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Homiletics: Outlines on Ranke Epistles

James G. Manz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Ranke Epistles

EXAUDI

EPHESIANS 4:14-16

The history of error and unfaithfulness in the church shows a tendency in every age to exalt human thought, work, and doctrine. Man by nature wants to be the master and teacher (Gen. 3:4-6). Our text warns against "every wind of doctrine." Above all, it points to Him who is the Truth, who alone can save and teach us.

Christ the Head and Life of His Church

I. Beware of the doctrines of men (v. 14)

A. Every "wind of doctrine" endangers Christ's rule in the church, tosses men "to and fro."

B. Human ideas are taught as doctrines "by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (RSV). False prophets are often intelligent, clever, and winsome. They may use Scriptural words, but they do not preach the Law and the Gospel. Error in the church is more subtle than unbelief outside. Blatant atheism is easier to recognize than soul-destroying heresy within. We must judge the doctrine of those who "lie in wait to deceive."

C. Our aim must be to grow up from the guile and simplicity of immature Christians into the mature strength of faith and knowledge.

D. Specific applications for our time and situation: The clever manifestations of "liberal Christianity" exhibit the same tendencies always seen in error. Human ideas and works would dethrone Christ and His Word—in personal life, thought, and devotion; in the church; in the world.

1. The history of humanism in modern Protestantism is told by Harry Emerson Fosdick in his autobiography, *The Living of These Days*.
2. "Positive thinking," advocated by many in our day, is often called a "do-it-yourself religion." It preaches no repentance (Law) nor forgiveness (Gospel).
3. These are modern examples of the "winds of doctrine" which have no divine message of sin and salvation.

II. Speak His truth in love (v.15)

A. The called ministers of Christ have the first responsibility to teach His truth, v.11; vv.12 and 15 show that every Christian, however, has this responsibility, for all belong to the church. Today's Epistle (1 Peter 4:11). The Holy Gospel (John 15:27). There is a priesthood of all believers. Do we exercise it in our words and actions?

B. Christ's truth must be spoken in love. True zeal for God and His Word (the First Table of the Law) always remembers also the Second Table (our duty toward men). 1 Peter 4:8. 1 Cor. 13:2: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." The same word is used in our text as in 1 Corinthians 13: ἀγάπη. Love is supreme. Christ's love which saves is always reflected in Christian life. 1 John 4:8: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is Love."

C. When Christ's truth is not spoken in love, we endanger and perhaps nullify the strength of our witness. The truth of the Word and love in our life and work must go together. We are to "grow up into Him in all things."

D. We ourselves grow in faith and knowledge when we testify to others. This blessed activity blesses speaker and hearer. It is by "speaking the truth in love" that we grow up into Him. 1 Tim. 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

III. Work together in harmony with other parts of His body (v.16)

A. Christ is "the Head" (v.15); Eph. 4:4-6; the Creed: "The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints."

B. Christ is also the Life of His church. His life thrives in many members. John 15:1 ff.: "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. . . ." To despise any member of the body is to offend Christ, since all have their life in Him and from Him.

C. The members of His body are one. Therefore they must live and work together. "From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (RSV). 1 Peter 4:8-10.

D. Every member of His body has his proper work and function. Therefore there is life and growth when all work together in love. 1 Cor. 12:14-27.

E. Specific applications: What am I doing in and for the congregation and the wider fellowship in the church? Am I working together in harmony with my fellow Christians? Have I accepted responsibility when others asked me to help in doing the Lord's work? Have I given others the proper example and encouragement?

Today is Exaudi, the Sunday after the Ascension. We have heard the glorious story of Christ's victory (Easter) and His ascension into heaven. He alone is the Head and Life of His church!

What about us? We must pray today's Collect, and ever remember its sublime truth: "Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will towards Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen."

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

WHITSUNDAY, THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

ACTS 2:1-21 (key verses 4, 7, 8, 13-16)

The whole significance of the story of the text is contained in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed together with Luther's explanation. Have the congregation join in reciting it (provide printed copies for all).

The exciting thing about the church is that God is present and active in her midst. The exciting story of the Shekinah in the Old Testament (Hab. 2:20 and related passages). The history of the church in the New Testament is even more exciting.

The Spirit Fills the Church, the Temple of God

On this great feast day, thrill to the story of how this was accomplished on Pentecost and how it is continually accomplished to the end of time.

I. The church baptized with the Holy Spirit

A. The setting of the miracle

1. The day. Significance of the Old Testament Pentecost. New Testament counterpart. Birthday of the New Testament church.
2. The crowd gathered together to witness this miracle. Wisdom of God in governing the affairs of men. Jesus' birth at the time of a universal census. Crucifixion and resurrection at

the time of the Passover. Outpouring of the Holy Spirit when Jerusalem was teeming with pilgrims. (Vv. 1, 5)

3. The church in the upper room (v. 1). Ten days had gone by since Jesus' ascension. But He would not leave them orphans (John 14:18); He would send the Comforter (today's Gospel). They were waiting.

B. The miracle

1. (Vv. 3, 4) Explain briefly. These phenomena were visible and audible signs.
2. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The person of the Holy Ghost. Not just an impersonal influence or power proceeding from God. The Third Person in the Holy Trinity, "the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."
3. A special indwelling fitting the disciples for a special task (vv. 4, 11). Bold witness of the "wonderful works of God." Salvation through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. Peter's theme. (V. 38)
4. The church was baptized with the Holy Spirit. In a special sense He had come down to earth to dwell in Zion.

II. The Holy Spirit continues to fill the church

A. Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy (vv. 16-21)

A new era has begun. Not just a one-time event but an ongoing activity.

- B. The Holy Spirit continues to fill the church, i. e., the community of believers. "From that day the Spirit has held permanent residence on earth in all believers, beginning with the 120 disciples who received Him on Pentecost, up to the present moment. When they received the Holy Spirit, He united them by His indwelling presence into one body, the mystical body of Christ on earth, which is His church. Singly and jointly they all received and possessed the Holy Spirit" (H. G. Randolph, *Filled with the Spirit*, 1934. The Lutheran Bible Institute). Cf. Introit for today.
- C. He does this by the means of grace. "Called me by the Gospel." "The moment a sinner becomes a member of that body of believers, he immediately shares with all its members, the gift of the Spirit. . . . They [the believing audience on First Pentecost] were cleansed, made members of Christ's body of believers, and re-

ceived the gift of the Spirit when, heeding Peter's command and believing the promise he had spoken, they in true repentance turned away from sin, and in Baptism turned to Jesus Christ unto the remission of sin. . . . Since Pentecost the sinner—child or adult—receives the gift of the Spirit the instant he is received into God's favor for the sake of Christ." (Ibid.)

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost once for all. We do not look for another Pentecost miracle. The individual believer's Baptism with the Spirit is an extension of the Baptism of Pentecost which has been the church's great blessing and gift since that day. Thank God that in Christ we and all God's children have the Baptism of Pentecost. "O God . . . grant us . . . evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort" (Collect for today).

Milwaukee, Wis.

VALENTINE MACK

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

(Any phrase of this tremendous, one-sentence text would be sufficient for a sermon. The preacher will do well to employ the entire text, just because he probably tends to by-pass this complicated statement in his personal Bible study and because the entire paragraph has a meaning and purpose different from that of any fragment extracted from it. For reading from the pulpit, vv. 5, 6, 7, and 13 will be useful.)

"The Feast of the Holy Trinity" may not sound particularly festal; for we may think of the Trinity as an abstraction, or a difficult theory about the nature of God, and the Day thus connotes an exercise in hard thinking. But our text stresses that the nature and work of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is revealed; it shows, and we are to play a part in revealing it on and on to others; it shows in us, and we show it on to others in love.

Bless God Who Blesses Us

I. To bless God means to say great things about Him

- A. It is God's purpose for us to bless and show Him forth (v. 3); "to the praise of the shining forth (glory) of His grace" (v. 6); the purpose of His work is to be the praise of His glory (v. 12); the guarantee of the process is for the praise of His glory (v. 14).
- B. This means to be able to think, talk and sing about God's actions toward us; not abstractly, but as people who have a part in these

actions, experiencing them in ourselves and not just reading or saying the words about them ("having made known," v. 9, having written into our experience). Anything less is a poor praise and blessing toward God, not a showing forth of His glory but a mouthing of formulas; worse, a failure to meet His great plan ("dispensation," v. 10, God's housekeeping whereby we become His own). Hence we ponder:

II. God blesses us by giving us every spiritual blessing

- A. We tend to bless God for blessing us physically; we thank Him at meals, are grateful for our health, our families, our nation. Here we are counseled to bless God for what He has made us spiritually, in a plan beginning before Creation and going on into a future world. (Vv. 3, 4, 9-11)
- B. He chose us — picked us out from many (v. 4) — long before the consummation of the plan, vv. 5, 9, 11 — to be His sons (v. 5), to be His inheritance (v. 11), His own property someday to be possessed in full. (V. 14)
- C. This plan implies that we be holy, set apart for His own, and blameless, without the guilt of rebellion or godlessness. (V. 4)
- D. This plan He works out through Jesus Christ (accented in every verse of the text!), who sheds His blood (v. 7), so that we are redeemed from the bondage of blame and sin and have forgiveness. (V. 7)
- E. This operation, planned before Creation, is an act of God's grace, undeserved but abundant and overflowing, working out with supreme insight and prudence, simultaneously an act of God's love and of God's shrewdly calculating purpose. (Vv. 5-9)
- F. Those to whom this knowledge has already come recognize, however, that the plan of God embraces still others (vv. 12, 13), and the plan works out through the message of God's grace in Christ, the story of His promise coming true, implanting the Holy Spirit also in them as a seal and forecast that they also shall belong to God's finally occupied property (vv. 13, 14). Here Paul's purpose for the Ephesians becomes apparent: both Jewish and Gentile Christians belong in God's plan and have the mutual obligation of speaking the truth to one another. (Eph. 4:13-16)

Hence to bless God and to know who He is and to talk about Him means to play the part which He originally designed for us in His

plan, to keep on telling the Word that God has forgiven our sins for the sake of the blood of Christ and has given us His Spirit through the message of the Gospel. This is not a feast of the intellect or of theological formulas; it is a feast of the Bread of Life, a reveling in the plan of God come true in Christ, and still coming true in us and in those to whom we speak, and finally coming true in our common ingathering with God in the heavenly inheritance.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 2:42-47

"To have loved and lost is better than never to have loved at all" may express a truth that applies in some areas of life. But in the area of the spiritual and in connection with our relationship with our Savior, to lose what we once had is the greatest evil. The condemnation on a Judas who once followed the Savior and then turned away from Him is greater than that on the benighted heathen who never heard of Jesus. To have possessed forgiveness and then to lose it we must number among the greater catastrophes that can befall any individual.

We must be interested in

Keeping Our Spiritual Blessings

I. Like the early church we have come to enjoy many blessings

A. Among the blessings of the early church we number the following:

1. Faith and its blessings. Those early Christians on Pentecost and in the days following learned to know Jesus, His salvation, His redemption, His comfort, His power.
2. Power for Christian godliness. Evident in their Christian love and charity toward one another (v. 44 b), in their regular worship and praise of God (vv. 46, 47), in their providing for one another's needs (vv. 44 b, 45), in their communal property, in their joy and gladness.
3. Favor with all the people (vv. 42, 47). The nonbelievers were impressed by the power at work among them. As a whole, the people of Jerusalem thought well of the Christians.
4. Growth in numbers. "The Lord added to the church." (V. 47 b)

B. We likewise have many blessings we wish to keep and increase.

1. Faith and forgiveness. During the festival half of the church year we heard again the Gospel and were built up in the faith.
2. Christian living. Whereas we must point to areas that need improvement, yet we rejoice that the Gospel has given us the degree of godliness it has.
3. Favor in the community and nation. The Lord has given us a certain prestige and good reputation.
4. Growth. As a congregation we are growing. As a church body we have grown. The mission development of our church.

II. Like the early church we want to keep these blessings

A. The early church kept them by continuing steadfastly and faithfully—

1. In the teaching of the apostles. The members both taught and were taught in the truths of the Gospel and God's Word.
2. In fellowship, by confessing Christ with one another. No factions. Helping one another in the faith.
3. In breaking of bread. Faithful use of the Lord's Supper.
4. In the prayers both in the worship in the Christian assemblies and in the homes and families.

B. We, too, can maintain and increase our spiritual blessings in the same way.

1. By faithfulness in learning the Word—at home, in Bible classes, in the services. No false isms of any kind, no indifference.
2. By continuing in harmonious fellowship with one another, expressing the spiritual fellowship that exists with one another.
3. By faithful attendance at the Lord's Table.
4. By steadfast and regular worship, privately and publicly.

The church and congregation that fails to safeguard its spiritual blessings by such a program of activity in all its organizations and in all its activities will soon lose its precious heritage. The history of the church can recount many examples both of congregations and of individuals. But whoever continues steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers, will continue to enjoy the blessings of salvation.

Springfield, Ill.

LEWIS C. NIEMOELLER

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 3:1-9

No one likes to be sick. Each of us spends money on drugs and doctors in order to stay healthy or to regain lost health. Even with the best medical knowledge and help we still deteriorate with age: hair and teeth disappear, etc. As we disintegrate, we must resist the temptation of Satan, who tries to tell us that God doesn't care about us. When we are sick or in trouble, we must rely completely on the grace, mercy, and wisdom of God, who alone is our Refuge and Strength. The example of Peter's healing of the lame man in our text should help us remind one another that

Through Christ God Helps in Every Ill

- I. As earthbound creatures we are subject to many ills which are evidences of our sinful natures
 - A. Sin has corrupted our lives and separated us from God. We were created whole and healthy in Adam to live to God's glory; but sin has broken us and corrupted our bodies and lives. (Rom. 7:18; Gen. 6:12; Micah 7:2; 2 Tim. 3:1, 2)
 - B. Sin is now the source of our misery, pain, and ills. Whatever goes wrong with us can be traced back to our sinful natures. (Deut. 28:67; Job 15:20; Rom. 2:9; 3:16; James 5:1)
 - C. Sin makes us weak and helpless as we face eternal death. We are powerless to get ourselves out of sickness and trouble. The Law condemns us to eternal death. Luke 13:11, John 5:7, and many other texts show man's helplessness in the world as he waits for the Judgment.
 - D. The lame man is a prime example of sin's corruption and man's misery and helplessness (v. 2). This man was doomed from the moment of his birth to utter helplessness because of his deformity. Here contrast the normal childhood games, the growing of others to virile manhood, the ability of others to travel, work, earn a living, with the lame man's poor state. Use imagination, but keep on the point that this illustrates sin and its work.
- II. God helps in every ill
 - A. The world's money and wealth are powerless to help. The lame man's friends could do nothing more than carry him to the Beautiful Gate, where the world's material wealth and the man's misery were even more apparent. When he asked alms, he

didn't even raise his eyes to the people who passed by (vv. 3, 4). Peter's remark. "Silver and gold have I none," is more than a statement that his billfold is empty; he emphasizes the lack of power in money to help.

- B. God is powerful to cure (v. 6). Peter has the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not faith healing, but the faith that heals. (Job 5:18; Ps. 103:1-4; Ps. 34:19)
- C. God desires to cure, ease pain, help misery (Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:8; Col. 3:12; Ps. 31:7; Ps. 111:4; Is. 57:19; Job 16:5). But God does not guarantee to any individual bodily health or immunity from temporal trouble and domestic loss. He may chastise those whom He loves or may use their sufferings to show His glory to others. (Heb. 12:6; John 9:3)
- D. God showed His power to cure when He healed the lame man (vv. 6, 7). The Spirit worked through Peter to give the man strength in limbs which had never walked. Muscles that had no strength to limp now had the might to leap.

III. God helps through Christ (v. 6)

- A. Christ gives immortality to replace corruption. (John 17:2; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:50-57)
- B. Christ gives happiness and peace to replace misery. (Ps. 128:1; Prov. 16:20; Is. 12:2; Phil. 4:7; 1 Peter 4:12; Rev. 21:4)
- C. Christ gives strength and power to replace weakness. (Rom. 5:6; 1 Chr. 29:12; Rom. 16:25, 27; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Is. 40:31; 41:10; Daniel 11:32; Eph. 3:16)
- D. Christ gave all these things to the lame man. He praised God for His new strength, which shows a faithful and thankful heart. He was so happy he leaped about and filled the temple with his praises. He was so strong in that instant that he walked and jumped, attracting a great deal of attention.

When the ills of life come to us, we must recognize them as symptoms of our sinful natures. God cures the real disease of sin when He gives us faith in the name of His Son Jesus Christ of Nazareth. To suffer is bad; to be unbelieving is worse. Having the cure of the real disease should make us confident that God will heal the outward signs if it will be best for us and for our souls. May God make us patient and trusting, whether we are sick or well, that our lives may be joyful and full of praise to the true God.

Maplewood, Mo.

WILLIAM E. GOERSS