

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Sexagesima

Psalm and Lessons:ⁱ

Psalm 33. *Exultate, justi.*

R **REJOICE** in the LORD, O ye righteous; * for it be-cometh well the just to be thankful.

2 Praise the LORD with harp; * sing praises unto him with the lute, and instrument of ten strings.

3 Sing unto the Lord a new song; * sing praises lustily unto him with a good courage.

4 For the word of the LORD is true; * and all his works are faithful.

5 He loveth righteousness and judgment; * the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; * and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

7 He gathereth the waters of the sea together, as it were upon an heap; * and layeth up the deep, as in a treasure-house.

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD: * stand in awe of him, all ye that dwell in the world.

9 For he spake, and it was done; * he commanded, and it stood fast.

10 The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, * and maketh the devices of the people to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsels of princes.

11 The counsel of the LORD shall endure for ever, * and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.

12 Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord JEHOVAH; * and blessed are the folk that he hath chosen to him, to be his inheritance.

13 The LORD looketh down from heaven, and beholdeth all the children of men; * from the habitation of his dwelling, he considereth all them that dwell on the earth.

14 He fashioneth all the hearts of them, * and understandeth all their works.

15 There is no king that can be saved by the multitude of an host; * neither is any mighty man delivered by much strength.

16 A horse is counted but a vain thing to save a man; * neither shall he deliver any man by his great strength.

17 Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, * and upon them that put their trust in his mercy;

18 To deliver their soul from death, * and to feed them in the time of dearth.

19 Our soul hath patiently tarried for the LORD; * for he is our help and our shield.

20 For our heart shall rejoice in him; * because we have hoped in his holy Name.

21 Let thy merciful kindness, O LORD, be upon us, * like as we do put our trust in thee.

G LORY be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the thirtieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter’s vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd [**SHARD**] to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit. For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the

rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.

“And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

“And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson

Text:

From the Psalm: “The Lord loves righteousness and judgment. The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

The Book of Psalms was the hymnal of temple and synagogue and was the prayer book of Christ’s church in its earliest days. In fact it still is for many Christians, including we Anglicans. It was also the Old Testament book most often quoted by our Lord and His Apostles. The Church Fathers commented on it and used it to demonstrate the clear continuity between the Old and New Covenants. The psalms tell us much about the Triune God whom we worship. One author has written: “The psalms foretell coming events, recall history, frame laws for life, suggest what must be done, and in general provide a treasury of good doctrine; they provide comfort in difficult circumstances, and provide examples of prayer, petition, and thanksgiving.”^v

Our Lord quoted the psalms often and in the most challenging situations: most notably when tempted by Satan in the wilderness and during His passion on the cross. This morning I would like to take a look in some detail at Psalm 33 which we have recited together today.

Athanasius advises us: “When you are gathered together with people who are righteous and upright of life, sing with them Psalm 33.” Indeed the psalm is addressed to the righteous: I am quoting the Authorized or “King James” Version, although you can easily follow along with the Miles Coverdale translation which appeared in the first Prayer Book and has been maintained right up through the 1928 edition we use. The two are quite close.

“Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise is comely for [RSV befits] the upright.”^{vi}

Basil the Great says that “...there is every reason for one who is in [the Lord] to be delighted and to make merry.”^{vii} And Augustine exhorts the just to “dance for joy in the Lord, for the Lord abides forever, and so will the exultation of the just.”^{viii}

Instructions on the proper method of praise then follow:

“Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery *and* an instrument of ten strings.^{ix}

Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise [RSV loud shouts].”^x

Augustine says: “only those who are new persons can learn (this new song)” those “renewed by grace...sharers in the New Covenant, which is the kingdom of heaven” and further “Let us sing this new song not with our tongues but with our lives.”^{xi} (By the way, Augustine’s congregation sang the psalms.)

Next we have a rationale for our praise:

“For the word of the LORD *is* right [RSV upright]; and all his works *are done* in truth [RSV faithfulness].^{xii}

He loveth righteousness and judgment [RSV justice]: the earth is full of the goodness [RSV steadfast love] of the LORD.”^{xiii}

There are four important aspects to this judgment of God, which figures so prominently in this psalm. God’s judgment means His forgiveness of sins for repentant sinners; it means eternal life for those who trust in Him and who do His will; it means the righteous’ beholding the beatific vision; and it means the wicked’s separation from His presence and glory.

Thus the Lord is the source of all truth. All His acts are motivated by His great love for all of creation, especially the earth and His greatest creation, mankind. The universe was created through the power of His Word. And that Word is His Son.

The next section of the psalm contrasts the futility of the counsel (thoughts, plans and desires) of the nations or the heathen with the counsel and thoughts of the Lord. Theirs are changeable, but His are eternal and unchanging. The nation that acknowledges him will be blessed. By implication those who do not acknowledge Him cannot rest in the same assurance.

“The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.^{xiv}

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.^{xv}

Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD; *and* the people *whom* he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”^{xvi}

The next few verses speak of the Lord’s care and concern for all men. He is constantly aware of all our thoughts and deeds.

“The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men.^{xvii}

From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.^{xviii}

He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works.”^{xix}

He knows those who put their trust in material means to save them and the futility of their misplaced trust. Only those who put their trust in Him will be preserved from death and famine.

“There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.^{xx}

An horse *is* a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver *any* by his great strength.^{xxi}

Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;^{xxii}

To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.”^{xxiii}

The psalm ends with a declaration of trust and confidence in the Lord on the part of the psalmist speaking for God’s chosen people. The last verse is a petition for the continued blessing of the Lord’s mercy with an assurance that the sole hope of the people is in him.

“Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he *is* our help and our shield.^{xxiv}

For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.^{xxv}

Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.”^{xxvi}

I would like to take a little closer look at verses 4 & 5:

“For the word of the LORD *is* right [RSV upright]; and all his works *are done* in truth [RSV faithfulness].”^{xxvii}

He loveth righteousness and judgment [RSV justice]: the earth is full of the goodness [RSV steadfast love] of the LORD.”^{xxviii}

Here God’s goodness means His righteousness and judgment, kindness, mercy, steadfast love, and forgiveness for the repentant.

The Hebrew word for righteousness (tsed aw kaw') refers to the relationship between God and man as well as that between men. The former implies a correct relationship to the revealed will of God. The latter is action in accordance with God’s law which promotes the well-being of the community. This includes helping the poor and needy (added during the prophetic period). God is the righteous judge who acts for His people and upon whom they may depend for deliverance and vindication.

The other virtue which God loves is judgment. This word refers to a verdict pronounced judicially by a judge who hears a case. It also refers to the rights belonging to someone. The basis of judgment is man’s response to the revealed will of God. It includes the entire range of human experience: thoughts, words, and deeds, and will be such as to allow for different degrees of knowledge of God’s will, and hence different degrees of ability to fulfill it.

Quoting St. Augustine: “... God is almighty, and he neither loses sight of judgment when exercising mercy nor abandons mercy when passing judgment. He looks mercifully on his image [*i.e.* man], taking our frailty into account, and our mistakes, and our blindness; he calls us, and when we turn back to him, he forgives our sins. But he does not forgive those who refuse to turn back.”^{xxix}

A related concept is justification. We know that the righteous are justified by their faith;^{xxx} in other words when they appear before the

judgment seat, they will be declared righteous on the basis of their faith in the perfect merit and finished work of Christ in living a life which sinlessly fulfilled the Law and ended with His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Our union with Christ as members of His Church implies a real incorporation into His death and resurrection.^{xxxii} Justification must lead to sanctification, that is our becoming more Christ-like. As St. James puts it, “faith without works is dead.”^{xxxiii} Believing in Jesus means to do the works which God requires.

But what, you may ask, of non-Christians who perform good works? Looked at from a Biblical perspective, these acts are evidence of the common grace which God sheds on all His people to restrain evil and promote goodness. However, such actions are not atoning or justifying. At the final Judgment, there will be a division between the righteous and the wicked, the elect and the non-elect, those whose names have been found written in the book of life and those whose names have not. Scripture also speaks of Christ’s judgment of His people at His second coming according to their stewardship of the talents, gifts, opportunities, and responsibilities granted to them during the course of their lives (*e.g.*, the Parable of the Talents).

I don’t know how many of you were able to view, much less attend, the National Prayer Breakfast that was held this^{xxxiiii} year on February 2, but I would like to conclude with some points made by the main speaker. Eric Metaxas is the author of best selling books on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and William Wilberforce. Both these men were Christians who believed that loving God meant doing what He commanded. Wilberforce you will recall was the Anglican who led the political movement in England which resulted in the abolition of the slave trade and eventually slavery itself. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor who spoke in defense of the Jews during the Nazi era and died a martyr in 1944.

Mr. Metaxas’ theme was real faith in God and its expression. It is clear from everything our Savior said and did that his was a living religion, in stark contrast to that of the legalistic, external religion of the Jews of His day who, to use our Lord’s metaphor, spent much time cleaning the outside of the cup while inside it was filthy dirty. His

words “as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me”^{xxxiv} re-echo today.

A question Mr. Metaxas posed to the assemblage was “Who do we say is not fully human today?” He had been referring to the promoters of slavery and later the exterminators of the Jews, both of which groups considered the people whose rights they denied as not being fully human. Further he asked: “Who is expendable to us?”

One thing that both Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer realized is that having a living relationship with God leads to action born of seeing others as created in God’s image, just as we are, and that is an idea which is radically different from the way many people view others, and themselves. This led to both these men viewing those who were on the other side of the issue, the pro-slave trade forces in England, the anti-Jewish Nazi regime in Germany, as persons loved by God, and whom they were also called to love.

So those of us who feel called to take a stand in favor of the unborn are also called to love those who do not yet see that they are persons, “fearfully and wonderfully made.”^{xxxv} Remember also that apart from God their view is the natural one. If we are all just accidents of a blind evolutionary process, then a person is simply what those in power say it is. We are called to show them the love of Jesus, love for every single human being, those born and those unborn.

Those who hold a Biblical view of human sexuality are often demonized by those on the other side as bigots. Jesus wants us to love those who call us bigots—to show them the love of Jesus. If you want people to treat you with dignity, treat them with dignity. Jesus tells us we must love our enemies. By his grace, and only by his grace, we can have that supernatural agape love for those with whom we disagree. God’s grace is not just for some; it is for all who will accept it. “The Lord loves righteousness and judgment. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”

Conclusion:

As we prepare our hearts to keep a holy Lent this year, let us ask the Father for grace to see Jesus in those who are different from us in thought, belief, and action. Let us pray for the love of God to be spread abroad in their hearts as it has been in ours. Let us pray the Father for grace to respond to those with whom we disagree about matters of life and liberty with the love of God. Let us pray the Father that our own lives will be a witness to His love for others plainly to see.

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

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 30:8-21 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Mark 4: 26-34 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Psalms 33:5 (MCV).*

^v *ACCS. OT VIII, Psalms, 51-150, Intro., p. xvii.*

^{vi} *Psalms 33:1 (KJV).*

^{vii} *ACCS, OT VIII, p 246.*

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} *Psalms 33:2 (KJV).*

^x *Psalms 33:3 (KJV).*

^{xi} *ACCS, OT VIII, p. 247.*

^{xii} *Psalms 33:4 (KJV).*

^{xiii} *Psalms 33:5 (KJV).*

^{xiv} *Psalms 33:10 (KJV).*

^{xv} *Psalms 33:11 (KJV).*

^{xvi} *Psalms 33:12 (KJV).*

^{xvii} *Psalms 33:13 (KJV).*

^{xviii} *Psalms 33:14 (KJV).*

^{xix} *Psalms 33:15 (KJV).*

^{xx} *Psalms 33:16 (KJV).*

^{xxi} *Psalms 33:17 (KJV).*

^{xxii} *Psalms 33:18 (KJV).*

^{xxiii} *Psalms 33:19 (KJV).*

^{xxiv} *Psalms 33:20 (KJV).*

^{xxv} *Psalms 33:21 (KJV).*

^{xxvi} *Psalm 33:22 (KJV).*

^{xxvii} *Psalm 33:4 (KJV).*

^{xxviii} *Psalm 33:5 (KJV).*

^{xxix} *ACCS, OT VIII, p. 248.*

^{xxx} *Habakkuk 2:4.*

^{xxxi} *Romans 6:1ff.; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5ff.; Colossians 2:20, 3:1ff.*

^{xxxii} *James 2:18ff.*

^{xxxiii} *I.e., 2012.*

^{xxxiv} *St. Matthew 25:40.*

^{xxxv} *Psalm 139:14.*