

**Sermon for Evening Prayer<sup>i</sup>**  
**The Second Sunday Before Advent**  
**(Trinity XXIV, 2010)**

**Lessons:**<sup>ii</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the nineteenth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis.<sup>iii</sup>

“And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

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“And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.

“And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

“And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed....

“... Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

“But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

“And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twentieth Verse of the seventeenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.<sup>iv</sup>

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they

answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the First Lesson: “But before [the two angels] lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.’”<sup>v</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Homily:**

I would be remiss if I did not point out to you that today’s Second Lesson is a discourse by Our Lord in which He teaches His followers something important about the end of this age, that is, about the day when He will come again in judgement. That coming will be sudden, it will be visible to all.<sup>vi</sup> No one will know of it until it actually happens but as surely as carrion birds will find a carcass, that judgement *will* come.<sup>vii</sup> Therefore, the only appropriate Christian response is to be always ready for that event.

This, I am sure, is the message the editors of our Office lectionary meant us to draw from these Scripture passages, especially during this semi-season of “Pre-Advent”. In the course of His teaching, and to make it more vivid to His listeners, Our Lord recalled to those listeners’ minds the Old Testament account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the way that God’s judgement was visited upon those cities suddenly and without warning.<sup>viii</sup>

However, I wish today to examine our First Lesson for a slightly different point. You may recall the text I read to you just a few moments ago: “But before [the two angels] lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last

man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.’”<sup>x</sup>

If, as many Baptists would have been, you had been following that First Lesson in your own personal Bible when it was read in its entirety, you would have noticed that the Lesson, as appointed in 1943, skips Verses 4 through 11 and therefore *omits* the portion I selected as my text. That, of course, is precisely why I *did* select it as such: to highlight the fact that, even as long as sixty-seven years ago, wishy-washy attitudes had already invaded the Episcopal Church to such an extent that it omitted from its public readings of Scripture material that made some of its members uncomfortable.

And why did those particular Verses make anyone uncomfortable? If you read them, they are the account of how the men of Sodom – every last one of them, so the guilt was a universal guilt, shared by all – gathered outside Lot’s house and rioted, trying to force their way in to kidnap and rape the visiting angels. Remember also that in 1943, a substantial number of Episcopal Church parishes in the U.S. still celebrated Morning Prayer as their principal service three or four Sundays out of each month, so the Morning Prayer lections accounted for most of Scripture to which Anglican churchmen in the U.S.A. were exposed.

So, clearly, what those early revisionists wished to accomplish was to prevent these churchmen and –women from being reminded of this particular portion of the account. They wished to downplay these Verses because they were offended by them. They were offended by these Verses precisely because they are the incontrovertible proof that, contrary to what many today wish to assert, the “sin of Sodom and Gomorrah” was no more and no less than the widespread practice of homosexuality.

If you examine these Verses in the Revised Standard edition, you will see that they state, “the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house....”<sup>x</sup> This leaves no room for doubt that this was a general sin, tolerated by

the culture of the whole city, not an isolated aberration practiced by a few among its population.

Nor is there any realistic question about what it was the mob was trying to accomplish. ““Bring them out to us, that we may know them””<sup>xii</sup> uses a Jacobean euphemism that really means “Bring them out to us, that we may have carnal knowledge of them”,<sup>xiii</sup> or in plain English, “that we may rape them”.

Instead of glossing over these Verses, a more recent generation of revisionists has tried to use them to argue that the “sin of Sodom” that incurred God’s judgement was not homosexual activity *per se* but instead the city populace’s abuse of the ancient Near Eastern code of hospitality. Certainly the unexpurgated passage refers to that code, for that is why Lot went to the extremity of offering the crowd his daughters instead of the visitors under his roof whom he was bound to protect, from any harm and at any cost.<sup>xiii</sup> However, that breach of hospitality cannot be what initially incurred God’s wrath and brought His Judgement upon the cities.

That is because, if you will recall, prior to the angels’ entry into Sodom, the Lord came with those two angels to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre.<sup>xiv</sup> There the Lord disclosed to Abraham that He had already decided to punish the two cities and it was from there that the two angels departed for Sodom while the Lord Himself remained behind with Abraham.<sup>xv</sup> It was then that Abraham bargained with the Lord, trying to save the condemned cities for the sake of the few righteous men and women who might possibly be left in them,<sup>xvi</sup> although oddly this revealing exchange, too, is omitted from the Verses appointed to be read this morning.

Be that as it may, however, the fact that the Lord Himself announced to Abraham that He had judged the cities of the plain and found them wanting, and had done so well prior to His angels’ entry into Sodom, is proof that the treatment those angels received at the hands of the Sodomites was *not* the reason for that judgement. However, it is equally clear that it was the Sodomites’ predisposition to such offenses that *was* the reason for that judgement. And this has been unquestioned by any reputable Jewish or Christian scholar for some three millennia.

## Conclusion:

The conclusion we must draw from all this is inescapable. No matter how uncomfortable to us the thought is, the message of Scripture is that God does, in fact, have rules and we are commanded to follow those rules. We may not understand them, we may not find them convenient, and we will almost always find them contrary to our instincts and desires. However, none of those facts constitutes an excuse for not following them.

When we do not follow God's rules, then, like the Sodomites, disasters will strike us, seemingly without warning. In truth, although we often choose to ignore this, the mere fact of the rules themselves was adequate notice of the problems that come when those rules are not followed.

And when we follow God's rules, then like Lot, we are given specific and timely warnings we can choose to follow and so take ourselves out of the way of disaster. Or, like Lot's sons-in-law and his wife, we may receive those specific and timely warnings and, in some important ways, ignore them. Then we, too, will be swept up in the resulting disasters.

As Our Lord warned us in another place, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."<sup>xvii</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>xviii</sup>  
November 14, 2010.

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<sup>i</sup> "Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening." Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xli (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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<sup>iii</sup> *Genesis 19: 1-3, 12-17, 24-28 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *St. Luke 17: 20-37 (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *Genesis 19: 4-5 (RSV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *St. Luke 17: 24.*

<sup>vii</sup> *St. Luke 17: 37.*

<sup>viii</sup> *St. Luke 17: 28-32.*

<sup>ix</sup> *Genesis 19: 4-5 (RSV).*

<sup>x</sup> *Genesis 19: 4a (RSV).*

<sup>xi</sup> *Genesis 19: 5b (RSV).*

<sup>xii</sup> *See, e.g., HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDS., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA 22, fn. 5 (Oxford University Press 1977): “Know refers to sexual relations (v. 8), here homosexual.”*

<sup>xiii</sup> *See, e.g., ibid., fn. 8.*

<sup>xiv</sup> *Genesis 18: 1-33.*

<sup>xv</sup> *Genesis 18: 22.*

<sup>xvi</sup> *Genesis 18: 23-32.*

<sup>xvii</sup> *St. Mark 4: 9 (RSV).*

<sup>xviii</sup> *Priest Assistant, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA. Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.*