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Homiletics: Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Swedish Gospels (Alternate Series)

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 4:21-25

Once again we are gathered round the Word. Christians sometimes look upon such assembling as duty only. It is a duty. Third Commandment. But great blessings come when duty fulfilled (Luke 11:28). Great blessings in the Word. Power. Power to shine out from Christian hearts and illuminate others. Power to build within the hearer grace and virtue. Today consider:

The Word Has Two-Way Reaching Power

I. The Word reaches outward and enlightens others

A. It reaches out through the hearer, who is a lightbearer.

1. The Christian is like a lighted candle, or lamp (v.21). A lamp is not placed under a bed, or bushel. Bushel = flour bin; today's equivalent: canister.
2. In like manner "Ye are the light of the world . . . cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). Christ came to be the Light of men. The great Teacher, the great Savior, said: "I am the Light of the world." His character, His deeds, His whole life—an illumination from heaven. Christians, illuminated by the light of His radiant Word, become lightbearers. The light reaches outward, through them.

B. Reaching outward through the Christian, it will not remain hidden.

1. V. 22. Christ is unwilling that the mysteries of His Word should remain concealed. They should be revealed. The secrets of the Gospel are to shine forth in all the world. (Cp. Eph. 3:3-6)
2. The world desperately needs that Gospel light, revelation. Without it the world is without hope; without it the world lives unhappily, goes insane, commits suicide, digs own grave. Let the light shine, that all in this great dark house of humanity may see their way to God. Receive a blessing from the Word; be a blessing through the Word.

II. *The Word reaches inward and gives increasing strength and grace*

A. It does this according to the measure it is "meted out."

1. V. 24. For same term cp. Matt. 7:2 (measuring out judgment) and Luke 6:38 (measuring out offerings). Cp. also 2 Cor. 9:6. Example: According to the measure in which a Christian "metes out" forgiveness will he be forgiven (Matt. 6:14, 15). Cp. Gospel for today: The Unmerciful Servant, refusing to forgive, receives no forgiveness.
2. Therefore take heed what (and how, Luke 8:18) ye hear. Bring a full measure of attention and eagerness to hear the Word; Jesus will return an even fuller measure of precious, saving truth and grace, pressed down, shaken together, running over, giving the hearer ever-increasing strength and grace. The Holy Spirit is at work, mightily, through it.

B. It does this according to the measure in which it is possessed and used.

1. V. 25. Cp. same use of term in Matt. 25:29, parable of Talents. "Hath not" = does not use. Power and effect of Word diminishes by neglect, nonuse. Spiritual strength becomes enfeebled by disuse. — "If you do not *use* the Word, you will *lose* it." Christ and His grace and strength lost to those who are neglectful.
2. Example: He that "hath not" the Word, has no anchor, no trust, in the day of trouble and disaster. (Cp. context, v. 35 ff.). He that brings no empty, hungry heart to Jesus to hear His "Peace, be still" and His repeated "Fear not," from him will be taken the little trust that he has. But to Him who possesses and uses the Word diligently, Christ gives increasing inner strength and grace. (LH, 385, 1—4)

Therefore "if any man have ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 23). Unreceptive hearer — a poor lightbearer for Christ — and decreasing inner strength and grace. Bring to God, instead, a heart honestly and earnestly desiring the Word. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, "that by patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which is given us in our Savior Jesus Christ."

Peoria, Ill.

THEODORE TEYLER

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 7:12

How long has it been since you have given earnest thought to the privileges which you enjoy as a citizen of the land in which you live? Must we not all admit that it is so easy to become utterly indifferent about them, to overlook them, to underemphasize them, to take them for granted, to treat them with disrespect, to take very little time in our lives to consider their true value and worth? If someone asked us earnestly: "Do you really think that you are a truly patriotic citizen?" what would you answer? What evidence would you present to witness to your patriotism? Have you waved any flags lately? Have you sat down recently to remind your children of the glory of their national heritage? Have you prayed earnestly for persons in authority? Have you thought a little about past and present history in our land to glory in the blessings of liberty and freedom? How concrete, how real is your patriotism? How practical is it in your daily life?

Surely these are questions which can rightfully engage the attention and thought of Christians. Need make no apology for thinking about these things as the children of God. Fitting and proper that we should give them earnest consideration. This we propose to do, under the blessing of the Spirit of God, as we consider:

When Will Our Patriotism Be Truly Practical?

I. *When such patriotism is intimately bound together with our religion*

A. The Golden Rule, as our text is often described, is a practical statement of the application of religion to life.

1. This rule was given to Christians. Only those who stand in a proper relationship to God will have any real interest in the true import of this rule. Only those who have found how the substance of this rule asserts itself in the great love of God for us in Christ Jesus will be interested in the application of this principle to their lives.
2. This rule became truly "golden" in the life, experience, and ministry of our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ. His life is the Golden Rule in practice. How wonderfully the essence of this practical rule asserts itself in His final sacrifice for us upon the cross! There He, in the fullness of absolute love, in obedience to His Father's will, truly applied the practical principle and ideal of the Golden Rule to the full. It was the high ideal of His life!

3. This rule can become a real part of our lives only when we are really ready to walk in the footsteps of our Savior and are His true followers. The rule is not an end in itself. The rule is not the substance of religion itself. It provides the directive in Christ as to how a Christian will want to express his religion.
- B. True religion always involves the sincere appreciation of a solemn social responsibility.
 1. The whole heart of the Golden Rule is the emphasis upon our relationship to others and the responsibility which evolves from that relationship.
 2. If the highest principles of Christian patriotism are to be worked out in a country, community, city, or neighborhood, they must stem from our concern for the welfare of the whole of society.
 3. In the practice of this rule as Christians the things which we earnestly desire most for ourselves as citizens are the things we most certainly desire for every other man, woman, and child in the society of which we are a part.
- II. *When such patriotism is founded on a sense of personal responsibility*
 - A. Personal responsibility for the welfare of others is the heart of the Golden Rule. It lays the whole matter squarely upon the shoulders of the individual.
 1. It is so very easy for us to think of patriotism only as an attitude, only as the manifestation of a spirit, only in terms of the broad issues which are related to our country and its history.
 2. It is so easy for us to think of patriotism only in terms of what we may do by way of duty to the government such as paying taxes, serving in Armed Forces, occupying political office, even carrying out certain duties which politics may impose upon us.
 3. It is so easy to think of patriotism only in terms of the things which a mass of people together or which the government may accomplish and perform.
 4. Real welfare in any area of life begins with the sense of personal responsibility.

B. The sense of personal responsibility alone can lead us to make something truly practical.

1. We will labor and pray for the things which become our obligation.
2. We will not shift obligations to the shoulders of others.
3. We will not be satisfied to let others shoulder the obligation alone.

Can you name anyone right now whom you consider to be truly patriotic? Do you feel very often that real patriotism is dead? Do you ever say to yourself: "My patriotism is not needed?" Have you ever tried to think of your patriotism in terms of its most practical expression? Will you think of it from this time forward in terms of the Golden Rule as a Christian and child of God?

St. Charles, Mo.

ERICH V. OELSCHLAGER

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 6:37-40

Tom Johnson had just bought \$10,000 worth of life insurance. The agent had left the home. He told his wife, "It gives you a comfortable feeling." Then little Tommy asked, "Does life insurance mean you're not gonna die?" This set Tom and Mary thinking. They thought, studied, and prayed until they found God's insurance of eternal life as we have it in our text:

God's Assurance of Eternal Life

I. *By giving us the essential blessings of eternal life here and now (v. 40)*

A. We already have eternal life itself (v. 40 b)

Jesus in text wants to prove that it was not up to the people but to God whether they would follow Him. Eternal life in Him is from God. A proof and assurance of this is seen in the blessings of eternal life we already have.

Our text says clearly we already have eternal life. We have it in the peace of God that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

The fact that we have heaven's essential blessings here is God's lay-away plan, even as the department stores have such

plans, especially before Christmas, to prove to us that we shall have the full blessings of heaven in eternity.

B. We already have our body (v. 40 c)

When Jesus says, "I will raise him up at the Last Day" (and this is a repetition of what we have in v. 39), then He must be referring to our body. The resurrection of the body is decisively taught in 1 Corinthians 15.

Thus the promise that our body shall live forever in the life beyond is a blessed assurance we have.

Recently the body of Cortez, the Spaniard who conquered Mexico, was found. It had been hidden for a long time because of anti-Spanish riots, but it was finally found. Our bodies will be found, even if they are destroyed, and they will be raised. We have more assurance of that than we have of the finding of dead bodies of prominent people.

Application: D. L. Moody said we should not call the service for the deceased a burial service but a "sown" service. Of the dead body we say it is "sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:42). The more we know that we have eternal life here and now, the more services for those who passed on will be services of sowing.

Andrew Jackson's own epitaph was: "I have prepared an humble depository for my mortal body beside that wherein lies my beloved wife, where, without any pomp or parade, I have requested, when my God calls me to sleep with my fathers, to be laid; for both of us there to remain until the last trumpeter sounds to call the dead to judgment, when we, I hope, shall rise together, clothed with that heavenly body promised to all who believe in our glorious Redeemer, who died for us that we might live and by whose atonement I hope for a blessed immortality."

II. By giving eternal life entirely Himself (vv. 37, 38)

A. God must give us eternal life

Not only does Jesus tell us that God draws us to prove to the Jews that they could not come themselves, but this gives us assurance of eternal life. If it is all up to the Father to bring us to Jesus, God will keep us with Jesus. Thus Jesus says those given to Him He will keep to the end. (V. 37)

This assurance is further heightened by the fact that Jesus

has come down from heaven to do the Father's will (v.38); so through Him God can create and maintain faith.

B. It is given to all regardless of human restrictions (v.37)

The word "all" in v.37 is significant. Everyone can have eternal life, regardless of human restrictions.

The criminal about to die in the electric chair, the alcoholic who feels his case is hopeless, the inveterate gambler, anyone—regardless of race or color, those who have a feeling they have sinned against the Holy Ghost, those who feel they are predestinated to damnation, all can be sure God will give them eternal life because of the "all" here.

Application: Since God gives this to all, we should extend the invitation to all. There is no reason for doubt or fear. We have the blessed assurance of eternal life, regardless who we are, since God does it all (Matt. 11:28; Hymns 276 to 281). May we come today and have that assurance now, before it is too late.

III. *By giving us eternal life in Jesus (vv.39,40)*

A. God's will is fulfilled in Jesus

Jesus says much about God's will and how it is fulfilled when faith in Him is found. God's will is that we believe in Jesus, who does God's will. God's will gives us assurance of eternal life, but this will is found in Jesus. Our assurance is only in Jesus.

After the battle of Inkerman in Crimea a soldier was found dead with his bloody finger on John 11:25,26. He died with assurance, believing in Jesus.

B. To have Jesus we must not only see Him but also believe in Him (v.40)

The Jews saw Jesus, saw His miracles, heard His words, but did not believe (Luke 7:16). This is not enough. We must in faith accept Jesus as our only Savior. That is why Jesus so often points to Himself.

One of our richest men said he never wanted to hear the word *death* mentioned in his presence. We need not fear death. We have a blessed assurance of eternal life.

Denver, Colo.

WALTER LANG

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 24:1-14

Church year instruction is suggested. This is the last Sunday of the church year. Comparable to New Year's Eve. Close of the year suggests end of the world, which in turn suggests the Judgment. People generally are interested in the subject of the last times. The disciples were (v.3), and modern disciples are as well. Danger that subject be only interesting and academic. Prophecy is made for more. It is a message to strengthen the faithful.

Face the Last Days with Confidence and Courage

I. *The confidence of the church is in her Lord and His message, not in her material holdings*

A. Confidence in material things is ephemeral.

1. The disciples were proud of the outward material strength of the Jewish Church (v.1). Beautiful buildings, powerful organization, great numbers, wealth, are often measuring sticks for the effectiveness of a church and the basis for its security.
2. Jesus demonstrated that the power of a church is not in her material holdings (v.2). These things would perish. Fall of Jerusalem. Some beautiful but emptying church buildings in marginal neighborhoods because mission and education opportunities were not seized.

B. Confidence in the eternal God is well founded.

1. Deception of false teachers undermines this confidence. In the last days religious deception will be prominent (vv.4, 5,11). Multiplicity of sects, each with its own deception. Devil is father of lies. "Lead us not into temptation" . . . often we think of temptation to murder, steal, slander, etc., as being worst. Luther: "God guard and keep us so that the devil, world, flesh, may not *deceive* us or seduce us into *misbelief, despair,*" etc. Greatest deception is leading men to trust in themselves or someone other than Christ for salvation. (V.5)
2. Truth bolsters confidence. Christ is the Truth (1 John 2:15-25). He taught and demonstrated both the truth of man (in His being forsaken, suffering, death) and the truth of God (in His life, resurrection, ascension, and session).

This is only power for endurance (v.13). Man inherently cannot endure, but can endure by the power of God through Jesus Christ (1 John 5:20). Salvation is not dependent on material resources or on ourselves but on God. In this is our confidence.

II. *Courage is needed to face increasing trouble and persecution*

A. Sorrows and trouble will characterize the last days.

1. Some sorrow and trouble will face all people. Wars . . . famines . . . pestilences. Christians and non-Christians alike will be affected (vv.6,7). All of this is to remind us that we are living in the last times. Christian courage will differ from that of non-Christians. Christians will witness, in spite of these things, to the love of God in Jesus Christ (v.14). This takes courage, which is supplied by Spirit of God.
2. Some sorrow will be the peculiar burden of Christ's followers (vv.9-12). Christians may expect an increasing amount of persecution (v.9), betrayal (v.10), and loveless action (v.12). Illustrations from Communist persecutions and social taunts in America. This takes special courage to face . . . doubts about God really being in control. These things are told before they come to pass, so that when they do come to pass we may believe. World will watch to see how Christians bear up.

B. The source of courage is in Him who has already endured like suffering.

1. The Savior promised that this was to happen (John 15:18-27). He has already borne this type of grief successfully and lives in us to empower us to do likewise. The courage to bear it is not our own but His.
3. This courage manifests itself in testimony. Persecutions come to set the witness of the Gospel in an even clearer light. Christians have no hope for material or worldly gain in preaching it—only threats. In spite of this they multiply their preaching and extend their witness.

Living as a Christian is never easy; it takes God-given confidence and courage to reject material and worldly ideas of greatness, to bear up under calamities, persecution, and the like. These things indicate that the Lord's time is near at hand. In spite of the fact that an extended witness may mean even more suffering, God will supply our

every need of confidence and courage so that we may preach His Gospel and pray fervently, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Wheat Ridge, Colo.

EDWARD MAY

THANKSGIVING DAY

MATTHEW 15:36-38

Thanksgiving is a proper reaction to God's action in our lives. It is not "natural" and inevitable. Many reactions possible. You are invited to Thanksgiving dinner today. Inappropriate reactions — throw what you don't want on the new Axminster carpet, leave a dollar beside plate under the impression you're paying for meal, ignore host and hostess as you eat, and leave acting as though they weren't there. Sometimes we react in these ways to God's blessings. We take some (material things) and throw rest (spiritual things) on His carpet as if we didn't need them. We think we have earned daily bread by the time we finally get it, assume we have paid for what we get. We get immersed in the things God gives and ignore God altogether. Thanksgiving is the corrective. Right reaction not an emotion of gratitude you try hard to feel today. Really, *thanksgiving is recognizing that Christ, the Source of all we need for complete lives, takes our little means, adds His blessing, and gives us more than we need to live.*

I. Jesus begins with the means we provide

- A. He begins with the means we provide when He gives temporal gifts. Text: He could have begun with nothing, air, grass, or stones (Temptation, Matthew 4). Instead He took their seven loaves, a few fishes. Thanksgiving doesn't mean denying that we work for our daily bread. We work plenty! Farmer, miller, packer, truck driver, warehouseman, grocer, you, the family breadwinner — all work hard to provide daily bread.
- B. Jesus begins with the means we provide when He gives spiritual gifts. Author of Fourth Gospel in the parallel story, Feeding of the Five Thousand, wants us to see in these miracles a clue to the unseen spiritual bounty Jesus came to give us. He begins with means we supply when He feeds our spiritual wants. Of course we print the Bibles, pay the preacher, provide pulpit, altar, church building, pews. Of course we bring bread and wine to the altar for Holy Communion, water to font for Baptism. He begins with these.

- C. Thus we may forget that He is the Giver. Our contributions seem so large, at least until some crisis comes. Disciples thought seven loaves and a few fishes were plenty for their little group of 13 — until the need to feed 4,000 developed. We work so hard, try to save to get a few dollars ahead, plan and fuss to tailor limited income to high cost of living. And from start to finish we seem to be keeping ourselves going. Hard to see what God has to do with it. Even in spiritual things you get out of religion what you put into it. We work hard to keep church going. We generous givers pay a high price for our religion. Pastor does a good job of inspiring us. Doesn't seem to be much room for God. Thanksgiving doesn't happen when we see all of life as product of our own planning and labor.

II. *Jesus' blessing is what turns the means we supply into blessings for us*

- A. Story of text teaches this: Jesus' blessing the determining factor. Work as hard as you will. Withdraw the blessing of Christ, and efforts will be fruitless, because He rules all things (Eph. 1:20-23). However carefully men plan and labor in agriculture, science, industry, daily living, there are always elements beyond their control, unforeseen factors which spell difference between success or failure in any situation. *Illustration*: 1958 National League baseball race long nip and tuck between San Francisco and Milwaukee. Always the standing of either team depended not only on how it played but on whether the other team won or lost its own game of the same day. So in all life the supreme X factor is Christ. His blessing can turn our means into what we need to live. Text: Jesus "blessed" the food.
- B. Jesus' blessing is what makes religious activity beneficial to us. The blessing of Jesus is the Holy Spirit, whom He sends (John 6:63). Without the Spirit all our religious activity, possessing Bibles, altars, retreats, rituals, a good preacher in the pulpit, cannot feed us. We miss the point. Life comes from Christ's own death that we might have life abundantly and forever. He rose from the grave to come and feed us on that. He sends the Spirit so we can have this spiritual life. So the Spirit is determining factor in worship. Cf. John 4:23, 24.
- C. Just as we may forget Christ as the Giver, so we may forget our need for His blessing, the Holy Spirit, and think we have

physical and spiritual insurance against failure of our own "means." Disciples doubtless thought they had food enough and to spare for their band. We have all kinds of insurance against failure of our plans: life, car, retirement, hospital, medical; we may lose sense of needing God's blessing. We're careful drivers. Catastrophe can't come, we think. Spiritually too, we think we have truth surrounded so that it can't get away, pure doctrine, comfortable sense of well-being from old habits of worship. Hence we have guaranteed eternal health, all insured because we belong to the right church, go regularly, take Communion, and now are even sharing some of our busy Thanksgiving Day with God. How can we miss? We may forget that we are dependent on God's blessing.

III. *The result of Christ's blessing is that people eat and live*

- A. The result of Christ's blessing on our means is that people eat and live (vv. 37, 38). Same thing happens with our meat, vegetables, potatoes, efforts of our physicians, etc., today. When Christ blesses them, they work, keep us healthy and alive, become aids to our receiving and transmitting the Holy Spirit. (Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come. . . Give us daily bread," i.e., in order that we may live for the kingdom of God)
- B. The result of Christ's blessing upon our spiritual means is that they become channels for the Gospel of the Cross. Christ died for us many centuries ago in Jerusalem, Palestine. We live in 1958, far removed in time and space. Through His cross, Christ made peace with the Father, forgiveness, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, available for us. When He blesses our use of Bible and preaching, they speak the Gospel of the Cross to us; and when He blesses bread and wine, they become means for bringing the Cross and its victory down into our lives today. He, by His blessing, makes Himself our Bread of Life, miraculously multiplied and distributed through Word and Sacrament to fill our needs. (John 6:35)

Thus we give thanks as we recognize our own need for Christ and His blessings in every issue of life. The evangelist wants readers to know Christ through his story as the Source and Supplier of all good, not just of bread and fish. Wrong if we say: "The evangelist made a mistake. Crowd must have had lunch hidden all along in the folds of their cloaks. It just looked like a miracle." Also wrong if we say, "Wonderful! This is a miracle! Period." True thanksgiving is that

we read the story and say, "This man is God, acting as He always acts to feed us what we need for our bodies and to give us Himself as the Bread of Life. We need Him!"

Pleasant Hill, Calif.

WILLIAM BACKUS

Nitsch Epistle Selections

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

HEBREWS 10:19-27

The beginning of a new year of worship. Why do we worship? Why do we go to church at all? For today we resolve to do so regularly, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Shall we do so just in order to have enjoyable moments of sociability? "We feel bad if we don't"? Is it just a duty to which we must discipline ourselves? The text gives us the great purpose:

As We Worship Together, We Stimulate One Another to Good Works

I. Great results accrue from worship only if it is true worship

- A. Not just any worship will do. The great promise of the text concerning the vitality and meaning of worship applies to the worship which it recommends. But not just any "going to church."
- B. Christians are apt to be thoughtless and haphazard about worship. They are tired or bored. Or perhaps they think of church not as worship at all. At times they are not really approaching God. Their minds are fastened on the detail of being present. Or the occasion does not bring them and God together at all. Their churchgoing is apt to lapse at times into a favor done for God, rather than a help from God.
- C. True worship means to come to God in full assurance of faith. We go to God because we need Him and His help; because we adore Him as the one great Helper. Explore the mood of worship in one of the great psalms, e. g., Ps. 85.
- D. This means that everything that holds us back from God must be overcome—our apathy, self-centeredness, sense of guilt, idolatry. Central must be the conviction that we need and have forgiveness of sins. Hence the start of every Common Service; the core of the Gloria in Excelsis; the heart of Scripture

and preaching; the showing of the Lord's death in the Sacrament.

- E. For the heart of our worship is that Christ, the High Priest, has gone to the Father in the act of the atonement, has made the sacrifice of His own body, has opened the way to God. As He has gone that road, He has opened the road for us (John 14:6). In our worship, therefore, we retrace His steps, and we have boldness to enter the Holiest by His blood.

II. Such worship has the result that we stimulate one another

- A. In true Christian worship we hold fast the profession of our faith. That means not just that we believe the truth of the atonement; or that we confess it in opposition to all error—although it means that. But the word in the text means that we converse about it, speak it back and forth to one another. (V.23)
- B. We do so not just in the piety of a religious exercise, but "considering one another." It is for the sake of one another. The worshipping congregation is not just a collection of individuals in a dialog with God; but it is the body of Christ, mutually exhorting one another. (Col. 3:15-17; Eph. 5:18 ff.)
- C. Speaking to one another about Christ—in our worship, the ministration of the order of service and preaching, the Sacrament—we bring a great power to bear on one another: the power of the Gospel, δύναμις θεοῦ (Rom. 1:16); the force that enables men to grow in grace and to serve in love. (Cf. the Christmas Epistle, Titus 2:11-14; or Jesus' words, John 15:1-10; or 1 Peter 1:25—2:2)
- D. We do this regularly, systematically, purposefully, because we don't have much more time; the days for growth are numbered; Christ is coming again. Hence the new church year starts with Advent, the remembering that He comes to judgment; just as the old church year ended on that note.

Some congregations live in feuding and quarreling. They provoke one another. But Christians provoke one another . . . to love and to good works. This they do through the mutual consolation and conversation of the Christian Gospel. For thus they refresh one another with the one power for producing the works that God would have us perform, in service to Him and to one another.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER