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Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels, Second Series

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

JOHN 6:60-71

You have problems too deep to solve, foes too strong for defeat by your own hands, dangers too formidable to face alone. Your help is in the name of the Lord and especially the Lord's Holy Spirit. On this festival of Pentecost bring petitions to the Spirit; He will supply the need.

Two Pentecost Petitions

I. *"From every error keep us free"*

A. Error, disbelief, and doubt frequently impinge on man's faith. (1) Text (vv. 60-62). "Hard saying" (*σκληρός*, hard to receive, hard to accept). Here particularly Jesus' coming down from heaven (v. 58). Therefore v. 62, where Jesus says in effect: "You will find it easier to believe I came down from heaven when you see Me returning thither." Cp. John 3:13.—Also included in "hard saying": Jesus' statements recorded in vv. 48-57, referring to His death as a sacrifice for sin. These sayings met with doubt and disbelief. (2) Today still: "blood theology" is doubted or disbelieved; it is a "hard saying." Doubts also come to Christians regarding other doctrines: conversion, predestination, etc. V. 61: "Doth this offend you?" cause you to stumble? to doubt? to err? Cp. Matt. 11:6. Because you are a believing Christian, Satan will attempt to wrest your faith from you. He sows the seeds of doubt and disbelief. This danger is too formidable for you to face alone.

B. The Holy Spirit offers the deterrent to stave off such threatening danger. (1) The deterrent is the Word (v. 63; cp. Gal. 6:10-17). On "spirit" and "flesh" cp. John

3:6; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Peter 3:8. On the quickening power of the Word cp. John 15:3; Rom. 10:17. The Word gives life because Jesus, who is "the Life" (John 14:6), makes Himself known and offers Himself to mankind through the Word. Cp. John 5:39; John 17:3; John 20:31. The Holy Spirit operates through the Word (Eph. 6:17), staving off thereby the threatening perils of doubt and disbelief. (2) Today still "the words . . . are life" (text). The Holy Spirit through the Word "shall teach you all things" (John 14:26; the standard Gospel for the Feast of Pentecost). Wield the "sword of the Spirit." Use the Word. Pray: "Give to Thy Word impressive power" (Hymn 235:2). Pray: "Let Thy knowledge spread and grow, working error's overthrow" (Hymn 226:2). Petition: "From every error keep us free," and the Holy Spirit answers by overthrowing error and doubt by rooting Christians in the Word of life. (Eph. 3:17-19; Col. 2:6,7)

II. *"Let none but Christ our master be"*

A. Some abandon Christ as Master; defection (apostasy) takes place. (1) Text (v. 66). Customary Pentecost theme: many being won by the Spirit (Acts 2:1-13, standard Epistle for Pentecost; 2:41, 47). But here the very opposite: defection. Facts recorded: "many went back."—Fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 44:18). Returned to their former ways. Allowed the world to gain the mastery over them again. Went back to the world, with its short-lived pleasures (2 Tim. 4:10). Went back to purposeless, aimless living, opposite of 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 2:20. Went back to anxiety, perplexity, fear (John 15:5b; John 6:20). Went back to die in their sins (John 8:21, 24). Went to face eternity without

Christ as Advocate and Redeemer (1 John 2:1). (2) Today still: a great deal of defection from Christ. Many want Him for temporal advantage only. Cp. context (John 6:15,26). Desire "free meals," the "meat which perisheth," rather than true bread from heaven, "which endureth" (John 6:27,33). When Jesus "fails" them, they "walk no more with Him." Cp. Lot's wife. We are daily exposed to the grave danger of apostasy.

B. The Holy Spirit offers the preventive for this grave danger. (1) Text, vv. 67-69. Peter says in effect: Poor, ailing, wretched, lost, sinful man has nowhere else to go but to Jesus. Cp. Hymn 334:2 ("... my *only* Consolation") and Hymn 348:1 ("... *only* Jesus can my heartfelt longing still"). "Thou hast the words of eternal life." "We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ..." Where did such conviction and loyalty come from? 1 Cor. 12:3; Matt. 16:16,17. The Holy Ghost works faith and preserves faith, thus preventing defection and apostasy (John 6:29; 1 Cor. 1:4-7). (2) Turn to the Spirit for continuing convictions and for unabating loyalty to Christ. Peter claimed for himself a loyalty that would never cease. This self-confidence was perilous. Jesus cautions against it (vv. 70,71), stating that even among the Twelve, individually chosen by Him, there was not the perfect loyalty of which Peter boasted. Strong language: "one of you is a devil." Cp. John 13:2,27.—All those belong to Christ who are given Him by the Father, through the gracious workings of the Holy Spirit (text, v. 65; context, vv. 37, 44, 45). Preservation in the faith (and safekeeping against defection) is possible, not through man's personal strivings but solely through the "drawing" of God the Spirit (Hos. 13:9, self-sufficiency results in self-destruction; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Thess. 2:13). To remain true to Christ alone, owning Him only as Lord and Master; to keep

"clinging to our Savior, whose blood [alone] hath bought us," pray Hymn 226:7, 8.

Conclusion: "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord. . . . From every error keep us free. Let none but Christ our master be."

By Way of Explanation: The two major divisions of the outline are from Hymn 224:2. This hymn may well be used as the sermon hymn, since other quotations are also drawn from its stanzas.—A careful study of the *entire* sixth chapter of John is essential to a proper understanding and full treatment of the text. Unlike some Bible chapters which have widely divergent sections wholly unrelated to one another, John 6 has a high degree of cohesion and unity, warranting detailed study *in toto*, if due justice is to be done to vv. 60-71.

Collinsville, Ill. THEODORE TEYLER

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

MATT. 28:16-20

We church members have been calling ourselves fortunate today because we can say that God is three-in-one. At least, that's what we said a few minutes ago when we prayed the collect: "God, who hast given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the Trinity. . . ." Why? If someone asked us to explain what we mean by "Trinity," most of us would be hard pressed to make it plain. But we're not just celebrating the fact that we know a doctrine but the great action of God the Father in sending Jesus Christ to redeem us and the Holy Spirit to bring the life of Christ to us. We're celebrating the fact that God doesn't just sit and marvel at His "three-in-oneness" but that He acts for His people. That's why, in this text, Christ makes it plain that He wants us to be a people who act to carry out the work He has given His church. We're going to see that Our Assignment Is to Act with God to Make Disciples of All the World by Using the

Tools of Baptism and Teaching to Bring Men to Meet God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I. *The aim our Lord gives us: to make disciples.*

Text (v. 19 RSV). Our job as Christians is not merely to spread Christian ethics and doctrine around the world, not just to repeat the Gospel into people's ears. Much more to our task than just printing and distributing tracts and house-to-house visiting and preaching. Each of us is to be concerned that the rest of us become and remain *disciples* of the Lord. Definition: disciples are pupils of a rabbi, or teacher. They followed him about, lived in his company, obeyed him as leader. We are to help men into this kind of relationship with our Lord.

II. *The scope of our task: all the world.*

Text: "all nations." Our scope not limited by any cultural or national boundaries. Roots of this worldwide point of view are in the O. T. To Abraham: "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 18); Psalms echo it (Ps. 2, 19, 24, et al.); Isaiah put it into sharp focus (ch. 60). We must be careful not to limit scope in either of two ways. Some find it easy to accept task of making disciples at home, but haven't much concern for world missions; others find it easier to give a few dollars for missions than accept responsibility for a neighbor.

III. *What we have to offer: a meeting with the triune God*

A. God is triune. Text: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Introit: "The Holy Trinity and Undivided Unity." But this is not just a doctrine we try to be impressed by because it sounds incredible. This is a way of describing God as One who gets things done, One who doesn't just sit quiescent through all eternity. We see Him at work when we think about the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Father willed

it and designed the schedule of our redemption; the Son carried out the actions planned by the Father, always with the help and presence of the Father (2 Cor. 5:19) "*God was in Christ . . .*" (also, today's Gospel, vv. 2, 15); the Holy Spirit meets us where we are with the life Christ has won for us (today's Gospel, v. 5).

B. When we make disciples, we actually bring people to meet this God. Sometimes, in evangelistic connection, people say, "Prepare to meet thy God." Actually, when we carry out the charge of Jesus to witness, people *are* meeting God. Content of what we have to deliver to men is not just words, not just new thinking, moral reform, but the triune God.

IV. *What we have to work with: Baptism and teaching*

A. Our Lord gives us tools for making disciples. One of them is Baptism (text cf. today's Gospel, John 3:5-7). "*In the name of . . .*" not just a symbolic act which we do down here while God erases sins in His book up in heaven. "In the name of" means that God Himself is present, that He meets the person we baptize, enters into fellowship with him, invites him to become a disciple.

B. Christ also gives us *teaching* as a tool for making disciples. Text: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." By teaching, we unfold the meaning of Baptism, help men understand the action of the triune God in redemption. But more, God is present when we teach Him to men, so that what we present is not mere words, but, as in Baptism, God Himself.

V. *Our task is possible*

A. When we face the task and plan of our Lord, we may be disheartened. Its scope is tremendous. We have seen opposition and resistance from the very people we are to make disciples. Church often seems to feel defeated before she starts. Church folk reach

for projects to keep them busy and the organizational structure intact rather than throw themselves into our Lord's project, because they feel beaten, outnumbered, convinced they cannot succeed at this.

B. We need to believe once more in the possibility of the task. Jesus knew this. Text: "All authority [power] is given to Me in heaven and on earth," and "I am with you always." We've just celebrated events of the resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Spirit—all the great signs of Christ, who possesses all authority in the universe. We need to remember these signs and cling to them because often the world looks as if Satan were king of kings and lord of lords. But Christ has all power, and He is present with us. He can and will guarantee success to His church if we just take the task and do it.

Pleasant Hill, Calif.

WM. BACKUS

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 15:1-8

Purpose: Results count in our day. The motivation stressed in this sermon must not be based on a quota of production but on a quality of life. We are identified with Jesus and united with Him through His initiative and by His power. The goals we have are the ones He has set. They are good in themselves and good for us also. He makes our life productive.

Sometimes all it takes to keep your car from starting is a loose battery cable. Occasionally we find words we are hearing on television or in conversation or at a lecture rather meaningless because our attention has wandered and we've lost the connection of thoughts. In certain business relationships as much depends on whom you know as on what you know. We say connections and contacts are important. In this year of presidential aspirations we shall see how candidates strive to associate themselves with popular people and causes. Such connections can contribute

to success at the polls. Our text emphasizes a connection that brings success to our life according to the measure of God. It offers us an opportunity to consider

The Productive Life

I. *A productive life is directly dependent on Jesus Christ (vv. 1-4)*

A. The goal of a productive life is not as real or vital to many people as the goal of comfort, or popularity, or power, or pleasure. "He that loveth his life . . ." (John 12:25). Spiritually we are too concerned with minimums.

B. Set your goal for a productive life. Let God define what a productive life is. Consider His evaluation of John's "tragic" life. (Matt. 11:11)

C. Many of life's burdens, disappointments, sorrows, and readjustments are God's process of pruning the shoots on His vine. Jesus is the Vine; the Father is the Gardener; we are the shoots (vv. 1, 2). "Chasteneth," Heb. 12:5, 6; "tried by fire," 1 Peter 1:7. These are similar pictures of purifying.

D. Life's experiences, however sweet or bitter, must be interpreted by the words of Jesus if they are to "prune" us properly. (V. 3)

E. If you leave Christ, get your goal or your motivation elsewhere, your life is futile even if it appears full. (V. 4)

II. *By a relationship to Christ we establish and increase productivity, not just production (vv. 5, 6)*

A. This relationship to Christ is best defined as consisting in the forgiveness of sins and the aspirations this forgiveness raises within us. "New creation" (2 Cor. 5:17-20). "That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom. . . ."

B. The verdict on your efforts not related to Christ is that they are nothing. It is not the good act alone as distinguished from the bad that is important, but rather its root and

purpose even though good. (Quotations from Shelley's *Ozymandias*, or Kipling's *Recessional*, or Sandburg's *Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind* may be useful here.)

C. The crackling of the fire burning dry thorns or weeds, or the prunings of the vineyard, orchard, or even the rosebush, illustrate the hopelessness of the destiny of those without Christ or fallen away from Him. (V. 6)

III. *Make your life productive, more productive than it has been (vv. 7, 8)*

A. To do so you will have to draw nearer to Christ. There is no other way. To do this His words are instrumental. Therefore public and private worship, Bible study, meditation on His promises, use of the sacraments are important and necessary. (V. 7)

B. Relate your past to Him in repentance, trust, and gratitude; your present with zeal and devotion; your future with anticipation and assurance. The Holy Spirit holds Jesus before you and guides you. (John 14:26)

C. It is not so much what your calling in life is, but how you fulfill it. If it is honest and useful in itself, it affords you an opportunity to be a productive Christian.

D. By being productive you do as Jesus did in His life on earth and glorify the Father. (V. 8; cf. John 12:28; 17:4)

Fairbanks, Alaska

OMAR STUENKEL

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 11:16-26

From a letter from a former member:

"I surely was shocked the other night. I heard Joyce talking to a friend saying that she had joined the C— Church. She said 'That Church is really on the ball; they are interested in doing things for people to help them in this life. They don't preach all this Follow-Jesus junk.' And her friend retorted: 'Yes, isn't that dumb?' So, I had to speak up."

Did she? Would silence have been better? She herself added: "Don't know if it was appreciated, but I did it in a quiet manner, not wanting to start any argument, and then I let the matter drop, hoping it would be food for thought." Would it? What would *you* have done? What *do* you do in situations like this

When Facing Unbelievers?

I. *Is it safe to witness? Yes, for much unbelief is childish*

A. Jesus found it so (vv. 18 f.). John's question (context) did not stem from unbelief (no "reed," v. 7) but led Jesus to speak of His hearers' rejection ("if ye will receive it," v. 14) of both divine messengers: Of John because He did not present a bright, sociable personality or message; of Jesus because He did. Both are slandered, discarded.

B. This is like peevish children (vv. 16 f.), unwilling to play either "wedding" or "funeral." Like asking, "What *do* you want?" "I just want to be 'mad.'"

C. Like present day objections to modern preaching and witnessing: Too much "repent," too much "comfort"; too strict, too liberal; too solemn, too gay; too other-worldly, too this-worldly; often contradictory, unreasonable: condemning ours, but accepting nobody else's either. Superficial: churches too friendly, not friendly enough, etc. Prejudiced: looking for a church to suit them instead of being willing to adjust.

D. No need to be swayed by such childish objections. Real cause: Lack of "wisdom" (v. 19); unyielded will (John 7:17; 1 Cor. 2:14). But Christ remains to us the "wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1). Our faith in Him is sure.

II. *Is it necessary to witness? Yes, for their condemnation is imminent*

A. Though childish, unbelief faces no mere juvenile court. "Day of Judgment" (vv. 22, 24) is due. Unbelief is no childish

prank, but rejects Him who is Judge of the universe. Starts in text: "began He to upbraid. . . . Woe." See damnableness of unbelief, rejecting God's gift of the Way. (John 14:6)

B. How concerned we ought to be over modern cities resembling ancient Tyre, Sidon, Sodom—predominantly "pagan"—sure of condemnation. (Rom. 1:20)

C. Even more so for our Chorazins, Bethsaldas, Capernaums—"Christian" cities and people who pass by the Christ and His churches. (Mark 16:16; Luke 12:47, 48)

D. Most of all concerned for ourselves "if we neglect so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3)—we, who have the "whole Christ," not merely the Great Teacher or Miracle Worker of Galilee (as people of Capernaum may have thought of Him) but also the Christ of Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Golgotha, the resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, session—the "Son of man" (v. 19), come to raise us to "sons of God"; the "Friends of sinners" (v. 19); the Christ of invitation, "Come unto Me." (V. 28)

E. In deep awareness of the Helper given

us, we share His spirit of deep concern to rescue the perishing by warning, witnessing. There still is time. The hour of Judgment has not yet struck.

III. *Is it of any use to witness? Yes, Christ will gain victories through us*

A. Our letter continued: "Hoping it would be food for thought; I think it was, because she brought up the subject again the other night. . . ." The last chapter for Joyce is yet to be written. God can triumph.

B. "At that time" (v. 25). Jesus thanks for faith as found in "babes." Not childish unbelief but childlike faith is God's goal (v. 26). See evidences in our own church of victory through witnessing of Christ. God's wisdom has "children" who justify His truth. (Matt. 18:3)

C. Some will reject the greatest preachers of all times (John, James), yet God will win Gospel victories through "babes" like us!

Is it safe? necessary? any use? (Acts 4:20)
"So I had to speak up" (letter).

Honolulu, Hawaii

WINFRED A. SCHROEDER