

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.³

“The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

“...

“Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith [SETH] the LORD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

“But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

“Yet ye say, The way of the LORD is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith [SETH] the house of Israel, The way of the LORD is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

“Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-third Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁴

“Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and

take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith [SETH] the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

“Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal. When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his

wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.

“Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 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. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew [SHOW] you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves,

Dear Lord, let us not be distracted by the meaningless and shallow diversions of the world. Instead, let us remain always fixed on You and Your Kingdom, remaining faithful always to Your ways. We know that the rewards of the world are of little value and last only a brief time. Let us remain always determined instead to achieve eternal reward with You. This we ask through the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW⁸
April 21, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday after Easter, 2013.

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 44 (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 xxxviii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-end (KJV).

⁴ Ezekiel 33:1-20 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 16:1-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:21-22 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 16:22 (KJV).

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The travails of the current world are real. There are costs inherent in how we live our lives. But the rewards, when we stay faithful to Him and to His will for our lives, is joy beyond measure and which no one can take from us. That is the reward for remaining true.

Jesus provided the ultimate example for us in His own life and death. He remained true to the Father's plan for achieve forgiveness and salvation for us, submitting Himself to live as one of us, then even submitting Himself to being viciously treated by men in spite of His innocence and even submitting Himself to death on the Cross.

If He can wait and persevere through the events of His Passion and death in order to achieve an end He desired for us, then we are faced with the question of whether we can wait and persevere through our lives in a manner that allows us to be with God throughout eternity. Can we remain faithful in order to remain God's own?

That is the value of waiting through what might be tough and troubling times now in order to achieve something far greater in a time to come. Not only can the greatest joy possible be ours, but it can be beyond the ability of any man to take from us.

As we are tempted from time to time by the various offerings of the world, we need to ask ourselves the longer-term questions. We need to be mindful of the competing demands on our time, our loyalty and our lives. Will we abandon God's plan in order to earn temporary reward from men and the world, or will we stay faithful to God's plan regardless of the costs of doing so in terms of the world?

Can you wait until later to receive your reward?

Let us pray.

What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith [SETH], A little while? we cannot tell what he saith [SETH]. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew [SHOW] you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Are you willing to work now, perhaps even to suffer now, for a reward you will receive later? Sometimes, it is difficult for us to keep in mind a later benefit when the work or cost directly in front of us seems too large.

We may then become afraid to take on a large task, because the benefit from that task seems too remote to focus on. When we lose sight of the eventual reward for our labors, we lose motivation. This is why the old song urges that we “keep our eyes on the prize,” for only by remaining focused on the “prize”—the eventual outcome and reward—can we remain motivated and driven to achieve and to stay focused on what we must do. In the mental health fields we call this “delayed gratification”, and it is one of the measures of maturity.

Young children often cannot maintain the longer-term view and stay focused on tasks in the here and now as is required to obtain benefit in the future. For them, the future seems too remote and too unsure to be a sufficient reward. Their ability to trust that the reward will come is not able to overcome their aversion to the work needed now.

Many of our current problems in society can be traced to this type of short-sightedness. If we have a problem in a relationship, we throw away the relationship rather than investing the work to fix what is wrong and make things work. Whether a friendship, or a marriage, the response is the same. No wonder that today in this country, almost half of all marriages fail.

Indeed, the marriage that lasts beyond a few years is viewed as an oddity, and one that lasts beyond 20 years or so is rapidly becoming unheard of. The reality, that the longer-term benefit of repairing, strengthening, and reinforcing the marriage is of more value than the short-term avoidance of pain or effort, never even gets considered. Jobs are no longer a lifetime commitment, as both corporations and workers no longer feel bound by the bonds of loyalty to work together in mutual respect.

Even family, the most basic of human relationships, is under attack from without and within. Faced with the expense and work of raising a family, tens of thousands of people a year turn to the bloody expedient of abortion. They cannot fathom that the reward of a family is worth so much more in the long term than the temporary inconvenience of a birth.

In our news during this past week, as it has highlighted the murder trial of an abortion doctor in Philadelphia who is charged with slaughtering seven babies who were born alive, we have watched in horror as the realities of this quite literal holocaust are brought to light. It is often said that we live in a “throw-away society”, and it is true, but we are throwing away our selves and our own bonds to one another, and our humanity in the process.

Our Lord urges us to remain dedicated to the long-term benefits of a life with Him, despite the short-term costs and struggles that doing so will entail. He told His disciples to remain firm, despite their fears, concerns about their lives and the challenges that faced them. The reward, He said, was “joy no man taketh from you.”⁷