

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.³

“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely. O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.

“How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots’ houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour’s wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith [SETH] the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

“Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD’s. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith [SETH] the LORD.

They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith [SETH] the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith [SETH] the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days, saith [SETH] the LORD, I will not make a full end with you.

“And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁴

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him,

living as a child of light?” That is why the Church gives us this season of reflection and repentance. We cannot mistake it as a time to give up food or creature comforts, alone, out of obligation. This is a time for us to begin wailing and crying out to God for mercy, as if the earth has opened up, and the flames of hell were beginning to consuming us.

We are to look at the master of our Kingdom, and begin comparing character traits. And if we do not see the same traits within ourselves as we do while looking up at Christ the King, then can we say that we are children of the Kingdom? St. Paul gives us the same call that Ezekiel gave to the heap of dead, dry bones as he stood amidst them in the valley,⁷ in, or the same call that Christ gave Lazarus: “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”

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The Rev’d Steven Victory⁸
March 11, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday in Lent, 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 42 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (CIPBC 1963).

³ Jeremiah 5:1-19 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 11:1-28 (KJV).

⁵ 2 Kings 1:2-16.

⁶ Genesis 3:15.

⁷ Ezekiel 37.

⁸ Priest, The Anglican Province of Christ the King; Rector, St. Charles King and Martyr Anglican Church, Huntsville, AL.

Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

“And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub [*buh-AIL-zeh-bubb*] the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub [*buh-AIL-zeh-bubb*]. And if I by Beelzebub [*buh-AIL-zeh-bubb*] cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith [**SETH**], I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept

and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

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. Amen.

Once again, we see in this morning’s Second Lesson, Christ dealing with another devil. This seems to be a regular theme of our Sunday lectionary and it recurs especially in the Eucharistic lections on each of the first three Sundays in Lent, as we then draw nearer to the death of Christ on the Cross on Good Friday.

On the First Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus dealing with Satan himself, the strong man armed, as Jesus there refers to him, within the desert during Jesus’ trial and temptation. On the Second Sunday in Lent, we see the Canaanite woman whose daughter was “grievously vexed with a devil” and how the Canaanite woman’s compassion, mixed with humility and persistent faith, brought healing to the daughter for whom she was interceding. And on the Third Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus casting out a devil, which caused a person to be mute and blind, probably from birth. This particular healing brought wonderment to those who stood by, but it brought conflict as well.

Today’s discourse is between Jesus and those who stood around Him. For some, who in Matthew’s account in chapter

blue, this member of his kingdom, without warning, by the finger of God (the Holy Ghost), resurrects and hears his name being called by the one who spoke life into existence, and by irresistible measure, comes to life through Grace, and becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus.

The measure, by which Satan has kept this person in bondage, no longer has a grip, and cannot keep this person weighted down in transgression, because the precious Blood of Jesus has redeemed and the Holy Ghost has regenerated this vessel, which passed from death to life. And that which is made a new creature in Christ Jesus is new indeed. The old life having passed away, the new life having come, the needs for sin and self pleasure or autonomy dissipate, while the total surrender to the sovereignty of God is restored, and sets back in place that which Satan attempted to destroy. One by one the elect are resurrected, hearing His voice, because His sheep hear His voice, while He establishes a Kingdom of Righteousness, amidst a dark and sinister world.

So, after we hear the Word of God, we begin keeping it only by spiritual resurrection. Those things that St. Paul talks about in Ephesians 5, which is where our Epistle is taken from this morning, are the character traits of someone who has not been resurrected. And not only is there not any room for these traits in the Church, but those who exhibit them will not inherit the Kingdom of Christ, and of God. Fornication, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, idolatry, homosexuality, drunkenness, adultery, liars, cheaters, thieves, deceivers, these are the children of disobedience. For us to continue to participate in these things, or share in fellowship with them, outside of preaching the Gospel of Christ to them, means that we are not walking as the children of light, one who has been resurrected from spiritual death, and by the finger of God, has been raised from the kingdom of the enemy.

Let us during this Lenten season, continue taking a personal inventory of our inward man, and ask ourselves, “Am I

As children under Grace, under God's covenant and provision, being restored to our original, created purpose, we are to be followers of God, as the beginning of our Epistle states. And what sums up our Epistle, in just one short sentence, is the truly the final sentence of our Gospel, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."

That is why the battle rages. All men, from birth, belong to the kingdom of the enemy. With the separation of likeness from image, came man thinking he is autonomous and absolute, outside of the sovereignty of God. Eventually this means that the totality of man is evil, the totality of man hates God, and all men are totally depraved, and on their way to hell. This is our natural disposition. This is the fruit of our sin. Until His likeness has been restored, we are the exact opposite of what we were first created to be, lovers of God. Man cannot, nor will not, ever love, choose, serve, or obey God through our own free will, because we are incapable of that.

So for Jesus to say, "blessed are they that hear" seems almost impossible, because the ear on a dead person doesn't work too well. You would never look down and thoroughly explain the directions to the nearest hospital to a dead guy, and expect him to get up and go on his own, without first being brought back to life. So for someone who is dead, for him to hear, he must be resurrected. Take the raising of Lazarus by Jesus for example. Lazarus was very dead, three days within the tomb; he had already begun decomposing. Jesus spoke Lazarus' name, and commanded him to come forth. If resurrection did not accompany the calling of Lazarus' name, then Lazarus would still be within the tomb. His physical ear could not have heard the voice of Jesus, without the power of resurrection preparing him to hear and come forth.

And that is why there is futility between the two kingdoms. Being dead, we belong to the kingdom of hell. Satan remains comfortable with the fact a certain soul belongs to him, that's less work for him in the fight to corrupt. When out of the

12 names the Pharisees, Jesus was acting as a puppet of Beelzebub [***buh-AIL-zeh-bubb***]. Now, Beelzebub [***buh-AIL-zeh-bubb***] was a god of Ekron, a city of the Philistines of which we first hear in Second Kings.⁵ The spelling of the name, as we find it in the English translation from the original Hebrew, is Baal-Zebub [***BAY-ull zeh-BUBB***], another name for the god Baal [***BAY-ull***], the god of the Canaanites. So we see here that the Pharisees associated Christ's ministry with something that was subject to the false god of the enemies of God and His people. Baal [***BAY-ull***], or Baal-Zebub [***BAY-ull zeh-BUBB***] was known or translated as the "prince of the dung heap," or lord of the "flies." But we see that Jesus associates or calls Baal [***BAY-ull***], or Beelzebub [***buh-AIL-zeh-bubb***], the ruler of, or over, the demons.

In essence, Christ wasn't willing to accept a counterfeit name for a god which opposes God the Father. Ultimately, He was trying to state the fact that there is only one God, and one enemy of God, which is Satan. And if that is truly the case, then the kingdom of the evil one would not send one of its own entities to go in and destroy what foothold that evil one has in any one. And for us, to see the Pharisees express their understanding of the possibility of demons fighting against themselves, it shows us the irrational pride and envy displayed by them in their opposition to Jesus. It shows us also, that as they remained unregenerate of heart, they were unable to discern the will of God, in His work of restoring men's souls to the rightful place in which it was created to be, free to live and walk in obedience to and be all consumed with the Spirit of the Most High God.

Whether we like to believe in or not, two kingdoms are being advanced in the world. We either belong to one or the other, and there is no in-between. For the reprobate and unregenerate sinner, Satan is his master. For the baptized, regenerate believer, he serves Almighty God. And there is, and has always been, an eternal feud between the two. From the moment God placed man and creature on earth, Satan has done

everything in his power to ultimately destroy and corrupt God's creation.

And there has been one significant victory, though temporal, in Satan's fight against the Kingdom of God. The moment Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, they began to die, which is the ultimate penalty of sin. And ever since that moment, within the procreation of man, His likeness has been separated from His image, and so the moment we are born, we begin the process of dying physically, while being entirely and utterly dead spiritually, because we are born into sin, and the judgment that it incurs.

After the serpent deceived Adam and Eve, one of God's ultimate curses against them was to remove them completely from Eden or Paradise. That was not just a garden, but was a state of full communion with God, and the deprivation of this state is what most people find to be the harshest of all the punishments visited upon our first ancestors and, therefore, upon us. But while we always hear of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we most always fail to recognize the fact that there was also the tree of life.

Had God allowed Adam and Eve to remain within Eden, and had they extended their hands and eaten the fruit of the tree of life, then not only had they been spiritually dead creatures, but spiritually dead creatures who lived immortally and eternally without the hope of restoration or regeneration. So from the moment of the Fall of Man, God provided for a restoration. He allowed that which was created perfect and immortal to remain after the fall, although then imperfect and mortal. This immediately allowed the cycle of salvation, or restoration, to begin. Immediately we hear the first prophecy of a coming Messiah and Savior, the seed of a woman who would bruise the head of the serpent.⁶ Afterwards, to allow that restoration to take place, God removed His erring creatures as far as possible from the tree of life.

So the conflict between these two kingdoms ends up taking place within humanity's souls. In Satan's efforts to destroy creation, his craftiness led him to deceive Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of that specific, particular tree. A creation that was solely dependent on God for wisdom, knowledge, and provision, could now see things for themselves, as they broke away from that sole dependency. In the deception of these representatives of mankind into attempting to be as absolute as God, the only thing that they actually accomplished was to see how sinful they then became (and therefore now are), breaking God's commandment while still being absolutely subject to His holiness.

And that introduced two emotions, formerly foreign to them but that still grip us all: guilt and shame. Satan won that battle, but in the end will ultimately lose the war. And the last nail driven in Satan's coffin was that last nail driven through our Lord and Savior's hands and feet. Provisional restoration has come in Christ Jesus, until the ultimate restoration takes place at the end of time, when all of creation and redeemed humanity finds a final resting place within that natural, restored, created purpose, when we will take on glorified flesh that is no more subject to the weaknesses of the flesh.

And the Kingdom of the enemy knows this outcome. So he goes around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour all he can, and try to squash the ultimate will and purpose of God in bringing about this restoration of all things. And he knows his time is short, which means as time passes on, the tools and methods he uses to corrupt and deceive become more and more apparent. He isn't as subtle as he was in the garden, the lowly voice of a serpent whispering to Eve. He is blatantly coming hard at the people of God, and at all creation, with all types of moral and religious perversion.

And that is where our Epistle lection ties in with our Gospel for today.