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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

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Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 15:1-8

The great acts of God for our salvation have been considered by us during the past festival half of the church year. During the coming months we are to note particularly what this Jesus means to us, the Jesus of Bethlehem, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha, and Joseph's garden. Luther put it tersely in the explanation of the second article: "that I may be His own, live under Him . . . serve Him in everlasting righteousness." A most difficult assignment, but definitely possible.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GODLINESS

I. As the branches bear fruit, the Christian produces works

A. The nature of "fruit"

1. Good works. 1 Corinthians 13: Faith, hope, charity. Gal. 6:22: Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Positive goodness in its many forms.
2. Avoidance of sinfulness. "Clean," v. 3

B. Such "fruit" is necessary

1. God demands it, v. 8. Discipleship is impossible without it. James 2:17; 1 Thess. 4:13; Eph. 2:10; John 13:35; 14:15, 23; 15:10.
2. The world expects it. The great drawing power of the early Christian Church. When pestilence raged in Rome, Christians ministered to their own and to pagan people. "Behold, how they love one another," said the heathen admiringly.

Our failure to live Christianity is one of the greatest obstacles in evangelization. A China missionary once complained that wicked lives of nominal Christians were his greatest problems. "What you do shouts so loud I can't hear what you say." The world would more quickly take note of Christianity if Christians were a better leaven.

C. The world needs it. Salt, light, Matt. 5:13, 14

D. "Fruit" is the result of life

1. The modern notion that fruit produces life is false. Because I am a Christian, I lead a Christian life. A "Christian" life doesn't make me a Christian.
2. Good works can be imitated. The basket of wax "fruit" on dining room table may contain bananas, oranges, apples, and peaches that look better than real ones, but they are not edible. Pride, self-glory, and identification with the miserable are motives that produce imitation good works. Augustine: "The virtues of the heathen are shining vices."
3. Only when works flow from faith are they God pleasing, vv. 5b, 8. "*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*" must be inscribed over every temple, whether stone or flesh and blood.

II. Fruit-bearing possible only when Christians, like the branches in the vine, abide in Christ

A. Christ is the genuine Vine

The only Christ is the Christ revealed in the Sacred Scriptures: the historic Christ, not the figment of some philosopher's tinkering mind.

B. We are "in union" with this Christ by faith in Him, produced through His Word, v. 3

Baptism and Lord's Supper are visible Word. Instruction in home, school, church. Private reading and study of Bible must be encouraged.

Godliness can result only from gratitude toward the Christ for us. Count Zinzendorf, standing before the picture of the thorn-crowned Christ hanging in the ancestral halls of his great castle, was moved to become the great patron of missions. "This I have done for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" was the legend beneath it.

C. This relationship must be continued ("abide")

1. The pure Word. John 8:31: "Continue"
2. Believe and do it. John 7:17; 15:10; Matt. 8:24; James 1:22

D. God's promised aids

1. **Warning, v. 6**
2. **Prayer, v. 7**
3. **Purging, v. 2b**
 - a. **Brotherly admonition**
 - b. **Tribulation**

Conclusion:

Thus we achieve our great purpose in life: to glorify God. But there are other blessings of godliness. Our good works will be rewarded in heaven: "Their works do follow them," Rev. 14:13, and we constrain others to uncover the source of our power. The legend of St. Francis of Assisi "preaching" by simply walking through the streets of the city. His good behavior was noted. So eloquent evangelistic sermons are preached by the pew.

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 11:16-24

Before us one of the most blood-curdling texts in Scripture. The Savior speaking in wrath and high irony. Easy for the preacher to flame in righteous wrath, to castigate his hearers for their prejudice, Pharisaism, apathy. Yet today we preach to a Christian audience. This text reminds us chiefly of the maladies of the world, even the religious world, around us, reaching into our hearts even though we still confess our Creeds and attend our worship. For the longer we worship, the more we need this instruction concerning

SALUTARY LISTENING TO THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. *Let us beware of barriers for the message set up by prejudice, and let us be stirred by Christ's reach to the heart*
 - A. Religious prejudices can bar off the message from the heart
 1. The people of Christ's time, especially the religious leaders, managed to encyst themselves against any preaching that called them to reflect upon their own shortcomings. When John flamed with righteous wrath, they dismissed him as

demonic. When Christ came with sympathy for the sinful and downtrodden, they dismissed Him as "a glutton and drinker" (vv. 18, 19). They were, Jesus said, like the children at their games in the market place, breaking up into quarrels and halting the game, whether they wanted to play wedding or funeral. The great message of God's will and grace to men was turned into an incentive for debate and hostility.

2. Today many people in our antiseptic age don't want to have their inner lives touched too roughly. They want religion that lulls them, or better yet, that makes them forget their weaknesses and discomforts. Others view religion as simply a code of man-made morals, and when the summons comes to have compassion on sinners of whatever stripe, they invoke demands of withdrawal from evil and fence themselves into herds of the pure. These religions are current in our time and appeal to the weaknesses of the flesh in the Christian believer—the weakness that will not sorrow for sin, the weakness that prides itself in being better than the sinner.

B. Let us be stirred by Christ's reach to the heart

1. Let the Law speak to us about our idolatry of comfort and complacency of heart and unmask our man-made god of self. Let it speak to us about our flesh and its pride of self. Let us not turn aside one way or the other.
2. Let the Gospel speak to us of the forgiveness of our sins and lead to true and total renewal, day by day. Let it spell out to us the forgiveness of our sins, and the sins of the whole world through Jesus Christ, and give us the love to share that forgiveness with everyone.

II. Let us beware of being lulled by the accustomed quality of its message, and let us be stirred by its power

A. The power of God in the Gospel can lull to security and apathy

1. This was the plight of the cities about the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus had taught and where He had done His miracles of healing (vv. 21-24).

2. So Christians today may hear the Gospel from childhood, weekly in their churches, daily in their devotions, and it gets self-evident and stale to them; worship becomes the recollecting of what they had heard before. They say things like these: "Why not more law so that we give better? more advice to government and society so that the community is more prosperous? Why always this Gospel about the Cross of Jesus?" They imagine that the work of Christ and the Church is to build big buildings.

B. Let us be stirred by the power of the Gospel

1. Confront the message of the Cross, which is the seed of the Spirit for the new life. There *is* the source of life and works; cf. Titus 2:11-14; or text v. 19. "Wisdom is justified of her children" (variant, "by her works"), the true way of life ever produces its work of God's own life in the hearts of people.
2. Remember that the message is preached to move us from our sin and complacency to a life of witness and of love. Capernaum is gone; but the Gospel of the Cross still stirs the world.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 10:13-16

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, was the Good Shepherd who sought the lost. Well it is that He did, for otherwise we should be in outer darkness forever. He not only loved us and gave Himself for us, but He gave us an example that we should follow in His steps. He wants us to be concerned for people even as He was. This concern is to begin with the neediest. Today He sets before us a pattern for this concern, which applies to every one of us and tells us to

BRING THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO CHRIST

1. Christ wants the little children to come to Him

A. The story speaks of tiny children that can be taken up into the arms. They are needy, and we are accustomed to provide their

means of subsistence and survival and to recognize that they can do nothing for themselves. Their very neediness and dependence makes them appealing to us. Yet their neediness is more deep-seated. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," John 3:6. They do not possess the Spirit of God by any heredity or accident of birth. They are without God, and He is not King in their hearts as they come into the world.

B. But "of such is the Kingdom of God," v. 14. God's rule pertains to them, too. That is not to say that they are the source of it; but they are to possess it, to own it. The loneliness from God into which a little child is born is to give way to an adoption. That adoption takes place through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who redeemed mankind, Gal. 4:4-7; through Jesus Christ as He is raised up that men may not perish, John 3:1-15. Hence Jesus Christ wants the little children to come to Him who preached that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand in Himself, Luke 17:21.

C. In fact, the Kingdom can come only to him who receives it as a child, v. 15. That doesn't mean just "when" a child, although that is a fine time to begin, and the easiest; but it means with the state of mind of a child. The kingdom of God comes by faith, not by works; it is of grace, lest any man should boast, Eph. 2:8. The tinier the child, the more trustful and ready to be helped. The faster it "grows up," or thinks that it does, the more independent it is. The kingdom of God comes only to one who takes it in faith, strutting no prowess of self and warding it off with no sense of competence and self-sufficiency.

II. Let us bring the little children to Him

A. Yes, the churches have programs of service also to children; religious classes for all groups, cradle rolls, group work. They baptize little children and enroll them in the roster of baptized membership. Isn't that bringing the little children to Jesus?

B. We have to be sure that we bring people, and also the littlest people, to Christ and not just to the people of the church or the buildings of the church. That means bringing the Word to the little children, through which Christ Himself is their Savior and their Lord, the Word of the forgiveness of their sins, 1 Peter 1:22 ff.

That Word comes through Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, Titus 3 or Colossians 2; and through the words with which the Gospel of the Savior is brought to them as soon as they can speak and as long as they can listen.

C. Our Lord is our Model. He took them up in His arms and blessed them. In person He cherished and fondled them and conveyed to them His mighty will that they be whole. We are of the body of Christ and are to be members one of another, 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 6. We are to reach out to the little ones, in the family, in the fellowship of the Christian congregation, and wherever we can speak Christ's Word to them and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to cherish and bless them, to preserve them against the world, to help them to be fruitful in every good work.

Hence in all our church work and Christian living in the family we need to remember to do our duty by the children, not just in training and educating them religiously, but in loving them even as Christ loves them; for only so do we bring the little children to Jesus.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 17:1-10

The theme of this text:

CHRISTIAN, BE FAITHFUL IN THE TASK OF PRESERVING SPIRITUAL LIFE IN YOUR BROTHER

Last Sunday we spoke of contributing it initially and preserving it in the little children of the church. Today we seek to widen the horizon of Christian love and to make every Christian aware of his responsibility to every other Christian within his reach.

I. The Christian has the task of preserving spiritual life in his brother

A. He must be careful not to ruin, or contribute to the ruin of, spiritual life in his brother. The Savior's term to "cause offense," to cause to stumble into sin. The one purpose of God's giving life to us is that we preserve life in one another; therefore the person

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who contributes to spiritual death in another has no further purpose for living and instead becomes a menace. The life that is here considered is the life in the "little ones," humble concerning themselves, but great in their faith in God; cf. Matt. 18:10. To tamper with that life is spiritual murder.

B. He must rebuke the trespasses of his brother against him. That means to make the sinfulness of the deed clear to him. It does not mean simply to attack him because of the discomfort he has caused; but to make clear the danger and damage for his own spiritual life. For the goal of the rebuke is repentance, change of mind, restoration of inner spiritual life. In our religious language we would say: It is to be the work of both Law and Gospel.

C. He must forgive the trespasser that repents. "How can I forgive?" is a common question among the people of the world. "How can I do otherwise?" is the Christian answer; cf. v. 4 of the text. For the process is one of maintaining the spiritual life in the brother, not only in one instance, but throughout the association, in friendship or business or community or family or congregation. Hence the way of communication must remain open, the hand of love outstretched. (On the entire process cf. the parallel Matt. 18:15-35.)

II. The Christian must be faithful in this task

A. This application to the responsibility of maintaining the spiritual life in the brother requires the gift of faith, v. 5. Some commentators imagine that there is no connection between the material beginning v. 5 and the preceding. But there is much; for the love essential for responsibility for the brother is the love by which faith works (Gal. 5:6; cf. the whole responsibility 6:1 ff.).

B. The definition of faith is essential; the word is overused in our time to indicate anything from religiosity to dependability. It means trust in God for righteousness, a trust which we have because in Jesus Christ, God's Son, we have forgiveness of sins and because the Gospel of that forgiveness has wrought the faith within us. But it also means, in this relation of trust, a faithfulness to God, a hanging on to Him through thick and thin and thus enablement for His tasks.

C. The one facet of faith is illustrated in v. 6. When we cling to the living God, limitless powers are at our disposal. Hence no need to say: "How can I forgive? How can I be responsible for my brother?" for faith in God is a faith that God can move the stubborn heart to the newness of love. Hence the Christian prays every day: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"; our Christian responsibility is attached in our desires from God directly to His forgiveness of our sins.

D. The other facet of faith is illustrated vv. 7-10. It does its tasks without seeking recompense or recognition. It views our life under God not as a time for ease, but as the empowering for responsibility. "We are unprofitable servants," "little ones," humbly taking both task and power from God, recognizing that His is the Kingdom and the power.

May the act on the cross of God's own Son, by which He sought to care for our souls and redeemed us to God, enable us to love and serve one another!

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER