

SERMON

Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Gustaf Wingren

1 Peter 4:10–11 · 1943

22 August 1943

Motala city park

Text: 1 Peter 4:10–11

Hymns: 502:1–3; 417:5–6

Today we want to gather our thoughts around our task of work on earth, our everyday work. When a human being becomes a Christian, he wants to do something for other people, for love of the neighbor belongs to the Christian. And if he is a quite fresh Christian, he perhaps gets carried away, far off, and goes into all sorts of enterprises which he will regret long and well. “Serve one another,” it says. But in the next verse the word is explained thus: “If anyone has a service, let him attend to the service, let him manage it with power.” Example: a preacher — in that case, faithfulness to the word of God. But this is only an example. All have services: father, mother, teacher, office staff, shop assistant, maid, farm worker, factory worker.

These callings we have not ourselves created. They were there before us, and the generations go into them and leave them again. This life is created by God, who calls us to work on earth in all these occupations, where each is to take his place.

God is love. One can see that also in his creation, not only in Christ. Think of fruits and kinds of grain, sun and rain.

Exactly the same love of God in people’s different callings. One marks it best when a working person falls away, for example when a father or a mother dies, when a faithful servant of some kind can do no more, or when someone is otherwise gone. So it is also with health and harvest. One marks the goodness in it at a crop failure or at sickness.

(Besides: have you marked that as soon as something goes wrong in the world’s machinery, this is a proof against God, but when everything runs its ordinary course, this is never a proof for God? Does one really mean that one deserves all the good that life gives? Does one then

never understand that the ordinary is a wonder — for the sinner: God holds his world up in struggling love?)

As was said: one marks it best when a person faithful in his calling is gone. Then there is need and bewilderment in the surroundings. There went a stream of gifts through that person's hands — and now that stream is shut. Stop. Nothing more comes here. Now you must manage yourselves, or get help from another quarter. All of us have surely several times in our life discovered this: what need we human beings have of one another, and how the different people in a society are like members in one single great body, where the eye must do its part, the ear its part, the legs their part, and all the inner organs their part.

But now comes something important. We go back to that situation, when a person goes away and we lose his contribution of work. Note that it need not be some good person whom we miss in that way. It can be a slovenly and gossiping mother, but one who keeps order among her children. A father who is not always quite sober, but who is able in his work. A really cross old grumbler, who manages a garden or chops the wood. Such is human life.

The good did not come out of them themselves. They had as their work to do one thing, and that they did. And this calling was of such a kind that it was of use to us, to other people. In order to get one's living one has a work, and this work is of such a kind that it is of benefit to others. All must serve all. God the Creator thus holds the whole world in might and forces people to serve one another and do good to one another, though in the heart they are evil [illegible] and want to have it comfortable. This is a mighty wonder, which we seldom think of.

And now each of us directs his gaze into his own little world. First, so that we with thanksgiving call to mind all those who have given us of the good things of life: clothes, food, house and home in childhood and youth. Widen the field: all the good we receive in our society — protection of the law, health care, care of the sick, independence of foreign power, and freedom for our land. Behind all this stand all the working people in the land: the farmer, the policeman, the doctor, the soldier. We all belong together. I, and so many. Next, so that we think of our own task. We want to be Christians and love our neighbor. Then the word holds: "If anyone has a service, let him manage it according to the measure of the power which God grants." And services we all have. Finally your act lies and waits for you in the home, or else perhaps you have an occupation in the service of other people. However it is, you must say to yourself that if you do your duty well, it is of benefit to others, and if you manage your work

badly, you sooner or later harm other people. These are “works prepared,” as it says in the letter to the Ephesians. You do not need to go far off in order to benefit others. God is near you and only waits for your eyes to be opened to his will with you. No one perhaps thanks you if you manage your work well. But he who has a good conscience can do without people’s praise, and he has in secret a much purer joy within himself than the one who is continually praised for what only glitters in people’s eyes but benefits no person.

Let us not be led astray by the voices of the time. One speaks nowadays of Christianity as if it were every simple Christian’s task to stop the war and rescue Europe from ruin. If the world is to be healed, it shall be healed from within, by the little world — the home, the workplace — being healed. And it is healed best through quiet and humble people, who do not take such large words in their mouths, and who do not fly off away from the duties of the everyday, but stay in them, with good humor and with faithfulness and with prayer in their hearts. It does not crackle and roar around a disciple of Christ. A quiet and good peace stands around him when he simply and naturally goes to his everyday work.

*You, Christ, show the way,
where you go to this height,
and humble, firm, and enduring,
you quietly attain his obedience.
In the mother’s way, to bring
your own their daily bread.
In lowly servant-work,
to give the weak support.
To suffer patiently the rod
in bitter time of sorrow,
and without grumbling and lament
here fight out your good fight. Amen.*

(Swedish Hymnal 417:3)

Translator's notes. He gave this sermon no title. The gossiping mother stays she. The father, the grumbler, and the disciple stay he. The word after "evil" is marked illegible and is left blank. The wartime sentence is kept: it is not the simple Christian's task to stop the war. The hymn lines are for sense, not meter.

Gustaf Wingren · draft translation ·