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## Homiletics

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# HOMILETICS

## Trinity 14 TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Standard	Ordo A
Jeremiah 17:13-14	Jeremiah 20:7-9
Galatians 5:16-24	Romans 12:1-2
Luke 17:11-19	Matthew 16:21-27

### The Accent of the Day

The Propers for Trinity 14 emphasize the worshiping community and its dependence on (and gratitude for) the mercy and help of God. The standard lessons surround this theme in various ways. Jeremiah asserts that God is the only hope of His people, their only Healer and Savior. In Galatians Paul asserts the freedom of Christians from the Law, which commits us to the "doing" on which the flesh feeds, and describes the life into which the Spirit leads. Luke 17 depicts an act of grateful receiving.

The Ordo lessons develop the decision character of life with God. The Old Testament lesson asserts Jeremiah's frustration with the task God has set before him. He would choose otherwise, but cannot bring himself to do so. Romans 12 reviews the choice set before the Christian, the choice between God and mammon, conformity to this world or "transformity" toward the will of God. Matthew 16 describes Jesus' own decision in contrast with His temptation. His call to follow Him is the call to decide between self and the Kingdom.

### Establishing the Kerygmatic Center of the Text

The Pericope includes two sections: Jesus' preparation of His disciples for His suffering and death and the rebuke of Peter (vv. 21-23), and Jesus' sayings on cross-bearing and finding one's life (vv. 24-27). The sequence

is Markan (8:34-38) and is consequent in the synoptic tradition (cf. Luke 9:23-26). The saying in v. 28, also a part of the synoptic unit, reflects the earliest community's expectation of the Parousia, which may provide the clue for its summary exclusion from the lesson.

Where is the kerygmatic center? That is, where is the text's creative ground which enables it to become Word of God for preacher and hearer? If we proceed from Jesus' own decision to reject the *skandalon* (v. 23) of Peter's conception of his Messiahship (cf. v. 16), then the sayings material provides the center: It is kerygmatic in that Jesus Himself and His call form the Gospel confrontation to be delivered. The kerygmatic center of the text is vv. 24-25.

### Supplementary Reading

D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, esp. Part I.3, "Discipleship and the Cross."

### Suggested Outline

Theme: **FINDERS WEEPERS, LOSERS  
KEEPERS**

- I. Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to decide between God and mammon.
  - A. The Gospel invites us to give up the ungoods of our life and to get ready for the surprise of God's rule.
  - B. The surprise is that life with God is established by Him as a gift (cf. Luke 1:52 f., Eph. 2:8-9, 1 Cor. 1:27 f.).
  - C. If a man tries to earn it he fails. If a man tries to find it he loses it. It is only when he quits grasping for it that he knows it has been *given* to him.
- II. Such good news too easily strikes us as being too good to be true.
  - A. Because we have to give up our own ways of achieving life with God.

- 1) Peter had different plans for Jesus' Messiahship.
  - 2) It is difficult to view "all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing" (Is. 64:4, Jerusalem Bible).
- B. In a success-oriented society we are easily committed to the "doing," and the "receiving" is far from us.
  - C. For Paul, as soon as we commit ourselves to the doing we are dead (Gal. 3, Rom. 7).
  - D. For Jesus, finders weepers, losers keepers (text).
- III. The surprise of the Gospel is that we are relieved from ourselves, from our own standards, our own grasping.
- A. Life with God is a gift.
  - B. "For Jesus' sake" (v. 25) means "Thy will be done" — the joyful anticipation of all God's surprises.
  - C. The Gospel means that our lives will be shaped and reshaped by the forgiving love of God.

## Trinity 15

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Standard	Ordo A
Deuteronomy 6:4-7	Ezekiel 33:7-9
Galatians 5:25—6:10	Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 6:24-34	Matthew 18:15-20

## The Accent of the Day

The Propers indicate the reliance of God's people on His continued guidance. In Deuteronomy 6 the great *Shema* introduces the Mosaic discourses concerning what God requires of His people. In Galatians the Christian life is one of sharing with and caring for other people. In Matthew 6 Jesus reminds His disciples that the future is under the control of the Creator, and that those

who commit themselves to His rule can be free from anxiety about their own future.

With regard to the Ordo lessons: the Old Testament asserts the duty of the prophet boldly to speak as an oracle of God. Romans says that love is the fulfilling of the Law. The communal regulations in Matthew 18 have as their goal forgiveness and reconciliation.

## Establishing the Kerygmatic Center of the Text

The kerygmatic center: v. 15. It could be v. 20, for that is the motivating factor toward the action in v. 15, where the creative ground for Christian life and proclamation points toward the goal of reconciliation. In the Qumran Manual of Discipline, 5:25 to 6:1, the same disciplinary procedure is outlined, but in accordance with the Torah, which governs membership in the new covenant. The parallel to v. 20 in the rabbinic tradition is: "When two sit and there are between them words of Torah, the Shekinah rests between them" (Pirke Aboth 3:3). The material in our text is uniquely Matthean, with only isolated parallels in the Gospel tradition (Luke 17:3; John 20:23).

Form-critically our text is categorized as church rules and community regulations. However, the contrast with the other Jewish parallels is striking: the goal for the action prescribed is not the purity of the membership (so Qumran), nor devotional-educational piety *producing* the presence of God (so Pirke Aboth). The goal in Matthew 18 is reconciliation and forgiveness, which *proceeds from* the presence of the forgiving Lord (cf. the framework of the Pericope, vv. 12 to 14 and 21-22).

## Supplementary Reading

The applicable treatments of the passage in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963.

## Suggested Outline

**Theme: ON GAINING AND REGAINING YOUR BROTHER**

- I. Christian fellowship means gaining each other for each other.
  - A. Because Christ has gained us (vv. 12-14).
  - B. Christ is now at work within our Christian fellowship (v. 20).
  - C. The proper work of the fellowship has the promise of God's approval (vv. 18-19).
- II. Christian fellowship does not mean total conformity.
  - A. Differences of opinion can be healthy.
  - B. Differences of opinion can be unhealthy
    - 1) When not motivated by the spirit of Christ;
    - 2) When goals of fellowship are forgotten.
- III. Christ has turned our losses into gains.
  - A. Through His saving work.
  - B. Through our reconciling work.
  - C. Through the mutual access we now have to His Father in heaven (v. 19).

## Trinity 16

## TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Standard	Ordo A
Deuteronomy 32:39-40	Sirach 27:30 to 28:7
Ephesians 3:13-21	Romans 14:7-9
Luke 7:11-17	Matthew 18:21-35

## The Accent of the Day

The Propers for Trinity 16 recall God's mercy and forgiveness, which yield results in the believers' lives. Deuteronomy 32 stresses God's mighty and eternal rule, Ephesians 3

the knowledge of the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, and Luke 7 reports the raising of the widow's son at Nain.

In the Roman Ordo series Sirach asserts forgiveness as the way of wisdom and asks: "Does a man harbor anger against another, and yet seek healing from the Lord?" Romans completes this when Paul writes that "none of us lives to himself," because we belong to the Lord. The Gospel carries forward the theme of forgiveness, something which we do not *have* or *get* without *living in it*.

## Establishing the Kerygmatic Center of the Text

Peter's question and Jesus' answer (vv. 21-22) form for Matthew the creative ground (NB: the *dia* in v. 23) for the parable which follows. Vv. 21-22 are an enlargement of a Q-saying (Luke 17:4), expanded to express the limitless nature of Christian forgiveness. The parable itself is Matthean and serves to underscore the limitlessness of God's forgiveness, which is the motivating factor behind Christian forgiveness. The kerygmatic center of the *parable* then is vv. 32-33, and could be that of the entire Pericope. But we shall remain with vv. 21-22, since for Matthew it is the creative ground for the parable itself.

## Supplementary Reading

T. A. Harris, *I'm OK, You're OK*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969; esp. pp. 226 to 231.

## Suggested Outline

**Theme: LIVING IN FORGIVENESS**

- I. In Matthew 18 Jesus' words about living in Christian fellowship are concluded with this parable about living in forgiveness.
  - A. Peter puts the question: "What are the limits?" "Where do we draw the line?"

B. Jesus' answer is His typical response to such casuistic legalism, full of humor but straight to the point.

- 1) Seventy times seven does not suggest a checklist of 490.
- 2) A modern parable from *Peanuts*: Linus: "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." Charlie Brown: "I had expected more grace than that!"

C. The parable suggests the joy of living in forgiveness.

- 1) Contrast the joy of Jesus' dealings with people to the joylessness of the uptight upright.
- 2) To the limits of Peter's question contrast the limitless aspects of the parable: the king's power, the size of the debt of this one servant (\$10 million; all of Palestine plus Idumea and Perea then paid only \$800,000 in yearly taxes), the king's mercy, the servant's anger toward his fellow servant (whose debt was \$20), the servant's punishment.

II. Life in Christian community breaks down when we expect only to receive but cannot live in forgiveness.

A. It is so inconceivable that the servant just released from his debt responds in such limitless rage to his fellow servants.

- 1) They are *fellow* servants.
- 2) Together they acknowledged one king's rule and lordship.

B. It is so easy to ask and appropriate for ourselves God's forgiveness, but so hard to extend it to others.

C. Such limit-setting selfishness has the effect of breaking down Christian community (v. 31; cf. also the day's lessons from Sirach and Romans).

III. Christian community lives in the limitless forgiveness of her self-giving Lord.

- A. Such forgiveness is not just to be had or got, but to be lived in.
- B. Such forgiveness frees us to see our own weaknesses and to deal with them in healthy and creative ways.
- C. Such forgiveness frees us both to accept and to be accepted.

Trinity 17

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Standard

1 Samuel 2:1-10  
Ephesians 4:1-6  
Luke 14:1-11

Ordo A

Isaiah 55:6-9  
Philippians 1:20c-24,  
27a  
Matthew 20:1-16

The Accent of the Day

The Propers emphasize God's total rule over His creation and creatures. The Old Testament lesson is Hannah's prayer of praise. Ephesians 4 asserts that the life worthy of the Christian calling includes eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; the liturgical acclamations in vv. 4-6 give added emphasis to this. Luke 14 relates Jesus' healing of the man with dropsy and His sayings on choosing places of honor.

Isaiah 55 is a call to return to a pardoning God. Philippians 1 describes the apostle's openness for God's future, with an admonition to the Philippians to walk worthy of the Gospel now in the present. Matthew 20 is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

Establishing the Kerygmatic Center of the Text

The parable of the vineyard workers is special Matthean material, with the added v. 16 to be found elsewhere in the synoptic tradition (19:30, cf. 22:14; Mark 10:31;

Luke 13:30) and therefore belonging to the framework of the parable rather than to the parable itself. The context includes the parables of the lost sheep and the unforgiving servant (ch. 18; see above) and Jesus' dealings with casuistry and legalism (ch. 19; cf. ch. 15 ff.), as well as the ambition of the Zebedees and Jesus' concern for two blind men (20:17 ff.). Further, the disciples' rebuke of those bringing children to Jesus and the incident of the rich young man (ch. 19) serve to situate the parable within a specific direction: to answer the protest against Jesus' fellowship with those outside the circles of religious or social respectability.

Jesus' table fellowship with notorious sinners and his refusal to observe the boundary between sinners and righteous disturbed the scribes and Pharisees, and even at times His own disciples. The protest, then, evident in this parable at v. 12 forms the kerygmatic center of the text: "You have made them equal to us." Instead of joy these words constitute complaint because of the attitude behind them. The householder shows that what appeared as a lapse in the ordered system of justice was really the appearance of goodness. And how is one to disapprove of goodness? A judicial system is being replaced by generosity and goodness (the literal translation of v. 15b provides the contrast: "Is your eye evil because I am *good*?"). What should be seen as good news and as an occasion for joy becomes instead an affront and a cause for begrudging protest.

#### Supplementary Reading

Eta Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables*, New York: Harper & Row, 1966; esp. pp. 81—88.

#### Suggested Outline

**Theme: YOU HAVE MADE US EQUAL**

**Introduction:** Jesus' table fellowship with sinners was in itself a parable of God's acceptance of sinners on the basis of His goodness alone.

I. The parable of the vineyard workers — a parable of the Kingdom (= God's rule) — is a picture of the goodness of God.

A. The householder seeks the laborers *all day*.

B. The reason for equal payment is the goodness of the householder.

C. This parable is a picture of the Gospel: the word of God's acceptance of all men on the basis of His goodness alone.

II. This is hard for us in an activist society to appreciate: the good news strikes us as being too good to be true.

A. Our first reaction to the parable is that most of the workers did get a raw deal.

B. But then the goodness of God becomes cause for complaint.

1) Cf. the grumbling of the uptight upright against Jesus' fellowship with sinners.

2) As soon as we commit ourselves to earning the reward of God, we shall not be able to rejoice in His goodness (cf. Matt. 6:16-18; 11:19; Mark 2:6 f.; Luke 15:29; 18:9 ff.).

C. Does the Gospel bring to us the joy it should?

1) Are there first- and second-class citizens in the church?

2) Can we remove our standards of acceptance of the brother and replace them with God's goodness alone?

III. The good news of God's goodness frees us *from* the fear of not making it on our own and *for* the joy of life under His gracious rule.

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- A. Jesus' behavior with sinners is our cause for joy.**
- B. Our need for God's goodness is answered in the Gospel.**
- C. The Gospel turns us from ourselves**

**to take joy in the brother who also is in need of God's goodness.**

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