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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

QUASIMODOGENITI

1 CORINTHIANS 15:54-58

"What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you?" If someone were to ask you this question, you would probably answer, in effect: "The resurrection of Jesus Christ prepares me for death. If I trust in Christ, I know that someday I shall rise from death just as He did. This comforts me and relieves my fears about death."

This is a perfectly good answer; however, it is not the whole answer. In our text St. Paul tells us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ also prepares us for life. As we stand before His empty tomb, not only death and the grave but also life and work look entirely different to us.

I. We should devote ourselves to the work of the Lord

A. The work of the Lord is carried on both in groups and in individuals. It consists of worship, humanitarian service, study, financial contributions, witnessing.

B. We should abound in the work of the Lord, be alert to new opportunities, and strive to take advantage of them fully. We should be steady, dependable, and untiring in this work. Keep forging constantly ahead. (V. 58)

II. Death distracts us from this work

A. We run into stubborn obstacles as we endeavor to do the Lord's work. In ourselves and in others interest fades quickly; there is strong competition from other factors; hard-won advances are quickly lost; participation is spotty and halfhearted. Faced with such difficulties we often lose heart and give up.

B. Death is the main distraction. In some respects it is related to everything that interferes with the work of the Lord. Why is it that we often neglect the work of the Lord? We are more concerned about other things, the things of this life. Life is short, and we want to get as much out of it as we possibly can. Billy Pearson, jockey, quiz contestant, and actor, who earned and squandered a fortune, says, "I'm reconciled to the fact that I will never get out of this world alive. And while I'm still breathing, I'm going to live it up. Who wants to go to the grave without living it up?" Though we wouldn't express

it so bluntly, this represents our inner attitudes too. Otherwise, we would not devote ourselves so frantically to trying to enjoy life.

C. This outlook views death as an end and a defeat. This it once was. Death entered our world through sin. It is a consequence of our defiance and disobedience. In His Law God warns against such behavior. He threatens those who disregard Him, and He backs up His threats with death. All of us are subject to death, we are perishable, mortal, because we are involved in sin. The most disastrous aspect of death is not only that it terminates this life but that it can separate us from God eternally. (V.56)

III. *In Christ we have the victory, and this should impel us to work*

A. Christ removed the sting of death and overcame it for us. On that first Good Friday, death settled upon our Lord like a giant insect and plunged its fiery stinger into Him. All of God's anger and punishment for sin struck Christ as He hung there upon the cross. However, through that vicious attack death lost its stinger. It was left behind in the body of Jesus. With divine power Christ recovered from the attack of death. It is helpless and harmless before Him. When He rose on that first Easter it was to dramatize His victory over death and the sin which brought it on. Through faith we can share that victory and look forward to our own resurrection at the end of time. Then we shall be immune to sin forever and free from its effects—immortal and imperishable. (Vv. 54, 55, 57)

B. This victory should revive us from lethargy and keep us strong in the work of the Lord. Though difficult and discouraging at times, His work is not in vain. It leads men to Christ and keeps them with Him until that great and final victory. We can look forward to glorious success after the struggle. The things of this world with which we become so preoccupied are perishable, but the work of the Lord is part of this which never dies. (V. 58)

Concl.: Success breeds success. Nothing is more invigorating to an athletic team or a military unit than a taste of victory. Energies and determination that were imprisoned by fear or despair are suddenly released. Opponents new and old are faced with confidence and optimism. Fatigue is forgotten, wounds and weakness are ignored, obstacles are laughed at, as fighting men move ahead.

Right now, at Easter time, we are living in a season of victory. Behind us we have the great victory of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Ahead of us we have our own victorious resurrection on the Last Day. We are literally surrounded by success. According to our text, this

can do a great deal for our morale and fighting spirit. We need to keep these victories in mind. In the period between these two victories we are engaged in a series of rugged mopup battles. Though decisively defeated our enemy fights on furiously. Spiritual warfare is hard work, and we need all the encouragement we can get.

St. Louis, Mo.

MILTON RUDNICK

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

1 JOHN 4:1-8

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel shows the love of the Good Shepherd for His sheep. He gives His life for them and knows their needs. The sheep therefore trust in Him and hear His voice. The Epistle tells us that we, who are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, should strive to follow in His steps and live righteously. The Shepherd loves us. Do we love Him? To the question "Do you love God?" every Christian would immediately respond, "Of course I love God." Do we really love God? There are many ways of testing our love to God. Mention several. Our text suggests

A Twofold Test of Our Love to God

I. *Our attitude toward teachers of religion (vv. 1-6)*

A. God wants us to test teachers of religion (v. 1). He does not expect us to believe everyone who professes or teaches a religion. It is simply not true that every teacher of religion should be given a hearing, because "every religion has some good in it" (Jer. 23:31). Many false prophets are gone out into the world (Matt. 24:11; 2 Tim. 3:13). Their "going out" implies that they expect people to believe them; otherwise they would not have gone out. God wants us to test everyone who teaches a religion, to see whether his teachings and practices agree with the Word of God. Example of Bereans. (Acts 17:11)

B. The test by which teachers of religion are to be judged (vv. 2, 3, 5). Does he show that he believes that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh and is of God? He, who is the almighty God (Is. 9:6), came in the flesh (John 1:14) that He might be put under the Law in our stead (Gal. 4:4, 5), that He might save us from our sins (Luke 19:10), and that He might deliver us from him who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14, 15). To deny that Christ came in the flesh is to deny His redemptive work. Such a denier is not of God but of the unbelieving world. He thinks the thoughts and speaks the language of the world and gets a hearing from it (v. 5). But he is

against Christ no matter how religious he may appear otherwise (v.3b). Such an antichristian spirit was at work then and is at work today. Therefore we should test every teacher of religion to see if his profession and practice agree with the full doctrine of Christ and His Word. This is the test.

C. We are to follow those religious teachers who are of God (v.6). The apostles were sure that they were of God. God revealed His truth to them, and they wrote it in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). To follow those who teach God's Word will prove that we are of God. (V.16; Luke 10:16)

D. Our attitude toward teachers of religion is a test of our love to God. If for fear, for a desire to please men, or for any other reason, we open our ears and hearts to false teachers, we fail the test. If we compare religious teachings with the Word of God and open our ears and hearts only to those who teach His Word, we pass the test. (John 8:31)

E. A big task? Indeed But not impossible. He who has made us children of God (1 John 3:1) is greater than the prince of this world. He can and will help us pass this test.

II. *Our attitude toward one another (vv.7,8)*

A. God is Love (v.8b). This is His very nature. He revealed His love to us by sending His Son and by giving us life through Him (1 John 4:9; John 3:16). Therefore we love (1 John 4:19).

B. We are to prove this love by loving one another (v.7). Our love is to reach not only up to Him who first loved us but also out to those whom He loves. A flower reaches up toward the sun to receive its warmth and then sends its fragrance out to mankind. Ours is to be an active love like His (1 John 3:17,18). Give examples. Such love is from above. (V.7b)

C. This is the test of our love. If we love one another, we prove our faith (v.7b), and we pass the test of love (1 John 4:12). If we do not love one another, we fail the test. (V.8a; 1 John 3:14; 4:20)

D. Can we stand this test? We can if we go to the source of love. Love is of God (v.7b). We are of God, His "beloved." Let us look to Him. He can forgive our lovelessness, help us overcome our weakness, and warm our hearts with love for others.

Let us prove our love to God with unflinching loyalty to those who teach His Word and by unflagging love to one another. (Hymn 399:5)

Riverside, Calif.

WILLIAM GRAUMANN

JUBILATE

1 JOHN 4:9-16

Moonlight and roses, tender little notes and mushy letters, pink and yellow sunsets, taffeta dresses and diamond rings—that's about all that love means to some persons. Love is made of sterner and stouter stuff than these things. It is deeper than sentiment and poetry. It is not a sanctimonious folding of the hands or a comfortable thinking of noble thoughts or a handing out of high-class, beautiful words. Love means doing for the other fellow even when it costs. Look what it cost God (v.10). This kind of love is the will of the Christian man bent toward the welfare of the other fellow, regardless of any claim that the loved one may or may not have on our love, regardless of whether or not the person loved is lovable. It is the directing of the total self to the good of others. This love has its origin wholly in God, who is the very embodiment of love (v.16). William Cowper:

The stream of pure and genuine love
Derives its current from above.

Genuine love is what God had in His heart when He sent a Savior for sinners (v.9). This is the "real love" (Phillips) our text asks us to show in our lives during the "little while" of our earthly pilgrimage.

The tree of Christian love, masted by the Cross, has its roots in heaven and its fruits on earth, where Christians are

Showing Love to One Another

I. *Showing love is evidence that our confession (v.15) is sincere*

("That we dwell in Him," v.13; "he . . . in God," v.15; "he . . . dwelleth in God," v.16)

A. Wordy confessions of Christ as Son of God are hollow and empty unless undergirded and reinforced by deeds of love. Henrik Ibsen's Brand puts it this way:

It is not words I bade you share:
They're barren when the belly's bare.

B. In one of Johan Strindberg's plays an aunt says to an unbelieving captain, "Why don't you believe in the love of God?" The captain replies, "Look here, Auntie, why is it that whenever you speak of the love of God you look so hateful?" Her outward manner gave the lie to her claims to an inward faith. In today's collect we pray to "eschew [*respuere*, "spit out"] those things that are contrary to our profession."

C. The evidence of love in our lives is the touchstone of faith and the mark of the Christian community. Make specific references and pointed applications, indicating how love will resolve tensions between individuals and groups and within groups of your congregation. Explain how true love will overcome differences in social standing, income bracket, political persuasion, and cultural and educational background and will weld differing individuals into a close-knit family of Christian brothers and sisters.

By exhibiting love we can show our true colors and also show God's color, for our

II. *Showing love shows the world what God is like*

("God dwelleth in us," v. 12; "He in us," v. 13; "God dwelleth in Him," v. 15; "God in him," v. 16)

A. No man ever saw God. Even Moses saw only His "back parts." But in the individual Christian God permits Himself to be seen, wants to be seen. God, as it were, takes form and is seen, touched, felt, and handled in the Christian who loves the brethren.

B. When we exercise such brotherly love, God's love reaches its goal (τετελειωμένη ἐστίν) in our lives. Men ought to be able to see what God is like when they observe our ways.

C. Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures* opens with a youngster asking his Sunday school teacher, "What is God like?" After a moment of thought, this reply: "Why, I suppose God must be pretty much like Mr. Dubois." God's love reached its goal in Mr. Dubois. Can the same be said about you and me?

D. We can prevent men from getting a good idea of what God is like and so become an offense to them if we keep His love from reaching its goal in our lives. Illustrate with football player who gets his elbow in the way of his own team's attempted field goal and deflects ball from goal posts. That hurts the team. Does God's love score in our lives?

E. Jubilate Sunday reminds us that the love in our hearts should strike a note of joy in our lives. We should be happy, pleasant, winsome, attractive creatures that others may be drawn to the same God whose love we reflect. It gives us pause when a man like Prof. Chad Walsh of Beloit College, in commenting on his decision to join the Episcopal instead of the Lutheran Church, says: "All in all, the Lutheran Church struck me as a little beetle-browed and dour. What I missed in it was any strong note of joy and reverent gaiety."

We ought to be a bunch of happy lovers.

Appendix. — It is very easy to connect this outline with the current emphasis ("Heartfelt Worship") of the planned parish program set forth in *Advance*. We want our love to stay warm, and "He that would be warm must keep near the fire" (Matthew Henry) — and worship! Recall story of object lesson by pastor when calling on backslidden member. Taking tongs in hand, he lifted a glowing coal from the fireplace and laid it on the hearthstone. In silence the two watched it die out. "You needn't say a single word; I'll be back in my place next Sunday."

Fairview Park, Ohio

BERTWIN L. FREY

CANTATE

PHIL. 2:1-4

(The theme, *What Makes the Pastor Happy*, at first glance might seem rather subjective and even make the preacher dismiss it for fear of drawing too much attention to his person. Obviously neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit felt that there is anything anomalous or out of the way in saying that a pastor can be happy and in defining what that happiness is. It is well that he take the occasion on Cantate Sunday to say just what makes him happy. Too often one feels that members are at a loss to imagine such a possibility, to say nothing of the pastor. Conversely, one has a chance to say what makes him unhappy.)

What makes the pastor happy? That's a peculiar question! How should I know? I'm not a pastor. Maybe some are inclined to want him unhappy. Think he is hard to please, impossible. After some thought, take that all back. Every true, sincere member surely wants him happy, just as every true, dedicated pastor wants a happy congregation. Whatever curious notions are running through the mind, let them run off the board. Invite another pastor to stand aside of your pastor as he says in the text: "Make full my joy" (v. 2). Before the sermon is ended, see that what makes a pastor happy also makes a congregation happy, even as it makes the Lord happy.

I. What else should be a *pastor's joy* but *his congregation*? May be times when he would like to run away from it, never see it again. But then he is no longer a pastor. A shepherd is not a shepherd unless he has a flock. His first joy is that he has a congregation. Would you believe it?

II. What kind of a congregation it is. Paul enumerates *four basic ingredients*, expressed in four taken-for-granted "if" clauses. 1) "If your being in Christ exerts any encouragement on you." If your being a Christian does anything to you — just anything, I'm not saying how much — then I'm talking to you, you're a member of the

congregation. "In Christ," that in itself makes me happy, and what I add further is building on that. 2) "If any incentive which love gives." Knowing that all the members have the same love in Christ in some measure, I am happy. 3) "If any association with the Spirit." I am happy if your association with the Holy Spirit is a real, living experience to you, no matter to what a limited degree. 4) "If you have any heartfelt sympathy" (AV: "bowels," i.e., from your very inside, total person). Toward whom should the Philippians direct these feelings? Why, toward each other. When you do that, my Philippians, you pour in the four ingredients that will intoxicate your pastor with happiness. Vv. 1,2: "Make full my joy."

III. From what you are proceed to *what you do*. "That you think the same thing." Implies they are not doing this very well. By gentle indirection Pastor Paul is getting his point across about some things that were making him unhappy. There are ways of driving a point home without hitting it on the head. At times the only way. That takes skill, and what Paul is doing for the Philippians is what your pastor is attempting here today. Do you begin to see through what I am scheming, not upon or against you, but for you. The better you can see through me in what I am trying to do for you, the happier I am. See our pastor doing for us, we quit doing each other.

IV. I am *not* coming at you, regarding rivalry, *through the front door*. (Here is a heaping of words. Many Christians have wondered how the pastor can say the same thing in so many ways.) I submit *what is lacking to my happiness* under three points: 1) "having the same love," having a common love, in contrast to a common hatred to one another. Love need not leave when a difference of opinion comes in. 2) "wholeheartedly being of one mind, soul." 3) Here he moves into the middle of their muddle: "doing nothing with a spirit of contention." You'll make me happy only when you get rid of that feeling, no matter how much this and that needs to be done—better leave it undone than to irk the other person. "Doing nothing from empty conceit," in a spirit of self-decoration, for show. These are the unholy twins, contention and conceit. How many churches suffer and are unhappy even when they do big things! "Do nothing" in that way, and I'll be happy, and you too. Not only in the church, but outside, in home, business, etc. Get ahead—yes! Progress—yes! But not in rivalry. In how many meetings and gatherings we plague ourselves with unhappiness for a happy project! While the job itself weighs 5 pounds, these two, contention and conceit, make it weigh 15 pounds, which is the difference between a comfortable, enjoyable

load and a distasteful burden. It doesn't make me happy, it doesn't you either.

V. Nothing rips so ugly a gash or so cripples the program of the church as internal strife. Observe how *Pastor Paul* counters with a profusion of nouns to close every possible gap and by indirection directs them to the will of God: persuasion without percussion. The pulpit is not a podium from which to browbeat. He does not make his point by a frontal attack. But 600 miles away and in jail he directs his parishioners to the joy of the ministry. For this ability every pastor asks God: the pastoral touch. The pastoral attitude: "My congregation!" Pastor, you mean, "my yoke." "No, my joy, my crown" (ch. 4:1). The congregation is to share in that joy.

VI. *A concluding contrast*: "But from lowliness of mind looking upon each other as rising above yourselves (members, look up at each other, not down). Everyone of you not looking out for his own interests (as though your life were the only one) but also each one of you, the things of others." Members who know how to look into the affairs of others with the same dedication that they look into their own, and at the same time do not think themselves better, recognize the high level of (a subtle, sharp slicing of) Christian responsibility. When members do this to each other, to those outside, they are a true joy to Christ, to the pastor, to each other.

Conclusion: Basic assumption to any happiness for anybody, "in Christ" (v.1). In the congregation we look upon each other as saints, fit for heaven, not by self-attainment, but because Someone else put others completely ahead of Himself. No one looked so much on the things that would bring joys to others as did Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:2). The only part we have in "sharing" the cross (if we allow the word for the moment) is to know that we are the hammer handle that drives the nails. Let us all take a good look at each other, right there, under the cross, for here our partnership begins. Remembering that (v. 5 f.), we will know how to work, plan, build under one love, one Spirit, one heart, one soul, one Christ. A joy to each other, to pastor, to Christ. Cantate, everybody!

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG

NOTICE

FOR THE NEXT CHURCH YEAR

The editorial committee is considering the possibility of offering homiletical materials of more extensive proportions and depth for some Sundays, and more summarized or rudimentary materials for others. Attention would be given, under this plan, to every Sunday and possibly to minor services and special series, but in a briefer format than at present. Each issue, however, would bring a more extended item, in the nature of an exegetical study of one of the texts for the month, or an article on a phase of preaching, or some other contribution to the pastor's practical preaching ministry. The committee solicits reactions of its readers to such a change before undertaking the first assignments for this plan. Communications should be addressed to the managing editor within the next three months.