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Homiletics: Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 48

The Text and Its Central Thought.—It is characteristic of O.T. Scripture to emphasize actual victory over the enemy as a revelation of God's purpose and nature (Ex. 20:2, 3). He who delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt continues His loving purpose. Our psalm speaks of God's deliverance of His people in Mount Zion. A great army had come, for kings are among the enemies (v. 4). They were close enough to see the city (v. 5). Yet their defeat was prompt and complete (vv. 6, 7). The very appearance and existence of Zion reveals His protection (vv. 12, 13). God's manifested might and protection are the basis for Israel's praise. Meditation upon His goodness is the basis of true temple worship (v. 9).

The sacred text does not name the enemy, and commentators differ in identifying the actual historical occasion to which reference seems to be made. Varying suppositions seem to depend upon an exegete's view of Israel's history and the development of its canonical literature. One is reminded of the victory of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20) and the destruction of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19). The new *Interpreter's Bible* speaks of this as a "pilgrim song," emphasizes patriotic and nationalistic use, and calls attention to the close association of Jerusalem and the temple. The *Popular Commentary* mentions "Zion as a type of the Christian Church" and speaks in general terms without attempting to make historical references.

The central emphasis is upon God's protection of Mount Zion, His spiritual Israel. Martin Luther's magnificent exposition of Psalm Two is a prime example of Messianic and evangelical exposition of similar and parallel O.T. Scripture. He says (Ps. 2:9): "Behold what the kingdom of Christ was at the time of the Apostles. . . . The heathen seemed to dominate not only the Apostles . . . but Christ Himself, whom they blasphemed. And yet who does not see that both the synagog and the Roman Empire were delivered to this King? For because they did not wish to receive Him, they perished, so that scarcely any vestiges or shadow of such great power are visible." (*Luther's Works*, American ed., XII, 60.)

The Holy Spirit through the N. T. Scripture and era enables us to see contemporary applications and to make our preaching of this psalm a living declaration of Christ the King. O. T. Scripture, in Christian exposition and preaching, should never be limited to its bare historical reference or meaning (this is the weakness of most modern commentaries). The Christian use of the O. T. reaches into the present and future time (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22).

The truths of this psalm are especially comforting to the Christian pastor, a leader in the Church Militant. Modern enemies of the church are of two kinds. Overt opposition comes from organized atheists, Communism, and similar groups. Other schools of thought and systems, ostensibly friendly and "religious," yet also at heart are real enemies of the church: Mormonism, Unitarianism and Universalism, Ethical Culture, syncretism in all its forms, Freemasonry and other unchristian and anti-Christian lodges, etc. History will show that these enemies, too, will go the way of all the others. It is self-evident that in thought or speech about the church's enemies we must be careful to distinguish between anti-Christian systems and organizations and misled or innocent people who may be entangled in them.

The Day and Its Theme.— "God lives in the midst of His people" is a good theme for the liturgical worship and lessons of the day. The Introit and Gradual clearly express this truth and voice the believer's confidence in the living Lord who saves His people. The Collect expresses faith in Him who has "almighty power" yet shows "mercy and pity." 1 Cor. 12:1-11 exhorts the church to unity amidst a diversity of gifts, and Luke 19:41-48 speaks of His judgment upon Jerusalem when she rejects her Lord. "Power through prayer: enlisting church members for prayer and work" is the *Parish Activities* theme.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.— To strengthen confidence in Him who truly saves His church and people. Faith in the God of salvation is the only basis for real church work and activity.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.— Unbelief is the first and greatest sin. (First Commandment.) The believer is always tempted to lose faith in Him who alone saves and to fear and trust in worldly and earthly lords, power, riches, and influence. Outward appearances in this respect are most deceptive. The victory of the church and the defeat of her enemies can be a most powerful preaching of the Law.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.— The believer's faith in the Lord and Savior of the church should be strengthened by joyous Gospel content in this psalm. Christ is the Savior and King! All are invited into His kingdom.

Illustrations.—O. T. victories (previously mentioned). The history of the N. T. church (quote from Luther). Modern applications: Where will Marxism be in 100 years? Why fear any enemy of the church? Hymn 473:3.

Outline

Introduction. The church of Jesus Christ appears to be very weak. It is outwardly divided and scattered, and it faces an unknown future. See, however, what God says of His spiritual kingdom.

Behold Mount Zion, the Church of the Living God

- I. Mount Zion is the city of the great King (vv. 1-3)
 - A. Christ is the King, the church the fellowship of believers. "The Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." Rev. 17:14.
 - B. His people know Him as their Refuge, the Savior from all evil.
 - C. The true praise and glory of God are known only in His Kingdom of Grace.
- II. The church has powerful enemies (v. 4)
 - A. "The kings assembled." Historical instances in life of Israel, the N. T. church, and modern Christendom.
 - B. The church must know and recognize those who would dethrone Christ. These are the enemies of His kingdom.
- III. The Lord always protects His kingdom and scatters the enemies (vv. 5-8)
 - A. Even powerful enemies are finally routed.
 - B. God's actual victories correspond to His promises of protection. Psalms 2 and 46. Matt. 16:18.
- IV. A joyful and reverent people worship the Lord in His church (vv. 9-11)
 - A. His loving-kindness is the subject of the people's faith and meditation.
 - B. A joyous confidence is characteristic of true worship.
 - C. The praise of the Lord reaches throughout the earth.
- V. The Lord and His kingdom are the only hope for future generations (vv. 12-14)

- A. All people should see and consider these things.
- B. Knowledge of Zion must be imparted to coming generations.
- C. The eternal God will always bless and keep His people.

Conclusion. Do you really belong to this Kingdom? Do you work and pray for it? "Thy Kingdom come!"

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 130

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This psalm is the sixth of the seven penitential psalms, and Luther called it, 32, 51, and 143 the *psalmi Paulini* in view of their stress on the despair of the sinner and the richness of God's grace. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple has an echo of it (2 Chron. 6:40), and it is indeed the daily prayer of every Christian. The psalm evidently voices the meditation of the believer as he ponders his own sin and culpability in the sight of God and comforts himself with the greatness of God's forgiveness. Vv. 1-3 describe his reflection upon his own sin. Such a pondering leaves the person in "the depths" as if sunk in a flood (Ps. 69:2, 14) and gives an urgency to his pleading; his prayers are not the idle mouthings of the self-righteous or the ritualist (Luke 18:11ff., Gospel for the day) but the absorbed demand of the person wholly in need. The need is iniquity. What if God should mark—literally, "preserve"—them? Certainly He knows them all; what if He should keep them on account, as Job surmises (14:17), stored up for the Day of Judgment? Then no one could "stand"—the original sense of "uprightness" being the ability to stand upright in the presence of God's searching scrutiny.—V. 4 gets to the heart of God's answer. The pleader has gone to the ear of God, begging that He would attend; and the assurance comes back: "There is forgiveness." Psalm 32 expounds the terms: God does not hold the sin against the sinner, charge it to his account. The sin is there, and God knows it; but He does not act in accordance with the horror of the sin, but according to His mercy. Why can that be? That He may be feared. The purpose is not that man be careless, that he rejoice in going scot-free; but the purpose is that God be feared, revered, as the one source of life and help, the one cause of mercy, the one means for the sinner's standing upright. The refrain comes through in N. T. language: there is no room for human boasting, but only for acknowledg-

ing the goodness of God (Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 3:26, 27).—Vv. 5-7 are the acknowledgment of the soul that truly "fears" God. It looks only to the Lord. It yearns toward Him and hangs on Him. It looks for an ever richer fulfillment of this great act of forgiveness. It cherishes every communication, word, of God by which this mercy is spelled out and assured. As the sinner pondering his sin in the night season desires the dawn, as the wanderer lost in the darkness pleads for sunrise, so the believer wants but one thing, that the Lord demonstrate this mercy to him.—Vv. 7, 8 insert into the believer's pondering of God's mercy the structure that it takes: redemption. It is the means of God's mercy; it is plenteous; it is the redeeming and freeing of a people; and it is redemption from iniquity. In Ps. 111:9 the word is related to the covenant with the people and to the fear that the people are to have toward God. "Redeemer" is an Isaianic word and brings into the concept the full tide of God's plan to bring the price for sin, the release of mercy, through the suffering Servant. "Trust in God's redeeming mercy for forgiveness."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Introit sings the power of God toward His family, and the Gradual speaks the prayer of faith. The Epistle summarizes the Word with which Paul was wont to edify the Corinthians, the Word that Christ died for their sins and rose again; and the Gospel is the most Pauline of the parables of Jesus, that of the Pharisee and the Publican, who trusted in the mercy of God and was justified—"Be to me as one who has become merciful!" Together the Propers construct a midsummer beacon of God's grace in Jesus Christ. "Trust in God's redeeming mercy through Christ for forgiveness and righteousness."

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The Psalmist reminds of the folly of self-righteousness, of the terror of being under the judgment of God. From the obverse of the text can be portrayed the listlessness and sluggishness, the irreverence toward God and apathy toward life with Him, characterizing much of the reaction of Christian or non-Christian toward the mercy of God.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To describe and evoke a trust in the mercy of God which is not just an assent to its importance, but a turning, a pleading, a life-and-death hope for help.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The text stands on its own in stressing the mercy of God. To fill out the picture of this mercy, the "redemption" of the text can be broadened from the covenant relation with Israel and its Messianic hope to the fulfillment in Christ and His atoning work.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The noteworthy N. T. analogy for the goal of life-and-death yearning of faith is the Savior's use of the picture of the serpent on the pole in the wilderness (John 3); or the parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13). The text itself suggests the picture of a wayfarer who has fallen into a desert arroyo at nightfall, is cold and wracked by pain during the night, and yearns for dawn and the rescue party to heed his cries for help.

Outline

Trust in God's Redeeming Mercy Through Christ for Forgiveness and Righteousness (sinner, turn to God for mercy)

- I. Of yourself you have only sin (you are a sinner indeed!)
 - A. Every man of himself is only a sinner.
 - B. God knows our every sin.
 - C. How dreadful if God should hold that sin to our charge!
- II. Trust in God's redeeming mercy through Christ for forgiveness. (Sinner, turn to God for mercy)
 - A. There is forgiveness with God; He does not hold our sin to our charge.
 - B. This is true because God has redeemed us through Christ.
 - C. Hence our pondering of God's mercy in Christ enables us to cry to God for mercy and trust that He forgives.
 - D. Thus we have ongoing righteousness (justification) and forgiveness.
 - E. Thus we can fear, reverence God, all the days of our lives.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ISAIAH 62:6-12

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text is set squarely into that wonderful third section of Isaiah. The future glory of Zion is particularly evident in Chap. 62. No more would she be called "forsaken" or "desolate," but "My delight is in her" and "married" (v. 4). God would rejoice over her "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride" (v. 5).

The text itself begins with the note of reality. Jerusalem is not yet established. Therefore God's watchmen are set on the city's walls as importunate pleaders for the day of salvation. The RSV brings out

much better than the KJV the parallelism of the original. "Take no rest, and give him no rest." The picture is that of soldiery on the battlements who refuse to rest until God gives His promised rest.

For God has promised deliverance and prosperity. Even more, He has sworn it by His right hand and mighty arm. Here the KJV "arm of His strength" is closer to the letter of the original, but the RSV "mighty arm" conveys more vividly the meaning. The mighty arm of Jahweh would avert the tragedy of again seeing enemies and strangers devouring the fruit of His people's hard work. They themselves would enjoy the fruit of their labor, praising Jahweh "in the courts of My holiness" (KJV). The RSV "sanctuary" is more specific for modern ears.

This sworn oath leads to the excited preparations of vv.10-12. Instead of siege and embattled, embittered farmers now comes the thrilling work of building up the highway, i. e., leveling it and freeing it from stones. God's peoples (the original is plural) are going to walk there with His standard lifted over them. This is truly good and saving news for Zion. The final result, reiterating v.4, are the wonderful names which result from the coming salvation (v.12).

The central thought is God's sworn promise that salvation is coming to Zion.

The Day and Its Theme.—A theme for the day's worship might be "God's help for our mission in life." The Introit is a prayer for deliverance and help. The Collect acknowledges that God alone gives the power "for true and laudable service" and prays for faithfulness in the here and now, but in terms of the heavenly fulfillment. The theme of the Epistle is God-given in the new, spiritual, life-giving, gloriously permanent covenant. The Gradual praises and boasts in "God, our Strength." Finally, the Gospel points to Him who alone can say, "Be opened"; to Him "who has done all things well."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—God's people are beset with enemies within and without, and their labors for Christ often appear ineffectual. The church is not yet fully established in the rest and power of its Lord. Consequently the hope of our prayers wears thin. But God's salvation has appeared in the person and work of His Son. In Him we are the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. In Him we also hope and pray and labor with utter confidence in God: that the church's glory will be visible and complete at the consummation in heaven. For God has sworn to give His people rest, and God's hand is never shortened. The goal, then, is confident hope based on the promise of the Gospel.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—To be less than importunate watchmen may be merely careless indifference, or it may become the sin of sins, to doubt God's promise. While faintheartedness over our weakness and the church's weakness may be a sin of weakness, utter despair of God's salvation (that He has come in Jesus Christ, that He does deliver us, that He will give us perfect rest) will result in mortal sin. In either case, the redeemed of the Lord will not be fruitful in hopeful lives and in hopeful prayer.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The oath of the Lord is a helpful way to emphasize the Gospel promise. This is no mere word of God, but His sworn promise. "The end of the earth" (v. 11) at least implicitly emphasizes the *gratia universalis*, not only for us but also for all. "Your salvation," however, throws the emphasis where it is most telling. God's help comes for you and for me who are now the "holy people," "the redeemed of the Lord" in Jesus Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The picture of the importunate pleaders is a good description of Christian ministers. It can be extended to all Christians. The excitement of v. 10 could be made contemporaneous through a description of postwar economic productivity. How much more exciting the Christian's life and work! Evident New Testament parallels lie in the importunate widow of Luke 18; the Christmas Epistle in Titus 2; the holy people of 1 Peter 2; God's oath in Hebrews 6; the right hand of power in Ephesians 1; the Christian's hope in Romans 8.

Outline

A God-confident People

- I. The church has not yet arrived at eternal rest
 - A. The church still labors in weakness.
 - B. Doubts increase.
 - C. Hope wears thin.
- II. But God swears His help and ultimate victory
 - A. God's Gospel is His oath.
 - B. He will bless our labors.
 - C. He will give us the eternal victory.
- III. His oath is as sure as Jesus Christ
 - A. His salvation has appeared for all men.
 - B. We are the redeemed of the Lord by faith.
 - C. Christ, our Brother, sits at the right hand of God.

IV. We live as God-confident people

A. Hoping in Christ.

B. Working for Christ.

C. Praying through Christ.

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HENRY W. REIMANN

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Jeremiah was sent by God to proclaim the judgment of God upon the Southern Kingdom for its sin and rebellion. That judgment took the form of the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people. But he also had a message of comfort, the return from captivity. In the mere physical sense this would be small comfort for the great majority of those who would be taken into captivity. But Jeremiah spoke in more than a physical sense. He promised a restoration in future time that would have its comfort already for the pious believer who languished in physical suffering. This text is one of the most brilliant affirmations of this promise.—Vv. 31, 32 define the promise in terms of contrast. The heart of the Old Testament believer's relation to God was the covenant, the guarantee and promise, given by God to their forefathers that He would be their God and that they were to be His people; the simplest summaries are in Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 7. This covenant was proclaimed at Sinai and signaled in the deliverance from Egypt and the bestowal of the Promised Land. God dealt with His people as a Father; He forgave to the uttermost. He guided and cherished. But His people broke the covenant. He dealt as a husband; His people behaved as a faithless spouse (cf. Hosea). The mission of Jeremiah had been to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity as God's chastisement for this faithlessness. All the more marvelous, then, that He now promises not just mercy in terms of the old covenant, as He had frequently displayed it in the past, but a new covenant altogether.—Vv. 33, 34: The difference between the old and the new would not be just the lapse of time; for the promises of the new were already gladdening the hearts of God's people, the "remnant," as the prophets called it. The difference would not be just a universality of the new, a stress in Isaiah (e. g., Ch. 60); for also this covenant was "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (v. 31); God was not turning away from His chosen people of old. But the stress

of the new would be upon its conquest of the inner life and spirit of the people. The old revolved about the Law, its proclamation from Sinai, the observances and government which stemmed from it, the enforcement by means of penalty, the purpose of turning the people again and again to the mercy of God. The new would itself be the act of mercy. It would bring to fruition the promise which is a constant refrain in Jeremiah: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The old was broken by the people because their heart was far from God. The new would be God's government in that very heart. God would write His Law in their heart. Their "inward parts" would be successfully altered. This was always God's intention for His people. Cf. Ex. 19:5, 6. But the theocracy of Israel, half God's, half idols', was not the consummation of His plan. Now would come the great goal: God's own Law, the thrust of His purpose and will, the Kingdom and direction of His own self, would reign within. The old covenant was carried out through observances and through a system of daily instruction (cf. Deuteronomy 11); the new would operate with people in whom God Himself was the instructor in the heart. The old found people saying: Know the Lord—and then people behaved as though they did not know Him. The new would comprise people who would already know God, "from the least to the greatest"; He would be experienced and understood in the inner heart and faith of His true people, and outward instruction would only assert what had already happened inside.—V. 34 ends with a reference to the mechanism of this activity of God in His people. It would take place not through ecstasy or vision, caprice or magic, but through God's forgiving the sins of His people, not remembering them against them. The new covenant would not differ from the old in that the new is by love and the old by force; but the new would be simply the climax of God's plan to be All in all to His people; and there would be no thought of men deserving God's goodness, but they could only take it as forgiveness of sin. "May God turn our hearts to be the people of His covenant through forgiveness."

The Day and Its Theme.—The congregation that prefers a leisure-time and fleshly message and worship during summer will probably bypass the Propers for this day. They are remarkably unified in stressing the covenant relation of the Christian to God. Introit and Gradual extol God as the supporter of the covenant; Epistle contrasts the new covenant with the old as actually the original way of God for His people as contrasted with the interlude of Law warning for Israel; Gospel has Jesus remind His interrogator that also the old covenant

levied its demands upon the inner life of its members and demanded a life which was greater than any human source could supply. The text fits perfectly into this setting. *Parish Activities* foster recruitment and training of church workers during the month, and this Sunday underscores their basic qualification to be covenant children of God.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The outwardness, superficiality, legalism of churchly custom; the confidence in human activity, sometimes given pious names but still human—"the fellowship of the church," "a program of religious education," "the blessedness of church work." Much of this may only thinly mask the self-will which ends in rebellion and spiritual whoredom.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To stir to the life of God in the heart, which is God's gift through His forgiveness of sins and the means by which it is conveyed to His people; to move the hearer to prize the rule and Law of God in the inward parts above every substitute on the surface.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The preacher must beware not to imagine that as he makes the promise of great goals, i. e., God ruling and stirring in the heart of the hearer, he is therewith preaching Gospel. Gospel is that the preacher speaks that through which the life comes, namely, the act of God's forgiveness of sins. The full exposition of the covenant aids toward this clarity; the covenant is God's doing, and the new covenant is in the blood of Christ, shed "for the remission of sins." If it be true that the Trinity cycle is a temptation to stress the Christian life and minimize the Gospel, here is a great Sunday to restore the balance. "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation"—this accent must pervade even the interpretation of the Gospel of the Good Samaritan.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The Joel prophecy of Pentecost comes to mind. Central is the Lord's Prayer and its expression of desire for the rule of God in the heart. Luke 24 and the relating of the atonement of Christ to "repentance and remission of sins," or the words of institution of the Sacrament quoted above, amplify the central accents of the text.

Outline

May God Turn Our Hearts to Be the People of His Covenant Through Forgiveness

I. God wants us to be the people of His covenant

- A. The covenant means that He desires us to be His people,
and we respond by desiring Him to be our God.

B. God demonstrated His desire in the promises to the patriarchs, the deliverance of His people from Egypt, the history of Israel.

II. Yet our hearts fail to fulfill His plan for the covenant

A. We lust after other gods, we fail to put Him over all.

B. We satisfy ourselves with substitutes on the surface for the full service to God in the heart and from the heart.

III. May God turn our hearts to be the people of His covenant

A. It is His nature as covenant God that He pursues us with His forgiveness. That He has exemplified in Christ, who gave His blood of the new covenant that we might live in and to God.

B. The message of that forgiveness in Christ can turn our hearts to serve Him, to have His Law and Spirit be the drive of our inner selves.

C. This service may well be displayed in our love toward one another as well as our adoration of the forgiving God. Yet even in the midst of that service let us remember: His forgiveness must work it all.

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