

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Second Sunday after Easter

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fortieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

“O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief

and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson:

“[W]hen he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Homily:

There can be only one true leader, and the motives of those who pretend to be or to speak for that leader are always to be suspected. In today’s Second Lesson, Jesus uses again the allegory of the shepherd and the sheep to illustrate another vital lesson to His followers. Here he speaks of the ways that the people of God—the sheep of the fold—identify that true leader, their shepherd. The first thing He notes is that the sheep know their shepherd, and will not follow imposters.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a

robber.” This message was directed at the false prophets, and the Scribes and Pharisees who had tried so hard to mislead the people of God by inducing them to follow man’s law rather than God’s. But Christ, the only good and true shepherd, was sent from God to lead the people, and so the people recognize Him and follow Him to the exclusion of others.

Further, He describes the Scribes and Pharisees as thieves and robbers, not sent by God, and not taking an honest, open, and correct approach to God’s people. Those Scribes and Pharisees and false prophets, Jesus says, “*entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way,*” and each of them is “*a thief and a robber.*”

The Church is much like the enclosure where the sheep are housed inside, and there the sheep meet with the shepherd, and are fed, protected and nourished for by the shepherd, just as the people of God meet their Lord, and are fed, nourished and preserved in the Church.

False leaders and ministers in the Church are damaging to the people of God, just as a false shepherd can deal violence and evil to the flock when they falsely find a way to enter into the sheepfold and take their place by usurpation. They find their way to the sheepfold by trickery and deceit rather than by the authority and power of God.

The proper shepherd, by contrast, “*entereth in by the door [and] is the shepherd of the sheep.*” Our shepherd is Jesus Christ, who takes His power and Authority from the Father to lead us and protect us. As the sheep know the voice of their shepherd, and follow him unquestioningly, so do the people of God follow our Shepherd, Jesus Christ. “*And the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out,*” Jesus says.

Where do we hear His voice? We find it in the Gospel, the Word of God, which is full of grace, mercy and love, and which proclaims to us the Good News that our Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, has achieved our salvation. As we know our Shepherd, He knows us as well. He calls us by name and leads us.

We take on the characteristics of our Lord and Savior, and are even known by His name: we are called Christians. We follow our Lord because we choose to do so, and we strive to be as harmless and inoffensive to our fellow man as are sheep. Even so, we find ourselves exposed to the evil of the world and of non-believers, yet we remain meek and patient.

It is from this worldly pasture that includes such evil that our Shepherd Jesus leads us. He leads us from a world dominated by evil, into the fullness of His own grace and to the presence of God the Father, where we may exist in perfect peace and tranquility with Him.

It is important too to note that unlike some shepherds, who drive their sheep before them to face whatever attack there might be, our Lord Jesus leads us, going before us to be an example and guide, and to protect us. Only two short weeks ago, we watched as our Lord went before us to protect us from sin, giving Himself to the gruesome agony of the cross to pay our debts. Thus our Shepherd Lord is an example to us as well as our leader, for He has warned us that we must follow in His footsteps. *“And the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”*

We know our Lord. He speaks to us directly and powerfully in the Gospel. He tells us what He wants of us, and offers us the choice of following Him or not. How different are the calls of our Shepherd-Lord to follow Him compared to the self-serving demands for money we often hear from false teachers and prophets.

Compare the words of our Lord, *“Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me,”*^v with the words of a television preacher who some years ago told his viewers that if they did not give him millions of dollars, God would “call him home.”

We do follow Jesus. We do know His voice. *“A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers,”* says Jesus. We will follow our Lord. We will follow those who profess His message and His word. We listen to those who preach His Gospel. But those who do not profess Christ we will shun. We know them to be not only disagreeable, but even dangerous.

We know that these false leaders often wish to promote not the Gospel of God, but instead the agenda of man. They replace Scriptural truth with politically correct nonsense and personal vendettas. These people are indeed thieves and robbers. They wish to steal the faith of God's people, to tear away the faith of the sheep of God and to destroy. They wish only evil.

Our Lord comes to give us everlasting life. As our Lord clarified for the benefit of the Pharisees, "*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*"

There can be only one true leader, and the motives of those who pretend to be or to speak for that leader are always to be suspected. We have but one Shepherd, and one Lord.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, grant to us thy sheep the wisdom and discernment always to know the difference between Your will and that of the false shepherds. Let Your Gospel always be our secure rock and assurance, and let us not waver nor weaken in the face of false promises, lies and deceits of the devil and of men. Let our eyes remain fixed upon You, and our hearts remain faithful and true. This we ask of Your eternal mercy. Amen.

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

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 40:1-11 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. John 10:1-10 (KJV).*

^{iv} *John 10:4-5 (KJV).*

^v *Matthew 19:21 (KJV).*

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