

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Lessons: ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-ninth Verse of the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus. ⁱⁱ

“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone: and Moses put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark. ⁱⁱⁱ

“And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a

voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias^{iv} must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.”^v In the Name of the ✠ Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the ✠ Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Development:

There is a advertisement being used today on radio and television in which the Australian voice of the announcer, after making what he perceives as a witticism, thinks better of his words and comments, “Have you ever said something, then wished you hadn’t said it? This is one of those times.” That must be how the impulsive Peter felt when told by the Father to quit talking and to listen.

It is important to remember that the Apostles at the time of the Transfiguration did not yet really understand who Jesus was, nor could they comprehend His mission on Earth. They assuredly understood that He was someone great, someone who could do inexplicable things, but they simply did not understand His divinity.

Just six days prior to the events in today's reading, there took place the second of the feeding miracles, in which Jesus fed the multitude which had come to hear Him, using only seven loaves and a few fishes in. Indeed, after that feeding, Jesus had rebuked the disciples for their non-belief saying, "*Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember?*" And He had explained to His disciples yet again what His fate would be: that He would be rejected and killed in Jerusalem, and then would rise again.

And now, in today's Second Lesson, our Lord had taken Peter, James and John with Him to a mountain, where He met with the prophet Elias—that is, Elijah—and with Moses. And before the very eyes of the bewildered Apostles, Jesus' very appearance changed.

In his description of these events, the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew says "*and his face did shine as the sun it had still the same appearance of an human face, but had such a dazzling glory upon it, as equaled the sun shining in its full strength*" Or, in other words, while His body was not physically changed, Jesus now appeared to the Apostles with His divine glory. Not only did Jesus shine, but so too did his clothes, reported the Apostle Mark. They became "*exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them.*" Whiter than any man could make them, no matter how much he scrubbed, or dyed, or bleached them.

And so, confronted with this vision, the bewildered Apostles did not know quite what to do or say. As Mark says of Peter, "*For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*" And of what were they afraid? Here they stood on a deserted mountain, observing these changes in Jesus, watching Him talking with Moses and Elijah, both revered Fathers of the faith, but both long dead.

Remember, too, that Jesus had just explained again to the Apostles what would happen to Him. He had explained to them how He would be condemned, and rejected and killed in Jerusalem. When Peter had reacted negatively to that news, our LORD told him, "*Get thee behind me, Satan.*"

He had told the Apostles the stark truth: “For *whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.*” It is hardly any wonder that Peter was afraid.

And so, Peter offered what he must have thought was a high compliment: “*Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*” It is good to be with Jesus, Peter thought. Good to be with Moses and Elijah, ancient leaders of the faith. Good not to be among the crowds below, and especially, perhaps, good not to go to Jerusalem and face the horrors Jesus had told them must come.

And so he proposed to build tabernacles, booths, used in the feast of tabernacles, one each for Jesus, for Elijah, and for Moses. The tabernacles were small huts, usually made of tree branches to keep off rain, wind and sun, in which Jewish families would eat meals during the festival of Sukkot and which commemorate the huts in which the Jewish people lived during the 40 years in the desert after the exodus from Egypt.

What Peter so obviously misunderstood was that Jesus is not on the same level as Moses and Elijah. To put them on equal footing with Jesus displayed a misunderstanding of who Jesus is. Further, to suggest that these glorified people might need a tabernacle to dwell in was mistaken. And so while Peter was making his proposal, God the Father stopped him in his tracks: “*And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.*” God the Father, cutting through all the lesser points, told Peter and the others, “*This is my beloved son.*” He set aside Jesus from all others, not including Moses, nor Elijah.

“*This is my beloved son.*” This is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. This is the very Son of God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. “*Hear him.*” Quit talking and listen. Don’t listen to all the other leaders, spokesmen, commentators; “*Hear him.*”

We would do well to do the same. Like Peter, we are prone to prattle. We talk before we think. We say and do foolish things, usually not from an intent to do evil, but from not listening to God.

“This is my beloved son. Hear him.” God was not speaking just to Peter, James and John, but also to us.

Let us pray:

Lord, grant to us the ability to shut out the distractions of the world. Grant us the peace to seek out your word rather than listening so much to our own words, and the wisdom to know the difference. Let us always seek to hear your Son, our LORD and to follow in His ways. Amen.

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

ⁱⁱ *Exodus 34:29-end (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Mark 9:2-13 (KJV).*

^{iv} *I.e., Elijah.*

^v *St. Mark 9:5-7 (KJV).*

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