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## Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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## Homiletics

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### A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

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#### NEW YEAR'S DAY

LUKE 13:1-9

*The Text and the Day.*—The note of repentance, the upward look for forgiveness, and the forward look for grace in Christ Jesus are primary thoughts at the beginning of a new year. All of these thoughts find ample expression in the text for the day.

*Notes on Meaning.*—The modern mind within Christendom still follows the age-old pattern of making snap judgments when it sees misfortunes and calamities strike individuals or communities. It thinks of some particular sin or transgression which elicited that calamity. When destruction of property, loss of children, and a broken body bowed Job down in grief, his three friends could think of nothing else than some specific sin in Job as the cause for his grief and misery. The context of our text shows Christ speaking of the signs of the times. Impressed by what Christ had said, some Jews, probably from Jerusalem, recalled a recent violent act of Pilate and undoubtedly meant to imply that the Galileans who suffered death were done to death because they were great sinners. Whenever the incident may have occurred (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, xvii, 9, 3; xx, 5, 3; and *Bell. Jud.* ii, 5; v. 1), Jesus brushed it aside and centered the minds of those who heard Him on themselves. Speculation about others was out of place. Consciousness of each one's own relationship to God was very much in place. Repentance, sorrow over sin, faith in forgiveness offered by God through Christ—that was to be the essential concern for everyone in the presence of Jesus. Whether calamity hit Galileans or Judeans, educated or uneducated, each one must consider himself and see that he understands what God means with "repent" in Scripture. If repentance is anything short of a complete turning to God, of a burning of bridges that coupled the individual to a life without God, it is not repentance. Repentance implies a new life, in which a man walks with God and no longer finds pleasure in the works of darkness.

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Jesus exemplifies the patience of God with sinners who ought to repent and do not repent in the parable of the fruit tree. Like the gardener who pleaded for another year for the fig tree which had not yielded any fruit for three successive years, God in Christ is ready to give the sinner another year of grace, another opportunity to repent, another chance to embrace forgiveness in Christ.

*Preaching Pitfalls.*—The earnest thought of Jesus in vv. 3, 5, 9 needs proper attention in the sermon, but the preacher must guard against a morbid stressing of sin and punishment. If the preacher follows the "wooing note" of Jesus in the Gospel according to St. John, he will put his people in the proper frame of mind to want to walk with Jesus throughout the New Year.

*Preaching Emphases.*—The goodness of God knows no bounds. Ever since the first sin blackened man's heart, God's mercy has not dimmed, and His arm has not grown short. Israel in the wilderness, the divided kingdoms in Palestine, the Church of God in each century, began each new year with the same faith that a merciful God would not withdraw His presence, His providential care, His Word of mercy and forgiveness. This truth needs emphasis today. The unsettled condition in the world, the continued ideological clash between the United States and Russia, the vexing problem of unemployment, the further devaluation of the English pound, give the archenemy of the Christian, the devil, a fertile field to cultivate, a field in which he sows doubt and uncertainty and tries to wean the Christian away from God, or in which he strives to implant the thought of Cain, who supposed his sin could not be forgiven. In view of these facts preach the long-suffering of God, who is like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, eager to give the sinner a chance to return and ready to clothe him in royal garments.

*Problem and Goal.*—A growing problem in some congregations is the question of attendance in this service. Preliminary work by the pastor will undoubtedly bring a larger number of people to church. The goal of the sermon on this text is not met by a dogmatic discussion of repentance and faith. It must aim to present a faith eager to confess Christ and ready to live the Christian life as evidence of the faith resident within the heart. With doors wide open for the Gospel in



many countries of the world, nothing less than a living faith will do. With so many lives blasted by sin, the beauty of real Christian living can lead some to ask for the reason of that beauty and become beautiful, too, through faith in Christ, who calls all men to repentance.

*Outline:*

**BEGIN THE NEW YEAR WITH CHRIST**

1. By confessing your sin.
2. By turning to Christ in faith.
3. By looking to Christ for strength for the days ahead.
4. By vowing to lead lives consecrated to Him.

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

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**THE FESTIVAL OF THE EPIPHANY**

JOHN 5:33-39

*The Text and the Day.*—The Festival of the Epiphany, also known as the Gentiles' Christmas, reminds us of the Christ Child's revelation to men. Cp. the Introit for the day. This text is eminently suited to this festival inasmuch as the Christ reveals Himself to this day to the children of men in the Scriptures. The question of the Magi regarding the newborn King of the Jews was answered from the Scriptures. Cp. Matt. 2:1-6.

*Notes on the Meaning.*—The Lord Jesus had begun His public ministry. By mighty words and deeds He revealed Himself to men as the Messiah of Israel and the Redeemer of mankind who was to come. However, there were those who questioned His Messiahship, and over against these caviling people He defends His ministry. He points to the testimony of John the Baptist, to whom the leaders of the people had sent a delegation, thinking that John the Baptist, perhaps, was the Messiah. V. 33. Cp. John 1:19-27. But this testimony from man is not what the Savior had in mind, much as He appreciates John the Baptist, v. 34. He refers to that testimony "that they might be saved," v. 34. John the Baptist, after all, was merely "a lamp that burneth and shineth," v. 35; not the light itself. But even John's testimony was of a nature to rejoice his hearers at least for a season, v. 35b. Above all, Christ's witness are His works, v. 36, and



the testimony of the Father, v. 37. Cp. Matt. 3:17; Luke 9:35; John 12:28. But alas, note the stinging rebuke in v. 38. Since they had the Scriptures, Christ urges them to search them for testimony concerning Himself. And thus they will have eternal life because the Scriptures testify of Christ, v. 39.

*Problem and Goal.* The problem directly confronting the preacher is to impress his hearers with the importance and necessity of accepting, by God's grace, the unimpeachable, incontrovertible testimony concerning the Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. Their very weal in time and eternity depends on it. To this end they not only should hear the preaching of the Word of salvation, but like the Bereans they should also search the Scriptures, whether the things heard are so. Cp. Acts 17:11. And having thus enhanced their knowledge of the Christ, having been firmly grounded in the truth by a diligent searching of the Scriptures, they are to be "a lamp that burneth and shineth" unto others. He to whom the Christ of God has been revealed as his personal Savior is obligated to reveal this Christ to others as their only Redeemer from sin and all its dreadful consequences through the preaching of the Gospel and personal testimony. It is tremendously important that this be done by our Christians — otherwise v. 35b and v. 38. Cp. 2 Cor. 6:1; also Matt. 5:15-16.

*Outline:*

**OUR EPIPHANY BLESSING AND OBLIGATION**

1. Christ is revealed to us as our personal Redeemer.
  - A. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, testify of Him, bringing us
    - a. The testimony of John the Baptist.
    - b. The testimony of His miraculous works.
    - c. The testimony of the Father.
  2. We are to reveal Him to others as the world's Savior.
    - A. This requires on our part a continued, diligent study of the Scriptures.
    - B. Thus we become a lamp that burneth and shineth (reflecting in our lives and by our testimony the brightness of the Christ's glory).
    - C. *Conclusion:* A note of warning, v. 35b, v. 38. Cp. 2 Cor. 6:1.

WALTER H. BOUMAN



## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

JOHN 6:28-35

*The Text and the Day.* — The Epiphany light still shines forth from the texts for the Sundays after the Epiphany. The Savior appears in His glory, working wonders, imparting blessings, and especially dedicating Himself and all that are His own to the work assigned to Him by the Father: the saving of men of all nations.

The regular Gospel lesson shows Jesus presenting Himself for His Father's business; the Epistle lesson calls upon the Church to dedicate itself to this same work, Matt. 10:32 ff. Christ promises life to His followers, thus showing His glory, Rom. 10:8 ff. His followers are called upon to confess Him as the Giver of Life.

Our text agrees with this thought: Christ's glory is seen especially in the gifts which He imparts as the Bread of Life. It is a gift for all; all lands therefore have cause to make a joyful noise unto Him and to serve Him with gladness (Introit). The emphasis, during this entire season, should be placed upon *Christ's* work, *Christ's* wonders, *Christ's* glory. How we welcome the opportunity! Cp. Hymns 339 to 368.

*Notes on Meaning.* — Jesus had spoken of laboring for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, v. 27. The Jews concluded that such laboring implied the offering of meritorious works. They wanted to know what works were required by God. Jesus answers: This is the work required by God, that ye believe. In other words: Place your trust in Me alone, not in your own works. No more is required.

Lenski (*Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, p. 455) wants the work of God in v. 29 to mean God's work in us. But compare that with v. 27. There Jesus told the Jews to work for the meat enduring unto everlasting life. To speak of faith as a work required by God is entirely in accord with other clear passages of Scripture. God is, of course, the *causa efficiens* of faith, but man is the subject. God doesn't do man's believing for him; He looks for faith in man. Cp. Luther, St. L. ed., Vol. VII, 2213 f.; Cremer, *Bibl. theol. Woerterbuch*, under *ergon*.

We need only keep in mind the difference between the requirements of God in the Law and those in the Gospel. When God requires obedience in the Law, He expects man



to render it as his own work: "This do, and thou shalt live," Luke 10:28. But when God requires faith, He is indicating the manner in which grace is appropriated. The blessing of life is not ours for the work's sake, which is faith, but through faith we receive the unmerited gift of God's grace.

The Jews were not ready to believe in Christ. They were not even ready to believe Him, to accept His statements. They wanted assurance that Christ was worthy of such trust, vv. 31-32. How slow they were to believe the testimony concerning Him, John 1:29 ff.; 3:25 ff.; 5:17 ff., esp. v. 36. They still considered Moses and the Old Testament Prophets greater than Jesus. In the following verses Jesus therefore proclaims His glory. He is the true Bread from heaven, giving everlasting life to those who come to Him. This Moses could not do. Moses could not even give manna from heaven.

Christ thus places Himself far above Moses and all the Prophets, not only in His person, but also in His works. Cp. 2 Cor. 3:7 ff.; Heb. 3:5 ff. This is His epiphany.

*Problem and Goal.*— Let the preacher so magnify the person and work of the Savior that his hearers will cry out, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," not sharing the carnal hope of so many of the Jews, but truly desiring the Bread of Life as the perfect nourishment for their hungry souls. If the outline suggested below is followed, the preacher should use every opportunity to emphasize the glory of the Savior.

*Illustrations.*— As Christ's word: "Lazarus, come forth!" actually brought life into the lifeless body of His friend, so His call to faith has within it the power to raise men from spiritual death and to give them eternal life.

As manna, a heaven-sent bread, nourished the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land, so Christ, the Bread of Life, nourishes our souls on the way to heaven.

*Outline:*

**WE GLORIFY OUR SAVIOR AS THE TRUE BREAD OF LIFE**

- I. He alone satisfies the requirements of God.
  - A. The Jews were in no position to do so. (Apply today.)
    1. They felt the need of additional works.
    2. No additional works could be suggested.



**B. Jesus offers Himself as man's Substitute.**

1. He shows that God has sent Him from heaven.
2. He gives assurance that God demands only faith in Him.

**II. He also fully satisfies the needs of men.**

- A. He provides more than the needs of their bodies — a minor concern. (Cp. v. 27.)
- B. He is Himself the life-giving Food for their souls.
  1. He brings men to faith.
  2. He sustains their faith.
  3. He satisfies their spiritual hunger and thirst — knowledge, strength, comfort, etc.

MARK J. STEEGE

**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

LUKE 4:40-44

*The Text and the Day.* — This Sunday belongs to the Epiphany cycle, and thus its message must basically be "epiphany," appearance or revelation of the Lord. The text is definitely Christocentric, not so much anthropocentric, although the latter is not beyond the scope of the text. The Propers for the day fit admirably to this Epiphany, for they stress worship, praise, and honor to the King of Kings.

*Notes on Meaning.* — V. 40. "When the sun was setting" — this was the end of the Sabbath, after our 6 P. M., hence, according to the Jewish law, the time when the sick could be carried around without violating Sabbath observances. The New Testament definitely distinguishes between those who were "sick" and those "possessed by the devil." The modernistic explanation that "possessed by the devil" is merely the expression of that time for what we today would call epilepsy, lunacy, or insanity is untenable. Jesus indeed cured both, but the methods He employed are usually quite different.

Every reader of the New Testament is familiar with the unexpected, but correct, confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah repeatedly coming from the lips of those who were possessed by the devil. Here is another case. Cp. James 2:19. Consistently Jesus silences such confession (cp. Mark



3:11-12) without directly stating the reason. It seems that He would have that kind of confession only from His followers.

V. 43. The universality of His message, so often misunderstood by His contemporaries, again and again is revealed by Jesus.

*Preaching Pitfalls and Emphases.* — Several thoughts stand out in this rather simple text: Christ, the Healer; comfort in sickness; the universal Savior. Yet, in view of the fact that this is an Epiphany text, this basic thought of an appearance or revelation of Christ seems the most appropriate treatment of this section. All the chief thoughts of the text can be related to this Epiphany theme, and the sermon thus becomes, as it should, definitely Christocentric. (Note the accumulation of a dozen pronouns referring to Christ in these verses.)

*Problem and Goal.* — Christ in the "epiphany" enters very directly into personal relation with a large number of people. The preacher may take his cue from this fact: Christ entering very directly within the sphere of Christian life and experience.

*Outline:*

**JESUS SHOWING HIMSELF TO MANKIND**

I. He shows Himself as the great Helper in all need.

A. No need is beyond Him.

B. No one in need is beyond Him.

II. He shows Himself as the Savior of all.

A. He does this by His Word.

B. He invites all to membership in His kingdom.

H. O. A. KEINATH

**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

LUKE 8:38-40

*The Text and the Day.* — The Propers exhibit the sum of Christianity: Gospel, a confession of unworthiness and a declaration of faith; Epistle, obedience; Introit, the joy of the saved; Collect, the Christian's prayer for deliverance from evil. — Our text does likewise.

*Notes on Meaning.* — Note first: The man who was saved from his terrible condition, v. 29, might have gone back to his



vocation; but gratitude to Jesus impels him to offer to serve the Lord. He is an example for us. God has done much for us — think of your illness, your trouble, your farm or business, your family and your possessions. And above all that, think of the gift of your Savior! Should you not have a grateful heart for all this? Especially because you are not worthy of all His blessings! Think of the leper, Zacchaeus, and Mary Magdalene. And think of the man in the text. — Note secondly: This man expected to serve God by being *with Jesus*. He pictured his new life in rosy hues, going about with the Lord, hearing Him, seeing His miracles. But the Savior has something else for him to do. He tells him to go back to his people and tell them what God had done for him. That was, doubtless, a bitter pill for him, to face all those people who had known him, called him names, ridiculed him. But that is the way God does. Philip was preaching in Samaria to many people, and he is told to go to Gaza, to a desert; St. Paul wanted to preach in Asia, but is sent to Macedonia; Elisha was plowing a great field that required twelve yoke of oxen for the task, and he is told to leave it all and become a prophet of God; Peter wanted to serve God on the mountain of the Transfiguration, but Jesus wanted him below among the people; the young man Luther wanted to become a lawyer, and God made him a preacher; Walther wanted to serve God as a church organist in Germany, but God wanted him to serve as a church leader in America. That is God's way. We must serve Him where He wants us to be. Some people never want to accept an office or responsibility in the church; some complain that they are never elected to anything, that the church is run by a small clique. Both attitudes are wrong. We must learn to serve God in the place where He puts us, as the man in the text had to do. — Note thirdly: This man was told by Jesus to tell others about what God had done for him. The purpose was to bring the people to a knowledge of God and to faith in Jesus. That must be the purpose of our activity in God's kingdom. All that we do, in the church and in its organizations, must have the ultimate purpose of bringing souls to Jesus and to heaven. We must tell people what Jesus has done for us.

*Preaching Pitfalls.* — Do not have a dissertation about demoniacal possession. Just say that this man was in that terrible condition. We do not know much about it anyway.



**Problem and Goal.** — The preacher sees his congregation as a working force; what tremendous things could be done if all would be willing workers! What an army stands by his side! Use this sermon to lead your flock to action. Try to depict God's love in glowing terms, and call for grateful human hearts.

**Illustrations.** — As an analogy, one may speak of the specter of unemployment that fills some hearts with anxiety; they fear the day when employment may be hard to find; they dread the day when younger men will take their places and leave them idle. In contrast, in God's kingdom there is always work to do for all. — This thought could serve as an introduction.

**Outline:**

**WE HAVE WORK TO DO IN GOD'S KINGDOM**

1. Out of gratitude to God for His mercy.
2. In the way that God prescribes.
3. For the purpose of bringing souls to Jesus.

FREDERIC NIEDNER

**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

JOHN 7:33-39

**The Text and the Day.** — The text is a true Epiphany text, showing Jesus revealing Himself as the Messiah. It lends itself well for this last Sunday in our Epiphany cycle, since it relates the last incident on the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles. The Introit expresses the joy of those whose spiritual thirst has been satisfied in the epiphany of our Lord. The Gradual points out that even unbelievers shall fear our Lord, whose glory is revealed in His epiphany in Zion, His Church. The Epistle shows the Christian working by love, through faith, and flowing into the life of others as "living water." The Gospel teaches that Jesus, the Fountain, satisfies every need. Hymn 277, v. 2.

**Notes on Meaning.** — The circumstances surrounding our text, including the symbolical pouring out of a pitcher of water from the pool of Siloam at the side of the altar, as the people sang Is. 12:3, explained by the Jewish teachers as find-



ing its fulfillment in the coming Messiah, may well be used as an introduction to the sermon.

V. 33. Jesus addresses all, not only the police. His words imply His Messiahship. Six months remained before He would go away.

V. 34. Luther: "These are terrible words, I do not like to read them."—A seeking in despair. Cf. Amos 8:11; Prov. 1:24; Heb. 3:15.

Vv. 35-36. They laugh, mock, sneer, as they talk among themselves about Jesus' prophetic threat. They would say: "Is He going to sneak out and hide away among the scattered Jews and hope to be accepted by them or even the heathen Greeks?" Their ridicule was reduced to reality by Christ's Apostle Paul.

V. 37. What a dramatic, impressive moment when the Son of God steps out of the role of teacher into the role of herald and shouts His invitation into the ears of the surging crowd in the Temple court!—"Thirst" . . . spiritual thirsting, which He alone awakens and alone satisfies. Cf. Jesus and the woman of Samaria, John 4:5-26. "Drink" . . . once is enough, never to thirst again.

V. 38. "He that believeth on Me" makes clear what the figurative coming to Jesus and drinking mean. The present participle (*ho pisteuoon*) characterizes the person as one who continues trusting in Jesus.—"Even as the Scriptures say." Cf. Is. 58:11; Zech. 14:8. Jesus never failed to say, "It is written." In every believer prophecy is fulfilled as an evidence of the truth of Christianity.—"Out of his belly" continues the figure used of thirsting and drinking, meaning that the Water that gave life to him will flow from him to give life to others.—"Rivers" . . . not a mere trickle.—"Living water" . . . flowing water, not stagnant, picturing the life-giving influence of the Christian. The believer resembles Jesus Himself in that he helps to quench the thirst of many others.

V. 39. The eternal Spirit of God was operative throughout the Old Testament, but He was not yet present as He would be after Christ had been glorified, as Jesus promised, Acts 1:8.

*Preaching Pitfalls.*—Being legalists by nature, we must beware lest we make the motivation, "Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me," etc. rather than the blessed invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come," etc.



**Problem and Goal.**—Make the story live in a modern setting. The sermon will aim to stimulate thirst, will show this thirst to be God's gift and a sign of spiritual life, will point to the Fountain, Jesus, from whom flows the Water of Life, will inspire our members to think themselves as secondary sources of living waters, with the implied possibilities of what their living, active faith may bring into the life of others.

**Illustrations.**—Physical thirst is God-implanted. Likewise the thirst of the soul.—The Jordan River and the Dead Sea are illustrations of living water and stagnant water. The flowing waters of the Jordan give life wherever they touch; so the Christian. The stagnant waters of the Dead Sea give and produce nothing and may be compared to a mere intellectualism or dead orthodoxy that is stagnant, lifeless, and no faith at all which "worketh by love."—The woman of Samaria is an example of a weak, but living faith, that brings life to others. Cf. Acts 4:28-29.

**Outline:**

**CHRIST'S INVITATION AND PROMISE TO SOULS  
THAT THIRST FOR GOD**

- I. The invitation.
  - A. It identifies Christ as the Messiah, v. 37.
  - B. It has a time limit, vv. 33, 34b.
  - C. The world rejects it, vv. 32, 35-36, and will despair, v. 34.
  - D. Have you heeded it?
- II. The souls that thirst.
  - A. Consider Christ's Scriptural claims, v. 31b.
  - B. Believe, v. 38a, v. 39.
- III. The promise.
  - A. Jesus will give them to drink, v. 37.
  - B. They will become life-givers to others, v. 38.

FREDERIC E. SCHUMANN

