

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity¹
(Year I)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Supply Priest²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Book of Joshua.⁴

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith [SETH] my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

“Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

“And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD.

And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.

“And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward [**REAR-wahrd**] came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward [**REAR-wahrd**] came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

“And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab [**RAY-hab**] the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they

have faith that God will bring it all to a proper conclusion at the proper time.

The climax of a drama is not the end. It is the point at which the end becomes inevitable. It is the pivotal point that determines what the outcome will be. We teach and believe that the climax of history occurred in the events of Holy Week and Easter. We’re still not sure exactly how everything is going to play out, but we are very sure that in the end, good will triumph over evil, right will prevail over wrong, truth will survive, falsehood will perish, and life will overcome death. Believe it. Count on it. But don’t try to figure it out.

We have work to do, but history is in the hands of God. Let us be content to leave it there.

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Orange, Virginia

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday after Pentecost, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, Year B, 2006.

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

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Joshua 5:13—6:20 (KJV).

⁵ St. Mark 4:21-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Mark 4:26-29.

he springs into action, immediately, to use Mark's favorite word, and begins to harvest the fruit of what God has been doing. The word that Mark uses gives us our English word "enthusiastic". So the parable tells us it is time for us, like the farmer, to get busy and gather in with enthusiasm the fruits of what God has done.

Together we have the responsibility to tell the good news of what God has done in Christ and to gather in and baptize those who respond in faith. On the personal level, we who have accepted and rejoiced in the Gospel need to gather into our lives the fruits of it, which include holiness, courage, generosity, and all Christian virtues.

But there's one more thing I would like to say about this parable before I stop. Like John the Baptist before him, Jesus also used the harvest image to depict a time of judgment. What emerges from the ground is not only wheat and corn and other desirable crops, but also weeds and inedible stems and pods that need to be separated out and discarded. We associate that day of judgment with the end of the world.

There is a lot of speculation these days in certain religious circles about when that day of judgment will come. There are all kinds of schemes for trying to predict the end of the world. People associate parts of the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic writings with various events that occur in the news and claim to be able to follow the progress of what is happening beyond what we can see, underground as it were.

But the farmer in the parable was unconcerned about that, and Jesus specifically told us in another place that we were not to indulge in such speculation. The harvest will come when it comes, and there's nothing we can do to hasten or to delay it. It is God's doing and not ours. We are to go about our business like the farmer, rising and sleeping, watching and waiting, but not worrying. We don't know what's going on beneath the surface, but we are confident that something is going on and we

shall come into the treasury of the LORD. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.⁵

"And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

"And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he ex-

pounded all things to his disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith [SETH] unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

One of the interesting things about parables is their flexibility. Parables can be interpreted on different levels and adapted to different circumstances. The parables of Jesus have been legitimately used by Christian preachers in many different contexts to address various issues that the church has had to deal with from time to time.

If you ask several preachers what a particular parable means, you may well get several different answers, and they may all be legitimate. You may even get more than one answer if you just ask me, because I believe it is one of the beauties of this literary form that it can have more than one meaning.

With that in mind, let's look at one of the parables in this morning's Second Lesson, the parable of the seed that grows in secret.⁶ Jesus may have told this parable originally to support His claim that the climactic moment of history had arrived. God had planted a seed long ago, and for centuries while people were going about their business, going to bed and get-

ting up day after day, that seed had been growing in ways that even Israel could not comprehend.

The prophets had predicted that one day that seed would blossom forth and produce a spectacular harvest. The claim of Jesus, and theme of His first recorded sermon, was that the time had come. The ancient prophecies were fulfilled in him. The kingdom of God was at hand. But soon after that proclamation, Jesus came under pressure by the Zealots to take some militant action against the Romans. Even John the Baptist became impatient with Jesus' apparent passivity. He sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah or not.

So the parable was also used to advocate patience. The kingdom of God breaks into history on God's schedule, not ours, and it is God, not us, who makes it happen. Thus it was that Jesus said to His mother at the wedding feast in Cana, "My hour is not yet here." And throughout the Gospels, Jesus is constantly telling His disciples, especially the Zealots, that His hour has not yet come. But when a group of Gentiles come seeking an audience with Him, He declares that the hour has come, and with that the Passion narrative begins.

Things move very quickly after that. Within a week of His jubilant welcome to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus is arrested, tried by the Jews, tried by the Romans crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. Within the next fifty days He gives the Apostles their final instructions, ascends to the right hand of the Father, and sends the Holy Spirit to guide and empower the Church.

Since the dawn of time, God has been directing history toward those critical days. Those days are the climax of history, and it is God, not man, who brought it about. But now it is our turn to act.

In the parable, the farmer does not do anything to make the seed grow. He just waits until it time for harvest. But then