

7-1-1958

Homiletics: Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

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Recommended Citation

Manz, James G. (1958) "Homiletics: Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 29, Article 39.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol29/iss1/39>

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 12:42-48

St. Paul had deep convictions regarding his position and responsibility. "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:1,2, RSV). The supreme responsibility of any minister of Christ is to be faithful in teaching the Word, the Law and the Gospel.

All Christians are priests in God's eyes (1 Peter 2:9). How do we use the Word of God? Do we obey His will in all phases of our life? What about our use of earthly wealth and possessions?

A Faithful and Wise Steward

I. He remembers that he is a slave of Jesus Christ (vv. 42-44)

A. This text brings us a parable of a ruler and master of a large household. The steward is in charge while his lord is away. A most important part of a steward's duty is to give the servants their just portions of food. "Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

B. The steward, then, has a well-defined position and well-defined responsibilities. He is only temporarily "over his household." His status is really that of a "slave"—δοῦλος (v. 43). This is the position of all who are in the kingdom of God. (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19; Catechism, Explanation of the Second Article)

C. The Christian steward, therefore, while a slave of Jesus Christ, is most thankful to his divine Lord for making him a member of His household, His kingdom. St. Paul, the greatest of the apostles, was proud to call himself "a servant [slave] of Jesus Christ." (Rom. 1:1)

D. The deep practical meaning for you and your life. You belong to your Lord and Savior. All that you have you hold in trust for Him. Your knowledge and skills, your investments, deposits, and the money in your pocket; your time and position in life—all have been given to you by the Lord, who has made you His own in Christ. Your present control over your possessions is only temporary.

II. *He is ready to receive his Lord at any time (vv. 45, 46)*

A. The verses preceding this text speak of the second coming of Christ. "Be ye therefore ready also, for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (v. 40). The Lord might return to His household at any time. The steward must be ready to receive Him when He comes. "Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning." (V. 35)

B. Stewards must remember this. The text intimates that there will be temptation to misuse the master's goods and servants. The steward says: "My lord delayeth his coming. . . ." The steward who beats the other servants and overindulges in food and drink is surely not ready to receive his lord.

C. Unfaithful stewards, surprised in sin when the Lord returns, will be severely punished and assigned their lot with the unfaithful. More details regarding the fate of the wicked are given in the account of the last Judgment. (Matt. 25:41-46)

D. Are you ready to face your Lord when He comes? How are you spending your time when you are free to do as you wish? How are you using the property over which you now have control? How do you treat those who are under your influence?

III. *He knows and obeys the principle of reward and punishment (vv. 47, 48)*

A. Those who know their Lord's will and do it not will be severely punished. This is a sobering thought for ministers and for those who have received special training in the Word of God. It shows church members that they must be the leaders in the doing of the Lord's will. Think of what this means for us in the Lutheran Church! We are noted for thorough training in the Bible and Catechism before we are confirmed! "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." (Titus 3:8)

B. Those who do not know His will will be punished for disobedience with few stripes. (See Luke 10:12-15; Rom. 2:11, 12)

C. This principle of reward and punishment concerns highly favored disciples and requires faithfulness and zealous service in the Lord's household. How many talents has He given to you? What are you doing with them? Will He say this to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?" (Matt. 25:21, 23)

D. The true stewardship principle recognizes responsibility to God. Do not compare what you do or give with what another does. It is not hard to find someone with whom we compare very favorably. You are accountable not to man but to the Lord! What will He say concerning what *you* have done with what He has given you?

The Holy Gospel for this day is often considered one of the most difficult of the entire year. The parable of the unjust steward is really full of meaning for us in the light of this text. We must have a Christian understanding of our stewardship obligations. The Law of God is necessary even for believers, who still must fight against their flesh and the devil. "... give an account of thy stewardship" (Luke 16:2). The Lord Himself asks you to do this. Are you an honest, responsible, and generous steward of Jesus Christ?

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 11:20-24

"The Hub of the Universe," nickname applied to Boston; has its origin in Oliver Wendell Holmes's provincial statement that "Boston Statehouse is the hub of the solar system."

Worthier of that title is Capernaum, "Jesus' own city," from which His ministry radiated in all directions into all the world. J. Ylvisaker (*The Gospels*, p. 434) calls Capernaum "the crib of the heavenly Jerusalem and the cradle of the kingdom of God."

Nevertheless, an instance of seeing and *not* believing. Capernaum and Jerusalem (cf. Gospel), together with some of the satellites of the Capernaum-Jerusalem axis, loom before us in rubbled ruin and ominous warning, teaching us not to neglect and so forfeit our spiritual advantages.

NOTE. Preachers who prefer another introduction are reminded (a) that August 10 is St. Lawrence's Day, the commemoration of a third-century deacon and martyr of the Church at Rome (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, p. 574), for which the German *Agenda* of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod provided propers, and (b) that seventeenth century and later Lutherans recalled the fulfillment of the prophecy of Our Lord in the Gospel for the Day (St. Luke 19:41-48) by reading the "History of the Destruction of Jerusalem" at vespers on this Sunday (the text of the "History" will be found in many German Lutheran hymnals).

Spiritual Opportunities—Use Them, or Lose Them

I. *Woe unto them who waste their opportunities and the gifts of the Spirit* (cf. Epistle)

A. The same Christ who came to Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida is marching up and down the avenues of our communities. Jesus comes to us individually. What kind of reception do we give Him? He never forces His way into our lives; we can ignore Him. (Cf. G. Studdert Kennedy's poem "Indifference")

B. Few church members are in danger of deliberately rejecting Christ. We seldom decide to run Jesus out of our lives. As someone has expressed it: "We seldom lose our religion by a blowout; it is generally by a slow leak." Another: "I never consciously gave up a religious belief. It was as if I had put my beliefs in a drawer, and when I opened it, there was nothing there at all."

C. We become so involved with a variety of interests, so tangled up with the matters of this world, that Jesus is squeezed out. 1 Kings 20:40: "Thy servant was busy here and there." We miss the boat. Story of mine explosion, sealing off miners in gas-filled prison from which no escape. After ambulances had carried away lifeless bodies of 80 men, grimy rescuer emerged with scribbled notes found beside bodies of victims. Each had its own pathetic message. Name of God was prominent in most. One read simply, "Have the baby baptized, and be sure to go to church." In face of death men frequently say what should have been said in the midst of life. Beware of procrastination.

D. Church people develop a false sense of security. They point with pride to their having been baptized and/or confirmed by this or that prominent pastor. Speak in glowing terms of their pious forebears. All the while they may be drifting far from the cross. The gifts they have received rust in disuse. They speak in matter-of-fact way about all they learned of Christian doctrine in day school or confirmation class. But woe unto us when we can talk of the Passion of our Lord and Savior in even tones and think of Calvary with a quiet pulse! (Cf. Ezek. 33:31, 32)

E. The farmer neglects his field, and he loses his harvest. The student neglects his studies, and he fails. The businessman neglects his business, and he goes bankrupt. The church member neglects the things of the Spirit, and he loses his own soul. The farmer may not throw acid on his soil or plant weeds. The student may not get drunk every week end. The businessman may not be dishonest. The church member may not actively oppose Christ. But they all fail because they fritter away their opportunities.

F. There comes an end to the day of grace and opportunity. Jesus may knock at heart's door more than once, but finally He comes in

judgment. Then woe unto those who have "neglected so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3)! At the end they force the loving Christ to say, "Thou shalt be brought down to hell" (v. 23). They make the cross their gangplank to hell. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:17)

II. Blessed are they who "know . . . in this their day" (cf. Gospel) and use their opportunities

A. Our advantages in our day of grace even greater than those of Capernaum et al. Ours is the whole Bible, the completed work of Christ, the entire Gospel of grace, the church with all its ministrations, and the cloud of witnesses. We have golden opportunities. Luke 12:48: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

B. Welcome Christ into your heart and home and life. Feed on the Bread of life. Use the Word. Read devotional literature. Partake frequently of the Sacrament.

C. As you think of the terrible consequences of spurning God's grace, find comfort and courage in today's Introit: "God . . . shall hear my voice . . . deliver my soul . . . from the battle." He will "give ear to my prayer. . . . He shall sustain me!"

D. Our thoughts and emotions before the cross, if they are Spirit-filled, will become motives and drives. They will lead to devoted service of Jesus. (Spell out a few specific opportunities for service.) We will use the gifts of God to His glory. Col. 2:6: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." Even as Jesus, while it was day, was bent on working the works of Him that sent Him, so will we.

May your day of grace become a day of glory! Live under the power of Jesus' cross! Hold that cross before your dying eyes!

Cleveland, Ohio

BERTWIN FREY

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 23:1-12

You and I would much rather hear someone else receive words of reproof and condemnation than hear ourselves reproved and admonished. To hear someone else rebuked in a way makes us feel good because we infer that we are much better than the one admonished.

If we read the words of our text in such a way, we will obtain

little value. To hold up our hands in horror because of the sins of the Pharisees, whom Christ condemns, is valueless. Rather in the light of that condemnation we must ask ourselves:

What About Our Personal Godliness?

I. *What is its standard?*

A. We have two choices—the Word of God or what others (teachers, society, associates, etc.) say or do. In our language, our views on morality and divorce, etc., we can follow the crowd and public opinion or the Word of God. Who has not heard as an excuse for an action, "But, mother, they are all doing it!"

B. For personal godliness we must make the Word of God our standard of faith and actions. We must beware of the standard of society, the world, or even religious leaders. Go back again and again to the Scriptures—in private reading of Bible, Bible classes, and the like.

If we do not, we tend to become legalistic and loveless (v.4). To turn from the Word of God will change all of the Bible into Law that never lightens man's burden of sin, for we shall be blind to the Savior and to His Gospel, even as were the scribes and Pharisees.

II. *Does it include both faith and resulting action?*

A. Christ condemned the Pharisees because their godliness did not include both faith and resulting good works.

B. Christ today condemns dead orthodoxy (faith without works, James 2:14 ff.) and self-righteousness (striving for works without faith in Jesus). Much of what is called Christianity today lacks power because it falls into one of these two categories.

C. We must take heed to have a godliness that flows from faith in Jesus, who died for us and in whom we have forgiveness. We have no power for godliness if we are satisfied with dead orthodoxy or with liberalism. To boast of a faith that does not show itself in good works is hypocrisy and self-deceit. No godliness without a Savior; but with a Savior we have godliness.

III. *Does it recognize Christ as the Master and others as brethren?*

A. A real threat to personal godliness is pride and self-seeking. Godliness cannot exist where these are present. The case of the Pharisees (vv.5-7). Self-exaltation is an offense in the Christian Church. All self-seeking in church members and officers, in our personal human relationships, we must avoid.

B. Godliness is humble, recognizing Christ as the Master and one another as brethren. We all sit at the feet of Jesus as Teacher. Our godliness is a service to Jesus. Even those in a position of leadership in the church remember that Christ is the Master and follow Christ's leadership, looking on the fellow Christians as brethren.

C. The Lord both warns and encourages us to have this type of godliness by declaring: v. 12.

IV. *Does it reveal itself in service?*

A. Godliness in relation to our fellow men shows itself in service (v. 11; Matt. 20:26). Here is the mark of true greatness. Here we, however, run counter to the general practice of the people of this world.

B. Therefore in examining our personal godliness, we need to ask: Am I ready to serve my fellow Christians, my fellow men? Our church work, all our activity in the family as well as at work, will have the end and goal of serving one another. To grow in personal godliness is to grow in service to one another. Mention of local opportunities and areas of Christian service.

What about your personal godliness? Lest we become guilty of becoming like the Pharisees whom Christ condemned, we must evaluate and re-evaluate our godliness in the light of these four questions.

Springfield, Ill.

LEWIS NIEMOELLER

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 5:33-37

The Gradual for this Sunday sets the theme as well as any that we could possibly formulate. We have in it the use to which the tongue is urged in praise of God; the sincerity with which this is to be done in that it is the soul that does it; and the purpose that it will serve in that the humble hear of it and are made glad. Nor should the Gospel of Christ's loosing the tongue of the man born deaf and dumb be ignored. We may confidently assume that Jesus loosed his tongue for the purpose for which the deaf man used it—to glorify God. Jesus still does the same also for us, so that with Paul in the Standard Epistle for this Sunday we not only can but must confidently state: "By the grace of God I am what I am." This being what we are by grace is evidenced by the use to which we put our tongue. Because we are what we are by the grace of God, ours is

The Christian Tongue

I. It gives expression not merely to a high type of morality

A. The sayings by them of old time. These were the gathered interpretations of the Scriptures which formed the ethics of the Jews. They took the basic commands of God and tried to explain them in all the wide variety of applications which might arise. This is a perfect expression of legalism and the legalistic spirit to this day, also within our church.

B. The powerlessness of all such sayings. They cannot possibly cover every case and as a result permit convenient exceptions. They are always merely "sayings," that is, "letter," which cannot give life. To consult these sayings, ancient or modern, in order to determine a course of action, to establish the limits to which one can go, is in itself a denial of the indwelling Spirit of God.

NOTE. In this section the very obvious application is the living by Law that some would still identify with living in the faith of Christ. Here arise all the hurts in the church. The tongue is not Christian that still attempts to live by precept.

II. It is moved solely by Christ

A. He sets Himself up in contrast to all mere sayings. This is almost the central emphasis here, Christ's "But I say unto you." If we do not know Him beyond Teacher, Guide, Model, Example, there is no reason why the "but" here should carry any particular meaning for us, much less any reason why we should heed it beyond the sayings of old time.

B. He deepens and broadens the sinfulness of sin. Legalism often escapes condemnation because it fulfills its own simple demands. Under the revelation of Christ here, no one escapes, however well he keeps the sayings. The fact of the matter is that with or without an oath not one ever perfectly expresses what he truly is, none except Christ. This is condemnation of everything that we say apart from Christ.

C. He is what He asks of us, and He enables us to be like Him in His self-giving. This is what is often missed in our hearing of Christ. We think that He sets up a higher ethics, a tighter moralism. But His real message is Gospel, and what He asks of us is enabling in that He furnishes the power in faith to be and do what is asked.

NOTE. In this section we must develop Christ's approach to us so that everything begins with the Person who is here addressing us. Otherwise we are likely to preach a new, even Christian, Law and drive people to despair.

It is the Savior who reveals Himself here and offers Himself to us to save us from our sins of the tongue and enable us to glorify God as our tongue is Christian, that is, as it expresses the faith that is in us.

III. *It shows forth the glory of God*

A. It sees everything in relation to God. Here vv. 34-36 should be developed. We say nothing about anything that does not give expression of our relationship to God and our faith in God's relationship to us.

B. It gives expression to Christ-in-us. This is the only reason why we can ever let our conversation be a simple yes and a simple no. Otherwise our conversation would still proceed from our old selves, and this would also be of evil.

NOTE: Here is where mention should be made of "Whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." There are times when the oath is demanded, but only because we are still involved in an unregenerate society, the kingdom of this world. But it is never of our own will that we swear. It is always because of need outside ourselves—government and love of the brother. Knowledge of this in itself is an indication that the tongue is Christian and gives expression to the new man, the Christ in us by faith.

As great a danger as any to which we are exposed is the danger of expressing something else than faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is our motive and our power. Faith in Christ alone guides the tongue. Otherwise it is not Christian. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is what makes for a Christian tongue.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 12:41-44

Baptist parson Roy McLain writes: "Last year a thief broke into my office study and with rude hands pried open drawers, rummaged through desk and papers, and scattered things in whirlwind fashion all over the place. Pictures were removed from the wall during the search for anything of value. But one picture over a kneeling altar was left untouched: Sallman's 'Head of Christ,' beneath which a light burns all the time. That picture was left untouched. Was it that the thief, seeing those honest eyes, was arrested in his burglary? I know not—all I know is that it was left in its place without being touched. The same eyes look down in penetrating grief and wrath upon those who, while plundering through God's world, selfishly snatch for themselves the good things without acknowledging His divine right."

It was the eyes of the Lord Jesus which long ago beheld the multitude throwing their gifts into the treasury chest. Those same eyes are still watching:

The Quality and the Quantity of Our Gifts

I. *Jesus observes how we place our gifts into His treasury (entire text)*

A. Jesus is not primarily comparing sums but hearts.

1. The widow's gift was a genuine sacrifice of thanksgiving.
2. Gifts of the rich showed unwillingness to sacrifice. They gave leftovers—from the top, not the bottom, of their pockets.

B. The quality of the gift makes it more or less in the eyes of God.

C. Faith is essential to bring quality into your gift. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."

1. Faith in the sacrifice of Christ. This is the only sacrifice of propitiation. Our sacrifices are sacrifices of thanksgiving—no more *and* no less.
2. Also faith in God to provide. "Seek ye first the Kingdom . . . and all these things shall be added unto you." God's promise is, "And whatsoever he [the righteous man] doeth shall prosper."

D. The widow had no thought of praise. She was not aware of the physical eyes of Jesus or any other eyes looking upon her. Her only thought was to give her whole living to God. The quality of her gift remains unsurpassed. Yet she was completely humble about it—perhaps even apologetic. Even her name is unrecorded. Thereby God honors all nameless individuals who give of themselves.

E. The fact that the place for gifts was outside the temple may suggest the thought "No praying without paying"—not that we must pay to make our prayers efficacious but that when a person prays, "Thy will be done," he is asking for his own hands to be opened, and his pocketbook along with them.

F. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." We hear no complaint, no moan, and no "gripe" from the widow's mouth. It was an act of joy.

G. Jesus knows the quality of our gifts as He knew that two mites were all the widow's living.

II. Jesus also observes what we place into the treasury

- A. Quantity is secondary to quality, but it is important. In the text Jesus mentions the amounts.**
- B. Quantity calls for the decision "How much." This should not be too difficult after we have determined the *how*.**
 1. The time-honored suggestion is the tithe. Abraham tithed before Mosaic law of the tithe. Many New Testament Christians have found the tithe a practical answer to the question of quantity of giving. Many do much more—some less. God makes no prescription.
 2. An interesting question—Did Jesus tithe? We do not know—but we do know He never criticized the tithe. Matt. 23:23—"and not to leave the other [the tithe] undone." The scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for breaking many Mosaic laws—but they never criticized Him for failing to tithe.
 3. God looks not only at "how much" but at "from how much it is given." (Matt. 10:8; 1 Cor. 16:2; Luke 12:48)
 4. In determining how much, it is again important to remember that self-consecration precedes wealth consecration. The example of the Macedonians, who first gave themselves, could be cited.
- C. Should we discuss the question of witnessing to others of our gifts? When we tell others what we do, it must be in the spirit of sharing our joy—not boasting or bragging. We witness of our joy in the sacrifice of Christ which forgives and saves, and our joy in the sacrifice of thanksgiving which we bring in terms of time and talent. Is it wrong to witness of the sacrifice of our treasure? Tithers usually witness humbly and joyfully. They share their joy with others.**

Jesus alone is capable of judging the quality and quantity of our gifts. But He does judge. He says we cannot serve God and mammon. He wants us to give in a manner and in an amount that shows where our love and faith is. "To give" is the fruit of love and faith—necessary fruit. God so loved the world that He gave—He did not lend, borrow, complain, tip, or hold back. He gave, and thereby He set the pace and example for us.

Baltimore, Md.

GEORGE H. SOMMERMEYER