

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Aspects of Change in the Postapostolic Church

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Homiletics

Book Review

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THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

The Propers

1 JOHN 4:12-16

The propers for the day, with the exception of the Gospel (John 3:1-15), sound the note of praise and adoration before the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Gospel focuses on the theme of regeneration by the Spirit. The reason is that this day was originally celebrated as the octave of Pentecost and prior to 1332 was not celebrated universally as the Festival of the Holy Trinity. While the 16th-century Lutheran reformers accepted all other propers for the Festival of the Holy Trinity, they retained the Gospel pericope for the octave of Pentecost. (See Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, rev. ed. [1959], pp. 518 f.; Fred H. Lindemann, *The Sermon and the Propers*, III, 21 ff.)

The Text

The sermon text, 1 John 4:12-16, confronts us not so much with the divine mystery of God's Trinitarian essence as with the holy mystery of God's loving action on our behalf and the goal of that action in the life of the believer. First John is commonly held to be from the same hand as the Gospel of John, weaving theology and ethics together in typical Johannine style. The writer is intent on

This month's homiletical helps are a continuation of the series of sermon studies for the current church year based on texts originally selected for the 1842 edition of the Perikopenbuch of the Evangelical Church in the Province of Saxony. Studies on these texts are being prepared by faculty members at colleges and seminaries associated with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The studies in this issue are the work of four members of the faculty of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Ind.: Paul G. Bretscher, Walter E. Keller, Edgar P. Senne, and Normand J. Widiger.

affirming the divine incarnation of God in Jesus, opposing the growing influence of certain Gnostic teachers who took offense at the God-in-flesh claim of Christianity.

In 1:3-4, the writer says he is writing that his hearers may have fellowship with God, that they may belong to God's people by belonging to Jesus Christ. A second statement of purpose appears in 5:13. Here the author states that he is writing to those who already believe that they may "know" they have eternal life. In our text the central concern is, "How do I know that I abide in God and He in me?" This is the fellowship question (1:3-4) and the eternal life question (5:13) combined.

V.12. How can we know that we are linked to God? He is not seen, but He is present where believers love one another. Not only is brotherly love a signal of God's presence, it is also the crowning result of His work in and through us. If this love is present, we abide in God.

V.13. We also know of our link with God because He has shared His Spirit with us. We know that we have received His Spirit because we utter the cry of faith, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15-16).

Vv.14-15. We know that we are linked to God because we have seen and confess Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world. God is not seen (v.12), but Jesus is "seen and touched" (1:1). Those who have not "seen and touched" the Son of Mary have nonetheless "seen and touched" the risen Christ through the testimony of the eyewitnesses and the confession and love of the believing fellowship. God has acted in grace through Jesus, and His Spirit has drawn us into that grace in the fellowship of faith. Because this has happened to us, we know that we abide in God and He in us.

This way of knowing God, of knowing

that our lives are attached to God's life and love, is quite different from those ways which were advocated by the Gnostic teachers. For them it was an esoteric "knowing" through contemplation and trance or through being told the "truth" in the secrecy of initiation into an exclusive religious cell group. Not so for the believers in Christ. They know God through His very public action of love in Christ. They know Him in the life of the fellowship that confesses Jesus as Son of God and lives in mutual love.

V. 16. We know God's love in Christ, and we believe that this is His saving love toward us. Being recipients of this love, we "abide in love," that is, we live our lives in it and give practical expression of it toward other men (see 3:17-18). Whenever love is given or received, we know it is "of God," for "God is love."

Contemporary Concerns

How do we "know" this love of God today? We know it through the witness of the New Testament writers and the Spirit's witness through their word. At the same time, we know it through the life of love (forgiveness, acceptance, and total care) within the believing fellowship. We experience God's love in the love of Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and neighbors. Can a man ever know the love of God if he has not known the loving concern of people?

What is the total love of God for man? Our text makes it clear that He desires to have man's life "abide in God." This means that God desires for man the achievement of the fullest humanity, the new birth in God (1 John 3:9). Such fullness is a participation in God's own loving nature, a participation which was begun in Baptism. This love of God is not confined to men's "souls." It is God's care for the total person; his spiritual, psychological, mental, social, and physical well-being and growth.

Finally, why must we who abide in God love one another? Because it is both in the

receiving and the sharing of God's love that we abide in God and participate in His nature. Through our love God reaches into men's lives with His care. Through our witnessing word and our loving deed our brethren will come to "abide in God and He in them." They will know that they are forgiven and accepted by God when those who tell them this also forgive them and respect them. They will know that God grants them the dignity of sonship when we tell them of this gift and when we treat them as sons of God. As men receive this love, they are drawn with us into the dignity and joy of God's people.

Outline

Abiding in Love

- I. *We Adore the Mystery of God's Love*
 - A. As proclaimed in the Word of Good News
 - B. As received and celebrated in the sacraments
 - C. As experienced in the goodness that touches our lives
- II. *We Know that We Abide in His Love, Because*
 - A. God has given us of His own Spirit (v. 13; see 3:24 and Rom. 8)
 - B. We confess Jesus
 1. He is God's Son (vv. 14-15)
 2. He is God's Savior (vv. 9-10 and 14)
 3. He is God's incarnate Love (4:2)
 - C. We live in the give-and-take of a community of love
- III. *We Can Joyfully Live in Love Because*
 - A. We are confident that we abide in God's love
 - B. We bear the love of God into men's lives
 - C. This is the perfection (v. 12) of God's love in us

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Propers

LUKE 17:20-21

The First Sunday After Trinity inaugurates the nonfestival half of the church year and the long trek that culminates in the explicit anticipation of our Lord's return. The Introit asks the thematic question of how long it will be before God reveals His mercy. The Epistle replies with its assurance of the present reality of God's love, and the Gospel with its accent on the decisiveness of the here-and-now reception of the prophetic Word.

The Text

The text portrays a delegation of Pharisees who ask *when* the kingdom of God will come. Contemporary expectations took the kingdom of God to mean that future goal of Israel's history in which God would patiently rule a world currently under demonic thrall by righting all wrongs and redressing all ills, and especially by vindicating the national hopes of Israel. The more deeply the current inequities were felt, the more spectacular was the just reversal of the future fortunes conceived to be.

The effect of Jesus' reply is to postpone the apocalyptic end-time, while introducing the kingdom of God into the present. Whether ἐντὸς ὑμῶν means "within you" (KJV) or "in the midst of you" (RSV), its reference is clearly to the present. Hence the signs of the kingdom of God are no longer the celestial and terrestrial upheavals, but the word and deed of Jesus. (See Luke 11:14-20; Matt. 11:2-6.)

What is meant by the kingdom (= Rule) of God is well illustrated by the preceding pericope. Jesus publicly healed ten lepers. Yet in itself that act of sovereign mercy is not yet the kingdom of God; for even though the physical infirmity is cured and the outcasts are readmitted into the society of God's people, 9 of the 10 acknowledge neither the source nor the mediator of that grace. Only

one returns to praise God and thank Jesus. Of him alone Jesus can say that he is whole and that he has faith. In him the sovereign grace of God and the mediatorial role of Jesus are matched by the doxological response of faith, which includes both God and the incarnate Jesus in its embrace. There the rule of God is complete, for God's mediated mercy has also succeeded in evoking the appropriate response.

From this it becomes apparent that the kingdom of God is not simply the restorative work of God, not even merely the healing ministry of Jesus. These are signs of the kingdom of God, the evidences that God is at work seeking to accomplish His rule. They are the visible side of God's rule, but they are not coextensive with it. God rules in fact when He is also acknowledged as Father and trusted as such.

The reply of Jesus thus indicates a difference with the Pharisees not merely on the superficial question of the time-schedule of the kingdom of God. At a far more profound level Jesus offers a qualitatively different understanding of the kingdom of God. Since the coming of the Kingdom will not be postponed until the eschaton, it dare not be conceived of as representing a kind of ultimate "pay-off" for services rendered and wrongs endured. Since it comes rather in the compassionate ministry of Jesus, it represents the dawn of God's redemptive purpose effectively operative in the present age. No longer can it be taken to mean the comeuppance long overdue to those who theretofore rebelled against God; it means rather that even the most hopeless of men are being called into the circle of the redeemed. No longer is it signed by fire and sword, by earth-shattering and heaven-rending cataclysms; it is signed by God's healing, compassion and mercy.

Consequently, the urgency and the significance, the decisiveness and divisiveness of the end-time have been imported into the present. Whoever has found the saving rule

of God in the gracious ministry of Jesus finds in that love the requisite confidence in the day of Judgment (Epistle), and whoever disregards this word now cannot pass the final Judgment (Gospel).

The Contemporary Concern

The desire to escape from the present moment into a presumably rosier future arises when the grief and the guilt, the agonies and anxieties of the here and now seem to require a postponement of God's rule to some better ordered and structured future. The longing for tomorrow's Kingdom and the impatience with the burdensome present are contemporary forms of the Pharisaic creed: first set your house in order and then God will come. Our circumstances appear incompatible with God's goodness, and they act as an effective barrier against it. The sermon therefore should not only expose the folly and sin of an idle flight into the future but should also proclaim the kingdom of God with its resources tailored for present exigencies. It can point to the valid signs which mark its presence. These do not cater to the Pharisaic *demand* for legitimacy but point to the *givenness* of God's rule.

Where is that kind of sign to be found? Once it was present in the person of Jesus, whose word and deed mediated the redeemed relationship to the Father. Today it is present in the Word which proclaims that Christ (Gospel) and the sacraments by which we continually participate in His death and resurrection. The Word, moreover, becomes the more credible as it is reinforced by concrete deeds of love (Epistle), deeds that serve as secondary signs of the presence of the kingdom of God; for in them the healing, restoring, forgiving work of God continues to exert its rule in our day.

Outline

The Kingdom of God Here and Now

I. The complexities of our life lead to an echo of the Pharisaic impatience with the

present; they increase our longing for a future end to ambiguities. These become especially acute when we are challenged with serious questions at a crossroad of decision.

II. The dangerous inference is too easily drawn that the benevolent God is absent from the present disorder (Introit). It encourages taking matters into our own hands, thereby only compounding the uncertainty of how we shall fare in the final judgment.

III. Thereby is revealed not only the deceptiveness and the naivete of shallow optimism about human life but also a peculiarly stubborn misreading of God's unconditional love and acceptance.

IV. The text offers the assurance that God's gracious rule is present, tailored to our present needs, in the word and deed of Jesus. These are made contemporary in our speaking about Jesus Christ and in our service to others through Jesus Christ.

V. Hence the kingdom of God redefines the Christian vocation in that the Christian is bidden joyfully to confess its presence, confidently to work toward its extension, and patiently to await its consummation.

Valparaiso, Ind. WALTER E. KELLER

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 5:23-24

The Propers

The Introit announces God as the source of whatever enlarged life, new space, fuller existence is possible and can be actual for the believer. The Collect calls for growth in and response to the continual action of God in and with life. The Gradual voices the petition for divine aid against enemies and for help to grow in the Christian life. A man is not delivered from lying lips and a deceitful tongue by some miracle. It occurs within the concrete life processes. Yet if he is delivered, it is of God.

The Epistle (1 John 3:13-18) also points

up the interconnection between God's action of love and man's action of love. If God is to love a man, it will be through that person who, grounded in God, loves the man in need. But the Christian who is the agent of such divine love to his fellowman does not arrogate to himself any credit for this love; he recognizes rather that he is able to love only because "God's love abides in him."

If the propers for the day set a theme of interactive love and growth in life, then the usual interpretation of the Gospel for the day (Luke 14:16-24) may be supplemented by viewing it also as a way of speaking about the Christian's relation to his fellow human beings and of God's action through that Christian who reaches out bountifully to all men. It is not the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God and is thus living on hope who is participating in the Lord's work, but it is the one who, having the bread, shares it with others.

The Text

John is writing to a second and third generation of believers who did not know the flesh-and-blood Christ and whose hope for His immediate return was not fulfilled. To such people, who were growing indifferent or who were tending to remove religious life from the concreteness of daily experience, John reasserts the present reality of the life of Christ among them.

Christ's judgment is probably best expressed by the previous verse (21). Judgment is set within the power of the Son to give life. That the Father judges no one indicates that the Father limits Himself to the action of Jesus Christ within the human and natural. A man's rejection of the life that Christ offers is the judgment upon him because he is not facing the true reality of his situation. Christ gives life. This is the reality. In giving this reality He makes inevitable the judgment.

The Father's love for the Son is demonstrated by a "doing" for the Son centering in

the gift of life. The Son's love for the world is demonstrated by a "doing" for the world centering in the giving of life.

The action of God in Christ, according to the context, suggests that there are concrete results in the world from the Son's action within it. All of these concrete results in the world are summarized in our text by the statement "passed from death to life."

The Contemporary Concern

When the text is interpreted in the light of this context we are reminded that when we "hear" His Word and "believe" in Him who sent the Son we are not bound to the language of words or to speech sounds nor restricted to mental affirmation in response. Rather we are opened up to the whole language of a new life and the whole expression of the action of this life in our lives.

"Passing from death to life" then becomes a summary statement of the total change in living that the acceptance of Christ brings about. This refers to a variety of possibilities, whether it be a change from illness to health (see John 5:2-18, particularly v. 17), from guilt to pardon, from ignorance to knowledge, from destructive to constructive living, from hate to love; it refers also to the very fact of growth itself—from one level of power to another. These are not merely signs pointing in various ways to what God will ultimately do for our salvation. They are also signs pointing to the fact that God's life is already effective in us and that our salvation, though not yet fully realized, is nonetheless a present reality.

In the above sense "death" basically means to be static, without dynamics or power, without movement or direction. This static quality of life may be indicated by fixation at one ethical level, by failure of growth, by absolutizing any portion of our life as ultimately religious, or absolutizing any particular action of God in Christ Jesus as definitive.

Our basic concern is with two questions:

How is Christ contemporary for us now? How does His presence and work now show itself concretely? Basically both questions may be answered by saying, "The work of Christ and His life in the world is recognized by its concrete results—a continuous passing from death to life." For this Sunday, this would make a stronger point than associating "life" with some future goal or restricting the present reality of God's action in Christ in the world to the idea of promise or hope, or completely supernaturalizing the action or the result.

Outline

To Honor the Son Is to Pass from Death to Life

I. *To Honor the Son Is to Participate in the Life That He Lives and Gives*

A. This is the nature of Christ's own relation to the Father, whom He thereby honors. (See vv. 19 and 26)

B. To participate in the life is to experience it as a gift.

C. The gift we experience is the action or work of Jesus. But the nature of His work for us is quite pervasive, involving all of what He is and does and all of what we are and can become.

II. *To Honor the Son Is Both to Hear His Words and to Believe in Him Who Sent Him*

A. Genuine hearing and believing will reflect the process of passing from death to life that is going on in us.

B. To hear and to believe also includes a giving or a sharing in which the passing from death to life is called forth in others.

III. *Passing from Death to Life Expresses the Work of Christ in Our Existence Today*

A. Passing from death to life is a life of healing and growth. It indicates a change.

B. The reality of Christ and His work in our existence is present in the concreteness

of this process within the community of "faithful" (participating) people. But there can be no absolutizing of any specific changes as the final criteria of the life of Christ in the community.

C. Passing from death to life as a process has its own power to convince. The community, or each member of it, simply celebrates it.

Valparaiso, Ind. NORMAND J. WIDIGER

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 5:39-44

The Propers

The propers for this day celebrate the un-failing mercy of God, the source of His people's deliverance from all affliction and helplessness. Unlike the world, we do not have to be strong, for God is our strength. (Introit, Ps. 25:16, 18, 1-2; Epistle, 1 Peter 5:6-11). Compare "His eternal glory" in the Epistle with "glory" in our text. Though the idea of resting in God's mercy is not central to the Gospel (Luke 15:1-10), it is implied here also.

The Text

Jesus' dispute with Judaism is a major theme in John. His polemic in Ch. 5 is occasioned by the accusation against Him for healing on the Sabbath and intensified by offense at His claim that the Father is at work in His works. Vv. 19-29 amplify Jesus' claim in a bold and daring way. The Father has made the Son the source both of resurrection and of judgment. Unless His hearers believe and honor Him, they will experience judgment rather than eternal life, for they will be disbelieving and dishonoring the Father.

At v. 30 Jesus proceeds to defend His authority. He does more than arbitrarily assert it (v. 31). He invokes four witnesses: John the Baptist (vv. 32-35, see John 1:29-36), His own works (v. 36, see vv. 2-9), the Father (v. 37, probably a reference to the

heavenly word at Jesus' baptism, John 1:33-34; Matt. 3:17; compare "my beloved Son" with "The Father loves the Son" (John 5:20), and the Scriptures. (V.39)

The text assumes that Jesus' opponents can and should know Him for what He claims to be. They claim, at least, to have God's Word (v.38) and God's love (v.42) abiding in them. As God's people they ought to seek and treasure the "glory that comes from the only God" (v.44). Thus Jesus and they stand on the same monotheism (see Judaism's key confession, Deut. 6:4). They ought to know their Father's name (v.43) and so recognize one who comes in that name. And they ought to know the Scriptures (v.39). If they really knew all this, they would know Jesus.

To understand the argument, we need to reconize that the name "Son" of God, as it is under dispute in this chapter, has to do not so much with Jesus' deity as with His identification with Israel. The baptismal word "This is my beloved Son" affirmed to Jesus exactly what God had long ago expressed to Pharaoh concerning Israel, "Israel is my firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22). Judaism made much of that text, interpreting "firstborn" not literally, as though God could have other sons, but as a term of endearment (beloved), or sometimes even in the stronger sense of "only" (see John 1:18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9; but see also Jesus as "firstborn" in Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6). The point is that even Jesus' opponents have the sonship, with God as their Father. This identity is their highest honor, given them by God, written down by Moses, whom they claim to believe (John 5:45-46), in the Scriptures containing the promise of eternal life. (V.39)

If that Word of God abides in them (v.38), as it does in Jesus, then they have the love of God in them (v.42) and know the Father. Then they will seek no glory but that which God has freely given them in tak-

ing them as His "son" or people (v.44). If they staked their lives on that Word, as Jesus stakes His life on it, they would have no trouble seeing in Jesus a clear representation of what God has called them to be. But they have resisted God in all of this. That is why they now regard Jesus as the enemy.

V.44 expresses the critical issue. A man who sets his heart on some other glory than that which God's Word alone confers on him will oppose and hate Jesus and so be revealed as the enemy of God.

The Contemporary Concern

Where does a man get his glory? In asking this we assume that he must have some kind of glory or dignity. We cannot stand to be nothing. The world that does not know God (this includes our own "human nature") seeks glory in the approval of other people, as Jesus' opponents did. We love applause. When we fail to get it and meet instead with indifference or even accusation and criticism, we are depressed. We react by asserting ourselves through boasting, excuses, counteraccusations, and grasping eagerly for delights of the flesh. All of this is evidence of our sin, loneliness, and lostness. The result is lovelessness. "Successful" people measure themselves by those over whom they have attained superiority. The defeated are wrapped in self-pity and evasions. Both live to themselves and are incapable of genuine love.

The true glory is that which God freely gives by Baptism into Jesus' name, sonship, and life. We do not have to achieve it, prove ourselves worthy of it, or defend any right to it. God's own Word has taken us into the family of God's people and flock (Gospel). Since all we have and hope for is "given" by our heavenly Father, there is no place for pride (Introit and Epistle). As affliction and disgrace and death could not take Jesus' sonship from Him, so nothing on earth or in hell can rob us of ours. The Word of God spoken in our baptism and filled by Jesus'

cross and resurrection stands forever. That is our glory, our freedom, and our hope.

Thus love becomes possible. Since we don't have to look at ourselves to see how we are making out, we can look to our neighbor, as Jesus did in healing on the Sabbath. We can cherish our place and our work in the fellowship of the saints. We can stand without fear against every accusation and every doubt. We know God our Father and are participants in His glory through Christ our Lord.

Outline

Where Does a Man Get His Glory?

I. *He Has Two Possible Sources*

- A. He may receive glory from God as God's free gift
 - 1. The Jews' glory as God's "son" or people
 - 2. Jesus' glory declared at His baptism
 - 3. Man's glory by Baptism in His name

B. The other glory is that which he himself creates

- 1. The Jews sought glory from one another.
- 2. Contemporary man seeks glory in his achievements.
- 3. His own self-conscious struggle, cycles of pride and depression

II. *Each Source Produces Its Own Kind of Effect*

- A. The glory that depends on human achievement
 - 1. Perverts the knowledge of God
 - 2. Generates lovelessness and sin
 - 3. Ends under judgment and death
- B. The glory conferred by God
 - 1. Holds us in enduring honor and security
 - 2. Makes love and sacrifice possible
 - 3. Contains the promise of life and Resurrection

Valparaiso, Ind. PAUL G. BRETSCHER

HOMILETICS SECTION TO ILLUSTRATE NEW APPROACHES TO PREACHING

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

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

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