

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us. O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth. LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. . . . Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentysixth Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.

“. . . Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he

that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[W]e know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction, Theme, and Development:

We have just read today’s First Lesson from the “Authorized Version” or “King James Version” because for four hundred years it has been one of the strong, distinctively Anglican traditions that in public worship we read the Scriptures from that Version. Indeed, the very reason for the existence of that Version is to provide the texts for the public readings in services conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer.

However, today’s First Lesson is one of those times, fortunately infrequent, when the beloved “King James” text is so corrupt that it makes essentially no sense at all. There are two factors that lead to this occasional ambiguity. For one thing, since 1611, more and better manuscripts of the Old Testament have become available than were known to King James’ panel of experts. For another, Western Christians’ understanding of the intricacies of Biblical Hebrew has advanced tremendously since that time.

So this is one of those times when, for the purposes of a sermon, it is useful to repeat that Lesson, using an improved scholarly text such as the Revised Standard Version:

“¹² O LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us,
thou hast wrought for us all our works.

¹³ O LORD our God,
other lords besides thee have ruled over us,
but thy name alone we acknowledge.

¹⁴ They are dead, they will not live;
they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end thou hast visited them with destruction and wiped
out all remembrance of them.

¹⁵ But thou hast increased the nation, O LORD,
thou hast increased the nation; thou art glorified;
thou hast enlarged all the borders of the land.

¹⁶ O LORD, in distress they sought thee,
they poured out a prayer
when thy chastening was upon them.

...

¹⁹ Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise,
O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

For thy dew is a dew of light,
and on the land of shades thou wilt let it fall.”

It is always harder to retain something in mind when it has only encountered the ear and not the eye, that is, when it has been heard read aloud but has not been read from a personal copy or from a blackboard or overhead projection. So let me read you that passage in the Revised Standard Version one more time:

“¹² O LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us,
thou hast wrought for us all our works.

¹³ O LORD our God,
other lords besides thee have ruled over us,
but thy name alone we acknowledge.

14 They are dead, they will not live;
 they are shades, they will not arise;
 to that end thou hast visited them with destruction and wiped
 out all remembrance of them.

15 But thou hast increased the nation, O LORD,
 thou hast increased the nation; thou art glorified;
 thou hast enlarged all the borders of the land.

16 O LORD, in distress they sought thee,
 they poured out a prayer
 when thy chastening was upon them.

...

19 Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise,
 O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

For thy dew is a dew of light,
 and on the land of shades thou wilt let it fall.”

One of the very best of the modern “Study Bibles” footnotes that passage as follows:

“In good times or bad the wicked fail to note God’s guiding hand, but God and the righteous will ultimately defeat them.... Without God, the people were in agony and helpless before their oppressors. Though as dead, they will be raised up by God, whose *light* will illumine the gloom of despair.”

This comforting message of God’s care for us is one of the Old Testament precursors of the message of today’s Second Lesson, which is, in essence, that two Persons of the Holy Trinity, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son, intercede for us before the Third Person, God the Father, so that we need never be separated from the love of God.

Further, as the newer translation makes clear with its two references to the “shades” or souls in Sheol, today’s passage from Isaiah can be read as a remarkable precursor of the New Testament doctrines of “Justification by Faith” – “thy name alone we acknowledge” – and of the “Bodily Resurrection of the Dead” – “Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.”

Conclusion:

This exalted message of hope, based on reliance on God's gracious providence, can only be confirmed, I think, by reading our First Lesson once again, this time in an even more explicitly contemporary Version:

“¹² LORD, you establish peace for us;
all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

¹³ O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over
us, but your name alone do we honor.

¹⁴ They are now dead, they live no more;
those departed spirits do not rise.

You punished them and brought them to ruin;
you wiped out all memory of them.

¹⁵ You have enlarged the nation, O LORD;
you have enlarged the nation.

You have gained glory for yourself;
you have extended all the borders of the land.

¹⁶ LORD, they came to you in their distress;
when you disciplined them,
they could barely whisper a prayer.

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¹⁹ But your dead will live;
their bodies will rise.

You who dwell in the dust,
wake up and shout for joy.

Your dew is like the dew of the morning;
the earth will give birth to her dead.”

*The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister, J.D.
August 23, 2009.*

1 Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

2 Isaiah 26:12-16, 19 (KJV).

3 Romans 8:26-39 (KJV).

4 Romans 8:28 (KJV).

*5 Note that we are here referring to the original "Revised Standard Version", published from 1946 to 1952 and updated in 1972, **not** the politically-motivated and untrustworthy "New Revised Standard Version" published in 1989.*

6 Isaiah 26:12-16, 19 (RSV).

7 Isaiah 26:12-16, 19 (RSV).

8 HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 852 (Oxford University Press 1977).

9 Isaiah 26:14a, 19b (RSV).

10 Isaiah 26 13b (RSV).

11 Isaiah 26:19a (RSV); cf. .Derek Kidner, Isaiah, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDS., THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED, 3RD ED. 605 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1970) but see Peter R. Ackroyd, The Book of Isaiah, in CHARLES M. LAYMON, ED., THE INTERPRETER'S ONEVOLUME COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE 347 (Abingdon Press 1971). A reconciliation between these two interpretive positions is suggested in Gerald T. Sheppard, Isaiah, in JAMES L. MAYS, ED., HARPER'S BIBLE COMMENTARY 563-64 (Harper 1988).

12 Isaiah 26:12-16, 19 (NIV).

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