

Concordia Theological Monthly



J U N E



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A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 17:1-10

The Text and the Day. — The Trinity season of the church year once again reminds us of God's great deeds for our salvation (the Introit) and of our sanctification (the Gradual). However, the regular Epistle speaks of the longing to be free from imperfections, and the Gospel tells us of God's long-suffering and mercy and warns us against unmerciful dealing with our brother. The text of this series fits admirably well for this Sunday and cries for a hearing on this or any other day of the church year.

Notes on Meaning. — Vv. 1-2 contain a warning from the Savior's lips against offenses. "It is impossible but that offenses will come." The reason for such offenses is found in Gen. 6:5; cp. Gen. 8:21; Jer. 17:9. Even Christians not above giving offense. Grieves them. Hence the groanings and sorrow of Christians. Cp. Rom. 8:23. Vv. 3-4. An admonition to be forgiving. To be done in the light of the mercies of God. Cp. Luke 6:36-37. Now in v. 5 we have a request from disciples for a greater measure of faith. V. 6, the answer of the Lord to the request of His disciples, implies that not an increase of faith is necessary, but simply to have faith. Where faith is, He says, it is possible to perform miracles such as mentioned in v. 6, even though it be but small faith. Certainly the implication is this, even if faith is small (as a grain of mustard seed), such practical Christianity as avoiding the giving of offense and being forgiving are possible for children of God. Vv. 7-10 bring an example by means of which the Lord teaches that service to Him is done by His children not only as being His just due, but done also because, impelled by faith, it is done without thought of seeking payment in return. Cp. *Concordia Pulpit*, 1932, p. 118ff.

Preaching Pitfalls — Not too much emphasis is to be placed on v. 5, "Increase our faith!" While an increase of faith is important, to be sure, the burden of the text nevertheless hinges upon v. 6, in

which the Lord Himself stresses the importance of having faith, however small.

Problem and Goal.—Certainly to impress our hearers with the importance of faith in their lives. Faith transforms them from service to sin to service to the Lord Christ. Faith, however small, enables them to ascend such heights as avoiding offenses, being forgiving, and leading God-pleasing lives without seeking reward. Vv. 5-6 could very well be used as the introduction to the

Outline:

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF EVEN THE WEAKEST FAITH

- I. It enables us to avoid giving offense to our fellow Christians.
Vv. 1-2.
- II. It enables us to be forgiving to those of our fellow men who offend us. Vv. 3-4.
- III. It enables us to serve God faithfully without seeking reward.
Vv. 7-10.

WALTER H. BOUMAN

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 12:8-12

The Text and the Day.—In the regular Gospel lesson Jesus tells Peter that he is to be a fisher of men, confessing His Master as the Savior of the world. In the Epistle lesson the same Apostle calls upon his readers to be ready always to give an answer to every man concerning their Christian hope. That, too, is confessing Christ before men. Most Christians need constant encouragement in this. They are not ready at all times to say with the Psalmist: The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? (Introit.) Our text furnishes the necessary encouragement.

Notes on Meaning.—The text offers no exegetical problems. The difficulty lies in the proper use of the teaching concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost. Cp. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 393 ff. There is a definite warning in the text to yield promptly to the working of the Holy Ghost and not to resist. But when bringing this warning, the preacher will do well to assure his hearers that they are not now guilty of the unpardonable sin. "This sin consists in a malicious denial of, a hostile attack upon, and a horrid blasphemy of divine truth, evidently known and approved by con-

science, and an obstinate and finally persevering rejection of all the means of salvation." (*Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, by H. Schmid, transl. by Hay and Jacobs, p. 252.) Note that all points must be included. Any one alone is not the unpardonable sin. Note also that the sin is always public. Cp. Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26, 29. There is forgiveness for even the vilest evil *thought* against God.

Jesus' self-appellation, the Son of Man, invites study and research. This name, which seemed to call attention to Jesus' lowliness, was actually, because of its reference to Dan. 7:13, to remind men constantly of His hidden glory, a glory which was His as their Savior and which will be seen by all the earth when He comes again on the Last Day. This Savior-King calls upon men to confess Him. See His lordly power in this name. See also His Savior-love, which prompted Him to become man for the saving of men.

Problem and Goal. — You want every member of your parish to be an active, confessing member, for his own sake and for the sake of those who hear his testimony.

Illustration. — See Hebrews 11 for bold confessors. Saul (later called Paul) definitely spoke against the Son of Man, but was forgiven, because he did it in ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13). So also the Jews (Acts 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:8). Peter, refusing to confess Christ, became guilty of denial, but his sin resulted from infirmity of the flesh and fear of danger; it was a sin against the Son of Man, not against the Holy Ghost. Later he heeded the Spirit's call to repentance.

Outline:

CHRIST PROMISES THE HELP OF THE HOLY GHOST
FOR OUR CONFESSION OF HIS NAME

We see

- I. The danger of refusing His help.
 - A. It often becomes a denial of Christ.
 - B. It may lead to a rejection of grace and so to damnation.
- II. The blessing of using His help.
 - A. The enemies of Christ are silenced and put to shame.
 - B. The kingdom of Christ is extended.
 - C. We who confess Christ are praised even in the presence of God's angels.

MARK J. STEEGE

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 19:16-22

The Text and the Day.—The chief thought of the Propers is the almighty power of God and the believer's trust in Him. The text chosen for this Sunday thus has no immediate connection with the subject of the Propers.

Notes on Meaning.—The setting of the story is this: Jesus had just blessed little children and had said: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." He now goes "into the way" (Mark). At this point, a man comes nearer, "running," says Mark. Had this man observed the lovely scene of Christ dealing with children? Had Christ's intimacy with the little ones raised the question in his heart: "I wonder what this Master would say to me?" Possibly. At any rate, the young man will not let this opportunity for a personal meeting go by unheeded.

The parallels give us interesting details, some of them homiletically very useful. Luke tells us the man was a "ruler," that is, a synagog official and thus religiously active. The man's reaction to Christ's last word to him is variously described by the Evangelists. Matthew says "he went away sorrowful"; Mark adds that he was "sad"; Luke says "he was very sorrowful," he became encompassed with grief; it was not merely a passing disappointment, but a frustrating feeling of sorrow. Mark alone has the interesting touches that Jesus "beholding him, loved him" and that He told the young man to "take up the cross." Thus the whole purpose of the Lord's dealing with this man is seen to be an attempt to rescue him from the folly of his own ways.

Jesus attaches a hint that He is more than a human "good Master" by skillfully attaching a higher meaning to the young man's "good": If I am really good, I must be more than man, I must be God.

Jesus preaches the Law to this self-righteous man. His first attempt to bring the Law to bear is the recitation of parts of the Decalog; the failure of this attempt brings the second word of the Law: "Go and sell." The first attempt reveals the man's utter failure to grasp the deeper import of God's Commandments, the second shows that his boastful "These things have I kept" was not

true even of the First Commandment. After all, his possessions were his god.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The text is chiefly a text of Law. The young man, though having many commendable qualities, was essentially a self-righteous man who felt no need of the Savior outside of his own possibilities. The instruction "Sell all" is not to be construed as a *consilium evangelicum* urging a higher degree of holiness than the average Christian can attain; this "Sell all" is a command aiming to bring the young man to a knowledge of himself, an *argumentum ad hominem* that all was not well. The *fact* of the man's wealth is entirely subordinate to his *love* of wealth, which made him an idolater.

Preaching Emphases. — The scope of the text is Jesus' dealing with a thoroughly self-righteous man whose self-righteousness, however, was somewhat hidden under a cloak of respectability and a certain eagerness for religious matters. His attitude toward his possessions puts this fault in a most glaring light. The "Come and follow Me" is a Gospel message.

Outline:

THE GREAT QUESTION: WHAT GOOD THING SHALL I DO
THAT I MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?

Let us look at

I. The man who asked this question.

- A. He had many seeming advantages: comes to Jesus without urging; is young but interested in spiritual things; is a synagog ruler who sought Jesus; he is wealthy, yet looking to his spiritual future.
- B. He was thoroughly self-righteous.

II. The answer which Jesus gave.

- A. He seeks to show the man his sins.
- B. He shows him that He is God.
- C. He tells him "Follow Me."

H. O. A. KEINATH

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 15:10-20

The Text and the Day. — The Epistle for this Sunday refers to the gravity of sin, to the punishment of sin, and to our redemption from sin; our text leads us to a discussion of the same thoughts.

Notes on Meaning. — The Pharisees had shown a lack of understanding of the *nature of sin*, v. 2. They thought that if food that had been touched by unwashed hands were passed into the mouth, that would be sin. Jesus says that sin is not such a trifling matter as that. Not what goes into the mouth, but what comes out of it, is sin, the wickedness that springs from the human heart, vv. 17-20. Sin is not a small matter, but it is something terrible, something to be ashamed of, to be sorry about, something to drive us to repentance. The recollection of a past sin which brought pleasure should fill the heart with remorse, and not with a desire for renewed enjoyment. The sins that were committed at home, at school, in our associations, in our periods of anger, are all deep, dark blots. We must not esteem them lightly. Sin is not a little thing; sin is a terrible thing (Christian Questions, No. 16, "look with terror at our sins and to regard them as great indeed"). — Jesus points to the *cause* of sin; it comes out of the human heart, vv. 18-19. At first the human heart was good and issued forth only that which was good; now it is a polluted spring, a cesspool of iniquity. Sins breed in the heart like flies in filth, and then come forth into our lives. We must understand the human heart. Doctors have told people that typhoid fever comes from wells too near to stables. Many people refused to believe that, but they had to learn that it was true. Sin comes from the human heart that is too near to the devil. — Jesus points to the *great harm* that sin causes in the world. Much harm is done by storms, fire, floods, and earthquakes; the greatest harm is done by sin. Evil thoughts disrupt friendships; murder takes the lives of useful people; adultery breaks up homes; theft costs untold sums for jails and courts and police. Sin brings death and damnation. The whole world aches on account of sin, Rom. 8:22-23. — Jesus also lets us know the *remedy* for sin, when He tells His disciples that the way of the self-righteous Pharisees is false, vv. 13-14. There is only one remedy for sin and that is faith in the Savior. He who believes that Jesus has saved him has

forgiveness for his sin and the strength to combat temptation. Faith in Jesus is the dam that holds back the devastating flood of evil that pours out of the polluted human heart. The Christian's constant prayer should be: Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Preaching Pitfalls.—The mind of the hearer will go off at a tangent if the preacher will take his cue from the opinion of the Pharisees about sin, v. 2, and will speak much about those who make it a sin to eat meat on Fridays, or to play cards, and so on. It would be better to omit all reference to those things and to put the whole emphasis on the *gravity* of sin.

Problem and Goal.—The sermon should follow the purpose of setting forth the terrible reality and the devastating results of sin, together with its source and remedy. Sin can be likened to disease, and an interesting parallel can be drawn between the treatment of disease and the Savior's words about sin.

Illustration.—Medical science concerns itself with determining the *nature* of a disease, finding its *cause*, realizing its *harm*, discovering a *remedy*, and preventing its *recurrence*. Religion does the same thing for the disease of sin. This thought could be used as the introduction.

Outline:

CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT SIN

1. The nature of sin.
2. The cause of sin.
3. The harmfulness of sin.
4. The remedy for, and the prevention of, sin.

FREDERIC NIEDNER

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 7:14-24

The Text and the Day.—The text shows the difference between the true teacher, sent by God, and the false teacher, who seeks his own. It is a fitting parallel text to the Gospel, which warns against false teachers. The Epistle stresses the truth that the real Teacher of all truth is the Holy Spirit, for whom we therefore pray in the Collect that He would govern our willing and doing. The words

of the Introit: "According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise," direct our thoughts to the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer, where we pray that God's name may be hallowed by purity of doctrine and a godly life.

Notes on Meaning. — The verses preceding our text lend themselves as an excellent introduction to the sermon, since they show the wrong attitude which the relatives of Jesus had toward His preaching ministry.

V. 14. Twice before Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem and challenged His enemies by public demonstrations, when He cleansed the Temple (John 2:13 ff.) and when He healed the impotent man on the Sabbath and sent him through the streets carrying his couch (John 5:9). On this occasion, however, He came quietly as a teacher when the feast was half over. He was, above all, the great Helper and Savior of His people, and a Teacher, but not a militant reformer and miracle worker.

V. 15. "This man" — a contemptuous "this fellow." "Letters," the rabbinical course of study. "This fellow does not know what he is talking about, because he has never studied in any of our Jewish schools" (Lenski). Similar discrediting insinuations are leveled against Christ's teachers today, where God's Word conflicts with pseudo science.

V. 16. It is My doctrine; I believe it and know it is true, but it is not of My own invention. I am the mouthpiece, the spokesman of God. So speaks every true teacher of God.

V. 17. "Will do His will" — shall will to do His will. Not a setting out to meet the requirements of the Law, so that man derives this will from his blind reason (Phil. 2:13; John 6:29). Jesus means that willing which God by His grace works in us through the Word and His Spirit. Essentially, this willing is faith. Where that will or faith is found, there the realization and conviction ("know") will grow that Christ's doctrine is not a human invention ("talking from Myself"), but from God.

V. 18. "This one is true" — *houtos* has the force of "only he and no other"; *alethes*, a true teacher. Jesus here sets the criterion for all teachers of God. The big "I" and sensationalism, which seeks popular applause, must give way to glorifying God with "Thus saith the Lord."

V. 19. A devastating charge. These false teachers try to discredit Jesus as a teacher and themselves are not even living up to the Law of Moses, which they claimed to uphold. Reminds one of the Modernists who advocate "mercy killing."

V. 20. "The people" (*ochlos*), the crowd that gathered, including many pilgrims present at the festival. Judging only by appearances, the crowd becomes aroused and impatiently challenges Christ's charge. True teachers are often misunderstood, and false teachers defended by an ignorant public.

V. 21. "*Dia touto*" must be drawn to "*ihau mazete*" to read: "you wonder because of it." Not the miracle caused them to wonder, but because it was done on the Sabbath.

Vv. 22-23. "Receive circumcision" — receive the blessings of circumcision. Jesus would say: "Whereas Moses *commands* circumcision also on the Sabbath, you will not allow the complete restoration to health on the Sabbath. Moses does not permit even the Sabbath to stand in the way when a man's welfare demands it, but you misuse the Sabbath law to block a blessing prompted by the law of love and mercy." Here is hypocritical legalism at its worst.

V. 24. In our day of spiritual flabbiness appearances count more than truth (John 8:32).

Preaching Pitfalls. — Doing the will of God, v. 17, must be carefully explained, lest our hearers get the impression that we are self-starters, coming to faith by beginning to do good works. — Speaking of true and false teachers, the pastor will avoid everything that smacks of self-righteousness. True pastors, too, are tempted to seek their own glory. 1 Cor. 15:10.

Problem and Goal. — Many find it difficult to recognize the marks of a false prophet. Our text gives us ample opportunity to point out the telltale signs that identify the false teacher and, on the other hand, the marks of the true minister of Christ. All of which should serve to drive our members deeper into the Scriptures to try the spirits whether they are of God.

Illustrations. — 2 Peter 2:17. — False teachers are like a flood that breaks the dam; like leaven; like an epidemic; like poison; like a cancer (Stock). Teachers who do not live what they teach are like the builders of Noah's ark, who assisted in building the

ark, but did not enter it; like Balaam, who had the prophecy of God on his lips, but did not experience the power thereof in his heart (Stock).—*True teachers*: Noah; Peter and John, Acts 4:20; Luther at Worms.

Outline:

IDENTIFYING FALSE AND TRUE TEACHERS

- I. False.
 - A. Stress learning above Truth, v. 15.
 - B. Teach own "wisdom," v. 18.
 - C. Seek own glory, v. 18.
 - D. Set themselves above God's clear Word, v. 19.
 - E. Confuse instead of confirming, vv. 20-24.

- II. The true.
 - A. Speak from conviction ("My doctrine"), v. 16.
 - B. Insist on "Sola Scriptura," v. 16b.
 - C. Seek God's glory, v. 18b.
 - D. Can expect opposition, v. 20.
 - E. Challenge to faith, v. 17.

FREDERIC E. SCHUMANN