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HOMILETICS

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 8:26-39

The difficulties of this pericope are notorious. They range from such incidental features as the number of demoniacs (Matthew's version having two) and the name of the locality (Gerasa, Gergesa, and Gadara all being supported in each of the three accounts) to the central feature of demoniac possession itself; here, moreover, in a multiple form. A word of caution seems in order. The difficulties met in the study should not be carried into the pulpit. To explain demoniac possession as mere mental illness is always dangerous. In this story such an explanation would be disastrous, for the subsequent behavior of the swine is explicable only on the basis of true demoniac activity. As for the destruction of the swine, a feature of the account which many have found repellent, it should be sufficient to remark that the Gadarenes, too, were repelled. The repulsion, basically, stems from a refusal to recognize Christ as Lord, who has the right to do as He wills with that which is His. To say that Christ does not command the demons to enter the swine, but merely permits it, is to sidestep the issue. In all this the preacher will be guided by the principle *qui excusat, accusat*. What is wanted from this text, as from every text, is positive Gospel proclamation. That will almost certainly result if the theme is taken from Jesus' words to the healed demoniac (v. 39):

"WHAT GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU!"

I

The Great Things of God Are His Deeds in Christ

A. The great things of God are deeds

The God of the Bible is a "God who acts." The Bible is the record of His activity. We often think of the God of the Bible as a "God who speaks." Even then there is a dynamic, active element, for the Word of God is always a creative Word. When God speaks, things happen. (Consider only the Creation account.)

B. The deeds of God are done in Christ

Christ already present at Creation (John 1). When creative Word became incarnate, it became manifest that all God's previous activity and all His subsequent activity, in so far as it concerns us, must be somehow related to this central act. In Christ God acts, as is demonstrated by

1. The confession of the devils (v. 28).—Confession of fear, not of faith (James 2:19). Recognized Christ as the Mighty One, who could confine them to the abyss of hell (v. 31).

2. The witness of the healed demoniac (v. 39). . . . Note the significant turn: "What *God* has done," "What *Jesus* had done."

3. The experience of Christians. . . . Christ has done for us what only God can do. Moreover, what Christ has done reveals God as nothing else can.

II

The Great Deeds of God Center in Christ's Victory over Hellish Powers

A. The miracle in Gadara was a victory for Christ over hellish powers

1. The scene.—In describing scene it will be difficult to improve on the concise yet vivid description in vv. 26-29.

2. The malady.—Rehearse symptoms. Severe mental and nervous disturbance. After cure, man is described as "sane" (v. 35). Yet no mere mental illness. A real possession by demons,¹ evident from the actual usurpation of the powers of speech (vv. 28, 30). A new personality, a new "I." Since sickness is a result of sin, all maladies can be referred to the devil as a cause (Luke 13:11; Acts 10:38); but this is manifestly a special case.

3. The cure: (a) The word of power. Devils dispute Christ's authority (v. 28), suggest that Christ is anticipating the time of Judgment (Matt. 8:29), attempt to strike a bargain (v. 32). Christ

¹ Nothing will be gained by describing at length the origin and nature of these dark beings. The N. T. itself is very restrained in its treatment of this matter. There are no elaborate descriptions and no speculative extravagances. It should be sufficient to note that, in the teaching of Jesus, demons are associated with the devil (Luke 11:17ff.) and that they are in all probability the fallen angels (Matt. 25:41; Jude 6). They are most assuredly not the spirits of evil men, who have died.

refuses to engage in dispute. Goes immediately to work speaking the word that heals. Cp. Matt. 8:32. (b) The visible demonstration of cure (v. 33).

B. The victory of Christ in Gadara was an instance in a general combat

Christ's whole life, from one viewpoint, a struggle against Satan (1 John 3:8). The casting out of demons a strategic skirmish. Hence such a prominent feature of the Gospels. A proof that kingdom of God was invading the kingdom of the devil (Luke 11:20). A demonstration that the devil was unseated as the accuser at God's throne, that the reign of grace had begun (Luke 10:18). Final and complete victory in the decisive deed of the cross (Col. 2:15).

C. The victory of Christ in Gadara serves to illustrate his victory today

1. Demonic powers are still active. — Symptoms in world and in our lives will readily suggest themselves.² True, actual physical possession rarely (I hesitate to say never) encountered today. But Satan, who entered Judas, is entering the lives of men and women in the same way today, Luke 22:3 (demonic activity and suggestion, however, does not absolve man from responsibility. Man willingly enters the great conspiracy against God (James 1:14).

2. Christ is still the Victor. — Through the Word, creative still, Christ's Spirit makes men new and leads them, repentant and healed, to Jesus' feet (v. 35).

III

The Great Deeds of God in Christ Call for a Response

A. The Gadarenes responded with fear (vv. 35, 37) occasioned by

1. Selfishness. — Property vs. human personality and the human soul. Gadarenes saw healed man and Jesus, but they did not see their pigs.

2. Self-willed independence. — Feared that such a Christ would become a tyrant over their lives.

² It may be legitimate allegorizing to compare the crazed actions of men today with single features of the demoniac's behavior. Little imagination is required to do this.

3. **Blindness to God's grace.**—Saw only the relative evil and failed to see the immeasurable good. All of this is clearly contemporary.

B. The healed demoniac responded with loving gratitude (vv. 38, 39)

1. **His motives were of the best.**—Did not fear the aroused Gadarenes. Did not mistrust the complete effectiveness of the cure. Desire to accompany Jesus prompted by loving gratitude. But Jesus refuses to grant permission because

2. **His expression of gratitude needed direction.**—Joyous, grateful home life and home mission work in the narrowest sense of that term.

Conclusion: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

Burlington, Colo.

WALTER BARTLING

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 7:1-13

God can use only humble men. If they are proud to begin with, God makes them humble. "Take me and use me after Thy will, While I am waiting yielded and still."

We cannot but note the humility of great religious leaders: Moses (Ex. 4:10; 6:30); Gideon (Judg. 6:15); David (1 Sam. 16:11; 24:6-15); Paul (1 Cor. 15:9, 10); Luther, Walther, to mention but a few. The life of Jesus on earth is notable also for its simplicity and the complete absence of the marks characteristic of many of the leaders of this world. With all their humility, however, these men did not hesitate, upon the right occasion, to testify boldly.

Our text makes clear to us that *just as Jesus could not be turned aside from His purpose to reprove evil and to call men to repentance by urgings to self-glorification, so the Church, true to Jesus as God and Lord, must promote not itself, but the glory of God.* Our text parallels under different circumstances the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

PURPOSE AND METHOD IN RELIGIOUS PROMOTION

I

Religious Promotion Can Serve a Useful Purpose

A. Its purpose is not simply to publicize a certain group or gain support for a religious venture (vv. 3, 4).

1. Pride and selfishness are improper motives (Gal. 2:20).

2. The danger is there to promote a cause without promoting Christ. Such danger is very real also within the churches (John 13:35).

B. Christ has no part in religious promotion that is not prompted by faith and a desire to help others (vv. 5, 8; cf. 1 Corinthians 13).

1. The feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem, one of the three great festivals, provided opportunity for display (Deut. 16:1-15).

2. The "brothers" (possibly cousins or other relatives, possibly literal brothers) and the people in general were not clear on what Jesus came to do (vv. 4, 12).

3. People today (also some within the churches) are not clear on what Jesus means to us and therefore evaluate religious promotion incorrectly and mistake its purpose (vv. 4, 11, 13).

C. Whenever people are brought to repentance, faith, and a godly life by our religious promotion, then we are doing what Jesus wants (vv. 6, 7).

D. We have effort at promotion in our church locally and otherwise, and ought to have it, but we must always examine our motives and our methods (vv. 6, 7).

II

Repentance, Faith, and Service in the Name of Jesus Are the Goals in Religious Promotion That Give Christ His Rightful Place

A. The time best suited for recognition of Jesus for what He was had not come, and would not come, in the way the brothers suggested (v. 6).

B. Jesus' reproof of the world was intended to call them to repentance (v. 7).

1. Christ-preaching churches will always reprove the world (Eph. 5:11; Psalm 26).

2. The world will respond with welcome to its own (v. 6: "... your time is always ready") but with hate to those who call it evil.

C. The repentance and faith which Jesus sought to provoke and inspire in the hearts of people constitute the goal of the Church's work in His name.

D. The Christian churches, moved to unselfish service to others by Jesus' love to them, can expect the same evaluation from people which Jesus received (vv. 1, 6, 12; Cp. Matt. 10:16-28).

1. Some people will fight them desperately.
2. Some will recognize the service to be to the glory of God.
3. Some will praise the churches as worth-while agencies in society, equal to other humanitarian or moral agencies.
4. Some will call them hypocritical failures.

III

The Method Used in Religious Promotion Must Always Keep the Purpose in Mind (v. 10; cp. vv. 16-18)

A. Deceit, pressure, threat of revenge, gambling, slander, and violation of conscience for popularity's sake are never methods in accord with Christian purposes ("Your time is always ready"; v. 6; cp. v. 5).

B. Financial drives, membership campaigns, fellowship dinners, Sunday school increases, are not end in themselves (relatives urged unworthy motives on Jesus, v. 3).

C. Promotion and publicity may be spiritually good for a congregation, depending upon the motives, methods, and effects (Matt. 5:16; 28:19, 20).

D. The power of God active in His Word and in the lives of His followers brings men to Christ (Ps. 145:10-12).

Conclusion: Show your repentance and faith in Christ by witnessing to Him as Savior. Others may not understand what Jesus can do, but do not let that confuse or disturb you. Imitate the humility of Jesus, and work patiently for the salvation of others.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 10:22-30

In life and business we must be able to prove certain things. Therefore we make use of receipts and witnesses.

What witness do we have for the truths that we hear in Church? The Jews raised this same question when they asked our Lord: "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus gives His own answer.

THE THREEFOLD WITNESS OF CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP

I

The External Witness of His Words and His Works (Vv. 25-25)

This demand of the Jews seemed to be reasonable. Actually Christ already had given abundant testimony to His Messiahship.

A. His words. "I told you, and ye believed not" (v. 25). At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus went to the synagog at Nazareth. He read a beautiful Messianic passage from Isaiah and then said: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). He claimed to be Messiah on other occasions: for instance, when He said: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

B. His works. "The works that I do . . . they bear witness of Me" (v. 25). His words were not idle or presumptuous claims. His works give evidence for the truthfulness of His words. John the Baptist had sent messengers to ask Christ the question: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Here, too, Christ points to the evidence given by His mighty works (Matt. 11:3, 5).

C. Here, then, is factual and objective evidence for Christ as Messiah and Lord: His clear words and claims and His mighty works! Christians need never fear any questions that anyone may ask. We can point to the external evidence offered by Christ's words and works.

D. The people who questioned Christ had heard His words, had seen His works or heard of them. Yet they did not believe. Their unbelief, therefore, was not due to any lack of evidence. Faith is not only a matter of the head, but of the heart! Only Christ's people have the most impressive witness for His Messiahship.

II

The Internal Witness, Which Is Known Only by Those Who Follow Him (Vv. 26, 27)

A. "My sheep hear My voice" (v. 27). Believers do not dwell primarily on the outward evidence. Above all else, they humbly hear the Word of Christ. By reading the Bible, and through faithfully hearing God's Word in Church, Christ's people receive the most certain assurances that He is their Savior and Messiah.

B. "They follow Me" (v. 27). Only those who humbly and faithfully follow Christ can speak of real assurance as to His Lordship. The real proof of Christ is known only by believers. Those who truly follow Him are not plagued and troubled by doubts. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself." (John 7:17).

When once Thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine.

C. Outsiders and unbelievers should know that the outward evidence that they seek can never give the comforting assurance of faith. To all unbelievers we say: "The real witness lies before you. If you do not believe, you can never know Christ as His people know Him. 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him!'" (Ps. 34:8.)

III

The Final Witness, Which Will Be Evident to All Only on Judgment Day (Vv. 28-30)

A. No one can eternally harm Christ's people or destroy His gracious plans for them. They are safe in His care. "Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (v. 28). This means that they are also under the Father's care: "No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (v. 29). "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

B. The final proof of Christ's Messiahship and Lordship still lies in the future. On Judgment Day He will say to His people: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The full and

visible proof of Christ's Lordship, which will be given on Judgment Day, will strike terror into the hearts of all who have rejected Him. His people, however, safe in His care, will rejoice at His great advent.

It is the assurance of faith alone that satisfies our minds and hearts. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 16:1-12

BRINGING THE LORD JESUS UP TO STANDARD

The theme, does that sound right? You say it is impossible, ridiculous, blasphemous? Sounds as though He has something missing, needs improvement. — To be sure, nothing to improve on Him. Not something which *can* be done, but which all people by nature *think can be done*. Common sin of the day with which Christ had to deal, and with which we deal today.

In the text, people trying that very thing (v. 1): "Master, we are not quite satisfied. You do not meet our standard of religion. Just one little miracle between our standing up and bowing down." Whether they realized it or not, they would keep right on asking for more. If they can demand *A*, they will go to *B* right through the alphabet. No longer Christ's religion but theirs.

Not come because they *wanted* Him — because they did *not want* Him. Strange motive. No dearth of signs. Wherever He went, they were done. Summarized in Luke 7:22. In other words, it's all a fraud. Act as though they had not been done. "O ye hypocrites! telling Me to do what I am doing. Open your eyes!" How obstinate can people get? Mark 8:12: "He sighed deeply in His spirit."

Lord holds His temper in perfect control: His answer (vv. 2, 3): *I have given* you signs aplenty; therefore "no sign."

Still going on today. Step up to Christ, make demands, certain standards to be met before they accept. All start with *if*.

If No. 1: If the Gospel, in might and power, makes the world a better place (expand), look how long we have had it! No such sign.

If No. 2: If important people would be impressed. Great majority do not accept. Not a good sign.

If No. 3: If Gospel came in a more intelligent way and did not embarrass, shame, humiliate people. No room for helping, only being helped. If it would compliment and praise people. No giving, only being given.

There are other *ifs*, but people are just looking for a hook to hang Christ. Men try to set the standard. Demand how God should do. Men presume the right and ability to formulate it. Act as if God gave no signs.

In earthly things, give close attention to signs of their individual skies: the weather prophet, the stockbroker, the farmer, the politician, the merchant, etc. Each knows, observes, his sky. But how many judge the times spiritually? When experts report on signs they see, all listen. When God gives report on man, sends His Son as Savior, does it all as predicted in O. T., it is nothing, not impressed. Even sign of Jonas (v. 4), rising from the dead—their verdict—it does not come up to our standard.

Fools! While they demand, Gospel performs signs before their eyes.

Sign No. 1: Man-eating heathen in New Guinea quit cannibalism. Thousand natives on Sunday morning assembled in church they built themselves. Listening to the Jesus man, sitting sensibly, in order, no witch doctors.

We say, "Look at these signs." They act dumb, "Sign! What sign? Sign of what?" Well-nigh lose your temper, yell: "Sign of the Gospel, you hypocrite!" "Having eyes, they see not. . . ."

Sign No. 2: War in Korea. We say, "Sign of God's judgment, repent of sin, end of world." Do not see it, only a sign of bad politics.

Sign No. 3: Death comes to their house. We say: "Sign of sin, 'The wages. . . .'" "Why, all men die," misinterpret; "no sign at all, rule of nature, we all have to go sometimes."

Sign No. 4: Television, coast to coast, "This Is the Life." With waning of radio, we continue.

What *other people* are to see, be sure to see *yourselves*. Times we yearn direct sign, critical frame of mind, not satisfied. Lord does not come up to our standard, expectations. Great temptations.

Those days coming for disciples. Warning, preoccupied with bread, signs of physical life. Lord concerned with signs of spiritual death (v. 12). A little pinch of that demanding leaven will do great harm. Pick on one point. Insult Him.

Paul prayed for Colossians (Standard Epistle of Day 1:9): "Desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." As we grow through the Gospel of the cross in knowing Him as our Savior, we shall find that He will give us greater faith and trust.

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG, JR.

THANKSGIVING DAY

LUKE 12:15-21

The rapid and almost total secularization of life in the U.S. has caused many to come to the Church, if at all, with much the same request with which the man came to Christ in Luke 12:13. In more than a forced sense this can be particularly true on a day like this. Whatever else a day or a season like this may bring forth, it must compel each of us to answer

WHAT SHALL I DO?

I

The Land Has Borne Well (v. 16)

A. It should be noted that it is the land, the farm, the estate.

1. While we express ownership, it is always a given one.
2. This simple recognition must pose Paul's question: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (1 Cor. 4:7.)

B. It should be noted that the land did the bearing.

1. The labor, the planning, etc., are ours.
2. The fruit is a blessing beyond our control.

NOTE: Surely it must be evident that no warping of the text is necessary to see the rich man as our rich country, his fertile estate as our extremely fruitful land. The bearing well is recognized even by governmental proclamation: therefore Thanksgiving Day. The answer to the question of the theme will be shaped to a large extent by the manner in which we digest Part I.

II

Man's Response to the Posed Question

A. If he is a fool

1. His emphasis will be on "my crops," what I have been able to label as mine during the past year.

2. His use of his crops, of what he has gathered, will be dictated by purely selfish motives for purely selfish ends. Here the "I," self-determined, self-seeking, the purely sensory "I," exalts itself to the position of God. Ingratitude always involves idolatry. The First Commandment the most sinned against of the Commandments in our day, even on Thanksgiving Day.

B. If he is wise

1. He will see that his life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesses (Psalm 49).

2. His faith and gratitude toward God will make him rich toward God even as his real and expressed dependence upon God will be the measure of his gratitude.

III

God Has the Final Answer to the Posed Question

A. "Thy soul shall be required of thee." We are not the only ones who talk with self and plan with self (v. 19). The self is summoned before God.

B. "Thou fool" — if thou hast nothing but what thou didst possess, either meagerly or abundantly (Ps. 49:6, 7); for self always stands alone and naked when it stands before God. Hence the fool has nothing.

C. "Thou wise man" — if thou art rich toward God, having what thou hast in trust from Him, being what thou art in total dependence upon His grace. This means knowledge of self as undeserving and knowledge of God, graciously loving the undeserving.

Conclusion: What shall I do? See God as the Father of Jesus Christ, that I may know Him as my forgiving Father, even the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, and from whom therefore cometh down every good and perfect gift. What shall I do? Glory in God, who does the giving, and not in that which thou hast received.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE