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Homiletics: Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 11:25-30

Prominently displayed in one of the corridors of the Lutheran Hospital in St. Louis is a copy of A. B. Thorwaldsen's "The Blessing Christ." There it has assuaged grief, given comfort, and bestowed strength on sufferers for many years. With it the words of our text have become so inextricably connected that for many it is impossible to think of the one without being reminded of the other.

As we give our devout attention to this text, let us fix our mind's eye on the

Outstretched Arms of Our Savior

I. His great love for all mankind

A. At first glance the invitation to the laboring and heavy laden seems to be restrictive. Actually Christ has no help for those who are full of themselves. The church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:17) considered itself rich. The rich young ruler was convinced that he lacked nothing (Matt. 19:20). The Pharisee in the temple was proud of his own righteousness. (Luke 18:10-12)

B. Upon closer scrutiny these words are quite inclusive. Careful self-analysis and study of others will show that all have burdens and suffer from fears and anxieties. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7). Education, power, wealth, or success cannot prevent cares and troubles. Our Lord wants men to recognize their weakness and need so that He can apply the only cure.

C. The same thought is stressed in the "babes" (v.25). Not the way of wisdom or prudence but "becoming as little children" brings us to Him who can fill us with His wisdom and strength. Not a doctorate from a university, not a diploma from college or high school, not even a graduation certificate from the eighth grade qualifies anyone, but of children is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

The entrance to the ancient Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem has been constructed in such a way that only children can enter walking erect. All others bend low. Only by becoming children can we enter the Kingdom (Matt. 18:4). Suppose that God had established any

other requirement for entrance to the Kingdom. Some would surely have been excluded. In this way none are. The outstretched arms actually say: "Come unto Me, all."

Have we let our Lord speak this invitation to all? Or are there areas (the better sections of the community, for example) where we have deliberately refrained from bringing our witness? Have we evaded the slums because we have no message for the down-and-outer? The Lord rejects no one (the woman taken in adultery; the woman at the well of Sychar); nor should we.

II. *The arms outstretched on Calvary's cross won salvation full and free*

A. Not only all men's sins but all sins of men were paid for. Can't see the arms outstretched in invitation without remembering that they were outstretched on the cross to make this invitation possible.

B. Men are forever running away from God. Blind, dead, enemy is natural man.

C. The revelation of the Father in Christ draws men (v. 27). Lifted up, draws all men (John 12:32). The only Way, Truth, Life (John 16:6). The Word and the Sacraments bring us the Gospel.

D. The Father's good pleasure (v. 26). The Son's will to reveal (v. 27). These are the cause of our salvation. God reaching from heaven. No decision on our part. Even our coming is possible only because His invitation makes it possible. At the tomb of Lazarus "Come forth" bestowed power. "Come" bestows power also here to fulfill its requirement. How great God's grace, which has done all, even bestowing the ability to come! How reprehensible to refuse such an invitation! The hymn "Just as I Am" should be our prayer.

III. *The outstretched arms support us for burden bearing*

A. He who invites and makes possible our accepting His invitation also gives us the strength to discipline our life for Him. Living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1)

B. Being a Christian implies a yoke. The chasuble represents the yoke of Christ. We are "yoke fellows."

C. But all Christ's discipline is designed for our blessing and benefit. No real burden, but what is conducive to our Christian life and benefit.

D. Rest unto your souls. The ultimate bliss of heaven, of course. But also peace of mind here.

Do you view God's will in your life as working together for your good, or do you conceive of it as an infringement upon your liberty?

Is your greatest delight and happiness hoping for the life to come and having your souls stayed on Him? The mark of the Christian is his yoke bearing.

The incident of Christ pointing to His disciples (Matt. 12:50) and noting those as related to Him who do the will of His Father in heaven. He wants you to come to accept and bear His burden. Will you?

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 6:19-23

The Lord Jesus gave such high standards for the behavior of His Christians that some thinkers have guessed He did not quite mean them and that Christians will have to settle for something halfway. Halfway our efforts may be, for this side of the grave we shall always sin; but may Jesus help us never to settle for the halfway! For the purpose of His teaching is that we see the tremendous goals and the grand design of God's people and thus ever be encouraged to reach out for help to reach those goals. That yearning to reach God's goals we call prayer; and this text is part of the Savior's great training on prayer. Here He reminds us that

Our Life Is as Good as Our Heart's Desire

Therewith He makes the goal of Christian living even higher than we might have wanted it to be. Our life is what we want, the wanting of it; see to it that you want what God wants!

I. *The importance of the desire of the heart*

A. Jesus uses two pictures to describe the importance for our lives of our inner selves and their desires.

1. Treasure. What a man works for to save and prize denotes the real objective of his heart (v.21). He spends time and effort to get it; he is much concerned to keep it for himself when he has it.
2. The eye. If its vision is clear, the individual knows where he is going; there is "light" and understanding for his way.

B. These pictures confront us with a drastic alternative for our own inner lives.

1. The alternative is eternal life or corruption; heaven and the permanent control and guidance of God or decay.

2. The alternative is light or darkness. Our behavior is not simply satisfying outward demands of behavior, but it is the vision and sureness of the inner man. When that inner self is cluttered and straying, "the whole body is full of darkness."
3. Jesus confronts *us* with an imperative for action. We have to lay up treasures in the right place, show whether we are rich toward God and want things His way and want to share His life or whether we are in love with corrupt things and therefore our own life is corrupt. (Cf. Luke 12:13-21)

II. Hence the important prayer that God shape the desires of our heart

A. Jesus' pictures relate to the inner will of prayer; He has just taught the Lord's Prayer and has discussed two facets of good prayer — the will to forgive and the sincerity and humility of good prayer. (Vv. 14-18)

B. Laying up treasure and seeing are actions which consume the entire person. Hence He is counseling to the inner attitude of heart out of which the life with God can grow.

C. His counsel is simultaneously goal for behavior and means by which the goal is to be gained. To "lay up treasure in heaven" is to exercise the self-discipline by which God becomes supreme in life. Heaven is not just after the grave but the rule of God at work now and that rule for which we pray in every good prayer (v. 10). In Jesus' words in Luke 11:13 it is prayer for the Holy Spirit, the urgent demand to possess God Himself and His rule in the heart.

D. Two things go together in this self-discipline: the one is the urgent desire, which is reinforced by the realization that anything else is folly and death (vv. 19-23), with the goal of worms and decay; the other is the search for God where He may be found, the turning to His grace in Christ Jesus. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; Ps. 37:4-6)

E. Hence the prayer life which supports "the good life" is ceaselessly busy contemplating the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, what He did to claim our hearts and lives and to give us His kingdom. But this is coupled with the concern that this work of Christ take hold in our inner selves and bend them to God's purposes, so that our whole inner self becomes light and we truly are "lights of the world." (Matt. 5:14)

Today's Epistle is a challenge to put the lordship of Christ, which

He gained over us through His blood, to work in our care for one another's spiritual welfare. Then let us not simply imitate His desires superficially but draw on Him to shape our desires His way.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 11:1-44 (Read vv. 20-27)

The Gospel for this 16th Sunday after Trinity shows a familiar scene—funeral procession—"dead man carried out"—followed by "a widow and much people of the city." It is a scene as old as the day when "sin entered into the world and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12). No biological, chemical, or medical research has found, or ever will find, anything to halt such claims of death. Funeral processions will continue through rural and urban streets, accompanied by weeping and mourning relatives and friends. But our text for this morning fixes attention upon one, who, walking this earth over 19 centuries ago, lorded it over death as if it were a mere toy in His hand.

It Is Jesus, the Lord of Death

"Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick" (11:3) was obviously a plea for help. V. 5 shows that Jesus fully understood their unspoken plea. Yet note His reaction:

I. He deliberately lets death approach to set the stage for Him

A. He knows. Paraphrasing v. 4, Jesus said in effect: "In this case death will be disappointed. It will not be able to hold its victim. I shall use death in this case to reveal My glory as the Son of God." And so—

B. He waits. "He abode two days still in the same place where He was" (v. 6). Even as God of old gave Satan leave to approach Job, saying, "Behold, he is in thine hand" (Job 2:6), so Jesus here gives the nod to death and sits back. Deliberately He waits two days for death to lay its cold finger upon His friend Lazarus. The whole scene, with its calm, deliberate action, speaks of a lordship, before which death cowers and shrinks and does not dare to lift a finger without the Lord's consent. How calmly we can look upon the issues of life and say with the psalmist: "Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand." (Ps. 31:15)

II. *He boldly and confidently goes to assert His claim over death*

A. He goes. After two days of waiting He bestirs Himself and says, "Let's go" (v. 7). Nor is there any mistaking His purpose. "Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep" (v. 11). Oh, Lazarus was really dead (v. 14), but to the Lord the dead are like sleepers that only need awakening.

B. He relishes the opportunity. We detect a hidden elation in the Lord. "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there" (v. 15). Seeing an opportunity to reveal His glory and build up faith in His disciples, He goes as one who feels His strength and flexes His muscles. No thought of failure! He already rejoices over the end. The whole thing echoes the inner conviction He voiced previously: "I lay down My life that I might take it again. . . ." (Ch. 10:17, 18)

C. He asserts His claim. "Thy brother shall rise again," He says to Martha (v. 23). And while Martha may be quite willing to postpone it to the Last Day, not He. I imagine that at this point Jesus straightened His shoulder and lifted His voice a bit and then boldly made this startling claim: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. . . ." (Vv. 25, 26.) And note, after that Jesus Himself felt the bite and fang of death in His own body, but on Easter morn He "was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4). And so—

III. *He speaks and it is done*

A. He speaks. "Where have ye laid him?" (v. 34) signaled the time for action.

"Take ye away the stone" (v. 39) indicated His bold intent. Nor was He the least intimidated by Martha's remark "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (v. 39). It would only heighten His glory. Even His prayer is not a petition but an outpouring of gratitude and confidence, spoken for the benefit of the people that stood by (v. 42). And then the loud cry: "Lazarus, come forth!" (V. 43)

B. It is done. "He that was dead came forth" (v. 44). Whether dead or alive, whether animate or inanimate, whether whole or decayed, when Jesus speaks, it is done.

"Believest thou this?" (v. 26). There lies your and my cue. Accept this Jesus as Lord of life and death; know that your times are completely in His hand and that life's riddles are all solved for you.

Corvallis, Oreg.

A. W. SCHELP

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 8:31-36

Freedom! What a wonderful gift! For this men have left home and familiar surroundings to find a new home. For this men have fought wars. This gift some cherish more than life itself — "Give me liberty, or give me death."

The Freedom of the Christian

I. *What is it?*

A. Not freedom to sin (v. 34). Some imagine real freedom consists in being free from restrictions of God's Law. "I'll do as I please." Like teen-agers who can't wait till they get out from under restrictions of home, these spiritual adolescents think they are free when they flout God's Law. Miserable, blind slaves of sin! (Rom. 6:19.) Here Christ includes sin of unbelief. Unbelievers sometimes "pity" believers, who are "restricted" by their Christianity. Imagine they are free because they are not bound by the Word. Some call themselves "free thinkers." This is not freedom! Still under sin and dominion of Satan. (V. 34)

B. But freedom from sin and its curse (v. 32). Result of work of Christ (v. 36). A spiritual freedom. Freedom from (1) bondage of sin (Rom. 6:18-23); (2) love of world and fear of men (1 John 5:4, 5); (3) fear of condemnation (Rom. 8:1) and fear of death (1 Cor. 15:55-57). This freedom enables us to serve God (Rom. 6:18). True freedom. (V. 36)

II. *Who has it?*

A. The believer in Christ, who continues in the Word (v. 31). His Word cleanses us and enables us to bear fruit for Him. (John 15:3-5)

B. But not the believer in name only (vv. 33-35 a). These Jews claimed to be children of God because they were sons of Abraham. Went through motions of worship, but did not believe in Christ. They thought they were free, but they were still under bondage. (They understood that Christ referred to spiritual freedom, for they did not mention yoke of Romans, under which they were at this time.) Those who claim to be believers today, whether inside or outside the church, but do not believe in Christ, do not have this freedom. Such will be cast out. (V. 35 a; Matt. 7:21-23)

III. *Why is it important?*

A. Because it is one of the rewards of true discipleship (vv. 31, 32). We shall know the truth. Errors will be corrected; prejudices, doubts, and uncertainties will be removed; the darkness of ignorance will be scattered. The light of truth will shine into our hearts; understanding will be deepened; spiritual views will be enlarged; ability to distinguish truth from error will be improved. Besides this, the truth will make us free from the curse of sin. See I B. This is one reward of discipleship. It pays to be a Christian.

B. Because it assures us of eternal life (vv. 35 b, 36). Christ is the eternal Son of God. Came to give us that freedom which men cannot give. This freedom not a temporary reward of man's efforts. The person who wants to be saved by his own efforts will be cast out like Ishmael (Gal. 4:21-31). But if we believe in Christ, who is the Heir and the Son of God, we shall receive from Him the gift of eternal life (John 3:16, 36). Indeed a most precious possession!

IV. *How is it preserved?*

A. By continuing in His Word (v. 31). Gospel is meant. It is the means of grace which produces and preserves the faith which receives this freedom. Don't think you are free when you start skipping church and neglecting the Sacrament. True, it requires a certain discipline to continue in the Word, but that is how this freedom is preserved.

B. By daily repentance. Because we are still in this world, and because we are what we are, we still sin every day. Let us repent daily and turn to Christ for forgiveness. The Son shall make us free indeed. (V. 36)

Let us prove our repentance by avoiding sin (v. 34). Freedom from the curse of sin does not give us license to sin (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). With help of God, let us avoid sin lest we be entangled again in chains of sin. Let us be servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18) that we may be free. "A runaway horse is not free. It runs into bruises, exhaustion, beating, subjugation. The locomotive leaping the track is not free. It leaps only to wreck and the scrapheap." The horse is free that pulls an honest load and goes home to good food and kind treatment. The locomotive is free that stays on the track and triumphantly pulls its load into the terminal. Let us then live a sincere Christian life, keeping "on the track" of the Word of Christ, and we shall triumphantly go to our eternal home.

Riverside, Calif.

WILLIAM GRAUMANN