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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

TRINITY VI

MATTHEW 21:28-32

Introduction

What do fathers and mothers talk about after their children have gone to bed? Usually conversation centers about the family. There are shoes that have to be bought, shots to be taken, a way found to smooth out a neighborhood argument. Fathers and mothers have a special way of talking about their children. They are concerned about their problems, about how they will grow up. Parents are partial to their children; after all they are their own flesh and blood.

What do sons and daughters talk about? Parents must know their children talk about them. A son tells his friends he thought his father was the best driver in the world, only to discover that father came home with a ticket for speeding in a school zone. Teenagers say their fathers and mothers do not have enough confidence in them.

The talked-about should address some frank words to themselves. Fathers and mothers, sons and daughters should ask themselves: "What kind of father am I?" "What kind of son am I?" Even more important is it for all of us to ask ourselves what kind of children of the Father in heaven we have been.

Jesus told a parable about a situation that should have caused two sons to ask themselves: "What kind of son am I?" The boys answered their father without thinking, but what each said reflected his attitude toward his father. We Christians reflect on the quality of our sonship as we ask:

Really, What Kind of Sons Are We?

I. *God Is Partial to Us and Expects Us to Be His True Sons*

A. A relationship of love and devotion

expects a response. We assume that there was a wholesome and normal relationship between the father and his two sons. The father simply said to each one, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." There is work to be done, and all had to do their share. Naturally the father was partial to his boys. This was not an unreasonable request. As their father he felt that he had a right to ask them, and this was something which they could do and in which they should have an interest. Because of the relationship which had drawn them together in love and devotion, he felt there would be no excuses. There was no reason to bargain, for the father felt that as true sons, who loved and respected him, they would automatically do what he asked.

B. The Father regards us as His true sons and speaks to us. At baptism we were received into God's household. We are members of His family by His grace and mercy. He is partial to us. There can be no question of that. What He has done for us in Christ Jesus is proof positive.

As part of His household, we sons and daughters live in an atmosphere of love and service. A relationship of love and devotion has grown up between us and God. We expect the Father to speak to us. Each day He says to us: "Your sins are forgiven you." But He also says: "Go and work in My vineyard." As a part of that household, we know there is work to be done. Our Father is so partial to us that He gave His own Son to serve us, and Christ made us God's sons through the cross. This Son did His work perfectly. "I have come to do the will of Him that sent Me." And because He did this for us, suffering and dying, and rising on the third day, He has made us sons in His household. Now the Father assumes that all He need say is "Do this, and do that," and that

as true sons we will out of love do what He asks.

As true sons, we ought to love the Father with all that we have. We can't grumble about what the Father asks—not when we in faith know and believe that His Son went to the cross for us. That was His task, and He did it with obedience and faithfulness. We are encouraged to live as His true sons and do whatever He asks when we see that even the Father's partiality for His own Son did not spare Him the cross. The Father is partial to us with a love like that of His Son and therefore we ought to exclaim: "I will be true to You, Father. I will do Your bidding no matter what. I stand ready to serve You not only because You have asked me, but because I am Your loving son and seek ways to express my love for You."

Though we are scarcely impartial as we look at our past lives, we must acknowledge:

II. *Our Conduct as Sons Has Been very Confused*

A. There are unexpected reactions—disobedience and repentance; vain promises and disdain. The replies and the reactions of the sons must have been a shock to the father. The first son stated bluntly and flatly: "I won't do it." He offered no excuses. He simply didn't want to have a thing to do with working in his father's vineyard. He had other things to do and didn't want his father to interfere with his plans, so he flip-pantly replied: "I will not." We would say, "If he were my boy, I would wash his mouth out with soap." After what his father had done for him, how could he talk back like that? But this son had a change of heart. He thought, "How can I be like this? This is my father. He has a perfect right to tell me what to do and what not to do." He was sorry that he had told his father off and went out to the vineyard as the father had asked him to do. It took a little time, but he got around to it. It wasn't easy to do, but it was the right thing to do. And he did it.

The second son replied to the father's request: "I go, sir." It was a sure promise. He exclaimed: "You can count on me. I am your dependable son." We would say, "Here is the kind of boy that would make any father proud." As soon as the father's back was turned, however, this son went the other way. He had given his word of assent to his father, but it didn't mean anything. It was an easy way to get out of a job. He gave a good impression and then he put his vineyard tools back into the shed. It was the easy thing to do, and the wrong thing. And he did it.

B. We are tempted to disrupt the relationship. Did you ever have a youngster around the house who would reply to your order with: "Just a minute, Mother"? Sometimes those minutes become hours, and the job never gets done; or it all ends up with Mother picking up the toys herself. When God lays His commands before us, we don't like to say: "We won't do it." We are more clever; we answer, "Just a minute." And in our hearts we don't intend to do what God wants us to do. Our lives are filled each day with outright disobedience to the commands of God. It is bad enough to have to admit that like the two sons in the parable we simply don't appreciate what the Father has done for us. It is even more serious when we must begin to question our sonship. Certainly we have not matured in our love for Him.

We think of the commendable promises we so often give to God. How many promises we offer to God in our services of worship, kneeling at His altar, and in the final prayers of our days. We tell our Father there's going to be a greater demonstration of real love on our part; we're going to place ourselves into greater service and be more faithful in our Christian duties. Is it happening now? Did it happen last Sunday? As we get ready to get into the car and leave the church parking lot, does a friend call out to us, "Well, George, take it easy"? And we do

just that. We take it easy. Our worthwhile promises made to God are broken because our philosophy of life has become "Take it easy."

We need the only-begotten Son of God to bring us around, to show us our sin, and to change our disobedience into obedience, our broken promises into ones which are kept. Because of the perfect obedience of His own Son, our Father forgives and gives us another chance: "Go and work in My vineyard."

III. *Let Us Learn to Be Consistent in Doing the Father's Will*

A. By repenting. Jesus raised the question: "Which of the two did the will of his father?" Of course the audience answered: "The first" because he repented, had a change of heart, and eventually went out into the vineyard. Jesus wanted them to realize that they were not like the first son but like the second. It was so easy for them to make promises to God, but they did little to carry them out. That is why He said that publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom of God before they would. For those who admitted their sin realized that they had to come to the Father, repent, and prove the sincerity of their repentance by doing the will of the Father.

We come in repentance to the cross of God's Son; here is where we are forgiven, and this is the reason we are determined to do the Father's will. We can best learn the Father's will on our knees. We can find new power and new direction through Christ, in whom we understand how much the Father is concerned about His sons.

B. By acting out of faith and love. After hearing a sermon on the second coming of Christ, Queen Victoria is reported to have remarked to the minister: "Oh, how I wish the Lord would come during my lifetime." When the minister asked her: "Why such an earnest desire?" the Queen replied: "Be

cause I should so love to lay down my crown at His feet." Our acts of love and devotion are evident not only in our willingness to lay down our lives at His feet but also in our ready response to our Father's bidding: "Go and work in My vineyard." Out of faith and love we need to be consistent in our service to the Father. This begins with repentance, as in the case of the tax collectors and prostitutes, and finds its greatest expression in the surrender of our will to the Father's. We can't say "I refuse to go" or "Just a minute," but out of faith and love we give our Father the very best.

What our Lord asks us to do will not always be easy. It may interfere with the pattern of our personal living and comfort, but when we are assured of forgiveness and have a genuine love for our God, we will seek to do His will. We want to be His true sons. He is our Father, and we really are His sons. The Father sent His only-begotten Son into this vineyard of sin and shame to redeem the disobedient sons of this world. We work with Him. We offer no excuses, but as forgiven sons we say, "Lord, we go," and then we do go and accomplish what He wants.

Loving Father, loving son—a blessed relationship for us, made possible by God's Son. We consistently seek to do His will until that day when we can lay down the shovel, the hoe, the book, the saw, and the hammer, and our very lives at His feet.

TRINITY VII

MARK 4:26-29

Introduction

"How does your garden grow?" a nursery rhyme asks. We reply that we need more rain or that the nights are too cool. We are concerned about our gardens; after all we have to take the tomatoes to the market, and this year there is a good price for the cabbage. The freezer is almost empty, and we have a long winter ahead of us. But there

really is no point to our concern. God must take care of the garden's growth.

There is another garden about which we need to be more concerned. Out of this garden, God says, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witnesses, and blasphemies." God wants to plant and cultivate in this garden, so that out of it may come the joy of forgiveness, righteousness, honesty, and purity. How well we know, "What a man sows, that shall he also reap." In this garden, then, it is vital that God do the sowing. His seed will sprout and grow out of the ground, and eventually there will be a harvest.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

I. *It Is Planted by God*

A. God faithfully keeps on planting the seed. In our Lord's day seed time and harvest was just as common as it is now. Everyone's existence depended on the harvest. In our Lord's country there was little black dirt. Hard ground and rocks were more common. And the people were familiar with the Lord's imagery of a sower with his sack at his side, scattering seed over the ground in the spring. Jesus told how some seed would fall on hard ground and the birds would eat it. Some would fall on stony ground. Its roots were not deep, and it would wither away. Some would fall among thorns, and the thorns would not give it a chance to grow. In telling that parable Jesus said, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." In explaining it He identified the seed with the Word of God. When the Lord is at work sowing, our ears are to be put to good use hearing.

The world lives and is impressed by spectaculars in rockets shooting into space; first pictures from a camera soft-landed on the moon; the local baseball team winning five games in a row and producing visions of a pennant. But while all this is going on, God is quietly planting the seed in the hearts of people. In the church's service God is

working in the garden of our lives. God plants this seed through the educational agencies of the church, where young and tender hearts receive the Word from the hand of the Sower. He plants the seed when people are discouraged and unhappy and when they rejoice and are glad. He plants it when people are making plans for their vacation and His Word finds its way into a suitcase. He is at work in Viet Nam as He is in New York City.

The seed is God's and He devises strange ways and methods that the sowing might go on 24 hours a day every day of the year. He doesn't stop if men refuse to let His Word come through loud and clear. Whether or not the field finds the process soothing in spite of any flaws or defects in the distribution God keeps right on planting. Wherever His Word is in use, God places His seed into the hearts of people. Concerns of war and death, of political crisis, or of worry about what they will wear and what they will eat cause people to care little about what God is doing. But He keeps right on, diligently and faithfully. And He then lets men sleep at night and rise in the morning. He gives time to men so that the Word can spring up and grow.

B. God's sowing is so necessary. If farmers in the springtime would all decide not to sow, it would not be long before the people would clamor for them to get out the tractors and the planters and get the seed into the soil. But even when there is no demand for it, God knows that He must always be planting the Word. Sin has made us think the desert is the environment natural to man. Sin has made us think starvation is a way of life. If God were not busy at His work, our lives would turn in on themselves, and the only fruits that would be produced would be self-digested by our own bodies. And they would be poisonous.

God knows the necessity of His planting. The garden He made has been turned into

a wilderness of sin by one man and one woman. And all their descendants have become enmeshed in a jungle of sin and unbelief. But God "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." To bring fertility and to restore His life to this world no less a seed of His Word than His own Son was needed. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. God brought salvation into our world by planting His Son like a seed in the earth, by having Him die to produce new life. Those who accept the meaning of His cross live in the garden of God's love and holiness. God's own Son placed in the tomb of Joseph's garden enables us to live forever in God's garden of eternity.

II. *It grows*

A. Life and power is within the seed. The Word is the power of life. The power is not within the heart, for the heart by nature is lifeless and dead. God knows its power; a power to produce the faith in and love for His Son; a power to live godly lives. God is content to place the power of His Word in the Gospel and the sacraments.

B. Don't be concerned about it. God wants us to let Him do His part. He gives us the assurance that it will grow, stretching out of the ground to produce first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. God has given to it the very life He wants restored to the earth. When the seed grows, we often are not able to explain it. It is God's miracle right before our eyes.

A mother was watching her boy and his friends in her backyard, where they had converted a fine lawn into a miniature baseball diamond. During the summer months they had a wonderful time but, of course, they trampled the grass and wore it bare to the ground. By the end of the summer it was a sorry sight. But the mother took a very

philosophical view of the matter: "You can always grow grass, but you can't always grow little boys." Boys seem to have a way of growing all their own. They eat and they sleep, and most of the time they just grow. You hardly notice it until the bottoms of their trousers rise above their ankles. That is how God describes the growth of His Word. It grows unnoticed. You don't have to be concerned about its power at all. As long as the soil of the heart is loose and is properly cultivated, the seed will always be producing results. God will see to it that it never returns to Him void. We become impatient as we try to watch it grow, and we want to see greater results. But we are not responsible for the results. God is. We are to be content that the Holy Spirit will bring about the fruit of the seed in our lives. We are weak, but God eventually will make us strong; we are proud, but God will humble us. And the results are often amazing, for we find ourselves "abounding in love to one another." We can't help it; this is what happens because of the seed which God sows in our hearts.

When the Tower of Pisa was being erected, the unfinished structure suddenly and unexpectedly began to sink to one side. Some thought of stopping construction altogether. Others suggested supporting the structure with stays to keep it from tilting any further. The engineers had a better idea. They went right on building the tower, but they made it heavier on one side. In this way they made sure that the weight of the tower rested on the foundation. It has been leaning like this for 800 years. When God's Word of forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross grips our hearts, our lives are weighted on sure foundation.

III. *It Will Be Harvested*

A. The harvest will come at the right time. At the right time, when the right fruit is there, God comes with the sickle to cut it

down. God does not harvest it until it is ripe and mature. Sometimes it may seem the harvest is premature. Death comes at a very early age. To us this is a tragedy. But from God's point of view the fruit was ripe and ready. Other fruit may not ripen until a long life has been lived, and then God takes it unto Himself. The death and the resurrection of Christ that made the harvesting possible makes us content to leave these decisions up to God. From God's point of view harvest time is a happy moment. This is God's harvest, and with Him we should recognize the harvest time as the climax of the perfect salvation produced by the seed of His Son. We may call death tragedy, and tears easily do come. But we need to realize that God is taking the fruit of His seed to Himself.

B. It will come in a short time. "Our days upon earth are as a shadow." The time which we have left for the seed to grow is very short. It lasts for a time, and then it is gone. But time has been granted us for weeding. If growth is choked off by a love for the things of this world or by a lack of love for our God and for others, we have time for what needs to be done. God has His own way of bringing tears of repentance during the time of sowing, so that the joy of forgiveness might be ours at harvest time. When God comes with the sickle for us and we know that the moment of the harvest is at hand, our joy will be in that morning when the One who was laid into the earth in Joseph's garden rose to bring us new life.

Avon, Ohio LYLE W. HALVORSON

TRINITY VIII

MATTHEW 12:46-50

Relation to Propers

The thought for this day is well summarized in the prayer of the Collect. Throughout the propers we find an emphasis on the people of God doing the will of God. In

the Epistle this is seen in the idea of the adopted sons of God being led by the Spirit of God to do His will in order that we may be glorified by Him. In the Gospel Christ warns us that we must be good trees bringing forth good fruit, for it is not words that make us His disciples but "he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." In the gradual God exhorts His people to hear His words, and the Introit expresses the response of praise of the people of God for His loving-kindness.

Homiletical Helps

Cranfield (*The Gospel According to St. Mark in The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary*) in referring to the parallel in Mark 3:33-34 (p. 145) says that Jesus was mildly reproving Mary and His brothers. G. Campbell Morgan (*The Gospel According to Matthew*), pp. 136-139, states that this "is the account of opposition of the most subtle and powerful kind." Consider our text to be an example of the second kind of opposition to Christ. Note also that *Nestle's Greek Testament* lists John 2:4 as a possible parallel text (unconscious opposition to God's will).

The Central Thought

The closest ties for the Christian are not human ties but heavenly ties. Disciples, who did the Father's will, were closer to Jesus than human family.

Human and Heavenly Ties

I. *Human Ties*

A. Foundations of our human ties. Family and blood relationships are the most obvious. Yet common interests and concerns often form even closer ties. Friendships, service organizations, political parties, and, of course, marriage, tie us close together. All these are God-pleasing yet merely human and thus temporal ties. Therefore:

B. Human ties may be obstacles to heavenly ties when they directly oppose God's

will; when loyalty to Christ forces us to turn our backs on family and friends (Matt. 10:34-39; Christ the Divider!). Paul's warning (2 Cor. 6:14 ff.) against being "unequally yoked with unbelievers." Do friendships, business obligations, etc., force us to compromise Christian standards? All clear-cut issues here; no mistake on what is our duty.

More often, when human ties indirectly oppose the will of God, issues are not clear. Satan is at his worst when attacking in insidious, subtle ways. In warfare a charge across an open field is easier to fight off than sniper fire and subversion. "The second best can be the worst enemy of the best." Wonderful things which, taken out of perspective, interfere with doing God's will. What is the most important is not what values we have but how we *rank* them. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." Life second best. Is Shakespeare more important than Bible? Is relaxing on the seashore more important than worship with God's people?

II. *Heavenly Ties*

A. The foundation of our heavenly ties is created by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. (Christ the Unifier!) Thus we become the sons of God (Gal. 3:26-27; John 1:12). God our Father through the blood of Christ. The brothers and sisters of Christ. The Epistle: (Rom. 8:16-17) fellow heirs with Christ of the Kingdom. Rom. 8:29. Therefore we are of the household of God, the holy family of Christ. (Eph. 2:19)

B. Heavenly ties are God's way of working out His will on earth (v. 50). The purpose of our heavenly ties is doing God's will for unity of faith. United as the family of God in our community, let us be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," being bound together by "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph. 4:3,5). Thus: no barriers between Chris-

tians based on externals, matters of administration, petty arguments, personality clashes, or race. God forbid that we should split the body of Christ!

Doing God's will for unity of action. Parallel: Luke 8:21. "Those who hear the Word of God and do it" are of Christ's family. We are the salt of the earth in all of our human ties — family, business, society, nation, and the world. Thus we carry out Christ's mission on earth. Someone said, "The congregation does not have the choice of whether to carry out Christ's mission or not; but merely to decide whether or not to be the church!" How about us? Do we evangelize our community? Do we speak out prophetically against evil, political demagogery, social injustice, sexual immorality, crime, lovelessness, or do we *not* want to become "involved"?

Conclusion

The theme of the 1965 Detroit convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was "Even So Send I You." We are ambassadors to denounce sin and to proclaim the love of God to a fallen world. We have a great challenge; God grant us the courage and the ability to fulfill it.

TRINITY IX

MATTHEW 13:44-46

Relation to Propers

The Epistle serves as a warning. The people of Israel had the best, the covenant relationship with God, but rejected Him. "These things are a warning for us, not to desire evil." The dishonest steward in the Gospel was commended for the wisdom he devoted to his earthly future. Christians should use their wisdom and zeal for the best goal and purpose, their heavenly future. In the Collect we ask for guidance in choosing the best thing, "to ask such things as shall please Thee." The Introit states plainly

what is the best, what we rely on, "Behold, God is mine Helper."

Background

These are two parables about the Kingdom, addressed to Jesus' disciples. They are addressed not to ordinary adherents, but to convinced disciples who must be ready to sacrifice everything because they have been given that which is truly worthwhile.

Introduction

"Give me the best!" A common expression, at times prideful and selfish, but when the investment is large, often a good policy. Jesus gives a lesson in values to teach us when we should go all out for the best. Example of mistaken values: An extensive search for a Stradivarius violin ended when the violin was found being used as a door-stop. People often fail to realize what the best is.

If we make this mistake, we may fumble in the big business of living.

The Search for the Best

I. We Must Know What the Best Is

A. We can be fooled on values. In the things of the world we've all been cheated at some time or another (cars, food, gold bricks, imitation jewelry, bad stocks, etc.). A fast talker puts one over on us. We get confused by the values of the crowd.

In matters spiritual we may be fooled by good laws, fine ethics, good feelings. We need the warning of Isaiah: "Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread?"

The merchant in the text could tell the best. He had a sense of values. Our first job is to develop a sense of values.

B. What is our estimate of the value of the Kingdom? Is it valued at times only as a life preserver in storm-tossed waters? Are we interested in Kingdom values? A treasure is interesting; do we see the Kingdom as

a treasure? How careful are we to guard our treasure? Illustrate how carefully treasures are guarded: The gold at Fort Knox, the mint in Washington, D.C. Our estimate doesn't change the value of a thing. Illustrate with South Africa diamonds, which can easily be mistaken for dirty stones. If we make a mistake in values, we cheat ourselves.

II. We Must Go After the Best

A. We must live purposefully. Often we have no purpose because we don't know what we are looking for or where to look. Purpose means power. Examples: David purposed in his heart to build a temple to the Lord. He didn't get to build it but got things ready for his son Solomon. Carrie A. Nation changed the mind of the nation and ultimately succeeded in getting the constitution amended.

B. We must not be satisfied with anything less than the best. The merchant in our text was not satisfied until he had found the best pearl. Often we fall short. We frequently choose worthless trifles or even vicious goals. More often we are willing to settle for the second best. Examples: Mr. A. is told by his doctor that he will live 10 years longer if he gives up drinking and smoking. He answers, "What's the good of living without those things?" Why? What was his aim in life? A businessman was asked why he wanted to make a lot of money. He answered, "So that I can 'tell the other fellow to go to the devil.'" What a worthy purpose!

What are you after? If you gain the goal you are now striving for, where will you be at the end? You have one life to invest. What are you buying? Illustration: A boy saw a rabbit trapped on a tiny bit of land in the midst of a flooded river. He was so eager to catch the rabbit that he plunged into the water, reached his prize and started to bring it back but a large log hit him on the way back. When they found his dead body, some distance downstream, the rabbit

was still clutched in his hand. His rescuer held up the rabbit and said, "This is what he gave his life for." What a cheap price!

III. *We Must Be Willing to Pay the Price for the Best*

A. Some are unwilling to seek the best. Some are unwilling to pay the price and so belittle the best—a sort of sour-grapes attitude. Examples:

- The ten spies in Palestine who returned with a false report because of their fear.
- We have youthful ideals, some of which are excellent, but when we fail to attain them, we laugh at them.
- We use criticism as a smoke screen to hide cowardice.

Some are waiting for the price to be marked down as at a bargain counter. They say the church is "too strict." Frequently they are encouraged by spiritual leaders who actually do try to reduce the price of Christianity.

B. What is the price? The price for the farmer who bought the field with the treasure was all that he had. The price for the merchant who got the precious pearl was all that he had. The price for you and me is all that we have. No more. The Lord does not expect of us what we do not have, but no less. We come into God's kingdom with all that we have and are.

And yet, we are not speaking of the price which we must pay. God offers us the blessings of salvation without money and without price. The price has been paid by Jesus. He gave His life to gain entrance for us into the kingdom of God.

Who can afford it? Everyone. In this search nobody need be disappointed. In the gold rush of the 1890s the majority were disappointed and lost all they had. In our lives today there are things we want but can't afford. But everyone may win in the race for life. Will you be able to get this pearl? You already have it set aside for you.

Conclusion

You may be a respectable person, a church member, a hard worker; but can you say, "Jesus is mine, my Lord and my God"? If so, then you have found the Best.

TRINITY X

MATTHEW 23:24-39

Background

Jesus is speaking to the crowd during Holy Week. The early part of the chapter contains His "woes to the scribes and Pharisees." Verses 37 ff. contain His lament over Jerusalem.

Relation to Propers

The Gospel echoes the words of the text: Christ weeps over the city, then cleanses the temple. The threat of punishment and judgment is prominent in Christ's preaching. The Introit speaks of reliance upon God, who will deliver His people from battle and give peace. In the Collect we ask for grace to obtain the heavenly treasure and to follow God's commands (as opposed to commands of men, i. e., the Pharisees).

Introduction

"I can't stand this damned piety." Would you say that this statement is blasphemy? No. It is Christ's message from this text.

Damned Piety

I. *Wouldn't You Like a Whole Congregation of Pharisees?*

A. The Pharisee had many good points. He was an excellent student of the Bible. He practiced religion more than was required. He was always in church. He was "pious." He was socially prominent. He was influential. He was respectable. He was clean. He may have been wealthy. He was a good giver. He spoke of religion often.

Read the story of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10-12). With people like the first speaker, you could have the

most prominent, prosperous, most highly-regarded church in town.

But Jesus condemned their "piety."

B. The seven woes against the Pharisees are recorded earlier in Matt. 23. The Pharisees lock up the Kingdom. They turn converts to hell. They swear by money values, not by God. They observe trifles and neglect the heart of religion. They are outwardly clean and inwardly filthy. They put on pious appearances and are spiritually dead. They honor dead prophets and ignore the living ones.

Their "piety" was the source of damnation for themselves and for others who followed them. But we must not denounce the Pharisees and excuse ourselves. What about our piety?

II. *We Have a Day of Grace*

A. God gives us opportunities to know Him, to follow Him, and to be saved. The Gospel of God's love in Jesus' work of redemption is passed on by men. God sends prophets with His Word. We still have our prophets today, people who speak to us of Law and Gospel.

He sends wise men to interpret and apply the Word. Stephen is an example. He was made the first martyr for doing just that. We still have men who apply the Word to daily life—and often it hurts, for our eternal good. He sends scribes, teachers of Scripture. What kind of reception have they had throughout the years?

B. How will we treat them? Read verses 29-30. Would we have acted differently? Example: Many who praise Lincoln now would have bitterly opposed him in his day. There was criticism of his Gettysburg address at the time. His home paper said he was "falsifying history," another referred to it as the "President's silly little speech," still another accused him of "using soldiers' graves for political oratory."

Dead prophets tend to be less disturbing

than living ones. What will happen to the living prophets who speak God's Word fearlessly in our day? Some will be killed, as was Stephen. Some will be crucified, as was Peter. Some will be scourged, as was Paul. Some will be chased out of town for refusing to trim the truth to please radical elements.

C. The judgment is pronounced. This is the pattern of the unbelieving world (v. 34). It began with the first murder when evil Cain killed righteous Abel. It happened in Jesus' day when, according to Josephus, righteous Zacharias was killed in the synagog during a siege.

This generation is called to account because of the privilege given to it. Those who reject so great a salvation bear the curse of a "family sin," for they are part of the family of Satan.

III. *We See the Anguish of Great Love Rejected*

A. God grieves. He grieves because of His great love which He showed on the cross. He earnestly desires the salvation of all men. He yearns for our Jerusalem (our town). May we reject God's mansion for our own hovel? "I wanted to love you," says God, "but you would not." God does not force His love upon us, but we reject Him at our own peril.

B. The prophetic doom is pronounced in v. 38. "Your house is left . . . desolate." What happens to a city, a church, a life, when God leaves? The city without God is destroyed by enemies from within or without. Worship, without God, is a hollow set of human philosophies and rituals. The life without God is lost. This is hell: when God leaves, never to return.

C. There is only judgment left (v. 39). These words were spoken by the crowd when Jesus came to Jerusalem but were rejected by many who didn't want Jesus in their city, their worship, their lives. They'll hear the words again at the Second Coming.

Conclusion

What will we hear when He comes again?
"Ye would not" or "Blessed are ye"?

TRINITY XI

LUKE 7:36-50

Background

Still early in His ministry, Jesus addressed Himself to the Pharisees who had rejected John's call to repentance. He had shown that He is the promised Messiah by His miracles. The opposition of the Pharisees had not yet become strong. One, at least, was willing to invite Him to dinner and hear what He had to say. Jesus' conduct and lesson at the dinner is an excellent illustration of why the Pharisees opposed Him and the sinners called Him their friend.

Relation to Propers

The Epistle presents the heart of the Christian message, that Christ died for our sins and was raised again from the dead. This is the height of love and prompts us to yield total trust and faith to God. The Gospel presents the right and wrong way to worship. The Pharisee loved little, thought he needed little forgiveness. The publican, like the sinner in the text, showed he realized his need for much forgiveness. The Collect confesses to the great love of God, who is "more ready to hear than we to pray" and prone "to give more than either we desire or deserve," who forgives us and gives us good things. The Introit says: "God is in His holy habitation." God's house is where we receive His love and forgiveness, where His people gather to worship.

Introduction

We like to criticize the Pharisees. We dislike them. Why do people turn away from the "righteous ones"? — children from their "righteous" parents, husbands from their "righteous" wives, people from their "righteous" pastors, unbelievers from "righteous" Christianity? To escape judgment?

Yes, but more. Because they need love which is rooted in forgiveness and this the "righteous ones" cannot give.

In the text the sinner is seriously a sinner. The righteous Simon is seriously righteous. The guardians of the law of God in their time were the Pharisees; the Puritans and legalists are today. They appeal to the middle-class morality. Don't condemn them for their righteousness. They take their moral obligations seriously. Yet Jesus takes the side of the sinner against the righteous. Why? This is the mystery of the Gospel. Jesus explains it in a parable to Simon — and to us. "I have somewhat to say unto thee."

How Much Do You Owe?**I. Much Love**

A. Love is important. Love is *the* mark of discipleship. Love is a basic part of the living Gospel. Love is the supreme essential. 1 Cor. 13.

B. Love shows itself in actions. Simon invited Jesus, listened, judged, and was proud. He showed little love for Jesus or the unfortunate woman. The woman's actions showed her love.

C. Do we love? There can be perversion of religion. There can be feelings of superiority which make one hard and loveless. Knowledge is not a goal in itself. The test of its value is how it affects our lives. Knowledge must lead to love. Let's test our knowledge by asking, "Does it help us meet the needs of others? Do we use it to reach others with the love of God?"

II. Much Forgiveness

A. Love is an effect or fruit of forgiveness. Why does a person love much? (Vv. 40-43.) There is much ado about the need for service (love) in our society, but it is like crying for fruit before you plant the tree. "We love because He first loved us." God's love in Christ is the cause which brings about the effect of love in our lives. His love is shown in forgiveness.

B. What is involved in forgiveness? Is it an escape from penalty? No, it may not be an escape from temporal punishment. The two thieves on the cross are an example. Both died in agony, the forgiven one as well as the unforgiven. The drunkard is an example. He may repent yet still suffer from a bad liver. David is an example. He was forgiven, yet endured much grief because of his sins.

Forgiveness means that we are restored to fellowship with God. Nothing greater can happen to a human being. When you forgive another person, you get to be friends as you were before. When God forgives, we are restored to fellowship with Him. He accepts the unacceptable in spite of, not because of, what we are. But God is love, and when we are forgiven, love will become a part of our lives, since by forgiveness we are restored to the image of God.

III. *A Great Debt*

A. All are in debt. In the parable both were in debt. Simon and the woman were in debt, but who had the larger debt? Who can say whether the "hot" or the "cold" sins do more damage or are worse before God? We also are in debt, but do we realize it? Simon didn't. How heavily does sin weigh upon our hearts? It's not a question of whether or not we owe. We do. Forgiveness is God's answer to the most difficult problem in our lives—sin. But before we can get God's answer of forgiveness, we must face the problem of our sin. It is not a question of how much or how little we sin. The essential part of sin is the state of the heart—rebellion against God. Everyone owes much.

B. All are unable to pay because of the moral depravity of man. We cannot undo our sins of yesterday.

The moving finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

Even Paul says, "The good that I would, I do not. . . ." We even know that we're going to sin again tomorrow. The burden of the flesh.

C. Sins are freely forgiven to those who realize their debt, repent, and look to the crucified Christ. It is through God's grace in Christ. Our self-accusation and self-humiliation have nothing to do with it.

Conclusion

If there is lack of love, there is lack of forgiveness and so lack of sorrow over sin. If we realize our debt of sin, the forgiving love of God awakens our love. This will find expression in our lives. How much do you owe? Ask the right question and you'll get the blessed answer—forgiveness and love.

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GEORGE LOOSE

SERMON STUDY TEXT

LUKE 7:36-50

I. Background Study

For an adequate understanding of this text, two things are helpful: (1) a brief study of the Pharisees, and (2) the approach to love and forgiveness in the New Testament.

(1) *The Pharisees*

The Pharisees came into being after 200 B.C. during the Maccabean period as a group concerned primarily with preserving "orthodoxy" at a time when Judaism was being influenced by Hellenistic ideas and the Mosaic Law was falling into disrepute. They saw themselves as the guardians of the faith, and the development of their theology came as a result of their intense desire to maintain the Jewish race as a pure people. By the time of Christ they had achieved wide acclaim within, and important influence upon, Judaism. They were highly regarded and respected both for their "sanctity" of life and their judgments in matters of custom, tradition, and practice.

"At first, when one incurred great danger in joining the party, the Pharisees were men of strong religious character; they were the best people in the nation. Subsequently Pharisaism became an inherited belief, the profession of it was popular, and men of character very inferior to that of the original members joined its ranks. With the lapse of time also the essentially vicious element in the system developed and laid the Pharisees, as commonly represented by the members of the party, open to scathing rebuke. John the Baptist called them and the Sadducees a generation of vipers. . . . They became a cunning body of men (Jos. *Antiq.* xvii, 2, 4)."¹

(2) *The Approach to Love and Forgiveness in the New Testament*

Our Lord Jesus Christ rarely refers to love simply as a concept. He speaks of it more often in terms of its effective action in the life of man. In this sense he lays down the principles of man's relationship to man in the great Sermon on the Mount, primarily in the opening statements (the "Blessed" ones or Beatitudes). The negative effect of the absence of love as the basis of man's inhumanity to man is most vividly portrayed by Jesus in His scathing denunciation of the Pharisees' action as recorded in Matt. 23: 13-39.

Love, as the highest and greatest quality of Christian life, is brought to our attention by St. Paul, 1 Cor. 13. Here again we note that love's fruit in action becomes the window through which love becomes visible.

So, too, John sets this forth in his first epistle: 4:7—5:3. Here love's source is directly attributed to God Himself, who "is love." Once more love is spoken of as an active force that necessarily finds expression in a loving relationship of man to man. Only

¹ "Pharisees," in *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. John D. Davis and Henry Snyder Gehman (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 476.

in such an evident relationship can man prove the "unseen" love he may claim to have toward the "unseen" God.

That love and forgiveness are indissolubly joined is, of course, nothing new to the Christian heart. God, who is love and whose love is basic, expressed His love in the act of redemption. God's love also is not known or experienced outside of the context of His action. Granted, His love is experienced in other areas than that of the redemptive act in Christ Jesus, but it is in this redemptive act and out of this redemptive act that the fullness of His love in other acts becomes evident so that eventually all acts of God toward His "loved ones" are acts that stem from that highest expression of His love on the cross.

Inherent in the act of redemption is the fact of man's utter unworthiness to be the recipient of God's love because of his sinfulness (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Eph. 1:3-12; 2:4-10; 1 John 4:7-13, 19; Rom. 5:5-11; 6:23; Is. 43:25; 44:22; 53; Micah 7:18). God's act of love, then, is not dependent on any quality in man.

The area in which God's act of love becomes operative is that of forgiveness. Forgiveness implies a previous condition overcome, a barrier that heretofore has separated; but now, being removed, the way is opened for action to become effective. Hence even God's act of redemption, the fruit of His love, is of no effect when forgiveness is rejected.

God's love being prime love (that is, without which no love exists) all love must stem from His love. God's love in action being the redemption of man through Jesus Christ, no love can exist until that act is effective in man. Forgiveness being the channel of God's effective love in Christ, no love exists where forgiveness has not first been accepted.

With this in mind, we can more fully understand the whole point which Jesus Christ is trying to get across to Simon in our text.

II. Brief Word Study

Verse 37: γυνή ἥτις ἦν . . . ἁματωλὸς — "a woman who was . . . a sinner." The extent of her sin is indicated only by our Lord's statement: "Her sins, *which are many*, are forgiven." The nature of her sin is not revealed. One can suppose that she may have been a prostitute, but this is neither stated nor even implied. Nor can any identification be made between this woman and Mary Magdalene. In fact, since Mary Magdalene was possessed of seven devils which Christ drove out of her (cf. 8:2), it would seem difficult to identify the woman of our text with Mary Magdalene.

Verse 39: προφήτης — "prophet." Here in the sense of one who has insight into people's character, rather than one who foretells future events.

ἄπτεται — "is touching." This verb implies an aggressive action: "cling to," "fasten oneself to."

Verse 40: ἀποκριθεὶς — "answering." There was no vocal statement by the Pharisee. Jesus, knowing Simon's thoughts (εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων, v. 39), answered these thoughts.

Verse 41: δηνάριον — "denarius," a Roman coin whose value varied from time to time. Its significance lies in the fact that it represented the "average daily wage" at the time.

Verse 42: ἐχαρίσατο — "dispensed with," "cancelled," having the connotation that the action was one experienced freely or graciously as a favor.

Verse 43: ὑπολαμβάνω — "I suppose." Simon's reply was one of unattached involvement in the situation.

Verse 45: φιλημά μοι οὐκ ἔδωκας — "you gave me no kiss." Another common custom and courtesy. (Gen. 33:4; Ex. 18:7; Matt. 26:49)

ἀφ' ἧς εἰσῆλθον — "but from the time I came in, she has not ceased. . . ." This may explain how she came in with the invited

guests. It would appear that she came in simultaneously.

Verse 46: ἐλαίῳ . . . μύρω — "olive oil" . . . "perfume," or "ointment." Note the contrast. He failed in the use of the common oil. She used nothing but the best and most expensive.

Verse 47: ὅτι "for," "because." The ὅτι here cannot be translated out of context with the statement: ᾧ δὲ ὀλίγον ἀφίεται ὀλίγον ἀγαπᾷ — "but he who is forgiven little, loves little." This indicates immediately that the woman's sins were not forgiven "on account" of her love; but, rather, that her greater love was in response to the greater sin forgiven.

ἀπέωνται (also v. 48), ἀφίεται, and ἀφίησιν (v. 49) — from the root verb ἀφίημι, used in the sense of "cancel," "remit," "pardon." Used throughout the Old and New Testament predominantly in the religious sense of divine forgiveness. Used here by our Lord in connection with ἁμαρτίας, "sins."

Verse 49: "τίς οὗτός ἐστιν;" — "Who is this?" The question arises but is not directly answered. We may assume, however, from the incident recorded in Mark 2:7 and Luke 5:21 that they associated this with Jesus' claim to divinity.

καὶ — "even" (KJV: "also") — This may imply that those present had witnessed the Lord Jesus performing miracles, or it may be limited to their high regard for the words of instruction to Simon in the parable as well as its application to the immediate situation.

Verse 50: ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε — "your faith has saved you." In keeping with the context we must understand the meaning of πίστις as "saving faith," the faith that rests in the forgiveness of sins.

III. General Notes and Comments

The scene before us is a moving one, touching upon the failure of man to achieve

anything in "his own righteousness" and demonstrating the all-embracing mercy and all-sufficient grace of God in the forgiveness of sins. The keynote is love.

One must suppose that both the central figures in the text, the Pharisee and the sinful woman, had had previous contact with Jesus: the Pharisee because of the invitation he extended to Jesus to be a guest in his house, the sinful woman because of her obvious devotion born of humble penitence. Both demonstrated a specific reaction to Christ's teaching and/or miracles: the Pharisee, discourtesy; the sinful woman, faith and devotion.

The reason for Simon's hospitality to Jesus is not mentioned. We can exclude, by reason of the events which transpired, that he did so in the spirit of humility and devotion. The very fact that he fails in the common courtesies of the day (vv. 44-46) indicates that he actually did not regard Jesus very highly. His disgust with Jesus (v. 39) for allowing the sinful woman to touch Him (an act so contrary to Pharisaic demeanor), would emphasize this. He furthermore exhibited a complete lack of insight into his own spiritual need by his response to Jesus' parable (v. 43). We might rightly assume, then, that he invited Jesus into his home for the reason so often indicated in the action of the Pharisees,² namely, to prove Jesus to be a false prophet and by treachery to trip Him up on His statements.

Jesus accepted the invitation, knowing, of course, beforehand exactly what was in the heart and mind of Simon. He voluntarily walked into the trap. His reason for doing so becomes obvious as the incident unfolds itself. He was seeking an opportunity to awaken the conscience of Simon and bring him to the realization of his sin and need for

² Luke 5:21,30,33; 6:7; 10:25; 11:16,38, 53-54; 14:1; 15:2; 16:14; 17:20; 19:7,39, 47-48; 20:1-2, 20-23.

forgiveness, and thus to teach him God's full love. (Vv. 40-42)

The sinful woman, quite different in her motivation and action from Simon, enters the house conscious of her fallen state but aware of the nature of Him whose feet she washed with her tears, wiped with her hair, and anointed with perfume (vv. 44-46). All of her actions were those of self-abasement directed to One whom she loved and trusted. In all that she did she evidenced deep contrition, repentance, and faith.

Jesus responded to her action, knowing also what was in her heart, with a public pronouncement of that which had already become a fact in her life—her acquittal before God, the full forgiveness of her "many" sins. (Vv. 48, 50)

One never ceases to marvel at the blindness of the Pharisees to learn the obvious lessons which Christ taught by precept and example. That is, one never ceases to marvel until the light of another basic truth comes to bear upon the subject, namely, that expounded by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 1:18—2:16, summarized in 2:14: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

The Pharisaic mind, as evidenced by Simon, is not only blind to God's love and to man's sinfulness, his "unrighteousness" under the Law (Gal. 3:10-11; Rom. 3:19-20), but in its conceit disdains all others (Luke 18:19). False pride is the product of unbelief. False pride sets itself away from others, rather than reaching out to others in their need. Simon disdained the woman. He would have been horrified to have her (the unclean) touch him (the clean). Simon failed to see the sinfulness of his disgust with Jesus because he was so wrapped up in his own purity and goodness.

The danger is always present. As God's chosen ones, the saints, we might become

equally involved in this basic attitude over against the "untouchables" in our world. It is so much simpler to judge and condemn others for their gross sins. So we sit on the sidelines of life and do not become involved with the "world" around us. The cry of human need, both physical and spiritual, so often falls on deaf ears on our part because we are afraid to taint our souls by becoming involved in the dirty business of life. We shy away from the alcoholic, the prostitute, the dope addict, the criminal, the corrupt union leader or politician, because these are the "sinners" in our society.

The sinful woman represents the true repentant sinner. Her sins were many. She knew she was unwelcome in the house of Simon. She knew she was debasing herself in the eyes of all around her, but she did not mind what others were going to think about her in that moment. She came to One whom she trusted. She came seeking only one thing, to give thanks and praise for His priceless gift.

The "price" of forgiveness (if we would call it such) is repentance and faith (Ps. 51: 1-12). God asks only that we seek Him for the right reason. In the face of God's holiness and love, ours must be a sense of guilt and shame so great that we cannot master it. Ours must be a desire for renewal which He alone can grant. Tears of repentance are the order of the day in God's economy of forgiveness.

Our Lord's desire to bring Simon to the awareness of his spiritual emptiness and His granting of spiritual fullness to the sinful woman are the key to our understanding of God's love. He was not anxious to reject Simon. He was happy to accept the sinful woman. The all-embracing love of God reaches out to all men (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). The all-sufficient mercy of God in Christ makes possible the forgiveness of all sins (Ps. 103:3; 1 John 1:9). God's love is not measured by man's worthi-

ness but by man's need (Luke 19:10; John 3:17; Is. 53:5; Rom. 5:6). God's forgiveness is not restricted to certain sins or a certain number of sins. His forgiveness extends from the least to the greatest of sins in both kind and number. (1 Tim. 1:15; Is. 1:18)

Love and need are inexorably joined. The greatness of God's love is manifested in the greatness of man's need for His love and the ability of God's love to answer that need. Man does not, and cannot, properly appreciate the greatness of God's love until he has first seen his own hopeless, helpless, totally destitute condition under the bondage and curse of sin and then has found in Christ the measure of love and forgiveness he needs to free him from that awful bond. (Prov. 20:9; Is. 53:6; 64:6; Rom. 3:23; 7: 24-25; Gal. 3:13; 1 John 1:8)

Jesus made it quite clear to Simon that love begets love, but implied is the fact that the extent to which love begets love is the extent not so much of the measure of love offered, but, rather, the extent of love accepted (vv. 40-47). Simon had felt no need to express loving action toward Christ simply because he felt no need on his own part for the forgiving love of God. The sinful woman was profuse in her acts of devotion and love because she had felt the need for and accepted the greater love in forgiveness.

We see now why Scripture emphasizes the fact that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17), and "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another—" (1 John 4:11). Faith which appropriates God's love in forgiveness is not static. It is always active, for it is born of love and begets love (v. 47). The commandments, the law of God, become the Christian's guide for expressing that love to the fullest, for "Love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:10). Hence St. Paul, in the greatest work on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, his letter to the Romans, repeatedly comes back to the point that

love and law are not divorced from each other, nor foreign to each other, but closely interrelated. (Rom. 6:1—8:13; 12:1—13:14)

Simon, the Pharisee, may have been rated in his day as a truly pious, God-fearing, devout member of God's people. Yet Simon proved himself far removed both from Christ and from the penitent woman in that which God regards as true faith.

"Actions speak louder than words" is an old proverb, but one might add in the Christian context that these actions must always stem from true love to God. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. . . . Then wilt Thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings" (Ps. 51:17, 19). This is the measure of God's acceptance of our actions today no less than it was in David's day.

As in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the temple (Luke 18:9-14) so also here it is the penitent who goes home justified. How beautiful and comforting are the final words of Jesus to the penitent woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (v. 50). Her struggle of life was not finished as yet, but she had come to the point that would assure further victory and her guilt-laden, sin-burdened heart was lightened of its load (v. 48). She went away in that moment knowing the "peace of God which passes all understanding." (Phil. 4:7)

The "peace which passes all understand-

ing" is a peace in the midst of struggle. It is a peace that comes from Him who said "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). It is the peace that John echoes in his first epistle when he states: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). It is the peace that is born of the love of God.

IV. Brief Outline

The Measure of Love

I. *The Pharisee measured love*

A. By outward formal action

1. On his own part
2. On the part of others

B. Thus proving himself loveless

1. Because of inward pride
2. Failing to see his real need for the love of God in Christ.

II. *Christ measured love*

A. By acts of love performed by the sinful woman

1. Over and above the "call of duty"
2. In complete surrender and devotion

B. Thus proving God's love in action

1. In the Parable of the Debtors
2. In the dismissal in forgiveness and peace

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