

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Trinity IX
The Reverend C. Richard Pumphrey, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons: 1

Psalm 91. *Qui Habitat.*

HOSO dwelleth under the defence of the Most High,
 * shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
 I will say unto the LORD, Thou art my hope, and my stronghold;
 * my God, in him will I trust.
 For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter,
 * and from the noisome pestilence.
 He shall defend thee under his wings,
 and thou shalt be safe under his feathers;
 * his faithfulness and truth shall be
 thy shield and buckler.
 Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night,
 * nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
 For the pestilence that walketh in darkness,
 * nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day.
 A thousand shall fall beside thee,
 and ten thousand at thy right hand;
 * but it shall not come nigh thee.
 Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold,
 * and see the reward of the ungodly.
 For thou, LORD, art my hope;
 * thou hast set thine house of defence very high.
 There shall no evil happen unto thee,
 * neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.
 For he shall give his angels charge over thee,
 * to keep thee in all thy ways.
 They shall bear thee in their hands,
 * that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone.
 Thou shalt go upon the lion and adder:
 * the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet.
 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him;
 * I will set him up, because he hath known my Name.

He shall call upon me, and I will hear him;
 yea, I am with him in trouble; I will deliver him,
 and bring him to honour.

With long life will I satisfy him,
 * and show him my salvation.

LORD 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 tenth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.2

“And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran [**HAIR-ann**]. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

“And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.³

“For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia [*Mass-eh-DOE-knee-uh*], that Achaia [*Uh-KYEuh*] was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply if they of Macedonia [*Mass-eh-DOEknee-uh*] come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Ali, one of our Egyptian students, who has been to church with us two or three times, was talking to one of the new Egyptian students, Sally, who is a Christian. He told her that I was a different man when I did my job at church. I thought about

what he said. I certainly had not thoughts about being “different” when performing clerical duties. Upon thinking of this, I thought of Psalm 91, our Psalm today. I could then see that it is the authority and anointing of God that Ali was seeing.

According to Psalm 91, this is available not just to clergy but to all of us. For the Psalmist says “Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High” shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Most High in Hebrew is El Shaddai [***El SHADD-eye***], God of the mountains, God of the high places, the all powerful God. If we do this, we then abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

We need to be dwelling under God’s defense now, and not wait until we are in acute need. A modern analogy would be to get the flu shot now instead of ending up in the hospital with influenza. The Psalmist is speaking of seeking wholeheartedly for God, and putting Him first. This does not mean that you need to be 24 hours a day in church, or be a religious monk or nun. Nor does it mean that one should necessarily be doing as the Anchorites and Hermits of ancient times did. They went into the desert, or climbed on top of a tall pillar to be alone, to get away from temptation and difficulty -- but that is not usually the way of dwelling under the defense of the Most High.

In many cases they merely spent the time in thinking about themselves all day long, and this naturally brought serious troubles upon them. Progress is made by overcoming the practical difficulties of our everyday lives, not by running away from them.

Jesus knew this. He said that he would not pray that his followers should be taken out of the world, but rather that they should remain in the world and develop naturally there. Practical life is the school for spiritual development and leads to overcoming selfishness and fear. Your duty, and my duty, is to fill our places in life, whatever it may be for the time being, to the very best of our abilities, and to sincerely do our best to live up to the highest that we know at the moment.

Look at the promises of Psalm 91. I like to pray Psalm 91 everyday. You, if you dwell -- abide, stay, be with, have your home with -- the Most High, look what happens to you. You are protected from snares of life, from sickness, you are made safe. You have His faithfulness for your shield and buckler. You will not be afraid.

You may see others overtaken, because they walk not with God. God will give you a vision of the reward of the ungodly. You will have holy angels guarding you. You will be delivered from evil. You shall be able to call upon the name of God and God will hear you. This means that He not only hears you, but that he will take action and do something about what He hears. He will give you long life and salvation.

Look at all of these blessings that flow from your simply letting your dwelling place be with God. We have the story of Jacob. Jacob had rocks for pillows. He had a rough life. But what did he see in a dream? Dreams are important in the Bible and they are important to us.

God had a message for Jacob. The God of Abraham and Isaac was speaking to Jacob. God gave a promise of Jacob being a great nation and dwelling in the land that was promised to Abraham. He saw angels going up and down a ladder. Angels bless us and do the work of God. Jacob vowed to give back to God for his blessings. St. Paul in the New Testament reading today reminds us to be cheerful givers.

Jacob had an epiphany. He saw the working of God in his life. God is not a respecter of persons. He has jobs for each of us. Sue and I were remarking the other day that since moving to Tennessee we have more friends and a more satisfying life. From that, one would think that this is the place where we belong. Let's look for where we belong and what we are to be doing.

Let us be aware of dreams. I generally write them down in a notebook. I look back to see if God or my subconscious is telling me something that I need to know. Let us be aware of the spiritual in our lives. The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

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

² Genesis 28:10-22 (KJV).

³ II Corinthians 9:1-15 (KJV).