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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

JOHN 15:1-9

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The Gospel for the Day suggests preaching materials for each of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. This text makes no mention of the Holy Spirit. The preacher should beware of extracting comments of this text on Father and Son and then filling in material on the Holy Spirit from elsewhere in order to maintain the Trinitarian theme. Rather should he endeavor to find and to preach the central accent of this text, and in so doing unfold the doctrine of the Trinity in the practical rather than the systematic sense, namely, as a summary of the functioning of God toward the Christian believer.—John 14:31 b may suggest that the words of this text were spoken by Jesus to the disciples upon leaving the Upper Room and on the walk to, or upon arrival at, the Mount of Olives. The analogy of the text might well be suggested by vineyards through which they passed.—The preceding chapters in the Upper Room had discussed the importance of Christian love in the disciples and between them and had unfolded the picture of the redemptive work of Christ. This chapter undertakes to accentuate a new theme: their faith and discipleship must remain firm in the face of persecution and trial (vv. 18-27). This firmness of faith is to be not simply an unwavering subscription to propositions of teaching, but an "abiding," staying and permanently residing, in Christ Himself for the sake of producing fruit.—Vv. 1, 5, 8 stress the purpose of the believer's relation to Christ, namely, to bring forth "fruit" for the heavenly Father. This fruit is equated with the discipleship of Jesus (v. 8) and with "glorifying" the Father, i. e., rendering His life and purpose palpable in the behavior of the Christian believer. Also previous chapters had described particular elements of the discipleship, i. e., loving the brother (13:34); keeping Christ's commandments (14:21; 15:10); joy (15:11); and 15:27 speaks of their witness to Christ. The latter involves being unspotted by the world.—The great analogy of vine and branch, Christ the Source and the Christian fruitful as he lives in Christ, is exploited in several directions. Behind

the whole is the thought that the fruit that the Father wants and that Christ died to procure is produced actually *by* the disciples; the fruit grows on the branches (v. 2). But that they be fruitful, several things must happen: they must cling to the vine so that their life is the vine's life (v. 45); the branches must be cleansed of twigs that sap the life away from the fruit ("now ye are clean through the Word, which I have spoken unto you," v. 3); and branches that do not bear fruit have to be trimmed away altogether (vv. 2, 6). In the context of the prospect of persecution, the lesson is apparent: some of the fiery trial is for the purpose of stripping away the deadwood.—The analogy is carried through with little interruption; thus the redemptive work of Christ, by which He becomes the Life of the branches is not discussed (except 15:10 b). But He does make one break into the literal (v. 7). He wants to make clear that the life which He seeks in His disciples is the inner life, that of the inner motives, will, ambitions, desires, aims—the life of the spirit. The great result of living in and through the life of Christ is that the spirit becomes altered to conform to the will of God; the surface symptom of this fact is answered prayer. But to make that inner life possible, the words of Christ must be the steady diet of the Christian; he must continue to ponder the things which Christ had been discussing with the disciples, namely, His redemptive task (cf. 1 Peter 1:23—2:2). The spirit of man thus shaped and directed into the will of God is the fruit of the Spirit of God (cf. Luke 11:1-13; or Gal. 5:22-26).

The Day and Its Theme.—The Swedish Lectionary suggests as theme for the Day "The Spirit and the New Life." *Parish Activities* suggests for the month "Conquering for Christ," with special reference to the college years. The latter may enter into this sermon by way of partial application, but the nurture of the life of all levels and age groups of the congregation becomes the function of the parish sermon. In view of text and Day the central thought of the sermon may be phrased: "Keep the Word of Christ in you so that the Spirit make you fruitful for God."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—It is fruit for God, the "fruits of the Spirit." These involve love to the brethren, steadfast faith under trial, sturdy Christian witness.

Sin Diagnosed.—The obvious is to delineate barrenness, the lack of the above fruits. But parallel evils suggest themselves: the assumption that Christianity is mental assent rather than the fruit of life, mental subscription to teachings rather than living in Christ as

a climate and atmosphere of existence; the flabbiness to wander into fruitlessness and apathy instead of abiding in Christ.

Opportunities for Gospel.—The one direct cue in the text is v. 9, and it is ample: Christ loved us by going to the cross for us; He held back nothing. The great and unique function of this text is in the domain of applying this redeeming love to ourselves, "continuing in it." That means holding it before ourselves as the principle of life just as much as the sap from the vine is the principle of life for the branch and its fruit.

Illustrations.—The text is one great illustration, cannily constructed to stress the organic and real rather than the merely factual and mental. Similar techniques in describing the essential relation between Jesus' redeeming work and the Christian life today are John 6:35 ff., and the Gospel for the Day, especially John 3:14, 15 and its description of faith as the life-and-death hold of the believer on the redemptive work of Christ.

Outline

Be Fruitful for God

- I. The fruit of life — it glorifies God, it is discipleship, God plans and wants it.
- II. The requisite for life — abide in Christ, cling constantly to His atoning work.
- III. The safeguard for life — have Christ's Word abide in you, the Word of His redemptive work; thus the inner life is filled with the Spirit, and we are clean.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 12:13-21

The Text and Its Central Thought.—To a multitude numbering in the thousands Jesus had been endeavoring to teach deeply spiritual lessons concerning hypocrisy, the fear of God, God's loving care for His children, and the need of confessing Christ. But one man in the crowd had no ear for the spiritual lessons because he was troubled by the material problem of an undivided inheritance and sought to enlist the help of the Lord in his cause. Instead he was rebuked, and the Lord used the occasion to relate a telling parable against the sin of greed, from which this man suffered. The parable of the Rich Fool

shows a successful man, probably an intelligent and hard-working farmer with an unusually big crop and a wholly selfish, materialistic outlook on life. The decision to pull down his barns and to build greater was not in itself sinful. But the words, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid by for many years," etc., show a man who foolishly puts his trust in material things. The folly of this man and of all who are like him becomes apparent when in that very night he is called to face his Maker, while he leaves his treasures at best to a wiser wife and children, at worst to quarreling or laughing heirs. Not having amassed the true riches of faith and good works (Matt. 6:19,20; 19:21; Luke 12:33,34; 16:9; 1 Tim. 6:17-19), this man is naked and bare indeed as he comes before his Judge. He is held before the eyes of men as a warning example in the words: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Gospel of the ancient church for this Sunday is Luke 16:19-31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. It warns, as does our text, against materialism and misuse of earthly possessions. The Introit for the Sunday, as well as the Collect, voices the believer's trust in God, while confessing the weakness of our mortal nature and imploring the help of divine grace.

The monthly theme in *Parish Activities*, "Conquering for Christ in the College Years," may in some congregations suggest a sermon especially for youth in school, calling particular attention to the materialistic trend of much of modern education and showing what, according to Scripture, the true treasures are and how education may be used to become rich in God through unselfish service to God and man.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To lead men from the materialistic attitudes of our flesh to a truly spiritual attitude with consequent proper use of their possessions.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Materialism and greed to be shown for what they are—idolatry and folly; the prevalence of these sins, and their threat also to Christians; the bitter fruits of these sins, both in this life and in the hour of death; by comparison the glory of a life dedicated to the service of God and of the neighbor.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Since the text is essentially an exposure of sin, the Law will be very prominent in the sermon. The conclusion will call for a strong admonition to repentance, with accompanying promise of forgiveness through the merits of Christ, who has atoned for all sin, also for the sin of materialism and greed.

Illustrations.—Perhaps the frightful frequency with which high-powered executives, who have given their all to making money, die of heart attacks in their forties or fifties. Biblical illustrations: Laban (Gen. 31:41 ff.); Nabal (1 Sam. 25:3-38).

Outline

Take Heed and Beware of Covetousness

- I. It threatens all men, also Christians.
- II. It is really a form of idolatry, claiming for earthly things the love and trust which belong to God alone.
- III. It cheats people out of true enjoyment here on earth and finally out of eternal life.

Springfield, Ill.

FRED. KRAMER

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 9:51-62

The Text and Its Central Thought.—There are two distinct stages in the teaching ministry of Jesus. 1. To show that He was the promised Messiah. 2. That He must go to His crowning by way of suffering and death.

The second emphasis followed Peter's confession. Thereafter "He began to show His disciples how He must suffer." Until now He had not spoken of His cross, His resurrection, His second advent. From now on the strong accent in His teaching was the cross and all that it meant.

Our Lord's face was set "like flint" toward Jerusalem. He knew the bitterness of the cup He would have to drink. There was no other way to conquer sin and death. Satan's chief fury is on the other side of death. That dark empire Christ had to attack and destroy.

He saw the dawn of victory on the other side of death. Never in the New Testament did Jesus refer to His death apart from His resurrection. He was going to the cross, but the crown was beyond it. He saw "of the travail of his soul . . . and was satisfied" (Is. 53:11). "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). He saw you and me and all members of the white-robed congregation.

The disciples were confused. Their love was deep, their understanding shallow. The zeal of James and John was not "according to knowledge." They were undercutting the basic spirit of Jesus. He had come to save life.

Albert Schweitzer finds the term "reverence for life" adequate for his social, religious, ethical philosophy. Jesus went much deeper. He knew the kingdom of God could be built only on the defeat of sin, death, hell. 1. In this way He gave life and made it abundant. 2. This was His "reverence for life."

Three men petitioned formal discipleship. Our Lord demanded of them everything that He was Himself already doing. In these demands we have an interpretation of His face set toward Jerusalem: 1. Detachment from all that hinders the Kingdom. 2. Abandonment of the nearest earthly tie when in conflict with the Passion and purpose of the cross. 3. No looking back. He never looked back. He set His face to go until He came to conflict, death, and victory.

The Day and Its Theme.—Trinity season exhibits the secret of a living, working, loving faith. Epistle accent on this Sunday is that God is Love, and He who claims to love God will prove it by loving his brethren. The Gospel, of the rich man and Lazarus, mightily supports this thought. Collect: We pray that the Holy Spirit may give us "will and deed." This is discipleship, to have the will to serve the Savior in faith and love and to implore the Holy Spirit to give us the power.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To show how steadfast and devoted Christ was to His purpose of winning forgiveness and life for us. To show how His reverence for life and dedication to a cause is the spirit of true discipleship.

Our Savior went "all out" for us. He gave up everything which men ordinarily hold dear, all that we might have life in Him. Now that we have life in Him, we are to have His reverence for life. There is a zeal for His honor which involves His dishonor, for it is against His primary purpose, which is to save life.

If life in Christ is first, then let it be first. Our Savior calls for men with a single view, a single eye, loyalty to a single goal. Life must have one supreme goal. No man can travel in two directions at the same time. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Having gained the crown, He looked down upon a church with pity: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). It still makes Jesus sick at heart when a person, having seen the end of both paths, chooses to walk on both.

Cost of discipleship is high. "Whereas the early Christians heard the call of Christ as the summons of the Commander to Battle, the popular trend of our day is to invite men to church as a salesman calls to a bargain." Ralph Sockman. Someone expressed it this way: "The trend of the modern church is to take out the cross and put in cushions."

Sermon Illustrations.— Those who are following the theme suggested for this month may be able to use this point: A college president stated recently: "It is estimated that every college graduate is worth from \$500,000 to \$10,000,000 to his nation," If he is worth that much to his nation, he, as a believer in Christ, is worth infinitely more in the greatest work on earth, the building of the Kingdom.

Outline

What the Kingdom Means

- I. Suffering and death of the Son of God
 - A. A steadfast move toward the cross
 - B. Confident faith in the outcome
- II. A great reverence for life
 - A. The wrong zeal for God's honor
 - B. A rebuke that taught a deep lesson
- III. A costly discipleship
 - A. Detachment from earthly and attachment for heavenly values
 - B. No earthly ties to be higher
 - C. A single devotion to a supreme purpose

Los Angeles, Calif.

CARL WALTER BERNER

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 9:9-13

Text.— Our text is one of a group of stories which trace the growing opposition to Jesus and His work. In the foregoing pericope Jesus' critics challenge His right to pronounce pardon; in our text they criticize His choice of candidates for pardon.— The story of the call of Matthew (Levi in parallel accounts) is remarkable for its brevity. It is all the more remarkable if Matthew himself is regarded as the author. Not a word concerning his thoughts, his feelings, his psychological conditioning before the call, or his inner reactions after the call. Nothing but the royal choice and the kingly call itself. This and the significant notice that Matthew was a "publican." The whole world shall know what Matthew has experienced in his own person: that "Jesus sinners doth receive." The significance of the call of a publican was not lost on Jesus' contemporaries. It awakened the

calculated response: joyous acceptance of Jesus by "sinners," indignant rejection by the "righteous." Jesus defends His actions by quoting a familiar proverb (v. 12) and a familiar but neglected passage of Scripture (v. 13). Like a physician, Jesus goes where He is needed. Not desert, not merit, not His own pleasure call Him—but need. And in His fellowship there is healing. Jesus' eating with sinners is a sign of the forgiveness. In entering into fellowship with sinners, Jesus removes the distance that separates them from God. He forgives sin, so that the sinner becomes righteous, the publican becomes an Apostle. Jesus quotes Hos. 6:6, as if to say: "Learn the principle on which God acts—free grace. Then go and do likewise. You criticize Me, but so *you* should be." If the Pharisees' service of God calls for sacrifice without mercy, then Jesus' service calls for a mercy that urges to sacrifice, *self*-sacrifice and ultimately the acceptance of the cross. "To ask whether the saying of our Lord (in v. 13 b) implies the existence of any 'righteous' who need no repentance is a foolish pedantry which misunderstands the character of the context, in which both 'righteous' and 'sinners' are ironical echoes of the terminology of our Lord's opponents" (Rawlinson). Jesus' apparent refusal to call the "righteous" is itself the final and strongest appeal.—The central thought of this text would be: "Jesus illustrates and defends His right to be known as the sinners' Friend."

The Day and the Theme.—The regular Gospel for the Day forms a twin text with our passage. The parables of the "Lost and Found" illustrate the fact of Jesus' friendship with sinners; the fact interprets the parables. In Jesus, God is seeking the lost.—The call of Matthew is a supreme illustration of the "Prevenient Grace of God," which is the suggested theme for this service. There was nothing in Matthew to motivate Jesus' choice, nothing but the negative fact that he was a sinner in need of grace.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To prompt the hearer to identify himself with the "sinners" of the text in order that the call of Christ may be heard anew and lead to the obedient fellowship of faith.

Sin to Be Diagnosed.—Our text furnishes one of the best commentaries on the terms "sinner" and "righteous." At the time of Jesus, as now, these terms were used to pass moral judgment. Sinners and righteous were identifiable as such by their moral behavior. By His acceptance of the "sinners" and His scorn of the "righteous" Jesus reveals the true religious significance of these terms. In doing so He upsets every accepted scheme of values. Before God all are sinners, the respectably religious as well as the flagrantly immoral. Before God

any man can become righteous through fellowship with Christ. The "sinners" are adjudged righteous, not because they are sinners, but because they know they are and welcome the forgiving fellowship with Christ; the "righteous" are adjudged sinners, not because they are righteous, but because they think they are and refuse to submit to Christ's judgment. — This analysis suggests a theme for the sermon: "Christ's Judgment of Saints and Sinners."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel. — This story is an epitome of the Gospel: God's gracious approach to the sinner in Christ, the unmotivated love which chooses sinners and calls them to faith, the life of obedience in fellowship with Christ. Because the Gospel content is so "obvious," the preacher risks the twofold danger of a calculated novelty, on the one hand, and, on the other, of a soporific concoction of platitudes. Christ's determined search for sinners is still a scandal to religious respectability, and it is still good news (Gospel) to the lost. It must be preached in such a way that the scandal is not evaded, and the good news is not reduced to a commonplace.

Illustrations. — The parables of Luke 15 and the story of the Pharisee and the publican supply obvious illustrative material. The first chapters of Romans elaborate on the religious significance of the terms "sinner" and "righteous." The forgiving table fellowship with Jesus will almost irresistibly suggest the Lord's Supper.

Outline

Jesus' Judgment of Saints and Sinners

- I. Even saints are sinners
 - A. If they regard themselves as righteous.
 1. They are proud of their moral and religious accomplishments.
 2. They lack the first requirement of righteousness — mercy.
 - B. If they refuse to submit to Christ
 1. In His judgment of their righteousness.
 2. In His forgiving mercy.
 3. In His offer of fellowship.
- II. Even sinners can become saints
 - A. If they recognize their unrighteousness.
 - B. If they accept the forgiving mercy of Christ.
 - C. If they answer the call of Christ and enter the obedience of fellowship with Him.

Alternate Outline

Jesus, Friend of Sinners

- I. His conduct in our text illustrates His right to be called the sinners' Friend.
- II. His defense of His conduct justifies His right to be called the sinners' Friend.

Seattle, Wash.

WALTER BARTLING