

## SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER Saint Matthias (February 24)<sup>i</sup>

### Lessons:<sup>ii</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Verse of the second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.<sup>iii</sup>

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s [FAY-rose] house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith [SETH], I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith [SETH], Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni [HAHFF-nye] and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.<sup>iv</sup>

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith [SETH] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”<sup>v</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Homily:**

**Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.**

Our Second Lesson today comes to us once again at the tail end of the Sermon on the Mount. After Jesus teaches the people about holiness, prayer, fasting, judging, He begins to wrap up with this warning: “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ravaging wolves.” So Christ is giving us instruction, now, on the priceless gift of discernment.

Most people, looking at this when reading the entirety of Chapter 7 of St. Matthew, will turn to verse 1 and say, “But I thought you told us not to judge?” Especially after our Lord continues to tell us that we should become fruit inspectors, one begins to see how this could tie in with, and somehow contradict with, what He teaches in there about judging others.<sup>vi</sup>

What we don’t realize, though, is that our interpretation of judging others has become so warped that we are afraid to call out sin when we see it. What He is trying to tell us there is that we can’t point the finger at someone out of self righteousness, because if it were not for the grace of God, there we would go, too. But we have to maintain the integrity of the Body of Christ, to keep her pure and holy, so we have to inspect the fruit of those within the Body, and those who come and want to be a part of the Body.

We can’t be prideful or arrogant in our discernment, because we have to love all with the same self sacrificial love as does Christ, but we do have to protect the harvest of God’s elect, and weed out those who are imitators, from those who are genuine believers.

We see in the parable of the wheat and tares<sup>vii</sup> that as the good seed was sown, the enemy came by and sowed weeds, or tares, alongside with the wheat. On the outside, both are indistinguishable. As a matter of fact, that portion of the parable warns us that we should be delicate in how we handle these tares, or wolves in sheep’s clothing, because if we uproot them too soon, it tells us we might uproot the wheat as well.

Another word for those weeds is darnel. And actually darnel stimulates the growth of the wheat, at first. When it is in the blade stage, it looks identical to wheat, and would take a botanist to decipher the two. But as it begins to grow, the darnel begins to develop its own properties, and can be toxic if consumed by animals or man. As a matter of fact, one would suffer vertigo if one were to eat it.

So we have to be aware that all those who call themselves followers of Christ are not. You can ask just about any one you meet if they are Christians and the common response is, "Well, I go to such and such Church." My reply to such a response would have to be, and has been, that going to Church no more makes you a Christian than standing in a garage makes you a car. And we have to be cautious and discerning when dealing with these types of people.

In our attempt to inspect their fruit, we have to inspect per the guidance given to us in sacred Scripture. But to be honest, if we genuinely live out the Gospel and the good news of sacred Scripture, then you will visually begin to see the separation between the wheat and the tares, the genuine believers from the imitators.

And that is how we handle them delicately. Our Gospel for this morning says that every good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So as we begin to produce the good fruit of the Gospel in our dealings with others, and in our relationship with God through Christ Jesus, those that cannot produce good fruit will begin to weed themselves out, because that which is unrighteous cannot dwell amongst the righteous.

And if that which is capable of producing good fruit does not bear fruit, in our calling to be fruit bearers, then that which cannot produce good fruit remains, and steals the vital nutrients needed to live by out of the soil from the garden of healthful spirituality. Those that can bear good fruit begin to wither because of the lack of vital nutrients. And as the nutrients are drained, the good trees no longer have the capability of bearing good fruit.

But what does it mean to bear good fruit? St. Paul explains this thoroughly in his Epistle to the Galatians: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. We must not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”***<sup>viii</sup>

He also defines what it means to be an imitator, one who may act the part of a Christian, but inwardly holds on to the things of the flesh. He says, ***“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar, about which I tell you in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”***<sup>ix</sup>

And to begin these instructions, He says, ***“I say then, walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other.”***<sup>x</sup>

Bottom line—those that are imitators, even though they appear to be capable of producing righteousness, live after the lusts of the flesh internally, as Saint Paul points out to us in Romans, where he points out something that automatically separates the two: ***“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God.”***<sup>xi</sup> And of course, in his Epistle to the Galatians, Chapter 5, he explains the fullness of understanding of what it means to be led, and to live by the Spirit of God.

And this echoes what Jesus revealed to Nicodemus about being born again: ***“unless someone is born of water and the Spirit of God, he cannot enter the Kingdom.”***<sup>xii</sup> Jesus continues to say that ***“whatever is born of flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of Spirit is spirit.”***

And that is where the rubber meets the road in our outlook in what it means to be a fruit-bearer. When we were baptized into the Body of Christ, was it a birth born out of repentance, where we felt the Spirit of God calling us to the resurrected life, a life consumed by the power and

presence of the Spirit of God, or was it a ritual cleansing, going through the motions, a check-the-block-and-get-the-certificate type of action?

The Church is filled with both types of persons, both lay and leaders. And we have to be sure that the mission, values, and fruit of the Church are not hindered by those that are carnally minded. For those of God's elect, they receive the spirit of adoption, where the Spirit of God Himself beareth witness to our spirit. Remember that everyone who says to Him, Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven.

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd Stephen Victory<sup>xiii</sup>  
August 14, 2011

---

<sup>i</sup> *This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2011.*

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>iii</sup> *I Samuel 2:27-35 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *St. Matthew 7:15-27 (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *St. Matthew 7:15 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *St. Matthew 7:1-5.*

<sup>vii</sup> *St. Matthew 13:24-30.*

<sup>viii</sup> *Galatians 5:22-26 (KJV).*

<sup>ix</sup> *Galatians 5:19-21 (KJV).*

<sup>x</sup> *Galatians 5:16-17 (KJV).*

<sup>xi</sup> *Romans 8:14 (KJV).*

<sup>xii</sup> *St. John 3 5-7 (KJV).*

<sup>xiii</sup> *Rector, St. Charles King and Martyr Anglican Church (APCK), Huntsville, AL.*