

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Supply Priest<sup>2</sup>**

**Lessons:<sup>3</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>4</sup>

“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? ... The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>5</sup>

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith [SETH] to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

“A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, To call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith [SETH] to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Book of the Maccabees.<sup>6</sup>

“Then his son Judas, called Maccabeus, rose up in his stead. And all his brethren helped him, and so did all they that held with his father, and they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel. So he gat his people great honour, and put on a breastplate as a giant, and girt his warlike harness about him, and he made battles, protecting the host with his sword. In his acts he was like a lion, and like a lion’s whelp roaring for his

---

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 9:1-end (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> I Maccabees 3:1-26 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> St. John 10:1-end (KJV).

<sup>8</sup> St. John 10:14-15 (RSV).

<sup>9</sup> I John 1:1b.

In one of his epistles, St. John says that if the world does not know us it is because it did not know Christ.<sup>9</sup> The flip side is that if the world does know us, it is because we reflect the values and the standards and the methods of the world. In that case we are not really a church. We are simply another organization developed by mortals to satisfy our own aspirations.

But we are the Church if we know the mind of Christ and follow His commandments against all the wisdom of the world. Do we do that as a parish?

And while you are thinking about that, let me ask you just one more question, a personal one. In your own private life, do you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the midst of all the other voices around you? Do you recognize that voice and respond to it, or do you simply respond to whatever voice happens to be the loudest?

Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”

Amen.

—oo0oo—

St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Orange, VA

May 7, 2006

---

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fourth Sunday of Easter (the Third Sunday after Easter), according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, Year B, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Retired Rector, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Chester, PA.

<sup>3</sup> *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 45 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xl (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 8:1, 22-end (KJV).

prey. For He pursued the wicked, and sought them out, and burnt up those that vexed his people. Wherefore the wicked shrunk for fear of him, and all the workers of iniquity were troubled, because salvation prospered in his hand. He grieved also many kings, and made Jacob glad with his acts, and his memorial is blessed for ever. Moreover he went through the cities of Juda, destroying the ungodly out of them, and turning away wrath from Israel: So that he was renowned unto the utmost part of the earth, and he received unto him such as were ready to perish. Then Apollonius gathered the Gentiles together, and a great host out of Samaria, to fight against Israel. Which thing when Judas perceived, he went forth to meet him, and so he smote him, and slew him: many also fell down slain, but the rest fled. Wherefore Judas took their spoils, and Apollonius’ sword also, and therewith he fought all his life long. Now when Seron, a prince of the army of Syria, heard say that Judas had gathered unto him a multitude and company of the faithful to go out with him to war; He said, I will get me a name and honour in the kingdom; for I will go fight with Judas and them that are with him, who despise the king's commandment. So he made him ready to go up, and there went with him a mighty host of the ungodly to help him, and to be avenged of the children of Israel. And when he came near to the going up of Bethhoron [*beth*-HOE-rawn], Judas went forth to meet him with a small company: Who, when they saw the host coming to meet them, said unto Judas, How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong, seeing we are ready to faint with fasting all this day? Unto whom Judas answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company: For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host; but strength cometh from heaven. They come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us, and our wives and children, and to spoil us: But we fight for our lives and our laws. Wherefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face: and as for you, be ye not afraid of them. Now as soon as he had left off speaking, he leapt suddenly upon them, and so Seron and his

host was overthrown before him. And they pursued them from the going down of Bethhoron [*beth-HOE-rawn*] unto the plain, where were slain about eight hundred men of them; and the residue fled into the land of the Philistines. Then began the fear of Judas and his brethren, and an exceeding great dread, to fall upon the nations round about them: Insomuch as his fame came unto the king, and all nations talked of the battles of Judas.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.<sup>7</sup>

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father:

a lot of humility to arrive at the kind of consensus that emerges in the church when the mind of Christ is really understood.

The Son does not look to the Father for corroboration of what the Son has decided. The Son does not look to the Father for permission to satisfy His own desires. Likewise the Church, the true Church, does not look to Christ for corroboration of its own ideas or for permission to pursue its own desires. The church must look to Christ as the Son looks to the Father, to discern what is right in order to do what is right.

Now, let me ask a few questions. What does Our Lord see when He looks at this parish? Does he see the reflection of Himself? Does he see the projection into our time of His own character? Does Jesus see us doing the things He did when He walked this earth? Does he see us healing the sick, binding up the broken-hearted, welcoming the poor, teaching the people, challenging false leadership and self-serving power? Does He see us gladly bearing ridicule and shame for the sake of the Gospel? Does he see us overcoming temptation and pouring out our lives for each other? Or rather, does He see us destroying ourselves with petty rivalries and power struggles and rejection of those who differ from us? Does he know us as the Father knows the Son?

There are other questions that will be asked of us when we get onto conversations with about obtaining a rector. How much money do we have? What is our average pledge and our average attendance? What kind of shape is our building in? What are the demographics of our town? Such questions will need to be asked.

But the important questions are the ones that tell us whether or not we are truly part of the Church established and animated by Christ. The important questions are the ones that tell us whether we belong to Christ or to the world, or in Biblical terms whether we are the children of light or the children of darkness. Those are the questions I’m trying to put before you.

The Church, of course, can only do that when it truly understands the mind of Christ and is completely committed to discerning and obeying His will. Now let us apply that test to ourselves. This is good time to do it, because one of the steps in procuring a new rector is to engage in a self study—to examine ourselves and determine what kind of a parish we are and what kind of parish we want to be. From that study we develop a profile of ourselves as a parish, and from that we develop a profile of the kind of priest for whom we are looking.

It's a long and complicated process to be sure, and we are not going to have new rector any time soon, but perhaps I can help get things started by asking a few questions that grow out of the passage before us.

How well do we in this parish know the mind of Christ, and how do we go about discerning His will? To put it another way, how do we make decisions around here? Do we really care about Our Lord's priorities? Or are we more concerned with what is important to us? Do we simply assume that whatever is important to us must be important to Christ? Many people make that assumption. Many Churches do as well.

The will of Christ has been blamed for keeping churches open when they should be closed and for closing churches when they should remain open. The will of Christ has been blamed for moving churches, when in fact it was the will of Christ for them to remain where they were. Magnificent structures have sometimes been built and great works of religious art commissioned for no better reason than to satisfy the egos of parishioners and clergy. But always it is said that it is the will of Christ.

The Episcopal Church in particular seems to be quite vulnerable to confusing the will and the leadership of Christ with the current trends of society. But discerning the will of Christ is not so simple as to be decided by a majority vote. It takes a lot of prayer, and a lot of study, and a lot of debate, and

and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

“There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

“And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed [SHOWD] you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought

again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

**From the Second Lesson:** “I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”<sup>8</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Homily:**

Today’s Second Lesson talks about the difference between a true shepherd and a religious leader who is simply in it for the money. I would like to suggest that there is a similar difference between a true church and a basically secular organization that simply has the appearance of a church. The key to understanding the difference lies, I believe, in this statement: “I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”

The relationship between Christ and the Church, according to that saying, parallels the relationship between the Father and the Son in the life of the Holy Trinity. Christ knows the true Church in the same way that the Father knows the Son. The true Church knows Christ in the same way that the Son knows the Father.

I would like to work with this parallelism for a few minutes because I believe it offers insight into the real nature of the Church and, consequently, helps us to recognize the true Church when we see it.

How does the Father know the Son, and how does the Son know the Father? St. Paul calls Jesus, “the image of the invisible God.” That is to say, He is the projection of perfect spirituality onto a material screen so that we who cannot see pure spirit are able to discern a reflection of it. So When the Father looks upon the Son, He recognizes Himself, just as a man recognizes his own image in a mirror.

At the same time, of course, the Son must always know the Father if indeed He is to reflect the nature of the Father. He must know the mind of the Father if He is to carry out His Father’s agenda. He must know the will of the Father if He is to obey it, and obey it He must if He is to remain the eternal Son.

When the Son of God entered into human life and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, He did not cease to reflect the character and qualities of the Father. That is what made Jesus unique. Within the context of a human life, with all the finite boundaries and limitations that implies, Jesus lived out the will and the purpose and the character of God.

When Jesus was baptized, a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son.” The same voice said the same thing in the Transfiguration scene just before the Crucifixion. The point is that God looks upon Jesus and sees His own divine characteristics of love and truth and righteousness and life-giving power reflected back to Him. He also sees a will that is perfectly aligned with His own. That is how the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father.

So when Jesus says that the Church stands in the same relationship to Him as He Himself stands in relationship to the Father, this is what He is saying. He is saying that the Church, the true Church, displays within its own life the same kind of love, the same kind of compassion, the same kind of prayer, the same kind of Scriptural knowledge, the same kind of courage in the face of injustice, and the same kind of willingness to sacrifice itself for the sake of the world that Jesus Himself displayed.