

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

“Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib [tell-AY-bibb], that dwelt by the river of Chebar [KEY-barr], and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have

made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith **[SETH]** the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! ⁴O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith **[SETH]**: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith **[SETH]** it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, there-

¹⁴ Isaiah 27:6 (KJV).

¹⁵ St. John 15:5 (KJV).

¹⁶ I Peter 4:10-11 (KJV).

¹⁷ Zechariah. 4:6 (KJV).

¹⁸ Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

virtues unless the Fruit of the Holy Spirit grows within our lives, as spoken of in the fifth chapter to the Galatians? How could our sacraments work effectually, or our message go forth, without the charismatic gifts of laborers spoken of in the fourth chapter of Ephesians? How could men receive Holy Orders without the gifts that Paul writes of in both Epistles to Timothy, that were given by the laying on of his Apostolic hands?

My message to my fellow Continuing Anglicans is simple: As you pray, learn dependence on the Holy Spirit. Stop trusting the arm of flesh which will fail you. Our warfare is not carnal, but spiritual: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”*¹⁷

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd Robert Hart¹⁸
May 20, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sunday after Ascension Day, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 43 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Ezekiel 3:4-21 (KJV).

⁴ Ezekiel 13:1-16 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 15:1-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:5 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 8:42-43 (KJV).

⁸ Examples: St. John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18.

⁹ Ephesians 1:23 (KJV).

¹⁰ The Gospel according to St. John is about the dual and heavily-related (interdependent) themes of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which should help us understand why John 14:6 cannot be controversial for true believers.

¹¹ St. John 1:14 (KJV).

¹² Acts 2:32-33 (KJV).

¹³ St. John 20:21 (KJV).

fore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

“Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD.

“Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, And say, Thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD; Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies? Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against your

pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as

and of the Holy Ghost, as the Church derives its very being and life from God. For it is not only the Apostles, and not only the bishops, who have Apostolic Succession, but it is *the whole Church that is Apostolic*, by the gifts of God that come through them.

We must *depend* on the Holy Spirit. This means two things: We must not rely on the flesh as if our warfare was carnal; and it means we can have faith in the presence, power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as His direction if we will only learn to hear His voice. Ah, but how can we learn to hear His voice until we learn that He is speaking and giving direction that we are all too often too deaf to hear?

We treat the Holy Spirit like a stranger, and we assume that we must go about the mission that Christ gave His Apostolic Church by our own cleverness, and by our own means, **and within our own limitations**. No wonder our labors are lost, and we produce results that are blasted and dried up. If you want the ground to bring forth fruit you must pray for rain. If you want the Church to grow so that “*Israel may blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit*,”¹⁴ you must gather as the disciples did in Ascensiontide, and pray for the mighty outpouring once again of God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “*without me ye can do nothing*.”¹⁵ For this reason He has sent the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. Look at the words of St. Peter: “*As every man hath received the gift [χάρισμα, charisma], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever*.”¹⁶

How can we heed these words without gifts of knowledge and of utterance beyond the limitations of our own wisdom? How can we grow in grace unto holiness and develop

cannot be absent. Where the Son is present, the Father must be present also. Where God is, He is there in His fullness (this is the meaning of “Divine Simplicity”). Indeed, the whole Gospel of John is about the Trinity and the Incarnation.¹⁰ It opens with two verses which name God as three Persons and then concentrates on the Word (λόγος, *Logos*), especially as we come to the Holy of Holies in all Scripture: “*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*”¹¹ Jesus is the Apostle of the Father, and it was expedient that He go away so that His own Apostles could establish the Church by the supernatural and charismatic ministry of *God with us*.

Ascensiontide points us to Whitsunday or the Feast of Pentecost. Every passage of Scripture appointed for Holy Communion during Ascensiontide emphasizes the coming of the Holy Spirit. Christ is exalted back into the hidden dimension of Heaven that surrounds us, that is separate from the world where sin and death have their allotted time; and His exaltation only turns our attention to our dependence on the Holy Spirit. On Whitsunday, we read about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and see that Saint Peter tells us this about the resurrected and glorified Christ: “*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*”¹²

Remember what the Lord told the Apostles after His Resurrection: “*As my Father hath sent (ἀποστέλλω, *apostellō*) me, even so send (πέμπω, *pempō*) I you.*”¹³ The Apostles are sent by the Son as He is sent by the Father, and He sends them just as He sends the Holy Spirit to them. When you say “I believe the Apostolic Church”, you are saying a mouthful about the men who have succeeded the Apostles into the College of the Apostles; a mouthful about the mission of the whole Church; a mouthful about dependence on the Holy Spirit that the Church must acknowledge, and then trust in; a mouthful about the presence in and among us of the Father and of the Son

I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

On Ascension Day, I said this in my sermon:

“We have been led to think of the Ascension as Christ’s coronation. This is not the emphasis of the Scriptures, because

the New Testament clearly reserves that significance to the day in which He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, when the Father will put every enemy under His feet. These Scriptures we have read are concerned, rather, with the continuation of Christ's own *charismatic* (χάρις) ministry through his Church, to spread the Gospel to all nations in the working out of salvation among all peoples of the earth."

As we look at today's Second Lesson, we must notice that same emphasis. Recall the Gospel of John, and the words we heard from it on the Fourth Sunday after Easter: "*Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*"⁶ And we meditated that Sunday on the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Church to convince the fallen world concerning Christ.

It is of great importance that we understand the Procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father exactly as our Lord Jesus speaks of it here. We must consider it in the context of the same Gospel of John where we find Jesus teaching clearly about His own divinity: "*Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.*"⁷

Here the Lord speaks of two things. First He tells us Who He is, and uses the Greek word translated "proceeded forth" (ἐξέρχομαι, *exerchomai*), and then speaks of His Incarnation and coming into the world, using the word translated "sent" (ἀποστέλλω, *apostellō*). Indeed, He could have said, "I AM eternally begotten of the Father, and I AM the Apostle of the Father." It would mean, in His case, the same thing as the words He did say. For the fact that the Son proceeded forth from the Father is more often spoken of, in this same Gospel according to St. John, with the word "begotten" (μονογενής,

monogenēs).⁸ But on this occasion, He says that He "proceeded forth."

The Lord is not speaking here redundantly. When Jesus spoke of His having "proceeded forth" from the Father and His being "sent" by the Father, I hope you see very clearly that He speaks of two distinct things: (1) who He is as God the Son or Word, and (2) His mission in the world as the Father's Apostle.

Now when we look at the Second Lesson for today, and how Jesus speaks about the other Comforter (παράκλητος, *paraklētos*) by telling His disciples that the Holy Spirit proceeds (ἐκπορεύομαι, *ekporeuomai*) from the Father and that He, the Son, will "send him" (πέμπω, *pempō*), the idea is the same as when Jesus spoke of Himself, His own proceeding from the Father and also His being sent into the world.

The Greek words used are not the same. What is the same is the distinction between two things that He tells us, first about Himself and then, here after the Supper, when he echoes the same distinction, speaking about the Holy Spirit. In both cases we see a divine Person who proceeds from the Father's very Being. We can say truly of both of these Persons, the Son and the Spirit, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God." Indeed, we can say truly of both the Son and the Spirit, "Being of one substance with the Father." And in both cases we see a divine Person Who is sent into the world.

In the case of Jesus, "*the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*" by taking human nature into the Godhead, our created nature into his uncreated Person, being conceived by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary. In the case of the Holy Spirit, by His presence with us the Word continues to dwell among us in "*the church which His Body, the fullness of him which filleth all in all.*"⁹

For even though the Persons of the Trinity are distinct, they are also inseparable. Where the Spirit is present, the Son