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Homiletics: Studies on the Old Testament Texts

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Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

OCULI, THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

PSALM 77:7-15

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The Psalmist sits in the midst of his trials and is utterly cast down. He looks to God, but finds nothing except additional reason for despair, because he looks at God through his problems. Then faith comes to the fore, and the Psalmist regards God according to His revelation. Thus he is able to exult that God's way, which also includes the Psalmist's trials, is holy. The conclusion, then, is obvious, also with regard to what the Psalmist is experiencing at the time.

The Day and Its Theme.—Through the Introit, Collect, and Gradual, the day becomes a cry to God out of the midst of man's ongoing need and man's special needs as they arise. According to the Epistle we were sometime darkness, but now are we light in the Lord because we know God revealed; we walk as children of light when we walk by the faith which the revelation calls for. The Gospel emphasizes: "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." Unless we believe in the Word, we end up where the Pharisees did, our hearts are not yet conquered by the Stronger, and our emptiness of faith makes us fit habitations for the unclean spirit's return with his cohorts. Not yet with Christ, we are against Him. God's mercy is greater than our trials, but in no sense is this perfectly obvious. It can be known only by the revelation of God, the Word of God, and by guarding or keeping it as our only means of knowing God.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—That we, as members of the body of Christ, grow in holiness. This does not mean primarily the superior moral behavior which we habitually term holiness, but growth in faith, and we grow in faith as we learn to know God better as He truly is, not as we imagine Him to be.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The basis of all sin for those who are members of the body of Christ is doubt, doubt as it forsakes the revelation of God and sits in its lonely vigils attempting to understand and fathom God's will, even His love, by the trials that ring us round. The only remedy is to see God as He makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. If God has redeemed us (v. 15) at so great a cost to Himself, then surely no one and nothing can separate us from the

love of God which is in Christ Jesus. See that your doubt and your despair are your infirmity, a personal weakness by which you imagine that God's right hand has changed (v. 10). See God as He has made Himself known, and you will recover faith's deeper insight (vv. 11-15).

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Actually this whole text revolves about the very heart of the Gospel, that God, our Redeemer, is nothing but Love to us, though our problems (vv. 7—10) rise up to becloud His never-failing, never-changing grace. Vv. 11-15 should be a development of the Gospel, for, without allegorizing, "the works of the Lord" should be remembered, and God's works of grace are much more evident to us in Christ than they were to the Psalmist. "God's wonders of old" have been surpassed by what they hinted at, the great and mighty wonder of God's Son, our Savior; meditate and talk of these things that you may know God's way as holy. Even in the weakness of our infirmities He does wonders and declares His strength, because He is the God who by His mighty arm, Jesus Christ, has redeemed His people.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane with His faith in the will of God, though it meant anguish beyond our imagining; Paul with his thorn in the flesh and the final faith in grace as being all-sufficient; Rom. 8:21-39; 1 Peter 1:7-9; Heb. 12:1 ff.

Outline

Introductory Thought: The easy enthusiasm of the woman at the close of today's Gospel is corrected by Jesus as He points out what is the true blessedness. It is the true blessedness to this day, because when we are something less than enthusiastic, even down in the dumps and despair, then especially do we need to hear the Word of God and hold on for dear life. That Word of God in our text would have us realize that only God Himself can work in us faith to cry out:

Thy Way, O God, Is Holy (v. 13)

- I. The Psalmist sees aright when he sees that our life is God's way, that it is in God's right hand, that every last part of it is to be related to God. This is implicit in vv. 7-10 and is contrary to the modernistic, secularistic, materialistic view of life; it is also contrary to all easygoing Christianity that is only a Sunday or holiday affair.
- II. The Psalmist sees wrong when in those very same verses he permits his personal sufferings to becloud the grace of God. We will never find God, the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

by peering through the dark clouds which our problems cast about Him.

III. God's way is holy (vv. 11-15)

- A. All of God's dealings have but a single purpose, our sanctification.
- B. Our problems must be looked at through God's way, and not God's way looked at through our problems. This is the exercise of faith, and walking by faith is the true holiness that God seeks in us.
- C. This can be known and believed only on the basis of what God has revealed of Himself
 1. In Christ Jesus (v. 15);
 2. In all His works and wonders and manifested might (vv. 11-15).

Conclusion: Begin where the Psalmist finally arrived, and at all times meditate upon the greatness of God's love and the marvels of His mercies in Christ Jesus, and your faith will be faith that is faith indeed, faith that overcomes the world, faith that believes not because of anything in our lives, but in spite of everything in our lives, and purely and simply because of God as we know Him in His Word.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

LAETARE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

EXODUS 16:4-9

The Text and Its Central Thought.—V. 4: A month and a half after the Exodus, after the miraculous deliverance from Pharaoh and another miraculous provision of water at Marah, the Children of Israel arrived in the Wilderness of Sin. Here the populace grumbled against Moses and Aaron, charging that they who had enjoyed the food of Egypt were about to die of hunger in the desert. Now the Lord makes the promise to Moses that He "will rain bread from heaven," which the people might gather according to ration to prove whether they were obedient to His law or not.—V. 5: On the sixth day they would gather bread for two days. This provision was according to the Sabbath law (vv. 23, 26). The communication in vv. 5 and 6 is very brief, and Moses and Aaron give it in fuller form in the subsequent address to the people.—V. 6: Moses and Aaron communicate God's message to the people. God's provision would help the Israelites to

know that God is the God who brought them out of Egypt.—V.7: Each evening and morning would demonstrate the glory of God to the people; they would be able, in this provision of food, to see the great God at work. It is God who will do this; for the murmurings of the people were really against Him, not just against Moses and Aaron.—V.8: Moses continues the explanation, attaching to the words of v.7, "Then ye shall see the glory of the Lord." Actually the provision of food would be both flesh (quails, v.13) at evening and bread (the manna, vv.14,15) in the morning, both of them the demonstration of the power of God ("glory" in that sense, rather than praise). God's reason for doing this is to rebuke the murmuring and unbelief of the Israelites, which is really an affront to God and not just to Moses and Aaron.—V.9: Moses told Aaron to assemble the people for a special announcement. This God Himself gave from the cloud which had marked His presence with them in their desert pilgrimage. The promise of food is given now a third time from the direct communication of God, through Moses, vv.11,12.—This much of a review of the text yields the sermon theme, "God provides daily food to remind His people that they belong to Him."

The Day and Its Theme.—Laetare has been assumed to be a Sunday of good cheer in the midst of the penitence of Lent. Actually the Sundays in Lent are still Sundays, with the note of redemption and release strongly pervading them all. And Laetare is not hilarious or merely exuberant. The Gospel is the Feeding of the Five Thousand. But the Epistle brings the indictment of work-righteousness under the allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4; and the rejoicing to which the Introit summons is that which is coupled with mourning for God's judgment. The theme of the day's worship can be summarized, "God's supply is our unfailing joy." The theme for the month in *Parish Activities* is neutral with regard to the theme ("Growing in Holiness"), but it may well supply individual applications or illustrations for the particular material of the text.

New Testament Parallels and Illustrations.—The Gospel for the Day is the obvious New Testament counterpart of the quail and manna—simple food applied to simple everyday need, but through divine purpose. For Jesus in John 6 the purpose was indeed to "manifest forth His glory" as He had done under simpler circumstances at Cana (John 2:11), and cause men to realize that He is the Messiah (John 6:14). But at once Jesus had to direct these same men to a truer understanding of His Messiahship, and His discourse on the Bread of Life (John 6:26-58) makes use of the reference which His

questioners made concerning the manna in order to make clear that God Himself through Jesus was giving them food for a heavenly and not just an earthly life. Through the insight given by John 6 we can arrive at the distinctive and helpful central thought: "God provides daily food to remind His people that He provides also heavenly food." This theme is possible without allegorizing or typical application by stressing the great intention of God in the provision even of daily food.

Sins to Be Diagnosed.—The grumbling and murmuring of the people (v. 3) is the surface demonstration—disgust with daily provision and fear of the future—of the underlying malady of unbelief and rejection of God's purpose and promise. Keil-Delitzsch quotes Luther: "It was deep unbelief that they had thus fallen back, letting go the word and promise of God and forgetting His former miracles and aid." Actually this sin occurs on two levels: the text and its fretting at insufficient food; or John 6 and its assumption that the food for the body is the only food to be concerned about. Both are a repudiation of God and His plan and promise that we should fulfill His eternal purposes in this world and that which is to come.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—A simple device is to discuss the Old Testament manna, and then on the basis of John 6:35 discuss Jesus as the Bread of Life. This loses the opportunity, however, on the basis of Exodus 16 to preach Gospel to remedy the particular sin of unbelief set forth in this text. Cues for such preaching are given in God's plan to prove His people whether they walk in His Law (v. 4), and particularly in the portrayal of the glory of God. Even the daily provision of food is that glory, that steadfast demonstration of the purpose and plan of God that His people serve Him and represent Him. If even food and drink can so set forth God's glory to the instructed believer; how much more the Word made flesh, in whom the glory of God is made wholly manifest and we are redeemed to serve the living God forever! To this point the words of Jesus, John 6:38-40, 49-58, pertain directly.

Outline

God Provides Daily Food to Remind His People that He Provides Also Heavenly Food (Rejoice in God's Food for Life)

I. God has food for daily life

A. Quail and manna in the wilderness.

B. Food for five thousand in the wilderness.

C. Food for us (fleshpots or manna, much or little; but food).

- II. God has a purpose with His provision of our daily food
- A. We are to realize that He is the Giver and rejoice.
 - B. We are to realize that He has an even greater life for which to sustain us, beginning now and continuing forever.
 - C. Hence the horror of thanklessness or grumbling or refusing to use life for His purposes.
- III. Hence rejoice in God's food for eternal life
- A. God's food for eternal life is Jesus, who redeems us by giving Himself into death for us.
 - B. As we consume that food by faith, we live forever.
 - C. Nourished by the Bread of Life, we shall rejoice in our daily food also and serve the Lord with gladness.
- St. Louis, Mo. RICHARD R. CAEMMERER
-

JUDICA, THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

LEVITICUS 16:15-22

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This is an excellent treatment of the vicarious atonement and pictures beautifully how the justice of God is fully and forever satisfied in the forgiveness of man's sin. As the outline will show, this text presents in all its stark viciousness the true nature of sin, its offense to God, and the only method for its expiation. These are lessons our world needs to have enforced again and again. The social aspects of sin are touched on by the reference to the cleansing of the Holy Place, Tabernacle, and altar. The necessity of confessing sin is indicated in v. 21. Probably Aaron mentioned the specific sins of the people, though he may not have detailed them. The various terms for sin ought to be noted and explained. Interesting is the use of the number seven in v. 19. As in Revelation, it might be construed as the numerical symbol of the world's reconciliation with God.

Aaron might be treated as a type of Christ, but the text is so full that this phase could well be left for another day or touched on in the introduction.

The Day and Its Theme.—On a day when traditionally catechumens are publicly examined prior to confirmation and the sober Passion Week is introduced, the preacher could scarcely have a more fitting text to emphasize how precious God's children are bought and how earnest their striving for that growth in personal holiness ought to

be which God desires and bestows through His Spirit. Introit, Collect, and Gradual stress the calling upon God and the assurance of His help against evil men and circumstances, which is the prerogative of those who have been reconciled to Him. The Word of His truth is their help and guide for continuing in His grace. The Collects for the Gospel and Epistle emphasize the peace, hope, and holiness that faith in a reconciled God produces. The standard Epistle is a very appropriate corollary to the text. The Gospel might well be used as an introduction to point up that the rejection of Christ by the Jews was to perverted notions on the nature of Messiahship and not to Scriptural failure to delineate His character and office.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The hearer is to perceive how precious his status is as a reconciled child of God and a member of the congregation of God and to strive by the Spirit's help to maintain the cleansed condition faith has imparted.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—To be emphasized is the sin of underestimating our own sinful condition and, in consequence, underestimating the reconciliation God has effected through Christ's vicarious death; as well as its dire result in our lives, namely, no real concern for our growth in holiness of life and in service to God.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Few texts in Scripture stress so remarkably the facts of sin and grace as does this. Christ bore our personal and social sins forever away from even the ken of God by His death on the altar of the cross. Christ is the antitype of both goats, the bullock, and of Aaron.

Illustrations.—A simple presentation of the dramatic subject matter in the text will make unnecessary the use of much additional illustrative material. Here is a quotation that might be useful to prove the need for emphasis on man's sinfulness: "I deny that men are inherently evil, that people love war, fight, and combat. Most people are peaceful and would go their own way if left alone and not forced through systems of government and economies to act parts they don't like and didn't choose." — CHARLIE VAN COTT, in *Masonic Inspiration*, I (July 1955).

Outline

The Divine Remedy for Human Malady

I. Man Is a Lost Creature

A. Not generally admitted.

1. By human philosophy which deems him inherently good.
2. By "Christians" imbued with philosophy of work-righteousness.

B. The viciousness of sin.

1. Terms — "uncleanness," "transgression," "iniquities," "sin."
 2. Requires death to free man. The enormity of sin (Heb. 9:22).
 3. While sins often are against the fellow man, they are primarily an offense against God. Blood sprinkled on and before mercy seat (v. 15) and altar (v. 18). No man to go into holy place until atonement made (v. 17).
 4. Contaminates and perverts man's environment (vv. 16, 18; Rom. 8:20; Is. 6:5).
 5. Sins must be confessed (v. 21).
- C. Requires a power outside man to save him. Bullock, goats, sacrificial animals.

II. God's cure

- A. As a substitute was provided for Isaac, so God has a Substitute for man, but, unlike Abraham, this required the sacrifice of His Son. Scapegoats and bullock are types of the Messiah.
- B. The animals (types of Christ) are to bear the sins of men. Imposed (v. 21).
- C. Can be wiped out only by death. "Blood is the life" (Deut. 12:23; Lev. 17:11, 14; Is. 44:22).
- D. Carried away forever from the presence of God and man. "Wilderness," (v. 21; Ps. 103:12).

III. A holy people results

- A. Sins are cleansed away. Men and places hallowed (vv. 19, 20).
- B. God and man are reconciled. God now Friend and Father (v. 19). Seven number of reconciliation.
- C. Entrance into Holy Place (v. 17), worship, again possible. Practice of confession and absolution at beginning of service correct.
- D. We are a *congregation* of God. Joint work, not only as individuals.

San Francisco, Calif.

A. C. NITZ

PALM SUNDAY, THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

ZECHARIAH 9:8-12

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Our use of the New Testament accounts of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem has tended to emphasize the humility of Christ. These verses of Zechariah add the thought that Christ came to bring peace.—V. 8: God promises His people security and protection against all oppression. "לְבֵיתִי, *dat. commod.*, 'for my house; for the good of my house. The house of Jehovah is not the temple, but Israel as the kingdom of God or church of the Lord. . . ." (Keil.)—V. 9: God invites His people to rejoice. "Rejoice" includes the idea of physical and emotional involvement. Koehler and Gesenius-Tregelles trace the word back to roots which are translated by "go round," "to leap for joy," "to go in a circle . . . to dance."—"Shout" in triumph and joy.—The reason for rejoicing: "Behold, your King will come to you." "לְךָ, not only to thee, but also for thy good" (Keil).—This King will be endowed with the following qualifications and characteristics: צָדִיק, "right"; "(juridically: man whose behavior is examined and found immaculate), guiltless, correct, just"; "(morally right), without fault"; "(hence) righteous" (Koehler).—נוֹשֵׁעַ, σωτήριον (Septuagint), salvator (Vulgate). So also Luther. "Endowed with נוֹשֵׁעַ, salvation, help from God . . . or furnished with the assistance of God requisite for carrying on His government" (Keil). "Victorious" (RSV). "Bearing the salvation which the Lord had planned" (Kretzmann).—עָנִי, oppressed by misery, poor, lowly, afflicted, humble.—"Riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass."—His kingdom will not be established by worldly might and power nor by men and weapons of war.—V. 10: Their King will bring peace not only to them, but also to the heathen. Cf. Eph. 2:14, 17. שְׁלוֹמִים, peace, salvation. The relationship of peace will include the גוֹיִם, the nations who were not a part of the covenant nation. His kingdom will extend to the ends of the earth.—V. 11: "The pardon of Israel will not merely consist in the fact that Jehovah will send the promised King to the daughter of Zion; but He will also redeem such members of His nation as shall be still in captivity, out of their affliction" (Keil).—V. 12: אֲסִירֵי הַחֵקוֹה, "prisoners who may still hope" (Koehler); "the captives cherishing hope" (Gesenius-Tregelles). "Prisoners of hope' is an epithet applied to the Israelites, because they possess in their covenant blood a hope of redemption" (Keil).—God, speaking through the words of Zechariah, urges His people to rejoice—to become totally involved—because of the peace their King will bring to them and to all nations.

The Day and Its Theme.—The propers for *Palmarum* emphasize the thought that in our meek King we have peace. The Introit takes us through the events of Holy Week to the cross itself, where we hear our Substitute and King cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" In the Collect we pray that God would inspire us through Christ's humility that we may "be partakers of His resurrection." (The Old Testament lesson is a portion of the sermon text.) The Epistle reminds us of Christ's humility and of His subsequent exaltation. The Gospel is the historical fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. Our sermon text emphasizes the purpose of Christ's coming: to spread His peace that all men may have true rejoicing.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To move the hearer to greater trust in, praise of, and service to, the Christ who came in lowliness and meekness to bring us peace. This sermon fits into the "Growing in Holiness" theme suggested in *Parish Activities*.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Some of the hearers will be "annual visitors" who may be in attendance because they want to witness confirmation or "to feel prepared" for their annual Communion on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Easter. They present us with a particular challenge. And yet none of us have become totally involved in the spirit and purpose of Christ's kingdom. Apathy, a lack of Christian optimism, restlessness, and insecurity are indications that we are not making full and proper use of Christ's message of grace and peace.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Many of the words of our text can be filled with the Gospel message. The words "just" (righteous) and "lowly" (humble) can be used to emphasize Christ's active obedience. The words "having salvation" provide us with an opportunity to remind our hearers that Christ came as God's Messiah and is Himself the Redeemer, the Establisher of peace, through His passive obedience.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The best illustrations for this sermon can be found in the events of Holy Week: Christ washing the feet of His disciples; Christ's suffering and death on the cross; Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil—the enemies of peace. Each of the Evangelists mentions Christ's entry into Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-40; John 12:12-19.) However, only Matthew and John refer to Zechariah's prophecy.

*Outline***We Who Have Peace Through Christ the King Are to Rejoice!**

- I. Zechariah prophesied that God's Messiah would come
 - A. As King.
 1. Just.
 2. Yet lowly.
 - B. As Savior (bringing salvation).
- II. Christ established His kingdom
 - A. Not by worldly power and force.
 - B. But by His
 1. Holy life.
 2. Suffering and death.
 - C. To bring about true peace.
- III. We have reason to rejoice (to become totally involved)
 - A. Christ's kingdom has expanded and now includes us.
 - B. We have peace with God.
 - C. We are "prisoners of hope."

Marion, Ind.

ARTHUR F. GRAUDIN

GOOD FRIDAY**ISAIAH 53:3-6**

The Text and its Central Thought.—This text contains the heart of Isaiah's entire prophecy. It stands as the pivot of Israel's destiny, the hinge of mankind's history. The text may be most profitably studied with special regard to its broad historical and theological context. Two themes are written across Isaiah 40 to 66: 1. *The failure of Israel as God's witness*; 2. *Redemption for Israel through the suffering Servant of the Lord*. God has called and commissioned Israel as a nation to be a witness for Him before the idolatrous nations of the world. But Israel has borne a faltering and false witness, has herself lusted after the idols of the pagans. God has commissioned Israel to demonstrate His almighty strength before the Gentiles. Yet Israel has put her trust in alliances with the pagan powers, only in turn to be harrowed and consumed by them. Division, disgrace, demoralization, despair, and defeat are her self-inflicted lot. Still God will not utterly cast her off. Despite their repeated failure God will redeem His people to the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose. This He will accomplish through the obedience of His true and faithful Servant,

who will succeed where Israel has fallen short. This Deliverer, however, will appear as One "despised and rejected," a source of astonishment to all who will see Him. "We hid, as it were, our faces from Him." The obedient Servant has "borne our sicknesses and ailments," assumed our moral disjointedness and corruption. God has laid on His "Submissive One" (servant) the stripes, the wounds, the punishments belonging to our crimes and their guilt ("iniquities"). Wayward sheep, we have forsaken the Shepherd and the flock; but God has slain His Beloved as a guilt offering for us. In the Hebrew stanzas the pronouns stand in emphatic contrast: "*He* was pierced for the crimes that were *ours*; *He* was crushed for the guilt that was *ours*" (Smith). Here is the marvel of the vicarious atonement. The cause which Israel has lost, and in which she herself has been lost, will still issue in triumph by the amazing grace of God. Through the suffering of the Servant, Israel will yet fulfill her commission, bringing the Gentile nations to the worship of the true God. The central thought may be stated: The Servant of God suffers and is sacrificed to free Israel from her sins. The New Testament bears repeated testimony to the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus and His Cross. Among the direct references are: 1 Peter 2:21-25, ". . . His own self bare our sins in His body on the tree"; Phil. 2:7: ". . . the form of a servant . . . obedient unto death"; and Matt. 8:17: ". . . Himself took our infirmities and bare our sickness." Other passages include John 12:37; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19f.

The Day and Its Theme.—A suggested theme for Good Friday is, "Jesus Bore Our Sins." *Parish Activities* offers the theme: "The Church, the Body of Christ—Growing in Holiness." The two are aptly met in this text, for Isaiah 53 in its direct sense links the individual to the church (O. T. and N. T.) as regards both failure and salvation.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To help the hearer perceive the necessity of Jesus' cross for the redemption and ultimate hope of His life.

Sin Diagnosed.—Sin is here seen as the failure of the church and of each individual within the church to measure up to God's expectations. It is revealed as failure in stewardship, failure in witness, a clinging to prejudice, a lust for the material (Israel's specific sins). Sin dissipates our possible strength for good, destroys God's flock, and places us ever more securely under Satan's control.

Opportunities for Gospel.—Christ is afflicted by the Father that He might restore righteousness to us. His obedient suffering heals our sickness, brings us new health. This healing links us inseparably

to Him and to His flock, the church. We are redeemed to the fulfilling of our ultimate calling, the bearing witness to God's power and grace before the nations of the world.

Outline

By His Stripes We Are Healed

- I. We have come short of the glory of God**
 - A. The tragedy of Israel's failure.**
 - B. The tragedy of our failure.**
 - 1. As individuals.**
 - 2. As members within the church.**
- II. Jesus, the obedient Servant of God, bears our sin on the cross**
 - A. Israel is redeemed in the promise of the suffering Servant.**
 - B. We are redeemed in the suffering and death of Jesus.**
- III. By His cross Jesus claims our lives**
 - A. We are saved to be witnesses to Him who saves us.**
 - B. We are linked effectively to the church and its mission.**

Leonia, N. J.

A. KARL BOEHMKE