

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
Saint Bartholomew¹
(August 24)

The Rev'd Warren E. Shaw, Rector

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Thus saith [**SETH**] the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. ...

“... For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish [**TARR-shish**], Pul [**POOL**], and Lud [**LEWD**], that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan [**JAY-van**], to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith [**SETH**] the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites [**LEE-vights**], saith [**SETH**] the LORD. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith [**SETH**] the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith [**SETH**] the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the First Epistle General of Blessed Peter the Apostle.⁴

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Saint Peter tells us in the Second Lesson for today to cast our care on God. The word translated as “care” in the King James Version is translated as “anxiety” in the Revised Standard Version and that is the word that I shall use. In this translation, “It” refers to those things about which we are preoccupied, or that we worry about.

Notice that the Apostle does not say “If you have anxieties”. He assumes that you do. Everybody does. As long as we are the kind of creatures we are and live in the kind of world we live in, we are going to have things to worry about: our children, our health, our finances, the state of the world, our friends, our business, our social standing. It doesn’t do any good to tell ourselves not to worry. We can’t

help it, and we only make things worse if we try to drive these concerns, these anxieties, from our minds by sheer will power.

Psychiatrists tell us that when we drive things from our minds by sheer will power, we simply drive them underground, below the level of consciousness, which is where they do the most damage. Our anxieties are like gasoline vapors. When they are out in the open, they are annoying and can be harmful, but when they are enclosed and pressed in, they become highly volatile. A small spark can set off a huge explosion.

St. Peter does not tell us to ignore our concerns or to suppress our fears. He tells us to face them, acknowledge them, and then lay them before the Lord. And he tells us to do that for the astonishing reason that God cares about us: “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.”

Do you find that hard to believe? If you find that easy to believe, I’m afraid there is something wrong with your sense of proportion. Think about these statistics.

Light travels at a speed of 186,000 miles per second. At that speed, if it could follow the curvature of the earth, which it cannot do, it could travel completely around the world at the equator in 1/10 of a second—faster than I can say it.

To reach some of the 2 billion or more stars in our galaxy, it would take 230,000 years or more traveling at that speed, and there are many galaxies out there that are much larger than ours. One of the smallest stars in our galaxy is the sun, and on the fourth-smallest planet that revolves around that very tiny star, well that’s where we live. So how could anyone ever get the idea that the One who created all those worlds and sustains them, the ultimate Being from which all other being derives, is even aware of our existence, much less is concerned with our well being? But that’s what the Apostle says, and that is what the Church has always believed and taught.

This mighty incomprehensible God not only cares about the human race as a whole; He cares about each individual. That’s what the Gospel for the day teaches

us. God knows your name. He cares about you as unique person. He knows how many hairs are on your head, and in my case He knows there are not as many as there used to be. He cares about your hopes, your dreams, your fears, your successes, your failures, your joys, your concerns. God cares about what you do with your life. What happens to you makes a difference to Him.

It's not that God needs us. He can get along very well without us, and He did for untold aeons before he decided to create the heavens and the earth. As Archbishop William Temple once said, "God minus the world equals God. The world minus God equals zero." Nevertheless, God cares about us and has more than a passing interest in what happens to us. He wants us to share our anxieties with Him.

How did the Church ever come up with such an outrageous idea? I'll tell you how. It was not by speculation or deduction or by the observation of nature. Those are the methods of philosophy and science. The Church has its own peculiar way of arriving at truth. It is called "revelation".

Revelation means that God shows Himself to us and shares His ways with us through historical events, witnessed and interpreted by people inspired by Him. The initiative in philosophy and science is with us. We seek the truth. But in revelation the initiative is with God. He comes looking for us, as the Gospel passage says. In religion the truth seeks us.

"God shows his love for us," says the Apostle Paul, *"in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* That's how we know God cares about us. In the person of Jesus Christ, God entered into His creation and became a man like us. *"In him,"* says St. Paul, *"all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."* Not only that. He took upon Himself the penalty that justice demanded and abolished death once and for all. We still have to die, of course, just as He did, but we also are destined to rise from the dead, just as He did. So in today's Second Lesson, St. Peter identifies himself as one who has witnessed the sufferings of Christ and partakes of His Glory.

There is a story in one of the ancient books that was not included in the New Testament canon. Such books are not reliable for establishing doctrine, but this story contains a sentence that is simply magnificent, so I have to tell it to you.

It seems that St. Peter and St. Mary were having an argument about which of them should have the place of preëminence in the Church. They were arguing like Christians, by which I mean that Mary thought Peter should have it, and Peter thought Mary should have it. And here is that wonderful sentence: Peter says to Mary, “He whom the heavens cannot contain was pleased to be contained in thee.”

He by whom all things were made entered into the womb of a woman as a tiny helpless embryo. And Mary, the unwed mother, did not abort Him.

Do you think your problems are too trivial in the context of all that is happening in the world? Nothing is too trivial for Him who takes note of the death of every sparrow.

Do you think you are unworthy to come into His presence? Well, you are. But He has nonetheless invited you. Would you insult Him by declining such a gracious invitation?

Do you think the things that trouble you will not change because you lay them before the Lord? Perhaps not. But neither will they change because you worry about them. The fact is that most of the things that trouble us are really distractions that take our attention away from things that are within our control. The things we can do something about are the things we need to focus on. Everything else we can safely leave in the hands of the God loves us enough to become a man in order to be able to shed his blood for us.

Given all of this, and given the continuing abiding presence of the risen Christ in His Church, it is easy to understand why St. Peter says what he says: “*Cast your anxieties on God, because he cares about you.*”

—oo0oo—

St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville Virginia

June 16, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday after Trinity, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 66:1-2, 18-23 (KJV).

⁴ I Peter 5:1-11 (KJV).