

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.^{iv}

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.^v

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;

they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?”*^{vi} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

A more direct contradiction of today’s popular lifestyles is difficult to imagine. In a world where “image is everything,” and “the clothes make the man,” and in a place where we “live to eat,” today’s Gospel message is a broadside salvo into some of the popular beliefs held by so many today.

The values of the world are askew. When image matters more than substance, we are in grave trouble. When values are cast aside in the acquisition of things, we put our lives in peril.

The rot extends far and wide. Politicians are successful, not because of what they believe or do, but because of how they are packaged by advertising specialists. Their words are almost never their own, leading to examples such as the “leader” who cannot string together two ideas in a literate sentence without the help of his

teleprompter. We end up with elected officials actually saying that we should pass a piece of legislation so we can find out what is in it.

The 30-second advertising blurb has become the replacement for honest, clear explanation of ideas. When the purveyors of this kind of empty thing get caught playing fast and loose with the simple truth, they cannot admit, “I made a mistake”, or “I was wrong.” No—they “misspoke,” or they were “taken out of context.”

Many of our young people wear clothing that is intentionally torn to near rags as some kind of fashion statement gone wrong. Others wear clothes that cover nearly nothing and which would once have been thought proper attire only for the locked-door bedroom of a newlywed.

We have become a people no longer served by those who propose to sell us things, but rather overwhelmed by their constant push at us to buy, buy, buy. We should get a new car, they insist. Certainly our old cell phone—which we bought only last year—is out of date and hopelessly obsolete.

We should all run right down to the store and buy the latest lawn food so that next week we can go get a new lawnmower and all the accessories for that. Then, by next year we will need a new mower.

When we go out to eat, we should all make sure we “supersize” our meals, they tell us. (Friends, don’t look now, but I know very few of us who need to supersize our meals.) How refreshing it would be if they could instead say, “Get the meal that is made with the freshest and best ingredients for you.”

Just as our minds are reeling with all the consumer demands made on us, leaving us in a state of stress, we are told we also need to “ask our doctor” if the pill on TV is “right for us.” Never mind that it may make us spout feathers and grow a tail. Clearly, with our stress-filled lives – we need it.

Or do we? Let’s go back to today’s Gospel: “*Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life.*”

Stop worrying so much. Depend instead on God. Quit coveting the wealth of the world, which in the end is useless. Remember that those who seek all the rewards of this life have earned their reward, while our reward is in Heaven.

In our choice of that which we treasure, we also choose which life we shall live. As Matthew says, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*^{vii}

The treasures we claim when we follow God’s value system rather than man’s are eternal. Man’s treasures are subject to time, to loss and to decay. God’s are impervious to time, and cannot be stolen or lost.

Further, the things of man are valuable only because of the imperfect value system of man. How else could it be that pants with holes in the knee would be more valued than those that are whole and without tears?

The reality is, our lives are more important than any of those things. Our lives were given us by God and they are valued by Him. We are more than packaging, and far more than just that stuff that we drape ourselves in or put into our mouths.

“Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?” Isn’t our life more than just the eating, the working, the everyday business of life? Are we not more than our jobs? *“Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”*

If we know that we are here for one reason—to serve God—then all else is minor detail. When we allow our concerns over those details to determine our decisions, our choices, our very lives, then we turn our existence into a farce in which we are here to serve the irrelevant, rather than God. But if following God’s will is our desire, if His love is our treasure, then our hearts and minds will instead be focused on Him and His service.

No man can serve two masters,^{viii} says Saint Matthew. You must choose who you will serve, and who you are willing to ignore. You will, in Matthew's words, have to choose to love one and hate the other. You must choose, then, between the pursuits of the wealth and values of man, and the values and eternal treasures of Heaven.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The two might exist without conflict for a time. Eventually, however, they will conflict. When that time comes, it might be too late to choose.

None of this is to say that God's people cannot, or even should not, be successful in their lives. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with being successful. The question really comes down to what is the most important thing to you. What really, truly, in the last analysis, matters to you most? It is to say that your focus, your goal, should always and in all things, be the glorification of God and service to Him.

So when someone says that they would "give anything" for a particular car, or item of clothing, cringe. When someone says a particular food is "to die for", pray that they do not mean it.

We can have but one God – and our God cannot be our lust for the things of the world.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us to cast aside the cares, attractions and distractions of the world, focusing instead on Your plan for our lives. When we are tempted, give us the strength that will let us return to Your reassuring pathways. When we falter, uplift us. When we question, calm our troubled minds with Your ever-valid answers. When we need reassurance – stand with us in the time of tribulation so that in the end, we may be welcomed home with all Your saints – good and faithful servants.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW^{ix}
September 16, 2012

ⁱ “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).

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

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

^{iv} *Joel 2:21-27 (KJV)*.

^v *St. Matthew 6:24-end (KJV)*.

^{vi} *St. Matthew 6:25 (RSV)*.

^{vii} *St. Matthew 6:19-21 (RSV)*.

^{viii} *St. Matthew 6:24 (RSV)*.

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