

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany¹
(Year II)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Verse of the fifth Chapter of Micah.³

“... But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah [**BETH-lee-hem eff-RAH-tah**], though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

“And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the

sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. ¶ This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Gospel: “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd.*”⁵ In the

ple of Israel, who will also know and follow Him. But to “follow Him” means actually to follow – and to live according to -- His words and commandments, not just to give them lip service.

In following Him, these “other sheep” join with those of the ancient tribes who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They become part of one flock, with one Savior, and one God.

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW⁸
April 14, 2013

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

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxi (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Micah 5:2-7 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 10:1-18 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 10:16 (KJV).

⁸ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro Cathedral, Metairie, LA.

Na~~x~~me of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Homily:

On the strength of this one line, it might make sense to draw the conclusion that some do—namely, that people of all kinds of backgrounds and faiths and views will be accepted by our Lord as His own and their beliefs—however at odds with the rest of Scripture—will be acceptable. A look at the context in which this line appears, however, casts it in a very different light and gives it an entirely different meaning. Few verses of Scripture have been used to create such dangerous mischief among believers as has this one.

That mischief is the result of taking Scripture out of context, and twisting its clear meaning almost beyond recognition, and is properly called the work of the devil. Just this past week, I heard someone who is a self-declared Wiccan announce that she, too, is a child of Jesus, and that while she worships nature and powers that she does not understand, and engages in the casting of spells and the like, nevertheless she and her Wiccan friends are some of those St. John recorded Our Lord has having referred to as “not of this fold”. That is, she believes they are numbered among those who, although not formally members of Jesus’ Church, also hear His voice and therefore will be saved.

Now, quite apart from the theological confusion that is clearly evident in such a stance, it is necessary for one to completely misunderstand what Jesus was saying in order to reach that woman’s conclusion.

Our Lord was speaking here to a group of Scribes and Pharisees. These were they who had placed themselves at the head of Jewish society, claiming to have been appointed by God to guide and lead the people. These self-appointed rulers of the people of Israel liked to set themselves up as better than others,

establishing a vast, complicated jungle of legalistic rules and minutiae which they were themselves exempt from, and which no person could reasonably be expected to understand or to follow.

Yet, for the Pharisees, anyone who failed to follow any of their rules was labeled as outside the law, unfit for membership in the family of God. These self-appointed rulers held in utter disregard and contempt anyone not of the tribes of Israel and who was, therefore, not under the Old Testament dispensation.

Jesus, however, rejected out of hand this petty legalism, insisting that the criterion for acceptance into the family of God was whether one accepted God and His salvation, not whether one adhered to minor legal trivia instituted by men.

Jesus referred to the Gentiles who would come to hear and follow Him as the “other sheep” who He had who would also hear His voice. We are some of those who are His “other sheep”, and so we should be thankful that He claimed us as well, for by His doing so, we can claim inheritance to the Gospel.

But it is critical to realize that we were not granted some kind of pass from what Christ requires of all His followers. We are not excused from the requirement that we accept Jesus as our Lord. We are not given an option as to other saviors—for there is only one Savior. We are not allowed to blaspheme without penalty. We cannot recognize a panoply of Gods and pick and choose among them at our leisure. We do not have the option of claiming to be Christian while rejecting the Gospel.

The Ten Commandments of God do not become only suggestions for us. It is we who must change, not God. God accepted us as His own, despite that we were not part of the original tribes of Israel. We were part of His creation, and therefore He took a special interest in us, as well as His chosen people.

In time, He specifically sent some of the Apostles, and especially St. Paul, to minister to Gentiles and those not part of the tribes of Israel, to bring us to Him as well as the Jews. But to receive these benefits, we are required to follow the Gospel as the Word of God.

This was the message Jesus was giving to the Pharisees. The people of God are not just those who are ethnically and culturally pure. They are not just those whose families can trace their roots back to the Exodus from Egypt, or who can count one of the ancient Kings of Israel as among their ancestors.

No, these others who would follow Jesus because of His teaching were also to be accepted by God. Jesus would bring them into heaven with Him as well. These would be known by these signs: “*They shall hear my voice,*”⁶ and they would join with the Jews as part of the family of God, following Jesus as their Lord and Savior. “*There shall be one fold, and one savior.*”⁷ They would follow the Gospel toward God.

Note, it is not that all kinds of varying beliefs and faiths will be under one common umbrella, but rather that many people from a variety of different backgrounds will come together in one faith, one belief to worship one God. People might have come to Jesus from varying backgrounds, but they must choose their common future with Him.

If those who claim the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice and teachings think that they can call themselves children of God, but need not hear His voice and act on it, or if they think they can claim to be disciples of Jesus’ without following His Gospel, then they fool themselves and place themselves in danger of their very souls.

Jesus did not say, “I appear differently to many different people, with a variety of messages that they can each feel good about.” He said He has other followers who are not of the peo-