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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

TRINITY XII

JOHN 8:31-36

Introduction

The forces of labor are wrestling with a real problem—automation. What began as a force to free the worker from enslavement to hard labor may result in enforced idleness that will be much worse. When is a man free? When is he a servant?

Great changes are taking place in the Western world as technology comes to full fruit. Machines are replacing men and doing their jobs better and faster. Automation has led to machines that operate other machines. "Cybernation" is the term used to describe the next generation in machine development—devices that replace men's brains as well as their hands. Whole categories of jobs are being wiped out. Before all this is finished, man's life will have undergone one of the most radical changes ever witnessed, changes greater than the whole industrial revolution.

To many, this is not a promise of "Utopia" but rather a most serious threat to man's freedom. Dr. Erich Fromm, a sociologist, fears that we may now develop societies "in which the inhabitants are fed and clad, having their wishes satisfied and not having wishes that cannot be satisfied; automatons, who follow without force, are guided without leaders, who make machines that act like men and produce men that act like machines." ("The Present Human Condition," in *The American Scholar Reader*, ed. Hiram Haydn and Betsy Saunders [New York: Atheneum, 1960], p. 390)

The real change must be in men, not in machines. Freedom must mean more than not having to serve. Too often the freedom to serve in the dignity of labor becomes enslaved by passions of power and greed. "How can I serve best?" can easily become "How can I be served best?"

Our Lord talks about freedom and He talks about service. He reminds us that we are

Free—to Serve Him as King

I. Freed from the Bondage of the Law to Forget the Service of Self

A. By nature we are concerned about one person: "me, myself, and I." What a miserable world if all continued to be so ego-centric! What an eternity where self would be the only point and purpose!

B. We have been freed from self by the Cross. Romans 7:19—difficulty of renouncing self. Francis Quarles wrote:

I like, dislike, lament for what I could not;
I do, undo; yet still do what I should not,
And, at the selfsame instant, will the thing
I would not.

C. By nature we are bound to our habits and pet sins. "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (v. 34). Yet we have been freed by His grace. "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (V. 36)

II. Freed by the Gospel to Remember Others in the Service of Proclaiming Him King

A. Freedom requires a new definition when it applies to the new man. 2 Cor. 3:17. Epistle—2 Cor. 3:4-9.

B. No one was ever reborn by the Law, but in Baptism we have risen to the new life. The death and resurrection of Christ brought to us by the proclamation of the Gospel and through Baptism help us to rise daily to the new life.

C. We are now free to "speak of His love," to "act in His grace." Gospel—Mark 7:31-37. We do all we can for Him—and proclaiming Him King is what He now wishes us to do. Collect: "true and laudable service."

D. Service to God is expressed in a per-

sonal relationship. It is not obedience to a set of written rules; it is rather a relationship with God "which ends in making men good" and is made possible only "through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ." When we continue in the Word—in all that term contains—we become truly disciples, knowing the truth.

E. We gather around the altar in order that God might draw us again into that relationship and that we might every week receive anew the strength for service.

Conclusion

This kind of service to the King takes us away from love of self to love of service to others. We proclaim Him as King in the totality of life. Example: A young man was crippled by polio at the end of senior high. His mother devoted herself completely to him. Her life revolved around "the cripple upstairs." There was nothing he could want that she wouldn't get him. Soon there was nothing she could get him that he really wanted. But she forgave him his bitterness in the face of his "misfortune." Then the boy's mother died. The father loved the son just as surely as had the mother, but he had different ideas about what humans are. He got the boy out of bed and into a wheelchair. He helped him enroll at the university. The son earned his degree, married, had a home and family. Both parents loved the boy. His mother saw him only as the object of self-love. His father saw him more Biblically as a child of God requiring usefulness and vocation to be fully human. His father freed the son from service of self to become an instrument of service to the Lord and his fellowman.

Real freedom comes when we are freed of self to serve others. Only One can lift us up out of self-concern by saying: "Son, thy sins be forgiven." Only in the full realization of the impetus given to our lives by the God of Bethlehem and Golgotha do we understand "freedom" and "service."

TRINITY XIII

MARK 12:41-44

Introduction

Members of the sophomore class of Ohio University were forecasting the events that would happen in the world before their graduation from the university in 1968. They predicted:

1. The population of the U.S. will surpass 200 million.
2. Scientists will have landed a man on the moon and will have drilled a hole to the center of the earth.
3. Distilled water from the sea will turn deserts into farmlands.
4. Hurricanes will obey the commands of weather satellites.

The president of the university (Vernon R. Alden) noted that the biggest change will be in "what men know." For in a single day modern man now undertakes enough research to fill seven complete sets of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Half of all the knowledge we have today was acquired over a period of 10,000 years. The remaining half has been acquired in the last 15 years. And this will be doubled in the next 5 years.

If, despite nuclear weapons, people fully expect to survive this century, there is one greater development that must take place. We must cease ignoring God and begin carrying out His will among men. We are spending billions trying to simulate the origin of life, while we still find it difficult to govern the life that we already have. Mankind finds it difficult to serve his fellowman and virtually impossible to serve the Lord.

The text talks about service to God. And it suggests the necessity of serving with everything we have.

Serving the Lord Christ with the Gift That Costs

I. *It Costs*—in the Commitment to Personal Service

- A. The basic cost: personal commitment

to the Lord King. First great feature of Christian character—love. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16). Life is lived not by rules but in personal relationship with God through Christ.

B. The payment in personal involvement. The Christian learns to love his neighbor, not because he has to, but because he wants to (Gospel). Christians undertake to "show kindness and mercy, each to his brother." (O. T. Lesson, Zech. 7:4-10)

II. *It Costs—in the Commitment to Personal Sacrifice*

A. We cannot hold back part of the price. The value of the widow's gift was measured in personal cost—what she had left! She was willing to risk all—literally her "next meal." Her gift was "big business," for it represented her commitment! It cost personal, financial sacrifice. Yet she was rich—2 Cor. 6:10. "We give Thee but Thine own"—but do we?

B. We must accept the payment our Lord has made. We remember what it cost God to become involved in our world. We remember the agonies of Golgotha and the joy of Easter. We remember that we have been buried with Him and have risen anew with Him in our baptism (Romans 6). We plead in the Introit: "Have respect for Thy covenant." We want the Lord to remember: "I will be your God, and you shall be My people." We need to pray: "Give us the increase of faith, hope, and love" (Collect). There is warning in the Epistle: The service of Abraham was in the covenant of grace; then came the service of the Law because of man's weakness. Through the death and resurrection of our Lord the service of the Christian is again like that of Abraham under grace.

Conclusion

We want to serve the Lord King in commitment to personal service to Him and our

fellowman. We would follow up that personal commitment with personal sacrifices. It will not be our old man that manages that. We must be renewed after the image of Him who created and Him who redeemed.

Renewal again today at the Lord's altar.

TRINITY XIV

JOHN 5:1-14

Introduction

Our Lord doesn't seem to get much out of redeeming man. We are so often ungrateful people. So often we seek "another"—whatever the passing passion may be. Is it really worth all the trouble for the Lord? Day by day He pays the price of our folly—by forgiving us our sins. Day by day and week by week He gives us the means to be lifted up from our fallen lives by giving us His Word of reconciliation and the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. What marvelous grace He has shown. Will we accept it? We who are so helpless, do we "want to be healed?" "A multitude of invalids" is to be found all around us, many of them "have no man" to help them. We who have been healed—will we help the helpers?

Serve the King—in Thanksgiving

I. *By a Concern for the Despairing and Helpless*

Healing pools or healing hospitals—it is the Lord's work. But health is not life. Love and concern must be added to medication if men are to live. We cannot understand why our Lord permits so many to suffer in misery. But there is no question as to why He places us next to them in this life. We are His contemporary agents of love.

Gradual: "It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord . . . to show loving-kindness."

A. Giving hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless was our Lord's way of acting.

Jesus cured not merely the neurotic whose only problem was self-pity, but He sought out the desperate and hopeless. 38 years

lame! (If he tried to get into the pool every day for 38 years, that would have been 14,000 attempts!) To him Jesus said: "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And the man could walk—the miracle of hope!

B. No one is beyond the reach of our Lord's mercy and love.

II. *By a Concern for Purity of Living*

A. Our Lord puts the question to us: "Do you want to be healed?" Note the "sin no more that nothing worse befall you" (v. 14). This seems to indicate that this man brought much of this problem of illness on himself.

The man was not worth saving! We are not worth saving. Our sickness is just as real as his. Collect: "the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall." Often the actions of Christians are even less laudable than those of the "happy pagans." Two kingdoms are constantly battling for mankind.

B. An essential in the life of the kingdom of grace is purity. St. Paul in the Epistle—"walk by the Spirit." "Crucify the flesh." Note the listing of the sins of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." The pure Son of God is the source of our purity.

C. Our life should be lived in thanksgiving. The healed man is found by our Lord in the Temple. Note the "one" who returned to give thanks in the Gospel (Luke 17:11-19). Clement of Alexandria: "The Lord instructs, exhorts, admonishes, saves and shields us, and His bounties promise us the kingdom of heaven . . . and the only advantage He reaps is—that we are saved."

Add to that at least this—thanksgiving.

Conclusion

"Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee . . ."

TRINITY XV

JOHN 11:1-11

Introduction

Being a Christian does not spare one from illness or death. Tribulation and trouble are part of the life of man—even of the most dedicated follower of the Lord. Even those "whom Jesus loved" suffered illness and death. The story of the illness and death of Jesus' good friend Lazarus points this out.

Serving the King in Illness and Death

I. *Serving the King—in Illness to His Glory*

A. Jesus diagnosed Lazarus' illness as "for the glory of God." Our Lord spent pleasant days at Bethany with Mary, Martha, Lazarus. Mary had shown her love with the expensive perfume once poured on His feet. Mary and Martha had shown their love in listening to His words and in their hospitality. They had learned to depend on His love and concern. Then Lazarus became ill. They notified Jesus. "He whom You love is ill." The mystery of evil. It lays us low in an attempt to make us fall.

B. Our troubles and illnesses are not intended to make us despair, but "that the Son of God may be glorified by means of them." They turn us to the One who alone can aid. They turn us in sympathy to our brothers in need. Epistle: "Bear ye one another's burdens."

II. *Serving the King—in Death to His Power*

A. Lazarus' illness—an opportunity for the Son of Man to be glorified, for He now begins the final trip to the cross. He returns to Bethany—that His glory and power might be shown. The disciples are disturbed: "Go back to Judea? That's sure suicide!" Jesus' answer indicates that the will of His Father is to be done: "Are there not twelve hours in the day? . . ." Our Lord's life would end, not in accordance with the will of men, but in accordance with the will of His Father.

B. Lazarus dies—as Jesus carries! "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep!" "For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Reminder that our Lord has the power *over* death. He can use even death for our life. Lazarus' death (and ours) is an opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate His power.

C. Our death gives the Lord an opportunity to demonstrate His power. We are to live with a singleness of purpose—for we cannot serve two masters (Gospel). While we live—we serve the King: (Epistle and O. T. Lesson: 1 Kings 17:8-16)

- by bearing one another's burdens;
- by forgiving and being forgiven;
- by honoring those who serve us with Word and Sacrament;
- by sowing to the Spirit and not to the flesh;
- by never growing weary in well-doing;
- by doing good to all men, especially to those in the household of faith.

When we die in faith we show the world the power of what God has done for us in Christ. (John 11:45)

Conclusion

Our sicknesses and our tribulations are not punishment for some specific transgression. God permits them even as He permitted man the first choice between good and evil in Eden. But even tribulation gives us an opportunity to serve our Lord King that His glory might be shown among men.

Our death—and the death of all of the Lord's saints—is also an opportunity for the Lord of the church to demonstrate His power. Our baptismal covenant is a demonstration of this (Romans 6). Again today in the Eucharist we show forth the significance of our Lord's death—and we express our confidence that He will come again for our final victory.

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TRINITY XVI

MATTHEW 11:25-30

Introduction

Today our liturgy places before us the compassionate Lord. He is concerned about our suffering. The Epistle shows Him as the One who strengthens us with His love and presence in our physical pain. But He is also with us in our emotional strain as He was with the woman from Nain. Our text shows us Christ as He helps us in a different type of suffering, the suffering that comes to one who is burdened by the Law.

To Those Who Labor Under the Law and Are Burdened by It He Offers Freedom

I. Often We Are the Laborers and the Burdened

A. It becomes apparent in burdened consciences. Perhaps we do not feel burdened like the Psalmist in today's Introit, but many are burdened by guilt. Psychiatry tells us this is so, and we can see it in our dissatisfaction with ourself, our bringing up of past sins, our excuses to God and our friends for sins and our clumsiness in meeting the God who said: "Thou shalt."

B. It becomes apparent in burdened service. We find ourselves laboring with our religion. It is difficult to part with our offerings, with our personality that does not please God, with our time to show love. We are burdened because too often ours is a service motivated by the Law's demands.

II. Christ Offers Us Freedom

A. He offers freedom from the Law.

1. He frees us from its condemnation by fulfilling it (Romans 8:1-4) and by laboring to work God's will perfectly.
2. He frees us from its curse by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) and by bearing the burden of His cross for us.
3. It is no longer our taskmaster

(Gal. 3:23-29). If we place our burden of sin upon Him, we have peace, rest, pardon, and comfort.

B. He offers us freedom to serve.

1. There is a "freedom to." We are not only free *from* the Law, but free *to* serve. In trade for our labor and burden he offers the yoke of service and the burden of concern.
2. The yoke is easy, the burden is light. Our service is performed not because of the Law's demands but because of the constraining love of Christ (1 John 5:3). A boy may find the garbage can to be awfully heavy, but the new bike is easily lifted from the car trunk.

Conclusion

We now approach the Lord's Table to receive His supper. Here we bring our burdens, and they are lifted as He says: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." We walk away ready to pick up the easy yoke of service and ready to bear the light burden of concern for others.

TRINITY XVII

MATTHEW 12:1-8

Introduction

The Introit tells us, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." The Pharisees were undefiled in the way and they walked in the law of the Lord. Yet God was not pleased with their service. They did not have the pure hearts and minds prayed for in the Collect, nor the meekness begged for in the Epistle, nor the humility enjoined in the holy Gospel.

To Please God, Our Service Must Be Done for Him in Response to His Grace

I. The Mere Performance of Duties Does Not Please God

A. We are not pleased with mere acts.

A mother tells her boy to go to the store. He returns with the merchandise after two hours of play along the way. She is not pleased. A husband buys his wife flowers after she reminds him it is their anniversary. She is not pleased.

B. Neither is God pleased with mere acts. He is not pleased with church attendance and sacramental reception done thoughtlessly. He is not pleased with love shown to exploit the neighbor. He is not pleased with prayers offered mechanically. It takes more to please Him.

II. God Is Pleased with Acts Done in Response to His Grace

A. The motive must be pleasing for the act to be pleasing. Two girls conduct themselves properly on a date. One, because she might get caught; the other, because she is a child of God. The motive is as important as the act itself. Here is where the Pharisees missed out.

B. God's grace and mercy provide the motive.

1. God is a merciful and gracious God. We are not "blessed" because we are undefiled in the way, nor have we walked in the law of the Lord (Introit). God, who is upright in judgment, must return the verdict of guilty (Introit). But He deals with His servants in mercy (Introit). He chose us for His own inheritance (Gradual). His right hand doeth valiantly (Gradual). This is shown in His sacrifice.

2. In response to this we serve. As we say "for me" to God's mercy and grace, we live "for Him." This is our motive, and this pleases God.

III. To Please God Our Acts Must Be Directed to Him

A. The Pharisees had misdirected service. Their service was not God-directed. They

served some law or some tradition. This preempted God.

B. Our service is often misdirected. We serve an organization, but not Him who served us. We strive to please a pastor or father, but not the Good Shepherd and Heavenly Father. We give to a budget or need and not to Him who gave Himself. We often perform our duty to fulfill a responsibility and not to please Him who dutifully kept the Law for us.

C. God-directed service pleases. We must seek to please Him and offer Him our service.

Conclusion

The motive and direction of our service is difficult to discern. That's why we must continually pray for a pure heart and mind, so we may be undefiled in the way, walking in the Law of the Lord.

TRINITY XVIII

MARK 10:17-27

Introduction

We live in an age when it is easy to sing the praises of man. He has done so much and has made so many great steps forward. And it is right that we should recognize man's accomplishments and his abilities.

But there is a danger in this. We may think that his ability in gaining knowledge and applying it to subdue the world also carries over into the kingdom of God. To do this would be to fall into a mistaken belief, for when it comes to the kingdom of God,

We Must Recognize Our Human Inability and the Divine Ability

I. Recognizing the Human Inability

A. This is something the young man couldn't do until shown. He shows his inability to recognize his inability by his questions and answers. "What must I *do*?" "All these I have *observed*. . . ." Finally he comes to recognize his inability and walks away.

B. Our Lord pointed out the human inability. We wonder at the Lord's statements. Why did He not correct the question or at least give the answer of St. Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:38) or of St. Paul and St. Silas to the Jailer at Philippi (Acts 16:30)? He wanted to move the man to repent of his sin of pride and show him his misplaced trust.

C. The disciples saw the human inability. They saw the young man leave. They heard about the rich, the camel and the eye of a needle, and in the process they saw their human inability. They ask, "Who then?"

D. We must recognize our inability. This is distasteful because it means losing our pride. But it is a necessary part of repentance, and it is necessary because until we do it we can neither give God glory for our salvation nor accept His grace.

II. Recognizing the Divine Ability

A. He can work repentance in us. He can break our pride and bend our knees. He does this by showing that we cannot keep the commandments and that we cannot even have the faith that trusts to put God before those things which are most precious to us: our prosperity, our family, our security.

B. Through the Gospel he leads us to faith. He loves us and shows it. Therefore remember anew how Jesus Christ was rich and became poor for our sakes. At this moment He through His cross helps us to believe and makes it possible for us to have the faith which says, "For me!"

C. Through the Spirit he leads us to trust. Through the Spirit's guidance we can love and trust God above all things. His power gives us the faith to forsake all and follow Christ, trusting Him completely.

Conclusion

Recognizing the human weakness and the divine strength in matters of faith, we must daily pray as we do in today's Collect. As we

pray we have the assurance that the Spirit will guide and rule our hearts. He will give us the faith we need to be saved, and He will continually confirm that faith through the Gospel and the sacrament.

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EXEGETICAL NOTES

MATTHEW 12:1-8

Chapter 12 of St. Matthew's Gospel depicts a series of events in the course of which the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees sharpens to the point where the Pharisees plot to kill Him (v. 14). Our text, a Synodical Series Gospel for the 17th Sunday After Trinity, depicts the first of these events.

The text is simple enough, but its meanings are profound. The eight verses are no more than the account of a brief conversation which culminates in a pithy but striking saying of Jesus. As we see Jesus in conversation, we observe His method of teaching. He does not "generalize" but makes a ruling in a concrete situation that illumines and illustrates a big problem, in this case, the problem of the Sabbath. In doing so He sheds light on Law and Gospel, His own person, and on His authority as the Son of Man.

Comparing the account with the parallel versions in Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5, we note that Matthew gives the fullest rendering of the incident. He alone has the words of vv. 5 and 7.

Verses 1-2

The story takes place on a Sabbath, thus making the situation real for Jesus, the disciples, and the Pharisees. The time of the year is the time of "ripened grain," late spring, possibly April or May. But it was more than spring; it was a time of growing hostility toward Jesus. The enemies were watching His every move.

Sabbath violations were not only a sin but also a violation of national honor. Not only had God established the day in the time of Moses, but the day had also been sanctified by the blood of the Maccabean martyrs in their struggle against pagan ideals during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Macc. 2:29-41). The Sabbath was a day that was twice holy—it meant obedience to God and recalled national pride. Jesus, of course, is not *against* the Sabbath, but He is *for* man. The meticulous concern of the Pharisees had given the day a meaning God had obviously not intended.

And so it happened that as the disciples walked through the fields of ripened grain, they plucked ears of grain and ate. To "pluck" was technically "to reap," and to eat was technically "to thresh," and reaping and threshing were two of the 39 principal classes of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath. Exodus 34:21 seemed to establish this for the Jews. (The offense, incidentally, was not eating grain that was not theirs. Deut. 23:25 allowed this.)

The disciples could not argue that it was a case of need or necessity, such as starving or exhaustion from hunger. The Greek ἐπεινάσαν simply says they were hungry. The Pharisees could have understood and even forgiven cases of need, but there was no necessity for this specific violation. Consequently the Pharisees rebuked sharply—criticizing the disciples but addressing Jesus, whom they considered responsible.

The question reveals the strictness (ἀσφι-βεία) of observing ancestral laws on the part of the Pharisees. But actually more than that. Matt. 12:14 tells us that they were really out to destroy. They were looking for causes to build their case against the "prophet" from Nazareth.

The Sabbath question was the hard question. To violate it was a threat to the "life" of the nation; it was also a way of inviting

a threat to your own life. The question was real: Who can violate the Sabbath—and live?

Only One, the Lord of the Sabbath, the Messiah, the Son of Man, who will come from heaven and establish God's new world, which, as the Jews expected, will be "all Sabbath." This is the authority of the Messiah, an authority indicated in the Old Testament by David, who portrayed the Messiah; and by the priests, types of the Great High Priest, whose Sabbath-service in the temple "set aside" the Sabbath for them.

In the conversation which follows, Jesus makes these very points and thus establishes Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath, as "the Messiah."

Twice He asks, "Have you not read?" (vv. 3, 5). Don't you read the Scriptures? Don't you understand them? Surprise, criticism, and dismay are suggested by this double question: Why is it that you, the religious leaders of the people, either read without understanding or fail to read at all? If you know Scripture, why not apply it? But when you so clearly fail to apply it, one must ask: Have you not read?

Jesus then proceeds with two cases from Scripture.

Verses 3-4

The *first* case, dealing with "David and the bread of the Presence," refers to 1 Sam. 21:1-6. The incident involves David and his men and took place in the house of God at Nob (probably Saul's temple, a mile to the north of Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem). David and his men eat the bread of the Presence ("shewbread"). Old Testament references to "shewbread" are to be found in Ex. 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; Lev. 24:5-9. Josephus tells us, *Antiquities* III. 10.7, that this bread was baked on Friday and brought to the temple and laid on the holy table early on the Sabbath, remaining there until the next Sabbath, when it might be eaten by the priests. The

bread was placed in "the presence of God" as an indication of Israel's willingness to sacrifice; possibly also as an acknowledgment of God's gift of daily bread.

Jesus implies that the human need of David and his men is of first importance. The very fact that Jesus uses the example of David does not exclude, but in fact suggests, that if David and his men could eat the "bread of the Presence," why then could not the Son of David, David's Lord (Matt. 22: 42-45), and His disciples also eat grain on the Sabbath?

With this reference Jesus does not only point to Himself *with* authority and as "the authority," but also destroys legalism, the religion of the Law. There can be God-pleasing violations of traditional law. God is not the jealous guardian of "bread," but the merciful provider for "man."

Verses 5-6

The *second* case cited by Jesus describes another situation allowing a violation of rules: the priest in the temple, "working" on the Sabbath and yet blameless. The Old Testament itself enjoins such work. Have you not read Num. 28:9-10? But even though the priests "work," they are guiltless. The necessity of performing the sacrifice is greater than the command to abstain from work.

A suggested thought follows: If priests can do this, why not the Great High Priest, the Messiah, who has come to serve and sacrifice Himself for the many?

The temple with all its sacrifices has its importance, but—note again the strong assertion of authority—"something greater than the temple is here" (v. 6). Indeed, the "presence" of the God-Man, of whom both tabernacle and temple are symbols and types, is greater than that which foreshadowed Him. In Jesus the presence of God is better represented than in the temple. These "temple thoughts" assume special significance later in

the trial of Jesus, Matt. 26:61; Matt. 27:40. Also, the thought that in the time of the Messiah God's "new temple" will appear dare not be overlooked in this connection. Cf. Mark 11:15-18.

From one viewpoint these two Old Testament references may not be particularly convincing. The disciples' need for food was probably not nearly as acute as that of David and his soldiers. And picking heads of grain is not as important as the service of priests in the temple. What is the "great fact" in this account?

Verse 7

The central fact is the mercy of God toward man. To establish this point, Jesus refers to the Old Testament a third time, showing that He is really faithful to the Old Testament covenant, Hos. 6:6. He indicts the Pharisees for losing sight of mercy and kindness. Their traditions are blind to human need. They come to men with heavy demands and are ready to pronounce severe judgment. Jesus does not set aside cultic regulations, but He places them under the primary demand that God's will be done in its entirety. God's will always includes mercy, for only mercy provides that which man really needs.

For the Pharisees, God is the demanding God. He demands men's gifts: the showbread (no one is to eat it); the holy day (no one is to violate it); the temple (no one is to profane it). But as a matter of fact, says Jesus, this is not a true picture of God at all. He is the God of mercy. Jesus says by word and action: I am the highest revelation of this mercy.

Verse 8

The final verse (v. 8) is an integral part of the text. In fact, the story is probably told to establish the truth of this verse: The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Were it not for this verse the entire story could be an illustration for the emptiness of external

piety and the need for humanitarian considerations. But the point is the authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. "If," says Floyd Filson, "rulings about Sabbath observances are to be made, it is *not* the Pharisees but the Son of Man, as Lord of the Sabbath, who has authority to say how to observe properly the day of rest." (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* [New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1940], p. 147)

The term "Son of Man" is the decisive one in verse 8. (Compare the usage in Matt. 8:20 and 9:6.) This term, occurring 80 times in the Gospels, is rooted in the Old Testament. Ezekiel uses the phrase more than 90 times. Daniel's striking use, Dan. 7:13, gives expression to divine office and portrays Him coming with the clouds of heaven and coming to "the Ancient of Days." Used in the gospels, in its Greek dress, it is not generic but a title of authority. It is an appropriate self-description of Jesus, who in His incarnation became man among men in order to reveal and restore their proper human dignity as the sons of God.

Jesus Himself quotes the Dan. 7:13 passage in answering the high priest, Matt. 26:64. But again the term does not only speak of sovereignty and deity, it also speaks of service. The Son of Man came to serve and give His life a ransom for many, Matt. 20:28. His supreme sovereignty is actually exercised in humble service.

The authority of Jesus is thus declared by Jesus Himself, and verse 8 is well understood by the Pharisees. To preserve their own authority they had no choice. They would have to take counsel and destroy this man who claimed to be authority personified and thus threatened their own.

In reading and preaching this Gospel, we need to be sure that we do it for Jesus' sake. After all, it was written for His sake. We read the gospels "to find Jesus," and men

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come to hear sermons "to find Jesus." Any sermon on this text ought to establish more profoundly the authority of Jesus the Christ, in whom the Old Testament is fulfilled: the Son of David, our serving High Priest, and the Son of Man. It ought also to say some-

thing to us about Jesus' use of Scripture (three striking Old Testament quotations). And surely it will point us once again to that "old Lutheran doctrine," the proper division of Law and Gospel.

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