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Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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Homiletics

A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 12:1-10

The Text and the Day. — This text forms a fine combination of today's Epistle and Gospel selections, the former containing a prayer for spiritual growth, particularly in Christian understanding, the latter depicting the repeated adversities in our lives.

Notes on Meaning. — It is essential to remember that Paul's glorying was provoked by antagonists who doubted his apostleship. Such glorying was distasteful and needless to him and was done merely for the good of the cause. He gloried not in his own achievements, but in the manifestations of divine grace in him. — The "visions" are objective, not subjective apparitions; not imaginary, but actual. — "Lawful": God has not given us the ability to understand or use the language of heaven now. — "Forbear": Refrain, abstain; I want to spare you. — "My grace is sufficient": The knowledge that I am your gracious God is all that you need to carry you through to the goal. — "When I am weak, then am I strong": A pleasing paradox. We are strong only as long as we realize our frailty and lean wholly on God (Peter).

Preaching Pitfalls. — It is vain and futile to speculate on Paul's reason for identifying paradise and the third heaven, as well as the identity of these. Let us not look for other heavens. — Also, it is impossible to ascertain which event fourteen years previously the Apostle had in mind. — So also the nature of the "thorn in the flesh," which has received a variety of interpretations. It is best to refrain from speculation on these points.

Preaching Emphases. — The underlying purpose of this text is to set forth the refining power of divine grace, by which our gracious Father leads His children forward on the road of life, protects them against pride and resultant apostasy by disciplinary measures, yet also gives them encouraging manifestations of His love and grants continued strength through

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the Gospel to fight the good fight of faith to a victorious finish. When a heart is filled with pride and self-reliance, divine grace cannot accomplish its ends, since it is not irresistible. Hence, God uses adversities to soften our opposition and pave the way for His sanctifying grace.

Problem and Goal.—The sermon should be directed at the sufferer, offering him the light of Scripture on the why and wherefore of suffering, offering glorious assurance and giving him a new lease on life.

Outline:

GOD'S SPIRITUAL TRAINING SCHOOL

- I. Our loving Father sends us both joys and sorrows.
 - A. The joys are exemplified by the apparition (v. 1-4).
 - B. The sorrows are represented by the thorn in the flesh (v. 7).
 - C. We, too, have our portion of both. Why?
- II. By them our Father would produce greater spirituality.
 - A. Never-failing humility (v. 7).
 - B. Unceasing prayer (v. 8).
 - C. Unreserved reliance on His grace (v. 9).
 - D. Other spiritual fruits may be added.
- III. Such persuasion will equip us against all enemies of our souls.
 - A. Our strength lies in knowing our weakness and relying on God (v. 9, 10 b).
 - B. Our submission to God's will must be done cheerfully for Jesus' sake (v. 10 a).
 - C. Let us heed well and put into practice these principles of our divine Teacher. OTTO E. SOHN

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 8:1-9

The Text and the Day.—Under the broad theme of the Christian life the stewardship of possessions deserves a place. Our text, together with its context, is one of the most explicit in the New Testament on this phase of Christian living. The regular Epistle text dwells on the close bond uniting all Chris-

tians. Our text deals with an outward evidence of this close bond of faith and love.

Notes on Meaning.—The translation in our Authorized Version is quite exact. In v. 2 “liberality” might be better rendered “sincerity” or “single-mindedness”; but the result is about the same. Add abundant joy, in being permitted to serve, to deep poverty, which made their serving difficult, and the result is proof positive of the sincerity of the Macedonians. Take away their joy in giving, and the work loses its worth; take away their poverty, and the gift no longer is a great sacrifice. Christian works may be measured by the love and the effort or sacrifice required. Cp. Mark 12:42-44; Luke 7:47; John 12:3.

In v. 4 we read: “Begging of us the favor (Lenski insists on ‘grace,’ i. e., God’s grace) and the fellowship of the ministry unto the saints.” The Macedonians insisted on taking part in the collection, though they themselves were seemingly in need of help.

V. 5 proves their growth in sanctification. When life itself is given to God, a man’s hands, feet, voice, his silver and gold, etc., are given also. (*Lutheran Hymnal*, 400.)

In v.7 Paul sums up the treasures of the Corinthians: They have saving faith; they have the preaching of God’s Word; they have knowledge of things spiritual, which has resulted in earnestness and love. Now let them give evidence of their faith by matching the sincerity of the Macedonians. No law here, but Gospel admonition.

V. 9: The one thing needful is presented in the clearest, simplest terms. The meaning is clear; but the gift surpasses all understanding.

Preaching Pitfalls.—There are none for the pastor who loves his people and will permit the Lord to speak to them in our text. Note that the Corinthians were not as zealous as the Macedonians. But Paul did not rebuke them. He helped them to improve.

Preaching Emphases.—The Gospel minister will make the most of verse nine with its message of grace. Here is the source of love and of the whole Christian life. Minor emphasis should, however, be given to the good example of the Macedonians and their followers today, which shows the grace of God in operation.

Problem and Goal. — The problem before Paul when he wrote 2 Corinthians was to elicit the wholehearted support of the Corinthians for the Palestine famine fund. This was made the more difficult by the fact that the congregation, having begun the project a year before, had grown indifferent not only to the collection but to much of the Christian way of life. Paul's first letter dealt with a number of these problems, and though improvement had been made, some matters, including the collection, had yet to be attended to.

Note that Paul uses the Gospel of Christ as motivation for this work of love. Note also that he doesn't wait until all other problems have been put aside. Even weak faith should be put to the test.

Note, finally, how little Paul says about the need of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. No pictures here of starving Jews to work on men's sympathies; the picture is of Christ, who first loved us, and of the Macedonian Christians, who gave Him love for love. That is Gospel motivation. And it is successful. Cp. Rom. 15: 26 ff.

Outline:

CHRISTIAN LIVING IMPLIES CHRISTIAN GIVING

- I. It was in the very nature of Christ to give.
 - A. He gave Himself to man;
 - B. With Himself He gave man great spiritual riches.
- II. Those who give themselves to Christ share in this nature of Christ.
 - A. The Macedonians did so and found great joy therein;
 - B. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to do the same,
 1. By pointing to the love of Christ,
 2. By showing what joy is found therein.
 - C. Today the same opportunities present themselves to Christians to find joy in loving service.

MARK J. STEEGE

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 THESS. 3:1-5

The Text and the Day. — The propers for the day uniquely parallel some thoughts of the text chosen for this Sunday: Prayer that the prophets be found faithful, prayer in general,

the praise of the Lord to reach all nations. The *to loipon* (v. 1) appropriately introduces the tapering off of the church year with its reminder of sanctification.

Notes on Meaning. — The Thessalonian congregation was perturbed by false opinions concerning the Last Things. Paul patiently instructs them not to expect the return of Christ at once; the Man of Sin must first be revealed (2:3-9). In contemplation of this development of the antichristian power, Paul exhorts his Christians to stand fast (2:15), and adds the prayer (v. 17) that the Lord give them strength.

The text presents no serious difficulties, although a few variant interpretations of some words can be found. The present imperative *proseuchesthe* indicates an action going on which is to continue: "Keep on praying," a neat touch of the Apostle, who is always ready to acknowledge fruits of faith when he sees them. Similarly, continued action is indicated by *treche* and *doxazetai*, i. e., this is already going on. The King James "unreasonable," *atopos*, may be misunderstood: *atopos*, "out of place," hence, a wrongdoer. *Pistis* (v. 2) can be taken either as subjective or objective faith; either makes good sense here. The *ponerou* of v. 3 can be taken either as "evil" or as "The Evil One," preferably as the latter. The *agape Theou* and the *hypomonen tou Christou* are best taken in the sense of "love which God gives" and "patience which Christ gives."

Preaching Emphases. — The text definitely deals with sanctification, the result of a living faith in the hearts of people who are Christians. These have an obligation to the Word and to those who brought this Word to them. Such obligation, as well as Christian life in general, may indeed meet serious opposition, but the Apostle is sure that Christian faith will overcome.

Outlines:

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR A BLESSED RELATION BETWEEN PASTOR AND CONGREGATION?

I. The Congregation's Part

- A. To pray for success of the Word preached by the pastor;
- B. To pray for deliverance from the wicked.

II. The Pastor's Part

- A. To pray that the congregation be kept from evil;
- B. To have confidence that the Word will be a power in the congregation.

Or:**CHRISTIAN WAITING IN A WORLD OF TURMOIL**

We wait in

I. Prayer

- A. Prayer that the Word of the Lord have free course;
- B. Prayer that all messengers of the Word be delivered from evil.

II. Confidence

- A. Confidence that the Lord is faithful;
- B. Confidence that the Lord will establish His Christians and keep them from evil.

H. O. A. KEINATH
NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**2 THESS. 3: 6-13**

The Text and the Day. — The thought for the day is that the Christian's greatest problem is still sin (Gospel) and that he must ever work towards eradicating all sin from his life (Epistle). The Introit shows where to gain strength and guidance in combating sin, and in the Collect the congregation prays for guidance to avoid everything that would "hurt us" and hinder "those things that Thou wouldst have done." Our text fits into this thought, since it shows how to correct congregational sins.

Notes on Meaning. — Because of the times and conditions, which caused some to teach that Christ's advent was imminent, disorderly conduct was found in the church at Thessalonica. This conduct had been censured 1 Thess. 4: 11-12. It persisted and must now be vigorously dealt with. V. 6 is directed not merely to the elders, but to the church in general (1 Thess. 5: 14), stressing the congregational authority. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," the source of all true authority in the Church. "Withdraw," not excommunicate. The purpose was to bring the disorderly brother to his senses. They were, in no uncertain way, to show their disapproval. The person

should sense that, though still considered a brother, his conduct might lead to excommunication. The withdrawal was, as it were, to be a quarantine to protect against the spread of this disorder, and to show that the congregation would have no part in it. "This man will be refused participation in the agape of the congregation, thus also in the Lord's Supper" (Lenski). "Disorderly" (*ataктоos*), a soldier who is out of line and therefore throws confusion into the ranks. Vv. 7-8. "*Verba docent, exempla trahunt.*" A beautiful example of living for Christ and therefore for others. V. 9. However, the Thessalonians were not to misconstrue or misuse this example. V. 10. Paul expresses a fundamental law of God and strikes at the heart of the disorder. V. 11. "We hear" (we are hearing), implying repetition. "Disorderly, working not at all (nothing), but are busybodies." Lenski: "To be busy with what is none of their business. They gave up their employment, spent their time in idleness, and occupied their idle time by running around and agitating and bothering other people." Expositor's: "Fussy and officious, doing anything but attending to their daily trade." They were busy with matters which ran counter to living a quiet and godly Christian life in keeping with God's Law, and were therefore a source of disorder. V. 12. "In our Lord Jesus Christ," whom alone every member is serving. "With quietness (*meta heesychias*)" is the point of emphasis, since the Church's aim must also be "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." V. 13. "Be not weary," do not let down. Despite the disorders, those not involved should undiscouraged and undisturbed continue in their upright conduct, correcting the congregational sins.

Preaching Pitfalls. — To use this text only to condemn the sin of being a busybody, would be to miss its wider implications and the opportunity to point out the congregational sins of our day. Don't forget v. 6 and 12, which strikes the evangelical note, lest the sermon be only Law.

Preaching Emphases. — Disorders will be found even in the best of Christian congregations. They dare not be overlooked. They must be brought out and viewed in the light of God's Word. The orderly Christian, and self-evidently the pastor, should, to further our Lord's cause, be willing to forgo even some of his rights in order to wield the greatest

influence in the congregation. The disorderly person must be dealt with as an erring brother. Permitting any congregational sin to flourish will ruin that congregation. Be persistent, but undiscouraged in dealing with any congregational disorders, which violate God's Law.

Problem and Goal.—In our day many disorders have crept into our congregations. Due to the multiplying duties of a pastor he may begin to generalize in his sermons and neglect these symptoms of spiritual deterioration. Our people, too, may sidestep their duties toward a brother and thus endanger their own faith and that of the entire Church. God help us pastors to see these signs of spiritual decay, and patiently but persistently to counteract them in the humble, self-effacing spirit of St. Paul. Then the dead weight of uncondemned parish sins will be lifted, and our congregations will grow in grace, if all is done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Outline:

CORRECTING CONGREGATIONAL DISORDERS

- I. We must ever guard against disorders.
 - A. They crept into the church at Thessalonica.
 - B. They threaten our churches today.
- II. How shall we deal with them?
 - A. With courage.
 - B. With persistence.
 - C. By a blameless, self-effacing example.
 - D. Always in the name of our Lord Jesus.

F. E. SCHUMANN

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 THESS. 2:9-13

The Text and the Day.—The Gospel for this Sunday, the Marriage Feast of the King, and its parallel, Luke 14, are often used to speak on building Christ's kingdom in the world. The Epistle ties in with this theme, for only sanctified believers are properly equipped for this work. The Collect, too, suggests the same thought, for in it we ask for cleansing from sin, so that we may serve God. The text before us lends itself well for emphasizing church work in one's community.

Notes on Meaning.—V. 9. "Labor" denotes exertion;

"travail" is fatigue following such exertion, both terms implying hardships. "Night and day," the Jewish mode of reckoning, meaning incessantly, continually. "Because we would not be chargeable to any of you," no imputation of selfishness or covetousness could be laid to the Apostle's and his co-workers' charge. V. 10. "Holly," shunning sin, conduct toward God; "justly," obeying God's norm of right, conduct toward men; "unblamably," no one could justly cast blame or reproach upon the Apostle. "You that believe," not as though the Apostle acted otherwise among the unbelievers, but only believers recognized and understood his conduct. V. 11. Follow rather the R. V. "As ye know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging you, and testifying." "Testifying," a solemn pressing home of the exhortations to the hearers. V. 12. "Unto His kingdom and glory," not glorious kingdom or kingdom of His glory, but the Kingdom of Grace, which will be followed by the Kingdom of Glory. V. 13. "For this cause," because of your reception of the Gospel. "The Word of God which ye have heard from us," lit., "the Word of hearing which is of God." The Gospel is called the Word of hearing because it comes by hearing. "Of God," God is the Author of the Word (inspiration). Note the difference between *paralabontes* and *edexasthe*, the former meaning to receive, the latter, to accept. The *energeitai* is our English energize. The Gospel not only brings a person to faith; it is the sole power to energize a believer to a godly life.

Preaching Pitfalls. — When using this text for speaking on church work, the preacher must be careful not to stress mission work in general. The text applies to work in the local congregation and in the community.

Preaching Emphases. — The text shows how Paul and his associates established the congregation at Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:1-9). Sinners today are won for the Kingdom by the same means and methods as used by Paul. Followers of the Savior will grasp every opportunity to save souls by personal testimony. Such testimony, however, must be accompanied by a sanctified life, for how can they ask others to be sanctified when they themselves lack sanctification?

Problem and Goal. — "Each one reach one" is still the slogan of our Church. Our members must be reminded re-

peatedly that they should be witnesses unto the risen Savior and that, in the final analysis, the sole purpose of their life is to extend Christ's kingdom.

Outline:

BUILDING CHRIST'S KINGDOM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- I. The workers. They must be
 - A. Consecrated believers in the Savior (vv. 10, 12-13);
 - B. Zealous, unselfish, and self-sacrificing (v. 9).
- II. The means
 - A. The Gospel alone produces and sustains faith (v. 13).
 - B. The Gospel alone creates and sustains a sanctified life (v. 13).
- III. The methods
 - A. Individualized work (v. 11);
 - B. Continuous and persistent efforts (v. 9 a.).

WALTER A. BAEPLER

THE FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION

1 PETER 2:1-10

The Text and the Day. — The text is a *sedes doctrinae* for the universal priesthood of all believers, a truth restored by the Reformation and re-emphasized by Walther. Like the Epistle, the text emphasizes the publishing of the Gospel and the *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Notes on Meaning. — 1 Peter is addressed to the scattered Christians, strangers and pilgrims, and encourages them to live as Christians among the heathen, in conformity with their living hope.

V. 2. *Artigenneta brephe* includes those who had been Christians for years. "Newborn" contrasts with their natural birth. *To logikon adolon gala*, the unadulterated spiritual milk of the Word, not in contrast to "strong meat," as in Heb. 5:12.

V. 5. "Be ye built up a spiritual house." The imperative is preferable to the indicative. — "Spiritual sacrifices are contrasted not only with those of cattle, but even with human works offered *ex opere operato*, because *spiritual* refers to the movements of the Holy Ghost in us." Apology, *Trigl.*, 391. Cf. Rom. 12:1.

V. 8 b. "Whereunto also they were appointed." Not to

their unbelief, but to their stumbling and perdition as a punishment of their unbelief. *Voluntas Dei consequens*. An earnest warning of God's righteous judgment. Cf. 2 Cor. 2:15 f.

V. 9. "A royal priesthood," a priesthood in the service of a King. Cf. C. T. M. XIX:241 ff. — "A peculiar people," a people for God's own possession. — "Praises," His goodness, mercy, and grace as manifested in His saving acts, especially those enumerated in the Third Article.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Let no one be given the slightest impulse to carnal pride and self-exaltation, nor let the hearer identify the true visible Church with the *Una Sancta*.

Preaching Emphases. — Also in a Reformation sermon the preacher will do well to follow the example of the text in letting the positive side of the presentation predominate and especially in employing the powerful Gospel motivation. — The text points to the three great Reformation *Solas*: *Sola Scriptura* (v. 2), *Sola Gratia* (vv. 3, 9-10), *Sola Fide* (vv. 6-7). The text also answers the question: What is the Church? *All Christians* are addressed in the text. All Christians are a holy priesthood and have direct access to God. One expression of this priesthood is the congregational singing restored by Luther in 1524 on the basis of v. 9, Eph. 5:19, and Col. 3:16.

Problem and Goal. — The high spiritual functions given to O. T. believers were largely forgotten as a result of Jewish nationalism, legalism, and formalism. Similarly, the glorious privileges and sublime responsibilities of N. T. believers were obscured and almost blacked out by the Roman hierarchy. After four centuries of Reformation blessings we are threatened by smug complacency, satiety, and lethargy in our congregations. Lest we become vainglorious when we glory in our great Reformation heritage, the sermon will aim at a deeper appreciation of *Sola Gratia*, a more diligent use of the Word for spiritual growth, and a deeper consecration, a larger offering of spiritual sacrifices. The preacher will accomplish much if he creates in his hearers an enthusiasm for the exalted status to which God has elevated them.

Outline:

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION —
A REMINDER TO PRAISE GOD

I. For His great grace

- A. In calling us out of darkness and giving us the new birth;
- B. In making Christ precious to us;
- C. In making us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession;
- D. In restoring by the Reformation the pure knowledge of Christ, of the Gospel, and of our sublime privileges, and in preserving these treasures to us.

II. By a diligent use of the Word.

- A. Tasting that the Lord is gracious stimulates our appetite for the sincere milk of the Word.
- B. As living stones we will be built solidly on Christ (*Sola Scriptura*) and by ever coming to Him remain on this foundation. (When speaking of our foundation, Christ and the Word are used interchangeably.)
- C. As regenerated people we will nourish the new life that we may grow.
- D. As priests we will "keep knowledge" (Mal. 2:7) in the home, in Bible classes, etc., and keep the open Bible open.

III. By offering spiritual sacrifices.

- A. The Christian is both priest and sacrifice.
- B. Our sacrifices are never propitiatory. Spiritual sacrifices can be offered only by the pardoned sinner. They are acceptable to God through faith for Christ's sake. F. C., *Trigl.*, 969.
- C. The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15; Hos. 14:2).
- D. The sacrifice of mind, body, and will, by obedience, service, and conformity to His will (Rom. 12:1; 6:13, 19).
- E. Publishing the grand qualities (love, mercy, and grace) of our God as revealed in His saving acts. Sharing our rich heritage with others.

In a world that loves darkness rather than light and is hostile to the crucified and risen Christ we are to conduct ourselves as God's noblemen, ever conscious of our exalted position, ever active in performing the functions of our high calling.

V. L. MEYER