mustard seed carried with them from the fathers' hearth and church by pious, God-fearing hearts was transplanted in foreign soil and one of the very first Norwegian-Lutheran congregations was founded here, a mother church for a host of others; because this was to have an eternity's significance for succeeding generations in thousands of ways. Therefore we have every reason to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord, to serve the Lord with gladness, to come before his presence with singing." But our joyful noise is to be full of thanksgiving so that we "enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." And surely, my dear friends, this Jubilee of ours will be well-pleasing to God and a blessing to us if our hearts can rightly be filled with thanksgiving through the Word and prayer with which surely we want to sanctify this celebration so that our festive joy can be a thank-offering to the Lord for his loving-kindness and faithfulness.

<sup>9</sup> The 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America.



We will therefore ask the Holy Spirit to bless our meditation, when for the reason our text gives, we consider that our offering at this Jubilee is to be:

### OUR HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE LORD

- 1) for all the grace he has *shown* us;
- 2) for the loving-kindness he *promises* us to all eternity.

#### 1.

My dear friends, if you would attempt to enumerate all God's blessings toward you and your fathers in these fifty years since your fathers settled in these parts, where should you then begin and where end? How poor were most of your fathers, those Norwegian immigrants, how unfamiliar with the language and customs, how unaccustomed to the climate, and way of doing things! How wild and lacking in communication were not these parts—just hunting ground for wild Indians! How devoid of older and independent settlers who could extend a helping hand to the inexperienced newcomers.

And look at this so charming, lovely landscape *now* where well-built farms follow one after the other, surrounded by woods and fields, meadows and orchards which delight the eye with their vigor and fruitfulness! How it all testifies to the prosperity of those who live here, of God's rich blessing!

Well do I know a little about the privation and trials, sickness and need of the first pioneer years, how many, shortly after their arrival here had to bury their loved ones in an early grave, taken away by the fever and pestilence which ruled the country then, but God did not forget them. No, he did not forsake his people. According to his wisdom he helped in the day of trouble, relieved the sorrow and did all things well, so that we must sing with praise and thanks: The Lord was good to us, his mercy was new to us each day.

However, it is not these temporal blessings of the Lord of which the congregation's founding is to remind us most, although it is the will of God that his goodness also in this matter is to lead us to conversion. It is the *spiritual, eternal* blessings of which he in his grace has allowed the congregation to be partaker which especially invite us to heartfelt thanksgiving here.

What does it profit a man if he gained the whole world but lost his soul? What good did it do us, my friends! all this earthly grandeur, if our souls had to pine away on the walk to eternity? What would have happened among you in these fifty years, in what dangers would you be now if God had not then been merciful to you and established his Lutheran Church among you? The Lord be praised! He had thoughts of peace toward his people, he brought to light the best heritage our fathers had with them from home: the Lutheran *Catechism*, his Gospel, and he established the ministry of reconciliation among you.

He cleansed your children through the washing of water in the Word and made them his children. He let conversion and faith through the forgiveness of sins be preached through his faithful servants, and he prepared his table with the bread of life for you in the middle of the spiritual wilderness.

While in a sense, magnificent temples were erected round about you, but where the Word of God was abridged and its bread spoiled through the commandments of men and false doctrines of many kinds, streams ever more pure and clear flowed here from God's Word for the refreshment of souls thirsty for grace.

How many who were gathered into the kingdom of grace here in the net of the Word, how many who found healing for their wounds in Jesus' wounds and were cleansed by the blood of Jesus the Son of God, how many of your loved ones who died in peace through faith in Jesus Christ and whose dust now awaits the resurrection to glory over there under the sod,<sup>10</sup> that, you see, my friends, shall eternity first reveal. But what

<sup>10</sup> The congregation's cemetery lies next to the church.

songs of jubilee and praise shall not resound then when we meet in glory up there and get to see all the wonderful works the Lord has done down here in this congregation! However, we can and we are to thank God and to say with the psalmist already now: "O give thanks to the Lord, sing praises to his name; *it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture,*" because in what way, really, have you deserved such grace? You will answer: All we can do is blush. And as it was *the Lord, your God* who *gathered* your fathers around the banner of the Lutheran Church here, so was it *he* who in spite of all your sin and weakness *preserved* you as an orthodox congregation up to this day, since he preserved his Word of truth among you so that you could be built on the Rock.

Certainly, it has not happened without a hard struggle and trials of many kinds. Wounds were inflicted and blows were struck, and most recently there was a rift<sup>11</sup> whose after-effects are still being felt painfully. But the Lord was with you, he was your sun and shield. Through the testimony of the truth he beat back the enemies' attack and preserved you in Luther's doctrine, so that you—as we dare hope—came out of the battle richer in knowledge and grace.

They were of course precious truths of which the old evil foe wanted to rob you and it was up to you to defend them. And surely the more the Lord drove you into the Word of God during the controversy with its anxieties and pressures, the more you learned among other things to understand and to treasure the *Christian liberty* which Jesus has purchased for you with his blood so that you did not let yourselves come under the bondage of men, under the ordinances and the commandments of men; likewise the great blessings of *absolution*, so that you would not tolerate that it be made dependent on a man's judgment or by a quality of man, but solely through the Lord's institution and the pure proclamation of the Gospel. But above all, it was through the battle that it dawned upon many a troubled soul, oppressed by sin, that we are *justified* before God by the *grace* of God alone through faith in Jesus Christ and that our conversion therefore is not dependent on or is not the fruit of our good attitude but on God alone, who works it through the Means of Grace "when and where he will," as our Confessions say. And what comfort the understanding and the acceptance of this basic truth with which the Lutheran Church stands and falls has been for countless souls hungry for grace, that, their songs of praise around the Lamb's throne shall some day reveal.

And if you ask now, in what way has God so graciously preserved the congregation and let it emerge from these battles victorious, then the answer is without a doubt: The Lord has taught it more and more to regard Scripture as the only source and guide for faith and life, humble of heart, to bow before its divine authority and to take reason captive under the obedience of faith. And it was a great blessing, that in the two pastors who worked in your midst the longest,<sup>12</sup> God gave you true servants of the Lord, who taught and strove on the basis of Scripture.

When we now, dear congregation, rightly consider this gracious protection of God over the congregation in the fifty years, these invaluable blessings of his, these glorious treasures of grace which he has entrusted to you, and how it really would look now if God had not gathered and preserved this congregation, then do we not have reason to say with the psalmist: "He has done great things for us; whereof we are glad," (Ps. 126:3) and to break out in laud and praise: "he has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture,"—reason to thank him and to bless his name?

But how should you then really better thank him and bless his name than through holding fast to and confessing these precious truths which alone can give the heart comfort in life and peace in death, in the future?

## 2.

Moreover, dear congregation, your Jubilee offering is also to be heartfelt thanks for the Lord's gracious promise. As our text says, "His mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations."

<sup>11</sup> The Election Controversy in the Norwegian Synod in the 1880s.

<sup>12</sup> Adolph Carl Preus [1850 -60] and Jakob Aal Ottesen [1860 -91]

When you look at the signs of the times and see how, along with all kinds of errors, also the obvious falling away from the Lord, and contempt for everything that is holy is gaining the upper hand, and how worldliness and a carnal mind are making their way more and more into the congregations, then anxiety can easily take hold of you over the thought of what the future will bring, and how it will go with us and our children and the generations which are coming after us, if we and they also will continue standing in the truth during the coming trials. How comforting is it not then to hear the Giver promise that his mercy endures forever and his truth from generation to generation. The Lord knows how frail and weak his children are, how easily on the one hand they let themselves be infatuated with the lust and glory of the world, on the other hand, be led astray by the pious, spiritual appearance with which error so often knows how to disguise itself. But the Lord will not forsake his own. Their salvation has cost him so unspeakably much: his bitter suffering and shameful death on the cross. He will not take his hand from them but with the Sword of the Spirit, *the Word of truth*, he will defend them against the seducers. The world's best goods and pleasures shall lose their radiant luster and strong attraction when the heart, broken by sorrow for sin, tastes anew the goodness and kindness of God and receives the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. When the love of Christ flows through the heart and the eye of faith fixes itself on the invisible, heavenly treasure which is given us in Christ Jesus, then shall the cross of renunciation and self-denial be light for us, and being a follower of Jesus be precious to us.

However blinding error's appearance can be, *the light of Christ*, however, is always stronger and with its clear radiance the Lord will disperse error's darkness so that the upright are not deceived by it. The Lord has said that he will be with his people always unto the end of the world. He is the same, yesterday, today and for ever. He promises his people the Holy Spirit who shall *guide* them into all truth. Therefore the psalmist says: "The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:130) and again: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Ps. 119:7.) It is up to us to continue in the Word, not merely have Scripture handsomely bound on the table in the room but use it diligently in the home, in school, in church, and meditate upon it night and day and keep it in faithful, pious hearts. Our heart of course is a fragile thing. When the storm of unbelief and the waves of error threaten to bury the church's ship in the abyss, and the noise and the screams seem totally to drown out the faithful servants' warning, guiding voices and we see how one person and then another, often of our loved ones, overwhelmed by the cries, leaves the ship in the time of danger, then even the most courageous heart can sometimes sink, and the cry of hopelessness and distrust is heard, "Lord, we're perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). But if we *turn* still to *the Lord* with our cry or weak sigh then we shall experience that he delivers us in the day of trouble and we shall praise him: "You are my hiding place and my shield: I hope in your word." (Ps. 119:114.) His word stands fast: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against his church." (Mt. 16:18.) "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall never pass away." (Mt. 24:35.)

If he has by his grace founded a congregation here upon that *good confession* and now preserved it in the same confession for fifty years, then you are also to trust his gracious promise that he will still preserve it on that *Rock against all the devil's attacks*.

Yes, the Lord's promise also stretches into *eternity*. Even if his beloved people must sow with tears, Scripture says they shall reap with joy. "He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Ps. 126:6. Then, dear brothers and sisters, we are going to enter into *the rest* which is prepared for the people of God. We are going to inherit the eternal life which is given us in Christ Jesus and with thanksgiving and songs of praise we are going to hold an eternal jubilee.

My friends! if we had God to thank only for *proven* blessings, then we would just celebrate our jubilee today half-heartedly, looking anxiously into the future. But we bring him our thanks now with hearts full of joy because his mercy endures for ever and his truth from generation to generation.

However, we still want to think of one thing in closing. The Lord does not give you these glorious, comforting promises so that you shall use them like a soft pillow and become secure and lazy. They are to strengthen your courage and inflame you to serve him with ever greater zeal, with thanks for all his blessings. Yes, do not forget all his blessings, dear congregation! Do not let your rich treasure lie unused, because

"whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever does not have, from him shall be taken away even that he has." (Mt. 13:12.)

May the Lord bless you forevermore and let you remain a blessing! May he preserve you and your pastors now and always through the Word of truth and make you more and more like the city on the hill to be a light which shines for all them who are in the house, so that all the heathen can see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven! Amen.

*Minde fra Jubelfesterne paa Koshkonong, Decorah, IA., 1894; p. 33–39*

# Christmas Day

*Luke 2:1-14*

## **THE GLORIOUS TIDINGS OF CHRISTMAS, “UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY A SAVIOR”**

Dear fellow redeemed! The bells have again rung in our joyous festival of Christmas. Their call again gathers a host of young and old from city and village to celebrate in the Lord's temple. And what prompts thousands upon thousands of people not only in this country but all around the globe to celebrate so universal a festival of joy at this cold, dreary time? What is it really which causes you to see a light streaming from the darkened corner and to hear old and young singing: “In this our happy Christmastide The joyful bells are ringing,” and to join in singing the angel's song of praise: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men”? Oh, you know it is the angel's announcement which came on Christmas night: “*Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord.*”

The fact that a poor, little Child was born 1800 years ago in a humble stall in Judah could easily appear to be little reason for so universal a celebration. And unfortunately there are many who think so and who are not moved in the least by these tidings that it is a Savior who is born, but who take part in Christmas festivities just to have a really good time for a few days. However, already in the Old Covenant through the prophet Isaiah we hear the Lord order all creation to thank God for this Savior: “Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD has done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.” (44:23.) Yes, we also hear the holy angels from on high coming down from heaven to sing the praises of this Child's birth in spite of the fact that he did not take the nature of holy angels but that of sinful man, and neither was he born for their sake but for ours, as the angel says: “I bring good tidings to *you*,—to *you* this day is born a Savior.”

And we whom this concerns most intimately, we should also hear these tidings indifferently and our lips should remain silent during this universal singing of praise! God preserve us therefore, even though we never fully can receive this miracle of grace or contain this “great joy” in our hearts or give expression to it and praise it as it deserves! Luther says:

Our hearts are much too small to grasp the vastness of such a great blessing. Because it is so vast, that if a person could grasp the fact that the Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, takes us as the dearest of all his children, truly takes such joy in us, has such a great concern for us and directs such great love and tenderness toward us, I say, if we could fully comprehend how gracious God is toward us, then so great a joy would arise from it, that we would soon give up the spirit for endless joy, or die from joy.

But even if we must feel and acknowledge with shame that our hearts are both too cold and narrow for receiving and containing this miracle of divine love, wisdom and omnipotence rightly, and that it is only with stammering tongues that we can speak of it, yet we will try to encourage and help each other to a fuller understanding of it, and praising it, consider together:

### **THE GLORIOUS TIDINGS OF CHRISTMAS:**

“To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord,” and then see that it contains: 1. *The Greatest Miracle*. 2. *The Greatest Joy*. .

#### I.

“Great,” writes the apostle Paul, “*is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh,*” 1 Ti. 3:16. And that is exactly what the angel announces about the little Child who was born of the virgin Mary and whom the shepherds found lying in the manger in the stable in Bethlehem, that in this Child “God was manifest in the flesh,” because he says that the Savior who was born in the city of David is “Christ the Lord,” that therefore this little Child is the One promised in the Scriptures, the *Messiah* long awaited by all the

faithful in Israel as it was foretold by the prophet Micah that he should be born in Bethlehem the city of David, and "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (5:2.) Therefore we hear the angel call this little Child "Lord." But now surely the angels have no other Lord over them than God, which is why the angel announces in his greeting to the world that this Child who was born of the virgin Mary on Christmas night is *true God*. But now, my beloved, isn't it a miracle surpassing all miracles that the eternal, infinite God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, through conception in the womb of the virgin Mary receives a human nature and in that way enters into so intimate a union that in Christ, the one divine person, God is man and man is God? Is it not a miracle that he, the Almighty by whom all things were made and who upholds all things by the word of his power is born from a virgin's womb, is carried in a mother's arms, is nourished at a mother's breast,—that he, the rich one, to whom gold and silver belong, becomes poor and has no place where he can lay his head,—that he, the Holy One, joins himself not with angels but the sinner fallen from him,—he, who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," (He. 1:3) is revealed in "the likeness of sinful flesh," (Ro. 8:3)—he, who is the eternal King, becomes servant of all, the most wretched and despised of the children of men,—he, the Lord of glory, lays aside his divine glory and humbles himself and takes upon himself our fallen human nature and in the form of a servant becomes obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? In him, the little Child in the manger,—in him, who nailed to the cross was despised as one before whom a person hides his face,—in him the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily! The Lord of glory dies on the cross!

Brethren! We are standing before a miracle without equal, a mystery into which even the angels of God desire to look, a divine miracle before which it behooves us, as previously it did Moses, to "put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Ex. 3:5.) It is a miracle so great, so incomprehensible, that all human understanding is silent, and we children of the dust, we poor sinners, must only join adoringly in the angel's song of praise: "Glory to God in the highest."

How wonderful is also the manner in which God presents this Child's birth and the circumstances surrounding it! It was in his *eternal* counsel that God determined to send his only-begotten Son into the world, because it is written: "He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." (Ep. 1:4.) Centuries, yes, thousands of years ago, beginning at the Fall of Adam this Child's birth was already promised and prepared. The promise concerning him is the heart whereof the entire Old Covenant and also the most important of the world's events concern themselves, rays of light toward which the Old Testament's believers turned their eyes, upon which they set their hope.

Now the great events of the world, the heathen emperor's decree, must serve to fulfill the various prophecies about this Child given thousands of years before. Thus we see in our Gospel for today that the mighty Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, who wanted to know nothing of the true God and his only-begotten, must, however, serve them. He must issue a decree that "all the world should be taxed," so that Joseph and Mary who were of the house and lineage of David, must journey from Nazareth in Galilee, to Bethlehem the city of David, and she give birth to her Child so that it could be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Micah, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (5:2.)

Also with respect to the time for the Child's birth, the patriarch Jacob had already prophesied, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." (Ge. 49:10.) Now when Jesus was born, the Roman emperor's decree shows us that the sceptre had departed from Judah and that the Jews had come under foreign rule. My beloved, we are to learn from this not to lose heart no matter how dark things appear and when no way out is apparent!

Who points the clouds their courses,  
Whom wind and waves obey,  
He will direct thy footsteps  
And find for thee a way.

And finally, my friends, what a wonderful sign of the Messiah the prophet Isaiah gives! "Therefore," he says, "the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call

his name Immanuel." (7:14.) And listen now to what the Gospel reports: "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." (Lk. 1:26–27.) And this virgin to whom the angel said "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you," (Lk. 1:35) she is now the one who without knowing a man gives birth to the Child, Jesus, that holy one who "is called the Son of God." (Lk. 1:35.) Oh, what a great miracle! He, who is born of the Father from eternity, is born here without being begotten by a man, as a true child of man, of a virgin, and of a sinful virgin is born the Holy One who is called the Son of God, after sin was purified from the mother's body by the Holy Spirit. Truly, curious reason must be silent here and believing hearts worship humbly. St. Bernard says that there are three unities which occurred through the power of God over which he cannot marvel sufficiently, namely, God and man united in Christ, mother and virgin united in Mary, and faith and the human heart in every true Christian, which grasps the other two unions.

Is it not to be marveled at that God sent nothing less than his angel from heaven to announce the wonderful news to the poor shepherds and to us poor sinners. Yes, that a multitude of the heavenly hosts must come down to earth on this occasion to sing us a heavenly song of praise so wonderfully beautiful that its equal had never before been heard on earth. Therefore the Child already receives the name, "Wonderful," among other names, from the prophet Isaiah.

## II.

But why so universal a celebration over a miracle, even the greatest miracle? What good is it for us, that we should be so happy over it? My beloved! The tidings of Christmas not only proclaim *the glorious miracle* to us, they bring to us, God be praised! also *the glorious joy*.

Our Gospel tells us that "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid." It would appear as if those poor shepherds had reason to rejoice at the glorious revelation from heaven which came to them, but we see that the opposite was the case. They were sore afraid. The radiance of the angel of the Lord and the glory of the Lord which shone around them awakened fear and distress in their hearts because they felt that they were condemned sinners, deserving of God's wrath and judgment. A revelation from heaven couldn't do anything else than terrify them, just as the Jews were terrified at Sinai.

In this way, my friends, fear and distress will also grip the natural heart of man when the Lord approaches the conscience in all his majesty and holiness through the Law or its dispensation and makes sin come alive in us! Even the light-hearted debauchee, the impudent blasphemer can suddenly feel terror pierce him when the Lord stands before him as a consuming fire, and as Belshazzar did, he sees the invisible hand writing, "You are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting," (Da. 5:27) because at such times the sleeping conscience awakens and accuses of transgression and sin, and warns of death and judgment. Oh, unfortunately, many people willfully deaden the voice of their conscience and seek to forget its accusations in the lusts of the world. If they continue to despise God's call to them in this way they will never taste the joy which the tidings of Christmas bestow, but will bring upon themselves a hasty destruction. But some people cannot get rid of this sting of the Law, which is sin. It stabs and gnaws at them again and again. It disturbs their enjoyment even of the innocent joys of life, and under its power makes them restless and terrified, just as the shepherds are *sore afraid*.

Do you feel this sting, my hearers! so that your heart wanders restlessly and cannot find peace? Well now, frightened heart! The angel's Christmas announcement speaks to you, just as previously to the shepherds at Bethlehem, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Yes, God be praised, beloved! The Christmas tidings ring in our ears even now. Oh, therefore we can all rejoice, however much reason we still have to fear, should the Lord enter into judgment with us! Because it is surely from the Lord that the tidings come, from him against whom we have sinned. If he says to us that we are not to fear, what right do we then have to be afraid? Surely his wrath and our judgment are not being proclaimed to us as previously at Sinai, but his grace and "*great joy*"—*great joy*, do you hear? And this great joy, it says, shall be for *all people*. The shepherds could surely enough think: The joy is not for

us wretched, poor shepherds and to such poor sinners as we are. But look at what the angel says: This joy shall be to *all people*. This must refute every such doubting thought. But it can also well be that when it says "Fear not!" that you say, "Oh, yes, were I like those pious shepherds, then perhaps I would dare to hope that God would also allow his severe wrath to depart from me. But as great a sinner as I am, as thoroughly condemned as my heart is, surely I have reason enough to be afraid." No, the angel says you are not to be afraid, however great a sinner you also are, however much you also have deserved God's wrath and eternal damnation, because the joy which I proclaim, you see, is to be to *all people*, therefore also to you, and not just a few special, elect people. Therefore, my friend, however great your anxiety still is and however good reason you also have to be afraid, yes, however great and numerous even your sins are—as blood red as the color of scarlet, yet listen, the Lord is saying to you, *Fear not!* Oh, rejoice, take his word for it! He does not lie. He will not mock you in your misery but will deliver you from fear and make you rejoice. Therefore, rejoice on this Christmas Day if you never have done it before. Rejoice over these blessed tidings of Christmas!

But, my beloved, our dear God lets his angel not only proclaim "great joy" to us in the tidings of Christmas but he also reveals to us in what the joy consists or what the basis for the joy is, so that we can apply it to ourselves in spite of all inner doubt, hold firmly to it in spite of all opposition, and sincerely rejoice over it as something which is able to give us *the greatest joy* in spite of all sorrow, distress and death.

"To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." That is how the angel goes on. Oh, my friend! Have you really considered what it means: *a Savior*? Oh, life-giving tidings! Oh, sweet name: *Jesus!* A Savior is sent to you in this little Child who is born in Bethlehem! God has looked to you in your misery and has had mercy upon you! He has sent a Savior to you. A Savior is born to you. A Savior who has freed you from all your enemies, sin, death and the devil. He has delivered you from all evil, from the wrath of God, a gnawing conscience, the judgment of the Law, the fear of hell and of eternal condemnation! But, you say, how can this little Child save me from sin. How can God forgive that? He has still said, "You shall die the death." (Mt. 15:4.) And his Law says: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them." (Ga. 3:10.) Listen, dear brother, to who the angel says this little Child is. He calls him who is born in the city of David, "Christ the Lord," just as we heard earlier, the Messiah promised in the Scriptures, the Lord, true God from eternity and yet also true man, born of the virgin Mary, so that he could take our sin on himself and fulfill the Law in our stead and suffer its punishment, the accursed death on the cross and the agonies of hell. And precisely because he is God his sacrifice has atoned for your sins and all the sins of the world and reconciled God with us so that now "the blood of God's Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jo. 1:7). Therefore we can also sing confidently:

That God has laid His anger by,  
 He by His gift hath shown us;  
 He gives His Son for us to die,  
 In Him He now doth own us;  
 These joyful tidings tell abroad,  
 That Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
 From sin doth us deliver;  
 Who then should not be glad today  
 When Christ is born, the sinner's stay,  
 Who is of grace the giver?

No, it is not otherwise possible, my friend! than that these blessed Christmas tidings must make you rejoice and be glad and drive away all the fear which can worry you, when you accept them with a believing heart. A Savior is born to you! What more do you need, what more can you desire than—a Savior? Blessed are you, blessed in time, blessed in eternity are you who through faith have embraced the little Child in the manger, you who in Jesus have your Savior! Truly, the tidings of Christmas bring us *the greatest joy*.

But, oh brethren! do we also all rejoice in it? Do our hearts exult in us by hearing that a Savior is born to us? God grant it were really so! But unfortunately there likely are some among us who sit cold and indifferent as they hear these tidings. And why? Because you do not know that you are a condemned sinner, because you do not see and feel that you need a Savior. Therefore, you also seek your happiness in something



entirely different: in the world, its goods and its pleasures. But, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 8:36.) And this happiness of yours, even if it isn't happiness derived from sinful pleasures or from drink, sensuality and the like, will you be able to retain it in your dying hour when you will say farewell to everything, everything precious which you had here, when you will give account to your God and will have to answer for everything which you have done here below; for *everything*, do you hear? Do you think that you will retain your happiness then and depart happily when you see then, but, oh, too late, that you are a condemned sinner who cannot answer one question in a thousand, and in addition have wasted your time of grace and despised the salvation which was proclaimed to you? Oh, friend! therefore, wake up, you who are sleeping, and let Christ appear to you! It even says today. Tomorrow may be too late. Even now the tidings of Christmas ring in your ears: "Unto you is born this day a Savior." Oh, do not harden your heart, do not push your Savior away from you! He will bring you the greatest joy—eternal salvation.

But I hear someone sigh and say, Oh, I would really like to have this Savior. I would really like to have joy in him instead of this constant unrest and fear. But how do I dare believe it, as unworthy as I am? Yes, that's true, my friend, you are unworthy. We all are; unworthy of the least grace and gift. The Canaanite woman felt it so keenly when the Lord said: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." (Mt. 15:26.) David felt it when he lamented: "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Sa. 12:13.) Peter confessed it when he cried: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man," (Lk. 5:8) and Paul, when he said: "I am not meet to be called an apostle." (1 Co. 15:9.) Yes, even Jesus' mother felt it when she accepted this word from his mouth: "Woman, what have I to do with you?" (Jo. 2:4.) But now, when the Lord's grace is so great that he has had mercy upon everyone without respect of persons, and through his angel allowed it to be proclaimed: "to you," take notice! "To you is born this day a Savior." Oh, my friends! do not deprive yourself of this great joy through your unbelief and do not reject him who has loved you so much that he has given his only-begotten Son so that you shall not be condemned, but believe in him and have eternal life. Because, through your wretched unbelief you make God a liar in his Word and it just comes from pride in your heart, from your wanting to be somebody in your own eyes and being able to give him something before you will believe that he will be gracious to you. Therefore away with that and go to the manger "confidently," as the shepherds did! You will also find the Child there as the angel has said.

Now let us all with gladsome cheer  
Follow the shepherds, and draw near  
To see this wondrous gift of God,  
Who hath His only Son bestowed.

And God be praised, you will not need to seek far and wide for him or seek him in vain! "Say not in your heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) Or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)." But say: "The word is nigh thee, even in your mouth, and your heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach." (Ro. 10:6.8.) Yes, this is the sign God has given you. Just as the angels said to the shepherds: "And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes," so shall you always also find him in his church, wrapped in the Word as his garment, just as he says: "Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (Jo. 5:39.) And just as the shepherds did not despise his humble appearance and poor dwelling but on the contrary took confidence that neither would he despise them but would make them rich through his poverty, so neither should you despise his church, the humble dwelling which he takes as thanks, or the despised Means of Grace in which he now is wrapped as in a poor garment. As often as you seek comfort there in need and distress with a heart hungry for grace from the Child who alone can comfort his people, you will find him there and you will see that he will not disdain the poor dwelling of your heart but will enter in and will dwell there with his spirit and you will have "*great joy*," greater than all the world's goods and pleasures can give you. Therefore say:

O dearest Jesus, holy Child!  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled  
Within my heart that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

However, dear congregation, we will know even better what great joy is given us in this little Child when we consider the angel's song of praise of which the close of our Christmas Gospel tells us! It says: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Yes, the joy over the Child's birth was so great that a whole multitude of angels had to come down to take part in it and to greet their Lord, this little Child in the manger, "the Lord of hosts," as he is called in Scripture, and sing praise to God for the numerous and great blessings which are given to people through this Child.

"*Glory to God in the highest,*" the angels sing. Apart from this Child, they want to say, God receives no glory from people. They take all the glory for themselves, give it to the creatures instead of to the Creator. But from now on, through this Child, God shall again receive the glory which is his. Because through the birth of this Child, God is first truly known in his unfathomable grace and mercy, as well as in his wonderful power and wisdom with which he has accomplished his will for people's salvation, as we hear the Lord himself say, "No one knows the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him," (Mt. 11:27) and again, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jo. 14:9.) Rightly to acknowledge God is to give him the highest glory, as Psalm 48 says, "According to your *name*, O God, so is your praise unto the ends of the earth." (10.) Now if we acknowledge and receive this little Child as our Savior, for whose sake God loves us and grants us everything good, then we will also thank him for every good gift, bodily and spiritual, and with body and soul and everything we have, will glorify him and only him.

"*And on earth peace*" is the second verse in the angel's song of praise. Without this little Child there would be no peace on earth but man would be a peaceless creature without peace with God, without peace in his conscience, at enmity, hatred and strife with his neighbor, since everyone seeks his own. But this Child, who is called "the Prince of Peace," (Is. 9:6) has broken down sin's wall of partition and has reconciled God with us and us with God so that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Ro. 5:1) and so that we no longer regard God as a consuming fire but as our gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves us in the Beloved. This produces a good conscience and a humble, benevolent mind, so that we also wish our neighbor everything good, intercede with God for him and seek to live in peace with him as far as it is possible for us.

"*Good will toward men,*" thus rings the last verse in the song of praise. We heard just now that without Jesus it is impossible to glorify God and to have true peace. How would it be possible, then, for God to be pleased with a child of man except for this little Child or for them to rejoice in God and his guiding of them? Thus it says back in Genesis 6:5 and following: "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And he was grieved in his heart that he had made man." But now, with the birth of this little Child, our nature is raised up in Christ and God regards the human race not as it is in itself, but he is pleased in it for the Beloved's sake, as Paul writes to the Ephesians, "He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved." (1:5.6.) But if we thus always are certain of God's good pleasure through Christ then we also have a confident, joyous heart and a contented mind which is at peace with the way God leads us. We bear our affliction patiently and wait on the Lord until he changes it, as Paul writes, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." (2 Co. 12:10.) I will therefore say with Luther:

God gives men a happy, joyful heart, so that they can say: I have a Savior, the kingdom of heaven is mine. Christ, God's Son, is mine! Therefore, even if I shall suffer persecution and every possible misfortune for the sake of this my faith and confession, yet I will, however, not be offended because of it or become impatient, but delight in it. Now, no sorrow, suffering or persecution, be they as great as they will, shall hinder me or deprive me of my joy over this newborn Child. Behold, my beloved, these are the blessings which the birth of this Child have brought us and over which we have heard the angel of God rejoice and praise God! Tell me, can a greater joy be given or named than that which the tidings of Christmas bring us: to have a Savior through whom we can give God all glory and have true peace and with whom God can be pleased with us and we in him! God grant that with Mary we may keep all these words in our hearts and ponder them so that now when we

return home, each to his own, it may be with us as it was with the shepherds: "They glorified and praised God for all the things which they had seen and heard, as it was told unto them."

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart, that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

My heart for very joy doth leap,  
My lips no more can silence keep;  
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue  
That sweetest, ancient cradle song:

Glory to God in highest heaven,  
Who unto us His Son hath given!  
While angels sing with pious mirth  
A glad new year to all the earth.

Amen in Jesus' name.

*Proedikener over Evangelierne, pages 40–52*

## Septuagesima Sunday

*Matthew 20:1–16*

### THE GREATNESS OF DIVINE GRACE IN THE WORK OF SALVATION

*Grace.* What depth of merciful love in the heart of God does not this word open up to us! Who can empty this fountain? What sweetness, what blessedness for poor sinners, for real sinners, does not this word contain! Who can fully grasp, to say nothing of describe divine grace? While the *love* of God embraces all creatures and he feels and shows the most sincere pity and *compassion* toward all gloomy people, yet *grace* means that he has mercy upon *sinners* and has resolved upon a plan of salvation for them. It was by grace that he sent his only-begotten Son and through his blood reconciled the world unto himself. It was by grace that he revealed his "mystery of godliness" [1 Ti. 3:16] in the Gospel. It is out of grace that he exhorts through his messengers, "Be ye reconciled to God," (2 Co. 5:20) and sends his Holy Spirit in order that he shall make us partakers in the salvation in Christ through the Means of Grace. Finally, it is by grace that the Holy Spirit calls, enlightens, regenerates and sanctifies sinners; in other words, saves them through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus grace is just for sinners and suits sinners alone. Were it not for sin, we would be blessed. Then we would need no grace. But if you are a sinner, and we are all sinners and are lacking the praise we should have for God, then you need grace as The One Thing Needful. "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" is all which the publican asks for. Lk. 18:13. If you have God's grace, my friend, then you have everything! "My grace is sufficient for you," Christ says to Paul. (2 Co. 12:9.) If you are lacking grace, then in the midst of the greatest abundance you are after all lacking everything. How poor and miserable was not the rich man who "fared sumptuously every day"! (Lk. 16:19.) On the other hand, if you feel yourself to be the greatest sinner there is still grace for you, grace to make you righteous and blessed as if you had never sinned.

This grace of God is in *Christ Jesus*. It was acquired by him and is shown to us for his sake alone. It can therefore only be made one's own in Christ Jesus through *faith* in him. But this faith is also by grace, a gift of God, just as the continued appropriation, preservation of faith, and the life which is created through the appropriation and the streams of living water which constantly flow from it, are God's works of grace so that everything is "by grace alone," both this that we were made alive and this that we live in him, work, strive and suffer for him, yes, also that we die in him, so that it is God who works by grace, so that whether we live or die we are the Lord's, his people who are raised from the dead, who die no more but live forever, or this, that we shall live and reign forever.

What mercy, dear hearers, that this time of the visitation of grace is granted us in which the blessed Gospel of salvation in Christ, salvation for poor sinners, is proclaimed to us and his gifts of grace are offered to us! O, that none of us might neglect this precious time of grace, not despise this unfathomable great love of God, not take this wonderful message of salvation in vain, not willfully resist the Spirit's mighty work and not thoughtlessly let go of the hand of grace either which might have grasped us and snatched us like a firebrand out of the fire! Woe unto us if we live and die without the grace of God! The Word of God says of such people that their worm never dies and their fire is never put out.

However, it is difficult, my dear friends, both to grasp and to hold firmly to this hand of grace and to receive grace for grace from it, to comfort oneself through it alone, to build on it alone, to live by it alone and to die in it! How much is there not which holds the poor heart back from grasping it, and if it is grasped by it, how easily does it not fall into doubt and hopelessness, and will forsake it, especially in distress and temptation! How inclined is not the heart to want to rely upon itself and to keep flesh for its arm, to seeking its own glory, yes, to placing a value in that which has been by grace, or something it has done, and to finding in it a certain worthiness for obtaining grace and the promised reward of grace!

Just before our text it tells about a person who refuses the grace which was offered and who turns away from the kingdom of God because he has more love for and confidence in his own kingdom than in the Lord, (Mt. 19:21.22) and of another man, Peter, who succumbs to the temptation to think well of himself and sees a

merit which is worthy of a special reward in the fact that he has left everything and followed Jesus, although that obviously was a work of grace and a proof of grace for which he does not have himself to boast of but God alone to thank for it. (Mt. 19:27.) After Jesus has promised those who have left everything for his sake a hundredfold again and everlasting life, we hear that he directs an earnest warning to Peter in the somber words, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first," (Mt. 19:30) as though he wants to say: "Be careful, my dear Peter, that you do not pride yourself on the grace of which you have become partaker, and you thus go from being among the first to being among the last." After that Jesus sets forth for instruction and help for Peter and everyone who is brought into a similar situation the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

This parable certainly presents great difficulties when in expounding it a person wants to get the various parts of it to harmonize with each other. Interpreters therefore differ widely with each other. However, this isn't of such great importance when a person just does not contradict the clear teaching of Scripture in any point. In the meantime this much is indisputable that the main point in the parable is what Paul expresses with the words, "*By grace are you saved ... not by works, lest any man should boast,*" (Ep. 2:8.9.) That is clearly evident from that question of Peter which obviously gave the occasion for the parable: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you; what shall we have therefore?" (Mt. 19:27) and from the Lord's answer to Peter: "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first," and it is also with these very words that Jesus concludes our parable. We will therefore consider in the light of the Gospel:

### **THE GREATNESS OF DIVINE GRACE IN THE WORK OF SALVATION.**

Lord, to this end grant us your Holy Spirit's aid! Amen.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard." This is how the Savior begins our parable. Just as it says here that the householder went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard and later that he continued doing that all day, that is also the way it is in God's kingdom of grace, the church, the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Now what was it really, my dear friends, which prompted the householder to do that? It was certainly not any request either direct or indirect on the part of those who were hired. Even if they heard of the vineyard they didn't regard it as any good fortune to become laborers in it and they didn't worry about it. But perhaps the fact that they were standing idle prompted him? Well, yes, in so far as it awakened his sincere pity, that was the reason that he hired them. Because he knew that they would fare badly and they would perish miserably if they should be standing idle all day, their whole lifetime. On the other hand, it is unreasonable to suppose that the fact that they were standing idle and were doing nothing was of any merit in the eyes of the householder by which he was prompted to hire them and to pay them wages. But perhaps the fact that they allowed themselves to be hired can have prompted him to hire them? Every man who has hired laborers will say that it is just as unreasonable to suggest such a thing.

No, the thing which prompted the householder to be so persistent in hiring all those men whom he found idle, even when there was only a short time left for them to work in, was obviously his sincere desire to further their good fortune and welfare, along with the fact that he really wanted to have the credit and satisfaction of seeing his vineyard well cultivated. And that is exactly the way it is now with the invitation to the kingdom of God on earth. It is totally a kingdom of grace, where grace reigns from beginning to end. The householder, our heavenly Father, goes out, compelled by boundless grace and mercy, in mankind's early childhood to call laborers into his vineyard, lost sinners to his kingdom of grace. He has planted a vineyard so that it should bear fruit. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts," says the prophet Isai ah, "is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant," (5:7) and in the 27th chapter the concern of the Lord for it is described, "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." (2.3.) He has a right to ask: "What more should I have done with my vineyard than I have done with it?"

The heavenly Father has planted his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the true, living vine in the parched soil of mankind, so that we shall be grafted into him and as living branches in him bear fruit. Long

beforehand, right after the Fall, he was promised as the Seed of the Woman who should crush the serpent's head, afterward as the offspring of Abraham in whom all the generations of the earth should be blessed. Already at that time therefore we see the heavenly Father being merciful to the whole human race. In order to prepare the way for this plan of his for the salvation of the race, he chooses his Israel and he plants a vineyard, the kingdom of heaven on earth where Jesus Christ gives his life as the true Vine for all them who are grafted into him through faith.

There was nothing which prompted him to do this except his sincere compassion for people's misery and his undeserved grace in the beloved Son who bore all the world's sin as the innocent Lamb of God and thus reconciled it with God. Thus neither was there anything other than his undeserved grace in Christ which prompted him, as it says in our text, to *go out*, namely from the light in which he dwells from eternity and to which no one can approach, and to *reveal* this grace of his in Christ and to *call* people from the power of sin and Satan, in which we all lie captive, into his kingdom of grace to do his will.

How great and incomprehensible, my friends, is not the grace which is shown us by this! Think of them whom he calls "standing idle in the marketplace"! Yes, unfortunately, that's the way it is with all of us by nature. We are standing idle in the marketplace. The word of God which he has commanded us in his holy law to obey perfectly under the threat of the loss of salvation, that, we do not do. We do not want to do it. We cannot do it, just as it is written, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Ro. 8:7.) The soul is, as our *Catechism* says: "inclined only to evil and unable and unwilling to do that which is good." In this condition we can therefore work with the greatest diligence, ability and perseverance, we can strive and work like a slave, yes, work ourselves to death under the law; we are, however, according to the righteous judgment of God, standing "idle in the marketplace," and with all our work and effort, all our toiling like slaves under the law, we are its transgressors in God's eyes and as such under its judgment, deserving of the wrath of God and of eternal condemnation. O, that everyone of you might hear that and take it to heart, both you who also according to the judgment of the world are standing idle in the marketplace while you are squandering the strength of your youth and manhood in drink and lust, and you who are faring sumptuously every day and looking for ways to kill time in the most pleasant way, just like the rich man in the Gospel, because you are rich enough and don't need to work! But, dear friend, you hear it too, you who are squandering the work of your calling as a busy farmer or hard-working craftsman or prudent businessman. In the eyes of God you are also standing idle in the marketplace as long as you have not become a laborer in his vineyard, come into his kingdom of grace and been translated from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, as long as you have not received life in him and the love of God is not poured out into your heart!

But, my dear friends, what bottomless grace is it not, that our Lord and God, in whose eyes we have stood idle outside his kingdom and in whose eyes all our work has been sin, calls us to his kingdom of grace, to doing his work as his co-laborers for the building up of his kingdom! Yes, he not only calls us to work but he even promises the faithful laborer a reward. True, someone could think that the promise of reward has to exclude grace. But here we shall note that God's call is a powerful call and not a mere powerless human offer which it is up to us to accept or not accept by our own power, as we please. Through the power of his Word through which he calls us, he works, so that we receive a new desire and strength so that we both want to and can accept the call, both want to and can work in his vineyard and bear fruit to his good pleasure, just as Paul says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Ph. 2:12.13.) Thus the promised reward is not one of merit but of grace, a reward of grace.

Or, tell me, you who are working in the Lord's vineyard: The one who called you, did he not give you the talent for you to make the most of, and the love of Christ besides, the thing which Paul says constrains us to use our talent faithfully and to do the work in his vineyard? Look at Paul himself! He could say that he had worked more than all the other apostles. And yet, what does he confess about himself? "By the grace of God I am what I am." 1 Co. 15:10. In the kingdom of grace it is of course true that it is in our weakness that the strength of God is made perfect. Among the children of the world the laborer thinks first and last about the pay; in the Lord's vineyard the work itself is considered both as an honor and a blessing. To be able to work with the Lord all day long as his servant and co-worker is a demonstration of grace and blessedness for him who earlier knew of nothing other than serving the prince of this world and working for the meat which

perishes. The fact that through his call God invites us to be his laborers, is grace and the fact that he makes us capable of doing the work, that is also grace.

To this work in the vineyard the Lord calls not merely some individuals whom he prefers but everyone whom he finds idle. Yes, what pains do we not see in the Gospel, that the heavenly householder takes pains not to pass anyone by but to get everyone who is standing idle into his vineyard! He is not satisfied with just going out at dawn, at the first hour and a little later at the third hour in order to hire laborers. No, even though the day is getting shorter and he can only expect less and less work from them, yet he still goes out again at the sixth and ninth hours. Yes, he even calls laborers into his vineyard at the eleventh hour when the day is waning. He passes no one by nor does he merely pretend to call anyone but shows the same earnestness for getting them into his vineyard over toward everyone, yes, also toward them who had neglected and misused almost their entire lives and stood idle in the marketplace until the evening of life. Also to such a person he grants the same grace and calls him to work in his vineyard so that we must exclaim with Peter, "Of a truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons." (Ac. 10:34.)

What great comfort, my friend, does not lie in just this *universality* of grace! It assures you of the fact that just as the Master comes to everyone with his call, thus he came also to you, the individual, and called you so earnestly that with the first spark of life which was kindled in your soul and with which you were translated from darkness to light, you felt that God was speaking to you, that the Master was hiring you to be a laborer in his vineyard!

What comfort for him upon whom it dawns for the first time in the evening of his life that he has stood idle in the marketplace throughout his entire life and who now yearns so sincerely after being able to work in the kingdom of grace the brief time he has left, but who fears that now it is too late for him. What comfort it is for him that the Lord also calls laborers into his vineyard at the eleventh hour and calls them to the same work and to enjoy the same grace! Yes, what comfort is there not in the Lord's answer to the thief for him who perhaps like the thief on the cross turns to the Savior for the first time in his last hour, "Today you shall be with me in paradise," (Lk. 23:43) so that what the Lord says through the apostle Paul is also true about the eleventh hour, "I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the hour of salvation have I succored you: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" (2 Co. 6:2.) Woe to him, however, who in sinful security would not heed the Father's "acceptable time" when he let his call go out to him at the third or sixth hour! There is nothing in our parable about the fact that they who were hired in the eleventh hour had scorned the call earlier, which now has gone out to them. No, today if you hear his voice, Scripture says, "harden not your hearts!" (He. 4:7) just as we of course also sing:

This is the day of grace,  
This is the day to find God.

O, that we, brothers and sisters, might rightly appreciate the great grace he has shown to us through calling us into his kingdom of grace so early through Baptism! Even if you have now been unfaithful to him, he is still faithful and the covenant he has concluded with you stands immovably firm so far as he is concerned, so that through it his inviting voice also has been able to call to you, accusing, exhorting and drawing you even when you fled from him. Yes, he assures you that he is also using the events of your life, the little ones and the big ones, in order to draw you to him through them and to hire you to be a laborer in his vineyard.

My friends, if we think of what undoubtedly compares most closely with the different hours in the parable to the different times in the course of the world all the way from the promise spoken to our first parents and until the Gospel is proclaimed for the last time before the trumpet of judgment sounds, then we also have an excellent testimony of the greatness of divine grace in the heavenly Father's concern that the blessed Gospel is to be proclaimed for the salvation of sinners at all times and to all peoples.

It says further on in the parable that the householder agreed with the laborers he hired in the morning, for a penny; to those who followed, he said, "Whatsoever is right, that shall you receive." That he considers it right also to give them a penny is evident from his order to the steward: "Give them their hire," and from the fact that when they settled up, "they received every man a penny."

As much as to say, God has of his great mercy given his only-begotten Son as ransom for us, as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In him we have become partakers of every blessing, temporal, spiritual and eternal. Because he who has given us his Son, should he not give us all things through him? All this he promises the laborers in his vineyard, in the Gospel. In the parable and elsewhere he himself calls it "a reward" which he has agreed with them about and which they shall receive "as is right." God's grace, my dear friends, is so great that in Christ he has established a covenant of grace with people, the New Testament covenant in his blood. In the Gospel he comes to us in order to take us into covenant with himself since he proclaims to us that he has accepted the atoning sacrifice of Christ as complete payment for us, and for the sake of Christ he will take us into his grace and give us the right of inheritance with himself. If we accept this blessed message, if we comfort ourselves with this atoning sacrifice and through it the covenant of grace established in that way, and if we thus are reconciled with God and receive the rights of children, then we also obtain with it the right to plead Christ's merit as ours. Whatever even the devil can reprove such a laborer in the Lord's vineyard for, with however much right he can even point to the brief time we have labored, to many kinds of weaknesses and negligence in the work, however much he now can even for that reason threaten and frighten him with the judgment of the law, the laborer can, however, God be praised, boast of his right over toward all these temptations of the devil! He can appeal to the fact that the heavenly Father, who of his grace has engaged him as his laborer and given him the will and strength for the work, has also agreed with him about the reward of grace. He can fearlessly boast of it as something which rightly is due him according to God's covenant of grace in the power of Christ's merit. And, praise God, the devil with all his power cannot dispute the believer this right!

Thus we see to the praise of God's grace that even if there is a great difference as to the time of every individual's call it makes no difference with regard to the nature of the call. They are called in the eleventh hour with the same earnestness to the same vineyard, to the same work in it, and they are promised the same reward of grace. In confidence in this promise of grace they also go to the work in the vineyard.

The same thing is also true with regard to the *work* in the vineyard. The length of time they work can vary for the different workers all the way from having "borne the burden and heat of the day" up to only an hour's work. The kind of work can also be very different. One person is a very learned professor or very gifted pastor, another a farmer or a daylaborer, another again a poor seamstress who sits with her sewing from morning until night for years, or it's a helpless widow who lies paralyzed on her sickbed surrounded by a number of children. In one sense there is no difference in their work. It's all the same, big or little, distinguished or ordinary. It is work in the vineyard as surely as it really is work, work in faith in Jesus to the glory of God according to the Ten Commandments, as surely as you do not in spite of all your striving, apparently in the vineyard, still, however, stand idle in the marketplace.

The one penny, the same reward of grace which is promised every laborer, the one as well as the other, and which he already possesses beforehand in hope, also makes them all equal in spite of differing gifts, differing circumstances and positions in life. Thus there is no difference, man or woman, bond or free, lay or learned. It makes the poor Lazarus at the rich man's door rich and successful while the rich man is poor and miserable without it in spite of the fact that he fares sumptuously every day. It makes the least significant laborer in the vineyard respectable. Thus he gets a new outlook on life, a new way of looking at life, namely that of which the apostle Paul speaks, that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God and what is poor and despised in the eyes of men is exalted and glorious in God's eyes. And what grace is that not, my friends! Who has reason now to complain of meager abilities and gifts, about heavy and tight circumstances in life, about a low position in life, and unfortunate events in life? By the grace of God everyone can be a laborer in the vineyard, who is in an honorable, even if it is also the lowest position in life. May everyone only heed the call when it comes to him so that he does not plug his ears and despise it. May everyone therefore hear the Word of God diligently and keep it because through it the Father is calling him to the work in the vineyard, and this call of the Father is powerful.

But if you have now become a laborer in his vineyard through the Father having hired you, then while you are working it is important always to have the proper view, the proper understanding of *the penny*.

Because in the parable we see that that is the thing which shows the value of the work when they settled up, whether it really has been a work in the vineyard or not, and in that way also whether the promised



reward is due you as a laborer in the vineyard. However, also where that is the case, there the work in the vineyard does not thereby cease being by grace alone and the reward to be a reward of grace and not a merit on the basis of work or of the greater or lesser diligence and faithfulness with which it was carried out. Because the faith and confidence with which the laborer in the vineyard accepts and keeps the promise about a reward of grace, the glad hope with which he looks forward to the promise during much weakness and suffering, as well as the humility, willingness and faithfulness with which he therefore also seeks to do his work in the vineyard, is of course all an effect of God's call of grace—all by the grace of the one who called. The faithful laborer in the vineyard will therefore not himself assume the least of the glory for it either, but will give the Lord all the glory.

We come now to the last section of the parable, the settling of accounts which the master orders his steward to make with the laborers toward evening.

Our dear God is keeping such an accounting with the individual already here in the time of grace in order to exhort him to earnest self-examination and repentance so that no one who is usually considered to be among "the first" shall be placed among "the last" at the final decisive judgment. The master wants with this to bring one and another person who in spite of his work is standing "idle in the marketplace," to realize this in time, and still follow the master's call which perhaps is now going out to him in the eleventh hour, so that he can be one of "the last" who are reckoned as "the first" at the judgment.

On the Last Day, when he comes again to judge the living and the dead, the Son of man will make the decisive judgment which takes place for every person among us already at our death.

"Call the laborers," the lord of the vineyard says to his steward in the parable, "and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first." We see that the steward does that. The reward of grace which we heard the householder had agreed on with the first laborers, he paid. He therefore finds it right also to give it to the last without any reduction. The Lord who has acquired this reward of grace has of course earned it for us all, and suffered the same painful, cursed death on the cross for them who came into the vineyard last, as well as for the first.

That the Lord orders his steward to begin with the last is not to surprise us. His name is of course "Wonderful," (Is. 9:6) and his entire household of grace is a miracle by which the world is offended to this very day. It is however very comforting to hear that just the last, they who consider themselves as the last, these tired souls and troubled consciences, shall least of all be forgotten when the reward of grace is distributed on the Day of Reckoning. These last, we see, each also got their penny.

They had regarded it as grace in the extreme that they were called in the eleventh hour and received permission to work along in the vineyard. But with what joy and thanks, my friends, did they not accept the reward of grace! They saw now their hope gloriously fulfilled, all doubt and hopelessness in the fearful hours of anxiety and struggle put to shame.

"But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny." Already by this, these first laborers show that they have by no means considered it as pure and simple grace that they who however stood idle, were called so early and received permission to work in the vineyard throughout the entire day. Therefore neither do they consider the promised penny as a reward of grace. Much rather, they look upon it as something they deserve because they had worked so hard the entire day and they think that this ought to be taken into consideration at the accounting and that it gives them the right to expect that they are going to get more than the others. When they see themselves disappointed in this, we hear their dissatisfaction break out in murmuring against the householder, and envy over toward the other laborers, and they said, "These last have worked but one hour, and you have made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." But what answer did they receive? "Friend!" he said to one of them, "I do you no wrong: did you not agree with me for a penny? Take your money, and go your way: I will give unto this last, even as unto you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil, because I am good?"

My friends, we must not understand this in this way, that on the Last Day anyone is going to presume to call the Judge of the world to account, or that then he is going to see it necessary to engage in such a justifying of his judgment. No. Everybody is going to bow their knees then and the Lord is going to stand justified in all his judgments.

On the contrary, here the Lord wants to reprove us, as if in a mirror, and caution and instruct however many there are who are regarded as "the first" in the church and are tempted to regard their work for the kingdom of God as something meritorious and to see their own glory in it, yes, as the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, even to look askance at the fact that such great sinners are accepted into grace and were considered worthy of the same salvation which they themselves expect. The Lord wants to teach us that if we do not earnestly resist and overcome such a temptation, but allow that idea to get the best of us, and then to work with that idea in mind, we will then become "the last," after having once been "the first."

The Lord shows in his answer how shameful and damnable such an idea is and how completely incompatible it is with being a child of God and a true laborer in the Lord's vineyard. First, he reproves exactly those laborers that he is doing them no wrong. What he agreed with them on of his grace, he has faithfully kept; he is faithful. The fact that they shut their eyes to the value of this reward of grace, the fact that they therefore cannot enjoy it and rejoice in it either, is not his fault but their own. They have already received their reward. They must let themselves be satisfied with it and be on their way.

Next the Lord justifies what he has done for the last laborers by saying that it is lawful for him to do what he wants with his own. If he is good, and of his grace wants to give them the same eternal salvation which he had also promised the first, but which they despised, then they only show their evil disposition when for that reason they want to challenge him and begrudge the other laborers. After that, he concludes with the words, "So the last shall be first, and the first last, for many be called, but few chosen." And with that, each receives his sentence.

The first were of course also called, yes, even in the first hour, to work in the Lord's vineyard. They have no reason to complain that they have been wronged in any way or that they are shown less grace than the others. But like so many who do not outwardly follow the call but are standing outside the church, they have despised the grace of God. They have certainly joined the visible church on earth and according to human judgment taken part in the work of the kingdom of God perhaps even as the first, but during all of that they had no knowledge or understanding of grace, of the fact that it is by grace that they are called into the Lord's vineyard, by grace that they are allowed to participate in the work here, and by grace that the reward is promised them.

Not for the Lord's sake, but for gain, or because they believe they are doing God a service by doing it, do they profess themselves members of the church of God. Their work in the vineyard, their prayers and sacrifices, their denial and forsaking of self, their entire life in their own so very pious opinion, they consider to be meritorious and they think that the Lord cannot possibly do anything else than take notice of that in this life as well as at the final distribution of the rewards.

Or they have followed the call sincerely from the beginning and have been good laborers in the vineyard, members of the kingdom of God, but then they have been negligent in the use of the Word of God and the Sacrament, have neglected to watch and to pray, have been lukewarm, indifferent and secure, have fallen from grace little by little, to rely on their works and have at last become like those hypocrites and dead members of the church. Because they therefore slight the grace of God through which alone they can be preserved as faithful laborers in his vineyard as true, living members of the church of God, they are not acknowledged by the householder now as legitimate laborers in his vineyard, as belonging to his kingdom of grace, but are rejected. They become the last, who actually were among the many who are called, but not of the few who are chosen and who enjoy the blessed fellowship of God eternally. That this however was completely their own fault and not the gracious God's, the Lord thus teaches us in the parable. Yes, "contempt of grace shall be avenged terribly," and, "Let him that thinks he is standing take heed lest he fall." (1 Co. 10:12.)

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let each of us examine ourselves now and look at how he is working in the Lord's vineyard!

You, lay or learned, who are working tirelessly in the church of God in the position in which God has placed you, not without trouble and sacrifice, perhaps not without visible blessing either, you who do not fall into denying either that it is by the grace of God that you are both working there and are expecting the reward, oh, watch, however, very earnestly over your own deceitful heart and beware of the proud, self-righteous thoughts which so much want to creep into the humble Christian's heart too! See that your hard work may truly be a work, both in, with and for the Lord, a witness of the fact that you yourself are a living member of Christ, that you have the true faith in him and the proper view of confidence in his merit and the grace founded on it, which makes you to be the Lord's faithful laborer and one who shares in the grace promised to you! On the other hand, guard against looking at that work of yours or the attitude shown in it as something you are taking along in the settling up, even if ever so little, in order to support your hope of the eternal reward of grace, or as something which you think God must take into consideration as something meritorious, why he must give you this reward of grace over so many who either are hardly laborers in the vineyard or whose work appears to you as not worth mentioning in comparison with your own! Yes, be on guard for that; because "the first shall be the last."

It is with an entirely different frame of mind that the last people whom the Lord talks about in the parable enter and work in his vineyard. They look upon it as an incomprehensible grace to receive permission to come into the vineyard and to work there, even if only for an hour. They have acknowledged with both dismay and sadness what it is "to stand idle" and what a wretched end that will bring with it. To get to work, even if ever so little, in the Lord's fellowship as his servants and to his glory, is for them a grace for which they can never fully thank him with ever so intense, sacrificing work in the vineyard. Therefore they acknowledge also the blessedness which he has promised them and which they rejoice in in hope already down here as an undeserved demonstration of grace which is given them not for the sake of their diligence and work but for the sake of Jesus Christ alone. There is nothing they are so afraid of as that by giving pride, self-righteousness, the love of the world and other sins room in their heart, they are going to despise and forfeit the grace of God and thereby fail of the blessed hope of life. These people who thus show that they have the marks of the elect, namely that called by grace, they work tirelessly in the Lord's vineyard through the grace of which they are partakers, and in humble but sure expectation of the eternal salvation which is promised them by grace—these last are now the first.

And may this, my dear friends, be the goal to which we all shall strive earnestly in humility, in firm confidence in the merciful God who has promised us the necessary grace for that in Christ Jesus! Hear us and grant our prayer, O God, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

*Proedikener over Evangelierne, pages 148–162*

## Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 9:18–26

### THE ORIGIN, ESSENCE AND GOAL OF TRUE FAITH

In our days Christianity is becoming more and more despised. Many people look down upon it and do not trouble themselves about it. Many people scoff at it, poke fun at it and persecute it. And yet, my friends, Christianity is something so great, blessed and glorious that human language cannot express it! It is the life-creating and saving power in the world, and true *believers* who have appropriated the truths of Christianity to themselves in a living faith are happy, blessed people, although they are despised in the world. That's why *faith* is also praised highly in Holy Scripture.

Already in the Old Testament it says that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness. The apostle John says, "Our faith is the victory which overcomes the world." (1 Jo. 5:4.) The Lord Jesus says that "all things are possible to him who believes" (Mk. 9:23) and that "whoever believes ... shall be saved." (Mk. 16:16.) In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say to the woman with an issue of blood: "Daughter, be of good comfort! your faith has made you whole." According to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures therefore, faith justifies us before God in life, it saves in death and glorifies in eternity.

But Scripture also speaks of another faith which does no good, a dead faith which cannot save, and warns against it. The apostle James writes, "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and does not have works? Can faith save him?" (Ja. 2:14.) The devil also believes (that God is *one*) "and trembles." (Ja. 2:19.) Therefore Scripture says: "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith." (2 Co. 13:5.) But if that is going to happen, then everyone will easily see how necessary it is to learn how rightly to recognize *that faith* so that we can examine and properly judge if it is the true faith which we have, and not lose out on eternal salvation through self-delusion. Therefore in this hour of meditation, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will consider

### TRUE FAITH

according to the opportunity which today's Gospel gives.

#### I.

Our Gospel presents two persons to us, who, visited with their crosses, who in their distress, seek and find help in Jesus. The one, a woman, has suffered from an issue of blood for twelve years. As the evangelist Luke reports, she had "spent all her money on doctors, and had not been able to be healed by any." The second, a ruler and director of a synagogue, by the name of Jairus, had left his little daughter "near death." Just as that woman had experienced that all her riches could not help her, nor all the skill and art of the doctors, but rather that things had gotten worse for her, so had Jairus also had the experience that with all his authority and respectability he was not in a position to give his little daughter health or to save her from death. Both had learned to know human impotence in the school of the cross and to surrender all confidence and trust in their own as well as in other people's power and ability to save them from their distresses. They had learned to give up on human help.

It is in this *distress* of theirs that they go to Jesus in order to find help. As long as they still had not felt their wretchedness and helplessness they stayed away from him. Now need drives them to *him* of whom they have heard that he takes the wretched to himself and heals the sick with a word. Because it is as Jesus says: "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick." (Mk. 2:17.) That's why our *Catechism* also teaches us that faith is conceived *in the feeling of our sinful misery*.

Yes, if we are going to come to Jesus in faith, if we are going to place our firm confidence and trust in him as our Savior from sin, death and the power of Satan, from all distress and sorrow in time and eternity, then we must first come to a humble, thorough and earnest recognition of our spiritual anguish, of the heart's deep corruption both through original sin and actual sin, of our totally, completely helpless lost condition. We must have had the sorrowful experience that sin is a spiritual loss of blood which it is not in human power to stop or to heal. We must therefore have learned to give up on our own as well as other people's help, yes, to consider every effort in that direction and through such means, that is to say, without Christ, to be completely useless and hopeless to save us from distress. That's what the apostle Paul means when he writes to the Philippians, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (3:8.) The apostle had been zealous according to the Law, and hoped through this zealous effort of his to be able to stand before God by means of the Law and to obtain the crown of righteousness. Now he lets all these rotten props go and abandons the false basis for his confidence and trust upon which he had relied before. Yes, he counts all things as loss and as dung because they have kept him away from Christ, however much they may have glittered in people's eyes and however great a spiritual appearance they may have had.

But unfortunately, when in his grace God wants to lead us to such a humble recognition of self and to repentance through the Law, then the proud, arrogant heart does not want to detect itself in this. The Law divests the heart of the nobility it imagines that it has and the Law throws it down from the heights it occupies in its own thoughts. A person is made a poor, lost sinner, and is disturbed in his happiness by the Law's severe, crushing judgment. In order to avoid this man seeks all kinds of escapes in his excuses and attempts to justify himself. Circumstances, he says, make a departure from the truth and uprightness excusable if not necessary. Yes, error and sins are even made virtues, so that, for example, covetousness must be called thrift, wrath holy zeal, slovenliness in the defense of the truth Christian patience and forbearance, and so on. And if all this doesn't help, but the sting of the Law still wants to intrude and to separate joints and marrow, interrupt pleasures and disturb the heart, yes, then many people plug their ears and try to blot out the impression by giving themselves completely to the intoxication of the senses. Or, they take the Law to heart insofar as they acknowledge God's just demands on them in it, and they try to observe it with the most extreme exactness, but they think that by doing that they can make satisfaction for their sins and thus become righteous before God by their own works, because people are completely blind to the spiritual significance of the Law and do not see that a person falls under the judgment of this Word of God: "Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness ... For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." (Ro. 9:31.32.)

However, our dear God does not let go of the palsied soul so easily but takes it into the school of the cross and of suffering in order to heal and save it just as we see that he did in the Gospel with the ruler of the synagogue and the woman with the issue of blood. Certainly the sufferings themselves cannot instruct us about our sin, far less teach us to know Jesus. The Spirit of God accomplishes this only through the Law and the Gospel. But when the thoughtless or secure sinner is suddenly deprived of his property or is laid upon a hard sickbed, when death approaches him, or he sees himself separated from some of his dearest friends who were his greatest joy in life, then God is seeking to awaken him from his sleep of sin through such a chastisement, to lead him to reflection and to bring him to pay attention to the voice of his conscience and the Lord's testimony in his Word. The Lord also seeks in this way to lead the proud, self-righteous sinner to the feeling of his spiritual impotence, and to despair of himself. For that reason the psalmist says: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept your word." (Ps. 119:71.67.) For such an afflicted, frightened sinner the Gospel becomes a pleasant, joyful message, a healing, refreshing drink through the instruction of the Holy Ghost. In a soul which feels its sinful misery in that way the Holy Ghost can create faith. The "healthy" person who does not know his sin's distress has no need of a physician. He will push God's hand of grace away from himself. If he confesses faith in the Savior, yet his faith is not true, but dead. He deceives himself, and through hypocrisy seeks to deceive others. The power of the Law is felt in distress and tribulation. Sin becomes alive through the Law and thus the Law becomes our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. We shall therefore not murmur if the Lord leads us into the school of affliction, even less turn our ears from the Law or try to remove its sting when it penetrates our hearts. In that way we hinder God's Spirit from leading us to repentance and make it impossible for him to work true faith in our hearts.

In our Gospel for today it says: "While he (Jesus) *spoke* these things unto them, behold, there came a ruler and fell down before him and said: My daughter is now (almost) dead; but come and lay your hand upon her, and she shall live." And the evangelist Mark reports that when the woman *heard* of Jesus, she came behind him among the people and touched his garment." (5:27.) It is therefore through the *word* that both came to faith in Jesus so that he both can and will help them out of their distresses, so that they go to him and seek help from him. Now also it is only through the Means of Grace, *the word and the Sacraments*, that the Holy Ghost works and preserves faith in the poor sinner's heart. "Faith comes by hearing," Scripture says, and again: "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?" (Ro. 10:17.14.) If you therefore, dear friend, really want to come to the true faith and preserve it, then do not despise the Means of Grace but use them diligently! It is a necessary condition that we hear the Word of God in order to be able to be converted and believe. If you do not want to hear the Word of God, then you close off the way of the Spirit to your heart and are yourself responsible for being lost. Watch therefore, so that you do not become so strongly taken up with reading the newspapers, novels and all kinds of worldly books, that you neglect the divine Word! However, not even everyone who hears the Word of God is converted. Paul writes of some people that they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Ti. 3:7.) And Stephen cries to the Jews: "You do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do you." (Ac. 7:51.) People must therefore always take the responsibility themselves if they are not converted by the Word of God. The reason is that they harden their hearts and harden themselves against the witness and stirring of the Spirit just as Christ says: "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Ac. 28:27.) And again, when he speaks to Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings! And you would not." (Mt. 23:37.) For such people the Gospel becomes a savor of death unto death.

On the other hand however those people in whom the opposition is broken and who come to conversion must not give themselves or their zeal or their concern in reading the Word of God the glory for it but the Spirit of God alone, who by grace, for the sake of Christ, works such a change in the heart of man just as it says in the prophet: "you are stronger than I, and have prevailed." (Je. 20:7.) Everyone who has come to a true conversion will surely confess that he would never have been converted if it should have been the excellence of his repentance and prayer and his zeal in reading the Word which should have prompted God to take him to grace. He will certainly confess that he has the grace of God alone to thank for it and that his conversion therefore was accomplished through it alone, that God has been merciful to him in spite of his stupidity, indifference and reluctance. However, since the Spirit does not work faith apart from the Word, then it is necessary that we hear it diligently and earnestly pay attention to it.

## II.

Since we now have seen in whom it is and through what means it is that true faith alone is worked, we want now to consider its *essence*. In our text we hear the ruler approach Jesus with the words: "My daughter is now almost dead; but come and lay your hand on her, and she shall live." Likewise the woman says to herself: "If I can just touch his garment, then I am healed." In both, firm, unshakeable confidence in Jesus is characteristic of their faith. It has no doubt that he surely has the will as well as the power to help. It is as it is written: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." [He. 11:1.] This true faith can certainly often be weak and express itself then as a heartfelt longing for grace but it is still always very different from false faith which so rather bluntly and half-doubting says: "Oh, I imagine God will be gracious to me," or: "I have to hope that I also will be saved." Just as the little child can hold the same costly pearl in his trembling hand as the giant with his strong hand, so does also weak faith possess the whole Jesus when it is true, although it naturally is more easily exposed to losing him than is the case with strong faith. Also, weak faith, in contrast to doubt and human opinion, is "a firm conviction," because it is based on the immovable foundation of the Word of God. True faith does not build on human appearances nor on one's own feelings and experiences but on the promises of God alone. It clings to the Lord's covenant in baptism, to God's promises in the Word, to his gracious promise in absolution, and to the pledge in the Lord's Supper. It takes its refuge in the wounds of Christ, builds on his merit and comforts itself with his battle and victory. In a word: It appropriates the Lord to itself as its own with all that he has done and suffered. With that and with that alone it comforts itself believingly, to stand before God. And precisely because all this is outside

him, but promised and assured him in the Word of God who cannot lie, therefore *the faith which clings to his word is also a firm conviction*. Take the Word away and true faith is gone. Make the promises uncertain or conditioned by anything, be it much or little which a person is to fulfill, then faith is soon gone because then this imperfect work of man will always be necessary to look to and to build on as that which is demanded for the fulfillment of the condition and it becomes thereby an uncertain opinion, to doubt and fear, instead of to firm conviction. This is not to say however that true faith is never exposed to doubt. On the contrary it constantly has to fight with doubt and temptations. But just as it never seeks help apart from Christ, so neither does it let itself be enticed or frightened away from him by any other voice. It has a struggle, but it conquers: "this is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith," (1 Jo. 5:4) because it knows the voice of the Good Shepherd and follows it. It relies upon Jesus' Word and promises also over toward all unfamiliar voices, objections and threats.

Look at the woman in our Gospel. According to the Law of God she was unclean because of her sickness and dared not approach the gathering. And if she now wanted to expose herself to the judgment of the Law, how was she, a weak woman, to get through the tight mass of people and get to present her petition to Jesus? And how did she dare nourish the hope that Jesus, the Holy One, would have anything to do with her, the unclean one, and hear her supplication? We see here that her own reason, popular opinion, the judgment of the Law all combine to hold her back and tempt her to think, There is no use in your trying to apply to him for help. You only expose yourself to ill treatment among the crowds of people, yes, even to being punished, because you who are unclean have intruded among the people. And if you should be so fortunate as to get close, then he, the King of the Jews, the Holy One in Israel, will, however, have to deny you sternly. But you see, all that is not able to shake her faith. "If I can just touch his garment," she thinks, "then I will be helped; in him is all the necessary power, and there can be no lack of desire to help." And now she prevails in spite of reason, people, and the judgment of the Law. She touches his garment and is healed. And then Jesus, as Mark relates, asks: "Who touched my clothes?" and "looked round about to see her that had done these things." (Mk. 5:30.32.) Then she became really frightened, and "fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her," but in faith she took courage, "came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth." (Mk. 5:30–33.)

Likewise we see what a shock Jairus' faith had to sustain. While he was on the way to his home with Jesus some people came, again, as Mark relates, with a message for him: "Your daughter is dead; why do you trouble the Master any further?" (Mk. 5:35.) And when he comes home he finds the house full of flute players and people who are weeping and howling over the dead girl and who only laugh at Jesus when he says, "The girl is not dead; but only sleeping." (Mk. 5:39.) However, all that is not able to hinder Jairus from following Jesus further, who had heard his prayer and had gone with him in order to help his daughter. He clings to the Word of the Lord which he had already received: "Be not afraid, only believe!" (Mk. 5:36.) His faith is strengthened mightily by the word he hears Jesus address to the woman on the way: "Daughter, be of good comfort! your faith has made you whole," and by the miraculous healing to which he is a witness. Although he hears mournful sounds upon entering his home and sees so many signs that the girl is dead, and hears the people's ridicule of Jesus, yet it does not affect his faith. Nor does he doubt the truth of the Lord's word: "The girl is not dead, but is only sleeping," but takes comfort and strength for his faith from the Word which the others laugh at and ridicule.

And this is always the essence of true faith. It is well aware of objections such as these from subtle reason and deceitful feelings. How is it possible that God can be three persons—three divine persons—yet only *one* divine being? How can the eternal, unchangeable God also be a finite man subjected to grief and death? How can a righteous God punish the pure and innocent for the guilty? How can a little water together with the Word of God be a washing of spiritual regeneration and cleanse from sin? And how can a piece of bread and a cup of wine be the body and blood of Jesus Christ? Likewise, feelings object: "I daily see so many imperfections and sins in myself. How can I then be pure and holy in the eyes of the all-knowing and holy God? How can the holy God who hates even the least sin be willing to forgive so great a sinner as I who have nothing other than sin and weakness to bring to him? How can a little band of frail, despised Christians hold their ground and be preserved against the world's power and the devil's cunning?" Faith often has a severe struggle with these and similar thoughts. But with the Word of God for its defense it cares as little about the judgment of conscience and the Law as for the ridicule of reason and the world and scorn for Jesus and his Word and deeds, his disciples and followers. Over toward all this faith clings, as I already said

before, to the Word which says: "Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies," (Ro. 8:33) and again: "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things," (1 Jo. 3:20) and again: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men," (1 Co. 1:25) and: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Co. 1:20.) Faith clings firmly to this Word that it is divine truth and that God is faithful. And faith is obedient to this Word and believes and does as it says, and it always says over toward such temptations: "Be not afraid, only believe!" (Mt. 5:36.) Therefore, dear brethren, let us not be negligent in the use of the Word of God but let us meditate on it day and night so that we can say with the psalmist: "Your testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors," "I will delight myself in your statutes: I will not for get your word"! (119:24.16.)

### III.

Finally, today's Gospel teaches us that neither the woman's nor the ruler's faith was put to shame, but that both *were helped at the opportune time.*

Hardly has the woman touched Jesus' garment before her issue of blood stopped and she was free of her torment. And since she fears that she might have been too bold in touching him and publicly confessing to him what she had done, how is her faith then strengthened, what peace her heart receives through his Word to her which the evangelist Luke renders in this way: "Daughter, be of good comfort: your faith has made you whole; go in peace!"

So also with Jairus. Upon his request Jesus goes with him. And when his faith is in danger of wavering by the news of his daughter's death, Jesus comes to its help and strengthens it, first by letting him be a witness to the woman's miraculous healing, next by his word to him: "Fear not, only believe, thus shall she be saved," and the comforting assurance: "Weep not! She is not dead, but is sleeping." But that his Word was not an empty word of man, but a word of the Almighty Godhead which accomplishes what it says, and that before him all the dead were as sleeping, because if he wanted to he could raise them up and make them alive through his almighty power, he now testifies when he takes the girl by the hand and says: "Maiden, arise!" And, behold, "her spirit returned, and she stood up immediately." All of which the evangelist Luke reports in much detail.

Thus true faith in Jesus finds help from all distress, spiritual and physical, for time and for eternity. Because Jesus has overcome all our enemies and won for us all spiritual gifts, so would it surely be just as impossible that faith should miss out on these good things and lose the fruits of his victory, as that the devil should again be able to get any power over the Son of God or that the truthful and faithful Savior should break his vow and not keep his promises: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," (Mt. 28:20) and: "Fear not, little flock! For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Lk. 12:32.)

Thus the true believer obtains in his spiritual distress the forgiveness of sins, justification and peace, because "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin," (1 Jo. 5:1) and: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ro. 5:1.) In all temporal distress faith is fully assured of God's fatherly care and protection because "he that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" (Ro. 8:32.) And of course we have the assurance that "all things work together for good to them that love God." (Ro. 8:28.) Finally, faith is also convinced that death is swallowed up in victory through Jesus' death and resurrection. Faith therefore does not fear death but awaits it with blessed hope and longs after being separated from here because now it sees in death a sweet and peaceful sleep as it says in the hymn:

I know of a sleep in Jesus' name,  
A rest from all toil and sorrow;  
Earth folds in her arms my weary frame  
And shelters it till the morrow;  
My soul is at home with God in heav'n,  
Her sorrows are past and over.



Faith expects with longing and gladness that on that great day Jesus shall awaken us from this sleep and place us "with all others who believe, in eternal life." Thus the believer can also therefore trustingly sing:

I know of a morning bright and fair  
When tidings of joy shall wake us,  
When songs from on high shall fill the air  
And God to His glory take us,  
When Jesus shall bid us rise from sleep -  
How joyous that hour of waking!

God's Son to our graves then makes His way,  
His voice hear all tribes and nations;  
The portals are rent that guard our clay,  
And moved are the sea's foundations.  
He calls out aloud, "Ye dead, come forth!"  
In glory we rise to meet Him.

Because true faith already here possesses peace through the forgiveness of sins and has such a blessed hope, it also gives desire, strength and courage to work and to fight for the Lord's cause. It loves him again, who has first loved us. Courageously it goes into battle because it knows we shall be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord. Patiently it will bear cross and suffering, ridicule and disdain for Jesus' name's sake because it has surely the blessed hope that God will grant a good outcome thereof and a blissful ending.

During all this time the true believer feels and humbly confesses his great weakness, and says trustingly: "When I am weak, then am I strong," (2 Co. 12:10) because Jesus has said: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Co. 12:9.) It has the comfort that "he which has begun the good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Ph. 1:6.) With this comfort and this hope the believer now awaits "the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Ph. 3:20,21.)

And now, dear brothers and sisters, let us examine ourselves well, whether we are in the faith, true faith, and are not deceiving ourselves with a false, dead faith! That does not help at all but only makes us more miserable and lost. Just as people with false faith remain in their wickedness, so they also remain without true comfort and peace. But let him who by the grace of God is standing in the true faith, see to it that he does not fall! Let us therefore diligently cling to the Word of God and continue in it. Because "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Lk. 11:28.)

Lord Jesus, you who have loved us and given your life into death for us, have mercy upon us! Create in us a pure heart and give us a steadfast spirit! Grant us a blessed departure from this world and a glorious resurrection at your coming!

Now opens the Father's house above,  
The names of the blest are given;  
Lord, gather us there; let none we love  
Be missed in the joys of heaven.  
Vouchsafe Thou us all a place with Thee:  
We ask through our dear Redeemer.

Amen in Jesus' name.

*Proedikener over Evangelierne, pages 672–683*

# Sermon for the Sunday after Easter

## THE BLESSED FAITH OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

*John 20:19-31*

We have just celebrated our, and the New Testament's Easter with jubilation and songs of praise and rejoiced over the glorious, triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hardly had the God of peace, through an eternal covenant of blood, raised up the Prince of Life, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, from the dead, before we see the Risen One as the true Shepherd of Souls seeking the circle of his dismayed and grieving disciples in order to bring them the fruit of the victory which he took with him from the grave from his battle with sin, death and the devil. We see the weak disciples strengthened thereby in a wonderful way, the dismayed were reassured, the grieving gladdened and the forsaken encouraged. Yes, in today's Gospel we even see the unhappy, unbelieving Thomas first thoroughly humbled thereby and later gloriously raised up, so that he exclaims in blessed adoration: "My Lord and my God!" Truly as great and glorious a miracle as the resurrection of Christ itself from the dead, is the mighty change which we see occur in the whole spiritual state of the disciples through the appearance of the risen Savior before them; a blessed change in every respect!

But, my beloved! was it now just that little band of disciples whom the Savior had in mind and wanted to bless by his redemption? No, certainly not. Just as he gave his life as payment or redemption for many and has been a ransom not for our sins only but for the sins of the whole world, and just as he was revealed through his resurrection as the righteousness before God for us all, so as the true Shepherd of the sheep did he want to gather the scattered, poor, broken sheep to his flock and gather to himself a host of disciples, a holy church, from all people and races until the end of days. He wanted to make all of us share in the victory of his glorious resurrection and in all the blessings and treasures he has acquired for us through his victory.

Let us then, my friends, hear from Jesus' own mouth what he teaches us in today's Gospel about

### THE BLESSED FAITH OF HIS RESURRECTION,

namely:

1. What This Blessed Faith Is .
2. How We Become Partakers Of This Faith.

#### I.

*"Peace be unto you!"* With this greeting with which the Church of God is greeted from that holy place as often as it gathers, the risen Savior suddenly is standing in the midst of the circle of his disciples assembled behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. In this little word "peace" he sums up the fruit of his glorious resurrection from the dead. And with this precious fruit, with this precious gift, he now comes to his dismayed disciples, drives away the fear from their restless, anxious hearts, comforts them and makes them happy and blessed, as it says: "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord!" Because *peace* was the very thing the poor disciples were in need of, just as it is peace, true peace, which we by nature all lack and need. And the lack of peace in the heart made them, as it does us, restless, afraid and unhappy.

*Sin* causes a separation between us and our God. It makes God our enemy and us enemies of God. We are all by nature sinners and are lacking the praise we should have for God. Therefore we have no peace with God, as it is written: "There is no peace unto the wicked." (Is. 48:22.) Because of sin we are all by nature "children of wrath." (Ep. 2:3.) But we fear this wrath of God. Yes, because of it we hate him as our enemy: "the carnal mind is enmity against God." (Ro. 8:7.) At the same time sin activates the law so that it accuses and judges us and we see God as a consuming fire. Sin arms the conscience with the most dismaying accusations so that it threatens us unceasingly and gnaws on us like a worm and leaves us no peace and rest.

Thus we hear David complain: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones." (Ps. 38:3.) Alas, a dreadful situation!

And as little as we ourselves can appease God or calm his righteous wrath with any sacrifice or any work, and it is the devil's delusion if we imagine such a thing, as little can we ourselves quiet and still the conscience or silence its accusations. We can, of course, lull it to sleep for a while by vain excuses, and stupefy it by throwing ourselves into the stream of pleasure and avoid the warning, chastening Word of God. But the peace we win in that way is the false peace of the world. You say: "I will do the best that I am able, then God will not take it so seriously." Blinded man! Do you not know that it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them"? (Ga. 3:10.) Do you not know that all your deeds, all your works, even the best, are like a filthy rag before God? And do you want to hide the shame of your nakedness with it? Do you think of stepping forward and getting by before your God, the Holy One who has eyes like flames of fire, with it? Is this to be your sacrifice, your atoning sacrifice, for sin? O woe to you, poor man! May the Lord have mercy upon your blind ness!

Or do you try to calm your conscience by saying, There is no God, there is no judgment. What do I have to be afraid of? However, my friend! is there therefore really no God, does no judgment really come for that reason? Why then is your heart sometimes restless and anxious? Why are you sometimes also afraid? You see, only "the fool says in his heart: there is no God." (Ps. 14:1.) Oh, you fool, buy eye-salve for yourself, so that you can see!

Suppose you do forget the accusations of conscience for a while in the enjoyment of this world's goods, its riches, its friendship and honor, its domestic joys, which dull its bite, and find a false peace? How can they comfort you when these perishable goods are deprived you or the hour comes when you are torn away from them and from everything which was dear to you here? Will they give peace to your heart also then?

And if you now take your refuge in excuses and say as Adam did: "The woman gave me of the fruit, and I did eat," (Ge. 3:12) did Adam then find peace that way? Alas, he was expelled from paradise. Or, if you say as Cain did: "Am I supposed to be my brother's keeper?" (Ge. 4:9) did Cain then obtain peace by saying it? Listen to what he himself says: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from your face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one who finds me shall slay me." (Ge. 4:13,14.) That was his peace!

No, friends! It is *the world's false peace* we find in that way. The devil wants only to draw us away from the true peace by it. Therefore the Lord warns us against the false prophets who cry: "Peace, peace!" and there is no peace. (Je. 6:14; 8:11.) If we are soothed by it for a while we can never be sure that the conscience does not wake up. It can happen without any warning when we least expect it, in the midst of the intoxication of pleasure. But when sin, which lies at the door like a lion who lies in wait for prey, awakens and the conscience's false peace is gone at once, then woe to that poor heart! It trembles like a leaf in the least wind and is prey for the most destructive thoughts and lusts, and that so much more violent the longer and the more consciously it has been deaf to the voice of conscience and built in security on the false peace. Yes, it often ends with the frightened, peaceless conscience driving the man into despair to end his excruciating existence himself, like Saul and Judas, but alas only to find an even more excruciating one in eternity. O my brethren! think, what a frightful enemy a conscience without true peace is! However, God be praised, if the world with all its goods and pleasures, as little as we ourselves, is in a position to provide the heart with true peace, peace with God and our conscience, *Jesus Christ brings it to us as a blessed faith in his resurrection!* The prophet Isaiah already calls the Messiah of whom he prophesies the Prince of Peace, when he says: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, the everlasting Father, *the Prince of Peace*" (Is. 9:6.) And when the Child was born the angels sang: "on earth peace." (Lk. 2:14.) Jesus' whole redemptive work was done in order to establish peace between God and ourselves and to provide our hearts the true peace. It is that which the prophet prophesies when he says: "But he, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our *peace* was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." (Is. 53:5.)

Through his suffering and death as well as through his perfect obedience, he, true God and true Man, paid sin's price, blotted out the handwriting that was against us and nailed our letter of guilt to the tree of the cross. Thus God "has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ." (2 Co. 5:18.) This One he then raised from the dead as solemn testimony to all the world that he accepted the sacrifice the Son had brought as payment in full for us, that his wrath was appeased, and that Jesus had burst the chains of death, and as the Victor over sin, death and hell was gone forth from the grave and revealed as the true "*Prince of Peace*." Therefore the Holy Spirit also writes to the Ephesians through the apostle Paul: "He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of two *one* new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in *one* body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." (Ep. 2:14–17.) And again: "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him." (Co. 1:19.20.) It is with the promise of this peace that he comforts the disciples troubled over his departure, when he says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (Jo. 14:27.) Just as the Father has publicly testified by raising Jesus from the dead that by his death he has completed the work of redemption, so has Christ brought peace, life and immortality to light by his resurrection which he has earned for us by his death.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus now returning from his triumphant battle and bringing the olive leaf of peace to his disciples sitting behind locked doors when he greets them with the words: "Peace be unto you!" And when he said this he showed them his hands and his side as testimony that he was Jesus of Nazareth who was given into death for them, who was, however, now no longer dead but alive, raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, their and the entire world's only Savior, the true Prince of Peace.

But *we* also need this peace. For us also, as we heard a minute ago, has Jesus earned it. However, just as we see the disciples sitting gripped by fear and terror until Jesus brings them the glad message of peace, so neither would we have any benefit or joy from the triumph and fruit of his resurrection if we got to hear nothing about it, as Paul writes: "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Ro. 10:14.) But, God be praised! Jesus also comes to us with his "peace be unto you!"

The provision he has made in order to make us partakers of this peace which is the blessed fruit of his resurrection shall comprise the next object of our meditation.

## II.

It says in our Gospel today that when the disciples had become glad through Jesus' greeting of peace, that Jesus repeats his greeting: "Peace be unto you!" and says: "*as my Father has sent me, even so send I you,*" namely, in order to bring peace to sinners. And just before his ascension he says to them: "Thus it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that *repentance and remission of sins* should be preached *in his name among all nations*" (Lk. 24:47.) And again he gives them as his testament the command: "Go into all the world, and *preach the Gospel to every creature.*" (Mk. 16:15.)

With this he establishes—in order to bring us peace—the *Ministry of the Word* and entrusts it to his disciples, his Christian church on earth. He comforts them with the fact that he himself is sending them just as the Father has sent him, and gives them the authority to loose and to bind when he says: "*Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; but whosoever sins you retrain, they are retained.*"

This Ministry of the Word is also called *the ministry of reconciliation*, (2 Co. 5:18) because through it Christ brings hearts the message of peace and reconciles them with God. Now it is surely in Baptism, the Gospel, Absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar that he proclaims and bestows on us the forgiveness of sins and with it peace, eternal life and salvation. Wherever the Gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered, there therefore, the holy ministry of the Word is in actuality whether it takes place through parents, brothers and sisters, or through other Christians in the exercise of their spiritual priesthood during the toil of their daily calling, or through teachers and called servants of the Word as they do the work of the

ministry. Because when Christ in our text gives his disciples power to loose and to bind, then it is not only to them as his apostles or possessors of the public ministry that he entrusts this power, but as the little flock which believes on him. Because just before he gives them the power to forgive and to retain sins he gives them the Holy Ghost, as it says: "He breathed on them, and said unto them: Receive the Holy Ghost!"

It is to his present disciples and therefore to all his believers who have the Holy Ghost, his Christian church on earth, that the Lord gives this power and entrusts the so-called binding and loosing keys. It is for this reason also that according to God's express command the congregation has the authority to transfer the use of the power of the keys on its behalf to servants of the Word whom it has called and installed in the congregation for the public conduct of the ministry. However, the congregation relinquishes none of the power given it by God by this transfer, but uses it daily through all its members in the exercise of their spiritual priesthood just as surely in cases of necessity the public exercise of it is also incumbent upon every Christian. All Christians therefore are to make use of this power, not by intruding into the public pastoral office which the Lord of the Church has also instituted, and thus create confusion in the church of God, but by diligently using their spiritual priesthood just as the apostle Peter writes: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pe. 2:9.) What a rich opportunity, my beloved, every Christian has, man and woman, young and old, in daily conversation with the family, with neighbors and friends, to use this spiritual priesthood of his through brotherly chastisement, teaching, admonition, and comfort! What an invitation boldly to show diligence here and not to refuse, must not the assurance give you that it is the Lord who sends you and that with his Word he himself is also working mightily through his Spirit! And on the other hand, when parents, relatives and friends, even if they can be simple and little enlightened, chastise and admonish you with the Word of God or comfort you with the forgiveness of sins, then consider that it is God's own voice which speaks to you and that you are to accept their forgiveness as God's forgiveness, because Christ says: "He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me." (Lk. 10:16.) You are not to be afraid that you are treading too near the public ministry or hindering its effectiveness when in humility you faithfully tend to your calling as a spiritual priest. On the contrary, by doing it, you will mightily promote its effectiveness and every faithful and zealous servant of the Lord will be sincerely thankful to you for the help you render him in his work in this way. Yes, how much better it would be in the congregation if every Christian would earnestly consider this, and help in this way. It is, of course, essentially the same work both have to do, the Christian as spiritual priest and the public servant of the Word, namely to promote the glory of God by proclaiming Christ for the sinner's conversion and salvation, even if there are public acts which only the servant of the Lord called by the congregation has to perform on behalf of the congregation.

However, we do know of course how necessity can make it the duty of every Christian to perform them in the capacity of his spiritual priesthood.

Since the Lord has entrusted the keys to his believing disciples, then it already follows from this that he to whom the congregation transfers the public ministry of the Word through its Call according to God's command, ought to be a believer, which Scripture also teaches in other passages. Certainly it is not faith which makes him a servant of the Word or a pastor but the Lord's Call through the congregation. But without faith and the Holy Ghost he will not be able to administer the holy office faithfully. However great his biblical learning can be and however purely he can even present the doctrine of the church, he will lack the gift of rightly dividing the Word, of applying Law and Gospel. How is he who has not himself felt his sinfulness going to be able to talk properly to a sinner's conscience, and he who himself has not tasted the comfort of the Holy Spirit, be able to comfort a broken, anxious sinner, properly? Neither will he be able to comfort himself in his work by the promised blessings. However, as earnestly as everyone who teaches others is to see to it that he himself is taught by God, and who preaches to others, that he is not himself lost, and as surely as it is the congregation's duty not to tolerate in the public ministry one who must be revealed as a hypocrite, the working of the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments, is, God be praised, not bound to the person of the administrant or to his faith! Wherever the Word of Christ is, there Christ himself is also present. Therefore Paul also says of himself and of every true servant of the Word: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God!" (2 Co. 5:20.) But where Christ is, there is

also Christ's Spirit who works with divine power, as Christ testifies: "My words are Spirit, and they are life." (Jo. 6:63.)

Thus Christ comes to us with the Good News in order to impart peace to our poor hearts through the ministry of the Word, the power of the keys, whether it is used publicly by the servant of the Lord called for that purpose or privately by another Christian. Where the Word of God is spoken you hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd. The forgiveness which is announced to you is God's forgiveness, as the Savior says: "Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained." What grace, that God has given men such a power! However, they have no right to use it as they wish but are obligated to use it according to the Lord's will because he remains always the Chief Shepherd and the Supreme Bishop. He has made his will known to us in his Word. It teaches us that it is the penitent who are to be comforted with the forgiveness of sins, the impenitent who are to be chastised and their sins retained until they repent because faith alone can appropriate the forgiveness of sins to oneself. Therefore we are to cast pearls before swine as little as we are to break the broken reed or quench the smoking flax. He who would misuse the keys in that way shall receive his judgment. But the keys do not fail. If the unrepentant sinner pretends to take the forgiveness of sins to himself but by his unbelief despises it and thereby brings judgment upon himself, the sins were, however, forgiven him by God in heaven. The keys were not faulty keys. For this reason also, if he does not repent, he will get to experience that "contempt of grace avenges itself terribly," because the Gospel of Christ is the forgiveness of sins and brings the forgiveness of sins to everyone who hears it. The power of Jesus' blood is in it. Thus we also hear Luther confess that there must lie hidden in the keys of Christ his blood, death and resurrection, by which he has opened to us heaven, and thus imparts through the keys to poor sinners what he has wrought through his blood. (LW, 40,328) Our unbelief can therefore as little deprive the Gospel of this power or make it an empty word as it is our faith which bring the forgiveness of sins into it and makes it a Gospel. On the other hand, as faith accepts the Gospel, and with it the forgiveness of sins, so the unbeliever rejects the Gospel precisely by his unbelief so that it is for him "a savor of death unto death." [2 Co. 2:16.]

In the ministry of the Word, therefore, Christ comes to us and does not merely tell us of the peace he has earned for us but gives and imparts it to us in his Means of Grace through the power of the Holy Ghost who is there given to us. However, when the forgiveness of sins and peace are proclaimed to us there, yet in our natural state we are neither willing nor able to accept and believe this comforting message. Our understanding is darkened by sin and cannot grasp spiritual things, which are foolishness to it. Our will is by nature bound, so that we, however, neither can nor want to be freed from the chains of sin and Satan by which we are held prisoners even if we feel our wretchedness to a certain degree and would like to be rid of it. Thus our poor hearts are also in part so completely hardened and dulled that they are not at all concerned about the condition of the soul, in part so arrogant that they think they do not do wrong, or that in any case they can help themselves and make themselves righteous before God. Therefore, when the message of peace is spoken many do not even want to hear it and of others it is true what is written: "They seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." (Mt. 13:13.) The devil takes the Word away from their hearts.

It is therefore necessary that the soil of the heart be prepared in order that that life-creating seed of the Word can penetrate downward and sprout and bear fruit. For "they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Lk. 5:31). For that purpose the Holy Ghost presents the holy will of God to us in *the Law* and its terrible threats because of our transgressions. Our sinful depravity, our numerous transgressions and our appalling guilt of sin are shown us in it as in a mirror. Thus the conscience is awakened from its secure sleep of sin and begins to be restless, so that it is anxious before the judgment of the Law and the wrath of God and feels its lack of peace. If we then, thus roused, try to change, to put off the old habits of sin and to keep the Law with its commands, then we soon experience that with all our improvement in the outward we are, however, not able to do it satisfactorily, yes, not even a single point, because we lack the love which is the fulfilling of the Law. We learn to understand that the Law is spiritual but we are carnal, sold under sin. Neither do we find that the Law is able to give us the life, the love, which we are lacking but that much rather it kills instead of making alive just as the apostle Paul says: "When the commandment came, sin revived, And I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, which took occasion by the commandment, deceived me and by it slew me." (Ro. 7:9.)

In this way the Holy Spirit seeks to lead us to the knowledge of sin and to fear of God's wrath through the Law so that we no longer are secure in our sins. But as great as our fear of sin and eternal damnation may be, as crushed by doubt as we may feel ourselves, and as wretchedly as we may bewail our misery in this condition, not even a spark of love for God is kindled in our hearts by the Spirit's work through the Law. Much rather is its natural enmity against God strengthened, even if in impotent defiance. All the while, fear of God's wrath over sin which the heart also relies upon and does not want to let go, grows, because the Law works wrath. Neither has the heart been made ready to feel a longing for grace in Christ, even if ever so weak, through this preparatory work of the Spirit, nor the will in any measure been sanctified or empowered to want or to do what is truly good and well-pleasing to God, much less wanting to trust God and accept his grace. No, however great changes may have been accomplished within us through the preparatory grace, as long as we are not *born again* we are still carnally minded. We neither can nor want to fear, love or trust in God. It is impossible that the old Adam can accept grace and believe in Christ. What all Christians confess therefore stands fast, "that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him, but it is the work of *the Holy Ghost*." However, it is only in the perception of our sinful wretchedness that faith which grasps Christ is awakened. Therefore it is also that in his work the Holy Ghost must use the Law which kills in order to provide our hearts with peace.

Now if we have not plugged our ears and hardened ourselves against the Spirit's chastisement and judgment but have been crushed by it and now lie there and groan in our sins, then the Holy Ghost comes with the message of peace in the Gospel in order to provide our anxious hearts with peace through faith in Jesus Christ, because faith is the only means by which we can appropriate to ourselves the grace in Christ which is given us in the Gospel. The Holy Ghost now finds the soil of the heart prepared for the life-creating seed of the Word. However, the fact that the heart accepts this and believes the Gospel is to be credited solely and entirely to the Holy Ghost's powerful working through the Means of Grace. It is thus far from true that man cooperates in any way here, much rather that he opposes the Spirit, since both reason and feeling raise all kinds of objections against the mysteries of the Gospel and the words of God's order of grace, and this in spite of the fact that at the same time the heart can wish nothing more than to be freed from the fear of death and to obtain peace. Thus reason cannot do otherwise than be offended by the mystery of the Holy Trinity, how Christ can be God and Man in *one* person, how a righteous man can atone for the guilt of the unrighteous and the holy God can accept such a propitiatory offering and forgive sin, how the Son of Man who ascended into heaven can give us his body and blood in the bread and wine, how the Holy Ghost can convert people without force, even though before conversion they can do nothing but resist him, how only some few are converted without any cooperation whatsoever on their part, when God, however, wants to save everyone but without forcing anyone, or how so many can be lost without God being at fault, when our conversion and salvation are to be credited to God alone, etc. Similarly feelings will object: How is it possible that the holy God can forgive so great a sinner as I am, who have rejected his call of grace for so long and with whom no great change has happened? It is impossible for me to understand. How can I believe that God is gracious to me? I feel only the sinful lusts in me and God's wrath upon me. If I am going to be able to believe that I really am favored by God, then I must, however, first see a greater change having occurred in me, perceive in myself another power to overcome sin and to serve God, feel a genuine joy in God, his Word and guidance, instead of the fear, mistrust and discontent which I now feel. Oh, my friends, who can depict all the opposition, count up all the hindrances people themselves set up for not accepting the Good News? And these hindrances must be removed, this opposition must be broken if people are to come to faith, find peace and be saved. And this is the Holy Spirit's work which he accomplishes through the Gospel. He teaches us to know our complete inability better, both to grasp the mysteries of grace and to do anything through which we should be able to move God to bestow grace upon us, and how such efforts come from the pride of the heart. Likewise he reveals to us the infinite depth of God's love to poor sinners, lets us see that grace is much greater than all the world's guilt of sin and that God does not want the death of any sinner but that he should be converted and live, does not push away from himself any sinner who comes to him but invites all them who labor and are heavy laden to come to him and to find rest for their souls. He shows us Christ's genuine love and precious sacrifice for our sins, and how the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. Thus he makes God's mercy exceedingly great and grace really sweet. He teaches us to build on the Word and promises of God as the one firm ground of rock in spite of the heart's feelings, the Law's judgment and the devil's threats. He teaches us that faith is a firm conviction about things which are not seen, that "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," as Jesus says to the unbelieving Thomas in today's Gospel. Further, that in spite of everything which we see, feel and perceive we are to

continue in the Word because he who has spoken it cannot lie to us or deceive us but is faithful and keeps his vows and promises, and that doubt about the Word of God is not a sign of true humility but an expression of the heart's pride which places one's own thoughts above the Word of God, and that, therefore, like unbelief it is a great sin since it makes God a liar in his own Word.

And you see, my friends, this Gospel has such power through the Holy Ghost who works in and with it that the poor sinner's heart is opened, as happened with Lydia! Yes as certainly as he does not repeatedly resist and harden himself against the working of the Holy Ghost's convincing and persuading power, who, as the prophet says (Je. 20:7) becomes too strong for him, he thus at the same time creates a new man within him so that like Thomas he falls into his Savior's arms with a: "My Lord and my God!" or with that troubled father exclaims: "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24.) In the same moment that the heart's opposition is broken the hindrances are overcome and the person is born again. Granted that this faith is very weak, only like a spark, like a sigh of longing for Christ's forgiveness, for the comfort of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood, it does, however, stretch out its arms toward Jesus Christ and grasp him with all his merits and gifts. And the merciful Savior does not snuff out the smoking flax nor does he break the broken reed. How gracious does he not show himself toward the unbelieving Thomas, how amiably does he not deal with him! Thomas had not been present at Jesus' first appearance to the other disciples. Although he heard the others' testimony: "We have seen the Lord," he still answered: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." At the Lord's appearance eight days later Thomas was also present. The Lord does not disown him because of his unbelief but after he has again greeted them with his greeting of peace, he says to Thomas: "Reach hither your finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither your hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Now Thomas believed, and exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!" But the Lord does earnestly chastise him because of his unbelief as he had done with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and says: "Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

There is many a doubting Thomas also now, many a troubled sinner who does not dare to believe that God is gracious to him and that his sins are forgiven him. The regenerated person also has the old Adam to contend with as long as he is here on earth. Doubt and temptation hem him in. Now it is doubt about his state of grace, now about his preservation in faith through life's many temptations and struggles. But, God be praised! The Spirit comes to the help of our infirmity. He comforts the grieving through the Gospel and the Sacrament. He strengthens the weak and raises the fallen so that he can again appropriate grace to himself and exclaim: "My Lord and my God!" Then the Spirit of God bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, that for the sake of Christ God does not count your sin against you but the righteousness of Christ to you and regards you in Christ as though you had never sinned. Then your heart obtains *peace* again, peace with God. Because "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Ro. 5:1.)

Tell me, you who have been reconciled with God and have found true peace, isn't this the way it goes? Through repentance, anxiety and affliction led the way to the coveted longing for grace, to the assurance of faith and peace of heart, but everything was the Spirit's wonderful working through the Means of Grace.

Now where the heart has found this peace there is joy in the Holy Ghost, there the soul delights in the Word of the Lord, there is a mind devoted to, content in God, a mind which is at peace with the Lord's leading, thankful for his blessings, patient in affliction, zealous to confess the Lord as the only Savior and to bring other poor sinners the same peace, comfort and joy, and willing to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name.

However, my friends, all this is only the beginning! The old Adam continues to cling to us to our dying day! He is always seeking to disturb our peace, hinder our course and cause us to fall. The Prince of Peace, who brought our hearts peace, can alone still the heart's unrest and preserve its peace through his Spirit, until he has completed our salvation and leads us into the home of peace, the heavenly Jerusalem. Thus we see that the apostles were preserved. Till now very weak in their knowledge, they now show themselves full of self-confidence, no longer quickly afraid so that they flee or shut themselves in for fear of the Jews. Now after the gift of the Holy Ghost has become theirs we see them comforted, glad and confident. The world has not changed, the old Adam either. They were exposed to the enmity of both. They were hated and persecuted, were miserable and poor, yes, like outcasts in the world and the doormat of everyone. But they confessed the



Lord courageously, suffered patiently, and departed gladly after having suffered persecution for Jesus' name's sake. Yes, they confidently met martyr's deaths and prayed for their enemies while they awaited the fulfillment of their hope, the crown of glory, eternal rest in the home of peace.

The Prince of Peace also now sends the same Spirit to his disciples so that he can strengthen and preserve them unto eternal life through the Word and Sacraments. O what grace, that we have the ministry of the Word among us! We cannot counter-balance this treasure with anything else. Let us see to it that we neither neglect nor despise it. It is the Prince of Peace whom we then despise; eternal peace and salvation we then forfeit. Then Jesus' death and resurrection do not help at all, nor the Ministry of the Word, and the Spirit's powerful working through it is in vain for us. The Word of Life becomes for us a savor of death unto death; Christ's body and blood unto judgment. We stumble against the Cornerstone and are crushed. Instead of greeting us with his: "Peace be unto you!" the Prince of Peace is then revealed as our Judge and the terrifying, decisive judgment says: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Mt. 25:41.) Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, for the sake of our peace, our eternal salvation, let us use the Word of God diligently in the home, in the church and in the school, in daily conversation and in the assembly of the congregation! Let us hold it in high regard and in honor, and gladly both hear and learn it's drawing toward evening and the day is almost over, therefore chasten us but do not reject us. Comfort us when our soul is crushed, so that we do not perish entirely! Uphold us and give us your peace now and eternally! Amen.

*Proedikener over Evangeliene*, pages 290–305

# Norway Grove Lutheran Church

3rd Sunday after Trinity

June 10, 1894

*Luke 15:1-10*

## **JESUS RECEIVES SINNERS**

Dear fellow redeemed! Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As it was in the days of Jesus' flesh so do sinners still approach Jesus to hear him while self-righteous Pharisees frown at them and find only themselves entitled to approach Jesus and to enter the kingdom of heaven because of their piety and virtue. And because the poor sinner feels his sin and unworthiness, the Pharisees' grumbling causes him anxiety and perhaps tempts him to withdraw from Jesus even though he feels that he needs him.

Our Gospel today contains a beautiful comfort for all such repentant, anxious sinners, because the very thing for which the Pharisees reproach Jesus here, is consoling divine truth:

## **JESUS RECEIVES SINNERS.**

When the publicans and sinners came near to Jesus in order to hear him and the Pharisees murmured, Jesus set forth these parables to them: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, does not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently til she find it?"

What is Jesus teaching here? Obviously this that just as that man seeks the lost sheep and that woman the lost piece of silver, so does Jesus seek the lost, namely the sinner.

Now we can of course appreciate in a way the fact that we are sinners, and lost sinners at that, expelled from Paradise, and ruined. But we cannot and do not want to turn back. We do not want to and cannot seek Jesus the Good Shepherd who has dedicated his life in order to lead us stray sheep back to him. That's why Jesus has to seek us.

And as he says about that man that he goes out after the lost sheep, so did Jesus come down here to earth to save that which was lost. He pities our need. "The son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk. 19:10.) "This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Ti. 1:15). That's why he lived his life and suffered an accursed death on the cross for us.

And is he not coming and seeking you in his Word today? Has he not gone after you so many times with its persuasive correction and comfort and sought you diligently? Not merely during his walk on earth did Jesus preach the Word. At his departure he provided for it that it should be preached until the end of days. Because through the Word he pricks the conscience and reveals our sin and lost condition to us. The Word is like the candle with which the woman looks in the cracks for the lost piece of silver. The Word of God penetrates into the heart's most secret places and reveals its evil inclinations and lack of truth, love and obedience, all in order to save the lost.

The Word is preached in season and out of season. Now it uses sufferings, now blessings, now the examples of other people, in order to get people's attention. He sought "publicans and sinners." No one is too wretched, too great a sinner for him not to want to seek him. Think of the thief on the cross, of a Mary Magdalene, of a Saul!

And, you see, he does not pretend to seek them just for the sake of appearance. No, he seeks, in order to find sinners. Or was it not he who found those people I mentioned, found the raging Saul so that he became a Paul, found Mary so that she sought her all in him, found the thief so that in the hour of death he asked and received, and he got to be with Christ in Paradise?

It's true, many people will not let themselves be found. They love the world, mammon, friends, sin, themselves, their fun, their honor, more than their soul and their God. They harden themselves against the testimony of the Spirit. He must say today about so many people as he did before about the Jews: "How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not!" (Mt. 23:37.)

And yet the Word does not return void.

When we were lost, the Good Shepherd  
To us came in the wilderness,  
His own life 'gainst the foe he laid,  
The cruel wolf, the devil is;  
'Mong thorns and thistles He did tread  
And called us long, 'til He us found,  
Home with Him us He carried.

The testimony of God's love melts so many a hard heart, removes the natural stubbornness of the heart and regenerates it so that it approaches Jesus in the distress of its sin to hear the Word which is like balm for the wounded heart.

Take note of this, it is not we who first find him and grasp him. The shepherd finds the sheep, the woman the piece of silver, and the Good Shepherd finds us, and it isn't because of our willingness, our merit or good attitude. No, it is his love as our Savior, his faithfulness as our Shepherd which finally finds us.

When you became a child of God in baptism, was it not he who did it? When you acknowledged your sin, was it not from him that you learned it? When your heart hungered for grace or rejoiced in the forgiveness of your sins, was it not his work in you?

He leads us to repentance and faith, so that we confess and pray:

O, woe is me, that I had strayed!  
From Thee toward hell's wide, open gate!  
Grant but that I regret it!  
Lead me into Thy pastures now,  
From sin and wrath, oh, free me now,  
Sincerely do I ask it!

And now when Jesus has found the sinner, what then?

"Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

Just as Jesus' soul was "sorrowful unto death" (Mt. 26:38) over our wretched condition, so does he rejoice over our salvation, over the fact that a sinner returns to him again from the snare of the devil. He rejoices over the fact that what he has done and suffered in order to come to bless us has not been in vain. The prodigal son was received with joy, so is the sinner by Jesus. With *joy* he *carries* the sheep which has been found, carries it with much patience toward our weaknesses. He nurtures, strengthens and comforts us through the Holy Spirit, just as a mother can joyfully carry the weak child who daily causes her anguish and toil.

Jesus rejoices over every sinner who is converted, over the fact that there still are some who know his voice, belong to his flock and are his. He of course looks with sorrow upon those who step over into another place. How must he not love us when our weal and woe grip his heart like that!

Hasten, then, to run to Him! Jesus is the sinner's Friend.

It also means something when Jesus points to the joyful participation of friends and neighbors in both parables, and as though summarizing the parables, says: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." You've learned, of course, to ask God that he shall order his angels to surround you. If you mean anything by that then you also mean that the angels joyfully preserve God's children from evil, yes, and joyfully accept every one who comes from the darkness into the light. Shouldn't the angels rejoice over everyone who places himself under the banner of light? Every believing soul rejoices over every one who confesses the name of Christ.

Yes, the more often the true Christ must grieve and lament the falling away and the hypocrisy, the greater will be his joy when he sees a sinner turn from his evil way to his God. He will also rejoice that the Lord's hosts are increased, that brothers and sisters make their appearance at his side in battle against the forces of evil. And he thanks God for everyone who is snatched as a firebrand out of the fire. Because God is certainly the one to thank for that. Jesus says that a sinner repents, although, of course, it's Jesus who finds him, because it's with the sinner that this happens. The change occurs in the sinner. It's the sinner who is converted and turns to God.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, can there be anything more joyful for us than what we've heard today? Is it not a comfort and an encouragement for every poor sinner who is anxious and who fears for his unworthiness when he considers his many and great sins of the past and his daily errors and weaknesses? Isn't it rich comfort and encouragement to stay close to Jesus in order to *hear him*, when he sees how kind Jesus is, what effort he makes in order to seek and to find the sinner, and how he rejoices over his salvation?

Therefore:

Ye sinners, come, O, come hither,  
O, come now in the time of grace!  
You are all in great danger:  
See, Jesus now does ope' His heart  
For all them, who with pain confess  
That their sins have done them hurt.

When we look at ourselves then we can well think that we ought to flee from him, the Holy One, but that, friends, would be our ruin. No, we are to stay close to him to hear him, not stand far off as though he doesn't concern us, but close, in order to hear what he has to say to us, and that, not just once, not just on Sunday, not just when we are in distress, but constantly.

And if Jesus thus has found you, my friend, then you should grasp him as you are apprehended by him, to purify yourself just as you have already been made clean through the word which he has spoken: "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." (Mt. 9:2.) It has to do with not consenting to any sin, fine or coarse. "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Pr. 1:10). It's easy to fall away, stray, be *lost*. Therefore, let us stay close to our Lord and Savior, dedicate ourselves to him with body and soul, which belong to him.

You see, he receives sinners. Come! Jesus can and will save you, yes, take you in his arms. Come, with penitent, weeping hearts. Fall at his feet in faith. He will be merciful to you!

Lord Jesus! You receive sinners. Receive also me! Amen.

*Mindeblade til Jubelfesten paa Spring Prairie, 1851–1901; p. 13–16*

H.A. Preus delivered this sermon shortly before his death. As were several of his last sermons it is not as fully developed as he was accustomed to doing.