

afterwards

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE RIGHT WAY.

A Sermon.

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 17TH, 1859, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” Isaiah xlv. 2.

To whom, then, were these words spoken? They were spoken to a man who stood out for the freedom of the Israel of God, the national freedom, I grant; but still, Cyrus, in thus standing out for the national freedom of the people of God, is a type of him who came to lay down his life for the freedom of the Israel of God, and who still pleads their cause, and who governs all worlds and all things for their freedom. Every Christian man is brought to stand out for the freedom, wherewith Christ hath made him free.

And then, look at the “I will go before thee.” Who is it that thus speaks? It is, my hearers, the everlasting God; it is that blessed God who had no beginning, who is self-existent, and who has no end; that God who is in all the attributes of his nature, incorruptible; that God that is immutable in all the counsels of his will; that God that fills immensity; that God who hath loved his people with an everlasting love, and brings them to stand out for that freedom that Christ hath obtained. He it is that saith, “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” Oh, if the Lord be pleased this morning to enable me so to speak upon the several parts of this Scripture, and you so to hear, as to enter into the spirit thereof, and to receive a little of the advantages thereof; I am sure you will retire from the house of the Lord, blessing his holy name for the infinity of his condescension, and for the greatness of his mercy, and for the assurance of the care which he will take of you. “I will go before thee;” here is the promise absolute; none can hinder him. And, “I will make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass; and I will cut in sunder the bars of iron.” And we ask here, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

We may notice our text under three main departments. The first, is that of *direction*: “I will go before thee.” The second is that of *safety*: “I will make the crooked places straight.” And the third is that of *freedom*: “I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.”

The First is that of *DIRECTION*.—Direction as to which way we are to go; and, I shall notice this direction under two departments; first, that which is *essential*: and, secondly, that which is *circumstantial*.

I. I notice, then first, that which is *ESSENTIAL*. Hence, the Lord Jesus Christ, is said to be our Forerunner. We must begin with this essential matter; or else we shall not be right in the circumstantial department. Now, how is the Lord Jesus Christ our Forerunner? We cannot get before him; we must follow him; we must come after him. Let us see the way in which he is our Forerunner; so that we can walk only in that way which he, as our Forerunner, hath made. Well, he is our Forerunner in having gone to the end of the law. He has obeyed and magnified God's holy law; he has established the precept

of God's eternal law for ever; he has gone before us; and therefore, his obedience, his righteousness, becomes the way in which we are to look for the Lord's mercy, the way in which we are to look for peace, the way in which we are to look for acceptance with God. He is also our Forerunner in having gone before us in enduring the penalty of the law. He hath taken that hell which belonged to us; he hath taken the curse which belonged to us; he hath endured the wrath which belonged to us; he hath endured and swallowed up in victory that second death, as well as the first, which belonged to us. He has therefore, gone before us; so that the law, (he having gone before us,) is dead to us, and we are dead to that; the law cannot find us now, for we are no longer under the law; the law has its dominion, but the law has no dominion where the righteousness of Jesus Christ is; and therefore, if I am where that is; if I am a believer in Christ, in his righteousness, brought to renounce all creature doings, and looking for justification by that righteousness which justifies from all things, there is not a single thing ever connected with you before called by grace, or since, or ever can be, that is displeasing in the sight of the Lord, from which this righteousness doth not free you and justify you; and therefore, being where this righteousness is, you are where the law has no dominion. The law may look for you in all its own dominions, but it cannot find you, you are not there; and if the gospel look for you in its dominions, it will find you, and pretty often does find you too, but always finds you to say something kind to you, to minister some mercy to you, some comfort to you, some promises to you; and even when it finds you to minister some gentle reproach or rebuke to you, it is only just to touch you in some tender place to make it sore enough to make you cry out for the Lord's healing balm of mercy and goodness to be manifested unto you. Therefore, being brought to where Christ's righteousness is, we are no longer under the law's dominion; the law may look for us long enough, but we are not found there; we are not there, because we are where Christ's righteousness is; and therefore, when the law looks for us, the first thing it would find would be Christ's righteousness; and the law must put a negative upon that righteousness, which standeth, as it were, between us and the law, and between us and all the threatenings of the Bible—the law must put a negative upon that righteousness before it can put any negative upon us; that must be removed out of the way before it can reach us. Oh, how true the words of the apostle are, that "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and who walk not after the flesh." Now the flesh there means the fleshly mind, the carnal mind; and the carnal mind is enmity against God; and therefore, the meaning is, those that walk after the flesh, having enmity against this way of acceptance with God; but those that walk after the spirit of faith in Christ's righteousness, after the Spirit of love to God in and by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Again, as I have said, he is our Forerunner also in enduring the curse; so that as his righteousness becomes the way of justification, so his precious blood becomes the way of escape from the wrath to come: his blood becomes the way of access to God: "we have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies." Here then it is we are brought into that path which leadeth unto everlasting life; we are brought into that path where God is well pleased with it, and with us; we are brought into that path where the Holy Spirit is the free Spirit, where the Holy Spirit can and does carry on his work in our hearts, and open up to us from time to time those mercies that we need. Now, if the Lord then does go before us, if he be our Leader, our Teacher, this certainly is the path in which we are spiritually walking by precious faith in Christ as our Forerunner.

But he is also our forerunner in the resurrection. He has risen from the dead; so that his resurrection becomes our way of rising from the dead: and

we can no more remain in the grave beyond the appointed time, than he could remain in the grave beyond his appointed time. There was an appointed moment for him to rise: and there is an appointed moment for his people to rise: and his resurrection is the way of their resurrection. Then he is also our Forerunner in his ascension. He ascended up into heaven; and we can no more be kept on the earth, than he could be kept there. He ascended up far above all heavens; and he says, "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." Then again, he is our Forerunner also, in glorification. There he is in glory: and there he will be for ever. So that he becomes the way from under the precept of the law; the way from under the curse of the law; the way out of the grave; the way to heaven; the way of fellowship with God; and the way of eternal glory. "I will go before you." If the Lord be our leader, this is the way that we shall be brought. "I am the way," saith Christ, "the truth, and the life." Now, these then are the persons to whom such a promise as this belongs. "I will go before thee." But if I am going another way, contrary to Christ's righteousness, the Lord will not go before me in that way. If I am going some other way, and not by the atonement of Christ, the Lord will not go before me that way. If I am going some other way, seeking for eternal life not by the resurrection of Christ, then the Lord will not go before me in that way. If I am expecting to ascend to heaven some other way, and not by the ascension of Christ, then the Lord will not go before me. If I expect to be glorified in any other way than by Jesus Christ, then the Lord is not going before me. But if all other ways are to us stopped, and we see there is no other way, and we are brought into this way, then the Lord has done great things for us.

But I notice this also *circumstantially*. "I will go before thee." First, in greatness of power. If you are in Egypt spiritually, as the Israelite was literally, however great the power may be that may be needed to deliver you from your difficulty, from your bondage, and from your trouble, there is that power. You cannot need more than almighty power; you cannot need more than that; and if you do need almighty power, and nothing but almighty power, you think, can lift you out of your wretchedness, and put you where you would be put, in safety, into the presence of God, by Christ Jesus; then there is almighty power to do that. Perhaps you will say, Well, that is very true, but that does not exactly meet my case; mine is a case not only for power, but for something else. Well now, what is that something else? Really I know not how to express it, only by saying that mine is a case that requires an infinity of mercy. All the better; I am glad of it. Then you mean to say that you are such a poor, depraved, sunken, helpless, guilty, filthy creature before God, that you cannot think for a moment that there would be, strictly speaking, any limits to that power that would bury all your faults, lift you out, and make you an heir manifestively of God, and a joint heir with Christ. Well, there is an infinity of mercy; it is the mercy of the everlasting God; and that mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. Oh, then, our faith may be small, but that does not lessen his mercy. When Peter was walking on the sea, when he began to sink, his faith was very small; but the Saviour did not say, "O thou of little faith, as thy faith is so small, I cannot exercise great power; if your faith had been great, I could have exercised power enough to have saved you." No! Peter's smallness of faith could not hinder or limit the power of Christ, for the Lord reached forth his hand, caught him, and he went into the ship just as safely as though his faith had been ever so strong. So, bless the Lord then, if we have faith but as a grain of mustard seed, and ten thousand tremblings, and doubtings, and fearings with that, yet if we are brought into the way—for there is the turning point—Christ Jesus is our Forerunner; if he be our Fore-

runner, then, if we are brought into that position, he will not plead against us with his great power, but he will put strength in us; he will not plead against us with law, and justice, and holiness; for all these perfections are met by what the Saviour has done; but he will magnify in us the greatness of his mercy; and he will become so glorious in our eyes that we shall cease to wonder at those exclamations in the word of God, "Who is a God like unto thee; pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; and passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?"

Again, he will go before us where it is needful to strike terror into the enemy; so that those whom we tremble at, those that we fear, those that are fierce, like roaring lions, the Lord can go before us, and make the Canaanites as still as a stone; he can make their hearts to melt, he can take all their courage away from them; so that while to-day they meant to do us some great injury, to-morrow they shall tremble at the thought, and be ready to fall down before us, be ready to come and ask our pardon. Now then, taking this view of the matter, does it not give propriety to the Saviour's words, "Fear not them which kill the body?" that is all they can do, and that only if permitted to do it by the Lord; and if your adversary should be permitted to go thus far, it shall work together for your good, and your strength shall be equal to your day. "I will go before thee." Again, he will go before us sometimes by causing us to do some good thing; causing us to do some good deed, causing us to do some good action; causing us to do something that is good. And perhaps at the time we are doing it, nobody is with us; we are despised and hated; and perhaps almost in danger of our lives; we have done it, feeling it to be right; and there the matter drops, and we hear no more of it. Bye and bye, for this is a world of circumstances, a certain circumstance occurs. I want, says Haman, to get rid of the Jews, and of this Mordecai; I want to get rid of them all. Now, if I can find some way in which I can accuse this Mordecai to the king; if I can get from Mordecai's history some evil that I can bring against him before the king; then my dominion will be complete. Ah, the Lord foresaw this; and therefore five years before this very time, Mordecai knew that certain men intended to take away the life of the king; and Mordecai made this matter known; and just as Haman was very busy trying to bring Mordecai down, and to destroy the Jews, the Lord steps in; and one night the king could not sleep, and he commanded the Chronicles to be brought and read; Mordecai's good deed comes up. Now what do you think ought to be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Oh, says Haman, I know what ought to be done; thinking of course that he himself was the man—"Go and do even so to Mordecai." Oh, how the Lord went before him! Here was Mordecai's good deed; man would have left it in the dark; but the Lord brought it to light; and perhaps at the time he did it there might have been persons around that said, Why, Mordecai, what a man you were to stop those men from taking the life of Ahasuerus; why we meant to take the life of this king, and get a better one. But the Lord went before him, and brought that good deed to light; and thus he shews that he has his eyes upon his people; and will take care so to go before them as to appear for them in ways of which they never dreamt. Well, but say you, suppose there is some evil deed; suppose there is some evil deed imagined, for instance, and that will pass current; what do you say then? Say? Why, our text has no conditionality in it.—"I will go before thee." Now there was an apparent evil in Joseph; an imagined evil, and that report no doubt gained currency, and stood for truth perhaps all Joseph's days. Potiphar thought it was true, and Joseph was cast into prison, and of course under universal reproach, and perhaps all his days it was a report that passed current for truth, for Joseph was a good man, and must have been hated; and they were glad, no doubt, to get hold of something. But the Lord knew it

was false, and so the Lord was with Joseph, and the Lord went before Joseph, and Joseph came to all the honour, to all the glory, and all the advantages which the Lord had predicted he should come to. But then, say you, suppose there be real evil; what do you say then? Why, our text cannot be altered then. No. Ah, there are two books to read, friends; there is the book of the law, and the book of the gospel. In olden time, when the kings of Persia, studied the law rolls, they found that Jerusalem had been a rebellious and a bad city—and so it had, but not in their sense of the word;—now, they said, We will stop them; they shan't go any farther. But the Lord says, "I will go before thee." And it did apparently stop them; and they were stopped for some years. But by and bye came another order of things; there was a decree by Cyrus—who had studied the gospel roll—that that city was to be built; and therefore, the Persians were obliged to forsake those books where the people had faults, and come to those books where the people had no faults. Just so it is now; if you go to the book of a man's life, you will find faults enough there to stop him; if you go to the book of the law, you will find faults enough there to stop him; but go to the book of the gospel, where he is complete in Christ, where his sins are forgiven, blotted out, put away, and gone for ever, you cannot stop the man there; no; there it is the promise still stands, "I will go before thee;" that is, in that gospel way to which we have already referred. Thus, then, if the Lord want a good deed in the future, he will lead us to perform that good deed, and make use of it to our advantage another day; and if the Lord intends that grace should reign; instead of reigning by power, should more conspicuously reign by pardon; then he will leave his Noah's, and his David's, and his Peter's, to some evil or another, and he will make those evils become the means of magnifying his grace, and shewing the firmness of his promise—"I will go before thee." The promise cannot fail, let circumstances be what they may. We are all creatures of circumstance; and I do not know wherein the sovereignty of God appears more than in his permissive dealings with his people. There is not anything can shake this promise as long as the foundation on which it is laid stands good; and that Foundation is Christ; there is not anything can shake this promise as long as the Saviour's atonement is what it is, as long as his righteousness is what it is, as long as his name is what it is, as long as God's immutable covenant is what it is, why, if I had the natural gifts of some men, that I could speak out more clearly than I do, I would go ten thousand times further in gospel matters than I now do; and therefore, let me say once for all that the Lord goeth before his people as seemeth good in his sight; the essential that we have shewn, and the circumstantial, that we cannot always precisely enter into; suffice it to say, let your circumstances be whatever they may, you are where the Lord intended you should be. How can that be, you say, when I have made a mistake, and have come the wrong way. You perhaps have come the wrong way for some of your fleshly comforts, but you have come the way the Lord intended you should. Oh, I don't believe that; because I don't believe he was the author of that silly step that I took. Well, he knew that you would take it, and he could have hindered you; but the reason he did not hinder you was, because he had some use to make of it; and I have an idea, too, of one or two of the uses he had to make of it; one was just to shew you what a poor creature you were; instead of priding yourself upon your wisdom and goodness, you are obliged to say, what a fool I am; what a silly thing I am. And does that make you think less of God's truth? Well, no, say you; I should never have thought so much of it if I had not been knocked about so much here and there. Ah, it has done you good, then; the Lord will go before us all our days. Neither the cloudy pillar, nor the manna left the Israelites until they were safely landed in Canaan. So neither

the truth, nor the sustaining power of the Lord, will leave us all our journey through, but will be with us. The Lord enabled you, Christian parents, to pray for your children; and to say, the Lord go before me, and before my sons, and my daughters. Lord, guide them to thyself; pluck them, if it be thy pleasure, as brands from the burning; thou hast gone before me; now, Lord, go before them; for they have in them the elements of their own destruction; and without interposing mercy, destruction must be their lot. How can we then taste the joys of heaven, how can we share in the mercies of the blessed God, without feeling for those that are near and dear to us, and praying for them? And then, next to that, we pray for the extension of the same wondrous gospel, that the Lord would bring our fellow creatures to walk in the same heavenly way, to have the same heavenly good, the same heavenly assurance; for what is everything earthly in comparison of the precious promise that the Lord will go before us; that he will never leave us, nor forsake us? His blessed name, his loving kindness, and his glory, will be a substitute for everything within the range of mortal existence; when time itself shall grow old and die.

II. But I notice the next part of our subject. "I will make the crooked places straight." I think there are four things meant here. Now a place or path may be crooked by being *undulating*. And so the Christian may go dangerously low or dangerously high; and then how is the place in this sense to be made straight. I can point out to you some that have gone down fatally low; and others that have gone up fatally high. The Christian may go dangerously low; therefore he wants something to keep him from that. Jehoshaphat went down dangerously low when he went into affinity with Ahab. Oh, what an awful circumstance was that; what an instructive circumstance; could Jehoshaphat have seen the results—his own sons murdered—he was gone out of the world—but when he descended to Ahab, he was then dangerously low. The Lord, you see, will fulfil his promise; but still he will make some apparent exceptions, as kind of admonitions and cautions for his people. Oh! to go down into carnal affinity with the ungodly, for the sake of a little worldly gain; to go down into affinity with the wrong systems of religion, just for worldly applause and worldly gain! What matters it what enemies you have? Never try to overcome them in that way; try to overcome them by abiding by the truth, and praying to the blessed God to appear for you, that your conscience may be kept, that you may not follow Jehoshaphat, thus to go down dangerously low; not fatally. Jehoshaphat did not go down fatally low to himself; because there is nothing that can be fatal to a real child of God; though many things may be amazingly injurious. Then there is another, that went up dangerously high; a good man too; and who was that? Uzziah, king of Judah, a good man; but somehow or another he had forgotten God's order of things; and he said, Well, I have prospered on every hand; I think now I can burn incense as well as the priests can. What! You take the priest's place? They are placed there by the authority of the blessed God; and as a type of that which is far dearer to God than anything else. Tarnish the priesthood, and you tarnish the whole church. I don't wonder at the indignation of the Most High against Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, against Eli's sons, and against Eli himself, for permitting that priesthood to be corrupted. The eternal purity of the church lies in the eternal perfection of the priesthood of Christ; and therefore if, the very type be corrupted, it is an insult upon the Most High God; you cannot be too careful in this matter. Uzziah was puffed up with pride, he forgot himself; rushed in to offer incense; the priests stood out for God; the Lord smote the king with leprosy; lifted up to his own destruction as a king, he could be king no longer; and so he dwelt in a several house, as a leper unto the day of his death. The Lord,

therefore, I say, makes things straight; but he allows these apparent exceptions, to shew that we should not go down into wrong affinities; nor be lifted up with pride to assume that which belongs to the Lord.

Well, say you, where is the preservative? Jesus Christ. Stand fast simply upon his finished work; and that will guide you the right way. Do not go down beneath that, and then you will go into no wrong affinity; do not go up above that, and then you will not tempt the Most High to smite you with leprosy; but simply stand fast upon the holy level; for his work is the level; it stands level, equal with all the demands of law, and justice, and holiness; stand there, thou standest upon level ground; it will keep thee from going down into beggarly affinities, and keep you from soaring up to dangerous pride; for thou art safe there, and nowhere else.

Again, a path may be crooked not only *undulatively*, but also in a *zig zag* way; it may take you too much to the left, or too much to the right. And so if you go too much into the world, you may depend upon it you will catch a good deal of its leprosy; ah, that you will, if you go needlessly into it; if you make a worldly man your pleasure-companion, all that will strengthen the propensities of the flesh—which, as a Christian, you wish to be weakened. That is going too much to the left. Then you may go too much to the right: you may have a legal bearing; you may look to the law, and say, Well, I will not go to heaven entirely by grace; I think there is a little business to be done on Sinai; I will see if I can find a gold mine, or a silver mine; see if I cannot enrich myself by my own doings, by my own works. That is going too much to the right. I could mention many more instances of going too much to the left or to the right, but time forbids me so doing. Where is the preservative? Christ Jesus. Wherever I cannot go with his name, I have no business to go; wherever his fear is not, there I have no business to go, except in my lawful avocations—that is another thing. On the other hand, if I go among work-mongers, law-mongers, where the Saviour's work is accepted in the letter, but denied in the spirit, then I am too much to the right. Let me keep in the straight path—Jesus Christ; he is the straight way; everything is made straight enough in him; it is by him that I am so salted as to be kept from the world; by him I shall be preserved from legality. Christ is the way: by him crooked paths are made straight, raised high enough, made low enough, and made straight enough.

Thirdly, a way may be crooked in a *round about* sort of way. You may go into a road, not knowing it to be round, and after you have walked on for some time, you find you are just where you were when you set out. So it is with the religions of the world: they go the round of duties, round and round, round and round, from year to year; and after twenty years, if you talk with them, you will find they are just where they were when they set out: they know no more of their state as sinners now than they did then; they know nothing of Christ, nothing of the covenant, nothing of his truth. That is a round about way, it is not a progressive way; that is a religion that leaves you where it found you. Whereas, if you are one of those to whom the Lord makes the way straight, that is, Christ is the way, he is the straight way, he is not a round about way, he is a progressive way; if we are brought to him, there is a growing in grace, there is a going forward, there is a going from strength to strength; and you will look back, and have mercies to recount, deliverances to recall, and cause to praise the name of the Lord, who has brought you on so far; so that your religion does not leave you where you were, where it found you; it found you dead, it makes you alive; it found you in the dark, it brings you into the light; it found you guilty, gives you pardon; found you condemned, justifies you; found you a captive, sets you free; found you afar off, brought you nigh; found you in the congregation of the dead,

brought you into the congregation of the living; found you under the law brings you under the Gospel; found you on Sinai, brings you to Zion; found you one with the devil, dissolved that bond, and has made you one with Christ, set your face Zionward; so that now you are progressing into the deep mysteries of a vast eternity. "I will make the crooked places straight;" not too low, nor too high, nor too much to the left, nor too much to the right, but in the midst of the path of judgment; and not a round about path that will leave you where it found you.

Lastly then—I must say no more; I must say nothing this morning of the gates of brass, of the bars of iron; there is quite enough there to occupy us a little longer another Sunday morning. Lastly, a crooked way will also mean a *deceitful way*; a way that you think is right, but the end thereof is death; a way that you think will gain you many advantages, but, alas! alas! brings you directly into the power of the enemy. Therefore, it is a promise against such delusion. Oh, how many have been fatally deceived here! Cain thought his way was the right way; he brought the fruits of the ground; came without sacrifice for sin; but the end was delusion and death. Judas thought his was the right way to be a happy man; for if I can get plenty of money, I shall be happy; but he dropped into the hands of the adversary; the devil himself was so anxious to get Judas into hell that he would not let him live; he went, under the pressure of Satan, and hanged himself. A crooked way, then, will mean a delusive way. Oh, what numbers, at the last great day, of that legal spirit, legions of which we have, will plead their own works; "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; have we not cast out devils; have we not done many wonderful works?" That's the way we have come; our own doings. And yet these very persons belonged to the mystery of iniquity; they belonged to a system of error that obscured and opposed God's truth. Therefore the Saviour saith, "I never knew you;" you never knocked at my door; you were never shut out as hopeless sinners; therefore, never knocked at my door; I never knew you; you never sought for the pearl of great price; you never felt your poverty deep enough for that; I never knew you; you never cried out for my righteousness; I never knew you; I have had no acquaintance with you, you have never had any real sympathy with my real people. You have prophesied; yes, and what have you prophesied? You have cast out devils; cast out the saints, if you like; that's what you have done. Oh, but we have done many wonderful works. Yes, they are wonderful indeed, and the world wondered at them, but I know all about them. "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." All of you, therefore, that belong to duty-faith churches, and free-will churches, you are workers (spiritually) of iniquity to a man; because you are advocating error that is part of that great mystery of iniquity appearing in all its gross forms in Rome. All these systems are nothing else but the branches from the system of Popery; you are workers of iniquity to a man. Why, it is the last thing these people would have thought the Saviour would have said of them. We workers of iniquity! Why, we have walked consistently, and have always contended for piety. We workers of iniquity! Why, we have always told people that unless they were very pious in their lives they could have no hope. Why, we have prophesied in thy name, and have cast out devils; we hated these Calvinists, and cast them out; we have done many wonderful works. Never knew you, never had any acquaintance with you at all, nor you with me. "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

Oh then, looking at a crooked way, meaning a way of deception, how sweet the promise, "I will make the crooked places straight." How does he do it? Simply by making Jesus Christ all in all; making Him the Way. Oh, if thus brought to Him as the only way, thou shalt not be deceived, thou shalt stand fast in the truth all thy days; and thou shalt have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.