

Sermon for Morning Prayer Pentecost, or Whitsunday

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus

from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Joel seems to have been associated with, and to have preached at, the Temple in Jerusalem in about 400 A.D. The occasion for the particular message that is our First Lesson was a great plague of locusts, not an uncommon disaster in the ancient Near East. A swarm of locusts could strip an entire district bare of all living vegetation so, in response to this threat to their food supply, Joel calls upon the people to repent and turn to the Lord. The words in which Joel couches this call are among the most memorable in the entire Bible:

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

Theme:

Joel promised the people that if they will so repent, and return to the Lord, then God will bring about what Isaiah had called “the day of the LORD” and Joel expanded into “the great and terrible day of the LORD”. This is a recurring theme in Old Testament prophecy which was expressly picked up by the New Testament Church and by it applied to Our Lord’s coming.

Undoubtedly, both the Old Testament and New Testament peoples assumed that the appearance of the predicted signs of the Day of the Lord, such as the sudden

outpouring of the Spirit causing prophecies and visions, would be followed in short order by the arrival of the day itself. In actuality, however, it has proven to be the case that these two events have been separated by a very considerable, not to say indefinitely prolonged, period of time.

Development:

1. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, foretold by Joel as a sign of the imminent Day of the Lord, actually occurred on Pentecost.

In the second Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke tells us how the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at the Jewish feast of Pentecost. He gave them the gift of speaking in actual human languages which they themselves did not know and they used this gift to preach the Good News of Christ to the assembled festival goers, many of whom came from distant parts.

Some hearers, who were hostile to the new Faith, seizing on the fact that many of them could not understand the foreign languages in which the Apostles were preaching, accused the Apostles of being incoherent because they were drunk – at 9:00 in the morning! St. Peter defended the Apostles, quoting this passage from Joel, thus making the explicit claim that this outpouring of the Spirit was the one foretold by that prophet.

In other words, from its very first day as a missionary enterprise, the Church has claimed to be the fulfillment of this prophecy, that is, to be the beginning of the Messianic Age, the dawning of the Day of the Lord.

2. The so-called Second Coming of Our Lord will be the advent of the Day of the Lord itself.

Notice I said this would be the “dawning” of the Day of the Lord. That day will not arrive completely and finally until Our Lord comes again in Judgement. We are living in a very prolonged pre-dawn twilight, having seen the faint radiance of the Sun as it nears but still standing in substantial darkness as it remains hidden around the curve of the earth. As the old proverb says, “It is always darkest before the dawn” and at some point “the dayspring from on high” will have risen sufficiently to show the upper limb of that Sun peeking over the horizon.

In the meantime, we of the Church are the dim, barely-perceptible but real evidence to the world that this dawn of the great and terrible Day of the Lord is indeed coming.

3. Between those two events, the Church is the Kingdom of God in constant development upon earth.

As the first, faint sign of the dawn of the Kingdom of God, the Church is a real, although very imperfect, part of that Kingdom. There is much to be done before that Kingdom has arrived in all its potential and glory but enough now exists to put humanity on notice that this fuller, more perfect realization is, indeed, coming.

Between the Church's beginning on the Day of Pentecost until the Day of Our Lord's Coming in Judgement, we, as the Church, represent Him here on earth. Thus we, as the Church, have the responsibility of seeing that His work here is carried out.

Conclusion:

This is the genesis of the Church's missionary enterprise: we are the Body of Christ here and now and so we are called by Him to call others so that they will not fail to enter the Kingdom. We must not be like the so-called "wise virgins" who took advantage of their own foresight to be present to welcome the bridegroom and so gain entrance to the wedding feast while their less provident companions were off looking for oil to refill their exhausted lamps.

Instead of treating the wedding feast of the Lord as an exclusive club for which we have managed to wrangle a place, we should be looking out for our less aware contemporaries. We should warn them of the dangers if they do not provide themselves with sufficient lamp oil and, at need, be ready to share ours with them.

We should not accept the foolish excuses of the men who avoided attending the Lord's feast and who were replaced as guests by chance travelers and the homeless whom the Lord's servants picked up from the wayside. Certainly we must call those to the feast but we also must not neglect those to whom invitations were given but who foolishly ignored them. Just as the wise virgins should have warned their less provident sisters, so we should remonstrate with those who have spurned their invitations.

While we must always be courteous and respectful in our approaches, we must never accept “No” as an answer. This is why, for just one example, the Church always works, and properly works, for the enlightenment and conversion of the Jews and of the Muslims. The best way we can do this is not confrontation but, instead, regularly to lift them up in our prayers:

GOD, the God of Abraham, look upon thine everlasting covenant, and cause the captivity of Judah and Israel to return. They are thy people; O be thou their Saviour, that all who love Jerusalem and mourn for her may rejoice with her; for Jesus Christ’s sake, their Saviour and ours. *Amen.*

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who in thy goodness hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine in our land: Extend thy mercy, we beseech thee, to the nations of the world that still walk in darkness. Enlighten the Moslems with the knowledge of thy truth; and grant that the Gospel of salvation may be made known in all lands, that the heart of the peoples may be turned unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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

2 Joel 2:28-32 (KJV).

3 Romans 8:1-11 (KJV).

4 Joel 2:28b-29 (KJV).

5 R. A. Cole, Joel, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER EDS., THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED 3rd ed. 716 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1970).

6 Joel 1:1-13.

7 Cf. Exodus 10:12-15.

8 Joel 1:14-2:17.

9 Joel 2:12-13 (KJV).

10 Isaiah 13:6a and 13:9a; see also Ezekiel 30:3a; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18a and 5:20a; Obadiah 15a; and Zephaniah 1:14a – where it is “the great day of the LORD”. Zechariah refers four times to event by saying, “in that day”, without appending the phrase “of the LORD”: Zechariah 12:3a,

12:6a, and 12:8a, 12:9a and 12:11a.

11 Joel 2:31; cf. Malachi 4:5.

12 I Corinthians 5:5; II Corinthians 1:14; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:1a and, 2:3a; II Peter 3:4a and especially 3:10a: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...” and 3:12a: “the coming of the day of God” (KJV).

13 Acts 2:13 & 2:15.

14 Acts 2:17-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32.

15 Job 19:25-26; St. Matthew 16:27-28; St. Mark 9:1; St. Luke 9:27; St. John 5:25-29 and 6:54.

16 I Corinthians 12:12-31.

17 St. Matthew 25:1-13.

18 St. Luke 14:16-24.

19 Prayers and Thanksgivings, *THE SCOTTISH BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* (Episcopal Church of Scotland 1929).

20 *Ibid.*

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