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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

MAUNDY THURSDAY

JOHN 13:1-15

A solemn hour! The crisis of the Redeemer's days in the flesh is at hand, His going to the Father, v. 1. Powerful emotions surge through His soul, v. 3. A clear perception of His relation to the Father, the commission He holds from Him, and His approaching return to Him possess His soul. In this sublime hour, however, He does not forget His disciples who were to be left struggling in the world, but He loves them unto the end, v. 1. There follows an act of His most condescending love to them.

JESUS WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

I. A Symbol II. An Example

I

A. It was the 14th Nisan. On the evening of this day the passover was eaten (Edersheim II, p. 481). "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15). They were in an upper room in Jerusalem (Luke 22:12). According to Jewish regulations servants brought in water before the feast and washed the feet of the guests. The disciples must have been startled at what now occurred: v. 4-5. He omitted nothing that belonged to this service.

B. What Jesus' action meant became apparent when He came to Peter. V. 6 literally: "Lord, Thou my feet dost wash?" Contrast of "Thou" and "my." When Jesus answered that Peter should know presently, this disciple said: "Never shalt Thou wash my feet," v. 8. In his reply, v. 8 b, the Lord gave the first indication of the meaning of His action, namely, that this washing was symbolic of the higher cleansing from sin. It typified the cleansing of the conscience from the dead works of sin. Luther: "Christ speaks of the washing which He has made by His blood on the tree of the holy Cross and which shall be dispensed to believers through the Gospel and

the blessed Baptism." Thus the disciples were all clean of sin before Him, ch. 15:3. Except one: Judas, v. 11, because in unbelief he rejected this salutary washing away of sin. Thus the Redeemer gave to His disciples beforehand the fruits of His redemption, Hebr. 9:13-14; Rev. 1:5; Zech. 13:1.

C. This cleansing by justification is effective once for all and requires no repetition. However, the symbolic action also implies the daily cleansing from sin. The feet of an Oriental were daily defiled by dust and filth. See Ex. 30:18-21. The believer pollutes himself daily with sin and daily seeks ablu-tion, saying: "Our Father who art in heaven, . . . forgive us our trespasses." And Christ daily washes the believer's feet after they have been in contact with the earth.

II

A. The action completed, Jesus applies the washing of feet as a lesson. He removes the servant's garment and appears before the disciples again as Lord. V. 12-15. Washing of feet was an act of hospitality bestowed upon visitors and was performed by slaves. When three angels visited Abraham, he did not wash their feet, but had it done by his slaves, Gen. 18:4. The Lord knelt before the disciples and performed the service of a slave. What condescension! Yet, what else was His whole life? Phil. 2:5 ff.; Mark 10:45; Is. 53. His career was one continuous service, ending with the most self-sacrificing and lowliest service, when He humbled Himself unto death on the Cross. Now the Lord reveals the exemplary significance of His action: v. 14-15. If I, your Lord and Master — of whom you are to learn and whom you are to obey — have washed your, the servants', feet, you fellow servants ought to wash one another's feet. Greatness in the Kingdom of God consists in service, Matt. 20:25-28. How much did the disciples need such an example! Prompted by vanity, they had in all likelihood shortly before engaged in the controversy which is recorded Luke 22:24-27.

B. In these days when love is waxing cold in Christendom, how vital the exhortation: I have given you an example! The Good Samaritan learned his lesson well, Luke 10. Paul likewise: 1 Cor. 9:19-22; Rom. 9:3; Phil. 4:12-13. Peter later in life applied the lesson he had learned from His Master: 1 Pet.

4:9-11; 5:5-6. The crying need across the waters to minister to the starving, the naked, the homeless.

Conclusion: v. 17: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

L. J. ROEHM

GOOD FRIDAY

LUKE 23:44-49

Some pictures are designed by the artist to attract and delight by sharp contrasts of shadow and light: they are studies in black and white. The Bible often uses this contrast of light and darkness to teach the great truths of God, e. g., "Ye were darkness — walk as children of light," Eph. 5:8: "What communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. 6:14. But nowhere in Scripture is the contrast of darkness and light, of black and white, delineated in such sharp lines as in the events of Good Friday. Here we have side by side grossest darkness and light in all its brilliance.

The study of no other picture is so significant as the contemplation of the scene of darkness and light that Good Friday bids us view. The right study of this picture is decisive of the greatest issues of our existence. Let us go again to Calvary and view

GOOD FRIDAY, A CONTRAST OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT

I. Good Friday is shrouded in ominous black

A. The symbol of that darkness: the miraculous eclipse of nature's light, v. 44-45 a. It was a sign, wrought by God, to symbolize 1) for Jesus: the darkness of His soul when He bore the full weight of divine judgment upon the sins of the world, "being made a curse for us." During this darkness Jesus reached the climax of His agony and cried out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matt. 27:46. — 2) For us: our doom if we were to face the justice of God in our natural condition. Shut out from God by sin, we are in "the power of darkness," Col. 1:13: a) the darkness of our understanding; Eph. 4:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:35; b) the darkness of evil deeds; Matt. 6:23; 2 Pet. 2:12-17; John 3:19; c) the darkness of eternal judgment; Matt. 8:12; 22:13; Jude 13.

B. The reality of that darkness: Jesus passes through "the valley of the shadow of death" in seeming defeat by the powers

of darkness. 1) Jesus' death was real. "He gave up the ghost," v. 46 c. "Death is the wages of sin"; Jesus suffered the full penalty, the agonies of hell. 2) It was the last great onslaught of the powers of darkness. When Jesus died, the disciples in black despair thought all was lost — but:

II. Good Friday is bright with heavenly light

A. The symbol of that light: the miraculous rending of the veil in the temple, v. 45 b. 1) The veil in the temple signified the separation between God and man, and the need of atonement for sin. O. T. sacrifices. 2) The rending of the veil signified that now free access through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God has been achieved. Not only is the Holy of Holies no longer barred to men, but heaven is opened, and we can come boldly to the throne of God. 1 Kings 8:12; Heb. 9:3-15; 10:19-20.

B. The reality of that light. 1) Jesus' death is bright with actual victory over death, v. 46. a) "Father" — no longer forsaken of God, but God has accepted His work. b) "Into Thy hands" — "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. 10:31, but Jesus entrusts His soul into the hands of the Father. Willingly He lays down His life. c) "I commit My soul": John 10:17-18. d) "He cried with a loud voice": the cry of victory; not an ordinary death; a voluntary sacrifice; a death of victory. — 2) Jesus' death is bright with trophies of victory. It gives "light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death," Luke 1:79. In His death He is a) "a Light to lighten the Gentiles": v. 47. The centurion glorifying God (Luke 5:25 f.; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15, 18) is an earnest of the salvation of the pagan world. Acts 26:18; Is. 49:6 b; 60:2 ff. b) "And the glory of Thy people Israel," v. 48-49: an earnest and a prelude of the repentance of Pentecost. c) Thus He is the "Light of the world." John 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8-9; Is. 60:19; Ps. 112:4; 1 Pet. 2:9.

What contrasts of darkness and light on Good Friday! On Good Friday we indeed drape our altars and pulpits in black; in the Middle Ages the crucifix was also shrouded in black. But the name "Good Friday" is a corruption of "God's Friday" — it commemorates God's great gift of Light into our darkness of sin and despair.

WALTER R. ROEHR

EASTER SUNDAY

JOHN 20:1-10

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the cornerstone of the Christian religion, 1 Cor. 15:14, 17. True, we call the doctrine of justification by faith the cardinal doctrine of the Bible, but there could be no justification by faith and all that this implies without the resurrection of Christ. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we assure ourselves of the fact that the Lord is risen. Our text gives us such assurance. Let us consider

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

I. *The evidence of the empty tomb*II. *The testimony of the Scriptures*

I

A. Recapitulate briefly the burial of Jesus, stressing especially the manner of preparing the body (*ὀθόνια* and *σουδάριον*), the nature of the sepulcher with the large stone at the door, the imperial seal upon the stone, and the imperial guard at the tomb.

B. "On the first day of the week" (Matt. 28:1, *ὁπὲ δὲ σαββάτων*, after the Sabbath), on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene came unto the sepulcher," v. 1. John is reporting on Mary Magdalene (1-18), and he singles her out. That she was accompanied by other women is indicated by the "we" in v. 2. Mary and the other women on their way to the grave with spices and ointments to complete the task of burial left unfinished on Friday, see the stone rolled away, v. 1. The tomb is open; the Lord is gone.

C. Mary at once informs Peter and the other disciple (John) of the fact of the empty tomb, v. 2. When the two disciples arrive at the sepulcher, they behold a strange sight. The linen clothes were lying there, vv. 5, 6, 7. These *ὀθόνια* are mentioned three times in the text, evidently for a purpose. They had not been disturbed, stripped off or cut off the body of Jesus, and thrown on a pile. They were lying there as last seen on the Friday before, but without the body of Jesus. Indeed, a sign to behold.—But there was another witness that something unusual had taken place. The head cloth was

not lying together with the linen bands, but in a separate place $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$, in a place by itself, having been folded, v. 7. The two items had not been handled the same way. John deliberately distinguishes between the folded head cloth and the lying linen strips, in order to impress this difference upon the reader. Friends could have folded the head cloth, but they could not have taken the body of the Lord out of the linen bands without disturbing them; enemies, likewise, could not have done the latter, nor would they have done the former. There remained only the third possibility — Christ himself slipped out of the linen bands and either He or an angel folded the head cloth. The empty tomb with the huge stone rolled away, the lying linen strips, and the folded headcloth convinced John. He believed, v. 8, that the Lord had risen.

D. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus is the only satisfactory explanation of the empty tomb. Neither the friends nor the enemies of Christ would have remained silent had they removed his dead body from the sepulcher. Indeed, the chief priests and the elders bribed the guards in an attempt to cover up the fact of the resurrection. Matt. 28:11-15. But the evidence of the empty tomb remains, and, like John, we believe that Christ rose from the dead.

II

A. John believed because he saw. "For as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead," v. 9. Had the two disciples possessed a proper understanding of the Scriptures at that time, they would have been prepared for the tremendous event. Moses and the Prophets had foretold the Messiah's resurrection, Luke 24:27; Christ Himself proclaimed it, but the disciples "understood none of these things," Luke 18:31-34.

B. Later on, when the disciples had grasped the full import of the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah's death and resurrection, they used them to prove the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. They quoted Ps. 2:7 (Acts 13:33); Ps. 16:9 (Acts 2:25-31); Ps. 110:1 (Acts 2:32-36). By inspiration of the Holy Spirit they gave us the record of the great Easter event. Cp. the four Gospels and also Paul's sweeping testimony, 1 Cor. 15:4-8. This testimony of the Scriptures we accept in faith, and on the basis of it we believe in a living Savior.

C. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is of tremendous importance to us Christians, 1 Cor. 15: 55-58. If we keep before us the fact of the risen Redeemer, we shall have greater comfort and more hope in the present life and more fervent zeal in doing the will of Him who loved us and died for us and rose again. Amen. WALTER A. BAEPLER

EASTER MONDAY

JOHN 20:11-18

What heart-thrilling truths lie within that challenging outcry of the early Church: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever!" Heb. 13: 8.

Have you thought of them? If not, this story affords an excellent opportunity. Mary thought Jesus had changed. Wasn't He dead and gone? His wonderful appearance, however, proved to her as it will to us —

JESUS STILL THE SAME

I. *The Same Savior*

Text. — Why did Mary weep? "Why?" asked angels. Was it not chiefly her fear of being without a Savior? She, more than others — Luke 7: 39 — had experienced His power to save. Now that nothing of Him remained — even His body taken away — what would become of her? Would she fall again into Satan's power? To her, therefore, a chief of sinners, Jesus appeared first, showing the same mercy, proving He is *the same Savior*.

Application. — How graciously Jesus received penitent sinners, such as Zacchaeus, publicans, the malefactor! That, of course, was "yesterday!" How is it today after His resurrection, in His exaltation? Is He still ready to forgive? Is it still true — Rom. 5: 20? Indeed, His resurrection proves He is today as yesterday. Oh, burdened consciences, heartsick apostates, doubting souls, remember: Jesus is still the same Savior.

II. *The Same Companion*

Text. — "They have taken away my Lord," Mary cried. So keenly she felt the separation. His fellowship had meant so much to her that she had followed Him — even to the Cross. She had found Him the best Friend and Companion. But now

He seemed gone beyond recall, far, far away. Still He was near, very near. He appeared to her, called her by name, conversed — just like before, proving He is the same Companion.

Application. — What a glorious “yesterday” was the day of Christ’s visible presence! “The Word . . . flesh . . . dwelt among us . . . beheld.” . . . John 1:14! What blessing to disciples on dark, stormy seas to have Him near, hear: “Fear not, it is I.” What a Companion! Is He still the same? Is He as near today as yesterday? His resurrection has not altered, but confirmed His “I am with you.” His appearance to Mary shows you, O lonely, fearful, trembling souls, — Jesus is still the same Companion.

III. *The Same Commander*

Text. — Recognizing Him, Mary approached closer to Jesus. He, however, restrained her. He wanted her to perform an important service, without delay. “Go, tell,” He commanded. She, with her joyous experience, was to comfort weeping, hiding disciples, and so she learned: Jesus was still the same solicitous Commander.

Application. — Already before His death Jesus had commissioned disciples, twelve, seventy, Luke 9 and 10. To all He said: “Confess Me before men,” Matt. 10:32. “Preach ye upon the housetops,” Matt. 10:27. Is that still His command? Is He the same divine “Commissioner” today? Indeed, His resurrection has not changed, but reinforced Matt. 28:19! Each one is to reach one . . . and more! Remember this, if you are inclined to disparage Synod’s anniversary mission efforts. He is still the same “Commander.”

IV. *The Same Comforter*

Text. — Always had Mary found comfort in Jesus’ words. But how was it now, after He was risen, exalted? Were consolations withdrawn? By no means! Said He: “My Father and God is also yours. As I ascend in glory, so will you,” John 14:13; 17:22-24. Could not Mary tell He was still the same wonderful Comforter?

Application. — How often in days of humiliation had Jesus stressed these consolations! Matt. 5:12; 13:43; John 10:27. That was a long time ago. How is it today? Are these com-

forts altered, withdrawn, discredited? No, in fact, they are more certain than ever; sealed by His resurrection. Oh, look and listen, all ye downcast, sorrowing, grieving ones—to Jesus. He is still the same Comforter.

Conclusion.—Hearing all this, ought we not shout with joy as the early Christians: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever!”? ALVIN E. WAGNER

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOHN 21:15-19

The regular Gospel for this Sunday tells of Christ's appearance to His disciples (John 20:19-31). A most fitting Gospel! The risen Lord comes to His disciples to enrich them (vv. 19-20). But He comes also to entrust them a) with a most important service (vv. 22-23) and to impart to them b) a true, overcoming faith (vv. 24 ff.). The importance of such faith is properly demonstrated in the Epistle for this Sunday (1 John 5:4-10). Unless we believe in the risen Son of God, we shall not have eternal life. True faith, however, manifests itself in ardent love toward God and the neighbor (Matt. 22:37 ff.; Gal. 5:6), and only he who truly loves Christ can truly serve Him in the ministry of the Word.

TRUE LOVE FOR THE RISEN SAVIOR

- I. This Christ demands of His disciples*
- II. This should show itself in true service*

I

A. To understand the text properly, we must consider Christ's own seeking and gathering love (vv. 1-14). Calvary preaches Christ's redeeming love; but every appearance of the risen Lord to His disciples proves His matchless winning love. He came to them with the message of peace to assure them that He was their risen Savior and truest Friend. But love divine demands love of all disciples of Jesus.

B. Christ demanded love especially of Peter. We know the reason why (Matt. 26:69 ff.). But Peter had repented of his heinous sin (Matt. 26:75) and so was to be restored to his apostleship (Luke 22:32). Nevertheless, he was to give proof

of his love. The great earnestness of Christ in examining His repentant disciple is shown 1) by the name "Simon, son of Jonas," for he had not proved himself a "rock"; 2) by the question put to him three times, each demanding a most serious self-searching; 3) by the demand to love "more," for he had sinned more grievously than had the other disciples; 4) by the Lord's prediction of the manner of his death (vv. 18-19). Peter had sinned once in the face of death; would he deny Him again and thus deny also his love for Jesus? Truly, his was a most momentous meeting with the risen Lord.

C. The risen Christ demands true love also of us who are His disciples. To us too He comes with the important question: "Lovest thou Me?" This love flows from His own great love revealed in His suffering, death, and resurrection (1 John 4:19). This love is found only where there is true repentance and faith (v. 17: "grieved"). This love bears the Lord's examination and professes itself in many emphatic replies (vv. 15-17). Christ is not present visibly as He was then, but He is still present with us in the Word and Sacraments and demands of us true love. Will you give it? Easter is a feast of joy, but also one of deep seriousness, of honest self-examination, and of solemn profession of our love for Christ.

II

A. This love should show itself in true service, as the threefold command to Peter proves (vv. 15 ff.). Peter was to feed the Lord's sheep and lambs, adults and children. He who had professed his love for Christ by word, was to profess it yet more convincingly by his life in the apostolic ministry. And oh, how well he fed Christ's sheep! (Cp. Acts 2:14 ff.; 3:6; 4:1 ff.; 5:29 ff.; 10:1 ff.) His was a difficult ministry (vv. 18 f.), but he was faithful unto death (his martyrdom).

B. There still are sheep and lambs to be fed at home and abroad. Do we show our love for the risen Savior by witnessing of Christ where we have opportunity, by praying for the coming of the Lord's kingdom, by giving joyously and constantly in order that Christ's work may be fully carried out? Do we show our love for Christ by fulfilling our obligations in home and school? The work is as important now as it

was when Christ examined Peter, for the Church is still to be planted the world over (Mark 16:15 f.; Matt. 28:19 f.).

C. *Lovest thou Me?* So the Savior asks us today. What will be your answer? *Feed My sheep.* So the Savior commands us today. Will Peter's response be ours? Only if that is the case, then have we celebrated Easter rightly and profitably.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOHN 15:9-16

During His public ministry the Lord bestowed some notable titles upon His followers: "Ye are the light of the world," "the salt of the earth," the "blessed of My Father," "witnesses of these things," "My disciples indeed," and in our text,

YE ARE MY FRIENDS

I. How did they become friends?

II. What are their privileges as friends?

A. The followers of Christ did not become His friends by any previous friendly attitude or merit on their part. V. 16 a. It was impossible for us to make the first overture of friendship, because the carnal mind is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1; 1 Cor. 12:3.)

B. It is evident that under these conditions Jesus had to take the first step to establish friendly relations with man. "But I have chosen you." V. 16 b. (1 John 4:10; Rom. 5:8.)

C. Therefore the next step that Christ took to make us His friends, was to die for us. V. 13. In the place of the guilty ones, Christ gave His own life, thus delivering His friends from the punishment they should have borne for all their transgressions. (2 Cor. 5:19.) He remits the debt, the handwriting against us is blotted out, we are His own.

D. The third step that Jesus took to secure us as His friends, was to tell us about His love. He told His disciples about His love for them. V. 9, 11, 15. He preached the Gospel to the poor. (Luke 4:18.) He tenderly invited all to come to Him. (Matt. 11:28.) And those that came were not cast out. (John 6:37.) He was a friend of penitent publicans

and sinners. (Matt. 11:19; Luke 15:1-2.) He referred to Lazarus, who had died, as "our friend." (John 11:11.) When He ascended into heaven, Jesus made provision for the proclamation of His friendship and love for all men. "Teach all nations"; "Preach the Gospel to every creature." St. Paul wrote: 2 Cor. 5:20.

E. All who accept by faith the Word of Reconciliation become the friends of Christ. (James 2:23.) — What an honor to be chosen as a friend of Christ! Everything that is done by the believers in faith is the result of the gracious election of Christ.

We may sing and pray: *Lutheran Hymnal* 362:1; 347:1.

II

A. What are the privileges of the friends of Christ? Jesus does not treat His friends like servants. A benevolent master will be friendly in the treatment of his servants. But he does not spread his personal affairs before them. He will not reveal his intention and plans to them. "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth." V. 15 a. But as "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11), so the Lord spake to His disciples. V. 15 b. (Cp. John 17:26.) What a privilege to be in the confidence of Jesus and to be admitted to the inner circle of His friends!

B. Another privilege that Jesus accords His friends is the privilege of serving Him. V. 10, 14. Just as Christ kept the will of His Father in the work of our salvation, so the Christians, His friends, will gratefully delight in observing all of His commandments, remembering all of the sayings of Jesus, always clinging to Him by faith in His Gospel.

C. As an evidence of this faith, the friends of Jesus will have the privilege of loving the brethren, always keeping the love of Christ in mind. V. 12. Biblical instances of such love and service are: The enduring friendship of Jonathan for David, even under adverse circumstances. (1 Sam. 20); John the Baptist (John 3:26-30); St. Paul (2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 9:1-3); Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:4). Ought we not also love our brethren and sisters, yea, all our fellow men? (1 John 3:16-18).

D. A final privilege is to be the recipients of the joy that Christ will bestow upon His friends. V. 11. As Christ re-

joiced in the intimate communion with His Father, so the friends of Christ will feel the same joy in the constant communion with Christ and God. Theirs will be a full and lasting measure of joy in contrast with the fleeting joys of this world. An evidence of this joyous communion with Christ and God will be the petitions which the friends of Christ will constantly bring to the Throne of Grace in the name of Jesus (v. 16 b), trusting in His redemption, which has restored them to their rightful position as the children of God and the friends of Christ.

Therefore, in conclusion, may we continue in the love of our heavenly Friend (v. 9) and as His true friends joyfully keep and do His commandments, love Him and one another and bring forth fruits of righteousness. *Lutheran Hymnal*, 399: 5-6.

H. C. HARTING

