

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate**

**Lessons:** <sup>i</sup>

Psalm 48. *Magnus Dominus.*

**G**REAT is the LORD, and highly to be praised \* in the city of our God,  
even upon his holy hill.

2 The hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth; \*  
upon the north side lieth the city of the great King: God is well known in  
her palaces as a sure refuge.

3 For lo, the kings of the earth \* were gathered, and gone by  
together.

4 They marvelled to see such things; \* they were astonished, and  
suddenly cast down.

5 Fear came there upon them; and sorrow, \* as upon a woman in her  
travail.

6 Thou dost break the ships of the sea \* through the east-wind.

7 Like as we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of  
hosts, in the city of our God; \* God upholdeth the same for ever.

8 We wait for thy loving-kindness, O God, \* in the midst of thy  
temple.

9 O God, according to thy Name, so is thy praise unto the world's  
end; \* thy right hand is full of righteousness.

10 Let the mount Sion rejoice, and the daughters of Judah be glad, \*  
because of thy judgments.

11 Walk about Sion, and go round about her; \* and tell the towers  
thereof.

12 Mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, \* that ye may tell  
them that come after.

13 For this God is our God for ever and ever: \* he shall be our guide  
unto death.

**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 second Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>ii</sup>

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the third Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.<sup>iii</sup>

“. . . These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives’ fables,

and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

I’m going to preach on one of the Psalms appointed for today, but it will take a little while to get to it because I need to lay a lot of groundwork.

Our prayer book directs us to say the Gloria at the end of the readings from the Psalms and from certain canticles taken from the Old Testament. That is a way of claiming them as our own. It is like baptizing them. It is saying these texts belong to us Christians.

The Church Fathers consistently interpreted the Psalms as metaphoric prophecies of Christ but the practice goes back beyond the Fathers to the Apostles. The New Testament quotes the book of Psalms more than any other book in the Old Testament and applies those quotes consistently to Christ.

The practice goes back even to Jesus Himself. “You search the Scriptures,” He says to the Jewish authorities, “because ye think that in them ye have eternal life, and it is they that testify of me.”

In the prologue to the fourth Gospel, St John refers to Jesus as “the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” Justin the Martyr picks up that line of theology in his second apology and makes the following claim: “Whatever has been uttered aright by any men in any place belongs to us Christians.”

The claim is that all wisdom has a single source, and that source is the Word of God. This morning’s First Lesson from Proverbs supports that claim: “The Lord giveth wisdom. Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

So the Church claims the right to mine the Old Testament and other sources as well for insights and prophecies. Justin himself draws on Greek culture, as does St. Paul and the author of Hebrews. But since we are dealing this morning with texts of Jewish origin, I will focus on them.

The 48th Psalm begins thus: “Great is the Lord and highly to be praised in the city of our God, even upon his holy hill.”

The Psalmist thinks he is singing about Jerusalem but in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about the city that is set on a hill in the context of addressing His disciples. “You are the salt of the earth”, He says. “You are the light of the world,” He says. And those are the declarations that surround the reference to the city set on a hill, which cannot be hid. The city on the hill is the church. And the hill, by the way, is Calvary.

The author of Hebrews talks about “the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” He states that Abraham, the head of the Jewish race, in whose loins were all the great heroes of the Old Testament, looked forward to entering the city that God had prepared for them. It is clear that the city to which he is referring is the Kingdom of God, also known as the Church.

St. John the Divine writes in Revelation about the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, “adorned as a bride for her bridegroom”. The image of the Church as the bride of Christ is unmistakable.

The Psalmist says that God upholds the city forever. Jesus says that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church.

So whenever we sing in the Psalms about the glory of Jerusalem, we are singing about the glory of the Church and the protection that God provides for us even in difficult times. “God is in the midst of her,” says another of the Psalms, “therefore she shall not be removed.”

And in the midst of Jerusalem stands the temple, which is the place where God’s presence abides and where forgiveness of sins is attained. The Psalmist says, “We wait for thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.” That temple is Christ, about whom St. Paul says, “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. “Making peace,” he says in another place, “by the blood of his cross.”

This interpretation goes back once again to Jesus Himself, who says in St. John’s Gospel, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it.” The evangelist then adds, just to make sure we all understand, “He spoke of the temple of his body.”

The author of Hebrews explains that the temple, and the sacrifices offered there, were “Shadows of good things to come”, “figures of the true”, and “patterns of heavenly things”. Drawing on Platonic philosophy, he sees Christ as the real temple where the real sacrifice is offered once (as we say in our consecration prayer) and not repeatedly as in the temple, which is merely the reflection of Christ.

When St. Peter says to the high priest and other dignitaries of the temple, “There is salvation in none other,” he is referring to Christ and echoing what Jesus Himself has said: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” As the temple once stood in the midst of the city of Jerusalem and was the center of its life, so Christ stands in the midst of the Church and is the center of its life.

The Psalmist says, “We wait for thy loving-kindness, O God in the midst of thy temple.” And so we wait in Christ for what St. Paul calls “the manifestation of the sons of God”, which he subsequently defines as “the redemption of our bodies.”

The teaching here is that, as we say in the Creed, we “look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” We await the coming in glory of Christ to judge both the living and the dead. He has already come in humility to pay the price for our sins. He remains with us as we participate in the life of the Church on earth. He continues with us when we go to our graves. The loving-kindness for which we wait consists of the transformation of our bodies into the likeness of the glorious resurrection body of Jesus. We wait for that great event in the body of the one in whom dwells all the fullness of God, which is to say, in the true temple.

So we pray in the closing prayer of the Mass, “that we may continue in that holy fellowship”. So also we pray at the bedside of those near death, “that when we shall have served thee in our generation we may be gathered to our fathers . . . in the communion of the Catholic Church”. (That’s on page 317 if you want to look it up.)

And again at the grave we ask God to “multiply to those who rest in Jesus the manifold blessings of [thy] love, that the good work which [thou] didst begin in them may be perfected until the day of Jesus Christ.” St. Paul outlines the teaching that underlies these prayers in the famous 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of I Corinthians.

### **Conclusion:**

Now I have given you a lot to think about, and I don’t expect you absorb it all in one morning. But I do hope that, over time, you will come to appreciate the whole new dimension that emerges from the Psalms when you interpret them with reference to Jesus. That’s what the Apostles did. That’s what the Fathers of the church have always done. That’s what faithful Christians still do.

“Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised in the city of our God, even upon his holy hill.”

“We wait for thy loving-kindness, O God in the midst of thy temple.”

“Glory 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.”

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St. David's Anglican Church  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928/1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Proverbs 2:1-9 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *I Timothy 3:14—4:16 (KJV).*