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Homiletics: Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

Elmer E. Mueller

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 1:35-51 (key verses, 35-39, 43-46)

GI Joe is known the world over. He is an American. He is either a credit to his country or a disgrace. If he is loyal, thoughtful, helpful, he wears his uniform well. He may be a disgrace; like a parasite, taking, and giving nothing in return; as troublesome as the GI Joe who killed a Japanese woman.

"CM Jim" (church-member Jim) is known the world over. If he is loyal, etc., he is a credit to God. He may be a disgrace; a parasite, like the men "idle in the market place"; a betraying Judas; a back-sliding Demas.

Jesus is gathering His disciples. He says: "Follow Me." "Come and see." May the Holy Spirit use this message to show you what He wants you to do.

When You Follow Jesus

I. *You know Jesus*

A. You know Him as the seeking Savior (vv.39,43). He seeks the lost (Luke 15:4; 19:10; John 5:14; 9:35). He invites you to come: "Come and see" (v.39); "Follow Me" (v.43); Come for rest (Matt.11:28); Come to the marriage feast (Matt.22:4); Come for the Gospel feast (Luke 14:17); Come for spiritual satisfaction. (Rev.22:17)

B. You know Him as your Savior from sin (v.36). This is how the disciples knew Him. Andrew: "the Messiah" (v.41); Philip: "Him of whom Moses," etc. (v.45); Nathanael: "Son of God" (v.39). John the Baptist's message was "Repent! Prepare! Make your paths straight!" This message still fits, for sin is still the problem (Eccl. 7:20; Is. 64:6; 1 John 1:8,9; Matt.15:19). Troubled by sin.

II. *You come to Jesus*

A. The disciples came: Andrew and John (vv.37-39); Peter (v.42); Philip and Nathanael (vv.46,47). Gospel (Luke 5:11). John the Baptist directed them to Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God." (V.36)

- B. You come through the Word (John 5:39; 14:23); in the church (Luke 11:28); in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42); in your prayers (Matt. 11:28). You come as a sinner. "Just as I am, without one plea," etc. You "behold the Lamb of God." (V. 36)
- C. You come for help. Jesus asked John and Andrew, "What seek ye?" (V. 38). What are you seeking in life? You who are young—just an education, a position, a pleasure? You who are parents—what are you seeking for your children—food, shelter, education, security? Are you seeking only for this world or for the full development of your child? What are you seeking—health, wealth, power, position? "What seek ye?" Are you planning just for now or for eternity; for the present moment or for the hour when earthly treasures lose their value? Come to Jesus, "the Lamb of God," your Savior, your Redeemer, your Sin-Bearer, because He loves you and helps you.

III. *You serve Jesus*

- A. You confess Him. The disciples confessed Him (vv. 41, 45, 49). After Pentecost they witnessed with power (Acts 1:8; 4:20). The apostle Paul confessed Christ. You have an obligation to work, like Spurgeon, for the conversion of the sinner; to carry the unbeliever to God in prayer; to give a clear, certain testimony whenever you have the opportunity; to bring others to Jesus.
- B. You live for Him. He lived and died for you. He says, "Follow Me." You respond: "Savior, I follow on, guided by Thee," etc.; "Savior, I long to walk closer with Thee," etc. You say with the apostle Paul: "For me to live is Christ." "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." When you live for Him, you live a full life, a rich life, a confident life. Each morning you can affirm, "I am persuaded," etc. (Rom. 8:38, 39)

When you follow Jesus, you know Him; you come to Him; you love Him; and you serve Him. When you follow Jesus, God has blessed you with faith, with the promise of heaven and eternal glory. May God, who has blessed you with faith, keep you in faith until you see "the angels in heaven" (v. 51). This is what Jesus wants when He says to you this morning: "Follow Me." "Come and see!"

Omaha, Nebr.

ELMER E. MUELLER

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 5:17-19

Mass evangelism is common in our day and well known to Christians and non-Christians alike. Perhaps some of us have seen a meeting of a famous evangelist like Billy Graham. Even if we have not, most of us know that the evangelist lays great stress on a "decision for Christ." Such an emphasis often carries with it a grave danger. The impression may be left with people that this is the only thing God expects of the individual. Our purpose is not to discuss the merits or demerits of evangelists and evangelism but to show that the Christian must go on after the "decision" into the fullness of life in God. Our text is an "upward call" both to the newly converted and to the older Christian to see the whole will of God and carry out the same.

A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life

I. *In Christ we are confronted with a new demand for the fulfillment of God's Law*

- A. The Law of God was issued to man at creation. As a result there is an ever-present sense of moral obligation in man. The Christian sees this sense of "ought" as evidence for the Moral Law, the Law written into men's hearts. It was later embodied in the Ten Commandments, and it has at its center the two great imperatives of love to God and man.
- B. When our Lord pursued His ministry among men. He did not come as an innovator. In regard to the Law of God He was what we would call a conservative (v. 17). The idea was circulating among His contemporaries that He was a revolutionary. He violated the letter of the Sabbath law and other stipulations. But Jesus did not conceive of Himself as overthrowing the Law but rather as one who took its intent and validity seriously. As one who fulfilled the Law of God perfectly, He asks His followers to do the same (v. 19). He is unique in His matter-of-fact demand that the Law of God be kept perfectly.
- C. This demand of our Lord makes us realize the utter bankruptcy of our own righteousness and our helplessness in carrying out God's Law. We pride ourselves on some moral attainment. Here Christ says that nothing but perfection will do. Perhaps we have thought that we were making progress with our own powers. Here Christ tells us that we are still helpless. Our Lord's words are a terrific jolt to a comfortable, complacent,

and easygoing Christianity which speaks only of God's free grace without the necessary corollary of a holy life.

II. *In Christ we are confronted with a new situation which makes it possible to fulfill the Law*

A. Our situation would be desperate indeed were it not for the fact that with the new demand our Lord creates a new situation. (E. Stauffer in Kittel's *TWNT s.v. agape*.) For centuries God had promised believers a time when the Law would be something the faithful could carry out (Jer. 31:33; Is. 2:1-4). This was to be one of the marks of the Messianic age.

B. In Christ this promise is fulfilled. Christ fulfills the whole Law to its last detail. He does this as our Representative. He does this on behalf of us all. Thus He releases into our world a new force and a new power, the power of the age to come (Heb. 6:5), the power of God's love in the forgiveness of sins. He who lays hold on this power and is found in Christ by faith receives the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God Himself animates the believer to do the will of God. The Law of God as God's will for men is kept.

III. *The Christian goes to Christ therefore for this forgiving power to do the will of God*

A. The demand of Christ makes us conscious of our need. The new situation created by Christ makes us conscious of the gift of God. Gratefully we accept the forgiveness of sins in our Lord's atonement for us. We feel this gift as power. We sense the love of God for us as a mighty stirring within us to a life of faith which works by love. Having committed ourselves in trust to God, who justifies the ungodly for the sake of the only One who is just, we have the Spirit of love and faith within us.

B. And so we too go on to a life of holiness. We undertake the will of God not only in those portions where we feel inclined to follow His desires, but also in those where our personal tendencies run opposite. We strive to observe the will of God in its minutest detail. Out of love for God and by the power of the Spirit from sheer joy in doing our Father's bidding, we strive to be "great" in the kingdom of heaven.

C. As we strive for holiness, we realize that we shall never escape a certain ambiguity. Insofar as we are in Christ, we enjoy the power of the age to come and do the will of God from the

heart. The demands of the Law are a source of joy, an invitation to the life of God. Insofar as we are in the flesh, we labor under the power of this age. The demands of the Law are a source of terror, an accusing force. In this latter aspect the Law will remain with us "till all be fulfilled," "till heaven and earth pass." When that happens, we shall be perfect and shall do the will of God as it is done by those in heaven.

Here Christ issues a serious call to a devout and holy life. See in Him the greatness of God's forgiving grace. Let that grace be a power in you to a wider consecration, more fervent love, a deeper commitment to the will of God! (Cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, IV, V, VI)

Yonkers, N. Y.

RICHARD E. KOENIG

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 17:9-13

Not all of the church year is made up of the Christmas and Easter seasons and the thrill of the high festivals. We are sometimes on the mountaintops, but we are more often down on the plain. Today we are on the plain. It's July 20, the Seventh Sunday after Trinity, a relatively unimportant midsummer Sunday. The Transfiguration of our Lord is a high festival, but we are six months past the Epiphanytide celebration of the Transfiguration. For the disciples the Transfiguration was a flash of Christ's glory. But the flash soon passed. Life returned to normal. They soon came down from the mountain. Our flashes of Christ's glory pass quickly too. We soon come down from the mountaintop experiences of our faith. Of this we think today. This seldom-used text goes beyond the transfiguration itself. It describes reactions

After the Transfiguration

I. *We sometimes see flashes of Christ's glory*

- A. We sometimes see flashes of Christ's glory (v.9). The transfiguration was a special and rare privilege for the disciples, a flash of Christ's glory (vv.1-8). We, too, sometimes have mountaintop experiences as Christians—great spiritual victories, glorious expressions of worship, powerful answers to prayer, moments of great faith. On the emotional level we might compare them to the rare view of a magnificent sunset, the sun and rainbow after a rainstorm, a great musical thrill. These experiences do not come into our lives every day.

- B. We want them to remain (v.4). We enjoy these experiences and hate to see them end. Peter, James, and John felt the same way about the transfiguration. Notice Peter's fumbling words of reaction to the transfiguration in v.4. We reach out and cling to the last fading traces of a great experience — physical and emotional as well as spiritual. *Illustrations:* Wistfulness after a rich worship service ends; sadness when removing party decorations; letdown when arriving home from a gay holiday; exhilaration and moments of "hanging on" while the last notes of a great musical piece fade away.

II. *These flashes soon disappear, and we wonder why*

- A. These flashes soon disappear (v.9). Life is not spent on the mountaintop. Most of it is on the plain. The night of the transfiguration soon passed. Morning came, and it was time for the disciples to come down the mountain with Jesus. Application to our lives is easy and obvious.
- B. We wonder why they must fade so quickly (v.10). V.10 describes the confusion of the disciples. A paraphrase might be: "Evidently you are the Christ, our Messiah. This vision has convinced us that what Simon confessed (16:16) is true. But the scribes interpret Mal.4:5 to say that first Elijah, the great prophet, must return to restore all things. What about that? Where is Elijah? Here we barely see a glimpse of Your glory, and it is gone again. Your vision has faded too quickly. We have not had time to put all the pieces of the Messianic event together." *Application:* We might say: "If Christ is so great and wonderful, as we evidently know from our occasional mountaintop experiences, why must these experiences fade from our view and slip from our grasp so quickly? Why must we so quickly come back to the plain, to words of sin, suffering, and death?"

III. *We wonder why God reveals Himself so strangely*

- A. We cannot see why the glorious Christ must suffer to save us (v.12). As the disciples could not see why Christ's flash of glory must fade so quickly, they could not see what suffering and death had to do with His Messianic work. They consistently ignored or misunderstood Christ's predictions of suffering and death. Cp. Matt. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23. *Application:* For all our preaching of a suffering Savior and the Christ Crucified we too

sometimes still stumble on this and take offense at the preaching of the Cross. (1 Cor. 1:18, 21-25)

- B. We find it difficult to understand how suffering and death can lead to life (vv. 9-12). When Jesus came down from the mountain, He began talking not only about His suffering and death but also about a resurrection (v. 9). The disciples obviously did not comprehend. Cp. Mark 9:10. Jesus did not want them to tell of the vision until the resurrection actually had happened, because they did not understand it (v. 9). They did not see the whole sweep and meaning of the Gospel. They did not have the Pentecostal Spirit so needed for witnessing to a crucified and risen Lord. Cp. Matt. 8:4; 16:20; Mark 3:12; 5:43; 7:36. The fact that the disciples changed the subject from the resurrection (v. 9) to a question about Elijah and about their worries regarding the time sequence of the Messianic work shows how completely they missed the point (v. 10). *Application:* We have similar difficulties with the apparently paradoxical mystery of our faith—how suffering and death can lead to life. *Illustrations:* Paradoxes and mysteries in God's physical world—how the atom can contain so much energy, how God can bring new life to us through reproductive systems, etc. God has His way of revealing His glory.

IV. *The suffering and death of Christ is God's way of giving us hope and life*

- A. God prepares us for His life by showing us our sin and asking us to repent (vv. 11-13). First God shows us our sin and asks us to repent. This was the point of the Elijah-John identification (vv. 11-13). The disciples had not understood God's preparation for the Messianic age through John's preaching. If they had known the Benedictus (Luke 1:17) or had paid attention to an earlier word of Christ (Matt. 11:14), they might not have remained so blind. Because they did not identify John and his message with the predicted Elijah, they were in some respects just as slow to believe as Herod, as the scribes and the Pharisees, who were looking for a literal return of Elijah, as the crowds along the Jordan, and as other curiosity seekers who had attended the words of John. *Application:* The first message of the church—sin and repentance—sometimes falls on deaf ears when it is directed our way also.

B. God then shows us the necessity of Christ's suffering and death (v. 12). As so often before, Christ again after His flash of glory repeated His prediction of suffering and death (v. 12). Thirty per cent of the Four Gospels is concentrated on the events of Holy Week. Cp. our constantly recurring message of the crucified Savior. This is obviously important and necessary. (1 Cor. 2:2)

C. God shows us that His way of hope brings us eternal glory (vv. 9, 13). The transfiguration experience gave the disciples (1) a foretaste of heaven and (2) a limited level of understanding of God's plan of salvation (v. 13). Matt. 17:20 shows that it was still small and limited. God uses His message to give us (1) a knowledge of sin and the chance to repent (vv. 11, 12), (2) faith (v. 13), and (3) forgiveness, life, and a foretaste of heaven (v. 9). The glory of the transfigured Lord can remind us of the glory of the entire life that we have in Christ.

The transfiguration experience somewhat strengthened the disciples' weak faith. It gave them an additional authority of the highest sort and pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, the glorious Son of Man. So our occasional flashes of Christ's glory can momentarily strengthen our faith. Ultimately, however, for hope, life, and the real meaning of God and His forgiveness we need with the disciples to look at Christ's suffering and death for us. This we can do with enthusiasm even after the transfiguration, when we are "down on the plain," in our worship on a relatively unimportant and hot (?) Sunday in July.

Berkeley, Mo.

HAROLD W. SCHEIBERT

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 23:23-33 (esp. vv. 27-30)

"A man may smile and smile and smile and be a villain." Deceit is often not easily detected. Spiritual deceit is the most difficult of all to detect and the most dangerous to identify. It is so difficult because it deals with motives as well as with deeds, so dangerous because it not only rouses the antagonism of the deceiver but also throws doubt on one's own motivation.

Jesus did not hesitate to remove the mask of deceit from spiritual impostors. True, He was in a unique position to do this, but the fact

that He did it shows us that error is not to be condoned, much less enthroned in equal honor with truth.

A man who is spiritually ignorant is to be pitied and taught. A man who is spiritually weak is to be warned, encouraged, and then strengthened. But when spiritual deceit unmasks itself, it is to be roundly condemned. In every case the action to be taken is to flow from within us from love to God and for men.

Our text sounds like a knell upon hypocrisy and deceitful spiritual leadership which not only rejects the message of salvation through Christ but parades virtuous deeds with mean motives cleverly concealed. To the extent that we are guilty we respond with repentance to our text.

The Mask of Deceit

- I. *Judgment falls on those who deceive in spiritual things* (vv. 23, 25, 27, and 29)
 - A. We are sensitive to the woes which Jesus pronounces in our text, because in us also there is the inclination to make religious form and ceremony our refuge and to pretend to virtues by words which we do not possess in motive. (Cf. 1 Peter 2:1,2)
 - B. Fierce zeal for details of tradition or of convention, and willingness to expend time and effort with real devotion for peripheral activities in the church, may conceal a guilty heart or weakness of trust in God. (Vv. 23,25; cf. Matt. 15:3)
 - C. How often we have been impressed by the determination with which some set themselves difficult and presumably devout chores or religious regimens. For them the question must be: Is this what God commands or invites, or is it an attempt at atoning self-torture? Am I zealous for principles but neglectful of people? (V.23; cf. Luke 18:9-14)
 - D. The Pharisees of the text, for all their extraordinary effort, were labeled hypocrites by Jesus. In a number of picturesque phrases Jesus describes the deceit and the futility of their efforts. (Vv. 25,27, and 29)
- II. *We must not follow, foster, or encourage an emphasis on form and letter to the neglect of spirit* (vv. 24,26,28,30, and 31)
 - A. To oppose those who are fiercely zealous for tradition, or to question the wisdom of detailed organization and prodigious planning for efforts relatively unimportant spiritually but emotionally important to some, is to risk slander and misunder-

standing. Note what antagonism both John the Baptist and Jesus encountered. (Luke 7:30; 20:17-19)

- B. To follow in the train of those who dote on outward form but are not sensitive to the spiritual core hurts both us and them. (V.24; 2 Peter 2:1-3)
- C. The Pharisees and scribes were meticulous in their observance of legalistic details devised by men but missed the substance of the Law (Matt. 22:37-39), and opposed the Gospel of forgiveness. (Mark 7:5-9; Matt. 23:13)
- D. They honored the prophets their fathers had killed and tended their graves, but they followed their fathers in persecuting the prophets, yea, the greatest of all prophets, Jesus Himself. (Vv. 29, 30; cf. Matt. 23:34-37)

III. *When we cry for help and mercy as God's "woes" point out our sin (v.33), He hears and helps*

- A. God's true and faithful people abhor hypocrisy but know that they are not immune to the weakness which creates it. We acknowledge our sins. (Prov. 28:13; Psalm 51; Luke 15:21)
- B. We feel the terrifying justice of the challenge "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Rom. 5:12)
- C. By humble, contrite clinging to God's mercy in Jesus Christ, we are assured of forgiveness. How much better this is than hypocrisy! (1 John 1:8-10)
- D. We have no cause for pride or snobbery, but every cause for gratitude to God. (Is. 63:7; Ps. 103:1-3)

We must tear off the mask of deceit if we are to be saved. Hypocrisy and self-pride can only bring destruction. We can bear to have the mask torn off now only if we see forgiveness in the mercy which God has on us because of Christ. Jesus' words and work accomplish salvation.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

EVERARD HINRICHS, executive secretary of the Northwest District, Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, Portland, Oregon.

AUGUST C. REHWALDT, professor of biology, Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wis.