

SERMON FOR SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY
Larry Wagoner (With permission)

Lessons and Psalm:ⁱ

The Psalm: Psalm 20. *Exaudi te Dominus.*

THE LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; * the Name of the God of Jacob defend thee:

2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, * and strengthen thee out of Sion:

3 Remember all thy offerings, * and accept thy burnt-sacrifice:

4 Grant thee thy heart's desire, * and fulfil all thy mind.

5 We will rejoice in thy salvation, and triumph in the Name of the LORD our God: * the LORD perform all thy petitions.

6 Now know I that the LORD helpeth his anointed, and will hear him from his holy heaven, * even with the wholesome strength of his right hand.

7 Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses; * but we will remember the Name of the LORD our God.

8 They are brought down and fallen; * but we are risen and stand upright.

9 Save, LORD; and hear us, O King of heaven, * when we call upon thee.

GLORY be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, now is, and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of Joshua.ⁱⁱ

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the

going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy:ⁱⁱⁱ

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

All three of our readings today, Psalm 20, Joshua and Second Timothy, concern themselves with being a soldier for Jesus Christ and for the Gospel. All three encourage bravery, single-mindedness and trust in God. These military metaphors are appropriate because we know that the Church from its earliest days has been under attack from forces desiring to destroy it.

This is perhaps more true today than ever, with even our own government pushing policies trying to restrict the free practice of religion, or force practices that are Scripturally abhorrent on people of faith. Today's readings urge us to consider the disposition of forces, as it were.

As Saint Paul will later comment in his Epistle to the Romans, *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”*^{iv}

From Psalm 20:

*“Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses; * but we will remember the Name of the LORD our God.*

*They are brought down and fallen; * but we are risen and stand upright.*

*Save, LORD; and hear us, O King of heaven, * when we call upon thee.”*^v

Then again, from Joshua 1:9: *“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”*^{vi}

And finally, from Second Timothy 2:3: *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”*^{vii}

Let us consider each of these exhortations. The chariots mentioned in the Psalm reflect the power sometimes brought to bear against Christians. The chariot was, in its day, a fearful engine of war. It lifted the warrior above those he fought against, and gave him speed and power in battle. Chariots often were outfitted with cutting blades along their sides, and could cut down opposing infantry like a scythe. They were the “main battle tanks” of the ancient world.

Horses trained for war would paw and trample opposing soldiers. They, too, put the warrior above his opponent, and gave him an advantage in combat because of their immense strength and speed. These kinds of instruments are trusted by some, says the Psalmist, but the Christian knows to hold fast instead to God:

*“...but we will remember the Name of the LORD our God.
They are brought down and fallen; * but we are risen and stand upright.
Save, LORD; and hear us, O King of heaven, * when we call upon thee.”*

Only in God can we be assured of victory in our battles against evil. Those who trust in the things of the world are bound to fail in the end, while the Christian knows *“but we are risen and stand upright.”* We can stand up against evil not just now, but in all times to come, for we rely on the Lord, the King of heaven.

In the Book of Joshua, we hear of the Lord speaking to Joshua, urging him to be brave and follow His commands: *“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”*

The Lord had ordered Joshua to lead the people of Israel to cross over the Jordan on the journey to the promised land of Israel, into the land of Canaan. Joshua, trusting in God, led the people forth. But the command from God was not just to go, it was to go forth in strength and in courage.

Joshua was ordered to trust in God—the everlasting I AM—who is faithful and able to fulfill His promises to the people of Israel. We, too, are called to take on our daily tasks with courage and strength. When we consider whose work it is we do, we can only find courage and strength.

We, like Joshua, are commanded to “*be not afraid, nor be thou dismayed.*” We should never lose our confidence in God, no matter how dire the circumstances might seem at the time. The forces arrayed against us often seem powerful, but compared to the might of God they dwindle to nothingness.

That is not to say that it is not sometimes hard to battle onward. We are faced by people who continually protest that we are being unfair, that we are hateful, that we are biased, that somehow we do wrong when we say again and again, “No. God has told me that is wrong, and it *is* wrong.”

We are told we should accept the unacceptable. That we should not object, and certainly never give voice to our objections when we are asked to do things that we know to be wrong. We are shunned, called all sorts of vile names, and are persecuted. But what did Christ say? “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”^{viii}

Remember always that God is with us always. As Paul counsels Timothy, “*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*”

The soldiers of Jesus Christ must know that they will suffer “hardness”, afflictions and suffer evil. It is the nature of the battle we fight. Jesus told us we must take up our Cross and follow Him. Our Lord and leader suffered scourging and the death upon the Cross. We fight under His leadership and guidance. We fight the good fight of faith. We strive to be the “*good soldier of Jesus Christ.*”

It is a difficult thing sometimes to take on that battle. We get weary. We become fatigued with the strains of this spiritual battle. We begin to consider whether it is better to make concessions in order to

preserve some kind of peace. We wonder about what we give up in order to fight the fight.

But Paul warns us about this as well: “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*” The soldier for Christ does not concern him- or herself with the things of the world that are sacrificed for the service. As soldiers give up the general civil concerns to military service in a literal sense, those involved in spiritual warfare give up concerns of the world in the spiritual sense.

We do not “entangle” ourselves with affairs of this life, focusing instead on the things of the time to come. If we are misunderstood, put down and persecuted for our faith, what of it? How could any such matter compare to the eternal issues at hand? It is truly said that no one can serve two masters. We are called to serve God and Gospel.

We look to Him to support us in knowledge, strength and courage. With Him on our side, we cannot fail.

Let us pray. Lord, guide us always to fight your fight. Lead us, strengthen us, give us courage in time of peril and an understanding heart and mind to follow your commands always and in all things. In Jesus’ Name we pray. *Amen.*

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

ⁱⁱ *Joshua 1: 1-9 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *II Timothy 2: 1-13 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Romans 8:31.*

^v *Psalm 20:7-8.*

^{vi} *Joshua 1:9.*

^{vii} *II Timothy 2:3.*

^{viii} *Matthew 5:10.*

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