

3-2-86. Hope. There is a charming story about a man who lived in a land in which private opinions were regarded as high crimes against the state. He was a man of strong private opinions, and in addition possessed the courage to express them verbally and in print. As sometimes happens in such cases, he was gifted also with the wit to speak his mind in such a clever way that the thought-police, themselves never strong on thought, did not understand the extent of his rebellion. But then came the day when he was denounced and arrested as an enemy of the state. As he was taken away to one of those detention camps he said, the time of fear has passed; now comes the time of hope. I thought of that story as I thought about the text for today. I also thought about it as I started cabbage plants in my basement--the winter of fear has passed, the seed sprouted, now is the season of hope. I think of that story at the beginning of each new term in the college; fear comes before there are students, before there is a class. But when we assemble to <sup>begin</sup> a study, with a subject of significance before us, then comes the time of hope. And so, too, it is the season of hope in the Xn calendar; last wk we passed thru the revelry of fat Tuesday, to the burnt palm leaves of Ash Wed, and to the beginning of the time of preparation for the passion of our Lord. At this season we have before us seven lessons on the subj of the Xn Hope, with texts taken from that group of short messages we call the general epistles, because they were not addressed to any particular group. For today, text 1Pet1. Any who would like titles and texts for March/Apr/May...

In all of this Bk there is no more beautiful writing than is found in the letter we call First Peter. It has been called the epistle of courage, it has been called the map of the Xn pilgrimage, it has been called the breath of hope. ~~Hope~~ is the dominant theme of the letter, and it was directed not to a particular group but to all who know fear and need hope; it is therefore addressed to us. The language is so lofty, and the Grk original flows so effortlessly, that in the last century some ~~have~~ objected to its authorship. Peter, a simple Galilean fisherman, they say, could never have written what we have here. But near the end of the letter you will see the explanation--by Silvanus, a faithful brother, I have written briefly to you. Silvanus is Silas, and very likely that same Silas who accompanied Paul on his journeys. So we have the inspiration of the first among the apostles, put into the literate language of the time by a friend and brother. It is co-authorship of the very best kind. Tradition from the 1st Cen assures us that these are indeed the words of Peter. From AD 95 we have written quotations from this letter, attributed to Peter, which is sound evidence. And there are hints in the letter that we have the testimony of one who saw Jesus and testified to his life and resurrection. So through the middle of April we shall be reading from the general epistles. Today we begin with 1 Pet. 1 Pet. 1: 3-9. This has been called a doxology for the risen Christ; it is worth many readings, even memorizing. It begins with a prayer of praise to God. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord J Xr. Prayer must always begin a religious experience, because prayer is mankind's confession and submission to God. Faith begins, said Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, when we realize that we are not God. That is what prayer proclaims. To Thee, Oh God, do I bend the knee, and bow the head, and confess that thou art God. It is the beginning of faith; it is also the beginning of knowledge, and wisdom, even life itself when we grow beyond the fear into the sunlight. Reverence toward God is fundamental, it is basic, it is bedrock. In this prayer it is the mercy of God that has given us new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of J Xr from the dead. That is one of the largest twenty words in all of literature. Hope is rooted in praise to God, for it is mercy that made us new. And it is our living hope. Faith, hope, love, these three, Paul wrote, in his own doxology to the gift of God; but he declared the greatest of them to be love, charity, caritas, agape. Faith is of course the beginning, the primary level that brings us to prayer, still, w/o hope, faith and love are incomplete. // Some yrs ago there was a fad for what was called the theology of hope. People who study the meaning of God wrote books and made speeches and ran courses on hope. It faded quickly, at least as far as I can tell, for I no longer see notices of books on the subject, and I would guess that the theological seminaries no longer have a professor of hope. I know hope to be necessary, but it nags at me. We do not hope for what we already have. Hope is a kind of stubborn standing when there seems little to justify standing. We do not praise or admire the intelligence of people who hope for a good meal just as they arise from a groaning table. When we say we hope we are in effect complaining about the present, which does not provide all that we wish or need. There is a proverb--hope makes a tasty breakfast but a poor dinner. Hope is the attitude of youth, for it is the expectation of what is not present; contentment, or despair, is the attitude of the elderly. They have realized what they hoped for, or else they have failed to attain. So to put hope at the center of one's life is evidence that the richness of experience has not yet manifested itself to us. It is better than giving up, to be sure, or than assuming that as things now are, so they shall continue to be. But still, it nags at me. I can agree w/invitation of Robt Browning, grow old along w/me, the best is yet to be. But I can also see the present as rather good in itself. The presence of sacred in secular does not await a future cataclysmic interruption. The joy of the journey is not reduced by the fact that the arrival is the purpose of the trip. So we know the love of God, and the mercy of God, even in a world that



is less than the best, that is passing away. We need not hope for that; we have it like that bird in the hand. But still ahead of us are the two birds in the bush. Mankind is gifted with memory; he is also equipped with the imagination to prepare for the future. Mankind is as far as I can tell the only animal that knits blankets in the heat of summer, and knows why he is doing it. It is that awareness that there is a future that makes mankind human; it is hope that holds us to the belief that future will be better than was past. Without it, life has no purpose, all is vanity, all is empty, all is futile. Of what value is education if there is no field of action somewhere in all our tomorrows for us to share the wisdom we have stolen from the experience of the past? Of what value is civilization if future will destroy rather than add to the meaning of life? And religious faith also looks to a more intimate connection w/God--we saw in the past as if it were in a dark mirror, in which the reflection was hazy and indistinct; but by that living hope that is within us, we shall see face to face, in the clear, bright light of the sun. That hope is so new, so radical a thing, that it can only be described as a new life altogether, on a level unlike anything that has been available before. By his great mercy--which means we did not and cannot earn it--we have been born anew. Peter used the word transl in the older version begotten; it is a Grk word used only twice in NT, and both of them are in this chapter; once here, v.3, and again v.23. It is even stronger a word than is used in John 3, where we read of J's conversation w/Nicodemus, and the words, you must be born from above. Here the new birth is compared to begetting; in the same way that none of us causes our own physical begetting, so none of us can cause our spiritual begetting. It is the gift of God, and flows from his mercy. It is God's creative work, as in the gift of life on the animal level. The other thing we need to note about this remarkable phrase is that the living hope is based upon the resurrection. It is that which makes this appropriate for meditation and memory in this season of preparation. Easter is a unique event, and it must happen to every one of us personally. It is not like the revolving of earth about the sun, that brings us to spring-time whether we prefer winter's winds and snows. It is God's creative work in restoring to life that which died, the crowning affirmation of life in a dying world. The early Xns knew it for a fact, for they either saw the risen lord, or they heard it from someone they trusted, who had. It was not fable, not a dream, or wish-fulfillment in imagination. It was the free Gift of God to men of something they could not do of themselves. For that reason the early Xns lived lives of triumph. The time of fear had passed for them; now was the age of hope. The present life was glorious, it was glad and sunny and richly filled with miracle. But the future was even more filled with wonder. It was like the music Mozart composed in the final months of his short life. I do not know what he sensed about his approaching death; I do know that as he came closer to it his music became joyous, happy, sunny, bubbling with life and laughter, placid and serene. The musical direction dolce, Italian for sweet, rarely found in the earlier Mozart, now abounds in his scores. And it was not w/o accident that much of his most inspiring music was composed for Lenten concerts in Vienna. So it is a living hope that we have because of the resurrection; we can recapture the joy and the triumph that illumined the early church; the dimension of eternity and the promise of a glorious harbor at the end of life's voyage infused their lives with joy and love and peace. It can also be ours. So v. 3--we are in 1 Pet 1--is an enormous truth expressed in very few words. But then look to v.4: we have been born anew To an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, unfading. The promise is assured, the hope we entrust to the dependable certainty of God is sure. No disappointment here. This is the best that is to be, that reaches beyond the present. In v.5, note the prepositions. We are kept--the new transl has guarded, which is a better mind-picture of the original--we are kept BY God's power THRU faith FOR salvation. By, thru, and for. To understand the nouns that follow those words is to know the rich texture of the good news in Xr. And note the paradox in v.6--in this you rejoice, even though now you suffer. Here is the mixture of emotions which makes up our lives. Sorrowful, but always rejoicing, being exceedingly glad, knowing true light-heartedness, knowing too the inner peace that is the proof of God's presence with us. Rejoice, even in heaviness, for the gold itself, even though imperishable, is still tested by fire, v.7. Those words were directed to a generation of believers who knew what it meant to be tested by fire, for from the early 60's under Nero it was a crime to profess the faith of a Xn. It is a glorious salvat in the present life, and it is also glorious yet to come. V.8--without having seen him you love him, a hint that the writer has seen, and is an apostle giving direct eye-contact testimony, also a hint that many to whom the letter was directed, had not done so. We too are among that number. We can no longer see him in the flesh, but we set our faith upon a living Lord; we rejoice with unspeakable and exalted joy. It is beyond human telling, so complete is it. In this is the Xn's hope. There is just ahead of us in the Xn calendar the memorial to the death of J, when we mark the good Friday stations, and the words from the cross, when all the church mourns in its black sorrow. But joy beyond words! there is also just ahead a resurrection. For us, too, there is death; but for us, too, there is resurrection. In this is our hope. Let that joy be in all of us that was in Xr J; let joy bubble thru every crack in our lives; rejoice, and again I say rejoice. For no greater gift than this hath any man received.



3-9-86. Suffering. People who lived thru most of the ages of the past considered themselves to be suffering uncertainty and to be living thru tragedy. Wherever one dips into the comments of the past that people have made about their own times there is some evidence of joy and freedom, but in every century there has been strong feeling that we face crises and we are threatened w/disaster. In the mid-1940's Averell Harriman said that anyone who wished to live a quiet and untroubled life should have chosen a different century. And ever since I read that I have from time to time toyed with the question, which century? I have not yet discovered a time, a generation, a third of a century, in which most people did not weep as often as they laughed, or tread in sorrow as often as they danced. Grief has always been a familiar guest at humanity's tables, and suffering is a constant companion on our journey. It is the reality of pain that makes us individuals. Suffering is the great divider that teaches us our individuality. To hurt is to know separation from all other people, for pain is the most individualizing sensation we can know. To suffer is to be alone; to watch another person suffer is to feel, even to claw at, the barrier that shuts every one of us off from every other one of us. We can imagine, but we cannot feel, a group suffering; there is no collective pain. Only individuals can suffer, and no one can know another's suffering. Still, it is the common bond that unites us, but that is mind and not spirit at work. Our minds simplify, seeking to relate all things and to see the meaning of the whole. But the spirit individualizes, and singles out the great soul that suffers in and to itself. So it is to us. The mind sees the Christ of the gospels as the mediator between God and man, and as essential to man's redemption. But it is the spirit that focuses upon the Son of Man, who suffered, and suffered in such a way that thousands, and millions, great multitudes of human-kind that no census can count, have suffered with him and understood God and nature and themselves thru him. Art happens when the mind that connects and the spirit that individualizes are in perfect balance. X That is the theme of the lesson we have before us today, text 1 Pet 3,4. This is the 2d in a short series of lessons on the Xn's hope. Last wk we began the series with a discussion of hope, based on some lines in 1 Pet 1. The texts for these lessons are from those brief letters in NT we call general, or universal, or catholic, epistles. There are 2 by Peter, 3 by John, one by Jude. None of them is addressed to a specific group or individual; they were not written in response to a request for teaching, or clarification, or inspiration. Instead they were like sermons, or pamphlets, these people were inspired to write, to all the faithful in all the world, and in all the ages. And the key word in underst those writings is HOPE. You will remember that last week we talked about hope; some yrs ago there was a fad among theolgs about hope. They made speeches and put together courses and wrote books about hope. Somewhere there may still be a scholr or 2 who emphasize hope, but I've not heard from them in a while, nor have I heard of a seminary professor who sits in the hope chair. The probl is that we do not hope for what we already have. Do any of the young ladies of your acquaintance have hope chests, as they were called several hundred yrs ago, in the balmy days of my youth? No daughter obtained cedar chest and filled it with linens and towellings against the day when she would preside over her own home, if she already presided over her own home. Do you remember the women in George Eliot's Mill on the Floss who continued to store away treasures long after they were married and mothers, because they could not bring themselves to use what they had inherited, and would in turn pass along to their daughters? No one hopes for what one has; it is absurd to hope for what one has. And that is what bothers me. To make hope the center of one's relig understanding is to proclaim that the richness of God's presence has not yet happened. I know there is promise of future glories, but the present is to the person of faith also filled to the brim with joy and beauty and blessings that can come only from the providence of God. Hope is only half an apple, to be delivered at some future and undesignated time, to people who find no fruits of the spirit in the life of the present. And that is what bothers me. It is better than giving up when the odds seem insurmountable, but it is a shade short of My peace I leave with you, not as the world giveth. Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, and they are great and necessary gifts. In spite of our niggings we must not demean hope, for she consoles the spirit of man when the road ends and darkness falls and all about us is confusion and what appears to be meaninglessness. So let us turn again to the letter of the pastor of the apostles, Peter, to learn of hope, even when it requires that we suffer. 1 Pet I: 3:12-17. This is the Xn answer to persecution. It may mean less to us than it did to our ancestors in the days of the Roman Emps Claudius and Nero, for we may have reached a level of tolerance that takes the sting out of faith. But to the early believers that was not possible. To accept J as Lord and Master put them at variance with their world, for it was one of pleasure and sensuality and corruption and tax breaks to the wealthy, a world of violence and injustice, of class privileges--in short, a world not at all like unto our own. They had fraternities that broke the rules, a condition we have outgrown in our greater maturity; ~~they had athletes who led the class in writing poetry and reading philosophy, another condition we have left behind except for an exception here and there.~~ they had allies in the far east who looted their treasures, something our century would not permit. Nor had they yet developed works of the mind that contained the

*and the Dnsgeld, as Eng; yielded earth + fire to Moke*



potential of destroying the planet. But in these words we have a guidebook for living in the world. In general, (as a rule) Peter wrote, the best defense against a hostile world is an upright life. Does it astound you that such advice was necessary, or may even have been news, to the Xn communities of A<sup>g</sup> Min to whom Peter wrote? That is like telling them to breathe five times every minute as the best way to get oxygen to the lungs. It means something that Peter thought it proper to tell those believers that no one would harm them if they were zealous for what is right, folwfs of that which is good. It is still left to us to define the right thing to do; it may be that every one of us knows what it is; whether we do it or not, we know. The Grk philosophers would disagree, of course; knowl is virtue, they taught, so that imprudence and immorality arise from ignorance, the lack of knowl. I wonder if students anywhere anymore devote their time to reading and discussions about the good, and the right, and the true, and the beautiful. But Peter said it--zeal for the right will keep you out of trouble. Once again we are reminded that the physician heals the sick; those who are in good health have no need of him. Faith and forgiveness are for those who fall short in the zeal to do right. Aside from that, there is serious truth in these words that we must not miss. We must be alert to the cost of our commitment. Life is joy and beauty and blessing, but it is also trial and trouble and separation from others, which means grief, and it is pain and suffering. Here is a hope that is worth suffering for, Peter says. Even if we do suffer for righteousness' sake we shall be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. In this we begin to see the meaning of suffering; it is the prerequisite of hope. Pain is God's way of telling us that the present, for all that we know His presence with us, is not yet the face-to-face contact with God that we shall know. We all suffer, in one way or another; to suffer for righteousness' sake is reserved only for those who make righteousness a goal to be obtained. An ancient poet said that before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat. Long is the road thereto, and steep and rough at the first. The Grk sculptor Phidias carved a statue of Zeus the Father at Olympia, of which nothing remains but verbal descriptions; he made of the human body a religious experience, so we are told. One who saw it wrote that if a man heavy of heart, who had drunk often of the cup of adversity and sorrow should stand before it, he would remember no longer the bitter hardships of his life. ~~Relig~~ Relig should not wipe out memory; it should ennoble it and with it all of life. It is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong. I Pet 4: 12-19. This is a call for faithfulness in the face of adversity. We may not walk thru the fiery furnace in literal truth, though forty years ago some millions of our brethren died in the gas chambers for no other crime than being the chosen people of God. If we are indeed the new Israel then every one of us deserved the same fate. Do not be surprised, Peter tells us, when it comes, for it is a testing, to try us, to prove us. Do you remember the words of the old hymn about testing God? Try me, prove me, test me, says the Lord. Today's text, to be remembered, and pondered, is v.13--but rejoice in so far as you share Xr's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. Now you note that there are two sides to this rejoicing; one is to rejoice if we are called upon to share in Xr's sufferings. It is not easy to rejoice in suffering. Suffering hurts, and pain blots out reason, and compassion, and understanding. It takes a truly great soul to suffer for no reason other than holding a faith and not curse the hand that harms us. And ~~let~~ Peter tells us that we can rejoice in suffering when we partake of our Lord's suffering, for then we shall share that for which we hope. There are two sides to ~~suffering~~ rejoicing, then--one when we rejoice even as we hurt, and the other as we rejoice because we know that for which we kept the faith--know as real, as present experience, not as something imagined, or looked for in some distant future. This moves beyond breaking bread to remember the Lord's death until he come; to share in the breaking of the body itself is to extend one's life beyond the present and into the realm of eternity. So if we are asked to suffer for God's will, let us entrust our conscious natures to the certain safekeeping of a faithful creator, v.19. Do you notice that his hope begins and ends with a faithful creator? The same God who created heavens and earth, the same who created fish and the water that gives it life, and crawling things, and flying things, the same God made man and gave him mind to discover God in the nature that he created, and to discover the mathematical exactness of the laws that govern it--that same God will receive us here, and in the hereafter. The same spirit of love and mercy controls history, and also rules eternity. So we may suffer for our faith, or we may see others suffer for theirs. We know that suffering is a personal thing, that pain cannot be transferred from one of us to another. In our minds we understand the role of Xr as mediator. But it is our spirit that makes us one with him as human being, suffering as an individual, for each of us, doing what we cannot do for ourselves. And as we suffer we know the relief & release that hope can give, for it is in pain, and fear, and aloneness, that we need the gift of hope. When the present is sunny, and we enjoy health, and friends, and warmth, then we do not need hope. But when the present turns upon us, and all around is turmoil of soul, then we need hope. It is worthy of suffering, for nothing is as sure as the promises of God.

✓ Still, we need to remember that we have access to forgiveness, like erasing a tape it wipes away guilt and tears.



3-16-86. Wait. Today we have a lesson about waiting. I know that every one of you is blest with the gift of patience, but not I. The entire world cannot hold the list of things I cannot do well, or the encyclopedic record of the things I dislike doing. ~~But~~ Near the top of either list is waiting. In my otherwise rather prosaic life I ~~have~~ survived five years of life in the U. S. Army, where everything that was not prohibited was required, by everybody and at the same time. I waited in so many lines that I made a private resolution that if I ever get out of this Franz Kafka nightmare I will never again wait in a line for anything. Afterwards, when I was a student, and registering for courses, there were lines. I refused to join them. I went off somewhere and sat me down and took out a book, or talked to somebody who might be interesting, or might teach me something. In grocery stores I have been known to take a full cart of food to the check-out and then carefully replace every item I had chosen in its right spot, return the cart to the line--carts do not mind waiting in line--and left the establishment. On one occasion I remember it took me so long to replace what I had selected that the long lines had melted away. I did not care. Waiting is an offense to me. I fidget to wait in doctor's offices, or dean's offices, and have considered sending a bill for my time, which is all I have to live in. The point of all this is not to present myself to you as an antediluvian curmudgeon--you already know that about me. It is to get you to thinking about how difficult it is for us to wait, because we are going to meditate together this morning on the thought that waiting is a duty, and may be the highest form of faith, and is a necessity for all of us. Text 2 Pet 3: 1-13. Today is the 3d Sun of the month, and the 3d lesson in a brief series of lessons on the theme, the Xn's Hope. The texts for these lessons come from those short letters near the end of the NT, ascribed to Peter, John, and Jude, and called general, or catholic, epistles because they were directed to all believers and not just to a particular group. The first 2 lessons were taken from meaningful and beautiful passages from 1 Pet. There is no doubt that the ideas in that epistle came from the pastor of the apostles, though the words themselves may have been provided by Peter's friend Silas. ~~But~~ There are testimonials from 1st Cen that the ltr we call 1 Peter is Peter's, and is inspired. But then we come to 2 Pet. No one in modern times, and very few among the ancients, accept this ltr as from the hand of Peter. From the late 2d Cen, 185 or so, there are comments upon it, and the opinion was then, and remains, that 2 Pet is canonical but not authentic. That means that what it has to say is part of the accepted literature of the Xn Church, which makes up the canon--and that is not something that belches fire in battle--but that it was written by someone using Peter's name to get an audience. If we are to accept the tradition that Peter was a martyr to the faith at the hands of Nero's executioners in Rome about 64 a.d., then how can we account for the fact that 2 Pet. expects his readers to know the gospels' account of the transfiguration, writing that could not have been done for another 20 or 30 yrs after 64? Or the writer's admission that the generation of the fathers had already passed, or that he knew in the 60s of Paul's ltrs, and even that they were used by those whose faith was not correct? What we have is a valuable essay written by someone to whom the name Peter meant orthodoxy, the correct teaching, and who wrote nearly a century after Peter's death to correct the errors he saw around him. That does not mean we demean the writing, or ignore it. In 16th Cen John Calvin said that our doubts about the author ought not to keep us from reading it. And so they should not. 2 Pet 3: 1-13. This is a passage urging us to wait with strong and unshakeable faith the second coming of the Xr. That is a subject that was of supreme importance to the early Xns, but which has in our own day, as it had already in the day of the author of this ltr, become an embarrassment, the target of scoffers and teasers. What about Xr's coming? people were asking, and those who care are still asking. It is not a creed that the so-called liberal, or the self-styled intellectual, advocates of Xr's gospel feel comfortable with. It is like the walking on water, or raising Lazarus from the dead; many of us would just as soon it hadn't happened, or hadn't been prophesied. One reason is that the 2d coming has been made into a hell-fire and brimstone super weapon to be used by a particular type of evangelist as a stick to hit the sensuality of the age over the head with. Among my earliest memories there are pellucid and thunderous pulpit-bangings by righteous harmony fists, attached to preachers confident that when the judgmental trumpet sounds they will hear AS anthems the terrified screams of the wicked, who enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season, while they themselves will receive the crown, and be invited to sit at the right, or maybe the left hand, of Xr the King. Even in these latter days, if you tune your Japanese electronic ~~radio~~ to the right spot on the dial, you will hear someone cataloging current history to prove that the time is right, and the remnant will be snatched from the burning, if you just send us your check. Do you suppose that somewhere there are ascension robes for sale? or a debate over the meaning of the mark of the beast? The late great planet earth still has its mourners, and as you can guess from these few words, it is easy to ridicule the whole idea. Year follows year, generation begets another generation, centuries flow from the mists of the future to the gloom of dusty annals on the shelves of the library, and there is still nothing new under the sun, no evidence to indicate the beginning, or the end, of the millennium. The scientific mind reduces reality to the known and the predictable // the one-dimensional

① Some insist 4th Gosp written to prove it already real, in Pentecost.



linear view of the historian can detect no fulfillment of the promises made in the hills of Galilee so long ago. The unwilling mind of the pagan, who rejects any place for the divine, or the miraculous, thinks it a monstrous humbug. In fact, as time passes and the confidence in the quick end to the age, which was widespread and fundamental in the teachings of Jesus and Peter and Paul, dissipates before the continuing routine of the years, the temptation that confronts us all is to adopt the mind-set of the natural scientist, or the historian, or the pagan. As I heard a preacher say some years ago, because the Parousia has been delayed--Parousia is Grk for presence, the verb to be present, and is the word theologians use for the second coming--because the parousia has been delayed, we have the temptat to live as if it had been repealed, or vetoed. That is the attitude that this writer speaks to in these lines. His plea to us is not to lose sight of the hope, for it is worth waiting for. We must never forget that we are living in the end-time; that every Sunday, every Lord's day, is a memorial to bring us to face the fact that we ~~are~~ living in the interim between the third day and the last day. As the resurrection is our promise of life eternal, so the advent of the presence is our hope of triumph. It is joy but it is not revenge; it is reward and not punishment. And so we have in these days the same kinds of questionings and doubtings and ridiculings that existed in the world in which lived the author of 2 Pet. To that attitude of unbelief he offered three answers. First, there is the argument from history. Are you really sure that things have continued to happen as they always have, and that they always will continue in the same routine? A great number of events have happened which do not convince us to take our ease, ~~for~~ there will be no deviation from the tread-mill repetition of the past. What about the Flood? he asks. Remember? that too was a time in which people thought there would be business as usual into the farthest reaches of the future. There was widespread licentiousness, adultery, drunkenness and drugginess, fraud and corruption at all levels, infidelity reigned. But history did not continue for those antediluvian party-goers. And <sup>what</sup> to the present, history has taken sharp turns, there have been breaks in the workings of Time's loom. The world that ~~then~~ <sup>then</sup> existed was deluged w/water & perished. Next will come fire, being kept until the day of judgment. But do not succumb to the routine! The earth has spun upon its axis, so that the sun appears to rise, for trillions of mornings; is that any proof that it will do so tomorrow? Second, the writer offers an argument of the contrast between our puny view of reality, and God's sweeping understanding. It may be that the basic evidence of our humanhood is the temptat to confuse time w/eternity, to assume that ~~because~~ time as we know it has unrolled w/o a hitch as far back as we can see, and the astrophysicists are now reaching back to the first few milliseconds of the big bang; because time has continued to flow from the wells of the universe, it will always be thus. That is an act of faith, and it is ironic that it is the favorite response of people who claim to have no faith. Can anyone really be sure of the next year, or the next hour? Nature is faithful and predictable, but there are contingencies in nature, there are crises, there are beginnings and endings, there is life and there is death. What we see is the narrow confines of finitude. With God a thousand years are as one day; God is not limited to time, as we creatures are. We do not even notice a millisecond--and there are now words to describe atomically brief periods of time--but God can spend what would for us be an eternity, upon every millisecond of our time. Foolish man, to think God limited as he is. Reality is not measured by the clock, or by the calendar, or even by the ages. When God thru his son predicted an imminent second coming, who are we to find fault if God's imminent is our forever. And then third, the writer asks us to contemplate the infinite mercy and patience of God. God stays the hand of judgment, as some of us would never do, to give the wayward and the wilful every opportunity to change the way they live. God is forbearing toward us, not wishing that any should perish. And so the blade of the axe is stayed, the door remains open, the candle in the window gleams out its offer of peace and forgiveness. For many of us, the delay is not an act of longsuffering mercy, but rather is taken as proof that there will never come an end. What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop? as Browning asked. Jesus told the parable of the thief who comes in the night, and finds the householder asleep; had he known the hour, he would have stayed awake. Here, too, the writer uses the image of the thief in the night, when many of us are besotted, or asleep in our confidence that we are in control of our lives. But the lesson for us is the certainty of that second coming, and that day of the Lord, and that fire and that loud noise. The judgment appears to come slowly, to be delayed, to some of us even annulled outright. It was a bad idea, it is too harsh a judgment, it will not happen. But the word is clear--it will happen, and so it matters desperately how we live while we are waiting. It is the test of faith, and of patience, that we wait, in holiness and godliness, that we live in the end-time of a world that is doomed and not become a part of its values or its distorted life. Waiting is not easy, nor is it fun. Long ago I took the vow never again to stand in a line, at the grocery store or the post-office window. But for the return of the presence we all wait, in singing and serving and believing. For the Xn's hope is worth waiting for.



3-23-86. Truth. Today we have a lesson that asks us to consider the difference between true and false. That is not an easy distinction to make. There are many among us who reject the assumption that there is any thing such as truth; that what we have are facts and information and knowledge, and some of it is useful and some isn't, but that truth is a concept that has no meaning and no value. You can build an automobile, or grow corn, with knowledge, but you cannot do either with truth. Facts are facts, but truth shifts even as we look at it; from one frame of reference there is truth, but move 90 degrees south and the same datum is no longer truth, but falsehood. To know truth from falsehood, and to know real from imitation, may be the ultimate objective of education. But oh, my, how far most of us are from ever getting there. // There is a cardinal who lives in my back yard, and he may have something helpful to teach us. Since last spring that brilliant red bird has pecked incessantly against the windows of the house, has struck the solid glass, and has retreated to a branch on a bush to spring and do it again. We can only guess why that silly bird has expended so many waking hours at that endless quest; we think it sees its reflection and thinks it a competitor for the territory. If that is itself fact, then we have the classic case of illusion taking precedence over reality. I watch political campaigns run on the same basis; I see consumer goods hawked with the same appeal. How that cardinal knows what is real and what is not does not matter much to us; it is a passing curiosity. But how we know the difference matters a great deal; it may even be a matter of life and death. That is the subject we have before us this morn, text 1 John. This is the fourth in a short series of Lenten lessons based on the NT ltrs we call general epistles. For the past 3 Sundays we have read and thought about texts from 1 & 2 Peter. Today we begin 3 sessions taken from the ltrs of John. They are short; there are three of them, but the 2d and 3d hardly fill a page of my Bible. And they are not general epistles, for you will note that they are addressed from someone who called himself the elder to specific individuals. But 1 John differs. It has no greeting at the beginning, as it should have if it were to be a ltr. Our custom is to begin a letter with Dear Mom, send money, or Dear Sir or Mme, as the case may be; just as likely, Dear Occupant, or Boxholder. But the Grk form was to begin with the name of the writer, then the name of the addressee, and then a greeting: Paul, an apostle of Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are at Philippi. But look at the beginning of 1 John. There is no greeting, no salutation. In this it resembles Hebrews. But then, Hebrews begins like a pamphlet but it ends like a letter. 1 John ends as if part of the page had been torn off and lost. So it neither begins nor ends like a letter. And in the body of the document, whatever it is, there are other problems, of subject, and meaning. Many NT scholars reject the authorship of the same John who wrote the 4th gospel and the Revelat, on the basis of assorted prepositions in Grk, measured in a way I find incomprehensible. It is possible that the writings come from early in 2d century, and that they deal with a growing dissention within the Ch over the meaning of the incarnation, and that these ltrs, or tracts to be taken by missionaries to be read in the Chs, were intended to attack and destroy the error. The error was likely the gnostic claim that the appearance of God in evil flesh was not possible, or the docetic belief that it only seemed to be God in Christ. It could also have been an attack upon an anti-Xr. I do not know, being no gnostic, and gladly leave these debates to the professionals. The passage we are assigned have to do with the knowledge of God, and how we know what is true about it. 1 John 2: 1-6. There are other verses in the printed lesson, but this may be all we can chew and swallow in one session. You hear in this the terse, direct style of this writer, and the way in which he goes from subject to subject rapidly. It is as though this were a collection of sayings, each of which might have been in the beginning the subject of a lecture, or of a sermon. But in this are two or three things we need to think about, and learn from. First is the confusing and yet thoroughly understandable paradox we all face in the Xn life. I refer to the contradiction in v.1: I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin. The writer is in a very small company of people who write in order that people may not do the wrong thing, and rebel vs. God. This is what in this century has been called preventive religion. It is like boiling the water before we drink it, because it is easier to avoid getting typhoid fever than it is to cure it if we catch it. The argument is that it is easier to write to people, or speak to people, or legislate for people, in order that they do not sin, than it is to snatch them from the burning, and from the guilt, when they do. I would think that there is far more profit to be made in inducing the innocent to befoul themselves than there is in keeping them clean. That it may be so is a thing we should all be ashamed of. But it is becoming clear in the closing years of this century that the family as a teaching and guiding institution for the young has come unglued. To be sure it is not true for all families, for there continue to be parents who feel & care, who teach and guide. But in too many cases the center has given way. There has been great insistence that the schools do what family, and often also church, have failed to do. Who would demand that we set aside the Constit and have school children pray, or have a moment of silence, if home and Ch were doing their duty? But the writer here wants to keep the little children from sin. This can only refer to the grosser sensualities of the flesh, and not to spiritual rebellion that is woven into our cells and nerve-ends. But hear the paradox--I would keep you from sin, but



if you sin. It is inconsistent, and yet precisely true, <sup>honest</sup> and it is the best case to make against perfectionism. There must have been people in that early day who considered themselves to be without sin, and perfect in every way. In this ltr the contradiction is emphasized and repeated, that we are required to live a sinless life, and at the same time the writer refused to permit anyone to claim himself beyond sin. And it will not help matters, if this writer is the authority, to speak of a distinction between moral and venial sins, between peccadillos and weightier matters of the law. In this we face one of the fundamental paradoxes in the gospel--that we are all called to renounce our evil impulses at the same time that we are assured that we are forgiven by a merciful God for the sins that we are required to confess. The reason this is a paradox for which there may be no solution on the human level is that we have a confrontation between a God of judgment who condemns sin as iniquity, and a God of mercy who forgives the sin and loves the sinner. I cannot explain that, or even understand that, but I give thanks for it. There is a tension, and it comes thru clearly in these words, between keeping us from sin, and yet if we sin. We cannot with safety relax the moral imperatives, for our wrestling with them strengthens our character even as it teaches us humility; and we can only give thanks for a God who forgives even as he condemns. The invitation of know the peace of forgiveness is universal, it is for all of us, all of the time. For we are called to perfection, which we cannot attain; so we are promised an advocate with the Father. The Grk word transl advocate is paraclete, one who stands beside, as an attorney stands alongside his client and pleads his case. Jesus is advocate; he is also expiation. That is a Latin word that began as a legal term for paying the penalty for crime. The middle syllable is also the root of the word pious, meaning one who is pure because his debt is paid, his offense punished. But here it is J who paid the penalty, who served the prison term, who gave his life. Recently there was published a 40-year old novel of Graham Greene about a group of French hostages taken by the occupying Nazis. Because a french resistance fighter killed a soldier, three of the hostages must be shot to death. One rich hostage offers all his wealth to someone who will take his place; a poor peasant agrees, to die, that his family will profit by his death. Something like that is involved in expiation. J has made us all rich by taking upon his innocent back the stripes that were meant for us. We stand absolved of the guilt which is rightfully ours. Another matter we need to note is the call to obedience. There is an inescapable connection between eternal life, and moral life. We know J as advocate before God for us, as expiator of our guilt, as we keep his comdmts (v.3). That means that we accept the rules as given by a loving father God. We do not ratify them, we did not write them; all we can do is accept them or break them. We are told here that we know God only as we obey. There are always among us people who want to know God through the mystical experience, which is a psychological thing; or to know God thru the intellect, or thru nature, This may be the essence of the error the letter was written to combat. And it is still with us. The emphasis upon education has led to the heresy that the best Xn is the best educated Xn. I have met simple folk who do not know the anteNicene fathers who know God as I never shall. There are also numerous cults, who want to speak in tongues, or hide secret knowledge from the rest of us. Last wk I saw an article in a magazine of relig opinion arguing that Halley's comet is a message from God. Are we to commune w/God only every 76 and a fraction years? No, we know God as we seek His will, and as we obey his Comdmts. The universe has a moral basis, and we ignore it, or rebel against it, to our peril. And finally, there is the nagging question that red bird in my yard poses to all of us. What is real, and what is illusion? What is the difference between true and false? v.4 tells me that if I claim to belong to the body of Xr, and do not obey the comdmts, I am a liar, and the truth is not in me. True, then, is in the doing of it; true is in the discipline we impose upon our inner beings, and in our outward relats with nature, and neighbor, and the work ~~we are~~ given to do. Far too many of us want to get to heaven on J's coattails, while ignoring all his teachings. We dishonor moral purity; we make excess our goal, instead of moderation; we use other people. We act as if all we need to win out over life is knowl, and skill, for with them we can grow more corn or build a better automobile. But love is superior to knowl, and obedience is the proof of our faith. By this we may be sure that we are in him--he who says he abides in him ought to walk as he walked. That clause, by this we may be sure, is confusing, and it is used a number of times in this letter. What is confusing about it is that it may connect to what went before, as the KJV has it; or it may relate to what comes after, as RSV. It does not matter except to the pedantic; whether love of God is perfected in him, and by that we are sure; or whether we are sure in that we walk with him. In either case, the highest form of life is to imitate Christ in our lives. In him the comdmts touch us as ink on paper cannot do. An example is of greater value than is a law. In these weeks of preparation for the great gift of life that God gave us in his Son, we need to keep the human example before us. For this is to us the good news, that we have an advocate, an expiator, and the more surely we walk as he walked, and live as he lived, the more surely do we find our spirits uplifted and cleansed, and the clearer becomes our knowledge of God, and our love for God. Truth is being, and knowing, and loving.



3-30-86. Easter. Not so very long ago, in one of the leading opinions journal, there was a discussion of when the modern age began. One view was the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1452; another was Columbus' 1492 voyage to the Caribbean; another was the publication in 1543 of Copernicus' questionings of the accepted faith about the solar system. There are other date-lines, of course, and it may be that for each of us there is a different clock. But somewhere in the frontier between an earlier age and the modern world there must come some weight to the end of certainty and the rise of doubt. The ancients taught that man is a rational animal; moderns in despair confess that man is irrational and self-destructive. To the age of faith all things were possible; to the modern nothing is possible, and even the probable is uncertain. Somebody said it in a quip: the age of faith was followed by the age of reason, that was succeeded by the age of neither. It is to that great sea of uncertainty in which we sink or swim that the proclamation of the resurrection speaks. No, it shouts, it sings, it leaps high in the air in unfettered joy. It tells us that being modern does not mean anything if we must sacrifice the certainties of the past. It says that we cannot enjoy whatever mechanical or material progress is offered to us if we forget the values by which we guided our lives in the past. We may no longer need the north star to navigate the pathless oceans, but we very much need the north star to know the unchanging beauty of the creation. In all of life, & especially so as we remember the sources of our faith, we must make modern the ancient truths or else we lose the value of the modern. This is our challenge, and our hope, as we hear once again the glad news that life and light have triumphed over death and darkness, and that God is creator and sustainer, and will keep safe that which we have entrusted to him until for all of us the dawn shall break. Text 1 John. Today we are near the completion of a brief series of lessons based upon the general epistles of the NT, on the theme the Xn's Hope. We have the 2d of 2 lessons taken from the ltr we call 1 John. Among those who devote their professional activity to a study of the short writings we call 1, 2 Pet, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude, there is no agreement as to authorship or date of composition. And not all scholars agree that the same John who wrote Revelat and 4th Gosp is the author of these brief messages. First John is unlike any other part of NT; it is not like a ltr, for it does not begin with a greeting, as do all the others. It is not like a tract, as is Hebrs, but Hebrs ends like a ltr. 1 John ends as if the scroll were torn off. It just quits. It neither begins nor ends like a ltr. And the contents of the writing, whatever it may be, reads like lecture notes, or an outline of a major work. It is ~~repetitive~~ epigrammatic, and has little continuity. Whoever wrote it, and whenever, and to whom, it has been a favorite of the faithful since 2d Cen. It has something fundamental to say to us in these days, something about the ageless validity of truth, whenever revealed, and however expressed. 1 John 4: 13-17. The subject of these assorted sentences is the Xn's confidence. It was a favorite subject for the writer of this letter. thirteen times in this short statement he uses the Grk word we translate confidence. Blessed assurance, we call it, and that is what he gives us here. If the past is the time of certainty, and the present the age of doubt, then the writer of this letter wants us to live in these yrs as if they followed the style of the past. It was to him certain that people of faith abide with God, and that love is the glue that binds human and divine into a unit. If there be any who are unsatisfied with life, and feel that there must be a better way, then take a look at what these lines say to us. It is a basic need of humankind that we have a basis upon which to build a life, and a set of values, something that is beyond guessing, beyond doubt, something that is real, and sure. This does not replace the leap of faith, for that is life's greatest adventure; it gives us a sure springboard from which to make that leap. By this we know, the passage begins; that is looking forward, and not backward. The writer does not state his case and then say that the evidence enables us to know; instead, he tells us that we know, we are assured, we stand upon a ground of certainty, because of what he is about to tell us. We can take comfort, too, in knowing that the early Xns also needed to be assured. The age of doubt has no time of beginning or of ending; like the poor, it is with us always. If, as some would say, the need for certainty marks the line between ancient or medieval and modern, then whoever read this letter was modern. They needed to know. To this writer, the proof is the indwelling spirit. We abide in God, and he is in us, because he has given us of his spirit. There is a mystical element in all relig faith, and so there is in this. But do you note the unusual aspect of this mysticism? The presence of the spirit within us is proof we can offer to our reasons, our knowing parts, that God is with us. It is an objective test. Those who interpret this writing as an answer to the gnostic deviations already present emphasize these words. They deny the subjective --that is, within ourselves, and not open to all--they deny the subjective relig practices common then, and still with us. The writer says that all of us should be able to recognize the work of the spirit of God within us. It goes beyond membership in a body that does not have effect, or an unthinking internalizing of relig experience, or the use of the word Xn to mean a political/military faction, as some in this world do, or even to identify a civilization or a culture area. It also goes beyond the speaking in tongues and other practices that set us apart, rather than bring us together. As we have seen, (v. 14) and ~~as~~ we testify; that sounds like legal evidence admissible



in a court of law. Here is another ground for confidence in the certainty of God's intervention in the world of time and humanity. It is the confession that the believer makes. It is two-fold; one, we testify that God the Father has sent his Son into the world as savior; second, God abides in all who confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Here we are looking deep into the past. Last wk I saw pictures of that comet, taken from a spacecraft while so close to it that its pebbles knocked out the machinery. I was told that materials in that comet's head are from the time of the creation of the solar system, so to look upon it is like looking into a microscope that shows the beginnings. V.15 here is like that, for in these words we have the oldest confession that Xns know. In our day it has become fashionable to demand an elaborate creed, and we condemn any who will not agree to it. But long before there was orthodoxy there was faith; before the doctrine of the trinity there was faith in a God revealed as father and son and spirit. Before there were the five fundamentals, or the 39 articles, or the logic of systematic theology, there was the proclamat, J Xr is Lord. Here it is J is Son of God. That is the first step, the beginning, the cornerstone, of Xty. All else is addendum. But with all that truth, the core of the passage is v.16, the one we should read and re-read and memorize, and ponder. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, & he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. The older translat uses other English to say exactly the same thing. The original is the same in either case. But here the eloquence and simplicity of revealed truth soars above us, and yet reaches out to touch us; and the boldness of the assertion is impressive. The modern mind might perhaps distinguish between knowing and believing, might even place them upon different steps of the staircase, and put knowledge above & beyond believing. Note that here they are equated. We know, and we believe. In John 6 the same 2 verbs are put in the same sentence, but there faith is the way to knowledge--Ptr is quoted in v.69--we have believed, and have come to know, that you Jesus are the Holy One of God. There is the confession that is repeated in these words. There is here, too, those simple and yet profound words of confidence. God is love. Remember, when we were very young, they were the first memory words we had. As soon as the infant tongue can form sounds, it can say that. It is not an action for God to love; it is nature, it is essence, it is being. God does love, yes; but even more, God IS love. On our side it is an act of knowing that about God. But let us not overlook the fact that here the emphasis is not upon knowing, but upon relatshp. God is love, and he who abides in love/dwells in God. Because God is love, all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. Love is the life of God in the life of man. It is above creed, above knowledge, above morality; it is the essential quality of faith. One other thing we need to note about this remarkable sentence. What it says is general, and applies to all who live in love. Something there is about love that is at base an expression of the divine. Love is a whole, and is of God and the nature of God. And yet--we must not lose sight of the meaning to this apostle. Love is grounded in the Xn experience, and is predicated upon confession of J as Xr. Begin w/v.15 and read it all--whoever confesses that J is son of God, abides in God, and he who abides in love abides in God. The Xn proclamat must not be intolerant of other attitudes, but it must not give up its uniqueness. It affirms that only in Jesus do we see the perfect love of God, and that all other expressions of love must be measured by that standard. We do not condemn, but we must proclaim the truth that has been revealed to us. 1 John 5: 1-12. This is a constitution and set of by-laws directed to the children of God. It is not a secret society, nor does it shut anyone out of its fellowship. But for those whom God has called into it, here are rules by which to live. The passage begins at 4:19, not assigned this time. But the description of the members is 5:1; children of God are all who believe that J is the Xr, is God's anointed, is the promised one of Israel. Here again we have a primitive confession, given as the price of admission into the family of God. Notice in these verses the different ways of loving God. We keep God's comdmts as one way; another is that we love mankind; and also the converse is equally true, that at no point is the love of God more true or more real than when we love our fellows. And whatever is born of God overcomes the world. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. V.6 may be another of those arguments against whatever different opinion was circulating--some said that J became Messiah at his baptism, when the spirit descended upon him; that happened, we are told. But he was also Messiah by birth, by water, and by blood, and the blood also reminds us of his death, in obedience to God's will. God's testimony to the sonship of J is given in the resurrection and the life that we know in him. The witness is in our inward certainty, and it is the product of faith. We know in whom we have believed, because God bore testimony in his son. And the evidence is in the life lived on the level of the eternal; the life we live is in the son. His obedience even unto death made it possible, but God has given us eternal life, which we have in faith in the resurrection. He who has the son has life. Here is a modern statement of an ancient creed; we must make modern the ancient truths or we lose the modern. May we all know the surging of life that we have as we abide in the father, and he in us, in the unity of the spirit. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Nature provide analogs  
Earth-Nature Connection  
obvious



4-6-86. 2-3 John. Last week in the newspaper, on the page opposite editorial, there was an article about the need for a new appraisal of the individual's right to die with dignity. Two people in the country lie insensate in hospitals, dead in all but the basics, kept alive only by intricate machinery. Not so very long ago, the article said, people died at home, in their own beds, surrounded by familiar faces and smells and things. Now we die in hospital, looking like porcupines stuck all over with needles and tubes and pumpers and blowers. The result, in many cases, is not to prolong life, but to extend death. It reminded me of the Biblical truth that without the saving faith in the man Jesus who was also God, who died and overcame the power of death, in whose name we pray, without that, we are all walking dead, living only on the fringes of life, never tasting the delicious flavor of life as it was intended to be. Today we are a week away from the central fact of Xty in one direction, 51 weeks away in another. But we meet on the first day of the week because that is the day of resurrection, and the new covenant inscribed upon human hearts instead of upon stone, written in a broken body and spilled blood. Today's lesson is designed for us, to keep warm and fresh the faith we had when first we learned how to believe, text 2-3 John. For March/Apr we have been doing a brief series of lessons on the Xn's Hope, with Bibl materials taken from those short letters, or messages, we call the general epistles--2 ascribed to Peter, 3 to John, Jude. Today we have the next-to-last of these lessons, and for it we go to the shortest writings in NT, 2, 3 John. As we have seen earlier, there is no agreement among NT scholars about the authorship or the purpose or the date of these epistles. Probably, and I repeat probably, they were written in first third of 2d Cen, but if that does not satisfy you, then you may in good company reject it. Evidence is good either way. Defenders of the later authorship point to the emphasis upon correct doctrine rather than loyalty and faith, and they argue that the one came much later than the other. It does not matter in the sense of the language, or the beauty of the ~~language~~ poetry, or the urgency of the message. It also is not of supreme consequence that the 3 epistles bearing the name of John are cast in different forms. 1 John does not begin or end as an ancient letter should. It may be that it was written to be carried by hand by missionaries, or by teams of missionaries, to be read aloud to all who would listen, and were used as texts for sermons. Some speculate that they were intended to be read aloud to members of the house-churches in the cities of Asia, as a means of countering some erroneous teachings that were being spread around. The other two John writings in this collection are brief to the point of being terse, succinct. 2 John has but 13 verses, 3 Jno. has 15. The diff w/1 John is that they both begin and end as letters; there is a salutation and an addressee in each, and they end with greetings. ~~XXXXXX~~ Both are written by someone who calls himself "the elder," about which more in a moment, and one is addressed to the lady & her children, the other to a man named Gaius, who offered hospitality to travelling missionaries. The subject of 2 John is the threat of false teaching, and of 3 John the matter of taking in those visitors, and the authority of the elder. The few verses we are assigned speak of truth, and love, and life. 2 John 1-11. Except for a closing sentence, this is all there is to the letter. As you hear, this has 3 parts--an address, an appeal to love, and a warning against deceivers. Let us take them line by line, for each part has meaning for us. First there is the designation of the writer. Whoever he was, he used no name, not even a made-up one. Instead, he used a code-word by which his readers knew him. In imagination we can see the aged John, the beloved apostle, last of the disciples to live, so weak he was carried bodily among the faithful, touching them with his hand and saying the same thing to them, over and over: little children, love one another, for this comdmt we had from him. If you've not read Robt Browning's poem about the weak & saintly John, please do; its name is A death in the desert. This could be that same John, known to the church-family as the old man, the elder, the Grk word is presbyter, from which we get the name of the denomination that is governed by boards of elders, presbyters, called collectively the presbytery. What a person calls himself, or thinks of himself, is an important indication of character and attitude. Notice that he did not refer to himself as his grace, or his eminence, or his lordship. Not even to his academic degrees, diplomas for which hang on many a wall, and usually in vain--for the person who waves a bit of vellum to prove his competency may have no other proof to offer. There is an old poem, and I wish I could remember the words, about a preacher named Fiddle who refused an honorary degree, so he would NOT be called Fiddle, D.D. A 130 yrs ago Anthony Trollop visited the clerical community attached to Salisbury Cathedral in southern England, and wrote a series of novels about Barsetshire and the humorous-but-satirical ambitions and jealousies among the churchmen of his generation. This writer did not cite his entry in Who's Who in central Asia, nor does he tell us how long he has been in the ministry or the profession, or the offices he has held. If he were that last disciple, he did not say he was the last to touch J's hand, or see him smile, or take bread from his bowl and see it broken. None of that. Just, the elder, one whose authority flows only from his confidence in the truth of the message. He wrote to another code-word, the elect lady & her children. We can only guess what that might mean. It could be a mother and her family, but from the remainder of the letter it probably refers to a particular church and its membership. If



that is true, then we should give a minute or two of thought about a time in which Xns had to conceal their identities with pass-words and code names. Is it possible that we no longer need to do that because it does not matter anymore? Elect means chosen, and it is the oldest Bibl teaching about God and man; long before Calvin and his book on Xty it was clear to all that God chose those to whom he would entrust faith. To be among the elect was humbling and entailed responsibilities; it was not something you boast of. As we have lost the sense of awe at an omnipotent God who chooses the faithful--not on any basis of merit, not for deserving, but by grace--as we have lost that sense, we have lost also the sense of providence and the all-caring God. But we read that the word is from an elderly person, and it is written to a favorite church known by arcane words, and that it is about truth. Do you want to count the number of times the word truth appears in the first 4 vv. of this short letter? It is a word that sings thru these lines, in a duet with the other word love, that is also repeated here. It means that there is a connection between truth and the love that is uncaused, that is the nature of God; that the same God who is Love is also truth. The truth is set against a threat from that which is not truth, and which is not love. Truth means the good tidings which shall be of great joy; truth means that God invaded time in the person of Jesus, truth means that he was beaten for our transgressions, and by his stripes we are healed. Truth means that he stood silent before his accusers, like the lamb before its shearers; truth means that he died, as all mortal flesh must die; he died feeling himself abandoned and forsaken of God; but then the pwr of God prevailed over the darkness, and over death. He rose again, and he lives. That is the truth which shall be with us forever. Always there are people who ridicule it; always there are people who will not, or cannot, believe. And no one can prove that after our death there shall come the resurrection, certainly, surely. Little children, whatever anyone may say, do not forget that. It is our hope, and that hope is founded and built on truth. The love of God is truth, as truth is love, and together they promise life. But look at the salutation, v.3\* grace, mercy, and peace. Grace is love that stoops down to our level, and pardons us, and reveals the truth of God to us. It mystifies me that God should do that, for there is nothing in my personality, or my possessions, or my abilities, that makes it necessary, or justifiable, or understandable. It has no other reason for being than that God's love is God's truth and it is God's will. (This is Gospel in capsule) Grace is love held out to someone who might expect harsh judgment and punishment. Grace is love which forgives, and mercy is love that pities and supports. Mercy is compassion, and sorrow, that pours healing upon our wounded spirits. In those few words we have a mighty landscape of meaning, and a gospel writ small. God's grace reaches to every one of us, and softens judgment into mercy, and forgiveness, and when that happens we have peace. A calming touch has soothed my troubled conscience, so that the death I was living becomes life, gushing out like an artesian well, making the discords and disharmonies within me sing a chorus that jars no longer between deed and desire. Here is a description of life. Truth and love are the banks between which flow ~~truth~~ grace and mercy and peace, coming from God the Father and from J Xr the father's son. That is part 1 of this passage. Part 2, vv.4-6, is an appeal to love. It is not a new command, but one we had from the very beginning, that we love one another. It is a matter of rejoicing that SOME of the children have been following the truth. Even at that early day, when disguises and code names were used, there were those who did not follow truth. Which means that they did not follow love, for love means that we follow his commands, v.6. The definition is necessary because some do not follow the command. That leads us to part 3 of the ltr, which may well be the reason for its writing--a warning against error, vv 7-11. There are deceivers in the world, so beware. They teach that J Xr did not come in the flesh, which is a reference to those who regarded flesh as evil and spirit as good, so a righteous God could not appear revealed in human flesh. It is the earliest, and the longest existing, of mankind's doubts about the incarnation. It is still with us, and lures us to deny the reality of God, and the presence of God, and the love and care of God. And then the writer said an interesting thing, v.9. KJV here used a flawed text, to read whosoever transgresseth. The newer version is better: anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Xr does not have God. Those who go ahead are opposed by those who stand in the same place; it is a debate between progress and conservatism. But there is a good and a bad for each, and the measure is the results they produce. Those who go beyond the teaching of J are in error, says writer. But applying old teachings to new problems is the essence of revelation, and proclamation. The key is that new must always be tested by old. It is a subject, and an idea, that needs more time to develop than we have here. The writer wants us to think, that there is a truth in abiding in the established doctrines, even as we fit them to the ills & challenges of a world 20 centuries later, and 20 times larger, than the elder dreamed of. But when is progress not progress? Is the new always best, and the old forever wrong? It is when old takes life instead of giving it. The purpose of incarnation and resurrection was to give life, and life abundant and full and free, life with joy and color and excitement. Take it, for the empty tomb shouts out an invitation, and makes us a promise. The hope is built upon truth.



4-13-86. Guarding. This week the theatre on campus opened the final show of the school year, a satirical musical production about the first world war. In a different connection I have been reading about the war in the trenches, and that haunting and beautiful autobiography of Vera Brittain in the war years. I think there is no more destructive force than warfare, no more stress upon consciences and orderly thinking and the civilities we cherish, than national violence against nation. The comdmt condemns killing, and the Xn progression from that places the burden upon hatred, and also upon calming the urge to retaliate. If anyone strikes you upon one cheek, turn to him the other also. It seems clear from the context that there is a greater evil in killing than in being killed, and that if the civilizt and the ethical values we enjoy and value are threatened, we let God go to their defense and to their revenge. But then, but then, there is that other side to the coin. Warfare is the refutation of all humanity, but does that mean that we should stand for the defense of no idea, no principle, no article of faith? Do we object to no error, no evil, no act of violence against the innocent? Is there a point at which we go onto the attack against greed that takes from the weak and bankrupts the land? no offensive against filth that assaults the mind and pollutes art and degrades the spirit? The lesson we have before us this morning is a partial answer to those questions, text Jude. Today we come to the final session in a series of lessons on the Xn hope, with texts taken from the group of brief writings we call the general epistles, near the end of our NT, just before the revelation. Beginning next week we have a ~~group~~ unit of six lessons on & about the 3d person in the trinity, the holy spirit of God. Anyone who would like.... Today we have the 25 verses of the ltr of Jude. // Never before, in the yrs I have been reading, & trying to understand, and trying to explain, the Bible, have I been called upon to do a lesson taken from this bk. It is possible--all things are possible--that I have heard a sermon preached upon a text from that short book. But it has not left any impression upon the rock-hard contents of my brain-pan. I remember, and I am sure that every one of us remembers, the lofty sentiment of the benediction that ends the book. How many worship svcs, meetings of all kinds, gatherings of the body of faith, have we concluded by using those lines? We shall read them a bit later this morning. But first we need a short introduction to Jude the obscure. Thomas Hardy's novel is aptly named, for his story, and also for ours. The first line of the ltr tells us that the author was brother of James, and by tradition that has meant that he was also brother to Jesus, and grew up in the family with him, and knew him. But, just as with the book of James which we have in NT, there is no mention of any details that might help us understand those formative years. In fact, it is the opinion of the scholars that the language and the subject-matter date the letter to about a century after the crucifixion and therefore in the third generation. That is no reason to suspect its inspiration or to question its wording. It is well attested in the early writings of the Church; parts of Jude are quoted in II Peter 2, which was perhaps a generation later. Much of Jude is also found in writings considered apocryphal, but Jude itself has been cherished since end 2d cen. Whoever the author was, he was a person who firmly believed in creedal Xty, and he wrote to defend the correct teaching against the errors that were being taught within it. It was not a war he preached, not a crusade to take the sword to the infidel, but it was a quarrel, it was a contention, it was a trumpet-call to stand up for the faith. Jude 1-4. This is the customary opening of an ancient letter. The writer introduces himself, addresses his words to his readers, and prays for their welfare. Jude also is spelled Judas, and is a variant of Judea, or Judah, one of the sons of Israel. It was a popular name for Jews and Xns; two of J's disciples bore that name--Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot. There are other individs in NT with that name. This one is a servant of J Ch, and brother of James. This is the only place in NT where a writer identifies himself by his family connection. James was the head of the Xn Ch in Jerus, the one who w/Peter contended w/Paul about keeping or abandoning the Jewish initiation rites. It could have been the way the writer wished to be accepted as one of the founders of the Xn family, to put his words into the tradition of the apostolic group. His readers are those who are called, beloved, and kept. // Those designats are interesting. The Grk word read called is a noun, not a verb, and in the original is the third in the order, not the first. At this point the older translat, while awkward and bumpy, is more true to the original. But think a moment about the Called as the name of something. If it were a verb--those who have been called--it might be incomplete. That is, the call might not have been answered. But to refer to the readers as the Called-ones, we are the Called, is to indicate that God did the telephoning but that we answered in the affirmative. B<sub>e</sub> loved in-or-by God the father; the preposition, which is translated differently in old and new versions, can never be correctly read, because it can legitimately mean both. In is its common sense--do words have a common sense?--but if being loved by God sounds better to you, then keep it. Kept means guarded, treasured, stored up where we cannot be lost. So to all who are the called-ones, and that is the Grk word we translate church, the ltr is addressed; to all who are in the love of God, to all who are treasured for J Xr. Now look at the prayer that closes the address. Mercy, peace, love, be multiplied unto you. I can think of no more beautiful, no more peaceful prayer. And this is the only place in NT where these three gifts are put together in a single wish.



This is what all of us long for, down deep in our beings. Mercy means that God will not do with us as we deserve. Peace is the oldest greeting of mankind, and was sung by an angel choir to shepherds abiding in the fields by night. Love is the nature of God. May these gifts, states of mind, be multiplied in all of us. // With vv 3-4 we come to the reason for the writing. Jude had an urge, a call, a feeling, that he should write to those called-ones. But what he intended to write was about our common salvation. When I read that I wished that he had started his letter earlier, so he could have done just that, before his mind was changed to do something else. Wouldn't it be of great value to us to read what this strong mind and person would have to say about the life of faith that every one of us needs? But something intervened. He learned of a threat to the faith itself. He could not tell us of the faith; he must fill his page of papyrus with the threat to it, and he must urge us to stand up for it. The appeal (exhort) is that we should contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. We can only guess what the threat was, for there is no indication here. Whatever it was, it was so strong and so stubborn that there was no chance that gentle persuasion could change it, or that argument could convince it. The community must go on the defensive against it, for the faith as it was originally revealed is too precious to lose. I have no doubt, and I think the writer here has no doubt, that God can defend his own, and guard the writings and the persons which hold this treasure. But in this line there is a place for us to act. The verb is contend. Here is the bugle-call not to do battle but to quarrel with the unthinking world, with the malice and the enticements of those who would tear down morality & decency & civility. We are heirs of truth which the past has bequeathed us; into our hands the fallen heroes have thrown the torch, be ours to hold it high, be ours not to break faith, with the tradition even when we do not understand it, or value it; with the way that is unpopular because it demands an undeviating character; with the pure that many would for the sake of a few pieces of silver cover with the mud and filth of uncontrolled appetite. There is error, and sensuality, and misplaced motive, abroad in the land. Peter Marshall prayed in the Senate, where he was chaplain, Lord, teach us to stand for something, lest we fall for everything. Note v.4, that the error is not from without the body, it is not the state compelling allegiance to this world. It is within, and that is a far greater threat to the security of the family. In God's good will we shall not be invaded & overthrown from without, until we have first rotted and festered and watered down and compromised within. Certain men have crept in unawares, men who were intended from long ago for this work of wrecking. Termites in the altar, they are; erosion in the foundation, locusts in the green corn. Ungodly persons, they are, for they use the grace of God to cover their evil passions. There were such persons at the time, and there are such persons among us now. They teach that since God has forgiven much, then we must sin much; because God has forgiven all that we have done, we must turn life into lasciviousness, for we only go around once, and we must live it up. The end of v.4 has been so garbled in copying through the years that it cannot be translated. What you see is a guess, and a construction. The meaning is lost, and perhaps also some of the text. But from what we have, the threat was common then, and now. Paul railed at it when he said, since grace abounds, shall sin also abound? And he answered, God forbid. Jude raises the flag of resistance and contention. Morality is not the prerequisite to God's forgiveness, or to the drama of redemption. It is the other way around. The pure do not need forgiveness, nor do the healthy need a physician. The miracle is that while we were yet sinners Xr died for us. But morality remains an essential part of the life in Xr. We cannot buy our way into God's favor by works, by being good. But we show our gratitude that the grace of God has reached even us, by the lives we lead. Unethical business practices may reap rich rewards, but there is always the judgment; sexual abandon may appear sensible, but what of one's opinion of oneself? Do not even the animals live that way? 50 yrs ago in Germany there was a Lutheran theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died in a prison camp. He wrote that the Xn must hold to two contradictory truths--only the person who believes is obedient; only the one who obeys, believes. There is perhaps no clearer indication of the lack of faith in a righteous God and a moral universe than to live by no other guidepost than taste-buds and nerve-ends. It is with this that we must arise and contend, just as it was to the called-ones to whom Jude wrote, just as it has been to the generations since that time. The way we do that is told in the key verses of the letter, 20-21. (Faith, and prayer, and the love of God, and waiting for God's mercy; that is the formula for holiness. v.21, keep yourselves in the love of God;; Compare v.1, to those who are the called-ones, beloved in God the father and kept, or preserved, in J/Xr.) Keep what you are, hold to what you have received, and we can pass thru the storms. Those who are beloved in God, who are kept, treasured, keep yourselves in the love of God. (See, it is the same) The faith once for all delivered to the saints, guards us at the same time that we are guarding it. The life for which we contend protects us from evil and leads us not into temptation. Here is the argument and here is its answer. Faith, holy in its source, produces holiness. V24-5, praise to God, who keeps our feet from stumbling, and then picks us up when we fall. Joy and confidence, and hope are here. Let us Take them for our own.



4-20-86. Spirit. I heard a story once about a man who had grown up in a backwoods environment, far from the machinery with which most of the world lives. In some way he suddenly became very wealthy, and one of the things he acquired was the most luxurious, the most powerful touring automobile that was available. When it came it was the envy of the entire county. It was a novelty that people came long distances to see. The rich man hired eight muscular men to push him in his sleek, shiny vehicle. He sat at the steering wheel and guided the car as it rolled slowly along, propelled by human muscles. Someone saw this and was perplexed. Does not your car have an engine in it? he asked. Oh, yes, replied the owner. It has an engine, but I am afraid to turn it on. That sounds to me like a made-up story, but it has meaning for us every one. We too have a power that we can use to get us thru the journey of this life, and we are sometimes afraid to turn it on. It is the 3d person in the trinity, the holy spirit of God. Today we begin a miniseries of six lessons on the subject of the person & work of the holy spirit. We need to know about the spirit, and we need to overcome our fear of turning it on, for it is power to overcome all fear and all the hindrances that keep us from running the race with joy. Today the text is from Lk 1,2. It is one of the most often repeated remarks among the teachers of the faith that the belief in the holy spirit is the most neglected doctrine of the Ch. One reason, of course, is what some of us have done to that teaching. Some of us take on wild looks in our eyes when we speak of the baptism of the holy spirit. Some go into trances, and roll on the floor, and rant, and shout, and utter mystifying sounds that make no sense to anybody. Some of us make pentecost the only event they think about, or talk about; we push aside the ethical insights, and the awesome burden of the cross and what happened on that small hill just outside the gates of Jerus. Some of us tell the entire story of Bibl revelat, from Adam & Noah and Abraham, as the road to Pentecost and the pouring out of the spirit of God. But there was spirit evident before pentecost, as there is spirit evident afterwards. And when we open this book we hear men speaking of the gift of the spirit, in calm tones of certainty. But because of what some have done with the teaching, others are embarrassed to acknowledge the spirit. Many of us are unitarians w/o knowing it. Others of us are unitarians by choice and by profession, and understand what they are doing and what they can accept. But it is quite another thing to repeat the creeds of the trinity and, without knowing it, or intending it, to live as if we did not believe it. Some who take readily to a creator/lawgiver God, and to the faith that God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth, find the son of God a problem. The incarnation, a located and limited God, a God who could be taken and flogged and then put to death, is a stumbling block for us. We want God to be above and beyond us, unknowable, infinite, and distant. We hear that the wall of separation between now and forever has been broken down, and it bothers us. And then, some want the son, and the spirit, but not the Father, who judges, who condemns our artistic reproductions of the holy, who sends evil upon the 3d and 4th generation of those who hate him, who is a jealous God who made us and then could not understand what he had made. Give us the son, we cry; he is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh; being one of us, he cannot judge us, or condemn us to perdition. And the spirit we can also live with, for He is not intrusive, or blatant, but He keeps his distance, there when we need Him, but not demanding, not nagging, not chalking up our mistakes in a great book of memory. So let us, for the next month and a half, turn our attn to the trinity, to all 3 persons of the trinity, for it was from the beginning the faith of the Ch that God revealed himself in three persons. We can therefore do no less than to take seriously the tradition, and think about it, and make it ours as well. The text for today, and the topic we are assigned, get us <sup>to</sup> at this late date to the birth of our Lord. This time it is not the advent that we are asked to consider, howvr; it is instead the work of the holy spirit of God in the miracle of the birth. Lk 1: 35-42. Luke's acct of the birthday of the incarnate God will always remain our favorite. The story is told with reticence and tact, and in it are those poetic outbursts that move us to emotions of joy and thanks. There is also in it a clear account of the intervention of God in every aspect of it. We have spoken often of the virgin birth of Jesus. To some it is a major barrier to overcome. As we have noted before, there is no evidence in the gospel as we have it that Jesus knew he was born in a miraculous way; nowhere do we hear him requiring belief in it as a condition of salvation or redemption. Two of the gospels, written that we may know and believe that J was the Xr of God, make no mention of the birth. John's gospel tells us that by faith we can become children of God, because of the only begotten of the father, but he omits any mention of the birth itself. Paul established churches and made the Ch a permanent institution and gave no hint that he knew any birth story. There is no reason for us to doubt the record we do have, but it should be made clear to all that it is faith in the Xr who is risen Lord that offers us salvation, not faith in the virgin birth. But let us take a look, and a lesson, from what the birth story has to say about one of the persons of the Godhead. Note that the messenger who announced to Mary explained the meaning of the incarnation. The writing here is too early for the spirit to be given personal existence. As in the OT, the spirit is impersonal, as expressed in the Hbr and Grk words for it. Both use the word which means breath, or wind. When John told about the



visit of Nicodemus to J, in which J spoke of the new birth, we miss the play on words that is in the Grk. When he said, the wind blows where it will, the word wind also means spirit, breath of life. To be born of the spirit was to be born of the breath, or wind. The sign, or proof, to Mary, was the expected son to be born to her kinswoman Elizabeth, who was considered barren. The phrase, with God nothing will be impossible, was filled with meaning to those who lived intimately w/Hebr scriptures, for it reminded them of Gen 18:14, when Abraham & Sarah had a similar experience and explained it in similar words. What happened in each case was that the holy spirit came upon them and worked a miracle within them. The poetry of the angel's message to Mary requires that the words be different but that the meaning be repeated. Thus the holy spirit in one line becomes the pwr of the most high in the second line. In that is our first clue to the nature of the holy spirit. It is another side that God has shown us of his nature. It should be no secret to any of us that God is so far above and beyond us that knowing him is not of our doing, but of his. And it can only be in part, like looking into a very bad mirror, or explaining the color orange to a person who cannot see. Martin Luther said, when we speak about Jesus Xr we are really babies talking brokenly in quarter words. But it is in the spirit that God reveals himself to us. And the other way of describing spirit is Pwr of the most high. In the NT, this is the first appearance of the spirit of God, which is the pwr of God. We are not told how the spirit came to Mary, but we are told that she would become a mother without male cooperation. From the very beginning, then we are indebted to the spirit of God, and to the power of God. That pwr seems to many people to be lacking among us; it has been called the blind spot of Xty in our time. As we have erected beautiful buildings, with lofty spires, and air conditioning, and letter-head stationery, and cushions, and carpets, we have lost the effective pwr of the spirit within us. And w/o spirit we find it diffc to feel within us, and around us, the presence of God. W/o that sense of presence we are lost and alone, doomed travellers in a doomed world going we know not where. Beginning w/the encounter of angel and Mary, Xty has been the creation of the holy spirit. Before J was born, there was the spirit. He knew he had to go away, he knew he had to send a substitute, so that we might come to know him in his fullness, in his glory, in all his God-man-hood. Unless the spirit comes upon us, the words of this bk make no sense; unless the spirit teaches, we cannot know the things that matter in this world; unless the spirit intrudes, we may know about J, but we cannot know him as he is. Now note the second appearance in NT of the spirit, v.41. Mary went immediately to the hill country, in the region of Judea, to visit Elizabeth. When she greeted Eliz, her child leapt and she was filled w/holy spirit. After Mary, Eliz was second person in all the world who believed that J was from God. What she said is the theme of NT--blessed are you, and blessed is the one who is to be born your son. Faith is always blessed, and it is the gift of God by the spirit. Now let us look at the 3d visit of the holy spirit. Lk 2: 25-32. Simeon was a pious Jew who was on the lookout for Messiah, and the holy spirit was upon him. The spirit led him into the temple, just at the right moment, when J's parents--notice the wording here. The old man took up the baby and held him, and in him he saw the salvation of the world. Nunc dimittis, he said, from the first two Latin words of his hymn, now you send away this old man, I can die now, for I have seen, a light of revelat to the Gentiles, glory to thy people Isr. Few indeed could put it so well. Think about it for a moment. What is there that you would like to see before you die? There would be many answers from us, perhaps a different one from each of us. Simeon's desire was to see the fulfillment of God's promise, and to see that he needed the intervention of God's spirit. Look at the verbs in these few sentences. It had been revealed to him by the holy spirit; he came by the spirit--newer version reads, inspired by the holy spirit. Here is the work of the spirit. None of us would be able to see unless the spirit reveals, and none of us would be in the right place to see God's glory unless the spirit led us there. In these brief extracts we have three characters and one mighty person. Mary, Elizab, Simeon are the three people, the holy spirit of God is the mighty person. A great drama began with them, and the spirit was the prime mover in the show. There are some things we need to notice, and to think about. One is that the holy spirit as a distinct person in the Godhead was at work in the mission of J from the beginning. God was in Xr reconciling the world to himself, even before he was born, in the person of the spirit. Pentecost, with all its dramatic intensity, and hold upon the imagination, and effect upon thought and action, was not the first outpouring of the spirit upon human flesh. In the Bibl story it happened long before that; in the Xn story it happened here, in making possibl motherhood for two women, in making possible a vision of sãlavat for an elderly gentleman. The holy spirit is the working agent of God in the world, to do his bidding and to work his will. The Ch is the body of Xr, the spirit is the spirit of Xr, guiding, teaching, leading, making things happen in strange and incomprehensible ways, until in the end we see that we were never alone, and that nothing that happened was accidental, and that all things work together for good to those who love God, and are called according to his purposes. The worker and the caller of events and people is the holy spirit, which is with us to the end.



4-27-86. J's Calling. Does it really matter what happened in a hilltop town in Palestine 1900 yrs ago? It is the Xn faith that great events took place there, events that cut history into two parts and proved to man how important is his happiness and his salvation to God. The proof is in the person of J, who lived upon this earth, who worked in a carpenter's shop in a small backward village, who walked the dusty roads of his native province, and who taught with authority about the way to know God. And then he willingly gave up his life in order that we might know the redemptive love of God to us. It is the Xn faith that thru that death there was opened to us a closer fellowship w/ God than had been possible before. He that hath seen me hath seen the father, he said, in one of those audacious claims that set him apart. And thru his resurrection and the gift of the spirit we all know God not as creator-mathematician-lawgiver-distant judge, but as living presence in our own lives, where we need him most. And having that presence with us, we can face the world and whatever it contains. Neither persecution, nor pain, nor illness, nor weakness, nor sense of lostness, nor anything else has been able to separate us from the love of God as revealed to us in the person and the work of J. And yet, again comes the question, does any of that really matter? Last wk's paper reported a survey among corporation executives in Calif; 30% reported that they attend public worship w/any degree of regularity, while 83% exercised their bodies seriously and often. Does it matter, that the body perishes, while the spirit starves for lack of nourishment? Does it matter, that over and over, thru the centuries, people have discovered in J an experience w/God so powerful that it fills every aspect of life, and gives meaning and direction and comfort and instruction? With all of that, is there no more to bold Xty than taking meals on wheels to shut-ins, or repairing ruined housing in the inner city? That is part of it, to be sure, but that is the part that humane ethics has taught since mankind became aware of the destructive nature of selfishness. Does it really matter? The spirit of God is the topic we have for a brief series of lessons; today, the spirit at J's call to minister, text Lk 3,4. From the very beginning, when believers thought about what had happened to them in the Jesus way, they thought of God as the trinity. There was God the Father, and the Son, and the Comforter, or spirit. It was not easy for them to define it exactly, & that we are still trying to do; but they could feel it, and know it, before there were words to put the certainty into. The Xn fathers wrestled with the problem, and what they wrote makes interesting and instructive reading. Some called the Holy Spirit Gift, some spoke of the Son as the Word of God, and the spirit as the Love of God. But however the careful students of theology explained it, the three expressions of the one essence were clear. Last wk we heard how the spirit was present in the miraculous birth of J; now today we have the presence in the call of God to J. Lk 3: 15-17, 21-2. This is the story of John's baptism of J, with 2 verses of comment omitted. This is the event in which all 3 of the gospels describe the gift of the spirit to J. Just as the spirit came upon Mary so that her special child should be born, now the spirit of God comes upon J, so that he may be inspired to do what he was sent to do. Note in the opening line the basic condition of spiritual awakening. As the people were in expectation. That is the seed-bed of preparation, and no amount of management or planning can take the place of it. It makes me sad to read & hear of plans made in some office, or a billboard along the road, announcing a revival of the spirit among us. Without an expectancy it won't make a dent in anything. No revival has ever come from the leaders, imposed upon people; when revival comes it comes from people themselves, living in expectation, and it sometimes overturns the establishment or the system in which it occurs. That is why rulers fear the terrible meek, and the truly religious, and try to exercise a control over relig. That is when it matters what happened in a hilltown in Judea so long ago. A people in expectation can know that miracles are real; a people in expectation can hear the call of God, and can respond to it. No individual can proclaim the word to a people who expect nothing to come of it. The question here was the role and status of John, who preached and taught down by the river. To the question he gave a clear answer: there is coming another who is so much greater than I am that I am not even qualified to be his slave; not even worthy to stoop down and untie the strings of his sandals. He pointed the way, and was humble enough to know that he was not it. There are two major ways in which we can damage the work of God for a short time; one is to teach what is less than the revelation, or to distort it so that it reflects not the mind of God but the cupidity of mankind. The other is to pose as the promised one of God. John did neither. His teaching was of judgment rather than of forgiveness, but it was honestly and clearly expressed. John saw the fan separating grain from chaff, which is judgment; he saw the consuming fire and not the cleansing fire; and to that extent he was greatest among the sons of men but least in the kingdom of God. He baptized w/water but he knew that one was coming who would give to all mankind the gift of the spirit of God in our beings. J came to him to connect himself w/best of the old, so he could begin the best of the new. Why he was baptized has been debated ever since these words were written. It is a fundamental of the faith that he was tempted in all points like the rest of us, he remained altogether w/o sin. To those to whom baptism is necessary to wash away the taint of original guilt, the baptism is a mystifying experience. Of what sin did he have to repent? Of what original flaw in his genes did



he seek forgiveness? But to see baptism as the symbol of joining a movement, or as the symbol of death-burial-resurrection, as Paul did, it is no mystery at all. It was not repentance, but the confession that whatever lay ahead for him, he was ready. He identified himself with the words of John that the kgdm was at hand, the reign of God was about to happen. That was so important, so vital, that in comparison nothing else mattered. Note also that J was praying. He taught us to pray, and he was himself constantly in prayer. It is a force we all need. Pity those who must wait for a constitutional amendmt to pray; pity also those who do not feel the need to pray. There was a time when I was envious of people who could get thru life w/no need for a faith, or a morality, or even, bless your hearts, any awe at creaturehood. But no more. Pity, not envy, is in order, for that attitude is less than human and is a recipe for anxiety and insecurity. To pray is to admit one's creature-ness, it is to seek the source of life and power in the universe, and it is to confess that it is bigger than I am. But the gift comes when we are in prayer. The holy spirit descended upon him in bodily form, looking like a dove as it came down. In Lk's version it comes, not w/baptism, and note that Lk does not definitely say that John did the baptising; the spirit comes w/prayer. And it is a miracle, for the spirit, and Lk adds the adjective holy, comes in bodily form. There is no other way of understanding it than that it was the understanding of the first generation of believers that in J the spirit was incarnate, in the body. In the words quoted as coming from the heavens, J is addressed as the messiah, the promised one of God, in three different terms-- my son, my beloved, my chosen. Of no one else have we such words; in this line we have the faith of the Ch. Lk 4: 16-21. We leap over the acct of the temptat in the wilderness, to the first words to his Nazareth neighbors, sometimes called the inaugural address. He went into the synagog, as his custom was, and he stood up to read. What he read shook that crowd so much that they lost their cool and took him and would have thrown him over the cliffs to his death. Does it matter what happened in that little town 1900 yrs ago? It mattered at the time; it mattered so much that the defenders of the faith regarded it as a threat to their favored status in the eyes of God. ~~None~~ ~~will object to repairing apartments, but~~ they arose in wrath at what J said to them. First, he read a familiar portion of Isa 61, altho there are some words from Isa 58. He may have read the entire passage beginning w/58 to 61, and whatever version he read, Lk has quoted the Grk translat and not the Hebr original. The phrase //to heal the broken-hearted, in KJV, is not in the best MSS. But what the original said is explosive, because it promised that when the Spirit of the Lord comes upon people they have a relig that meets all of their needs, physical, ~~and~~ but also spiritual. Lk felt a spl compassion for the poor of this world. In his version of the beatitudes he includes the poor in the Kgdm of God w/no conditions; they are just there because they are poor, not because they have faith. To preach the gospel of God in Xr to the poor is the first fruits of the spirit of God. And it is a good news that liberates the captives, and enables the blinded to see, in both literal and figurative meanings; note that it is a recovering of sight, meaning that onfe we could see, but then we became blind. In the gift of the spirit J has pwr to make us see again, and to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That means that the messianic age has begun. Read the paragr that follows, on your own, to see the wrath and the proclamat that caused it. The reading we have takes on new meaning when we connect it to what went before. The baptism and the praying and the gift of the spirit in bodily form now means something new, when we read w/J that the spirit of the Lord is upon me, to preach, to liberate, to provide vision, to proclaim the messiah's presence. Here is the pwr of the gospel made real among us. And it does not enslave it does not make blind, it does not oppress. It is the good news that sets us free to live life to the fullest, in every dimension. There is healing in God's wings, but there is much more than that. There is liberation, and release of those in prison, and an end to the oppression of colonial peoples. Look at the nouns in these words--release, and sight, and liberty. How have we managed to take those ancient goals and fashion them into captivity, and blind bigotry, and enslavemt, and spiritual darkness? How have we taken the full gospel that meets all needs, and reduced it to a soup kitchen or a revival invitation? It cannot be either w/o the other. The soul is as hungry as the body, the spirit as enchained as the wrists. The church can never be content to serve only the present age, or the everlasting human spirit. If there be any need in this community which the church does not address, then it is to that extent shutting out the pwr of God. To care for others is to close the door upon coldness, or cruelty, or vengeance; ~~or~~ to know that in the person of J the spirit of God is made real is to melt the icicles of sadness, or boredom, or a feeling of aloneness. What the gospel assures us is the nearness of God, and the love of God. Together it guarantees liberation and release and vision, so that we can see and know the reality of God in ordinary things and places. In the words of the old spiritual, free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we're free at last. It does matter. It matters more than anything else.



5-4-86. Ministry. Last wk I saw a short note in the newspaper quoting Robt Frost on the advantages of memorizing pretty things that are well said. He used the old term, learning by heart. Without it, he wanted to know, what do you do when you wake up in the night and need something to think about? That reminded me of the times I walked around the yard when I was a grade-schooler, learning a poem by heart. And in class, if I were called upon to recite, I had to start on the correct foot and walk the poem around the imaginary yard, as I recited it. And if in my mind I got to the wrong part of the yard, I got to the wrong part of the poem. One short poem I learned was the verses about seeing the invisible. Who has seen the wind? Christina Rossetti asked. Neither I nor you: but when the leaves hang trembling The wind is passing through. Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I: But when the trees bow down their heads The wind is passing by. It is a parable of the lesson we have this morning, which has to do with the work of the holy spirit in the ministry of Jesus. Text Matt 12, Lk 11. Many of us are insecure with a faith in a personage we cannot see or touch or hear. We want proof before we will believe. The Grks among us demand wisdom, the Jews demand a sign; how many of us pray God to give us tangible evidence of his existence, or his presence? If we could just be sure, we think; if there really were handwriting on the wall, or chairs floating thru the air, or rains which came when we commanded them. Then we would be loyal members of our religious group, whatever name it might take. Evidences of God are all about us, but it takes faith to see them, so that we have the endless circle, the catch-22. It is like the wind, that makes the leaves dance for joy, and bows down the tall heads of the trees; we can see only effect, we cannot see the cause. But for those who ask, the holy spirit is teacher and guide and comforter, the Gift of God, as the early Church called him. God is Father, the Son is the word of God, the spirit is the Gift of God, through whom we know God's love. This month ~~at church~~ we are doing a short series of lessons on the person and work of the holy spirit, the 3d person in the trinity, that aspect of the Godhead we know so little about. In past wks we have seen the direct intervention of the spirit in the birth of J and in the calling of J to ministry. Today we have the 3d lesson in the series, & the final one on the spirit and the work of the Son; the final 3 lessons deal w/spirit & Church. For today we have two incidents, widely separated in time, but closely related in subj, and both telling us something important about the work of the holy spirit in the ministry of J. First, from Matt 12: 22-28. This is one of the many occasions when an act of healing became the cause of a controversy and a teaching that has meaning for us. It was an act of exorcism, of an evil spirit, a demon, that had taken possession of a blind and dumb person. Witches and demons have always lurked just beneath the veneer of rationalism by which we all claim to live, and from time to time have broken through to frighten and upset many people. Recently there have been stories in the press about cases of demon-possession among us; horror novels and movies continue to exploit the theme. A personal devil, who infects individuals with the power of evil, appeals to many people & explains much to them of current history and individual tragedy. There are now among us psychiatrists who cure the ill by exorcism, and much illness which is now attributed to trauma or brain chemistry was once explained by demonic possession. Whatever you accept about that in the present, it is abundantly clear that in the world in which J lived there was wide acceptance of demons. The prince of the power of the air was blamed for dry milk-cows and bad health in the community, and in the case we have here, of causing blindness and the inability to speak--aphasia. Jesus healed him, so that he regained sight and speech. Briefly, and undramatically, the healing is reported. It is the effect of the healing that is the point of the story. The people were amazed, and asked, could this be the Son of David? another way of saying, the promised Messiah of God. The healing was accepted as a miracle, a sign of the Christ, evidence of divine power. Without that aspect, the story makes no sense. But then the divine power was questioned and denied by the Pharisees, the strictest and most obedient of the Jewish groupings. They declared that this miraculous power came not from God but from the Adversary, from Satan the tempter. We know from the writings of Origen in 3d Cen that there were critics who declared that Egyptian wizards could do all the wonder works that Xr did, & that Xr had learned his trade on the banks of the Nile. Now, here it is in the gospel account. Not from God, but from Beelzebul, the prince of demons, does this man cast out demons. The older translations read the name Beelzebub, a variant that came from Jerome's vulgate; it means lord of the flies, as a term of contempt. Flies are pests; to be chief among them was not an honorable rank. So call it Beelzebub if you wish; it has Bibl basis. But here the word is Aramaic, and means lord of the earth--exalted one. They should have thought before they took on Jesus as a debating opponent, for he utterly demolished them in a few short words. These may be summaries of a much longer discourse. But take a look at a sharp mind at work. His answer is unanswerable, so when he concluded, all they could say was, we need a sign from you, we want evidence. The answer is in three parts. First, there is the logic of a unified power of evil. If the power of the prince of demons was employed to cast out demons, it meant that there was a divided command among the forces of evil. Should malign spirits attack malign spirits? When I was a boy I cut my foot badly on a piece of broken glass. The doctor stitched and bound, and then gave me a shot of something he called a toxin anti-toxin, a fairly new thing at the time; He made a joke about using a poison to overcome a poison,

It is the Lord we can see, the Kgdum of this world.



to and keep me from contracting <sup>a dread</sup> the disease. Do you really believe, J asked these men, that the evil spirits can do battle w/evil spirits? He even quoted a familiar proverb of the time--no city or house divided against itself will stand. It is as true an insight now as it was then. Families, and neighborhoods, and nations, and the world itself, are in need of focus, and the unity that is strength. No church divided against itself will make the bold proclamation that gets attention; no world divided into two superpowers and a third world of the poor and the unwell/can long keep the peace or provide justice. Second, J pointed to the exorcists who worked for the Pharisees. They too believed in demonic infestation, and employed people to cast them out. By what power do they act? he asked. They shall be your judges. And third, there is the sign, the evidence. If it is by the pwr of the spirit of God that J casts out demons, then the Kgd<sup>m</sup> of God has come upon you. It was part of the messianic hope that when Messiah comes, then would the power of the demons be broken, and all men and women live pure and happy lives. That, said J, is the meaning of the healing of the demoniac. It is the work of the spirit of God in two ways. One, it is by the power of the spirit that J could, by faith, drive out that evil spirit and restore the man to wholeness. By doing that, second, it was a sign from the spirit of God that the Kgd<sup>m</sup> of God had become fact. The reign of God, for which men had sighed, and prayed, and looked for in hope, was now real. It does not await the millennium, or armageddon, or some other noisy & cataclysmic event; it is here and now. Like leaven in the meal, it works quietly but surely. He that hath eyes to see, let him see. Through the holy spirit who works within us, we have seen the wind--not as wind, but as leaves blown across the lawn, or as bushes bow their heads to the blast. What the spirit tells us, is that the new age began on that day when evil met its conqueror. We continue to know pain, and to live intimately with death, and separation, and tears still run down our cheeks. But by this sign we know Who is in charge here. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; every tear shall be dried, and every voice sing in joy. The spirit is the proof. Lk. 11: 5-13. This is a familiar parable that teaches us something we need to hear often. The parable is called the importunate friend. In the story, a peasant in the village has received guests in the middle of the night, and has no food to serve them. People often travelled by moonlight to avoid the heat of the day. Hospitality was an important thing; the reputation of the whole village depended upon generous welcome. So the man went next door, to a friend, to ask bread. But the friend was angered at being awakened in the midst of his sleep. Go away, he said; I am in bed, my children are in bed, the door is shut, we cannot get up to help you. That is the story, and it is intended to teach one lesson. The details are unimportant. The lesson is about prayer, and it tells us to be persistent. God is not to be likened to that sleepy neighbor, but we are urged to pray without giving up. Sometimes the answer must be No, sometimes the phone appears to be dead. But we prove our faith, and our conviction that what we are asking is urgently important, by keeping at it. Ask, seek, knock; these are the words for prayer that implores an answer. J's promise that such prayer WILL be answered is absolute; there are no conditions and no exceptions. Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. Then v. 10, which we should learn by heart, and repeat to ourselves--for every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened. There are no ifs, no buts, no exceptions. We add them ourselves, but note that there are none in the original promise. We are instructed to pray that God's will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven; but there is no evidence of the model prayer in these strong lines. And that is not all; there is more to come. You and I can trust God to respond to our needs in the same way that we trust our human father. See what a responsibility rests upon the shoulders of fathers! They are human symbols of the loving, caring, heavenly Father. J asks: do any human fathers give their sons a poisonous snake when they ask for fish, or scorpion when asked for egg? V. 13 is the other memory verse we need to learn and repeat: if you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him? Notice that the subject has changed; in the beginning, it was, ask anything of God and you will get it. Now it is even more generous a gift, for it is the holy spirit of God, the Gift, as the early church called him/her, that will be given to all who ask. We may not get what we pray for in the way we want it. We may go hungry, and know pain, and sorrow, and defeats, in spite of our prayers. Students may flunk exams, sick friends may not recover, but with the gift of the spirit we still triumph. It is the best of all gifts, for it is the presence of God with us in whatever calm or crisis we know. And it is the gift that cannot be given unless we ask for it. A father can give food and shelter to a child, but he can give of himself, and his love, only when it is asked for & accepted in gratitude. So, the spirit teaches us that the Kgd<sup>m</sup> of God is within us, and the spirit of God is the freely offered gift of God to all who ask. God cares for us, God hears us when we pray, and is pleased to give us what we need. We have that truth on the very best authority. Take it, and live it.



5-11-86. Pentecost. One of the oldest lessons that humankind has learned is the danger inherent in a life without challenge, a condition in which far too much comes far too easily. Ease, and talent, and good fortune, these are not in themselves the problem. The danger appears when the too-easy life destroys character and makes discipline and intelligence unnecessary. A century ago it was the prevailing interpretation of history that where the environment was too harsh, and where it was too complaisant, societies did not develop meaningful civilizations. That theory taught that where the most arduous endeavor yielded the most meager of returns, frustrations brought hopelessness; where ripe fruits fell of themselves into the mouths of constant party-goers, easy living brought meaninglessness. The Arabs, who know more than we about too much good weather, have a proverb that says, too much sun makes a desert. Students are in rare moments of self-understanding ashamed to admit that in a course that has no tests and no requirements, they learn little. To those to whom good things come without work, there lurks the danger. Today we are going to take another look at a familiar event that offers us the exception to the rule. We have today the gift that supports and strengthens, that guides and teaches, that abides, and does not weaken us, but energizes us, to do more than we could on our own. Text Acts 1,2. For Apr-May we are studying the person & work of the holy spirit, the 3d person in the trinity as Xns have understood the revelation of God. Three of the lessons centered on the Holy Spirit and the calling & ministry of J; today we begin a unit of 3 lessons on the holy spirit and the church, or the holy spirit and the believer. We go back to beginnings, back to the gift of the spirit, back to the virgin birth of the church. Strange and miraculous things happened on that occasion, events the witnesses could not understand, but could experience and describe in tones of awe and wonder that are still evident in the account written 60 yrs after. It was the Pentecost, which is the Grk word for 50th, and referred to the Jewish festival of the first-fruits of the new plantings, and was the sabbath of weeks after the passover. You remember it was the passover, and the shed blood of the sacrificial lamb on the door post, that gave life to the enslaved Israelites in Egypt. They escaped their overlords in the confusion of the death-angel, and were protected by the miracle of the red sea. Seven weeks after, the sabbath of weeks, Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai, so the 50th day became a special day of remembering. It was an old tradition of the rabbis that on that hill God spoke the law in 70 languages, to be received by all nations, but only Israel heard it. Now, on the 50th day after the passover, that marked the redemption of mankind by the shed blood of the sacrificial son of man, all who were in the city heard the word of God in their own language. To Xns it was the gift of God that came undeserved, the free offering of God to undeserving mankind that does not weaken, but makes man whole and healthy. First we have the promise of the power. Acts 1: 4-8. The verb in v.4 is not clear in the original; it could mean while eating with them, or while being assembled together with them, even while camping out with them, for it is a military term; we would say bivouac. The original must have been misspelled or changed by a sleepy copyist at some time. It was before J's departure, whatever the right word is. He commanded them not to leave Jerus, but to wait for the promise of the power. The details of the events from the crucifixion to the pouring out of the spirit cannot be reconciled from the available evidence. What happened first, or what happened where, is a mystery we have to live with. There is a Galilean tradition ~~tradition~~ in which J told Peter to go to Galilee after the resurrection, that J would go ahead of him and meet him there. But here we have the clear command that the disciples not leave Jerus. They are to wait for the promise of the father, which was the baptism of the holy spirit. The hardest thing for us to do is to wait. John Milton wrote a sonnet on his blindness that ends with those familiar words, They also serve who only stand and wait, and in context that means to have the humility to do the menial tasks, to stand in the presence of the lordly, and wait upon their needs. But waiting in the usual sense is not an easy task, however menial. It takes patience to wait; it takes self-control not to do something foolish just to be doing something. The mark of the educated is their constructive use of enforced leisure. Colleges should offer courses in loafing wisely, in goofing off with single-minded purpose. Many of us have professional degrees in action but are still in kindergarten in waiting. But religion is in large part passive; to wait upon the Lord was the invitation of the prophets, as it is here. We are in no position to make demands of God, as if he were our servant to do our bidding. Like the night watchman we await the coming of the dawn of God's word to us, ready to obey as we can. The gift of the holy spirit was the promise of the father; it remains the promise of the father; may we all have the faith to wait for it, and to know it when it comes, as surely it shall. Look at the final question the disciples put to J before he disappeared from them in a cloud v.6. They are presented here as completely misunderstanding what J meant by the promise of the Father. They are still looking for a political state whose King is Jesus, whose people lived in faith under the Lordship of God. They were still looking for a restoration of the past glory of the Kingdom of Israel, for that is what they understood of the gospel. If the record we have is correct, then in the most of his ministry J spoke often and compellingly of the Kgdms of God, but not much about the holy spirit. By the time the book of Acts was written, as the sequel to the gospel of Lk,



the Church had understood that the true return of J was in the gift of the holy spirit. There is in this sentence a strong element of historical truth, for we have a reddition of a misunderstanding that had been clarified when the writing was done. And note too J's answer to the question, an answer that the older gospel of Mark quotes J as saying much earlier (Ch 13, omitted in Lk). One ancient version reads it, "No one can know." Here the words are, "it is not for you to know. Anyone who claims to know times or seasons is a liar, and is to be suspect. V.8 is one of those landmark sentences we need to memorize and quote often--but you shall receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses to the end of the earth. Power was taken to mean the ability to counteract nature in miracles; in our time, and for most of us, the power has departed, unless, we define miracles to mean upsetting nature in other ways. But witnesses we can be, in our joy and in the competence with which we do what we are called upon to do in this world, in the way we measure the present in the light of past and future. We cannot recapture the glory that was in the Jerusalem of David and Solomon, but we can transform the present, and we can await the future with faith and hope. The spirit which is the gift of God will be present while we wait. And now we read the major theme of the book of Acts, which is the working of the spirit upon the minds and lives of human beings. Acts 2: 1-4. This is the introduction to the subject that fills the entire chapter, which is the birth of the Xn church. It begins with the gift of the spirit, which had been the promise of the father before J was taken away in a cloud. As a result of the resurrection, human kind was given the permanent presence of God among them. It is the Xn faith, and the gospel accts testify, that God was present and acting in the world in J of Nazareth as God was present nowhere else. The writers and the believers who held that view were proclaiming what had happened to them, and in all sincerity; they were not trying to monopolize the human approach to God for personal gain, as some have attempted to do. These words are the transfiguration of the small band who would take the gospel to the ends of the earth; this is the story of that pentecost. It was the fiftieth day after passover, and the gift of the spirit was the equivalent in the new covenant to the gift of the law. It was an experience that was unique at the time. We find it difficult to brush aside the reactions of the hundred generations that have lived since that time, and to see this as an entirely new thing. Earlier, the spirit was given to individuals, and was the vital power of God in the world. Here it was poured out upon a group, and from them, to all the world. It was a frightened group of disciples, in hiding for fear of their lives, now empowered and emboldened, to stand up in public and state their faith, even though it might well mean their death. It is that turn-about in their behavior that requires explanation. If they were self-deluded, or drunken, as people then and since have charged, or even victims of poisoned mushrooms, as one recent book alleges, we are left with the fact that it was their own lives at stake. We cannot know, but we believe, we have faith, that what happened to them was of God, was real, and forever changed their lives and our own. And they were standing outside themselves, as the Grk word ecstasy puts it. They were all together in one place. We are not told where it was, but there is a tradition that it was in the same safe house, in the same upper room, where they had eaten the passover meal on the evening that Xr was betrayed. Nor can we be sure who the ALL were; whether only the disciples, the 12, upon whom the spirit fell, or the 120 we read about in Chap 1. But what happened to them was an unforgettable experience that turned them around and made them conquerors and witnesses and martyrs. First was the sound, that they agreed sounded like the rushing of a gale. We have heard the moaning of the wind; in storms it has the noise of a railroad train; the old English word is wuthering, for wind that blows along under the eaves of the house on the moor. They heard a sound that filled the house. And then they saw the tiny fires, like tongues, that rested upon their heads. Fire is an odd symbol of God's presence. But the really exciting thing was that every one of them was filled with the holy spirit. It was a joy unspeakable, it was an emotional sense of elation, and happiness and triumph. I can imagine that they all wanted to laugh, and sing, and shout, and leap and dance. What they did was to speak in syllables that did not make sense, so excited were they at touching the electric power that created and managed the world. It fulfilled the promise of the father, it was the baptism of the holy spirit, it was the beginning of a new age in human existence. It meant that Peter's declaration of faith was the correct answer, it meant that they had not been hallucinating when they saw and talked with the risen Xr. All understood what all were saying because they shared the gift of the spirit, and all were talking about the goodness of God. When we talk about the fundamentals, the needs and feelings that are common to all humankind, then we can all understand. It is when we discuss the lesser things, as if they were the major things, that we create noise instead of harmony. Ritual is a lesser, as is liturgy, and form, and costume, and ceremony. Sin and salvation, love and forgiveness, our needs and our failures, our hopes and our dreams of freedom in a world devoted to the reign of God--these are basics that we can understand. Pentecost is the great gift of the spirit to mankind. You and I can receive it too, when we ask in faith and in humility, from a generous God. It is the only gift we get, that we have not worked for, that makes us whole, and human, and healthy. Ask, and we all shall receive.



5-18-86. Gifts. Many yrs ago we had the great good fortune to live for a full yr in France, work- at the university in the beautiful city on the Rhine River, the capital of the province of Alsacia. At one of the gatherings we met a German woman who lived in the town just across the river. There was something she wanted which we could provide--I have forgotten the details--and so we bundled it up and entrusted it to the international postal union. To make certain that it would get to the woman with no difficulties of customs or inspections, we marked the parcel with the english word gift. Then it was that we learned what we should have known before. A gift in one language is something very bad and very dangerous in another. One person's gift is another person's poison; one's gift is another's burden. Few indeed are the sources of conflict more fruitful than are the gifts we have received, and how we make use of them. That is the theme of the lesson we have today, text 1 Cor 12. This is the 5th of a brief series of 6 lessons we have this spring on the holy spirit, the 3d person in the trinity, the manifestat of God we know least about and should know better. In Apr we did 3 lessons on the holy spirit and the birth and calling and ministry of J; this month we have 3 on the holy spirit and the church, and these of us who are members of it. Next month we begin a 3-month unit on 3 of the OT prophets and what they have to say to us in these trying times. But for today we need to understand the gifts of the holy spirit, and the nature and opportunity of that which has been entrusted unto us. 1 Cor 12: 4-11. I never read any part of the NT ltrs to the Ch at Corinth that I do not feel a pang that I could not visit it and get to know it. Every Ch has its personality, its character, and they all differ in minute ways from each other. Go to your own Ch and imagine yourself a visitor, there for the first time. But that brawling, vital, inspiring group of brothers and sisters in the Ch at Corinth at mid-first century had a personality all its own. Corinth boasted of its reputation as the most pgn city in the Medit world. It sat astrid the major trade routes of the empire, and it received drifters and pleasure-seekers from all the world. There is a lesson in the fact that in that seemingly inhospitable place Paul establ one of the most infl Chs in all of that narrow world. Many of the members came to it out of a background of material sensuality, and found it diffic to grasp the meaning of the Xn proclamat, even as many of us do. But they did not lapse into apathy, nor did they give up the effort to understand. They asked questions, and because Paul their minister was away from them, he ansd them in writing. The result is a great gift to all of us 20 Cents later, for we can read Paul's answers and see not only the way the Corinthians lived, but also the meaning of the new way of God in Xr. The passage we have here came in response to questions from those quarrelsome Xns in Corinth. We can guess from the answer what the question must have been; we can even guess what must have inspired it. As I read it I can see the people of my own time in it; I can even see myself, and that is both more difficult and more embarrassing. Some people in Corinth had heard about the speaking in tongues that happened in Jerus on the day of Pentecost, when the holy spirit was poured out upon all people, not just a chosen few, or upon one individ, as had been the case earlier. And there are two problems w/speaking in tongues. One is that while it may be a genuine gift of the spirit, nobody can understand what it means unless there is an interpreter. The other is that the people who have it, or can fake it, which is too easy and perhaps too common, but those who have it//regard themselves as better than the rest of us, closer to the spirit, nearer to the heart of God. I can guess that some of the Cor. Ch. spoke in toggues, and called it a gift, and set themselves above the flock. And some body asked Paul about the pecking order, the ranks of the gifts of God. So we have 3 Chaps of this ltr on the subj of gifts, talents, abilities. And everyone who feels himself better than another, or less than another, because of what they can do, need to read and re-read these lines. In the short passage we read there are two major lessons for us. One is that there is a variety of gifts; every one of us has a gift, but the gifts are different; the other is that whatever ability or capacity we have IS a gift of God acting thru the holy spirit. With those two lessons before us, then, let us go phrase by phrase thru these verses. Paul wanted the people of the Cor Ch to know that God works thru every one of us who will permit him, and that none of us should boast about that fact. He also wanted to emphasize what is the meaning of the incarnation--that there is no dividing line, no wall of sparation, between sacred and secular. Some are called to serve God in what we call full-time gospel ministry, in the Ch. Others are called to what we OUGHT to call full-time gospel ministry outside the Ch, on week-days, in business, in the professions, in the crafts. Vocation, the call of God, comes to all of us, and no calling stands above another in the purposes of God. To continue to act and to believe as if there were a fence between pew and pulpit, or a hierarchy of gifts that makes one more valuable than another, is to miss the meaning of incarnation. Paul illustrates this truth--which we call the doctrine of vocation--with a passage in which he uses, and re-uses, the word translated varieties. ~~X~~ Three times the same word appears--in the older transl KJV this iteration is lost to the reader. All are gifts; we have no talent or ability of ourselves, but they are different. They are different, but they all come from the same God. God in three persons gives three varieties of gifts, and varieties of service, and varieties of working. Spirit, Lord, which means Jesus, and God, who is father. Paul did not have a fully-developed doctrine of the trinity,



because he did not yet need it, but he was fully aware that God acted in a variety of persons to bestow a variety of gifts. It is of interest that he distinguished between service and working; both mean that we do our faith as well as proclaim it. Working is a more general term than service, as service is the activist side of faith. The same member who teaches, or witnesses, could be the same person who washes the spoons or cuts the grass in the churchyard. Gifts are not to be used as measures of ranking, or for personal gain; v.7 says they are for the common good. It requires a person of very strong self-control, and an immoderate dose of humility, who has a gift for organizing or managing, not to feel superior to the humblest brother or sister. The gift that divides the brotherhood is not from God; what we do and say and teach and demonstrate must make the community healthier, and stronger, and closer together in spirit. In vv 8-11 there are 9 different gifts of the spirit, and they are listed with repetition that gets almost to the point of boring us with the sameness of it, that every one of them comes from the same spirit. The lesson for us, one we must remember, and repeat with the same monotony we hear in this passage, is that there are different gifts but the same God gives them. Some time ago I ordered some dwarf apple trees that had been grafted so that the one stem would produce four different kinds of apples. They did not long survive, but the idea behind them is the same as we have here. On each tree grew red apples and golden, delicious for eating and tart for pies. Different fruit, from the same stem. Could any of those apples look upon the others and say, Hey, I'm better than you; or say, Hey, my taste is my own doing? No; each was dependent upon the common stem, and each had a place in the world of apples. The differences in what we can do are like that 4-in-1 apple tree. Varieties of abilities, but the same source of nourishment. We should give thanks that we are different, and can excel at different things. Wouldn't it be a boring world if everybody had the same color hair and eyes, or the same preferences in food and fashion, or had to march lock-step in the same regimented society? There would be no commerce if everybody farmed and nobody went to the farmer's market for food; there would be no richness to life if everybody had the same talent. Can you imagine the terrors in a world in which everybody was a garrulous history teacher, or if everybody played the oboe and nobody played the flute? Nine times Paul made that point here. To each is given the manifestation, the evidence, of the spirit, for the common good, v.7. V.8, to one is given thru the spirit the speaking of wisdom, to another the speaking of knowl--thru the same Spirit. I find it extremely meaningful that Paul distinguished between wisdom and knowl, and I could wish there were time to play with that idea. All around me I hear people saying that we are in an explosion of knowl--though I would rather use the word information for that--but I have never heard anybody bemoan the excess of wisdom. Wisdom describes the ability to use knowledge to a useful purpose. Some of us can learn and teach the rest of us the facts--of theology, or biology, or physics, or nuclear-powered generating plants. Others of us can understand the ethical implications, or the philosophical effects, of a theological theorem, or genetic engineering, or the risks of core melt-down in a plant. And it is important, even crucial, for us that we understand that there is no difference in rank or effect of those talents. All gifts are from the spirit, and gifts come in different shapes and sizes. Last month the chronicle of higher education ran an essay on the idea of collegiality as the answer to jealousies and contentions on college campuses. It meant something that the scholastic community must come back to the idea Paul expressed in these lines. Some teach knowl, others speak wisdom, and neither has the right to condemn the other for being impractical, or only practical. We need both in this world; we are incomplete without both. V.9 reminds us that faith is itself a gift, and comes from the spirit. If we have it, we should give thanks for it, for it is not something we can do of ourselves. Faith as trust in God is not given to all of us. Those who have it are not better than those without it; happier, perhaps, because ~~the~~ it is given to them to stand in the sunlight of God's love in ways that others can never understand--even though they too stand in that same warmth and closeness. The gift of healing is another, and it too comes from that same spirit. Some of us have it, and do not know it. For some of us, the touch of the hand upon another is a calming and a healing touch. Try it, and see if you have it. To others is given the gift of miracles, a gift some of us are tempted to ridicule or belittle. How do you know the gift was not given to you until you try? That same spirit gave to some of us the gift; it is valuable, it is a marvel, but it ranks alongside uttering knowledge or speaking in tongues, or explaining what the mystery syllables mean. All of this leads to the summation in v.11, which we should underline, and memorize, and ~~remember~~ rejoice in. All of these gifts, every gift, of whatever nature, are inspired by one and the same spirit, who distributes to each one of us individually as it pleases him. Some of us can speak, some can teach, some can bring the word of God to this present generation and to this particular group of believers, but most of us are given the abilities that are needed to show forth the glory of God in the secular and the every-day. The ideal to which Paul points in these lines is the unity of the felwshp in the variety of activities and talents. And it is the spirit of God who gives them both. No thing that the spirit gives can be anything but spiritual. In that is the wholeness and the worship of the individual in the community.



5-25-86. Fruits. There is a story about a farmer plowing with one mule. A neighbor heard him yell at the lone creature--giddyap Pete; Giddap Barney; Giddap Johnny; giddap Tom. He called over to the farmer, how many names does that mule have? The farmer ordered the mule to stop, left the plow, came over to the fence, and whispered: he has just one name; his name is Pete. But he's an ornery mule who won't work if he thinks he's doing all the pulling. I put blinders on him, yell a lot of names at him, and he thinks he's in a team with three other mules helping him. It's a good story, and it also has a lesson in it. There is a strong dose of mule in all of us; we work better when we see that we are not alone, that the burden is being shared, that another is helping pull the load. That is the meaning of the promise of the holy spirit. Even when we are alone and to all evidence unaided, even when we think that no one knows our sorrow or can feel our pain, there is the spirit of God with us, and around us, and in us, to comfort and strengthen, to heal and to instruct. We need no play-acting, no calling upon mules that are not in the field, to fool ourselves. We have the promise, and nothing is so certain as the promise of God. The test of the presence is the fruit, the result. By their fruits you shall know them, J said; the same goes for the working of the spirit within us. Let us consider for a few minutes the results of the spirit's presence among us, text Gal 5, 22. Today we come to the final lesson in a miniseries on the life & work of the holy spirit. Next week we begin a new topic, a study of 3 OT prophets; those who would like a listing of texts... We began the present series in the middle of Apr, with 3 lessons on the holy spirit & J's birth & ministry, and then there were 3 on the holy spirit & church and the believers. Today the session is entitled the fruit of the holy spirit. From the beginning there have been imposters, charlatans, thieves, who have claimed to have the spirit of God, but whose lives and attitudes belied the claim. None of us is strong enough, or pure enough, to throw the first stone, of course, and to judge means that in like manner we shall ourselves be judged. But we know an oak tree by its leaves, and its bark, and by its fruit. The working of the leaven in the meal produces the rising of the bread; we cannot see the microscopic cells that expand upon the sugar and produce the gas that makes the bubbles; but we know they are there when we see the result, the bubbles in the dough. So we see the presence of the spirit in the result. It is a gift, freely given to those who ask, and the spirit works changes in personality and in attitude. That is the proclamation of the text before us today. Gal 5: 13-26. This is part of a letter Paul wrote about AD 56 to a group of churches in a region of Asia Minor known as Galatia. It is evident from the content of the ltr that someone, or a group of someones, had visited these churches to command them to practice all of the ritual and law of the Jewish tradition, as a prerequisite to becoming Xn. It was the central probl that Paul had to face in his missionary effort. He was given the assignmt of working among the nations, the gentiles, people who were by Jewish law pagan, ceremonially unclean, their food an affront to the righteous, their pleasure-centered lives a blasphemy, their rejection of the moral code a shocking invitation to disaster. The faithful of the old tradition could not sit at meals with them, for they were unclean. To accept them as brethren for whom Xr also died, without requiring them to meet every condition of the pious Jew, was to lose the idea of the fulfillment of the law, and to cut Messiah from his roots in Israel. It remains among us today a very difficult thing to tell people that the law no longer applies, that nothing we can do will win the favor of God, unless God give it when we ask, that all things are legal to those who love God and are guided by his spirit. Doesn't it mean that there shall be sensual orgies instead of restrained worship? Is there no place for obedience in this religion of freedom? It is a fine line indeed, and many of us fail to understand it, or to respect it. There are still many people who will quote the ancient cmdmts, as well they might, and overlook the fact that what none of us can keep, what none of us can do in ourselves, has been kept and done for us by the only innocent adult who ever walked upon this earth. And one of the most confusing of all scripture is this 5th chapter of Galatians. It has bothered me for what will soon be 50 yrs, and I am not sure even yet that I can understand it, and help some of you to understand it. It begins w/ that ringing declaration of independence--for freedom Xr has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. If we receive circumcision, which was the crucial rite the Judaizers demanded of all proselytes, v.2, Xr will be of no advantage to us, for if we keep that part of the law, we are bound to keep all of the law. We could understand the same of every aspect of the law. It is an entity we cannot add to or take from as we choose; we cannot sit in judgment on God the law-giver, to find fault with what we do not relish, or cannot understand. To take one cmdmt as an absolute is to tie us totally to the whole list. But the law no longer binds us; for freedom Xr has set us free; let us not return to the yoke of slavery. But somewhere there is a moral law we break only to our own destruction. V.13: for you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but thru love be servts of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, which is the law of love, love neighbor as we love our selves. And with that we are back to the Great Cmdmt, which you remember led to the parable of the good Samaritan. Paul does not here describe who his neighbor is. But here the confusion is compounded. We are free from the law, and yet we are under the law. No law can touch us, and still we must obey

Work is easier in a group



the law. Take a look at what this chapter tells us. V.18, if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law; but for those who continue to live by the measure of the pagan society around them, there can be no membership in the family of God. There is a list of sensuous practices here, and then, v.21, the warning: those who do these things shall not inherit the Kgd<sup>m</sup> of God. This is what has confused and bewildered me in years past. A mind like Paul's would not commit so grievous an inconsistency as to say in one breath, there is no law; for freedom Xr has set us free; and then a few lines farther say, still, but on the other hand, the law is so rigorous that drunkenness, carousing, immorality, impurity, behavior we all know about and some find irresistible, all such shall be shut out of the family of God. I have read and re-read these words many times in search of the explanation. And one day it came to me. <sup>^</sup>The key is in V.18. Who is in charge here? To whom have I entrusted the control of my life? To those who permit the spirit of God to lead them, there is no law. But, and here is the important consideration, those whose lives reach no farther than the flesh, the stomach and the nerve-ends, the law remains inexorable. This is not a contradiction; it is a description of two different life-styles. One of the most impressive of the Italian Renaissance writers spoke of the glory of mankind; the only creature, he said, who had a choice of what he would be. Angels have no choice; they must be angels; pigs have no choice either; they must be pigs. But it is to the glory of humankind that we can be either. Some of us prefer the life of the pig, others attain unto the angels; most of us bump along between the two, sometimes one, rarely but actually the other. We are free to be independent of the law, but only if we are led by the spirit of God. Freedom is for the committed--and it is better perhaps to say that freedom is for the enslaved, those who live by the spirit of God are truly free. And from the binding to the will of God comes service to neighbor--v.13, use freedom not to drag spirit thru fleshly pleasure, but use freedom thru love to be servants of those who are in need. The works of the flesh are evident to all, and they were also well-known to the students of Grk ethics, for there are similarities in this to the teachings of stoic and epicurean and the students of Socrates. But look at the fruits of the spirit, beginning w/v.22. When we permit the spirit to invade us and teach us we have a different character and personality. It is also different in significant ways from the best ethics of the Grks. Here Athens and Jerusalem stand in contrast. The first fruit is love, and that is the basic difference with what the Graeco-Roman mind taught. The word is agape, an idea the Grks did not make much use of, but which to Paul was the basis of the revelation of God in Xr. It means love, but love that is uncaused, love that flows from the nature of the lover rather than out of admiration or being enamored by the object. God so loved the world, we are told, and we know it was not that the world was lovely, or lovable, but that the nature of God is love. Love as agape is set in opposition to love as eros; agape gives the connotation of God reaching down to man, by grace, that while we were yet sinners Xr died for us; we did not have to stop being sinners, in fact we could not stop being sinners on our own will. But God loved, and reached out to us. In the spirit we can see however dimly the great sea of God's love for us, unlovely and unlovable, and can share that love with neighbors who may also be unlovely and unlovable. Joy goes beyond happiness just as agape goes beyond eros. Happiness is being warm, and well-fed, and loved; joy is knowing contentment when cold and hungry and alone. Happiness comes from outside; joy is from within; happiness is temporary and conditional, joy is forever and nothing can separate us from it. Peace is a state of mind, not a condition of world politics. We live in a violent world that is not demonstrably more courteous and civil than was the imagined primitive world of Thomas Hobbes, where brutish beings met upon the darkling plain. Irene means peace, peace with God who has brought us near who were far off, God who has by faith accepted what was unacceptable. It is a peace that is beyond human understanding, beyond human achievement, and it begins with values that are beyond the present and the material, so that quarrels can never begin. It is not passive imperturbability nor the calm at the eye of the storm. It can speak truth to power because it knows it is a temporary sojourner in this world, using things it cannot take when it leaves. Love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control. These are the results of the gift of the spirit, and there can be no law against them. There is an old proverb that says that where people are good, laws are unnecessary; where people are bad, laws are broken. This is a case of unnecessary law. One who knows that things cannot satisfy the human spirit needs no law against theft; one who respects human life needs no law against killing. As we live by the spirit, may we also walk by the spirit; not of law, not of obedience, not of good works, lest any of us should boast. Freedom before God and man is a magnificent gift that can only come to those who live above the law. This yr is the centennial of the statue of liberty. She is being cleaned and strengthened for other centuries. A process intended to shine her cheek has instead left it dark and looking unclean. It is a parable of man's quest for liberty, and for cleansing of the spirit, without the spirit. The holy spirit of God is the gift that makes us whole, and joyous, knowing peace amid violence and cleanliness in filth. Ask, and it shall be given.