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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

THE FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION

MATT. 11:25-30

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Preaching on this text forces the pastor to view the Reformation in its deepest aspect—*spiritually*. Notice that Matthew does not give the setting of the text. The words of our Lord are given as an answer without any mention of the occasion. In the parallel passage (Luke 10:21) the occasion is the return of the Seventy. Thus the thanksgiving and "praise" (v.25) apparently comes as a response to the report of the Seventy regarding the reception of their proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was not the "wise and intelligent generally" who received the Word, but the simple novices in learning. The prayer ends; with v.27 He turns to the crowd. (According to Luke, He addressed Himself to His disciples next.) "All things *were* delivered . . ." by the Father when He commissioned His Son to go into the world.

The participles in the invitation in v.28 to those who "labor and are heavy laden" are active and passive, reminders of the dual side of human misery. Meyer applies this to the "legal and Pharisaic ordinances under which the man is exhausted and weighed down as with a heavy burden, without getting rid of the painful consciousness of sin." He offers what none of their teachers had been able to give—"rest." The basic idea of the word is "relief." Wycliffe's "refresh" does it for moderns. Virtually every word in the final two verses is significant enough to demand study. The picture of the yoke was frequently used by the Jewish rabbis to describe submission to duty. In a completely new spirit our Lord speaks of His yoke as one under which rest is found. "Easy" in the last verse is misleading. The root idea of the word is "good" or "serviceable." In his *Word Studies*, Vincent suggests that no one English word combines its full meaning of "wholesome, serviceable, kindly." "Christ's yoke is like feathers to a bird; not loads, but helps to motion" (Jeremy Taylor). A central thought: Christ reveals God's deepest desire for us in His invitation to come to Him.

The Day and Its Theme.—Every year new books appear on the market interpreting the Reformation from an economic, political, or

social frame of reference. There is a certain dimension of the Reformation in which each of these is true. But central from the viewpoint of the faith is another emphasis: the spiritual! For the center of the Reformation was not a revolt of princes, educators, or shopkeepers. It took place within the church. The problems raised were spiritual. Its method was spiritual. The answers desired were spiritual. An unusual degree of integration can be achieved in the service. The Introit introduces the theme: Because of the presence of the Lord of Hosts, we will not fear. The Collect summarizes the goal in a series of petitions: Pour out Thy Holy Spirit . . . keep them steadfast . . . protect and comfort . . . defend against all enemies . . . bestow Thy saving peace.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To bring the hearer to the point where he will increasingly take Christ's yoke upon him and thus receive His rest. The goal of the sermon, then, is not simply to "tell" people something new about either Luther or Jesus Christ. The goal is to achieve an action: that people actually take upon themselves the yoke of Christ.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—There is a great danger that celebrations of the Reformation become a mighty applause of what Luther once did—coming from a seated, self-sufficient church. The sin this Gospel confronts is an intellectual-type faith which acts only as spectator before God. Specifically, the sin is our tendency not to accept His yoke; consequently, we never receive the full depth of His blessing.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The general reference to the Incarnation in v. 27 invites an examination of the redemptive life which followed. Scripture holds up the cross as the point at which God is most fully known by His people. Likewise, the yoke illustration suggests the Savior, who Himself puts His neck under the other half of the double oxen yoke. All current blessings flow very directly from the one act of the cross.

Illustrations.—Luther's experiences in early life were in direct contrast to the text. Commenting on this period, he wrote: "From childhood on I was so conditioned that I was terrified and turned pale when I heard the name of Christ, for I was taught to think of Him only as a stern and angry Judge." A useful introduction can be culled from the rash of Reformation material that sees print early every fall. Contrast the many emphases regarding the meaning of the Reformation culturally with this primary spiritual impact.

Outline

Christ's Invitation to Come to Him

- I. We tend not to draw near to Christ.
 - A. Observance of Reformation outwardly
 - B. Danger of being among the "wise and prudent"
- II. Christ came into world to make God known to us.
 - A. Commissioned for task of redemption
 - B. Goal was to make Father known to us
- III. He invites us to Himself.
 - A. He invites us
 - B. His yoke is good
 - C. In Him we find rest

St. Louis, Mo.

DAVID S. SCHULLER

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 18:15-22

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Revenge is, always out of the question for the Christian. His concern for others is to be strong enough, because of the love of Christ for him, to overcome the inclination to revenge, thoughtlessness, legalism, or limited forgiveness. The text embraces several aspects of a Christian's concern for others as it expresses itself within the Christian community. Note that our text deals only with relationships within that community. This is not to say that the words have no significance for relationships of a Christian toward those outside the community, but it is important to note that the counsel is specifically directed.

The text is not difficult to understand or to follow as far as language and thought are concerned. The original presents no great difficulties. One question that seems rather vital is whether the trespass spoken of is to be thought of as referring to private personal offenses or to evident sins against the Christian way in general.

The first meaning seems to be personal wrongs experienced at the hand or voice of another, but really we ought not draw too rigid a line between the two. A wrong has been done by a fellow Christian serious enough to cause us deep concern.

Central thought of the complete text is that Christian brotherhood shows its depth in such concern for others in the Christian community

that we dare to speak to them of their wrongs, that we seek to be one with them in spirit, and that we forgive eagerly and endlessly.

The Day and Its Theme.—For all who observe Synodical Sunday on this day this is doubtless not the best text that could be chosen. The theme of *Parish Activities* for this day, "Stewardship," is in line with the total dedication of life to the Savior and the response to His love out of which this text springs.

The theme of the service as expressed in hymns, Scripture readings, and prayers should be forgiveness. Certainly the standard Gospel for this day, Matt. 18:23-35, offers a most excellent commentary on the text and complements it. The elaboration of the Epistle, Phil. 1:3-11, on the quiet serenity which prevails in the brotherhood corresponds to the theme of the sermon.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—In a text which is as rich and full as this one on a specific subject but presupposes so much concerning the basis and source of devout Christian living, the sermonizer is confronted with several pitfalls. Because a rather detailed exegesis of each of the three parts of the text is necessary for clarity, the central message of the Gospel may be passed by rather hurriedly, particularly since it is not explicit in the text. Another pitfall is that the sermon becomes an exposition of the meaning of the text as such without clear perception of its real purpose by the hearer or without sufficient application to present situations, which in such a text involve very sensitive matters.

The goal and purpose of this sermon must be to picture to people the beauty and the glory of life lived in the brotherhood of the Gospel, a brotherhood so real and so realistic that it can bear to confront the brother's weaknesses and sins and deal with them. We must be sure to strengthen people for such living by holding before them the forgiveness which is ours from God through Christ.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sins are almost too evident for comfort, but then comfort, in the usual sense, is not our goal. Backbiting, refusing to be reconciled, outworn patience, righteous withdrawal, glee in faultfinding, too-ready condemnation, introducing resolutions when we should speak privately, neglect of prayer, unwillingness to warn the brother, and self-righteous "generosity" where there should be forgiveness.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The opportunity comes throughout as we consider how anyone can be capable of such a depth of brotherhood as is here pictured. The only source for such strength

is that which the Spirit supplies in the endless forgiveness we receive through Christ.

Illustrations.—Concrete examples which are common to daily life, the unkind word, the harsh judgment, the deliberate lie, the evident guilt, the careless talk—these are particularly useful to apply the text's significance. Nor ought we overlook Biblical illustrations—the Lord's Prayer, Joseph and his brothers, David and Saul, Jesus Himself.

Outline

Introduction: How different life would be if the words of our text were followed as they are understood! Revenge, spite, cruel withdrawal, and legalism have no place in the Christian life.

The Depth of Christian Brotherhood

- I. It is not characteristic of Christian brotherhood to let wrongs or wrong go unobserved, but to deal bravely and lovingly with them.
 - A. Personal consultation, with no others present, is the first step when wrong has been done. The goal is to gain the brother.
 - B. Others for whom the offender has esteem may help win him if first attempts are fruitless.
 - C. The seriousness of his fall may finally have to be pointed out to him by that group which he ought most to esteem, the Christian community.
- II. We must depend on His presence as we live in Christian brotherhood.
 - A. We act as agents of Christ and in His name when we loose and bind sins.
 - B. The strength of united Christian prayer is beyond measure.
 - C. The presence of Jesus is real though invisible.
- III. There can be no legalistic limit to the depth of Christian brotherhood.
 - A. We cannot limit the action of Christian concern for others by a set measure of time or number.
 - B. As we have been forgiven by God through Christ endlessly, we can find strength to do so also to others.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 17:24-27

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Matthew 17 sets forth both the divine and the human nature of our Lord. The chapter begins with the account of His glorious transfiguration (vv. 1-9). It contains the story of the epileptic whom He alone could heal (vv. 14-21) and a prophecy of His Passion (vv. 22, 23), ending with the account of His payment of the Temple tax (vv. 24-27). He whose face "did shine as the sun" humbly obeyed the Law and the custom of the people of whose flesh He came. This incident takes place in Capernaum, Christ's headquarters during the years of His earthly ministry. It is fitting that He is asked to pay the Temple tax in this town.

V. 24. The tax receivers were respectful in their approach to Peter, who here seems to be the representative disciple. The silver shekel (τὸ δίδραχμον, half shekel) amounted to 62 cents. This tax was payable annually by every Jew above twenty as his contribution toward the support of the Temple and its sacrifices. Cf. Ex. 30:13 ff.; Neh. 10:32. Peter's "yes" is prompt (v. 25). Christ's general bearing or Peter's remembrance of a past payment is probably responsible for the fearless answer. Custom—τέλη, a tax on wares, indirect tax. Tribute—κῆνσον, a tax on persons, a direct tax. The Temple tax was a direct tax. This verse is important in showing that Christ here thinks of civic obligations in general. Reference to the "kings of the earth" shows that He here enunciates a universal and timeless truth. This tax is clearly considered to be representative of all types of lawful and necessary taxes. The incident therefore deals with more than the fulfillment of the Law by Christ (Gal. 4:4, 5). It contains positive instruction for all believers concerning their civic duties. V. 26: Peter's prompt answer to the tax collectors had seemed to imply that the children of God were not free. Jesus makes it clear that the children of the Kingdom are truly "free." The royal family has the privilege of exemption from tax. A king surely does not collect taxes from his own family but from others! There is also here a twofold teaching concerning sonship: Christ is God's own Son in the highest sense. Yet even Peter and other believers are members of the Kingdom and sons by adoption, since the payment of the tax is "for Me and thee." V. 27: Christ's very manner of paying this tax gives evidence of heavenly authority and power. Στατήρα—four drachmas. He who subjected Himself to the Law, for our sake, shows that He rules all things.

There is a clear and positive lesson here concerning Christian life and duty. Christ Himself paid the Temple tax. Civic obligations must be taken most seriously. Believers therefore must fulfill earthly duties. To fail in this regard would perhaps "offend" those of the nation. The Greek word that is translated "offend" carries a much more serious connotation than most people realize. *Σκανδαλισωμεν*—RSV: "not to give offense to them." Cf. use of the same word in Matt. 18:6: "offend"—to tempt to unbelief or apostasy. A textual sermon on this passage should stress civic responsibilities and duties in a very positive way, since to "offend" others is to put a real stumbling block in their way (Rom. 13:6,7).

This Scriptural teaching is clearly set forth in the Augsburg Confession, Article XVI: Of Civil Affairs, and in the Apology, Article XVI: Of Political Order.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle, Phil. 3:17-21, teaches the two basic truths set forth in our text: appreciation of our membership in the divine kingdom ("Our citizenship is in heaven") and the necessity of fulfilling our place and obligations in the earthly realm. ("Brethren, be followers together of me.") The holy Gospel (Matt. 22:15-22) contains the classical passage concerning this whole question: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." A proper reading of the ancient lessons, with thoughtful emphasis looking forward to the sermon, will do much to prepare the people for the truth which will be preached in the pulpit. The Introit, Collect, and Gradual fit in with the sermonic message, without especially emphasizing the lectern and pulpit message. "Christian Patriotism" is a good statement of the theme of the day's worship. The believer is addressed as a member of both church and state.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—This part of God's revelation is designed to show the Christians their civic responsibilities and duties, awaken consciousness of past sins and neglect, and arouse them to greater appreciation of the heavenly kingdom.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Reference to our everyday life and work gives abundant material for sharpening the conscience in the direction of civic duty and obligation. Almost all of us file income tax returns and pay this levy either by means of an automatic payroll deduction or in quarterly installments. The whole range of national, state, and local taxes has very real and personal meaning for all. Are we honest and fair in this phase of our life and conduct? The Law in this text will reveal much sin. Hesitancy to seek and

occupy public office may sometimes be due, in part, to a sinful desire to escape lawful obligations. "Stewardship," the *Parish Activities* theme, includes the use of time and talent as well as money.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—"Then are the children free" are striking words of our Lord which should bring out a full Gospel emphasis even in this text, which concerns civic duty. The unique and realistic setting of this story should make it possible for a well-prepared sermon to stress both Law and Gospel in a particularly effective manner. True appreciation of our heavenly citizenship makes our earthly service and obedience a joyful Christian experience. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God . . ." (Rom. 12:1). See Part I of the suggested outline.

Illustrations.—Local applications and needs will readily suggest themselves. The regularity with which "death and taxes" face everyone enables the thoughtful shepherd to speak of both the heavenly and the mundane aspects of Christian life.

Outline

The Christian Foundation for Good Citizenship

- I. Christians should recognize their priceless citizenship in God's kingdom, 25 b, 26.
 - A. Christ is God's only-begotten Son, yet His people are also called sons of God, by grace, through adoption.
 - B. Heavenly citizenship is our most precious blessing. "Then are the children free."
 - II. Christians, however, are in the world, and God demands that they accept their rightful civic responsibilities, 24, 25 a.
 - III. The payment of taxes is a Christian duty and privilege, 27 b.
 - IV. The Lord has wonderful means of providing for His own, 27 a.
- Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 20:27-40

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The Sadducees, who were of the priestly and ruling class, feared the effect of Jesus' ministry upon their status and therefore opposed Him (Luke 20:19, 20; Matt. 26:34; John 18:14). They had engaged in public conflict with Jesus before (Matt. 16:1 ff.). Now they challenged His doctrine of the resurrection, for they taught that "there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit" (Acts 23:8). They cited "one of their stock problems from the field of casuistry" concerning the seven brothers, each of which in compliance with the Levirate marriage laws of Moses had been the husband of the same woman. Under the assumption that the resurrection life would be identical with our present existence, they asked: "Whose shall she be at the resurrection?" Behind this challenge, as behind every attack upon Scripture, is the failure to restrict one's thoughts to the concepts contained in the very words of Scripture and the failure also to recognize God's supremacy over every condition and walk of life. The angellike people of the resurrection will furnish no problem.

That the dead shall rise Jesus could have shown from Dan. 12:2; Job 19:23-27; or from Gen. 22:1-3 (cp. Heb. 11:19); but He chose to answer Moses with Moses and quoted from Ex. 3:6. Here God had declared Himself to be the God of the patriarchs of the Jewish nation, who at that time had been dead for more than two centuries. However, God is the God of living and not of dead men. Hence these patriarchs cannot have been separated from God. It follows therefore that they must be alive in the spirit and that they will rise with their bodies.

However, this resurrection of the blessed shall be the lot of those only who "shall be accounted worthy thereof."

The Day and Its Theme.—The last Sunday of the current church year reminds one of the fact that someday our lives in this world will cease. Then begins "the life that never ends" (service theme). As good stewards (*Parish Activities*) therefore of our lives and our talents we ought to live and worship and walk as those who have been "delivered from death" (Gradual), are "partakers of the inheritance of the saints" (Epistle), have Christ as the "Rock of their salvation" (Introit), and constantly pray for a stewardship life of willing service (Collect).

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To achieve an appreciation of the responsibility that comes to us who "look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," so that in Christ we may abound in the fruits of such faith.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Going beyond the clear meaning of the words of Scripture, a practice that can only engender doubt; materialism which sets its eyes on this world; rationalism which elevates man's reason beyond right; the failure to let God's mercy in Christ prompt us to make the fullest possible use of our talents in this life. Only as we by daily contrition and repentance "put on Christ" can we ever be "accounted worthy" of the resurrection unto life and develop also the will to serve Him (Gal. 3:26, 27; Rom. 6:1-16).

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—"Shall be accounted worthy" (text); "in whom we have redemption," etc. (Epistle); "thy faith hath saved thee" (Gospel); "the rock of our salvation" (Introit); "Thou hast delivered my soul from death"; and "with Thee is the fountain of life" (Gradual).

Illustrations.—The resurrection of the daughter of Jairus illustrates the power of God and the raising of the very body that has died, as also the resurrection of Lazarus and Jesus does. As it is reprehensible for Lutheran pastors to subscribe to the Creeds of Christendom and then to deny their content (recent ULC heresy trials), even so it is reprehensible for Lutheran laymen to join in their church's confession of faith on Sunday, and then fail during the week to practice a stewardship of life supporting such a confession. The rewards of faith shown in the Gospel of the day. St. Paul's life of service based on his faith in the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).

Outline

"I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body"

- I. I believe it on the testimony of Scripture.
 - A. Rationalism, materialism, and going beyond Scripture only confuse.
 - B. The Scriptures clearly teach the resurrection of the body.
- II. I believe it with all my heart.
 - A. Any other kind of faith would be dead.
 - B. Jesus went to the cross for it, His whole life sustaining it.
 - C. The Apostles believed it and gave their lives in support of it.
 - D. We ought also to support it by the stewardship of our lives.
- III. I believe it to be a free gift of grace.
 - A. Only they who "are accounted worthy of it" shall have it.
 - B. I am so accounted in Christ, through faith in His redeeming work.

Chicago, Ill.

THEODORE NICKEL

THE FESTIVAL OF THANKSGIVING

Ps. 103:1-5

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The entire Psalm is a unit and might well serve as a text; length and complexity alone suggest concentrating on fewer verses, and later elements of the Psalm are parallel to the thoughts of the text. The preacher need not enter upon the trustworthiness of the superscription "a Psalm of David," for the text is the praise song of every child of God through every age. V. 1: The soul is the whole man, particularly in his relation to God (Gen. 2:7). Hence it is the whole man who is to respond in a continuous act of blessing the Lord. To bless God is to acknowledge that He blesses us, makes us whole toward Him, fills out our lives that they be according to His plan; hence to bless God means to review His blessing acts and to elevate Him, in the heart, to the place of the great Creator, Healer, Restorer. V. 2: Unthankfulness to God is already from the human point of view ignoble and bestial. But the purpose of thankfulness is much more: It is the review, and thus the re-enactment, of God's blessing and healing program toward us. Our thankfulness toward God is one of God's means of living toward us with the Word of His healing; hence unthankfulness bars us from the possession of God (Rom. 1:21). V. 3: Essential to the text is this priority of things which the thankful Christian blesses God for: He forgives our iniquities. The parallel member of the verse sets this in a figure: He heals all our diseases. This is not a statement of a physiological counterpart of a spiritual one; it is simply the demonstration that where God forgives sins, God reaches into the improvement, the making whole, of all of life. "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation"—the great accent of Luther's Reformation. V. 4: God rescues life from destruction, the pit, through an act involving a price; here is the cue for the most explicit N. T. Gospel. Again the parallel member is in danger of being debased to exclusively material considerations, as though it referred to the "all these things will be added" (Matt. 6:33) and those were the ones that we hoped for all the time!—but it underscores the tremendous and ongoing act of God's rich grace and forgiveness in Christ; note the heaping up of the acts of mercy and the Christian's response of blessing in Eph. 1:1-12. V. 5: Countless harvest festivals have given this a physical connotation, but in the context it, too, is total. Our whole self is renewed and refreshed through the continued provision of God for our life toward Him, so that already in this life we have His daily grace and in the

life to come also our bodies will be completely vehicles of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 15:42-54. God's grace crowds our cheeks with his goodness, restores our life like the annual renewing of the plumage of a bird.—Of the accents in this text several major ones have their echoes throughout the Psalm. We are to bless the Lord (vv. 20-22). He has forgiving mercy upon us despite and in view of our sins (vv. 6, 8, 9-12). His grace is abundant and enriching (vv. 13-18).—V. 2 is a convenient summary.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Swedish lectionary does not provide a text for this day, which is originally a quasi-secular and national day of thanksgiving at harvest time. This text is important to reinforce the spiritual purpose of the Epistle for the day and to counteract a tacit mammon worship. On the basis of this text people can be led to appraise their physical and material advantages in terms of God's design for their total souls.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The goal is that the worshiper bless God. This means defining this concept: The inner and total outreach of the Christian, together with his worshipping brother, in adoring God and thanking Him for His rich mercy and continued help.

Sins to Be Remedied.—If v. 2 be taken as a statement of theme, then the cardinal sin of listlessness toward God's mercy, particularly toward His healing of our broken relation toward Him and forgiveness of our sins, is conveniently presented for analysis.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The Old Testament language needs its revision into explicit New Testament terms. Convenient bridges are the concepts of "all His benefits," all of v. 3, "redeemeth"; and the parallel in vv. 8-18 on God's faithful plan for His people, Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New, to keep it in Christ and search it out with His forgiveness despite its sin. If the axiom be granted that the Gospel of the redemptive work of Christ is basic for every achievement through preaching, then the preacher wants to settle for no mere satisfaction with prosperity, in his hearers, but for nothing less than their joy in the forgiveness of their sins.

Illustrations.—The nine lepers were unthankful; the tenth was whole completely, not just from leprosy; he was the one who reviewed the work of Christ to him (Gospel for day, Luke 17:11-19). Mohammedans are thankful; but they measure cause for thankfulness in the proportion of material gain—could it happen to Americans? The Christian is thankful, with reference to things, when God gives them

or when he takes them; he is always thankful for God forgiving and not just giving. Lovely is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought of the "new song" that Christians always sing together (*Life Together*, Harper's, p. 57 ff.).

Outline

Bless the Lord, O My Soul, and Forget Not All His Benefits

I. Let us remember the Lord's benefits.

A. The forgetting:

1. It is shameful, irreverent, impolite.
2. It is deadly, for it cuts off from the life stream of God.

B. The remembering:

1. It reviews God's forgiveness, redemption, mercy, in Christ.
2. It sees in this God's supply for our entire life toward Him.
Note purpose of citizenship in 1 Tim. 2:1 ff.
3. It thus attaches to God's supply anew. Luke 17:11 ff.

II. Let us bless the Lord for them.

A. This means acknowledging God as the one Giver.

B. This means praising God for His constancy and faithfulness.

C. This means summoning every element of self and church to join in worshiping and adoring God.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER