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Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

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Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels, Second Series

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 10:13-16

What is a child? The answer depends on whom you ask and when. An expectant mother is apt to say that a child is bulgy shapelessness and a backache. A harried mother in midday will say a child is a vexing, mischievous, dirty rascal. When this child is washed, in his sleepers, and sleeping in his little bed, mother will say, "Isn't he a little angel?" God, whose opinion does not change, says, "Children are an heritage of the Lord." A good stewardship of the children on loan to us will include remembering that

Jesus Wants to Bless Our Children

I. *They need the Lord's blessing*

A. Jesus thought so (v. 14).

B. Scripture says so. Choice of passages on original sin.

C. Experience agrees thereto. Children need not be taught vices. It is the graces that they need to learn. For example, children are selfish by nature — "that's mine," "he can't have that," etc. Sharing, an evidence of love, must be taught.

II. *They are capable of receiving the Lord's blessing*

A. We don't know why the disciples rebuked those that brought the children — Jesus too busy? Children not important?

B. Human reason still objects in one way or another: Children cannot believe because they can't understand, sleep during Baptism, etc.

C. But Jesus made them the objects of His benediction (v. 16). In fact, the recep-

tiveness which marks a child is requisite for kingdom membership. (V. 15)

III. *Therefore bring your children to Jesus*

A. Show the sort of concern for your children's spiritual welfare which reflects the "they brought" of v. 13. We devote thought, energy, money, to children's teeth, health, music, education. Good! But "what shall it profit," etc.?

B. Jesus will bless them. First Baptism (appropriate passages); then build on this foundation with the Word at home via Bible stories, family devotions. Regularly in church so that babies learn the habit. Sunday school, confirmation classes, VBS. Every association with the Word is an opportunity for Jesus to take your children up in His arms and to bless them.

Today's Gospel — a man finds a lost sheep, a woman her lost coin. Their joy illustrates the joy in heaven over a recovered sinner. If an angelic choir chants this paean of praise, there must be an antiphonal chorus which answers with a "Hallelujah" when a little one is brought to Jesus.

Quincy, Ill.

E. J. OTTO

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 17:1-10

(Our text is a discourse composed of logia which appear in slightly different forms and sometimes different contexts in Matthew and Mark. Furthermore, it seems to be a discourse which finds its unity in the persons addressed, i. e., the disciples, rather than in its subject matter. At least three different topics are treated: 1-4, the Disciple in the Community; 5-6, the Disciple's Faith; 7-10, the Disciple's Reward, a paragraph peculiar to Luke. In order to preserve the unity of the sermon, we shall not

attempt to integrate these different sayings into one sermon. Instead we shall treat the first group of sayings as the text. This departs a bit from the emphasis of the old Gospel for the day but accords well with the Collect and the standard Old Testament pericope, for the church is to be the community on which the holy God has put His name.)

Somebody has said that the church is not a gathering of perfected saints but of a group of sinners trying to be saints. Rightly understood this is so. Often those outside the church fail to see this. But this "trying to be saints" is not something which is done on an individual basis alone. The church is a community, called to holiness, in which each is supposed to help the other achieve the goal which the holy God has set for His people. Our text is a reminder from our Lord of the responsibilities each of us has as His disciple within the community of believers.

The Disciple in the Community of Believers

I. *The true disciple of Jesus Christ seeks to preserve the holiness of the church, the community of believers*

A. By taking heed unto himself.

1. A Christian believer knows that he has been called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:3). Holiness of life, which is the life of love in the Spirit of God, is the outward sign of the inner possession of salvation. The whole redeemed community is called to holiness. (Explanation to Third Article)

2. Sin destroys the life of God in the individual and in the community. Thus sin endangers the most precious possession we have — our eternal salvation. The Savior would not have warned us against sin so earnestly if it were not so terribly serious (vv. 1 and 2).

3. The true disciple of Jesus Christ will be careful to avoid causing the brother to sin. Given a fallen world, it is impossible that temptations to sin (RSV), *σκάνδαλα*,

do not come. The disciple will dedicate himself to the task of edifying the brother and never giving offense. A *σκάνδαλον* was a trap or snare. It became an expression for enticement or allurement to sin. We set no *σκάνδαλα* before the brother* (v. 3a). Practical examples. The Christian lives with an eye to the brother at home, work, and play.

B. By taking heed unto others.

1. Sometimes the brother will err (v. 3b). This also threatens the life of God in the fellowship of believers. It is a danger to the brother.

2. The Christian has a responsibility toward the brother. He must rebuke him (v. 3b). He does this in order to win him, for once again the issue is eternal salvation. When the brother repents, he must always be forgiven. Thus the community of believers is built up in holiness and love and salvation preserved.

II. *The Disciple becomes mindful of his need for repentance*

A. No one can study this text without being led to searching self-examination. We see that we have lived within the fellowship of the church unmindful of the brother's needs ("After all, it's my business how I live") and of our responsibility toward him ("I'll just write him off and let it go at that.") We have given in to the individualistic attitude which besets the modern church. This causes us sadness.

B. With grateful hearts we remember Jesus' words "If he repents, forgive him."

* Most commentators see in "little ones" a reference to immature Christians (Arndt) or children. Stählin (*Skandalon*, 1930) sees it as a reference to any Christian. The Savior seems to be saying: "Christian believers may look little and insignificant, but look at the punishment which follows if you lead any one of them into sin." This is a powerful interpretation against an insensitive disregard of the brother.

These words are a mirror of divine forgiveness. God forgives those who repent for the sake of Jesus Christ. He more than any other was mindful of others to the extent that he gave His life that all our *σκάνδαλα* might be covered and forgiven.

C. We accept that forgiveness today, aware of how little we deserve it, letting it be a power within us for a deeper and more responsible life of sanctification. Thus God preserves us in His gift of salvation and uses us to preserve our brethren also.

Our Epistle for this day points us to the Christian hope. What a joy it will be to see its consummation! And what added joy it will be if, when we see it, there is one there who will say, "You helped me"! God grant us all to experience that joy.

Yonkers, N. Y. RICHARD E. KOENIG

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 21:15-19

(This is a beloved and familiar text. However, careful study of the original Greek will be rewarding even to the most experienced pastor. Several points of interpretation deserve attention: (1) Our Lord's question to Peter [v. 15]: "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Does Christ here refer to the other disciples [Matt. 26:33], or does He merely refer to Peter's old familiar life and love of fishing, in view of his hasty and impulsive earlier action? [Vv. 6, 7] (2) The old question of the significance of different words used here: for love, *ἀγαπάω* and *φιλέω*; for Peter's work, feed, *βόσκειν*, and tend, *ποιμαίνειν*; for the people, *ἀρνία*, lambs, and sheep, *προβάτια*. Obviously, our Lord and the inspired evangelist had some reason for this particular and varied use of words, even if it is only for euphony. (3) Do vv. 18 and 19 constitute a direct prophecy of Peter's martyrdom, or is it merely a general picture of the helplessness of old age? (4) The Roman Catholic claim that this text is important evidence for Peter's primacy in view of the questions and the charge directed to him, "Feed My lambs . . . sheep." The basic thought of the text is well expressed in the Collect and ties in well with

both Epistle and Gospel. The outline here presented makes a general application of Christ's words to St. Peter.)

Love is really the key word for understanding the Bible. God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ is the golden thread throughout all Scripture—promised in the Old Testament times, fulfilled in the New. All Christians profess faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We trust in God's love and forgiveness. We are also to show this love in our lives. If faith in God's love and mercy is genuine it always manifests itself in thought, words, and action. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Do we really do so?

The Proof of Love

I. *We prove love to Christ by our words* (15-17)

A. This was one of the last conversations which Christ had with His disciples. It took place when Christ had revealed Himself to them on the Sea of Galilee, after a breakfast together. He gave them another dramatic proof of His resurrection, His presence, the reality of His glorified body.

B. Three questions directed to Simon Peter. The first time Christ asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" The second and third time He simply asked "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" The thrice-repeated question undoubtedly was a reminder of Peter's three-fold denial. (Matt. 26:69-75)

C. Earlier, Peter had suddenly and impulsively jumped out of the boat in order to swim toward Christ on the shore (v. 7). Christ's question made him face up to the real situation: Would love for Him prove to be stronger than concern for the old life, fishing, earthly things?

D. Three times Peter, in clear and unmistakable words, professed love for Christ. The third time Peter even appeals to Christ's

omniscience. Here are words of honest confession! Peter no longer claims to be more faithful than others. He merely says that he loves Christ!

E. The words of our mouth are necessary. They can reveal our inmost thoughts and emotions. God Himself places a high value on speech (Rom. 10:10). What does *your* speech reveal or accomplish? Above all, what do your words reveal about faith and love in Christ? Yet words are not the only proof of love.

II. *We prove love to Christ by our deeds* (15-17)

A. Christ assigned a task to Peter upon each affirmation of his love for Him. The first time He said: "Feed My lambs" (little ones). Then the Lord said twice: "Feed My sheep" (older members of the flock). Lambs need more constant care than sheep, but both types need faithful pastoral instruction, guidance, and protection. Peter was again declared to be an apostle and leader among God's people.

B. Peter's confession of love, in words, was good and necessary. It was not sufficient, however. The apostle was enjoined to show the reality of his faith and love in his life and deeds. Peter's principal work upon earth was to feed Christ's children and people. A true pastor must bring spiritual food in the means of grace. He is also to shepherd and guide his people. (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28)

C. Deeds are always the proof of Christian faith and love. 1 John 3:18: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." 1 John 4:11: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John 4:20: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

D. Every Christian professes faith and love for Christ. Not every professed Christian, however, shows by his deeds that he is a true disciple. "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:16)

E. What does an honest evaluation of your own life and deeds show? Home and family life. Business and social contacts. Church and community work. Remember the words which Christ will speak on Judgment Day! (Matt. 25:40, 45)

III. *We prove love to Christ by our faithfulness unto the end* (18-19)

A. The final test of Peter's love would come in later years. Then he would be alone, aged, helpless. His enemies would be able to do with him as they wished. Would he show his love for Christ and remain faithful even then?

B. The text clearly says that he would "glorify God" even in his death. There seems to be a reference to death by crucifixion in the Lord's words about those who would "stretch forth" his hands.

C. Ancient tradition speaks of Peter's martyrdom in Rome. Eusebius says (on Origen's authority) that Peter was crucified at Rome, head downwards, on his own request. The one who had denied his Lord three times on the night of His betrayal became strong enough to seal his confession of love with his very life and blood.

D. No one knows what the future will bring. In ancient times Christians were willing to die rather than deny Christ. There are places in the world today where Christians must be prepared to die for their faith. Christ is more precious than anything that this earth can bring or offer us. Would we be ready to die, if necessary, rather than deny Him? Those who truly love Him know that He is more precious than life itself! "Be

thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

People are beginning to see that the outward prosperity of the church in America may be very deceptive. Millions belong to Christian churches. Church membership in America has reached the highest percentage in our history. The numbers and the wealth have been increasing. People come to church and profess faith and love. It is fair and legitimate, however, when we are asked: "Is this genuine religion?" Our text gives a threefold test and proof of Christian love. We prove our love to Christ by our words, by our deeds, and by our faithfulness unto the end. May God enable us to do this.

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 15:1-9

(Observe the propers for the day. The Introit strikes the theme and spirit of the day in the words "The Lord is the Strength of His people." The Gradual reaches its climax in the Psalm "Deliver me in Thy righteousness." The Standard Gospel underscores this petition by demonstrating the need for a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and the Standard Epistle reveals the source of it. The Collect, therefore, is the supplication of Christ's holy people for the "increase of true religion.")

Someone has said that it is easier to change a doctrine than it is to change a tradition. As a church grows old, her traditions become deeply ingrained. There is more concern that the church retain and observe "the tradition of the elders" than maintain the purity of Word and Sacrament. Resistance to any change in tradition is often expressed by statements such as "We tried that before," or "We have always done it this way," or "It isn't Lutheran." Resistance properly channeled must be resistance against a faith that degenerates into a rule-book religion

of tradition, ceremony, custom. Today we note

The Ruin of Rule-Book Religion

I. *Rule-book religion ruins the true Christian faith*

A. As devotees of rule-book religion this was the intent of the scribes and Pharisees. Their concern for the rules prompted a special delegation from Jerusalem (v. 1). The tradition of the elders required washing before eating, for hands that might have touched anything belonging to a Gentile would defile the food, and the food, in turn, would defile the eater. The disciples violated this "canon law" of the church. The scribes and Pharisees held Jesus responsible, for what they did as His disciples must have been done by His consent and, perhaps, by His example. The charge reflects how closely they were watched, how exemplary their conduct, since no more serious charge could be found. It also shows what importance rule-book religion attaches to the rules. We may observe the same in rule-book religion today.

B. Rule-book religion destroys the concept of true righteousness. Pharisaic righteousness consisted in merit self-attained through ceremony and tradition. True righteousness is beyond human attainment, something infinitely better. See Matt. 5:20, the Standard Gospel for the day. The Pharisees were, indeed, good people, but their rule-book righteousness was a deceiving mask. The righteousness of Christ is a saving robe.

C. Rule-book religion destroys the exercise of true righteousness (vv. 3-6). While the Pharisees insisted on hand washing, a tradition of the elders, they violated the law of love and mercy, the laws of God. Jesus replied with a countercharge. Their traditions permitted a man to ignore his obligation to support his parents by the claim that his money was being given to the church. While their rule-book religion, therefore, claimed faithfulness to tradition, it neglected

love. The priest and Levite "passed by on the other side," reading their rule books.

D. Rule-book religion fosters hypocrisy. See vv. 7, 8. It would, in fact, make God Himself guilty of hypocrisy by the assertion that a perfect God could accept an imperfect holiness in man. It makes a hypocrite of its devotee inasmuch as hand washing is confused with heart washing. Clean hands, but an impure heart. The mote and the beam. Rule-book religion has no confession of sin, no forgiveness for sin, no cross, no Christ.

E. Rule-book religion is a vain religion (v. 9). It is vain worship. It would come into the divine Presence in something less than the righteousness of Christ, without a wedding garment, as whitened sepulchres, behind a false front. The worship of the good Pharisee contrasted with the worship of the scoundrel publican.

F. The extent of rule-book religion today. It is greater than we should like to think. It is the religion of natural man, manifested in every heathen creed. It often assumes a Christian flavor in pietism, formalism, church tradition, legalism, bootstrap Christianity. It may ensnare us too. Not that we would assert salvation by works, for we know better than that; we know all the catechism's answers. But we can so easily turn our churchgoing, our Communion celebrations, our offerings, into a rule-book system.

II. *The Christian faith is the ruin of rule-book religion*

A. It reveals the emptiness in the cup of human righteousness. It describes the terrible gulf that is fixed between man's holiness and God's holiness and the failure of everything human to bridge that gulf. It offers no comfort in the greater delinquency of others. It tears off the mask and reveals our spiritual nakedness.

B. But the Christian Gospel offers hope. It calls for a new heart (v. 8; Ps. 24:3, 4;

Ezek. 36:26; John 3). The vessels in which the sediments of sin have settled must be cleansed on the inside. Not the sprinkling of perfume on the surface of the heart's cesspool, but a new heart, a pure heart. The blood cleanses. The atoning sacrifice. 2 Cor. 5:21 and Rom. 5:19. "In Thy righteousness"—here is our deliverance. Salvation is not a seniority or priority that is built up over years of "obedience." It is a gift. God is no credit bureau, no scorekeeper. His Gospel confers the new heart it requires, for

C. The Christian Gospel offers not only cleansing from past sin but also cleanliness. It creates a clean heart and renews a right spirit. Rules? Rules, indeed! The rule of Christ and the rule of His Spirit in the heart.

III. *Increase in us true religion*

A. The means? The Gospel, as above. And the Gospel in Baptism (Rom. 6, today's Epistle). Buried with Christ, dead to sin; raised with Christ, alive to God.

B. And the results? Newness of life. Purity of heart. Rich in good works. True religion. (James 1:27)

C. Our prayer: "Increase in us true religion." The religion that knows Christ, the righteous Savior; that is filled with the Holy Ghost, His purifying Spirit (Ps. 51:7). And the pure in heart shall see God.

St. Louis, Mo.

A. F. WEDEL

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY

AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 15:10-20

The introduction could well be the development of v. 8, because it indicates what is the ongoing problem of the Christian and calls for the ongoing work of God.

God's New Creation

The theme and the heart of the text must be v. 13. Here we find what we must always

look for, both Law and Gospel, and under this verse the rest comes out right.

I. It is always opposed

A. All Pharisaism is always offended by it (v. 12), especially the Pharisaism that is still to be found in ourselves. This is still the natural man who goes to work on himself in order to produce what God's Law demands.

B. It always has to do with externals only (v. 11). This is not only legalism, but also the very heart of all man-made religion, made still and also by ourselves. We can readily spot it by the manner we are always tempted to still our accusing consciences: by promises and efforts at improvement apart from grace. It should be noted that our main emphasis is not in the direction of fasting and ceremonies but of the attitude, the heart (vv. 13 and 19), out of which these things proceed.

II. It calls for renewal of our understanding

A. This is the initial breakthrough of God (v. 10). When Jesus urges men to hear so that they understand, He also make it possible for them to understand. This is the call to initial repentance, so that we do not merely hear with our ears but that what we hear penetrates to the condemnation not merely of our ordinary kind of hearing but also of our way of looking at things, our understanding.

B. This is necessary as long as we live, even for us who already follow Christ (vv. 15, 16). Peter, disciple that he was, needed the same kind of hearing, because he was also without understanding. This is the Christian living the life of repentance. Like Peter, however, it knows where to go for understanding—to Christ, and like Peter it willingly submits to His rebuke in order that it might be made to understand what Christ means and that He always means us.

III. It condemns us for what we are in ourselves

A. The condemnation is implicit in the fact that God must create new and cannot simply take what He finds in us (v. 13). The condemnation is openly stated in the fact that God must pull us up as plants which He has not planted. It is the work of God's Law, the ongoing work of His Law, lest we pride ourselves in our expressions, our advances over what we once were, and fail to see that the condemnation always hovers over everything that is not altogether and only under grace.

B. The condemnation is radical (v. 13) in that the plant itself must be pulled up by God if He has not planted it. This is why mere religious tinkering is never enough, because there is still the heart of the man (v. 19), and until the heart itself is reached, it will continue to bear its own fruit and not the fruit of God's plant.

C. We always express what we are before God so that we ourselves are condemned as evil. Here we emphasize again that we sin because we are sinners and do not become sinners by individual acts of sin. Here the true Lutheran doctrine with regard to original sin needs to be preached in the light of vv. 13 and 19 so that we do not end up with our own refined kind of moralism or something less than the confession of sin, which admits that "I am by nature sinful and unclean." I am in this horrible condition of rebellion against God, and that's why all my actions are the actions of a rebel against Him, even my rites and ceremonies and deeds by which I would worship and serve God.

IV. God makes new what submits to His condemnation

A. The promise is already implicit in the endearing term used with regard to God as we are reminded that the real Worker here

is the heavenly Father of this Jesus Christ (v. 13). When we come to see Him as such, our eyes are opened from their blindness in which we reckoned religiously only by ourselves and are brought to see how God makes all things new.

B. Under the crushing of God's condemnation, or the pulling out of that which God did not plant, we not merely recognize our own inadequacy in the things of God, but we have wrung from us the cry of repentance "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This is the first look away from ourselves so that we listen to this Jesus who is working us over so unmercifully that we may yet cry for mercy. This will never happen so long as we have a leg of our own to stand on, so long as we are even only remotely sufficient of ourselves to still think something of ourselves.

C. God's new creation is faith itself, faith whereby the heart becomes new and produces no longer of its own but of God. St. Paul reminds us that whatever is not of faith is

sin. By the same token, what is of faith, is pleasing to God. Faith makes us new so that we now produce in faith what is the product of God: these are the good works of the life that is in Christ. Believing in this Jesus who is here talking to us and with His address offering to make us new plants planted of His heavenly Father, God also becomes our heavenly Father and not merely the God who must be appeased and whose negative reckoning must be offset by our positive efforts. This is the Gospel.

D. As God's new creation we please God. We are God's children, and He loves what we do, not because it is so good in itself but because it is the doing of people whom He loves, it is the doing of His beloved children. Now many things still proceed out of hearts that are not everything that they should be by exact legal definition, but God takes them because they come out of hearts over which He is the heavenly Father in Christ Jesus.

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