

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.⁴

“And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab [NAY-dab], and Abihu [uh-BYE-huh], and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him.

“And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

“Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab [NAY-dab], and Abihu [uh-BYE-huh], and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.

“... And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“... Jesus said unto his disciples, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things may obtain thy promises. That was the heart of our collect this morning. How many times have we, in the recent past, asked God the Father to pour into our hearts such love toward thee? Shouldn't that be the center of our prayer and the heart of our pilgrimage here on earth, as we traverse toward our final reward in Heaven? But within our human understanding, being tainted by sin, we are more

concerned with obtaining thy promises, than loving thee above all things. And so it was with the religious leaders of Jesus' time.

That is why our Lord began our Gospel this morning with, "*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter Heaven.*" Of course, the context of our Gospel, this morning, comes from Jesus' teachings from the **Sermon on the Mount**, which begins in Matthew chapter 5:1 and ends with chapter 7:29. Now, this is the longest recorded teaching that we have from the lips of our dear Saviour at any given time. And what its teachings consist of is how we can have lives devoted to personal holiness, prayer, our relationship with our fellow men, fasting, and how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

What intrigues me, though, is that what Jesus taught was nothing new. All of what He spoke of, in these three chapters, were found either in the Decalogue, which is the Ten Commandments, or the Law of Moses, mainly the Levitical Law, *i.e.*, the book of Leviticus. So the truths, that Jesus spoke here, were nothing new, and had been perpetuated from the earliest of times, beginning with the patriarch Moses.

Now, in saying that, the nation of Israel was founded on this Law, as a theocracy, God being the Head of State. And in establishing these principals of love for God and of fellow man, which in turn we interpreted as standards and regulations, was just His solidifying what we consider the natural created order and the natural moral law.

In chapters 1-11 of the Book of Genesis, we see that the creation of the world and the creation of man were created in perfect unity with the Father's will, and He called it Good. So not only did Jesus speak on these things, and not only did God establish this as a living standard for all faithful Jews to follow, but it was written into our hearts from the very beginning of creation.

Man is intrinsically selfish, but not, as we see here, intrinsically evil, as some may have you to believe. And because we are intrinsically selfish, we see that within the first few chapters of the creation account, man has broken the heart of

the Father, in his desire to become as absolute as God and believing the serpent's lie that God is not good. No longer do we have the freedom to enter into a loving, restored relationship without some means of sacrifice to atone for our corrupted, intrinsically selfish beings.

We walked freely in a loving relationship between Creator and His Creation. But because we no longer cared for the peace and provision of God's divine plan or will, we selfishly fell to the Tempter's tune of becoming like or above God Himself. And so we truly see that after man ate the forbidden fruit, he did know more, as the serpent promised, but what he knew now wasn't of any benefit to him. He knew the shame and guilt of transgressing the only law established by God.

And the effects of that transgression were immediate. Immediately, Adam and Eve, now being under the guilt of sin, were ashamed of their nakedness, which before was regarded in unity of the divine plan and goodness of God's creative purpose, and they clothed themselves with fig leaves.

And as soon as they heard God walking their way, they hid themselves from Him, which allowed them to begin the process of dying a painful spiritual death, which would eventually lead to physical death. But the signs of death were immediate, because death literally means separation from God. And our relationship with Him was broken, because we separated ourselves by transgressing the law, which removed us away from the natural created order, and the natural moral law.

And that is where we find Jesus' train of thought here in the beginning of our Gospel lection today. After years and years of trying to appease the Father out of a broken relationship, we see that the nation of Israel was only interested in going through the motions of the broken relationship. Out of guilt and shame, the Israelites felt they had to hide behind the law which they transgressed. And Jesus was simply pointing to the fact that the Scribes and Pharisees were experts in external righteousness, hiding themselves behind the so-called fig leaves of spiritual shame.

They no longer knew God. They did not have a love for the Father, so Jesus was simply stating the fact that all they could be counted worthy of was their hid-

ing behind the written law of God, and external righteousness, because the law could not be found written within their hearts. And that is exactly why the Messiah had to come. That is why Jesus exposed the hearts of the religious leaders of His time. They perpetuated only that of the spiritual state of God's chosen people.

After our breaking of the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and King David, which in all reality should have drawn us into a deeper relationship with the Father, and giving us the scope in which this relationship was to be lived out whether it be within the family, or within a kingdom, God still did not have the hearts of those who belonged to Him. Because flesh will, and has, always failed the human end of the deal in covenant making, God became flesh, in the incarnated, begotten Christ, to establish a covenant with Himself that would be available to all flesh.

And before the Lamb of God became the propitiation of our sins on the altar of the Cross, He gave us a living example of how one could function within this newly restored relationship-to-be. Through His life and teaching, we see and hear of the heart of One Who is united to the Father's will. Jesus gave us the perfect example of this in His prayer in John chapter 17. He said, "*as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You.*" That has been the desire of God the Father from the beginning, a loving, intimate relationship between Creator and creation, where we give our lives out of love, to the worship, adoration, and service of God Almighty.

Exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees simply means placing the fullness of your trust in Him, Jesus Christ. The law that these men hid behind in spiritual brokenness, Jesus Christ fulfilled. Christ came not to destroy the law, because the law is perfect and will remain so until His second coming. He came to fulfill it.

The demands of the law are just, but no man born of Adam can keep it. And so the fallen nature of man needs someone to redeem it. And there is Good News: That Someone has come. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem man who was under the law, that we might return to the divine relationship of restored Sonship that was lost to us within the sin of Adam.

And in the spilling of His precious blood, the once-for-all sacrifice we discussed earlier was made. He died to fulfill the requirements given to obtain this restored relationship. But don't forget, He was also brought back to life in the Resurrection. And it is in this Resurrection that we have freedom from living under the bondages of sin, and freedom from living under the guilt of knowing that we could not fulfill the demands of the law.

That is why Paul speaks of being united to Christ's death and resurrection in Baptism. Within those waters we are placed in the duality of a tomb and a womb. The dead man, the transgressor of the law, is put to death and laid to rest, and then born again unto new life in the restored image and likeness of God.

Through Faith in Jesus Christ, through repentance and baptism, we can finally become uninhibitedly united to the Father once again, so that He can, without hesitation, pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises.

The promises obtained are divine Sonship and spending eternity in the bosom of His love. Our right to that is the oneness we have with the Father, through the fulfillment of the Law within the incarnation and sacrifice of His Son. So thus a loving unity can be restored by the binding of divine love, which is the Holy Ghost, who shares with us the love of the Father, while breathing new life into us.

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd J. Steven Victory⁶
July 15, 2012

¹ "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).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Exodus 24:1-11, 16-18 (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 5:20-26 (KJV).

⁶ Rector, The Anglican Church of St. Charles King and Martyr (APCK), Huntsville, AL.