

THE LORD'S TABLE

by Scambler

Scambler's devotional and theological meditation on the Lord's Supper in 55 chapters, exploring divine ordinances, Christ's life and sacrifice, remembrance, communion, the good shepherd, and various aspects of fellowship and spiritual nourishment through Holy Communion.

55 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. LS-00.2-Introduction
2. LS-00.3-A Thanksgiving for the Loaf
3. LS-01-Divine Ordinances
4. LS-02-We Would See Jesus
5. LS-03-The Last Passover
6. LS-04-They Went Out
7. LS-05-Eucharista
8. LS-06-The Fount Of Life
9. LS-07-The Cross Proclaimed
10. LS-08-Till He Come
11. LS-09-How Often?
12. LS-10-This is My Body Which is for You
13. LS-11-The Ransom
14. LS-12-A Communion
15. LS-13-When They Saw The Lord
16. LS-14-Remembrance
17. LS-15-What Mean Ye By This Service?
18. LS-16-The Good Shepherd
19. LS-17-Fellowship in Suffering
20. LS-18-Secret Bread
21. LS-19-The Attraction Of The Cross
22. LS-20-The Manifold Grace of God
23. LS-21-The Pioneer
24. LS-22-Abiding In Christ
25. LS-23-The Lord's Guests
26. LS-24-The Coming Triumph
27. LS-25-Sacred to the Memory of
28. LS-26-Eternal Life
29. LS-27-The Cup Of Salvation
30. LS-28-Strength For The Journey
31. LS-29-The Divine Guest
32. LS-30-The Abiding Presence
33. LS-31-The Mystery Of Godliness
34. LS-32-A Memento
35. LS-33-The Sense Of Sin
36. LS-34-The Need Of Reconciliation
37. LS-35-To Whom He Manifests His Love!
38. LS-36-The Guest-Chamber
39. LS-37-He Lives!

40. LS-38-John--Three--Sixteen
41. LS-39-The Betrayal Night
42. LS-40-Gethsemane
43. LS-41-Pictures Of Jesus
44. LS-42-The Meaning of Gethsemane
45. LS-43-Gethsemane's Prayer
46. LS-44-The Privilege of Communion
47. LS-45-In Christ
48. LS-46-A Hard Saying
49. LS-47-The Grace of our Lord Jesus
50. LS-48-Immanuel
51. LS-49-The Approach to The Cross
52. LS-50-Reconciliation
53. LS-51-Hints To Presidents
54. LS-52-Prayer
55. LS-53-A Final Poem

LS-00.2-Introduction

Introduction

Only the Risen Christ can explain the joy of the Lord's Supper. Without Him it would have been a funeral meal, kept for a while by love in its despair, and then dropped for ever. From the very first till now it has been a feast of life and thanksgiving. It is a contemporary and immortal witness to the risen One. And the risen One is alive for evermore. And in His eternal life He is our here and now. ... Eat Him and drink Him, that you may live because of Him. Such is the festal meal of the Church, spoken straight from her Lord to the heart of every member of His body.

--Dr. H. C. G. Moule.

LS-00.3-A Thanksgiving for the Loaf

A Thanksgiving for the Loaf Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks to Thee for the revelation of Thy love in Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for this symbol, telling of the body which was given for us, which we now receive. Give to the hungry of heart the bread of life, which if he eat thereof he shall never die. For His sake, Amen.

A Thanksgiving for the Cup

O Thou who hearest what our words cannot tell, accept our gratitude today for the redeeming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee as we take this cup, which speaks to us of life poured out for us. Help us to partake of it in loving remembrance, and give us understanding hearts. In the name of our Saviour and Lord, Amen.

LS-01-Divine Ordinances

Divine Ordinances 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

One can hardly but be impressed with the fact that our Lord Jesus, accustomed as He was to all the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish faith, gave little attention to rites Himself. In the Christian institution, established by our Lord, there are but two--baptism and the Lord's Supper. The first is a rite of initiation. It is performed by each of us but once, as we come into His fellowship of service. "By one Spirit were ye all baptised into one body." It is a commemorative act, for we are baptised into His death. It is also the symbol of a rich and full spiritual experience, for the old nature dies, that the body of sin may be done away, and we are united with Him in the likeness of His death and in the likeness of His resurrection, as we are buried with Him in baptism and rise to walk in newness of life. The second rite--the Lord's Supper--is one of continuous observance. We often attend to it. This also is commemorative. "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come." It points us back to the foundation facts of our Christian life, declaring that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose from the dead the third day. But it, too, is the occasion of an ever-enriching spiritual experience. It is a communion. "The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ?" It is sustenance. Here the Master breaks for us the bread of life. Here we partake of the living bread which came down out of heaven, the which if a man eat, he shall live forever. Is anything more required? Are other rites necessary? No, these proclaim the whole message of salvation through Christ, and they cover the whole range of Christian experience. "There is no room for other rites, because these two, the rite of Initiation, which is baptism, and the rite of commemoration, which is the Lord's Supper, say everything about Christianity as a revelation, and about Christianity as a living experience" (Maclaren).

LS-02-We Would See Jesus

We Would See Jesus

John 12:21. The words were those of certain Greeks who came with the throng of Jews to worship at the passover feast. The knowledge of Jesus and His helpful ministry had extended beyond the bounds of Palestine, and had awakened interest and enquiry in hearts other than those of His own people. The request thrilled our Lord with sudden joy. He saw in the coming of these men from afar the firstfruits of that innumerable company from all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues who would be redeemed unto God through the sacrifice He was about to make. "The hour is come," He said, "that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." The vision of the joy that was set before Him was clouded for a moment by the thought of sacrifice. Human-like, He shrank from the ordeal it involved. "Now is My soul troubled," He said, "what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour." But only for a moment. At once there came the triumphant assertion in His will to accomplish the long purpose of God. "For this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name." And in the assurance of His Father He went unflinchingly on to betrayal and death.

We, too, would see Jesus. He who died is alive for ever more. We believe that He died and rose again. We may now know Him in the intimate experience of communion.

"Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me

A living bright reality;

More present to faith's vision keen

Than any outward object seen;

More dear, more intimately nigh

Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie."

Thus, while we partake of these symbols before us in remembrance, our communion together would lack much if it were not also communion with Him, our living and glorified Redeemer. While the emblems turn our thoughts to the work of redemption accomplished by Christ in the clays of His flesh, they also signify to us our reception of those life-giving influences which come to us through the presence of, the Christ who lives in men. While we appreciate the wonder of redemption in the finished work of Christ, may we know the living presence of Him who abides with His people till the end of the age.

"We would see Jesus-the great Rock-foundation,

Whereon our feet were set with sovereign grace;

Not life, nor death, with all their agitation,
Can thence remove us, if we see His face."

LS-03-The Last Passover

The Last Passover

He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.--Luke 22:15-16.

Here was the human Christ, His heart filled with loving affection for His friends, earnestly desiring a last communion with His loved ones, even as we do with ours.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end. He anticipated much from that experience at the passover table. Many things He wanted to say, tender lessons He wished to teach-loving counsels to prepare them for the difficult days to come.

We cannot measure the value to these disciples of the years they had spent with Him. They had been in training in the school of the Master. There was still much He must say to them, and for the telling no occasion would compare with the sacred hour they spent with Him before He suffered.

They had disappointed Him often. Even as they drew near to solemn meeting which was filled with such significance for Him, they were unseeing and hard of heart. They had that within them which rendered them oblivious to the cares which oppressed His tender spirit, and permitted them to contend for places of honor in the kingdom of heaven. His kingdom would have no place for such rivalries, but they did not understand.

Oh, there were so many things He needed to say to them, and they were so slow of heart to learn! Yet He could not leave them until He had impressed upon their hearts once more the lessons of humility and service, of love and loyalty, of hope and cheer. So He gathered them together. It was the passover feast of the Jews, looking back to a great deliverance in the long ago, but He made it a sacred communion that looked forward to a greater redemption, of which the passover itself was but a type and symbol. He was about to give His life for the world, and the bread and the fruit of the vine became the emblems of His sacrifice. It was to be His last passover with them. When next they met in communion with Him, the age-long passover would have found its fulfilment in the kingdom of God. "Take this," He said, "and divide among yourselves. This is My body. This is the new testament of My blood." They were subdued and awed by His solemn words, and though they might afterwards sometimes fail Him, they would not forget. That solemn rite, then for the first time observed, became the trysting place where Jesus met His disciples in spiritual communion throughout the years, and where we to this day meet with Him and come within the spell of His gracious power.

LS-04-They Went Out

They Went Out And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the Mount of Olives--Matthew 6:30. From that tender and sacred fellowship they would go out, surely, to devoted service. Whatever failure had characterised them before, from henceforth they would never fail Him! So we should expect. But oh! the inconstancy of the human heart, the weakness of human devotion 1 One went out to betray Him; another to deny Him; all to forsake Him. And He went out to die.

One went out to betray Him. It was a settled purpose. He had steeled His heart against the gracious influence of the Lord's presence, and for some reason--perhaps we do not understand--he determined to betray his Lord. At the Supper Table the Master made a bid for his soul, but failed, and Judas went out on the deadly errand of betrayal.

One went out to deny Him. He was the most impulsively affectionate of them all. Though all men should deny Him, he never would! So he asserted, and so would we have said for him. But the tender associations of that sacred hour were not sufficient to save Peter from a dreadful fall.

They all went out to forsake Him. They were loyal-hearted, and felt strong enough at the table. They all assured Him of their constancy. As they listened to His words, and received from Him the sacred symbols, they felt they could do anything, endure anything, for Him. But when the test came, they all forsook Him, and fled.

He went out to die. For this He came. To this end He moved through days of popularity and opposition. Only thus could God's purpose in Him be accomplished. He saved others; he would not save Himself.

We are met together, and presently we shall go out, away from converse with our Lord, and communion with one another. We too shall meet with temptation, to forsake Him, perhaps even to betray Him.

Oh my soul, remember! Remember the love wherewith He loved thee. Remember too thine own frailty. And may His all-embracing love sustain thee when thou goest out from this fellowship to meet with an indifferent and hostile world.

LS-05-Eucharista

Eucharista He took the cup, and gave thanks.--Matthew 26:27. The cup! That which represented His blood, to be shed the next day! Holding in His hand the symbol of His own pain, He gave thanks, as though He rejoiced in the prospect of death. Yet we know He shrank from that terrible experience. "Now is My soul troubled," He had said, only two or three days before, when He thought of the sacrifice He must make, "now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour." The contumely, the shame, the hate of men He loved, the physical distress and agony which He could anticipate only too well--His soul revolted against it all, and He would have avoided it if He could. That very night, when He went from the table where, cup in hand, He had given thanks, He bowed Himself in agony, and earnestly prayed that the cup of suffering which the other had symbolised might be taken away. Again and again He prayed, saying the same words: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

What was the meaning of it all? Man-like, He shrank from the physical distress that was involved. But this alone is not sufficient to account for the weight of woe that oppressed Him. Rather, His pure soul recoiled from bearing the burden of guilt that must become His as the sin-bearer of the world. But Saviour-like, He rejoiced in His God-appointed mission to redeem the sons of men. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." For this He gave thanks, even though it involved such tremendous cost to Him. "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising shame," knowing that one day He would see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

O Lamb of God, I silent stand

Before this mystery;

Thou gavest thanks with cup in hand

For Thine own agony!

O love unmeasured, love unknown!

How couldst Thou thankful be,

To leave Thy glory-circled throne

To shed Thy blood for me?

How shall I dare this cup to drain,

Unless it mean for me

A holy passion to be slain

To save a world with Thee!

O blood of Christ, transform in me
This selfish heart of mine,
Till I shall wish my blood might be
A lost world's saving wine!
--A. C. Townsend.

LS-06-The Fount Of Life

The Fount Of Life He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst.--John 6:35.

It has ever been so. In all the ages since, He has broken the bread of life for the hungry souls of men, and they have been satisfied. Men have sought Him with that thirst of soul that nothing on earth can quench, and He has given refreshing draughts of the water of life.

Eight hundred years ago there lived in Burgundy a man of God who exerted a tremendous influence among the people of his day. He was a Romanist, the friend of popes and the companion of kings. In those days when the Church, despite her many failings, yet ventured out in faith to subdue the world to Jesus Christ, it was decided to establish a new monastery in a wild unfruitful valley enclosed by high mountains. The region was known as the Valley of Wormwood, because it was the retreat of a band of robbers. But a house of God was established there, and it was called the Valley of Light, or as it was in the Latin and French, Clairvaux. Bernard was to be its first abbot, and by hard work on his part, and on that of the monks who enthusiastically followed him, the rough land was subdued, and made fruitful and wholesome. But it was not by such a work as this that the name of St. Bernard of Clairvaux is best known. He was a deeply spiritual man. Some of his writings have come down to us, among others a hymn of fifty verses, expressing the soul's deep longing for Christ, and the soul's satisfaction in Him. It may justly be called one of the greatest hymns in the world. It has been the inspiration of many hymns that we sing to this day. Bernard's hymn was written in Latin. One of our hymns derived from it is that which begins:

Jesus! the very thought is sweet,
In that dear name all heart joys meet;
No thought brings sweeter comfort nigh
Than Jesus Son of God most high.

Another, and better known hymn, which is also translated from Bernard's haunting song, is that beginning:

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see
And in Thy presence rest.

Still another, and perhaps even better loved, is the translation of a beautiful old hymn often used in communion services. The knights and soldiers in the Second Crusade used to sing Bernard's hymn as they kept their guard around the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It well expresses our own

thought as we turn our memories back to the cross and the tomb, and look up to Him who ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of Life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.
We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountain Head,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill,

LS-07-The Cross Proclaimed

The Cross Proclaimed For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.--1 Corinthians 11:26. The word the apostle here used is one that means a public oral proclamation. It would seem that it was the practice, when the Lord's Supper was observed, to make a public statement of its relation to the death of Christ. The apostle had told the Corinthian Christians what he had received in revelation from the Lord Jesus, that on the betrayal night the Saviour had taken the bread and said: This is My body, which is for you; and the cup, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood. Therefore it was that in Christian assemblies, which met in the supper of remembrance, statements were made which set forth the redemptive power of the death of Christ. Some interpreters indeed, understand the words of the apostle as an injunction: As often as ye eat*this bread, and drink the cup, proclaim ye the Lord's death-a duty to be observed regularly until the Lord comes again. But does not this passage also mean that when we silently partake of the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord, by that very deed, though no words are uttered, we proclaim the Lord's death? So, at any rate, a host of believers have loved to think. They have felt that the Supper itself, taken in love and in deep reverence, is a testimony to the world of the great facts of the gospel. Here is a sermon without words, wonderfully appealing and effective, accomplishing a great mission, even though the spoken word of a preacher may fail. Every Lord's day a great chorus of praise ascends from myriad voices the world over, every week uncounted hosts of preachers proclaim the word of life in Christ. But what proclamation could equal in power and effectiveness the quiet observance of the communion feast, when with bowed heads and grateful and contrite hearts, His people the world over receive the tokens that speak of love expressed and life received through death?

Only let us eat and drink in a worthy manner. It was because the Corinthian Christians had observed this feast in some unworthy way, that this exhortation of the apostle had become necessary. Just as a preacher of the gospel, by unworthy conduct or unseemly behaviour, may destroy the value of his message and do despite unto his Lord, so may we all dishonour Him by our thoughtless approach to the Table, and our careless indifference to the great facts of redemption which it represents. Let us therefore prove ourselves, and so let us eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

Here we show forth His love,
Which spake in every breath,
Prompted each action of His life,
And triumphed in His death.

LS-08-Till He Come

Till He Come For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.--1 Corinthians 11:26.

Till He come! This Supper then is not among the things that shall abide for ever. We shall not need it when He comes. Now, we need a memorial. We are so constituted that it helps us to have some tangible token of remembrance. But we shall not need it when we see Him face to face. We cherish it now, just as we value the tokens of affection we have received from absent friends. But these tokens lose much of their significance when the friends come back to us, and we can see their faces and hear their voices and enjoy their fellowship. We then experience the reality of which the tokens were but the sign.

Now, we need a medium of communication. Perhaps it is a sign of our poor humanity that we do.

If our love were but more simple

We should take Him at His word,

And our lives would be all sunshine

In the sweetness of our Lord.

If our spiritual apprehension were clearer, maybe we should not need the many things that now help us in communion. Constituted as we are, a well-appointed church building, an act such as the ordinance of baptism, the subdued strains of organ music, help us in our aspiration after Divine things. So does the Lord's Supper. It keeps us in touch with the Lord, whom we think of as absent, because He is invisible, though He is ever with us. But only till He come--we shall not need this means of intercourse then. We shall know Him then in ways that are not possible to us while we abide in the flesh.

Now, we need this means of grace. It helps us as we strive to attain to that standard of life and character which He has set before us as our ideal. We aspire, but we often fail. We are so much in contact with the material world, which has a strange power of lowering our spiritual vitality, that we are ever disappointed in ourselves. But we believe that when He is manifested, and the environment that now encumbers us is removed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. "And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." But till He come, this Table of the Lord, which He has appointed for spiritual intercourse, will be one of the trysting places along the way of life.

Thus the communion of the Lord's Supper is a well-spring of hope. It is a constant reminder that we have turned from the world to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. It is a stimulus, renewed every week, to the great hope that we cherish, of the return of the Lord Jesus.

LS-09-How Often?

How Often? As often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come.--1 Corinthians 11:26.

How often should it be? Our Lord did not say. Churches differ in their faith and practice. Some keep the feast only at extended intervals--quarterly, or even annually. More frequently the Supper is observed as a monthly institution. It is our custom to meet for this sacred purpose every first day of the week, and we do not hesitate, in special circumstances, such as in cases of sickness, to spread the Lord's Table on other days besides.

Alexander Campbell pointed out that while all churches acknowledged the breaking of bread to be a Divine institution, they differed much in their views of the import of the institution. In one idea, however, they all agreed, that it was an extraordinary and not an ordinary act of Christian worship, and consequently did not belong to the ordinary worship of the Christian Church. That resulted in an incorrect attitude towards the Supper. As an extraordinary event in the worship of the Church, it could only be attended to occasionally, and then with a degree of preparation and a solemnity of observance that destroyed the joyous character of the feast, as it was experienced by the early disciples. The frequency of the observance of the Supper, therefore, will have an important relation to the meaning that it has for us.

Those who practise the less frequent observance plead that the weekly communion service tends to diminish its beauty and effectiveness, that it brings with it a familiarity which induces thoughtlessness and irreverence, and thus destroys the significance of this Divine ordinance. It is claimed that the more infrequent meeting gives opportunity for special preparation of heart and mind that could hardly belong to the weekly gathering. It seems clear, however, that at least one New Testament Church met every first day of the week to break bread, and there is no indication, apart from that, what the practice of the early Church was. We are persuaded, as a result of our experience, that the coming together with the return of every Lord's day, to partake of the Supper, has spiritual values that can be realised in no other way. It is surely not too much to ask of us, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, that every week we follow the apostle's suggestion: "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Certainly those who make the weekly observance the habit of their lives, believing it to be in accordance with the Divine will, find therein a satisfaction of soul, and a renewal of spiritual power, which nothing else can give. Let us come therefore, though it is but a week since last we met thus, with grateful thanks, sincerely seeking the benediction that awaits His people here.

LS-10-This is My Body Which is for You

This is My Body Which is for You 1 Corinthians 11:24.

What does this mean? What relation has the body of Jesus to our spiritual needs? We are accustomed to the phraseology which describes the washing away of sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. That is a figure which makes a ready appeal--sometimes, I fear, a too ready appeal, when it descends to a crude literalism in thought and expression. But what is the relation of the body of Christ, pierced by the nails and wounded by the spear, to our salvation?

We should remember that both forms of statement have to do with the fundamental fact which lies behind them. To those accustomed to the law and its numerous sacrifices, the idea of the remission of sins by the shedding of blood was very familiar. Even then, if the worshipper approached the altar in spirit and in truth, he realised that this was but a figurative way of saying that life was given for life: "It is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (Leviticus 17:11). It was natural that men accustomed to that concept should express themselves frequently in terms made familiar by their earlier forms of worship. We are redeemed, they tell us again and again, by the precious blood of Christ. The same fact of redemption was in our Lord's mind when He said "This is My body which is for you." It is the giving of Himself, whether expressed in the words "My body broken," or "My blood shed," that is the ground of our acceptance with God.

You will recall that our Lord Jesus coupled the two ideas of His body and His blood on another occasion. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him" (John 6:53-56). The words puzzled some of those who heard it. Perhaps they puzzle us. How can this Man give us His flesh to eat? Our Lord's meaning is that we must receive in an inward and spiritual act of the heart, the blessings that come to us in our Redeemer's sacrifice, and the spiritual influences that flow to us from His living presence. Believing, He said, was to "eat"; believing was to "drink."

Sometimes, we fear, there is a tendency to ascribe a magical idea to the power of blood, as such, in the work of redemption. We err, if we think thus. He laid down His life for us--that is the fact we should accept in faith. "This is My blood of the new covenant"--this is one way of expressing it. "This is My body, which is for you"--that is another way of teaching the same truth, that our acceptance with God is made possible by the atoning work of Christ. In a physical sense we feel benefit when we eat and drink--we are strengthened, nourished and refreshed. In like manner, if we come in faith today, conscious of the meaning of these symbols which we handle, we shall receive peace and joy and strength of soul.

LS-11-The Ransom

The Ransom The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.--Mark 10:45. The word ransom will hardly suggest to us the same ideas as it did to those who heard our Lord, for we are not familiar with the institution to which it refers. To us, perhaps, it calls up the picture of a wealthy banker in America, captured by gangsters, and held for ransom, or a hapless traveller in Manchuria in the hands of bandits who demand huge sums for his release. To the disciples, however, the payment of ransoms was a familiar custom, and the Mosaic law contained definite regulations concerning them. If a man had parted from his inheritance, and wished to secure it again, the money he paid for it was called a ransom. Men a man in bondage to a stranger was bought out of slavery, the price paid to purchase his freedom was his ransom. A very peculiar institution in the law of Moses concerned "atonement money" which every man over twenty had to pay at the time of the census, to avert Divine judgment--the money was a ransom for his life. There were many provisions, strange to us, by which the life of one creature might be redeemed by the sacrifice of another. "A ransom, when given for persons, rescued them from slavery or from death; it cancelled the claims which deprived them of freedom, or the crime by which they had forfeited life." Our Lord was speaking in metaphor, and we need not press the figure in all its aspects. The word has become a stumbling block when this has been done. To whom was the ransom paid? Some of the old fathers said, To the devil. Others, who saw how revolting that thought was, said, It was paid to God Himself. But that is equally impossible. It was God who provided the ransom, to purchase us to Himself. Some have said, It was paid by Divine mercy to Divine justice, as though God were divided against Himself.

No! no! Let us centre our thought on this, that our Lord is a Redeemer, and His life the ransom price. Let us meditate upon the subject in this single relation, and its meaning will become clear. He is our deliverer. He saves us from the guilt of sin. He delivers us from those moral and spiritual evils which would otherwise destroy us. He restores us to the life of God from which sin had severed us, and in that life we find freedom and security. Mystery no doubt it is, but the fact is realised in the experience of uncounted hosts of men and women who have been redeemed from sin in Christ, and blessed with every spiritual blessing. Praise be to Him who gave His life a ransom for many, and redeemed us to God.

LS-12-A Communion

A Communion The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?--1 Corinthians 10:16-17. The experience of Christian people throughout the ages bears witness to the fact that our Lord Jesus may be known in the emblems of the broken body and shed blood with a fulness that may not be obtained in any other way. The "mystic sweet communion" has been realised, even when it may not have been clearly understood. The attempts to explain this mystery have given rise to some strange doctrines. The Romanist, for instance, believes that when the priest utters the words of consecration, the elements of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, so that what is partaken of by the worshipper is actually the body and blood of Christ, under the species of bread and wine. This is the doctrine of the "real presence," so-called. Some of the reformers, in endeavouring to correct this obvious error, taught that while the nature of the elements indeed remains unchanged, in some mysterious way the human nature of Christ is conjoined with them. The worshipper partakes of bread and wine indeed, but the body and blood of Christ are present in the elements of the Lord's Supper. We may discard this, too, as another philosophical explanation which misses the real meaning and spiritual significance of the Lord's Table. In what sense, then, is the cup of blessing a communion of the blood of Christ--the bread a communion of the body of Christ? It seems evident that the apostle believed that in some way communion with the body and blood of Christ was established through partaking of the bread and of the cup. That communion, we verily believe, is a spiritual one. There comes to the worshipper, in so partaking, an inward consciousness of participating in the body and blood of reconciliation, the consciousness that through the Divine Redeemer we become sharers in the life of God. Here at the Lord's Table it seems specially true that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and that He is in us the fountain of life and blessing.

Sit at the feast, dear Lord,

Break Thou the bread;

Fill Thou the cup that brings

Life to the dead:

That we may find in Thee

Pardon and peace;

And from all bondage win

A full release.

LS-13-When They Saw The Lord

When They Saw The Lord The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord.--John 20:20.

Through closed doors He came. They had not closed the doors against Him. They were afraid of the Jews, perhaps the more afraid because of the news coming in that the grave was empty and Christ Jesus had risen. Mary Magdelene had brought tidings that He was alive. Peter and John had seen the empty grave. Two men from Emmaus had come with thrilling news of a meeting with the Lord. We can imagine the feelings of the disciples. They had been cast into the depths of despair by the death of their Master. Now a new great hope was struggling into being, that after all, in spite of death, all the wonderful things they had looked for might still be true. But fear was awakened too--fear of the malignant enemies who had done their Master to death, fear perhaps of another fiery trial to test their loyalty which had failed so miserably before. Then it was that, though the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood In the midst of that group of men who were alternating between fear and joy, and spoke the word of peace-the word above all others they needed that night. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

We may not be unfamiliar with the experience of having Christ come through closed doors to bless us. Our necessary contact with the world of things is often sufficient to close the doors against the spiritual influences we so much need. It may that, like the disciples of old, we have had dreams die from our hearts and visions fade from our minds. Perhaps we have become baffled and confused because of the strange outworking of our life's problems, often so different from all we had hoped for and planned. Disappointment and grief may leave the heart hard and apparently incapable of faith. Indeed, sometimes sin takes possession of these hearts of ours, and the doors are closed against Him. But through all such closed doors He may come. We know He can. We have gathered together today awaiting His coming in blessing. We meet expectantly, even though some of us may be aware of barriers that would seem to obstruct His coming. As we partake of these emblems that speak of His love, we shall pray, "Through every closed door come, Thou risen Christ, and stand in our midst, saying Peace be unto you." So shall we be glad, when we see the Lord.

LS-14-Remembrance

Remembrance In remembrance of Me.--1 Corinthians 11:24-25. The men to whom He spoke these words would remember Him in ways we never can. They walked and talked with Him; they loved and worshipped Him in the days of His flesh. They saw Him taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain. "Remembrance oft may start a tear," and we may be sure it did for them, as they recalled His tender solicitude for them, and the harsh termination of their happy association during His ministry. But if we may not experience the emotions that were theirs In this way, we can at least remember Him in the way He indicated. The words He utters seem chosen with care to express the fact that it is His death He wishes His disciples to remember. He took bread, and broke it, and said, Take eat, this is My body, which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me. Then the cup: This cup is the new, testament in My blood; this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. The double act, with the repeated "In remembrance," indicate how He wished to centre their thoughts on the fact of His death, for He was giving Himself for the life of the world. But not death alone. We remember not a dead Christ, but "Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." The disciples would never have kept festival over the Master's death if it had not been followed by the triumph of the resurrection. When the Master said, Do this in remembrance, He did not mean that they should do it because they remembered, but as a means of remembrance--so that they would not forget. Human as they were, they were liable to forget, and that would be their loss as well as His, nay, theirs more than His. They felt that He was their strong tower and defence in those days when He companied with them before the cross. They were to realise after He was gone that in His eternal life He was their life and joy. There was gladness in remembrance, then, when the emblems that spoke of death told also of His victory over the grave, and of His spiritual presence with His people. No doubt our Divine Lord was human enough to yearn to be remembered by those who loved Him. But it was not alone for His own sake, we may be sure. It is more important that we do this in remembrance for our own sakes. This feast becomes a means of grace to us. When we forget, we become indifferent. When we remember our hearts are stimulated anew by the power of Him who once died, but now lives and reigns for us.

LS-15-What Mean Ye By This Service?

What Mean Ye By This Service?

What mean ye by this service?--Exodus 12:26. When the passover was instituted by God for His people Israel, its permanency in the religious life of the nation was indicated. "Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever." But its meaning would not be clear to succeeding generations without explanation. When the very natural question came from the children, "What mean ye by this service?" their parents were to say: "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover," and they were to tell the story of the great redemption wrought by the Lord in Egypt.

What mean ye by this service? our children inevitably ask, as they gather with us on the Lord's day to partake of the Lord's Supper. We may make the meaning clear by reference to the names which the people of God have used and still use for this feast.

Sometimes the Lord's Supper is called the eucharist. We do not often use that name ourselves, but many Christian people do. It is a name which means thanksgiving, and those who use the word really call this feast "The Thanksgiving." We may well think of it in that way. We follow the example of our Lord, and give thanks for the bread and wine, and when we partake of them it is an act which expresses our gratitude to the Lord Jesus, who died on the cross for us.

Some Christian people call the Supper a sacrament. Now, that, too, is an interesting word. It means, first of all, something sacred, such as an oath by which a soldier bound himself to serve his country, or a vow that a person might take to follow Jesus. The word also came to mean something that was mysterious and Divine. So when the Lord's Supper is called a sacrament we are led to think of the very sacred union which exists between Christ and His people, and of the sacred pledge we gave Him when we became His disciples. But those two names are not Bible names, and we do not often use them in our meetings. The apostle Paul speaks of the communion of the body and blood of Christ, when he is explaining the meaning of the bread and the wine. This word means a sharing together. When we partake of the bread and the wine in memory of our Saviour, we share with one another in the great blessings that come to us through Jesus Christ. There is a deeper and richer meaning too, for we share with Jesus Himself a loving intimacy and fellowship such as people enjoy with their best friends.

Perhaps the best name for this feast is that which is given by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:20 --"The Lord's Supper." Jesus met with His disciples at the passover Supper, and there He took the bread and the wine, and gave them to His disciples, saying, Do this in remembrance of Me. Because the Lord Himself instituted this Supper, because it is observed in memory of His death, and because it is a place where He still meets with His disciples in spirit, it is the Lord's Supper.

LS-16-The Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.--John 10:11.

Many beautiful things are said in the Scriptures concerning the relation of the Lord to His disciples, under the figure of the shepherd and the sheep. You will recall some of them readily. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." "He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arm and carry them in His bosom, and will gently lead those that have their young." In our Lord's words also, very tender and beautiful expressions are found, under this metaphor, setting forth His love and care for His disciples, and their confidence and trust in Him. "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice." "I am the Good Shepherd; and I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me." But it is not this which is the most striking thing in the words of the Master when He speaks of the Good Shepherd. He emphasises strongly, and we are impressed by the fact that the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. That in itself might not be unusual in any good shepherd. Jesus indicates that it would not. The hireling fleeth at the sight of danger, but any good shepherd would be prepared to protect his sheep with his life. That has often been true-true of the actual shepherds who have time and again given their lives on behalf of their flocks; true also of many spiritual shepherds--prophets and apostles, missionaries and ministers of the cross, who in times of persecution have died rather than betray their trust.

There is another element in the statement of the Lord Jesus, however, which is more significant still. It is not only that He, as the Good Shepherd, is prepared to die for His sheep, it is the fact that He intends to do so. He knows that their peril is such that He must give His life to save them. The nature of the evil which threatens them is such that His life must be surrendered. The shepherd who dies in defending his flock does not intend to die he dies because the wolf or the bear is too strong for him. But our Lord gives His life voluntarily. "I lay down My life. ... No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay It down, and I have power to take it again." His dying for men was in some way different from the sacrifices of those who have died in the service of the Church and of God. The unique character of His death is indicated in the words so often used as we celebrate this Supper: "This Is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, unto the remission of sins."

LS-17-Fellowship in Suffering

Fellowship in Suffering "That I may know Him ... and the fellowship of His sufferings."

Heart-searching words are these. Can we share with the apostle so noble an aspiration? Who is sufficient for these things? Week by week we gather together, and seek by beautiful symbolism to enter into fellowship with our Lord.

We take the bread, and it speaks to us of a broken body. We receive the cup, and it brings the message of blood that was shed. Do we desire to enter into fellowship with Him there? "This is My body given for you." Have I been prepared to endure for Him? "This is My blood of the new covenant." Have I been willing to pour out the energy of life itself for His sake? The Master definitely calls us to this sacred fellowship. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." In the work of redemption which He carries on in the world, His saving grace becomes effective when men are prepared to suffer with Him. It may be in some act of self-denial for His sake—a surrender of personal inclinations or tastes that means genuine sacrifice. It may be in some deed of service to which duty seems to call us, but which is not in the line of easy achievement for us—some task against which our nature rebels, but which provides us with a sure means of helping Him. It may be in some work of blessing to needy men and women—the kind with whom our Master loved to associate so much, and to whom some kindness rendered, Jesus regards as given to Himself. There is no higher exhibition of goodness than this, the voluntary acceptance by good men and women, of privation and suffering to redeem the lost. Paul did it, Carey did it. The hosts of saints who through the ages have made the gospel effective have done it.

We must recognise, of course, that no participation in suffering for Christ's sake and for the sake of others, can ever compare with His. Probably we can never apprehend, except in the dimmest kind of way, the travail of His soul. "We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains He had to bear." He is the Redeemer; we are always the redeemed, and can never share those sacred prerogatives which are His alone. But as redeemed men and women we are saved to serve, and blessed that we may bless, and all such service is costly. Our weekly communion at the Lord's Table, in memory of Him, will bless us indeed, if it brings us to compare our lives with His, in our willingness to endure and even to suffer, in a noble cause.

"O Lord and Master of us all!

Whate'er our name or sign

We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,

We test our lives by Thine."

LS-18-Secret Bread

Secret Bread And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord ... and they shall abide.--Micah 5:4.

Thus spoke the prophet, in one of those Messianic predictions which told of the coming of Him at whose Table we gather today. No soul can go without its necessary nourishment. Jesus Himself said, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We are all nourished and upborne, not alone by the physical bread which is our daily portion, but by some secret bread which sustains the inner life, and impels us towards our goal. In a work of fiction entitled "Secret Bread," by Tennyson Jesse, one of the characters is Parson Boase, who says to a young man: "There is only one thing certain--that we all have something, some secret bread of our own soul, by which we live, that nourishes and sustains us. It may be a different thing for each man alive." For some, it is a beautiful earthly love, for some a noble sacrificial service. Others there are who find their springs of action in a consuming ambition, or an unhallowed desire--they spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. Parson Boase said, "That feeds my soul from which my soul came, and daily the vision draws nearer to me and its reflection here strengthens even my earthly eyes. This world is dear and sweet, but only because I know that it is not all, or even the most important part. Each day is the sweeter to me because each day I can say, 'Come quickly, O Lord Jesus.' "

There is a beautiful story told of Francis of Assisi, "the jongleur of Christ"--Christ's gleeman, concerning his visit to the bishop of Ostia. He sat next to his host at the sumptuous table. Knights and nobles were there, whose attire contrasted strangely with the rough garb of the monk. As they feasted, Francis took food from his wallet of alms and began to eat. It was poor food that he had begged, and this he ate while his hosts and the other guests partook of the rich provision of the bishop's table. But to him his meagre food was the Bread of God, which had been given him by the peasants among whom he loved to work. Then with that gaiety and courtesy which so characterised him, he gave a morsel to each of the knightly guests, saying: "I hold this as toward God the highest nobility and royal dignity, in honour of Him, who, being Lord of all, was willing for our sakes to become the servant of all."

We, too, have our secret bread. We find it this morning in communion with our risen Lord and Redeemer. In that spiritual experience which He Himself described as eating the Living Bread which came down from heaven we are nourished and refreshed. Lord, evermore give us this bread!

Break Thou the Bread of Life,

Dear Lord, to me;

As Thou didst break the loaves

Beside the sea.

LS-19-The Attraction Of The Cross

The Attraction Of The Cross And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.--John 12:32.

"This He said," explains the sacred writer, "signifying what death He should die." "The 'lifting up' meant the crucifixion. He well knew all that was involved in such a death." "Into such a phrase he crowds the smiting hammers, and the cruel nails, and the thorn-crown, and the purple robe, and the pain, and the shame, and the darkness, and the breaking heart, and the wounds hardly big enough to let death in or to let life out, the slow six hours of dying--all these are just to be 'lifted up.' My soul! shall we not in this spirit deny our small self-denials and crucify our crucifixions?" (Carey E. Morgan). As surely as any unusual object, elevated above the heads of a crowd becomes the centre of interest to those who are within sight, so the lifted cross has become the centre of attraction for the whole wide world. But not as an object of curiosity. Lifted up as He was upon the cross, He attracted the curious gaze of the idle multitude. But lifted up in a spiritual sense, by all that the cross expressed of self-denying love and vicarious sacrifice, He has drawn to Himself the best elements of devotion and service that the human heart can offer. As surely as iron filings are attracted by the magnet, so the Saviour, by His cross, draws men unto Himself. How the heart is subdued, the conscience roused, the will humbled by the uplifted cross! A missionary in India told the story of a simple village woman who had learned to read, and was asked to tell a Bible story. "There was that simple village woman sitting on the floor, just able to read a few words, and there was I, the college graduate from the West, examining her, and as we sat there side by side on the floor, the village woman began to tell the story of the crucifixion. As she told it, it had a pathos and power and beauty I had never seen in it before, and when the simple woman came to where they drove the nails through Christ's hands she began to weep, and then she wept aloud, and threw her arms around my neck and said, 'I cannot go any further--it will break my heart.'" They sat together on the floor, these two women, representatives of the East and West, and wept in each other's arms, tears of tender sympathy and joyous love, at the thought of the cross of Christ.

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

LS-20-The Manifold Grace of God

The Manifold Grace of God As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.--1 Peter 4:10. The word used by the apostle, of which "manifold" is a translation, means variegated, many-hued. Up in the hills the other day, we saw a homestead tastefully laid out with deciduous trees. There were the birch, the oak, the poplar, the Japanese maple exquisitely beautiful in the light of the sun glinting on their varied autumn tints. Many-hued was that garden, fit symbol of the manifold grace of God that held the attention of the apostle. He saw the grace of God in its various aspects: The gentle compassion, the infinite goodness, the loving care, the Divine forgiveness, the unwearied patience--all those tender revealings of the heavenly Father which move our hearts and bless our lives. It is as if He were gazing on the rainbow, that sign in the sky which has always been regarded as a message of light and hope. As the white light of the sun is separated by the prism into the colours of the spectrum, so the grace of God, as it is revealed in Christ, is seen to comprise all the elements of blessing that our hearts need. Here is the solicitude of a parent, the consideration of a friend, the fellow-suffering that consoles, and the exertion of a power that reaches out to save. The exhortation is a particular one, having reference to gifts of special nature, which we have received, and which, as good stewards, we should minister to others. But the thought of the apostle could not be narrowed into any limited groove. The grace of God is various, it touches our lives in all directions, and the natural response of our lives is the overflowing of those Christian graces which bless other lives as well. We are the constant recipients of His goodness. The Lord's mercies are new every morning. Because we are saved by His grace, we must become saviours; because we are blessed in His love, we must become a blessing to others.

We may stand among the beauties of nature and be unconscious of their charm. We may have streaming upon us the wonders of His grace, and fail to realise its blessedness. We pause, therefore, to reflect awhile, to open our minds in understanding, and our hearts in appreciation of His love. But not for ourselves alone is this grace given; not for ourselves alone do we seek it, but in order that, having received the gift, we may minister the same to others, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

LS-21-The Pioneer

The Pioneer Ye ... killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead.--Acts 3:15.

Strange anomaly! The Author of life had come, and men had put Him to death! He who is before all things, and by whom all things consist, placed Himself in the hands of frail and sinful men, and they, not knowing what they did, killed Him! In some strange way Divine purpose was intermingled with human sin. He became a partaker in flesh and blood, in order that by means of death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and thus deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Thus He was not only the Prince, or as the marginal rendering has it, the Author of life in its beginnings; He was, as another translation suggests, the Pioneer of life through death. He did not lead the way to the portals of death. Men had always been subject to death. But He pioneered the way through death to endless life.

How much is included in that fact for us! We may catch a glimpse of the wonder of it all by reading the passages in the New Testament where this great word occurs. Moffatt's translation uses word Pioneer in each instance. Let us read them thus.

Acts 5:30-31 : "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Pioneer and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins."

Hebrews 12:2 : "Looking unto Jesus the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith."

Hebrews 2:10 : "It became Him ... to make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

It means, of course, that Jesus has trodden the path which all must tread, who would be victors over sin, and enter into life. He has blazed the trail. He has opened the way. I remember some word of Dan Crawford, the African missionary, telling of the man who led His company in the early morning through the dew-laden grasses of the jungle. He was the pioneer--they called him the dew-drier, because he opened the path, shook off the dew, and made it possible for others to follow in comfort. Our Lord Jesus has opened the way of faith and of victory over sin--the way that leads through death to deathless life, by treading that path Himself. Is not this the secret of His power over men? It is not the whole of the secret, of course. But it is an aspect of the truth that will help us and bless us this morning as, we remember Him.

LS-22-Abiding In Christ

Abiding In Christ

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for apart from Me ye can do nothing.--John 15:4-5. This is a simple and beautiful statement of the relation between the Lord Jesus and His disciples. In the spiritual life we are entirely dependent upon Him. We cannot live unless we maintain our union with Him. We dwell in Him, and He dwells in us, and the possibilities of the Christian life are not determined by our own natural resources, but by the power of Christ Himself. The wonder of this fact may become clearer to us if we consider for a moment our relation to the world about us, and the manner in which we draw upon its resources. Every moment of our lives we are dependent upon the system of forces of which the universe is composed. We appropriate those forces by means of the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the sunlight we absorb. Thus we store up supplies of the energy of nature for subsequent use. In every deed we perform, in every word we speak, yea, in every thought we think, we are expending some of this force which we have received from the universal energy of nature.

Man has been able to tap the resources of nature in another sense. The growth of our civilisation has been due, as we say, to our control of the forces which surround us. There is strength of wind and tide which man can utilise. There is latent energy in oil and in coal which he transforms into living power. He subdues the mighty and often destructive forces of electricity, and uses them in his service. He makes the vibrations of the mysterious ether the servant of his will. Thus his own power is mightily extended, because he links himself with the powers that lie, ready to help him, in the universe of which he is a part.

None the less do we depend upon our Lord for all our attainment in the Christian life. Without Him we can do nothing. We are strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. In our victory over sin it is His overcoming power which is manifested. We fail if we seek to develop and maintain the spiritual life apart from Him. The fruits of the Spirit can be perfected only in Him, for the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Let us then abide in Him, that He may abide in us.

LS-23-The Lord's Guests

The Lord's Guests The Master saith ... where is the guest-chamber?--Luke 22:11.

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat.--Matthew 26:26. The disciples were the Lord's guests at the passover. The indications are that this love feast had been in His mind for a long while. He had arranged with some unnamed friend to provide the room for His guests when the time came. With that friend He had even planned the time and the place for meeting the disciples whom He would send ahead of the company to prepare the passover. "Go to such a place," He said to His disciples, "and there you will meet a man with a pitcher of water. Follow him, and in his house you will find the room ready for us. Prepare the passover there." It was as He said, and when, later, He met with His band, He told them how this meeting at the passover feast had been on His heart, and filled His desires.

It has always been the custom in the East to attach special significance to eating in company, and especially to the acceptance of hospitality at the meal table. That was esteemed as a sacred bond of friendship, which no man could lightly or honourably break. Dastardly as the act of betrayal on the part of Judas was, from any point of view, the deed was stained a darker hue because one who had eaten of the Master's bread had lifted up his heel against Him. Jesus showed that He felt this aggravation of the betrayer's crime. "I say unto you," He exclaimed sorrowfully as they sat at meat, "One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me."

We are His guests today. This Table is the Table of the Lord. He invites us here. Common articles are these which are provided for us, yet we recognise that this Table is "spread with more than angel's food." It is a spiritual feast to which we are invited, and as we take the bread and drink of the cup, we partake in a richer deeper sense of the provision of the Master's house. These emblems signify to us the Bread of Life and heavenly refreshment, which only He could supply. As we receive them at His hand, He welcomes us to a loving fellowship, and we pledge ourselves in loyal devotion. And not alone to the Lord do we bind ourselves today. We partake in company, sharing in a fellowship that is holy, because it is formed in Him. He receives us all. You are His guest, and so am I, and as we sit at the Table with Him, may His gracious spirit bind us to Him and to one another in ties of loyalty and service.

LS-24-The Coming Triumph

The Coming Triumph I shall not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.--Luke 22:18.

What boundless faith, what supernatural insight, is revealed in these words of promise and hope! For remember, it was the betrayal night. His enemies were in the ascendancy. One of His own group, a traitor, was about to deliver Him into the hands of His foes. The cross which had shadowed Him throughout His ministry was to become a reality on the morrow. His few disciples would be scattered; the things He sought to accomplish undone, and the Divine objective He had set before Him hopelessly dissipated. So it seemed. In that dark hour, when by all human estimates, His soul should be overborne by apprehension and fear, He looks forward with confidence to the triumph of His cause. He institutes a rite which was destined to be observed by His followers to the end of time. The life which wicked men, with diabolical cunning, seek to take from Him, He declares He gives for the sake of others. The blood for sight of which His enemies were prepared to commit any crime, He offers freely as an atonement for sin. The hour of deepest depression become the hour of Divinely prophetic assurance. Instead of needing comfort Himself, He speaks words of strength and cheer to those who, failing to understand His spiritual mission, would soon be scattered as sheep without a shepherd. He is about to die, but He declares that His body and blood are spiritual food and drink for mankind. The years have rolled by, reaching into millenniums, and we now know that of that group gathered together at the passover Table, the Man of Sorrows alone understood the meaning of the strange drama that was being enacted. The Via Dolorosa, which He traversed that night, which led to the cross, was the way to the goal of His achievement. The day would come when He would see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. In this communion of the Lord's Supper, we have one of the most striking evidences of the reality of our faith and the truth of our gospel. It has been well said: "If all the records of Christianity had perished, and only the rite of the Holy Communion remained, it would still remain certain that One had appeared on earth who claimed to be the Divine Saviour of the world, and whose death was believed to have been followed by a glorious resurrection and ascension."

LS-25-Sacred to the Memory of

Sacred to the Memory of

an Undying Love In remembrance of Me.--1 Corinthians 11:25.

Most beautiful of all the tombs of the world is the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. The story of its building runs back three hundred years. Mumtaz Mahall, the wife of the emperor, died. Her husband was overpowered with grief. And as an expression of his undying love resolved to spend the wealth of his dominions in building an appropriate resting place for her body. It was built in a garden, planted with flowers and flowering shrubs, the emblems of life, and with the solemn cypress, the emblem of death and eternity. Materials and architects and builders were gathered from many parts, that the best of everything might be used, and the tomb, world-famed for its delicate beauty, was erected in the course of twenty years. In the central chamber, the queen, for whom it was intended, and her lord and lover now lie. "No words can express its chastened beauty seen in the soft gloom of the subdued light coming from the distant and half-closed openings." Strange acoustic properties are there too. "Sounds are caught up by the echoes of the roof and repeated in endless harmonies, which seem to those listening above as if a celestial choir were chanting angelic hymns. It haunts the air above and around, it distils in showers upon the polished marble, it rises, it falls." A traveller tells of standing in the recesses alone, and repeating the words, "Sacred to the memory of an undying love." "A wonderful echo caught up the words, and bore them towards the dome, where, like a baffled bird, it fell to the pavement, again to rise, only to flutter down again, but ever repeating the words, Sacred to the memory of an undying love." The memorial of love we have before us today cannot compare with the Taj Mahal in magnificence or expended wealth. Well indeed that it is so, else for most of us, like the Taj, it would be a monument that we might hear about but few would ever see. It is a memorial of simple elements, which may be brought before the eyes of all men everywhere. But as we receive them, must we not say in our hearts: these emblems are sacred to the memory of an undying love? And is not this a message that we would love to send out to encircle the world, and echo through the corridors of eternity? It is the memorial of One who holds the undying love of our hearts, for He loved us, and gave Himself up for us.

LS-26-Eternal Life

Eternal Life Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.--John 6:54. Our Saviour was not thinking of the communion of the Lord's Supper when He used these remarkable words. The passage has no reference to literal eating and drinking. To eat His flesh and drink His blood mean to receive by faith the blessings that come to men through Christ, both in His sacrifice on the cross and through the power of His living presence. The whole purpose of the Master was to help those who heard Him, to think less of the bread that perishes and more of the food that endures unto life everlasting.

Christ is speaking in a figure therefore. When we receive Him in this way we have eternal life--a present possession which involves a future blessing, "I will raise him up at the last day." The connotation of the word eternal is such that we naturally understand that everlasting duration of life is meant, yet it can hardly be doubted that Jesus was not thinking so much of duration as of a quality of life which we may possess now. It is a life which begins at the new birth, and is sustained and developed by contact with the Lord of life. In touch with Him, we become partakers of the Divine nature, we "have eternal life."

We may seem to speak in paradox when we say that this blessing of eternal life which we may now possess is subject to certain influences that may weaken and even destroy it. Yet so it is. This life eternal needs sustenance. When the flame burns low it needs renewal, and every contact we make with our Lord contributes to this work of renewal. This is why it is appropriate for us to think of these words of the Master when we come to eat and drink at His Table, though the text has no reference to this feast. For it is here that we are helped to enjoy a closer intimacy with Him than that which is our normal experience. Here we may lay aside for the hour our worldly interests, the distracting thoughts that are related to business life, and all the varied obligations of the social round, and for a little while give ourselves to communion with Him, aided by these symbols of the broken body and shed blood--the emblems, too, of that spiritual food which nourishes the soul, and gives eternal life.

LS-27-The Cup Of Salvation

The Cup Of Salvation

What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.--Psalms 116:12-13.

It may help us in our meditation this morning if we think of our Lord and His disciples singing these words before they left the supper room to go to the Mount of Olives. The group of Psalms (113-118) in which these words occur, forms the Hallel, or Hymn of Praise, so called because of the frequent use in them of the word Hallelujah--Praise ye Jehovah. This hymn was regularly sung at the passover, and was probably the hymn which the Master and the disciples sang at the close of the Supper.

It may be that "the cup of salvation" to which the Psalmist refers, is the paschal cup. He is numbering his blessings. He realises that the Lord has been wondrously kind. "I love the Lord," he says, "because He heareth my voice and my supplications, because He hath inclined His ear unto me. God is merciful. I was brought low, and He saved me. What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." If he means that he will faithfully observe the passover, with all its sacred associations of gratitude and joy, the thought is, I will take this paschal cup--the cup of memory, of salvation, and thus come into the sphere of blessing as I attend to the Lord's appointment.

But, of course, the ancient singer in Israel may have used the word as a figure of speech, and by "the cup of salvation" may have meant all that he received at the hand of God. Many things come to us in the experience of life. Sometimes the cup overflows with sweetness and joy (Psalms 23:5). Sometimes it is full of bitterness (Mark 10:38). But whatever comes, he will receive it in gratitude as a cup of salvation from the good hand of God.

"Jesus took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them." It was the paschal cup, but he invested it with new meaning. Henceforth, to the men who received it, it would be a memorial of a greater redemption than it had been before. It now became the symbol of the blood of the new covenant. The apostle Paul called it "the cup of blessing." It is a "cup of salvation" too, because it is a medium for the impartation of saving grace, when by means of it we come in to communion with our risen Lord and Redeemer. Let us receive the bread, and take the cup, with gratitude and joy, remembering all His benefits, especially the spiritual blessings of pardon and power which God bestows upon us through our Saviour.

LS-28-Strength For The Journey

Strength For The Journey Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.--1 Kings 19:7.

They are the words of the angel of the Lord to a very despondent and harassed man. Elijah, after his victory over the prophets of Baal, fled into the wilderness to escape the vengeance of Jezebel. There, under a juniper bush, he wished and prayed to die. In response to his prayer, Divine provision was made for his need, and obedient to the word of the angel, he received food and went in the strength of that food forty days.

There come to us all, at times, those crises in life when we are weighted down with trials too heavy to be borne. The spirit of heaviness broods over us, the sorrows of life crush us, the problems that confront us confuse us, or temptations threaten to overwhelm us. Then comes the gracious invitation: Come ye apart and rest awhile. Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee. And when the Master invites, He provides, and in the strength of the Divine sustenance we go on our way. But there are occasions when our strength is near to weakness, and our spiritual resources are depleted, and we do not know it. Just as our physical frame may be near the point of collapse through overstrain, while we are all unconscious of it, so our spiritual nature may be sapped of its vitality while we are unaware of our loss. It happens sometimes that the material blessings which bring us comfort and satisfaction, and make the way of life very pleasant, may endanger our spiritual health. Ease may be enervating, pleasure may tend to selfishness, and the very conditions of life that should be the means of increasing blessing may become the subtle influences that weaken the spiritual life. Frequently the invitation comes: Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee, and we dare not neglect this gracious call. So we have come, and there is food here to strengthen us for all the journey of the week. He who spreads the Table and extends the invitation is Himself the feast. It is Christ whom we need to receive into our hearts. He is the living Christ. All power in heaven and in earth is His. From that source of Divine energy we may constantly draw supplies for our need. In our business, in our homes, in social intercourse, in times of solitude, and in the path of duty and service we need Him. Rise and eat! "Feed on Him in thy heart with thanksgiving," and strength for the way will be given.

LS-29-The Divine Guest

The Divine Guest

Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.--Revelation 3:20.

We have all heard this text used as a gospel message. Christ Is represented as standing at the door of the sinner's heart, knocking for admission, and telling of the joys of communion that may be the blessing of the life that will admit Him. So used, the message is happily true-He does seek to enter into the life of every unsaved man, and to bring with Him the blessings of His presence and sustaining grace. But these words of our Lord were not addressed, in the first instance, to the alien from Christ. They were spoken to men in the Church. But it was a Church which had excluded her Lord. She was rich in this world's goods, had become satisfied and complacent in the possession of material things. With regard to the things of the spirit, she had become indifferent and lukewarm, and was ready to be rejected by the Master whom she professed to serve. Serious words of warning He spoke to her, and words of grave counsel. Then came the tender yearning words of love, expressive of our Divine Lord's reluctance to rebuke and chasten, and of longing to enter in and bless.

"O Jesus, Thou art standing

Outside the fast-closed door,

In lowly patience waiting

To pass the threshold o'er.

"Oh love that passeth knowledge

So patiently to wait!

Oh sin that hath no equal

So fast to bar the gate!" Could it be that any of us, immersed in the things of the world, would unconsciously harden our hearts to such an extent that the Lord of love could find no entrance? We have gathered together today, to examine ourselves before Him. We want our lives to be a fairway for the triumph of His spirit; we want to have our hearts prepared for His continued occupation.

"If any man hear My voice and open the door!" That is our responsibility.

"I will come in to him!" That is His promise.

"And will sup with him, and he with Me!" That is the communion we enjoy when we admit the Divine Guest.

LS-30-The Abiding Presence

The Abiding Presence Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age.--Matthew 28:20.

Each century, since the promise was made bears its own testimony to the fulfilment of the promise. Every Christian man who reveals his inner experiences witnesses to the reality of the Saviour's presence, There are some circumstances in life which help us to feel our need in a special way, and in some of life's experiences the cheering presence of the Saviour is especially revealed.

There is one trysting place where our Lord has always met with His disciples and where they have become conscious of His living presence. It is at the communion of the Lord's Supper. He has said: Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. It would almost seem from the history of Christian experience that when the gathering together is for the purpose of remembering Him in the breaking of bread, the realisation of His presence has been especially marked. In those terrible days when the Boxer rebellion was at its height in China, when many missionaries and native Christians were murdered, when the very existence of missionary work in China seemed to be imperilled and every hour brought news of fresh atrocities and dire forebodings, one of the missionaries, Dr. Ament, of Tengchou, wrote home to his friends: "We celebrated the Lord's Supper this evening, and our hearts and minds were soothed by coming in contact with the pure soul of Christ. The aroma of His life seemed to fill the room, and for a moment the sounds and turmoil of this world were lost in the growing glory of Christ." So it has always been.

Dr. Fairbairn has said: "In upper rooms, in catacombs, where the dust of the dead rested, and the spirits of the living met to speak to each other words of holiest cheer; in desert places and moorlands, where hunted fugitives assembled to listen to a voice which, though a man's, seemed God's; in cathedrals, where form and space spoke majestically to the eye, and in lofty music to the ear; in rude huts, in savage or heathen lands; in ornate churches in wealthy, busy and intellectual cities--men of the most varied types and conditions, saintly and sinful, ignorant and educated, rich and poor, peer and peasant, sovereign and subject, priest and people, forming a multitude no man can number, have for centuries met together to celebrate this Supper, and be by it made wiser, happier, holier." And as we join in this age-long communion of saints we pray that this blessing may be ours.

LS-31-The Mystery Of Godliness

The Mystery Of Godliness

Yes, confessedly great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was manifested in the flesh,

justified in the Spirit,

seen of angels,

was preached among the Gentiles,

believed on in the world,

taken up into glory.--1 Timothy 3:16.

It is suggested that Paul was here quoting the words of a Christian hymn, sung in the early churches in such cities as Rome and Ephesus--a hymn which is at the same time a confession of faith, setting forth some of the great facts of the incarnation, the resurrection and the ascension, and the success of the gospel in the world.

We, too, love to sing of the great facts of our gospel. We believe them, we rejoice in them. We know that because of them we are redeemed. We incorporate them in our hymns, and voice them in our praise. Yet we ever feel that there are mysteries here beyond our understanding. "O depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" The Incarnation--who can understand it? Who can tell what it means to say that God is manifest in flesh? The creeds of the Christian Church have sought to express it. But great is the mystery of godliness! The Atonement--who can set forth this wondrous truth? Ever since the Lamb of God came to bear away the sins of the world the keenest minds of the Christian Church have sought to fathom its meaning, and bring forth its treasures to the gaze of mankind. But no adequate statement of the atonement has ever been made. Vicarious suffering! Expiation! Ransom' Satisfaction! Propitiation! Words which each express some aspect of truth concerning the death of Christ, as men have experienced it, but words which are difficult to reconcile in a regular system of thought, and when combined, are still inadequate to the task of setting forth the wonder of our redemption in Christ. But thanks be to God! The power of His redeeming grace is a fact, which we know and experience, apart from any explanations that may be made about it. We may know but little of what transpired in spiritual realms when our Lord Jesus gave His life for sinful men, but we know that our redemption was accomplished, and Christ has made us free.

"I am not skilled to understand

What God hath willed, what God hath planned;

I only know at His right hand
Is One who is my Saviour."

LS-32-A Memento

A Memento And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave to them saying, This is My body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me.--Luke 22:19. A momento--that is what the Supper is, for it serves as a reminder, and is a memorial of something we want to remember. I have seen the suggestion that the word in this text, translated "remembrance" really means a memorial before God, and carries with it the thought that the Supper is intended, not so much as a reminder to His disciples of the death of Christ, but to remind God of that central fact in the history of our world. If that were so, every observance of the Supper would be, on our part, a presentation before God, of the merits of Christ's sacrifice, Every time we came to the Supper we would be saying in effect that the ground of our approach to God is the death of Christ, and we plead His mercy and favour, not on any right of our own, but for the sake of Christ our Saviour.

There may be truth in that thought, but I doubt if it was what Christ had in mind. This is the only direction He gave to His disciples concerning the Supper, and it seems to have been intended primarily for them, that they might not forget Him. It is a very simple requirement, and it was very human-this request that they might meet to remember Him. Using materials that were on the table for the passover feast, He lifts the bread, and then the cup. "I don't want you to forget Me," He says. "When you take bread and break it and eat it thus, think of Me. When you drink the cup, remember that My life was poured out for you." Of course they never would forget. Dr. Marcus Dods beautifully said, "As the friend who is setting out on a long absence or is passing forever from the earth puts into our hands his portrait or something he has used or worn or prized, and is pleased to think we shall treasure it for his sake, so did Christ on the eve of His death secure this one thing, that His disciples should have a memento by which to remember Him. And as the dying gift of a friend becomes sacred to us even as his own person, and we cannot bear to see it handed about and remarked upon by those who have not the same loving reverence as ourselves; and when we gaze at his portrait and recall the many happy times we have spent together, and the bright and inspiring words which fell from his lips, or wind up the watch he wound for so many years, or handle the pencil-case worn smooth by his fingers, so does this sacrament seem sacred to us as Christ's own person, and by it, grateful memories of all He was and did throng into the mind."

LS-33-The Sense Of Sin

The Sense Of Sin

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.--1 John 1.

Such words as these we do not often hear today. It is not a popular form of speech. We are not accustomed to think or speak in such a candid way about the fact of sin. We have almost ceased to think of ourselves as sinners. It is many years since Mr. Gladstone, when he was asked what was the great want of modern life, replied thoughtfully, "Ah, a sense of sin; that is the great want of modern life." But with the passing of those years there has been an increasing loss of the sense of sin. Less and less do men seem to be conscious of the force of sin as disturbing the relationship of the soul with God.

Perhaps even in our best moments we would not be willing to restore that attitude of mind, so characteristic of some earlier periods, that led men to abase themselves at every thought of God. That excessive humility and contrition was born of two things an over-sensitive consciousness of human unworthiness, and an exaggerated idea of the terror of the Lord. In so far as we no longer dread undue harshness at the hands of our God, the change is for the better. But is it a healthy sign if we are no longer conscious of the guilt of sin, which has disturbed our relationship with God?

We recall our Lord's treatment of sin in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. There were many elements of good in the Pharisee. He was a man of prayer; he fasted regularly; he consistently practised tithing. But he cherished a lie in his inmost soul. Unconscious of his sin and his need, he congratulated himself even while he prayed to God. The other man, with downcast eyes, beat upon his breast, and pleaded for the mercy of God. He it was who was justified before God. Our presence at the Table of redeeming love is itself a confession of sin. But that confession may be a purely formal one, unaccompanied by any real consciousness of sin, or of our need of forgiveness. It will be for our good if we can pray in sincerity, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness. It is the first essential of spiritual health to be aware of our need

LS-34-The Need Of Reconciliation

The Need Of Reconciliation God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.--2 Corinthians 5:19.

What was the need of it? Why should the world be reconciled to God? Why not allow the world to follow its natural instincts? Because God is the one source of goodness, and through sin men had cut themselves off from the supply. "There is none good, but One, that is God," Jesus said, and we cannot be good except as we are in harmony with Him. Sin breaks the harmony; it disturbs the relationship between God and the soul. "How can any one be good who distrusts God, the one spring of goodness, who is afraid of God, who is hiding from God, who hates God?" asks James Denney. "To do wrong gives us a bad conscience, and a bad conscience paralyses the moral nature. We know this even in our relations one to another. The child who has violated his father's will does not wish to meet his father, or to look him in the face. There is something in his heart he wishes to hide. But his whole moral health, strength and happiness depend upon his having no secrets from his father; they depend, in fact, on his sharing with the father the common life of the family, without impediment or restraint. By this wrong act he has cut himself off from this, and till he overcomes it he is morally crippled. He fears his father, for he knows he must disapprove of what he has done; he distrusts him, for he very possibly does not know that though his father's love has been wounded by the wrong he has done, it is great enough to bear his offence and to love him through it; and if he fears and distrusts and hides long enough, he is likely, at last to hate. All this admits of easy and exact application to the sinner's relation to God. The bad conscience means definitely the sense of being wrong with God-of being estranged from Him by what we have done, yet unable to escape from Him, at once alienated and answerable. It is the fundamental truth with which we have to deal, that a bad conscience, or the sense of sin, induces moral paralysis. It disables the moral nature on every side. It dulls moral intelligence. ... It impairs even the power to repent, so that the more we need to sorrow for our sin with a sorrow which reaches the depths of our nature with healing pain, the less such sorrow is in our power. But, above all, it relaxes and ultimately destroys the nerve of moral effort."

Here, then, is the need of reconciliation. To remove the sense of guilt, to renew the sense of loving relationship with the Father, to dispel fear, and to restore the capacity for moral effort-this is the work of the Mediator between God and man-the man Christ Jesus.

LS-35-To Whom He Manifests His Love!

To Whom He Manifests His Love!

He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him.--John 14:21.

We know that His love reaches out to all, and that it is not limited in any sense to those who love Him. But there is a certain quality of love that cannot be exercised except in a reciprocal way. There are certain attitudes of mind that we may will to cultivate, without respect to the conduct of other people. We may, for instance, be sympathetic to all who are in trouble, whether they receive it gratefully or otherwise. But we cannot exercise unlimited confidence in those who have proved themselves unworthy of trust-that is a quality that can be entertained only when we believe the object of our confidence to be trustworthy.

We may indeed love those who are unworthy of our love. People often do. We would not need to go very far among the mothers of our acquaintance to find a wonder of love far beyond what the object of that love deserves. Yet is it true that there is a quality of love that can be seen only in response to love. Thus it is that even God, who loved the world of sinners lost, can cherish a peculiar love for those who love Him. It is the love that is called forth by love. Not only so, but the Master says that to those who love Him He will manifest Himself. Is He partial then? Does He reserve the manifestations of His love and power for those only who love Him? Necessarily so. Spiritual things are always spiritually discerned. The pure in heart see God. The carnal, the gross, the unlovely, are excluded from that beatific vision because of a natural blindness. Sin clouds the organ of spiritual sight, and makes revelation impossible. "He that loveth Me," says Jesus, "I will love, and will manifest Myself unto him." That speaks of a condition of heart in the disciple that makes Him susceptible to Divine influences, and the Lord Jesus can commune with him and reveal Himself to him. A real experience is this as many a one can testify. The Christian heart becomes conscious of a Divine Companion. We lose much in our lives of service if we never know that experience. You have perhaps had this happen to you. You have mentioned a matter in conversation, and your friend has said, "I was just thinking of that very thing." Many a time that happens to people whose lives are a joyous communion. If such telepathic communication is possible among us, need we be surprised if the Divine Friend finds an avenue of self-revelation to hearts that are attuned to His?

Let us seek to open our hearts to Him now, that here, in this sacred moment of communion, He may manifest Himself to those who love Him.

LS-36-The Guest-Chamber

The Guest-Chamber

Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water: follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, the Master saith unto thee, where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with My disciples. And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.--Luke 22:11-12. The brief story kindles the imagination. Who was the unnamed friend of Jesus, who acted as His host that evening? When had they met before? How intimate had been the friendship that prompted the "goodman of the house" to offer his guest-chamber to the Master, and to prepare it for the passover feast? When had they met to plan how it would be done? We do not know, but the charming story reveals a phase of the inner life of the Lord Jesus that links Him closely to our common human nature.

Somewhere this man had come into contact with Jesus. Perhaps his heart had been stirred as he listened to the gracious words that fell from the Master's lips. It is possible that he was one of the many nameless people who had been specially blessed by the Saviour's tender and healing ministry. We do not know. But we do know something of the understanding sympathy which led this man to offer his home to the Man who had no home of His own, that Jesus might have a place to gather with His disciples to celebrate the passover before He suffered. How Peter and John must have wondered as they were sent ahead of the company, to look for a man with a pitcher of water! Him they were to follow. When they arrived at the house where he led them, did they find a stranger there? Or was he one whom they knew as a close friend of their Master--this man who had the upper room ready for their use? In some way this delightful little story suggests the inner friendship we may have with the Lord Jesus. We are followers of the Master, as were the twelve. But surely we want to be also among those who open the guest-chamber for Him, and in quiet unobtrusive ways welcome Him into the closer fellowship of intimate friendship. Singularly blessed are we if we can welcome the Lord into the guest-chamber of the soul.

"Jesus ever desireth the empty soul that He may fill it with His grace," says Dr. John Watson. "In the refectory of San Marco of Florence there is a very pleasant picture wherein St. Dominic is seated at table with his monks, and he is asking a blessing over cups that have no wine and platters without bread. His companions are amazed, but even while the saint is praying the angels of God are moving unseen through the room, carrying the bread of which if any man eat he shall never hunger again. For it cometh to pass in this hospitality that if any one furnisheth a chamber for Jesus he shall find he is the guest and Jesus has become the host."

LS-37-He Lives!

He Lives!

I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.--Revelation 1:18.

It is recorded of Martin Luther that on one occasion when he was in a situation of extreme danger, and his spirits were cast down because of the circumstances in which he was placed, he was found tracing on a table with his finger the words "Vivit! Vivit!"--"He lives--He lives!" His human nature was particularly in need of power above its own, and he was finding comfort and strength in reminding himself of the fact of Christ, his risen Lord and glorified Redeemer.

Jesus lives! That is the fact beyond all others in importance to us. We remember His death, and though that event is so far away in time, it affects us more profoundly than does the death of those we knew in the flesh. Alexander Maclaren said: "Christ's death has a present and a perpetual power. He 'has offered one sacrifice for sins forever;' and no time can diminish the efficacy of His cross, nor our need of it, nor the full tide of blessings which flow from it to the believing soul. Therefore do men cling to Him as if it were but yesterday that He died for them. When all other names carved on the world's records have become unreadable, like forgotten inscriptions on decaying grave-stones, His shall endure forever, deep graven on the fleshy tables of the heart."

Yet that death alone would not account for His hold on the affections and His power in the lives of men. His death would avail us nothing, did He not live. He died; He is alive. He is the Prince of Life; it was not possible that He should be holden of death. In Him all things consist. He is the source of that Divine energy which is the dynamic of the spiritual life of the world. We believe He is in our midst today. We believe that. We may realise Him, that we may reach out spiritual hands and touch Him, and touching Him become the recipients of His inflowing power and blessing.

No fable old, nor mystic lore,

Nor dream of bards and seers;

No dead fact stranded on the shore

Of the oblivious years;

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet

A present help is He,

And faith has still its Olivet,

And love its Galilee.

--Whittier.

LS-38-John--Three--Sixteen

John--Three--Sixteen

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This beautiful passage is one of those complete scriptures that seem to stand alone. It satisfies the heart. It is too beautiful for analysis. Preachers rarely use it as a sermon text, for when the text has been quoted it is instinctively felt that any comment may impair its beauty and weaken its power. The text is part of the words addressed by our Lord to the Pharisee Nicodemus, and it has a definite relation to all that the Master said. "Ye must be born again," He had said to this ruler who came enquiring about the kingdom. Unless a man receives life from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But how may that life come? What are the conditions of its reception? Is it sufficient that he prepare his heart for the heavenly gift? Will the new birth be experienced by one who becomes conscious of his need of God, and turns in penitence from his sins, and yearns for the Divine forgiveness, and prays for the blessing of communion? Is the birth of water and of the spirit an experience possible to all who seek the kingdom? Assuredly. Yet, had it been so when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, the golden words of John-three-sixteen need never have been uttered. To make such an experience possible to Nicodemus and to all who seek it, it was necessary for the Lord Jesus to die. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The brazen serpent in the wilderness, lifted high before the eyes of the people, was used to symbolise His own lifting up on the cross.

It is this that gives significance and beauty to the text we are Considering. After all, it does not stand alone. God's great love is in it, and the wonderful gift He made; our own response is there, and the blessing that it secures. But even the simple grandeur of the words would fail to move our hearts if there were not shining upon them the light that streams from the cross of Christ. God loved the world, and gave His only begotten Son--gave Him, that is, to death--and thus it is that whosoever believeth in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

LS-39-The Betrayal Night

The Betrayal Night With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.--Luke 22:15. The end was drawing near. Once, when His enemies beset Him, He passed through the midst of them, and went His way. But He realised that when the appointed time came, He must endure the cross. As the time of separation approached, He thought much of His disciples. An indescribable tenderness towards them filled His soul. Their coming sorrow called forth His sympathy; their weakness, His concern. Thus He planned to spend His last evening with them, to prepare them in some measure for what was to come. How lovingly He dealt with them! How tender lessons He gave them; what words of courage and hope; with what holy compassion and grace He bore them in prayer to His Father!

They needed a lesson in humility and service, and to teach them He girded Himself as a servant, and attended to the lowly task of washing their feet. "I have given you an example," He said, "that ye should do as I have done to you."

He was about to leave them. It was expedient that He should do so. It would enable Him to be with them more truly than ever. But their hearts would be desolate for a while, and He encouraged them with His word about the mansions in the Father's house, where He would prepare a place for them, and where some day they would dwell with Him again.

Meanwhile, He gave them a commission. They had work to do. But it was to be a spontaneous service, and their achievement as natural a fruitage as that of the branches on the vine. "Herein is my Father glorified," He said, "that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples."

He Himself was about to go forth to die, and they themselves would be scattered. Tribulation awaited them. The world persecuted Him-it would persecute them. But the warning was not given to affright them, but to prepare them, to strengthen them. "Be of good cheer," He said, "I have overcome the world."

Finally, as was natural, He prayed for them, He prayed that they might be kept from the evil one, that they might be sanctified, and that they might be united in love.

It was a wonderful night. He knew that the cross awaited Him on the morrow, but it did not oppress Him. "Not a shadow intercepted His view of the face of His Father or dimmed the satisfaction with which He looked on His own work just about to be completed. It was as if the passion were already past, and the glory of His exaltation were already breaking around Him" (Stalker).

LS-40-Gethsemane

Gethsemane

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto His disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.--Matthew 26:36. When the Moravian missionaries began their work in Greenland, they proclaimed the great God and His rightful requirements of men. It seemed to them that there was little use in preaching anything else till this was accepted. But nobody accepted it, or cared even to hear about it. It was the story of the Garden of Gethsemane that moved the first soul. The love and sympathy of God as revealed in Jesus Christ was the moving power of the gospel, and opened the hearts of these people to receive the word of life. The Moravians realised they had been wrong in their approach to these people, and were wise enough to change their method.

It moves our hearts too, the story of Gethsemane, as often as we read it. How simply, and how graphically, do the evangelists describe the scene! The first writer says that when our Saviour came into the garden "he began to be sorrowful and very heavy." Other translations of the same passage are: "He began to feel distressed and agitated;" "We began to be full of terror and distress." The second gospel adds this further word: "He began to be amazed." Another translation of this passage is "He began to feel appalled." The third gospel, describing the Master's experience a few minutes later, says, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly." Thus in a few vivid touches they set before us a scene of overwhelming amazement and terror.

They quote His own words too spoken to the little group of intimates who went with Him into the recesses of the garden: "My soul is crushed with anguish even to the point of death." Does He mean that His physical strength had reached its limit, and that the thread of life was about to snap under the strain of His grief and despair?

We may not lightly seek to probe the depths of the experience into which the Saviour entered at this time. It is not a subject for curious investigation Or psychological study. I have heard preachers describe this scene so callously as to make the hair stand and the blood run cold. But this is holy ground. We must tread reverently here. But we must not avoid it. It has many lessons to teach us. Let this be our thought this morning--the strangely moving power of the story that reveals the sacrificial love of the Lord Jesus. It is a story of redemptive suffering that has moved the world to all nobility of thought and life. We shall be better men and women for this brief visit, with understanding and reverence, to the Garden of Gethsemane.

LS-41-Pictures Of Jesus

Pictures Of Jesus A Talk to Young People When our Lord Jesus met with His disciples at the Passover feast, on the night before His death upon the cross, He took bread from the table, and broke it. You may be sure that the disciples watched Him with much interest, and that they wondered what He was doing. Perhaps they would not understand all at once what He meant, when He gave them each a portion of the loaf, and said, "This is My body, given for you." He did not mean, of course, that this bread actually was His body. It could not be, for His body was there before them when He gave them the bread. He meant that this bread was a kind of picture of His body--a symbol, we call it, a thing which, when we see it, reminds us of something else. For instance, a boy has his photo taken, and when friends come in, his mother takes this photo and says, This is Tom. She does not mean that it really is Tom, but that it is a picture which shows the features of Tom, and the friend can see what Tom looks like. Well, Jesus was to be put to death the next day. His body would be wounded and broken. He was to die for His disciples. Afterwards, when they met together, and did as Jesus told them to do, and took bread, and broke it, they would see in it a picture of their Lord, who sacrificed His life for them.

Jesus then took the cup of wine. "Drink it," He said, "this is my blood, which is poured out for many, for the remission of sins." And yet it was not really blood. It was another symbol. Whenever they met in this way, and took the cup with the fruit of the vine, they would think of Jesus, who shed His blood for them.

We often think in pictures and symbols. For instance, when you see the Australian flag, you see more than a piece of cloth on a pole, with certain colours upon it. It stands for something of great importance. It represents our country's honour, and the honour of the British Commonwealth. Some people see in the colours a picture of the best qualities of our people--red meaning sacrifice, and white, purity, and blue, loyalty.

Now this bread and wine, which we take today, mean more to us than something to eat and drink. If that were all, we could have better meals at home. But as we take them, they mean to us that Jesus' body was broken, and His blood was shed, for us. So we should come to this Table--the Lord's Table, we call it with earnest and thoughtful minds. As we take these symbols in our hands, let us say Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your love for us, which took You to the cross; thank You for the love You still have for me, and for the help You give me every day.

LS-42-The Meaning of Gethsemane

The Meaning of Gethsemane

And, being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground.--Luke 22:44.

How are we to account for it--this agony of prayer, and distress of body and mind? What is the explanation of the amazement and terror, the sorrow and grief, which the Saviour experienced in Gethsemane? That surely is not the kind of spirit we are wont to admire in men, when they meet great crises, and face the horrors of a cruel and untimely death. We are conscious enough of our own frailties; we may know that under the stress of a great trial our own strength might give way, and we might present very unheroic pictures to those who witnessed our testing, but we like to think it might be otherwise, and that we should face any experience of terror or pain with resolution and courage. Certainly we like to read of men who met the realities of torture and death with calmness, serenity and strength. How, then, are we to explain this paroxysm of grief, this distress of mind, this bloody sweat, this pathetic prayer in Gethsemane?

We love to speak of the manhood of the Master. His life was characterised by acts of noble endurance and sublime courage. No fear of man, no dread of suffering, could turn Him from His God-appointed task. He has been, through all the ages, the source of strength to myriads who have been called upon to suffer for His sake. The noble army of Christian martyrs drew all their resolution and courage from Him. The brave succession of heralds of the cross have been inspired by the noble example of Him who hung upon that cross. Did He Himself fail in this crucial test?

We do not read this story aright if we see in it only a natural human shrinking from the prospect of suffering and death, even though that death was to be the horrible Roman method of crucifixion. Our Lord came to the cross as the bearer of sin. "For our sakes He (God) made Him to be sin, who Himself knew nothing of sin." Guilty of no transgression Himself, the load of human guilt was laid on Him. He was "made a curse for us." It was this dread experience that the New Testament writers tried to describe for us, from which the pure soul of the Saviour of men shrank. It was the spiritual horror of separation from God because of sin--our sin laid upon Him--rather than the natural human fear of a dreadful physical ordeal, which was responsible for the Master's woe in Gethsemane.

"For me it was in the garden,

He prayed, 'Not My will, but Thine;'

He had no tears for His own griefs,

But sweat-drops of blood for mine."

LS-43-Gethsemane's Prayer

Gethsemane's Prayer And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.--Matthew 26:39.

Again and again He withdrew from His disciples, and prayed, saying the same words. It is a heart-rending cry. We remember the travail of soul from which it came, and our hearts are moved to pity and sorrow as we read the sobbing petition.

What was the cup He did not wish to drink? That it was involved in the experience of the morrow, with its mock trial, its raillery, its scourging, its crown of thorns and the cross, there is no doubt. Not that those things constituted the bitterness of the cup. There was sin in it--not His, but ours--for He was made sin for us, and His pure soul recoiled from it. Was the prayer answered? Certainly the cup did not pass from Him. It was pressed to His lips and He drained it. Yet we are assured that when He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, He was heard in that He feared (Hebrews 5:7). The cup was not taken away. But He received the needed strength to drink it. An angel came from heaven, and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43).

Thus in the supreme crisis of His life did our Saviour give us our deepest insight into the meaning and mystery of prayer. Prayer is not merely a petition. Our prayers are usually requests for desired blessings, but true prayer is more than that. Sometimes we seem to think of prayer as an attempt to induce God to do something He otherwise would not do. But that is not prayer. Prayer is the effort of the soul to enter into communion with God, to understand His will, and realise His purposes. Dr. O. O. Lang says: "Prayer means the uplifting of our souls in desire, affection, and will to God as the supreme end of our life. If our prayers are to be the means whereby we secure our abiding in Christ, their main object must be not to get what we want, but to give what God wants--a life surrendered to Himself."

God is Love. He is merciful and gracious, and full of compassion. No prayer of ours could make Him more tender and kind. He wills the best for us. His purposes are always just and right, and for Him to act contrary to His will would be to contradict Himself. Thus our prayers, expressing our own desires and aspirations though they do, must be the conscious movement of the soul towards God, if they are to avail anything. Deeper than all our own expressed desires, comprehending all and subduing all, must come the complete surrender: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

LS-44-The Privilege of Communion

The Privilege of Communion

"Send us a set of communion vessels; we shall need it some day." So Mary Moffat wrote from Bechuanaland, Africa, to a friend who had asked whether she could send anything of use. That was in 1827, says their biographer, when the missionaries were living in the midst of danger, and were almost in despair of seeing any change in the people. But, weak in body though she was, Mary Moffat was strong in faith, and did not falter. It took a long time to communicate with the old country in those days. A year passed before the friend got the letter. A second year had gone before the gift reached its destination in Africa. In that year, 1829, there were a number of enquirers after salvation, and six of the natives were selected for baptism--the first fruits of the mission. They were to be received into the Church on a certain Lord's day, and on the Friday before this was to be done, the communion set arrived. The converts were baptised with feelings of deep gratitude, and in thankfulness and joy missionaries and converts knelt together that evening to commemorate the death of our Lord.

John G. Paton, describing the first communion service held on the island of Anima, New Hebrides, wrote: "It was Sabbath, 24th October, 1869, and surely the angels of God and the Church of the redeemed in glory were amongst the great cloud of witnesses who eagerly peered down upon the scene, when we sat around the Lord's Table and partook of His body and blood with those few souls rescued out of the heathen world. For the first time, the Dorcas Street School Teachers' gift from the South Melbourne Presbyterian Church was put to use--a new communion service of silver. They gave it in faith that it would be required, and in such we received it. And now the day has come and gone. For three years we had toiled and prayed and taught for this. At the moment when I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism, now stretched out to receive and partake of the emblems and seals of the Redeemer's love, I had a foretaste of the joy of glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces. I shall never taste a deeper bliss, till I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus Himself."

It was but natural that the moment of deepest joy felt by the missionaries in their work was the moment when they met at the Table of the Lord with the converts they had won. Here, where the soul enters into the most intimate communion with the Redeemer, all the hopes and joys and glad realisations of the Divine blessing seemed to be gathered up in the experience of His worshipping people. Is it not also true of us that some of our richest experiences of the Divine grace have been in those moments when, as now, we have fellowship with one another, in Him, in this privilege of communion?

LS-45-In Christ

In Christ

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.--Ephesians 1:2. The apostle sees in Christ the source and sustaining power of the whole universe. "In Him were all things created." "In Him all things consist." (Colossians 1:16-17). This cosmic significance of the person and work of Christ arrests our attention, and perhaps awes us. But the apostle thinks of our relation to Christ in a much more tender and intimate way than this. All the experience of our spiritual life is born and maintained "in Christ." We were "buried with Him." We are "risen with Him." We are "created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are "made to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." We are assured that our "labour is not in vain in the Lord." Again and again the thought recurs. What does it mean? Is it but a figure of speech? Even so, it must have meaning. The same complete relationship with the Saviour is expressed in another way. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." We are "in Christ," Christ is in us. In His all-pervading power we live and move and have our spiritual being. The life we live is sustained by faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. If we came to Him in repentance, it was not all our own deed, but He granted us repentance unto life. If we are developing in our spiritual natures it is because His Divine life flows into our souls. If we approach the Divine ideal of Christian holiness, it but reveals the energy of His own holiness at work in our hearts. The "fruits of righteousness" which may be seen in us "are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." (Php 1:11).

We may not understand it very well. The truth is beyond our thinking. Yet somehow we feel it is true. Our faith lays hold of it. We believe that every privilege of communion with Him, such as we may enjoy at the Table of the Lord, opens for us fresh avenues for the reception of His Divine grace.

"Thy love, Thy joy, Thy peace,

Continuously impart

Unto my heart;

Fresh springs that never cease

But still increase."

--Francis Ridley Havergal.

LS-46-A Hard Saying

A Hard Saying This is a hard saying; who can hear it.--John 6:60.

There are ruins at Tell Hum, on the northern shores of the Sea Of Galilee, among which are the remains of a synagogue. On the lintel which is still to be seen, a pot of manna is sculptured. It is thought that these ruins may be the remains of the very synagogue in which Jesus delivered His discourse on the heavenly manna, and uttered the hard saying which caused many of His disciples to turn back and walk no more with Him. On the previous day He had fed the multitude with the loaves and fishes. From the other side of the lake where the miracle had been wrought, the people had followed Him hoping for a repetition of the miracle. When the Lord gently reproved them, and urged them to work for the food which abides unto eternal life they demanded a sign as a basis for faith. "Moses," they said, "gave bread from heaven--what do you do for a sign?" They seemed to imply that the miracle of the loaves and fishes was hardly to be compared with the heavenly manna their fathers had eaten in the wilderness. The Master said in reply that He was the true bread. "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever, yea, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day."

They could not understand that. "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" they protested. He at once made it clear to them that He was speaking in a spiritual sense--they were not to eat His flesh literally. "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life."

Many of His disciples stumbled at His teaching, and withdrew from Him. Probably not even the twelve understood very clearly what He meant. But later they understood. There came an evening, a year later, when Jesus met with His disciples at the passover table. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and He gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is My body." Even then perhaps, they might not have understood very clearly, but when his death, which in these mysterious words He had foretold, had been accomplished, and the resurrection had taken place, and Jesus had gone from them in the flesh to abide with them forever, they learned to say: "The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" This is not a hard saying for us. He gave Himself for the life of the world, as He said, and we take this symbol of the body broken for us, and partake of heavenly food which we receive in communion with Him.

LS-47-The Grace of our Lord Jesus

The Grace of our Lord Jesus For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich.--2 Corinthians 8:9.

What do we mean when we speak of the grace of Christ? We understand it well enough, of course, but would you find it easy to tell? "It is the free favour of God," you say. Yes, but how cold and formal that is! What does such a definition tell of the wondrous message of sovereign grace that was so often on the lips of Paul? "I know until you ask me," said Augustine, "when you ask me I do not know." Most of us have felt that difficulty.

"You really cannot define grace," said Dr. Jowett. "Grace is energy. Grace is love-energy. Grace is redeeming love-energy ministering to the unlovely with its own loveliness. Yet we cannot really define it." Dr. Jowett went on to tell of the wing of a native bird he had received from a friend who was a missionary in some primeval forest--a little sample of the wealth of colour to be found in that tropical home. "And when we have made a compact phrase to enshrine the secret of grace, I feel that, however fair and radiant it may be, we have only got a wing of a native bird, and bewildering stretches of wealth are untouched and unrevealed. No; we cannot define it." The word was often used by the apostle. He loved to speak about it. Its root meaning is anything that gives joy or pleasure, or is delightful. Since beauty was delightful, the word early came to be applied to anything that was beautiful. A beautiful movement of the body is graceful. A well-fitting garment is graceful. We use the word, especially of the refined and delicate type of beauty. The fertile mythology of the Greeks constructed three beautiful personalities--goddesses who enhanced the enjoyments of life by refinement and gentleness. They called them the Three Graces.

It was early seen that there is an inner as well as an outward beauty. There is beauty of character, well calculated to give delight to beholders. Look at those qualities of unselfishness which issue in kindness and consideration for others. They are delightful ornaments in character. Lovingkindness is a grace. It charms us at once.

Let us now turn our eyes to that supremely beautiful picture of grace which the apostle holds before our wondering eyes. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might become rich."

We feel like "saying grace" as we gaze upon, it--saying thanks, for that is what the word means in this connection. In the New Testament, the word that is commonly rendered grace, sometimes means thanks. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." Let us then bow in grateful thanks as we receive the emblems that speak to us of His redeeming grace.

LS-48-Immanuel

Immanuel They shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us.--Matthew 1:23. In days when Jerusalem was threatened by enemies, the prophet Isaiah gave to the king a sign of hope. A child, he said, would be born, who would be called Immanuel--a symbolic name which was a pledge of God's presence with His people to deliver them.

What fulfilment then occurred, we are not told. But hundreds of years afterwards, in the coming of Jesus, born of Mary, Matthew saw a complete fulfilment of this ancient prophecy. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. In the Lord Jesus, God is with His people in a more complete sense than had ever been realised before. In Him, God was with men in human form. When Jesus came to earth, no new person came into existence, but the eternal Son of God entered upon human experience. God became man, and through the human personality of Jesus, revealed Himself in a new way.

"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,

Hail the incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with men to dwell,

Jesus, our Immanuel."

God is with us to redeem. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save the people from their sins." That was what the angel said, and the sacred writer says all this was done in fulfilment of the prophecy that a virgin should bear a son, whose name would be Immanuel. God in Christ became God with us, to bear our sins Himself, and redeem us from all iniquity.

God is with us, a living Presence. It has always been true that God is with His people. God said to Moses, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Men like Moses could realise it. But the presence of God became a new experience after Jesus came. The incarnation made it possible for the ordinary man to realise God's presence. Plain men and women, unskilled in abstract thought, were able to understand more of the Divine nature than the profoundest philosophers had understood before. God was manifest in flesh. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.

"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age," He said. And conscious of His presence men have been aware of God. May He be made known to us anew today in the breaking of bread.

LS-49-The Approach to The Cross

The Approach to The Cross And it came to pass, when the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.--Luke 9:51.

"When the days were well-nigh come." He knew it was near, and He knew just what it would be. Many a time He had told His disciples about it. The mocking, the scourging, the cross--it was not so uncommon in those days but what every detail of the bitter experience could torture His imagination. And such a death! It would be enveloped in horror and shame. We can hardly imagine it now. The cross today is the sign of peace, and forgiveness, and honour. But then, this punishment was so brutal and dishonouring that Rome would not use it for her meanest citizen--only for the alien, the conquered, the enslaved.

"He stedfastly set His face to go." He told them about it again while they went on their way, and they were amazed and afraid. But He faced it, stedfastly. Do not suppose that it was easy for Him to go this way. There are many indications that He was often sorely tempted to go some other way than the way of the cross. The cup He drained was bitter to Him. Yet He chose it. He could have avoided it. It was not just a resolute facing of the inevitable. No man taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, He said.

There is something magnificent in the complete heroism of the cross. Jesus calls upon us to take up the cross and follow Him. There is little in our lives, however, that could be compared to taking up a cross. There have been times when discipleship involved a real cross--sometimes a literal one. Look back to the days of persecution, when bodies were torn asunder, lions were loosed, fires lit, boiling cauldrons received their victims, and actual crosses carried their languishing sufferers. And the resolution which enabled these heroes of the cross to be "faithful unto death," was born at the cross of Christ. The cross puts iron into the blood. It stimulates our noblest impulses, and rebukes our soft comfort and selfish ease.

"When the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up." We have spoken of His Divine fore-knowledge, and of His stern resolution. But these do not tell all the story. What, after all, was it to which He went in Jerusalem? It was to be "received up." Not "delivered up." "Delivered up" meant the cross. "Received up" meant glory. When the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face towards what lay between--the city of rejection and death. Think not that He came to the cross with any sense of defeat. He knew it was the path to His glory. He knew He would one day see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied.

LS-50-Reconciliation

Reconciliation For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell; and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in times past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unproveable before Him.--Colossians 1:19-22.

If any of us has ever experienced the sense of alienation from God because of sin, the first thought that will come to us from this great passage is the wonder of our own personal reconciliation to God through Christ. That is a precious truth, and we must never lose sight of it. Even though the sense of alienation was never very powerful, because we have been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and have never known the desolating experience that may come to those who are lost in sin, we may yet be conscious that the fellowship we have with God is ours because of the reconciliation wrought for us in Christ. In Paul's mind the work of individual reconciliation is but a small part of the blessing brought to the world through Him in whom all the fulness dwells. God has reconciled all things unto Himself, whether on earth or in heaven. Wherever there is disharmony in the universe of God, He has chosen Christ to put an end to it, and to bring in the blessing of peace.

We have been impressed by the coming together in delightful harmony, of thousands of scouts from many races and nations. They are united in the great principles of brotherhood and mutual helpfulness. Such a gathering helps to break down the walls of separation between the peoples of the earth. Now that is what Christ has done a thousand times. Recall how the apostle visualised this great achievement, when he spoke of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile as broken down. Those who had been far off were made nigh by the sacrifice of Christ, and the enmity they had cherished towards each other was abolished in Him. But did you notice in the text that the apostle's thought is lifted far beyond, even such a work of reconciliation as this? There are things, in heaven, as well as on earth, that are reconciled to God through Christ. Now we do not know exactly what Paul meant by that. We do not know what things in the unseen world may need to be reconciled to God. But the thought is clear. The consecration of Christ in sacrifice is so effective that it will ultimately, put an end to all the disharmonies in the universe. All forms of evil, wherever found, will be overcome, and wherever conscious beings have been at variance with God, they will be reconciled through Christ, and be presented holy and without blemish and unproveable before Him.

Such is the work of Christ which it is our joy to celebrate today.

LS-51-Hints To Presidents

Hints To Presidents 1. Realise that you are to lead the congregation in worship--a solemn responsibility and a great privilege.

2. Be ready to start on time. Dilatoriness interferes with devotion.

3. Prepare thoroughly your mind and heart for this hour of leadership--your mind by study, your heart by prayer.

4. Conduct the service with dignity and reverence. Your attitude will impart its tone to the service.

5. Let your communion talk be a development of but one helpful thought, and let it be brief.

LS-52-Prayer

Prayer

Holy and Merciful Father, Thy glory makes the earth a temple, and all life a sacrament; in the house of Thy presence we lift up our hearts in worship. Thou whose love is our hope, reveal Thyself to us in this hour of fellowship; help us to reject the testimony of the world and reaffirm our faith in Thee. Lead us beyond the outward symbol into the inner secret of grace and truth, making our home in that which no doubt can obscure. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

--J. Fort Newton.

LS-53-A Final Poem

A Final Poem

I sometimes think about the cross,
And shut my eyes and try to see
The cruel nails, and crown of thorns,
And Jesus crucified for me;
But even could I see Him die,
I could but see a little part
Of that great love, which, like a fire,
Is always burning in God's heart.
--Anon.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net