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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 21:15-19

The theme of this text:

FOLLOW ME!

The selection is eminently suitable for the day. It is directly tied up with the Gospel and the Epistle (especially vv. 14, 15). The Introit reminds us of Peter's cry of repentance; the Collect is a petition for love. Some reference may be made to Saint Peter and Saint Paul the Apostles' Day of the previous week (June 29).

I. In Love

The Christian does not follow because of some tyrannical force, nor even simply as an obligation of duty. His is a free discipleship motivated by love.

A. Nurtured by daily repentance.

A critical self-analysis in the light of God's Law leads us ever to a deeper repentance, and this repentance, coupled with the knowledge that Christ loves us, creates a deeper love for Him. In view of the task to be assigned to Peter, Jesus gave him an opportunity for self-searching. Peter had already repented of his sins (Matt. 26:75) and had been forgiven (Mark 16:7).

The name Simon Barjona seems to be significant. Not used by John since Peter was first introduced (1:42), when Jesus saw in him the potentialities of an Apostle. In a way, Peter's discipleship was starting all over again.

"More than these" (v. 15) — a reminder of his boasting. Three times he was asked — a reminder of his denial that followed hard on his boasting. Note the emphasis on the number of times, "second," "third." Jesus cuts the wound clean. Any self-analysis must be an honest facing of the facts, for then only will our repentance be genuine.

B. Grounded in faith.

From the start Peter's repentance was not simply a sorrow; it was coupled with faith. Hence he knew he had been forgiven (Mark 16:7; Luke 24:34).

The very question of Jesus held out a promise. Peter knew that the Savior was concerned about him and wanted his love because He loved him. The three times offered Peter all his previous benefits again. Each answer of Peter was an acknowledgment that Jesus was his Lord, that He was the One who knew, yes, knew all about Peter, knew all things. Though Jesus' first question implied concern and love, it did not imply that Peter would enjoy his former unique status as a disciple. Even so, Peter believed regardless of status. Only to have Jesus, his Lord and Savior, was enough.

C. Expressed in sincere humility.

Peter's love had been chastened. He threw himself before his Lord, who was able to explore his innermost self. For himself he refused to evaluate his love.

Twice Jesus used the word meaning a higher love—the love from God which chooses and judges. Peter laid no claim to such a love. He answered with a word which meant primarily the love of the heart and passion. Only this love he laid claim to. When Jesus in the third question met him on this level of love and even questioned it, Peter threw himself before the omniscient Lord as if to say: "Lord, don't doubt even this declaration. I only know I love Thee. You define it. You nurture it."

Peter never again boasted of his love or his loyalty. For him it was most important merely to be ready to give the proper expression of love and loyalty when the occasion demanded it (1 Pet. 3:15).

II. By Service

As the loving Lord assured Peter of His regained discipleship, He also assigned him to the service. "Follow me" was not a figure of speech—it described a service meant literally. Love is not nourished in a vacuum; it thrives on service.

A. Jesus' own example.

The highpriestly prayer is a service prayer (John 17). Some of the duties of the shepherd who faithfully serves are described in

John 10:1-18. Jesus had tended his sheep Peter, feeding, guiding, and snatching him out of danger.

B. The assignment.

The Great Shepherd assigned a similar service to Peter and all followers. Pasture and continue to pasture My lambs; shepherd My sheep; tend My sheep.

Peter was to give loving care to the whole flock, young and old. In a narrower sense the service meant the work of the holy ministry. In a broader sense it described the service of all Christians, that loving and deep concern for all whom the Christian Church comprises, serving them with love, gifts, talents, through the nourishment of the Word.

The Word is to be used by all followers in its several offices (2 Tim. 3:16b) so that all in the flock may grow (2 Tim. 3:17).

C. Devoted service.

Peter himself tells us how this service is carried out 1 Pet. 5:2,3 (gladly, with devotion, exemplarily).

III. Through All

A. Willingness to sacrifice.

Loving service does not count the cost of discipleship (Matt. 10:38). It simply offers everything (Mark 10:21; Luke 9:23; "himself," "daily"). For Peter it led to martyrdom; for all of us it will mean some hatred of the world (John 16).

B. Implications of such service.

In Peter's First Epistle he has set forth the implications of such a service. He saw in the tribulation not an occasion for falling away, but a refining process (1:6,7) to lead to a deeper repentance, a stronger faith, and a renewed zeal to serve. Hence we are to have courage to speak of the hope (the Epistle: v. 15) even though it may mean suffering (3:16, 17). Note the intimate way in which Peter speaks of a service through all, even death (4:12-19).

As we follow our Lord Jesus through all, we are buoyed up in the knowledge that Jesus has revealed to us that opposition is part of His general plan (5:9), that He nevertheless is Master of the situation (5:10) and will crown the faithful (5:4).

St. Louis, Mo.

ARTHUR C. REPP

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 15:1-9

History repeats itself, even church history. Special defects, dangers, false teachings continue to raise their ugly head. Many bad conditions against which Christ Himself had to testify and lash out in His day in our day especially threaten the life of the Church. The instruction of the Lord in the text before us, therefore, is timely indeed.

THE URGENT NECESSITY, ESPECIALLY IN OUR DAY, IN THE CHURCH TO MAKE A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS AND GOD'S COMMANDMENT

I. What This Means

A. In the days of Christ the Pharisees and scribes appealed to the traditions of the elders, that is, to the ordinances which from the ancient teachers of the Church had come down to their day. "Jewish scholars of the past, beginning with the days of Ezra, had surrounded the Law of Moses with a wall of interpretations and precepts, and these precepts or ordinances of the elders were looked upon to be just as holy and inviolable as the Commandments which God had given by Moses." (Stoeckhardt, *Bibl. Gesch.*, N.T., 132 f.) However, generally the ordinances of the elders were formulated not with a desire to contradict the Word of God, but with the best intentions, namely, as exposition, application, supplement or defense of Scripture, or for the furtherance of congregational or private life. In the course of time, however, a point was reached at which the traditions of the elders were placed on a par with Scripture, or even made to supersede it.

B. So it has ever been in the Church. Examples: The Papacy, especially in the Middle Ages; the sects.

C. We, too, must guard against this danger. We, too, have traditions, e. g., synodical resolutions of a former day, expressions and opinions of prominent men, expositions and applications of Scripture and various rules and regulations, certainly once made for the furtherance of the life of the Church. No, we are not to despise these; however, they must always be subordinate to the Scriptures. In the final analysis everything must be decided according to the Scriptures; what the Scriptures command must be com-

manded; what the Scriptures prohibit must be prohibited; what the Scriptures permit must not be made a sin to anyone. And with regard to usages and customs in the Church and resolutions of a Synod or a congregation, let us note that a Christian will abide by them and submit to them out of love and for the sake of good order as long as these are not against the Word of God.

II. Why This Is So Necessary

A. If in a church body or in a congregation no sharp distinction is made between God's command and the ordinances of men, of the elders, whether they be traditions or resolutions or opinions of the present, then there always will be confusion in the field of doctrine, and people are led to transgress God's commandments for the sake of human ordinances. Thus it was with the Pharisees (vv. 3-6). So it is in the Papacy and among the sects. So it will happen among us also if we do not constantly keep the Word of God in the foreground.

B. Furthermore, the text points up the lesson that when people lay too much stress on the keeping of men's ordinances, they become hypocrites in their worship (vv. 7, 8). Pharisees and scribes indeed took an active part in the worship, but their so-called worship was no worship at all because they were more concerned with the fulfillment of the ordinances of men than with abiding by the commandments of God. So they came nigh unto Him with their mouth and honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. So do all to whom the traditions of men mean more than the commandments of God. Against such vain worship we must guard.

C. Jesus calls the so-called worship of the Pharisees and scribes "vain worship" (v. 9). Their doctrines were the commandments of men, and their worship was mere hypocrisy; therefore they served God in vain. Though Jesus does not expressly say that through such "worship" one will go to hell, the implication of this danger is nevertheless in the text; for hypocrites, who transgress God's commandments for the sake of human traditions, whose worship is vain and an abomination to God, certainly cannot enter heaven.

Let us, then, always sharply distinguish between God's command and human ordinances. But what we have learned today we don't want to apply only to others, but rather first of all to ourselves.

The spirit of the times and the entire manner in which we do Kingdom work today could involve us in the error of the Pharisees and scribes. From this graciously preserve us, heavenly Father.

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Duluth, Minn.

WALTER H. BOUMAN

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 15:10-20

The lessons of this Sunday touch two seemingly contrasted areas of life: eating food for the body (the Feeding of the Four Thousand, Mark 8) and the service rendered by the entire body to God (Rom. 6:19-23). What does food and drink have to do with service to God? People have often been uneasy about that question, to the point of answering with one of two extremes; either: nothing, and then they gave themselves up to gluttony or drunkenness; or: they are opposites; and then they fell into puritanism, work-righteousness, asceticism. To the latter answer our Lord addresses Himself in today's text. He speaks of the traffic of the mouth and warns against defiling it. But—

THE DEFILING TRAFFIC IS OUTWARD-BOUND

I. "Not That Which Goeth into the Mouth Defileth a Man"

A. It could, couldn't it? What of the soaring national consumption of liquor, the thousands of broken homes, the rising tide of alcoholism? What of the brutal assumption that we "live to eat rather than eat to live"? Doesn't that show that people defile themselves by what goes into the mouth? It makes them beastly.

B. Not quite. With minor exceptions the heart is already at fault. It is already ridden by the assumption that the thrill of sense is what man lives for. It "labors for the meat which perishes" (John 6:27).

C. Simply assuming, on the other hand, that refusing to eat, calling some foods pleasing to God and others unclean, in order to court the good will of God, is mistaken religion, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). The Pharisees practiced this, chiefly for the sake of their own prestige, and came under the denunciation of Christ in this text. That is not the

culture of the heart, but of the stomach. "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. 14:17; cf. Col. 2:16; 1 Tim. 4:3).

D. The heart needs other treatment, and they that take recourse to artificial and formal means are "blind leaders of the blind" (v. 14). Among these means the Savior included practicing ritual for its own sake (v. 20). The same malady besets present-day church people when they imagine that their churchly practices, whatever they are, are in themselves a means of gaining the favor of God or of making them superior to others. What goes into the mouth has nothing to do with the heart (v. 17), except as the heart itself invited it.

II. "That Which Cometh Out of the Mouth, This Defileth a Man"

A. Now the Lord widens his picture to reveal the heart as a source of things "proceeding from the mouth," and this is the traffic that defiles the man. For the reason is that this traffic depends on the heart itself. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (v. 19). As it is born into the world, the inner life of man, the seat of his desires and personality, is without God (John 3:6). That flesh continues its nefarious activity also after the new life of the Christian has come into being; cf. Rom. 7:18.

B. The things that proceed from that heart defile; they react back upon the man again and upon others. Strange is the listing of v. 19 as coming from the mouth (v. 18); curiously enough, they all have to do with speaking, plotting, and contriving; the mouth has to do with all of the commandments. All of those defile a man (v. 20); they increase the sinfulness of the heart, in the Christian they whittle down the domain of the Spirit. Cf. James 1:14, 15 for the chain reaction of evil.

C. Hence the need for cutting into this chain reaction, of stopping this defiling traffic, of remedying the source of the heart. Hence also Jesus' sharp attack on ascetic and ritualistic self-righteousness; it leaves that remedy unused (vv. 12-14).

D. That remedy for the heart, repentance and the new heart and mind, regeneration and salvage for the first time and in continuing fashion, must be God's gift from without (John 3:1-15; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7). He has made that gift to us in the redemp-

tive work of His Son and the sending of the Spirit to change and continually to renew our hearts through the message of the Son (Gal. 5:16-25).

Conclusion: The Christian needs to tread a careful path between the self-righteousness of the puritan and the license of the libertine. "Ye have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

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RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 5:30-38

The question of authority in religion, in determining what is truth, is always of the first importance. Why so many religions? Indeed, why so many Christian denominations? The reason: varying or confused views concerning this standard or inconsistent application of it. Ultimately there can be only one of two authorities: God or man. False religions generally claim divine authority, but act as though man were the arbiter. Only a few have frankly tried to make man the measure of all things. Nevertheless, this false principle, whether avowed or not, and whether consciously or unconsciously followed, has underlain all error in religion; and it has dominated Western thought in general since the "Enlightenment" two hundred years ago, shaken only by the increasing plight of man in the past thirty-five years.

The same question obtained in Christ's day. The scribes and Pharisees, who claimed to sit in Moses' seat, but substituted human judgment for God's, said to our Lord: "What is Your authority? We say that You sinned when You healed a man on the Sabbath. We say that You blaspheme when You call God Your Father" (v. 18). Some today say: "Christ is man only, and His authority only human." Others: "He is God, to whom every thought must be taken captive." We consider the question under the theme

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST: IT IS DIVINE

I. His Will and the Father's Are Identical (v. 30)

A. His aims and purposes were always the Father's (v. 30), as He so often asserted (John 5:17, 19; 6:38; 4:34; etc.).

1. That men might truly know the Father as the Lover, For-giver, and Rescuer of man (John 1:18; 14:9; Luke 10:22; the parables of Luke 15; Ex. 34:6; Ez. 33:11; Hos. 14:4 ff.).
 2. That the Father's purpose of redemption might be fulfilled (John 3:16, 17; 17:4; 14:31; 15:8).
- B. Necessarily, the Father's purposes were also identical with the Son's (context, v. 22; John 6:29), with the intention that
1. Men should honor the Son as they honor the Father (John 5:23).
 2. Dishonor to the Son be reckoned dishonor to the Father also.
- II. The Father Himself Bears Witness to the Son (v. 32)*
- A. Through the works which the Father has given the Son to finish (v. 36).
1. They testify to the Son's coequality with the Father (John 14:10 f.).
 2. They exhibit the Son's Messianic mission, character, and authority (Matt. 11:2-5; Luke 4:18; Is. 29:18; 61:1).
 3. They carry conviction of the Son's divine authority (John 3:2).
- B. Through the Father's Word in the Scriptures (vv. 37, 38).
1. The prophetic Scriptures had long since testified to Him (context, v. 39).
 2. They had so clearly described His divine origin, His redemptive mission, and His earthly career (birth to resurrection) that only the willfully blind (v. 40) could fail to recognize Him when He came.

We must forever, therefore, revert to the judgment of God in His Sacred Word in both Testaments—to the Old that we may observe the foretold marks, and to the New that we may observe how completely He fulfilled them. This, to the end that, hearing a voice which is not man's voice, and following a judgment which is greater than man's, we may never be deceived, but steadfastly follow Him through whom alone we come to the Father (John 14:6).

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