

Concordia Theological Monthly



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Outlines on the Ranke Epistles

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 5:12-24 (read vv. 17-21a)

Nuclear energy holds promise of great benefit for world; but many must face toil and danger before such good can be realized. God, by His Spirit, would redeem a sinful world; but the church, answering His commands, must follow a bold course of action if this is to be.

God Cares for His Saints as Boldly They Build His Kingdom

I. *God protected the apostles in their dynamic mission program*

A. The apostles pursued Christ's ministry, with the Holy Spirit's aid (vv. 12-16).

1. They fearlessly continued the work of Jesus. — One of high moments in history. Once scattered by fear (the barb of the "King of Israel" joke at the cross, Matt. 27:42), now welded into an effective mission force, an instrument of God's miraculous mercy. Agreed and bent upon works of Christ. "Works that I do shall he do also" (John 14:12).
2. They taught and healed in Jesus' name. — Boldly called on God to help and heal in Jesus' name. At Jesus' command they once asked 4,000 to sit down to seven loaves (Gospel). Now showed fearlessness in face of spiritual want and physical and mental disease. The start of a wider mission program (v. 16). Multitudes now converted (v. 14). The clinic in the streets (v. 15).

B. In the face of hardship they found deliverance (vv. 17-24).

1. They were persecuted for righteousness' sake. — Position of priests threatened by this ministry. Healing, as with Christ, incontrovertible sanction. Once their "hour and power of darkness" (Luke 22:53); now God's hour and power of light. Apostles forbidden to use Jesus' name on pain of death (4:21). "Kingdom suffereth violence" (Matt. 11:12). The "cup and baptism" of Jesus (Matt. 20:22).
2. They were delivered by the angel of the Lord. — Angel rolled back stone at Christ's tomb, now opened prison doors for His apostles. Christ's resurrection converts forces of

evil into power for good. In the midst of danger for His people, God carries His purposes forward. God engages the gears of history. "The peace of God that passeth understanding."

3. They continued to teach with remarkable boldness.—The angel said: ". . . in the *temple*, to the *people*, *all* the words"; an utter boldness enjoined (v. 20). God's code of conduct for His prisoners of war. Early in the morning they entered temple and taught.

II. *God protects His people today in a dynamic mission program*

- A. God involves His people in the church.—The life of the Christian, redeemed at the cross, now caught up in the total mission of Christ. "Yield members to righteousness . . . have fruits unto holiness" (Epistle). Redemption finds fulfillment in the church at work; a dynamic process so long as we are a part of history. Once it was: ". . . everyone to his own way" (Is. 53:6). Now we are reunited within the body of Christ to do God's will. The communion of the sanctified. A cycle of the cross—the Christian—the church—the cross: a generation of enormous energy. A controlled reaction of the Spirit.
- B. God cares for His people in the midst of dangers, not apart from them.—When the church is comfortable, it needs to re-examine its objectives. God is our refuge; the church is our campaign. The church that is about Christ's business will suffer hardship for righteousness' sake. Then the mighty hand of God will best be seen. Augustine, missionary from Western Church to Britain, terrified by dangers on journey through Gaul. Returned to Gregory for leave to abandon mission. Sent out with company and orders to endure hardship. Established Christianity in Britain, whence ultimately it carried to all parts of the earth.
- C. The church must set a bold course of service for Christ.—Its field of activity is where man's need is greatest. The commission of the Savior has never been altered. An ever-expanding mission challenge lies before us. "He shall subdue the people under us . . . the nations under our feet" (Introit).
The work of healing is of prime importance. Christian hospitals a sign of the presence of Christ and His kingdom. The challenge of medical missions in Latin America, Africa,

the Orient; the clinics in the streets. Lutheran Medical Mission Association, Wheat Ridge Foundation.

Christ bids us commit ourselves boldly to His tasks. His compassion must be our motive, His Spirit our strength, His name our confidence. In the midst of such labors we shall see both His merciful care and the ultimate triumph of His kingdom.

Farmington, Mich.

A. KARL BOEHMKE

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 6:1-7

God has given the church a clear-cut commission (Matt. 28:18-20) to build His kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, and to that end has set up the office of the ministry (1 Cor. 4:1). Nowhere in Scripture, however, do we find a prepared constitution and bylaws for a congregation under which the church must organize for its work. And yet the example of the early Christian Church, found in our text for this morning, is a clear indication that

The Church Must Carefully Organize for Kingdom Work

This is made necessary

- I. *By the many demands that are made upon the time and attention of the church*
 - A. The early Christian Church quickly discovered the need for it (v.1). With the increased number of disciples, the work became more complex. In the social and charitable program of the congregation at Jerusalem this work created problems calling for special attention, time, and talents.
 - B. The church has ever since experienced the same kind of problems a thousand times over. The larger the church body, the more complex its program. Children, young people, students, orphans, widows, the aged, the deaf, the blind, the poor, the needy, the displaced, the refugees, and a dozen other categories of human society claim the church's time and attention (Acts 11:29).
- II. *By the fearful danger to the church if pastors would attempt to look after all the needs within the church*
 - A. The twelve apostles quickly recognized this danger (v.2). Ordinarily no human being is capable of doing many things

well. If the apostles were to give their time to "serving tables," this would necessarily rob them of time to "labor in the Word." And what a terrible mistake that would be! It would undermine and defeat the one great mission of the church (1 Cor. 2:2).

- B. And where is the congregation that does not sense and feel this great danger amid the complex activity of the church. Let pastors become bound up with the details of every area of church activity, and it will not only empty the pulpit of its power, but it will empty hearts of Christ. It will quickly reduce the church to a social club that serves tables and neglects to save souls. (Here don't fail to emphasize the prime importance of the preaching and teaching of the Word in the program of the church. Underscore the pastor's need of time for studying, for laboring in the Word, so that they may speak with conviction and unfold for men God's plan for the salvation of sinners.)

III. *By the fact that all Christians have been saved to serve*

- A. How quickly the apostles recognized this truth. They turned to the laity of the church and said (v.3): "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you." It was a clear call to the laity to organize for kingdom work. They, the laymen, were to look for men from among themselves qualified for such business of the church, while they, the apostles, would narrow their activity to "prayer and to the ministry of the Word."
- B. No wonder our church has long tried to follow this pattern and has urged the laity to organize for kingdom work. Each congregation has its boards and committees and auxiliaries with special aims and objectives among the youth, the men, and the women; and for our church at large the *Lutheran Annual* lists more than 40 departments, boards, and committees.

IV. *By the fact that all members of the church need to support such organized efforts*

- A. Here lay the secret of success in the incident of our text (v.5). We read that "the saying pleased the whole multitude," which means that all were willing and ready to support such organized effort. Furthermore we read that when they had carefully elected qualified men for the work, not a single one declined

to serve. No wonder that "the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied." The chosen men so ably and efficiently tended to their tasks that the apostles could give all their time "to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

- B. Here lie the dangers that threaten the effectiveness of our organized church work today. Is each member pleased to support it? Do we carefully choose men "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" to positions of leadership? Have we too many who decline to serve? Has this led us to overorganization? Are a few chosen to a dozen different positions, so that the very purpose of organization is defeated? Has it again involved the pastors in the necessity of attending every meeting and directing every activity?

Summary! If the very heart and core of the Lord's work lies in the office of the ministry; if it is imperative for pastors to give themselves wholly "to prayer and to the ministry of the Word," then the laity, saved to serve, must organize for effective church work.

Corvallis, Oreg.

A. W. SCHELP

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 7:51-59

(This time the Ranke selection is already an abbreviation of a larger section, namely, the whole Seventh Chapter with its discourse of Stephen, the first martyr. Probably v. 60 should be added to the text.)

In the Christian vocabulary "witness" is a common word. We all should witness, namely, of our faith in Christ, so that others will know Him and believe in Him. We don't always remember that another word for "witness" is "martyr." We save that word usually to define the witness that ends in death. Yet the opposition that descends upon Christian witness is God's way of sharpening the witness and speeding the Gospel. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The last discourse and the death of the first martyr, Stephen, should be a mighty encouragement to

The Courage of the True Witness

- I. *This is a courage which seeks to bring the Gospel to people*

A. Stephen (Acts 6:8).

- B. We often fail in this primary courage: bashfulness, inexperience in speaking, the assumption that we have to debate and argue, the sluggishness to speak the saving Word.

- C. Yet God Himself gives us the mandate in Christ (Matt. 28: 20), and Christ gave Himself into death that we might take up the task (John 17:18).

II. *This is a courage which encounters opposition*

- A. Stephen, Acts 6:9-14. Sometimes the opposition stems from the offense of the Gospel and simple ignorance (1 Cor. 1:18 ff.; 2:11). Sometimes it arises from resentment toward conviction and cheer in the believer (Acts 6:10, 15).
- B. Where our witness never encounters opposition, we may have to question whether it has been clear. This is not to suggest tactlessness or combativeness (2 Tim. 2:24-26). But our Gospel will have to invade areas of the heart that flinch from the message of sin and grace.
- C. Hence keep charged with the Word of Life against the temptation to be silent or fearful. Let the church be a company strengthening one another for courageous testimony (Acts 4: 24 ff.; 12:5).

III. *This is a courage which remembers the nature of opposition*

- A. Stephen recognized it: the unregenerate heart (7:51). The text concludes an address which had sketched the rebelliousness of his hearers and their forefathers already in the days of Moses.
- B. Yet in his very indictment of stubbornness he persisted in portraying the Redeemer (Acts 7:37, 45, 52, 56).
- C. His heart was charged with no resentment or despair, but with concern for his slayers in the moment of his death (Acts 7:60), his re-enactment of his Savior's sufferings. Cf. 1 Peter 4:13.
- D. The present-day Christian's program to match this courage: remember that he plays a part in God's own struggle with unbelief and death; that he is a comrade of Jesus not only in the battle but also in the victory. Cf. v. 56.

IV. *This is a courage which brings great results*

- A. Stephen felt the hatred of opposition, the torture of death (vv. 58, 59). Yet the young man who guarded the clothes of the executioners and sought to extend their venom to other areas became God's missionary to the Gentiles.

- B. Our motivation is not so much that of the Mohammedan who thinks himself blessed for dying in battle against religious opponents as it is that of the one sent by Christ to witness on His behalf and help save men from death.

Would that we all, at our witness in fair weather or foul, could have "a face as it had been the face of an angel"—messenger for Christ.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 8:1-8

One of remarkable features of Jesus' ministry—the divine compulsion He felt in doing His Father's will. Foretold (Ps. 40:7, 8). His own statements (Luke 2:49; John 4:34; 9:4). Would to God that each of us had the same burning desire to do the work our heavenly Father has assigned to us, the work of spreading the Gospel!

The Will to Spread the Gospel

I. *Must be shared by all Christians*

A. It was shared by all in the early Christian Church.

1. By the apostles. Jesus told them Acts 1:8. Faithfully and courageously did this. Number of believers multiplied. Opposition developed. Apostles forbidden to preach, but kept right on spreading the Gospel. Their motto Acts 4:20. Filled Jerusalem with the Gospel (Acts 5:28). Church at Jerusalem became so large that assistants were chosen to help with work (Acts 6:1 ff.). Soon these assistants are preaching. One of them, Stephen, is silenced with stones (Acts 7:59).
2. By the laymen. Stoning of Stephen like a match that kindles a big fire. Great persecution broke out against church (v. 1). Laymen were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word (v. 4). Not theologically trained. Not called by organized congregation. Did not preach as ordained ministers to assembled congregations. Simply bore witness of their faith. Told why they left their homes and were willing to give up everything. It was for Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior. Philip, one of the Seven, preached Christ in Samaria (v. 5).

- B. It must be shared by all Christians today.
1. By the pastor, because he is a Christian by God's grace, because he is called by the congregation to do so, because it is God's will (1 Cor. 9:16).
 2. By the laymen. Some laymen feel this is pastor's responsibility alone. We all owe the Gospel to others. In war not only officers but all soldiers go to battle. Every soldier of Christ must fight against Satan. We are not expected to preach, like a trained pastor to assembled congregations. But we can tell what Jesus means to us: the mother to her children, the housewife to her neighbor, the workman to his fellow worker. We can't substantiate message with miracles as Philip did (v.6), but we can substantiate it with a Christian life. Living sermons by living Christians — this is what we need.

II. *Must be carried out in spite of difficulties*

- A. The early Christians carried it out in spite of difficulties (vv. 1-4).
1. The difficulties they encountered. Persecution by Saul. Systematic pursuit of Christians. Sanctity and privacy of homes invaded (v.3). Many Christians had to leave home, property, business, relatives, friends, beautiful temple with its impressive services. Had to flee for their lives.
 2. Their reaction? They did not deny, like Peter (Luke 22:54-60); but, like Daniel (Daniel 6), they were faithful. They spread the Gospel (v.4).
- B. We must carry it out in spite of difficulties today.
1. Our difficulties. Not bodily persecution but ridicule of unbelievers and apathy and indifference of Christians. Even opposition of some "Christians" who oppose mission work. Our own fear of offending people.
 2. Our reaction. Since we have the same Christ and the same promises the early Christians had of His guidance and blessing, we, too, must spread His Gospel. Even more so with our advantages, modern means of communication (Luke 12:48b).

III. *Will produce wonderful results if carried out*

- A. People will be saved.
1. People were saved then. In Samaria (vv.5,6). Philip

preached Christ to them. Miracles confirmed his words. Result? The people gave heed to the things which Philip spoke, to the Gospel. They believed the Gospel (John 3:16). They were saved.

2. People are saved today when the Gospel is shared, also when it is shared by laymen. The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). When you share the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works through it on the heart of the person who hears it. Perhaps you had the joy of winning someone for Christ recently. You are thankful to someone who shared the Gospel with you. This is God's promise: When the Gospel is shared, people are saved (Is. 55:10, 11).

B. Hearts will be made happy.

1. Hearts were made happy in Samaria (v.8). True and abiding joy of Christian faith. Their heathen religion gave them no real joy. Now they had assurance of forgiveness, peace with God, sure hope of eternal life. This is the joy that removes fear, satisfies the soul, and reaches into eternity.
2. Hearts will be made happy today. Troubled by sin? Here is a message of forgiveness! In doubt? On the verge of despair? Here is hope! In darkness or ignorance? Here is light and truth! Afraid of the future? This message removes fear of the future! Concerned about life after death? Here is eternal life! Unhappy? Here is a message that gives deep and abiding joy! Those who receive this message can sing Is. 61:10.

Since the will to spread the Gospel is to be shared by all, even in the face of difficulties, and since the Gospel saves souls and makes hearts happy, let us, like our Savior, work the works of Him that sends us, while it is day

Lord, lay some soul upon my heart,
And love that soul through me.
And may I gladly do my part
To win that soul for Thee.

Riverside, Calif.

WILLIAM GRAUMANN