

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER Thanksgiving Day (U.S.A.)¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God: And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest [SHOW-est] thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

We are grateful to Almighty God today for our great country, and for the multitudes who have sacrificed to make it great. As more people turn their backs on God, the mess we are in gets worse. Nevertheless, we are grateful for our heritage.

We are grateful for our number one ally, Great Britain, who provided us with our foundations in religion and culture. We are grateful for our other number one ally, Israel. We have two number one allies, Great Britain, and the miracle which is Israel.

Israel is a miracle, for which we give thanks to God. “Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, it was just one day old when it was attacked by twelve armies that the world fully expected would annihilate it. Israel did not even have an army. There was one tank and five cannon ... to fight the Armada against them. And yet, Israel won. Given the circumstances surrounding Israel’s birth as a nation, and the odds against its survival, Israel should not exist as a nation today. Yet

it not only exists, but seems to thrive in spite of its adversities and in the face of circumstances that defy logic and reason.”⁵

During World War I, the British Army cleared the way for the emergence of Israel as a nation. In December, 1914, British soldiers were near Jerusalem, at Michmash, vastly outnumbered by the Turks. One night, a young British officer was reading his Bible, at I Samuel 14, where Saul’s army was at Michmash, sorely hemmed in by the Philistines. Jonathan and his armor bearer, by themselves, at night, climbed up a hidden ravine to the mountain ridge where the Philistine top command was camped. The two of them killed all twenty of the Philistines there and caused a panic and a rout of the Philistine army. The young British officer read about this and decided to use the same tactic that night against the Turks. He and his small band quickly destroyed the Turkish command post and routed the entire Turkish army.

God’s deliverance of His people, over and over again, brings us to our knees in gratitude and admiration and awe. In the 1967 war, when Israel was savagely attacked, a detachment of the Israeli army entered a mine field. They began to carefully dig the mines out with their bayonets. Just then an incredible powerful wind blew over them, and swept away all the earth around the mines, exposing them all to view.

In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in the Valley of Tears below the Golan Heights, the Syrian Army was ready to crush the remaining Israeli defenses, and sweep down to the Galilee, and on to Tel Aviv. There were only 7 Israelis tanks against some vastly superior number of Syrian tanks. The Israeli tank commander gave the order to attack them, and they mysteriously began to retreat. Earlier that morning, at 3 a.m., Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir had telephoned U.S. President Richard Nixon with a desperate plea for a vast quantity of weapons. Many years before, Nixon’s mother had told him that someday he was going to be in a position to help the Jewish people, and when the request for help came, he should comply with it. Shortly after 3 a.m., Nixon, against the advice of his Secretary of State, ordered one of the largest military air lifts ever. He saved Israel.

Today, before the Throne of Grace, we remember with gratitude God's miraculous deliverance of His chosen people. There are so many stories of miraculous deliverance, right up to our own time. God has spared His people as a sign to the world of His promises to them. So we, the New Israel, may be thankful to Him for how absolutely faithful He is, to them, and to us.

—oo0oo—

The Rt. Rev'd Paul C. Hewett⁶
November 22, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally given at Holy Communion on Thanksgiving Day, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 6:26-35 (KJV).

⁵ Bill McKay, *Against All Odds*, (video documentary) www.AmericanTrademarkPictures.com.

⁶ Bishop Ordinary, The Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.