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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

Alvin E. Wagner

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 12:1-8

So enthusiastic a multitude of friends thronged Jesus that "they trode one upon another." But crowds never deceived our Lord; nor would He have multitudes deceive themselves. A series of solemn admonitions He, therefore, "began to speak unto His disciples first of all." And — to indicate that these expressed ideals to which His true friends would aspire — He exclaimed (v. 4): "I say unto you *My friends.*"

Today, while multitudes claim some friendship for Christ and often "tread one upon another" to acquire reputation of being His disciples, it is important to consider

THE CHRIST-GIVEN IDEALS OF CHRIST'S TRUE FRIENDS

I. *Earnestness* II. *Fearlessness* III. *Trustfulness*

I

Text. — "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy . . . proclaimed upon the housetops." (Vv. 1-3.)

Application. — Solemn words. Note the high ideal of earnestness they express. Through them our Savior is saying also to us: "Be careful that no dissimulation permeates your works, devotions, as it does those of the Pharisees! Deceitfulness is a characteristic of the old nature. It is innate. My true friends will recognize, deplore this. They will keep in mind that not even past masters of deception, like the Pharisees, can deceive God. To Him the very motives are known. In judgment these shall be revealed, proclaimed, 'in the light,' 'on the housetops.' Will you not, therefore, as genuine friends, strive to be disciples indeed — not merely in name — with sincerity, great earnestness?"

Illustration. — Man said to minister: "I am a Christian, but I don't believe in taking it too seriously; God will forgive, you know." That careless attitude is typical. Heart-searching,

self-examination, and earnest striving after godliness are bypassed. But Jesus' real friends will not be content with lip service, form godliness. Knowing the "Searcher of Hearts," they will be careful not to abuse His grace.

II

Text. — "Be not afraid. . . . Fear Him. . . . Whosoever shall confess Me . . . before the angels of God." (Vv. 4-5, 8-9.)

Application. — What a call to Christian fortitude! By holding up this ideal of fearlessness our Savior is saying also to us: "Take heed lest fear of men turn you from confessors into deniers of Me. Easy enough to stand by Me when crowd is for Me, but to confess Me when enemies threaten to kill you is a severe test of friendship. Yet if you are my real friends, will you not strive to meet it and overcome all timidity? Will you not brace yourself with the thought that, after all, the worst an enemy can do is kill the body, and better is that than have your soul under the condemnation of God?"

Illustration. — A faithful martyr confessor (B. Hooker) on way to stake said: "Life is sweet, death is bitter; but eternal life is sweeter, and eternal condemnation is more bitter." These thoughts, inspired by our text, gave him courage to face a martyr's death. And what about the gracious promise: "Confess [you] before the angels of God (v. 8)? Ought it not inspire every real friend of Jesus to that ideal of bold confessions, true fearlessness (2 Tim. 2:11; Rom. 10:9 ff.)?"

III

Text. — "Not one of them is forgotten before God . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Vv. 6-7.)

Application. — A comforting assurance for weakest of His friends! Knowing that even with the Twelve the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak, and that some were thinking: What will become of us and our families if upon our confession the rulers exile us (John 9:22)? Jesus said to them, and He says to us: "Look how your heavenly Father cares for sparrows, and they are little nothings compared with you. Remember, the hairs of your head are all numbered, your tiniest needs concern Him. And since you that suffer for My name's sake (Matt. 5:11-12) are under His special care, will you not

also strive to prove the genuineness of your friendship for Me with more trustfulness?

Illustration. — In a critical moment of American history, one of our statesmen said: "The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of the truth that God governs in affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without Him?" And we add: Is it possible for Him to forget His kingdom, His believers, confessors, to whom promise is especially given?

Conclusion. — Real friends of Jesus know they have not attained these ideals. They weep over their faltering faith, fearfulness, and carelessness. But, at the same time, will they not seek their Savior's pardon and aspire to these ideals with renewed love and zeal?

ALVIN E. WAGNER

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 15: 11-32

"No man can come unto Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him," John 6:44. "This drawing is not like that of a hangman when he pulls a thief up the ladder to the gallows, but rather an act of friendly attraction." Luther. The Lord drew Peter through His "words of eternal life," John 6:68; Paul "by His grace," Gal. 1:15; Israel "with loving-kindness," Jer. 31:3; cf. Cant. 1:4. He still draws in the same manner.

THE FATHER-HEART OF GOD

I. It abounds in forgiving love

II. It pulsates with loving appeal

I

The younger son wanted his share of the inheritance to which he was entitled, but the disposition which actuated him was evil. He desired not only his "living" but, most of all, separation from his father's house. He spent his money unwisely and soon was penniless. He spent his life like one for whom there is no salvation and soon was friendless. He sought help from a person who was an alien to his father's house by gluing himself to a stranger, and was degraded

to a position lower than the beast. Sin causes "evolution" in reverse. "From wine to swine." In his riotous life he had been beside himself. Only when he repented did he come to himself.

The younger son is a picture of natural man, Gen. 3:6a; Eph. 2:12; of man fallen from baptismal grace. We too daily sin much and need the forgiving love of God. When Albrecht Durer painted "The Prodigal among the Swine," he painted his own face as that of the prodigal. Whose face do you see?

It was the knowledge of his father's love and trust in the same that caused the son to return. The father saw him afar off — had been waiting for him; was moved with profound sympathy; hastened to him; kept on kissing him; gave opportunity to make confession but not for request to become a servant; presented him with emblems of sonship; staged a festival of joy; called him "this my son."

The father-heart of God would have no enforced service, but is ever longing for sinners to return, Matt. 11:28; *Lutheran Hymnal* 385:2. By His grace He leads us to repentance, Ezek. 36:25-31. He adopts us as His children, Gal. 3:26. He clothes us with the garment of Christ's righteousness, Is. 61:10; adorns us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; gives us power to walk as the children of light, Eph. 6:15; He welcomes us into the family of the elect, v. 7. *Lutheran Hymnal* 385:4-5.

The Father's heart abounds in forgiving love. Accept it! It also pulsates with loving appeal.

II

The elder son is suspicious. From the outset he feels there is something wrong with his father's action. He demands an explanation. He is angry, does not own his father's son as his brother, is displeased that his brother turned out good after all, complains about his "unequal" share.

The Pharisee — and there is somewhat of a Pharisee even in every Christian — sits in judgment of God, expects a reward for his supposed good, is envious of the blessings enjoyed by others, is dissatisfied, is loveless, fails to see that he

too has sins to be repented of, though they may be of a different type from those connected with "riotous living."

The father went out to plead with the elder son, reminded him of the blessings of living at home and sharing all his goods, invited him to join in the festivities which were to be enjoyed by both sons, bade him rejoice that his brother was alive and found.

The large heart of God pulsates with loving appeal and would win even the narrow, grudging heart of man. God goes out of His way to win also the self-righteous, pleads that they repent of their sin, offers His love. While God might tell the self-righteous that since they had lived in company with Christians and enjoyed so many more blessings than the "scum of society" and still had failed to grasp the truth of free, unmerited grace in Christ, He would offer them no further opportunity to repent; yet His Father-heart pulsates with the loving appeal that they too "come in," make merry, and be glad.

The Father-heart of God would draw *all* men unto Him. Whether you have been leading a life of shame or are proud of your goodness, God bids *you* repent and believe.

VICTOR MENNICKE

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 9:51-56

We call ourselves *Evangelical* Lutheran. We not only preach the Gospel, but carry on church work in an evangelical spirit. Unlike dictatorial Rome, legalistic Protestantism, and multitudinous unchristian religions, we present the grace of God as the motive for Christian conduct and works, not precept, threat, or bribery. A meek, tender, soul-seeking spirit should characterize and dominate us in all relationships with our fellow men. Because of the law of sin in our members we need continued instruction and encouragement. Our text presents

THE SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS AND FORBEARANCE

- I. *It must achieve the mastery over our inborn pride, prejudice, and impatience*
- II. *It flows from appreciation of our mission as soul winners*

I

Text takes us to a critical point in Jesus' ministry. It was time for His return to the Father (v. 51), and He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Cf. Mark 10:32. Path led through Samaria, where He sent disciples ahead to arrange for lodging. The villagers refused Him because He was going to Jerusalem to honor religious capital of their rival. (See Fahling, *Life of Christ*, p. 178, on attitude of these people toward each other.) Incensed over this insult, and using Elijah's example as a precedent (2 Kings 1:10 f.), James and John (sons of thunder, Mark 3:17) sought permission to destroy them (v. 54) and were rebuked (v. 55).

We all possess a measure of the Boanerges spirit. Natural man is self-centered and loveless toward all save friends and benefactors (Matt. 5:46). Christians are easily provoked to lovelessness by ignorance, indifference, ingratitude, intolerance, etc., and give vent to emotions in angry words, hasty deeds, severing of friendships, unjust criticism and condemnation. Also troubled with prejudices (Acts 10:28) of race, color, language, nationality. And how impatient we can become over lack or slowness of understanding in others in church, school, or home! Prone to become legalistic, forgetting that fruits of faith are produced by the Gospel. Need to be reminded of v. 55 and then strive toward God-willed gentleness and forbearance.

II

Jesus here referred to His own spirit, beautifully described in Matt. 12:17-21 (Is. 42:1-4). Jesus was ever the gentle, tender, compassionate Christ, who did not drive men, but drew them to Himself by kindness. True, He did not mince words in explaining the Law (Matt. 5:20, 22, 28, 46, 47; 6:2, 5, 32, etc.); He also could talk very sternly (Matt. 12:34; 23:13-39). But that was to stubborn resisters of His grace. The disillusioned, the weak, the penitent, always found a welcome. He was gentle when others expected sternness (Luke 7:36-50; 19:7). He had come to save, not destroy (v. 56).

That spirit should also characterize Jesus' followers. While there must be no compromise with, or glossing over of, sin, there must always be a tender solicitude for the sinner's eternal welfare. Our mission, too, is to be soul winners. Hence the ever-recurring admonition to speak the truth in

love (Eph. 4:15); to practice long-suffering and gentleness (Gal. 5:22-23); moderation (Phil. 4:5); mercy, meekness, and forbearance (Col. 3:12-13), etc. The dominant note in our thinking must be the salvation of men's souls, which can be accomplished only by the Gospel. That will help us to overcome pride, prejudice, and impatience. Additional aids are the realization of our own continued need of God's mercy and our fellow men's forbearance with us as well as the knowledge that spiritual growth takes time (Mark 4:26-29).

Let us daily appear before the throne of grace for pardon, and in appreciation of it strive to be more Christlike toward our fellow pilgrims to eternity. OTTO E. SOHN

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 9:57-62

Faithfulness and loyalty to God and to Christ are demanded throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament we have Elijah 1 Kings 18:21; in the New Testament, John the Baptist, Stephen, and others. The means by which God works such faithfulness are mentioned again and again: Rom. 16:20; 1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6. Despite this, many disciples of Christ fall by the way because of divided loyalty. To warn against this, the words of our text are recorded.

THE TRAGEDY OF DIVIDED LOYALTY

- I. Between worldly advantages and Christ*
- II. Between family duties and Christ*
- III. Between earthly ties and Christ*

I

Christ is on His way to Jerusalem to pay the supreme sacrifice for the sins of the world, vv. 51, 57. Stopped by a man who makes a great promise, v. 57b. The promise is all-comprehensive, Rev. 14:4. Why, then, the answer of Jesus? V. 58. This man had failed to count the cost of discipleship. Cf. Matt. 19:21. Using His own example of self-effacement and humiliation, the Lord outlines the cost of discipleship. Not as though every follower of Christ must be poor as a church mouse, but every follower must consider Christ and His riches, won by

His humiliation (2 Cor. 8:9), of the highest importance. He must be ready to forsake all else. True today. Worldly advantages, e. g., "benefits" of the lodge, "gains" by tending store during public worship, and the like, if sought, denote the spirit of divided loyalty.

Evidently the man in our text turned back. He failed to weigh the eternal riches of Christ and so, when weighed in the balances of God, was found wanting in faithfulness and loyalty. Reason for divided loyalty today is the same. Failure to recognize, as did Paul, the all-sufficiency of Christ, Phil. 3:8. A timely warning against materialism.

II

The next example of divided loyalty found in the man whom Jesus Himself told: "Follow Me." He seems very willing, but he asks for a reprieve. Wants to take care of his father, v. 59. Nothing blameworthy in that of itself. In fact, God Himself has established family duties. Cf. Table of Duties, specifically: Of Children, 1 Tim. 5:4; Husbands, Eph. 5:25. These duties, however, dare never be placed on the same level with, or above, the love and duties we owe to Christ, Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:20, 24. Here, then, was a definite case of divided loyalty, and hence the answer of Jesus, v. 60. Matthew Henry: "It is a plausible excuse indeed: 'Let me go and bury my father, let me take care of my family and provide for my children, and then I will think of serving Christ'; whereas the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof must be sought and minded in the first place."

This divided loyalty stems from failure to recognize the truth expressed by the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, Luke 2:49; expressed by Christ at the wedding of Cana, John 2:4; expressed by Jesus in the summary of the Law, placing love and service to God first.

III

The third person mentioned also offers to follow Jesus, v. 61a. But he adds a condition, v. 61b. This, too, seems reasonable, for this is what Elisha asked for when Elijah called him, 1 Kings 19:20. But the answer of Jesus (v. 62), bares the divided loyalty of his heart. Edersheim: "The farewell proposed was not like that of Elisha nor like the supper of Levi, or Matthew. It was rather like the year which Jephtha's

daughter would have with her companions, ere fulfilling the vow. It shows that to follow Christ was regarded as a duty; and to leave those in the earthly home, as a trial. And it betokens, not merely a divided heart, but one not fit for the Kingdom of God. For how can he draw a straight furrow in which to cast the seed who, as he puts his hand to the plow, looks around or behind him?"

Not only a good beginning, but also faithfulness to the end is essential, Matt. 24: 13. Cf. Lot's wife; Demas. In the pass of Thermopylae, in the country of Greece, there stands a monument, world-renowned, erected to Leonidas and his valiant three hundred. It bears the inscription: "Go stranger, and tell at Sparta that we died here fighting to the last in obedience to our laws," and commemorates that thrilling event when Leonidas, with his three hundred, successfully held the pass of Thermopylae against tremendous odds until betrayed into the hands of the enemy. Thus this monument bears magnificent witness to the quality of loyalty or steadfastness. Even so Christ demands of His people faithfulness unto death.

How to escape divided loyalty? Not possible with men, but with God. He works faithfulness through Word and Sacraments. He works repentance for divided loyalty by His Spirit and assures the penitent: "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." For also the failings in loyalty to Christ are paid for by our Savior. May we, then, take the warning of our text to heart and ever ask the Lord: Hymn 366: 7.

EDWIN H. PFLUG

