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THE PROCLAMATION

Part Two

"The People of God"

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I THE CHURCH

THE GREAT FLOOD OF THE SPIRIT

(1879)

Isaiah 44:1-5 "But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!
Thus says the Lord who made you,
Who formed you from the womb and will help you:
Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.
For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.
They shall spring up like grass amid waters,
like willows by flowing streams.
This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,'
Another will call himself by the name of Jacob,
And another will write on his hand,
'The Lord's,' and surname himself by
the name of Israel."

Here the Lord talks with Jacob or Israel, that is,
with the people who are descended from Jacob, whose name
is also Israel. The Lord speaks with him. This is not
merely an expression, but it is really true that in Israel
there is a God who speaks, even if He speaks only through
His angel as His personal representative, or through pro-
phets who were filled with His spirit. They speak just as
though it were the Lord Himself speaking, placing their own
personality completely in the background. It is a wonderful
thing, unheard of anywhere else in all of world history,
that God stoops to speak with a people. He cannot do this

without, at the same time, keeping in mind all the peoples of the earth of whom the people of Israel are but a small part.

This people is to be the servant of God to be used by the Lord for His purpose, a servant through whom services will be rendered to all nations of the earth. When the Lord says of this servant, "I have made and prepared you, I have chosen you," this refers first of all to the actual people of Israel. But since the Lord Jesus came, all who believe in Him belong to this Israel. Whoever loves the Son is also loved by the Father, and the Father clings to such a one and allows him to claim for himself all the wonderful and glorious things that were foretold for Israel. Therefore we want to take it as if we also were being addressed. We are chosen just as Jacob was, made and prepared like Israel, and from our childhood on we are consecrated to the Lord through baptism, as Israel was through circumcision.

What does the Lord wish to say to us now? How much we would like to hear from Him, and we would have much to ask. "What does He say?" we would all like to ask, for what one usually hears on earth from men is so very unsatisfying. But when we hear, "The Lord speaks," - then the response in us must be, "Oh, I also want to hear that!" But now, what does He say?

1. "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen."

Yes, the people who confess the Saviour are in great fear and tribulation, just as Israel once was. Everyone turns against those who belong to the Lord. The world goes its own way and at the best ignores God's Israel, despising and even often reviling them, seeking in every way to harm them and to attack their life. Besides this, there is also much misery; but nevertheless, he who wants to belong to the Lord must also be His servant, that is, he must do something for those who are far away from the Lord, for in no other way can we be His servants. But now, if we attempt this - how many obstacles and dangers confront us! The murderer from the beginning is always present, seeking to thwart everything we do! For centuries men have brooded upon this, and what has come of it? All that has come of it is that man cannot pass a single day without fear. If a man wants to do something, then fear is his bread of affliction. To tackle anything is to risk all. Danger and oppression are all too widespread as soon as we refuse to make any concession to the enemy. And then, if we should summon up hope that the Lord will be master over all nations, we really are startled! "How?" will then be asked. "Who will do this?" "Where is

something we can build on?" We see only ruin before us. We turn our eyes toward heaven and would like to ask for advice. "What shall we do? Everything is going to pieces, nothing will last!" Roughly speaking, that is the lot of those who belong to the Lord. In fear we arise and in fear we go to rest. Those with a more serious nature always fear that sooner or later everything will be lost. The Lord has such situations in mind when, in speaking here to Israel, He says, "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun (that is, Beloved), whom I have chosen." When it is so that we can no longer see anything we can hold on to - that does not matter! Things will quickly change - the Lord will soon intervene. Do not straightaway be afraid that all is lost. Do not act in such a dejected and despairing way as though it were the end and the death of everything. No - fear not, O Jacob my servant! Why not? Because He, the Lord, wants to do something! Well now, as soon as we see that He wants to do something, then we are no longer afraid. As long as we think that it is we who have to do something, then fear and worry are able to rob us of sleep. But when we know that He will take things in hand and that His people and servants need only serve, then there is no anxiety.

2. What does God now have in mind? Just listen:

"I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the

dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring." There you have it! When everything is thirsty and dry, when there is no more hope and all life seems to fade away, when everything languishes and is parched, then, from out of heaven falls refreshing rain. Water comes - first in drops, but increasing ever more until streams pour down onto the dry ground. When we read and hear this, we want to jump up and cry, "What? God will let something come down to us from above? Shall something from above come to us?" That gives us fresh courage. On earth there is nothing more to be found; everything is completely dried up. But if something is to come from above, that is quite different. God's meaning when He says, "I will pour water on the thirsty and streams upon the dry ground" - so that the languishing will be refreshed and the dry hearts be softened again, is to be seen in the words that follow where it says, "I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring." By this is meant the Spirit of God which is still to come. It is implied that Israel did not yet have this Spirit, and it was not promised for that particular moment but was to come upon his descendants, upon his offspring. In other words: Be patient! You do not yet experience it, but your offspring will, and then you also will benefit from this.

Well, then, I too hope for this, and we must all put our trust in this. There is no other means to refresh the thirsty and to revive the parched land than that the good God pours out His spirit. There are, of course, many to-day who no longer want to believe this. Why? Because it is something extraordinary that does not fit into the ordinary things of this world. If we seek to liken it with things of this world, we find absolutely nothing with which to compare it, because it is so new, so extraordinary. If you consider that it will be once again as the Apostles experienced it at the first Pentecost - then compare that with our usual manner of life, thought, and feeling, and you will have to admit that all this is absolutely nothing in comparison with that which shall come about through the spirit of God. For this reason, to most people this seems too great. But I cannot help this; I cannot make it smaller or think of it as smaller than it really is. Perhaps if it were not quite so great, people would find it easier to believe, but I cannot make that which is great smaller than it is. A stream of the Spirit will come upon the descendants, upon the offspring of Israel, and consequently upon the offspring of Christians - upon us. Let us confidently await this. Already to a small extent this was fulfilled at the time of the Apostles. But because, for reasons which

we cannot so easily tell and explain, this retreated again so that it is no longer present as it once was; it must come again. Must this not be fulfilled in larger measure as once it was in a small way? In the first pouring-out of the Spirit we have proof that God keeps His word. Now we need this once more, for we are parched people; we are well-nigh dying of thirst, and it is just too bad to see how mankind decays in an inner way, and outwardly as well. Now because we need it, God will also give it again. Here is the promise: Fear not, Jacob! Your God knows what to do! He has only to send the great gift of God, the Holy Spirit, which comes from God and which is able to make the nature of men divine, and then everything will be different.

3. The results accomplished by the Spirit of God, descending like a stream of life upon the thirsty and the parched, are also described. There is first of all the picture, "They," the offspring of Israel, "shall spring up like grass amid waters, like willows by flowing streams." Everywhere an infinitely great change takes place as soon as God sends forth His Spirit, and things start to come to life once more among those who believe in a childlike way. It is also expressed without a picture when it says, "This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will call himself

by the name of Jacob, and another will label himself 'the Lord's' and will call himself by the name of Israel."

Children of Israel will rise up everywhere, as grass springs from the earth, until a great Israel will be created from mankind and all the generations of men will be renewed into a divine nature. There will be great astonishment at how quickly and comprehensively the Spirit of God works among men. Then they will run from all sides, saying, "I also want to belong to the Lord; I also want to belong to the people of Jacob and to be called by the name of Israel." Nobody will want to stay behind and be excluded from the blessings which flow to the people of God from their God. Then the servants of God will receive the authority to say to them, "Yes, you shall also belong to the Lord, you shall also belong to God's Israel; it shall also be with you as with the others; just come here!" Oh, what a wonderful time that will be when men who are now engaged in all manner of foolishness and perversity are filled only by the one thought of how they can enter the domain of grace and the blessings of God and be called by the name of Israel and Jacob.

Yes, if this could only begin! And is it not possible in our poor, barren time? Let us who have been prepared for great things by the Father in Heaven ask that He might

permit this time to begin and not delay too long but intervene in order to make once more vigorous and lively all that which is now slowly dying. Come then, let the word from the mouth of God give us fresh courage, comforted and joyful, to await the hour when this will come about.

Praised be His name. Amen.

REJOICE

(1880)

Deut. 32:43 "Rejoice all ye who are his people."

(free translation from German text)

It is not without importance that it says, "ye who are his people," which means, "you who belong to his people." We must bear in mind that this was said of the people of Israel in contrast to the Gentiles. The surrounding Gentiles were outside God's camp; they were therefore more exposed to wickedness and darkness than those within the camp of God. Those who were outside the people of God could not take hope in God, but those who were within certainly could. Those without could attain nothing through prayer and supplication; those within, by turning to their God to whom they belonged personally, could attain much, finally over and over again as much as they needed. If we now apply this to ourselves, we can say that as Christians, as baptized people, we are His people. Certainly, with the passing of time a great difference has developed among those who are baptized. And yet nevertheless one can say that whoever, through baptism, counts himself as part of the people of God, also receives the advantages of this people. If he will rise to this, then he will know himself to be

under God's protection and grace, can pray to God, and can call upon the Saviour as being the one who forgives sins. Of course, if anyone does not value his baptism and does not ask about the rights and benefits that should come to him from this, but thinks of himself as a Gentile, then such a person is without and not within the camp of God. If, however, he regards himself as one who has come through Jesus Christ to the Father, then he belongs to His people. Since we have been accepted, it depends entirely on us as to whether or not we immediately receive our full rights as children.

A PEOPLE OF HIS OWN POSSESSION

Deut. 4:20 "But the Lord has taken you ... to be a people of his own possession, as at this day."

God calls Israel a people of His own possession. That is because He wanted for Himself a place on the earth which was otherwise occupied completely by the prince of this world. This could only come about through a believing man, if He could find one - one who was somehow able to keep himself independent of the prince of this world. Such a man was found in Abraham, and God commanded him to migrate to Canaan. God looked upon this as His land; and the people to whom He would give it would inherit His land as the people of God's possession. Thus Israel, as a people of God's possession, received Canaan, which God wrested away from the prince of this world. In this land, valued as a land made holy by God, there should therefore especially be no idolatry, because therein lay the difference between it and all the other lands which had become the dwelling of the prince of this world. This land remained holy and God's very own. God laid claim to it ever after on behalf of Israel, even when they defiled it and made it like a heathen land. For this reason there were times when they had to leave the land, as was the case at the time of the Babylonian exile.

Since the time of Christ, however, Canaan has ceased to be the only land made holy by God. Now the whole earth belongs to God, as everywhere the prince of this world shall be driven back. The holy land of God is now everywhere where the children of God gather and pray to the true God and to Jesus Christ whom He has sent. All humanity is now a people of God's possession, bought with the blood of Christ. Hence the thought that Israel, as the people of God's possession, must again return to Canaan has no longer any basis now that the whole earth has become the Lord's and all is now His in the way that Canaan was previously. God, who once was only known in Israel, wants to make Himself known everywhere. Why should there now be a land of God in contrast to other lands? Now we sing with the angels, "Holy, holy, holy is God the Lord; all the lands are full of His glory." This means that all lands are now made worthy of the glory of God in the way that was previously only known among Israel in Canaan. Therefore the Lord also spoke of this to His disciples. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." They shall not only be citizens of the former land of God but inheritors of the whole earth. Let us, through our faith and through holding firmly to God and to the One whom He sent, make everywhere a land of God, rightfully due to the people of God's possession; for everywhere He is recognized, or shall be recognized, in His full divine majesty.

THE LITTLE FLOCK

(1876)

Luke 12:²²~~13~~ "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The Saviour is speaking to His disciples (verse 22), with those who were appointed to go out into the whole world and preach the good news to all creation. Before this text He expressed many things that concern all Christians - how they should not be anxious about their life, their food, or their clothing, just as it is written in the Sermon on the Mount, although in the Sermon on the Mount He was primarily instructing His disciples. Because in their calling the disciples would have to suffer much need and privation and be dependent upon their faith, even for their smallest needs, He told them to apply all of this especially to themselves. Servants of the Gospel, when at times outwardly hard-pressed, could take these words as being directed especially to them, to serve as a comfort.

In our text the Lord addresses His disciples as the little flock which, small and insignificant as it is, nevertheless has such a great vocation and shall change the whole world into a Kingdom of God. How easy it was for them to become despondent and discouraged! The natural man cannot grasp how a hand full of people could be in a position to

fulfill such a great task. But the Saviour tells them that they should not be afraid and points them to God's good pleasure or to His well-pleasing counsel so that they would be able to bring to pass the Kingdom of God; He would give it to them. As Jesus says, it is the Father in Heaven Himself who wills this. Accordingly, the words spoken just previously, "Seek the kingdom of God," are given a special meaning for the disciples - namely that they are really concerned that the Kingdom of God may come about; that they turn all their thoughts towards this so that it receives an ever greater impetus. Then they can lack nothing, and all that they need for their existence, concern for which would only be a hindrance, will be given to them without fail. We can also add to our text the words spoken by the Saviour to His disciples on the last evening, after He had emphasized how they stood by Him in His temptation: "As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you" (Luke 22:29) The Kingdom was appointed for the Son before His ascension, although it never came about. Now the disciples are appointed to deliver this into His hands through their work and their struggles. What a joy for them, through His help from heaven above, to be allowed to deliver to the Saviour that which is His, bought with His blood!

We see how careful we must be to interpret our text rightly. By "little flock" most often one thinks of those who will inherit the Kingdom of God, which will only turn out to be a very few. This small number must not be concerned about their own salvation even if it is hard for them to bring about the Kingdom of God in the face of many who remain distant and hostile towards them. Here the word "give you the kingdom" is mistakenly understood as "to save your soul." In this way the most wonderful words can be misunderstood and given a selfish meaning, thinking only of our own salvation and not of the winning of the Kingdom of God for all.

At any time only a little flock remains of those who may accomplish this, and each one just has to do his part towards this in order that he may be of the small flock of workers who must conquer the Kingdom for the Lord Jesus. The disciples did not bring this to a conclusion, of course. When it is concluded, we would have to say that it is something granted them by the Father. Up to today their work and their word are alone the means through which we can bring this about, with the help of the Spirit of God. Finally, it will again be a little flock on whom the ultimate things are laid. What! Do you not also desire to belong to the active little flock? Oh that our feet

were better shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace!

Amen.

(Ephesians 6:15)

THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH

Joshua 1:5 "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life."

This is what was told to Joshua when he was to conquer the land of Canaan. God Himself vouchsafed to him that no power of the enemy would be able to hold its own before him. Joshua could now also depend upon this and had no need to measure his strength against that of the enemy. He could, without more ado, attack in whatever way he met the enemy, and victory was always on his side, that is, on God's side.

Now we who wish to be disciples of Jesus are also all of us conquerors, just as Joshua was. We want to belong to the little flock of which the Saviour speaks. To them applies also the word, "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life," and for this reason the Saviour says, "Fear not, you little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." If we do not belong to this flock but stand to one side, then any enemy can press and fall upon us, and who knows what manner of evil may befall us - we can even be completely put to flight. We must be a part of the flock and indeed, fully so - the flock that gathers around none other than

the great Joshua, Jesus Christ. Whoever strives towards the Kingdom of God, in Him and through Him, belongs to the people of God for whom the Kingdom is granted, as the land of Canaan was granted to the people of Israel. But the little flock must fear no enemy; it will be victorious through faith in Jesus Christ. When they have this faith, they cannot be overpowered by enemies from either within or without. Of this faith it is also said in the first letter of John (5:4), "Our faith, this is the victory that overcomes the world." With this faith we have the living God; with this faith we have the Lord Jesus to whom all authority is given, in heaven and on earth; with this faith we already have the victory in advance. It is a defeat when I do not believe, and a victory when I believe. For when I believe, for me it is: "Jesus is Victor." That is how it should be with us if the enemy is not to press us hard. We must have the victorious Saviour, for then we may not look upon our weakness and need in the fear that we could be overwhelmed. We will become much more conscious that everywhere His hand leads to victory. Therefore let us only allow our faith to grow stronger so that we may belong to the flock to whom the Saviour can say, "I am with you always and will lead you to victory." Then we

are secure and experience that we advance toward the goal, when all things will be subject to the Lord Jesus. What joy the little flock will then have after all their struggles and tribulations!

THE LOVE TO JESUS

(1873)

John 14:21 "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

When the Saviour asked Peter "Do you love me?", He said further, "Tend my sheep." We should never think of the Lord apart from His sheep and lambs; that is to say, we cannot love Him without loving His sheep. He who is a stranger to His sheep loves the person of Jesus in a purely selfish way, without considering that which is most precious to Jesus. The Father cannot yet love a person for the sake of love like this, which is completely egotistical. Whoever wants to love Jesus must do everything possible for the good of His sheep. Jesus became the sacrifice for the sin of the whole world and bought all with the price of His precious blood so that the Redeemer and those redeemed become one. If we want to love Jesus, then we must love the whole Jesus, that is, Jesus together with His sheep. Jesus would rather recognize those as being the ones who loved Him who, without knowing Him, cared for His sheep, than those who know and want to love Him without caring about His sheep. Only to those who show a keen striving and eagerness for the deliverance of others will the glory

of God be revealed, and only such can rejoice in the loving nearness of God, as the text says. May the Lord give us wisdom that we may be found to be His true and wholehearted lovers!

THE SAINTS - THE FAITHFUL

Psalm 31:23 "Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful."

The believers are the saints, and the saints are the believers. They are called the saints of God because they are His chosen ones, those near to Him, those for whom He has a special regard, friends taken out from the great mass of people and whom He then also protects. This is only possible insofar as they are believers and put all their trust in God. For as soon as they are lax in this, they depart from the Lord; yes, they even separate themselves from Him and make themselves independent, as if they had to do everything alone, without Him. Then they would no longer be His saints. But those who trust in Him and acknowledge Him in all things, who look up to Him in faith, these, as His friends, draw close to His heart and are therefore His saints and chosen ones. Not just all of those whom we nowadays call believers belong to the saints. For among them there are many who stand on their own feet, acting independently, and not in the fellowship of the Lord. There are some who just believe in a theological system, and these are no saints. For with a belief in doctrine, one is still not a new man, not a man of God,

and protection from God's side will also continue to be lacking. But if we want to belong to the believers who are at the same time saints, then we must have a childlike trust in Him and show Him unreserved obedience. The Lord will then be able to protect us, today and every day of our life.

To those saints who, in trust, are obedient to the Lord the summons can be given: Love the Lord! Be content with Him, even when what He does is not always that which you would wish. Love Him, even when He seems puzzling and incomprehensible, for it is no great matter to love the Lord as long as He only does good to you, allows everything to succeed, and grants every request. But to love Him as the One who always acts rightly - even if there were reasons to be irritated, annoyed, and discouraged, really means to love Him. The lovers of the Lord can always be recognized by whether they grumble or not, whether they lose courage or not, or are fretful. If one is a saint in the sense of being a believer who puts all his trust in the Lord, then the love of the Lord will not get lost, even when the darkest and most puzzling things happen. Let us hold firmly to Him! It can do us no harm. Our trust should expect the utmost from Him, especially in those times when all seems lost. Yes, in a time when everything is going to rack and

ruin, we may even hope and expect from Him the reclaiming of all that has been lost. In this way we are saints who are particularly near to God's heart and believers whom He supports in an especial way and whom He protects.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF GIFTS

(1874)

1 Peter 4:10 "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

The life of the first Christians was so wonderfully arranged that every one had his place wherein he could serve the whole, his small task with which to be of some use to the others. There, nearly all, the lowly as well as those who had a higher place, had received appropriate gifts which they were to use in the service of all. Gifts were given with an eye to the whole so that among the many who were there, not one was neglected, and each was appreciated for himself. Of course, faithful stewardship was required of all - and that is what our text enjoins us to carry out. Only be of some use to the whole, the Apostle is saying, by serving one another, using your gifts in whatever way you can to prove your faithfulness. Do not stand outside the circle with folded arms, criticizing, gossiping and judging, shaking your head about all you see and hear, especially as regards those charged with special responsibility. Rather, give help wherever you see that it is needed, in whatever way you can, and as much as you are able.

That is how it should be among us, too. We have not, certainly, the same gifts as the first Christians, but still much is given to many, enabling them better to assist all those around them as the occasion arises, through instruction, admonishment, and warning, by visiting, by cheerful encouragement, or by help through word and deed. But most people act quite differently. If they are not entirely indifferent, then they like to be the clever ones, ready to give their disparaging opinion about this or that, always organizing and debating the rules, without ever themselves doing anything to encourage and improve others in a personal way for the sake of the Lord. And so it happens nowadays that the ministry, even where properly carried out, cannot accomplish much. No one will serve in order to help others. The people abandon everything and leave it all to the ministry. They go about their own business with never a thought about the Lord and His Church. There are certainly societies of every sort serving the home missions and doing this very commendably. However, the spiritual care of individuals through other individuals - where we should actually serve one another according to the instructions of the Apostle - is almost completely gone everywhere, and "stewards of God's varied grace" are almost nowhere encountered, except among those charged with the ministry. It occurs to very

few to support those with this ministry, with little or much as we are able, so that they can better carry out their task. Especially the sectarians are quick to criticize and argue. "Now you can see," they say, "the church accomplishes nothing and is under a curse." How can things improve if the better ones, namely those who have received gifts to serve others, band together against the rest, instead of placing themselves at the service of the whole? If we do not learn to serve one another in accordance with the words of the Apostle so that all may be uplifted, we cannot expect that out of the present wicked corruption something better will arise for the future. The life of the church, yes, the whole church, depends upon this: that we learn to serve one another fully in every way.

How we wish that in our communities there would be people like the first zealous, God-fearing, and humble helpers! Can this still be? Hardly, I fear, unless the Lord comes near to us once more with the Holy Spirit, who will bestow more decisive gifts upon each one. Let us hope for such a time of grace in which Christians will be more active for one another! Amen.

THAT THE DISCIPLES MAY BE ONE

(1874)

John 17:22,23 "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them, even as thou hast loved me."

Even upon the way to the Garden of Gethsemane the Saviour prays amidst His disciples. And, praying to His Father, He expresses among other things how much He longs that His disciples take to heart that they be one, just as He and His Father are one, so perfectly one that absolutely nothing divides them inwardly from one another. How could disunity among the disciples be in accord with the oneness of the Son with the Father? Should the Father and the Son watch while the disciples separate themselves into groups, exclude and repudiate one another, settle down into their own cliques, and then stand before Father and Son expecting in some way all to be regarded equally? Some of them act in one way and others in another, and both sides say, "We are the ones - we have the right way; and these others are not the ones, they do not have it." What does it mean if here below they are unable to be reconciled one with the other, but persist in disunity, each holding to his own views? The Saviour is expected to settle this - judging

one right and the other wrong, although such bigotry is reason enough for Him to think that none of them can be used by Him, because none of them have taken any notice of His most ardent wish that they should be one. Ah, this is the great failing of our time! Is it to remain like this until the Lord comes? When He comes in triumph from heaven, after having united all the heavens, must the Lord look on while the people on earth elbow one another aside, putting themselves forward as if they were the most distinguished people, and trying to show the Saviour that they, not the others, are the only ones He need ask for, in the same way as they do now on earth? No, I say that still has to change before the Lord comes.

But can it change? Will all the disciples of Jesus ever become one? Surely everybody despairs about this; and because they despair about it, they make a virtue out of this need, ignoring the fact that before God and all the angels this is a tremendous mistake and that it is utterly wrong to say that the sects especially are the core of God's people. Yet I say that things must still change; but then you must believe as I believe. For the Lord says in His prayer, "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they - or so that they - may be one."

What is then this glory which was given to Him and which He gave to the disciples? Evidently this does not refer to the glory which the Son received from the Father "before the foundation of the world" (verse 24), but to the glory which He received on earth as the Son of man, when at His baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. From then on He performed His miracles, through which His glory was made manifest, as described in John 2:11. The glory, which in His prayer He speaks of having given to His disciples in the same way as was given to Him, is the same glory as He had in the flesh, given Him through the Holy Spirit. This Spirit He emphatically promised to His disciples, as the Comforter, the Guide into all truth, and therefore as the One who unites; His promise had the same value as though it had already been given. Glory such as this was given to the disciples so that they would be one, and from this we see that without this glory, that is, without the Holy Spirit, He could not expect the disciples to become one. Here, where nobody had expected it, we find Scriptural proof of how necessary it is to receive the Holy Spirit in the way that it was given to the disciples. If the Holy Spirit could only come to us in order to make us one, completely one, how important and significant would

be this gift from heaven - just in our day! There will never be any unity so long as we rely upon our own natural inclinations and thoughts, doing just as we please - or as the Evil One dictates. But if we are filled by the one Spirit from heaven, who is proclaimed in Person by God, then things will turn out well and something will happen. Otherwise it will never come about.

Let us also think about the words of our text that the world shall recognize in the unity of the disciples or believers that the Father sent Jesus and loves them even as He loves the Son. Has anything, however, brought greater discredit to the Gospels than the different denominations, sects, and divisions which have increasingly come into being? We are well aware that even other churches reproach us that our cause is of no value because we are so disunited. Imagine, though, what sort of fresh impression the Gospels would quickly make again if all at once, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the various denominations, sects, and divisions who really believed became united and as a consequence dropped all their differences which separate just in order to be sure together of the love of Jesus, delighting in His glory, the Holy Spirit. How wonderful if, just as it was in the beginning, all "isms" would suddenly cease

among those who truly believe and the believers were only aware that they were brothers, all equally just and blessed through Jesus' blood! By day and by night we should cry out, "Lord, give us once more the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and Teacher of all truth, so that He makes us one, even as you, Father, are one with the Son." Whether it is many or few who cry out, the Lord will listen to the few for the sake of the many and - perhaps very soon - will send us that indispensable gift.

GOD'S OWN PEOPLE

1 Peter 2:9,10 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

Now the greatest thing is that not only one individual tribe and one man in that tribe are His priesthood, but that everything which belongs to God's people belongs to His priesthood. Individually and collectively all of God's people can draw near to Him and receive revelations. Access to Him is open to all, and each one has priestly concerns to bring before the Lord and can personally approach Him at any time. It is therefore written, "Let us then with joy draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) At one time, only the High Priest might do this, but now it may be done by every Christian. Our text also speaks of "a holy nation, God's own people," that becomes God's own through the Saviour. Present-day Jews therefore cannot say that they are the chosen race; only we can say this - we who believe in Jesus and find consolation in Him, in life, suffering, and death. Before giving the commandments God said to Israel, "You must be a people holy to the Lord, and in keeping my commandments

you shall be a holy nation." This is not revoked by the new covenant, and therefore our text says that we are to be God's own people "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Thus, it must come about that we become a holy nation. The commandments of God do not cease; now you should really show in your whole life, by keeping His commandments, that you are His people. Merely believing with the head, without also proclaiming the wonderful deeds of God in our actions, does not make us members of Christ's Kingdom, does not make us God's own people. The failings of those who till now have been the people of God must be put right among us so that from now on the Holy God is represented among His people. If we are His children, then we must also represent our Father in our whole being, and only then are we the "chosen race, the royal priesthood." But if we just want the name without representing the Lord, the holy and great God, then this would be a sheer lie. Oh, how we should be on our guard that we do not become unworthy of belonging to the holy people! The image of God must be renewed in us and only then will we, by our deeds, become God's own people. How eagerly we should strive for the honor of our God, doing all that we can so

that God may see in us that He is holy and just and compassionate, patient, gracious, and true. God - who called us - should have in us His personal representatives. How highly we are regarded! And so it comes about that we are His people, although once we were not His people; that now we are in grace, although once we were not in grace. Oh, that we may really understand and practice this! May the Lord help us that in all our doings and conduct we more and more resemble our compassionate and beloved Saviour; that we more and more give ourselves faithfully to the Lord so as to be well-pleasing to Him.

THE BRIDE

(1881)

Psalm 45:10,11 "Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house; and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him."

The bride spoken of here is the Church of God upon earth. She shall allow herself to be instructed, she shall open her eyes and ears to hear and understand the Lord who wishes to speak with her, to reveal Himself to her, and to bring honor to her. She is to forget her father and her father's house, that is, leave the world and its corruption, leave behind completely all the perverse things that she has heard, felt, and done, so that she no longer appears as a child of the degenerate world. She shall leave everything, if necessary leave father, mother, brother, sister, just for the sake of having her Lord alone. If she does this, then there is "beauty" in her which is a delight to the king, her Lord; then He has pleasure in her and considers her worthy of Him. When she has cast off all the filth of the world and submerged her whole being in that which is Godlike and heavenly, then the Lord will enter with her into eternal joy. The one to whom she is to belong is her Lord whom she must follow in all things, whose commandments she must accept, placing Him above all

else. She must worship Him as the one from whom she is to receive all things, and she shall turn to Him again and again, entreating Him and paying homage to Him. Then she will be the daughter, the bride, the church of the Lord. But what applies to the church as a whole also applies to each individual soul. He who wants to belong to this has heard how he will prosper and what he must do in order to avoid failing the highest which the Lord will deign to give him.

2 THE POVERTY OF THE CHURCH

BE SOBER AND AWAKE!

(1856)

1st Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians 5:6-8 "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation."

Dear friends in Christ Jesus, today we celebrate our yearly festival of the Reformation in which we commemorate the great blessing which the Lord conferred upon a large part of Christendom three hundred years ago, including our Fatherland, enabling us to pierce through the rubble of gross ignorance and folly and to re-discover the shining light of the Gospels. For a long time now we have been in undisturbed possession of the Gospel and can all enjoy its teachings. We can instruct our young people in this, being familiar from our childhood on with the Holy Scriptures, the fount of all light. We can serve our Saviour and trust Him in life and death without being led astray under pressure from men. For this great grace we can well devote a special day, and so we, too, want to show our thankfulness by resolving anew to use faithfully the good things given to us by the Lord so that we may not be accused on that day that we who were in the light nevertheless

had walked in darkness.

Let us take a closer look at our text. Today, dear friends, we rejoice especially in the light that the Lord gave us with the Reformation. We rejoice in the knowledge of God's word, which clearly places before our eyes God's will for our salvation. We rejoice in our well-established basis which can easily lead us in all that we need so that we may gain the eternal jewel. No longer do we feel pressed by a darkness forced upon us from without. We are free, and we can reflect undisturbed on the salvation of our souls and strive for this. But, in this freedom, the big question to us is: Are we who stand in the light really awake and sober? Or is it so that in spite of the light we have, we act like sleepers and drunkards? This is a serious question.

A look at Protestant Christianity of our day scarcely gives the impression that the social life is any better than among those from whom we have descended. We get the impression that a great deal of sleepiness, indifference, and unconcern delude thousands of people. There are many to be seen who are not sober and who stagger around and appear not as children and heirs of eternal life, but as those who do not know what they are nor what will become of them. They waste away in indolence and dullness, most of them - at least the greater part of them - like dumb brutes whose life passes

by without their being able to think any kind of higher thought. Thus do thousands of Protestants stagger about. Among other things, they have abused to the point of impudence the freedom which they enjoy, shaking themselves free of everything - not only the yoke of human laws, but also the commands of the Word of God. They make themselves into the law-giver and God, with no thought of what the true God has made known to us through His Word and which should serve us as a guide line for eternal life. This sleepiness has overcome everyone to a greater or lesser extent. Even those who are awake, or appear to be awake, have to struggle a good deal with sleep, and before they know it, they are also asleep, staggering around, oblivious of their high calling, and at the same time a prey to the prince of darkness.

Dear friends, the Lord did not place us in the light of day so that we should regard day as night, doing as little by day as is usual at night, or even trying to make use of the day for carrying out the horrors of the night. Against this the present day is a powerful challenge: Rise up, you who sleep, so that you are not overcome by a darkness from which no arising is possible! The Apostle's words contain all that we need to consider in order to escape from sleep and drunkenness, showing us the way in

which we should be awake and sober. The Apostle expresses it simply with the words that we should "put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." The Reformation tried to bring back to us these three things: Faith, Love, and Hope. It has become much brighter around us because of these three things, and whoever stands in faith, in love, and in hope and has put these on, stands in the light. But he who only voices these things, without really having them within him and upon him, is still in the darkness as though he had never heard of faith, love, and hope. The preaching and the light of the Gospel are lost upon him. Oh, dear friends, how essential it is that all which is proclaimed to us becomes a reality within us and not just something learned by rote! Let us therefore speak about these three things.

To show that we are awake and sober we need:

1. The breastplate of faith, that is, a faith which serves as a breastplate, as armour against the attacks of darkness. We are well aware that it was chiefly Luther who brought to light the truth that men are saved by faith and not by the works of the law. This is evidenced by all his writings. The whole structure of evangelical faith is built upon our faith and trust in the living God who redeems and saves us through undeserved grace, not because of any merit of ours,

but through the merit of Jesus Christ alone. We often hear this, but it has always been a difficult matter, right up till today, to awaken true faith in men. Thousands, even millions, of Protestants comprehend this with their minds but not with their hearts. Faith of this kind - of the head and the mouth - does not signify that we are in the light, that we are awake and sober. We must put on this faith so that it fills our whole nature, and we no longer have thoughts which are not submerged in this faith and trust in the Lord.

The heart of the faith demanded of us by the Gospel is that we, as poor sinners, take refuge in the merit of Jesus Christ, that we despair of ourselves but trust completely in the Lord for the sake of Jesus Christ. There are now countless numbers of Protestants, however, who have not arrived at faith by despairing in themselves, have not previously abased themselves and reached out eagerly toward the Saviour who alone can help them. Untold numbers have kept their self-love, smugness, and self-justification, have never felt a true repentance and remorse for their sins, and yet still want to lay claim to the faith that brings salvation! In our age the greatest harm has been caused by the presence of so many with a pretended faith who are of as little use in the Kingdom of God as

those who have never heard of faith. Therefore, dear friends, we want to be awake, we want to be sober - and we must be convinced that there is nothing good in us and that we must constantly submit and humble ourselves because of our sins and because of the many sorrows we inflict on the Lord through our sins. Let no one claim to have faith unless he has previously been broken and felt the full burden of his unworthiness and his sins. God's compassion cannot truly be grasped until one has felt the unhappiness of being without it. Dear friends, there are perhaps many people among other denominations who, with sorrowful hearts and in self-accusation because of their sins, seek in all manner of ways to find peace of soul; people who practice many of the rites in which they have been instructed, who are ready for much sacrifice, and who go to great lengths to mortify themselves, and also otherwise in various ways impose penances upon themselves. It could well be that many who thus humbly undertake such things will be found more worthy on that Day than all the presumptuous believers who, although having nothing to do with such superstitious acts, still hold their heads high and do not humble themselves before God. But He will see into hearts and inquire whether someone has become poor in spirit, has borne suffering, has been meek, has hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and so on.

If, however, as Protestants we want to be different in that we do not want in any way to admit to being guilty or being in need, and stand impudently before God without any spiritual effort on our part, just wanting to take the merit of Jesus Christ without more ado, then on that Day we may be found wanting! So let us remember that if we want to show ourselves to be children of light through faith, then we must always have a contrite heart and the conviction that we are absolutely and completely nothing. Otherwise, in spite of the faith we boast of, we are in deep sleep and are drunkards who let ourselves be deluded. When the Reformers again want to bring the light of faith to us, fight that you may also have a life of faith, so that all we are and do may be penetrated by the vision directed upward and we believe in such a way that our lives show that we have a God who delivers from sin, death, and corruption.

Just how much we fall short in our faith is shown by how little trust in God, His Word, and His promises there is among us. Perhaps more than other people, Protestants look upon it as superstitious to trust a Saviour in all need and to believe that He who sits at the right hand of God stretches out His hand to him who asks. Yes, we Protestants can speak less about this faith in our own

circles than we can in other circles. But what then is our faith if we cannot expect something from it, cannot prayerfully trust that He will hear and give us what we ask of Him? How can we say that we have faith if we regard such things as impossible or even scoff at them as something that belongs to the middle ages. By believing this we would be returning again to darkness from the light! Yes, it has really gone so far that people think that it is darkness if we believe that the Lord will hear our prayer! What a heavy burden of guilt Protestants bear in always boasting of a faith which, when one looks at it more closely, has nothing to do with faith in a living God, but is merely intellectual wisdom. It is a rare thing indeed to find a heart that fully and completely trusts the Lord in heaven, and we can therefore scarcely boast of being in the light and sober. How much we could expect and hope if this faith once more became new and living!

2. The situation is, if anything, sorrier when we ask: "Have Protestants put on the breastplate of love?" What stood out so strikingly during the first decades of Protestantism was the belief that the love of the first Christians had returned. There was noticeable evidence of a devoted love, the like of which had been known only in the time of the Apostles. A heart-felt union of all those who had been penetrated by the

new light was to be seen; and one can well say that it was just this love that offered the best proof that a ray of compassion had come down to Christians from above. But all too soon things changed - indeed, in two ways. Firstly in daily life. For where is the special love of Protestants in daily life? A lot is talked and testified about love, and scarcely a Sunday passes without our hearing a great deal of preaching about love. But where is it? Where does one find the love that is not irritable or resentful, harms no one, but will rather suffer wrong than do wrong, despises nobody but humbles itself for the sake of the others, that forgets itself and has regard for others? Do Protestants distinguish themselves by this love so that when others come to us they are able to say, "Truly, it is not like this among us! We are amazed at how they love one another and bear patiently with one another and no quarrelling is heard; discord is unknown. It is just like being in heaven!" When someone comes to us, will he be edified by the love that is customary among Protestant Christians? To be sure, there are individual circles where heartfelt love prevails, but on the whole where can one find that love which should distinguish Protestants? Dear friends, in this we must humble ourselves and remember that although we know well enough what belongs to love,

nevertheless there is nothing of this to be seen. How can we then say that we are in the light and are sober when we wound and sadden one another, when we do wrong, when we are abusive, and when we rob one another? Is that being a Protestant? Oh, dear friends, we can speak and be zealous like Protestants but cannot love and bear with one another like Protestants. Oh, that our merciful God would remind us of our obligation and of the great frailties that lie within our daily and social life!

There is, however, still another way in which Protestantism has failed in love. What a factious spirit has arisen among us - we who want to stand in the light and be sober! How much bickering, envy, anger, enmity, hatred, even deadly hatred, is to be found among Protestant Christians, among just those who want to be something and who take things more seriously and who want to differentiate themselves from the so-called world. It has gone so far that in some places a person is not reckoned a good Protestant unless he continually rants and raves, unless he flies into a passion about something and brandishes a sword against those who think differently on this or that point. It has gone so far that a difference over even one small point brings about a mutual exclusion of one another. We can see no way out as to how things can ever be different, for the longer it goes

on, the worse it gets. One faction after another arises, claiming, "We are the ones! We are right!" And in this way they cast all others from their hearts, and they regard as enemies everyone who cannot decide to go along with them. How much quarrelling, hate, envy, and rage there is just because of some so-called points of faith! Instead of exhorting one another continuously - at least not to depart from love - just the opposite is the case, and we think that for the sake of God's honor we may hate one another. This has happened a thousand times in our church. Yes, this shows plainly that we do not wear the breastplate of love, and on a day like this we must deplore that we fall so far short of what the Lord so urgently wanted when He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." Therefore, guard yourselves against a factional spirit! Just as soon as this becomes zeal that wounds, offends, and repudiates other souls, surely and truly it is of evil. It is part of a Satanic spirit which wants to divide and destroy us and hates nothing more than those who have a Saviour and want to unite with one another, because it knows that this is an impervious power against the prince of darkness.

We must grieve, however, that such a power is very much lacking! Ah! If we do not come more into the light

and become sober, what can the Lord do with us, for He can only accept into His Kingdom hearts that are full of love, compassion, mercy, gentleness, and patience. This also shows that our faith does not rest on a proper foundation, for if faith had grown out of a genuine repentance which recognizes that we are nothing and have deserved only death and hell, then lovelessness could not be the fruit of this faith, and hatred and conflict could not be its consequence.

Ah, there are many whose eyes must be opened by God, for they walk in blindness as in the dark. Whoever does not know love is in the dark; he deceives himself in whatever he has; it is of no use to him without love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." As we are together to rejoice in this day, let each one guard against the loveless spirit of partisanship and learn to treasure each other, and to treasure especially anyone who has any regard at all for the beloved Saviour. It is the saddest thing to see people

who love the Saviour cast each other out because they do not agree in every particular; they should thank God if even a trace of faith in Jesus is present. To reject somebody because in this or that point he is not yet one with us is the most terrible thing that the evil enemy could contrive among us. Therefore let us keep awake and be sober - also by seeking in all ways to stand in the love which one day will be the sole test of our faith!

3. Now, I hasten to the third thing that must be shown among us if it is to be said of us that we stand in the light. The Apostle calls this the helmet of the hope of salvation. Oh, my dear friends, the actual New Testament understanding of hope is something that almost all of Protestant Christianity, in spite of its knowledge, has forgotten just as much as have the other denominations. This is nothing other than the hope of His coming, through which everything will be put right. Our hope is that our Saviour Jesus Christ will at last become Lord, will conquer all His foes, and then come again to lead His people into His Kingdom, whether they are alive or dead. The hope of the New Testament refers to the expectation of the end of all things when all will again be brought into harmony, when all pain ceases, all mysteries are revealed, and the fullness of God's mercy in Christ Jesus will unfold

over all creation, and this shall be revealed to the children of God when the groans of all creation are quieted. And when it says here "hope of salvation," it is not meant in the sense that we hope for salvation after death; the Holy Scripture means by this salvation the final deliverance of all groaning creation from its torments and need, its misery and distress.

Dear friends, what do we say to all this? How does the Protestant church of today view a hope such as we have just described? Ah, how self-seeking and egotistic our hope usually is! Most Christians hope for nothing other than that which concerns them, and them alone; they are not concerned about any other hope. Nobody asks as to what is the hope of the whole of mankind, the whole creation, but only about the hope that "I" may be saved - "I," "I," and nobody else but "I!" But how un-Protestant this is, for there also the Reformers have such a wide vision! They strove not only for their own salvation but that entire nations might be snatched from the fetters of darkness. Let us remember how large-hearted our Luther was, how he sent epistles out in all directions and cried daily to God that He might bless His whole gospel. This spirit that extends to all men, which inspired the Reformers, can be seen in so few people! On the whole, people know of no other hope than that of working

for forty to fifty years and then of lying down and dying peacefully. But each one should be zealous for all; each one should be concerned that Christianity's great hope should be fulfilled and that more and more the arm of Jesus clears the way for the deliverance of all creation and the conquest of the Satanic powers, until at last comes the great refreshment of His countenance. If we do not have this hope, then we are not in the light. How deadly dull it is if this goal is not before our eyes! Generations come and generations go, and each generation has had to struggle through the same battle, with Satan on top and Christ below. We, however, would not be sober if, on looking at our children, we thought of nothing but: Ah, now they must wade through all this and see how they may be saved - one after the other - and so it goes on from generation to generation! Whoever does not have that real hope lives in drunkenness and is not in the light, for if there is to be light, then there must be light over everything.

It is, therefore, also necessary to impress this hope upon each soul today. But how often will this actually happen? Ah, whoever understands what is said here, let him do his part and, believe me, nothing will be right in our Protestant church until we are wholly filled by this

hope, until we rest only in this hope and, for the time being, find a peace in it about the many riddles of life. If we had this hope we would learn to reach out more to Him who has gifts to give to mankind. We could pray more and by this draw further divine powers down to our poor, groaning Christendom. But because men know nothing of this hope, they allow everything to waste away miserably, and they believe that this is how it must be. If we had this hope we would also be able to cast a loving glance in the direction of other denominations with the thought: Be of good courage! When the Lord really does burst forth upon us, then this will happen to you as well, and we will together experience that there is no other salvation except in the name of Jesus.

Oh, may this word, spoken in weakness, find some measure of understanding in all of us! May the Lord shed more light upon us and help us that at least we, the more we become the children of light, never again sleep but stay awake with eyes that survey the whole world and remain sober until the end. Amen.

CONCERNING THE PITIFUL STATE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(1846)

Isaiah 24:16 (from the German)
 "From the ends of the earth
 we hear songs of praise,
 of glory to the Righteous One.
 But I say, 'I pine away,*
 I pine away. Woe is me!
 For the scornful deal scornfully,
 The scornful deal very scornfully.'"

According to these words, dear listener, it seems that today we are not called upon to rejoice so much as to lament greatly. We listen to the people of God, to whom God has revealed Himself, bemoan their barren condition, while ever and again from afar can be heard songs of praise to the glory of the Righteous One. They complain that many scornful ones are in their midst who even mock and despise the holy of holies instead of rejoicing and giving praise and thanks because of it. Does this also apply to our day, dear friends? Truly, there is probably no one here who did not think right away - yes, that applies to our day! It should not be the concern of just the individual congregation when a place of worship is dedicated, although it is chiefly they who should remember that a house of God is given them

* "I pine away" is translated throughout by the expressions "pitiful," "barren," "meager."

wherein the Word of God will be proclaimed. But all the churches are linked together, and if they all at some time collapsed, would ours alone remain standing? Or if the entire Protestant church, even the whole of Christendom, were destroyed - which will never happen - would just we remain standing? We celebrate a Christian festival today because a church has been founded which will stretch out her arms to all corners of the earth and in which one congregation will always support and care for the other so that in every parish where this Christianity flourishes, there stands a church and a preacher, and many services for worship will be held. Today, therefore, I may be permitted to take a general look into the nature and condition of this Christian church of which we are a part. In a larger context we will think of Christianity, or our Fatherland, or of our Protestant church, as one single person. In what frame of mind will this person be today - happy or sad? Will there be praise and thanks, or will there be complaints and sighs? We should soon be clear about this and know where we stand. Although one or the other has reason to be joyful that God's Word is proclaimed to us, on the other hand we should all begin to grieve that things look so pitiful in the Christian church. Nowadays we also hear many songs of praise from the ends of the earth and hear many stories of what God does

at this time among distant peoples. People learn to know the Lord who until now have known nothing of Him, and in some places they come running with joy and do not know how to be sufficiently grateful for this message of salvation that is brought to them. Especially in the present time many nations wake up and acclaim the Gospel; many old Christian churches reawaken as well, and only yesterday I heard of some former Christians in Armenia and Constantinople who are turning again to the God of the Christians. These are songs of praise that come to us, and their sounds are loud enough for us to rejoice in them, from however far they come. But how are things with us, and what is the matter with us? Oh, yes, we have particular reasons for picking ourselves up from the dust. Just listen to how things are among us! The text groans and complains of the presence of those who are scornful: "Woe is me! For the scornful deal scornfully; yes, the scornful deal very scornfully." Does this not speak very especially to our age? Has there ever been a time which has begotten so many shameless despisers of the divine truth as ours has? Soon it will even be a disgrace to believe in Christianity! Most of this emanates from the wise and scholarly people of this world, although also those of lower station, who in other respects have little knowledge, eagerly grasp

and accept this as wisdom; they revile, despise, and mock along with the rest. This note of contempt can be heard today, especially also in our believing land. From one end of the country to the other you can meet circles in which it has become the fashion to think of Christianity as being entirely insignificant and to laugh politely about all the good things foretold in the Gospel. And if you look for the little company of those who are sincere, how many will you find? Will you find even one among a thousand? Or have I said too much? When the Lord tests men and picks out His true children, who knows whether He will find one among a thousand of whom He can really say "This is a member of my Body"! Although many can sometimes be found in the same place, one could almost say that on the average there is hardly one to be found in a thousand. And if this is so, can we say that we prosper? Can our church be jubilant? Must she not say, "Woe is me! I pine away! I pine away! How few still cleave to me!" One could almost despair about what has been revealed to us by the goodness of God through the ages.

Ah, dear souls, not only in this context do we wish to view the feebleness of the Christian church. We also want to turn to those who know of the Gospel, who are in some way members of His Body, who to a greater or lesser degree

hold to Him, loosely or firmly. Are they perhaps the ones to say, "I am rich, and I am well satisfied," or would not the righteous, those who are zealous for the Lord, have to add in the words of the prophecy, "You do not know that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"? (Revelations 3:17) At a church dedication, aside from gratefulness for the great things that the Lord has done, has not each one of us cause to sigh, "How pitiable I am! How constantly needy I am!"? And today, dear ones, it is especially important for each one to examine himself. It is particularly important to see and examine how things are among us and why the whole of our Christian church, nature, and life are so barren, for which we are also in part guilty. One can even say that it is especially the pitiful state of those who love the Saviour which has caused so many people to be scornful today. Just this, that one sees so little that is genuine and powerful in the Lord's disciples, provokes so many taunts and sneers and contempt - and sometimes envy, hate, strife, and persecution. It is just as the text says: because things are so pitiful, the scornful ones gain the upper hand, aspiring higher and higher, and finally appear to destroy everything completely.

We now want to see wherein the poverty of our

Christianity lies and why each one of us has to say that his concern is very small. We must, of course, differentiate here, since all are not alike, although we cannot now emphasize these differences. However, I would like to ask that each one modifies what is now said to fit his own situation, and then perhaps all will note that in nearly all of the points to be touched upon, there is a great deal of wretchedness to be found among Christians in general, some especially in regard to one point, others in another, and many in all points. We ask then: wherein lies the barrenness of our Christianity? And we answer with two very short points, which shall then be explained.

1. We have so little understanding.
2. We have so little power.

In these two points - understanding and power - the Church of God today is lacking in every respect. Because of this, things look so miserable, wretched, and pitiful that we can hardly believe any longer that the Word revealed to us is what it claims to be.

O, Lord our Saviour, for that which is now to be brought before us, we ask that you give us understanding and that we take it to heart. And let us separate from one another in deep consciousness of our true wretchedness, and let each in his own way learn to do what is necessary at this critical

hour. Amen.

1. I pine away! Thus speaks the church in the words of our text. We will first examine more closely to what extent there is so little understanding and discernment among Christians. So very much comes to my mind in this connection that I just do not know where to begin or where to go on or where to stop. It would be necessary to speak shortly about everything that belongs to Christianity in order to show how ignorance has come to prevail everywhere. I will try to do this shortly and simply.

Firstly, I would like to draw attention to how many are among us - also among those whom I like to believe are members of the Body of Christ - how many are among us who do not know the Holy Scripture and have not even a superficial knowledge of the Word of God. The churches are there, to be sure, and the preachers and the school teachers. School starts at the age of six, and the children are then worked upon by teacher and preacher. In the fourteenth year they are confirmed, after being instructed. After confirmation they attend church, some more and some less often. They grow older, get married, dress up every Sunday, and twice a year go to Holy Communion. Gradually greater experience comes, but also temptations appear - and so it goes on. But what do they know of Scripture?

Or the names of the prophets or the individual books? Which writings are in the Old Testament and which are in the New? You can see already in this such a vast ignorance among Christians that one cannot be sufficiently amazed and horrified by it. People are not concerned and do not consider seeking even a superficial knowledge of the Holy Word. And so just this treasure upon which our church rests, the book which preserves all the Lord's promises for us, is unknown to most people. Isn't that ignorance? Is it reasonable for a man to ignore just that book from which he can gain the most, allowing it to stand unopened, not knowing what God has to say to us? It is simply frightful to see the ignorance of many Christians who nevertheless believe that they are not the worst. But we proceed.

Secondly, ignorance shows itself when people have learned to hold on to external forms and to believe that an outward act is sufficient. I don't need to discuss this. And the church - the building up of which we should celebrate today - is attended by Christians who, for the most part, only come in, sit down, and either sleep or else think about something completely different, and leave when the service is ended. But - they have been to church and are therefore devout people. Others go to the Holy Supper without realizing that they must become changed people; they are

completely untouched, but they have not neglected their duty and therefore nothing is lacking. Others want to be still more pious, and they go just as mechanically to prayer meetings; one has to regard them as good people because they go to such gatherings.

Further: nowadays many complain about the decline in attachment to the church, and of course in many places church-going has decreased. All too often one finds empty churches, although on feast days they are attended a little better. It is like this in many places, and everywhere there are individuals - even among us - who do not think it so necessary to go to church. All this is zealously opposed - many meetings are held to discuss how church life can be improved, all kinds of suggestions are made, and people want to try - but how can this be tackled? People continually cling to external things; they imagine that if something attractive were offered from the pulpit then everybody would come running, things would suddenly change; and if only the people were sitting on the benches once more, then everything would be fine. Dear souls, what is all this? Is it not the highest degree of stupidity? Or is it understanding to try to satisfy people in this superficial way? I can tell you there are thousands who think: "If only the churches were filled!" But I disagree

with this, and I sigh over this hypocrisy and false piety, which has no substance. It is the most tragic thing that men try to turn external things into spiritual things, and there is nothing there at all whereby they can refresh themselves.

But let us go on to a fourth point. Most people - I will not say all - but the greater part, devout or otherwise, no longer have any idea of what is good or evil in certain situations. Everybody knows that stealing is a sin - but it is doubtful if everybody sees fornication as a sin. Oh, how awful that it has gone so far! There are doubts about perjury - though that still is something bad! Although in general the crudest things are considered sinful, how many thousands of matters come up in daily life which are never regarded in the light of being good or evil! Yes, there are occasions when people have to stop and think whether a thing is right or not - things which which should need no such thought. Discernment has been lost. And so there are thousands and thousands of such things which come up in daily life regarding honesty, and on the other side regarding hard-heartedness and lack of compassion, and regarding impurity, especially in marriage. If, in a court of law, we can do a favor for another by giving false witness, we do this unashamedly, saying, "I am not harming anyone but am

doing my neighbor a favor." Is that discernment? People's conceptions seem to be completely distorted. And this lack of discernment, in which men no longer consider what God's will might be, has penetrated the whole of Christendom to such an extent that when we examine public and private life, it is a disgrace to see the worldly tone everywhere. Nowhere is there a life in God, nowhere a Christian life. Is that not truly a disgrace? But Christians are so unreasonable that they pay no attention to the Word of God that strikes so piercingly upon their conscience. When these unprincipled interpretations of God's commandments have become so common within the Christian church, is it not quite clear why it had to fall into such a pitiful state?

But to continue further. Men no longer know how to distinguish between light and darkness. It is a dreadful and distressing fact that it is impossible to make clear to some of those who understand the Scriptures and are educated people that certain charms which have now been introduced are a sin. Many simply do not want to understand how it can be a sin to use and wear magical pieces of paper; and when the three holy names are misused in these magic formulas, it is said, "But it is prayer!" Is it discernment to give this the name of prayer? Where is insight and discernment if there is no discrimination at all and

men do the most godless things with the idea that this will help them? Consider, dear ones, what kind of Christians are these? Can you take offense if we speak of the pitiful state of the Christian church? Well, that is the lack of judgment which has again spread through the whole Christian church, and we cannot be sufficiently awestruck by the depth of the abomination into which nearly all have plunged themselves. But we still have much to say.

Most Christians no longer have any conception of God's judgments; they pass over them and never consider that here and there the chastening hand of God might be at work. When it happens that fire breaks out, a hailstorm destroys a whole harvest, or there is a crop failure, or if an epidemic, pestilence, or contagious disease occurs - then without exception people will not believe that this can be a direct punishment from God, that this is a judgment of God carried out in a small or large way. At the most, such things can only be expressed in church; privately, it would be considered silly. "A hundred years ago people believed that, but not any longer." But it is not only these more universal acts of God - which in truth already cry out loud enough and which must perhaps increase in number until men finally realize that the Lord has spoken - but how many thousands of things do we encounter in the course of daily life, how

much sickness, curable and incurable, how many ailments, how many thousands of such things are constantly taking place, and who stops to think of where he has incurred blame? No longer is one allowed to say that sin could be the cause of this or the other accident, of this or that sickness. Is this sense? Yes, some may well call it sense, but I would not give a "thank you" for this kind of light. If we look at the Bible and see how serious the Scripture is, truly one can no longer doubt why the world is full of such misery. Until this is once more recognized, we cannot say that the Christian church has understanding; she persists in her ignorance as though there were no God in heaven. Because man does not want to find divine justice anywhere, nobody in these days wants to be converted, and the Christian church will remain in her pitiful condition.

There is something more that I want to say and which I will summarize. In general among Christians, the ways have been perverted, even regarding the understanding of their whole Christian faith. Thank God, we have a Word, we also have a Teaching which we can say the Lord has acknowledged, and in our church we have been given a truth to which we can assent, for in all its aspects it is grounded on the Word of God. But how do Christians look upon divine truth? For example, someone was once heard to say, "Christ

has broken the power of the devil, crushed the head of the serpent, judged the prince of this world, who is now just about done for, and therefore the devil has no longer any power." That is the logical conclusion of these people, and without further ado the existence of all powers of darkness is flatly denied. They say that this is no longer possible and if there ever was a devil, he no longer has any power. Is this understanding? Is this a right conclusion? Is this an intelligent grasp of divine truth, or do we not see there a most superficial interpretation of the truth? And all those people who so far have been subjected to the power of the devil - are they now suddenly rescued from all this? Is it not clear that the only thing given to us is the strength to fight? But people believe that they no longer need to fight because the Saviour has already fought. Just look at such ignorance - such nonsense! Is it any wonder that Satan gains ever more power? Again - our evangelical faith says that we are justified by faith. And people are quick to accept this! "I believe, therefore I am justified." As long as a man does not deny anything and joins with others who are called believers, and perhaps they are believers, or as long as a man has a part in Christian institutions, then he is held to be a believer, and that's that. Today the greatest harm has been wrought

by just this sentence: "We shall be justified by faith," especially because blind man has applied it in a completely wrong way. Does one need much understanding to grasp that there are different kinds of faith? It is the same with other sayings - for example, he who asks receives, he who seeks finds, to him who knocks it will be opened.

There are some who make out that all promises in regard to prayer no longer apply. But is that understanding? Is that knowing one's Bible, knowing one's Saviour and the Word of God? Isn't this the same thing as trampling upon the One who gave the promises? Others say, "I pray and therefore I will be helped," and they cannot understand that their prayer is not heard, cannot understand that there is a difference between prayers. They do not see that praying requires something, that something hinders their prayer from being heard. And they believe that if they only stammer out a few words they are under God's protection, to which they have commended themselves. Is that understanding? Is it not ignorance if a man doesn't even understand how to pray, does not even recognize his sins? Is it then astonishing that things look so pitiful? Further, how quickly men are ready to count themselves or others among the converted! How quickly men are ready to consider their sins forgiven! After they have been guilty

of almost everything but now perhaps have a good thought and occasionally experience an enjoyable hour in communion with the Lord, they think that their sins are forgiven them. (Translator's note: "Wenn sie alles angestellt haben, und nun etwa auch einen guten Gedanken bekommen ..." can be understood in two ways and we have given it the above interpretation.) Is there not behind all this an abysmal ignorance, as though God had ceased to be a righteous God since He was on earth? Furthermore, we remember that the Saviour ordained the ministry of the "keys," according to the word of John 20:23: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." - These are words which are now completely excluded from the Christian church; "Nobody but God can forgive sins." Yes, that is how the Pharisees also acted, and today people have only a Pharisaical understanding. In that case, how can things improve in the Christian church? This is universal priesthood - everybody wants to forgive sins. We do not take into consideration that with this we override the last words of our Saviour, that there must always be particular members who help the others. But look how nowadays everything is taken in the wrong way and everything is thrown into confusion. Because there is a little truth in everything, men straightaway make a dogma of it,

and so make nonsense of it. It is therefore easy to realize that, because men will not accept and understand the Word of God, in the Christian church everything must gradually deteriorate. Is it then possible for our Christian church to flourish again? Must she not waste away more and more until at last she lies there breathing out the last of her miserable life? I would have much more to say, but I must hurry. I think the second part will go more quickly.

2. The pitiful state of the Christian church is shown in that she has no power, which actually proves that there is nothing in Christianity as it is lived today. It is to be highly deplored and regretted that individuals who want to give themselves to the Lord feel within themselves so little strength for a renewal of their inner being. Oftentimes a person is to be greatly pitied who fights and prays and tries in every way to overcome a vice, a temptation, a bad habit, which has become a burden or a reproach to him. Yet, however hard he fights, it does not improve or does not appear to improve - and anyhow, so very many weaknesses and infirmities remain that he must say, "Ah, how little strength I have received from the Gospel." How slowly things move forward, how very much of the old even tries to make new demands, when I think of you, my dear and treasured church members, in whom a relatively great strength was manifested

at the beginning. In certain instances of crudeness, of unforgiveness, things remain practically unchanged, at least with some, even when they repent of this time and again and fall into great need and concern about it. It is hard for them and for others that there seems to be such powerlessness in a newly awakened Christianity.

Many people have come to the view that this is how things have to be and that the Lord also ordained that men struggle through like this, right to the end, and that we keep certain weaknesses even to the grave. I do not believe this, and I also ask that nobody should consent to this view, for it is opposed to the Word and the promises. We must cry out, however, and lament this pitiful state - we must cry out and sigh, "Dear Saviour, how is it possible that you can leave us in weakness and poverty such as this!" But this is how it is, and this is what has happened in the Christian church. Here, however, I must say that many things that happen are not our guilt so much as the guilt of our forefathers who have bequeathed us such a burden, have left behind for us such poverty. For centuries now men have not desired anything more than this; throughout all this time of falling away from the living God, the generations of men have become poorer and poorer - and we lie there without knowing how to pull ourselves up. But it is not right

for us to let it go at that - that is just the point at which we must fight until the situation improves, until more strength from above is given to those who desire it. We must not believe that this condition is decreed by God's grace - no, it is not so! If we consider God's mercy and consider the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and the situation of the early Christians, is it in keeping with His glory that a power that came from Him should, in the course of the centuries, become weaker, like an aging man? Look! It is as clear as day! We must win back what has been lost, and when at last God's blessing is restored to His church, then we shall celebrate a joyful church dedication. But have courage and faith! We can gain the victory; we have only to unite with one another and see this critical state. The time will surely come in which His people will again be clothed with power, and every single person will experience to the full the strength of peace and compassion of God's heart.

Although we have now looked at these aspects of the pitiful state of the Christian church, there is still one more matter to consider - the power to witness is lacking in our Christian church. How many hundreds of people, especially in our Fatherland, do not hear the pure truth? They sing evangelical songs, listen to evangelical prayers,

and many of the Lord's zealous ones stand in the pulpits. All the institutions which are to be found among us breathe the true and living spirit of God and are of the truth - and yet, how many people come alive, become new beings? How many are inwardly kindled so that they desire to change their ways? Is it possible that so few are open to be instructed, so few want to be true believers, so few allow themselves to be guided to a Christian life? What is it that is lacking? The church on earth lacks the witnessing power of the Word of God. His Word seems to be more of an echo than a strength, and therefore although stony-hearted men hear it, they remain stone and iron! Everywhere messengers of the Lord stand and preach the will of the Lord - and yet the world becomes more and more corrupt. What is the cause of this? Here, truly, we see a pitiful state. We see that the power from on high has been withdrawn and that things must become quite different in order that the Word may kindle again. But that is how it is. Here and there we can find other reasons why there is no strength to witness and to convert, but this much remains certain - many true and lively voices ring out, but no fruit appears. I could tell you about many true men of God who have preached for years but who still could not say of even one soul that it has been converted. Isn't this a tragedy? Because of it

the scornful gain ground and say, "All this preaching is of no avail." Ah! Should a church dedication not also lay this need upon our hearts so that we pray that the Lord will restore His power as it originally was and that this may capture and burst hearts open everywhere and bring them from hell into life? There are still other points in which we see how pitiable we are. We look back to the first Christian church - what strength was astir there to heal the sick, to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf! What strength was astir to restore the lame, to drive out the devil, and to comfort with the power of the Word and with special strength from above all those who were under attack! What a promise Christ the Lord left behind for us in the words of Mark 16:17 - "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover." Where are these powers? Just look at the misery which has penetrated all of human society! Just look at the great number of people who are confused, tempted, and possessed, with whom our age abounds! Look at all the wretched people of whom we all know enough examples in our immediate neighborhood. What

attitude does the Christian church take to this? Oh, where is the strength to check this need? We weep, we pray, we try by all possible means, but it is of no use. The misery remains. Dear souls, what is wrong? Can we say that we are rich in strength, that we have abundance, and that we do not lack for any good thing? Oh, who does not know the many sighs that perpetually rise up to God - and still there is no strength to help! Nowhere in all of Christendom are there people who believe that men should have strength. Every belief that men should have strength, and every trace of the fact that Jesus is the same yesterday and today and in all eternity, is interpreted and disputed in a way which shows that men prefer weakness to strength and would rather see people pine away than do good to them. Ah, - must the church not also say, "I pine away! I pine away! How impotent is all my strength!"? Do you wonder that the scornful ridicule and mock? When one makes so much of Christianity and yet nothing is to be seen, is it any wonder that the scornful increase? Dear souls, are they right or wrong? Yes, we must groan that this strength has also left us, not as if it were God's order, as it is everywhere explained nowadays - no, indeed! It is our punishment and our shame, and it should touch our hearts so that we turn back to the Lord and pray that He come once

more to make an end to our misery.

These are then the things that we have been able to consider again today. Ah! There is much more I would like to say, but I think you will all agree with me that we have reason enough to cry out with the Prophet, "I pine away!" May the Lord have mercy and let the spirit of grace come down again and urge us to cry out, to pray and to fight, each in his own way, until the heavens open once more and give us what is our own, fought for through the blood of Jesus! The time will surely come when the Lord will again comfort His people, and all the world will shout for joy and rejoice over all that He does for the children of men. Amen.

WHEN THE LORD COMES

(1878)

Luke 18:8 "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

We often think that the Saviour has far too little confidence in men, for what sort of a time would that be if nobody any longer believed? Nevertheless, in our day it has come very close to this. Who does believe? Dogmatic belief - orthodoxy - yes, many believe in that way, but in nothing more. Practically no one believes in God's intervention in the decaying state of mankind, or has faith in a second coming, or in God's drawing closer through Christ. I, for instance, hardly dare express such thoughts, even among believers. Yes, in our generation faith does not mean anything and still is called faith. When sometime, through God's intervention, things will change - which nobody wants to believe - only then will men see how they have forsaken faith. Now everything is accepted as natural instead of as being the working of God, in both physical and spiritual matters; in this can be seen the unbelief of our age. We must therefore seriously ask ourselves, "Do we have faith?" - even if this is only a belief that a personal relationship to God is possible and that He will make Himself known once again so that from above something real and tangible

will come into the world of men. Yes, in that time who will believe it when it comes? Who now trusts, in faith, that it will come? Because of this it is so hard for faith; faith stands in a tremendous struggle with the overwhelming forces of unbelief which plague almost every mind. But the widow of whom the Lord speaks in this chapter kept on calling, "Vindicate me against my adversary!" And suddenly the Lord will burst forth and deliver His chosen ones and justify their faith before the whole world.

THE GRANTING OF PRAYER

(1881)

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will."

People are quick to misunderstand this, imagining that everyone can ask for whatever he likes and then he will get it. But stop! It says whatever you ask in prayer. And who is meant by "you"? Something more than this one or that one - not just anyone. This means those who are most closely united with the Saviour, who live in His strength, and who abide in His spirit. These are the ones who may and should ask in the hope that whatever they ask for in prayer will be given to them. Nowadays it is not easy to find anyone who is as deeply united with the Saviour as were the disciples, grown together with Him as it were, or even someone filled with the Holy Spirit. Consequently this passage can in no wise be completely applied to us. As we now are, the Saviour cannot say to us, "Whatever you ask for you shall have, if only you believe." Just try it - nothing will happen! The reason for this is not that the promise has been weakened, but that you are not the man for it. What is lacking is that men are not made ready. When apostolic men appear once more, equipped with complete oneness with Christ and more completely filled with the Holy Spirit than we are -

then this text will apply - then it will be possible to move mountains and uproot trees. But for the present, let us be glad if the Father in Heaven listens at all to our prayer. Would to God that many people soon begin to pray in the power of God, in the grace of God, in the way taken for granted in this passage. Then evil could soon be done away with.

THE ACCEPTABLE TIME

(1881)

Psalm 69:13 "But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of thy steadfast love, answer me; with thy faithful help rescue me"

For there is an acceptable time and also a time that is not acceptable. The acceptable time is when heaven is open to reveal every grace and wonder. The time which is not acceptable is when heaven is closed and only with difficulty can one receive anything at all from above. At the one time everything is ready and at the other, everyone is on short rations, so to say. For this reason we can see that the present time is the time that is not acceptable; we may often pray a great deal, and nevertheless it seems as though all is lost and nothing seems to open up. That is how it actually is now - although for my part I cannot say this, but this does not apply generally. By and large we feel that the countenance of God has not yet shone fully upon us. He still veils His face from us. He is still angry with mankind, and the grace of the Saviour can not yet, or at least not at the moment, penetrate everywhere. It is a hard time when we ask and do not receive what we ask for, but still we ought to receive something. The words, "Ask and you shall receive," as well as other

similar promises made by the Lord to His disciples, also only apply in the fullest sense to the acceptable time. It may, therefore, often be that we receive what we ask for, find what we seek, but this is not the rule. When it does become the rule again, then the acceptable time is here once more.

Nowadays people sometimes harp upon certain words spoken by the Lord to His disciples, as for example: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; ... they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover." (Mark 16:17) Or: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23), and other such words. Yes, these words are completely valid as long as it is the acceptable time, but when the time of grace slowly recedes, then it is different. Whoever harps upon these words because they are written down forgets that they refer to the acceptable time. All these powerful sayings refer to the acceptable time when heaven is open, and I need only reach up and take what I need. Meanwhile we must ask that the acceptable time comes once more. That is what I really await and expect, that the mourning-crape which shrouds the whole of mankind will be removed and that a word of prayer will find immediate entry. This can happen when the powers of darkness are abolished, for they are so

much in the way. It is quite apparent that the powers of darkness stand in the way, not the Saviour. He would like to help, but cannot because of the darkness which the guilt of man has spread over everything. The clouds of darkness must depart, and then there will be a clear, a benevolent heaven.

David said, "My prayer is to thee, O Lord, at an acceptable time . . .," which is to say a time when I may hope to be accepted and to approach with my request; a time in which I am sure of being heard and sure of your faithful help through your great love; or in help that you, O Lord, will give me because you cannot be unfaithful to your promise to listen and to help in the acceptable time. At other times I must also cry out, pray, and implore, but also have patience and remember: "Lord, let it be according to your will - you remain faithful, and help will finally come." We must, in fear and trembling, be grateful for every help given us in this present time, and we should not make any commotion about it if God helps in this case or that, for I always fear that someone else will come who has had the same request and it has not been granted. Therefore, above all else we must ask that the acceptable time may soon come when we need only ask and we will receive all that we need. Meanwhile the Lord Jesus is nevertheless

the compassionate and gracious One, even if the whole world is not so clearly aware of it and able to experience it. At last, however, His countenance will shine upon all men.

PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

(1881)

Psalm 116:1,2 "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live."

My heart is heavy when I think of the misery and need in which many people are today. On the whole, this time of confused concepts is difficult, for no one knows any more what does or does not belong to Christianity. Often I have the impression that one no longer has the slightest notion of what Christianity demands of a man, and I just do not know how this can change unless the Lord helps. In the meantime, sorrow and misery are with us - and one can see from the Word of God how much judgment is needed before we reach even a little understanding. Meanwhile, we have God's Word, and in this we have comfort and hope. David, at times, was given special proof that the Lord heard his voice and his supplication, and that God inclined His ear to him. We live in a time when such things are extraordinarily slow in coming and are seldom experienced. Although there are exceptions, often when God does hear, it seems as though He does not want people to be aware that He grants a prayer, lest they think He is so gracious -

and yet He is not, or cannot yet be. The Lord does very much - but slowly and in secret, inconspicuously, so that we are not especially reminded of Him or of His listening to us. Consequently we must call to the Lord and ask Him to make it more plain that He listens to our voice and more evident that He inclines His ear to us, than is now the case.

For now the most important objective of our prayer must be that the Lord does not make Himself a stranger to us but lets Himself be heard much more clearly amid all the distress and misery, amid the terrible blindness of the children of men, so that we may rest in Him and His will and learn more easily to rely on Him in patience and faith, whatever may befall us. It would certainly be ingratitude if I were to say that the Lord never heard my supplication and never inclined His ear to me. No - on the contrary, I must say that He has been exceedingly kind, also to me, and all things considered, He remains the caring and listening Saviour, even if we have to suffer much distress, need, and affliction. Thus it is not hard for me to say with David, "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplication." I have now many years behind me; how many are before me I cannot know, but as long as I have breath I will call upon the Lord even more, and I will do this more fervently, more faithfully than till now. I will not cease to bring before

the Lord, in prayer, the misery of His people and to ask for new compassion that the separation between Him and His people may cease and that we may come to a better relationship with Him. This is the chief thing that we need. For this a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit is necessary, and we should pray for this without ceasing, by day and night.

TRUE CHURCHES

(1881)

Revelation to John 2:1 "... him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands."

The seven golden lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are the angels and elders, among whom walks the Lord. True churches are meant here, churches who have allowed God's spirit to work among them, who have living fellowship with the Lord, who can receive His instructions, and who stand in direct communication with Him through the angels. Wherever the Lord can have such communion, there He walks in the midst of them, even where there are weaknesses; for, as we know, the Saviour also had much to complain about in these seven churches and threatened that He would overthrow the lampstands and give up His communion with them so that they could then only deal with Him in the ordinary manner. This, then, is what is told in Revelations, and we are astonished and hardly know what to say about it. Where are there such churches here on earth of whom it can be said that the Saviour has a direct, personal communion with them? Here we must sigh, for that is just what is lacking. A great deal could happen if only the Saviour could walk among us. Yes, the first thing that

will come with the breaking in of the end times will be that the Lord has His people on earth to whom He comes near; otherwise, the devil would truly be master over all people.

It always seems to me that because these letters precede the other prophecies in the Revelations, it will follow that churches like these will arise again and that angels will be found like these who will be in direct contact with the Saviour as prophets, or whatever you want to call them. Yes, this will happen again and in this way the Lord will come closer to us, even if only to a few, and walk among us. Through these few the whole will be influenced, and thus He will gain influence on earth. We will await this time and pray for it, and when this has come about, then things will go on until all the things are fulfilled that are to happen according to the Book of Revelation. But we must all admit that we miss and yearn for the nearness of that personality which is uniquely His, as is shown here and elsewhere in Scripture. The Lord, however, permits us to find Him, and He sees the sighing and languishing of creation. He allows nothing to waste away and decay. Then we may hope that He will still gather together His lambs and do what is necessary for them that they may pull through and shine in the world as lights and stars - that the world may come out of darkness into light.

GOD'S POWER IN THE GOSPEL

(1857)

Luke 5:1-11 "While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.' And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.' And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him."

In this account which lies before us the Lord wants first to give Peter courage for his calling, for in venturing to win men Peter would be taking on a great deal, and the many hindrances which stood in the way could easily make him faint-hearted. Especially somewhat later he might be discouraged by the thought that the Lord Himself had apparently labored in vain almost to the end. However large the crowds at the beginning and however great the

change in the people, nevertheless one sees how increasingly they quietly withdrew from Him. Those who had admired and looked up to Him in Jerusalem seem to have turned away from him more and more when He stood, accused, at Pilate's judgment seat - and perhaps some of these many former admirers also cried out, "Crucify, crucify Him." Were the Apostles to think about this, even Peter, who of course was standing by, then Peter's faint heart might say, "What can I do - how can I hope to accomplish more than He Himself did when He has achieved so little, and has lost so much of what we thought we had gained?" Thinking of the future, the Apostles dared a great deal and they were in need of encouragement - strengthening for their coming struggle.

The Lord now gives them this strengthening by means of a miracle, which seemed especially great to Simon, although we may not easily understand it. But remember - Simon was a fisherman. He knows that the time to catch the most fish is at night; he knows that most fish are to be found near the shore. The whole night he had tried to catch fish by the usual methods, but got nothing. Now, contrary to all the rules of fishing, he cast out his net during the day and into the deep, and never had he caught so many fish. He was a sincere, childlike soul who immediately understood the miracle. Perhaps others might not have made so much of

it or attached so much significance to this happening as he did. However, childlike hearts understand when their God acts; for them the smallest and most insignificant things become great when they perceive the hand of the Lord in them. Peter was always open for whatever might come from the Lord and was therefore capable of being the man for God's cause that he was. And so he realized that the hand of the Lord was present here and this knowledge struck him with full force, shaking his whole being. He was so overwhelmed by the thought that here God had intervened that at first he could not even bear to be near the Saviour. The Saviour was too great for him and he wished himself away from His presence. He thought that he, the sinful man, could be harmed if he stood so near to a man like that. That is how we must understand Peter's words to the Lord after this miracle, when he fell down at Jesus' knee, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This also explains the shocked astonishment that came over the others, instead of the joy one would have expected. Now they could no longer think of the possible profit the fish might bring! Only one thought filled them. God has done this! The idea of God's immediate presence could only terrify them.

That, dear friends, should really have been the response to all the Saviour's miracles by all those who saw

them or heard about them. We occasionally read that people took fright and were terror-struck, but it was not so deep-going as here with Peter, and people slowly became accustomed to the deeds of the Lord. Although they had to say, "No one can do these signs which You do, unless God is with him," still, His miracles made no lasting impression upon the people; they accepted them as quite natural, every-day occurrences. That was the reason why the Lord rebuked many cities which had seen so many miracles but still did not repent. He told them that on the day of judgment it would be more tolerable for the ancient corrupt cities of Sodom and Gomorrha than for them.

Ah, dear friends, if only there were once again more feeling for God's working in our Christendom! But men resist this; they refuse to acknowledge that God's voice can be heard in this or the other happening; our generation is no longer sufficiently childlike for this. Even if tremendous events take place in nature, and everyone, even the weakest, should be able to recognize that here is a deed of God, men prefer to explain everything as being the result of natural causes. Whoever says that this was the work of God exposes himself to ridicule; he is looked down upon as a superstitious person with a mania for miracles. People simply will not believe that the living, personal God

directly intervenes at times in this or the other way. This is also the reason why such miracles as took place in the Lord's time hardly ever take place any more and can only gradually appear again. There are still too many people who immediately raise an outcry whenever they hear of something that the Lord has done, such as freeing somebody from some trouble or coming to the help of a person in a wonderful way. They cry, "Just look at those superstitious miracle-mad people!" For many, especially for the learned gentlemen, God has been dethroned and He is not permitted to work any more. Just so long as this unchildlike attitude towards God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, persists, just so long will the manifestations of divine power and majesty remain a rarity. But when we again take up the attitude that regards as possible the intervention of the Saviour who said, "I am with you always with all my might and power" - then we can also experience that the Saviour has not gone away completely and that the works that were His from the beginning on will surely be continued according to His will. However, all this is by the way, dear friends, as we were led to these thoughts by Peter's childlike astonishment at the miracle, which then brought him to deepest humility and penitence.

Now we must take a closer look at the story itself

and see what the Saviour wishes to say to Peter and the Apostles. There is something else in these words which is even more important. The miracle He performed caused a catch of fish to be taken under circumstances in which none is ever made. What does He wish to say with this? In His words to Peter afterwards, "Henceforth you will be catching men," it is clear that Jesus is quietly indicating to Peter that under circumstances in which nobody thinks it possible, he will gather into the Kingdom of God a great throng of people. I have suggested previously that the circumstances under which the Gospel came into the world at all were anything but favorable. The Jews could not understand it in their hypocrisy, and the heathen could not understand it with their pagan wisdom. The common folk were too much wrapped up in their everyday affairs for there to be hope that their hearts would be moved by so alien a word as was heard from the lips of the Apostles and which had never before been heard.

What, then, could the disciples build upon? Eloquence, perhaps? A glib tongue is of course the usual means of impressing people. That would not have encouraged Peter to hope very much. Up to the present day a glib tongue accomplishes very little, and if that is all it is, then we can say: "You had better be quiet; in any case, you have nothing

important to speak of!" What, then, shall we build upon? On learning, perhaps - an incisive, well-reasoned lecture, meticulously arranged and elaborated? This may please you - but try, and see how many souls you win with it; nothing comes of it, or at least there is no power in it, although it would be fine if there were. Truly the power of the Gospel is not to be found here. Even when it is called God's power, this scholarly and affected way of speaking is certainly not what the Apostle Paul meant by the power of God in the Gospel. We also hear about Paul that he gave up all his own wisdom. He had already learned that the usual means of persuading and convincing people was of no use at all in his calling. An apostle must build upon something else, and we servants of the Gospel must also build upon something quite different. This something different that alone gives speech a power over hearts is here expressed in the words of the Apostle Peter: "But at your word I will let down the nets." One could interpret this to mean: "Because you want it, I do it in obedience to your command." That, however, is not the real meaning, for at that time Peter was not yet in subjection to the Lord. Therefore when he says, contrary to all the rules of fishing, "At your word I will try it," then something more lies in these words. Peter is saying that he already reckons on

something extraordinary happening, that he is building upon a hidden strength in the One who commands and is already thinking, "If the Lord commands this, then there must be something in it." In short, Peter builds upon a hidden power of God which flows out from the Lord Himself to this catch of fish. What then must a disciple of the Lord build upon? He must build upon the power of God, which must accompany his preaching, although certainly with special direction from above, which often goes with it. But when the Lord, having identified Himself as a Son of the living God, appoints the disciples to go out into all the world and proclaim His word, then they can rely on active help from the Lord Himself with His immediate presence so that their work shall bear fruit.

Dear friends, today many people have a dislike for any kind of miracle, and this finds expression in a reluctance to think of the Lord as helping with His direct, divine power in individual cases. Men also apparently reject the thought that it is the Lord who must unlock hearts; men want to do this with their own words. Certainly it is said that the Gospel is a word of God and that when we speak a word of God, hearts are opened. But to be truthful, what is considered most important is the manner of speech, the human, dogmatic way of teaching the Gospel - but not the direct power of God which intervenes. What do I mean by this?

Because things are like this, miracles can no longer happen. The repayment for this kind of thinking is that the Word itself can work no miracle. Men can work for decades, with tremendous zeal, and at the end they have to say, "We have toiled the whole time and caught nothing." Why? Men do not cast their nets at His word; that is, they certainly cast their nets because He has commanded it, but not in the way in which Peter expresses it here - "At your word." "At your word" means trusting in your quiet power, your immediate presence, trusting in your Holy Spirit which you have promised to send; renouncing myself together with my wisdom, and trusting alone in the hidden working of the Holy Spirit deep in hearts everywhere. Well, dear friends, it is high time to change our thinking! If only we would realize that with all the rules of oratory which we may possess or the ability to teach, we still accomplish so little. It is about time we felt that something was missing. Yes, dear friends, something is missing; nobody feels it more than those who are in the service of the Lord and of the Kingdom of God. However zealously, thoroughly, and concisely, however long or often we proclaim the Word, cast out the net, something must be missing - for we catch nothing. Nowadays of course people are quite at ease with this situation. Many throw the blame entirely upon the listeners; they say

that if only you listened better then things would be different. They scold the people for their heartless attitude and lack of conscience and say that they hear but will not accept anything. But in spite of all this, nothing improves. The nets remain empty, and it is an exception when here or there someone is found upon whom the Word makes an impression. This certainly happens at all times, proving, God be praised and thanked, that everything has not yet perished. But we still have the feeling that something is missing when we cast out the nets.

What, then, is missing? Just that which is missing throughout the whole, the presence of Jesus with His promised strength on all sides - yes, the presence of Jesus is missing. Thus it was with the disciples when they toiled all night, and everything they did was correct, only - Jesus was not present. They had known Him previously and had also said of Him, "He is the one whom prophets have foretold will come, as John the Baptist has already testified." And so they followed Him, convinced that this was the one of whom John the Baptist bore witness. Perhaps both before and after this they spoke together from time to time about this Jesus, and He is therefore no longer a complete stranger to them. One thing, however, is still lacking - He is not actually present. But now He comes with all His divine power

and says, "Cast out your nets into the deep." They do this, and fish are there in such large quantities that the nets break. What does all this suggest to us? Oh, dear friends, it means that we should pay more attention to certain promises given by the Lord - promises such as the Lord makes to us about the Comforter and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It makes us long for all the miraculous and divine happenings that in the beginning brought about such great wonders in the hearts of men when the simple telling about the Lord opened the hearts of thousands who fell down in repentance with the words, "What shall we do to be saved?" With direct grace and power from above the Holy Spirit himself worked in an instant upon the hearts of the listeners so that they immediately broke down and followed a word that was as new and strange to them as it possibly could be.

Dear friends, we must learn just to look up to Heaven and to pray that our gracious Lord and Saviour may give these things once more to His Christendom so as to bring about the final consummation of the Kingdom of God upon earth. We should once again avail ourselves of all the promises and work towards the return of the Lord Jesus to be with His own, as He wanted to be, also with signs and wonders - in particular those mightiest of miracles by which hearts of stone are softened so that they are

able to accept that which is offered them for their salvation.

I feel urged to say something else at this point. For hundreds of years now, at least from the time soon after the Reformation, one can say that there was no power by which the Gospel was able to accomplish what it should have in the souls of men. It is well known how few among those who hear the Word actually have a sense of being disciples of Christ, how few there are who even show interest, and still fewer who really come to a true conversion; and nevertheless great pains are taken to ensure that the Gospel may reach all hearts. Does it not seem that the Saviour wanted here also to show that there are times in which although a great deal of work is done, nothing, or very little, is achieved - and have we not long been in this time of darkness when everything is attempted but still the fruits of the Gospel can hardly be noticed? It is a sad, dark time - but surely one that will pass away.

I live in this hope in spite of it all. Only those may do this who have returned once more to a Christian confession, who have also returned to the conviction that one may pray for the great things which the Lord Jesus told us we should pray for. A time will surely come in which Peter's catch of fish will be fulfilled once more in spirit. It will

come about that "at His word" and when His time has come, men will cast out their nets in the power that they had at the beginning, taking a great catch of fish, and with compelling urgency many thousands will come, saying, "What shall we do to be saved?" A time will surely come when a man of sincere heart need only open his mouth and he will immediately see how hearts are being shaken. This - His time - must come again if we believe that things should end differently. If, at the end of days, the Lord is to return in the glory of the Father, He must come secretly beforehand and stand by His own people as their protector with all His divine powers so that great multitudes may still be won for Him, and they too will go forth victoriously to meet Him as His own people. Let us pray for this and let nothing which is unmistakably and clearly written be put aside in a condescending way. The Lord will yet show that He is well able to "fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord," according to the promise. Amen.

TO THOSE WHO ARE FAINTHEARTED

(1875)

Isaiah 35:4 "Say to those who are of a fearful heart: Be strong, fear not! Behold your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God, He will come and save you."

The prophet spoke this with a future time in mind, in particular, a time before the coming of the Lord. We have to think of the Lord as One who comes twice. He came first of all in the flesh, poor and lowly. That was a time of despair, and people scarcely thought it still possible that the Promised One could ever come. There were also only a few who thought about and awaited the consolation of Israel. The others went their own ways and, except for the outward form, abandoned everything that was directed upward and toward their God. They resigned themselves to the whim of the moment, buried themselves in earthly pursuits, and were discontented with and grumbled against the regime under which they lived, comfortless when they thought even a little about life and death. Then they should have recalled the prophetic words, "Say to those who are of a fearful heart: Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God comes!" But only a few thought about this, and among these few were the shepherds to whom the angel

said at the time of the Saviour's birth, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy; for the Saviour is born to you this day."

The Saviour had come. How great was His comfort and encouragement! But they crucified Him! Now, as the Risen One, He inclined Himself graciously from heaven towards the fighting disciples, and they had no cause to lose heart for the Living One was with them, making them strong and joyful for every battle. But times have changed! The first witnesses are all dead. The first powers of the Spirit have vanished. The first life-powers of the Gospel have dried up under the faithlessness, inertia, and indifference of those who had possessed these. One century after another has passed by. Heaven seems to be more and more closed, and signs of a Saviour who was always to be here, until the end of the world, have only occasionally been glimpsed; indeed, now they have almost disappeared and are hardly perceptible any more!

Can we be astonished if there are fearful hearts when the powers of darkness manifest themselves ever more brazenly? Yes, there are fearful hearts - fearful because they are tormented - and oh, how many there are! Who has courage, who has cheerfulness, who has hope, who has peace and joy? Ah, how all lose heart - and even more so when we consider

how things really should be among Christians but still are not! Now, however, let us listen to the words of the prophet. Now is the time because we are nearing the last extremity. Yes, we may boldly believe and think that the time has come when the cry must go forth, "Say to those who are of a fearful heart: Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God comes!" When He comes, great graces, which will grip all hearts, will precede Him. O, come, come, Lord Jesus, that we may know you are here, that you are here in person; come beforehand with new graces and powers! Come, come, and show yourself! Our faintheartedness will not end until we see and feel something! Oh, let us see something that truly comes from you so that we may really be able to call and cry out, "Say to those who are of a fearful heart: Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God comes!" Yes, He comes and makes all things new. He will do it! Amen.

BLESSED BE HE WHO COMES!

(1876)

Matthew 23:39 "For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

These rather striking words sound strange in the context of this discourse of the Lord. The Lord had spoken of Jerusalem, whose children He often wished to gather together as a hen gathers her brood. But they would not, and therefore their house was forsaken and desolate. Then He ends with the words above, "You will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

The first thing we notice is that the time seems not very distant when they would see Him again after His death. For He is addressing people who are with Him and telling them that they, as many of them as are still alive then, will say, "Blessed be he who comes." We can see from this how completely He will have fulfilled His task by His death, a task undertaken for the salvation of the world. On His part, everything has been done to ensure that a proper development could take place on earth, which would then, under His invisible guidance, go forward speedily and irresistibly. To imagine it like this would be a comfort

to Him, and He wanted to encourage His followers to expect things to happen in a short time provided they were faithful to that which had been entrusted to them. In this last respect something must have been lacking, and this prevented what could have happened from happening. Due to the negligence of those on earth (apart from the Apostles) the Lord had to suffer a long delay. In our time everything seems to have come to a standstill, but if only the wheels would start to turn again, then we see from Jesus' words how rapidly events could develop. Therefore let us remain in this expectation. All at once things can come alive - and how wonderful it would be if we were the ones to say at His coming, "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Secondly, we notice the gentleness with which the Lord spoke these words. He had not just given up those who did not want Him, even though as punishment their house would become forsaken and desolate. He thinks of them as those who later will experience a great longing for Him, without ever seeing Him again. Moreover, He believes that through powers which He will allow to work from heaven, those who now are not willing will become willing and will attain the faith which will bring them fellowship with Him whom they do not see. Here we have something to consider. When again powers from above start to work so mightily on mankind, here

below everybody will await with longing the coming of the Lord. This is what the word of the Lord shows us. Let us have courage, then, even in the face of the great degeneration which now confronts us. It can all be different. There could be thousands and millions throughout all the countries of the earth who, when at last they see Him coming in the clouds of heaven, will cry out in joy, "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord." May this soon be! Amen.

THE GREATER WORKS

(1876)

John 14:12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father."

It is a tremendous word that the Lord speaks here, and we hardly dare to take it as it stands. This passage is usually not commented upon. People are afraid to speak about it more specifically, and whoever would do so is afraid of those who look upon it unfavorably and are fond of talking about it as if it were something said out of a human spirit. However, it is quite clearly the Lord who says that whoever believes in Him will not only do the works that Jesus did but will do even greater works.

We can imagine that with the words, "He who believes in me" the Saviour does not mean that every Christian, if he only believes, will be capable of these greater works. If there is any difference between one faith and another, then the faith spoken of here is indisputably one that is absolute and so completely founded in the Lord that few possess this or can possess it, because to this belongs a special position and calling in the Kingdom of God upon earth. The Saviour, however, speaks in a general way because He does not wish to exclude anyone who believes, as

if to say that something more than faith was necessary or that it took more than a normal person; consequently the more capable a person was, the greater would he feel himself to be. It is possible for each one to do great works according to his faith. James, speaking of the works of Elijah and in order to make plain that the earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power, says that Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves. (James 5:17) All the same, Elijah was the Elijah to whom God had given great tasks; and greater works always entail a definite personal task entrusted by God, which shall not be given to every man. With these words, therefore, the Lord is thinking of men through whom He wants to accomplish something special. For this, God can call anyone - only he must be called and no one may act as if he were called when he is not. Whoever has not been given special tasks by God must know that this passage does not, in its fullest sense, apply to him, although at the same time he may depend upon receiving wonderful gifts from the Saviour.

Now if greater works than those of Jesus take place - whether these are by many or few - it is at bottom very understandable. Jesus was on the earth in lowliness and had only to make a beginning. Hence the whole miraculous force of God's almighty power which is necessary for the proper

fulfillment of the Kingdom of God had not yet developed. But now Jesus goes to the Father and is clothed in all the divine glory and power, and His disciples are to carry on His work here on earth. What is more natural than that the closer the fulfillment comes, the greater the works become - far greater, indeed, than the works Jesus did on earth, although obviously accomplished only through Jesus in heaven.

Until now such great and greater works have not happened. That is an indication that the advance of the Kingdom of Heaven has come to a halt, even though the Gospel continues to spread. It is all the easier to grasp this because virtually all miracles, including those such as Jesus did on earth, have ceased. In this respect this saying of the Lord is a puzzle to us, and unbelievers feel that they have the right to say, "You see - Jesus says a lot, but nothing happens." Instead of this we should say: Have patience! Those things can still come about that have not yet happened when the time begins in which, with power from above and with a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, work will start again on the Kingdom of God and even on its completion. Then we shall soon see how Jesus' words are fulfilled, how great and even greater works are done, and how the works are not confined to the promised land but extend over the whole world. If it is true that the glory of God

will be revealed to all flesh, then we must understand that not only will acts such as Jesus did be performed but that still greater acts will be performed than people saw Him do, until everywhere hard hearts are broken so that they may be called to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Then God will let Elijah-like men appear. If the Elijah of old did great works, what can we not expect of the new ones when the time comes that every tongue confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and when at last the work of redemption is concluded? Let us look forward confidently to this time; let us not believe that it is too far off. It will surely come. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the words of Jesus will never pass away! Amen!

THE COMING OF JESUS

(1876)

John 14:18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you." (free translation from German)

When Jesus was no longer with the Apostles, they must have felt like orphans. He was a divine support to them. Through Him they had contact with the Father in heaven; indirectly they had a relationship with God Himself. If they were to continue to live and struggle on earth, without this divine relationship which always led in the right way, never deceived or led astray, which never left them without counsel or help, it could only make them feel like orphans who had lost father and mother. But henceforth the disciples were not to be without this divine relationship, even when Jesus was not with them. They were to have a substitute for His own visible presence who would completely take away this feeling of being orphans. Now the Saviour will still come to them. They will still have Him in all need, perplexities, and weaknesses through the Holy Spirit whom He will send to them as someone personally from God. The Holy Spirit will so represent His Person that they would really have Jesus Himself, though not being able to see Him. How precious was this promise to the disciples, and how gloriously was it fulfilled for them within a few days of

His ascension into heaven. From this time on they had no feeling of having suffered a loss; they were not orphans!

But now, how is it with us? Have we not gradually become orphans? Does the Holy Spirit, who can represent the true voice of God when we long for it, still dwell within us, in person, as at the time of the Apostles so that Jesus Himself is among us, as well as this Spirit? We must confess that at least we lack very much of what was given in those early times. How often are we left desolate, without receiving any of the direction that we so much need! How often do we lack counsel, discernment, help, comfort; how very helpless we are in the face of countless evils that assail us and those around us. A weeping can be heard throughout the world, throughout Christendom - a weeping like that of orphans who have lost father and mother, a loss which pains them deeply.

Shouldn't we expect all this to be changed? Today at this holy feast of Advent, which brings us into the time of expectation, let us above all once more prayerfully wait for the Lord to come to us again more fully through His Holy Spirit so that we are more aware that we really have Him, and what we have in Him, so that we can enter a new phase of our lives peacefully and contentedly, patiently and joyfully. When we once more have this grace which will prepare

the way for a new age of salvation, may it also be a sign that the actual coming of the Lord is not far off. Our eyes are directed upwards! Amid the travail that surrounds us we await the Lord. We are almost overwhelmed by a feeling of deep longing in this world of misery. But the Word of the Lord which we have heard, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you," must ever and again prevail; and because He has said this, we can also cling to this as though it were addressed to us, for we, too, share in His covenant. Let this be our concern in prayer and supplication, then no longer can He leave us orphaned. Yes, He will come to us and give us comfort and help, and He will come to draw us all to Him! He is faithful and true!

Amen.

INCREASE OUR FAITH

(1846)

Luke 17:5 "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'"

We are confronted here first of all, beloved listeners in Jesus Christ, by the prayer of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith." The disciples experienced, as we also often experience and as the saying expresses, "Faith is at times great and strong, full of confidence and joy; and at times it is small and weak, because much doubt and fear and much despondency creeps in." When the twelve were alone together, they often behaved all too naturally - they discussed things together, quarreled and wrangled with one another, and each one still had his own ideas. Their spirit, therefore, was often inwardly dull and empty so that it could not rise to the firm and living faith which they must have felt was necessary. It is just the same with us. Of course if we were to make use of all that is offered to us and at all times were inwardly prepared, then things would be different and better, but because we so often allow ourselves to be distracted and let our thoughts wander far away, the heart often becomes small in faith and weary, doubting and mistrustful, as indeed can happen again and again among us. So now comes the prayer to the Lord,

"Increase our faith." The first thing we must learn is that we have also to ask for faith. We should not allow ourselves to drift. When we notice that there is something lacking in our faith, then we must ask for that which is lacking, as did the father of the boy who was possessed, when he said, "I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief." (Mark 9:24) On the other hand this request for faith is not enough. Whoever wishes to pray for faith must allow his soul to be made ready for it; he must turn aside from all that interferes with the power of faith; he must compose himself, gather his thoughts, his spirit, and all his faculties; he must also be united in spirit with his own people and must not be inwardly ravaged and torn. Then the prayer that faith may come will be effective; faith will be given from above, and will find a doorway by which it can enter the heart.

This faith includes a number of different things which we should ask of the dear Saviour. First of all, we can also express, as is usually accepted, that the Lord may increase our assurance of faith, the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we are acceptable to Him and are in His grace; for when people say that they lack faith, what actually weighs most upon them is that they feel separated from their Saviour, and they become uncertain as to whether they can really bear this courageously. But we will not

talk further about this today. The disciples certainly mean something different. They know that they are called by the Lord and that the Lord has given them power to drive out unclean spirits, to heal the sick, and to perform many deeds in the name of the Lord. They needed gifts in order to be able to do this, and although they had accomplished many things, nevertheless there were other times and moments when they lacked these gifts - that is, they were not sure that something would really happen when they commanded it in the name of Jesus. Some times they were certain that they could speak out the Word with assurance; at other times they inwardly doubted, and then what they wanted did not come about. It must have troubled them when now and then something was lacking, for they were well aware that the lack was in them, that their faith was insufficient. For this reason they prayed to the Lord, "Increase our faith so that we will never be in want when we speak in Thy name." We well know that these disciples were once in a predicament about someone who was possessed - it was the boy whose father afterwards said, "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief." This father said, "I asked Your disciples to cast out this spirit, and they were not able." The disciples asked Jesus, "Why could we not cast it out?" We have here an example of how, at that time, the disciples felt a lack of faith;

they themselves were burdened by it and therefore prayed,
"Lord, increase our faith."

The question now is: how do we apply this to ourselves? May we also pray for this? Well, we must take a closer look at this question, for it is not so that one or the other should request for himself the faith which is really meant here, but that we should pray for this faith for the Church of God. That is our obligation and duty - "Increase the faith of the church, of the people of God, and especially of your laborers, that they may again enter into a genuine apostolic faith!" This should be our prayer, and this prayer is of the utmost importance for it is very wrong that within the Christian church men now dare so little in faith. It is deplorable that in the Christian church nothing more happens through faith to glorify the name of Jesus. It is now a fact that people think this faith is no longer needed. Thus a need is turned into a virtue, or merit is seen in wretched conditions, and men think nothing of just that which was most of all on the hearts of the disciples. For many hundreds of years it must certainly have grieved the beloved Saviour that nobody believes anything significant can still be done in the name of Jesus. Therefore it is vital that we pray, "Lord, increase our faith so that this belief may come again." An increase is needed all the more

in our time because so many voices are raised against it; so much is reasoned away that often one does not know what to answer. We can really be brought low in our faith by people insisting that signs are now completely unnecessary in the Christian church and that this is presumption and fanaticism. When we are then so downcast we feel once more that we are in a bad way, and again we see that faith must come to us. We must have faith or all is useless. Then the words, "Increase our faith that the time may come again in which signs will be performed to the glory of Thy name," strike our hearts again and again. We must leave it to the Lord to choose the people by whom this will come about, but our concern must be that this will again take place in the Christian church because therein lies hidden the glory of Christ which is revealed in the Church.

These signs and wonders should serve no other purpose than that the name of the Redeemer becomes more speedily known to all languishing souls - and that His Kingdom be extended over all the peoples of the earth. For this the disciples are to be armed with strength, to be used in faith - they must therefore only believe that the Lord Jesus will grant them the strength for all that is needed for the spreading of His Kingdom. Oh! If we think of this and then look at our times when there is practically

nothing of it to be seen, then we could weep and be troubled like the widow in the Gospel, dressed in mourning because she had lost her husband. She cried out, "Lord, save me from my adversary." The entire Christian church should put on mourning like this widow and lament to the Lord day and night that He should restore what has been stolen from her - that He will again increase our faith. Well, in this matter you have known for a long time what our obligation is, and today let it speak clearly again to your hearts. Follow this call which comes anew that you may also join in with: "Save us from our adversaries, Lord; increase our faith!"

Amen.

3 THE CRY OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

PREPARE THE WAY!

(1881)

Isaiah 57:14 "Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people's way!"

Yes, the way must be prepared for the Lord so that He can come closer to us. We would like to have Him closer so that He could be more completely with us again with His gifts of grace, powers of the Holy Spirit, and with His wonders and deeds. It seems to me that until now the Lord has always said, "I am not wanted here - why should I be among you? You want nothing from me; in the end you will again throw me out, as my people did long ago. You are ungrateful people!" There are obstacles on our side which prevent the Lord's coming to us cheerfully and joyfully. Now, however, it is said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way!" That would come about if the people listened, were repentant, turned to the Lord, longed for Him, and if they hoped for that which alone can prevent complete destruction. The more people arm themselves with faith, hope, prayer, and conversion, the more they prepare the way for the coming Lord and remove every obstruction that may lie on His way to us.

If only a yearning for Him were to arise, an awaiting His promise, then He would be content. When everyone sighs and weeps for Him, longs and hopes for Him, then it is time for Him to start on the way to meet those who wait in prayer, not resting until all the world is full of His glory.

WITHOUT CEASING

(1880)

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (free translation from German)
"Pray without ceasing."

"Pray without ceasing." Prayer must not stop. A man who had cut his foot with a hatchet told me when I visited him, "I prayed just this morning!" But his praying stopped with the Lord's Prayer. Men often rattle off prayers, and with the "amen" they have finished, and for the rest of the day there is no further thought of God, although they take it for granted that He thinks of us the whole day long. People are not constantly in a prayerful attitude; they reel off their prayers morning and evening and imagine that they have prayed. But "Pray without ceasing" is as much as saying: continue on and on in a prayerful and beseeching attitude to the Lord so that He may do all that is necessary for us and for all men to prevent utter ruin. Praying for something to come which will save everyone and, to this end, looking continually upwards in an expectant attitude - that is what it means to pray without ceasing. It is very distressing that people are unconcerned and no longer even believe that the Lord listens to His children when, night and day, they cry out to Him. There are, however, still

people who pray and believe, thank God; I count myself among these. I will not cease - and neither will you and many others also. Yes, till our last breath we must pray and hope that our prayer is heard. Whoever dies praying for the great redemption will not be found wanting when he passes over, and he will not have prayed in vain.

THE LORD, OUR FATHER

(1875)

Isaiah 63:16 "... Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name."

Isaiah prays from a deeply moved soul because he feels all the harm that has permeated everything, and especially does he see that Israel has sunk to the lowest level, into sin and into all manner of corruption and falling away from God. In verse 15 he cries out, "Look down from heaven and see, from thy holy and glorious habitation. Where are thy zeal and thy might? The yearning of thy heart and thy compassion are withheld from me." Compassion, which actually cannot be lacking in God, appears to be hardened against us because it does not intervene to fight the harm and check corruption. Is it possible, thinks Isaiah, that compassion can be so withheld - "and thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old." Further on (64:1) he sighs, "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence," as happened once on Mount Sinai when the glory of God was revealed before all the people.

If we understand the Prophet's pain and sorrow, then we may well feel that we must take the words from his mouth

and ourselves cry out to heaven. Yes, the increase in distress and misery in our time seems past endurance. It seems unbearable that the depths in which we feel ourselves are not yet deep enough, but it looks as though all must become completely black, completely dark, so that not even a spark of light can penetrate. But the prophet's prayer is written for our time, the last time, as we must admit, before such a darkness will set in. It is put into our mouths. Let us accept it and let us cry out day and night (verse 17): "Return, return! O Lord, why dost thou make us err from thy ways and harden our hearts so that we fear thee not?" Who will change the erring and the hardened hearts? Or should we, believing that it has to be like this, that all will be lost, and that there will be eternal ruin, allow men to go their own way - even though the revelation of the glory of God was promised? Never!

We hold firmly to "The Lord is our Father, the Lord is our Redeemer; that is his name from of old." His Son is present; He lives and rules at the right hand of God. Above Him, God has become the compassionate Father and the God of all consolation. Let us continue to be courageous and joyful; but let us pray - yes, cry out! Finally compassion will break through and the right hand of the Most High will change everything! Amen.

THE LORD, TEACHER OF THE GENTILES

(1876)

Jeremiah 16:21 "Therefore, behold, I will make them know, this once I will make them know my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord."

Jeremiah had been speaking of the Gentiles who would come to the Lord from the far ends of the earth, saying that until now their gods had been worthless and had not helped them but that henceforth they wished to seek refuge in the God of Israel. For the time being this coming is only an approach of heart and mind to the Lord, a longing and prayer to Him that they also be allowed to accept Him as their God. Such longing will increase among the Gentiles towards the end. In our own time, accounts of this frequently come from the pagan world. This awakening and growing desire is already a forerunner of the approaching Holy Spirit which quite certainly still will be poured out over all flesh. It is a desire also found in Christendom in which slowly a yearning has arisen. The longing and the hunger will become ever greater, and at last the time will come to leave the homeland and to seek places where it is possible to hear the unknown or partly-known message of salvation.

This longing will also be intensified because nowhere can help be found for all the need and affliction - but help can be expected from the God who slowly becomes known throughout the whole earth, even if only through vague rumors. The merciful God will come to meet such longing, as He says in our text: "Therefore, behold, I will make them know." He will in the end not leave it to weak men who have only words but are unable to give weight to their words by deeds. In Christendom, too, we also feel how hard it can be for many a preacher to have to talk and testify so much to what Christ is able to do, how He is a strength and a power, a refuge in need, as He was to Jeremiah (16:19) - and in spite of this, the preacher is able to offer so little real help. How welcome, then, is the Word of the Lord: "I will myself make them know." For when He is the teacher, He teaches with many deeds and shows what He is able to do; or, as our text says, He makes known His power and might to those whom He teaches so that they know He is the Lord.

With words such as these the Lord shows how willing He is to impart some understanding of His power and might to those who are ignorant of it. He performs all kinds of signs and wonders in them, through which, in a short time, they learn infinitely more than if they were instructed in

the usual way, having everything expounded without being offered something tangible. If they could, in the truest sense, see the works of God once more, how quickly would people among us also learn! O Saviour, what a loving teacher You were for the sick, for those afflicted in all kinds of ways, for the blind, the lame, the deaf, the crippled! You spoke one word - and how much they experienced and learned from this one word! Oh, if only He would teach us again in this way! Surely, if this happened a second time it would bear infinitely more fruit for mankind than it bore the first time. And He says that He Himself will make them know. Therefore, this time must come, and we await Him patiently until His hand and His might are made known to us. By this we learn to know that He is the Lord, yes, our salvation and our all! Amen.

THE CRY FOR HELP

Psalm 14:7 (free translation from German)

"O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion and the Lord redeem his captured people! Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad."

This has become a common saying for all those who sigh in Zion, who realize and understand the wretchedness of God's people, and who look towards something better which was promised to them.

"Out of Zion" means that help shall come from Zion, the holy place of the true people of God. Now we can, of course, say of the Lord Jesus that He came out of Zion, inasmuch as He took upon Himself suffering and death there for the salvation of the sinful world; but we must admit that the complete help is not yet here - only the preparation for help. We have at least as much reason as any Israelite had before the time of Christ to sigh deeply: "O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion and the Lord redeem his captured people!" "Captured" has to be understood in the way it is often used by the prophets and as the Lord Jesus meant when He points to Himself in Isaiah 61:1: "The Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the

opening of the prison to those who are bound." For the whole world is captive and bound. The whole nature and spirit of man is made captive. Men have little command even of themselves and fall into a thousand follies which are a misery and a pain for them. Then a sincere worshiper of God will wish that at last the great redemption may come which will change everything; and every individual can help towards bringing this about.

We, too, want to take this to heart today and like Israel, standing, as it were, as one body before God, we will call upon Him for help. God Himself tells us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you."

(Psalm 50:15) Each one of us is acutely aware of this need. The task therefore to which we all are called is to stand for the Kingdom of God in its entirety and also to cry out in this present day for the Lord to deliver us out of every need into which we have been driven. Accordingly, we will call to the Lord with one voice, not just each one for himself, but all for the whole, for the redemption of groaning creation, for the renewal of the whole universe. Even in the most dreadful need we will continue to cry to Him and sigh for the help out of Zion so that the promise "I will deliver you" may also apply to us.

After all, everything must be prayed for - in our sleep nothing will come. We therefore need people who pray, who pray earnestly. And if there are only a few of these, then these few must be all the more serious. All help must ultimately be prayed for; we must pray for the deliverance of the whole creation. When the year of redemption, the year of grace, comes at last, when the kindness of the Lord can reveal itself once again and be poured out from above, then will we truly praise Him, glorify Him, thank Him, because at last He has had compassion. Yes, how "Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad" when at last this great redemption is completed.

LORD, HAVE PITY!

Psalm 102:13 "Thou wilt arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come."

The yearning that God may have pity on Zion, that is, on the people of God, and subsequently on the whole world, is nothing new. It is already three thousand years old. Even at that time people looked with expectancy towards heaven, hoping that the Lord might intervene and relieve the misery of His people and of the whole world. This deep vision was always held by David and the prophets. It was said, "It is time ... the appointed time has come," which means that it has to be. Man, however, often thinks that it must be now - and nevertheless he has to submit to a long wait and be satisfied with crumbs for the present. Meanwhile a certain period of quiet came over Israel in those days, a quiet that endured for a long time and continued beyond the time of Solomon in whose reign there was peace. This quiet was at the same time to be a symbol of that rest of God which is at hand for His people. (Hebrews 4:9) In some measure the yearning of that time really did find fulfillment as far as this was possible, though almost only outwardly and confined to Israel.

Meanwhile with the coming of the Lord, God's compassion

upon Zion was still further revealed. How beautifully sang Zacharias, the father of John; and Simeon, the hero of expectant hope, rejoicing that the time of God's gracious visitation had at least begun. This took place, but again, only to a certain degree. Zion and the whole of mankind had to submit to a further period of waiting.

We know how matters stand with us now. Every stone cries out, "Arise and have pity on Zion!" And the feeling "it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come," permeates the world more and more. How long must we still wait? When once the Lord shall say, perhaps by sending special signs, "It is time, the appointed time has come" - then things will start moving. If we say, "It is time," then we must also be prepared for the Lord to say, "No, not quite yet." But the more prayers that are uttered, the more seriously people bear this on their hearts, the more Simeons that appear, all the quicker will the time come, and that for which all creation sighs and longs will take place. For it is something very great, the greatest, that we still have to expect - nothing less than the transformation of all creation into a new heaven and a new earth. This transformation must really be the goal of all expectation. Let us then be patient and await its coming! It will and must all come to pass.

THE TIME OF ANSWERING

Isaiah 49:8 "In a time of favor I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you."

It takes time for the Lord to answer and to help. If I pray today, it does not follow that my prayer is immediately answered. It awaits the time of favor, the day of salvation; or properly speaking, the answer and the help will be completed on the day of salvation. Prayers work towards their fulfillment on the day of salvation. To make it clear, this is how it is when we pray, as we are told to do, for the coming of the Lord: "Thy Kingdom come." We cannot then expect it right away, but we must await the day of salvation, the time of favor. But our prayer "Come, Lord Jesus" does have the effect that things move forward or that the preparations for the Lord's coming are kept going or are put in motion.

The day of salvation and the time of favor are also not fixed times which cannot be changed; but they will take place and will come according to how we pray. When no one prays at all, anywhere, the wagon practically comes to a halt and cannot go forward. But when there is really serious prayer, struggle, and fight, then the wagon rolls on and once again approaches the goal. The more the true children of God persevere in uprightness and earnestness, the more

quickly the wagon will reach the goal and the sooner the time of favor and the day of salvation come. It is one of the most foolish dogmas that things must happen according to our conception of time, when we believe that something will happen in this or that year. This is an obstacle to the wholehearted perseverance that the Lord demands of us, for then one could say, "If it is like that, then I do not need to pray; it will happen whether I pray or not." That is definitely quite wrong. As all the injunctions to prayer clearly show, His coming, and indeed all His acts of grace, are only answers to actual prayers and sighs. That is to say, they do not come unless they have been prayed and sighed for; otherwise, they would not be answers to prayer, and this is what they should be. Thus did the people of Israel in Egypt groan in their tribulation, and at last: "God heard their lamentations and groaning and took pity on His people, and sent Moses as their deliverer." Without this devout sighing of the people to the Lord asking Him to attend to their need, they might have waited a long time for Moses. And so it is the whole way through - right down to the smallest thing. Everything must be asked for in prayer. But everything also needs to mature, which we often forget. One thing leads to another, one thing makes something else

possible, until the time is right. Nevertheless, the more earnestly we work with prayer and entreaty, the sooner will the time of favor and the day of salvation be here.

THE WAITING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

(1847)

Luke 2:22-40 "And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.' Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.'

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.'

And there was a prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

In this Gospel, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, two people who awaited the redemption of Israel are brought to our notice. There were at that time quite a number of such people, albeit quite unobtrusive, for they did not create much of a stir and did not want to come forward freely with their inner hopes because others were present who, although they also spoke about these things, did so in a very wrong way. It is touching when we put ourselves in the place of such expectant people and imagine how they must have felt. They felt the burden of the times; they felt their bondage and captivity, but also had heard and experienced something of that to which the prophets witnessed. They were extremely troubled, and within them there arose a passionate longing that matters would soon improve. The distress of the people became so great that it was scarcely possible for a devout heart to be found among them. Thus it continued for fully four hundred years, and with every passing year it became worse. Each year saw the people more and more driven to pray in stillness: "O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion" - and the longer this was delayed, the more difficult it seemed for the prophecy to be fulfilled. At the time of the Saviour's birth very many devout Israelites were in this troubled state of mind. We are now reminded of two of these, Simeon and

Anna, and will now speak further of them.

But first let me mention something else. Is this longing now stilled? Has everything been fulfilled that those dear souls wished for and waited for? Is the Kingdom of God now in its full bloom as was promised? Or are we not once more at the stage of yearning? Must we not still long and pray in the same way that deliverance, that redemption may come, even though the Saviour has been here and now sits at the right hand of His Father, raised to the seat of His glory? Have things improved? Have they reached the point where we can wish for nothing more? Ah, who can say that Israel's hopes are fulfilled? The beginning has certainly been made - or rather our Saviour has laid the foundation so that the coming of eternal peace is made possible. But the enemies are not yet subdued and overcome. The struggle still continues, and in the last two thousand years has gradually increased until, as the prophecies expressly say, the dragon or the seven-headed beast has recovered from its wounds and it is also given to it to overcome the saints, and all who dwell on earth worship this beast. Thus it really looks as if the powers of darkness everywhere have the upper hand. Whatever men try to do fails; wherever men try to check the misery it almost seems to grow worse. Man's bondage in all directions is

so great that it is impossible to foresee how his spirit can ever be freed. It seems as if the waves of the sea may pitch and roll just as they wish - in the words of Psalm 93:4, "The waves of the sea are mighty and roar thunderously." It seems as if the wild animals may ravage the garden just as they wish, as if the whole of the Christian and pagan worlds were simply given over to darkness. Many a soul cries out: "Lord, when will peace come? When will that come for which you travailed through your suffering and death? When will the Adversary be overthrown?" And so today we are still waiting for the consolation of Israel. We must do this more in quiet, however, for the world at large is unable to hear it, cannot comprehend it, cannot grasp it. The world loves darkness more than light and will not even allow its eyes to be opened to the fact that again something drastic must take place in Christendom.

Now as to what the prophets foretold - oh, that gives us much to hope for! At whatever page we open the Book we can only look at one another and marvel. "We see nothing of this and never have seen anything." Will this still happen? Will this still come? This is the reason why believing souls like Simeon and Anna sigh, "O Lord, let the day of grace, the year of thy favor break in at last, to save the desolate, proclaim liberty to the captives, to

give a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, to give garments of beauty to the faint-hearted and freedom to all the afflicted and broken-hearted."

(See Isaiah 61). Now of course it is true, dear people, that there are many who cherish the hope that things will improve. This, however, is not necessarily a waiting for the consolation of Israel, for when someone is in distress, it is quite understandable that he would like to be spared his suffering. But that is not enough. That was how all the Jews felt at that time, but that did not make them all Simeons or all Annas - the weeping and wailing was not the expectancy of a Simeon or an Anna. Much evil and pain has come among us too, and we sigh and complain; but this is still not what the Lord requires of us if we want to stand expectantly before Him.

Now we must find out, chiefly from Simeon and from Anna, how those who await the consolation of Israel bear themselves in quietness, and accordingly we have much to learn from them, which we will bring to mind through short passages from the Gospel.

1. To be a Simeon a man must be as devout and God-fearing as Simeon was. Without an inward, fervent devoutness and a fear before the name of the All-Highest, nobody can show a proper attitude and respect toward the coming of

the Lord. We read about Anna (Luke 2:37): "She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day." Only the waiting of the righteous will turn into joy. If we too want to look forward to a better time and be counted among the "quiet" ones whose tears God sees, there must be first and foremost devoutness and fear of God among us. Daily we must lift up our eyes and hands to God in true devotion, in true earnestness- not as a matter of habit, not with idle words upon our lips - but as something that springs from the depths of our hearts, individually and together. We must walk in all our ways in the fear of God and guard against everything that grieves God's spirit, that hurts and offends Him. The words that we speak must be well considered; we must be faithful watchmen, also of the thoughts that pass through our souls, and we should be shocked by every sin to which our old impulses seek to drive us. If we can still act here or there against the Lord and sin, then we belong to those whom the Lord cannot accept, who must go in fear of being rejected when the day draws near - the day that will bring redemption to those who wait in hope. For this day will be as it is told in our evening reading for today, (Malachi 3:2,3): "For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi

and refine them like gold and silver...." (Malachi 3:5):

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts." We must be far removed from all this; otherwise, the coming day will not be the joy to us that it was to Simeon. In passing I would like to add that this present time of need is a real test as to whether we fear the Lord - for when we ourselves are in need, it happens very easily that we are oppressive, hard-hearted and merciless towards the hireling and sojourner, towards widows and orphans. I only mention this here so that we can resist such temptations and stand as those who fear the Lord; otherwise we cannot be a Simeon nor an Anna.

2. After the above testimony we read further about Simeon that "He looked for the consolation of Israel." We must speak about this in more detail. To this waiting belongs, in the first place, that Simeon recognized Israel's need and secondly, that he believed in the prophet's promise of consolation. In these two things we learn from Simeon that to begin with we must take this need to heart, realizing how deeply men are ensnared - also we ourselves.

That is the first thing that belongs to real expectation. However, this recognition must not let us become faint-hearted; rather, the knowledge of this misery must be followed by a believing hope so that we firmly hold to the fact that not one word of the promise may be lost. Let us think about all of this and learn from Simeon. O, that in this sense we might all become true Simeons and true Annas!

3. Whoever has this divine longing will soon be rewarded. We see this again in Simeon, of whom it is written, "and the Holy Spirit was upon him." The more virtuous his life, the more quietly he served the Lord, the more passionately he prayed for the world, and the more trustingly he hoped - all the more could the Spirit of God speak with him. And so he was given much comfort in his waiting, and he was able to believe more and more and could hope with ever greater joy. This is how we will also feel, you beloved and dear souls, as soon as the conditions are present with us that were present with Simeon and Anna. The Lord can refresh our souls in many ways, and He can illumine our spirits more and more so that we have insight the better to interpret what is happening and what will happen. And so one can say that the Holy Spirit is able in many ways to bear witness so that we do not become faint and tired but go forward confidently.

4. Simeon possessed something else, however, that was not given to all of those who waited as he did; this remained the possession of very few, whom God had chosen. It is written of Simeon: "And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." That was a very special grace that Simeon received, a grace that was not given in the same way to others. Even Anna did not receive this grace in words, although it came true for her just as for Simeon, so that she continued to live, spared by the Lord, until she beheld the One who was to redeem Israel. And so, to one or the other, an assurance can be given which he will never allow to be taken from him. This assurance is not given equally to each person - one may receive more; but then the others should draw courage from the firm faith of the one or of the few. In any case, we can see that those who look up to the Lord, those whose eyes are lifted to the hills from whence cometh help, receive much grace from Him. Many of you who take it seriously can testify that the Lord does not fail to manifest Himself to those who look up to Him.

5. We read further about Simeon: "And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple." That is, inspired by the Spirit he came at the right time into the temple. He must long have been wondering, "Where shall I find the

redeemer of Israel?" But the Lord leads His own in the right way; at the proper moment the Spirit urges Simeon to go into the temple. Though not knowing why, he feels that he must enter. The impulse is so strong that he just has to go. This indicates to us how the Lord opens up the way for those who sincerely hold to Him. In a wonderful way He knows how to bring it about that at the right time each one hears what he should hear, sees what he should see, and experiences what he should experience. So great is the goodness of our God and so inconspicuously and quietly does He guide His children that they can only shout for joy and be glad because of His great kindness to them.

Now Simeon is in the temple; he sees the Child. Because he is a sincere and upright soul, he also has open eyes and he does not need to be told that this is the One. Within him there is a feeling which soon becomes a certainty. Here is the Redeemer who will save Israel! He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." In a very similar way this could take place today, too. Not that the child would be born again - but when

He comes in His glory there will be light long before He comes. When certain signs take place, certain indications which make us aware of the time in which we stand, then I would say that this is also a little child which we can either reject or take into our arms. O, you dear ones, I almost believe that you also have been allowed to take the little child into your arms already and have received proof enough that we are no longer far from the salvation promised to His people. We have already seen signs and indications of this: the sensible ones take heed of it, the devout and understanding ones give ear; and even if it is inconspicuous, still it is something. If afterwards there is a long silence, as there is now, there is nevertheless something which can support faith in troubled hours. This little child goes forth with His parents. He grows up, and nobody speaks about Him. Simeon, who probably never saw Him again, dies. There must have been scoffers who laughed at Simeon, and no confirmation of his conviction was ever given to him. Yes, dear people, and how is it with us? Happy is he who stands in the fear of the Lord, certain in his hope and constant in his prayer that the Lord may fulfill the promise made to His Israel. Simeon praises and speaks prophetically; Anna also approaches. Thus peace and joy entered into these souls, and all those who heard it received

a spark of consolation for their tired souls; once again they could wait with hope and trust.

Come, then! Let us not become weary but wait patiently for our Lord. For He comes, He will not tarry, His Day approaches! Happy are they whom He finds awake and not asleep when He comes! Amen.

VINDICATE US FROM OUR ADVERSARY!

(1860)

Luke 18:1-8 "And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, "Vindicate me against my adversary." For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, "Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming."' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?'"

In this gospel our beloved Saviour wants to make clear to us and to lay upon our hearts that we should at all times pray and not become weary of praying. By this the Saviour could not have meant certain outward forms of prayer, spoken without really knowing why or for what, as if a mere formal prayer, long drawn out with many words and all kinds of pious airs and gestures were what the Saviour requires of us and is pleasing to God. Before going further we must consider why we should at all times pray and what it is that should, above everything else, concern our hearts so that as long as we live we may never grow weary in this and that our unceasing desire is to ask God to act or to grant our prayers. We see also that what the Saviour desires and that which should concern us is not something

that will come immediately but is something that is long delayed, or which only comes gradually, depending on how faithful we are in prayer and in not growing weary. But what is it that we should at all times pray for, until at last it is completed?

Here we must look at the last part of our Gospel text. It is clear that the beloved Saviour is thinking of His future coming. As long as the Son of man remains away there is still a great deal that we need pray for. Without delay our gaze should be directed towards His coming, towards the mighty, universal deliverance of all creation which will come about when He returns, and all our prayers and entreaties should unceasingly echo the cry: "Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!" For this we should at all times pray, and never grow weary in this prayer. All other prayer is of secondary importance and has little significance in the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, what the Saviour wants to impress upon His disciples and upon us is that all prayers shall be concerned with that which is still to come. Now we want to say a few things about what the Church of God must do according to our Gospel, and our basic theme will be: The time about which the Saviour speaks and for which it is always necessary to pray.

The Saviour speaks:

1. About a time in which the Christian church or the Church of God on earth will be a widow.

2. About a time in which there will still be chosen people representing the widow and crying out unceasingly.

3. About a time in which faith has almost disappeared.

We want now to see what the Gospel has to say to us in connection with these three points.

1. The Saviour speaks first of a time in which there will be a grieving widow. By this He obviously means the people of the Lord, His Church, or as we say, the Christian church, whose condition is such that it can only be called a weeping, oppressed and forlorn widow; the children of God on earth will be like a widow. How is this to be interpreted? A widow is a woman who has lost her husband and is therefore desolate. Now listen to the Saviour speaking to His disciples: "I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you." (Free translation from the German, John 14:18) But widows and orphans belong together. It was therefore not the Saviour's intention that His children be left desolate in the world, like widows and orphans; He wants to be with them and so, when He ascended to Heaven He also said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:20).

As long as Jesus is there, the Church of God is no widow, and the children of God are not orphans.

Now we must look more closely at this. In what way, according to His last words in John's Gospel, will the Saviour be present? Answer: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever."

(John 14:16) "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

In short - "The Holy Spirit will be with you in my place."

(John 14:26) And when He says, "I will come to you and not leave you orphaned," He is referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which came about at Pentecost. At that time the Lord Jesus came to His children bringing the divine powers and divine graces of the Holy Spirit in richest abundance, and the first Christian Church had the full glory of God in their midst and could never again say that they were forsaken, that they were widows and orphans. Ah, how blessed they were to be able to say, "We lack nothing, there is no gift we have not received, and now we only wait until He Himself comes." (Free translation from German, I Corinthians 1:7) Then the Church of God was the Lord's joyful bride and had constantly the deepest and most blessed fellowship with her Saviour; there was nothing that she lacked, but

everywhere she could feel the promised divine powers in her midst. Did it continue like this? Did the Lord remain with His Church in this way? Do we still have these glorious gifts of grace? We can answer this easily enough if we look at the manifold afflictions that have everywhere eaten into Christianity and for which we can find no help.

We can do nothing other than speak out frankly and confess that with us things are different. Inasmuch as our Lord has withdrawn with so much grace we have the feeling of being forsaken, as though He had left us. We are tremendously lacking in what the Lord wished to give us and to be to us - so much so that we can say with every justification that the Christian church is like a poor, desolate widow, deprived of her glory, who must in her mourning sigh and pray that God may again be merciful to her and give back what has been taken away; so that, in short, her Lord may return to her again in all His original kindness, until the time when He Himself will again appear in person.

There is something else mentioned in the Gospel which we must earnestly consider. The widow sighs because she has an adversary. Widows lack protection in the absence of a husband, and just because of this so many enemies come and do what they will with her. She cannot defend herself, she is powerless, and she is at the mercy of all who wish to do

violence and injustice to her. Oh, you poor Christendom! How the adversary has interfered in everything, taken possession of everything, and how he hounds the children of God. What ruin springs from his destructive influence! Thousands who find no peace, no one who can help, who must sigh in chains and bondage, must languish and bear the yoke of the adversary, and hour by hour experience the most painful things. All this, dear friends, needs no proof; we only need open eyes in order to see that today the Christian church can be compared to a widow, and because of her Adversary she is on the point of losing completely all that remains to her of the heritage from her Lord. This is really what this parable foretells, and we may well say that just this parable is especially important and meaningful. It should still be the greatest wish for our times that, like the widow, we hasten to the judge and wear him out until at last he brings about deliverance and puts all things on a better footing so that the Lord's future may be prepared and finally become possible, according to His good pleasure.

2. It is further expressed that there will come a time in which there will still be chosen people who cry out to Him by day and night. However forsaken, however many are hampered, bound, pitiful, and miserable, there nevertheless

are some among the tormented who, under this weight, cry out to God. These are the chosen ones. They also are robbed and feel forsaken and pressed by the Adversary. Ah, how true this is when we compare it with our own time! But these chosen ones still have one thing - they feel that they must still pray if things are to get better; they feel that things should not be allowed to continue as they are, and that the devil, who lays hands on everything and wants to seize everything, must not be permitted to go on plundering. They feel that they must keep coming to the Lord again and again, without tiring, in order to save something and to salvage something. There will still be chosen people such as these, and with this ties in the Saviour's admonishment that we should at all times pray and not lose heart. This we will really take to heart, dear friends. We can count among the chosen people all those who still believe in Jesus Christ and who, because they believe, receive many a sign of favor from Him, although this is only like a glint of light shining through a crack. Those people are meant who, in the midst of the general falling away and corruption, still seek their Saviour, turn to Him, and allow themselves to be cleansed by His blood; people who are content with His grace and mercy, assured that He turns no one away and pays heed to all who ask and who in some measure are able

to find a relationship and trust toward Him. These are the believers in our generation, a handful among the thousands and millions; they are the earnest ones who ask about God's word, who are concerned about the salvation of their souls, who struggle with the sins within them and try to put an end to them, who strive faithfully to withstand worldly temptations so that they may not also be hewn down as are other blind people. They are the little band of those who gaze upwards and who are not entangled in earthly matters. They do not seek their greatest treasure in a pleasant life here on earth. They are the handful who turn again and again to God and daily endeavor to remain in God's pleasure and grace.

These then are the chosen ones who cry out day and night, who are constantly concerned because things are as they are, and that there is so much tribulation; who sigh and lament unceasingly under the weight of Satan's bondage, and yearn for the redemption of creation. It is these who are told that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Here a little word must be spoken to these chosen people. There are still today a number of believing people who really do not belong to those who pray at all times without growing weary. There are so many discouraged people among the believers who start from the assumption that because

everything is corrupt, we can do nothing but save our own souls. There are many people whose hearts are untouched by the thousands and millions who will be lost, and they do not believe that it is still possible to receive something of God's mercy. When they see that the devil's power is superior here or there, they immediately conclude: "Now all is lost! It is all over! What is there to be done about it?" For their part they are satisfied with being loyal and not becoming entangled in the sins of the world; otherwise, everything can go on as it pleases. These are the people who lack the courage to cry out earnestly to God and ask that He look down in His compassion and seek out His prize from among the lost ones. There are also many who begin to pray but soon give up when they see no immediate result. They think, even if they don't say it outright, "Now Christianity has forfeited all this; God wants to show that He is a just God, for it is written 'God is not mocked.' Everyone has abandoned the faith and mocks God, and now His vengeance is upon us." And so these people have little confidence that something can be salvaged from the widespread corruption. They have grown weary in their praying and sighing.

The Saviour speaks earnestly to the hearts of all these people. Being the chosen ones who believe in the

Lord Jesus, who accept His merits, they should at all times pray and not grow weary. They should do this seriously and make it their concern that at least that which the Church of God once possessed and which can now no more be seen - or at best, only faintly - should return to her. They should take to heart that the Church is a widow and must therefore put on widow's weeds and as the representative of the widow cry out to the living God. They should remember how the adversary would like to dominate everything and they should unceasingly guard against this, struggle and fight against it by day and by night. They should do this even if it appears that nothing more can be done and that the power of evil is so great that in no wise can we expect any improvement. Let us remember then - we should persevere in prayer at all times or we will incur a heavy responsibility. The Lord commands this and therefore all opinions, all misgivings, and all prejudices must go. We have only to obey and at all times pray for His coming, for His Kingdom, for the gifts of His grace, for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We must continually step into the breach and see where we can intercede with our prayer and entreaty in order to achieve something. If it seems as though no progress is being made - still we must go on. If we feel that in the end we will only destroy everything - still we dare

not grow weary! If the judge seems to reject us and says, "What do you want with your cries? Get away from me, I have no use for you!" - we must still keep on coming back to him. Yes, even when it seems that Heaven is closed and that God's compassion is slow in coming, when it seems that even from above there is no longer any intention of helping this corrupt and abandoned generation - yes, even then it is required of the chosen ones that they come again and again, and ever again. In this way they must seek to make even the impossible possible, for it is certainly almost impossible to get help from an unjust judge. Just think - a poor widow comes to a hard, unjust judge who has regard for neither God nor man. How can she hope to gain anything? If she happened to tell someone, "I am going to the judge," they would have thrown up their hands in astonishment and said, "Oh, yes, you are going to the right one. He will not worry about you. Your case is lost." And so the widow could have remained away and gone on sighing in her little chamber, "It is all of no use!" However in spite of the fact that it seems impossible to get help, the widow does go to the judge and although she is sent away again and again, she still returns because her adversary becomes more and more impudent. Whenever the need caused by the adversary is at its worst, she hurries to the

judge again, until at last he thinks, "This woman goes too far, she gives me no peace. I will have to give her satisfaction." And so he helped her.

We can see by this how very difficult it is, humanly speaking impossible, to recover what is lost - not because injustice rules in heaven, but because the fall of man was so great, divine justice so flagrantly violated even after the Saviour had come, bringing grace and peace. All this made it practically impossible that help could or would be given. Yes, when someone sets to work and tries to obtain decisive help from heaven above, he is soon aware that it is no small thing, but a serious and difficult matter. In certain urgent matters a man can pray and implore ten times, a hundred times, and it seems as if all prayers die away in the wind, as if - as pictured by the prophets - heaven was like iron. (Leviticus 26:19) Thus it is no wonder that many of the chosen ones soon grew weary, for it seemed that their efforts were all to no purpose. But this is what the Lord foretold, and our parable makes it quite clear that in the dark times when the church is like a widow and the adversary is master, the chosen ones can only achieve something with great effort and sacrifice, and with hard and fierce fighting. They must give themselves up body and soul for this, also their external comfort and even

inner peace; they must continue in faith and in supplication, not with words but with their whole being directed towards the living God and His promises. If even the unrighteous judge can at last be made to relent, then surely the holy, just, compassionate, and gracious God will yield to entreaties, providing aid and deliverance to the widow, giving her all that she needs and setting her free from bondage to her adversary.

That is the prospect offered to us by the Lord if we follow His advice and never lose heart. For He says, "Will not God also vindicate His elect who patiently cry to Him day and night? Truly, I tell you, He will vindicate them speedily." At last, at last, the great salvation will come! At last it will come quickly, even if for a long, long time it has seemed as if we gained nothing by prayer! At last it will break in and very soon great things will certainly take place. Thus we may expect that suddenly the almighty hand of our God and Saviour will strike off a thousand chains, will burst open a thousand fetters which bind His children; He will show that He is the Lord, and finally He will completely shatter the power of darkness. And so, my beloved friends, the Lord demands that those who are devoted to Him should pray. His disciples could understand that better, of course, for what did they have? They

had absolutely nothing in this world! They had left father and mother, brother and sister, friends and relations, house and home - what else could they pray for than that the whole world should belong to Christ! It should also be our sole desire that all knees bow before the Name of the Saviour; we should have no other wish; everything else is incidental and comes of itself as soon as this one central prayer grips our innermost being, and we cannot go to sleep without thinking of sorrowing creation and can never awaken without feeling the burden of all mankind.

3. It is true that the number of the chosen is very small, which fact leads us to our third point. The Lord adds to this parable, as if with a sigh, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" How is this to be understood? Dear ones, you must first of all understand fully that there will always be people who praise the Saviour, who speak of a faith that justifies, who love the Holy Scriptures; people who attend church and divine service and have also received grace and the forgiveness of sins. There will always be people who come together for godly conversation and devotions, who also give themselves in a practical way to do something for the Kingdom of God and are therefore active in mission at home or abroad; people who seek by word and deed to convert others, who pray often

and concern themselves with prayer and who admonish and encourage one another to lead a Christian life. There will always be people who have left the world for Christ's sake, who mortify their flesh, and who withdraw from all that which is displeasing to the Lord. There will always be such people - and they are the chosen ones! There will be many like this also in that darkest of all times, and we will give praise and thanks to God that there still are such people. This certainly is a grace. But this is not what the Lord speaks of here. If none of these people understand the essence of what we are talking about, the Saviour has cause to sigh. When He says here, "... will He find faith on earth?" Jesus refers to the faith which expects help in a greater context, a faith which can believe once more in a return of God's graces and can pray for this. He refers to the faith which is convinced that the Lord will at last deliver us; the faith that earnestly fights and struggles, because the Lord is possessor of heaven and earth. However, the sad experience is that there are so many people who along with their Christian faith have so much disbelief; that along with Christian convictions, along with genuine Christian knowledge, along with unwavering searching and study in the Scriptures, along with family and public devotions, there still exists so much

doubt and disbelief and so much forsaking of the divine promises.

Oh, my dear friends, in the end the worst thing is to have faith and yet disbelieve; to have faith and yet have no faith; to have a Saviour and not to have confidence in Him; to speak of a Saviour before whom all those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth must bow the knee; to say this, and yet not believe it - believing instead, however, that the devil is more powerful than the One who has raised Himself to God's right hand - causes one to have no courage to pray earnestly for what has been promised. Imagine the climax of this sad time, imagine that the Lord's coming is near - what will things look like then? During this time the Adversary will have seized hold most firmly upon everything; then the antichrist will have trodden everything underfoot in frightful violence so that all go in fear of him. Then the faithful may have to find out how they can survive. Hundreds and thousands may be killed or be bound and tormented by Satanic powers. With his horrible dragon claws the Adversary will seize hold of all he can, far and wide. Imagine how many will then think and believe steadfastly: "Watch out - all this will end in one day! A day will come in which a trumpet will sound from heaven and then all the enemy hosts and the dragon will be cast into

the abyss!" But yet - because of lack of faith there could then be a further sorry delay - and who knows for how long! Oh, how close help would often be, how quickly and suddenly help could be given if only people could have confidence in the Saviour; if they were convinced that Jesus our brother, who sits at the right hand of God, has the power to help His children; if they were only convinced that He really lives for His Church, lives for those who believe in Him and who call out to Him! But no, people believe anything but this. We believe that He lives for us after we have died, but let us also believe that He lives for us as long as we live, and that He will redeem us and all His suffering creation!

Oh, my dear friends, for our part let us pray for the Lord to give us this faith which can expect and ask something of the Saviour. Our age needs this faith. Only with this faith will we be able to accomplish great things. With this faith we can conquer the powers of darkness. Only through this faith, through which we sigh to heaven, will we be able to rescue thousands who are held captive by the Serpent; will we be able to call down God's powers so that the wretched ones can find life and deep contentment. Yes, may the Lord look down and hear the cries of the few who set to work to sigh for the poor widow, and may He grant

that His counsel be acted upon and the counsel of the Adversary brought to naught. But it is He who will bring this about. He will not have shed His blood in vain, will not have judged the Murderer in vain, and will not have raised Himself to the right hand of His Father in vain! The victory will be His! He will deliver His people from all their tribulations! Amen.