



CONCORDIA
LUTHERAN
SEMINARY

Resource Materials for Seminary Sunday

September 23, 2007

Materials prepared by
Dr. Stephen L. Chambers
Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton

Appointed readings (Proper 25):

Amos 8:4-7

1 Timothy 2:1-15

Luke 16:1-15

Homiletical suggestions (related to Proper 25):

1 Timothy 2:1-15 (focusing on vv.1-7)

Ministry pervades the first half of this pericope, which speaks first and most specifically to Paul's unique call but also informs our understanding of the pastoral office today. Seminary Sunday is an ideal time to reflect on the numerous ministry-related themes within this text. Selected comments on some of them follow.

Ministry is not about us, nor is it a merely human arrangement. Its origin is from God, who bears the title of Saviour (v.3) and, in keeping with that title, "desires all people to be saved" (πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι, v.4a). This is the driving force that animates every pastor: the Lord's own active and energetic mission.

People are saved by "coming to a knowledge of the truth" (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν, v.4b). This does not deny a volitional component to conversion, but emphasizes the cognitive aspect. Elsewhere Paul describes the pastoral office as that of "pastor and teacher" (Eph 4:11). Later here (v.7), and again in 2 Tim 1:11, he includes "teacher" (διδάσκαλος) in the list of titles he applies to his own ministry. Instruction in God's truth, which stems most fully and directly from Scripture (Jn 17:17), is a key part of the pastoral task.

The heart of God's truth is the reconciliation he has created between himself and humanity in Christ, which is described in a compact and memorable way in vv.5-6 (see

the Greek text of Nestle-Aland, which prints these verses in poetic form). What some scholars call the "binitarian" form of early Christian confession is here obvious: one God (the Father), one mediator (Christ) (v.5, and compare 1 Cor 8:6). Calling Christ the sole mediator echoes his own claim to be *the* Way (Jn 14:6).

Christ's divinity is not, of course, denied by calling him "the man Christ Jesus" (v.5c); rather, the focus lies on the wonder of the incarnation, that the Father would deign to reconcile himself to humanity by means of a perfect one of their number. Nor is the Holy Spirit's membership in the Godhead denied by this poetic stanza either; again, the focus is simply elsewhere, in this case upon the Father and the Son as the originating and enacting agents of salvation, respectively (compare Col 1:13-20, among many similar passages).

Ministry comes to the fore again where Paul refers to "the witness at his own times" (τὸ μαρτύριον καιροῖς ἰδίους, v.6c). It's a bit unclear exactly what this phrase refers to, but many think it is a further (if looser) reference to Christ's salvific work, not this time as mediator but rather as testimony—as convincing evidence, that is, of the Father's intention to save all people. Certainly the reference to "proper time" (καίρος) supports this view, for it is an expression linked elsewhere to Christ's work (see Rom 5:6; Gal 4:4; Tit 1:3). See a good commentary for details on this point.

The pastor's work of bearing witness to Christ's own witness dominates the last verse of this section, as Paul describes his own role in God's unfolding plan of salvation. The only thing he really has to talk about—the “content” of his ministry—is the preceding: “for *this*, I was appointed” (εἰς ὃ ἐτέθην, v.7). His appointment has three aspects: first as a herald (κῆρυξ), namely one who announces good news; second as an apostle (ἀπόστολος), namely one who has been commissioned for a special purpose (see Gal 1:11-17); and finally as a teacher of the Gentiles (διδάσκαλος ἐθνῶν) in faith and truth. His emphatic declaration “I am speaking the truth, not lying” (ἀλήθειαν λέγω οὐ ψεύδομαι) seems to be a defence of his special assignment to carry Christ to the Gentiles, which was challenged by many.

How might these themes be brought into focus for Seminary Sunday? As mentioned above, we can draw a clear line of descent between Paul's special ministry and the pastoral calling today. As Concordia Lutheran Seminary's motto puts it, our church's seminaries seek to prepare “servants for Jesus' sake” (2 Cor 4:5)—which is a shorthand way of saying “men who are equally commissioned by God's initiative to preach the same good news about the same Christ.” Because God *still* desires all people to be saved, he *still* appoints messengers of grace to bear witness to his once-for-all reconciling initiative in Christ. The task of preparing these messengers for this service has been delegated by our LCC congregations to our seminaries, CLS in Edmonton and CLTS in St. Catharines. It's vital work, then as now, worthy of (and indeed dependent upon!) the support of each congregation and all of their members.

Luke 16:1-15 (focusing on vv.1-9)

The steward in this parable (οἰκονόμος, v.1) can without much difficulty be understood as a pastor (see Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 9:51-24:53* [Concordia Commentary Series; St. Louis: Concordia, 1997], 619-20). Compare 1 Cor 4:1-2, where

Paul speaks similarly of himself and other apostles as stewards of the mysteries of God (οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ). Paul's point, however, is different from what we hear in this text, for Paul insists that stewards must be found trustworthy (πιστός) while the master in this story, representing Jesus, calls this steward quite the opposite (ἀδικίας, v.8). What gives?

A cynical reader might conclude that the Lord wants pastors to become as good as possible at playing the game, working the system, and manipulating matters to their own advantage. This, however, assumes that what the Lord is commending is the steward's unfaithfulness *as such*—which does not seem to be the point of this story at all. Rather, the master commends this unfaithful man not for his unfaithfulness *per se* but rather for his shrewdness (φρονίμως, v.8)—which is a very different matter.

In what way is he shrewd? The steward is praised (ἐπῆνεσεν, v.8a) not so much because of the particular actions he took in discounting the master's debts, but rather because of his underlying motive in taking them. He sensed that there was only a limited amount of time available before the judgment came (v.9), and filled that short interval with purposeful activity, acting quickly (ταχέως, v.6) to avoid the looming disaster of unemployment and homelessness (vv.3-4). Like the steward Jesus commends in an earlier parable (Lk 12:35-48, esp. 42), this steward recognizes the urgency of arranging things quickly and well in order to avoid the coming wrath. In this respect, he is indeed able to “interpret this critical time”—unlike those who are outside the Kingdom (Lk 12:56). (A good commentary will illuminate the eschatological dimension of this whole scenario.)

The application to ministry is clear. Today too the Lord commends those who recognize the urgency of the looming judgement and act accordingly. The focus in this story is of course on this steward's efforts to save himself—an emphasis which serves first of all as a reminder that pastors are no

different from any other sinners but also need daily rescue from the consequences of our sin (described in particular here as “squandering” the master’s goods, v.1; compare the same verb in the parable of the prodigal son, Lk 15:13). More broadly, though, we also see a sharp contrast between this steward’s self-interest and a good pastor’s outward orientation. A faithful pastor is concerned not only for himself but also for the salvation of others (see today’s epistle, 1 Tim 2:1-7, and compare also 1 Tim 4:16). Pastors who are “servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5) strive to use all of the time and resources the Lord has placed at their disposal to maximize the growth of His kingdom!

Even as they do so, however, it’s not themselves they are basing their ministry upon, but the Lord’s mercy. Again, it might appear that the steward in this story really is “saving himself”: after all, isn’t it his cleverness in discounting the clients’ debts that earns the master’s praise? Well, yes and no. As Kenneth E. Bailey suggests (*Poet and Peasant* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 86-110), I think the reason this steward acts as precipitously as he does is because he has complete confidence in the master’s mercy. Even though he himself provoked the crisis by squandering the master’s estate (v.1), and is now further reducing the master’s income by a huge proportion (vv.5-7), he knows he can trust his master’s mercy—toward himself and others. First, he has no doubt that his master will ratify this drastic discounting of his debts, however unexpected and costly it may be. He, the steward, presumes that his master will let himself be bound to the word of grace that is proclaimed in his name. (For more on this, see Just, 614-15.) And further, this steward trusts that even these drastic actions will not backfire on him personally, but work out for his ultimate good (v.4)—as indeed they appear to do, according to Jesus’

approving comment at the end of the story (v. 9). It is important to remember that the master *praises* this steward (v.8a) for precisely these brazen and radical decisions.

Again, this speaks a powerful word about pastoral ministry. As Concordia Lutheran Seminary’s theme verse puts it, “We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). Our church’s seminaries aim to produce pastors who, like this steward, rely completely on the Lord’s mercy, both for themselves and for others. They try to foster in their students total trust in God’s grace toward them personally, on account of Christ—and then, further, we hope they will seize every opportunity to tell others about that same mercy so that they too can come to trust God’s grace. Our seminaries’ mission is to form men who will graduate with both the ability and the resolve to say with great boldness on every occasion, “Consider your debts to God completely erased—not just 50%, but 100%!” For that’s the gracious God we have, in Christ. He always delights in forgiveness, desiring all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (again, see today’s epistle, 1 Tim 2:3-4).

Pastors with this kind of bold confidence are exactly the kind of stewards the Lord calls LCC’s seminaries to form, for the good of his Church and world. Indeed, no pastor is perfect; each of us is aware every day of the ways in which we too have squandered much of what belongs to the Master (v.1). But pastors trust our gracious Lord even so, and can be bold even to the point of recklessness in proclaiming forgiveness and mercy to other “debtors” as well. When it’s read in this way, this story speaks of the essence of pastoral ministry: rock-solid confidence in God’s mercy on account of Christ, and urgent determination to make that mercy as widely known as possible before the End.

Suggested hymns (related to the Seminary’s work and life):

- LSB 497, “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (TLH 224, LW 154, LBW 163)
- LSB 498, 499, “Come, Holy Ghost, creator blest” (TLH 233, LW 158, LBW 472)
- LSB 558, “Not unto us, not unto us be glory, Lord” (HS 98 874)
- LSB 573, “Lord, ‘tis not that I did choose thee” (TLH 37)

LSB 586, "Preach you the Word, and plant it home" (LW 259)
LSB 589, "Speak, O Lord, your servant listens" (TLH 296, LW 339)
LSB 596, "All Christians who have been baptized" (compare TLH 301, LW 225, LBW 194)
LSB 602, "The gifts Christ freely gives"
LSB 682, "God of the prophets, bless the prophets' sons" (TLH 483, LW 258)
LSB 685, "Let us ever walk with Jesus" (TLH 409, LW 381, LBW 487)
LSB 688, "Come, follow me, the Saviour spake" (TLH 421, LW 379, LBW 455)
LSB 783, 784, "Take my life and let it be" (TLH 400, LW 404, LBW 406)
LSB 825, "Rise, shine, you people" (HS 98 871, LBW 393)
LSB 826, "Hark, the voice of Jesus crying" (TLH 496, LW 318, LBW 381)
LSB 827, "Hark, the voice of Jesus calling"
LSB 829, "Christ the eternal Lord"
LSB 830, "Spread the reign of God the Lord" (TLH 507, LW 321, LBW 379)
LSB 831, "How shall they hear, who have not heard" (HS 98 868)
LSB 833, "Listen, God is calling" (HS 98 872)
LSB 834, "O God, O Lord of heaven and earth" (LW 319, LBW 396)
LSB 835, "On Galilee's high mountain" (LW 320)
LSB 836, "O God of light" (HS 98 869, LBW 237)
LSB 837, "Lift high the cross" (LW 311)
LSB 853, "How clear is our vocation, Lord" (HS 98 879)
LSB 856, "O Christ, who called the twelve"
LSB 857, "Lord, help us walk your servant way"
LSB 861, "Christ be my leader" (LW 365)
LSB 865, "Lord, help us ever to retain" (TLH 288, LW 477)

Prayers

For the seminaries of Lutheran Church-Canada:

O God, through your Holy Spirit you illuminate the minds and sanctify the lives of those whom you call to the work of pastors and teachers. Look with favour upon Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton and Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines as they form men who are preparing to enter the sacred ministry of your Church as servants for Jesus' sake. Bless those who teach and those who learn, that they may apply themselves with ready diligence to the knowledge of your Word, which alone is able to make us wise unto salvation; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (adapted from LSB Agenda, p.188 prayer #593)

For seminary students:

O Lord God, merciful and gracious Father, we give thanks for all the blessings you have bestowed on our church's seminarians who have been moved to begin preparation for full-time work in your kingdom. By your Holy Spirit, grant them an open mind and heart to hear and learn your holy Word. Give them the ability to serve you faithfully and effectively as servants for Jesus' sake after their instruction is completed. Fill them with a loving concern for your people, and equip them with the ability to be ministers of your mercy, for the salvation of many. Support, strengthen, and protect them during the years that lie ahead so that by your Word your Church may be built and increased; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (adapted from LSB Agenda, p. 188 prayer #592 and p.207 prayer #598)