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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Woelfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuehren und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — *1 Cor. 14:8*

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ARCHIVES

Homiletics

The Nassau Pericopes

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 21: 33-44

The Text and the Day. — The Gospel, Jesus Weeping over Jerusalem, and our text, the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, present, in quite different settings, the same tremendous truth: Rejection of God's grace in Christ calls down on men God's wrath and punishment.

Notes on Meaning. — The time: Tuesday of Passion Week, the last full workday of our Lord's ministry and one of the busiest in His life. The place: the Temple. The occasion: the challenge of a delegation sent by the Sanhedrin: "By what authority doest Thou these things? And who gave Thee this authority?" (V. 23.) "These things": His preaching and miracles in general and His recent royal entry into Jerusalem and cleansing of the Temple, in particular.

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is Christ's plain, fearless, and stinging answer to that challenge of the Sanhedrists. They and their like-minded predecessors are the "husbandmen," tenants. The "vineyard" which God had planted and furnished with the utmost care and then "let out," leased, to them is Israel. The vineyard was and remained God's. Yet when God sent "His servants," prophets, and required the "fruits" that were His — repentance, faith, obedience — the husbandmen rebelled, mistreating and even killing the servants. God sent "other servants," more prophets, but the husbandmen continued to rebel, mistreat, kill. "Last of all" — what unheard-of patience, long-suffering, love! — God "sent unto them His Son, saying: They will reverence My Son." Here is Jesus' answer to the questions: "By what authority doest Thou these things? And who gave Thee this authority?" He is "His Son." Not God's "servant" — that already would be enough authority — He is God's "Son," the heir and owner of the vineyard. But do the husbandmen respect *His* authority? Their persistent rebellion against God reaches its climax in the rejection and murder of the only-begotten Son of God.

But if the religious leaders of the Jews are thinking that they can thus eliminate God's Son and usurp God's reign, they are "imagining a vain thing." "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. . . ." The Christ, whom they are about to crucify, will rise to become "the Head of the corner." The Kingdom of God will be taken away from Israel and "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." The rebellious husbandmen will be ground to powder by the wrath of the Lamb — unless they will heed what a loving Savior was trying to say to them on that last Tuesday, even by this parable of judgment: "Kiss the Son lest He be angry and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

Preaching Pitfalls. — Do not waste precious time — and the attention of your hearers — by dwelling at great length on the rebellious husbandmen who lived two thousand years ago. Speak of, and to, the rebellious husbandmen of today. There are many of them. And one of them is — our own God-hating self.

Problem and Goal. — "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Modernism rejects the divine authority of His Word and of His Son, and deifies its own inflated "I." And we ourselves are tempted to follow our reason rather than the Scriptures, to rely on our works rather than on the merits of Christ, and to live unto ourselves rather than unto God. Every such lifting up of self is rebellion against the Lord of the vineyard. May we fear His punishment, give Him the fruits of repentance, faith, and obedience, and let Him "reign supreme, and reign alone" both in our hearts and in our lives.

Outline:

REBELS IN THE CHURCH OF GOD

- I. They defy the authority of God.
- II. They reject the very Son of God.
- III. They incur the wrath of God.
- IV. But they will never destroy the Church of God.

OSWALD RIESS

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 5:1-12

The Text and the Day. — The second of the smaller Trinity cycles closes with this Sunday. The general theme has been "The New Life of Righteousness." We have been exhorted to be loyal, to be true, to be keenly alive to our stewardship. We have been warned against fickleness. The Beatitudes are largely in the spirit of the Propers for this Sunday. Note the harmony existing between the Epistle and Gospel and Collect! The Collect is a wonderful little prayer, which the pastor may recommend to his people as they bow their heads in the quiet moment before the service begins. The Gospel shows that the true worship of God is a casting of one's self upon His love. We must all guard against the spirit of the Pharisee in our hearts and in our worship. Pride in what we do, feeling one's self better than others, unfair judging — such a religion and worship is vain. The one who comes in humility, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness will hear the gladdening words: "Christ died for our sins. . . . But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain."

Notes on Meaning. — The most careless reader is struck with the contrast between the delivery of this sermon and the delivery of the Law on Sinai. That came dreadfully with startling effect, this was uttered by a sweet human voice that moved the heart most gently. That was delivered on the storm-rent hill which rose, with its red granite crags, above the scorching wilderness; this was given on the flowery grass of the green hillside which slopes down to the silver lake. Yet the new commandments of the Sermon on the Mount were not meant to abrogate, but rather to expound, the Law spoken from Sinai. The Law was founded on the eternal distinctions of right and wrong — distinctions as eternal as God. Easier would it be to sweep away heaven and earth than to destroy one *yodh* of its moral grandeur. Jesus warned them that He came not to abolish the Law, but to obey and fulfill it. He taught, however, that obedience to the Law had nothing to do with scrupulous adherence to the letter, but was rather a surrender of the heart and will to the innermost meaning and spirit of the Law.

The Sermon gives a new revelation of what constitutes

blessedness. The people were expecting a Messiah who should break the yoke off their necks. Their minds were haunted with legendary predictions of a Messiah who would clothe them with jewels and scarlet and feed them with even a sweeter manna than the wilderness had known. Christ reveals a different type of happiness—the riches of poverty, the royalty of meekness, the blessing of sorrow and persecution.

V. 1: “Poor in spirit”—against worldly exaltation and pride Jesus teaches the virtue of the lowly, humble spirit, teachable, submissive, trustful. “Neither be ye called masters, for One is your Master, even Christ.” “He that is greatest among you shall be as he that serveth.” “Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

V. 2: “They that mourn”—penitent distress over our sins and honest exploration of ourselves, a true judgment, leads to repentance not to be repented of.

V. 3: “The meek”—richness is in the fewness of our wants. They that learn to think, to thank, to ponder the wonders of His grace, will truly inherit the earth and discover the meaning of Paul’s words: “All things are yours.”

V. 4: “Hunger and thirst after righteousness”—one of the chief Christian virtues is the desire to be virtuous, to have the Spirit of Christ. If we are less perfect than Christ, we need a Savior. In striving for true righteousness we discover the greatness of our need and are led to the greatness of Christ’s grace.

V. 5: “The merciful”—“Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.” The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, himself a successful pleader for mercy, but unwilling to accord it to his fellow servant, shows the meaning of this beatitude. Others may not deserve mercy, but neither did we.

V. 6: “Pure in heart”—purity of heart springs from inner reverence for oneself as the object of God’s love. He who is to live in the sight of God will learn to love the things which God loves and to strive for a heart that is pure from evil. Our hearts will not be perfectly clean, but the desire for clean hearts will always be true if we walk after the Spirit.

V. 7: “The peacemakers”—we are to be not only meek and merciful ourselves, but also allayers of strife among others, reconcilers, active promoters of peace, “The wisdom

that cometh from above is first pure, then peacable" (James 3:17).

V. 8: "Persecuted for righteousness' sake" — the success of life is not measured in terms of outward triumph. The one who does God's will is engaged in a heroic enterprise. Persecution, sacrifice, suffering may be in store for him. All these experiences are to be counted as blessings. The scars received for the sake of God will someday shine as jewels. This gives us leave to rejoice. Someday there will be a reversal of judgment: What the world ridiculed will be approved of God; what the world despised will be honored.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The Beatitudes are not Gospel promises, but simply the marks of a Christian; they show the spirit and character of one who strives for the God-pleasing life.

Preaching Emphases. — This is not the greatest of the three great sermons of our Savior — the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7), the Sermon in the Upper Room (John 14—16), the Sermon on the Last Things (Matt. 24—25). The greatest sermon is that preached in the Upper Room, under the shadow of the Cross of Calvary. The center of Christ's ministry is found at Calvary, not in the Sermon on the Mount. The blessed Savior, who Himself put aside His glory, became obedient to the Cross, stooped to the needs of mankind in humble service, endured the persecutions of unjust men, for the joy that was set before Him, the joy of redeeming the world, remained true to His purpose, this Jesus now commends His way to His followers. His grace covers our sin, and His Spirit is to take over our spirit. We are to see the fang of the serpent in the spirit which the world approves — vain ambition, pompous self-assertion, brazen self-reliance. He recommends the putting on of those jewels of character which are in the sight of God of great price.

Problem and Goal. — In a world that is highly competitive, commercial, devoted to power, enslaved to things, these lessons must be taught with an insistence that they are the true principles of the Kingdom. Love of those things which Jesus loved and hatred of those things which Jesus hated — this is the high task of the Christian life. "We all . . . are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Mercy, meekness, humility, love — this is the music which echoes on earth harmonies of heaven.

Outline: FACETS IN GOD'S JEWELS

or

MARKS OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

A running expository comment is suggested rather than an effort to divide the octave of Beatitudes into two or three categories, which seems quite impossible. C. W. BERNER

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 6: 9-15

The Text and the Day. — This text is very appropriate for this day. The Epistle reminds us that we cannot even think anything of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God. The Gospel gives a practical demonstration of God's transcending power and goodness. The Collect addresses itself to the omnipotence and mercy of God, acknowledging that true service of Him can come to us only as His gift. How appropriate, then, to consider the Lord's Prayer, in which these points are so prominent, reminding us also of our own obligation in view of God's goodness.

Notes on Meaning. — Holy Writ records the Lord's Prayer twice, here as part of the Sermon on the Mount and later as Jesus' response to the request of a disciple, Luke 11. No doubt Jesus taught it oftener than that. Here it follows hard upon His warning against the vain ostentation and vacuous repetition practiced by the Pharisees with respect to prayer. To pray means to talk to God: not to give the Omniscient needed information regarding our problems, but through our prayers acknowledging and approaching Him as the only and never-failing Helper in time of need. Luther's masterful exposition of this prayer gives us more than sufficient material for this sermon, making further notes on meaning unnecessary. We merely point out: The aorist ἀφῆκαμεν (v. 12) indicates that forgiveness must have taken place in our hearts when we seek pardon. Intention is not sufficient.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The authenticity of the Doxology should not be discussed. Lack of time will also move us to refrain from offering too much detail in explaining the Seven Petitions, but to content ourselves with presenting the three categories: Spiritual needs; material needs; the averting of,

and deliverance from, spiritual and material ills. Care must be taken v. 14 to make clear that willingness to forgive our offenders is demanded of us, yet is not the cause of our pardon from God.

Preaching Emphases. — Take the opportunity to quiet frequently expressed doubts by pointing out that the terms *debts*, *trespasses*, *sins*, are synonyms. The main weight of this sermon should rest upon God's unlimited power and goodness, which along with Christ's command should be an incessant incentive and encouragement to pray. But we should ever be mindful of that solemn obligation to be merciful to others. The "seventy times seven" story of Peter as well as the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant should be utilized. Illustration: L. Harms' story of the sincere, yet foolish lad who offered to keep book on people's transgressions against him, yet felt justified to withhold forgiveness after the 490th sin.

Problem and Goal. — Cf. Luther's explanation of the introduction to this prayer, seeking to create in hearers the resolve to go out and do likewise, namely, heartily forgiving and readily doing good to those who sin against us.

Outline:

THE PRAYER OF OUR LORD

In placing this beautiful prayer upon our lips, our Savior bids us

- I. To rely implicitly upon the unlimited power and goodness of our heavenly Father.
 - A. In solving our spiritual problems, Petitions I—III;
 - B. In supplying our material need, Petition IV;
 - C. In warding off, or liberating us from, spiritual and physical ills, Petitions V—VII;
 - D. Of all these blessings, our gracious pardon is paramount;
 - E. The Savior's instruction to pray for these things is our guarantee.
- II. To extend the same goodness and mercy to our fellow men.
 - A. This is God's will, from which there is no appeal.
 - B. We must not presume to appeal to justice.
 - C. We must have forgiven our fellow men in our hearts before we seek pardon for our sins.

OTTO E. SOHN

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 11: 28-30

The Text and the Day. — In the Gospel lesson Jesus says three times: "Take no thought." The unrest of the soul shows itself in worry even about food and raiment and the "morrow." Furthermore, the labor of the soul brings no relief as long as we try to serve two masters: "God and mammon." To seek satisfaction in earthly things, whether noble or base, is destructive labor and only adds to the burden of the soul. However, when the soul is at rest, we can begin to cope victoriously with all of life's situations: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God . . . and all these things will be added unto you." — The Introit shows how penetrating Jesus' diagnosis of our ills is and stresses the fact that rest of the soul is man's number-one need: "Rejoice the *soul* of thy servant." It also tells how this rest of the soul can be had: only when we come as helpless and contrite publicans and say: "Be merciful to me a sinner." Man cannot rely on anything in himself or his fellow men for help: "Save thy servant that *trusteth in thee*." — The Gradual underscores again how futile all the labor of men is in quieting the restlessness of their soul. Don't "put confidence in man." All human devices, philosophies, and schemes break down and leave the soul laboring and heavy laden. However, the soul that has experienced this rest and knows its bliss cannot but burst into the song of the Gradual: "I will sing and give praise." — In the Epistle there is an illustration of the "yoke" of the Lord: "Bear ye one another's burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Notes on Meaning. — The simplicity of the words cannot but set our hearts aglow. It must be made clear that the burden of the soul stems from sin and the futile human effort to do something to quiet the guilty conscience. Some difficulty may arise as to what the Lord means with His yoke. The context gives us one cue. The Pharisees had saddled a heavy burden of legal requirements on the souls of the people (cp. also Acts 15:10 and Gal. 5:1), under which they labored in vain. Jesus' yoke is "easy," and His burden is "light," because it is not the yoke of the Law but the commandment of the Gospel: "Come," "take." Through His invitation He even supplies our spiritually dead souls with the power to accept that invitation. The yoke is the positive side

of the healing of the soul. It implies doing something. The soul unburdened of sin will delight and thrive in doing the will of Jesus. It will be a happy, soul-buoying activity. The Christian becomes a yoke fellow with Jesus, who said: "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me." Although Jesus here does not directly refer to the cross that the believer takes up in coming to Him and following Him, His promise includes also relief for every trial. The cross-bearer can also come to Him for strength, and so the burden will become light and the yoke easy.

Preaching Pitfalls. — These words of Jesus are not meant only for such as have never come to Him in faith. It would be wrong to assume that all our hearers are living serene and happy lives free from all frustrations, conflicts, and tensions of the soul. The surface may be calm, but storms may rage within.

Preaching Emphases. — The diagnosis of Jesus goes to the root of man's trouble: (a) Sin does not only damn to all eternity, it makes men unhappy, it dwarfs their lives, it lies at the root of all personality problems. (b) All efforts to find happiness outside Jesus only add to the problem. Because the soul came from the creating hand of an eternal God and is destined for eternity after the brief interlude of this life, nothing mundane can satisfy. Even the noblest exercise of the mind leaves a void where the fullness of peace should dwell. A psychology and psychiatry that does not operate with the *psyche*, the soul, is quackery.

Problem and Goal. — The problem: unhappy lives through sin. The goal: blessed lives because Jesus forgives sin; happy and full lives under the yoke of Jesus.

Outline:

JESUS HEALS THE SOUL

- I. He diagnoses the ills:
 1. Your soul is crushed under a heavy burden;
 2. Your soul exhausts itself in futile and destructive labor.
- II. He prescribes the remedy:
 1. It consists in
 - a. removing the burden: "rest";
 - b. supplying healthful, life-giving, soul-satisfying activity: "My yoke," "learn."

2. It is a simple remedy:
 - a. all that is required is to "come" and "take";
 - b. it is so simple that the "wise" reject it but "babes" can apply it (see the context).
3. It is a sure remedy:
 - a. The Physician has the credentials of heaven. "I," "all things" (context);
 - b. it is available in inexhaustible supply: "all" can come;
 - c. it cures the worst case: "all" will receive rest.
4. It affords "rest for the soul" and thus supplies the basis for the remedy of all ills of personality, life, and death.

WALTER R. ROEHRS

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 7: 13-14

The Text and the Day. — This text provides refreshing emphases for the standard lessons for this Sunday. The Epistle wants us to "walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh," and this text illustrates the walk of the Spirit as strait and narrow and that of the lusts of the flesh as wide and broad. The Gospel tells of ten healed lepers, nine of whom are ungrateful, and this text finds a similar proportion between the *many* walking on the broad way and the *few* who find the strait gate.

Notes on Meaning. — In the Sermon on the Mount, before the text, Matt. 5:17—7:12, Jesus contrasted Pharisaic keeping of the Law to obedience motivated by the love of God and our neighbor. Now He calls on His disciples to enter the strait gate of the "poor in spirit," to whom He referred at the beginning, 5:3. Incidentally, after the text, He continues His emphasis by warning, on the same basis, against false prophets: "Know them by their fruits"; also against the danger of lip service without true life: "Not everyone that saith, etc." "Enter in," to God's Kingdom and eternal life, ch. 19:17 and 2 Pet. 1:11; "at the strait gate," now opened to you through the words I have spoken unto you. Anything dictated by human reason can be included under the concept "wide gate." Note the difference of verbs used: for wide gate, "go in"; for strait gate, "find it."

Preaching Pitfalls.— Since the Sermon on the Mount is advice for Christian life, avoid the conclusion of reason, which may be drawn by hearers, that we gain life by our own efforts in striving to walk the strait and narrow way. It is the *Way*, not we, that leads to life. Scripture has much to say about the true Way. Supply the Gospel background.

Preaching Emphases.— Christ, Himself the Way, must be “all in all.” The cemeteries of the world are full of people who went down beaten and despairing because they thought God would be satisfied with something less than full devotion. “Forsake all, and follow Me.” Even: “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Or: “Who-soever will save His life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose His life for My sake and the Gospel’s, the same shall find it.” If a man insists on remaining his natural self, the end is always destruction.

Problem and Goal.— The human heart is terribly deceitful, especially in matters of religion, and this text must be used to break down all pride in anything that we are, do, or say, to make ourselves acceptable in God’s sight. The only right thing to do is to follow the path outlined in God’s Word, “a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” This is in agreement with Christ’s own application of the Sermon on the Mount in 7:24-27.

Outline:

THE TWO WAYS

I. The Way of Destruction:

- A. The wide gate;
- B. The broad way;
- C. Many go in thereat.

II. The Way of Life:

- A. The strait gate;
- B. The narrow way;
- C. Few find it.

HENRY GEO. HARTNER

