

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

Trinity Sunday²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-third Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.⁴

“The pride of the height, the clear firmament, the beauty of heaven, with his glorious shew [**SHOW**]; The sun when it appeareth, declaring at his rising a marvellous instrument, the work of the most High: At noon it parcheth the country, and who can abide the burning heat thereof? A man blowing a furnace is in works of heat, but the sun burneth the mountains three times more; breathing out fiery vapours, and sending forth bright beams, it dimmeth the eyes. Great is the Lord that made it; and at his commandment runneth hastily. He made the moon also to serve in her season for a declaration of times, and a sign of the world. From the moon is the sign of feasts, a light that decreaseth in her perfection. The month is called after her name, increasing wonderfully in her changing, being an instrument of the armies above, shining in the firmament of heaven; The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord. At the commandment of the Holy One they will stand in their order, and never faint in their watches. Look upon the rainbow, and praise him that made it; very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof. It compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the most High have bended it. ... We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore in sum, he is all. How shall we be able to magnify him? for he is great above all his works. The Lord is terrible and very great, and marvellous is his power. When ye glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as ye can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when ye exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough. Who hath seen him, that he might tell us? and who can magnify him as he is? There are yet hid greater things than these be, for we have seen but a few of his works. For the Lord hath made all things; and to the godly hath he given wisdom.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁵

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

It is sometimes difficult to live a Christian lifestyle. We are surrounded with temptations, challenges and burdens seemingly at every turn. Sadly, some of the most destructive of those challenges come not from without the faith, but from within.

This is especially true for us who strive to remain faithful to the Scriptures in our lives and who try to refrain from “innovations,” and changes that are little more than giving in to current popular whim.

We can be re-assured, then, that even in the time of St. Paul this was true. Paul found himself in prison, but was still called upon to write to the church at Ephesus to urge the church there to refrain from bickering, in-fighting and dissent: *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*⁷

We are all called to this same vocation: to live in the Lord and His ways. Paul is asking that we all continue to take the Gospel message seriously and live up to its demands on us. Too, it is interesting that Paul asks that the church—and we—“walk worthy”, which he, being in prison, could not do. He could only write, while we are free to move about and spread the message.

St. Paul makes no pretense as to how hard this is: *“with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love”*⁸ It is difficult to live in community with other fallible human beings. For us to continue to get along with each other requires that we forgive each other (and ourselves) often. We have to be prepared to accept each other’s foibles and failures as our own. And we need to be cognizant that others are doing the same thing for us.

In any community of people, one of the things the members report being hardest to do is to get along with each other. At first, of course, it isn’t so hard, but, over time, people seem to grate on each other, exceedingly fine at first like a bit of sandpaper, then progressively rougher, as a cheese grater. It is said that the main thing any couple needs in a marriage is a sense of humor. The two partners have to be able to laugh at each other to avoid doing serious injury to each other. The laughter comes from love.

Living in Christian community is like that. How many times have churches split apart over infighting among the members? So Paul tells the Ephesians to consider first that he is literally a prisoner for the faith, and that they should consider that they bear the name of Christ and should act accordingly: “*Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*”

And how do we do this thing? Paul says we must strive for unity of the Spirit and the unity of peace. Be faithful friends of all Christians and be a sworn enemy to sin. We should not allow ourselves to be easily provoked or offended. But this is a very difficult thing to achieve.

We are so prone to look for offense, even when none was intended. We imagine that others are trying to cause us difficulty, even when no such intent was present at all. But St. Paul calls us away from all that: “*With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*” Be humble. Be gentle of spirit. Be patient. Be willing to forgive, even when we have been injured. After all, we have much for which we, too, need to be forgiven.

Maintain always the family of Christ, for it is in that family that we live and thrive and grow and without it we would be alone. But if we can live in this unity of spirit, then we continue to support each other, uphold each other, support each other and love each other, just as Paul urged us to, and how we are commanded to in the Gospel.

“*There is one body, and one Spirit,*”⁹ Paul says. The one body is the body of Christ, of which we are members. None of those members stand alone or apart or can function appropriately without all the rest of the members. Each of the members of the body partakes in the same calling, being a Christian and living the Christian life which brings forgiveness of our sins and salvation, leading to eternal life.

And, as we should remember from our catechisms and the Articles of Religion, “*There is but one living and true God, everlasting...*”¹⁰ But if “*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*”¹¹ as St. Paul points out, why do we fight among ourselves? Christians are supposed to be known for their peaceable, friendly manner and willingness to live together without rancor or discord. Sadly, too often we fail to live up to that reputation.

Our Lord warned that “*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.*”¹² We cannot permit ourselves to be that kingdom that is laid waste or the household that falls. We must be, rather, the kingdom that is united, strong and sure, and the household that stands behind all its members, upholding them in love, in forgiveness and in harmony as our Lord would have us to do.

It is not easy. Our Lord did not promise us a carefree and easy life. Rather He called us to “*Take up (our) cross daily and follow me.*”¹³ We must live up to this vocation to which we are called and live as Christians. Remember that a trade not practiced will support no one, but this finest of trades, applied and practiced well will result in eternal life through the One Lord, faith and baptism and the One God who is above all, through all and in us all.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, You have called us to follow You in all things, including in our mode of life. Help us to show forth the forbearance, the love, and unity for which our common Christian life calls. When we fail, reprove us gently and return us to Your path. When we doubt, fill our minds with Your reassuring joy, and, finally, bring us with all Your Saints into Your eternal kingdom. Amen.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁴
September 30, 2012

¹ “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).

² This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ *Ecclesiasticus 43:1-12, 27-33 (KJV).*

⁵ *Ephesians 4:1-16 (KJV).*

⁶ *Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV).*

⁷ *Ephesians 4:1 (NIV).*

⁸ *Ephesians 4:2 (NIV).*

⁹ *Ephesians 4:4 (NIV).*

¹⁰ *Article 1, The Articles of Religion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 603 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

¹¹ *Ephesians 4:5 (NIV).*

¹² *St. Luke 11:17 (RSV).*

¹³ *St. Luke 9:23 (RSV).*

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