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Homiletics: Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

PROVERBS 2:1-9

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Prov. 2:1-9 is one of the key passages in the entire book. It speaks of wisdom as a gift truly to be desired and searched for. He who has wisdom will be ready for the trials, the temptations, the problems, of life. He will be able to keep to the right way of life, a way that is pleasing to God. Therefore, Solomon urges: cry for, search for, wisdom as for hid treasure, and know that the Lord will hear your prayer, for He is pleased to give wisdom to His saints.

The Day and Its Theme.—Rogate Sunday urges the followers of the risen Christ to pray for the best gifts. Solomon shows his wisdom in urging that we consider the wisdom that God gives as the greatest of all gifts to be asked of Him. The text goes a bit farther than most of the New Testament texts appointed for this day. These speak of prayer: praying in Jesus' name; being insistent in prayer; praying in faith. Our text also shows us how to pray, but focuses our attention especially on the gift to be asked of God.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—If the preacher will meditate on the truths of our text, he will see wisdom as Solomon saw it. He will want to impress on his hearers what a blessing it is to have this gift of God, and he will urge his hearers to ask for, cry for, search for, wisdom until God gives it to them in richest measure. A brief study of wisdom is included under the next heading. But no study will take the place of prayerful meditation. God gives us the wisdom of His Word that we may preach it to others.

Sin Diagnosed.—Ye have not because ye ask not.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—A hasty reading of Proverbs might cause a person to conclude that the wisdom referred to by Solomon is not the wisdom of God unto salvation. The theme of Proverbs seems to be "Right Living." The expositors of Luther's Small Catechism included a number of passages from Proverbs in the explanation of the Ten Commandments, but not a single one in the explana-

tion of the Creed. Under the Fourth Commandment we have Prov. 30:17 ("The eye that mocketh"), and 23:22 ("Hearken unto thy father"); under the Sixth, 23:31-33 ("Look not thou upon the wine"), and 1:10 ("My son, if sinners entice thee"); under the Seventh, 29:24 ("Whoso is partner with a thief"), and 19:17 ("He that hath pity upon the poor"); under the Eighth, 19:5 ("A false witness"), 11:13 ("A talebearer revealeth"), and 31: 8,9 ("Open thy mouth for the dumb"). It would have been a simple matter to find clear passages for the other Commandments as well.

If we were to tear these passages out of the context of the whole book, we could give people the impression that Proverbs is a book of ethics and morals. But a proper study relates all of this right living to the wisdom which Solomon urges us to ask for. Wisdom, according to Solomon, "reproves . . . pours out her spirit" (1:23); "counsels men to fear the Lord" (1:29f.); "helps men dwell safely and to be quiet from fear of evil" (1:33). When wisdom enters, discretion preserves us from the evil man (2:12) and from the strange woman (2:16). And it is a wisdom that God must give (2:6). Obviously, this is more than ethics. Wisdom places its possessor in a position of fear and love and trust in God, whom he knows as the covenant God. Wisdom is more than a knowledge of facts. It is a deep understanding of God's relation to us and our relation to Him, resulting in an ability to choose the proper, godly course and to follow through. For the believer in the Old Testament the godly life was dedicated to the same God to whom we dedicate our life, to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. An interpretation of the divinely inspired Book of Proverbs which ignores Christ makes the truth a lie. No man can follow Solomon's directions for right living until he has heeded his plea to search for wisdom as the greatest gift of God.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Paul makes wisdom and understanding the object of his prayer in Col. 1:9-14, asking the Lord to give these gifts to the Colossians. Also to the Christians addressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where he prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation *in the knowledge of Him.*"

It is important that we see no less in the wisdom of which Solomon speaks than we see in the letters of Paul. The fact that Solomon lost this wisdom of God for a time does not rule out a proper conception of it while he was writing the Book of Proverbs. He, too, saw in Christ the Power and Wisdom of God.

Compare also Hebrews 11, where the writer speaks of saints before and after Solomon's time, who lived the godly life described in Proverbs. God says of them that they did it *by faith*.

Outline

Today and Every Day, Ask God for Wisdom

I. It is a gift which God wants to give us

- A. Because of what it is (a right knowledge of God and our relation to Him);
- B. Because of the manner in which it will affect our whole life (keeping us on the "way" of His saints. New Testament also speaks of our life as a "way").

II. He therefore wants us never to cease asking for it

- A. Thus keeping us conscious of its worth (treasure, cp. Proverbs 8 and 9);
- B. And of its Giver (Jehovah, the covenant God. Note His love, His mercy, His help, vv. 7-9).

Springfield, Ill.

MARK J. STEEGE

ASCENSION DAY

PSALM 110

The Text and Its Central Thought.— This psalm of David is quoted more frequently than any other in the New Testament. References to this Psalm include Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13; and 1 Peter 3:22. The text for Ascension is sometimes limited to the first four verses. V. 1: Jehovah speaks this word to the Messiah. The right hand is the emblem of the almighty power of God, without limitation. Joshua 10:24 explains the meaning of footstool. This final victory will be seen by all on the Day of Judgment. Jesus is coequal with the Father and shares in the work of conquering the enemies. V. 2: In His kingly office He rules over all His enemies. The King's strength reaches into the very midst of the enemies, where He establishes His kingdom. V. 3: The church mobilized for God and the work under the King-Priest has the qualities of youth. Christ is in the midst of His people, who follow Him because of the desires of their heart. The people shall be willing. Christ's army of workers is made up of volunteers. Enemies are dominated; His people are led. V. 4: The priestly office is introduced abruptly

here with a solemn oath by Jehovah, who confirmed the office. Jesus is our Priest, not only by His intercession for us but also by His supreme sacrifice. He offered up His own blood and established an eternal redemption and atonement for us.

The type of the different, higher, and unchanging priesthood is Melchizedek. He was both king and priest; he had no father or mother who are mentioned in God's book. His priesthood was not inherited; he neither received it from a father or mother or gave it to a son. So Jesus was not born of Levi but of Judah. Christ was above the Levitical priests. Cf. Heb. 7:26-28. For Melchizedek see Heb. 6:20 to 7:28. Through His office as Priest, Jesus won eternal redemption for us.

The central thought of the text is that Christ, coequal with the Father, has ascended on high and seated Himself at the right hand of God the Father, where He fulfills His kingly functions and is our great High Priest.

The Day and Its Theme.—Ascension. This is the coronation day of Jesus. The Gospel, and especially the Epistle from Acts, gives us the New Testament accounts of the ascension. This marks the completion of the earthly life of Jesus and is confessed in the Apostles' Creed. The Propers tell us that this Jesus, our King-Priest, will come again.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The sermon ought to strengthen our faith in Jesus, who completed His work; it ought to give us comfort that He as our Savior also rules with almighty power from His throne on high. Christians will take comfort amid all the problems of life in the fact that the Lord God *Omnipotent* reigneth. Jesus, the High Priest who offered Himself for our sins, now intercedes for us.

Sin Diagnosed and Remedied.—The text does not directly mention sins. It speaks of Jesus, who gave Himself for our sins. Enemies are all those who are without Christ.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—A brief review of the suffering, death, and resurrection, and the whole priestly office, of Christ will fit in well here to show the progression of the life of Christ to heaven. V. 4 especially deals with the pure Gospel.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The Gospel, and especially the Epistle, will give the introduction and the New Testament side of this psalm. As Queen Elizabeth was queen and functioned as such for many months before her coronation, so also Jesus, who as our King was crowned on Ascension Day.

*Outline***The Ascension Story: Jesus Has Ascended in Exaltation**

Introduction: The word from the Apostles' Creed and the New Testament account of the ascension from Acts.

- I. Jesus rules as our King from the right hand of the Father
 - A. He conquers the enemies. No matter how strong evil is, our King rules over all. Hymn 262:3.
 - B. He leads His people. They follow Him with love.
- II. Jesus, our High Priest
 - A. He is Priest after the order of Melchizedek.
 1. He is King and Priest.
 2. He did not inherit the priestly office.
 - B. He performed the priestly duties.
 1. He was the great Sacrifice.
 2. He now intercedes for us.

Conclusion: With joyful readiness we honor and obey, trust and believe in, and work for, our King-Priest, Jesus, our ascended Lord.

Buffalo, N. Y.

JOHN E. MEYER

EXAUDI**PSALM 27:1-6**

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The psalmist David here converts a very unpoetical subject into high-flown jubilation. Two verbs for *fear* in verse one are used: יָרָא and פָּחַד. The one is the shaking kind so as to tremble; and the other the kicking kind, or the jumping fears. He does not try to localize this feeling to any particular occasion. It is a general observation of the everyday processes of life. At this point we already channel the central aim of this sermon, in keeping with the theme in the outline below, to describe the tensions of life as the text develops them. In v. 2 the fear tension is further particularized: the enemies who narrow you, put you in a tight place; the foes, who breathe hot down your back, *anschnauben*. These are the unorganized tensions that mob you with animal ferociousness, "to eat up my flesh." Being a military man, he casts his tensions into military terms in v. 3, which leads one to consider the more organized type of tension, as when they are stacked against you, just one thing at a time.

Though this type of tension may seem easier to handle, it is more frightening. It seems so final and inevitable. The ragged wounds inflicted by a mob of fears are in contrast to the swipe of a sharp sword or a clean bullet hole. What is the difference? They are variations that give the preacher the opportunity to speak of them. "In this will I be confident." In what? that God is my Light, *הָאֵלֹהִים אֱנֹכִי*, my Deliverance (Salvation), *יְהוָה מְעוֹדֵי*. Jehovah is the Fortress of my life, *יְהוָה מְעוֹדֵי חַיִּי*. One thing, *אֶחָד*, emphasis, I ask from Jehovah; now I excavate to the very bottom, that I may live in the house of Jehovah. If you can live your life with God, you can live with anybody or anything, anywhere, even in hell and with yourself. Religion is a full-time matter. How long? All the days of my life *כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי*. What will he do there, living in such a state? to feast the eyes upon the splendor of Jehovah. V. 5: For in the day of evil He shall hide me in His tent; He shall cover me in the shelter of His palace. For the tensions that stare you in the face, from which you would like to crawl in somewhere, God will give refuge. So it is for the tensions when you want to see nothing or nobody; so it is also when you want to see everything, a high commanding view of all things at your feet, on a rock. V. 6: at this time, and now, my head will be lifted up above my enemies on every side. In the one, there is the relief of head low and covered; here it is the relief of chin up and a commanding view, head high. The splendor of God is comprehended in the elevated head of the crucified Son of God. Hanging on His neck, we see the tensions all around: the darkness above and the rocks split beneath, and the blazing heaven beckoning above it all on the horizon. So elevate yourself, lean upon and over His shoulder, see your tensions tended and relieved. From private meditation he leads over to a public demonstration in church. V. 6: Therefore will I sacrifice (slaughter) in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to Jehovah. There will be vocal and instrumental expressions of thanks.

The Day and Its Theme.—Exaudi Sunday takes its name from the Introit, which is the verse following the text immediately: "Hear, O Lord, (when) I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me." The particular matter for which the Christian heart raises its voice today is the tension in his life. The text is an expression of experiences that cover a wide range of life's problems. One must gear it down. For the text runs fast and free, which is its grandeur and its challenge. The theme suggested for the day is, "Live Your Life Through the Power of God." This may be reduced even more to one

phase of life, namely, its tensions. The text lines them up in various categories, and they are there for the preacher to develop, which could well be done in the first part of the sermon. Show plainly that the tensions are there and what they feel like. In Part II proceed to show how to get rid of them. The theme to cover these two phases is the one outlined below: "Tend Your Tensions."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To bring the hearer to an activity similar to that of the writer of this hymn, both in private and in public. That is, to talk about his religion, His God, in connection with the tensions of his life. We cannot all be hymn writers and psalmists in the polished sense. But we can be that informally and intimately with our God privately. Publicly there is the church service, in which we have the hymnal, the psalms, and the organ. There is the confession of sins, of admitted tensions between God and ourselves; there is the absolution of tensions relieved. There is the bearing of tensions to the altar in Communion, and there is the leaving of them there. If we pray, "Deliver us from evil," then it is for us to go where God has provided the deliverance. Purpose: To develop another tension: the tension for a full-time, God-attended life.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Some people think they can tend their tensions by leaving them alone. Neglect never kills a tension. Nor will fancy words and godless psalms of rhyming nonsense help. Even Christians try them, e. g., "Every cloud has a silver lining," "In the sweet bye and bye," "We'll live through it!", "Blah, blah your blues away," "Something will turn up." But in vain they look for something to turn up, etc. These are expressions that should be replaced by this text. Admonition to church and Communion attendance: "Ye have not because ye ask not," because ye come not.

Appointments for Explicit Gospel.—"The Lord is my Light." It is not just a man saying something, but to show that this is really so and that God wants it so. Christ Himself says it in similar language several times: "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I am come a Light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). The text is filled with terms that imply the Gospel message: light, salvation, strength (fortress), the beauty of the Lord; He shall hide me, set me on a rock, lift up my head. The suspension of tensions between heaven and earth is resolved in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Introductory thoughts of an illustrative nature could be as follows: Engineers who concern themselves with the amount of stress and tension of given materials in the construction of a building. Exacting studies in the tensions of dead weight, crushing, stretching, torsion and twist. Add to each of these the measure of resistance to shock when force is applied suddenly. This introduces the text and theme in a tight unit. The illustrations of the introduction spill over into each part. If the building engineer will look to the dead tension of a church beam, how much more should the pastor look to the tensions of the living souls assembled under the church roof! Then, with text in hand, size up their tensions, and put them down by the power of the Word. The previous paragraph of this study has reference to the New Testament balance in the words of Christ.

Outline

Tending the Tensions of Life

I. You have them

A. The Psalmist describes his.

1. Fear (v. 1) general: the quivering and the jumping.
2. Fear (v. 2) as an unorganized mob, ferocious.
3. Fear (v. 3) as an orderly army, inevitable defeat.

B. They are there, they exist, they come: size them up (in the family, relationship, business, among the nations, the youth in school, with yourself, with God).

II. Tend them

A. Size them down with the Psalmist, privately.

1. How some tend them; then don't.
2. Get God into your life (v. 1). Terms for God and Christ.
3. Live with God, confidence (vv. 3, 4), meditation. Close the eyes (v. 4), head high and eyes open (v. 6a), and tensions relax.

B. Set them down publicly, in church (v. 6b).

1. Open demonstration, hymns, prayers, this psalm.
2. Let God answer your prayer "Deliver us from tensions"—through the sermon, absolution, and Communion.

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG, JR.

PENTECOST

JOEL 2:28-32

The Text and Its Central Thought.—According to the Hebrew text the words of Joel are divided into four chapters. What the KJV and the RSV designate as 2:28-32 are 3:1-5 in the Hebrew text. In this study we shall, however, follow the division contained in the English texts.

V. 28: "And it shall come to pass afterward," after things had so happened. These words refer back to what had been previously said in 2:18-27. God had promised deliverance and reason for joy. Some commentators find a reference in 2:23 to "the teacher of righteousness." Compare also margin of KJV.—God promises, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." ריחי, My Spirit (cf. Is. 30:1; 42:1; 44:3; Ezek. 36:27). פָּשַׁף, to pour out, to cause to flow. בָּשָׂר, flesh, mankind. That which does not have "real" life (cf. John 3:6; 1 Cor. 2:14).—The result of this outpouring of God's Spirit will be that sons and daughters will prophesy. קָרָא, to call; to speak. "To cause to bubble up, hence to pour forth words abundantly, as is done by those who speak with ardour or divine emotion of mind" (Gesenius-Tregelles). "Old men will dream dreams." "Young men will see visions."

V. 29: אֲפֹרָא, "even" (RSV), "also" (KJV), in addition. God promises to pour out His Spirit on "servants" (KJV), "menservants" (RSV), slaves, and upon "handmaids" (KJV), "maidservants" (RSV). "Not a single case occurs in the whole of the Old Testament of a slave receiving the gift of prophecy" (Keil).

Vv. 30, 31: "Blood and fire and columns of smoke" (RSV), the turning of the sun into darkness, blood on the moon, are signs that will precede "the great and terrible Day of the Lord" (cf. Is. 13:6ff.).

V. 32: Deliverance and safety are promised to "all who call upon the name of the Lord," for they "shall be those whom the Lord calls."

In vv. 28 and 29 Joel's prophecy concerns itself with the beginning of the New Testament era (cf. Acts 2:16). This beginning was to be marked by the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh. The outpouring of God's Spirit would result in prophesying, the dreaming of dreams, the seeing of visions, the breaking of barriers of age, sex, and society. In vv. 30 and 31, God, speaking through Joel, then speaks of the end of the New Testament age. According to v. 32, those whom the Lord has called and who in turn call upon Him will survive and escape.

The central thought is that God will pour out His Spirit to call unto Himself people who will serve Him in this life and call upon His name forever.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Introit begins with the announcement: "The Spirit of the Lord filleth the world: Hallelujah!"

In the Collect, God is asked to send His Holy Spirit to His faithful people to teach them to have right judgment and "to rejoice in His holy comfort."

The Old Testament lesson is the subject of this sermon study.

The Epistle (Acts 2:1-13) contains the account of the birthday of the Christian Church, the beginning of the New Testament era.

The Gospel (John 14:23-31) includes Christ's promise of "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost" (v. 26).

The theme for the day: God gives His Spirit to the church.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To bring our hearers to an awareness that they are living in the last times in order that they—by the Spirit's working through Word and Sacrament—may be able to stand in faith in Christ at the hour of death and on the Day of Judgment.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—We—and our people—do not appreciate the blessings that are ours because God gives His Spirit to us and to all His church. Nor do we always live as people who are living out the last chapter of the world's history.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a gift of God's love. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel. The Holy Spirit, through Christ, brings us to faith so that we call upon the name of the Lord. We shall "escape" and be numbered among "the survivors" because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in us and has kept us in Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—In the Pentecost sermon that is recorded in Acts 2:14-21, Peter uses Joel 2:28-32a as his text. In referring to the happenings of Pentecost, Peter says, "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (RSV). Peter, in quoting the first part of 2:28, uses the words "And in the last days it shall be" instead of "And it shall come to pass afterward." To illustrate the idea that we are living in the age of fulfillment of Joel's prophecy we can refer to indications that the Holy Spirit has been poured out—and is still being poured out—on all people; the interest in personal evangelism; the gathering of people in Christ's church regardless of race, age, sex, position in society.

Matthew 24 and Luke 21:5ff. give us Christ's picture of the end of the New Testament age. To illustrate the thought that we are

living out the last chapter of the world's history we can refer to the storms and floods that have plagued the coasts of our nation as well as to earthquakes and droughts.

Outline

God Pours out His Holy Spirit on All Flesh

I. Joel's prophecy

- A. Began to be fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:16).
- B. Is still being fulfilled today.

II. All who are in Christ have been filled with the Holy Ghost

- A. We were "flesh" (cf. John 3:6; 1 Cor. 2:14).
- B. The Holy Spirit has brought us
 - 1. To a knowledge and conviction of sin.
 - 2. To call upon the name of the Lord (Jesus Christ, our Savior).

III. The Holy Spirit continues to work through Word and Sacrament

- A. That we (old, young, male, female, etc.) may now prophesy (speak for Christ).
- B. To give us the power to stand in our faith in Christ
 - 1. In the hour of death.
 - 2. On the Day of Judgment.

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ARTHUR F. GRAUDIN

TRINITY

JEREMIAH 10:8-16

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The text presents a sharp contrast between the majesty of the true God and the utter vanity of all false gods. False gods are "the work of the workman." They appear to be wonderful; however, they are wood covered with a veneer of silver and gold. They wear blue and purple and thus give the appearance of royalty, but they are not what they pretend to be. True, they are attractive because they are the work of cunning men, but their beauty is deceiving and worthless (v. 9). False gods have no power. They are doomed to perish (v. 11). False gods have no life. They are vanity. They are lies (vv. 14 and 15). "The true God is the living God" (v. 10). He is eternal. He made the heavens and the earth. He preserves all things (v. 12). He has power over the elements (v. 13). He rules over the nations (v. 10). Those who trust and

worship false gods will perish with their false gods (v.18). Those who trust and worship the true God will be enriched through God's blessing (v.16).

The Day and Its Theme.—The suggested theme for the day, "The Triune God Is Supreme in Power and Love," fits the text perfectly. The same is true of the Introit, the Gradual, and the suggested Collects for the day. All point to the majesty of the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and the blessedness of the man who believes in Him.

The *Parish Activities* theme, "The Church, the Body of Christ, Serves Youthful Members," becomes significant in the setting of the text and the theme for the day when we remember that the duty of the church is to encourage its members unto a stronger faith in, and a closer walk with, the true God.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The purpose of this sermon is to teach the wisdom of worshiping the true God. The wisdom of such worship becomes very clear when compared with the utter folly of worshiping idols.

Sins to Be Remedied.—Sin against the First Commandment. The worship of idols always was, is now, and always will be a common and a terrible sin. It is the devil's delight to deceive men into such worship. In our day and in our land idol worship is not as bold and shameless as it was during the day of Jeremiah. However, just therein lies its danger. Many imagine that they are engaging in true worship, but because they do not worship the true, the Triune God, they are guilty of idol worship.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—At first glance it appears that this text offers little or no opportunity for explicit Gospel. This, however, is not true. The text emphasizes the wisdom of worshiping the true God. And the true God is not only the God who created all things, but also the God who redeemed men from the curse of their sin. He is also the God who kindles the fires of faith within the hearts of men by lifting their eyes to look unto Calvary and Him who was wounded that they might be healed. The true God created, redeemed, sanctifies. Just therein lies the wisdom and the glory of worshiping the true God.

Illustrations.—The text itself contains ample material to illustrate the wisdom of worshiping the true God. For example, the true God is living, everlasting, omnipotent. The false gods are "the work of

the workman." They are wood covered with gold and then clothed with blue and purple. They are "the work of errors." There is no breath in them. They perish.

Outline

What Do You Mean, "I Believe in God"?

I. Do you believe in a god

- A. Who is the work of the hand of man? (V.9.)
- B. Who is not what he pretends to be? (Vv.9, 14.)
- C. Who will perish? (Vv.11, 15.)

II. Do you believe in the God

- A. Who is the Creator and Preserver of all things? Also Redeemer and Sanctifier. (Vv.12, 13.)
- B. Who is true and wise? (Vv.10, 12.)
- C. Who is both living and everlasting? (V.10.)

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R. WIEDERAENDERS