

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER¹
St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles (October 28)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“... Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁴

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made

nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

A. The Apostolic Model: Called to follow and then sent to serve

We do not have much information about St Simon and St. Jude. The tradition says that they carried on active missionary careers and died as martyrs in Persia. But, even with the lack of details, we do know significant things about them. Jesus called them to follow him, and Jesus sent them out to minister to others. The word Apostle means, “One who is sent.”

The calling and sending of the Apostles provide a model for our growth into maturity as Christians. We were each in some way called to follow Jesus. We began as disciples and learners. But, at some point in time, we also are sent to serve others for Jesus.

B. From takers to givers

The Apostles didn't begin as missionaries to Persia and other far-off lands. They began as followers. Jesus had a three-year ministry, and the Apostles spent that time learning, watching and being ministered to by Jesus. To be sure, the Apostles did things for others during this time, but their work was something of an apprenticeship or residency. Jesus sent them out to preach and heal, and they reported back to Jesus on how the work went. It was not always a complete success. There was, for example, a failed exorcism; the Apostles were not able to cast out the demon and Jesus had to be called upon to help.⁵

It wasn't until Ascension and Pentecost that the Apostles were called to make the transition from followers to leaders. Jesus returned to the Father, sent the Spirit to them and said, essentially: "Now you are in charge." Then they began to preach, teach and heal, first "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."⁶ That's how a couple of native Israelites ended up dying in Persia.

This is the pattern of our own discipleship. We begin as learners and receivers of grace in the Body of Christ. Our sins are forgiven and our wounds are healed. We begin to learn the Biblical story and discover how to apply it to our lives. We take note of more mature Christians and learn to imitate their examples. Then, at some point in time, we are called to shift from being takers to being givers. Where we once looked to others to teach us and show us how it is done, we begin to be called to teach others and provide examples for them to follow.

Of course, we never stop needing grace, teaching, healing or mentoring. But, at some point, the balance should begin to shift. At some point in our development we should experience a transition from net taker to net giver, from mere follower/learner to missionary.

A newborn child does nothing but eat, make noises and fill diapers. When the child grows, there is an expectation that the child will help with some chores as well as empty the refrigerator. When the child becomes an adult, there is an expectation that he will begin to fill the

refrigerator and provide support for others. A young plant requires much water, sunlight and, perhaps fertilizer. It does nothing but take; but all that is given to the plant is in expectation that the plant will grow and bear fruit—that the plant will eventually give as well as take.

C. Trinitarian Theology, Creation and New Creation

We can understand the transition from takers to givers through the lens of Trinitarian theology. We believe that God created the world out of love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit is their mutual love that flows out from them into creative activity. God is so full of love that it is His nature to share it freely.

Sin separates us from God's love. It makes us self-centered and causes us to be concerned mainly with our own interests and needs. When we are called to follow Christ, we are called out of our self-centeredness back into the love of God. As we begin, in the words of Ephesians, to "learn Christ", we begin to be filled again with the love that comes from God, and we experience a change in orientation. We no longer live only for ourselves. We are no longer focused only on our own wants and needs. We realize that Christ has given us gifts that we can give to others. We begin to perceive the needs in the world around us and we begin to respond to them.

This is a restoration of the human vocation. We were made in the image of God. We were made to share in the fullness of His Trinitarian love. We were made to be participants in God's creative activity; to be signs and instruments of God's love in the world. We lost this exalted status through sin, but are restored to it through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Christ, we are filled with the love of God.⁷ We become participants in the work of God's new creation.

This is why the mission of the Church is not merely to do good things on a human level. It is to give to others what we have received from God. If we do not experience the love of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the life of prayer, we cannot be signs and instruments of that love to the world. Prayer and sacramental grace are the necessary foundations for mission.

D. The Missionary Church

It is a problem in the Church when significant numbers of people do not make this transition from follower to missionary; from taker to giver. This seems to be a particular problem in our time, with the prevalence of the narcissistic personality and the ubiquity of the consumer culture. Many people live in perpetual Christian immaturity—"I'm not being fed"; "I don't like this and therefore I am leaving". They complain and demand rather than sacrifice and serve. They are perpetually the problem rather than the solution. They are perpetually children who never become adults. They are trees that receive water but bear no fruit.

One sign of mature and healthy Christians is that they develop an outward orientation. They cease to be mere religious consumers and begin to be religious producers, that is, missionaries. They stop demanding that the Church do what they want and begin to ask how they can help the Church do what God wants. They are not only healed by grace, they also become instrumental in the healing of others. This is also the sign of a mature and healthy Church. It is focused on reaching out to the world with the gospel; it desires to share with others the love of God it experiences.

We can perceive this transition in our own church. Over the last quarter century we have grown from being wounded traditionalists into being missionary Anglicans. An increasing proportion of our membership comes, not only to receive grace, but also to be part of the ministry of grace to others. This is evident in the way we are helping St. Andrew's and other churches in the task of renewal. This is also evident in our growing involvement in overseas missions. We are growing in maturity. We are realizing that we are not here for ourselves, but are called to be apostles to others.

E. Further meditations on what it means to be a missionary.

We may not be sent to Persia to die as martyrs, but we are also sent out to serve. We are sent to reach out to our family members, co-

workers, friends and, even, our enemies. We are sent out into our homes and our places of work and leisure as ambassadors for Christ. We are sent out to be those who solve the problem rather than create it; who end the argument rather than perpetuate it; who try to understand rather than insisting on being understood. We are called to be signs and instruments of the presence of God's love in Christ in the midst of a fallen world.

This is why we talk so much about spiritual gifts. Your spiritual gifts are specific endowments God has given you in Christ through the Spirit. Your part in the mission of the Church will, in large measure, be discerned by finding out what your gifts are and how you are supposed to use those gifts in service to others for Christ.

We cannot be the people we are called to be without a sense of mission. The great error of the world is that we see the goal of life as accumulating things for ourselves. We try to take from the world for our own account. Thus, many aspire to win the lottery, get rich and retire into a life of ease and comfort. This is sin and the fall. We were made to live for something greater than ourselves—first for God and then for others in His Name. The paradox is that the more we fully we embrace our mission, our call to serve, the more full we ourselves become.

When we embrace our giftedness and mission, we participate in the work of building up the Church. The Church is not a physical building. The Church is the new community of people who are bound together in Christ through the Spirit, with each member filling his or her God-given role. When we were called to be disciples, we were, as the Epistle says just two verses after today's Second Lesson, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."⁸ As we mature in the Faith, we are sent out to participate in the ongoing work of building up the Church.

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- ¹ This sermon was originally written on the propers for Holy Communion on the Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, 2012.
- ² *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943), commonly called “the 1943 Lectionary”.
- ³ Isaiah 28:9-16 (KJV).
- ⁴ Ephesians 2:11-18 (KJV).
- ⁵ Matthew 17:14-21.
- ⁶ Acts 1:8.
- ⁷ *Cf.* Romans 5:5.
- ⁸ Ephesians 2:20.
- ⁹ Rector, St. Matthew’s Anglican Catholic Church, Newport Beach, CA.