

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ
THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

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

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb [**HOAR-ebb**]. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, (I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to shew [**SHOW**] you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount;) saying,

“I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing [**SHOWING**] mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out

thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

“Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Neither shalt thou commit adultery. Neither shalt thou steal. Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour. Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour’s wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour’s.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Verse of the twenty-second Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.^{iv}

“But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith [SETH] unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”^v In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

In the Second Lesson for today, a question is put to Jesus by a group of Pharisees: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

It is difficult for us to appreciate the enormity of that question because we know the answer and have always known it. We read it at the beginning of every communion service in which we do not read the Ten Commandments. But perhaps you can get an idea of why this question was so important and so loaded by allowing me to ask you a similar question. What is the single most important thing about the Christian faith?

There are many aspects of the Christian faith that all of us would assert, but to pick one above all others as being of supreme importance would surely start an argument. An argument is just what the Pharisees were looking for. There were over 700 commandments in the Jewish law, and every Jew could agree that they were all given by God. But the Jews could not agree among themselves as to which was the most important.

The priests said that the ceremonial laws were the most important of all. The Pharisees thought the moral laws were the most important. Others thought that the civil law was most important. And so it went. Whatever Jesus said was bound to alienate a significant number of people. That, of course, was the whole idea of asking the question.

But Jesus avoided the trap with a quotation from the Scriptures: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” That’s what God demands of you, said Jesus. He wants everything you have and everything you are. Nothing is excluded.

Then Jesus went on to add another quotation from the Scriptures: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” He linked the two quotations together and said, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” At the time the Law and the Prophets were the books that constituted Holy Scripture for the Jews. So Jesus was saying that those two commandments together are what the Jewish religion is all about.

Notice I did not say that this is what the Christian religion is all about, even if our President seems to think so. What we call “The Golden Rule” is part of our legacy from our Jewish roots.

People who think they are Christians because they love God and treat their neighbors right would no doubt be shocked to learn that what they take to be the essence of the Christian faith is actually the essence of the Jewish faith. The essence of the Christian faith is contained in the next question that appears in the passage: “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?”

The answer to that question is what distinguishes Christians from Jews as well as from Muslims and from the highly moral pagans who sometimes associate themselves with the church. Is Christ simply an inspired teacher among others? Is He a superbly moral man, a religious fanatic, a social reformer, or is He really God Himself in human flesh?

The Pharisees were quick to answer, “He is the son of David.” In other words, the Messiah is an ordinary man with a famous ancestor. So Jesus went on: If that is the case, then why does David in the Book of Psalms address him as “Lord”?

The Pharisees did not know how to respond to that, so they simply went away. But the question will not go away. It persists in our own day. It is really the fundamental question of our time. Who is Jesus? Whose Son is He? Where did He come from? What do you believe about Him? What authority do you attribute to Him? How you answer those question determines whether you are a Christian or not.

The essence of Christianity is not a code of behavior or even a set of values. The essence of Christianity is a Person. What makes us

Christians or not is how we relate to that Person. Do we worship Him? Do we obey Him? Do we trust Him with our lives and our eternal destiny?

There are many people in this world who admire Jesus. Even Muslims call Him a prophet. Many see Him as a martyr and an inspiring example of what a godly man should be. But such people are not Christians unless they also call Him “Lord” and “Savior”.

Jesus asked the same question of His disciples that He asked the Pharisees. St. Peter replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus said, “Blessed are you.” St. Thomas fell on his knees when he saw the risen Christ and said, “My Lord and my God.” And Jesus said, “Blessed are you.”

The Church throughout the ages has said, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” And Jesus says that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church.

So I put the question to you: Who do *you* say that Jesus is?

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
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ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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

ⁱⁱⁱ *Deuteronomy 5:1-21 (KJV)*.

^{iv} *St. Matthew 22:34-end (KJV)*.

^v *St. Matthew 22:36*.