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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 6:32-35

Text and Central Thought.—"Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" When? How? All was a mystery for the Jews. Jesus immediately attacked their carnal heart. The miraculous feeding of the five thousand had missed its purpose for them. Rebukingly Jesus said to them: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for Him God the Father sealed." The Jews cared not that He was their Savior. All they were interested in was that He should be their bread king so that He could supply them with every earthly plenty and pleasure that they desired. Therefore Jesus exhorted them to labor for the salvation which He had earned for them by His vicarious obedience and atonement for their sins. Holy Week.

The Jews were ready to labor for the bread which they wanted, and they said: "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" Jesus gives them direction, "Believe by the working of God!" Believe! This they do not want to hear. He leads them onto loftier truths. Moses gave you bread, but though it was bread from heaven, it was not the bread of life, because it was perishable itself and was not able to save from perishing. Remember how the multitudes died in the wilderness?

In contrast and with emphasis, "I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst." Come and believe—come by believing! Oh, that men would believe in their Savior, who is portrayed in all His vicarious and salutary suffering in this Holy Week. If only men would believe in Him and worship Him, the King of Kings.

The Day and the Theme.—Palm Sunday. Holy Week. This is the beginning of an entire week in which we contemplate Christ's substitutionary and sufficient suffering for the sins of the world. We should heed His pleading prayers for God's presence and preservation, appropriate His merits to ourselves, make His prayers our own, emulate His patience, and become partakers of His salvation. The Swedish

Lectionary suggests the theme "Christ's Purpose" (the Last Farewell) — the Purpose of Worship. The accent of worship can be made stronger in the above central thought of the sermon, "Prayerfully Worship Christ." To worship this Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is basic to the monthly theme of *Parish Activities*.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon. — To show the hearer how fruitful corporate worship supplies spiritual power to meet the opportunities, responsibilities, and problems of each week. To show the hearer how to get new benefits out of the church service. Worship Christ as the Lamb and Lord of God. Regular church attendance. Use God's Word in the home. Family devotions. Confess the precious Savior.

Sin and Its Fruits. — Sin and unbelief refuses to take Jesus at His word and acknowledge Him as the One who can satisfy the longing of the soul. To the ungrateful sinner Jesus says: "Ye also have seen Me and believe not." If anything ever seemed a failure, it was the preaching of Jesus. Read the entire sixth chapter of John. "This is a hard saying, who can believe it?" was the reaction of the people. Many of the Lord's disciples went back and walked with Him no more, so that He felt constrained to turn to the twelve and ask them: "Will ye also go away?" The depravity of the human heart does not realize its need for the Bread of Life.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel. — There is so little worshipful life in our homes and lives. Not only in ours but in those of all men. As the disciples worshiped Christ, especially after His resurrection, as the angels worshiped Him on earth and worship Him in glory, so we should worship Him continually and eternally. All His work was for us, His salvation is ours, He has saved us to be His own on earth and in glory. We should now begin the joy of worshipping Him. May the Spirit of God be given us to take away the veil from our eyes and to quicken us anew, so that we may find peace and satisfaction by worshipping Him devoutly. When others turn away and the Lord asks us, "Will ye also go away?" may the blessed experience of our own life urge us to exclaim with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we have believed and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Let us worship Him by our lives here on earth. To gain strength from our worship we must pray for the Holy Spirit, who alone can give us a worshipping heart. We can worship him by being active in parish work, and these parish activities may one day become heavenly pleasures. Let us grow strong by worshipping faithfully.

Illustrations: Follow the example of the multitude at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Heed Phil. 2:9-11.

Outline

Prayerfully Worship Christ

- I. He is our Hope of life
 - A. He came from heaven
 - B. He atoned for our sins
- II. Worship Him prayerfully
 - A. Consider His prayers in suffering
 - B. Pray like Him. Introit, Gradual
 - C. Thus gain strength for time and for eternity

Saginaw, Mich.

HAROLD F. KRACH

GOOD FRIDAY

LUKE 23:32-43

The Text.—Although this text presents no great difficulties, there are nevertheless a number of points worthy of special notice. It is significant to note in verse 34 that some manuscripts do not have the first word of Jesus from the cross. However, there is sufficient textual evidence to warrant its inclusion in the narrative. In verse 35 the word οὗτος may well be translated "this fellow." In verse 39 it seems that the words of the malefactor ought to be rendered: "Art thou not the Christ? Save Thyself and us." Although Matthew and Mark tell how both malefactors reproached Jesus and Luke speaks of only one blaspheming, there is no real contradiction here. Doubtless at first both men reviled Jesus, but at the last the penitent malefactor relented. In verse 42 there is some doubt whether the preposition in the phrase "into Thy kingdom" is εἰς or ἐν. Moffatt probably correctly translates: "Jesus, do not forget me when You come to reign." The dying malefactor is doubtless thinking of the final return of Christ. In contrast to this prayer, Jesus assures the malefactor: "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

Central Thought.—The burden of our message on Good Friday is the answer to the question: Why did Jesus die? We want our people to see again the love of God in giving His Son, the love of Jesus, who willingly became the Substitute for all men, and the spiritual blessings Christ won for all the world by His sacrifice. To accomplish this purpose our text is admirably suited.

This text presents a number of contrasts: the two thieves; the innocent Savior numbered with transgressors; Jesus praying for forgiveness for His enemies while the rulers and the soldiers jest. Perhaps we can succeed in dealing with these various contrasts by centering our attention on the paradox of Calvary: the innocent Jesus dies and the guilty world of sinners goes free.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Old Testament selection for Good Friday is Isaiah 53. The Gospel lesson, John 18:1 to John 19:42, describes the Passion history from Gethsemane to the burial of the Savior. The Introit, Collects, and Gradual point to the Good Friday theme of the sin of man, for which Christ died, the grace of God, who gave His Son, and the love of Jesus in becoming man's Substitute.

The emphasis set forth in *Parish Activities* is "New strength through Christian worship." In the penitent malefactor we have exemplified the elements of God-pleasing worship: sincere repentance and faith in Christ. If the hearer is led to worship as did the penitent thief, he will find new strength for his faith and life.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearer daily to find renewed spiritual strength by appropriating the merits of Christ in sincere repentance and faith.

Sin and its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—In the rulers, soldiers, and the impenitent malefactor we have examples of those who close their eyes to the love of Christ, committing the sin of sins. At the same time, when we speak of the penitent malefactor, we want our hearers to realize that they are no worthier of God's grace than he. Each of us must be led to look upon the malefactor and say: "There but for the grace of God am I."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—This text teems with opportunities for preaching the Gospel. Jesus is proclaimed the Christ, the Chosen of God. Here we have the grace of God, who sent the Savior. The entire passage proclaims the Gospel truth that Jesus gave Himself as our Substitute. The words of Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" and "Today thou shalt be with Me in paradise," proclaim the fruits of Christ's death.

Illustrations.—The text itself offers a wealth of illustrative material. Perhaps this word of caution is in place: Let us describe the physical suffering of Christ with restraint. Luke says simply, "They crucified Him." One might see in the question of Isaac, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" the question that inevitably arises in the sin-disturbed heart. Abraham answered, "God will provide the lamb" (Gen. 22:7, 8). Christ is the Lamb God provided for all mankind.

Outline

Theme: The Paradox of Calvary

I. The innocent Jesus dies

A. Jesus' innocence is established beyond a doubt

1. He was indeed the King of the Jews, the Son of God, who did no sin. V. 38
2. The dying malefactor testifies to His innocence. V. 41b

B. Yet we see Him dying on the cross

1. Numbered with transgressors. V. 33
2. Mocked by rulers, soldiers, and the thief. Vv. 35-37, 39

C. The Explanation: He is the Christ. Vv. 35, 39

1. Sent by the love of the Father
2. Himself the willing Servant who was made sin for us

II. The guilty go free

A. We deserve to die. V. 41a

B. There is forgiveness for all in Christ. V. 34

C. Those benefit who look to Jesus in repentance and faith. Vv. 41-43

Springfield, Ill.

HENRY J. EGGOLD, JR.

EASTER DAY

JOHN 20:10-18

The Text and Its Central Thought.—More than a charming story of one of the appearances of the risen Christ with a reminiscence of Luke 24:16, this text plunges into profound concerns of the Christian regarding the nature and meaning of Christ's resurrection. Vv. 10, 11: Mary had seen only the outside of the sepulcher and had run back to the disciples, with the tale that the body of Jesus had been stolen (vv. 1, 2). Peter had responded to her alarm and gone all the way into the sepulcher. John also had gone in "and believed" (v. 8). They returned to their home, and Mary came back to the grave after they had gone. Filled with her conviction that the body had been stolen, she was weeping. Then she, too, looked into the grave (v. 12). She saw the angels (Matthew and Mark mention one; Luke, two, but not in this detail). Does the detail of the account stem from Mary's telling John directly? (V. 18.) V. 13: A longer discussion of the angels' remarks appears in the other Gospels. This brief exchange focuses on Mary's presumption

that the body was stolen and prepares for the next. It already stresses Mary's preoccupation with the physical body of Jesus—the target of the Savior's rebuke (v. 17). Vv. 14, 15: This detailed conversation underscores the completeness of Mary's fixation, her bland forgetfulness of His promise to rise from the dead. V. 16: In the Emmaus story it was Christ's giving thanks over the breaking of bread (Luke 24:31 f.), here His pronouncing Mary's name, that led to the recognition. It will be good not to get into sentimentalities about "the accustomed and dear accents of His voice" but to ponder the significance of His saying the name. Is it rebuke—"Oh ye of little faith"—or is it the brooding desire that she recognize Him for what He is? The latter would accord with v. 17. V. 17: The present imperative shows that she was clasping Him. He bids her desist. Why the contrast with the other women (Matt. 28:9)? Evidently there their purpose was to express their faith and adoration. Here Mary is still concerned with the purely earthly and physical relationship. She was sure that the body of Christ had been stolen; now that it was not so and she saw that He was risen, the significance of His living was that the earlier human association could be resumed. But Jesus wants more. The conditions under which Jesus would, now that the redemptive work was done, associate with His disciples would set in at the Ascension. In that invisible and intangible, but real and dynamic relation Christians throughout the world and not just those contiguous with a physical body of Christ are to "touch" and grasp Him (Matt. 28:20). The relation of faith is to be one higher than of sight; note the next story (vv. 20, 29). It is a relation in which they are not simply physically associated, but in which they are one with God the Father (v. 17). V. 18: Mary was the first to see the risen Lord (Mark 16:9). She told the disciples (in v. 17 for the first time called "brethren" by Jesus), but they did not believe her (Mark 16:11).

The Day and Its Theme.—The theme of the Day is sketched broadly: "The Resurrection of Jesus." The Common Service comprises our hope of true immortality, our rising already in time to a new life, our confidence that Jesus is risen, our will to tell the story to others, and the resurrection a demonstration of the redemptive work of Jesus. Which accent does this text underscore? It stands in a sequence of narratives in which Jesus is wrestling with the sluggishness of His disciples in order to impress upon them the true significance of His resurrection, that it is the culmination and seal of His giving us the Father's life and Spirit, i.e., the concluding accent in the list above. The central thought of the text, therefore, may be stated: "The resur-

rection of Jesus should assure us not of physical companionship with Him, but of life with God." The monthly theme of *Parish Activities* is "New Strength through Christian Worship." An application can be made in this sermon to the point that strength-giving worship is that which draws on Christ as Redeemer and not simply on Him as present and companionable. A briefer way of stating the sermon theme could be: "Adore the Risen Christ as Your Redeemer."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The sermon should stimulate, not merely to a factual acceptance of the resurrection story, nor to physical sensations of the nearness of Christ, but to the faith that God is our Father through the redeeming work of Christ, attested and proclaimed by the resurrection of Christ.

Sin Diagnosed.—This text hits hard at the current Gnostic cult of Jesus as Great and Present Friend. It unmasks the physical, carnal, worldly demands and appetites that parade under the sentimental trust that Jesus through His constant presence makes always healthy, wealthy, and happy. In the case study of Mary (supplemented by Thomas later) we see the blight of limiting faith in Christ to a companionship merely and forgetting that He was sent by the Father to redeem us to God from our sins, to work our peace with God. The text reflects the ease with which a person who has been instructed in the Word of Christ can cease to ponder the redeeming work of Christ.

Opportunities for Gospel.—The text itself gives Jesus' description of the culmination of His redemptive work: He ascends to the Father, He removes from physical association with men, having made God to be the believer's God, His Father to be the believer's Father. This needs to be filled in with the full discussion of the redeeming work of Christ, finished on the cross, and the interpretation of the resurrection of Christ from the tomb as God's clamorous declaration that Jesus is He, the One that was to redeem and that finished His task—hence the declaration that through Christ God forgives the sins of the world. Cf. v. 23.

Illustrations.—In these days of Christian Science and "Peale's appeal" hearers will be sensitive and even hostile to the thrust of this text. Hence it is important to be ultratextual, to explore Mary's case patiently and draw parallels with common human nature.—Analogies are important for showing the relation between the redemptive work of Christ and the resurrection. But they must be dignified; trivial areas of life will be incongruous and disturbing when applied to this supreme event. The resurrection need not be illustrated; it *is* an illustration, the identification by God of Christ as the Redeemer.

Outline

Adore the Risen Christ as Your Redeemer

I. Your adoration can easily deteriorate

- A. As you ponder the resurrection intellectually, as a prop for a carnal faith
- B. As you rejoice in Christ's rising, but only to the end of physical cheer

II. Adore Christ as your Redeemer

- A. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He said to you and all men: This is the One who has redeemed you from sin, namely, on the cross of Calvary
- B. Hence our reflecting upon His resurrection moves us to growing faith in God as our Father, rejoicing in constant forgiveness of sins, assurance that Christ is with us always to bring us finally to life with Him forever

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

QUASIMODOGENITI (The First Sunday after Easter)

JOHN 21:1-14

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Ch. 21 forms an epilog, or appendix, to the Gospel of John. Though the chapter deals with the risen Christ, its goal does not seem to be that of adducing further proof for Jesus' resurrection. It rather describes His activity among His disciples. One of the key words is found in V. 1: "Jesus *manifested* Himself . . ." Note its repetition. Used of Christ in the N. T. frequently. Cf. Mark 16:12, 14; John 1:31; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 3:5. Vincent suggests that its basic idea goes beyond mere sense appeal and is "addressed to spiritual perception and contemplates a moral and spiritual effect." The disciples seem to have returned to their former occupations, perhaps waiting for some special event to determine their futures. It is after a futile night of fishing, "when the day was now breaking," that Jesus appears. His question indicates He expected a negative reply: "You have not, I suppose, caught anything. . . ." The definite command to cast on the right side is followed by the remarkable catch. John is the first to sense the impact of the sign: the Lord had come back to them. Peter is the first to act on this knowledge: he dives into the sea to come to the Lord. Their

peculiar awe and reverence before the risen Savior is evident in v. 12. They hold back at some distance from Christ. The strangeness of the whole scene prevents them from "inquiring" as to His appearance. (N. B. ἐξετάσαι, occurs only three times in N. T. — Matt. 2:10; 10:11 — implies careful, precise inquiry.) Jesus advances to the hesitant disciples, feeding them with "the bread" and "the fish" He Himself had provided. John seems to emphasize His role as "Giver"; nothing is said about his partaking. "The third time" apparently refers only to appearances "to His disciples" because John himself relates three appearances in ch. 20. (The ancients made much of comparisons with the first miracle of fishes related in Luke 5 as well as with the precise number of fishes caught. The first seems to be useful background; the second too allegorical to even bother with.) A central thought: "The Risen Savior shows Himself alive as He feeds His followers."

The Day and Its Theme.—As the octave of Easter this Sunday closes the Feast of the Resurrection, the climax of the church year. It was the ancient custom for those baptized on Holy Saturday to wear white robes for the entire week. On this Sunday they resumed regular dress. But as they and we leave the mountaintop of Easter rejoicing, we pray in the Collect that we might, "by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation. . . ." The Introit and Epistle likewise seem to be thinking of the newly baptized and confirmed: "newborn babes," "milk of the Word," "sing aloud unto God," "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Since "Christian Worship" is the general emphasis in *Parish Activities*, this text forms a natural basis for motivation. It is the risen Savior who comes to us, feeding us through Word and Sacrament.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To create a growing desire in the hearer to receive the nourishment Christ provides. The emphasis should not center simply on Christ's appearance as an end in itself; it was a means for an activity—giving the gift of food.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—When Easter was over, the disciples went home to resume the old routine of work. The implication of the new beginning somehow escaped them. So the Savior comes to them. He rouses them from their futile toil. He lifts their gaze from fish back to Himself. Likewise Easter as a day is over for us. We are likely to descend into the valley of old attitudes, deadening spiritual routines, lethargy before the risen Savior. The answer is not simply to encourage church attendance. It is to heighten the awareness of spiritual need for which He brings the cure. The

answer lies in the actual receiving of the spiritual food which He provides. We are not simply identifying Resurrection appearances. We are offering the Word, through which He nourishes our stumbling faith.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The miracle itself, the title "Lord," and the resurrected Christ form the natural channels through which we can lead into the Gospel. The concern and love which led Him to the cross now bring Christ back to His disciples again. They are discouraged and frightened. He comes now not only as the Crucified One, but as the Exalted One who was crucified and has risen. If Holy Communion is being celebrated, one has another means of reinforcing the message of forgiveness.

Illustrations.—1. Julian Huxley once wrote: "The modern man has a God-shaped blank in his consciousness." We keep trying to fill it with dreams and gadgets from the world. But they never fit. Christ offers us not only gifts but His very self. 2. With a little imagination, the "food analogy" can be reheated; usually it tends toward staleness. The need for actually eating a meal in place of merely identifying the courses is human—thus useful. 3. The vividness of the narrative will carry much of the story.

Outline

I. The World Tends to Drag us Down Spiritually

- A. After Easter we resettle into familiar, unthinking patterns of life and worship
- B. These attitudes kill faith

II. The Risen Savior Comes to Us

- A. It is the crucified and risen Savior who comes
- B. Christ takes the initiative in coming to us

III. He Offers Us Spiritual Food

- A. It comes as His gift
- B. Receive now the blessing of the Living Word

St. Louis, Mo.

DAVID S. SCHULLER

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI (The Second Sunday after Easter)

MATT. 9:36-38

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Most harmonies of Christ's life place the events which preceded the text in the following order: His second rejection at Nazareth and the third preaching tour in Galilee, then the preaching mission of the Twelve, which was initiated by the words of the text. The rejection and the third preaching tour had vividly etched upon our Savior's mind the great need of the people for consecrated leadership. Lenski supposes that the "seeing" of v. 36 must refer to some specific incident, some point in time. But Robertson (p. 832) points out that the constative aorist merely treats the act as a single whole, entirely irrespective of the parts or time involved. If the act is a point in itself, as Lenski feels, well and good. But the aorist can be used also of an act which is not a point. And so it was more likely Jesus' experience at Nazareth and His recent preaching tour which led Him to speak of the flock in its prostrated and torn condition, with a completely inadequate number of faithful shepherds to lift them back to their feet. Through this vision, Jesus is "moved" to compassion. This is the same deep compassion which "moved" Him to leave heaven (Phil. 2:5-8). Christ's compassion is "not only a pained feeling at sight of suffering, but in addition a strong desire to remove and relieve the suffering" (Lenski). This word "compassion" is one of the important keys to the understanding of Christ's work. When He is moved with compassion, action always follows. Being filled with compassion, He healed the sick (Matt. 14:14), He fed four thousand (Matt. 15:32), He healed a leper (Mark 1:41), He began to teach (Mark 6:34), He raised the widow's son (Luke 7:13). Christ's compassion is the wellspring and fountain from which His Savior love flows. In this case His compassion took action in two forms. He urged the disciples to pray to the Lord to send more laborers into the harvest, and shortly afterwards He Himself commissioned the Twelve to go forth as workers into the harvest. Only this same type of compassion could motivate the disciples to undertake that work, for it would be difficult and discouraging work. There was no hope for financial remuneration (Matt. 10:9), and there was real danger of personal injury (Matt. 10:16-18, 28). A suggested central thought for this text: Christlike compassion always produces action to relieve suffering.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle (1 Peter 2:21-25), carries out the Good Shepherd emphasis and also points us to the perfect

example of Jesus. The Gospel lesson (John 10:11-16), is almost an exact duplication of the thought of the Swedish lectionary text. In the Gospel lesson Jesus points to Himself as the Good Shepherd, who is going to lay down His life for the sheep. At the same time He reminds His disciples of the other sheep that were still to be brought into the fold. The Gradual emphasizes the wonderful fact that the sheep know their Good Shepherd. The Introit emphasizes our joy in knowing the goodness of God, also His saving goodness. The Swedish lectionary sums up all these ideas in the theme "The Shepherd and the Sheep." This rather neutral summary can be given more direction in the thought: "After the example of Christ true shepherds will make any sacrifice to help the sheep." The *Parish Activities* theme calls Christians to gain new strength through worship. Thus they will be able to carry out the Savior's command and wish concerning the prostrated and exhausted sheep.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To fill the hearers' hearts with a greater measure of Christ's compassion for souls and to lead them, while still in the power of the Easter season, to translate that compassion into action.

Sin and Its Fruits, to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sin which our text exposes is the complacency and indifference which have gotten such a terrible hold on the hearts of many Christians and Christian congregations. Symptoms of this condition: Few adult converts each year, mostly gained by pastor and one or two members. No effort to reclaim the delinquents. Mission budget which represents only small amount of the total budget. Remedy lies in the example of the compassionate Savior.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The hopeless condition of the sheep forces us to think of the redemptive work of the world's Savior. That leads to the truth that we who have found salvation in Jesus have been saved to serve and that our every thought, word, and deed should be devoted to praising and witnessing to Jesus.

Illustrations.—The story lends itself well to the gripping picture of the tender love between the shepherd and his sheep, with stories also from our own Montana sheep ranches. It can also blend with Christ's vision of the white fields in John 4. The Savior's life abounds with illustrations of His compassion in action (see above). The later lives of the disciples and the legends connected with their deaths could also be used effectively. .

Outline

After the Example of Christ True Shepherds Will Make Any Sacrifice to Help the Sheep

I. Christ's Compassion

- A. Its object, all the world, prostrated by sin
- B. Its nature, boundless and always active

II. Our Work as Shepherds

- A. Our hearts must be filled with compassion, because of what we now enjoy and because of the world's needs
- B. This must be a self-giving compassion. Convenience, "me first," must be done away with. Matt. 25:40. Areas of action

Janesville, Wis.

HERBERT T. MAYER