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Homiletics

Richard J. Schultz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

For the sermon studies in this issue we are indebted to three members of the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. Professors Gerhard Abo, Otto Hintze, and Richard Schultz have contributed textual studies and suggested sermon outlines based on texts selected from a pericopic series appearing in the 1842 edition of the Perikopenbuch of the Evangelical Church in the Province of Saxony.

ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

MATTHEW 7:7-11

Notes on the Text

Of specific note in the Greek text are the three imperatives in the present tense, which are best taken in an iterative sense. The command is to go on and on asking, seeking, and knocking. The three imperatives are also verbs of ascending intensity—ask, seek, knock. The verb for “ask” has in it the implication of humble, suppliant asking that looks for a response of grace.

The text is, of course, a part of the Sermon on the Mount. The general subject, at first glance, is “directives for prayer.” A careful study of the text, however, leads to the conclusion that it is not merely another directive that simply urges people to pray. From a perusal of this pericope and its context the much abused concept “Fatherhood of God” emerges with greater force and clarity.

Here is God offering Himself as Father—not reluctantly, but with an exciting eagerness. He employs an argument *a minore* in comparing Himself to a good, human parent.

His gracious offer is not limited. It includes “anyone who asks.” Does He really mean “anyone” or just “good people”? By designating the hearers as “evil,” the text makes clear that this offer is open to all.

The context invites us to remember who it is that makes this offer in behalf of the Father. The speaker is Jesus. How can He be so free with His Father’s grace? He and

His Father are one. This is the theanthropic Person speaking, the very One by whom atonement is made for all the children of men.

The text proclaims both Law and Gospel. Neither will have to be “dragged in.”

Some Homiletical Guideposts

1. *Change sought in the bearer:* to pray and to pray more confidently
2. *Fault in the bearer:* lack of prayer, small prayer, prayer as a superstition without reference to the atonement of Christ.
3. *Means of change:* the Gospel, as God offers Himself. Also, the work of the Christ, who makes the offer
4. *Unique appeal of the text:* the expressed eagerness of the imperatives, the repeated promises, the comparison with human parental concern

The Propers for the Day

Rogate—Rogation Sunday

Since the fifth century, this Sunday and the three following days comprise the Rogation season in the Christian calendar. A major feature of the Rogation season in ancient times was the special praying for blessing on the fields. In a sense, this is the close of the Easter season. The day has an Easter-Ascension tension or balance. Rogate can be emphasized as Prayer Sunday.

The Introit makes no explicit mention of prayer. It is really a song of victory. “With the voice of singing declare ye and tell this. . . . The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob.” The promise of the text exemplifies this redemption in one specific part of the Christian life.

The Collect: A prayer to “think and do right things.”

The Epistle: James 1:22-27. Be not only hearers but also doers. The Collect gets its emphasis from the Epistle.

The Gradual: Here resurrection and ascension are stressed. "Christ, who hath redeemed us with His blood, is risen and hath appeared unto us. I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father." The Gradual's connection with the text lies in its presentation of Him through whom our prayers are acceptable to the Father and who is now at the Father's right hand to pray for us.

The Gospel: John 16:23-30. This is part of the farewell discourse of Christ. He offers consolation before withdrawing His local presence from the disciples. In going, He leaves a real tie. Grace continues. He shares with His own His victory over the world. Direct access to the Father through prayer is always available.

An Outline

Prayer — The Privilege of Position

Introduction

The sermon might begin with the consolation idea. We live in a day when we do not enjoy the visible presence of Christ. We lack the intimacy of those who shared direct contact with Him during His days on earth. We are subject to a feeling of remoteness. This may result in weak prayer life. However, we need to remember:

I. *Our Position — God Is Our Father in Christ*

- A. This position is ours — not to achieve but only to receive. We are evil and do not deserve the position. Other positions can be earned or even purchased. Men attempt glibly to appropriate the Fatherhood of God, but its blessings can only be granted, not assumed.
- B. God has paid the price for our son-

ship. He has offered up His Son to make us sons of God. Redemption is not merely "a reserved seat in heaven by and by." It is a new relationship to God, a granted sonship now.

II. *Our Privilege — Prayer Is by God's Invitation and Promise*

- A. It is a privilege to receive God's eager invitation.
- B. It is a privilege to trust His solemn assurances.
- C. It is a privilege to know that, despite our folly and weakness, His answer will be "good things." Our Father is wiser than earthly fathers.

Conclusion

We need to beware of taking this remarkable offer lightly. Behind it lies the whole eternal plan and purpose of God. Behind it lies the agonizing, death, resurrection, and victory of our Savior.

Springfield, Ill.

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

JOHN 17:11-13

Notes on the Text

V. 11. The present tense of the verb εἶμι is striking. Christ is speaking as if He had already left the world physically. This thought is reinforced by the tense of the verbs ἦμην and ἐτήρουν in v. 12. Christ did in the presence of the apostles what He is now doing for all believers. The context, "I am no longer in the world," "they are in the world," "keep them," "I have kept them," etc., steers us away from the figurative interpretation of ἔρχομαι in vv. 11 and 13, as an expression for prayer, as if Christ were saying, "I am coming to you with these petitions." He was speaking of His ascension. See John 13:1. The more difficult reading

ὃ δεδοκᾶς μοι, is found in the great bulk of the MSS and versions. ὃ must refer to ὄνοματι, and so it is the "name" that God gave to Jesus in vv. 11 and 12. The present subjunctive of the verb "to be" (ᾧσιν) cannot be made to mean that Christ was praying for the *future* oneness of the disciples. Otherwise a form of "become" (γίνομαι) would have been used. The phrase should be translated "in order that they may continue to be one as we are."

V. 12. Note the play on the words ἀπόλετο and ἀπωλείας. "And none of them is lost, but the son of lostness." Judas was destined for destruction but not predestined. If ἡ γραφή is here understood as a definite portion of Scripture, the reference is probably to Ps. 41:9 or Ps. 69:4.

V. 13. πεπληρωμένη is used here in the sense of bringing something to completion and so is translated, "that they may have my joy completed in themselves." Christ prays for their complete joy with His joy.

An Outline

What Jesus Is Doing for You Now

Introduction

You have undoubtedly experienced the friendship of a person who not only did one favor for you but continued to do so time after time. What a Friend is Jesus, who not only favored us with His perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection but continues to favor us each moment of our existence.

I. He Is Interceding for You

A. You are in the world. You are not transported from the world when you become a believer in Christ. You are very definitely still in the world of cares, sorrows, suffering, evil, the flesh, unbelievers, and enemies of God, a world that is ruined, depraved, lost in sin, wholly at odds

with God. You are definitely in need of divine favor, lest you be overcome by the world and become a part of it, like Judas in the text, v. 12 (see Mark 4:18), or Demas, in love with this present world, 2 Tim. 4:10.

B. He is with God. Jesus was in the world and so knows your dangers very well. He still favors you with His presence, although not in the same manner as with the apostles, who saw and touched Him. He ascended in the narrow sense (left the sight of all with His glorified body) and in the wider sense (ascended to the right hand of the Father; "coming to Thee"—vv. 11 and 13; Acts 1:9; Eph. 1:20).

C. He speaks to God in your behalf. He has fully redeemed you and sealed your redemption with His resurrection and ascension. Though His intercession is not a continuation of His atoning work, it is still of the greatest value. He is interceding, constantly praying to God the Father, for you as He did in the text in the presence of the apostles. His constant solicitude and prayer for you is:

1. That you may be kept in God's name. God's name is all that He is, His being. His name was given to Christ (v. 11). Christ manifested it to the apostles (v. 6), in words (v. 8). He gave them God's Word (v. 14). Jesus prays that you be kept in God's Word. If you ignore God's Word, there is no way for you to be kept from becoming part of the world again, no way for you to be kept in true faith unto eternal life. Lose the Word, and you are lost. The Word is the means by which you continue to be a disciple of Jesus

(John 8:31) and possess the forgiveness of sins, your salvation. To be kept in God's Word is to be preserved as His to live with Him eternally.

2. That you may continue to be one with other Christians as the Father and Son are one. Father and Son are one in spiritual union and are one of will and purpose. Likewise you and I and all believers in Christ are united now into one spiritual body by a living connection with Christ in faith through the Word. Not to be in the same spiritual union with your fellow believers, as Father and Son are one, means that you are on the outside like Judas. Christ's concern that you be preserved in true faith is expressed in terms of spiritual oneness.

II. *He Is Praying that His Joy May Be Completed in You*

Jesus spoke this prayer (John 17:13) in the hearing of the apostles to indicate what was in store for them always from their ascended Lord.

- A. His joy is unique. There is only one true, lasting, worthwhile joy—His joy. His joy is distinct from the joy of the world. His joy stems from victory over the world gained by His death. He secured the salvation of all men, no matter where they live or what color they are. The purpose of Christ's praying for your preservation in the faith is that you may have His joy, which the world cannot give.
- B. You may have His joy in this world. Christ wants you to have His joy—completed, mature, solid—in you for all of life's situations. Your joy grows toward completion in you when there is absolutely no doubt

that the ascended Christ is praying for you constantly and that He is able to keep and guard you from all spiritual calamity and to save you for all time. Heb. 7:25. Your joy is in full control when you also realize that with Christ interceding for you there is nothing—your own heart, the devil, the world—absolutely nothing that can condemn you before God. Rom. 8:34.

Conclusion

Christ's ascension is cause for personal joy comparable to that of Easter. When He ascended, He did not thereby become irrelevant and remote to you. Nor has He forgotten you, now that He has won your salvation. He has a very personal interest that you remain His all the way, one with all true Christians in the world. What a Friend you have in Jesus!

Springfield, Ill.

OTTO HINTZE

EXAUDI: THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION

JOHN 14:12-17

Notes on the Text

Jesus is with His disciples in the upper room the night He was betrayed. He speaks to them poignantly and at length (13:12—16:33) about His impending death, resurrection, and exaltation. He comforts them with the encouragement and reassurance: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In the verse preceding the text He urges the disciples to believe in Him for His "very works' sake."

In v. 12 Jesus states that the person who believes in Him as the way, the truth, and the life (v. 6), one in essence with the Father (v. 10), and who continues in that faith (present participle), will do the same works Jesus was doing. The disciples would not only have memories of Jesus' deeds, but they

themselves would perform those deeds. In their subsequent ministry they healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and made the crippled whole. (Acts 2:43; 3:7; 4:30)

But Jesus assures them that they will perform still greater works. The reference here is to the bringing of the Gospel to the world, the conversion of large numbers of both Jews and gentiles, and the preservation in faith of many amid temptation and persecution. These works are greater than the miracles because they manifest grace more clearly, fulfill men's deeper needs more directly, and bring results that are more enduring. Jesus' ministry was but the first-fruits of a great harvest that began on Pentecost and continued throughout the history of the church. (Acts 2; 8:40; 12:24)

These greater works are possible because Jesus is "going to the Father." Conversions became possible because Jesus altered man's relationship to God. Only because He completed His work of redemption could the disciples be His instruments for spiritual conquest. The greater works are effected through the exalted Christ.

V.13. Faith, which puts the disciples in union with Christ and enables them to participate in His works, manifests itself (among other ways) in prayer. This verse states that the disciples can ask for anything they wish; but it appears that the introductory *καί* connects their asking to the "greater works." While so engaged, they will want to ask Christ's blessing. Thus Jesus stresses praying in His name, mentioning His name and asking in accordance with Christ's revelation of Himself. They are to pray in the knowledge of Christ as God and Savior. Such prayer will be heard, Christ will do what they ask, and the Father will thereby be glorified. As men are converted, grasping the Son in faith, they will also praise the Father.

V.14. Jesus reiterates His promise regarding prayer, making it clear that the

disciples can address Him as well as the Father. Here is a strong emphasis on Jesus' deity. Whatever they ask will be done, provided the Father is glorified thereby.

V.15. Prayer is addressed to a loving Lord, who instills love in those who pray. Love manifests itself in obedience. The disciples are reminded that as lovers of Christ they will keep, pay attention to, observe, His commandments. The commandments of Christ include all His teaching, both Gospel behests and moral precepts. Where there is love for Christ there is recognition of His authority and observance of His will.

V.16. As the disciples endeavor to carry out His instructions, Christ will ask (*ἐρωτήσω* — a verb that emphasizes Christ's equality with the Father) the Father to help them. The result: They will be given "another Counselor," one who is called to their side to aid them. Jesus, their first Counselor, was with them on earth for a limited time only; the other Counselor sent by the Father will be with them always. The future tense (*δώσει*) points to Pentecost.

V.17. The Counselor who will then be given is called "the Spirit of truth." This title implies the Spirit's distinct personality and true divinity. He will help the disciples to understand truths that were already battling against their old conceptions and to readjust their beliefs.

The world, of course, cannot understand such enlightenment; "it is not able" to "receive the Spirit." The unbelieving world insists on walking by sense and by sight, and outward sense cannot apprehend the invisible Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:8-14)

But the disciples know the Spirit, for He is "abiding with them," and soon "He will be in them" in a much fuller measure, granting them new knowledge and power. The receptiveness of the disciples at this time and on Pentecost had its origin in the Spirit's indwelling.

Relation to Propers

The opening words of the *Introit*, "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice," tie in with the text's thoughts on prayer. The plea, "Hide not Thy face from me," is also an expression of confidence that God will be accessible and will reveal Himself. This He has done and continues to do in the "greater works" done in the power of the Spirit. Through these works the Lord shows Himself to be our Light and our Salvation. With such a God at work in us and through us, whom shall we fear? We can go on laboring, confident in Him who makes Himself known as the God of salvation.

The Collect highlights the thought of serving God with a pure heart. Our prayer is that we would so serve as we participate in the works of Christ.

The Gradual beautifully anticipates the outpouring of the Spirit, who guides our works and strengthens us to perform the same. The words of the *Gradual*, "I will not leave you comfortless," are quoted from John 14:18, the verse immediately following the text. The text and the propers are well suited to prepare Christians for a celebration of Pentecost.

Sermon Thoughts

In the days of the apostles, miracles were wrought in support of the greater works. But the time came when miracles were no longer needed because the greater works themselves were sufficient proof. Thus we must not demand physical miracles of believers today. We must also be careful not to equate every social movement with the works of Christ nor to limit His concern to such work. There is one great work, greater than all: the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel creates faith and produces fruits of faith. It delivers men from the bondage of corruption and restores them to the glorious liberty of the Children of God. There is no

greater work than the proclamation of this Gospel.

Faith enables Christians to participate in Christ's works here and now. To be a believer is therefore not a static thing but a dynamic engaging in truly great works. These are done by Christ Himself in us and through us. Christ can achieve great things even when our faith is no bigger than a grain of mustard seed. (Matt. 17:20)

Christ sends His Holy Spirit to possess and empower us. We are "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). Feeble in ourselves, we are strong in the Lord.

We can boldly ask Jesus for help and guidance, trusting in His advocacy and seeking His glory.

Suggested Outlines

The Wonderful Works of Christians

- I. *They Are Made Possible by Christ*
- II. *They Are Guided by the Holy Spirit*

We Can Now Do the Works of Christ

- I. *Because Christ Has Gone to the Father*
- II. *Because Christ Has Given Us His Spirit*

There Is Work to Be Done

- I. *What a Privilege!*
- II. *What a Challenge!*
- III. *What a Comfort!*

How to Be an Active Christian

- I. *Be Sensitive to the Spirit*
- II. *Pray in the Name of Jesus*
- III. *Demonstrate Your Love*

What We Need Is More Spirit

- I. *So that We Ask More Confidently*
- II. *So that We Love More Perfectly*
- III. *So that We Work More Faithfully*

Springfield, Ill.

GERHARD AHO

WHITSUNDAY: THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

JOHN 14:23-27

The Setting of the Text

When a preacher begins to study a text for a Pentecost sermon he looks for a message about the Holy Spirit. His goal is to teach his people about the Spirit and His work. The text before us takes us back to Maundy Thursday. It connects our thinking about the Holy Spirit firmly with the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ.

The chapter heading in one old Bible edition summarizes the farewell addresses of Jesus with the words: "Christ comforteth His disciples." A more appropriate summary might be: "Christ prepares His disciples to understand His mission and participate in it."

Words were buzzing around the apostolic heads. Jesus was there. Yet He was going away. And He was coming again. Doctrines were falling "thick and fast." That is evidenced by the frequent use of John 14 in dogmatic textbooks and catechetical expositions. Very likely the apostles' heads were spinning. They seem to grasp at phrases to slow down the flood of remarkable concepts flowing from Jesus' lips. Thomas cries: "How can we know the way?" Philip blurts: "Show us the Father." Our text is a reply to Jude's question (v. 22): "How is it that you are going to make yourself known to us but not to the world?"

Keep Jude's question in mind. It gives direction to the text. The key thought of the text fairly leaps out of Jude's question: Christ's program of manifesting Himself to the world. It is a Pentecost theme because Jesus reveals the centrality of the Spirit in His program.

Looking at the Text

V. 23. "Jesus answered." That points us to the query of Jude. The AV has "My words," but the Greek is τὸν λόγον μου, correctly rendered by the RSV as "My Word."

Jesus' Word is the same as "the Word of God" and equals the Gospel, the Christ-message. This Christ Word is to be "kept." τηρέω means to guard, protect, observe. We keep the word by guarding it from loss, by protecting it from adulteration, and by responding to it actively. The verb does not indicate that we are to keep it to ourselves.

V. 24. This verse contains an interesting use of the plural and singular of λόγος. Jesus equates the "words" with "the Word." Simultaneously it is the Word of the Father. This puts a premium on having the very words of Jesus. The apostles' inadequate comprehension of Jesus' words in this very chapter indicates the hopelessness of the unaided human understanding of His words. This very problem is the focus of the sending of the Spirit.

V. 25. Lest we have any doubt about which words form the connecting link, Jesus spells it out. He means the very words which He *spoke* in the hearing of the apostles. This enhances the value of having an accurate record of the spoken words of the Christ incarnate.

V. 26. Here we have the Holy Spirit positionally designated as the Paraclete. His official title reveals His function. He calls us to His side in order to teach us, to admonish us, to comfort us. His authority is established. The Father sends Him—but in connection with the whole revelation ("name") and authority of the person and work of Jesus. His function is to teach. διδάσκω is the most general of the pedagogic words of Scripture. It means to impart instruction. In context it is fastened on the one hand to the revealed message of God and on the other to the disciple. It includes more than cognitive transmission. It has as its end the growth of the disciple and his eternal destiny. In this verse we have again a strong reference to the very words of Jesus. The Spirit will reproduce these in the minds of the apostles. This explains why we have, in

the Johannine account, faithful reproduction of the extended discourses of Jesus.

V. 27. Here our homiletical curiosity revolves about the word "peace." εἰρήνη is not "peacefulness." It is Christ's peace. It does not envision an easy, withdrawn life. His peace is peace between man and God. It is a peace, as the text indicates, that has to do with the terrible disturbances of a man's inmost being ("heart"). It is an antidote to terrors of conscience. It is a peace bought in the bloody arena where Christ defeated Satan. It is God's grace *propter Christum*, which reestablishes guilty mankind in God's circle of love.

The Propers

The Introit reminds us that the Holy Spirit carries on His teaching ministry in all the world. The Spirit is here to correct us if we have a mistaken notion about Christ's peace. The peace-filled disciples do not "let the world go by" but, equipped with the Word, wage war against the enemies of God and scatter them.

The Collect praises God's wisdom in sending the Spirit to be the Teacher of God's faithful people in the past and asks for the extension of that ministry to all disciples today in great effectiveness.

The Epistle (Acts 2:1-13) is the account of the historical miracle of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost.

The Gradual is a prayer for the ongoing function of the Paraclete.

The Gospel (John 14:23-31) is our text with several additional verses. It stresses the gift of the Spirit by the ascending Christ.

The Proper Preface calls on us to worship the ascended Christ, who participates in the rulership of all things and whose magnificent authority commissions the Spirit's function.

In short, the propers of Pentecost are clear and direct and strongly support the thrust of the text.

Sharing the Message with the Faithful

The Paraclete in the Program of Proclamation

Introduction

Pentecost has nothing in common with religious "enthusiasm" that seeks its own way to God and ignores Christ's plan. Pentecost is to excite us about God's plan and to help us to see how we can participate in the Gospel venture.

I. *The First Step*

Christ provides salvation by His sacrificial acts. Salvation is here flavored by such terms as "peace" and "fellowship with God." The context is applicable. (Vv. 23, 24, 27)

II. *The Second Step*

Christ Himself interpreted and taught the significance of His redeeming work while He was in the flesh. (V. 25)

III. *The Third Step*

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to guide the written, apostolic witness. Thus His good news specifically, and accurately, "belongs to the ages." (V. 26)

IV. *The Fourth Step*

Through the power of the Gospel, so carefully recorded, the Holy Spirit continues His work of bringing men of all times and all places into a faith relationship with God.

Conclusion

The apostolic record of the Gospel has come to us. Thank God! By our rebirth we are not only reserved for heaven but included in God's program. We ourselves are witnesses. We have a sure witness. We have a commission. By faithfully witnessing to the revealed Gospel we become instruments of the Spirit!

Springfield, Ill. RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

HOMILETICS SECTION TO ILLUSTRATE NEW APPROACHES TO PREACHING

In the church year of 1967—68 the homiletical material in the **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** will feature examples of new approaches to preaching. Rather than develop a sermon study for each Sunday of the year, we plan to print seasonal samples of dialog sermons, dramatic sermons, sermons for the family service, and other types with which preachers have been experimenting.

The editorial staff of the **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** invites readers who have developed experimental forms of preaching to submit samples of their sermonic work for possible publication in the magazine. A brief paragraph explaining the approach together with an actual sample of a service's sermon will be most helpful for sharing with other fellow participants in the preaching task. The editors will be helped if materials are submitted in double-spaced typewritten form. Kindly address samples and/or suggestions to:

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
CTM OFFICE
801 DE MUN AVENUE
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