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Homiletics: Sermon Study on Psalm One for Sixth Sunday After Trinity

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HOMILETICS

SERVICE THEMES AND TEXTS FOR JULY

July 1	6 S. a. Tr.	Psalm 1	The Life of the New Man
July 8	7 S. a. Tr.	Is. 62:6-12	The Fruitful Christian Life
July 15	8 S. a. Tr.	Jer. 23:16-29	The Importance of True Teaching
July 22	9 S. a. Tr.	Prov. 16:1-9	God's Help Against Temptation
July 29	10 S. a. Tr.	Jer. 7:1-11	The Grace to Overcome Evil and Serve God

Sermon Study on Psalm One for Sixth Sunday After Trinity

THE SEASON, THE DAY, AND THE TEXT

To the four cycles of the Trinity season may be given the following very general but helpful titles: "The Invitation to the Kingdom of Grace" (from Trinity Sunday to St. Peter and St. Paul's Day on June 29); "The Right Manner of Life in the Kingdom of Grace" (from June 30 to St. Laurentius Day on August 10); "Fruitage from the New Life in the Kingdom of Grace" (from August 11 to St. Michael's Day on September 29); and "The Blessedness of the New Life in the Kingdom of Grace" (from September 30 to the first Sunday in Advent). This division, while not obligatory, can be of assistance toward more aimful teaching and preaching in the application of the Propers and the text for each Sunday. (See Strodach, *The Church Year*, pp. 183, 196, 198, 216, 239.)

This, the 6th Sunday after Trinity, ushers in the second cycle, emphasizing the kind of life to be lived in the Kingdom. In the Collect, therefore, we call upon God to "increase in us true religion" or a "trust in God" (Gradual) as the "Giver of all good things" (Collect) and as the "saving Strength of His anointed" (Introit), so that we may walk "in the newness of life" as "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Epistle). Only so can we produce a righteousness that is "better" (the Gospel).

While our text stresses God's blessing upon piety over against

His punishment upon impiety, it can, however, be so pointed as to emphasize rather the kind of life which God expects of the righteous and which at the same time also has His blessing. Thus it will fit well into the general theme of the cycle and with the Propers of this day.

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

Because our text is a Psalm, it may be well here to ask, what are the Psalms? Says Delitzsch: "The Psalter is the Yea and Amen in the form of hymns to the Word of God given in the Torah" (*Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, Erdmann Ed., p. 81). Luther, who certainly knew and loved the Psalms, calls them a "Book of Hymns" and gives this classic advice on how to read and study them with profit. "The admonition is to be given" . . . he writes, "namely, that our affections and feelings be brought in accord with, and be attempered to, the feelings described in the Psalms. For since the Psalter is solely a certain school and place of exercise for the affections, he harps without results, who does not play his harp in the spirit. So that when thou readest, 'Blessed is the man that hath not gone away in the counsel of the ungodly,' thy feelings and affections ought to move at the same time and to hate the counsel of the wicked and pray against it, not only on account of thyself, but on account of the whole church also. . . . Again, when thou hearest that all things prosper for the righteous man, thou art to desire it for thyself, and to sigh for all those who are placed in any adversity, of what kind soever it may be. . . . First exercise thyself in one Psalm, nay, one verse of a Psalm. Thou hast done much when thou hast learned to make one verse in a day, or even in a week, a living, breathing word by being felt in thy affections. And when thou hast attained unto this beginning, all the rest will follow, and there will open unto thee an overflowing treasure of knowledge and affection; only take heed that thou be not frightened away from beginning by any weariness or despair. This is truly to harp, or as the Scriptures say of David, to strike the harp strings with the fingers. For the nimble fingers of the harpers which run over the strings and strike them, represent the affections running over the Psalms; and as the strings do not sound without the fingers, so neither is the Psalm read or sung unless it touch the

affections. . . . I know very well that if anyone be exercised in this matter, he will himself find more in the Psalter than all the commentaries and all the commentators can give him." (*Luther's Works, Psalms, Vol. I, Lenker, pp. 55—56.*)

Dr. Walter A. Maier leaned to the Davidic authorship of Psalm 1: (1) because in Jewish tradition and in some New Testament manuscripts (see the Tischendorf edition on Acts 13:33, where a quotation from Psalm 2 is referred to as ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ ψαλμῷ) this Psalm appears to have been at times combined with the Davidic Psalm 2; and (2) because of the many striking parallels of thought and expression with other Davidic Psalms (cp. Ps. 1:1 with Ps. 26:4; Ps. 1:4 with Ps. 35:5; and Ps. 1:6 with Ps. 37:18). Delitzsch, however, gives up trying to determine the date or the author. So do we.

TEXTUAL NOTES. PART I

Vv. 1-3: "Oh, the blessedness of the man who has not walked in the counsel of the evildoers and has not stood in the way of sinners and has not seated himself in the seat of the scoffers. For in the Word of Jehovah is his steadfast delight; and in His Word he meditates intently day and night. Thereby he becomes like unto a tree planted firmly by the water courses, which gives forth its fruit in its proper time; its foliage shall not droop; and everything whatsoever it produces shall prosper."

The *'ashre* in v. 1 is the constr. plural of *asbar*, "to be straight," "to be right or well-ordered," and literally means "blessings." Because it has the force of an exclamation here, it may better be translated with, "Oh, the blessedness of." *Lo balak*, "He has not walked, or ordered his life, by" the *'atsat*, lit., "ways of thinking," hence counsel, of the evildoers (Ps. 15:2; 101:6; Rom. 8:1).

The evildoers (*reschaim*), according to Is. 57:20, are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters bring up mire and dirt." They put no confidence in God's Wisdom, and are therefore tossed about in the restless sea of doubt and uncertainty. They are the unbelievers, "who, because they are in a state of unbelief, do not a single good work, though everything they do may have a fair appearance" (Luther, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

The *battaim*, lit., "those who miss the mark" in their lives, are

those "who live in coarse and manifest sin" (Delitzsch). The righteous man does not stop to join them in their "kind of conduct" (*bederek*).

The *letsim* are those who are "aggressive against God." To sit in the seat of such is to act the part of an instructor and teacher (Matt. 23:2; in ancient days it was the custom to sit while preaching and teaching, Luke 4:20, 21; 5:3; Matt. 5:1).

V. 2. The *Torab* (from the verb "to point out," or "to direct"), lit., God's authoritative direction, is translated with "Law" in the A. V., but must be used here in its widest sense.* It included, besides the rules for life, also the regulations for the Tabernacle with its sacrifices (Lev. 7:7; 14:54; 5:16-17; 6:7) which, according to the New Testament, preached Christ (John 5:39, 46; Matt. 5:17-18; Col. 2:16-17; Hebrews 8 and 10). Here, therefore, "it is to be regarded not merely as a rule of conduct, but also as the revelation of God's nature and of His dispensations. In this view of it, more particularly, lies its connection with the rest of the Old Testament" (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, under *Law*, p. 288).

Heptso, "substantival, instead of a verbal clause, with the primary notion of firmly adhering" (Delitzsch); hence, "The Word of Jehovah is his steadfast delight."

Yebgeb, the imperfect qal from *bagab*, "to murmur," "is used of a dull deep sound as if vibrating within and without, hence signifies the quiet soliloquy of one who is searching and thinking" (Delitzsch), "he meditates intently." The believing child of God always finds delight in a firm adherence to the full Word of God and in constant meditation on its blessed truths. How truly delightful, for instance, is a meditation on the Sermon on the Mount, from which the Gospel of this day (Matt. 5:20-26) is taken! In this Gospel Jesus points out the kind of righteousness which God expects according to the Law, which requires that every "jot" (the Hebrew letter *yodh*) and every "tittle" (one of the little projections which make the difference between the Hebrew letters *beth* and

* Dr. F. Pieper states: "Daneben wird das Wort "Gesetz" (*Torab*) auch in einem weiteren oder allgemeinen Sinne gebraucht, so dass es die goetliche Offenbarung ueberhaupt bezeichnet" (*Dogmatik*, III, p. 262).

kaph) be kept (Matt. 5:18) and which consists in showing kindness in word and demeanor (Matt. 5:21-26); in avoiding even the look of lust (Matt. 5:27-30); keeping one's every word (Matt. 5:33-37); in turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-42); in loving and blessing our enemies with the perfection of the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43-48); in giving, praying, and fasting without pomp, or show, or hope of reward from men (Matt. 6:1-18). There are requirements which no man living can meet, but requirements which Jesus came to meet for us. And here is the blessed sentence of Jesus which the believer must draw like a golden thread through the entire Sermon on the Mount: "I am come to fulfill the Law" (Matt. 5:17). "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled," but "*I am come to fulfill the Law.*" Here is His own sacred pledge that He will meet all its requirements for us; and by this one blessed sentence of assurance He turns the entire sermon into a consoling message of the Gospel, for as surely as He has kept these jots and tittles of the Law for us, even so surely have we been "made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). How good to meditate on these words in this fashion! What a dynamic they become for Christian living, stirring one to bend his every effort toward the attainment of a better righteousness (the Gospel), by putting off that which is evil in God's sight and putting on the garments of virtue! (The Epistle, Rom. 6:3-11.)

Here too is the blessedness of which the Psalmist speaks in the beginning and of which Jesus reminds us in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12). We shall take as an example only one. Jesus said: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). The Christian, seeing the perfect requirements of God's Law, is always aware of his many imperfections, always wishing he were better, holier, and purer, and yet his hunger and thirst is always and fully stilled with blessings the worldlings cannot know, when from the Gospel he obtains by imputation the perfect righteousness that is his through faith in Jesus (Rom. 10:4).

V. 3, *shatul* means "firmly planted." Luther urges that this tree be distinguished from those that grow wild (*op. cit.*, p. 41), since

the believer is a tree planted and nurtured by God (Epistle, Romans 6; John 3:1-18).

"The water courses" (*palge mayim*, the plural giving intensity to the figure) are, perhaps, the irrigation ditches and canals commonly dug to reach into the gardens and fields in order to supply them with abundant water at all times.

The "tree" — probably the date palm, which grows in its highest perfection amidst the sands of the desert. However, it depends on fresh spring water, which is indispensable to its existence. It is thus a fit emblem of the righteous living in a prosperous and wicked world, sustained by enduring influences derived originally from the skies (Ps. 92:12). This palm attains to a height of sixty to eighty feet and is crowned at the summit by a cluster or tuft of leaves or "palms." The inside of the stem is soft and spongy, while the outside is hard. "The green foliage is an emblem of faith (or the Word and doctrine, Luther), which converts the water of life of the divine Word into sap and strength; and the fruit is an emblem of works, which gradually ripen and so scatter their blessings around. A tree that has lost its leaves does not bring its fruit to maturity." (Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 86.)

"And everything whatsoever it produces shall prosper." Here many commentators claim that the picture is broken off and translate, like Delitzsch: "Whatsoever *he* [the righteous man] takes in hand he brings to a successful issue" (*op. cit.*, p. 86), but, according to Gen. 1:13 ff., *'asab* is also used of trees, and it may well be translated: "Whatsoever *it* [namely, the tree] produces shall prosper" [lit., "break through"]. The meaning, of course, is the same, but the translation is more textual and stays with the picture. And how literally its statement is true of the date palm. For there is perhaps no other tree which is so completely valuable in everything it puts forth. Its leaves, branches, sap, wood, flowers, yes, every part of it is put to some kind of use. The Arabs claim 360 different uses to which the various portions of the palm tree are applied. Its leaves, e. g., are used for roof covering, siding, fences, mats, baskets, couches, brushes, brooms, flytraps, etc. Its trunk serves to make cages for poultry, fences for the gardens, the masts of small ships, and it furnishes wood for building and heating purposes. The fruit is sweet and nourishing, and its juice is frequently made into a kind

of sirup or "honey," and sometimes also into vinegar. At the extremity of the trunk, and above the uppermost circle of the palms, is a terminal bud, containing a whitish substance, which the Arabs eat with the greatest relish. When the tender part of the flower is pierced, it gives a sweet, bland juice which yields sugar when evaporated and which can also be made into a spirituous drink. The pistils of the date blossoms contain a fine and curly fiber, which is beaten out and used in all Eastern baths for soaping the body. From a web at the base of the leaves thread is procured, which is used for sewing and is often twisted into ropes used for the rigging of ships and other purposes. It would be difficult to name a more serviceable tree and one more fitted to symbolize the prosperity of the righteous man. (See Van-Lennel, *Bible Lands*, pp. 148—149; Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, I, p. 65 ff.; McClintock and Strong, *op. cit.*, under *Palm*; and other Bible dictionaries.)

"With regard to the 'prospering,' take heed," cautions Luther, "that thou understandest not carnal prosperity. This is a hidden prosperity, which lies entirely secret in the spirit; and therefore, if thou hast not this prosperity that is by faith, thou shouldest rather judge thy prosperity to be the greatest adversity. . . . Therefore when thou hearest that all things prosper which a 'blessed man doeth,' thou hearest of a miracle, the greatest of all miracles. For what is more miraculous than that the faithful should grow while they are being destroyed, should increase while they are being diminished, should prevail while others are prevailing over them, should enter while they are being expelled, and should conquer while they are being conquered? . . . Yet the Lord hath wonderfully ordained that to His saint the height of misery should be the height of prosperity." (Ps. 4:1 ff.; see also Rom. 8:28, 37; Matt. 5:10-12; Luther, *Works*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47—48.)

TEXTUAL NOTES. PART II

Vv. 4-6: "Not so the ungodly, for they are as the chaff dust, which any wind drives away. Therefore no evildoers shall continue to stand in the judgment, and no sinners [shall continue to stand] in the assembly of the righteous. For Jehovah is always knowing the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly [evildoers] shall perish."

Kammots (v. 4) "chaff" or "chaff dust" (from *muts*, "to press out"), "which any wind scatters or drives away." The picture is that of an oriental threshing floor high on the hills, where when the grain is tossed into the air with the winnowing fan, the chaff dust is caught up by the winds, scattered, and driven away. Here the thought is, the evildoers are so utterly without root or life that they become the prey of the slightest breeze, so that any wind of affliction, or of error, or of God's just wrath scatters them (Luther). They possess no stability and have no security or rest.

Kum (lit., "to rise and set oneself so as to stand," hence "to stand firm or endure"). They shall not endure the judgments of God whenever they are meted out. "They shall not minister unto God, as they most confidently presume to do" (Luther, *op. cit.*, p. 51).

Heedah (from *yabad*, "to point out," "to select," "to assemble on being called or chosen") the "congregation of Jehovah," an assembly of those whom God has called and chosen to be His own (1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:9). In this community there are no evildoers. Luther says: "The ungodly are never among the faithful, though they carry so showy an appearance in external life that it may be thought that none have . . . such a place among the faithful as they. And this hypocrisy and external show of which they are so proud, on which they presume so much, and by which they deceive so many, is the very thing at which the Psalm strikes." (*Op. cit.*, p. 53.)

V. 6: "For Jehovah is knowing," a living, intimate, loving knowledge is meant, like that of a husband and his wife (Eph. 5:25 ff.); for the Lord knows His own, is one with them, and dwells in them (Ps. 37:18; Matt. 7:23; 2 Tim. 2:19; John 17:1-2, 21-22, 26).

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Since Hymn 414 (*The Lutheran Hymnal*) is a metrical paraphrase of this Psalm, it could be employed in the service to fortify the teaching of the sermon. And its author, Isaac Watts, could be pointed to as one of God's faithful servants. Under the stress of great adversity (he was an invalid pastor for thirty-six years), he delighted in the Word of God and enjoyed great spiritual prosperity. He became, during the days of his affliction, the real founder

and "Father of English Hymnody." Thirty-one of his hymns are in our *Hymnal* (among them, 87, 123, 175, 416, 426. See the *Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, Polack, p. 592). Hymn 387 would also be serviceable, and its author, Martin Luther, serves as a fine example of one of God's palm trees, firmly planted by the water courses of the Word and bringing forth much fruit.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

Theme: "The Life and Lot of the Righteous Man"

I. His Life

- A. He constantly avoids even the first steps of the evil-doer, since these lead only to lower levels of evil.
 - 1. The counsel of the ungodly (listening)
 - 2. The standing in the way of sinners (participating)
 - 3. The sitting in the seat of the scornful (teaching)
- B. He constantly and intently delights himself in the Word of God, through which the Lord comes to him.
 - 1. He beholds and meets God, just and merciful, in the Law and Gospel of His Word.
 - 2. He daily confesses his sin and his Savior and is constantly crucifying the flesh and putting on the new man (Epistle) as he strives to attain unto a "better" righteousness (Gospel).

II. His Lot

- A. Not that of the wicked, who are unstable as chaff and who shall perish in the judgment.
- B. But that of the blessed, who
 - 1. Have a security that is divine;
 - 2. Are fruitful in season;
 - 3. Enjoy a prosperity that is hidden, yet full;
 - 4. Are permanently joined in the blessed fellowship of the righteous: and
 - 5. Are intimately and everlastingly one with God.

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