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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

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Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 12:9-21

This text shows us Jesus at work, in a cross section of His ministry. As usual in the Gospels, such a glimpse does two things for us. It shows us how we are being saved, gives a glimpse of the spectacular rescue from death of the human race — ourselves. The other is that we ourselves are to be continuing that sort of ministry. "He that abideth in Me bringeth forth much fruit." "Know ye not that ye have put on Christ?"

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

is power and pattern for our own ministry to men, the ministry in which we all engage (Eph. 4:12).

I

What Jesus Avoided

A. Conforming to Law in order to gain renown. The punctilious obedience to the Sabbath law was a device of the Pharisees for capturing the plaudits of the multitudes. Thus they could plot to ruin the reputation of Jesus Christ by placing Him in the dilemma of obeying the Law or refusing to do good. Note v. 19 and Isaiah 42, the marks of human acclaim which Christ deliberately avoided.

B. Conforming to Law and forgetting the need of the human being. A false religion, a religion of code and conformity to Law, becomes a religion of "despising others" (Luke 18:9-14). The ease with which the *opinio legis*, the mode of religion that seeks approval of God through pride of deeds rather than the gift of righteousness and the Spirit, returns to the human heart; cf. Galatians.

II

What Jesus Demonstrated

A. Loving sympathy.

1. He was not deterred from giving service even by a plot. A man needed help; He helped (v. 13). He knew the plot that

would follow. He was "touched by our infirmities." He was Himself a human being throbbing to a sense of human need. But He not merely cringed under need; He sought to help. Particularly the suffering were His concern (v. 20; Isaiah 42).

2. That is to be our response to need. It begins with a sense of sympathy in the heart and moves on in self-sacrifice (1 John 3:16-19).

B. Self-sacrificing service.

1. Not only in isolated acts of mercy and miracles, but in a total ministry climaxing on the cross Jesus Christ gave Himself as the Suffering Servant. The section from Isaiah 42 quoted by St. Matthew as characteristic of Jesus Christ in this point of His ministry emphasizes a program which was carried out in a long campaign which climaxed in victory (vv. 18-20). That campaign went through death (Phil. 2:5-11). In that death, attested by His rising, Jesus Christ rendered His greatest service, and made possible the reconciliation of men to God.

2. That mind must be in us, too. We, too, need to sacrifice for one another, be ministers rather than those who are served (Matt. 20:20-28). That is a high ideal. We achieve it not through simple imitation, but through the way of trust and faith (v. 21). For Christ's ministry to us is one by which we are changed and in which we ourselves pass from death to life that we might love the brethren (1 John 3:14). Jesus Christ was He through whom God showed judgment, in whom His righteousness and peace was demonstrated. The result of that demonstration must be in our own lives, by which the ministry of Christ becomes extended to people.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 14:12-15

The little comics in the popular magazines give a cross section of the interests of American people. Uppermost the quandaries, common hypocrisies. This much is true: the inner motivations of human kindness often come to the surface there, just as they did in this dinner party which a chief Pharisee gave and to which he

invited our Lord. The latter made use of the occasion to bring much of that hidden motivation to light. Isn't kindness in itself a motive? No, behind it lie other wellsprings.

HAVE THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR HUMAN KINDNESS

I

Kindness Is a Good Thing

A. The Bible is full of counsel to be kind; cf. Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:32.

B. Social intercourse and hospitality is an effective channel for this kindness (Heb. 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9; 1 Tim. 5:10).

II

Be Sure to Have the Right Motive for It

A. There are bad motives.

1. The Savior attacked such a motive in our story. His attack seems to overshoot its mark, for He suggests never to invite anyone who can invite you in return, but only those who are unable to invite in return. To invite the poor was already a law of Moses (Deut. 14:29; 16:11; 26:11-13); the Savior says to invite only them. This dictum of the Savior's had the effect of bidding the guests at the table to examine their own hearts. He had already attacked the search for prestige which marked the guests as they sought out the chief places (v. 7ff.); now He attacks the lust for prestige and advantage of the host himself and the prospective hosts, who allowed kindness to be a front for advantage.

2. The word "just" in v. 14 indicates another foul motive for kindness which disfigures it: the attempt thereby to "justify one's self"; cf. Luke 10:29; 18:14. For to be good to men in order to get a recompense from God is, in final analysis, an unkindness to men and a perversion of love altogether (1 John 4:10).

B. Have the right motive: the will to help people, given by God's gift of life.

1. The will for kindness must be defined by the situation: "They cannot recompense thee" (v. 14). Jesus did not mean to suggest that we should not be kind to friends who are not indigent or to

relatives who love us; but He meant to emphasize that our will to be kind must be given by the simple desire to help them rather than to gain advantage ourselves. That is being "blessed" (v. 14), whole in heart; cf. Matt. 5:3 ff.

2. That motive in the heart of love for people has to be given by God Himself. It is the mark of being risen in Him (v. 14). It is difficult in any one verse of Jesus' sayings to discern whether He means the final resurrection (John 5:25; 6:40; cf. the text for next Sunday) or whether He means the new life at regeneration, which already puts us in relation to God and which will be pure and complete at Judgment Day; cf. the two John 11:25, 26; Phil. 3:11-21. This text seems to suggest a "recompense" or consequence to be reaped at some future time and therefore a reference to the final resurrection. V. 15 might accord with this, except that the Jew who spoke the words may have had an immediate and carnal understanding of what he said, a political Messianic kingdom.

C. What is the source of that resurrection? Jesus told Martha: "I am the Resurrection"; He told His disciples: "I am the Life" (John 14:1 ff.). The parable of the Supper in the following context gives the picture: God has to invite us, and our fitness for the invitation is in itself a gift to the host; cf. Matt. 22:11-14. Through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, God is enabled to give us the heart that loves, the new heart that is the source of true kindness (Col. 3:1-14; Eph. 4:1-4).

Then our kindness will be from the heart and not a grudging folkway. Then it will be done not to gain the good will of God, but because God already has had good will. Then it will be kindness as God is kind (Matt. 5:43-48).

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 20:27-40

What happens after death? It's a fascinating question. Heathen have believed in a survival of the soul. To the Spiritists that's a pretty painful thing. But Christians believe, "We shall rise again." In answer to that question our Lord says in the text:

"OUR GOD IS A GOD OF THE LIVING"

I

What This Statement Has to Tell Us About the Future World

A. In the text our Lord was attacked concerning the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. They had originally been a party opposing the additions to the Law made by the Pharisees. They were now characterized by their wealth and intellect and by a rationalistic rejection of such supernatural teachings as angels, the future life, and the resurrection. They believed that physical death brought the final end of the person. For a modern Sadducee cf. Corliss Lamont. Their attack revolved about the story of a woman who, according to Levitical law, married consecutively seven brothers (Deut. 25:5). If there is a resurrection to eternal life, she would have to be the wife of seven brothers.

B. Our Lord's reply came from the Pentateuch. God's people rise from the dead, for Moses called God the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Ex. 3:6 (in the original story God Himself so designates Himself); and God is not a God of the dead, but of the living. The Christian today finds his entire religion saturated with the conviction that he will rise from the dead; he worships on the Lord's Day, reminding of the first Easter; he confesses his faith in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting and regards Christ's own resurrection as proof positive of his own (1 Cor. 15:12ff.)

II

What This Statement Has to Tell About the Future State of the Living

A. Our Lord confines His answer to the future state of those who shall be alive, in terms of God. Not all men shall have the same fate in the life beyond the grave. (John 5:29ff.) Our Lord speaks of those "which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead" (v.35), "the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (v.36).

B. In these sayings our Lord gives remarkably explicit forecasts of that future life; most of the Bible is remarkably silent on specifications of the life after death. Even here the chief statement is that

it is in contrast to "this world" (v. 34). Here people marry and are given in marriage; there they shall not marry; they shall not die any more; they are equal to the angels. This world has procreation as one of its purposes; that world is a completed number. This world finds Christians still hampered with the flesh; in that world they shall be free of the handicaps of this present world, bodily and spiritually (Col. 3:1ff.; 1 Cor. 15:35-50; 1 John 3:2).

III

What This Statement Has to Tell About the Present State of the Living

A. Our Lord uses words for His people after the resurrection which already apply to them in this world. For already now they are the children of God (1 John 3:1; John 1:12; Rom. 8:14). They are that because of a thing which has already happened this side of Judgment Day, namely, the redeeming work of Christ and the subsequent gift of His Spirit. Cf. John 11:25, 26.

B. Hence the most remarkable thing which the life after the grave has in common with the Christian believer's life now: He lives unto God (v. 38). Cf. Romans 6; 12:1, 2. The Savior turns the discussion of Judgment Day and eternity into a consideration of the life of love which Christians are to live now (Matthew 25). Since we are destined for heaven, our citizenship is already in heaven, our works are already heavenly works (Phil. 3:17-21; 1 John 2:3).

This immediate aspect of the Christian's life under God does not alter the fact that he looks forward with joy to being with God forever, not in a vague "survival of the soul," but raised to be with Him and serve Him bodily forever.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 12:1-8

The greatest enemies of the Church are not the anti-Christian forces in the world, but the irreligious people who profess Christianity.

When anti-Christian forces arise, the Church arms itself to withstand the attack. However, the vitality and spirituality of the Church have always suffered setbacks when Christians permitted their religion to degenerate into a set of sanctified forms. Formalism is the archenemy of true religion today.

In our text Jesus rebukes the sin of formalism and indicates the temper that must guide the steps of Christians when He says:

I WILL HAVE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE

I

A Rebuke of All Empty Formalism in Religion

A. On the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples were walking through the barley fields. As they walked, the disciples plucked ears of barley, rubbed the hulls off the kernels, and ate the grain. Even the law of God itself allowed this activity (Deut. 23:25).

B. The Pharisees, however, regarded the action of the disciples as wrong. Plucking the ears was to them reaping, and rubbing the hulls off the ears, threshing. For that reason they rebuked Jesus for permitting something which they regarded as a desecration of the Sabbath.

C. Jesus discredits the charge of the Pharisees with the words: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." The fatal error of the Pharisees was that they were content with mere sacrifice. They put outward conformity to their regulations before inner worship of the heart. They worshiped God with their mouth and honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him (Matt. 15:8). They could devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers (Matt. 23:14). They were whited sepulchers, clean on the outside, but within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness (Matt. 23:27).

Therefore, even their worship, so exact, so respected by the people, was an abomination to God. It was worse than useless. Such sacrifice God does not want.

D. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives in our world. It is evident in the spirit of all those who, like the Pharisees, have a form of godliness but deny the power of it (2 Tim. 3:5). Cf. Rome's

insistence upon a certain number of prayers as a penance for sins; the Blue Laws enacted as part of observance of Sunday; attendance at church only because it is Sunday; the thoughtlessness of prayers; the inconsistent conduct of those who worship on Sunday, but live lives during the week which are a denial of their Sunday profession. To all these Christ says: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Application: Certainly this rebuke of Jesus calls upon us to examine ourselves. Is our worship merely lip service to God? Is our life consistent with our profession? These are questions which every heart must answer before God.

Transition: Let us not neglect sacrifice, but let it be of the right sort. Jesus tells us of what sort it ought to be when He says: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." For He here makes

II

A Proclamation of the Spirit of True Religion

A. That the principle of mercy is the spirit of true religion, over against the formalism of the Pharisees, Jesus demonstrates by three convincing arguments.

1. Vv. 3, 4. David and his men ate the shewbread (1 Samuel 21). Technically, the bread was reserved only for the priests. But the higher law of mercy dictated that the shewbread on this occasion be used to satisfy hunger.

2. V. 5. The priests performed labor on the Sabbath when they prepared the animals for sacrifice. Technically, this was wrong, but, again, mercy, the higher law, demanded the labor of the priests.

3. V. 6. The final argument is that Jesus does not condemn the act of the disciples because He, too, acts on the principle of mercy.

a. He is greater than the Temple. He is the Son of God Himself (Col. 2:16).

b. He is Lord of the Sabbath. Certainly if He does not condemn the disciples, they must be guiltless, and the principle of mercy must stand as the supreme law.

B. And it is. That was the principle upon which God acted when He gave His Son (Ps. 103:8-10; Rom. 5:8). The stern letter

of the Law demanded punishment for sin; but God acted on the higher principle of mercy.

Christ followed that same principle when He permitted the disciples to eat the barley, when He healed on the Sabbath, and when He died on the cross as the Savior of sinners (2 Cor. 8:9).

C. By that same principle we are to live, manifesting our faith in deeds of mercy. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27); cf. also 1 Corinthians 13; John 15:12; 1 John 4:20; Matt. 25:34-40.

D. Every day God gives us opportunities to manifest our faith in deeds of mercy, in the home, at our place of work, and through the agencies of mercy maintained by our Church.

Application: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). For Jesus Himself declares: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

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