

## **SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**

### **The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity**

#### **Lessons:**<sup>i</sup>

**First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>ii</sup>

“And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-first verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.<sup>iii</sup>

“. . . Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary

was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”<sup>iv</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Homily:**

Our Lord’s raising of Lazarus from the dead is one of the most familiar images in the New Testament. Probably it is so memorable because it is at such utter odds with our own knowledge. So far as any of us know from our own personal experience, the experience of our

physical senses, when someone dies, that person stays dead. Thus it is a strange and enticing novelty to be informed that, in the past, some have indeed come back from what the poet called “that undiscover’d country from whose bourn no traveler returns”.<sup>v</sup>

This not only has the lure of unusual and interesting events but, like the dreams of riches in which one indulges after hearing that someone has won the lottery, it also leads easily to the hopeful thought that the same might chance to happen to one. After all, the novelty of the event was one of the prime reasons that Our Lord did it in the first place: it was a teaching device, a demonstration designed to make those who saw it or who later learned of it to say, with the prophet in today’s First Lesson, “[I]n that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.”<sup>vi</sup>

So strong a hold does this account of Lazarus’s resurrection have on our memories and imaginations that we usually forget that, although rare, it is by no means a unique event in Scripture. In the Old Testament, Elijah raised up the dead son of the widow of Zarephath<sup>vii</sup> [**ZARR-eff-ath**] and his protégé, Elisha, likewise raised up the dead son of the Shunammite [**SHOE-nah-might**] woman.<sup>viii</sup> In fact, once Elisha even did this raising to life posthumously, that is, after Elisha’s own death. When a burial party was surprised by enemy soldiers, in its hurry to flee that threat it threw the deceased’s body into the prophet’s tomb. When that more recent body touched Elisha’s bones, that contact with the holy man’s remains restored the dead man to life.<sup>ix</sup>

In the New Testament, Our Lord raised up the dead so of the widow of Nain<sup>x</sup> and Jairus’s [**JEH-russ-ez**] daughter,<sup>xi</sup> in addition to Lazarus of whom we read in today’s Second Lesson. Our Lord also conferred this power upon His Apostles, for St. Peter restored life to Dorcas or Tabitha of Joppa [**JOPP-uh**],<sup>xii</sup> as St. Paul did to Euthycus [**YOU-tick-uss**] at Troas [**TROW-ass**].<sup>xiii</sup>

Of course, we cannot forget Our Lord’s own personal Resurrection from the dead, but where He is Himself divine, then as an example for our personal lives, that event is in a category of its own, fundamentally unlike those we have been discussing.

These other eight extraordinary events, each of which happened to an ordinary human being, surmounting as each did the uttermost barrier of which human's are aware, these eight miracles carry a powerful lesson. Each of the accounts of Our Lord's restoring someone to life ends with the comment that the people who heard of it marveled at it, as well they should have. To know that a person has returned from the dead is to know, with complete certainty, that God has been present and been acting directly in that person's case.

Just by itself, this is a salutary reminder that those people are wrong who try to tell us that God, if He exists, has removed Himself from this physical plane and takes no interest in our day-to-day activities here. To the contrary, in each of these recorded resurrections from the dead, God intervened in *one* person's life and wrought a miracle on behalf of that particular individual. So we know that God is, indeed, concerned with the details of the lives each of us lead.

Further, each of these resurrections was a demonstration of divine power. If that power could be exercised on behalf of those eight individuals, it can be exercised on behalf of each one of us. God may not raise me from the dead, and God may not raise any of you from the dead, but He will assuredly work in my life and in your lives in many ways, producing many important benefits for each of us. If at any time we begin to doubt that, we should just remind ourselves of those two boys at Zarephath [**ZARR-eff-ath**] and Shunem [**SHOE-nemm**], of the man hastily bundled into Elisha's tomb, of the boy at Nain, of Jairus's [**JEH-russ-ez**] daughter, of Lazarus, of Dorcas, and of Eutychus [**YOU-tick-uss**].

If God can, and did, work so powerfully in the lives of those eight individuals, He can, and will, work powerfully in ours as well.

Finally, please notice that of these eight resurrections from the dead, only three of them were performed by Our Lord Himself. In the remaining five cases, the channels for God's extraordinary Grace were mere human beings: two Old Testament prophets and two of Christ's Apostles.

Granted that these men were unusually holy and extraordinarily blessed by God – after all, Elijah and Elisha were the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament and Saints Peter and Paul were Apostles chosen by Christ Himself – yet, for all that, they were only human. They were, however, the official leaders of the Church of their time, called and anointed by God to that task.

### **Conclusion:**

The resurrections performed through Saints Peter and Paul serve, in fact, to teach us, first, that this power survived Our Lord's own Ascension into heaven and, second, where we are to look for this power in our own day.

The power of the Apostles resides in the persons of the successors to those Apostles, who are the embodiment of the leadership of the Church. Thus, while God's Grace may appear at any time and through any agent, we are entitled to expect it always to be available to us through His authorized agency, the Church, and especially through the ministrations of His duly-authorized agents, who are the ordained clergy of that Church.

They may not always, or even often, raise us from the dead, but they can, and will, always bring to each of us those Graces that God wishes each of us to have.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>xiv</sup>  
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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928/1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Isaiah 12: 1-6 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *St. John 11: 21-44 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *St. John 11: 32b (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, HAMLET III: 1.*

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<sup>vi</sup> *Isaiah 12: 4 (KJV).*

<sup>vii</sup> *I Kings 17: 17-24.*

<sup>viii</sup> *II Kings 4: 18-37.*

<sup>ix</sup> *II Kings 13: 21.*

<sup>x</sup> *St. Luke 7: 17.*

<sup>xi</sup> *St. Luke 8: 41-56.*

<sup>xii</sup> *Acts 9: 36-42.*

<sup>xiii</sup> *Acts 20: 9-12.*

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