

Second Sunday in Lent

March 12, 2017

LUTHERAN

LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the
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March 9, 2017 (Thursdays at 10:00 AM)

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44130

*(Presented as a part of the bible study/worship weekday service (currently on Fridays at 7:00pm) in a house church
setting, a newly formed assisted living site and used by Lutherans in Africa.*

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<http://www.lovethepic.com/image/59223/john-3:16>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 708 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 429

“Lord, Thee I love with all my heart”

“**Schalling, Martin**, son of Martin Schalling, sometime pastor at Strassburg (after 1543, pastor at Weitersweiler, near Saarbrücken), was born at Strassburg, April 21, 1532... He matriculated, in 1550, at the University of Wittenberg, where he became a favourite pupil of Melanchthon,... When, in 1568, after the Elector Friedrich III., of the Palatinate, had adopted Calvinistic opinions as to order of service, &c, all the Lutheran clergy who would not conform were expelled, Schalling had to leave Amberg... But when the clergy of the Oberpfalz were pressed to sign the Formula of Concord, Schalling hesitated to subscribe, holding that it dealt too harshly with the followers of Melanchthon. For this action he was banished from the court at Heidelberg; and after being confined to his house at Amberg, from 1580 to March 1583, he was finally deprived of his offices...

Though the above notice might seem to indicate that Schalling was an ardent polemic, yet this was not so. He was naturally a moderate man, and a man of peace; but during the period of 1550 to 1600, Protestant Germany was rent asunder by all manner of controversies, in which hardly any one with a conscience or an opinion could avoid being involved. Only one hymn by him is known, but that justly ranks among the classic hymns of Germany. It is:— **Herzlioh Lieb hab ich dich, O Herr.**” http://www.hymnary.org/person/Schaling_MM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK6TdX7QME4> “Heirs of the Reformation: Treasures of the Singing Church”, Concordia Publishing House/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyjzXDjUNeA> “An introspective and powerful arrangement by Sandra Eithun of the well-loved hymn for 3–5(6) octave handbells, with options for handchimes and trumpet.” Concordia Publishing House

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

Genesis 12:1-9; RCL (Revised Common Lectionary), Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 (Next Week: Exodus 17:1-7; RCL, Exodus 20:1-17)

“The promise to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12:1-4 marks one of the most dramatic transitions in the entire story of the Old Testament.

The Transition from Genesis 1-11 to Genesis 12: Deep Background

In Genesis 1-11, God struggled with a repeatedly rebellious, violent, and corrupt humanity as a whole (Eden, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, the tower of Babel). As a result, God resolves to try a new strategy by focusing on one particular family among all the families of the earth. However, as God often does, God decides to work through a most unlikely pair: old Abram and Sarai (later “Abraham” and “Sarah”--Genesis 17:5, 15)...”

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=870 [Dennis Olson](#)
Charles T. Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

The Call of Abram

12 Now the LORD said^[a] to Abram, “Go from your country^[b] and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you

a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”^[c]

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak^[d] of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

- a. [Genesis 12:1](#) Or *had said*
- b. [Genesis 12:1](#) Or *land*
- c. [Genesis 12:3](#) Or *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*
- d. [Genesis 12:6](#) Or *terebinth*

“Something that all the cultures of the world share is ancestor stories.

Some within the United States can trace their ancestry back to those who came originally from England. For others, including me, family ties go back to ancestry with roots in parts of the world such as Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Stories of how our ancestors struggled, survived, and overcame make up the core of our personal and communal histories. In the biblical text, the traditions of the ancestors depict how the mothers and fathers of Israel formed what would eventually emerge as the tribes of Israel. Throughout these stories, the biblical narrators recount how God blesses these family lines and in the process extends that blessing to the peoples of the earth.

The calling of Abram/Abraham is a fulcrum text, serving as a transitional point between what comes before it with what follows...

The final part of the Lord's promise states that the families of the earth will be blessed through Abram (12:3b). This suggests that God seeks to bless the many peoples of the world through a single family. God's benevolence is not only intended solely for the advantage of one chosen family. God makes promises to Abram and his descendents with the result that all of the peoples of the earth will benefit.

In Lent, a season usually marked by repentance and humility, we are reminded this week of God's unconditional promises that are directed to us not through our own merit. God blesses us with the remarkable gift of life, even when our present circumstances point to states of barrenness. God's blessing is specific enough to address our particular conditions and universal enough to extend to all peoples of the earth. Like Abraham, all that is required of us is to "go" (Genesis 1:4a) as the Lord asks.”

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=36 **Frank M. Yamada**
Director of the Center for Asian American Ministries, McCormick Theological Seminary,
Chicago, IL

Psalm 121; RCL, Psalm 22:23-31 (*Psalm 95:1-9; RCL, Psalm 19*)

"Psalm 121 is identified by its title as "A Song of Ascents."

The significance of the term "ascents" is not certain. The same root in Psalm 122:4, however, refers to a ritual journey to Jerusalem (see also Ezra 7:9; Psalm 24:3). Therefore, the heading of Psalm 121 may indicate that the psalm was used by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three yearly festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16). The psalm is located in a group of psalms (Psalms 120-134) placed together for that purpose. In the lectionary Psalm 121 is paired appropriately with texts that recall and comment on Abraham's journey from his home and family to the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17). Like Abraham, the psalmist expresses trust in the protection and care of God on the journey...." (Continued after reading)

My Help Comes from the LORD

A Song of Ascents.

121 I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
 he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
 the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
 nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
 he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep
 your going out and your coming in
 from this time forth and forevermore.

"Psalm 121 is liturgical in character, as indicated by the shift in voices throughout the psalm. Verses 1-2, and possibly verse 4, seem to be voiced by a pilgrim, who perhaps represents the whole company of travelers. The remainder of the psalm may be the response of a priest if

the setting is departure from the temple. Or the response may be the words of a travel leader, or one who is remaining at home, if the setting is the initial departure for Jerusalem. Regardless of the exact orientation of the travelers, the main issue in the psalm is the safety God provides through constant attention to the faithful pilgrims....

Psalm 121 is well-suited for the joy of "pilgrimage" through Advent on the way to Easter. Such a journey should be made in full recognition of false gods all around who compete for our devotion. Psalm 121 highlights a point made many other places in Scripture, that the Lord is "Maker of heaven and earth," the only one who gives and sustains life. The Lord is therefore the only one worthy of devotion."

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=916 **Jerome Creach**
Robert C. Holland Professor of Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary,
Pittsburgh, Penn.

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17; RCL, Romans 4:13-25 (Romans 5:1-8; RCL, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

"...An important part of the Lenten journey is learning to reject old patterns and old ways of being that keep us from accepting God's gift of grace and new life. But before we reflect on one such challenge, Paul's challenge to the law, let us first think about how difficult and challenging it is to change something more mundane; something like crossing the street.

If one was raised in North America one learned, as a child, to cross the street looking first to the left, and then to the right. Why? In North America cars, by law, drive on the right hand side of the road. So, when we travel to the British Isles, something that is second nature to us -- crossing, can become dangerous and life threatening. When stepping off the curb we must first look to our right lest we are hit by oncoming traffic. In London they recognize this is a major problem for foreign visitors. If you look down while standing at an intersection you will often see stenciled, in large white letters, the admonition "LOOK RIGHT."

The old way of thinking about Abraham, Paul tells us, is to think that Abraham was honored and praised by God by his works. Paul wanted people to look in a different direction. Look not to the works of the law, but look to faith..."

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=913 **Lucy Lind Hogan** **Hugh Latimer Elderdice Professor of Preaching and Worship, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.**

Abraham Justified by Faith

4 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in^[a] him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

⁹ *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* ¹⁰ *How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* ¹¹ *He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,* ¹² *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

The Promise Realized Through Faith

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

- a. [Romans 4:5](#) Or *but trusts*; compare verse [24](#)

“...Paul has devoted the first three chapters to prove that the whole world is guilty before God. He has most recently made the point that “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (3:20), that “none are righteous” (3:10) and that “all fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). But God in His graciousness provided justification through Jesus (3:26). Therefore, the only way to be justified in the eyes of God is by faith (3:28). To prove his point⁵ Paul shows that there are no exceptions and shows that this is not a new concept by giving scriptural examples from the lives of Abraham and David.

The Example of Abraham (4:1-5)

In first century Judaism, Abraham was considered to be a model of obedience to God. For example, 1 Maccabees 2:52 says, “Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and was it not reckoned to him as righteousness?” And Josephus says, “He was a man of incomparable virtue, and honored by God in a manner agreeable to his piety towards him.”⁶ The Jews looked at [Gen. 26:5](#) as further proof because in that passage God promised Isaac further blessing “Because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge.”⁷ Paul knows that in the Jewish mind, if anyone was justified by works, it was Abraham. If he can prove that this is not so, it will further

his argument. Therefore, Paul shows that even for Abraham, who lead an exemplary life and for whom there is no scriptural record of heinous sins, that justification was still by faith. Paul gives two arguments,⁸ one logical and the other scriptural, concerning Abraham's justification.

The Logical Argument (4:2)

His logical argument picks up on the concept of "boasting" in 3:27 as he asks "if Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to boast about." This would seem to imply that Paul's statement in 3:27 is not true, but he is doing two things here. Paul first defeats their argument by pointing out that even though one might boast before other men, it is unthinkable that one would boast before God. Second, one should recognize that this is a hypothetical argument.⁹ Paul is not actually agreeing that Abraham could even boast before men. He is simply saying that, even if Abraham were justified by works (but he was not), he still couldn't boast before God. Some argue as to whether or not Abraham could boast before men or not. This is not the real issue. Abraham was *not* justified by works, so he could not boast before anyone, man or God.¹⁰ The issue is that faith excludes boasting because the one with the faith doesn't do anything. Works is antithetical to faith.

The Scriptural Argument (4:3)

The scriptural argument comes from [Gen. 15:6](#) which says, "and Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." This further validates Paul's point that we are justified by faith because Old Testament scripture says that Abraham was also justified by faith. However, one must recognize that the scriptural argument would not be convincing to the Jewish audience because they typically saw Abraham's faith as just another work.¹¹ Consequently, Paul turns to an explanation of the difference between faith and works to validate his use of [Gen. 15:6...](#) <https://bible.org/article/justification-faith-case-abraham-and-david-romans-41-8>

"The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 3rd Chapter" **"Glory to You, O Lord"**

John 3:1-17; RCL, Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9 (John 4:5-26 (27-30, 39-42); RCL, John 2:13-22)

"The obvious challenge in preaching this reading may seem to be how to say anything fresh, meaningful, and new about the world's most famous Bible verse.

The less obvious, but I would argue more important, challenge is not allowing the world's most famous Bible verse to cloud the significant and even scandalous message of Jesus that a close reading of the larger passage yields...

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=903 **David Lose** President,
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Penn.

You Must Be Born Again

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³ Jesus answered him, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again^[b] he cannot see the kingdom of God.**” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You^[d] must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind^[e] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “**Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?** ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you^[f] do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^[g] ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[h]

For God So Loved the World

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world,^[i] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

- a. [John 3:2](#) Greek *him*
- b. [John 3:3](#) Or *from above*; the Greek is purposely ambiguous and can mean both *again* and *from above*; also verse [7](#)
- c. [John 3:6](#) The same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit*
- d. [John 3:7](#) The Greek for *you* is plural here
- e. [John 3:8](#) The same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit*
- f. [John 3:11](#) The Greek for *you* is plural here; also four times in verse [12](#)
- g. [John 3:13](#) Some manuscripts add *who is in heaven*
- h. [John 3:15](#) Some interpreters hold that the quotation ends at verse [15](#)
- i. [John 3:16](#) Or *For this is how God loved the world*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

The story of Nicodemus in John 3:1-17 is a take-off from the last three verses of chapter 2. In 2:23-25 John says that many in Jerusalem believed in Jesus because they saw the signs that he was doing. For John, this type of faith falls short of what genuine faith ought to be. John goes on to say that Jesus did not entrust himself to such believers "because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone" (2:24-25). We need to keep this summary statement in mind as we look at the story in chapter 3.

The first statement of Nicodemus is a confession that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God because "no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" (3:2). On the surface this may sound like authentic faith. But if the previous statement in chapter 2 is kept in mind, what Nicodemus says falls short of genuine faith, as John sees it. The reader is alerted at the end of chapter two as to how to interpret the following story and the opening words of Nicodemus.

The significance of miracles for faith is raised over and over throughout the Gospel of John (see 4:48; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 12:37; 20:29). New Testament scholars by and large agree that the Gospel writer used a collection of the miracles of Jesus as a source. The Gospel takes the miracles of Jesus seriously and recognizes their function in pointing people to Jesus. That is why John consistently uses the word "signs." Their value lies not in themselves but in what they do with regard to one's relationship to Jesus. However, mature faith is much more than this rudimentary level of believing in Jesus because of the evidence of miracles. The story of Nicodemus invites the reader to grapple with the issue of genuine faith that goes beyond mere belief on the basis of miraculous signs...

The Greek word *anōthen* [Greek: ἀνωθεν] can mean either "from above" or "again." Nicodemus takes it to mean "again," whereas Jesus has the first meaning in mind as is evident from the ensuing conversation...John is fond of having Jesus say something, only to be misunderstood by the hearers, which then provides an opportunity for Jesus (or John) to explain the true meaning of what was said. Nicodemus grossly misunderstands what Jesus has said. Yet what Nicodemus says is utterly true on another level. One cannot start all over again...

In v. 11 there is a significant shift to plural pronouns, "we" and "you." "Very truly, I tell you [singular], we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you [plural] do not receive our testimony." It is no longer Jesus and Nicodemus that are in conversation, but two groups of people. In fact, the plural "you" had already been used in v. 7: "You must be born from above." This clearly implies that Nicodemus stands for a whole group of people, as pointed out earlier...

Verse 13 is a continuation of what was said in the previous verse. The Son of Man is the only one qualified to speak of heavenly things because he is the only one that has descended from heaven and has ascended into heaven. The past tense of "ascended" indicates that here we have the voice of the early church's witness concerning Christ rather than the voice of the earthly Jesus.

Now, in verses 14-15 we have a shift of chronological point of reference. The lifting up of the Son of Man is in the future. In fact, the reference is to the lifting up of Jesus on the cross just like the serpent that was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness. How did this shift occur from verse 13 to verse 14? How is it that the ascension into heaven in the previous verse becomes ascension on a cross?

Here we encounter a crucial point in Johannine theology. For John the ascension of Jesus onto the cross is part of the ascension into heaven. The two are really one event. The death of Jesus becomes itself part and parcel of glorification and exaltation. Again, John uses the double meaning of a word to make a profound theological point. To be lifted up means to be exalted on high, but it also means to be lifted up on a cross. The purpose of Christ's being lifted on a cross is for people to have eternal life in him. The prepositional phrase "in him" could conceivably go with "believe" or with "have eternal life." The latter may be the better choice

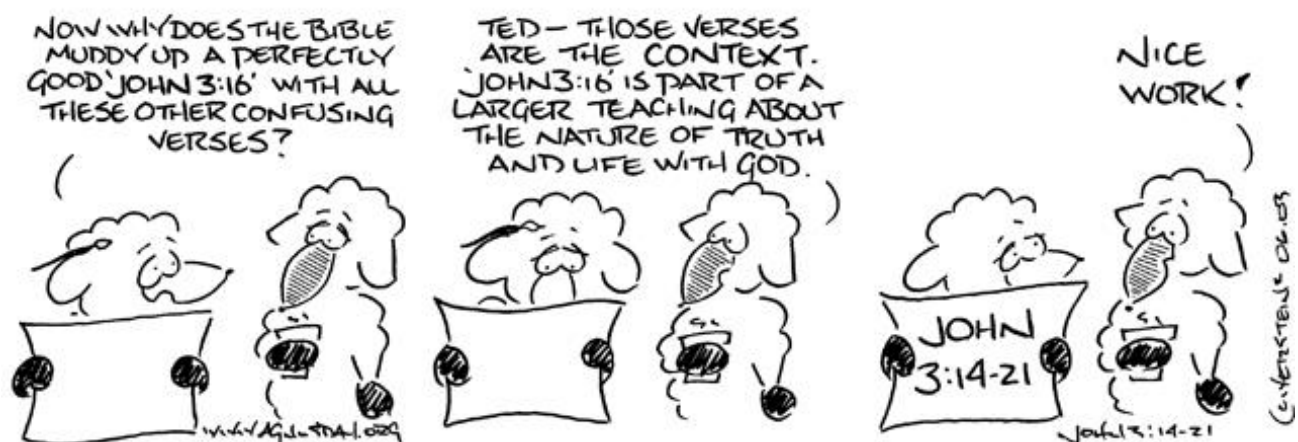
because the preposition here is not the Greek *eis* (into), which is usually used after "believe." Instead, the preposition is *en* (in), which John never uses after "believe" other than here.

John 3:16-17 clearly states that the purpose of God's sending his Son was not to condemn the world but to offer it eternal life. Thus the incarnation, life, death and exaltation of Christ are all rooted in the love of God. Some of the more extreme atonement theologies with heavy emphasis on penal substitution would find no support in John. In John the death of Jesus is never viewed as God's outpouring of punishment on Jesus in our behalf, but as a revelation of God's love for the world and the glorification of the Father and the Son (John 17:1).

This may almost come across as universalism, that is, the whole world will be saved, particularly in view of the statement in verse 17 that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." However, the next statement (v. 18) makes it clear that salvation is conditioned upon believing in him...

Finally, it should be noted that the dialogue between two individuals, Nicodemus and Jesus, almost imperceptibly turns into a dialogue between two communities. At least it is clear that the voice of the Christian community that cherished and was nourished by the traditions stemming from Jesus is being heard in the Gospel of John. It is not clear where the words of Jesus to Nicodemus end and where the commentary on those words given by the Gospel writer begins. The Johannine community has been so infused, shaped and formed by the life and words of the incarnate Word that a clear distinction between the words and thoughts of Jesus and the words and thoughts of the Johannine community can no longer be made. This Christian community exists and derives its identity by the power of the incarnate Word whose presence continues through the activity of the Spirit.

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