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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

Otto E. Sohn

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

MAUNDY THURSDAY

LUKE 22:7-20

Maundy Thursday the most solemn night of the Christian church year, filled with drama and most blessed events on our behalf, inviting us to the Upper Room, Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha to behold the final installments of the purchase price of our salvation.—Our text focuses our attention on the opening scene, the celebration of the last Passover and the first Communion, which heralded the impending close of the Old and the beginning of the New Covenant.

THE TWO COVENANTS

I

The Old Covenant of Rites and Ordinances

A. Vv. 7-12.—Thursday of Holy Week, the day for the slaying of the Passover lamb. Jesus and His disciples are at Bethany. Since He must fulfill all righteousness, He now sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to make ready, carefully directing them by virtue of His omniscience to a large and furnished upper room. The disciples complied, doubtless amazed over this demonstration of omniscience.

B. Vv. 13-18.—At the appointed hour Jesus and the Twelve gather round the table. At this point, very likely, the dispute, vv. 24-30, and the footwashing, John 13:1-15, took place, since the latter always preceded the Passover. Be that as it may, Jesus was anxious to observe the Passover. It was to be *His* last, and *the* last. For details see Exodus 12 and commentaries. Emphasize that it was not merely a memorial of the gracious deliverance from Egyptian bondage, but a type and figure of Christ, 1 Cor. 5:7b, as were other rites and ceremonies, cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Col. 2:16, 17; Gal. 3:24. Now the time for the Great Sacrifice had come, hence Old Covenant of rites and ordinances must end, Heb. 8, esp. v. 13.

C. *Application:* New Testament believers are no longer under Old Testament provisions, such as Passover and others. St. Paul is positive in his rejection of them, Rom. 14:5, 6; Gal. 4:9-11; 5:2-4; Col. 2:16, 17. The key is Gal. 4:1 ff. God regarded Old Testament believers as immature minors, unable to act for themselves; hence the elaborate ritual which was studded with ordinances, types, and symbols. Some of them a grievous burden, Acts 15:10. New Testament believers are regarded as having reached majority. Worship God in spirit and truth, John 4:21-23. Visible proof was given the following day by the rending of the Temple veil, Luke 23:45. Christians refuse to be led back into bondage, e. g., Sabbath observance, forbidden foods, etc. Cf. Gal. 2:3-5.

II

The New Covenant in Jesus' Blood

A. The Passover ended, Jesus with enabling words blessed and distributed remaining bread and wine, instituting the New Covenant in His blood, giving His body and blood, vv. 19, 20. In the Passover, disciples had partaken of Him spiritually only, now sacramentally. Note the present participles "given and shed," denoting that the Great Sacrifice had begun and was already in progress; the same that was sacrificed on Calvary's Cross the next day. Cf. Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. Not a mere memorial of His death, but "for you." Meal of grace for the comfort and strengthening of penitent souls which hunger and thirst after righteousness. Grandeur of the Sacrament by virtue of the Real Presence should promote earnest self-examination, 1 Cor. 11:28, but not deter. All miracles are out of reason's reach. The words of Jesus affirming the Real Presence are confirmed by 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:27, 29.

B. Holy Communion not a one-time institution, nor for Apostolic times only. Christ said "as oft," encouraging repetition. Though possible during the interim, regular celebration seems to have commenced with Pentecost, Acts 2:42. 1 Cor. 11:26 indicates that it is to continue until Christ's return. Frequency of partaking must be left to individual. No legislation. Pastors should seek to create desire by proper preaching. Luther's Preface to the Catechism.

C. Application: This New Covenant in Jesus' blood is an invitation, offer, and promise also to us. Pardon for sin and release from guilt our greatest need. The "as oft" not only shows that we are included in the offer, but that His grace is inexhaustible. This Covenant is sure, Ps. 33:4; 2 Tim. 2:13. May we exploit it to the fullest. Indifferent and negligent members should ponder Question 20 of Luther's Christian Questions. Gratitude for God's grace should move us to proclaim Christ's death till He come.

St. Louis, Mo.

O. E. SOHN

GOOD FRIDAY

JOHN 19:17-30

Christ Crucified shows forth the glory of God to some and is the height of folly to others. This fact stands out boldly when we consider

THE GLORY AND TRAGEDY OF GOOD FRIDAY

I

The Father Sacrifices His Son

The first Gospel, announced to sinners in the Garden of Eden, grew clearer and more definite as time rolled on. Abraham, Moses, David, the Major and Minor Prophets, received revelations and visions concerning the Redeemer through which God showed His people that He would remove their sin. The period of waiting and preparation came to an end in the glorious advent of Jesus of Nazareth.

Glorious was the ministry of Jesus. He revealed Himself as the Son of God and the Savior of men. He performed miracles to attest His deity. He taught and preached privately and publicly. Publicans and sinners, Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, Mary and Martha, and multitudes of other people were drawn to Him through His words of sympathy, grace, and forgiveness. But His ministry was not one of word and miracle only. He who had come to seek and save the lost, uncovered His real glory in His Passion and death. Vv. 17, 18, 28-30 tear at our heartstrings when we meditate on the events they describe. Yet here is glory at its height. God the Father lets His Son die for men to free them from sin and open the way back to heaven for them.

II

The Leaders of the Jews Reject Him

But the leaders of the people saw nothing glorious in the events that culminated in the triumphant cry and death of the Crucified. They were furious because Pilate had caused a title to be affixed to the Cross which said: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." They had hounded Jesus and set traps for Him all through His public ministry. The trial ending in crucifixion was their way of expressing their deliberate rejection of Jesus. What a tragedy! They, the chief priests of the Jews, preferred darkness to light, sin to forgiveness, death to life, hell to heaven.

The chief priests of the Jews, the leaders of the Church of their day, still have many fellow travelers. Numerous church leaders of our day are playing with Christianity. They study the Bible without accepting all of its teachings. They place crucifixes in their churches, but do not believe in a blood atonement. The thoughts they develop in their sermons do not tie men to God through Christ! They level off in pleas for men to co-operate with one another to build a better relationship between nations. These leaders undoubtedly mean well. But because their sights are set so low, they are missing the glory of the Cross and are rejecting Christ. Can there be a greater tragedy?

III

The Soldiers Ignore Him

The soldiers gambling at the foot of the Cross for Jesus' coat increase the sweep of the tragedy of Good Friday. They were totally oblivious of the meaning of the Cross, never dreaming that He whom they were crucifying could change their whole life, lift them out of a drab, humdrum existence, and give them peace that surpasses all understanding. Instead of reaching out to Jesus, they were wrapped up in their own little selves. They gambled, they ate, they drank, they looked no further than the tip of their nose. Knowing nothing of Jesus nor of His purpose in the world, they ignored Him and felt happy. But eternal death was ready to pounce upon them for their ignorance and blindness.

Those soldiers have millions of companions in our day. Not all of these companions waste time or money in gambling.

Many of them are quite busy in worthy causes. Their interests run from slum clearance to better and bigger hospitals, from industrial peace conferences to better government, from soil conservation to miracle drugs, from juvenile delinquency to better public schools. But they pass by churches and never think of entering them. Hymnbooks and Bibles are not found in their homes. There is no religious training for their children. Sin as the cause of all the unrest, disorder, crime, worry, and death does not enter their mind. There is no inclination in them to get at the real root of all human ills. Though Jesus is within reach, though they may hear good Gospel sermons over the radio, they ignore Him who died for them and bring tragedy into their lives.

IV

The Little Congregation at the Foot of the Cross Accepts Him

Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and John, the Evangelist, are a striking contrast to the two previous groups. Their relationship with Jesus had been intimate. They had heard His words and had seen His miracles. They had put their faith and confidence in Him. To them Jesus was God and Savior. However, in looking up at the Crucified their faith was sorely tried. Though they did not grasp the full import of what was happening, they did not reject nor ignore Him. The words of filial love and concern reassured them and let them see a little of the glory of Good Friday.

That little group has grown into a large congregation through the years. Millions have seen the glory of Good Friday, have lived in joy because of it, have died in peace because of it. You and I are a part of that vast happy host. God's promises of a Savior have come true. In the fullness of time God sent His Son, laid the sins of the world, your sins and my sins, on Him, and let Him die for them. Now we have forgiveness, now we are free, now we have peace and an open heaven. What glory Jesus prepared for us on Good Friday!

Let us thank Him by sharing the glory of Good Friday with others.

St. Louis, Mo.

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

EASTER DAY

MATT. 28:1-10

When we compare the Gospel for Easter Day, Mark 16:1-8, with our text, we find a few contrasts. The most interesting is Matthew's statement v. 8, as compared with Mark 16:8. These verses describe the state of mind of Christians as they view the resurrection of our Lord. In Matthew's words it can be summarized:

**THE CHRISTIAN'S FEAR AND JOY AT THE RESURRECTION
OF HIS LORD**

We are not disturbed by the alleged discrepancy. "The statement from Mark refers to the attitude of the women while they were returning home. They were so overawed that they did not stop at the houses of friends and acquaintances . . . but hastened back to their abode" (Wm. Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself*, C.P.H., 1926, p. 74). But we are much interested in how Christians react to this greatest sign to them of the heavenly Father that His Son is their Savior.

I. Fear

A. Fear can be an ungodly thing.

1. Death is the most natural thing in the world, and yet it makes people afraid. Still more shocking would it be that God would restore a person to life. That would clearly be the intervening of heavenly Omnipotence in time and change. That happened to the keepers, v. 4, and the women when they first arrived, v. 5. A force was at work greater than they could reckon with.

2. People may try to use that craven fear at the resurrection of Christ to godly ends—to shock people into faith. To them Christ would say Luke 16:31.

B. Fear can be a godly thing.

1. It is not a bad word, in Bible and Catechism: "Thou shalt fear and love God." For it means respect, awareness. God is invisible and high; but man who fears Him knows Him and knows that he is known. Psalm 139.

2. Surely the resurrection of our Lord makes a great contribution to that godly fear. For it is God's message—and note the

special messenger vv. 3-6, and the earthquake — that a great thing has happened: "He is risen, as He said." Christ had told His followers that He would rise; it had been foretold already in the Old Testament, Luke 24:27, 46. But here comes a thing that is not just an "idle tale" and words in print; here Christians see God's own hand visibly at work; their tongues are hushed in awe. The resurrection has much to say to busy, commercialized people in a harried civilization: Look up, God is at work.

II. Joy

A. The joy is in the Savior.

1. The disciples had learned to love the Lord. But they were not beyond doubt and uncertainty, beyond fleshly concepts of His kingdom. They rejoiced that His word, which they had not even understood in its fullness, had come true and that their dear Master, who had walked with them for three years, would be with them forever.

2. Especially did they rejoice that He was their Savior. When He said "All hail!" to them v. 9, He actually said much more than "Hello"; for the old worn-out meaning of the word jumped into new focus again: "Be healed!" He was the Lord, their Savior. He had foretold His Passion and resurrection as the working out of their redemption and ransom; Matt. 20:17-19, 28. Now He stood before them in living proof that the task was done, that they could forever be healed of sin and joyful of heart — "*Chairete!*"

B. The joy is for the Church.

1. An angel and Christ Himself told the women: Tell My disciples, vv. 7, 10. That is just what they did, v. 8. That is the great business of the Church, with joy to tell one another about the risen Redeemer; Col. 3:16, 17. Hence every Lord's day is an Easter day, a day on which Christians tell one another about the risen Lord.

2. This joy means the growth of the Church. Internally Christians grow as the new life in the risen Christ takes hold of them; Col. 3:1 ff.; Rom. 6:1 ff. The Church spreads throughout the world as Christians move on with the joy of the resurrection

and tell men of their Savior. Note the references to the resurrection of Christ in the sermons in Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 12:7; 13:22 ff.; 26:8.

Fear and joy! They don't seem to go together. The wrong kinds do not. The right kinds fit together like the two blades of a shears and are the Christian's witness to his world.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

QUASIMODOGENITI

JOHN 21:1-14

"The best-attested fact in history" is the verdict of unprejudiced people with regard to Christ's resurrection. "He is risen indeed" is not the foolish notion of some preachers, not the fanciful dream of His disciples, not the hallucination of neurotic women. God Himself proclaimed the fact through angel messengers. Jesus showed Himself alive, "being seen of them forty days."

Jesus had an exalted purpose in mind by His appearances: to build them up in their personal faith and to prepare them for their glorious task of witnessing.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RISEN LORD'S APPEARANCE AT THE SEA OF GALILEE

I

He Wants to Make Them Sure of His Resurrection

A. The story of the text. Jesus had told them: "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee," Matt. 26:32. While waiting for Him in Galilee, the disciples decide to go fishing. The risen Lord turns their failure into success. "It is the Lord."

B. His purpose in this third appearance to them as a group is to make them more certain of His resurrection. Was this necessary? Did not previous appearances suffice? No, they were slow to believe. Even on the mount in Galilee some doubted, Matt. 28:17. You ask: How was this possible? Good Friday experiences were not yet erased. They seemed to be in a trance. Their message of the resurrection was not wishful thinking, as unbelievers have it. The disciples doubted until they could no longer escape the fact: He is risen.

C. In a loving way Jesus convinces them. He reveals Himself not by word only, but by appearance and by a miracle, draught, breakfast. Now they knew, "It is the Lord." — The disciples were not the only ones to be slow of heart to believe. We, too, must through the Gospel again and again receive assurance.

II

Christ Wants to Prepare Them for Their Future Work

A. They were to learn of a change in their relation to the Lord. He was still the same Jesus, loving and kind, the same who was crucified, as the nail-prints indicated. But He came upon them with a mysterious suddenness, John 20:19. He was no longer with them precisely as He had been before. There was a mysterious awfulness about His person. "Touch Me not." No longer would they see Him in the same physical manner as before. "While I was yet with you," He says on Easter Sunday. They know Him by faith, are associated with Him in a spiritual way, in spirit and in truth.

B. On this occasion Jesus also reminds them of their duty of proclaiming the Gospel, of being fishers of men. John 21:15-17. Cf. Luke 5:10. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," Acts 1:8. They had to be convinced of His victory over death that they might qualify as Apostles "ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection," Acts 1:22. Thus only could they preach repentance and remission of sins.

C. The blessing resting upon their labors as fishermen was to be an indication to them of rich returns from their work as fishers of men. His Word would not return void. — We, too, are to bear witness. In our missionary endeavors, Matt. 28:20 applies.

D. The risen Lord is the almighty, merciful, loving Savior who will supply all physical needs. He may withhold them for a time to draw us closer to Himself and to reveal, when help comes, that it is the Lord. In all uncertainties and trials of life we are being watched by the risen Lord. In His own time He blesses our labors abundantly. Cast your care upon Him, 1 Pet. 5:7; Ps. 37:5. Hymn 200:4.

Conclusion: Rejoice in your living Savior. He is risen, your sins

are pardoned, your home in heaven is assured, your earthly wants shall be supplied. Continue in His Word, spread the Word, and look forward to meeting the risen Lord on the shores of eternity.

St. Louis, Mo.

PAUL KOENIG

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

JOHN 10:17-21

Introduction: Who is leading you through life? Everyone is influenced to some degree, whether he realizes it or not, by someone else's personality and suggested pattern of living. Make sure that your leadership is safe and sound. Look beyond mere human leadership. Look to Jesus Christ. He has given Himself an appealing and fitting title, "The Good Shepherd." Easter assures us that He, who unerringly led His flock in the first century, is the living Leader of 20th-century men. That you and I might be more fully convinced to follow Him through time and into eternity, let us take

A LOOK INTO THE HEART OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In the text Jesus bares His heart to the people (context)

I

What Does It Reveal?

A. *A loving heart.*

1. He expresses His determination to lay down His life, v. 18.
 - a. Entirely voluntary on His part. He is not under moral obligation nor under orders issued by a superior (the "commandment" of the Father in v. 18 is the demand of love that finds a willing response in the Son). "I have power (i. e., free choice) to lay it down." Every step in the Passion story bears this out.
 - b. Jesus knows that His death and resurrection alone will bring peace and eternal life to lost and sinful mankind.
2. The extent of His love.
 - a. It is universal, 2 Cor. 5:15. He died for the sheep and the goats (although only the sheep, His followers by faith, shall taste the fruits of His love). He died for you.
 - b. It is love supreme, John 15:13; Rom. 5:7, 8.

Application: The Good Shepherd's love is the magnetic power that will draw us closer to Him. It is the converting power that will transform our coldness and antagonism toward Christ and our fellow men to an active, demonstrable love.

B. *The heart of God.*

1. What we see in the heart of Jesus is to be found in the heart of God, the Father, v. 17. The Father is pleased with the loving determination of His Son to save the world. The Son is simply complying with the demands of the Father, v. 18c. Absolute harmony between Father and Son. (Refer to IA and apply to the Father.)

Application: Do you sometimes wonder how God feels toward you when you have sinned? Look into the heart of Jesus, and behold the heart of God. When afflicted, are you tormented with the idea that God is punishing you? Examine Heb. 12:6.

2. The Good Shepherd is God Himself—"I have power to take it again," v. 18. He possesses every divine attribute. (Mention some of them, and show how each one equips Him perfectly for the leadership of His redeemed souls.) He not only loves you, but can lead you unerringly through life, through death, Ps. 23:4, into eternal glory.

II

How Can We Look into the Heart of Jesus and be Assured of His Divine Love?

Some can see it, many cannot, v. 19.

A. *We cannot look into the heart of Jesus with the eyes of our natural understanding.*

1. Man's natural understanding had been corrupted, blinded by sin (Rom. 8:7; Gen. 8:21; Eph. 4:18), by pride, prejudice, hardness of heart.

2. That is why so many reacted as they did in v. 20.

Application: Since there is in every one of us the tendency to view spiritual matters with the eyes of our carnal understanding, let us note the fact and guard against it.

B. *We can look into the heart of Jesus only with the eyes of faith.*

1. Faith is produced through Jesus' Word, a convincing, powerful, effective Word, v. 21. Yet there is no coercion; for the Good Shepherd is no tyrant, forcing men to do His will, neither does He treat men like machines or animals, but as human personalities.

2. The eyes of faith are opened by the Holy Spirit, John 16: 13, 14.

Application: Read and listen to His Word, and pray while you are absorbing it into your mind that the Holy Spirit may open your eyes to see the loving heart of God revealed in the heart of the Good Shepherd. Then take His hand, and let Him lead you in peace and joy through this troubled world into a glorious eternity.

St. Louis, Mo.

ALVIN C. MACK

JUBILATE

JOHN 11:1-16

This text tells us that Lazarus died. But remember—he had to live all over again too. Did he do a better job of living the second time? Can we do a better job after meditating on this text?

Our Lord said this was an occasion for bringing glory to God . . . for proving that Jesus was indeed the Son of God . . . for increasing the disciples' faith. What an occasion! Jesus stood by Lazarus' grave . . . Jesus wept . . . Jesus prayed . . . and Jesus rose to the occasion!

Jesus was right. All those things were accomplished.

But what of some of the other people involved? It was hard on Lazarus. Mary and Martha and the disciples grieved. And after the rising they had it all to live through again. Did they rise to the occasion of dying, of losing a loved one, better for having the practice?

Important questions—for we have lately witnessed a greater resurrection. Is our certainty of Christ's deity and Saviorhood increased? Our faith more unshakable? Are we ready to go with Christ, die with Christ, rise with Christ? Today we ask the Holy Spirit to use this text on us "to the intent that we may believe," and, believing, be the more ready wherever Christ gives us the chance to

RISE TO THE OCCASION

I

Jesus Did! Jesus Rose to the Occasion

Some thought He didn't—because they didn't recognize what the occasion was.

A. Jesus recognized what the occasion was.

Not for a healing. Not for a resigned dying. Not for a strategic absence from dangerous Judea. Jesus knew (as above).

Remember that: Only God knows just what the occasions of our lives should bring forth. Trust Him! Remember His general rules. Live every occasion for all it's worth. God will make it work out for good.

B. Jesus would not let the occasion drop.

Not because of grief—His own, Mary's or Martha's, or disciples'.

Not because of danger from Judean Jews.

Not because of friends' concern. They wanted Him to create a thirteenth hour for Himself by staying out of danger at the expense of the occasion's purpose. Our Lord walked in the light. He did what God wanted Him to do.

Remember that: We must not let God's occasions for us drop. Let not fear make us minimize the opportunity. Let not grief blind us to the fact that God wants us to go along, not go alone. Remember Jesus deliberately waited two days to make the occasion what it was—and He it is who makes our occasions for us, and us for our occasions. Rise to them!

C. Jesus used the cross as the occasion for uplifting men.

Used the sorrow of His friends to lift them up. Lifted up our griefs and sorrows on the cross to give us eternal joy.

Remember that: He was lifted up—for you and me. We can rise to our occasions, for He promised, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me." By His cross He lifts us up, that we may rise to grasp our opportunities to serve, to help.

II

Did Thomas? How Did Thomas Rise to the Occasion?

He said to fellow disciples — to us too, "Let us also go that we may die with Him." It is difficult to tell — expression of fatalistic defeat? or of self-surrender? willingness to share His Lord's fate?

Thomas — Didymus — a twin. We are twins too — old Adam and new man. Question your motives for doing what you do for Christ. Do you do your Christian duty because it's expected? because you must? because your crowd does? Or because you want to? because you wish never to part company with your Lord? Every occasion an opportunity to rise toward heaven or to fall toward hell. Rise to the occasion!

III

Lazarus Did! Lazarus Rose to the Occasion

He didn't really do it? Of course not. Christ gave him life. You, too, were dead — and are now alive unto righteousness! He created the same change in you. You, too, can rise to your occasions. Christ cries, "Come forth!"

Don't be discouraged by past failures. Lazarus slept again after his resurrection, but was not dead. We have slept — the sleep of forgetfulness of our Lord. But He calls again. Come forth!

Put off the graveclothes. Don't think that the winding sheet glorifies God. You are alive unto righteousness — don't live in the shroud of sin. To continue to wear the evidences of death is not a tribute to Christ, but to be alive — to exert oneself — to rejoice — to answer Christ's call — to tell others of resurrection — to save others from the grave — this is tribute!

Jesus says, "Loose him, and let him go" to your old Adam. The only thing that keeps you bound hand and foot with the graveclothes of sin is your own clutching desire to stay dead, your own stubborn love for the shade of your particular shroud, your own indolent contentment with the coolness of your present sepulcher. Shake the napkin off your face! Look! You are a new man! Alive unto God in Christ! Behold! Your risen Lord calls! Your risen Lord gives you life! Your risen Lord comes to dwell in you! Rise! Rise to the occasion! What an occasion!

Silver Spring, Md.

GEORGE W. HOYER