

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Septuagesima Sunday¹
(Year I)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Supply Priest²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.⁴

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

“And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for

² Retired Rector, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Chester, PA.

³ *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

⁴ Genesis 1:1—2:3 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 1:1-18 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 1:5 (RSV).

signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every

The good news here is that God forgives our sins. The good news here is that God poured out His own life to atone for our sins. The good news is that God not only erases our sins, but gives us the power to become holy, like Him. “*To all who received him, ... he gave power to become children of God.*” Which in Biblical idiom means to become like Him.

Conclusion:

Isn't that what you really want? That's what Adam and Eve wanted when they did the one thing He told them not to do. The serpent told them that if they did that they would become gods themselves. But God has provided us with a better way to become like Him.

Let the light into your life even if it does dominate. It must dominate if you are to live the abundant life and not just the narrow filtered life of the world. The light must dominate if you are to embrace the full range of knowledge and plumb the depths of truth. It is God as light Who gives us food and warmth and power and knowledge. It is this light that has come into a world of darkness in the person of Jesus. So do not be afraid of the light. Open your heart and let Him in.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Orange, VA

December 31, 2006

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¹ This will be my final sermon in ECUSA because my license to function as a priest in the Diocese of Virginia expires at midnight on Sunday and I have not asked Bishop Peter Lee to renew it. Any sermon I post in the future will be based on the 1928/1943 Lectionary of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, which is the one used by the “Continuing Anglican” Churches.

Finally, it is characteristic of light that it can be shut out. It is not easy to shut it out completely, but it can be done. So God can be shut out of people's lives. "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" But human willfulness can shut it out.

Most people do not want to shut God out of their lives completely. What they really want to do is filter the light. Let a little bit in, but not enough to make a significant difference in the choices they make or in the way they live. That's what most people want. If you let in too much light, the light will take over and dominate your life. So most people settle for a little bit of God in their lives. The result is a little bit of power, a little bit of life, and a little bit of knowledge.

But Christ came into the world to bring us the power to move mountains. He came to bring us abundant life. He came to bring us ultimate truth. He is the light of the world, the true light that enlightens every human being.

So I urge you not to shut out the light as so many others have done. St. Luke says there was no room for Him in the inn. St. John says the world knew Him not. Even His own people did not receive Him. But, St. John adds, "*to all who received him, ... he gave power to become children of God.*"

St. John says, "*Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*" It is our sin, in other words, that makes us want to filter the light. We want our sins to remain hidden from ourselves as well as from God. We are afraid of the light and its ability to enable things to be seen. But Jesus says, "*Nothing is hidden that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be made known and come to light.*"

fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁵

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

“John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Homily:

The struggle between light and darkness is one of the great themes of the fourth Gospel. For those of us who suffer from light deprivation syndrome, this text is very comforting. “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

When we try to talk about God, we very quickly recognize the frustrating limitations of human language. We have no words to describe God. It takes God’s own Word, given to us at Christmas, to express the nature of God in human terms. “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*”

The only way we can talk about God at all is through the use of symbolism, metaphor, simile, and analogy, all of which are pathetically inadequate. But the metaphor of light is one that has been widely used, so I would like to spend a little time this morning meditating on this metaphor of God as light.

Science tells us that light is power. It is in fact the basic power that sustains life. Plants make use of it, in a process known as photosynthesis, to produce nourishment from the soil. Without light, there would be no food for animals or for us.

Science also tells us that when light rays are absorbed, they become heat rays. That is why it is always cooler in the shade. That is why we wear light colored clothing in the summer to reflect the Sun’s rays and dark colored clothing in the winter to absorb them. Without light, there would be no heat.

Even the oil and the coal, the so called fossil fuels that we burn for heat, are really like storage batteries that absorbed the Sun’s rays long ago and stored up the energy for centuries.

We have learned to run generators and other machinery using the power of sunlight. We have learned that when we concentrate light beams they exert force. We call those concentrated light beams “lasers”.

We have learned, in other words, that without the light, there would be no food, no heat, no energy, and no life. So it is good news indeed that “*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*”

There is another thing about light that makes an especially appropriate metaphor for God. Light cannot be directly observed. The only time we can see it is when it bounces off something. We can see things that reflect light, but we cannot see the light itself. Anything that does not reflect light is invisible to us. But the fact that light can be reflected is what makes it possible to see the things that we see.

God is like that. We cannot see Him in Himself. We can only see Him in so far as He is reflected in His works. He Himself cannot be known, but it is He who makes all knowledge possible.