

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus.ⁱⁱ

“And there went a man of the house of Levi [**LEE-vie**], and took to wife a daughter of Levi [**LEE-vie**]. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river’s side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to

slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian [**MIDD-ee-ann**]: and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian [**MIDD-ee-ann**] had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel [**ROO-ell**] their father, he said, How is it that ye are come so soon today? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah [**ZIPP-or-uh**] his daughter. And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom [**GURR-shomm**]: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the General Epistle of James.ⁱⁱⁱ

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is

able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[Y]ou ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this, or that.’”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction and Theme:

In today’s Second Lesson, St. James tells us two important things regarding our attitude toward our lives here on earth. He tells us that we tend to assume that we are in control of our lives when, in fact, it is God who is in control, so, for one thing, we must be very careful to remember that God answers most readily those prayers in which we submit ourselves to His will for us, as opposed to those prayers in which we inform God of what we have decided for ourselves. For another thing, James reminds us that all life is uncertain and our fates are in God’s hands, not our own, so when we pray, we should not make presumptuous assumptions about what we will do with the gifts He showers upon us.

IV. Development:

- A. God answers most readily those prayers in which we submit ourselves to His will for us, not those in which we inform Him of what we have decided.**

An important part of avoiding presumption in our prayers is to ask God only for those things which we ought to have, that is, those things that will make us better subjects of His. This does leave room for us to ask for what we truly need because good servants must be adequately fed and kept healthy so they can give of their best to their master. However, it does not leave room for those things that are purely for our own personal pleasure and that do no real good either for us or for anyone else.

It is for this reason that James warns us, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”^v Instead, we should be mindful of the attitude that informs the wise words of the Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity:

“Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and, *that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee*; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”^{vi}

B. Life is uncertain; our fates are in God’s hands, not ours, so we should not pray presumptuously, assuming what we will do with His gifts to us.

We never know what the morrow will bring, so we should live each day as though it will be our last one here on earth. It is for this reason that James warns us: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain’; whereas you do not know about tomorrow.”^{vii}

This same lesson is driven home by one of Our Lord’s parables, which is recorded by St. Luke:

“And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the

things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”^{viii}

V. Conclusion:

Actually, both of these points could be summarized as warnings against presumptuousness. The first thing James warns us against is the presumption we display when we assume that we know what it is we truly need. Instead, we should humbly recognize that only God knows our real needs, so that we should submit ourselves to His will for us.

The second thing James warns us against is the presumption we display when we assume that we can number the hours of our own time here on earth. Rather, we, like the rich farmer of whom St. Luke wrote, should realize that every minute we spend here is a gift from God and He may decide at any moment to receive back that gift. Thus we should live every moment as though it may be our last, for indeed it may.

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

ⁱⁱ *Exodus 2: 1-22 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *James 4: 1-17 (KJV).*

^{iv} *James 4: 15 (RSV).*

^v *James 4: 3 (RSV).*

^{vi} *The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels To be used throughout the Year, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 203 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943) (emphasis supplied).*

^{vii} *James 4: 13-14b (RSV).*

^{viii} *St. Luke 12: 16-21 (RSV).*

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