

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Tenth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.ⁱⁱ

“In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim [**Gee-HOY-ah-kimm**] the son of Josiah [**Joe-ZYE-uh**] king of Judah came this word from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings. And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; Then will I make this house like Shiloh [**SHY-low**], and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth. So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD.

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“When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king’s house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD’s house. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city,

and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Verse of the twenty-third Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias^{iv} [Zeck-arr-EYE-uSS] son of Barachias [Bare-uh-KYE-uSS], whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”^v

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the First Lesson: “Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings.”^{vi} In the Name of the Father, and of the ☧ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction:

The Christian approach to the Old Testament is to read it always as an introduction to the New one. Therefore, today I suggest we consider the text I have just proposed to you, drawn from the Old Testament book of the prophet Jeremiah, in the light of our marching orders which we receive in the New Testament:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”^{vii}

IV. Theme:

The difference between the commission laid on Jeremiah and that laid on us is very simple. He was one man, sent to stand in one place, on one occasion, delivering the Lord’s message of condemnation to the population of Jerusalem and the leaders of the Jewish people, so that in time that message might percolate throughout that entire nation – but a small nation – and so recall it to repentance and reconciliation with the Lord.

We are many men and women, sent to live and work everywhere in the world, constantly and unceasingly delivering the Lord’s message of redemption to all people, so that immediately and without delay that message may reach the entire planet and so call it to conversion, repentance, and reconciliation with the Lord.

V. Development:

A. If we are to be the Lord’s messengers to the world, we, as a community, must prepare for our task.

No great work is ever accomplished without proper forethought and preparation. Every military evolution begins with a plan of operations which is followed by rigorous training, before that plan is implemented. For Christians, there are two aspects to this planning and preparation: what we must do as a community and what we must do as individuals.

As a community, we must plan for evangelism and missions. We must train our members in the disciplines we call *dogmatics* and *apologetics*. They need to learn dogmatics, the study of the Church's teachings, so they have adequate knowledge of our beliefs and practices. They need to learn apologetics, the study of how to explain the Church's teachings, so they have the skills to commend and defend those beliefs to a skeptical audience.

These are not just matters for a few specialized missionaries, although we certainly should raise up from among us some who are called to devote themselves full-time to missions and evangelism. Indeed, the absence of such specialized vocations is an indicator that our Faith is less vibrant than it needs to be. However, an adequate grasp of both dogmatics and apologetics is a fundamental obligation for all members of the Faith.

Then, as parishes, dioceses, and as a Church, we must plan and give for the support of missions and evangelism, in the forms both of local programs and of support for work undertaken elsewhere. This must be a part of the budget of every congregation of this Church for until we thus formalize our commitment to these tasks, we have not actually made any such commitment at all.

And the amount which we budget for these things is a measure of the depth of that commitment, for we all grew up in a society where one's heart is where one's money is. There are parishes in this Church which budget ten or even fifteen *per cent.* of their gross incomes for missions and evangelism; a word to the wise should be sufficient on that score.

B. If we are to be the Lord's messengers to the world, we, as individuals, must prepare for our task.

The first preparation we, as individuals, must make may startle you. It is that each of us must examine ourselves and our ways of living to make sure that we are, indeed, *tithing* to the Church. That is, we must

be making serious efforts to give at least ten *per cent.* of our gross incomes to God.

One connection this has to missions and evangelism should be obvious: it is only when the people give as God has commanded them to do that the Church will have the material resources properly to fulfill this task. But the other connection may be less obvious: it is only when the people of God have thrown themselves completely on His providence, and truly trust Him to provide for them, that they have the spiritual commitment to commend the Faith to others.

This is part, but a direct part, of our larger task in preparing ourselves to support the Church's work in missions and evangelism. Of course, each of us must coöperate in training ourselves in dogmatics and apologetics, getting ourselves ready to capitalize on any chance encounter with someone who is open to learning about the Faith. But we must do more than just that sort of book learning.

Tithing, if it is to be possible at all, is only possible as part of an entire program of Christian living. And it is the constant struggle to live a Christian life that is the principal form of preparation for missions and evangelism that is the obligation of each of us. There are two important reasons for this.

First, it is only when we are truly trying to live as Christians, obedient to God's Word and commandments, that we will have the spiritual resources to undertake and to support missionary and evangelistic endeavors. Societies of shallow hypocrites may blossom and grow in huge numbers but they never survive for long because they are but empty shells, not solid constructions. It is only institutions composed of fervent people, committed to some grand cause, that truly grow and develop.

Second, it is only when *we* are truly trying to live as Christians, obedient to God's Word and commandments, that others will take us seriously. The world out there may not be committed to God but it is very keenly aware of any hypocrisy it encounters. Just think of the widespread distrust that is now directed toward politicians,

televangelists, and others who “talk the talk” but who strive mightily to avoid having themselves to “walk the walk”.

So it is only when the world senses that we practice what we preach that some of its members may be willing to stand still long enough to listen to that preaching.

VI. Conclusion:

Christianity is full of simple concepts that are excruciatingly difficult to put into practice. But it is only when we have properly prepared our church and ourselves, when we have formally and completely committed ourselves to doing the Lord’s work and living the Lord’s life, that we will be ready to stand anywhere and speak to the world all the worlds that God has commanded us, so that the world may hearken and turn every man and woman from their evil ways and join themselves unto Him.

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

ⁱⁱ *Jeremiah 26: 1-7, 10-15 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Matthew 23: 24-39 (KJV).*

^{iv} *II Chronicles 24: 19-21.*

^v Cf. *St. Matthew 21: 9.*

^{vi} *Jeremiah 26: 2-3 (KJV).*

^{vii} *St. Matthew 28: 19-20 (KJV).*

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