

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Second Sunday after Easter

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the fourth Chapter of Baruch.ⁱⁱ

“... Be of good cheer, O my children, cry unto the Lord, and he will deliver you from the power and hand of the enemies. For my hope is in the Everlasting, that he will save you; and joy is come unto me from the Holy One, because of the mercy which shall soon come unto you from the Everlasting our Saviour. For I sent you out with mourning and weeping: but God will give you to me again with joy and gladness for ever. Like as now the neighbours of Sion have seen your captivity: so shall they see shortly your salvation from our God which shall come upon you with great glory, and brightness of the Everlasting. My children, suffer patiently the wrath that is come upon you from God: for thine enemy hath persecuted thee; but shortly thou shalt see his destruction, and shalt tread upon his neck. My delicate ones have gone rough ways, and were taken away as a flock caught of the enemies. Be of good comfort, O my children, and cry unto God: for ye shall be remembered of him that brought these things upon you. For as it was your mind to go astray from God: so, being returned, seek him ten times more. For he that hath brought these plagues upon you shall bring you everlasting joy with your salvation. Take a good heart, O Jerusalem: for he that gave thee that name will comfort thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the

loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “I count all things as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Let’s look at some of the things the Apostle considers to be refuse.

He came from a respected family, with business interests in his home city. From his father, he inherited Roman citizenship, with all rights and privileges appertaining thereto. He attended the best schools. He was bright, energetic and had attracted the attention the home office in Jerusalem as a totally dedicated man on the way up in the Jewish hierarchy. He gave up a promising career to become a missionary for a small Jewish sect that was despised by the Jewish establishment and ridiculed by the Greek intelligencia.

Another thing the Apostle gave up was the opportunity to have a family. Some think he was a widower, but if so he never remarried and he had no children. All we really know is that he was not a married man when he began his missionary work.

St. Paul took on the oversight of at least six churches that he had established, and he maintained a travel schedule that would have taxed the strength of a healthy man, which he was not. Indeed it may have been that schedule and all the problems he had to deal with in the churches, plus his legal problems, that caused what he calls “a thorn in my side”. If that is true, we can add his health to the list of things the great Apostle gave up for the sake of his relationship with Christ.

Like his Lord, the Apostle was comfortable in dealing with people who were rich and powerful but, like his Lord, sought out the company of poor and simple people.

St Paul perceived with brilliant insight the central mystery of the Christian faith: To be filled, you must first be emptied. To be great you must first become small. To experience genuine power, you must experience weakness. To receive what is new, you must let go of what is old. You cannot live in a new house unless you move out of the old one, and you can't simply lay your faith over top of everything else in your life like so much icing on a cake.

The Resurrection of Jesus marks the beginning of a new creation. The old world is passing away. That is why the Apostle, like all of his fellow Apostles, considers the things that are valued in this world to be so much trash.

St. Paul always associates the Resurrection with the Crucifixion. In I Corinthians he says, “That which you sow is not brought to life unless it dies.” In Romans he says, “We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided* we suffer with him in order to be glorified with him.” In II Timothy he quotes an early Christian saying: “If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we endure we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us.”

There are many lesser Christians who show up in church in Easter, having bypassed Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and all of Lent. They remind me of the people who drive on the shoulder of a road to pass a long line of traffic and then try to cut back in at the head of the line. You might be able to do that with your car but you can't do it with your life and certainly not with your religion.

Saul of Tarsus could have risen to great heights in this world if he had applied his abilities and his political contacts in that direction. That is also true of Jesus of Nazareth. Both men chose instead to focus on the new creation that God is calling forth rather than the old creation that is terminally flawed and slowly dying. Jesus willingly went to the Cross in order to bring about that new creation, and Saul, who became St. Paul, willingly gave up everything in order to participate in it.

Here in the latter days of his life, as he sits in a Roman prison, the great Apostle reflects on what he has given up and wonders if he has given up enough.

So in light of all that, I put the question to you. Have you given up enough for your commitment to Christ? What have you let go of that is valued in this world but useless in the next? Does your social life take precedence over the demands of the Gospel? What about your ego, your career, your family relationships, your need to be liked, your need for control? Are you able to let go of all those things in order to make room in your life for what God has in store for you? If not, you will never know the power of the Easter Gospel.

St. Paul was willing to sacrifice everything in order to know that power and to participate in the new life of Christ. He acknowledges that he has not yet arrived at the fullness of the resurrection life, but he presses on toward that goal and invites us all to follow his example.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*
xxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Baruch 4: 21-30 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Philippians 3: 7-16 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Philippians 3:8.*