
Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928), A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 49:1-13 (KJV).

⁴ James 1:1-27 (KJV).

⁵ James 1:22 (KJV).

⁶ *The Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Easter*, The Book of Common Prayer 175 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁷ St. John 16:23 (KJV).

⁸ Deacon, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church, assigned to Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER The Second Sunday after the Epiphany¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

“And now, saith [SETH] the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew [SHOW] yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the

heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim [**SIGH-nimm**].

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the General Epistle of James.⁴

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted,

On the other hand, James also gives us examples of the actions of true doers of the Word. “*Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father,*” James says, is to take on tasks of mercy and love. He offers the examples of visiting the fatherless and widows. We might well add to his list assisting anyone who cannot care for themselves, including those who are ill, or in need, or any of God’s children who need us.

The doer of the Word, James adds, must “*keep himself unspotted from the world,*” which is to say, he must not take part in the worldly evil and sin that is so prevalent, but rather must hold to the Word of God. This can be uncomfortable at times, but we should not be dismayed by that. As our Lord Jesus counsels in today’s Gospel reading, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*”.⁷

Let us pray:

Lord, strengthen us to be always doers of Your blessed Word, and not hearers only. Grant to us the wisdom to perceive Your will in all things, and to follow that will with joy, and peace and fearless devotion. Let us be unspotted by the world and at the last day let us each be found doers of the Word at the final judgment so that our faith might be judged wholesome and true. This we beg in Jesus Christ’s Name. Amen.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner MSW⁸
May 13, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the Fifth Sunday after Easter (Rogation Sunday), 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 32 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The*

looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

How blessed are those who become doers of the Word. “The perfect law of liberty” is found in the Gospel. It is the law of God. It is that Word which can save us. This is the law we must be doers of—not once or twice, or on special weekends, or even every Sunday, but every day throughout our lives. It is the **perfect** law because it comes from the perfection of Jesus Christ. It is perfect because it contains all that is needed to achieve our salvation through Jesus, and through which He sets us free from sins.

We look into the law because it serves as a glass to reflect to us that perfection of Christ and to give us insight into Him. We look into the law because we realize that it is only through Christ that we can be saved. We continue to look into that law because we continue to grow in and from the Word. We never find enough to learn and experience of our Lord.

This experience is so vital to us that we are not forgetful hearers only, but find ourselves driven to be doers of the Word. From the inspiration we find in the Word, we find inspiration to carry the Word to others and share. We are motivated to offer to others this blessing we have found. And, James says, “*this man shall be blessed in his deed.*” In the very act of sharing and carting for others we find our blessing. We are blessed by the very fact that we are living out the Word of God.

And how are we to know whether we or others are living out the Word? James offers us this yardstick by which to judge. If a man seems to be religious—seems to be looking into the word, but continues to try to harm others—then he is deceiving himself. To be sure, God is not fooled, and nor need we be. This man’s religion, James warns, is vain.

when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any*

man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson includes the passage appointed as the Epistle on the Fifth Sunday after Easter, which we also call Rogation Sunday. Rogation, from the Latin word “rogare”, means to ask or beseech. In the Collect for that day, we ask for guidance from our Lord in two important areas – our thoughts and actions: “*O Lord, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that are good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*”⁶

In his Epistle, St. James directs our attention to how our thoughts and deeds are inextricably linked and cannot be separated without damage to either of them. If we attempt to separate them, James suggests, this can only serve to deceive ourselves and lead to our failure to live according to God’s will. We cannot only hear the Word, and not put it into practice. We must take the next step, and live the Word, make it the very core of our lives. We must live the Word.

Those who only hear God’s Word, and do not then proceed to internalize that Word, to live it and make it part of their very being, these people only experience the barest surface of the Gospel. They hear the words, but as they never go beyond that to live those words, so they never truly understand them.

These shallow people read the words “faith”, “sacrifice”, and “love”, but, sadly, they never experience faith, nor sacrifice, nor love. To them, these are empty terms, making up lovely poetry and verse, but never touching the very soul. These “hearers only” fool themselves when they try to convince themselves and others that they truly experience the Word of God.

In contrast to these “hearers only”, the doers of the Word live out the Word of God. When the doer reads of faith in the Lord, he then turns his life to acting and living in faith. Rather than only reading or hearing about faith, the doer experiences faith. He practices faith daily, intensely. He becomes a faithful person who lives in a faithful way according to the will of God. The way the world tests the truth of the Gospel is by judging how effective that Gospel is in transforming the lives of its believers.

The doer of the Word learns that, through actually experiencing sacrifice, he can come to know the sacrifice of God on his behalf. By experiencing sacrifice, he can truly value sacrifice – and then can make a truly loving, holy sacrifice of his life to God. The doer of the Word can give to others freely, knowing that in doing so he is blessed by God.

Rather than experiencing the love of God at second hand, as if reading a pulp fiction novel, the doer of the Word participates in a loving relationship with God, coming to know God intimately and personally. Instead of being merely words on a page, God becomes exquisitely and personally real for the doer of the Word.

James reminds us that this is not a one-time, brief experience, but a lifetime relationship. Like marriage and parenting, such a relationship requires real and constant work. It requires attention to thoughts, actions, motivations, and responses. It requires not just passing attention, but that intense devotion that should mark the most important things in our lives: “*But whoso*