Homiletical Helps on LW Series B
—Epistles

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:13-22
August 6, 2006

The smaller the world gets due to technological communication, the greater the realization that barriers and walls exist between cultures and people.

There is a certain hostility that seems inherent in the fallen created order between groups of believers in God. That hostility is related to the nature of religion as the search for the truth about God. If the truth is not found, a created substitute will fill the need to acknowledge God demanded by the First Commandment and that belief will be held in the heart of its followers. Because all such religious beliefs are at the core of human existence, they have the power to unite or divide people on a very deep level.

Paul speaks to a specific issue of this kind when he addresses the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. By the Law the Jews were isolated from all other nations and were informed regarding the will of God. The Gentiles were outside of the covenant. They were foreigners to God, quite distinct from God's chosen people, Israel. By abolishing the Old Testament ceremonial laws in His flesh, Jesus brought the Gentiles near to Himself and at the same time broke down that barrier between Jew and Gentile. Now there would be one new man, instead of the two groups, one new humanity created by Jesus. Faith in Christ creates unity and makes all people equal.

Jesus preaches peace to both groups, Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10:12). The new creation, including both Jew and Gentile, is designed to live in peace, not vengeance. There is oneness in the body because the wall of hostility has been broken down. In the world and in external affairs there is inequality, but in Christ's kingdom all things are one. Laws cannot bring people into agreement. Faith in Christ creates unity and makes people equal.

Paul moves past the elimination of the Law to the incorporation of all believers together in building a holy temple for God (vv. 19-21). Building projects can be exciting. Note the present tense of the verbs. The holy temple continues to grow throughout the world.

This whole text is part of the mystery of God's plan in Ephesians 1:9-11. God will bring all things together in heaven and on earth under one head, even Christ. There will be supreme peace and harmony in Christ's kingdom, and people will neither offend nor destroy one another. They will have peace and make peace (Rom. 5:1).

It has to be the plan of God and executed by God Himself since it is impossible for the people of the world to accomplish bringing people together on that grand scale. Paul gives praise to God for such great work (Eph. 3:20-21).

Suggested outline:

God's Great Plan for Living Together in Peace

Introduction: One of the great tragedies of human history is that today Gentile Christians believe in a Messiah who has been basically rejected by the Jewish
people (John 1:11). Even today there remains hostility between Gentiles and Jews.

I. There are walls which divide humanity.
   A. Walls between Jews and Gentiles.
   B. Fear of the unknown about other people.
   C. Century-old hatreds between religious groups of people all over the world.

II. Jesus abolished the wall between Jew and Gentile.
   A. He abolished the ceremonial law.
   B. He reconciled all factions to the Father through the cross.
   C. He created in Himself one new person.

III. Jesus gives us a new basis for relating with Jewish people.
   A. Jesus is the instrument of change cross-culturally.
   B. Through Jesus we can risk getting close and testifying to Jewish brothers and sisters.

Alternate outline:

Introduction: In the year of the Olympics, for a fleeting moment North and South Koreans are one team called “Koreans.” It’s a fleeting moment of unity. Attempts to bring people to oneness through the Olympics historically have failed. Righteousness and peace kiss each other (Ps 85:10). When we seek peace before righteousness, we do not find it.

Since the wall of ceremonial law has come down,

I. There is peace between religious cultures through Jesus.
II. There is peace in the human oneness created by Jesus.
III. There is peace in the forgiveness of the blood of Jesus.

Gary Schaper

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16
August 13, 2006

Chapter 4 of Ephesians is understood only in the context of chapter 1. Having been awestruck from chapter 1 concerning God’s plan, His choosing us, His setting aside the believers before the foundation of the world, His uniting the believers with the same power that raised up Jesus from the dead, how can anyone be anything but patient and humble?

The problem of the church in Ephesians 4 is that the vision of chapter 1 keeps getting muted by the world. Retaining the vision of the hope, the riches of His inheritance, and the great power that He has for us who believe is an ongoing quest and prayer (1:18).

Truth unites, often in the secular world, but especially in the spiritual world. It does not divide. It is very profound.

The unity of the church brings about a faithful and true proclamation to the spiritual world and the physical world. In 3:10 Paul talks about the manifold wisdom of God being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. The realm of the spiritual warfare against the exalted Christ involves a conflict that is universal in its scope, involving believers united together by the
Spirit of God. The goal is to have the strength and focus for the battle.

Note 4:13 "Until we all attain unity of faith and of knowledge (genitive in the Greek) not in faith because it is the nature of faith and knowledge to bring together people, to unite them. The uniting focus that we need on the hope, riches, and power of God (1:18) comes through faith and knowledge. When we have that, we are strong in the cosmic battle.

Suggested outlines:

**Sermon I: “It’s All a Matter of Focus”**

*Introduction:* In the Body of Christ it is easy to get caught up in hurt feelings or to get exasperated and impatient with the brother/sister. That focus is on small potatoes instead of God’s great plan for the world.

I. The people of God need to focus on the big picture of God’s plan.
   A. God’s plan is to unite the spiritual realm and the created order under Christ (1:9-10).
   B. It is difficult to focus because the world gives little hope, mutes the vision of the riches of God’s inheritance, and belittles the power of God (1:18-19).
   C. Focusing on the annoyances of life can lead to lack of patience in the body of Christ (v. 2).

II. God gives gifts to the church for focus.
   A. Every worker who proclaims God’s Word to the world is a gift from the exalted Christ to His church (vv. 8-11).
   B. The goal of the gifts is to help us to focus on God’s plan (v. 12).

III. That focus leads to unity and strength.
   A. There is an inherent unity of faith and knowledge that binds people together in awe and humility over against God’s plan (v. 13).
   B. Knowledge brings a united front against false teaching (v. 14). E.g., speaking to *The Gospel of Judas* and *The DaVinci Code*.
   C. The believers are built up and grow together (v. 16).

The focus is no longer on small potatoes, the impatience of man, but on the big picture, the vision of God’s plan for the world.

**Sermon II: “Keeping the Big Picture”**

*Introduction:* In this world it is easy to get caught up in denominationalism and historical wars. While it is important to rightly divide Scripture and to learn from history, it is also important not to lose sight of the given unity of all believers in the larger battle that continues between the body of Christ and the forces of evil.

I. The great war between the spiritual forces has been won by the exalted Christ but still continues on in the world (4:8-10; 4:14).

II. All believers are united in this struggle (v. 4).

III. Believers continue to grow and reach unity of faith and knowledge through the ongoing dynamic of speaking the truth in love with each other (vv. 13, 15).
Sermon III: “Look Beyond the Present”

I. Present circumstances and difficulties—Paul’s imprisonment.
   A. The frailties of your fellow believers (v. 2).
   B. The differences apparent in the body of Christ—differing of gifts, personalit­ties.

II. To see the oneness that God has created.
   A. Oneness created by the Spirit (v. 3).
   B. Oneness in the uniqueness of Christianity—One Lord, one Baptism (v. 4).

III. To see the gifts that God gives to the church for growth and strength.
   A. To foster the building up of the body, becoming mature in the faith (v. 12).
   B. Preparing God’s people for works of service (v. 12).
   C. Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (v. 13).

Gary Schaper

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 4:17-24
August 20, 2006

What I find remarkable about the epistle to the Ephesians is how easily Paul moves between Christ’s work as a grand cosmic reality and as personal reality and experience. In Christ all things in heaven and on earth are united (1:10), but so are two peoples—Jew and Gentile (2:11f.). In His death and resurrection all rule, power, and authority are subjected to Him (1:19f.), but so are our sins and trespasses as we are raised with Him and are seated with Him in the heavens (2:4f.). And now we see in this text that a plan hidden for ages with roots in eternity is made manifest in the present time in order to draw the sharp line of “before” and “after”—of “old” and “new”—across one’s individual life. Salvation history breaks into personal history—we are not only caught up in the mighty course of God’s salvation and re-creation, in Christ we are each a microcosm of these events!

In the earlier part of the letter, Paul makes known again the great mystery of this plan which had been entrusted to him; namely, that through the Gospel of Christ the Gentiles are now fellow heirs of the promises made to Israel (3:6). No longer are they alienated (απηλλοτριωμένοι; 2:12) or strangers, but rather members of God’s household. Through the cross, Jew and Gentile have become one body (2:16; 3:6; 4:4f.)—Christ has created in Himself one new man (καινὸν ἄνθρωπον; 2:15) out of the two. This reality is such that in 4:17 the word “Gentiles” can no longer adequately describe this newly fashioned body of believers (thus, to insert “other”—λοιπά seems to the point). These Ephesians no longer have anything in common with “the nations”—people yet “alienated (απηλλοτριωμένοι) from the life of God.” While their former path followed the empty and self-destructive ways of Gentiles, such a life—the life of the “old man” (παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον; 4:22)—is now divested in its entirety, even as an old garment is cast aside. Or even better, the cosmic work of Christ is a new creation, with the “new man” (καινὸν ἄνθρωπον; 4:24) as the centerpiece, “created according to the likeness of God (τὸν κατὰ θεόν κτισθέντα) in true righteousness and holiness” (cf. 2:10 “created in Christ Jesus for good works”).

And while this is decisive, Paul nonetheless urges the Ephesians to put off the old and put on the new, as if this is yet to be or continually needs to be done. So
which is it? Theology has expressed this paradox in various ways. Most of us I
expect are familiar with *simul iustus et peccator*, or the more modern “now, not yet,”
both of which speak to this issue. One could perhaps invoke these. However, what
seems quite clear in this paradox is this very practical and important theme: *one
can never get beyond the Gospel*. Christ has accomplished our salvation, once and for
all, but this fact can never be put behind us as a stepping-stone to something else.
This Gospel has implications to be sure—this is what Paul is after here—but it is
always intimately bound to that “great love with which God loved us” (2:4). One
must daily live the “life of God” from the hand of God as every spiritual blessing is
given to us...and given to us again...and again. This means that the shift from the
old to the new is ever and always found in Christ. The manner in which we receive
this remarkable event as our own experience—*through faith*—necessitates its con-
tinual repetition. In Romans 6, we are reminded that this happens to us in Bap-
tism; that is, in Baptism Christ happens to us. And yet, if Baptism is anything, it
is a daily event. So here, Paul assumes that the completed work of Christ and his
new creation is also a continual renewal in us: “be renewed in the spirit of your
minds.”

Erik H. Herrmann

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 4:30-5:2
August 27, 2006

In the fifteenth century Thomas à Kempis wrote *De Imitatione Christi*—“The
Imitation of Christ.” It immediately became a classic of spiritual devotion—under-
standably so since it is the ardent desire of every Christian to be like Christ.
Yet Thomas à Kempis is merely one contribution to the long-running debate over
what such imitation ought to look like. Various aspects of Jesus’ life have been held
up as a model and pattern to follow—whether the celibacy of the monastic move-
ments, the absolute poverty of St. Francis, or even the more banal WWJD of recent
times. Jesus has become like us, but in what sense are we to be like Him?

In today’s reading, Paul’s exhortation puts this question in even sharper terms:
“Be imitators of God.” Put this way, one thinks of bringing forth galaxies, keeping
the stars shining and the planets spinning, feeding sparrows and clothing lilies,
growing our hair while counting each one. Paul of course tells us what he has in
mind right away, but it is at least instructive to consider that the call and quest to
be like God is not always so obvious—we were both created in His likeness and fell
into sin by desiring to be like Him.

For Paul, the pattern has been set by the “great love with which he loved us”
(2:4), His love for us in Christ. To walk in this love is to walk the path of sacrifice
and giving of self. It is marked by the same *kindness* (Jesus paints the picture of
God’s kindness in Luke 6:35-36, “...be sons of the Most High, for he is kind
to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful...”), *compassion*, and *forgiveness* that God has
showered upon us in the sending of His Son. Indeed, it is as “beloved children,”
objects of our heavenly Father’s love, that we embark on the path of divine imita-
tion.

C. S. Lewis, in his *Four Loves*, begins by making the fundamental distinction
between “Gift-Love” and “Need-Love.” He notes that in Gift-Love we are near to
God in likeness, for then we live according to the image of our Creator and Re-
deemer. It is precisely through the love that pours itself out for others that we are most like the divine. On the other hand, it is only through Need-Love, a love that longs to be filled with the love of another, that we can truly approach God—for what else are we than children in need of our heavenly Father's love? It was the profound recognition of this Need-Love that inspired Luther's theology even until his very last words, "we are all beggars." It seems clear that in the confusion of these two kinds of love lay many of the misguided answers to the question of Christian imitation. To regard our neighbor only as a source of our own fulfillment or as a means toward a higher more spiritual end (for example, salvation) is to turn love into selfishness. Likewise, one approaches dangerously close to the pride of the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14) when our love for God is regarded as a gift that fills a divine need.

But Paul is quite clear in pointing to the love of the incarnation as source of our love. Reminded of God's love for us in Christ, this passage functions both as a proclamation of the Gospel and as an encouragement to "go and do likewise" and live as beloved children. One could read this passage in such a way that even—perhaps especially—in this love of the incarnate God imitation appears impossible for us. Who of us will ever be able to exhibit such love? Yet Paul's point is not to raise up an impossible standard but to engage us in the life that God has created us to live—"created in Christ Jesus for good works (2:10)...created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24)." Besides, our love can never replace but only reflect God's love for us. As C. S. Lewis concludes, we must never mistake "Like for Same."

Erik H. Herrmann

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:15-20
September 3, 2006

Considering the context: This is the sixth week out of eight weeks that the lectionary takes us through St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Whether you're preaching on this whole series or not, it would be helpful in the introduction to briefly review for your hearers some of what Paul has taught in this epistle, especially early on. The first two chapters provide (a heaping helping of Gospel foundation) for Paul's later treatment of Christian living in chapters four through six. Christians are those whom God chose "before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (1:4). Christians are saved by grace through faith in Christ (2:8-9). Christians are "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance" (2:10). Christians are "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone" (2:19-20). The immediate context reminds us that Paul is writing to Christians who "were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

Into the text: This text gives us the opportunity to contrast wise and unwise living. It might even be "wise" to use this contrast to formulate a structure for the sermon moving verse by verse with the contrast through verses fifteen to eighteen, proclaiming solid Law and Gospel in each section. The main thought of the sermon is as follows. In Christ we are wise. Yet often we tend to succumb to the temptations in these evil days and drift toward unwise living. Christ gives us the means
by which we are strengthened for wise living, that is to say, life in Him.

The unwise let time flutter away, considering only selfish personal interests. They give no careful attention to how they live. Wise ones make the best use of the time. The Greek ἐξαγοράζω means “buying which exhausts the possibilities available” (Kittel, vol. 1, 128). We live in the devil’s time, where he is free to roam the earth and reek havoc and destruction (Rev. 12:12). But Christ Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Through our Baptism, we receive that rescue from sin, death, and the power of the devil that Christ won for us on the cross. We have a new life no longer focused merely on self, but on Christ, in which the possibilities of serving Him are many.

The curse of original sin includes ignorance of the will of God. The unwise are foolish and senseless. They do not have a clue as to what God would have them do, nor do they care. Only one who has been “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2) can test what the will of God is. The Small Catechism gives us proper direction as to what God’s will is. In the explanation of the Third Petition we read: “God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.”

The unwise revel in drunkenness and debauchery. This passage certainly does not condemn the use and enjoyment of alcohol but simply warns against the dangers of overindulgence. Drunkenness dulls the mind and senses and leads to other sinful actions. Proverbs 23:31 communicates the lure of the strong drink, i.e., red wine “sparkles” and “goes down smoothly.” However, verse 32 warns of its danger, namely, that in the end it’s like the bite of a serpent. Rather, wise ones desire to be filled with the Spirit (5:18). Note that the verb is passive. Being filled with the Spirit is God’s gift! As Christians receive Holy Absolution and Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. What great comfort that is for us. Living as wise ones is not something in which we are left to ourselves to do. Rather, in Christ we are given the means by which God keeps us in the one true faith, living as wise ones.

The above thoughts can be concluded by bringing in a treatment of faithful Christian worship, building on what Paul writes in the remaining verses of the text. In worship, Christians are strengthened and edified for wise living by the proclamation of Christ, even in the midst of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. God feeds His people with the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, and we respond with thanksgiving and gratitude.

The liturgical context: The Old Testament and Gospel lessons can both appropriately be brought into the sermon. In fact, the preacher could make use of the Old Testament lesson as a nice illustration. Proverbs 9 contrasts the way of wisdom and the way of folly. They are each presented with the imagery of a banquet. Folly’s banquet is loud and seductive. Her feast consists of sweet, forbidden pleasures. Yet, she is deceptive. At her table are the dead. Wisdom’s feast is lovingly prepared. She slaughters the beast and mixes the wine. At her feast, there is life. Proverbs 9 provides ample imagery to work with. The Gospel lesson brings us out of imagery and into reality. In John 6:51-58, Jesus bids us eat His flesh and blood for eternal life. His flesh is real food and His blood is real drink. No deception here, just pure gift!

Joel P. Fritsche
Key to grasping and proclaiming the message in this text is understanding its place in the context of the entire epistle. The special theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is God's great purpose for His church. In Christ, God has brought believers into a new, saving relationship with Himself, establishing His one holy church with Christ as its head. Within this church God then has intentions for new Christian relationships. God's Holy Spirit works in believers to build up the body of Christ in works of mutual love and service.

In the opening chapters, Paul shows how God accomplishes His purposes through the Gospel. What marvelous things God has done for those to whom He gives His many gifts (1:3-14)! God has called each of us to be His own. Even before the creation of the world He chose us, adopting us as His children through Jesus Christ (1:4-5). We have redemption through the blood of Christ, forgiveness of all our sins (1:7). God has given us the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation, and has sent His promised Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (1:13-14). In His mercy God has made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions (2:4-5). By His grace God has saved us through faith in His Son Jesus. By His death on the cross, Jesus has established peace between God and sinful humanity, and provides access to the Father and the one Spirit (2:14-18).

Now all believers are fellow citizens, members of the household of faith, which is "built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (2:20). In Christ all believers are being built up together to form one people—the one true church—in which the Spirit dwells (2:22).

The Spirit calls those united in the body of Christ to live lives of love and forgiveness. Christ has given us His grace and His gifts to fulfill our assigned roles in His church (3:7-8; 4:7-13). Through our various callings, all of us are to grow and build ourselves up into Christ, our Head (1:10; 4:15-16). As Christians we are to live together as one body, loving and serving one another. This is part of God's plan for His people. We are His workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (2:10).

In 4:17ff., Paul details how members of the body of Christ—the church—are to live in relationship to one another (cf. also Col. 3:18-4:1; Rom. 13:1-10). Included in this discussion are instructions for special relationships: wives and husbands (5:22-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slaves and masters (6:5-9).

Focusing on the marriage relationship between husband and wife, 5:21-31 is to be considered in light of what comes before it in the preceding chapters. Paul shows that the relationship of husband and wife is to be analogous to the relationship of Christ and His church. Christ unites the church to Himself, and those in the church are members of His own body (5:30). He feeds and cares for the church, loving to the extent of giving up His life for it (5:25-27, 29). Following Paul's analogy, as Christ and His church are united, so man and woman are united in marriage and are one flesh (5:31). As Christ is the head of the church, so is the husband the head of the wife, loving and caring for her as for his own body (5:28). As the church submits to Christ, its head, so the wife is to submit to her husband (5:24). The union between husband and wife reflects the relationship of Christ and His bride, the church.

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The Lutheran teaching on vocation may find application here. Out of reverence to Christ, all Christians are to submit to one another (5:21). This is to follow from being “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). Christian marriage is an institution through which God loves and blesses His people. Wives are God’s own gifts to their husbands as husbands are God’s own gifts to their wives. God loves each through the other. As gifts from God, each is called by God to serve the other, yet with unique callings. Husbands are not called to serve their wives as wives are called to serve their husbands. Wives are called to submit themselves, to be selfless in their relationships with their husbands, recognizing them as their heads. Husbands are called to love their wives, recognizing their headship and even giving themselves up sacrificially for their wives. The husband’s headship is not a self-earned right to exert authority, but rather a God-given responsibility to love.

Submission and love are often difficult practices for Christian couples. While wives and husbands are called to serve each other in marriage, they still sin daily and are in need of forgiveness. God continues to forgive, sustain, and preserve them and the entire church through His Word. The love with which Christ loves His bride, the church, is perfect and holy, bringing forgiveness, salvation, and a new eternal relationship with the Father. As Paul says, this is indeed a “great mystery” (5:32).

Gerhard Bode

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 6:10-20
September 17, 2006

_Preliminary considerations:_ Christianity is often characterized by its disclaimers as a religion for the weak and unsuccessful in this world—people who cannot succeed here fall back on a nebulous hope for better conditions in a posthumous life. Some inside the church view Christianity as a nebulous, touchy-feely, stress-free experience without much substance. For others it is not much more than another resource for achieving riches, success, and temporal happiness.

Quite the contrary, as the distinctively military imagery of this text make clear, Christians are engaged in a serious conflict, in a spiritual battle with Satan, who is next in power after God and His heavenly hosts. Only the strong, those strong in God, can win this spiritual battle. This is a winner-takes-all conflict with eternal consequences. The outcome will determine our end-of-life destiny—whether we will be inhabitants of heaven or hell for all eternity.

This text with strong military overtones may not be popular in the current cultural climate of an increasing disenchantment with the war in Iraq, which is fueling an increasing number of anti-war demonstrations. Nevertheless, it is a text that needs to be preached since spiritual warfare has been a part of human life since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and will continue until the Last Day. It was a conflict that engaged Christ Himself during His wilderness temptation and during His intense agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Today we are still the constant prey of Satan.

Scripture is no stranger to military conflict of all sorts from the armies of Pharaoh to the Israelite conquest of Canaan, from the international wars waged by judges and kings in the Old Testament, to the possible battle between the Roman soldiers and a multitude of heavenly hosts which Christ said He could
summon in the Garden of Gethsemane. Finally, Revelation 16:16 speaks of the Battle of Armageddon which will occur near the end of the age.

The spiritual battle that we as Christians wage every day is a battle for our bodies and souls. It is waged against Satan, the most formidable of enemies. During his papacy (1963-1978) Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical to the people of his church in which he reminded them that Satan is a real being out to destroy their faith because he believed that many people were no longer taking the devil seriously as a real, living being and spiritual enemy of believers. Scripture describes Satan as a roaring lion walking around seeking whom he may devour (cf. 1 Pet. 5.8). The weapons of Satan are the constant temptations which he puts in our path every day from the little white lies to serious doubts that may arise from the constant challenges to our faith from the repeated claims of evolution to the discussions of Gnostic literature such as The Gospel of Judas, the book/movie The Da Vinci Code, and the temptation to water down our faith with the claims of religious inclusiveness, namely, all religions are of equal merit and truthfulness.

Textual considerations: Paul begins by clearly establishing in verse 10 that this is a battle or conflict that we cannot win on our own. We must be "strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." In verses 11 and 12, Paul identifies our enemies; they are truly formidable foes. He starts out mentioning the devil, who is the source of all evil. He then fleshes out his list of our spiritual enemies with a catalog of evil forces, namely, "rulers," "authorities," "powers of this dark world," and "spiritual forces of evil from the heavenly realms."

Next, like American troops in Iraq riding in humvees not equipped with heavy metal cladding, we are vulnerable on our own; we can be safe only when we are protected with the appropriate armor that only God can provide (vv. 13-17). This armor is itemized as the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet readied with the gospel of peace, a shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit or the word of God. In other words, God gives us full body armor so that we are protected from head to foot. Not one piece of armor comes from us. We have no resourcefulness or ability on which to rely on for safety. All our protection comes from God-issued ordinance, if you will.

From verses 18 to 20 Paul emphasizes prayer as one of the most important and potent weapons in defeating Satan and as one of the very important means of remaining faithful. Not only did Jesus Himself engage in prayer to His heavenly Father during His intense suffering in the garden and on the cross for His crucifiers, but He taught us the perfect prayer and regularly admonishes and commands us to pray. Prayer is one of the most powerful weapons we can wield against our spiritual assailants.

In verse 20 Paul mentions that he is imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and remaining true to his faith and apostleship. This is another reminder that the Christian life is not necessarily or always an easy existence.

Suggested outline:

Christians Are Engaged in a Spiritual Battle

I. There is a spiritual battle going on for our bodies and souls.
   A. Satan is the antagonist who uses all manner of temptation to destroy our faith and entice us away from God.
   B. Christ is the protagonist who entered the conflict on our behalf and took our place on the cross.
II. Faith is the real target of Satan’s attacks. If Satan destroys our faith, he wins us body and soul.
   A. Faith is a precious gift of God worth fighting for.
   B. Faith is the only source of eternal salvation.

III. To fight this war successfully we need the proper armor that only God can provide.
   A. If we rely on ourselves, we are bound to fail.
   B. If we trust in God, we will receive the crown of life.

Quentin F. Wesselschmidt

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
James 1:17-20
September 24, 2006

Thoughts on and from the text: In the entire three-year series, readings from the epistle of James appear only five times (...one for each chapter?). Chapter five is covered during Advent of series A. The other four are here, in series B, beginning with chapter one this week. So, if one is committed to the pericopes and wants to demonstrate that he is well past that “straw” business, then it is almost now or never. Indeed, our assigned portion of chapter one goes far in subverting the tired assumption that James is light on justification and rather heavy-handed on the Christian life part. The four verses break neatly in half—the first providing a stunning affirmation of divine monergism and the latter offering sound advice for the Christian life, yet not straying far from the justification foundation of it all. From the changeless Father who supplies all good gifts, and purely because of His divine choice, the ultimate gift is delivered—we are brought into existence (literally born)...not merely living, but living as God’s own people, the beginning of the redemption of all creation. The stress on God’s free choice and the emphasis on the divinely operative logos that is actually implanted in us and so saves us, screams the reality of justification that is a work of God and God alone. Passive righteousness before God is the point, here. The next three verses (w. 19-21) take up active righteousness and offer solid counsel on living prudently with other creatures—wisdom which is rooted, not surprisingly, in Old Testament wisdom literature (Eccl. 5:1; 7:9; and Prov. 15:1). The note on anger’s failure to accomplish God’s righteousness makes sense only when it is understood that it is the active righteousness of the horizontal realm that is forfeited when anger rules. So, the duality stands (v. 21): the Christian is responsible to rid himself of wickedness and filth, and God alone can save a human life. (In a Gnostic-leaning culture, it is advisable to render psyche in its wider definition rather than exacerbate the superiority of the soul notion...God saves not just our souls, but our whole selves—body included!). The Christian life is receiving. The Christian life is doing. Both.

Toward a sermon: The notion that sandwiches the text is deception. Verse 16 warns against the danger and verse 22 sharpens the warning: it is self-deception that is the enemy. This will serve as an excellent motif for the sermon.

Central Thought: There are no games with God; He is the real deal and works in us real righteousness.

Goal: To move the hearers to see the all-embracing reality of the Christian faith as it serves as the center and the direction for all of life.
Malady: People con themselves with assorted “God-games”: self-righteousness, “Sunday-Christianity,” acceptable mediocrity, conformist Christianity; when so deceived; they forfeit the life God intends for them...now and perhaps for eternity as well.

Means: At the font, God implants the logos; never a game-player, He is the gift-giver, working righteousness in both dimensions.

Suggested outline:

“The Most Dangerous Game”

Introduction: Literature anthologies often contain the story (“The Most Dangerous Game”) of the depraved hunter who tries to overcome his boredom with conventional hunting by stalking men in a controlled “game.” Deadly as this game was, it is nothing compared to games people play with God. (Alternatively, one could always follow the con-man theme.)

I. Deceiving and being deceived
   A. Before God (the ways that we seek justification outside God’s plan [vv.16-18]).
   B. Before men (the ways that we make a mess of relationships with others by our failure to attend to God’s will for our living [vv. 19-22]).
   C. Both forms of self-deception (always the most dangerous game) eventuate in disaster and suffering.

II. The logos from above.
   A. God sends the gift, and the game is over—we are right with our Creator.
   B. God directs us in our living with others not in game playing, which leads to sorrow and heartache, but in integrity and wisdom.
   C. God saves the whole man (most of all from himself!)—for this life and for eternity.

Joel Biermann

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18
October 1, 2006

In chapter two of his epistle James warns these Christians about the danger of “head faith.” He doesn’t specifically label it as head faith, but that seems to be what he is referring to. Note what James says in 2:19, the verse immediately following our text, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and tremble.” He’s talking about faith that is based solely on knowledge about God—“head faith,” but which bears no fruit. Even Satan and his demons have that kind of faith, yet still they tremble. This is not saving faith. They are damned for eternity.

What about Christians? Can a Christian have only this kind of faith? How can you tell? James points to good works as being evidence of saving faith? If one’s faith does not produce good works, it cannot be saving faith. Faith doesn’t show partiality. Faith moves you to love your neighbor as yourself. Faith is active in love. But faith without works is dead. In 2:14 James asks, “Can such faith save?” The ex-
The expected answer is no. So, a Christian who has only head faith, doesn’t have saving faith, and is therefore not really a Christian at all.

James is not accusing his readers of not having saving faith. He addresses them as “brothers” (2:1). He does this fifteen times throughout the entire epistle. However, certain actions and attitudes prevalent among them caused him to issue a warning about the place of good works in the life of a Christian. They are not immune from falling away. James uses the example of showing partiality to the rich who come into their assembly. He also uses the example of not helping a brother or sister in need. This is not how a brother who holds the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ lives.

As Christians, there is always the temptation for us to be more “head faith” than “heart faith people. We are all sinners whose works and very lives are tainted by sin. The preaching of the Law in the sermon should bring the hearers to the point of self-examination, to recognize their failures when it comes to good works. Specifically, in what ways have you shown partiality in the congregation? Have you refused or avoided helping a brother or sister who is truly in need? On the other hand, lest a person think he is full of good works and making progress at rooting out sin, let him hear James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law, but stumbles at one point, has become guilty of all.” In other words, even one sin means we are guilty of breaking the whole law. While works are certainly evidence of a living faith, they will never provide certainty for salvation. That is found not in us, but in the objective Gospel of Christ.

This is what is sorely lacking in many churches today with regards to the topic of good works. Much of popular preaching, especially what our people hear on TV, is filled with the urgency of doing more works. “Stop doing that and do more of this” is often the advice given. But doing more works is not the remedy for dead faith. That’s confusing Law and Gospel. Those who have been convicted by the Law and are aware of their sin, perhaps even to the point of questioning their salvation, need the comfort of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, lest they be left in turmoil and despair. More Law preaching will produce not more works, but terror.

Here, we as Lutherans, have the opportunity to clarify the Biblical teaching of faith and good works with the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. Stanza five of “Salvation Unto Us Has Come” summarizes it well:

Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone
   And rests in Him unceasing;
   And by its fruit true faith is known,
      With love and hope increasing.
   For faith alone can justify;
      Works serve our neighbor and supply
   The proof that faith is living.

Good works are certainly a result, a fruit of faith to serve our neighbor. As James says, they even give evidence of faith. However, we don’t increase faith by doing more good works. Faith clings to the cross of Jesus Christ alone! Only the Holy Spirit can create and strengthen faith—heart faith—by the Gospel. Christians need a solid connection to Jesus, the Vine (John 15), to receive the fruits of His cross and to bear much fruit. God shows no partiality. He offers His Son to the whole world, to all sinners.

We have been gifted with a rock-solid connection to Jesus through His promise.
to be present for us in His Word and in the Sacraments. This wonderful connection was begun in your Baptism and continues in Holy Absolution and Holy Communion. Faith filled with Christ Himself can't help but be active in love toward others. In the liturgy following our reception of the Sacrament of the Altar we even pray, "Strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another." It is no wonder then that we also pray today in the Collect of the Day: "O God, without whose blessing we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and govern our hearts; through Jesus Christ, your Son. our Lord.... Amen."

Joel P. Fritsche

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
James 3:16-4:6
October 8, 2006

Preliminary considerations: This text certainly fits the general characterizations of James as a book that provides guidelines for living the Christian life and that speaks out against some of the common sins that must be overcome. The sins that James warns his readers against have been endemic to mankind from the fall of Adam and Eve to our own time when they have become magnified in our self-centered and greedy society. James begins this text by mentioning the sins of envy and selfish ambition. These are certainly the sins that are the root of all other sins. Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan to envy God for His knowledge of good and evil and by a selfish ambition to be like God. As St. Augustine remarked, our first parents sinned in thought before they sinned in deed. These sins clearly dominate contemporary society with its extreme egoism and relentless pursuit of wealth and power. Envy and selfish ambition are important engines behind much of modern advertising. We are enticed to want a larger, more expensive, and more powerful automobile than our friends and neighbors have. We desire to live in larger, more luxuriously appointed homes located in more upscale neighborhoods than other people. We receive numerous mail solicitations urging us "to grow our wealth" so that we will have investment accounts and stock portfolios that will be the envy of everyone we know. Unfortunately this only leads to greater envy, to greater anxiety, broken human relationships, and often to a financially dangerous level of indebtedness.

Textual considerations: I think that any explication of this text needs to take into account verses 13-15 of chapter 3, which begin with the contrasting of two kinds of wisdom—one which leads to sin and the other to righteousness. Concordia Self-Study Bible (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986) identifies wisdom as “not just acquired information but practical insight with spiritual implications” (p. 1898, n. 1:5). One kind of wisdom comes down from heaven; the other is "earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." Here James clearly makes Satan the author of our sins of envy and selfish ambition; this not only condemns our commission of these sins, but it also informs us that society is wrong when it whitewashes and justifies them.

In verse 16 James clearly singles out envy and selfish ambition as core sins that lead to disharmony and strife among people and as the forerunners of all other sins. Not only are these two sins the cause for all disorder, disharmony, and strife between people, but they are also the source of all other sins. St. Augustine said: "And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For 'pride is the beginning of
Verses 17 and 18 are a positive interlude in the text which calls attention to the good fruits of heavenly wisdom. Heavenly wisdom produces in us characteristics that are the very opposite of envy and selfish ambition, namely, “peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” These are qualities that are God-pleasing, that build and sustain good human relationships, that reflect the faith we treasure in our hearts and confess with our lips. These are qualities that Scripture attributes to God Himself.

In 4:1-3 James describes what life is like when we give vent to envy and selfish ambition. They produce interpersonal strife, inner conflict, murder, and covetousness. They destroy our prayer life because they motivate us to ask for wrong things and from wrong motives. They produce a strong desire for seeking our own pleasure.

In 4:4-5 James pursues the consequences of envy and selfish ambition even further. He warns that, if we become friends with the world, we become adulterers toward God. Ultimately these sins lead to hatred toward God and make us enemies of our Creator and of the One who reaches out to us with the Gospel of salvation. Finally, in 4:6 James offers us a ray of hope—“But he gives us more grace.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31) is the hope that God offers in His grace and mercy to people whose lives have been rooted in the sins that grow out of and mirror the pride of our first parents. Verse 6 ends in a brief but hopeful Law-Gospel message. The Law is that “God opposes the proud.” Envy and selfish ambition bring us under the judgment of God. The Gospel is that “[God] gives grace to the humble.” God is always willing to forgive those who repent and put away their envy and selfish ambition for an attitude and life of humility.

Suggested outline:

Invidia et Ambitio pro Ipso: Radices omnium peccatorum ceterorum

I. The sins of envy and selfish ambition destroy
   A. Our relationship with God.
   B. Our relationship with other people.
II. Envy and selfish ambition
   A. Continue the root sin of Adam and Eve.
   B. Become the root cause of all our other sins.
III. Because of His grace God still holds out open arms for the envious and selfishly ambitious.
   A. He offers us heavenly wisdom which can lead to God-pleasing attitudes.
   B. He still offers us the grace that is willing to forgive even the root sinfulness of those who believe and trust in Christ.
Thoughts on and from the text: It is important to locate this text properly. Clearly, it has no place in discussions of conversion nor within the context of righteousness coram Deo. One does not submit so that he might win God’s favor, nor does he make the first move so that God will be provoked to respond in kind and draw near to the one making the good effort. Neither is this a sanctified version of the great American heresy: “God helps those who help themselves.” James is exhorting his hearers to indulge in the good life: a life lived rightly related to God and to creation. Perhaps the most important word for the entire pericope is the first: hupotatge. The best single word definition is probably the submit of most translations. But the idea, of course, is that the hearer is to “order himself under” God. The hearer should recognize who he is and who God is and then put himself into the appropriate position: full, unreserved, willing, obedient submission. Let God be God. You be the creature. Resistance is futile...God always wins (Acts 26:14!). Worse, resistance is folly...the one who fights God forfeits the blessings of God. Only when life is ordered according to God’s plan do things work as intended. Submission to the Creator is the necessary component. Nevertheless, the rebellious at heart may still find solace—one may rise up in revolt against the prince of this world. But, this rebellion takes on an odd form...it looks like repentance. Hands and hearts need cleansing. Hands are filthy with sin and hearts are polluted with doubt and double-thinking. (One simply cannot have it both ways. Duplicity is never a virtue, but is always roundly rejected—even by heathen thinkers.) Such repentance drives out ill-timed frivolity and laughter. One last observation before the task of the sermon: James obviously has a remarkably high regard for the Law. Clearly, he assumes that his hearers will not regard the Law as enemy, but as guide. Christians are called not to judge the Law of God, but to do it. And, when the Law is obeyed, the neighbor is not judged, but served. Again, the message is consistent with the first portion of the pericope: God is God; you are creature. Remember where you belong and stay there.

Toward a sermon: Unconditional surrender sounds harsh and vindictive—especially for the one on the receiving end of the ultimatum. But, it is the driving theme of the text. Christians are called to unconditional surrender—surrender utterly devoid of any salvaging honor or self-preserving dignity. Only in unconditional surrender do creatures find their place.

Central Thought: Let God be God and the creature be creature: surrender to God.

Goal: To call the listeners to unconditional surrender of self so that they may begin to live according to His good will and so enjoy the delight of life lived His way.

Malady: Instead of resisting Satan, we resist God and His plans (Law), and so become judge, doubter, and self-sufficient lords of our lives.

Means: Real living comes when God is really God and when the creatures know it. This is the reality worked when God is at work to save.
Suggested outline:

"Unconditional Surrender"

Introduction: In military terms, nothing is as degrading and repulsive as unconditional surrender. We much prefer negotiated settlements that allow the defeated to save face and to save honor. But, God's terms are, indeed, unconditional surrender (and negotiating only serves to thwart the will of God).

I. At war with God—we try to save our own identities and preserve our self-sufficiency.
   A. We judge others in our human relationships.
   B. We judge the Law of God by questioning His will and desires for us.
   C. We judge God by doubting His word and promises.
   D. We grab the reins of our lives and hence fight on the side of Satan.

II. Peace comes only after surrender.
   A. Jesus battles and defeats Satan (the Good Friday-Easter event).
   B. Jesus defeats us (at the font we are drowned and raised in Him!).
   C. Daily we surrender as we return to the baptismal reality.
   D. Creatures who have unconditionally surrendered are unconditionally saved by God.

Joel Biermann

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Hebrews 2:9-11 (12-18)  
October 22, 2006

In some lectionary systems this is a Maundy Thursday reading, chosen because of the larger high priest-sacrifice motif running through the book at large. Yet in a sense this could be a lesson for every Sunday since Christ, the Great High Priest, intercedes not just every Sunday but constantly for us before the Father, offering up what is described in these verses. But He is not just the High Priest. He is our High Priest. The Gospel is in personal pronouns both for the original readers, converts from Judaism learning the faith, and for us.

At first glance, however, Christ looks anything but lofty, and Jewish readers steeped in the Old Testament would remember Deuteronomy 5: cursed is one who hangs on a tree. But the author to the Hebrews lays out a catechetical lesson on the Messiah's humiliation and our salvation, and how this redounds to His glory in the end.

Verse 9 speaks specifically of Jesus ("He saves") being made or put or placed a little lower than angels, put into the whole creation that was made for and by Him (v. 10). The anticipated Messiah is connected specifically with this person from Nazareth. Expecting someone/something else is futile. The verses say, in effect, here is true flesh and blood but also God Himself, human like us but also the author of all things including our salvation. The point is clear: there is no place else to look than to this Jesus.

This Jesus does not just sip when the cup of death and God's wrath is placed before Him—no casual sampling like a wine tasting, moving on to the next glass. "Tastes death" (v. 10) means He experiences it fully and completely. He knows what
it is like because He Himself has gone through it. More, He does it for every man, that is, for all from Adam on. That's the crux of what has been called the hinge of history. Christ, the pin, holds together two halves of a working hinge. The historical dimension is there in Jesus' acting in history. And the relational dimension is there in the “for us.” Though it sounds bizarre to those long in the faith, it's worth asking if Christ could somehow have simply lived, suffered, died, and rose for Himself. Why do that? It's impossible for us to say, but it's arguable that undeserving of death, His humiliation and exaltation could somehow be a way to highlight His own personal innocence, worth, and glory. If nothing else, that would underscore our deserving condemnation. But verses 10-11 tell us this was for another purpose, namely, to bring all with Him into the Father's presence. There is a historic dimension, true, but this is not simply a matter of history but of promise: God says this all is for us. The historical foundation, the historical half of the hinge has to be there, but things do not end there. We also have proclamation—promise: for us and for our salvation as we say in the Nicene Creed. That means salvation always remains a matter of faith. Yet it is not pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking, but it's a clear story/events that happened to which God has tied His promises. So, says verse 11, the One who sanctifies and those whom He sanctifies are all one. In other words, we are brothers when it comes to the Father looking at us, just as welcome as Christ Himself.

Don't fuss over just “brothers” being used. Consider the culture when brothers were the heirs. Certainly the author of Hebrews knows there are women in that number then as well, even as today. Be glad rather salvation is already there for all (objective justification to use the textbook term). Instead spend time and energy laying out the facts/promises that people might believe and be saved (subjective justification). And if *The Da Vinci Code* is still conversation material when this Sunday rolls around, here's a text full of counterarguments. The Christian message is not anti-female. It is not Gnostic secret knowledge but is open to all. It is not rooted in an attempt to flee this world and avoid creation, but it is deeply rooted in creation as Christ put Himself in it not to reject it but to redeem it. Christian artists such as Leonardo or Albrecht Dürer knew that full well, which is why they portrayed Biblical scenes with garb and setting of their own day: salvation was real life in the real world also in and for their day.

God is glorified in creation, of course. These verses, however, underscore an even greater glory, a recreation, a redemption. “Hallowed be Thy name,” we pray. Luther explained that in fundamental, simple terms. Hallowing happens “when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity,” the Word being the declaration of how we are and yet what God has done, Law and Gospel. Then “we, as children of God, lead holy lives according to it,” that is, we embrace the truth of Hebrews 2:9-11 (believe!) and then live as God intended. Nothing special to lift ourselves up when it comes to living in/by faith. Jesus had already put Himself down for us and then lifted us up. It's not “making holy lives” but “lead holy lives,” that is, a living out of lives already made holy. So, says verse 11, Christ already is sanctified/holy by virtue of who He is. We are sanctified/holy by virtue of what He had done and does. We can hardly add to that glory of Christ's saving and the proclaiming of the same. Instead, rejoice at being part of the family.

*Suggested outline:*
True Glory in and from the One Who Saves

I. Who He is.
   A. In His own right.
   B. For another purpose.

II. What He does.
   A. Humiliation and exaltation.
   B. For us—Gospel purpose and promise.

III. So what.
   A. No longer just creatures but recreated as brothers (and sisters).
   B. Thus true glory in/by Him while we live anew (vocations).

We tend to hear with modern ears: “justify,” for example, often means explaining or excusing who we are and what we have done with the expectation that the one wronged will say, “Oh, I see. Well, it’s OK. Just forget it.” But as Paul makes plain, God does not dismiss transgressions of the Law so easily. In fact, He does not dismiss them at all. In fact, it’s not simply what we’ve done but who we are (“by nature sinful and unclean, and so have sinned...”). For background, along with looking at use of pivotal words and phrases as found elsewhere in Romans and the New Testament, it might also be good to read Luther’s Preface to the Romans, where key concepts such as sin, grace, Law, Gospel are defined. Luther’s text is translated in volume 35 of the American edition from Concordia Publishing House and Fortress and is also included in John Dillenberger’s anthology of Luther’s writings, which many bought while at seminary and may still have in their libraries.

There is a temptation to construct a timeline when encountering talk about being under the Law and then living by the Gospel and faith, as if Paul were saying the Old Testament is a time of the Law but the New Testament is the era of grace in Christ. Yet “back then...but now” is not Paul’s chronology. Instead the apostle lays out salvation as a relationship just as valid and the same at any point in history. True, the Old Testament awaits the Messiah while we look back on Christ’s incarnation (synecdoche for all the Creed describes: conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...). But even as all have sinned and are lost, all are saved the same way, namely, by clinging to the promises of God. All from Adam forward had promises made to them in present tense, so to speak, and they were saved then and there by faith. We have historical hindsight, but it is also by faith in present promises that we are saved: Christ’s life, death, and resurrection (historical events) are for you (promise now). The same carries over to Sacraments: Baptism’s washing is for you as entrance into the kingdom; this bread/wine/body/blood is given and shed for you for forgiveness, life, and salvation. By faith is Paul’s clear message. By themselves, Israel failed, the Romans failed, we fail. By faith all live.

The “so that” said of the Law in verse 19 does not rule out other functions or purposes, but it makes clear that our efforts to use the Law to justify are dead even before arrival and bring only condemnation. Moving on, there is no finessing freedom by refining “Law” to mean only ceremonial or ritual rubrics that no longer hold sway. In the famous Reformation era exchange between Erasmus and Luther over...
the free or bound human will (Luther’s Bondage of the Will is in volume 33 of the
American Edition and in part in Dillenberger), Erasmus tried to argue that Ro-
mans taught limited freedom from the Law (release from Old Testament civil and
ceremonial requirements), while the moral law remained yet could be kept by our
free will enabled by grace. “Free” for Erasmus meant neutral, and faith then was
formed, finished, augmented by works of love, that is, by keeping the moral law. In
contrast, Luther proved to be the better reader of the text. Paul is clear: the Law
condemns. It always condemns those who stake their eternity on it even in part.
And there is no free will in the sense of being neutral. Our will is fallen. “Free” for
Luther meant “godly,” but there’s no getting there unless God alone does all the
getting. So when Luther rendered Paul’s Greek into German, he made sure people
got the point by voicing the “alone” there in Paul’s explanation: by faith alone, not
by works of the Law. For Luther (for Paul!) there are but two options: bound and
dead when on our own; free and alive, made so by Christ.

Erasmus’ position reflected the logic too common to theology of his (and our)
day: if God, who makes no mistakes, gives Law, then there must be some way we,
enabled or assisted by grace, have the freedom to keep it or giving the Law would be
hollow and God would look foolish. (If we don’t get to salvation that way, then we do
our part at staying there by working at the sanctified life. Check the “how to”
section at the religious bookstore.) “If this, then logically that” is an “ergo” or
“therefore” approach.

In contrast Luther simply says, read Paul’s text. God acts not because of us, for
when it is up to us the Law condemns—not just the Decalog given to the Jews but
Law summarized there yet really known to all: the natural Law written, despite
denials, into hearts. So God acts not because of us but in spite of us, moved by love
and grace. There’s no ergo here but “dennoch” in Luther’s German, that is, “never-
theless.” In his 1518 “Heidelberg Disputation” (American Edition volume 31 and
in Dillenberger) Luther concluded his theological theses by noting God’s love, un-
like human love, is not drawn to something because if finds something lovable
there. Instead, Luther argued, God’s love creates its object. God’s love creates
something—a clean heart and a right spirit—where there was nothing to love.
That’s dennoch rather than ergo. That’s the Small Catechism, Third Article: “I
believe I cannot by my own reason or strength...but the Holy Spirit has called me
by the Gospel....” That’s Paul and Romans 3!

The verb “justify is used more than two dozen times by Paul, and perhaps no
pericope is more famous than this classic text for Reformation Sunday. That’s no
reason to get triumphalistic, for the real victory is Christ’s. But it is reason to take
heart, to give thanks, and to spread the Word. Law and Gospel cannot be any
plainer than what is here.

Suggested outline:

By Faith Alone: Salvation and Freedom

I. Doing what comes naturally—ergo.
   A. The Law and logic: a losing proposition.
   B. No wonder: the flesh fails and blinds us to the fact.
II. Christ saving against all logic—dennoch.
   A. Divine vocabulary as voiced through Paul.
   B. From Romans to Reformation to today.