

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
Quinquagesima Sunday¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.³

“And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel [**BETH-ull**], unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel [**BETH-ull**] and Hai [**HAY-eye**]; Unto the place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

“And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle: and the Canaanite [**KAY-nunn-ight**] and the Perizzite [**PEAR-ih-zight**] dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar [**ZOE-urr**]. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan [**KAY-nunn**], and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

The Rev'd Robert Hart²⁰
September 2, 2012

“And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre [**MAM-ree**], which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.”

Or,

Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.⁴

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer [**ell-ih-EE-zurr**] of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees [**KOLL-deez**], to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 34 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (CIPBC 1963).

³ Genesis 13:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Genesis 15:1-18 (KJV).

⁵ *Ecclesiasticus* 1:14-end (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 10:25-37 (KJV).

⁷ St. Luke 9:52.

⁸ Romans 5:8.

⁹ Acts 10:38.

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vv. 4-6.

¹² St. John 15:13.

¹³ St. Matthew 26:50.

¹⁴ Psalm 22:12-18.

¹⁵ St. Luke 23:33-34.

¹⁶ St. Matthew 5:43-48.

¹⁷ I Timothy 25.

¹⁸ *Tobit* 1:16-18; *see also Tobit* 2:3-8.

¹⁹ Proverbs 28:9.

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that a man of Israel had died, he rose from his dinner and buried him, even though the king had ordered that the corpses of Jews were to be left to rot, so that the crowds could belittle and insult them even in death.

*“And in the time of Enemessar I gave many alms to my brethren, and gave my bread to the hungry, and my clothes to the naked: and if I saw any of my nation dead, or cast about the walls of Nineve, I buried him. And if the king Sennacherib had slain any, when he was come, and fled from Judea, I buried them privily; for in his wrath he killed many.”*¹⁸

Acts of charity are always in accord with the Law of God. If the rare occasion arises wherein charity appears to conflict with a religious duty, God has commanded us to place charity as the higher priority. The Priest and Levite should have risked ceremonial uncleanness, a mere concern of the cultic “Kosher Laws,” to obey the moral law to love their neighbor in his time of need. Someone else could serve in the temple during the time in which they might have become *lo tahor*, or ritually “unclean”. It would not have been the end of the world. If ever your sensitivities, and not merely but *especially* your religious sensitivities, incline you to place ceremony or rubrics ahead of charity, be certain that God will regard your prayers as an abomination, adding sin to sin. *“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”*¹⁹

And, concerning that Law, the second great commandment is this: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus has taught us the way, and in showing us the way has, on His Cross, redeemed us from sin and death.

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He that shewed [SHOWD] mercy on him.’ Then said Jesus unto him, ‘Go, and do thou likewise.’”

came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites [AM-uh-rights] is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates....”

Or,

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.⁵

“... To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and it was created with the faithful in the womb. She hath built an everlasting foundation with men, and she shall continue with their seed. To fear the Lord is fulness of wisdom, and filleth men with her fruits. She filleth all their house with things desirable, and the garners with her increase. The fear of the Lord is a crown of wisdom, making peace and perfect health to flourish; both which are the gifts of God: and it enlargeth their rejoicing that love him. Wisdom raineth down skill and knowledge of understanding, and exalteth them to honour that hold her fast. The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord, and the branches thereof are long life. The fear of the Lord driveth away sins: and where it is present, it turneth away wrath. A furious man cannot be justified; for the sway of his fury shall be his destruction. A patient man will tear for a time, and afterward joy shall spring up unto him. He will hide his words for a

time, and the lips of many shall declare his wisdom. The parables of knowledge are in the treasures of wisdom: but godliness is an abomination to a sinner. If thou desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord shall give her unto thee. For the fear of the Lord is wisdom and instruction: and faith and meekness are his delight. Distrust not the fear of the Lord when thou art poor: and come not unto him with a double heart. Be not an hypocrite in the sight of men, and take good heed what thou speakest. Exalt not thyself, lest thou fall, and bring dishonour upon thy soul, and so God discover thy secrets, and cast thee down in the midst of the congregation, because thou camest not in truth to the fear of the Lord, but thy heart is full of deceit.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁶

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil

His persecutors. This was *Divine* forgiveness from the *Man* Christ Jesus.¹⁷

Getting back to the parable, look at the men who “passed by on the other side”. They saw their brother, a man of the same people and the same faith, stripped of his raiment, wounded and half-dead. The first man who saw him was a priest of the Temple. No doubt, he had his religious duties to attend to. Perhaps, from all he could tell, the man was dead, and therefore the priest did not want to be made ritually unclean. So, too, the Levite. He also served in the Temple, and if this man was dead, he, like the priest, did not want the inconvenience of being made ceremonially unclean. Their religious duties, awaiting them in Jerusalem, must have seemed too important to be interrupted by the need, even the desperate need, of this their neighbor.

I would think in the parable the Lord was using irony. Here are two men who know the Law, who belong to the Temple, who do sacred work, passing by the man, passing by on the far side of the road. Bu, a Samaritan, despised and rejected wherever his business took him in Israel, is the one man who obeys the Law. Yes, I *would* think the Lord was using irony, if not for my many years of seeing some religious people, the kind who are very correct about every little detail all the time, who know the rubrics better than God does.

All too often I have seen scrupulously religious people behave the same way that the priest and the Levite do in this parable. On the Last day you will not answer to God for how well you knew all the rubrics. You *will* answer for how well you loved your neighbor. Someone who serves in the Temple might pass by on the other side. However, one who serves God would not, even if he is *only* a Samaritan.

The Samaritan in the story did not do a great thing, but merely did his duty. The priest and the Levite did a great thing, for they committed a very grave sin. When news came to Tobit

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”¹⁴

Yes, they saw *Him* as an enemy, and treated him as a conquered enemy, exhibiting glee from the spectacle of his torments, triumphing with cruel merriment. But, from his Divine and human perspective, He was laying down His life for them, and *that* made them His friends, as it makes you His friend.

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”¹⁵

So, Jesus not only *taught* us to treat everyone as friends (even those who hate us); He *did so* Himself:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”¹⁶

This is not to be treated lightly. As *God on his throne* in heaven, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Son could not be harmed by man’s malice. But as a man, with flesh and blood like you and me, we see Jesus demonstrating the love of God through His human nature, actually *suffering* injustice, cruelty and pain; and He responded by forgiving and praying for

and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed [**SHOWD**] mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The parable we heard in today’s Second Lesson is called the Parable of the Good Samaritan. However, the Lord Jesus simply called the protagonist “a certain Samaritan.” The Samaritan is not held up as an *extraordinary* example, but merely as a *proper* example. If there is anything praiseworthy about the Samaritan, it is his mercy and humility. For, the Samaritan was chosen to be an exemplary character in the story, quite deliberately, to make a simple point: You must love your neighbor without regard for how he has treated you, or how you expect him to treat you later.

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, and they returned the resentment with no love lost. Jesus, however, reached out to the Samaritans. On one occasion the Samaritans of one village refused to receive him⁷ but earlier another Samaritan village did receive him (John 4:1-42). Even there, however, the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well reminded him, “The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”

It is highly significant, therefore, that the principal character in the story is a Samaritan. Of all the men who came by, and saw the wounded Jewish victim of a criminal attack lying on the side of the road, the Samaritan was the least likely to want to help him. Why should he help a man who, no doubt,

was entirely prejudiced against him? Perhaps, if the victim were awake and alert in his helpless condition, he would fear the Samaritan's approach. Perhaps, despite his need for help from somebody—anybody—he might nonetheless say something like, “Don't touch me with your Samaritan hands!”

But the Samaritan had one purpose, and that was to love his neighbor as himself, and therefore to respond to that neighbor's need. He may never win a friend for his efforts, maybe not the man himself, and maybe no one back home who might disapprove of helping a Jew. He may have been afraid to tell the folks back home. But, at that moment he was “*moved with compassion,*” and he obeyed the Law of God; he acted out of charity, love for his neighbor—even *this* neighbor.

The lawyer, in this case the student of the Torah, who asked Jesus about the commandments, no doubt had heard the Lord teach before. He already knew what were, in the teaching of Jesus, the two greatest commandments of the Law, and was able to answer accordingly: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*” And [Jesus] said unto him, *Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*”

Of course, Jesus did not only teach these things. He demonstrated them as well. The book of Isaiah foretold the day when God would, as St. Paul later put it, “*Commend His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”⁸ See the famous *Suffering Servant* passage. The prophet foresaw the day when the crowds would be turned against Jesus, rewarding the Man “*Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*”⁹ with hatred and rejection for all the good He had done. So wrote the prophet, roughly 700 years ahead of that day, “*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*”¹⁰ The Lord was treated worse than a Samari-

tan by his Jewish brethren, and worse still by the Romans who perpetrated the violence and cruelty that he endured. At the Cross He acted with love, according to the needs of each and every one of us.

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*¹¹

He had said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”¹² On the Cross He proved that a friend may or may not be one who loves you but he is someone you love as your neighbor. Jesus called even Judas “friend” as he betrayed the Lord: “*And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?*”¹³ From His perspective, as He was hanging on the Cross and pouring out His soul unto death for you, and for me, Jesus Christ did not have an enemy in the world. Yes, He saw that they poured forth their hatred against Him:

“Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.