

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The First Sunday in Advent¹

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

“Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

“And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim [PURR-uh-zim], he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the twenty-first Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage [**BETH-fuh-dgee**], unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Some of you may wonder why the triumphal entry into Jerusalem is read on the first Sunday of Advent. Actually it is quite appropriate because the word “advent” means an approach or a coming.

The coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was arranged for in advance. We know that because Jesus was able to tell His

disciples exactly where to go to find the donkey and what to say to its owner.

The entry of The Son of God into the world of time and space was also arranged well in advance. St. Matthew cites numerous prophecies from the Old Testament that came to fulfillment on Christmas and the days following. So it is appropriate for us to prepare ourselves in advance for the coming of Christ in glory. “Let every heart prepare him room”, as the carol says.

The Roman Catholic Church envisions a place called Purgatory where people go after death to have their souls purified before they are admitted to heaven. Some Anglicans go along with that idea, but the Articles of Religion call it “a fond thing, vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture but rather repugnant to the Word of God.”

Listen again to the Collect for today:

“Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and forever.”

The time is now and the place is here to have your soul purified.

In order to do that you need to ask Jesus to do what He did when He entered Jerusalem. He went into the temple and cleaned the place out. He threw out the merchants and the money changers and everything else that did not belong in God’s house. He needs to do that with the Church again today, and he needs to do it with every one of us.

Jesus came to Bethlehem in great humility. He was content to make His bed where animals feed.

He also came to Jerusalem in great humility. He rode on a beast of burden and submitted to the tyranny of ecclesiastical ego games and civil injustice ending in public execution. But when Jesus came to the Temple, He came with authority and executed judgment on those who had profaned it. So He will execute judgment on everyone who profanes the image of Himself that God has placed in every human being.

We all have stuff that has accumulated in our lives over the course of the past year. We begin a new year today in the life of the Church, and we need to look at all that stuff and decide what really belongs in our lives and what has to go.

In Shakespeare's play, Iago says to Othello: "Who steals my purse steals trash[;] ... 'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he who filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him, and leaves me poor indeed."

I'm sure your reputation has not suffered as much as Iago's has, but it may have become a little tarnished over the past year. Maybe your integrity has been compromised a little. Maybe some amends need to be made or perhaps an apology or two is in order. Now is the time get it all straightened out.

Now is the time to examine your priorities and see just who it is and what it is that takes precedence over everything else. Now is the time to make room in your life by clearing out whatever distracts you from worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Now is the time to make room in your heart by getting rid of whatever is not pleasing to Christ.

Are there old grudges and old resentments lying around in you? Get rid of them. Are there outstanding debts or obligations in your life that have been neglected? Discharge them. Are there relationships that have been neglected or bruised? Refresh them. Are there sins that you have been holding onto? Confess them and lay them on the Lord. That's what Advent is for. Now is the time.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday in Advent, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 28:14-22 (KJV).

⁴ "Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Matthew 21:1-13 (KJV).