

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Second Sunday in Advent¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fifty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith [SETH] the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Verse of the twenty-first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁵

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

A fearful prediction indeed. Jesus warns the disciples that when He returns after His Resurrection, there will be signs in the heavens, dis-

troubling of nations, turmoil in nature, great fear, even heaven itself being troubled.

Our Second Lesson, which is the Gospel reading for today, gives us a taste of the apocalyptic vision for the second coming of Christ into the world at the Judgment. It makes it easier to understand just why the season of Advent is at once a time to prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ, as well as for the Second Coming.

Each of these two events brings almost incomprehensible changes for the people of God. Each changes their lives forever, and each is a turning point from which there can be no return. Jesus' coming to Earth as a human changed the world by fulfilling a promise made ages before, that God would come to save us. Until the coming of Christ, people could only wait for the coming of Messiah. With His arrival, the people of God were confronted face-to-face with His power and authority.

With His coming into the world in that tiny little town of Bethlehem, God set into motion the events which would culminate in His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection and defeat of the powers of death and sin. This birth, obscure by the measure of the world, moved kings and empires.

Before the birth, a star was seen in the heavens above that tiny village, leading kings to the site where the Christ-child was born. In the weeks before the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary would have been preparing to travel, then actually journeying from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethlehem, a distance of about 60 miles.

Remember that this was a journey made in a time when there were no automobiles, no railways, no aircraft. It would have been a journey on foot and on the back of a pack animal, if one was available. Further, it would have been a journey undertaken with a young woman who was ready to be delivered of a child – and so certain delays would have been necessary during travel.

The journey would have taken them through the Plain of Jezreel in Galilee, across several rivers, then across the hilly midlands of Samaria, before traveling along the eastern foothills of Mount Ephraim, passing Jerusalem, and finally to the town of Bethlehem.

Advent is a time of preparation, of getting ourselves ready for the coming of Christ into the world, both in the celebration of His Nativity at Christmas, as well as His Second Coming as final judge of the world. The word Advent comes from the Latin “*adventus*” which means “coming”. At His first coming into the world, our Lord came meek, dependent on His human parents for His care, and subject to all the cares of a human. At His second coming, He will return in all power and glory and majesty to judge and rule. Both of these comings require of us that we prepare ourselves.

We must prepare ourselves to be His servants as we await His coming into the world. To that end we must make a careful, honest and searching inventory of our lives, to root out our own sin and all those things that make us unworthy to follow Him. As we heard in the Exhortation⁷ last week, we must each week prepare ourselves to be suited to receive the Holy Eucharist. If we find fault, we must be ready and willing to correct that fault.

Finally, when we consider the return to Earth of Jesus to serve as judge of all creation, we must prepare for that judgment, readily acknowledging and confessing our sins to God and seeking His forgiveness.

We do not know when that second coming may occur. We only know that it will occur. Yet, we are given signs for which to watch: “*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.*” We will see strange things occur in the heavens.

On earth, there will be “*distress of nations, with perplexity.*” People will be confused and wonder which way to turn. False leaders may arise and try to lead people away from God. Nature itself will seem to be in turmoil, as we see “*the sea and the waves roaring.*”

All these things will cause great turmoil and distress, as “men’s hearts fail them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” The events will seem so frightening, so alarming, so widespread that they cause panic among the people. All the world will seem out of control and in great distress.

The turmoil will extend even to heaven, He warns. “*For the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*” The faithful will not be shaken. They will remember Jesus’ words and hold tightly to that assurance. “*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*” Jesus, Son of man and Son of God coming again to Earth.

We must be ready. We must prepare. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Let us pray.

Come, O Lord, we pray. Be with us now as we prepare for the celebration of Your Nativity, as well as for your final return as our judge and savior. Help us to know our own faults so as to make those changes we need to make to be Your people. This we pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Second Sunday in Advent, 2012.

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

³ Isaiah 55:1-end (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. Luke 21:25-33 (KJV).

⁶ The Gospel According to St. Luke 21: 25-27 (NIV).

⁷ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 85 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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