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Studies on the Swedish Gospels

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 5:43—6:4

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text is Law, not Gospel. Taken from the Sermon on the Mount, it is part of Jesus' instruction on the righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (ch. 5:20). Here Jesus is speaking of the righteousness which God demands, not of that which He gives through Christ. He has given examples of this better righteousness from individual Commandments (5:21ff., 33ff., 38ff.). Here he applies the lesson to the Second Table of the Law.

The man-made maxim of the scribes and Pharisees "And hate thine enemy" was contrary to the Law (Lev. 19:17, 18). With divine authority the Son of God gives instruction on true love of the neighbor. It is to be like the love of the Father, who is benevolent to good and evil. We are to show mercy even to those who mistreat us. To love our enemies does not mean to approve of their sins or join in them but to show them the kind of love that will free them from hate, rescue them from sin, and save their souls. The purpose of God's goodness to good and evil is to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). By such love we give evidence of our love for Him who first loved us. We become children of our Father in heaven by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26). God expects His redeemed children to have a higher standard of mercy than the publicans, who even in their greed were willing to be kind to those who were kind to them. Our pattern of mercy is the mercy of our Father (v. 48). This goal is infinitely higher than the pagan level, but it is also too high for the Christian to reach. However, we must strive for it (Phil. 3:12).

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The common tendency to love the lovable and ignore or even hate the unlovable; the desire "to get even" instead of overcoming evil with good; the advertising of our deeds of mercy; our "feeling hurt" when our good works are not acknowledged or recognized; becoming weary in well-doing, even ceasing to practice mercy because our efforts are not appreciated. The cure? Remember God's mercy and love to us while we

were yet enemies. God has given us much that we do not deserve. He expects in return that our love for our fellow men rise above the self-righteous level.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The Epistle for the day lays the Gospel foundation for this text on practicing Christian mercy. The main thought of the Epistle might well serve as introduction to the sermon. Or emphasize that these words are spoken to disciples (5:1), believers, who have found forgiveness in Christ. When Christ's high standards of Christian mercy have been set forth, Christian people will feel their sins and failures; point them to Christ, who knows our failings and forgives them.

Illustrations.—The Good Samaritan showing mercy (Luke 10: 30-37). Jesus and Stephen forgiving enemies (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). The Apostle Paul as an example of a man who tried to follow God's pattern, though he knew he could never reach the goal. Besser, quoted by Lenski, says the Temple provided a place where bashful benefactors might place their gifts, to be distributed to the bashful poor, and the place was named "Silence." The secular press and some church papers serve as trumpets to advertise the charity of men.

If in 6:1 the reading "righteousness" is accepted instead of "alms," then this righteousness refers to the entire range of good works. These works are revealed in works of mercy (v. 2). They must proceed from a regenerate heart, not from a desire to be seen of men. Christ wants men to see our good works and "glorify your Father which is in heaven" (5:16). But if we do them to "have glory of men," they are no longer good before God. If our aim is to be seen of men, we may indeed receive the empty, fleeting praise of men, but we lose the approval and blessing of God. If our works of mercy come from a faith-filled, loving heart, without any desire of praise for them, they will be rewarded by the Father in heaven (Matt. 25:34-40). This, of course, is a reward of grace (Eph. 2:8-10). Therefore practice Christian mercy from the right motive, love, and with the right motive power, God's love to us (1 John 4:10).

The central thought of this text, then, is the practice of Christian mercy in accord with the instruction of Christ concerning the better righteousness.

The Day and Its Theme.—The theme for the day is "mercy." The Epistle shows that not the Law but God's mercy in Christ gives life. In the Gospel the Good Samaritan sets an example of true Christian mercy on the part of man. The Introit and Gradual plead that God would remember His covenant and hear the cry of His people. In the

Collect the Christian prays that he may both trust God's mercy and love His commands. The monthly theme of *Parish Activities* is "Christian Education." We need Christ's instruction on the subject of mercy.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To encourage the Christian, who knows of God's love for him, to practice Christian mercy in accord with the principles of Christ and from the proper motive.

Outline

Jesus' Instruction on True Christian Mercy

- I. Pattern It After the Father's Mercy (5:43-48)
 - A. The heavenly Father is benevolent to good and evil (v. 45b)
 - B. Set His example as your goal (v. 48)
 - C. This means showing mercy to the unkind (vv. 43, 44)
 - D. Thereby you show that your mercy is Christian (vv. 45-47)
 1. You give evidence of your Christian faith (v. 45a)
 2. You show that your standards are higher than the pagan's (vv. 46, 47)
- II. Practice It from the Proper Motive (6:1-4)
 - A. Do not practice mercy to be seen of men (vv. 1, 2)
 1. Such "mercy" is hypocritical (v. 2)
 2. Such "mercy" is not acceptable to God (v. 1)
 - B. Practice mercy from the motive of love (vv. 3, 4)
 1. Such mercy comes from a faith-filled heart (vv. 3, 4a)
 2. It will be rewarded by the Father in heaven (v. 4b)

Riverside, Calif.

WM. GRAUMANN

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 5:1-14

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Our text is the story of one of the few miracles of our Lord described by John. Like other miracles, it led to a lengthier discourse (cp. John 6, 9), in which Jesus established His authority as the Son of God, sent to do His Father's will. Accordingly He had the right to tell him whom He healed to carry his bed on the Sabbath day. Whatever the nature of the feast which Jesus attended (v. 1), it is significant that He did attend the Jewish festivals. He fulfilled the whole Ceremonial as well as the Moral Law.

The rule of our loving and mighty Savior seems to be the central thought for this entire text.

The Day and Its Theme.—The text fits well into the monthly emphasis of Christian education and is true to the theme of gratitude, taught in the regular Gospel for the day. The Epistle mentions the fruits of the Spirit which are evident in the life of those who are led by God. Gratitude is also one of these fruits.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—In our text Jesus clearly relates the long illness of the sick man to a sin which he had committed. This relationship of sickness and sin all children of God ought to see in their own lives. However, they ought not seek a certain sin as the cause of the illness of others. If they seek to defend their action by the words of Jesus, let them also seek to perform His works. He who could heal the sick could also read their minds and hearts. He knew what is in man. We don't know it. But if Jesus, knowing the man's sin and its consequence, showed mercy and love, how much reason have we to do the same!

Outline

The "Building for Christ" film this spring laid Bethesda on the hearts of our people. It is unfortunate, in a way, that most of us see few of the chronically ill, the invalids, the cripples, the deformed. Usually they are confined in nursing homes, hospitals, and the like. When we do see the unfortunates, we are moved to serious thought and reflection. Are we also moved to gratitude?

A Visit to Bethesda, A Real Lesson in Gratitude

- I. That We Are Not So Afflicted (we deserve to be; but are spared by a gracious God).
- II. That We Are Able to Help Those Who Are (let our Bethesdas never be prompted by a selfish desire to rid ourselves of the sight of the unfortunate).

(Let them be institutions of mercy and love, where competent men and women, real angels of mercy serving the Savior, can minister to the physical and spiritual needs of those who need such special care. Thank God for our Bethesdas.)

Springfield, Ill.

MARK J. STEEGE

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 10:38-42

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Luke is the only writer to mention this domestic scene. Details of the village and family may have been omitted deliberately to protect this family from persecution in the early years. Christ dismissed His disciples to go into Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, while He Himself first went to Bethany. This was the beginning of the feast, and Lazarus may have been in Jerusalem. This account would then take place in the open leafy booth which was the sitting apartment during the festive week (Edersheim). Others think it happened during the Feast of Dedication. Judging from the many friends who came out to the sisters to comfort them at the death of Lazarus, we gather that this family had many friends. Perhaps it was wealthy, or at least supplied with enough means to entertain guests. We like to think that here the Son of Man, who had not where to put His head, did find a home. How best to honor Jesus, the special Guest, was the concern of both sisters. Martha wanted to honor Him with much serving, Mary with quiet attention to His discourse. The only action of Mary is her hearing of the Word. She made the seat of Jesus a pulpit, her humble place at His feet, a pew, and the whole room a chapel where God Himself drew near with grace (Lenski). The central thought of the text is to point out the true mark of discipleship. Far better than any work, labor, sacrifice, in the kingdom of God is the eager reception of Jesus and His words with a believing heart. Time for worship is included in the "daily bread" which God gives us. All our efforts in Christian education must also be in the direction of teaching or listening to the story of Jesus. It is a fatal action to turn the heart away from Jesus, no matter for what reason.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle (Gal. 5:26—6:10) stresses Christian service. But this must be understood in the light of its context. Service is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 25). Service is a result of faith. "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate." Note the order: first "taught in the Word"; then "communicate." The Gospel (Matt. 6:24-34) tells us not to be filled with worldly care about food or clothing, etc. Keep first things first. V. 33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Don't be concerned with service to others or to yourself before seeking the kingdom of God. This is also the theme of our text today. In the collect the defense and the help which the church receives come through the Word.

Christian education, the emphasis for September, is teaching the Word of God. We must have our children seek the kingdom of God first (Gospel); be taught in the Word (Epistle); and sit at the feet of Jesus (text).

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—Jesus tells us to live His way. Special care is necessary in this text that we do not preach Mary and Martha but Jesus and His salvation. The Word, which is the good part, remains. We are to be strengthened in the conviction that nothing can take the place of listening to Jesus and following Him.

Sins to Be Remedied.—Do not serve Christ and the church at the expense of listening to Jesus. Jesus condemns being so busy that His words are neglected. Anxious care and worry are sinful. Good works are not the means of salvation. Don't use the weekly sermon as the opportunity to plan your Christian service. Don't be filled with a thousand things to attend to and then find no more time for the Scriptures, prayer, and public worship. Don't shut off the life stream on which faith depends.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Jesus came to serve us through His suffering, death, and resurrection, which took place only a few months later. Jesus can and will give us much more in Himself than we can ever give to Him. He is the great Host who cares for all. Choose the Word. The true mark of discipleship is to take the Gospel and keep it (Luke 11:28).

Illustrations.—A cobbler was asked what his business in life was. He replied that he was a Christian and only cobbled shoes to pay the expenses. He chose the good part. Let us be careful that we do not serve ourselves out of our spirituality. If a man is too busy to find time to listen to God, then he is busier than God wants him to be.

Outline

Sit at Jesus' Feet

I. Remove All Hindrances

- A. Martha placed obstacles in the way of good listening. Description of her anxious care for serving.
- B. We place obstacles in the way of true worship.
 1. Work in service organizations sometimes makes us lax and self-excusing about worship.
 2. Some have the faulty notion that such works are worship.

II. Listen Patiently

- A. Mary sat at Jesus' feet. In spite of her desire to serve, it was more important to listen when Jesus spoke.
- B. We also must regularly and faithfully listen to Jesus. To that end let us make:
 1. Our home a Christian church
 2. Our Sunday school a session at the feet of Jesus.
 3. Our church worship a weekly necessity.
 4. Our private devotions a daily requirement.

III. Accept Jesus Faithfully

- A. He brings salvation. There is no other way.
- B. He directs us in our Christian work.
 1. Mary later anointed His feet.
 2. He puts our faith to work (Epistle).

Buffalo, New York

JOHN E. MEYER

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 5:19-21

The Text and Its Central Thought. — "Then answered Jesus" — the text is the Word of Christ to the Jews to establish His identity. For a while most men were pretty well lined up with Him. His breaking God's Sabbath Law by making a man well at the pool of Bethesda and ordering him to carry his bed broke the line-up. They stuck Him on *what* He had done: He stuck them on *who* He is. What enrages them (v. 18) to the point of murder is precisely what Christ in the text shows to be the relation between the Father and the Son. The Jews, with all men, ask: "Who do You think You are? God?!" And Jesus answered "yes," and this is the way you have to line it up: "What I have done for the impotent man applies to whatever else I do. I do nothing on My own or by Myself. 'The Son can do nothing of Himself.' There is nothing crooked in what I have done. And that I have done it, I need not prove; you know it. Get that point clear, I am neither above God that I overrule Him; nor against Him to break His rules; nor equal to Him to fight with Him; nor under Him to confuse you. What I do, agrees with what I am, the Son of the Father. I am God. There is no conflict in the Godhead, either in essence, sub-

sistence, or expression. There is complete identification without confusing the personalities; co-ordination of Father and Son in an exclusive sense. In plain words this is the relation between the Father and the Son. This is a working and continuous mode of existence [all verbs are in the present tense]. This is the way the Father and I live, operate, and just are. That the impotent man can walk is as much the Father's work as it is Mine. It is God's work, and it is Mine. Feet crippled 38 years that can carry a body and a bed, underline what I have said before I said it [v. 20]. Not only dead feet but entire bodies will come to life, and I can do it, anytime I want to do it [v. 21]. You believe the Father can raise the dead; well, the Son can, too." And come they did at Jesus' call: the young man of Nain, Jairus' daughter, Lazarus, and last of all Himself. The central thought and purpose of the text is: Lining up the Father and the Son, and that, in turn, will line up with God all who believe it.

The Day and Its Theme.—While the Jews push Jesus on *what* He had done, He pushes them on *who* He is. And this is what is to be presented in the sermon. This is a text that the flesh would shy away from homiletically; and if one is going to use it, there is the attitude that it is one of the dry variety and above the heads. Yet consider that Christ offers this piece of theology to the common, very religious people. There is no need to go beyond the text. It is the task of the preacher to bear down with the more concentration to unfold the words of Christ on a level that makes them meaningful to the hearer. The theme suggested by the Swedish lectionary is "The Shadow of Death." Indeed, the Jews were in the very shadow of eternal death as long as they were dead set against Christ. However, an easier and more common theme would suit ordinary people better. This is not highbrow, peripheral, or seventh-heaven doctrine. This is where Christ begins, and this is where everyone else will have to begin if he will have Him at all. Therefore consider this theme: Lining up the Father and the Son.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—While religion, in the widest sense, is getting the popular treatment today, Jesus Christ, too, is being passed around for a sampling. It is not enough to skim off with the little finger some of the frosting of some of the things He said and did. He is not just the frosting but the whole cake, plate and all, to be eaten eagerly. He is not only one line or a line, but the only line that is straight from, straight to, and straight with God.

Sin and Its Fruits to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Like the Jews, we also have our prejudices, preconceived notions, and traditions to

contend with. They could not accept anything from Him, even a miracle, unless the relation between Him and God would be stated or satisfied, but at least stated. It still offends our spiritual senses and the theology of the Old Adam to have God present in such a way. Our opinion of God is so exalted that we cannot conceive of God moving among men so intimately. That is yet the greatest marvel. That is what the Jews so resented, aside from their preconceived specifications for a Messiah, both of tradition and Scripture misinterpretation. Thus the marvel is doubly compounded. How could God ever let Himself go so low, so common! Which proves how twisted our spiritual powers have become. God's ways and ours are diametrically antithetical. The Jews needed this text as much as we do, for they felt God is one, and this Christ is all too cheap for us. In every man's breast there is the spiritual climate that resents the line-up given in the text. It seemed that He was entirely out of line with God. "I am the straight line to God; and I am here to line you up with God. You are dead to God if you are dead to Me. Marvel you will, with your mouth hanging open, I promise you. Now close your mouth, and open your heart to believe." The popular notion: to have Christ without God, or to have God without Christ. This is the sin unto death that completely neutralizes and curls the line that God has to offer.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—All that Christ has done is a work of God for us. It is Gospel in itself that the Son of God engages the displeasure of the people by saying what He says in the text. He does not excuse Himself and say: "I had better leave this doctrine alone. They won't like it. It won't be popular; so I'll cover it up." For their good He would not bend the line but gave it to them straight, to bring them straight to God. If He had no position with God, then His position on the cross would have been unnecessary and His resurrection impossible. And His relation to us would be quite optional, like the frosting on the cake.

Illustrations.—There is no illustration adequate to show the relation of the Father and the Son. The mind of the congregation must simply be swept into this feature of the doctrine of God directly, with no marking of time and ponderous lumbering. Let it be as honest and bold as the text itself is. This sermon demands plain words rather than any series of tabulated illustrations. However, here are a few negatives: to have Christ in any other way is to have a gimcrack, knick-knack, bric-a-brac Ersatz religion. A novelty on the shelf, a notion for the moment, to be forgotten and finally pitched out when the charm has worn off. So He was not charming the Jews any more. You have

been raised from the dead when God is straight with you, as in the text, through Christ. Then all the kinks of life will spring into perfect alignment. Without this connection all is dead between God and man.

Outline

Line-Up with God

I. Between Christ and the Father

A. What all men think it is

B. What it truly is (vv. 19, 20)

(Transition: *Who* He is to *what* He does)

II. Between God and Us

A. It is to *know* and marvel (vv. 20, 21)

B. To be raised from the dead when you *believe* it

C. Then all things are lined up

D. Then we can make it straight to others

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG, JR.