

8-1-1950

Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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Recommended Citation

Pieplow, Edwin E. (1950) "Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 21, Article 56.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol21/iss1/56>

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HOMILETICS

A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 5:13-19

The Text and the Day.—The text is closely related to the Gospel lesson for this Sunday. The Good Samaritan proved himself to be the true salt of the earth and a true light of the world. The Epistle lesson, Gal. 3:15-22, especially the last two verses, emphasizes that no one can be saved by good works. We can never earn salvation even when we function as the world's salt and light. This text belongs to the Sermon on the Mount, which holds before us the high goal of perfection after which Christians should strive.

Notes and Meaning.—Nothing is more useful than light and salt. The sun shines in all lands. The salt is a preservative and a preventive in all lands. Christians as salt-bringers are to oppose the spiritual corruption of men and bring about their spiritual and moral soundness. Christians by their godly life, by worship and prayer, by example and attitude, are the means of preserving the world from decay and destruction. Salt is indispensable and irreplaceable. Light is indispensable and irreplaceable. "Ye"—not the Pharisees and scribes, not the political and economic, not the philosophers and educators, not even the modern religious liberals and modernists, but "ye," the redeemed children of God, the Christians, though ever so common people.

"Are," not "they ought to be" or "they will be" in some later age or in some future life, but they "ARE"—NOW—when there is so much confusion, fear, and perplexity in the world, when so many catastrophes threaten and problems vex the whole world.

"Earth—world," the terms are parallel and mean the whole world. Some say Jesus was interested only in individual souls; that He had no concern for the social order. Others say just the opposite. But this does not square with the text. Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world as they reflect the

light and glory of Christ's holy Gospel. The world cannot be changed unless the individuals are changed. Every Christian individual will set out to change "the earth" and "the world."

"If the salt have lost its savor" — "mooranthee" means to become insipid, so as to lack the proper preserving power. Here salt that has lost its strength and flavor. In the spiritual realm Christians may become unfaithful, mock God's Word, grieve the Holy Spirit. Christians sometimes become chameleons and adopt the color and flavor of the world. "Wherewith shall it be salted?" i.e., "How shall its efficacy be restored?" "It is henceforth good for nothing" — Christ warns His disciples against unbelief. Saltless salt is good for nothing. Christians who deny Christ by word and deed have no power for good. "Bleetheenai Exoo" — to cast out, i.e., indignant exclusion, "katapateisthai" — to be trodden under foot by men — in utter scorn and contempt.

"Ye are the light of the world" — The Christian Church is a light collectively and individually. Each Christian is a light, and in this world he is to glorify Christ. Christians who conceal their light destroy their own salvation. "Modios" — bushel, i.e., a Jewish grain measure, used also for many other purposes. "Lampsatoo" — a command — your light must shine. Every Christian has a light. This light must shine publicly.

Vv. 17-19. The entire Word of God will stand as long as heaven and earth remain and will always obligate all people. Christ came to fulfill, not to abolish, "katalusai," the Law. The Law will not pass away. In its present form it will last until the end of time. Those who break even the least of God's laws shall be punished.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Familiarity with the text may lead to a slipshod, superficial treatment on the part of the preacher and unwarranted disinterest on the part of the hearer. There is also the danger of becoming too technical and scientific in our interpretation of the nature, function, and purpose of salt and light. Scientific theories about light or the properties of salt will help but little in making plain to men what the will of the Lord is regarding the Christian life. The Savior applied the text in a natural, simple, illustrative manner. Cf. Mark 4:21-23; Luke 11:33-35.

Preaching Emphasis.—What we, the children of God, are expected to do. We can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world only when we proclaim Christ to be the Savior of the world and our very own Savior. The solemn duty of the believer in this world is to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and to keep and teach His holy Word. Christians should make their life count for God and for good.

Problem and Goal.—Christians are very often satisfied with a traditional, historic, and formal Christianity. Some think that when formal church services have been attended, a small contribution made, nothing more need be done. Such people remain spectators in the church and not participants. They are "balcony Christians," but "not a mighty army" in the arena. True Christian discipleship should manifest itself in power. The problem is to overcome lassitude, indifference, and the worldly spirit. Only the Word of God can change the heart. The goal is to make every Christian a powerful, believing, working Christian, living up to his calling and clinging to his Christ, who is the Salt and the Light of the world.

Illustrations: Abraham, Samuel, David, Paul, Luther, many Christian lay people in our churches; also pastors, teachers, and officers in the church and in church organizations.

Outline:

CHRIST'S CONCEPTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

I. The Christian in relation to society—as salt.

- A. Duty**—to flavor and preserve. This power comes from Christ.
- B. Danger**—to lose its savor. To receive a worldly impact instead of making a Christian impact. This happens when we grow indifferent to Christ.
- C. Doom**—salt that is corrupt is good for nothing. It cannot fertilize nor purify. This is the doom of the Church if it fails to fulfill its function in this world. This happens when we fall away from Christ.

II. The Christian mission to society—as light.

A. Nature—"Ye are the light of the world." What an electric light is to a dark room, that a Christian is to the world.

B. Importance—vv. 14 and 15. The Christian's life cannot be concealed, whether it is good or bad.

C. Fulfillment—vv. 16-19. We reveal God clearly to the world, we witness to the truth, we spread the light when the Spirit of Christ lives in us.

EDWIN E. PIEFLOW

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 12:9-21

The Text and the Day.—The Collect for this day calls upon God: 1) to keep us with His "perpetual mercy" (Latin, original, "Propitiatione"); 2) to keep us "from all things hurtful" (Epistle, Gal. 5:19-21; Gospel, Luke 17:18); and 3) to "lead us to all things profitable to our salvation" (Introit, "the courts of the Lord"; Gospel, Luke 17:17, 19; Epistle, Gal. 5:22-23; Gradual, "that the vow be performed"). Our text fits into this theme perfectly, showing us that through trust in Christ's name we shall have both mercy, or propitiation, and victory, or "deliverance from all things hurtful."

Notes on the Meaning.—V. 9. "Synagog," probably in Capernaum. (See *Life of Christ, Fabling*, 1st Ed., p. 245.) V. 10. "Xeeran" (cp. Mark 3:1, "exceerammeneen," aorist, lit., "had come to be withered"). According to legend (the Hebrew Gospel of the Nazarenes and Ebionites), he was a stone mason who had been maimed by an accident and who asked Jesus to restore the use of his working hand ("the right hand," Luke 6:6) that he might not have to beg. (Farrar I, 439.)

Vv. 10-13. Comparing the parallel passages (Mark 3:1-10; Luke 6:6-12), one gets the following harmony of events: 1) The Pharisees asked Jesus, Matt. 12:10b; 2) Jesus countered with Mark 3:3-5 ("When He looked . . . with anger," Greek, "orgee,"

according to Thayer, not like "thumos," a passionate outburst, but a kind of settled and composed indignation), Luke 6:9; Matt. 12: 11-13.

V. 11. The Rabbis held it to be permissible to pull out a sheep from a pit if it was in danger, and in less extreme cases planks could be put in and food furnished. But Jesus laid down the principle that it never was contrary to God's Sabbath Law to do that which is humane or necessary for the well-being of God's creatures, and especially of man (v. 12).

V. 14. "They took counsel" with the Herodians (Mark 3:6), a Jewish political party attached to the Herodian family; probably to place Jesus into political jeopardy. V. 16. It was not His aim to set Himself up as a miracle monger. Vv. 17-21. A free quotation by God's Spirit of the Hebrew text in Is. 42:1 ff. V. 18. "He shall show judgment," namely, God's declaration of pardon (2 Cor. 5: 19-20) "to the Gentiles." V. 20. "Till He send"—an abbreviation and paraphrase of Is. 42:3-4, the meaning according to Lange, that "the judgment is to be transferred into victory of truth, or into absolute victory." V. 21. "In His name" (Greek dative, "too onomati") according to Meyer, "The Gentiles will trust on the ground of what His name as Messiah implies."

Preaching Pitfalls.—An extended digression into the nature of the disease that was involved or into the subject of Jewish Sabbath Day practices would surely take the hearer too far afield.

Problem and Goal.—The preacher will strive: 1) to arouse in his hearers a deep sense of guilt over their mistrust of God's love and over their uncharitable deeds toward one another; and 2) to remove this burden of guilt through Christ's merciful propitiation for sin; and 3) by such removal of guilt he will incite them to trust God and to live in love with one another.

Illustrations.—1. The Gospel (Luke 17:11-17), God's mercy for ten, and the gratitude of only one. 2. For a modern example of healing and gratitude, see the *Lutheran Witness*, June 13, 1950, p. 2, under the caption "Made whole by Faith." 3. The Epistle shows us how we might give forth the evidence of a victorious life (Gal. 5:22-24). 4. Examples of "bruised reeds" that were healed are: 2 Sam. 12:13-14; John 8:3-11; Luke 15:20-24; 18:13-14;

23, 43. 5. The uncharitable application of the rules of the Rabbis finds its parallel today in an uncharitable application of synodical and congregational rules in dealing with one another. 6. 1 Cor. 13.

Outline:

"IN HIS NAME SHALL THE GENTILES TRUST"

I. For Mercy.

- A. The Messiah promised in Scripture is to be a Messenger of mercy, who will help in affliction and forgive sin (vv. 17-21; Is. 42:3-7).
- B. Jesus showed Himself to be that Messenger when He risked danger and suffered death in order to bring such mercy to all who come to Him (vv. 12-13; John 8: 3-11; 3:14-17).
- C. Let us, therefore, trust Him for such mercy and, moved by His love, be merciful also toward one another.

II. For Victory.

- A. The Scripture predicted that the Messiah would quietly but surely attain the victory (vv. 18, 20; Is. 42:2, 4).
- B. Jesus showed Himself to be this Victor, or Messiah, when He healed all who came to Him (vv. 13, 15) and when He saved the world from sin (2 Cor. 5:19-20; Rom. 4:25).
- C. No matter how great our affliction or sin, through trust in Christ we, too, shall achieve the victory (Rom. 8: 28, 35; Rom. 7:24-25; 1 Cor. 15:57).
- D. We ought, therefore, to produce the fruits of our faith by living a confident, a thankful, and a victorious life of love (Epistle; Gospel; 1 Cor. 13; and 1 Cor. 15:58).

THEODORE F. NICKEL

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 14:7-11

The Text and the Day. — Theme and text point to the believer's imperfect knowledge of his Savior and to the need for growth in his knowledge of Christ. There cannot be such growth without the

help and mercy of God, for which we pray in the Introit. The Collect, which pleads with God to preserve and defend the Church by His help and goodness, would also include the prayer for His aid toward the growth of the Church in the all-important knowledge of Jesus. And finally the trumpet call of the Gospel, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God!" would leave no doubt about the paramount importance of growing in the knowledge of Him who alone is the Way that leads to this kingdom.

Notes on Meaning.—V. 7. "If ye had known Me," i.e., if you had come to know Me fully. The disciples did know Jesus, but their knowledge of Him was imperfect. At this point they had, for instance, not yet come to know the important fact of His oneness with the Father, i.e., that Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus, that they are one, and that knowing Jesus or seeing Jesus was tantamount to knowing and seeing the Father. Thus Christ is justified in saying by means of the unreal condition (condition contrary to fact) at the beginning of this verse that His disciples did not really know Him yet. (See I A of the outline.)

"And from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him." But from now on, i.e., in the period beginning with Christ's acts and teachings on this night and culminating in the astounding events of the next few days, they will have a fuller knowledge of Jesus than they ever had before, and they will, therefore, also have a fuller knowledge of the Father, who is in Christ and with whom Christ is one. Even more perfect will be their knowledge of Jesus and, therefore, of the Father who dwelleth in Him when at the end of this eventful period Christ will have sent them the Comforter to testify of Him (John 15:26). And as they grow to see Christ more clearly in this eventful period (which has already begun), they also learn to see the Father in Him.—"And have seen Him," i.e., henceforth. They have seen the Father for a long time; they have seen Him every time they saw Christ, but they have not yet realized that. Henceforth, however, when their knowledge of Christ will become fuller and greater, they will become conscious of the fact that they have seen the Father often, that they have seen Him whenever they saw their Master. (See III C.)

V. 8. Philip has not yet understood that by seeing Christ he sees the Father; he is just like the rest of the disciples in this respect.

Christ's statement about seeing the Father has only produced in him the desire to see an appearance of the Father, of course, an appearance of the Father completely apart from Christ, i.e., such as Moses had seen (Ex.24:9-11). That, he says, would satisfy him and the other disciples. How far Philip was yet from a full knowledge of Jesus! None of the disciples corrects Philip. They must have agreed with his request. (See I B.)

V. 9. There is deep sorrow and disappointment in these words of Christ. How little must they have been concerned about knowing Him more fully, for how else could their ignorance be explained after His long and intimate association with them? (See II A.) — Yet this verse also shows Christ's love and concern for this disciple. His manner of correcting Philip is loving and gentle, for He does not aim to antagonize but rather to attract and win. Note how strong a bond Jesus creates between Himself and Philip by merely calling him by his name. (See III A.)

V. 10. "I speak not of Myself," i.e., the Father who is present in Me speaks them to you. Since the disciples often heard Christ speak words which came from the Father and since even unbelievers were prompted to say when they had heard Jesus: "Never man spake like this Man" (John 7:46), subdivision II B points out how disappointing it must have been to Jesus that His disciples did not recognize His oneness with the Father from the words which the Father spoke through Him.—Do not read: "*but* the Father that dwelleth in Me," etc.; rather read: "*and* (or *moreover*) the Father that dwelleth in Me doeth the works." Note that these works are not done by the Father but by "the Father as abiding in Jesus, by virtue of the oneness of the Father and the Son" (Lenski). If nothing else, then certainly the miracles of Jesus should have convinced the disciples long ago that the Father was present in their Master. (See II C.)

V. 11. "Believe." Note the plural; the Lord is speaking to all His disciples now. This is not a command, but an exhortation, a plea of the Savior, who is full of anxiety about their spiritual welfare. Jesus first appeals to them to believe on the strength of His own testimony that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. "*Ei de mee*," or else, and if not, i.e., if you should find it difficult to believe My words, if you should still have

doubts and misgivings. In that case "believe Me because of the works themselves." His works are the ultimate evidence. They exhibit beyond a doubt that Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Him. Lenski: "Always at the ultimate point the works are decisive. With words one may argue, with deeds only one thing is left—to see what they are and believe, or to shut the eyes and disbelieve." (See III B.)

Preaching Pitfalls.—The central message of the Gospel can be brought into the sermon at many points, but it will be absolutely necessary for the proper development of subdivision III C.

Problem and Goal.—The problem the preacher will face if he develops his sermon according to the outline suggested below is the fact that Christians are too often satisfied with a rather superficial and incomplete knowledge of their Savior. Knowing merely the most essential points about their Redeemer is sufficient for them.

The goal of the sermon is to show that such an attitude is both disappointing to the Savior and dangerous to the believer and that our Lord is anxious to help us to know Him better and better. Relying on the power of God's Word, the preacher will, therefore, aim to fill his hearers with an earnest desire and with a strong determination to strive to grow in the knowledge of their Savior and to continue this quest for a deeper and fuller understanding of Christ as long as life will last.

Outline:

AND YET HAST THOU NOT KNOWN ME?

- I. The disciples do not yet fully know their Master.
 - A. What they do not yet know (v. 7a).
 - B. Philip, an example of their ignorance (v. 8).
- II. What a disappointment to Jesus for
 - A. Had He not associated with them long and intimately to give them an opportunity to know Him? (V. 9a.)
 - B. Had they not often heard Him teach with words that came from the Father? (V. 10b.)
 - C. Had they not seen the hand of the Father in the miracles He worked? (V. 10c.)

III. Yet His love and concern for the disciples who have disappointed Him remain undiminished.

A. How gently and lovingly He corrects Philip! (V.9.)

B. With what deep concern for their welfare He pleads with His disciples: "Believe Me!" (V. 11.)

C. He comforts them that the last and crowning events in His work of redemption and finally the coming of the Holy Spirit will aid them toward a more perfect knowledge of Himself (v. 7b).

A. R. RIEP

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 9:14-17

The Text and the Day.—The Introit for the Day utters the plaintive cry: "Be merciful unto me, O Lord." With the Collect we plead for the grace of God that we might continually be given to all good works. The Epistle records the Apostolic prayer for spiritual strength motivated by faith in Christ and the knowledge of His love. By raising the young man at the gate of Nain, according to the Gospel, Christ demonstrates His compassion and the fact that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. In our text Jesus insists that we are free from "the yoke of bondage" and that we should enjoy the liberty wherewith He has made us free.

Notes on Meaning.—V. 14. "Then came to Him the disciples of John." Note the context: the conversion and call of Levi, Matthew; the "great feast in his own house." Matt. 9:9-11; Mark 2:14-15; Luke 5:27-29. Not to conform to outworn customs and traditions, socially to fellowship and feast with the unorthodox, to expose themselves to the stigma of creating a scandal, was, indeed, an act of heroic courage on the part of Jesus and His disciples. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not?" "We and the Pharisees!" A strange alliance. John was languishing in Herod's prison at Machaerus. Not all of his disciples had become followers of Jesus. Here was an opportunity the Pharisees grasped to pit John's disciples against Jesus.

Fasting and bodily preparation is no sin. But by custom and

man-made traditions, days of fasting had been multiplied from once a year, Lev. 23:27, to twice a week, Luke 18:12. These and other self-imposed burdens were considered meritorious acts to propitiate the Deity and to curry divine favor. Asceticism fostered in Christendom, monasticism, work-righteousness, holy-year pilgrimages, Sabbath observance, sectarian "touch not!" and the like, come under the classification of "fasting."

V. 15. The relation between Jesus and His disciples, between Christ and His Church, is that of the Bridegroom and the children of the bridechamber. The wedding festivities on the part of the bridegroom and the bridal party continued for a week or two. In the New Testament era the joyous life of Christians is portrayed as that of a wedding feast. We are to rejoice in our Savior. The joy of the Church Triumphant, Rev. 19:7; 21:2 is to be reflected in the hearts and lives of the believers in the Church Militant, Is. 61:10; Zech. 9:9; John 3:29; 1 Thess. 5:16; Phil. 4:4. Even the sorrow which His disciples were to experience "when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them" would "be turned into joy," John 16:20-22.

V. 16. There is neither rhyme nor reason to patch an old garment with a piece of new, unfulled cloth. At the first shower the raw material of the patch as woven in that age would shrink and play havoc with the garment.

V. 17. Bottles in the days of Jesus were made of goatskins. Old skins were already stretched to the breaking point. Put new, unfermented wine in them, and the results would be disastrous both to the bottles and to the wine.

In other words, don't hold to a religion of ceremonies, self-righteousness, traditions, or of any human invention, and attempt to patch it up with the new cloth woven from the righteousness of Christ. We dare not retain the old bottles, the Ceremonial Law, self-chosen customs and commandments of men, and make ourselves guilty of the incongruity of merely adding the Gospel of Christ. The old garments and the old bottles must be cast away. 2 Cor. 5:17; Matt. 15:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 16-17, 20-23; Gal. 5:1.

Preaching Pitfalls.—Beware of iconoclasm. The old is not always bad, nor the new always good. "The old paths," "the good way," Jer. 6:16. Jesus came not to destroy. Matt. 5:17; Luke 5:39.

Problem and Goal.—Brush away the cobwebs of traditions, the fungus of human customs and practices that taint the doctrines of Holy Writ, especially every vestige of work-righteousness. The children of the bridechamber are to lead a fruitful life of rejoicing.

Illustrations.—The Judaizers in the Apostolic age urged Christian congregations to patch the Gospel onto the old garment of Judaism. Narrow provincialism—world-wide mission obligations. Passively accepting a few agreeable Christian truths, but clinging to the old sinful manner of life. Sunday religion—weekday worldliness. Is. 1:11; Hosea 6:6.

Outline:

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." 1 Pet. 3:15. Learn of Jesus. He was asked:

"WHY DO THY DISCIPLES FAST NOT?"

- I. What provoked the question?
 - A. The great feast in Matthew's house.
 - B. The offense taken, v. 14.
- II. Jesus' answer to the question.
 - A. The custom of joyous marriage festivities in the days of Jesus.
 - B. The joyous relation between Christ and His Church, v. 15.
- III. The propriety of this answer.
 - A. The parable of the new patch on the old garment, v. 16.
 - B. The parable of the new wine and the old bottles, v. 17.

H. W. BARTELS