

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after Christmas Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fortieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed [SHOWD] to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?

saith [SETH] the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Or,

Here beginneth the forty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁴

“Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment. Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the sodering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved. But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on Palm Sunday, 2013.

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 31 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 40:12-end (KJV).

⁴ Isaiah 41:1-20 (KJV).

⁵ Philippians 2:1-11 (KJV).

⁶ Philippians 2:9-11 (RSV).

⁷ Philippians 2:10 (RSV).

⁸ Philippians 2:9 & 11 (RSV).

⁹ St. John 8:46-59.

¹⁰ St. John 8:49-58.

¹¹ St. John 12:26b (RSV).

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sees in the Gospel for Passion Sunday,⁹ by giving honor to Him, then through Him we simultaneously honor the Father Who sent Him to us.¹⁰

That is the answer to the question, “Why are our neighbors in church so often bobbing their heads or bowing themselves down whenever the name Jesus is read out in our services?” They are remembering St. Paul’s words to the Philippians, about how by honoring God the Son we likewise honor God the Father. Or as St. John reports Jesus as saying, “[I]f any one serves me, the Father will honor him.”¹¹

We therefore give due honor to “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible....” when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth....”

Conclusion:

However, having answered that question, we find ourselves posed with another one:

If in our outward gestures and postures we honor God the Son and God the Father, do we likewise honor them in our hearts and in our minds? Does our deportment and our manner of life—what the King James translation refers to as our “conversation”—display to others, and to ourselves, that we are sincere in our honoring of God? Are we inwardly committed to Him, or are the gestures we make toward Him mere empty, outward show?

There will be an examination on that, immediately after the Church Period of creation’s history.

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister JD¹²
March 24, 2013

whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith [SETH] the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah [SHITT-ah] tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.⁵

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

Sometimes, when one is in church one looks around at the other worshippers. Perhaps doing so is evidence of an unseemly inattention to the important task to which we are there to give our best participation, but I think that if it is a little bit improper to sneak a peak at those who are with us, it is certainly a minor, and extremely human, failing that can easily be forgiven.

And when one does give in to that little temptation, one often notices—at least, in traditional churches one notices—that many of our fellow-worshippers change their postures whenever the Name of Jesus is pronounced during the service. For those who are disposed to this practice, it may be as discreet as a nod of the head; sometimes it is a small but noticeable bow; and in extreme cases, someone may actually genuflect or—if really committed to traditional Anglican practices—give the deep “Sarum Bow” that is our graceful answer to the Roman genuflection.

Theme:

Because Jesus is mentioned quite frequently in most of our services, this practice can result in a considerable amount of nodding. Sometimes, in truly “Jesus-dense” services, it can turn the worshipper into a sort of ecclesiastical “Bobble-Head Doll”.

But if you have ever noticed this devotional practice, and wondered whence it arose, wonder no longer. St. Paul gives the answer in today’s passage from his Epistle to the Philippians.

Development:

The short and simple answer, of course, is that when we nod, or bow, or genuflect each time we hear the Name of Jesus read aloud, we are symbolically complying with St. Paul’s injunction “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...”⁷ And St. Paul tells us the reason we should make this acknowledgement is that “God has highly exalted [Christ Jesus] and bestowed on him the name which is above every name ... to the glory of God the Father.”⁸

So when we give due obeisance to Our Lord Jesus the Christ, then through the honor we pay to Him we are thereby giving honor to God the Father. It is as Jesus said to the Phari-