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Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

Herbert Berner
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 1:67-80

Joyful Christianity is the only consistent Christianity. Where there is joyful Christianity, there will also be a vital Christianity. This vitality is not always so much in evidence as we should like to see it. It comes through an acceptance, without reservation, of the Advent message, "HE IS HERE!" This brought joy to the angels, to the shepherds, to the Wise Men, and many others. It will also bring joy and vitality to us when we have caught the full vision.

Christ's Coming Instills Spiritual Vitality

I. It begets confidence

A. We see the faithfulness of God.

1. The coming of Christ had been prophesied for centuries (v.70), in Eden (Gen.3:15); to Moses (Deut.18:15); to Isaiah (9:6); to Malachi. (3:1)

2. Not only prophesied, but God had covenanted, drawn up an agreement (v.72), with Abraham (Gen.17:1-7); with Moses (Ex.6:7f.); with David. (2 Sam.7:12-16)

3. So solemn an agreement that God had sworn an oath to do this (v.73), especially to Abraham. (Gen.22:16-18)

Faithfulness means to keep one's word. This is necessary to win confidence. He who breaks his word destroys confidence. God kept His word. As a result we have confidence in His Word, for the past, the present, and the future; and what is more important, we have confidence in Him. Such confidence, faith, is necessary for salvation.

B. We see the greatness of the Messiah.

1. He is "an Horn of salvation" (v.69; Ps.18:2); a "horn" is a symbol of strength and power, so necessary, because of the power of the enemies. (Hymn 262:2)

2. He is "the Dayspring from on high" (v.78), a term denoting His glory and illustriousness. He is the "Light of the world" (John 8:12), predicted Isaiah 60:1f.

C. We see the marvels of His mercy, His pity, compassion for Christ's sake, the more general term.

1. Specifically His mercy is shown in our redemption (v.68), redeemed from sin, death, and Satan. The terrific price that this required.

2. Through God's mercy we have salvation (v.71). Remember from what we have been saved: our enemies who hated us and would make life miserable for us.

3. Through God's mercy we have enlightenment (v.79). Think of the misery of one who is blind, and by contrast, the joy of one whose sight has been restored.

4. Through God's mercy we have life, vitality. We no longer sit "in the shadow of death," no longer "drag our feet" spiritually, but run to do the will of the Lord.

5. Through God's mercy we have peace, which comes from the conviction that we have forgiveness.

II. *It incites to action*

A. It sets us free to serve (v.74). Nothing so crippling in our action as this bondage to Satan, but in Christ we have freedom. (Rom. 8:21; Hymn 387:2)

B. It shows us the nature of our service as illustrated in the life of John, the great Advent preacher (vv.76f.). Our service is to prepare the way for the Lord into the hearts of people by calling them to repentance (Matt.3:2), pointing them to the Savior. (John 1:29, personal witnessing)

C. It instills the right spirit to serve.

1. Without fear (v.74). Few things more disabling than fear. (Heb.2:14f.)

2. In holiness and righteousness, imputed to us by the Savior (v.74). This is necessary for us to lift up our heads and to look God and man in the eye, a necessity for effective service. This comes because we have the conviction that the burden of our sins has been removed and that we continue to lay aside the weight which does so easily beset us. (Heb.12:1)

3. With faithfulness, "all the days of our life" (v.75). With this spirit, one lifetime is all too short to devote to His service. We therefore want it to be full, and we want to make the most of it, remaining faithful unto death. (Rev.2:10)

As we thus contemplate the full implications of Christ's coming, it puts a song into our hearts, new life, energy, and vitality into our whole being.

Milwaukee, Wis.

HERBERT BERNER

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 3:3-14

In recent years we have seen tremendous programs of highway construction going on in almost every part of our nation. Through the teeming hearts of our large cities as well as through the peaceful countryside great swaths have been cut in order to accommodate the ever-increasing number of motor vehicles. And the end is nowhere in sight. No matter how many miles of new expressways we build, still more seem to be needed.

Our text is talking about a great road-building project. John the Baptist had been commissioned by God to begin an enormous program of this kind, one that is still in progress today. He was to start building a highway—not of asphalt or concrete—but of people. This living, human highway has stretched across the centuries and will not end until it reaches eternity itself. This highway is not for automobiles or trucks, but for the Son of God, to travel on. The promised One is coming, John the Baptist announces in our text. Prepare the way for Him. Be part of that way yourself. It is

The Way of the Lord

I. *Christ comes to and through His people*

A. Christ comes today. In our text, John proclaims His coming into human flesh and the beginning of His public ministry. This coming was unique and will not be repeated. However, Christ does still come today—through the Holy Spirit—and consequently the message of the Baptist still applies. Through this quiet, hidden power of the Spirit, Christ approaches human hearts and makes an impact on our world.

B. Christ comes to His people. When the Son of God visited His creation 2,000 years ago, He lived and worked among His chosen people, the Jews. His outreach into the human race began with them. Today we Christians are His chosen people, and so, when He comes, He comes first of all to us. Whenever we gather in His name to hear the message of His Word or to share in the Sacrament of His suffering, He draws near to us and makes His way into our hearts. The great highway on which He comes leads right up to each one of us Christians.

C. Christ comes through His people. The Lord does not mean for His way to end when it reaches His own people. Rather He intends for that way to continue through us to others so that He might come to them as well. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (v. 6). Christ has come to you and me through a long line of witnesses which ex-

tends all the way back to the time of His life and work here on earth. These witnesses have been the thoroughfare, the highway, on which Christ has traveled in order to reach us. And now, having been reached, we are to become part of that highway ourselves. By our testimony to Him we are to extend His coming at least a little bit further into this world.

II. *Sin blocks and hinders His coming*

A. Our sinfulness blocks Christ's entrance into our hearts. Road-builders of all kinds invariably run into obstacles. Mountains, canyons, winding passes, and jutting boulders all contrive against the construction of a smooth, safe roadway. On His way into our hearts Christ meets with similar obstructions. To illustrate and dramatize this, perhaps, John the Baptist did his preaching out in the rugged wilderness east of the Jordan. As He approaches each of us, John says, Christ is met by the jagged peaks of our pride and self-righteousness, by the deep gorges of our despair and degradation, by our twisted and deceitful natures, by our rough and loveless ways (v. 5). Our sinfulness hinders His coming and makes us unfit for His presence. We are actually disgusting to Him in our guilt and become the objects of His wrath. (V. 7)

B. Our sinfulness hinders His outreach to others through us. The same factors which block His coming to us disrupt His coming through us. Evil conduct and spiritual indifference mar our witness. Others can hardly be attracted to Christ if we who recommend Him are apparently so unmoved. Our spiritual and moral lapses are landslides and washouts on the Lord's highway. They prevent Him from getting through to others as effectively as He should. We are His redeemed people, and His way through us is no longer completely blocked, but serious obstacles do continue to arise.

III. *By moving us to repentance God prepares us for Christ's coming*

A. Repentance is regretfully admitting our guilt and sinfulness (Ps. 32:3-5). This is essential. Until we realize the seriousness of our plight there is no possibility of rescue and repair. This is the first step of preparation for His coming.

B. Repentance is accepting God's mercy in Christ. Repentance is not just gloomy humiliation. It is the glad and confident grasping of God's offer of pardon. Repentance is "for the remission of sins" (v. 3). As the Son of God comes toward us it is with a friendly, outstretched hand, a hand marked with the print of the nail reminding us of what He did so that we might be forgiven. With the power of His for-

giving love Christ shoves aside every barrier and blockade which our guilt has erected. He clears the way so that He can enter our hearts.

C. Repentance results in a changed life and drastically improved behavior. If we are genuinely sorry for our sins and if we sincerely accept God's forgiveness, then we will do things differently in the future. Our repentance will bear the fruits of a good life. Lack of fruits reveals a dead repentance, and God's judgment will destroy the individual concerned (vv. 8, 9). Notice the examples of a changed life which the Baptist supplies (vv. 10-14). Also notice that these changes are fruits, results, not a prerequisite for forgiveness and Baptism. The point is that before granting them pardon through this Sacrament the Baptist stressed to them that their lives must be different from this point on. We have no indication that he refused their request because of their previous unfruitfulness.

D. Repentance is the work of God through Word and Sacrament. We can not prepare ourselves for His coming. God must do it for us, and His power to this end is supplied through the means of grace. It was through the preaching of this prophet and the Baptism which he administered that men were able to do what he urged: Prepare the way of the Lord.

Concl.: Advent is the season in which we prepare to celebrate Christ's coming into human flesh on that first Christmas. As we ponder that coming, the same Christ will come into our hearts. As we tell others what Christmas really means, Christ will also come to them. If this really happens, we will not only prepare the way of the Lord, we will be that way.

St. Louis, Mo.

MILTON L. RUDNICK

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

JOHN 1:19-34

Most people find it easy to become sentimental over a little baby. To appeal to such sentiment is one of the dangerous detours which the devil would have us take during the Advent and Christmas seasons. While we should point forward during Advent to the coming of the Christ in the flesh, we must point backward in point of time to Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross for the sins of the world. Our text is especially suited for such a message.

In recent years many civic and religious groups have sponsored campaigns aimed at putting Christ back into Christmas. If nothing else, such campaigns have pointed up the danger of leaving Christ out of our planning, thinking, and conversation. Our thinking and speaking about Christ, however, should be more than some sentimental

chatter about a sweet little baby that was born in humble circumstances. Many children have been born under similar—and even worse—conditions. In our thoughts and conversations we, of course, should direct attention to the Babe of Bethlehem as the Savior of the world, but over the manger we also observe for ourselves, and point out to others, the shadow of the cross. Only one message counts for ourselves and for others: Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, is the Lamb of God and Son of God.

We Are to Believe in and Witness to Christ as the Lamb of God and Son of God

I. We are to believe in Christ as the Lamb of God and Son of God

A. We must see ourselves as God sees us. By nature we were a part of the "world" (v.29), that is, we had a burden and a debt caused by sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Is. 53:6). We did not "know" Christ; we were not acquainted with His person.

B. To be saved from our burden and debt we must "know" Christ. John the Baptist was acquainted with the mission and message of the Messiah, but up to the time of Christ's Baptism John had not become personally acquainted with the Messiah (v.31). On our part we must not only "know" facts about Jesus Christ, but we must have an intimate and "personal" relationship with Christ through faith.

C. To have such a relationship with Christ we must have seen Christ as the Lamb of God. We look forward to Christmas. However, as Christ lived under the shadow of the cross, we must see the cross over the manger. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (v.29). Christ came as a sacrifice for sin. Isaiah saw this in prophetic vision. (Is. 53:7; cf. also 1 Peter 1:18,19; Heb.9:28)

D. The Lamb of God must be for us the Son of God. Christ is more than a mere man. Christ is God in the flesh. We must confess with John the Baptist, "He was before me" (v.30, cf. John 8:58); "And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God." (V.34)

E. The Holy Spirit alone can work this faith and personal relationship with Christ (v.33). "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Cor. 12:3b)

II. We are to witness to Christ as the Lamb of God and Son of God

A. We are to be concerned about people, "the world" (v.29), for whom Christ died (1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:5). The "world's" gods of evergreen, tinsel, tin, baubles, and bells cannot satisfy. People who do not have Christ cannot celebrate CHRISTmas. (John 3:36)

B. We are to witness with our lips: "Behold the Lamb of God" (v.29); "This is the Son of God." (V.34)

C. We are to witness with our lives. We should back up our words with our lives. Christ "bare our sins in His own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24)

D. We are to witness in humility. "After me comes a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me" (v.30). "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30; cf. also Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16)

III. *Christ will work through our witness*

A. By His Holy Spirit, Christ will work His life in others through the reflection of His life and love in our words and lives. V.33: ". . . this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (RSV). On the day following the incident recorded in our text John proclaimed a similar message. "And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." (John 1:37; cf. also John 15:26f.)

B. By His Holy Spirit, Christ will sustain His life in us through our contemplation of Him as Sacrifice (Lamb) and Sacrificer (God). Cf. John 14:26. As followers of the Lamb we shall stand before His throne forever and ever. (Cf. Rev. 5:6,9,12,13)

We have a message. We have a mission. We have the greatest motive. "Behold the Lamb of God," "the Son of God," who gave Himself for you and for all the "world"! In the name of Christ—the Lamb of God and Son of God. Amen.

Swissvale, Pa.

ARTHUR F. GRAUDIN

CHRISTMAS DAY

JOHN 1:1-14

We have in John 1:1-14 a very rich Christmas text. It establishes both the divinity (v. 1) and the humanity (v. 14) of Jesus. It runs almost the entire gamut of the divine attributes of Jesus: His eternity (vv. 1, 4); His omnipotence (v. 3); His holiness (vv. 7-9, "light"); His benevolence (v. 11, "came unto His own"), His mercifulness (v. 14, "full of grace"). It paints beautiful and forceful word pictures of Christ, depicting Him as the Word (v. 1); the Creator (v. 3); the Light (vv. 4-9); the One Rejected (vv. 10 f.); the One Accepted (v. 12); the One who became flesh (v. 14); the Only-begotten One (v. 14). It carries out, from its first word to the last, the all-consuming purpose of John's great Gospel: "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). — I have set this great text in a framework of today's world and today's need. The preacher should be careful not to give emphasis to this framework, but to use it for what it is intended: the setting—only the setting—for the proclamation of the abiding truths that Jesus is in fact true God, the Savior, and therefore the only Hope for lost mankind.

Hope is essential to life, to well-being. When sick people give up hope, they quicken the approach of death. When the imprisoned lose hope, they no longer have a zest for living. To live without hope is to experience a living death. Hell's greatest bitterness results from abandonment of hope. (Cp. Dante, in his *Inferno*: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here.") — But a day of good cheer and hope has come. It is Christmas! Jesus, Harbinger of hope, is born! Abiding hope and cheer from the fact of Christ's birth and the facts surrounding His incarnation, person, and deeds.

Jesus Is Come, Harbinger of Hope

I. Hope for the world of our day

A. Our world is without hope and dying.

1. It is changing, decadent, lapsing from high morals, declining, godless, lost.

2. But into it has come the ageless, eternal Christ. V. 1: The One who comes, bringing hope, always existed. He was "in the beginning." He existed before the world came into being (John 17:5, 24). This Logos (Word) *was* God. He did not become God, He was not made God, He *was* God; not Godlike (θεϊός) but God (θεός); not having some of the qualities of God, but God in essence and in fullness. V. 2: Christ was eternally in relation with God. V. 3: He is the Creator of all things. Apart from Him nothing came into existence. What hope this ageless, eternal God injects into an aging, decadent world! What hope there is for the changing world in the changeless Christ who created it, who loved it enough to come to redeem it, and who now holds the universe "in the palm of His hand." "The hopes and fears

of all the years are met in *Thee*." Fear not, Jesus is come, Harbinger of hope!

B. Our world is without hope and darkened.

1. It has been plunged into darkness. General Omar Bradley: "Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have too many men of science, too few men of God." Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.

2. But into this darkened world has come the Christ, Harbinger of hope! Into surrounding darkness has come—Light! V. 4: "In Him was life," the life of plant, tree, and animal, the life of man, the life of the body and the life of the soul, the life transitory and the life eternal. This life is the light of men. V. 5: This light sheds its divine rays upon the world, a world to a great extent impervious to it. Vv. 6-8: This light emanates from One who is greater than the greatest born of woman. V. 9: This was the true light, the perfect light, a light for all men of all ages of all times. What reason for hope! The world of our day lies in deep darkness, but "light is come!" Jesus comes into our world—Harbinger of hope!

II. Hope for us, as we sojourn in the world

A. Hope—the hope that springs eternal with the assurance that God is for us.

1. Given power to become the sons of God (v. 12). In the great company of those who believe on His name (v. 12), begotten of God (v. 13); not of flesh—not by heredity—but by the express will of God! All this over against the fact that many reject Christ (v. 10f.: the world knew Him not; His own received Him not).

2. What an overpowering, overwhelming assurance that God is for us. Not only did He send His Son into the world, He sent Him for us! Not only has He come who is Light and Life, He came for us! God is for us! Christmas proves it. Good Friday seals it. Ours is a "lively hope."

B. Hope—the hope that springs eternal through the assurance that God is with us.

1. "The Word," the eternal Logos (v. 14), "was made flesh." He who always *was*, was made—*magnum mysterium!*—"flesh," taking on

the fullness of humanity (cp. 1 John 4:2), "and dwelt [tabernacled] among us," us mortals, us sinners. Immanuel! God with us! The God of glory, grace, truth, *with us!* He whom the heaven of heavens could not contain; He who is unspeakably holy, majestic, omnipotent — *with us!* He whose dazzling light at the burning bush, in the pillar of fire, at Mount Sinai, overawed mortal eyes — *with us*, in all His glory! He whose grace surpasses all knowledge, defies all description — *with us*, offering us its richness, its fullness!

2. God with us. No more cause for alarm. No need to worry. No reason to fear. O my soul, hope thou in God! (Ps. 42:11)

Collinsville, Ill.

THEODORE TEYLER

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

LUKE 9:57-62

This is the Day of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. If the propers for the day are used, then Part IV of the outline must be modified. It is useful to note that in the Epistle for St. John's Day the drawing power of the cross is implied as the author testifies to the Word made flesh "in order that you might have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (cf. Part I in the outline). The Holy Gospel includes Jesus' command "Follow Me," issued to reinstated Peter. Parallels with this text are evident.

In what order do we arrange our various loyalties? Should it be children first, then parents? Or parents and children? Or mate, children, then parents? Some cultures place old age first, and there parents are on pedestals. Ours places children first. Often children express concern about question of parent's loyalties: "Mommy, do you love Daddy more than me?" This text leads the problem back to the question of first loyalty. It says to us:

Christ Must Come First If You Are Going to Follow Him at All

I. *Christ Commands, Follow Me*

Three times in the text the issue of following Him arises. Today, each time we hear the Gospel or meet Christ in the Holy Eucharist, the meaning of the Gospel can be put in two words: Follow Me! Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32). Definition: not that His powerful personality, amplified by martyr's death, would attract admiring throngs, rather that He, by dying on cross, becomes an open Way to the Father. Through Jesus' atoning death the Father reaches out to lost men, unites them to Himself by uniting them with Christ. Hence whenever the Cross is proclaimed through Word and Sacrament, Jesus says again to you, Follow Me!

II. *We want to follow, but sometimes other loyalties claim priority*

A. We want to follow, but other loyalties seem to come first. Text: each man eager to follow Christ. Each had something which came first. Concern for home, loved one (burial), family. We are earnest about our Christian faith. Mean to follow Christ. Occasionally, however, we may serve conflicting loyalties without even knowing it.

B. One of the conflicting loyalties is *home* (vv. 57f.). For us this means, "Would you follow Me even if it meant giving up your home?" Scrapes a sensitive nerve for us. Despite the fact that the institution of the home seems to be crumbling among us, no other nation so glorifies the home. Young folks dream of a white house on the edge of town, with California patio and Danish furniture. Among us more people own their home and patch of ground, more ads offer more things to furnish and embellish home and garden, more human energy is spent developing and beautifying home, more of us have a good share of life mortgaged for 30 years, than is the case among any other people. Should think hard how to answer Christ's challenge to follow Him if it meant giving up home. If we can't follow, home is an idol.

C. Our burial customs often display other conflicting loyalties (vv. 59, 60). A recent sociological study, *The American Funeral* by Le Roy Bowman, lays bare some of our false values. Concern that the remains should "look natural" and be preserved at cost of strong coffins and solid vaults exhibits fruitless materialism, vain attachment to body of loved one. Our conviction often seems to be that the measure of love to the dead can be told in terms of funeral costs and display. Christ says, "Let the dead bury their dead." Doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't have funerals but that even solemn ceremony of burial and deep attachment to those we love should take second place to Christ's claim on our loyalties. Otherwise we play with idolatry.

D. Sometimes loyalties to members of our families displace Christ's prior claim (vv. 61, 62). Parents, children, mate—all may become idols. "My children come first," declares a young parent, with almost religious fervor. In our culture is danger that we may idolize children and youth. Some say wave of crime by youth is result of our failure to love children. Perhaps our children get too much of wrong kind of love. Among us "youngness" is idealized and imitated by those no longer young; children are on pedestals; toys, amusements, liberty, and cash showered on children as never before; encouraged to express themselves; bright remarks collected and sold in books; home life organized

around their schedules. Strange that in this very culture 20,000 children stole cars last year, a quarter million children arrested for crimes. Perhaps we have placed loyalty to children ahead of loyalty to Christ and given our children too much of the wrong kind of love.

III. *Such idolatry is deadly*

To persons loved with such love it may become a stranglehold which victimizes rather than helps. It is even more deadly for the idolater. To one who puts any love ahead of Christ these words apply, "No one who puts his hand to plow and looks back is fit for Kingdom." Lot's wife looked back. She couldn't detach herself from her things back in burning Sodom to follow God's leading—so she became a pillar of salt, a piece of the landscape, a part of all the material she couldn't give up. So with us if we idolize anything and do not worship and serve Christ alone. We lose Kingdom, die, become nothing more than dead fixtures attached to the things we couldn't give up.

IV. *Christ's challenge unmasks our idolatry, and His Cross forgives it*

Today's Gospel: "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Text exhibits Simeon's prophecy in fulfillment. Today's service clearly reveals the tender Babe of the manger to be the Man of sorrows destined for cross. Text fulfilled as He was going to Jerusalem to die. His death on cross draws men, bids them, "Follow Me!" Response to that challenge shows our true loyalties. Whatever we place before Him clearly revealed as an idol. But His cross is far more than a challenge. An invitation to be forgiven and reconciled to God in spite of past idolatries, an invitation to receive the Kingdom, of which we are not worthy. By kingly reign of the Spirit in us we can live lives of sensitive response to His command, lives which place Christ first—even before our most precious loyalties.

Such love for loved ones and home, love that makes them second to Christ, is really the best love for them, because it is creative and upbuilding—not the love of a leech.

Pleasant Hill, Calif.

WILLIAM BACKUS