

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Second Sunday in Advent

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes [DZAHN-ez] and Jambresⁱ [DZAHM-brez] withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof....”ⁱⁱ

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

Introduction:

Our First Lesson today, which is Isaiah's Chapter 55, concludes a section which begins with the opening of Chapter 54. This two-Chapter section is devoted to a vision, or prediction, of the restoration of Zion, which is pictured in the form of the physical rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the return of its people from their exile in Babylon.ⁱⁱⁱ

Theme:

Because Christians read and interpret God's revelations to the Old Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, in the light of His incarnate revelation of Himself to the New Israel, as recorded in the New Testament, we naturally see this prophecy of redemption and return as depicting the redemption that, in Isaiah's time, was yet to come with the Messiah and, in our time, has already come two thousand years ago.

As we so often remark during this Advent season, our eyes must be simultaneously focused on two images: in the foreground is the birth of the Christ child but, standing behind that as its background, is Our Lord's ultimate and final coming in glory to end this phase of all physical creation.

Development:

The prophecy's warning note is clear:

“Give ear and come to me;
hear me, that your soul may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.”

Equally clear is the prophecy's offer of hope:

“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way
and the evil man his thoughts.

Let him turn to the LORD and he will have mercy on him.
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

As Christians, we find that promised hope in God’s gift of Himself to us, that was accomplished in the Incarnation. As that same prophecy reminds us, ““This will be for the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.””

This is not to say that the achievement of our hope will be without difficulties and the efforts needed to overcome those obstacles. Quite to the contrary, the people will be indisposed to turn to God, even when that is their only means of saving themselves, and they will be encouraged in their obstinacy by the lies of corrupt teachers and leaders. As Paul tells Timothy in today’s Second Lesson:

“... But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God -- having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them ... who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.... [T]hese men oppose the truth -- men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.”

Conclusion:

Paul states explicitly that our persistence in the Faith will result in our persecution by the world, and that during that persecution, our primary source of strength will be our persistence in what we know to be true, the very truths our persecutors will try to force us to abandon:

“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings -- what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you

have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it....”

Our primary source of authentic knowledge about that Faith, and therefore our first line of defense against these oppressors and false teachers, is to be found in the written record of the Church’s actual teachings, and especially in the Scriptures:

“... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

It is for this reason that the Collect for today abjures us to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest those same Scriptures and promises that if we do so, they will abide with us and strengthen us in the hope of everlasting life that is our particular gift from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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*The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister
December 6, 2009.*

Isaiah 55:3 (NIV).

¹ *Isaiah 55:6-7 (NIV).*

¹ *Isaiah 55:13b (NIV).*

¹ *II Timothy 3:1-5, 6b-7, 8b-9 (NIV).*

¹ *II Timothy 3:10-14 (NIV).*

¹ *II Timothy 3:15-17 (NIV).*

¹ *The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 92 (PECUSA 1928, 1943).*

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ⁱ According to Jewish traditions, these were the names of two of the Egyptian wise men and sorcerers whose tricks' apparent duplication of Moses and Aaron's miracles convinced Pharaoh to disregard Moses' demand to release the Hebrews from bondage, Exodus 7:11.

ⁱⁱ II Timothy 3:2-5a (KJV).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Derek Kidner, Isaiah*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDS., *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED* 618-19 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1970).