

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher.³

“For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁵

“... See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

It is often said that we live in dangerous, even evil, times. We live in a world where we are constantly under attack from all kinds of enemies, who assault us physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Daily our newspapers are filled with accounts of killings, robberies and other violent crimes. Our values are assailed from within and without, and if we protest, we are called vile names. Our faith is ridiculed, our standards belittled, and from time to time we even face physical threats because of our beliefs.

It has always been like this, and in today’s Second Lesson we read Saint Paul’s warning to the church at Ephesus regarding the very same thing. To counter the world’s influence, Paul counseled, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.*”⁷

The word circumspect, from the Latin *circumspicio* [**sere-sum-spee-see-yoh**, or **keer-kum-spee-key-oh**], means to look about on all sides and to be wary and cautious in order to avoid danger and identify enemies as they approach. This kind of caution was certainly called for on the part of the early Church, which was under attack from the Jews as well as the Romans and others. It is equally apt advice for us today.

St. Paul suggests that the way to achieve this level of cautious attention is to remain focused on God and to continue to attempt to attain perfection in all things. We should be careful about our own conduct,

and by having our lives reflect the importance of God's rule for us, be the examples for change in others.

Our own walk in life must be the example. Our lives must show forth the rules of life which God has given us. We cannot simply profess the faith, but we must live it. If we profess to believe but then act as the world acts, we achieve nothing but to draw contempt. If, however, we "walk the walk" and "talk the talk" as well, we can be examples before the world.

In this way we can "*walk not as fools, but as wise.*" A wise man "*feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident,*" says the author of Proverbs.⁸ St. Paul echoes this very caution, urging the Church at Ephesus, and us, to avoid evil rather than taking part in it. We should fear evil, because it endangers not only our mortal lives, but our immortal ones as well. Dabbling in sin is the first step to being immersed in it. Sin separates us from God.

Being immersed in sin is the ultimate act of the fool, for in so doing he throws away eternity for the benefit of the pleasure of the fleeting moment. When we instead "*redeem the time*", we use whatever time and other resources we have to spend them in the most productive ways, to the best ends. Those ends are the praise and worship of God, the uplifting of others to the faith and the rejection of sin, and, instead, the doing of good.

Our Lord declares His estimation of this kind of wisdom: "*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.*"⁹

St. Paul offers as his reason for this "*because the days are evil.*" Certainly the times during which Paul penned these lines were evil. Christians were in fear of their very lives every hour. But today's dangers are every bit as real and as dangerous as those faced by the early Christians.

Even in our own nation, which we still sometimes refer to as a Christian nation, we find attacks against the faith everywhere. People of faith are told to tear down crosses and Christmas crèches, told not to wear clothing or articles that proclaim their faith, nor to pray in public places. Instead we are told we should erect a wall between our public lives and our faith. That, after all, is what the proponents of this anti-faith world truly seek. They view faith as some kind of embarrassing display that should be hidden from all sight.

So communities are ordered to cease to sponsor faith-based events that are open to everyone, to tear down memorials, and to ban some kinds of speech because of their religious content. Faithful people are regularly ridiculed by those in elected office and the media.

These are dangerous times indeed. When we are ordered to disobey our Lord, we must make a choice as to whether to obey man's laws or God's. "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*",¹⁰ St. Paul counsels. That will is that we be His children, fit in every way to be with Him. We must be holy and pure and devoted to Him in all things.

In order to achieve that end, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then will fill our lives with His joy, strength, grace and courage to live our lives as a celebration of the love of God.

Paul goes on to caution against certain specific kinds of excess and dangerous living: "*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*",¹¹ he demands. Those who drink to excess are prone to their own kind of joy, it is true, but not the sort of joy God would have us experience. We should sing songs not of drunken revelry, but instead of praise.

We should interact with each other, not through the fog of drugs or alcohol, but through the devotion to the Body of Christ of which we are part. Our conversation should not be the drunken patter of the bar, but the uplifting spiritual words of the Lord. Paul says we should spend our time "*speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,*

singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹²

When we concentrate ourselves on God and His Word, and on sharing that Word and its effect in our lives, then we have reason for the joy that prompts us to sing songs to God. This is not the substance-fueled joy of the drunkard, but the spiritual joy of the faithful person. It is one of the ways that we “*give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Thanksgiving is our natural response to our Lord. We have so much to be thankful for, and it is proper and normal that we should want to give Him thanks for the many gifts and benefits He has showered on us.

We do indeed live in dangerous, evil times. But we have the greatest defender there could ever be standing by us at all times to help us, to defend us, to comfort us. As long as we remain faithful to Him and His will, the very worst those dangers and evils can threaten is to harm us here on Earth. They cannot prevent us from achieving eternal life with God.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You more than we know the dangers that lurk in our world. But it is through Your victory over evil and the grace that we can remain assured of the final victory. Help us to remain always faithful to You and Your will, to resist evil in the world and to circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, for we know it is only by Your will and Your help that we can resist the evil in the world. Stand with us when we are weak and help us when we falter. This we ask in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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¹ *This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.*

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

³ *Ecclesiastes 9:4-10 (KJV).*

⁴ *“Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

⁵ *Ephesians 5:15-21 (KJV).*

⁶ *Ephesians 5:15-17 (KJV).*

⁷ *Ephesians 5:15 (KJV).*

⁸ *Proverbs 14:16 (KJV).*

⁹ *St. Matthew 7:24 (KJV).*

¹⁰ *Ephesians 5:17 (KJV).*

¹¹ *Ephesians 5:18 (KJV).*

¹² *Ephesians 5:19-20 (KJV).*

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