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## Homiletics

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## HOMILETICS

*These homiletical helps are a continuation of the series of sermon studies based on the "Series A" texts in the Saxon Pericopic System originally compiled in 1842. This month's sermonic materials were prepared by clergymen serving on faculties of educational institutions of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. Professors Paul Foelber, William Hassold, and Paul Meyer of Concordia Lutheran College, Ann Arbor, Mich., are the committee which prepared the sermon studies on the texts for Trinity IX and X. The studies for Trinity XI and XII represent the cooperative work of Professors Fred Growcock, Arthur Dauer, and Richard Dinda of Concordia Lutheran College, Austin, Tex. Professors J. Henry Gienapp, John Johnson, and Oliver Rupprecht of Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wis., are the members of the committee who cooperated in the preparation of the materials for Trinity XIII and XIV. Dr. Johnson has subsequently accepted appointment to the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Ill.*

### THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 12:41-48

#### *Introduction*

This is a sermon on stewardship. When you hear that statement, you probably think immediately, "Another sermon about money!" Or, "Another sermon on the three Ts: time, talent, and treasure!" But the sermon today will not deal directly with these rather limited aspects of stewardship. Instead, it raises a larger question for each one:

#### Are You a Responsible Steward?

##### *I. Are You Ready to Acknowledge Your Position as a Steward of God?*

A. The question Peter asked, "Lord, are You telling this parable for us or for all?" (v. 41) indicates a close connection with the preceding context.

B. The parables of Jesus are more than interesting stories that illustrate moral truths. They have an essential role in Jesus' procla-

mation of the kingdom of God. Jesus told the parables for the purpose of eliciting a decision from His hearers concerning Himself and His work.

C. Peter's question was at bottom an attempt to avoid making this decision, to bypass the responsibility for watchfulness.

1. In the parable of vv. 35-40 Jesus had stressed the need for watchfulness. He urged constant readiness. He promised that those servants who were ready for the return of their master would be blessed and would sit down at the Messianic banquet. But those who were not ready would endure great loss. The application of the parable is given in the words: "You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (V. 40)

2. Peter's question really assumed that the challenge to watchfulness was not directed to the privileged circle of the Twelve but was intended only for the people on the outer fringes of Jesus' followers. It was an attempt to escape the need for constant watchfulness by those who have been specially favored.

D. This same delusion may afflict members of a Christian congregation. They have been specially favored by God in that they have heard the Gospel of salvation in Christ. They may, however, be content to have been baptized, to have been confirmed, to be contributing members of a local congregation, etc., but they refuse to recognize their responsibility for constant readiness for the Lord's return to judgment. The question each one should ask is not "To whom does this admonition to preparedness apply?" but rather, "How does it apply to me?"

##### *II. Are You Ready to Accept Your Responsibilities as a Steward of God?*

A. To answer Peter's question Jesus, as so often, asked another question and challenged

His hearers with another parable: "Who then is the faithful and the wise steward?" (V. 42)

B. The faithful and wise steward of whom Jesus speaks is the Christian who recognizes and accepts his responsibility for service in the kingdom of God. But more important, he is the one whom the love of God in Christ makes wise and faithful—indeed, makes into a steward.

C. The pictorial language Jesus employed is that of a steward who is responsible for the nourishment of the master's entire household during the owner's absence. The responsibility Jesus was urging upon His faithful stewards was the proclamation of the kingdom of God. This may be done in various ways in the life of the Christians: Sunday school teaching, mission calling, visiting the sick and shut-ins, etc. Thus, a Christian may fulfill his responsibilities. But a wider duty includes every relationship in life.

D. Unfortunately many Christians abuse their privileges as stewards of God (v. 45). They know what they are to do, but they do not act upon their knowledge. They behave as though they had no responsibility to the world beyond their limited circle of acquaintances. They act as though the Gospel were their private possession, which they need not share with those who as yet do not know Christ and His salvation. They assume that they can always prepare themselves in time before the Lord's return.

E. Such an attitude can only bring down upon them the wrath of God for their refusal to meet their responsibilities. Such a refusal can only be considered tantamount to unbelief. (V. 46)

F. On the other hand, the responsible and faithful steward is clear as to his duty:

1. He knows that he must witness to the transforming power of God by the life which he now, by the grace of God, is able to live.

2. He knows that he must seize every op-

portunity to witness to the Gospel of Christ to those people who do not know Jesus as their Savior.

3. He knows that he must serve faithfully in every opportunity the Lord presents to him.

4. In turn, the Lord will give him further opportunities for service, and he will gladly accept them.

#### *Conclusion*

The challenge Christ places before us is clear: Are *you* a faithful and wise steward?

### THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 13:31-35

#### *Introduction*

To procrastinate, "to put off until tomorrow what we should do today," is a very common failing. The student delays doing his assignments until the last minute. The business man delays the completion of his tax return until the deadline for filing is upon him. The housewife postpones doing some distasteful task around the house until she cannot put it off any longer. Such procrastination has become a part of the lives of many people. If it is so common in our everyday lives, we should perhaps ask ourselves whether we procrastinate also in doing the Lord's work. Do we put off that work until a "more convenient" time? To help ourselves overcome any tendency to procrastinate in doing the Lord's work, we should hold before ourselves the example of Jesus, who said, in effect:

"I Must Work Now!"

#### *I. I Must Work Now Because of the Importance of My Task*

A. The task which the Father had given Jesus was to gather the people of God, "to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

1. The entire ministry of Jesus was a Messianic ministry of seeking the lost. The purpose of Jesus' ministry is described in the

programmatic sermon in the synagog at Nazareth, in which Jesus applied Is. 61:1 and 58:6 to Himself. Jesus' exorcisms and miracles of healing (v. 32) were a part of that Messianic ministry.

2. Jesus came to His own people, the Jews, and sought to gather them "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" in order to protect them from danger (v. 33). Jesus sought to shield His people from the wrath of God, which was to be poured out over their sin.

3. The death of Jesus on the cross was an essential aspect of the work of seeking the lost, for by His death Jesus accomplished the reconciliation of men to God. When the incidents of the texts occurred, Jesus had already predicted His Passion (Luke 9:22) and had set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He was determined to work until death, for He was fully aware that His death had saving power. (Mark 10:45)

B. Though the work of Jesus in gathering the people of God seemingly ended in failure (Rom. 9:1 ff.), for many of His fellow Jews rejected their Messiah, God was nevertheless determined to establish His Israel. The new Israel, the Christian church, in which racial lines are erased (Gal. 3:28), is made up of all who have been gathered under the wings of Jesus. This new Israel is the heir of both the privileges and obligations of the old Israel. The task of the new Israel, as of the old, is to bring divine blessings to the world (Gen. 12:3) and to be a light to the nations (Is. 49:6). The members of the new Israel are to plead with men, "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Such a reconciliation of all men is the very purpose of the work of Jesus, who died that the scattered children of God might be gathered into one. (John 11:51 f.)

## *II. I Must Work Now in Spite of Opposition and Indifference*

A. The task of Jesus was not easy, for He had to face:

### 1. The opposition of

a. Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, who believed that Jesus was John the Baptizer returned from the dead. Herod had executed John because of the latter's fearless reproof of Herod's incestuous marriage. Now Herod's guilty conscience was leading him to plot Jesus' death.

b. The Pharisees, who objected to Jesus' rejection of their legalistic religion. Though feigning friendship in reporting Herod's plans, they had not dropped the opposition to Jesus and His work, which they had shown from the beginning of His ministry. The Pharisaic opposition would ultimately be instrumental in bringing about Jesus' death. Their advice was, in effect, that Jesus should leave the country and thus leave the field to them.

2. The indifference of those people of Jerusalem who refused to heed Jesus' call. (V. 34)

B. The experiences of Christ's people today are not much different. They, too, must face:

1. Opposition. In the United States or other nations of the free world there is no organized political persecution of the Christian church. For this fact we thank God. If, however, persecution by the state should arise, we should recognize it as an attempt to keep the church from fulfilling its function as a witness of Christ. At the same time we must recognize that there are other, more subtle forms of opposition to Christian witness: ridicule, social pressure, etc. These, too, are intended to keep the Christian from witnessing.

2. Indifference. The person who witnesses faithfully for Christ must not expect that his testimony will be gladly welcomed by all to whom he speaks. The lack of response which he experiences should not discourage him, even as it did not discourage Jesus. He must continue to witness faithfully, for it is alone

through faith in Christ that men can be saved.

### III. *I Must Work Now Until My Task Is Finished*

A. Christ knew that His time was limited, and therefore He continued His ministry.

1. Christ knew that He had a limited time for His ministry. At the time of the warning which the Pharisees brought, Jesus knew that the opposition to His ministry was mounting and that it would culminate in His death. He nonetheless did not give up.

2. He sensed a real need on the part of people for repentance and reconciliation with God. Without the right relationship with God men will experience the full outpouring of divine wrath.

3. Jesus continued to work until the very end.

B. The Christian's time for working is limited, and it is urgent that he make use of every opportunity.

1. God has given us our lives in which to work for Him as witnesses. Even now, by Gospel and sacrament He makes those lives new.

2. On the basis of God's Word, we can see the need for the Gospel.

3. We should be moved to faithful service for Christ.

#### *Conclusion*

Every believer has reason to adopt the motto of Christ: "I must work now!"

PAUL FOELBER  
WILLIAM HASSOLD  
PAUL MEYER

### THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 13:23-25

#### *Background*

"On the way to Jerusalem" for the last time, our Lord is faced with the question:

"Are there few who will be saved?" (Luke 13:23). Does St. Luke put this question in this place as a parallel to the implied question in Luke 13:1-2: "What about the suffering in this world"? If this is so, then our Lord parries both these attempts to discuss the abstract questions about the nature of suffering and the implied judgment of the goodness of God by pointing us to ourselves. If you are concerned about suffering, then repent. If you are concerned about the fate of the lost, then agonize (fight) to enter the Kingdom. This treatment would then assume that the question about the few being saved reflects a serious concern for the lost on the part of the questioner. (Luke 13:23)

It would seem that the question is rather: "Are there few of *us* who are saved?" It is thus an implied questioning of the teaching of Jesus in the parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven (Luke 13:18-21) that the Kingdom works quietly, marvelously, and with great effect. The context following the text shows that the door will be closed to the strong "grabbers" of the Kingdom (the Pharisees, who have all their lives sought to enter) but open to those of the North, South, etc. (Luke 13:28), who will sit at the Father's banquet with the patriarchs. This indicates that Jesus is seriously saying in the text: "You try, but your seeking and agonizing to enter the Kingdom are in vain" (Luke 13:29). This background is vital then in determining our theme—"The Agony of Grace"—agony because the old man, who with his *opinio legis* wants to agonize and seek to enter, must die and *receive* the Kingdom, which is totally a gift from the Father.

#### *Introduction*

If I were asked to pick that word in the English language which had the most beautiful sound and which had the most pleasant associations for me, I would probably pick the word "grace." For it is by *grace* that I am saved. It is by *grace* that I am what I am. It is by *grace* that I preach the Gospel

to you. It is by *grace* that the cup of my blessings overflows. But there is also a heart-wrenching agony connected with grace. We must be brought to our knees. We must bend our proud backs. We must humble our own inclinations to put trust in our own little heap of good works.

#### The Agony of Grace

A man came to Jesus with one of those test questions which people like to ask the Lord. "Will there be only a few people in heaven?" This is not a life-or-death question—not like "What must I do to be saved?" or, "How does one become one of the few who will be saved?" The man who asked was really trying to focus attention away from himself—just as we do when we ask: "How are all those people in New Guinea or in Africa going to be saved?"

The Lord immediately focuses the questioner's attention back on himself. In fact, Jesus doesn't answer the man's question at all. In substance Christ is saying: "That had better not be your question. You ought to be asking Me how *you* can get into heaven—and even if you didn't ask, I'm going to tell you how. You have to agonize before you can enter the kingdom. I tell you that you get there only by Me."

Here is the agony of grace. One cannot take this text to mean that one enters into the narrow door by working hard or that entry into heaven is dependent on what a man accomplishes in his life. (Cf. Eph. 3: 12.)

Many people try very hard to get in by all the favors they have done for the Lord. The devil and our own flesh and our pretty pride often lead us into exactly the same effort. But suddenly the Lord says, Many people are going to stand at the door and bring out their little lists of favors they have done for Me and ask that the door be opened. "Remember Lord, I was instrumental in beginning three new missions." "Lord, I went

to Communion 4.36 times a year since I was confirmed." "Lord, I have 17 buttons for perfect Sunday school attendance." And when you stand outside and parade your piety in front of Me, I'm going to say, "Who in the world are you? Where did you come from? What do you want here?"

That is the agony of grace—that the Lord suddenly cuts off our pious legs at the knees and says, "Away with your cheap claims of self-righteousness. Away with your acts of piety. It's not *your* sufficiency that makes you a member of My body; it's only grace that opens doors."

Isn't it a terrible crushing blow to realize how deeply into the traps we have fallen? To realize how smug and complacent we become in our crippled little lives? That is the agony of entering the Kingdom, the agony of receiving grace, the agony of belonging to Christ's body: that we enter, we receive, we belong *in spite of ourselves*, that we enter, we receive, we belong *because of His grace*. That is a shattering agony for our sinful pride and flesh to bear.

It is in *agony* that we cry out in today's Introit: "Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord." Hurry up and strip that pride from me. Hurry up and help me bear this burden of agony. "Make my enemies," my pride and conceit "ashamed"; "let them"—my piety and my selfishness and lovelessness and little stock piles of good deeds—"that seek after my soul be confounded." Let anyone or anything that helps to set such traps of self-righteousness for my soul "be put to confusion."

It is *agony* for the sinful flesh to pray in the collect: "O God, almighty and merciful," it is only out of *Your gift* that we are of true and praiseworthy service to You; so we ask You for the power to be faithful servants, because this is not something we can do by ourselves.

There is even *agony* for the pride in the triumphant shout of the Gradual: "I will

bless *the Lord*. . . My soul shall make her boast *in the Lord*." Again this reflects the outcome of the agony of grace that leads to the understanding that our boasting is never in our accomplishments. "Sing aloud unto *God our Strength*"—more agony, for the Old Adam hates to hear how powerless he is.

The Epistle maintains the same theme—more crushing blows to the conscience—that the sufficiency which makes us acceptable to the Kingdom is not ours but that of God's grace.

It is this agonizing over the total inability of the flesh to accomplish our salvation which, in the power of the Spirit, leads us to total dependence on Him who is the Door of the Kingdom.

#### THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 15:11-32

##### *Background*

Our Lord is on His way to Jerusalem, where "all things written about the Son of Man shall be fulfilled." The opposition of the scribes and Pharisees has hardened, and the Lord has spoken His sorrow-filled words against those who refuse Him (Luke 13:22-35; see parallels in Matt. 23) as the door to the narrow, constricted, agonizing, high-cost (Luke 11:22-35) way of discipleship. The sinners and publicans come to hear Him, and He receives them (which is why they are His and drawn to Him) and eats with them. The scribes and Pharisees grumble at this. Never having understood or received or lived under the absolutely free, unfettered, boundless, all-giving grace of God, they refuse to allow this grace in Christ to be given to the unworthy. Believing themselves worthy, they declare their unworthiness. To these the Lord then tells the parable of the Prodigal Son.

##### Sermonic Suggestions

One of the problems in preaching about the Prodigal Son is that we, like the Phari-

sees, can sit and listen to such a sermon without ever feeling personally involved. Modern psychologists would say that we don't identify with the younger brother. After all, how many of us or how many of the Pharisees have actually ended up in a pig sty in some foreign country before coming to our senses? There is a real lesson in the parable about repentance and God's grace, but the Savior knew that Pharisees would not be comparing their situations with that of the younger brother. That must be the reason He included an older brother in the parable, for it is in the older brother that He shows to all us Pharisees our true selves. Unless we see a very strong resemblance to ourselves in the older brother, we miss the whole point of the parable.

It is almost frightening that the Lord could portray all of us as vividly as He has in the character of the older brother. Like the older brother, we view ourselves as *honorable*. In real life, we don't ask for the inheritance. The father gives it. Being dutiful sons, we refuse in substance to take the inheritance. We insist that the father still run the farm, that we will work for him. "Love you, dad; after you're gone, I'll take my inheritance. Until then, you're the boss."

Like the older brother, we view ourselves as *responsible*. Let that foolish brother go off dissipating. Someone has to stay home and work the farm. Someone has to assume congregational responsibilities. While the rest of the ungrateful bunch loaf or golf on Sunday morning, we will be in church.

Like the older brother, we view ourselves as *temperate*. The older brother doesn't even go out partying on weekends when his work is done. ("You never had a party for me.")

Dutiful, respectful, dependable though the older brother was, mustn't it have been a wretched life for him! See him cultivating the stony soil in the burning sun, eating his heart out with bitterness that the younger brother wasn't sweating out there with him!

Can't you see the family at the supper table, a concerned father wondering aloud about the younger brother, with the elder brother cynically commenting that he was probably living it up with never a dull moment? Can't you see him shriveling up all the joy in life with the crumbs he casts to his self-pity and piety?

Don't we see ourselves cultivating the same bitter attitude and outlook? "I sure wish the rest of the congregation would be giving some evidence of *their* love for the Lord." Don't we encourage the same petty shriveling jealousies when concern is registered about people being absent from church? "Oh, they probably partied last night and couldn't get up in time this morning." Don't we just plain uproot every joy the Lord gives us in life when we throw self-righteous little sops to our self-pity and console ourselves that if it weren't for us, the Kingdom on earth would go to wrack and ruin?

If we can reasonably say that Jesus wasn't talking about us in some of the details of the story of the Prodigal, we certainly cannot deny that He draws a shockingly accurate picture of us in the older brother. But the Lord is not yet finished. He gives us further disturbing information about the older brother.

The younger brother has returned to be joyfully accepted by the father. A celebration is planned. The breeze carries the noise of music to the older brother, who is exhausted by the day's long and hot chores. "What in the world is going on?" And when he finds out, he is really upset.

He confronts his father. "I don't get it! You are throwing a party because this worthless son of yours happened to come back! Look! did *I* ever ask you for an increase in my allowance? Did *I* ever moan because you didn't give me a birthday party? Did *I* ever complain about having to work in the field? There were times when we were talk-

ing about the next day's work and I could have walked out on you, but *did I?*"

Remember how the old timers washed their clothes? Wet it in the creek and then beat on it with rocks? In a sense, that's what the Lord does with us in the last two verses of the text.

All that our Father possesses has been ours all along. We have cried because we forgot that we are in His house. We have cried because our own smallness has stood in the way of our joy in being in the Father's house. We have cried because we expected still more, as if we were doing the Father a favor by staying in His house.

Doesn't that really anger us—"Son, you are always with me. All that belongs to me belongs to you."

Further frustration: a petty attempt to fault the father falls far short. The father says in effect, "Don't give me that 'your son' bit. This is *your brother* who has returned."

See the powerful condemning statement that this must have been to the Pharisees, who were complaining because Jesus was eating with those sinners of His.

Do you see how this whole parable stands as a terrible condemnation of us—breaking our hearts, shattering our petty nastiness, uprooting our jealousies, crushing our lovelessness? But it takes such a terrible condemnation for the Holy Spirit to make us realize that the moment we really see ourselves as the older brother, we have come to the place of the Prodigal who had reached the end of his rope. Once we identify with the older brother—seeing we have squandered the inheritance of joy, peace, comfort, forgiveness as prodigally as did the Prodigal—we, too, are at the end of our rope. There is no place left for us to go but back to the Father to throw ourselves on His mercy.

And, even now, while we are yet a great way off. . . .

FRED GROWCOCK  
ARTHUR DAUER  
RICHARD DINDA



**THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY  
AFTER TRINITY**

LUKE 9:57-62

*Introduction*

How strong is the intensity of divine love! "The glow within the Bible is the radiance of God's forgiving love." (Emile Cailliet)

How, then, shall we reconcile the words of the text with the Scriptural picture of a kind and merciful God? These words seem to be out of harmony with that proclamation. They speak of demands—the demands of discipleship.

The truth is that no conflict exists between this text and the general message of the Bible. If we think there is a conflict, the reason may be that we do not know the nature of true love.

What prompts a parent to spend the night at the bedside of a sick child? What caused Ruth to say, "Entreat me not to leave you"? It is love—love that knows no bounds—love that sees the requirements of love and meets them.

Unless we consider this text within the framework and perspective of true love, we shall go astray.

It is important also to remember that He who gave these three remarkable answers is the all-knowing God. How would you and I have dealt with these three men? Christ's procedure was correct because "He knew what was in man." (John 2:25)

We must think, however, not only of Christ's omniscience but of the pure and perfect love pervading all His actions. This text, far from being harsh and legalistic in its utterances, is dominated and controlled by considerations of love. He who speaks is the very "King of love." Here, as elsewhere, He speaks with supreme and convincing authority (Matt. 7:28 f.; Luke 4:22, 32; John 7:46). He knows whereof He speaks (John 3:11). He Himself paid the price of perfect devotion. Now He looks for the one suitable response—the loyalty of true discip-

ship. It is His love, His self-sacrificing love, that announces

**The Price of Discipleship**

I

Each of the three men presented in this narrative had his own special difficulty. Yet all of the men had a common problem: they had not paid the high price of discipleship.

What is the price? It is the renunciation of self and the supreme devotion to the things of the Spirit of God. It is love of the highest kind, love in its true essence: love of things divine and heavenly and spiritual and eternal, and the decisive action of a choice as unconditional as it is unwavering and unhesitating. The very fruit of the Spirit is this kind of love. (Gal. 5:22)

Matthew's version of this incident (8:19) states that the first man was a "scribe." Except for the light shed on this man's character by the words of Jesus and by the fact that he was following Jesus, we know very little about the man himself. It seems safe to say that he shared at least some of the integrity of his fellow scribe mentioned in Mark 12:28-34.

He was enthusiastic, but the generous burst of enthusiasm suggested by his words seems to have sprung from a momentary, purely natural impulse rather than from a Spirit-wrought desire. He had not "counted the cost." Specifically, he had not reckoned with "the utter homelessness of the Christ in this world." (Edersheim)

To the superficial observer this man's protestation of loyalty might have seemed adequate for immediate acceptance. He seemed to understand the implications of discipleship. He knew of Christ's journeys. He offered to follow Jesus "wherever You go."

Yet Jesus was not satisfied. He provided the man with food for additional thought. Had the man considered Christ's homelessness? Had he imagined that following Jesus

would be like joining the entourage of an earthly king?

Even the birds, although they have "neither storehouse nor barn" (Luke 12:24), can, so to speak, pitch a tent (see the Greek expression in v. 58) and thus do what human beings consider perfectly normal, find a dwelling-place. But not He, the Son of God, who has become the Son of Man! He "has nowhere to lay His head."

"Lay." What infinite pathos in that word! Not only its meaning but its position, its very sound (in Greek), is suggestive of the weariness resulting from constant travel.

"The only reason a road is good, as every wanderer knows,

Is just because of the homes, the HOMES,  
the HOMES to which it goes!"

(Kilmer)

But the Creator and Preserver of the world (John 1:3; Heb. 1:3) went homeless—so that the great promise of John 14:2 f. might be fulfilled for us, who had else been eternally outcast and exiled. "So strong His love to save us!"

Of course it was "logical" that Jesus be homeless. Had He not come to point men to their true home and to teach them to choose citizenship in heaven? (Phil. 3:20). The world had obligingly recognized the propriety of His attitude: it had responded by denying Him admission, acceptance, and abode (Luke 2:7; John 1:11). Yet He felt the sting of rejection and the bleak desolation of homelessness (Heb. 4:15). "It was truly a sore affliction for Jesus to be deprived of that which the worst rascals and scoundrels in Jerusalem took for granted: a home and a place of rest." (Luther)

To such homelessness, or at least to a willingness and readiness to endure it, Jesus calls His disciples. Jesus does not accept disciples on false premises. He does not entice them by offering false rewards. Instead, He plainly indicates the meaning of the price of discipleship.

Briefly stated, to follow Jesus means to *place the spiritual higher than the material.*

How could it be otherwise? This was, in a sense, man's original sin: preferring the earthly and exalting it above the heavenly. Surely, then, discipleship obviously involves that repentance, that change of mind and heart, that altered view which *sees things as they are*: in a divine realism, not in the distortion caused by materialism but in the proportion made possible by spirituality, a spirituality that *makes its choice*, the *choice of true love*, implanted by Him who speaks and calls. "We love—supremely—because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

There is nothing legalistic in this call to discipleship—no demand for asceticism, whether Oriental or Western, that spurns or distrusts created things (*per contra*, 1 Tim. 4:4); no enforced socialism (cf. Acts 5:4). On the other hand, this call from Him whose love sacrificed all to save us now envisages an answering love in us—a love so strong and intense that it is ready and willing and eager to *give up earthly advantages*. "Lord, Thee I love with all my heart!"

The price—to single out only one among numberless possibilities—may be loss of reputation and social acclaim. A man who refuses to become a partner to a dishonest contract may lose the "esteem" of his associates. A mother who welcomes God's gifts of many children may be slandered because her home lacks new furnishings or neatness. A young person who stands up for high ideals in amusement and entertainment may be ostracized from the "in" crowd.

Who will count the various forms of joyous, loving sacrifice? More important, who will count the cost of discipleship?

"In the career of Dr. C. F. W. Walther, we have a demonstration of what it means—and what it costs—to contend for purity of the Gospel. *It cannot be cheaply done.*" (Richard Schultz)

Again, "in our day we are called to a

mighty and expensive task of professional education in the coming years. Gird yourselves. In 20 years we must increase from 6,500 to more than 14,000 students in our synodical schools. We must provide the facilities, the staffs, and the boys and girls. If we do not rally to it, our schools will suffer, our churches will suffer, and that which has made the Word mighty in our midst will be weakened." (Schultz)

This is the price, this is the *test*, of discipleship: "We must seek nothing but *Christ Himself*. In fact, we must let ourselves be freed by Him from all clinging to earthly goods. Otherwise we shall not be fit for discipleship. Our answer ought to be given quickly and decisively. "Lord, I desire only You and Your grace (Ps. 73:25). Let my heart be Your home. Let me be Your dwelling-place (John 14:23). Then I shall be rich indeed, and fully satisfied." (Ps. 16: 11; 27:4-6; Rev. 3:18)

## II

It is significant that the second man in this series of interviews did not volunteer his services. Instead, he was invited and challenged to discipleship by a special and individualized call from the lips of Jesus.

There was not the spontaneity in this man which had characterized the first would-be follower of Jesus. This man, although not necessarily "sluggish, phlegmatic, and impassive" (Ylvisaker, p. 185), may have been of a calculating character. Where the first man was headstrong, rushing headlong into unpremeditated commitments, this man was more circumspect. He seemed to belong, by affinity of spirit, to the computer age of the 20th century, with its systems and devices of measuring and tabulating the tangible and the demonstrable. He wants to follow Jesus, but there are so many preliminaries to reckon with!

The man's request seemed to be entirely reasonable. Among the Jews, "no other duty would be regarded as more sacred than that

they, on whom the obligation naturally devolved, should bury the dead. To this everything must give way—even prayer, and the study of the Law" (Edersheim). Moreover, natural feeling would dictate careful attention to filial responsibilities. Why, then, the answer that was given to him?

The terse reply of Jesus seems cryptic, even cruel, unless we view it within the framework of love. Then the direction of His words becomes unmistakably apparent. *There is something higher than earthly duty. It is the call of the Spirit.*

Certainly He who rendered perfect obedience, not only to His heavenly Father (Phil. 2:8) but also to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51; John 8:46), would not set aside filial obligations or encourage juvenile irresponsibility (Matt. 5:17). But the law of God is the law of love. "Love is empress," Luther was in the habit of saying.

Jesus' words give no license to any wanton disregard of earthly duties. How scathingly He denounced those who employed spurious piety as a subterfuge to cloak the hideous evil of filial disobedience! (Matt. 7:9-13). "Some persons make a pretense of good works and use these to glamorize their own unwillingness to follow Jesus or to believe in Him." (Luther)

The wrong need not be filial disobedience. It may go in the opposite direction. It may be parental unwillingness to have a family or an unwillingness to assume duties that God places on fathers or mothers. But whether the unwillingness stems from insincerity or from an honest misunderstanding of the supreme and continuing relevance of spiritual love, the direction must be given in plain and unmistakable words. "Let the dead bury their dead."

True enough, not all those who bury the dead are "dead"—that is to say, spiritually unawakened—even as not all those who handle the "mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9) are stained by it. But the gen-

eral truth remains: burials, for the most part, are performed by those who themselves are "dead."

At any rate, under so specialized a circumstance as this one, the man was to see that such a predominantly earthly task as the burial of a dead body could be performed by others. Jesus was specifically entrusting him with a higher and more challenging opportunity: he was to "preach the kingdom of God." He was to proclaim the Word of God, and "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32). In this very hour Jesus was looking forward to the time when He was "to be received up." (V. 51)

What a bright and clarifying perspective unfolds when we consider these words in their context! The call to discipleship is issued by Him who is the Lord of life. At this very moment He was moving majestically and irresistibly to that glorious resurrection which would not only signalize His own triumph over death but which would also lead to the very means by which true life, everlasting life, would be given and proclaimed among men.

In such an hour is the candidate for evangelism to speak of burial rites? A greater contrast was hardly conceivable, and Jesus found it intolerable. "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God!" Share the vision that I have! See the superiority and the supremacy of that which deals with life, with real life, with the very essence of life!

The dead should not remain unattended. There will be those who attend to them. But you—!

As a rule, earthly duties need to be performed. If no one else were on hand to do them, the situation might be different. Circumstances alter cases. Because David's men were hungry, they ate the "hallowed bread" of the temple. Because Christ's disciples were hungry, they plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath.

But no such emergency was present in the life of this man. Others could perform the burial. By following the call—and by paying the price—of discipleship this man would give a *particularly eloquent kind of testimony*: his very actions would preach a sermon and would help point others to the living God. "Not to bury, but to make alive through preaching the Word of life, is the task to which disciples of Christ have been called."

"There are critical moments in our inner history, when to postpone the immediate call is really to reject it: when to go and bury the dead—even though it were a dead father—were to die ourselves!" (Edersheim)

How can we be moved and empowered to pay the price of discipleship? Jesus provides the clue. His words, though terse, are not harsh. The paronomasia ("dead"—"dead") may at first seem cryptic and baffling, but the two words contain their own helpful explanation (incidentally showing that puns are not to be a trivial and trifling "play" on words but ought to be used for a profound intensification of meaning).

Jesus is the Light of the world. His words, too, are light. They illumine our darkness. It is difficult, not merely to go, but to "go away" (cf. Greek), to separate oneself from former associates. It was difficult for Luther. (*Smalcald Articles*, "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope," par. 42.) It may become a very personal problem for many a 20th-century Christian.

"For our young preachers today to maintain unequivocally the doctrine of a verbally inspired Bible may exact a *costly toll*. It is not easy to be accused of obscurantism, of stubborn separatism, in a day gone mad with ecumenism; it is not pleasant to be accused of intellectual obliquity in a day which worships at the shrine of science." (Richard Schultz)

But see what discipleship does! It preaches (Greek: "proclaims everywhere") the king-

dom of God. The word to be proclaimed is the word of redeeming and forgiving love, of heavenly and eternal life. That love, that life, will *quicken your being* and will *enable you* to pay the price of discipleship—*joyously!*

How many missionaries have paid the price! How many young pastors, and their wives, in this country have steadfastly refused to accept a call to another parish merely because it happens to be "close to home" and have continued to work where God, rather than some doting parent, would have them! How many parents have chosen to live in a somewhat less fashionable area in order to be near a Christian day school for their children!

### III

The third man (mentioned only by Luke, not by Matthew in the parallel passage, 8: 19-22) seems to have been farthest removed from the path of true discipleship. He was frankly concerned about social relationships. The sharply discerning eye of Jesus detected the problem and recognized where this man's interests lay: he was in danger of letting human associations determine his life—and deter him from discipleship.

Without the words of Jesus we would hardly have been able to judge this man's case. There is a plausibility about his request that suggests the case of Elisha (1 Kings 19:20) or that of young Luther dining with his friends before entering the cloister (Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, p. 137). Only after hearing the reply given by Christ can we recognize this man's problem.

What this man needed was greater steadfastness of purpose. Jesus' words make it clear that he was a man of divided aims. He may have "liked" religion and the church and what he, in a quick and superficial survey, had felt was the heart of Christ's program, namely an emphasis on a kind of outward righteousness and on social welfare. But the deeper aspects of Christ's work seem

to have escaped him: the burning passion, the intensity of love, the zealous devotion to a spirituality that regarded the child of God as one who is in the world but not of the world, although filled with a missionary desire to reclaim the world for God. (John 17:15-18)

This man, apparently lighthearted, blithe, and good-natured, had sensed no great or urgent need of commitment to a principle of separation from worldly interests. His was an attitude of instability. He manifested a reluctance (somewhat reminiscent of Lot's wife, Gen. 19:26) to make a clean break with former associations. Why this reluctance? Possibly because this man had not yet discovered the *attractiveness*, the *delight*, the *high privilege* of discipleship.

How thoroughly modern! "If I join the church, what will I have to give up?" Often this question is asked without a word about "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Or without a thought about "considering abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt." (Heb. 11:27)

Or, again, a minister—back in 1920—was overheard saying: "I am reworking a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments; but now, in this modern and permissive age, there is so much that I have to omit." Have to?

None of us is free from this tug of war. We can sympathize with this third man—and it may be significant that tenderhearted Luke recorded his experience. We know what it means to long for the fleshpots of Egypt. We, too, have given priority to merely human associations. "Let me first go . . ." The pleasure of human company is so sweet; by comparison, the appeal of spirituality often seems to have a faraway sound.

What will resolve the conflict?

### A

First of all, Jesus uses stern language. The fact that the picture in His reply as a

merciful accommodation to this man's limited understanding is taken from everyday life involves not even the slightest concession in principle. The message is clear: All who attempt to perform the work of God with a divided heart and a distracted mind will come short of the goal. Who knows what detrimental consequences may have resulted from that one last farewell?

What was to be the purpose of the farewell? To use one last, golden opportunity to urge his relatives and friends to join him in following Christ? Such a charitable interpretation conflicts with Christ's warning. Apparently the intention was rather to have one final hour of fellowship, or even "one last fling," like the Mardi Gras carnival on Shrove Tuesday.

Jesus knew that this man would be unable to resist the pressure of such an occasion. "The devil quickly converts our 'just for once' into an unchangeable 'forever'" (Besser). Christ asks not for hesitation but for complete dedication. What a contrast between this man's wavering uncertainty and St. Paul's strong steadfastness of purpose! (Phil. 3:13 f.)

*Singleness of purpose is a mark of true discipleship.* Vacillation and half-hearted performance have no place in service to Him who worked so unceasingly that even His friends said, "He is beside Himself" (Mark 3:21). If a man has not merely "put" but forcefully "thrown" his hand upon the plow, with vigor of determination and strength of purpose, and then looks back regretfully with longing and desire, in a false appraisal of the things of his life, is "not well placed" and therefore is "unfit" for the kingdom of God.

As in the impressive sacrificial symbolism of Old Testament days (Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; Deut. 33:9 f.; Ps. 51:19; Ezek. 20:40 f.; 43:27), so in our own time *God demands totality of dedication* as a token and mark of discipleship.

Totalitarianism? Indeed, but of the most benevolent and most wholesome kind. Christ's totality of purpose was necessary for our redemption; our singleness of heart is necessary if we are to have fellowship with Him who can brook no evil. "He who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked." (1 John 2:6)

Easy? No! "Easy discipleship" may be a fond delusion of a push-button age. Compared with the yoke our God bore in our behalf (see Is. 43:24b), our burden is indeed easy and light (Matt. 11:30). But we, too, have trials of faith, and we may be called upon to resist to the point of shedding blood. (Heb. 12:4)

#### B

By whose power? Not by our own, but *by the power of divine love.*

The devil showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matt. 4:8). Jesus pointed this weak, wavering candidate to the King of kings and to the incomparable glory of His being: the glory of redeeming and forgiving love. Micah 7:18-20.

Our God is unique. To be a disciple in His kingdom is a priceless privilege. Tyrants commandeer their slaves. But God wins His disciples with sweet persuasion. Recall His statement to Old Testament Israel in the words of Hosea: "I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love." (Hos. 11:4)

The contrast at the end of the last two verses, heightened by the very sound of the words in the original Greek, will not escape the careful reader. The reinforcement, by a kind of assonance, at the end of v. 62, will impart to the contrast a solemn and impressive ring of finality: not "my house" but "the kingdom of God" is the decisive consideration.

What about me? Do those final words of Jesus ring in my ears? Does the haunting melody of these sounds stir my soul and

move me to pay — not grudgingly (Matt. 19:27; Luke 17:7-10) but willingly and joyously, because lovingly — the price of discipleship?

"Possessing Christian love and vision, you bring rescue and relief to all you meet. What you believe in your heart will be heard from your lips and practiced in your life. The magnet of lesser things cannot pull you away from God's design for you. Let others, who have sold out to earthly idols and powers, glory in personal feats and amuse themselves with pagan attachments to American culture. God chose you for a life's mission which requires courage, training, and dedication to a life crucified in Christ." (Waldo Werning, *God Chose You*)

If a person "shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). But take courage! "Yet a little while, and the coming One shall come and shall not tarry." (Heb. 10:37)

God grant that we will be "not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and keep their souls." (Heb. 10:39; compare with Matt. 10:22.)

OLIVER C. RUPPRECHT

#### THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 11:16-19

##### *Background*

The text under consideration is a statement Jesus made at a time when He was devoting Himself particularly to preaching (Matt. 11:5). In preparation He had commissioned the Twelve to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, telling them how to proceed and what to expect. He Himself had gone to teach and preach in cities known to the disciples (Matt. 11:2). Reports of His activity had reached John the Baptizer in prison, making him wonder whether Jesus was truly the Messiah and making him seek assurance.

One day Jesus faced a curious crowd. Having heard reports of John's earlier preaching, many had gathered in expectation of seeing something spectacular and of hearing something novel. Others had trekked out to the wilderness in response to the stir Jesus Himself was creating. The occasion gave Jesus an opportunity not only to pay tribute to John but also to assess the spirituality of the assembled crowd. He saw before Him a public that in its unbelief was seeking not the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness but another gospel, a less disturbing message, "smooth things" (Is. 30:10). This quest led Jesus to voice dismay over the noticeable aversion to the Gospel and to reaffirm His faith in the power of true wisdom.

##### *Text*

A problem crops up in the last verse of the text. Some manuscripts, following the parallel text in Luke, read: "Wisdom is justified *in/by her children*" rather than "*in/by her deeds*." But the reading "deeds" presents no theological difficulty, for the children of wisdom justify, that is, offer proof of the power of, true wisdom not only by what they say but also by what they do.

##### *Outline*

###### Introduction

God has given us His Word, the Word of reconciliation, the Gospel (2 Cor. 5:19). This Word is not simply to be bound in a book with a morocco cover and put into a book case. It is not to be filed away as highly confidential information. It is to be preached, communicated, "proclaimed upon the housetops."

This calls for preachers, men of God who are determined not to know anything but Christ and Him crucified, voices that cry in the wilderness of this world, pastors who mount their pulpits to speak about the mighty works of God, missionaries whose hearts are aflame with heavenly fire.

But preachers don't preach in a vacuum. They preach to people. They address hearers.

They face publics, be this an individual like the woman at Jacob's well, a group like the guests in the home of Simon, or a multitude like the one Jesus taught and fed in the desert.

When preachers bring their hearers God's Word of forgiveness, when they face their public, what do they find? The text under consideration shows a preacher, in fact, the greatest preacher the world has ever known, in a situation familiar to anyone who has ever preached:

### A Preacher Faces His Public

#### I. He Meets Childish Criticism

One day during a season of intensive preaching, Jesus faced a crowd of people brought together by a desire for the spectacular, a cross section of society, including publicans, Pharisees, lawyers. Jesus referred to the crowd not as His people but as "this generation," an expression baring an aching heart. He used this expression because, instead of finding His hearers receptive to the Gospel, He met with childish criticism.

These hearers reminded Jesus of moody children who refuse to join their playmates at play, no matter what the suggested activity, be it a lively dance or a solemn procession. At heart they were negative, childishly critical, critical of the *message* they were hearing. They objected to the preaching of the Law with its threats of wrath and condemnation and to the call to repentance issued by John. At the same time they objected to the Gospel with its offer of free and full forgiveness as proclaimed particularly by Jesus Himself. They sought a revelation, not on God's terms, but on their own, a "do-for-me" Christianity. Luther likened these people to burrs and thistles that sting, no matter how they are thrown.

The crowd gathered about Jesus directed its criticism also at the *persons* bringing the Gospel message. They found John, who came in the spirit of Elijah and who fasted and

abstained from strong drink, too stern and too austere. They said of him: "He has a demon." They hurled scorn even at Jesus, the very Son of God. They found Him contemptible, even profligate, because He ate and drank with social outcasts. They called Him a glutton and a drunkard.

Preachers still meet similar criticism. In many instances their hearers are barbs and thistles set to sting and prick. They find fault with the *message* God obligates preachers to proclaim. They resent a denunciation of their pet sins. They don't like to hear of total depravity. They also resent the Gospel, the truth that man is saved solely by grace. "Doesn't a morally decent life count for anything?" they ask.

Their criticism is directed also at the *person* of the preacher. Some fault him for being too serious; others, for not being serious enough. Some criticize him for not being relevant; others, for being too personal. Like children sitting in the market places, they are bound to raise objections.

#### II. He Also Sees Wisdom Justified

Jesus ended His comment on the spirituality of the public He was facing with a reference to wisdom. This is not the wisdom men ordinarily think of when the subject is wisdom. It is not the wisdom James calls "earthly, unspiritual, devilish" (James 3:15). It is not mere technical know-how or keen social awareness. It is the wisdom that comes down from above, that centers in Him whom God has made our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30). It is God's truth. Whoever makes this truth his own, whoever believes the wisdom centering in Christ Jesus, is a child of wisdom, and as a child of wisdom he is spiritually motivated. He does the deeds of wisdom, fights against the evil within himself, reflects the love of Christ in word and deed, bears witness to God's truth, prays for his enemies, bridles his tongue, visits the sick.

These deeds of wisdom are eloquent



tongues. They speak loudly. They justify wisdom, prove that the wisdom whose heart is Christ is true wisdom. Because of them the Gospel is vindicated, and Jesus is able to affirm confidently: "Wisdom is justified by her deeds."

When a pastor reviews his efforts to confront men with the Gospel, he becomes aware of cases of spiritual power and spiritual motivation. He sees parents giving their children a Christian training by word and ex-

ample, husbands and wives living in accordance with God's holy ordinance, young men and women resisting powerful temptations to evil, children obeying father and mother — all because of the wisdom from on high that governs their lives. Their deeds serve to advertise the Gospel, to justify wisdom, to prove that it is a power of God unto salvation.

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