

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Third Sunday in Lent

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

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.ⁱⁱ

“Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

“Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

“... And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the Lord shewed [SHOAH] signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at

this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the first Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith [SETH], I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory

in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas [SEE-fuss], or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

This text, known as the *Shema*^v [**she-MAH**], is to the Jews what the Apostles Creed is for us, the fundamental confession of faith. It is recited daily by observant Jews, and, as the passage goes on to indicate, is taught to the children, is discussed at home and in public, is worn as a pendant from the forehead, and is hung on the doorposts of houses by Orthodox Jews in the form of little metal capsules^{vi} containing the text.

There are two parts to the *Shema* [**she-MAH**]. The first part declares the unity of God. There is no room for polytheism in Biblical religion. The second part requires total devotion to God. It is this second part that Jesus said is the first and great commandment.

I would like to look in turn at each of these two parts of the *Shema* [**she-MAH**].

The fact that God is one means that there is no internal conflict in the structure of the universe. The Bible sees the universe as a coherent whole, reliable, and predictable. As St. James puts it, in God "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Science would be impossible if that were not true.

The scientific quest for what is called "a theory of everything" would likewise be futile, if not actually silly, were it not for the Biblical

revelation that there is one God who holds everything together in Himself.

At the present time there are scientific theories that explain various aspects of reality: magnetism, evolution, gravitation, time and space, matter and antimatter, mathematics, language, cognition. But holding all these theories together, in one master theory that accounts for everything in the universe, remains a scientific dream. Such a theory, if ever fully developed, would actually be a scientific explanation of God, because the Bible tells us that what holds the universe together and makes it coherent, is simply God. Theology, which used to be called “the prince of sciences”, is the study of the nature of that God.

Orthodox Christian, which is to say Trinitarian, theology is built on the foundation of the *Shema* [**she-MAH**]. Jesus makes that abundantly clear when He says in St. John’s Gospel, “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever [the Father] does the son does likewise.” And again he says quite plainly, “I and the Father are one.”

Polytheism has competing deities; The Bible has competing spirits but only one God. “Hear, O Israel; the LORD our God is one LORD.”

Jesus further demonstrates His familiarity with the *Shema* [**she-MAH**] when He quotes the second part of it in answer to the question, “What is the great commandment in the law?”

It is to that second part that I now direct your attention: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”

Just as God is one, so you who are created in his image are also a unified whole. You cannot compartmentalize your life as the Manichees [**man-ih-KEYS**] and other Gnostics have tried to do. The heretics have tried to say that your soul is not effected by what you do with your body. They have tried to say that if what you believe with your mind is orthodox, you can give free reign to your emotions, or, conversely if your heart is in the right place, it doesn’t really matter what you believe. None of that is true.

Some people try to confine their religious activities to church and give their lives in the secular world over to whatever the prevailing culture demands or allows.

That approach to life falls back into a polytheistic world view, where different deities control various areas of life. Such a world view is totally unacceptable for Christians as well as for Jews. As St. Paul says in I Corinthians, “Although there may be so-called gods—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

Under the guise of separation of Church and state, the world tries to push religion into a corner to make room for the false deities to dominate most areas of life. But God is a jealous God, and biblical religion is a full time, 24/7 commitment. It must pervade every area of your life, every relationship, every decision, every activity. No exceptions.

“Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia
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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xviii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *I Corinthians 3:1-23 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (KJV).*

^v *Like many ancient religious formulæ, including our Psalms, this declaration is named after its opening words, Shema Yisroel or “Hear, O Israel....”*

^{vi} *Called mezuzah.*