

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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Homiletics

Book Review

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HOMILETICS

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 12:46-50

The Propers

Collect

“. . . keep Thy household, the church, in continual godliness . . . given to serve Thee in good works. . . .”

Introit

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way: who walk in the law of the Lord.”

Epistle

The Father’s will is opposed by “principalities and powers.”

Gospel

Our Brother brings healing in accordance with the Father’s will.

The Text

Parallels appear in Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21. Mark has Jesus looking

The homiletical aids in this issue are a continuation of the series of sermon studies based on texts originally selected for the 1842 edition of the Perikopenbuch of the Evangelical Church in the province of Saxony. The 1966 to 1967 sermon studies on these texts have been prepared by faculty members of colleges and seminaries associated with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The following studies represent contributions by Robert K. Menzel of Concordia College, Portland, Oreg. (sermon study for Trinity XXI); Martin H. Scharlemann of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (sermon study for Trinity XXII; see special acknowledgment appended to this study); Wilbur E. Barnett of California Concordia College, Oakland, Calif. (sermon study for Trinity XXIII); and Donald E. Swanson, also of California Concordia College (sermon study for Trinity XXIV).

around upon the ὄχλος. In Matthew Jesus stretches forth His hand toward His disciples: *They* are “My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father. . . .” The differentiation from the multitude is clear: the will of God is done in discipleship. Luke (v. 21) embellishes: “. . . those who *bear* the Word of God and *do* it.” The will of God is accomplished in the words-and-acts which reflect it.

Although the text is brief, the context of the Gospel is rich, especially in such words as νόμος, πληρώω, τέλειος, περισσόν. The problem is clear—“throughout Ch. 12 Israel’s failure to respond to God’s will has been prominent; [and now] even the family of Jesus has failed to understand His mission and support it” (Filson). The story is told simply to make the point in v. 50. (Cf. Luke 11:27-28)

Outline of the Intent and Content of the Text

Theme

Brotherhood consists in doing the will of the Father—another aspect of discipleship in St. Matthew.

I. *The Call to Brotherhood with Christ Is a Call to Discipleship*

The goal of the text is to incite hearers to become and act like brothers of the Master. It is another call to discipleship in the Gospel of discipleship. Elsewhere (10:24 ff.) Jesus calls His followers μαθηταί and δούλοι.

A. Men are *called*, not born, to this brotherhood. “Who are My brothers?” Levi-Matthew understands this kind of call (Matt. 9:9), which “goes forth and is at once followed by the response of obedience. . . . It is a gracious call, a gracious commandment” (Bonhoeffer, p. 50). The call comes to us in Baptism, where “water is thicker than blood.”

B. This brotherhood makes us co-heirs

with Christ (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 4:7). We have God as Father who "knows what you need before you ask" (Matt. 6:8 ff) and who dispels our anxiety (Matt. 6:25 ff.). We belong to His "household, the church" (Collect). We are the Father's reconciled and reconciling community (2 Cor. 6:19 ff.). We "find our life" here (Matt. 16:24-26) and we "inherit the kingdom. . . ." (Matt. 25:34)

II. *There Are Many Influences Inimical to True Brotherhood*

These hostile signs of "principalities and powers" (Epistle) are a main thrust of Matthew. Many false human claims to brotherhood (including blood relationship) threaten our relationship to Christ. We live between brotherhood and alienation, the latter endangering the former.

A. Neither blood, nor nationality, race, class, or denominational affiliations guarantee disciple-brotherhood. "Human loyalties themselves falter and fail unless they are subject to an all-embracing loyalty to God." (Buttrick)

B. Antinomianism (a major target of St. Matthew) is also inimical to true brotherhood. The apostles "had to conduct the same struggle in their own midst against those who in the name of freedom held the view: We may do anything" (A. Schlatter *ad* Matt. 5:17). Rather, "I have come to fulfill the Law," i. e., to *establish* it. There is a form of the "new morality" which is a modern version of antinomianism. True brotherhood is endangered when we forget that the Christian is still a sinner who needs the Law to check him and constantly remind him of his need for God's grace.

C. Jesus confronts the hairsplitting legalism of the Pharisees, who claimed brotherhood because of their rigid pietism. "Woe to you . . . for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law" (Matt. 23:23). Brotherhood with Christ is not achieved by living

a set of rules or a moral code, which in fact prevents the very freedom brothers of Christ enjoy.

D. Jesus opposes the literalistic and arrogant interpretation of the Old Testament by contemporary rabbis and their insistence on tradition (see Matt. 5:21-48; 12:1-8) with His declaration: "But I say unto you. . . ." "Official exegesis" and "That's the way we've always taught" break brotherhood as loyalty shifts from Christ to opinions.

III. *They Are His Brothers Who Do the Will of the Father* (vv. 48-50)

A. To do the will of the Father is to *obey the call* and command of Christ. "No one wants to know about your faith or unbelief; your orders are to perform the act of obedience on the spot." (Bonhoeffer, p. 59.)

B. It is the "better" (περισσότερον) righteousness demanded by Jesus (Matt. 5:47), hence is τέλειος, perfect (5:48). This is obedience, discipleship of Christ (19:21). Matt. 7:12 shows the love-commandment as the principle of interpretation of Law and Prophets. This is the "new commandment."

C. The nature of "doing the will of the Father" will be revealed in the Judgment. Recall the eschatological discourse in Matt. 25:31-46, "To be a Christian means to be sent forth, to be under way with . . . Jesus' own Word, among an oppressed and broken people, which hates and persecutes the messengers" (cf. Matt. 10:24). Jesus sets the pattern for this will-doing and provides the offering of perfect obedience which makes it possible . . . "even unto the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8)

D. The mark of brotherhood is *fulfilling* the love-commandment (7:12). The call to action moves beyond easy talk about "saving souls" but which ignores social concerns and human hurts and needs. Don't "neglect the weightier matters . . . justice, mercy, faithfulness" (23:23). The hungry, the naked,

the needy are crying for the brother of Christ to do the will of the Father (Matt. 25). The test of discipleship is pointed to in the Introit's reference to "Thy household . . . given to serve Thee (through our neighbor) in good works." Cf. Bonhoeffer, p. 69, for illustrations of Good Samaritan. "You know the commandments . . . don't ask questions, get on with it!"

Concluding Thoughts

The all-inclusive "whoever" shows that this close tie is open to all who respond to God's will. Are you a true brother of Christ? Or do you come with some false claim? Those who do the will of the Father in heaven are "My brother and sister and mother!"

Sources

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Outline Suggestions

Take Another Look at Discipleship

Introduction

"Lord, why did you tell me to love all men, my brothers? I have tried, but I come back to you, frightened. . . ." (Michel Quoist, *Prayers*.)

Our frightened efforts to love all men as brothers begin when Jesus calls me Brother.

I. *See Discipleship as the Lord's Call to Brotherhood*

II. *Close Your Eyes to False Claims to Brotherhood*

III. *View Discipleship as the Brotherhood of Doers of the Father's Will*

Water Is Thicker Than Blood

Although homiletical textbooks warn against using the theme as one of the parts, consider the following:

I. *Blood Is Thicker than Water*

There are no purely human claims to brotherhood with Christ and sonship with the Father. As thick as these ties of blood are, they are severed by distance, alienation, death.

II. *Water Is Thicker than Blood*

The first step in "doing the will of the Father" is to be baptized with water. The Father's adopted children do His will and are true brothers of Christ. The ties of baptismal water hold us together through life, sustain us in doing the will of God, and continue after ties of blood are broken.

Onward, Christ's Brothers!

Introduction

The Epistle for today, Eph. 6, describes the panoply of the soldier. In our text, soldiers are brothers who:

I. *Do Battle with Foes of the True Brotherhood: Law-Despisers, Legalists, Traditionalists*

II. *Do Battle for the Father's Reign: Doing the Will of the Father*

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THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY

AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 21:28-32

Translation of the Text

Now, what do you think? A man had two sons. He approached the first one and said, "Son, go and work in my vineyard today." He said, "I go, Sir!" But he did not go. Then he went to the second one with the same

request. But he answered, "I'm not going to." Later, however, he changed his mind and went. Which of the two sons did the will of the father? They say, "The latter." Jesus says to them, "Of a truth I tell you that the publicans and harlots precede you in the kingdom of God. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, but you did not believe in him. The tax collectors and harlots, however, did believe in him. When you saw this, you did not even then change your minds and believe him."

Textual Matters

The chief textual problem is that of the order of the two sons. We have given the order as it occurs in the Nestle text. Both the KJV and the RSV reverse the sequence. In his apparatus Nestle indicates that the latter might well be the right one. The necessary changes in v. 31 have to be taken into account.

Some texts offer a third possibility. They reverse the order but do not make an alteration in v. 31. This would mean that those whom Jesus had asked were determined to keep Him from being right.

The Nestle order seems to fit the situation best. The parable follows the incident of cursing the fig tree and the question of the Messiah's authority. It is followed by the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. These are all items that deal with the relationship of the religious leaders in Jerusalem to Jesus as the Messiah.

Exegetical Items

The figure of the vineyard is familiar to us. In the fifth chapter of Isaiah it represents the people of Israel. It is a symbol of Israel as God's very own possession, His *segullab*. (Ex. 19:5)

Sonship is a concept to depict the covenant relationship of Israel with God. Moses was instructed to say to Pharaoh: "Thus says the Lord, 'Israel is My firstborn son, and I say

to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me.''" (Ex. 4:22-23)

As a covenant people, Israel was called to serve God in righteousness. However, as Isaiah put it, "He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry" (5:7). In the days of Jesus, religious affairs were the specific responsibility of the Sanhedrin, consisting of Sadducees, Pharisees, and lay persons known as elders of the people. These looked with disdain on ordinary folk known as "people of the soil" (*am haaretz*). Harlots and tax collectors in particular were objects of reproach. The latter often worked on the Sabbath; they represented political oppression and sometimes foreign domination. Harlots, of course, lived in immorality. There was hope for neither in Judaism.

Yet when John the Baptist came preaching "the way of righteousness," as it is stated here, it was not the religious elite that listened to him. They did not recognize his coming as God breaking in to do a new thing, to create a new people. Publicans and harlots, however, did — and that in great number.

Jeremiah had spoken of the new covenant as a time for forgiveness. This was to be God's "way of righteousness." John therefore quoted from Isaiah 40 to depict God's approach in terms of a highway for the King. Etymologically, you see, the Hebrew *zedakah* ("righteousness") means "smoothness." In fact, to this day Arabs use this term with reference to roads. In righteousness God had determined to smooth out the way between Himself and Israel, offering forgiveness. John proclaimed the forgiveness of sins and repentance. His baptism was another Red Sea act of God's creating and liberating a people for Himself.

John called Israel to repentance. This scandalized the members of the Sanhedrin. For were they not God's sons? Had not God

made a special covenant with this people? John called Israel to repentance because Judaism, in distinction from the religion of the Old Testament, described Israel's acceptance of the covenant as a meritorious act. There was an old Jewish parable, for example, which told the story of God offering a field (the Torah) to all the nations. None, however, wanted the responsibility to cultivate this field except Israel. (Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, I 865.)

There was another tradition, one that is worth knowing about because it helps us to understand the story of Pentecost as given in Acts 2. According to this view, on the 50th day after Israel had left Egypt, God had offered His law at Sinai to all the nations of the earth, to each of the 70 in its respective language. He offered it to the Moabites. They wanted to know its terms. God read the Law; but when He reached the Sixth Commandment, they replied, "Thank you very much; we were born in adultery." Then God proposed to give His law to the descendants of Esau, but they would not accept the prohibition on killing. The Edomites likewise declined on the principle that stealing had been part of their inherited way of life. Only Israel promised to obey. The Jews were quite proud of the fact that they had made this choice. The Sanhedrin, some of whose members were engaged in a running argument with Jesus, epitomized this feeling of special privilege. They headed a people who had promised to obey; but, like the son in the parable, they did not really follow through on their promise. They refused to accept God on His terms, especially not on the basis of forgiveness and repentance. Their reaction to John's preaching provided the evidence that they were in fact disobedient.

Harlots and tax collectors had responded otherwise. Many of them were delighted to accept the offer of forgiveness. They realized only too well that they were wretched sin-

ners. They were received into God's kingdom, for it had come for sinners only. Even then the religious leaders in Jerusalem did not change their minds. They would not accept the "way of righteousness" as God's offer of communion on the basis of being forgiven.

The parable itself ends at v. 30. It is very brief. Vv. 31 and 32 provide the setting and the explanation. By replying to the question of Jesus, "Which of the two did the will of the father?" the members of the Sanhedrin were confronted directly by the challenge of the parable, the claim of Jesus as embodying God's "way of righteousness" (cf. Rom. 1:16 to 17). They rejected the invitation inherent in the parable; so tax gatherers and publicans, people deemed to be outside the commonwealth of Israel, entered the Kingdom ahead and often to the exclusion of those who thought of themselves as already being in the Kingdom by virtue of their being Jews.

The importance of this little parable for an understanding of the nature of God's kingdom can hardly be overstated. God is determined to reestablish His rule among men by forgiving their sins. Obedience consists in the response of faith, of accepting this offer of a new covenant not like the one made with Israel when God led that people out of Egypt.

HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS

Introductory

God has always retained the initiative in dealing with men as His creatures. He has been their Redeemer, breaking into history, promising Abraham an inheritance and offering Israel a covenant. Later He became incarnate to confront men with His gracious will, to forgive their iniquities, and to remember their sin no more. That chapter began with the preaching of John the Baptist. His emphasis on repentance and forgiveness made it clear that God's kingdom had come —

For Sinners Only

I. *Israel, the First Son*

- A. Promised obedience
- B. Perverted God's grace by viewing acceptance as a meritorious achievement
- C. Religious leaders in Jerusalem, therefore, excluded from Kingdom
- D. Exclusion of all those who attempt to create the terms of sonship

II. *Sinners Represented by the Second Son*

- A. God's "way of righteousness" means His offer of forgiveness
- B. Repentance and faith as acceptance of this offer
- C. Entrance into the kingdom by faith

Conclusion

The church proclaims the Word of the Kingdom as God's offer of forgiveness. Baptism brings men into this community of forgiveness. The Lord's Supper is the "visible word" of forgiveness. All this is intended for sinners only.

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NOTE: This sermon study on Matt. 21:28-32 is reprinted, with the publisher's permission, from Martin A. Scharlemann, *Proclaiming the Parables* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 57-62.

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

MARK 12:41-43

The Propers

The propers for this Sunday emphasize the goodness of God to His people and the subsequent trust and thankfulness which this should inspire. The *Introit* promises us that God's attitude toward His people is one of peace and not of evil. It demonstrates this by reminding us of God's gracious deliverance of Jacob from the bondage of Egypt. The *Collect* reinforces this concept as it points to

the bountiful goodness of God by which we are delivered from the bondage of our sins. The *Epistle* focuses on the folly of centering our life on the acquisition of the material things of this world. In the *Gospel* we hear Christ's command to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Interestingly, Mark places this story in close proximity to our text.

Background

The chronological setting is of unusual significance. This incident takes place during Jesus' last days, shortly before His suffering and death. It is noteworthy that our Lord should have taken time for such a humble situation when there were so many more pressing things to think about. This indicates the importance of the incident as far as Jesus was concerned. The immediate context is also particularly significant. Jesus has just denounced the scribes for hypocrisy. He points out that these leading religionists of the day make a great show of their piety but that they neatly separate their religion from their daily life as they "devoured widows' houses."

Commentary

V. 41. After His heated denunciation of the scribes, Christ is relaxing for a few moments in that part of the temple which was the place for making monetary offerings—the treasury. John records for us that Jesus delivered a sermon in the treasury on another occasion (John 8:20). In this room were 13 large, trumpet-shaped bronze containers for the offerings. The times were good, the economy prosperous. Since it was the Passover season, the treasury was crowded with many people from far and near. Jesus quietly observed them as they made their offerings. He noted that the rich put in large sums that made a very audible clatter as they fell to the bottom of the containers.

V. 42. Jesus noticed a widow contributing two very small copper coins (*lepta*), an in-

finitesimal offering compared to what the rich were giving—a mere drop in the ocean. The temple would have survived without it.

V. 43. Jesus, however, viewed the widow's offering as so significant that He called His disciples to Him to discuss it with them. Jesus introduced His remarks with "verily," which He characteristically used when He wanted to make an emphatic point. The Greek brings out the full force of the widow's desperate situation when it describes her as "the widow—this poverty-stricken one."

V. 44. Christ demonstrated His omniscience when He told the disciples that the widow had given all that she had, her whole living. The rich gave of their superfluity, their over-abundance, while the widow literally gave what she needed to sustain her life—her next meal.

Suggested Outline

Giving Means Total Commitment

I. *Much but Little*

A. The rich cast in much as a religious duty

It was expected of them. It gave them opportunity to parade their piety. In the immediate context Jesus denounces the scribes for making a show of their religion. Many of the rich probably believed that supporting the religious institution was the essence of their religion.

B. For many their giving was inconsistent with their way of living

In their giving they appeared very religious; in their living they were like the scribes who devoured widows' houses. They were examples of that ritualistic formal religion which the ethical prophets had denounced centuries earlier.

C. These rich men remind us of much religion we see today

In our time too, much religious practice is done out of a sense of duty or to appear good, or because men are wont to go through

the motions. Belonging to a church often carries with it little ethical commitment. As Martin Marty points out in *Varieties of Unbelief*, "One joins a church by agreeing with its constitution but without being open to transcendent judgment, without being called to witness to the activity of God who disrupts even the most sacrosanct of men's form of life." Religious life is separated from secular life so that David Nichols can write, "Religion is not concerned with the whole life but with a part of life."

II. *Little but Much*

A. The widow cast in an impractical offering

Her gift was a "drop in the bucket." Who needed it? It wasn't "practical" of her to give God all she had left. She should have known that He could get along without it. Let the rich do the giving; they can afford it. Religion is good, but you have to be practical; don't get "carried away."

B. The widow cast in a "total commitment" offering

A real leap of faith. A real expression of her absolute trust in God. She gave all she had, even what she might need to buy her next piece of bread. She gave to God what was His, trusting that He would provide for her. What a lesson in faith! No rationalizations, no excuses. She gave as her heart prompted her to do, as her love for her God led her to do.

C. God's commitment to her encouraged her commitment to Him

As a pious Jewess the widow believed God's words of faithful commitment to His people, spoken over and over again in the Old Testament. She took Him at His Word and committed herself to Him.

D. Our commitment to God in the fullness of His commitment in Christ

How much more committed to God we should be who have seen the full glory of

His commitment to us in Christ. We have seen His greatest promise kept. His faithful Word became flesh to bring us the salvation He had promised.

E. His total commitment to us calls for total commitment from us

We dare not separate our faith from our life. What we say in church on Sunday must be lived out in the world the rest of the week. We must love in deed and in truth. Our daily life must be a constant witness to the living reality of our faith.

III. *Which Gift Really Counted?*

A. Quality not quantity

Even though the widow's gift was infinitesimally small compared to the gifts of the rich, still Christ states that she gave more than all of them put together. Certainly this was not in quantity but in quality. Quantity gifts are welcome if they have the proper quality.

B. The Lord looks at the heart of the giver

Christ saw beyond the gift to the heart of the giver and beheld there the great faith of this humble widow. Because of her faith He makes her an example to His disciples then and to His disciples today.

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THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY

AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 20:20-23

Some Text-related Questions

(The individual parish situation will suggest which can best be used.)

What is greatness? in the eyes of God? in the eyes of man?

What is my idea of success? Is human ambition wrong? Or, is ambition for earthly things wrong? What kind of prayers are we to speak on behalf of others? What does Christ expect those who follow Him to do? Is Christ anti wealth? Where is the kingdom

of God? Keep these questions in mind as we discuss the topic "Kingdom Ambition."

The Propers

The *Introit* sets the environment for Kingdom ambition: peace from God. The *Collect* states the first need of the Christian life: forgiveness, absolution. Then Kingdom ambition can be properly directed. In the *Epistle*, 1 Thess. 5:1-11, the admonition "Watch!" demands that ambition for the Kingdom be ready for fulfillment at any time. One direction for Kingdom ambition is encouragement and edification of the brother in the faith. The *Gradual* and *Gospel* point to the finality of Kingdom ambition. The new Jerusalem opens to those who are prepared, but then the door closes, never to open again. Kingdom ambition will then turn to Kingdom realization.

Context

The concept of the kingdom of heaven (20:1-16) dominates the section. After Christ has shown the disciples to whom the Kingdom really belongs (19:13-15), they fail to get the point when the rich young ruler is not accepted into the Kingdom (19:16-26). Jesus assures them that they will be blessed (although not on their terms) for their discipleship (19:27-30). Following the text, Christ defines greatness in the Kingdom in terms of *service* (20:24-28). His power as a King is demonstrated in His service to others. (20:29-34)

Notes on the Text

V. 20. James and John were willing followers of Christ (Matt. 4:21-22), even members of the inner circle (17:1). Their request seems legitimate. In Mark 10:35 these disciples ask the favor of Jesus directly. Jesus also perceives that the idea was theirs; He addresses His answer (in both records) to *them* instead of to their mother. The mother's act of kneeling may be seen not merely as

a sign of respect but also as an expression of her trust in Jesus' power.

V. 21. Thrones were not a new idea to the disciples; note 19:28. The added idea of the second and third command posts in the Kingdom was either a misinterpretation of Old Testament ideas (1 Kings 22:19) or an attempt on their part to "get in on the ground floor." Here the disciples seem out of role; They anticipate too much instead of giving their usual show of little faith.

V. 22. Jesus did not rebuke mother or sons, but led them to a proper understanding of the Kingdom. "Drink the cup" is here equivalent to sharing a person's lot or destiny; it means being afflicted in the same manner as Jesus was (Matt. 26:39). The apostles did share this cup later (Acts 4:3; 5:33, 40-41). In John 18:11 Christ's acceptance of the cup of suffering takes precedence over all else. The King drains the cup of suffering for all. Luther commented on the pride of the apostles: "Since their pride springs from faith, it is in need of purification. Thus, we note the patient, gentle treatment of Christ in contrast with His impatience with Pharisaic pride." "We are able" was an answer of blindness; it was evidence that they did not know themselves. They exaggerated their own powers. Knowing our weaknesses is the beginning of trust in God's strength.

V. 23. Jesus is in full unity with the God-head; He does nothing of or for Himself. (See John 5:19.)

Suggested Outline

Kingdom Ambition

I. *The Dimension of a Personal Kingdom*

A. Human ambition misdirected: "We are able"

1. James and John represent Christians who need to grow, to mature in their respect for the King and the Kingdom. They think they

have their own "corner on the market" as they say, "We are able." They are overconfident of their ability to come through for Christ, to share His lot in life. They seek grace by their own standards: positions in an earthly organization. Therefore their ambition becomes misdirected.

2. The mother represents overindulging parents as well as certain well-intentioned but misdirected welfare efforts. In place of mother love, here is "smother love," an overindulging of the needy. Love is shown by guiding, not always giving; love sometimes calls for saying no for the good of the person.

- B. Human ambition related to goods and people. "We are able" to manipulate the habits of men: TV commercials calling consumer "demand" into being. "We are able" to send spaceships, improve living standards, amass wealth. "We are able" to get people to do anything for a price. But we are unable to solve social problems. We are unable to decrease the threat and existence of war. We are unable to answer the inner needs of men — without God.

- C. Selfishness may be involved in the assertion "We are able." It may be a pride-filled declaration of our own potential. "Let's go" is a worthy cry, but the destination and goal is the only determinant of the real worth of the call. Notice that the disciples tried to get an answer from Christ before the question.

II. *The King's Dimension of the Kingdom*

- A. The Father defines the Son's life as a life of service and suffering. "Thy will, not Mine, be done." "My meat

is to do the will of My Father." The Servant of the Most High came not to be waited on but to serve, to answer the needs of men. By answering man's greatest need He gave proof that He answers other needs also.

- B. The King who understands. (V. 22a) There is no reprimand for the mother. Jesus recognizes the shallowness of their understanding. He is the empathetic Brother (Heb. 4:17). In 2 Tim. 2:11-13 the faithful actions of God replace the faithlessness of man.

III. *The Spiritual Dimension of the Kingdom*

- A. The King is enthroned in the believer's heart. The attitude of a child's faith—complete trust—should be highlighted here. At this point in the sermon the pastor might ask a child, possibly a member of the junior Sunday school class who has been previously prepared for such participation, to arise or even to come forward to the chancel to answer the question "Who is Jesus?" From previous discussion with the child, the pastor will know that "He is my Savior" might be the answer given. The next question, "How do you know Him?" might be answered: "He brought me to faith in Him through Holy Baptism. He also tells me about Himself in the Bible. I believe it." (See the context, 19:13-15.)
- B. The rule of the King in the heart is the inspiration for ambition—for Him, not for me. The "Sons of Thunder" outgrew their ambition for little kingdoms of their own. The King ruled their heart. James died

a martyr's death. John worked for His King in Asia Minor besides writing books of the New Testament. What a difference a King makes! He gives motivation and inspiration to our ambition. Then we learn to "seek first the Kingdom." We learn also to put the needs of others alongside our own.

IV. *The Practical Dimension of the Kingdom*

- A. Being in His kingdom shows itself in "Kingdom living." Ambition for His kingdom is shown in the believer's life as he seeks the establishment of Christ's rule in the lives of others. Sharing the hope that is in us increases our own joy. Dividing this hope with others means that we ourselves have it in even greater measure.
- B. Kingdom ambition reaches out to others. Everyone has certain areas of control or rule, his little "kingdom": home, work, family, friends, committee. How do I act the part of "king" in my own "kingdom"? Or do I demand of others: "You must serve me and my wishes!"? Or do I approach others within the sphere of my "kingdom" with the desire to serve them as fully as possible? Do I desire to serve them above all by bringing them into the kingdom of Christ?

Conclusion

Ambition is a necessary factor in life. Life under the kingly rule of Christ is characterized by a proper control and direction of ambition, a control and direction which are possible precisely because the believer lives under the kingly rule of Christ and draws strength from Him through Word and Sacraments.

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