

## **Sermon for Morning Prayer The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity**

### **I. Lessons:<sup>i</sup>**

**A. The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the thirtieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.<sup>ii</sup>

“... For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

“Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**B. The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.<sup>iii</sup>

“After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda [**beh-THEZZ-duh**], having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

## **II. Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “So the Jews said to the man who was cured, ‘It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet.’ But he answered them, ‘The man who healed me said to me, “Take up your pallet, and walk.”’”<sup>iv</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **III. Introduction:**

One of the oddities involved in writing a sermon that is intended for someone else to read is that I do not know many things one normally expects to know about those who are now sitting and hearing what I have written. On the other hand, I can and do know certain other things about you simply by virtue of the fact that you are hearing this read to you.

### **IV. Theme:**

For example, I have no idea whatever of the name or location of your congregation, nor even of the church jurisdiction with which you may be affiliated. Yet these are things that preachers expect as a matter of course to know about those they presume to address. And yet again, I know that, just because you are hearing this particular sermon, you select the Scripture readings for your Sunday service from one of the traditional lectionaries associated with the Book of Common Prayer and that, in turn, makes it virtually certain that you use such a traditional B.C.P. for the text of your service.

Because I myself am one of those people who uses the traditional Book of Common Prayer, and only the traditional Book of Common Prayer, in my own worship, I know without knowing you as individuals or as a congregation some important things about your own beliefs, and one of those things I thus know is that you accept as normative guides for your lives the teachings of Scripture as the Scriptures have been historically interpreted by the wider Church.

### **V. Development:**

That might seem like a relatively small piece of common ground between us but, I assure you, it is in fact a very great deal that we share. You are surely aware that our common belief in the primacy of revealed Truth, which nearly everyone in the Christian World accepted as a matter of course as recently as my grandparents' day, is no longer something that is taken for granted by most cultured people.

To the contrary, the belief in revealed Truth at all, and most especially in the revealed Truth as found in inspired Scripture, is something that is increasingly dismissed by our contemporaries as both *passé* and *naïve*. In fact, this dismissal of Scripture, as both the ground and source of Truth and as the principal test of proposed Truth, is a principal plank in the platform of those who seek to reshape our moral landscape into a spiritual topography of their own devising.

Many of these moral revisionists are too clever to say flat out that Scripture is no longer the prime source and test of Truth. Instead, they prefer the “soft sell” of appearances over content. Thus they give formal lipservice to the primacy of Scripture while applying covert techniques of reinterpretation to what Scripture says, in order to deprive the Biblical texts of their essential meanings. Like a tank on which someone has left the stopcock open, once emptied, that tank can be refilled with whatever is desired by those who drained it. Yet to the casual observer it will still look like the same tank while in fact it is only the outer shell that is the same and the most important part, what the tank holds, may be utterly different.

Let us take a moment to look at how this sort of reinterpretation works as it is used in connection with real issues that are currently being debated among Christians. Take, for example, the question whether a liturgical church should, or even can, ordain women to the ministry of its altar.

It is undisputed that Scripture attests to Our Lord’s having appointed only men to be His Apostles and, so far as we can tell, to other positions that involved leading the liturgical and sacramental lives of His followers. It is likewise indisputable that those Apostles had accompanied Jesus for three years of “on-the-job training” and had heard virtually everything He said during that time, so that they were in a far better position to know and understand His will with respect to many matters on which the written record is silent.

It is likewise undisputed that those Apostles themselves appointed only men to positions of cultic leadership in the churches they founded although in at least one case St. Paul appointed a woman to be what, in our terms, would be the lay Senior Warden in one congregation.<sup>v</sup>

The proponents of women's ordination dismiss this unbroken record of an exclusively male liturgical ministry by saying that it is the result of mere sociological or anthropological factors, not theological ones. According to this argument, both Jesus and His Apostles were constrained from appointing women as liturgical leaders by what they allege were the cultural prejudices of both the Jewish and Greek societies of that day and age.

The historical bases for this assertion are dubious but the theological ones are even more so. Thus we may question just how "oppressed" women were in an Hellenic city such as Philippi, where it apparently passed without comment that Lydia, the purple seller from Thyatira one rose to become head of her own household and mistress of a successful business.<sup>vi</sup> Would her eminence and importance have been so unremarkable if hers had been a unique situation?

But leaving aside those background issues, there are profound theological problems with the revisionists' notion that Jesus the Christ was unable to withstand the social and religious *mores* [MORE-ays] of His day. One of those problems is illustrated in today's Second Lesson. For it is a fact, clearly recorded in the Gospels, that Our Lord *did* in fact flout some of the most deeply-held beliefs of the society into which He was born and in which He conducted almost His entire ministry.

One of the most important among those beliefs was the sanctity of the Sabbath. It is grounded firmly on the express words of the IVth Commandment: "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day"<sup>vii</sup> and in Jesus' time, and for long after, was regarded by both Jews and Christians as inviolate.

Yet Jesus, when need required, felt no compunction whatever about violating that strictest of Jewish cultural prescriptions, as He did in the case of the healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, which is the subject of today's Second Lesson. Thus the argument that Jesus could not manage to violate the prejudices and customs of His day is simply not grounded in fact.

He did violate those prejudices and customs and did so just with respect to Sabbath observance on at least four separate occasions<sup>viii</sup> other than that contained in today's Second Lesson. In addition to these, there are His breaches of major taboos in His dealings with the foreign Syro-Phoenician woman<sup>ix</sup> and with the despised Quisling tax collectors, to name only two others.

The records of those occasions completely demolish the sociological and anthropological assumptions upon which the revisionists' arguments lie. Contrary to what they assert, we know He *could* thwart the prejudices of His time because we know He *did* thwart them.

However, those matters deal with records of historical fact. For Christians, there is an additional and most important reason why we cannot entertain these arguments. They assume that Our Lord was constrained by the customs and social restrictions of the society in which He lived in a human body but cultural artifacts are just that, creations of human beings. Yet every time we recite the Apostles' Creed,<sup>x</sup> we assert our belief that Jesus Christ was the only Son of God the Father Almighty and that He is Our Lord.

And every time we recite the Nicene Creed,<sup>xi</sup> as the BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER requires us to do in every celebration of the Eucharist,<sup>xii</sup> we not only reaffirm that He is "the only-begotten Son of God" but that He is "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made...." However, if, as we claim, He is "God of God" and "Very God of very God"; if, as we claim, "By [Him] all things were made"; then, assuredly, He could not have been bound by the limitations of merely human culture and society.

## **VI. Conclusion:**

Thus, at bottom, to assert that Our Lord could not rise above the restrictions of ancient society is to assert that He was not, in fact, truly God and a co-participant in God's great act of Creation. That is *not* Christianity; instead, it is a very ancient heresy called "Arianism" [**AIR-ee-ann-izm**]. And it is the Church's refutation of Arianism [**AIR-ee-**

**ann-izm]** that is a major part of what Our Lord's Sabbath Day healing in today's Second Lesson teaches us: That He who is Lord of the Sabbath is also Lord of all Creation.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister, J.D.<sup>xiii</sup>  
October 10, 2010.

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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Jeremiah 30: 12-22 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *St. John 5: 1-16 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *St. John 5: 10-11 (RSV).*

<sup>v</sup> *The place was Philippi and the woman was Lydia, the woman from Thyatira who sold the ultimate luxury good of the ancient world, purple textiles, Acts 16: 14-15. It has been estimated that 6,000 Murex truncata or Murex brandaris marine snails were required to produce one pound of "Tyrian Purple" dye, which explains why that product literally cost its weight in gold.*

<sup>vi</sup> *See footnote 5 supra.*

<sup>vii</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 68 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943). See also Exodus 20: 8-11.*

<sup>viii</sup> *St. Matthew 12: 1-8 & St. Mark 2: 23-28; St. Matthew 12: 10-13 & St. Luke 6: 1-10; St. Luke 13: 10-17; St. Luke 14: 1-6.*

<sup>ix</sup> *St. Matthew 15: 21-28 & St. Mark 7: 24-30.*

<sup>x</sup> *See, e.g., The Order for Daily Morning Prayer, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 15 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>xi</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>xii</sup> *Rubric, ibid. 70.*

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