

# **FOUR SERMONS**

1792-1793

## **Isaiah 61:7-8**

10 January 1792

For your shame double shall come, and for disgrace they shall rejoice upon their fields; for they shall possess double in their land; they shall have everlasting joy. For I am the Lord, who loves justice and hates predatory burnt offerings; and I will bring it about that their labor shall be certain, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Nothing is more consoling, nothing more encouraging for our heart, than occupation with thoughts of the great attributes of God. They awaken our highest admiration, fill us with humility, and incite us to worship the greatness of the Creator. This reflection, moreover, carries with it the most penetrating motives for the joyful performance of our duties, since the violation of them is at the same time an offense against our greatest benefactor and ingratitude toward him. Finally, this reflection strengthens our courage in suffering, and teaches us to bear it patiently, since we know that it is God who lays it upon us, and that all our destinies stand in the hand of the one who intends the best for us.

Following the guidance of the words of my text, I shall speak of the justice of God: first, how it shows itself as punitive justice; and second, how it shows itself as rewarding justice.

I. God, our Creator, has written into our soul an indelible law, which, independently of our sensibility and of circumstances, is to be the fixed rule of our actions. He has accompanied this law with a feeling that rewards good actions, actions in conformity with duty, with satisfaction; but in the opposite case becomes unpleasant and disturbing to us. This voice of conscience itself acknowledges, when we violate this holy law, that we have deserved punishment, and places us in fear before the evil consequences that never fail to occur; or, even when we have nothing to fear from these, it causes us to have to despise ourselves in our own eyes.

Besides this revelation given to every human being, God has made his will known in many kinds of ways, and more determinately and distinctly. That voice of conscience often needs more urgent incentives in order to become stronger and more developed in the human being. Already in a more natural condition of humanity, sensibility rules so strongly that one gives little hearing to the inner voice of reason and does not allow it room to develop. Still more is this the case when, from youth onward, we are

accustomed to so many kinds of needs, when so much becomes indispensable to our life, which often has to be acquired with great exertion, often with infringement of the rights of other human beings. Against this reinforced power of sensibility, which has planted itself so early in the soul, the inner feeling of right and wrong would offer little resistance if another, more powerful dam were not set against that current. This dam is the legislation revealed to us by God, which he has made known to us partly in the Old Testament and still more purely through his Son.

This order agrees most exactly with what our conscience tells us; and we are so strongly bound to it that we feel ourselves absolutely obligated to observe it, or else to seem contemptible to ourselves and at the same time to be convinced that we have deserved contempt among others, God's displeasure, and the loss of our blessedness. At the same time, however, this legislation is so arranged that only in following it is the common welfare of the human race, as well as that of each individual, most securely attained; only in the best possible observance of these divine laws can the wish of every human being, to be happy here and once in that other world, be fulfilled. Conversely, the one who removes himself from the will of his Creator and from the noblest impulse of his heart has the greatest measure of misery to expect.

In accordance with his holiness and justice, God has ordered our nature and the arrangement of all beings outside us in such a way that punishment follows upon transgression. Even in and for itself, in accordance with this arrangement, immorality must punish itself. So many bonds attach us to this earth; so many kinds of enjoyment are prepared for our senses. But if the human being lets himself be bound too strongly by these bonds, if he gives himself over immoderately to enjoyment, he destroys his own machine, makes himself unfit and unusable for further and nobler pleasures, and draws upon himself weakness and pains in the body, which cast down still more the already disordered spirit. For this spirit is tortured by remorse and dissatisfaction, holds before him only the image of his own worthlessness, and torments him with the thought that he has drawn these sufferings upon himself, and that he has not merely let the time given to him for better occupations pass by unused, but has even used it to his own harm.

Other crimes degrade him just as much, make him lose the respect and love of other human beings, and deprive him of the good pleasure and blessing of God. These unhappy consequences are further increased by others. The vicious person often has the failure of his works and designs in common with the one who has good intentions in his efforts; but he lacks the latter's consolation of receiving compensation for fruitless labor, and besides this has the vexation of seeing his designs thwarted, as well as the fear of being punished in the future.

Finally, to those who, despite such manifold exhortations to the good, still did not walk the way that he has marked out for us, God has threatened special punishments, which, in accordance with his truthfulness, he will certainly one day carry out. And in this he acts all the more justly, since he never failed to provide opportunities, never failed to provide encouragements, to lead human beings to the good; since he had these threats made known beforehand, so that everyone knows what fate will strike him, and so that the excuse cannot take place that one knew nothing of the law and of the punishments attached to it.

As strict as God shows himself when he has cause to punish, so splendidly appears, II, his rewarding justice, which manifests itself as inexhaustible and infinitely great. God does not repay us according to our sins, but according to his great mercy. Faithful performance of duties, even if it is deficient here and there, God rewards already here with temporal happiness. The death of his Son has freed us from the fear of punishments to which every human being was always subject, because all have sinned; and so joy and contentment can now enter undisturbed into the heart of the human being who fears God and, in trust in him and his help, strives to do what is right.

In his undertakings, because he uses rightful means for them, happy success and blessing accompany him; or, if he finds that they fail, he is convinced that they did not accord with the plan of Providence, and that it was therefore more advantageous for the whole, and for him in particular, that they were omitted. His calm conscience lets him take part in pure joys and sweetens for him the enjoyment of them. The last change, before which all human beings tremble, death, is for him only a transition into a wider theater of the perfections of creation and of the greatness of the Creator, a transition to the further development of his capacities and to greater joys.

**II**

One of the most excellent merits and one of the most important benefactions of the Christian religion is this: that it has taught us to know true virtues and to distinguish them from false ones. All the noisy virtues with which human beings often dazzle others, often deceive themselves and their own conscience, lose their brilliance as soon as they do not flow from the right source, as soon as love of God and love of human beings do not underlie them. Only the human being who acts from such motives can be called a true Christian and acts in the spirit of Jesus' doctrine. There are many virtues that are easy to practice and that greatly strike the eye, but that lack precisely what is essential, what gives them value in the eyes of God, and what is often hardest to obtain: namely, a complete alteration and improvement of the heart. Only such a disposition, purified from the passions of sensibility, permeated only by love for God and his laws and by love toward all human beings, is capable of that virtue which is the object of our further reflection. Following the guidance of today's Gospel, I shall speak of conciliatoriness, and, first, of what character it must have if it is to be of the right kind; and, second, that we may be firmly assured of the forgiveness of our sins only if we possess this virtue.

You, God of love and of peace, fill our hearts also with your spirit, and make us ready and capable of fulfilling your commandment, which orders us to be forbearing toward the faults of our fellow human beings, to forgive those who offend us, and to love those who hate us. Amen.

Before we consider further what character conciliatoriness must have, let us first seek out the sources from which implacability arises. Self-love, which leads us into so many faults and vices, also has a special share in this vice. We see it often among human beings, often even among friends, that when one has offended the other and both would often be inclined toward reconciliation, pride and self-love allow neither one to take the first step. It is hard for the offending party, even when he already feels his wrong, to go to his brother and say to him: I have wronged you; forgive me.

Not seldom, however, we see that lower impulses, more dishonoring to the human being, have a share in this disposition of mind. Vengefulness, hatred, and resentment are often what make us wholly disinclined to forgive and close the heart against the voice of humanity, against the call of God. Human beings who have bitterness and hatred in the heart are as much to be pitied as those who have to associate with them. They embitter life for others, which they ought to make pleasant; they enlarge the sufferings that they ought to help one another bear and sweeten; and they make

themselves incapable even of enjoying with gratitude and gladness the good that God lets flow to them. Because inner peace does not dwell in their heart, they are also not inclined to do good to others. Benefactions shown to them by other human beings and by God, and examples of magnanimity, make little impression on them any longer; they do not move them to mildness and forbearance toward other human beings.

Such an example of hardness of heart is given to us by today's Gospel, where Christ presents to us a king who, moved by the misery into which strictness would place one of his servants, remits to him so considerable a debt, more than he could ever have expected from him. At most he could have hoped from the goodness of his lord that he would forgive him a part of the debt, or have patience with him for a time, until he had put himself in a position to discharge his debt without the ruin of his household. But this good fortune, instead of making him milder and more forbearing, has rather the effect that it makes him still harsher and more merciless. For immediately after this occurrence he meets one of his fellow servants, who owed him a small sum, especially in comparison with the one his lord had just remitted to him. He demands it from him with the utmost severity, and thereby plunges him and his family into misfortune. But he did not long enjoy the fruits of his hardness, the slight increase to his fortune. His other fellow servants, embittered by this sin, told their lord the incident, and he then punished him according to his deeds.

Let us apply this example to ourselves and see whether we too do not often find ourselves in a similar case. Every human being will admit that he too very often needs forbearance. No one will want to maintain that, despite every effort not to neglect any of his duties, he does not now and then fail in one way or another, that he does not offend others in anger, in the fire of a passion in which he is not entirely master of himself, or often merely from ill humor; that he does not sometimes use less active help in assisting an unfortunate person or in rescuing him from need than duty requires and his circumstances actually allow. Every human being will admit that he commits faults for which he needs the forgiveness of others; only pride and vanity can persuade him of the opposite. But if he wants to receive forgiveness from others, if he wishes that people not deal with him severely, then he too must be gentle and forbearing toward others, bear the faults of his fellow human beings with love, and gladly forgive them offenses.

Still more will he see that he has no need to be hard and merciless toward others when he considers how long-suffering and patient God is toward him. If we proceed honestly with ourselves, our conscience will soon teach us that we are not worthy of the manifold benefactions of God, that by our conduct toward him we have not deserved them, and that through implacability we act against both his law and the example he has shown in us ourselves, whose imitation ought to be our highest striving and our

highest pride.

An implacable disposition is precisely the opposite of the spirit with which true Christianity fills us, the opposite of the conduct by which, according to the express declaration of Jesus, his true disciples are to be distinguished. Love one another, he says to them; by this shall one know whether you are my true disciples. Such Christian love alone makes us capable of forgiving our offenders from the heart. Therefore, when human beings do us wrong, when they injure our honor or anything else that is dear to us, this Christian love commands us not to repay these offenses with offenses, even if we were in a position to avenge ourselves on them and to cause them as much harm as they caused us. The Christian suppresses the desire for vengeance, which is sweet only to crude human beings.

But if this forgiveness is to be complete, it is also required that in the sequel we retain no resentment in the heart against offenders; that, even if we cannot love them, we nevertheless do not hate them, but rather give them our compassion. Besides open vengeance, the requital of evil with evil, there is also a more hidden kind of vengeance, which is less dangerous for the one who practices it but often more injurious for the one against whom it is put into operation. I mean slander and calumny. Such a slanderer often gives himself the appearance of magnanimity; he says that he does not want to repay the other for what he has done to him, but in the meantime he treacherously tears apart the other's good name and often harms him more thereby than by an actual revenge. Yet only small and cowardly souls are ever capable of such a way of acting; and a human being who is serious about forgiving despises it, and, on the contrary, does good to his enemy, does not deny him his compassion and his help even when he sees him in misery. He is far from letting the unfortunate one who formerly did evil to him now feel that it now lies in his power to repay him like with like.

He is equally far removed from another false virtue, which often assumes the appearance of magnanimity and conciliatoriness: namely, when one forgives one's enemy, but at the same time hopes and wishes that, of itself, things will not go well for him in the future, and then misuses the expression from Holy Scripture that one leaves vengeance to God; and then, when a misfortune really does befall him, calls out to him: you once deserved that from me. Such delight in another's harm does not dwell in a heart improved by love of God. It abhors the actions of wickedness, but at the same time has compassion for the human beings who commit them.

The Christian is likewise forbearing toward such faults and infirmities of others as do not cause any personal disadvantage. He seeks, indeed, to improve them and lead them to the good, more by his example than by useless admonitions, and he is cautious in judgments. For he is conscious that the human being is too short-sighted to see through the heart of others,

that the omniscience of the Creator is required in order to estimate actions according to their true inner worth, and that to him alone are known all the springs from which the action stems, the powers allotted to the human being, and the circumstances that have a powerful influence even on the most tested person. Bad motives that we suspect in the actions of others not seldom flow also from our own evil heart, which is conscious that in similar cases it has acted with no better intentions.

Whoever is truly concerned with the good does not occupy himself with seeking out faults in others and raising an outcry over them, but reaches into his own breast, confesses his faults to himself, and seeks to improve them, bears the follies of others, and does not grow weary of forgiving them. It is not enough for one to believe that one has done something great if one overlooks something in the offender once or twice but becomes annoyed at often repeated wrong. When Peter asked his Lord whether it was enough if he forgave his enemy seven times, Jesus answered him: not only seven; you shall forgive him seventy-seven times. Your patience, your love for human beings, is not to be exhausted by offenses repeated even often.

But one might think: does the Christian religion then command that I should let my property, my honor, be stolen by others; that I should let myself be placed in poverty and want without stirring against it; that I should not in the least resist the wantonness and injustice that robs me of what is mine? Christianity makes too severe demands on us. One would misunderstand the meaning of Christ if one believed that Jesus demands this. On the contrary, we are to take care of what is ours, seek to increase it in a rightful manner, and protect it against unjust claims. But if what is ours is torn away from us, Christian love demands that in pursuing our right we go no further than just to recover what has been taken from us; in doing so we are to renounce every kind of revenge.

As strongly as the Gospel impresses forbearance toward the faults of others upon us, as little should we be forbearing toward ourselves. It could easily happen that one thinks: because one is forbearing toward others and overlooks faults in them, one may hope that others will have the same patience with us. Such sluggishness would directly oppose the striving to become ever more perfect and to make ever further progress in the good. Least of all can such a contract of mutual forbearance be entered into with God. The true Christian is to be strict toward himself but patient toward others.

The most sublime pattern of such conciliatoriness, of a heart wholly free from resentment and bitterness toward its persecutors and filled only with compassion and love for them, is set before us by Christ in himself. Sent into the world to teach his fellow citizens truth, to proclaim to them

salvation and eternal blessedness, he is rejected by them and rewarded with ingratitude. As fruitless as his efforts are among the greatest crowd, he does not grow weary of forgiving them what they had done against him. When he went toward Jerusalem to meet his sufferings, and saw before him the city sunk in ruin, what occurred to him was not what he had suffered in it and was still to suffer, but the innermost feeling of compassion made him shed tears of melancholy, not the tears that powerless anger weeps over it. With the deepest sadness he foretells the misery that would strike Jerusalem, without wishing it upon the city, without the least delight in another's harm, which many a person would feel if he foretold with certainty that his enemy would one day become unhappy.

When Peter believed himself strong enough to prove his attachment to Jesus even in suffering and unto death, his Lord foretold to him with love that in a short time he would deny him three times. And afterward, when Peter felt himself unworthy even of his master, Jesus did not withdraw his love and his trust from him, did not repel him as many a human being would have done with a friend who abandons him in need, but had compassion with him and with the weakness of human nature. Finally, Jesus gave the most sublime example of love toward his persecutors when, mocked, beaten, and then fastened to the cross, he surveyed the whole crowd of his murderers, their crude fury and their malicious joy over their victory; yet this sight brought no resentment into his heart. In the hour of death, when the human being often first lays aside the mask with which he deceived others throughout his whole life, he shows the same composure. Amid the most dreadful torments, which his very enemies had prepared for him, he prays to his heavenly Father, filled with compassion: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Let us, my friends, not have this great example set up for imitation in vain. Through sustained watchfulness over the stirrings of the evil inclinations of our heart, let us strive to bring it to that high degree of love and conciliatoriness which Jesus has displayed to us in the greatest purity: so that neither self-love and pride nor low vengefulness make us disinclined to forgive, and so that only benevolence and joy in the happiness of human beings fill our heart.

II. I have still to show in a few words that only through sincere conciliatoriness can we be assured by God of the forgiveness of our sins. When John appeared among human beings, he called them to do penance and to desist from sins. Jesus gave us a higher commandment. He taught human beings that it did not mean much to guard oneself against conspicuous sins and to prevent crude eruptions of passions; rather, in order to please God, he demanded a wholly pure heart filled with love. He gave us a new commandment, the commandment of love, which Paul describes in the spirit of Christ in 1 Corinthians 13. Only upon such love can

the true faith be grounded, which in childlike trust relies upon God in all destinies, expects all happiness from his goodness, and endures unhappiness with patience, because the thought gives it courage that this too comes from the hand of its Father and will turn to the best.

Not the faith that confesses Jesus only with the mouth and does not show the true fruits of faith, but only the faith that springs from love for him can become capable of the benefactions that God lets come to the human race through Christ. With this faith and this love, conciliatoriness is most intimately bound. It is the true distinguishing mark of right faith: how can one love the God whom he does not see, if he hates his brother whom he does see? How can love for God exist together with hatred and hardness toward human beings? In a heart filled with thoughts of God and with veneration of the most exalted being, low passions, delight in another's harm, and hard-heartedness can find no place. It regards all human beings as sons of one Father and loves them as its brothers; it is ready to have forbearance with their weaknesses and to forgive them their faults, and can then also be assured that Jesus will not leave unfulfilled the promises he has attached to such conciliatoriness.

If you forgive human beings their faults, then your heavenly Father will also forgive you your faults. Only then can we hope that God will hear our daily petition in the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our debt, as we forgive, etc. Here we pronounce our own sentence of condemnation, insofar as we ask God himself to forgive us our debts, while at the same time promising also on our side to practice love toward our neighbor. Let us, my friends, walk in this divine spirit, obey the commandments and the example of Christ, so that we too may have hope of taking part in the blessedness that he has acquired for us through his suffering and his death, and of entering the dwellings of peace, where we shall no longer have to forgive any wrong, any offense, but where so very much will first still have to be forgiven to us by God.

Through gentleness - practice only duty -  
you will overcome the enemy.

O do not rob your soul  
of this divine pleasure;  
then the Lord will also forgive you  
and be your Father and requiter.

Lord, out of obedience toward you  
I will not avenge myself;  
if I gladly forgive, then the good cause  
will speak for me.

The gentle spirit comes only from you;

through your spirit, Lord, give it to me!

### III

#### On the Feast of Philip and James, 1793

For a true faith, for a virtue as perfect as is possible for the human being, long practice is required: the corrupted heart of the human being; the strength of sensibility; the example of the apostles, whose memory we celebrate today. They had already enjoyed the instruction of Jesus into the third year, and could still put questions to him whose answer every one of us would know how to give to himself. The extraordinary character of the event: they saw him act like an ordinary human being; he associated with them as with his equals. They saw, to be sure, that God especially assisted him; they had an intimation of his future glory; but they had not yet experienced the resurrection of Christ, the capstone of the Christian faith. Even if we already know more about the person of Christ than the apostles knew during the conversation that we read in today's Gospel, we still may not believe that true faith consists merely in knowledge, or that if our memory knows more, our faith is therefore firmer, better, more living. True faith must rest upon this: that the Father dwelt in Jesus; and then we shall also perceive the genuine fruits of faith.

How true faith must be constituted: first, grounded upon the conviction that Christ was the true Son of God; second, the constitution of true faith is to be seen from the works that it brings forth.

You have placed us, O God, in the situation that from youth onward we are educated in your blessed religion, that from youth onward we learn that Jesus is your only-begotten Son, whom you have sent into the world to lead us along the way that leads to eternal life. Grant that this knowledge become living faith in us, that it become rich in good fruits. Give us, O God, your spirit, so that it may lead us into all truth and to all good. Amen.

I. Why are we called Christians? Not because we know that Christ is the founder of our religion, but rather, a) already for true knowledge of God it belongs to regard Christ in this way. This great institution and benefaction for human beings, a greater proof of his goodness, calls forth greater gratitude, greater love, a nearer connection with him. But Christ first opened access to God. Ephesians 2:18.

b) Christ demands of us that we regard him as such. He had to know best whence he had come, who the one was who sent him, and what commissions God gave him for human beings. Our trust rests upon his assurances. c) Yet not merely upon his assurance, but also, alpha, upon his

works, John 15:24. Sensuous human beings need them. Beta, upon the testimonies of the Father at his birth, at his baptism, also John 12:28. The greatest testimony is his awakening from the dead through the power of the Father, and finally his ascension.

II. This faith is not merely a matter of the understanding. a) It is not, however, an enthusiastic faith in miracles, as there are still people today to whom the passage in our Gospel has given occasion for this. Misunderstanding: it applies only to the apostles and to the first times of Christianity, when extraordinary institutions were needed for the spread of the Christian religion. Our passage concerns only the apostles, as also Matthew 17:19-20. But even in the times of the apostles such miraculous gifts were not always proofs of true faith. Matthew 7:22. We are so fond of clinging to the external; like the Jews we want signs and wonders, and do not press toward the spirit, toward the power.

b) What are the true fruits of faith? By their works, etc. Not praying or fasting; the Pharisees, Matthew 6:1-2; the intention to do good, not to pray in order to boast, Matthew 6:5; in general, not what is external. God looks upon the heart. The widow who put only one groschen into the treasury. Do we believe that we render God a service by this, that we glorify him? He remains as he is. It is easier to perform outward acts of divine worship, but not so easy to restrain one's desires, favorite inclinations, and evil lusts of the heart: corrupted nature; the flesh lusts against the spirit; the spirit is weak; the commandment of love.

c) If we make the effort, God comes to the aid of our weakness. He supports us with his spirit, which will dwell in us, so that we may be one with him, as Christ is one with him; so that we may become perfect as Christ was: friendship, freedom, and childhood of God.

## **Sermon on Matthew 5:1-16**

Third Sunday after Trinity, 1793

Our text is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, the epitome of the duties that Christ demands of his true disciples, in which he completely portrays the spirit by which a true fellow citizen of the kingdom of God must be animated. Besides this, most of Jesus' teachings, and the many beautiful parables that the Gospels have preserved for us, are directed toward the end of guiding his disciples and us to the right concept of the kingdom of God, and of educating and forming us into citizens of this kingdom. We wish to speak of the kingdom of God and, I, to show that it is nothing external but something internal; II, that Christ has opened to us the way to it.

But you, only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father, whom the power of God has raised to be Lord over all, ruler and king of this spiritual, this heavenly kingdom; and you, Spirit of the Son, establish your dwelling in our hearts, so that we may learn to despise the earthly and become children of God, heirs of the light. Hear our daily petition that your kingdom also come to us, and that your will be done on earth as it is done by your holy ones in heaven. Amen.

I. Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance, to announce to them that the kingdom of God was at the door. He came into the world to acquire for us entrance into it and to teach the way in which we are to become worthy citizens of this kingdom.

a) This kingdom is not a worldly state, as his disciples and contemporaries long hoped. But his whole doctrine is opposed to this; so is his servant-form. He emptied himself of the power with which he could have established one. Before Pilate he clearly declares: my kingdom is not of this world. What is held to be great in this world is not so in the kingdom of God.

b) Nor is it the visible church. We are all called Christians; the Christian religion is spread over the earth; today, on all pulpits of half the world, the doctrine of Christ is proclaimed, his name praised everywhere; before his majesty knees are bent and adoration is consecrated. Is this the kingdom of God? Are we citizens of the kingdom of God through community with this church, because we outwardly profess ourselves, are baptized in his name, say Lord! Lord!, and enjoy his supper?

c) The kingdom of God does not show itself in external ceremonies. The veneration of God does not consist in external divine service. Luke 17:20-21. Baptism, enjoyment of the Lord's Supper, confession with the

mouth do not yet make us children of God. The spirit of Christ must dwell in us; this spirit must teach us to pray to God. The letter kills, but the spirit makes alive. We must be born again through the grace of God, John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:22-23. Putting off the old human being and putting on the new, Ephesians 4:22-24. Putting on Christ, Romans 13:14.

When we are thus born of God, when we have become new human beings - that is, when we have died to sins, put off our evil habits, and become masters over our sensibility; when our heart is improved through love for God and Christ, so that we fulfill his commandments willingly and joyfully - then we are citizens of his kingdom. Then the kingdom of God has come to us; then we are also certain of our future blessedness. This spirit of God makes us spiritually poor and humble, peaceable, and comforted in suffering; for it assures us of the hope that we shall hereafter be comforted, that we shall be called children of God and shall behold God.

II. a) It is difficult. Whoever represents it to himself as easy does so either out of mere ignorance and negligence in the knowledge of our duties and of what is required for perfection; or often out of self-satisfaction and pride, not wanting to know the inborn corruption of the human heart, not wanting to know the power of the world and of its lusts, of habits and favorite inclinations, of the too strong attachment to the treasures of this earth. Matthew 19:24.

b) As difficult as it is, God nevertheless gives consolation, verse 26. If sin is powerful, God's grace is still much more powerful. God does not impose upon the human being more than he can bear. In Christ he has opened for us a source of salvation and blessedness. Christ has freed us from the bondage of the Mosaic law, and we may now expect from God not punishment but help and salvation. Yet through this we may not believe that we are already generally free, already raised to children of God; indeed, no longer under the service of the law, but very much still under the service of sin and the pseudo-service of words. We cannot free ourselves from it except through firm faith in the grace and promises of God, and in the merit of Christ.

This confidence, this faith supported by the spirit of God - yet the human being must not become inactive, but must never grow weary in the struggle against his self-love, his lusts and desires - only then can true faith arise, which is fruitful in good works, which makes the human being peaceable, humble, merciful, and comforted in suffering. If we have such faith, then we are children of the light; that is, we hate the works of darkness, the wickedness that has to conceal itself. We love truth in speech and action, which may let itself be seen openly and freely before everyone. Then we are sons of God, that is, we have childlike trust in him. Just as a child expects good gifts from his father, so we hope for all good from him and receive it

also from him.

Thus God's spirit dwells in us; thus we are citizens of the kingdom of God, that is, citizens and fellow participants of that kingdom where God, as the highest lawgiver and ruler, is venerated by us in spirit and in truth: not by shouting, Lord! Lord!, but by imitating him according to human weakness; by being diligent in good works, letting our light shine among human beings, and rendering to him the most pleasing divine service, namely, that we are good and upright. Then we are also heirs of his blessedness, which he has prepared for all those who leave the broad military road of vice and enter his kingdom through the narrow and struggle-filled gate of Christian virtue, and who are well rewarded in heaven.

How blessed is the one born from you,  
who receives from you a new heart,  
and, chosen by you as your possession,  
renounces sin and thinks divinely,  
and lives divinely! How blessed is  
your child, your possession,  
the true Christian.

Textual notes preserved from the source section:

1. The first sermon is dated 10 January 1792 and is introduced by Isaiah 61:7-8; the source apparatus records numerous cancellations and later insertions in wording, including details in the biblical citation and in the outline concerning punitive and rewarding justice.
2. In the second sermon, the source apparatus identifies several revisions concerning the opening description of true and false virtues, the wording of the prayer, and the treatment of self-love, revenge, slander, judgment of others, and Peter's question about repeated forgiveness.
3. The third sermon appears in a more schematic homiletic form than the first two. The source records references to John 15:24, John 12:28, Matthew 17:19-20, Matthew 7:22, Matthew 6:1-5, and the commandment of love.
4. The fourth sermon is headed as a sermon on Matthew 5:1-16 for the third Sunday after Trinity, 1793. The source apparatus marks revisions around the definition of the kingdom of God as inward rather than external, visible, ceremonial, or merely ecclesiastical.
5. Bracketed words in the translation indicate supplied words where the German text itself, or the critical source's indication, requires an implied term for readable English.